

## City talks to business, economic development people about future

By LAURA URSENY - Staff Writer

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Business owners and economic development leaders weighed-in Thursday with their take on Chico as part of the General Plan update process.

About 25 stakeholders were invited to the "visioning" session, asked about the Chico of today and the one of 2030.

Consulting firm PMC's Kendall Flint asked the questions that would bring out priorities, problems and the idea what the Chico of 2030 would look like -- physically and philosophically.

Comments were wide-ranging, from new funding mechanisms for business that wouldn't be hinged to prevailing wage, to the continuation of open space and cows as part of the city's landscape.

Chico Chamber of Commerce President Mark Sorensen commented on the large number of government jobs in the economy, saying he's like to see more manufacturing and retail jobs.

Downtown business owner Alan Chamberlain talked about having jobs for college graduates, tapping their knowledge pool.

Marc Nemanic, executive director of the Tri County Economic Development Corp., mentioned the importance of ready-to-go commercial and industrial property.

Representatives of PMC took in an hour's worth of comments, pulling answers from everyone

in the room. Most everyone had something to say, and comments didn't stay on business-related tracks but ranged to housing, roads and cooperation among groups.

A scattering of comments included:

**Downtown:** More parking is needed; building owners need to be more active with their buildings; second and third floors capacity for commercial and residential uses should be improved.

**Business space:** Buildings should be taller to increase density; housing density should be dictated by the market, not artificially set.

**Transportation and infrastructure:** Issues ranged from better transit that would preclude the need for cars, to electric car islands from which cars could be borrowed and left at the next station, to a bus loop in downtown that runs every 10 minutes;

**Employment:** On the want list was ways to gain better-paying jobs; job incentives; finding jobs for local college graduates; vocational training should start in high school or lower.

**Growth:** The city should be compact in its expansion; grow north and south while protecting the foothills and ag lands; increase opportunities for light industrial, which now is only at the airport and in south Chico;

A "brand" or recognized identity for Chico should be developed.

This meeting was one of several stakeholders meetings over the course of the General Plan update process, and PMC will be calling the stakeholder groups together again as the plan advances. Wednesday night the consultants met with students.

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The update is expected to take two years to complete.

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**BACKGROUND:** As part of the General Plan update, the city is talking to various interest groups.

**WHAT'S NEW:** On Thursday, a group of business owners and economic development professionals were asked for their thoughts.

**WHAT'S NEXT:** Meetings with other interest groups will be held as the General Plan update takes shape.

**TO COMMENT:** Further comments can be made to the consultant's Web site: [www.chicogeneralplan.com](http://www.chicogeneralplan.com).

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