

Group seeks input on Valley blueprint

By Aaron Burgin, The Porterville Recorder

TULARE - Several government officials on Friday urged public involvement in the planning of two documents that will guide growth in the Valley and the county for the next 50 years.

The San Joaquin Valley and Tulare County Blueprints will plan transportation and land use decisions in the region to the year 2050, officials said in a noon news conference at the Southern California Edison Agriculture Technology Application Center.

Friday's conference is a prelude to a public workshop at the Visalia Convention Center Tuesday, where residents will prioritize planning values compiled from the results of wide-scale public survey held from September through December 2006.

Dist. 2 Supervisor Connie Conway, Tulare Mayor Craig Vejvoda and Farmersville Mayor Lionel Benavides were joined by several key blueprint architects in encouraging the public to attend Tuesday's 4:30 p.m. session at the Visalia Convention Center.

"I think it is the biggest thing we have ever embarked on," said Scott Cochran, senior regional planner for the Tulare County Association of Governments. "The fact that it involves the entire region puts it in a category of uncharted territory."

On Tuesday, the public will be asked to prioritize over 70 topics identified as values in the survey, which are broken down into seven categories:

Natural resource protection,
economic development,
transportation options,
housing choices,
healthy and sustainable environment,
improved educational opportunities and well-designed communities.

The Valley's eight Councils of Governments - which handle individual county transportation-planning issues - started the Blueprint process in 2006 when they submitted a proposal to engage in the process to the California Business Transportation and Housing Agency.

The state agency has funded similar blueprint activities in other regions over the past two years.

Each of the eight San Joaquin Valley counties are developing individual blueprints that will ultimately be used to form the regional document.

The goal is for locales and counties to implement blueprint recommendations in their general plan updates and regional transportation plans, Cochran said.

"The state is awarding cities and communities that are thinking mixed-use and smart growth," Cochran said. "And cities that use the blueprint would be doing those things. Basically, if you play the game, you get rewarded."

The Tulare County Blueprint effort is overseen by TCAG and the Blueprint Technical Advisory Committee, which consists of senior planners from the county's incorporated cities and the county Community Development Agency.

One of the bigger hurdles officials said they had to clear in the blueprint's earlier phases was getting local officials to put regional goals over those in the individual municipalities.

For example, the regional goals may stimulate development in some areas faster than others, which had the potential to turn off some of the participants, Tulare City Manager Darrel Pyle said.

"In the beginning, I don't think everyone was sold on the idea," Pyle said.

Vejvoda agreed.

"I think turf wars like this have always been going on, and to some extent they will continue long after we're gone," Vejvoda said. "But a rising tide lifts every ship in the harbor, and I think all of us are beginning to buy into that concept."

Most Valley officials, Vejvoda said, understand the only way the Valley will receive its fair share of state and federal funding is by banding together.

"I think the blueprint is a prime example of this cooperation," Vejvoda said.

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