

## Session seeks "big ideas" for Chico

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Community members took a look at the bigger picture Saturday during a workshop to gather public input on Chico's General Plan update.

The update will map the future of environmental, developmental and economic issues in the city through 2030, providing a "blueprint for growth" for city planners, said Steve Peterson, Chico planning director.

The crowd was split into a dozen tables of small groups at the Elks Lodge during the second half of the workshop where a handful of people discussed things they'd like to change, add and preserve, and where they see Chico in 20 years.

"We're here asking for big ideas about Chico," said Pam Johns, project manager for PMC, the consulting company working with Chico on the project.

Many of the discussions centered around the same issues: preserving open space and neighborhood quality, enhancing the economy and improving community connectivity. The majority of the groups summarized their discussions as general concepts of improvement rather than nailing down specific ideas.

"The idea today was to get people to open their minds and be vague," said project manager Holly Keeler, who also works as the city's principal planner.

One popular idea that identified a specific desire was establishing community gardens. Another group suggested adding a sports complex, implementing education programs at homeless shelters, improving the appearance of roads on the north side of Chico and preserving Chico Municipal Airport.

Prior to the workshop, 400 residents were polled using a telephone survey, which revealed that 59 percent of residents are very satisfied with their quality of life in Chico. Twenty-three percent listed public safety, including crime, as the most important issue facing the city.

Keeler recognized that many of the ideas at the workshop were contradictory, such as wanting more jobs and houses, but also preserving the small-town atmosphere.

"There are abstract things that we like, but it's hard to figure out how to get them," said Alan Gair, who summarized his group's discussion for the rest of the crowd during a brief table-by-table report.

The individual and collective ideas will be gathered and placed in a book to develop the General Plan update, which will take an estimated two years to complete.

Another public workshop is scheduled from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Monday at the ARC, 2020 Park Ave.

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