

Residents weigh in on density, land use at General Plan workshop

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Article Launched: 03/12/2008 01:02:01 AM PDT

For residents like Gaye Buckholdt, Tuesday night's workshop marked the first time they participated in the process of updating the city's General Plan.

Buckholdt and more than 60 others weighed in with their opinions on land use and the local economy during the first of four "key issues" workshops.

It was the first General Plan meeting Buckholdt has ever been to, but she said now that she's retired and has the time, she's interested in how the town she's been in for a "long time" grows.

"I like to feel like I had a small part in making it go the way I want it to," she said after going through one of the five stations set up at the workshop Tuesday night.

The workshop sought to capture opinions from residents to influence the update of the Chico General Plan, which will guide decisions on the future physical development of the city.

The plan, which is expected to take two years to complete, will include planning until the year 2030.

Pam Johns with PMC, the city's consultant for the update, said the input residents gave tonight will enable the consultants to "roll up their sleeves" and start working on particular parts of the General Plan related to land use and the economy.

By going through the stations spread around the

California Park Lakeside Pavilion, residents gave opinions on where they did and did not want the city to grow, where they wanted shopping centers to be, what kinds of jobs they wanted to see in the city, and ways the city could improve economic development and attract businesses.

Those at the meeting were also asked to pick from one of four definitions of the term "compact urban form," which refers to the physical layout and design of the city.

Johns said she's heard the term at least 20 times, but everyone seemed to have a different definition of it.

She said it was important to clearly define the term so that everyone is on the same page for the updated General Plan.

Residents also weighed in on density during a "live" poll that came out in a dead heat, with 43 percent in favor of allowing denser housing developments than currently allowed in Chico and 44 against increasing density.

"It's always interesting here in Chico," PMC's Kendall Flint said after the crowd laughed when seeing the split results.

A city planner noted during a break when asked about the crowd makeup that the group appeared split between representatives of the building industry and those normally on the opposite side.

"I think I've learned it's going to be impossible to please everyone, but there's so many good ideas," said Nancy Ostrom, a member of the General Plan Advisory Committee, which operates as a citizen's oversight committee on the update.

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Like Buckholdt, Bob Contreras and Matthew Swain were also attending a General Plan meeting for the first time.

This was the first Chico General Plan meeting for Paul Hendrick, who has attended meetings for the county's General Plan.

"It gives me an opportunity to form my own opinions as well as see what other people want," said Swain, who said he would go to future meetings.

Scott Hamm, who works with commercial real estate, went to one earlier meeting related to the General Plan and said he was interested about how and where the city grows.

"What we put down is going to be there for 100 years or more and it isn't going to move, so we better get it right," Hamm said.

"And I'm from Fresno, so I've seen bad planning in action.

"We have a great city, and I want to keep it that way."

Residents who were unable to make it to the workshop can find information and take surveys at chicogeneralplan.com.

The next "key issues workshop" is April 8 on the environment and sustainability.

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