

An Important Message from the League of Women Voters of Fresno

2014 Revision of the Fresno County General Plan

September 17, 2014

Dear Residents of Fresno County:

For the past 8 years, the Fresno County Department of Public Works and Planning has been working on a major revision of the County's General Plan Policy Document.

A draft of that revision is scheduled for public hearing on Tuesday, **September 30, 2014 at 2:00 PM** on the 3rd floor of the Hall of Records. In all likelihood, the Board of Supervisors will adopt the revision at that time.

Two years ago, the League of Women Voters of Fresno (League) decided to prepare a 2-volume Study Guide for the pending revision. This was done because the County had failed to provide the public with an understandable document and because the County had failed to provide any reasoning for the extensive revision of County land use policy. **The League's Study Guide has recently been updated (September 17, 2014).** It is available on the League's website at www.fresno.ca.lwvnet.org.

Volume I is in two sections. It opens with a 12-page explanation of the significance of the overall revision. These introductory pages are must reading for anyone interested in land use planning in Fresno County. The remainder of Volume I is a collection of the significant revisions – all the deletions, additions and amendments that, if adopted, will significantly change the meaning and implementation of the General Plan.

Volume II serves a different purpose. It tracks every change made to the 604 policies and 121 programs currently under review. It reproduces the full text of each policy and program, revised or not.

For ease of understanding, the policies and programs in Volume II are presented in three different forms:

- As currently written [current form of the 2000 General Plan]
- As proposed for revision [redlined form showing additions, deletions and modifications]
- As proposed for adoption [final form of the General Plan, if the proposed revision is adopted]

Disappointingly, the County has provided the public with only the redlined version of the General Plan Policy Document, which makes comprehension difficult. In contrast, the League's Study Guide provides the essential pre- and post-versions as well. Shown below are examples from Volume II. With the three versions side by side, the magnitude of the revision of these two "Water Supply and Delivery" programs is immediately apparent.

As Currently Written

Program PF-C.A

The County shall develop a process for resolution of water supply problems and apply the process when areas of need are identified.

Program PF-C.B

The County shall adopt a well construction and destruction ordinance that will include among other requirements the mapping of location information on abandoned wells in the County GIS database and which includes a procedure for ensuring that abandoned wells are properly destroyed.

As Proposed for Revision

Program PF-C.A

The County shall participate in Inter-Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) efforts with other regional partners to identify and implement projects and programs to improve water supply reliability and quality. ~~develop a process for resolution of water supply problems and apply the process when areas of need are identified.~~

Program PF-C.B

The County shall adopt a well construction and destruction ordinance that will include among other requirements the mapping of develop and maintain an inventory of location information on public water system wells, permitted wells, and abandoned wells, ~~in using the County's GIS database and which includes a procedure for ensuring that abandoned wells are properly destroyed.~~

As Proposed for Adoption

Program PF-C.A

The County shall participate in Inter-Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) efforts with other regional partners to identify and implement projects and programs to improve water supply reliability and quality.

Program PF-C.B

The County shall develop and maintain an inventory of public water system wells, permitted wells, and abandoned wells, using the County's GIS database.

Recent Changes in the Revision of the General Plan

After the League's Study Guide was first published in February 2013, the County significantly revised the Policy Document once again. The County retained some of the policies and programs previously proposed for deletion, significantly modified others and even added some new ones.

In addition, the County significantly modified the narrative of the Policy Document. For example, sometime after February 2013, the County rewrote a fundamental General Plan theme entitled "Urban-Centered Growth."

As Currently Written

Urban-Centered Growth

The plan promotes compact growth by directing most new urban development to incorporated cities and existing urban communities that already have the infrastructure to accommodate such growth.

As Proposed for Revision

Urban-Centered Growth

The plan promotes compact growth by directing most new urban development to incorporated cities and existing unincorporated urban communities ~~that already have the~~ where public facilities and infrastructure are available or can be provided consistent with the adopted General Plan or Community Plan to accommodate such growth.

As Proposed for Adoption

Urban-Centered Growth

The plan promotes compact growth by directing most new urban development to incorporated cities and existing unincorporated urban communities where public facilities and infrastructure are available or can be provided consistent with the adopted General Plan or Community Plan to accommodate such growth.

As is evident above, the General Plan currently requires the County to direct most new urban growth to areas of the county that already have the infrastructure to accommodate such growth. But with this latest revision, the County will be able to direct urban growth to areas where infrastructure is not available but can be provided. This latest revision weakens the County's resolve to protect and conserve agricultural lands and to curb urban sprawl.

Other significant revisions have been proposed as well since the League first published its Study Guide. Below are but three examples:

The County is proposing to eliminate from the General Plan the all-important **General Plan and Zoning Correspondence Matrix** (Table LU-2). The General Plan explains the importance of the matrix this way: "*While the General Plan is long-term in perspective, the Zoning Ordinance is immediate in its application. Table LU-2...shows how the various zoning districts correspond to the land use designations in the General Plan.*" (2000 General Plan, page 10.) And from page 2-3, "*Table LU-2 shows which zoning districts are deemed compatible, conditionally compatible, or incompatible with the various General Plan land use designations.*" Not only is the County proposing to eliminate from the General Plan this indispensable matrix, but it is also proposing to eliminate definitions for "*compatible*," "*conditionally compatible*" and "*incompatible zoning*" districts as well as the tables listing the range of typical uses allowed in areas designated Agriculture and Westside Rangeland.

Sometime after February 2013, the County completely rewrote the policies governing the I-5 Freeway Corridor. If the most recent revision is adopted, the number of commercial interchanges will expand from 5 to 7. More significantly, the acreage for possible commercial development will expand from 5 to 20 square miles.

Although the public was encouraged, early on, by the fact that the revision contains a new proposal to prepare a climate action plan, the County has recently made a significant wording change. "*Shall*" has become "*should*." This change makes the preparation of a climate action plan highly unlikely.

The proposed 2014 revision constitutes major changes in County policy. The League encourages residents to read the Study Guide and to attend public hearings respecting the draft revision. The League expresses its appreciation for all the work done by community members over the past several years to make the revision comprehensible.

With respect to the General Plan, the League wishes to add that it is greatly disappointed that the County has (1) failed to revise its outdated Housing Element, (2) failed to prepare the state-required annual audit of the implementation of the General Plan (for the past 11 years), (3) assigned the implementation of the County's Economic Development Strategy to a non-profit corporation, (4) decided not to conduct the required update of the General Plan Background Report and (5) failed to conduct an environmental analysis of the proposed revision.

Nyla Zender, President
League of Women Voters of Fresno