

October 19, 2021

Measuring Success through an Indicators Program

“The Fresno County General Plan must be monitored and maintained regularly if the County is to achieve the goals of the plan.” This pronouncement appears in both the current 2000-2020 General Plan and the proposed 2020-2040 plan. Even so, the statement belies the fact that the County has no mechanism in place by which to judge whether General Plan goals are being met.

The Fresno County General Plan is comprehensive. The 2000-2020 plan embodies a set of fifty-two goals — everything from enhancing agricultural productivity, ensuring an adequate water supply, protecting the environment to improving employment opportunities, providing affordable housing and ensuring public safety.

Several months prior to the adoption of the current 2000-2020 General Plan, in a letter to the Fresno County Planning Commission, the League of Women Voters of Fresno (**League**) recommended that the County develop an “indicators program” to serve as a tool to evaluate progress toward the attainment of General Plan goals. Indicators are data of various types which, when collected over a period of time, indicate whether particular goals are being met. For example, to measure the success of achieving the County’s goal to conserve agricultural lands, the County could annually track the amount of acreage lost to urban uses.

The Planning Commission endorsed the concept, and the Commission’s first annual progress report (**APR**) on the implementation of the 2000-2020 General Plan devoted twelve pages to the concept. A portion of that APR read:

“In an effort to promote the use of indicators...the League of Women Voters has initiated a ‘pilot project’ to develop a set of indicators for two elements of the General Plan under the themes of economic development and agricultural land protection....”

Two months later, on August 26, 2003, the League made a formal presentation to the Board of Supervisors. The

Board endorsed the idea of an indicators program and directed its staff to “return to the Board with [an] implementation plan on the indicators for use on a regular basis....” Despite that Board direction, County staff did not develop an indicators program.

In 2006, as comment on the initiation of the revision of the General Plan, the League again recommended that the County adopt an indicators program. As a result, the County’s first draft revision of the General Plan Policy Document (August 2010) contained a new program directing the County to develop an indicators program. The proposed program read as follows:

New Program LU-H.C

“The County shall develop an Indicators Program that monitors the success of the County in achieving the goals of the General Plan. The County shall conduct an annual review of the Indicators Program and report the findings to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.”

This same language was retained in the next four draft revisions of the General Plan; however, with the release of the sixth draft revision (December 2017), the County removed the new program from consideration. The County’s most recent draft 2020-2040 General Plan update does not include an indicators program.

In a March 2019 report to the Planning Commission on the implementation of the General Plan, the League again requested that the County add an indicators program to the General Plan. The League wrote:

“The County should adopt a General Plan program to develop and implement an indicators program. The data...can be used to annually evaluate success toward achieving the goals of the plan.”

Absent an indicators program, there is no way for elected officials and county residents to know if the County is reaching its goals — whether the General Plan is working as envisioned or whether it needs restructuring.