

SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS

Wednesday August 16, 2006

As VPAC crumbles, Valley Plan to be debated

Public hearing on Sept. 13

By Glenn Wallace Staff Writer

Following the resignation of three Valley Planning and Advisory Committee (VPAC) members, 3rd District Supervisor Brooks Firestone confirmed that the Valley Plan process would continue.

"Great committee, great work and I'm sorry to see that people are resigning," said Firestone in an interview Thursday. "But technically the work of the PAC is complete."

During the Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday, VPAC Chairman Bob Field elaborated on what he called "measurable discontent," among the remaining members of VPAC. He said that during the July 18 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Valley Plan stalled due to, "false information provided to (supervisors from outside the 3rd District) by others."

Field added that yet more resignations from the nine-person committee could be forthcoming.

In her resignation letter, Los Olivos resident Judith Hale, who has been involved in the Valley Plan effort for eight years, criticized the extra meeting as a way of meddling with past community decisions.

"If any board members had been in attendance during the process, you would know how difficult these meetings and decisions and recommendations were," Hale wrote.

"You've got the real bookends here," Field said about the resignations of Hale and John Poitras of Santa Ynez. "You've got the rookie and the veteran saying, why bother?"

"[Poitras] attended all the meetings and thought that this would be a chance to make a difference," Field said.

Poitras was named to VPAC only a month ago, and had not yet sat on the

committee in a public meeting.

For his part, Field holds no ill will for Firestone, still calling himself the 3rd District's advisor and supporter. He stressed the importance of local control while discussing the Valley Plan.

"Right now it's gone from community plan to county politics," said Field.

The VPAC, appointed by the supervisors, conducted public debate on elements of the Valley Plan, holding 16 meetings over two years, as the most recent chapter in nearly a decade of revision.

"I think we did a great job and the VPAC did a great job of promoting this, but nevertheless, a number of people had expressed concern over not being able to express something regarding the plan," Firestone said.

"(It was) prior to a vote to move the plan to the environmental review and I felt the board wasn't ready for that. I also felt that some of my fellow supervisors were not informed about the project, indeed there were a few inaccuracies about the plan that required clearing up. It seemed a good moment to take a step sideways," the 3rd District supervisor said about his decision to suggest a sub-committee meeting, which he hopes will move the Valley Plan into environmental review.

Firestone added that his proposals to do away with a controversial trail map and remove an appendix item on historic buildings had not been digested or debated by the Valley public yet, and should be before the plan proceeds.

The supervisors' sub-committee public hearing on the Valley Plan, to be led by Firestone and 4th District Supervisor Joni Gray of Lompoc and Orcutt, will be held Sept. 13 at the Solvang Veterans Memorial Building, in the large hall, from 6 to 9 p.m.

Firestone added that while he does not intend to begin appointing replacements to the committee at the present time, he does plan to amend county ordinances to create a more permanent local advisory committee.

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