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Saranap area provides input for Envision Contra Costa 2040

By John T. Miller

The ambitious undertaking of Envision Contra Costa 2040 - the county's plan to address land use, transportation, housing, climate change, environmental justice, and other important issues over the next 20 years - is underway, with the county completing the last of 17 community meetings earlier this month at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building.

Representatives of the Contra Costa Planning Department, with Supervisor Candace Andersen chairing, met with about 25 residents of the Saranap and Parkmead unincorporated areas for input on putting together a new general plan and zoning code for the county.

Andersen said, "The plan is a road map to where the county is going in the next 20 years. This is the legacy we're leaving behind by creating a better future for the next generation."

Will Nelson, a senior planner with the county who spoke at the meeting, said both the general plan and the zoning code are in need of updating. The current general plan was adopted in 1991, while the zoning code has not been comprehensively overhauled in over 70 years. "The current general plan was mostly written in the '80s," he said. "Much has changed since then."

Barry Miller, an urban planning consultant retained by the county, also addressed the group, saying, "The general plan is a constitution for development and conservation, providing consistent direction for the future." He added that the plan should balance growth, conservation, and quality of life while also documenting baseline environmental conditions.

After the introduction by the speakers, participants discussed their Saranap and Parkmead neighborhoods, brainstorming what they liked about them, and also what they saw as challenges and issues for the future. Likes included the quiet ambiance and small town neighborhood feel, proximity to BART and trails, good public schools, extended family living close by and many other perks.

Some of the challenges and issues of concern included a fear of too much development, not enough open space and parks, a lack of viable public transportation, and safety issues for pedestrians and bicycles - especially students on their way to and from schools - due to narrow streets, too many parked cars and a lack of sidewalks.

Residents stressed preserving the community feeling by encouraging small businesses and accommodating an aging population.

From Bethel Island and Discovery Bay in the east to Rodeo and Richmond in the west, the county conducted community meetings of residents from their diverse and wide-ranging unincorporated areas. The county also hosted open houses and gathered a wealth of information about citizens' concerns and needs.

Envision Contra Costa 2040 is a two-year process, with public meetings and documents developed in 2019, a public review process in the first half of 2020, and formal hearings in late 2020. County residents can use the interactive website at envisioncontracosta2040.org for dialogue, input and more information.

The next meeting, focusing on implementing the County's Climate Action Plan, will be held by the Committee on Sustainability at 5 p.m. Aug. 26 at the Department of Conservation and Development, 30 Muir Road, Martinez.

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