



"It's Our General Plan Update"

P.O. Box 1876, Salinas, CA 93902 ~ www.8of10monterey.com

**California Native Plant Society, Monterey Bay Chapter ~ Carmel Valley Association
Citizens for Responsible Growth ~ Concerned Citizens of River Road ~ Coalition to
Protect Housing, Farmlands, Air & Water ~ Friends, Artists & Neighbors of Elkhorn
Slough ~ Highway 68 Coalition ~ LandWatch Monterey County ~ League of Women
Voters, Monterey Peninsula ~ Líderes Comunitarios de Salinas ~ Monterey Pine
Forest Watch ~ North County Citizens Oversight Coalition ~ Planning and
Conservation League Foundation ~ Prunedale Neighbors Group ~ Prunedale
Preservation Alliance ~ Rancho San Juan Opposition Coalition ~ Save Our Shores ~
Sierra Club, Ventana Chapter**

January 31, 2005

Butch Lindley, Chair
Monterey County Board of Supervisors
240 Church Street
Salinas, CA 93901

RE: General Plan Update Process
February 1, 2005 Agenda – Item # S-11

Dear Members of the Board of Supervisors:

This letter is written on behalf of the signatories shown on the last page, to comment on Item # S-11 on your February 1, 2005 Agenda. We would like to suggest a quicker, better, and cheaper way to update the Monterey County General Plan.

As you know, the General Plan Update process has already taken more than five years, and has cost County taxpayers about \$5 million dollars. Last June, when your Board was presented with a third draft General Plan Update, with extensive Planning Commission recommendations, a majority of the Board refused even to consider that document, and voted to “start over” with a completely new process. The groups listed on the letterhead protested this idea, and when the Board nonetheless did vote to “start over,” we started over, too. During the period from August through November 2004, we sponsored a community-based planning process that consisted of seven community forums, two of them conducted entirely in Spanish. Out of these forums, held throughout Monterey County, has come a “Community General Plan,” presented to your Board on January 11, 2005.

The Community General Plan consists of the seven elements mandated by state law, plus two “optional” elements, an “Agriculture Element” and an “Administration and Enforcement” Element. This document is a fully-integrated, complete, and legally adequate General Plan that meets state law requirements. It is based upon the Twelve Guiding Objectives adopted by the Board of Supervisors, and in all other respects fully conforms to what the Board of Supervisors has said that it wants the new, updated Monterey County General Plan to be.

The Community General Plan is simple to understand, and is much shorter than the current General Plan. It contains special policies for all of the County's individual Planning Areas, so that local concerns are addressed, while incorporating a unified approach to land use policies that will make the Monterey County permit process work better. Policies to protect the Coastal Zone are included, so this Plan is ready for certification by the California Coastal Commission. It fully conforms to the requirements of the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), and has been officially submitted to HCD for their review and comment.

Suggestion #1

Since the Community General Plan fully conforms to what the Board has said it is looking for in a new General Plan, and since it is explicitly based on the Twelve Guiding Objectives adopted by the Board as a result of hundreds of community meetings conducted by the County, we recommend that the Board direct staff to initiate the legally required environmental review, using the Community General Plan as the project document.

This recommendation will be the fastest and most cost-effective way to move towards adoption of a new General Plan for Monterey County. Because the County has already done an Environmental Impact Report on the third draft of the General Plan Update prepared by County staff (GPU 3), and because the Community General Plan is at least as protective of the environment as GPU 3, it should be possible to complete environmental review and to hold the necessary Planning Commission and Board hearings by the end of June of this year. Obviously, the Board would retain the right to modify any policy contained in the Community General Plan, so our recommendation allows changes based on public testimony during the approval process. However, by following this recommendation, the Board can move ahead towards adoption of a new General Plan in the most cost-effective and expeditious manner possible.

Suggestion #2

If the Board is not prepared to use the Community General Plan as the "project document," then we have an alternative suggestion. This alternative will also produce a final decision document for Board action on a faster timetable and at less cost than the staff recommendation presented to you.

Instead of "reinventing the wheel" with respect to key General Plan policies, direct your staff to present you with a decision matrix (as illustrated below), covering the key issues that staff believes must be addressed. Then, hold one or more workshop sessions to take public comment on the alternatives, and make a decision as to each key issue. A document incorporating the Board's decisions on the key issues would serve as the "project document" for required environmental review, and the other policies not selected would be "alternatives" considered within the EIR. This approach should result in final adoption of a new General Plan by no later than the end of 2005.

Key Issue	1982 Plan	GPU 3	"Refinement Group" Draft	Community General Plan	Board Decision (Pick Alternative or Devise New Policy)
Land Use Patterns					
Affordable Housing					
TDR					
Ridgeline					
Slope Policy					
Other Key Policies, Etc.					

The point we are making is that there is *already* a lot of policy language out there. You don't need to direct the staff to produce more. Provisions in the County's current General Plan may be considered. The GPU 3 document is the result of five years worth of public involvement and \$5 million dollars of public investment.

The “Refinement Group” draft is the result of many hours of involvement by a small number of interested persons. The Community General Plan largely builds upon the County’s extensive earlier work, but also represents the work of about 1,000 people working in seven community forums held throughout the County, assisted by a well-respected professional planner.

In short, what is (or has been) lacking is not policy language to deal with the key planning issues. Various approaches have been suggested, and you don’t need to have your staff do any more work to make use of the policy language that is already available to the Board. All you need to do is to make a decision. Frankly, the willingness to make the tough choices is the only thing holding the Board back.

If the Board decides not to adopt our Recommendation #1, to use the Community General Plan as “project document” upon which to base the legally necessary environmental review, then we urge the Board promptly to set up the public workshops that will allow it to review the policy options already designed, and to make a decision about what to include and exclude from the “project document” upon which environmental review will ultimately be undertaken.

Suggestion #3

If the Board is unwilling to take Suggestion #1 or Suggestion #2, then we urge the Board, in connection with whatever process it establishes, to reconfirm the Board’s commitment to the Twelve Guiding Objectives. These objectives are attached to the staff report for Agenda Item # S-11. Any direction to the staff to spend time developing new policy options should include a requirement that all policy recommendations remain faithful to the Twelve Guiding Objectives.

Thank you for taking seriously our recommendations on how the Board can promptly and cost-effectively deliver the General Plan Update that the public has been waiting for (any paying for).

Yours truly,

Friends, Artists and Neighbors of Elkhorn Slough (FANS)
 Coalition To Protect Housing, Farmlands, Air & Water
 Rancho San Juan Opposition Coalition
 Citizens For Responsible Growth
 LandWatch Monterey County
 Sierra Club, Ventana Chapter
 Monterey Pine Forest Watch
 Prunedale Neighbors Group
 Save Our Shores

cc: County Planning Director
 County Counsel
 County Administrative Officer
 County Planning Commission
 Other Interested Persons