

# Modesto OKs updating its long-range plan

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Salida resident Nachita Quintero, center, and other residents wave "NO SALIDA ANNEX" signs during a 2013 meeting of the Salida Municipal Advisory Council at the Salida Library in Salida.

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The City Council decided Tuesday night to embark on the first comprehensive update of Modesto's growth plans in nearly two decades, but not before members heard an earful from the public over the city's planning practices.

The council voted 7-0 for the comprehensive update of the general plan, which serves as a blueprint for how the city will grow and develop over at least 15 years. The update will consider such issues as housing, land use, economic development and open space.

Modesto last updated its general plan in 1995. The new update could take three to five years and cost \$2 million to \$3 million.

The update would not start until after the city completes amending the land-use and transportation components of the general plan. The city has been working on this for about two years and expects to complete the project by fall of 2015. The amendment is less expensive than a comprehensive update. City officials say most of the cost of the amendment is being covered by a \$200,000 grant.

The amendment has been controversial because it proposes keeping Salida – a town of about 13,700 residents – and hundreds of acres in Wood Colony – a more-than-century-old farming community – in Modesto's general plan. Hundreds of Salida and colony residents and their supporters have attended recent meetings to protest.

Council members heard Tuesday from those residents and other members of the public, who had lots of questions about what the city is proposing. Some questioned whether they could trust the city to follow the guidelines of the updated general plan.

Naraghi Lakes-area homeowner Jon Olson claimed the city did not follow the general plan when it approved an 18-acre shopping center near Naraghi Lakes in northeast Modesto. "I did everything an honest person should do and what happened?" Olson asked. "I'm getting this massive shopping center. ... That's really smart planning. How did you get away with that?"

Others asked how Modesto can afford to do a comprehensive general plan update given the city's finances. The city is in the process of cutting \$8 million to \$9 million from its roughly \$113 million general fund budget over this and the next two fiscal years.

The council also voted to set aside \$500,000 from the general fund in the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, for the comprehensive update. Mayor Garrad Marsh said the \$500,000 is one-time money that comes from legal settlements and budget savings. He also has proposed that the city sell its McClure Ranch property to raise money for the comprehensive update.

Audience members also said it does not make sense to them that Modesto would amend its general plan and then turn around and start from scratch with a comprehensive update. They said they believe that would be a waste of money. Community and Economic Development Director Brent Sinclair said it was worthwhile to complete the amendment because it addresses many other issues besides Wood Colony and Salida that are not controversial and need to be amended.

Councilman Dave Cogdill repeated his concerns from the Jan. 28 council meeting that the rhetoric over Wood Colony, Salida and the general plan has gotten too heated, that the city has failed to engage enough of the community, and that doing the amendment before the comprehensive update is putting "the cart before the horse." But he supported the comprehensive update as long as the work is vetted through the council's Economic Development Committee before it is brought before the full council.

Councilman Dave Lopez said he is not going to stop advocating for removing Wood Colony from the general plan.

Marsh said the entire community will be included in the discussions involving the comprehensive update of the general plan.