

SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS

Land-use changes deserve better hearing

By Carol Herrera

The future of the Valley is at stake. On Dec. 5, the Board of Supervisors will hear the recommendations from Comprehensive Planning on the update to the Uniform Rules, the county's name for the book of rules for any agricultural property within the Williamson Act, a program in which the majority of agriculture parcels participate.

Due to the public's request for more information and clear explanations about the Uniform Rule changes, the supervisors have decided to set aside 2.5 hours for presentation and public comment. Critical issues such as community impacts and guidelines for agricultural zoning will be addressed at this meeting. Few constituents will be able to attend this meeting.

Because there is so much agricultural land in the Santa Ynez Valley, many citizens have asked Brooks Firestone to schedule a meeting in the Valley, prior to the Board's action. The purpose of this community meeting is simple — to hear the agricultural committee's proposals and pursuant recommendations.

In the past, when Mr. Firestone was asked to present the agricultural proposals to the VPAC, he decided it was not necessary to bring this information to the public. While acknowledging the work of our fellow citizens on these proposals, we respectfully disagree with Mr. Firestone and believe that it is necessary to bring all the proposals and recommendations before the public now.

At the board meeting on Nov. 14, the supervisors were asked by several residents of the Santa Ynez Valley to set the date of Dec. 5 back, in order to review the changes to the Uniform Rules together with the two substantial sections known as Expanded Home Occupation and Downshifting or Streamlining of permits. Mr. Firestone was quick to cast the deciding "no" vote, even though it was his own constituents making the request.

When Supervisor Carbajal attempted to analyze the three-pronged agricultural changes and asked staff if all the housing/building recommendations could be combined for cumulative and comprehensive analysis, he was shouted down by Chairwoman Gray. Joe Centeno incorrectly stated that all the complaining came from the Santa Ynez Valley.

As two remaining members of the VPAC (Valley Planning Advisory Committee), we are publicly asking Mr. Firestone to request that the Uniform Rules, the Home Occupation Expansion and New Streamlining/downshifting of building permits for all agricultural lands be presented to the public in countywide informational meetings, prior to any board action.

If this meeting on Dec. 5 proceeds and board action is taken on the Uniform Rules update, the supervisors will have made determinations for our future based on proposals that do not adhere to CEQA standards.

So what is the community of the Santa Ynez Valley to think about all this? Are we not principally made up of agriculturally zoned parcels? Are we going to wait and have the Valley Plan usurped by new land-use policies for agricultural lands within and outside the plan area, as well as throughout the county? These changes affect all agriculturally-zoned lands in the whole county.

Call your supervisor and ask that this meeting be set back until after regional meetings are held to inform the public about our agricultural lands' future. Our local government is only as good as the involvement of its constituents. Do your part to improve it.

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