

## Letter: Preserve Chico's charm in General Plan

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After poring over numerous General Plan update meeting minutes, it's abundantly clear that preserving whatever makes Chico "special" is the most common theme. That sentiment echoes what I've heard on the Planning Commission over the years, which is usually expressed as some physical component in our community. Like downtown, charming neighborhoods, trees, and so forth.

If you believe the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, then these individually identified components are pieces in a larger puzzle. Solving the puzzle requires understanding why the whole is special.

First and foremost, Chico is geographically isolated, off the beaten path of I-5, surrounded by open space. This isolation is precisely what gives Chico a true sense of place, imparting the small-town feel, in spite of already being a 100,000-person metro area.

Second, Chico has culture because of Chico State. Our older downtown is great, but not radically different from hundreds of similar-sized towns more than 140 years old. Our college (read culture) sits on the doorway to downtown. Not many college towns can boast of this.

Third, Bidwell Park is fabulous, not due to its size, rather due to its in-town location — like Central Park to New York City, and unlike the larger, remote Forest Park in Portland, Ore. Bidwell Park and the other natural greenways that flow through Chico

actually pull in the surrounding geographical isolation, linking us directly to the sense of place we seek to maintain. Let's solve this puzzle during the General Plan update.

— Dave Kelley, Chico

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