

No moratorium on B-and-Bs and event centers

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy** From page A1 | March 09, 2016

WOODLAND — A 2 1/2-hour hearing featuring public comment from 34 county residents concluded Tuesday with the Board of Supervisors choosing not to issue a 45-day moratorium on new bed-and-breakfasts and event centers.

Instead, the same 45-day period will be used to convene a workshop and further discuss many of the issues raised during Tuesday's meeting, with the goal of clarifying county policy on agritourism, but without a temporary ban on new projects.

"If it's that important, let's do it in 45 days," said Supervisor Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento. "But I think a moratorium sends the wrong message."

With Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland agreeing with Villegas, the possibility of a moratorium became moot, given that it required a four-fifths vote of the board.

The proposed moratorium grew out of concerns raised during a February board meeting when several local farmers testified that rather than enhancing the county's agritourism industry, new establishments like bed-and-breakfasts and event centers are actually hurting local farmers.

Specifically, they said, rather than being used by local farmers to supplement their income, these establishments are being proposed by non-farmers often in locations that interfere with farming activity, whether it be the ability to use crop dusters or by clogging narrow rural roads with increased traffic.

Much of the criticism has been directed at a proposed bed-and-breakfast and event center that would be located northwest of Winters off of County Road 29. The Field & Pond center would include up to nine bedrooms and a large event center that could hold more than 35 events per year for up to 300 people.

Field & Pond is one of three pending projects that supervisors could have included in a moratorium, according to county counsel, but board chair Jim Provenza of Davis said before public comment began that the moratorium being considered would affect only future projects.

The pending projects, he said, would proceed through the usual conditional-use permit process — which requires approval by the county's Planning Commission and which can then be appealed directly to the Board of Supervisors.

“Until it’s before us,” Provenza said, “we don’t get involved.”

Nevertheless, the majority of public comment supervisors heard on Tuesday was about that Field & Pond proposal.

Barbara Dieter, one of many Road 29 residents who spoke during public comment, said the event center would create a public safety hazard by increasing traffic along the rural road.

“My concern is about public safety,” she said. “This issue needs to be addressed. This determination should not be made by staff on a case-by-case basis.”

Joe Rominger, who grows tomatoes off Road 29, said the increased traffic from Field & Pond would impact his ability to transport his produce off the farm.

“I have 100 employees in spring, summer and fall,” he said. “I don’t want to have to tell those guys they’re going to lose their jobs because of another ill-placed event center.”

And while most of the concerns related to farming operations, another Road 29 resident, Bob Schneider, brought up other issues as well.

Schneider — senior policy director for the conservation group, Tuleyome — owns a ranch at the end of Road 29 and said his concerns about Field & Pond “involve both habitat protection and protection of farming.”

“I think we need to take a closer look at which areas are appropriate and not appropriate (for event centers),” Schneider said.

While the majority of those speaking during public comment Tuesday supported the proposed moratorium, about a dozen people came to speak out against it, including one of the owners of the proposed Field & Pond, the owners of Park Winters (a popular event center on County Road 26), as well as some farmers and residents.

Tom Barth, who also lives on Road 29, told supervisors “a moratorium is not warranted here.”

A moratorium, he contended, requires that there be an immediate threat to the community “and there are no facts to support findings that (Field & Pond) will be a threat.”

Park Winters co-owner Rafael Galiano also expressed opposition to a moratorium, which he said “would set a bad precedent.”

“The biggest thing I want to convey is that there is not a problem, and there hasn’t been a problem in five years,” he said.

Park Winters co-owner John Martin agreed.

“To my knowledge, there is not a (bed-and-breakfast) or event center that has ever stripped (away) one bit of farmland. It’s just not the case. No farmland has been compromised,” Martin said.

“Moratoriums are typically placed when there is a massive burden,” he added.

But given that there are only three pending permits “and they wouldn’t be included in the moratorium ... it seems like it would be really not necessary.”

Finally, Dahvie James, the Field & Pond project applicant, told supervisors, “We think a moratorium is a bad look for Yolo. You might as well tell people not to invest here. That’s not the message we want to send.”

With supervisors choosing not to issue a moratorium, it remained unclear Tuesday how the current process might change.

Taro Echiburu, director of planning, public works and environmental services for Yolo County, said there is a benefit to leaving county code vague and relying on a permitting process.

“We need to be very careful about putting too much detail into a definition or a process because it may well create an unintended consequence,” Echiburu said. “Many of (these) are left vague on purpose because we cannot anticipate every situation. Once we allow these uses with the benefit of a conditional use permit, we open up ... the ability to review.”

Provenza countered that “the conditional use permit process is fine, but we need to give a little more direction on things like roads so people don’t spend a lot of money on things that don’t get approved.”

“As a community,” Provenza added, “we need to decide where we want to go on this. Nothing is more important to me than protecting our (ability to grow food). I don’t want to go down the road and find we did it wrong and now we have a problem.”

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