

Editorial: One more chance to shape city's future

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The various general plans under construction around Butte County are getting to the critical stage. You can tell because the general public is no longer engaged in the process.

It happens whenever one of these documents gets prepared. There're endless cycles of meetings, ever-growing piles of densely written reports, and repetitive, long-winded presentations. Finally, ordinary folk just throw up their hands and walk away.

Finally, the only people present are politicians, bureaucrats, private parties whose job it is to be there, and self-proclaimed "community advocates," advocating for a community most of us wouldn't recognize.

The people in the room don't need to introduce themselves when they talk because they all know each other. They actually don't even need to talk, because by now everyone knows what everyone else is going to say before they even open their mouths.

And in these cloistered gatherings, documents that guide land use for the next 20 years are drawn.

That's why those plans usually have some unreal provisions. That's why those plans always include something that just won't happen. The general public, who actually has to live with those decisions, isn't in the room to say, "What?! What are you thinking?!"

Tonight, the city of Chico is giving its citizens one

more chance to shape the process. The City Council and Planning Commission are having a joint meeting to take comments on three alternatives for the city's future that have been developed over the last several months.

The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 421 Main St.

We'd encourage people who don't usually make a trip down to City Hall to stop by tonight if they care about with the city's going to look like, what kind of housing there's going to be and how much it will cost, and what kind of job opportunities there might be.

Because the three options offer radically different futures for Chico.

One option allows expansion of the city outward to accommodate the houses with yards many people want. This kind of development chews up vacant land, requires more roads and longer sewers, and if not done properly, forces people into their cars for the most routine of errands.

The contrary option calls for the "compact urban form" that's all the buzz with planners and deep thinkers. It aims for a "walkable" city, pedestrian-friendly and cozy. And it all sounds lovely, until you get to actually implementing it with that nasty "infill." A backyard isn't a place for children to play, but rather a place to build another house. Cozy quickly becomes crowded. And even at that, housing can become scarce and expensive.

The third option is a compromise between the first two, and has enough of each extreme to be opposed by everyone, at least by everyone still at the table.

You can view the options at www.chicogeneralplan.com. And if you see something you like, or

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