

This article may be read online at:

<http://www.newsreview.com/chico/Content?oid=606355>

Copyright ©2008 Chico Community Publishing, Inc.

Printed on 2008-04-01 12:01:53.

General plans

City, county on collision course?

By [Robert Speer](#)

If the city's and the county's new general plans disagree, whose will trump whose?

That's not an idle question. Butte County has been working on its [new plan](#) for a year, and the county Board of Supervisors already has made some decisions that could limit the city's choices when it comes to growth.

Chico is just getting started on its plan. Mayor Andy Holcombe welcomed about 70 people to the Elks Lodge Saturday morning (Dec. 8) for the inaugural "visioning" workshop. The first thing he noted was that the county was also writing a new 2030 general plan and that the city and county would be working together to synchronize their products.

His announcement had a warm and fuzzy feel, but synchronization could turn out to be more difficult than he was letting on.

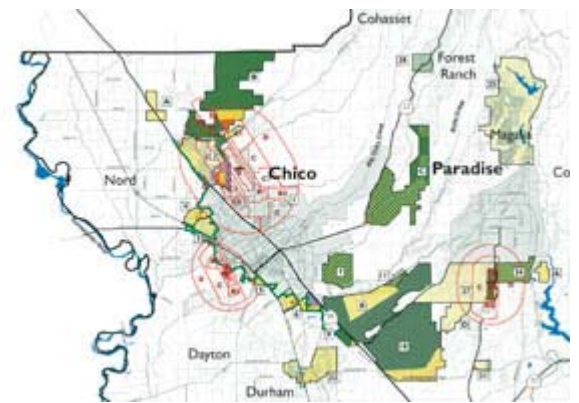
Chico is running out of room to grow. As Supervisor Jane Dolan recently acknowledged during a phone interview, "The city is in a very tough spot. It might be reaching its holding capacity."

It's constrained from growing to the west by the Greenline protecting prime farm land, but the east side is problematic, too. It's got endangered-species issues, and many residents want to protect the foothills "viewshed." Vice Mayor Ann Schwab has even called for an eastside "gold line" beyond which development cannot go.

Partly as a result of these constraints, the city has looked north, toward areas around the airport, for more developable land, with some success. But the airport, with its need for safe flyover space, has provided its own constraints.

That leaves the land south of town, along Highway 99 near the Southgate industrial area, and in Nance Canyon, a huge area south of the Skyway and east of the freeway. The worry is that this will create sprawl along the Highway 99 corridor, contrary to established policies promoting compact urban development.

In 2003, the City Council asked planning staff to analyze the areas where growth could go in and around Chico. In addition to several infill areas such as the Diamond Match property, the planners identified four areas just outside the



WHAT'S IN, WHAT'S OUT

County supervisors already have decided to eliminate potential-growth "Study Areas" A, B, 4, 5 and 6 from their general-plan discussions, saying they should not be developed. The city of Chico has been looking at Areas 4, 5 and 6, which are just outside the Greenline, for possible development. The supervisors left in Area 3 (Bell-Muir), Area 7 (1,440 acres in southwest Chico), Area 8 (Nance Canyon, south of the Skyway) and Area 9 (Southgate). The red lines indicate airport flyover areas.

Courtesy Of Butte County

Greenline to be studied further.

One was the Bell-Muir area between Henshaw Avenue and Bell Road in northwest Chico (Study Area 3). Consensus has long been that this hodge-podge of orchards, ranchettes and homes will be developed eventually. Even Dolan, the midwife of the Greenline, agrees.

On Nov. 27, she made no effort to keep Bell-Muir from being included in the county's general plan as a "study area." But when it came to the other three areas the city had designated, she put her foot down. "You leave it on the table, you create expectations," she explained.

The vote was unanimous on all three, Supervisor Maureen Kirk said. "It was just understood that we weren't going to alter the Greenline."

Of the three areas, two were more feasible than the third. One, the so-called Mud Creek area (Study Area 4), is 541 acres immediately north of Bell-Muir and west of the Northwest Chico Specific Plan area now being developed.

The land, which is planted in orchards, is conveniently bordered by Mud Creek on the north and Highway 32 on the west. There are only two property owners, which would make it easy to plan its development. Bell-Muir, in contrast, has more than 100 landowners, a nightmare for reaching agreement on a plan.

Dolan doesn't care that the Mud Creek area "looks nice on a map." She's not about to let those trees be uprooted.

The second area (Study Area 5) is 170 acres between Dayton Road and the Union Pacific tracks immediately south of town. Although the area is bordered by the Stanley Park subdivision on the south, Dolan believes it should remain as farm land.

"I don't think because we made a mistake [approving Stanley Park] 50 years ago we should compound it today," she explained.

Besides, she added, we shouldn't put more houses on the west side of the railroad tracks until overpasses are built that allow emergency vehicles to get through even when a train is there.

The properties are in the city's sphere of influence, so ultimately the city and the landowners will make the decision on whether to develop them. Whether they will do so in the face of opposition from Dolan and her many political allies, however, is doubtful. Sometimes politics trumps a general plan.

Interestingly, the supervisors did not cut Nance Canyon from the list of county study areas. Asked why, Kirk responded, "It was left in because it wasn't behind the Greenline."