

October 19, 2021

General Plan Annual Progress Reports

As years pass, conditions and community needs change, and new opportunities arise. Because the General Plan must keep pace with such changes, it is essential that the County periodically review the plan and candidly report on its implementation and effectiveness. The plan must be kept current and workable.

Government Code 65400 mandates that by April 1 of each year every county must prepare an annual progress report (APR) on the implementation of its general plan and submit it to the state and to its legislative body.

The County's first APR for the 2000-2020 General Plan covered Fiscal Year 2001/2002. The APR included this opening statement: *"The intent is to ensure that the General Plan...remains an effective guide for future development. Because the role of the General Plan is to act as a "constitution" for the long-term physical development of the County,...it is critical that the County periodically review the [plan] and its implementation. The Annual Report serves as a tool for this purpose."*

More specifically, the purpose of the annual progress report is to provide enough information for decision makers to assess how well the general plan was implemented during the previous year. The APR should explain how land use decisions relate to adopted goals and policies, and it should provide information sufficient to enable the legislative body to identify necessary modifications to improve implementation.

The County's most recent APRs do not satisfy these objectives, and this has created problems for both the administration of the current 2000-2020 General Plan and for the drafting of a new plan for 2020-2040. The APRs from 2015 through 2020 lack basic components required by statute, including an analysis of the degree to which the plan complies with the *General Plan Guidelines* established by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. They also veil the fact that the County has had difficulty successfully implementing the plan as written.

Below are two examples where oblique reporting obscures a lack of implementation. Rather than explain the degree to which programs have been implemented, the APRs present information that is not on point.

Program OS-G.A requires the County to review the *Guide for Assessing and Mitigating Air Quality Impacts* published by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and then to adopt County procedures for performing air quality impact analyses. But rather than report on whether the County has completed these designated tasks, the County's APRs report that the County requires development projects to comply with Air District rules to mitigate impacts on air quality.

Program LU-A.D requires the County to periodically review agricultural land preservation programs to assess their effectiveness in furthering the County's agricultural goals and policies. The General Plan lists thirteen such programs, the Williamson Act being one. But rather than appraise the County's review of the effectiveness of these programs, the County's APRs only state that the County routinely audits Williamson Act contracts for conformity with state and local requirements, evaluates cancellation petitions and processes non-renewals for parcels that no longer meet eligibility requirements.

In 2018, based on data in the County's 2017 APR, the League of Women Voters of Fresno (**League**) analyzed implementation of the current plan and observed that the County was able to report successful implementation of only 33% of its General Plan programs. (See Appendix E of the *League's Annual Progress Report on the General Plan for Calendar Year 2017*, which is located on the League's website at www.lwvfresno.org.)

The County's APRs for calendar years 2015 through 2020 offer no guidance for improving plan implementation. They contain no Planning Commission recommendations for plan modification. As a consequence, the County has not been able to keep the 2000-2020 plan current and now has no documentation to support the many plan changes that constitute the proposed 2020-2040 plan.