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Purely Political

Keep it rural!

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The Santa Ynez Valley Community Plan (SYVCP) just might be getting one step closer to initiation on September 26, 2006 when the plan could move forward into the Environmental Impact (EIR) stage.

Support for the plan moving forward along with new and remaining concerns were expressed during the public comment portion of a special SYVCP hearing held at the Veteran's Memorial Hall on Wednesday, September 13. Nearly 150 community members were in attendance.

Some of the items discussed during the course of the evening included: trails on private property, affordable housing, historical sites, Heritage Sites, farm worker housing, recreational overlays, highway infrastructure, water quality issues, blue line creeks and tribal expansion.

On farm worker housing, 3rd District Supervisor, **Brooks Firestone** assured the community, "I will not support any ag plan that alters the sense and purpose of our Valley Plan nor will I support any proposal that would add those implied numbers or development units to our agricultural areas" referring to a Santa Barbara News-Press story on the Agricultural Advisory Committee proposal that stated the SYVCP had the potential of adding 10,000 units to the county.

"I've heard some calls from that" the supervisor remarked, garnering peels of laughter in the room.

Firestone emphasized and reiterated that he, "will never support a plan that would lead to substantial housing growth outside our planning process. It just will not happen."

Supervisor Firestone opened the meeting with a brief history of the SYVCP from its inception in 1998 to the process of a revised Community Plan beginning in 2000, recommended changes that he says are needed before the plan goes to EIR. He requested that the public trails provision and the Historical Sites Appendix both be eliminated. Also recommended is the removal of the Environmentally Sensitive Habitat (ESH)

provision because of its redundancy. He stated removing the provision from the plan would not remove it from protections that are already in place through county, state and federal regulations.

At Least Two Years To Go

Although more than 50 public meetings have already been held, it will be another two years before a final plan goes to the board for review, approval and adoption. Those in attendance were assured there would be many opportunities along the way for continued public comment.

The next two years will feature and include: a Notice of Preparation to be circulated, EIR Scoping Meeting, Draft EIR, Final EIR released with Planning Commission hearings with a final SYVCP arriving to the board for consideration in Winter 2007-2008.

The special hearing on Wednesday came about after the Board of Supervisors appointed a subcommittee on July 18 with Supervisor Firestone and Supervisor Gray to conduct additional public hearings in the Santa Ynez Valley to receive testimony regarding the SYVCP after some discussions about inaccuracies in the plan arose and requests were made to bring the plan to the valley for more public exposure.

Through the evening, Valley residents expressed their thoughts and ideas on a wide variety of matters.

Joan Jamison, President of the Santa Ynez High School board, urged the subcommittee to address recreational overlays. “Our fields are disappearing as our schools grow” Ms. Jamison stated and urged the board to assist in encouraging large landowners to think about donating or designating some of their property for recreational overlay.

“Please consider the youth of this Valley” she pleaded.

Traffic a growing concern

Valley resident **Fred Chamberlin** expressed concern that the infrastructure of existing roads and particularly Highway 154 will not continue to support the enormous increase in traffic from the North County to the South County.

“50 years of inaction by our government is going to choke us” he said.

Lorraine Thompson concurred and added that as the North County expands, people who live there continue to work in the South County and use Highway 154 as their “speedy shortcut” creating not just a congestion problem but a safety issue for valley residents as well.

Firestone added that Caltrans will be placing a stop sign at Highway 154 and Edison within the next two or three months because of the high rate of accidents at that

intersection.

Stakeholders versus Planners

Large parcels continue to be a cause of disagreement between landowners - or as one valley resident - **Arvin Schmaltz** put it “stakeholders” - and “planners”.

“I’m a stakeholder because I have my stake in that farm. I have my life in that farm. Almost all my savings are in that farm” he said.

He asked that assumptions not be made when dealing with the Heritage Site provision in the plan and added, “All of a sudden we assume a review committee and a 30 minute session can make a decision better than this guy who lives on that farm all his life and has an interest to maintain his value and his respect in the community by doing the right thing.”

There was a strong sense among the “critics” of the Heritage Site provision that the Heritage Sites are the gateways and the number is down small enough that “*each one* should be addressed at a hearing” Fred Chamberlin said.

Nancy Crawford, former VPAC board member, stated, “I personally am insulted when people keep trying to say that I’m out there to develop that beautiful place” referring to her San Lucas Ranch.

“We built one house in 80 years and it was to house a manager for the horse facility” she added.

Tribal Expansion

A number of speakers also expressed concern over tribal expansion not being addressed in the plan.

Steve Pappas, representing Preservation of Los Olivos (POLO) and Preservation of Santa Ynez (POSY), requested the board adopt a formal policy for tribal annexation or fee-to-trust because, “We have a tribal neighbor. We need to live peacefully with our neighbor”.

However, “Tribal annexed land is not guided by this plan so all the years spent developing this plan becomes irrelevant because the Community Plan guidelines do not apply to any land that is taken into federal trust or annexed by the tribe” Pappas said.

Nancy Crawford also expressed concern about tribal policy not being in the SYVCP, “I have no idea what they want, what they’d like to do, what their vision is and until we talk together and we all sit at the same table with equal opportunity, there will be no peace in this valley and I don’t see anything getting better until that happens.”

Crawford emphasized that the tribe has been invited to partake in the plan and the planning process, but have not done so.

Supervisor Firestone noted that he and others would be meeting with tribal representatives on Thursday September 21st to discuss the Community Plan.

Tuesday September 26th, the Board will vote on the initiation of the plan into EIR. “I have every confidence that it will proceed on the timetable outlined,” Firestone stated.

Former VPAC Chairman, **Bob Field**, was optimistic “My opinion is if this plan or something much like it is adopted,” he said, “ten or twenty years from now – there will be growth in this valley, there will be empty lots that are developed – but this valley will still look and feel very much the way it does today”

Rural. That’s the bottom line. Overwhelming support for this goal was palatable and residents believe that is what is special about this valley and that is what needs to be preserved.

Firestone closed the meeting with, “If it can, then I think we will have served our purpose.”