

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Resignation signals concern over S.Y. plan

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Expressing concerns that the long-debated Santa Ynez Valley Community Plan is in danger of being hijacked by interests outside the valley, Bob Field on Tuesday resigned his position on a local advisory board.

Mr. Field had served for almost two years as chairman of the Valley Plan Advisory Committee, or VPAC, which was designed to move the controversial plan forward toward completion.

His resignation comes just weeks after the supervisors voted to delay approval of the growth plan, and to hold additional meetings in the valley. That decision came after a decade of discussion on the highly controversial document and more than 70 public hearings.

Mr. Field said there is now a fair amount of discontent with the remaining members of the VPAC, and he expects additional resignations, in light of the delays.

He indicated the plan had been derailed by small groups of people who were unable to persuade the VPAC to incorporate certain elements. Although he didn't name them specifically, agricultural interests told the board last month they did not have enough input. Ranchers and farmers have complained about the plan, particularly its proposed "downzoning" on agricultural land and developing public trails on private property.

Certain people, Mr. Field said, "went out of the district and lobbied supervisors from outside of the districts to see if they could get their way. In the course of that, many misrepresentations were made to the supervisors. Much, if not all, of what was raised as objections by supervisors (last month) were false information provided to them by others."

Clearly discouraged, Mr. Field told the board, "If an outside district can be influenced by handfuls of phone calls on a community plan, and in terms of going through years of public meetings, the question arises, 'Why bother?' "

If the draft plan had been approved last month, an environmental review would have begun. Now, 3rd District Supervisor Brooks Firestone and 4th District Supervisor Joni Gray will set new hearings.

When he joined VPAC, Mr. Field said the "objectives were to meet the widely supported goals of the Valley Blueprint, and to find a fair and reasonable middle ground between the diverse interests in the community."

The meetings appeared "remarkably amicable, productive and have set a tone and atmosphere that is laudable for the process and county," Mr. Firestone said. "We're very appreciative of this."

Ultimately, it's a question of local determination, Mr. Field said.

"Certainly some issues are countywide and should be decided countywide," he explained. "But a community plan is a pretty local issue. It's a prime example of where the community is being responsible in its planning."

Mr. Field said in an interview that while he is leaving the planning committee, he is "not leaving the plan."