

## **6 1/2 years and 65 meetings = 1 plan**

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By Jonathan Edwards | Enterprise staff writer | November 11, 2009 09:20

WOODLAND - 'Ladies and gentlemen,' started Yolo County Board of Supervisors Chair Mike McGowan. 'It's unanimous. We have a new General Plan.'

The board room broke out into shouts and applause Tuesday as McGowan spoke and the board finished a 6 1/2-year process crafting a state-mandated document that outlines how a county of 200,000 residents nestled between the Bay Area and Sacramento plans to deal with growth over the next 20 years.

Since the board first directed county staff to start the third update of a General Plan in the county's 150-year history, eight supervisors, 13 planning commissioners and dozens of advisory members have weighed in.

That's not to mention the estimated 5,500 hours of staff time that went into the plan, much of it spent traveling throughout the county to get community input at more than 65 meetings, workshops and hearings.

'Thank God Yolo County is small enough that, if you have something to say, there are people who will listen to you,' McGowan said.

And that's what makes the plan strong: 'This truly reflects what the community wants. This has really been a community-driven process,' he said.

The county's General Plan consultant, Heidi Tschudin, praised the board for doing something 'relatively rare.'

'There are many planners, elected officials and decision-makers with long and productive careers who have never had the experience of doing a comprehensive General Plan update,' she said.

And this one 'commits you and your (successors) over the next generation to a course of action that we believe will continue the county's exemplary legacy of excellent land use planning,' like preserving 96 percent of land outside cities as farmland and open space.

Keeping that farmland and open space between cities is what makes Yolo County 'a special place on Earth,' McGowan continued. 'The cities are distinct, and they're clearly delineated and defined. Long before any of us got here, (our predecessors) decided they weren't going to sprawl and connect the communities with strip malls and suburban development.'

While Tuesday was more about celebrating than crafting policy, the board made a few touch-ups at the last minute.

Mark Wilson, a grape grower from Clarksburg, suggested that one of the policies prohibiting a well within 500 feet of the toe of a levee was too extreme.

'There have been poor well designs, and they do need some oversight,' Wilson admitted, but 'you're going to wind up doubling the cost of some of these wells.'

And Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis wanted to allow future supervisors to study the possibility of requiring developers to offset the loss of any farmland they build on by setting aside more land than they pave over. Currently, the standard is a one-to-one ratio.

Tschudin and Senior Deputy County Counsel Phil Pogledich said neither Wilson's nor Provenza's change would affect the legal validity of the project's environmental impact report. So the board

made both changes.

The pomp and circumstance didn't stop General Plan spearhead David Morrison from looking at the future.

A full economic report of the plan's impacts is due in December. Morrison, assistant director of planning and public works, is eyeing February for a 'vision strategy session,' in which supervisors can rank priorities and determine how they want to implement the plan in its first year.

But, Morrison said, implementing the plan depends on having money and staff, 'both of which are in short supply.'

'We're happy to get going on the next steps,' McGowan said. 'We haven't screwed it up here. We started out right and agreed to keep it right. That's what this General Plan represents to me.'

'We're only going to be successful ... if it's a document that's embraced by the entire county, and once we can believe in.'