

Article No. 3

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Lack of Public Participation in the Design of the 2020-2040 General Plan

The County of Fresno has not invited county residents to participate in the development of the new 2020-2040 General Plan. In marked contrast, as the 2000-2020 General Plan was developed, there were numerous public meetings, including 15 focus group meetings administered by UC Davis, 35 open houses and 8 town hall meetings.

The current 2000-2020 General Plan was adopted October 3, 2000. As part of the update process, in early 1997, the University of California at Davis interviewed 128 county residents representing a variety of interests and areas of the county. In 1997, the university published a report entitled “*Fresno County and the Future: Residents’ Views of Growth, Resources and Jobs*” which listed the concerns of county residents, the matters of greatest interest being (1) job creation and economic diversification, (2) the protection of resources and (3) the strain on infrastructure and services caused in part by inefficient growth patterns – i.e., urban sprawl.

Over the next three years, the County held dozens of public meetings — informal community get-togethers, more formal presentations to city governments, and workshops before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. The process culminated in 2000 with the adoption of a plan that outlined a dual leadership role for the County as protector of the county’s natural resources and as coordinator of countywide efforts to promote economic development to improve the economic prospects and quality of life for all county residents.

In 2005, the County initiated a five-year review of the 2000-2020 plan to evaluate whether the plan’s goals, policies and implementation programs were working well and whether changes were needed. In contrast to the development of the 2000-2020 plan, the five-year review was low-key — just two public workshops in the fall of 2006: one for county residents and one for the development community and public agencies.

As a result of input from these two public workshops, as

well as input from Planning Commissioners, the Board of Supervisors and County staff, the County received nearly 200 comments recommending changes to the Policy Document. At a public hearing on July 22, 2008, the Board directed staff to incorporate over 100 of those changes into the draft Policy Document.

A matrix created by County staff provided information about each comment: commenter’s name, comment, responses from the County’s consultant, as well as staff’s recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. The openness ensured understanding and transparency.

In September of 2010, the County released for public review the first draft revision of the Policy Document for the five-year review of the 2000-2020 General Plan. This is around the time the County’s enthusiasm for public participation began to wane.

Over the course of the next ten years, the County produced six more drafts, the most recent dated July 2021. Although each draft incorporated additional changes, the County did not give an account of the proposed changes: what they were, who made them, or why they were recommended.

In 2015, the County transformed the five-year review of the 2000-2020 plan into a comprehensive plan update for years 2020-2040 without seeking public input. In 2018, thirteen non-profit organizations formally asked the Board of Supervisors to make a clear public pronouncement about that change and to hold countywide forums to educate residents and to elicit public suggestions regarding what the General Plan goals and policies should be for the next two decades. To date, the Board has not honored that request.

The only meetings of interest after 2006 were five identical community meetings in 2018, but at those meetings, County staff did not elicit any ideas for change. To date, public engagement in preparing the 2020-2040 plan has been absent: no County surveys of public opinion, no public forums, and no requests for input.