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Community Planning Efforts in Valley Springs

In 1884, an eighteen block grid was laid out to form the town center for Valley Springs. This was the first, and some of the best, land use planning applied to our community. The current community plan, written in 1974, references those eighteen blocks of “tree-lined streets” and envisions “an attractive, pleasant community” for the future. However, the '74 plan, though visionary, lacked specificity and concrete suggestions for the implementation of a vision, so its recommendations were ignored.

In 1992, a group of citizens encouraged by their supervisor, Dick Gordon, conducted “A Survey Regarding the Greater Valley Springs Area.” The survey solicited responses from over 1,000 residents of the area, which included Rancho Calaveras, La Contenta, Valley Springs proper, Jenny Lind, Quail Oaks, Mother Lode Acres, and Scenic Valley Ranchos. The survey collected information on demographics, community character, circulation, land use, housing, conservation, and safety.

The data was intended to be used to update the 1974 Valley Springs Community Plan, the 1983 Rancho Calaveras Special Plan, and “to bring the rest of the area” into a community plan. The survey group wrote, “The issue of future development in the greater Valley Springs area should be of interest to all residents and/or landowners.” They recognized “planning is needed so the area can grow in a manner to preserve our rural and recreational character, yet still accommodate business and residential growth.” Unfortunately, though the survey results are valuable background information, they were never used to update the Valley Springs plan, because the effort died from lack of interest.

We still have the outdated 1974 community plan that does not adequately address the increasing pressure of growth and development. However, the Rancho Calaveras Special Plan was updated in 1999. “The result was to re-affirm that the Rancho Calaveras community still desires to maintain the rural residential atmosphere and to prohibit commercial and multifamily development.”

In late 2005, MyValleySprings.com (MVS) started a website to provide education and information and to increase public participation in local planning. It is the mission of MyValleySprings.com to promote responsible growth and development through public participation in community planning in order to preserve the quality of rural life in the greater Valley Springs area. In 2007, the website had 27,060 visits representing 11,464 visitors. This is just one indication of the high level of interest in community design that currently exists in the community.

To initiate the Valley Springs Community Plan update process, MyValleySprings.com launched a series of town hall meetings on February 28, 2007 with “Community Design: An Overview of Smart Growth Principles” followed by “Understanding the Calaveras Council of Governments: A Look at Regional

Transportation Planning” on April 12, and “Water and Land Use Planning: Making the Connection” on May 23.

With grant funding, MVS was able to host a two-part community design workshop (a mini-charrette) on November 24 and 27, 2007. Over 75 residents and stakeholders participated in the interactive presentations facilitated by the Local Government Commission (LGC). A report was issued (available at www.myvalleysprings.com) and made available to the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, the Community Development Agency and others, so they may apply the results to the county’s general plan update.

Working with the director of the Calaveras County Cooperative Extension office, MVS developed a proposal to hire a graduate student land use planning intern to compile the baseline information necessary for the community plan update. The proposal was funded by the California Communities Program—University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and we hired a doctoral candidate who began work in January 2008 and completed her report June 8, 2008 (available at www.myvalleysprings.com).

Beginning in February 2008, MVS began fostering the Greater Valley Springs Advisory Group (GVSAG), an ad hoc group of citizens working on a community vision, survey, and boundary alternatives to provide community input and help craft language specific to the Valley Springs area for the Calaveras County general plan update. (This effort was, for MVS, an alternative strategy initiated because community planning grant funds were not assured.) The GVSAG, which is now independent of MVS, holds monthly meetings to update and inform the public. The Valley Springs Area Business Association Visionary Council has also drafted a community vision and proposed relocating the town center to Highway 26 and Hogan Dam Road.

On August 16, 2008, MVS continued its community presentations with “Conservation Strategies: An Overview of Easements and the Williamson Act,” and hosted a November 5 showing of the PBS film, “Where do the Children Play,” which, in part, explores the important link between children’s learning and community design when considering outdoor recreation and play spaces.

In October 2007, the Calaveras Council of Governments (CCOG), in partnership with the Calaveras Community Development Agency (CDA), the Local Government Commission (LGC), and MyValleySprings.com, applied for a \$204,648 Community-Based Transportation Planning grant from Caltrans. Notification of the grant award came in September 2008. The project, “Rural Smart Growth: A Community-Based Plan for Valley Springs,” will produce a community planning document consistent with the Calaveras County General Plan and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The grant project coordinators are the CCOG, CDA, LGC, MVS, Caltrans, Public Works, and the District One supervisor. The current community plan project timeline extends from September 2008 (grant award notification) through July 2010 (submission of the planning document to the county for integration into the general plan).

(updated 11/26/08)

