

County looks into crystal ball Planners want residents' suggestions

By Jed Chernabaeff
Staff writer

With skyrocketing population projections, by 2050 Tulare County could have up to four new Visalia-sized cities.

That's why county planners are asking what Tulare County residents think are the top issues associated with growth.

A meeting Tuesday in Visalia will allow residents to provide suggestions for the Tulare County Blueprint, a planning document that addresses long-range and regional planning issues for the next 50 years, said Scott Cochran, a senior regional planner for the Tulare County Association of Governments, or TCAG.

"The blueprint is not TCAG's plan, it's John Q. Public's plan," Cochran said.

Since September, Cochran said, TCAG has received advice from local communities and organizations to learn what future land-use patterns people think could have an effect on the county's transportation systems, housing supply and environment.

According to estimates from the California Department of Finance, Cochran said, the population in Tulare County will reach 870,000 residents by 2050.

"With those projections, that can mean four new Visalia-sized cities in Tulare County. We used to ask where [to] put them. Now we have to ask where and how to put them," Cochran said.

Before the county should consider planning new communities, Cochran said, TCAG and other counties are trying to identify transit and other infrastructure needs.

A high-speed rail system, improved access to Southern California, farmland preservation and urban density were some of the issues brought up in past meetings.

Cochran said Tuesday's meeting will help TCAG prioritize what residents want for the future.

"The blueprint makes sure all the cities are on the same page and we grow together with cooperation," Cochran said.

Tulare County's blueprint plan will be presented in a later meeting with several other counties also participating in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint, which covers long-range planning issues from San Joaquin County to Kern County.

The reporter can be reached at jchernab@visalia.gannett.com.