

Fresno County general plan review stirs controversy

By Marc Benjamin

Proposed changes to Fresno County's general plan policies would add new concepts, such as plans for promoting healthy communities, and revise older proposals designed to generate traveler-oriented development along Interstate 5.

On Tuesday, supervisors will discuss the [review of the general plan](#) -- the county's blueprint for future development.

Environmental advocates oppose many aspects of the review, which they say could trigger legal action depending on the board's course.

Environmental advocate Radley Reep said the county is not offering details for each of the 149 proposed revisions to policies in the general plan. Some of the changes should trigger an environmental impact report, but the county has prepared a less detailed environmental document.

"These could be changes in the way the general plan is implemented," he said. "It could be a change that means something other than what (the policy) means now."

The county should review the plan every five years, but in this case, has waited nearly 10 years, he said. In the meantime, county growth policies have not been followed.

"What's written in the plan isn't what's happening on the ground," said Reep, who also has coordinated [responses for the League of Women Voters of Fresno](#).

Since the review was passed by the Fresno County Planning Commission two years ago, county officials have conducted public workshops about the proposed revisions.

The review is not a general plan update, which entails more significant detail about policy changes, said Bernard Jimenez, deputy director of Fresno County's public works and planning department.

"It's a review of what we have learned over 14 years," he said. "If anything, we are enhancing the document to try to reflect current trends."

The review does not affect the fundamental policies of the general plan that address economic development, transportation and urban growth, he said.

"There may be a change in approach, but no significant policy changes," Jimenez said.

A new item is a plan for "health and well-being," Jimenez said, which promotes community gardens, locally grown agriculture and walkable communities.

The review also adds a prohibition on redesignation of rural residential development by supervisors, which "will strengthen our fundamental policy for preserving farmland," Jimenez said.

There also is a renewed effort to add travel services along Interstate 5 and in other areas of the county. The I-5 plans will require environmental study into endangered species and water availability, Jimenez said, but additional travel services have been part of county plans since the interstate was built.

"The county has envisioned that for decades," he said. "Our general plan recognizes six interchanges where those uses could be established."

Supervisor Phil Larson, who represents much of the west side of Fresno County, said he supports a roughly 40-acre truck stop with trucker and traveler services and restaurants at the Manning Avenue exit.

He views it as a way to add revenue to the county treasury. A property owner, Larson said, has offered land for a fire station, but the county can't pay for staffing and the nearest fire station along I-5 is at Harris Ranch, 30 miles from Manning. There are no other fire stations near the freeway between Manning and the Merced County border.

Revenue from a truck stop could help finance fire station staffing while creating about 100 jobs and offering services that aren't available now to residents and workers, Larson said.

"The state put the interstate through and there are 150,000 cars and trucks a day on it," he said. "Why shouldn't we have some services for them and benefit from the revenue?"

If you go

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors will discuss general plan policies at 2 p.m. Tuesday in the Fresno County Hall of Records, Tulare and M streets.

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