

Sue Taylor's El Dorado County Permit Process Recommendations

After much time and study of El Dorado County's permit process, I have come to the conclusion that our county first needs to come to grips as to who is going to determine the future development of our county. Right now it seems to be a toss up between developers and environmentalists.

Since the passage of the 2004 General Plan special interest groups have been badgering the Board of Supervisors for special considerations. Meanwhile, the Board set up an Ad Hoc committee to analyze the difficult permit process. I was also placed on this committee. I am a building designer that has helped my clients in going through the permit process at the county. When I design a home or commercial building, I also do all the planning for the project.

I moved to this area with my parents in 1977. I now have children and grandchildren that live in this area. My roots and love for this county run deep.

Being involved in this committee has made me aware of many things that are of deep concern to me. The new General Plan calls for vast urbanization of many of our communities. At this time the Planning department is working to come up with new zoning throughout the county. Many environmental restraints have been incorporated into this General Plan. Most of these restraints can be mitigated. Mitigation and fees are impacting and often devastating small projects and not really affecting the large Developers. Mitigation is not a big deal for large Developers since they have the time and money to work it out. In addition, the instructions and rules given to the Planning Department are constantly changing. So how can those in the Planning Department give clear direction to the public when the policies are not clear?

In this process the public is left out of the loop. This is a poor way to plan a community. I have felt that those that have come to this county have been rugged individualists. Unless we as individual communities get involved we will lose our rural identity. The best solution our planners, consultants and The Board of Supervisors can come up with for economic development is a type of development that mirrors Folsom and Elk Grove, instead of looking at the resources within our existing communities. Do we really want El Dorado County to turn into another Folsom or Elk Grove?

Many areas could blossom if so many constraints were not put on Ranch Marketing and Agriculture. Markets and events on weekends could bring in those precious tax dollars the Board keeps talking about and we could keep our rural identity.

Instead of lining the Missouri Flat area with Box stores and Stucco Box homes, how about doing something more in sync with the historical feel of being a gold mine town? How about something that might actually bring people **to** the area? Perhaps a cool mining town mixed use development that promotes small

businesses and communities instead of something that looks like a strip mall? Why not give people a reason to live around the area instead of dumping on them?

Last of all, the morale of county government employees is at an all time low. The best qualified workers are either overlooked or have been given golden handshakes. Incentives need to be in place in order to retain good people, people that are willing to work with the public and local groups to set policies that actually work. Give these employees the tools to do their job.

So to start, we need to create community groups. Each group should be diverse and have a viable interest in their community. They would work, along with the "local" Planning Department (not another outside consultant or study group), to determine Zoning, holding town meetings along the way to involve the public. Each community would determine what is environmentally important within their own area. Then, instead of being able to mitigate those environmental issues away, the environment should be protected through planning. Plans should be made to include ideas that would enhance those areas to be used as an economic resource while also protecting them, such as the rivers.

Changes would first go through these Community Groups before the going to the Planning Commission. This would take the pressure off of the Planning Department, Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. The wrangling for the Boards attention between the Developers and Environmentalists would be eliminated. This would put the planning process back in the hands of individual communities, creating better environments in which to live.

Once these plans are in place, it is crucial for the Board to support these plans.

So here are my recommendations:

- Each community form a group to develop a community plan for their particular area rather than a one size fits all General Plan.
- Use our rural resources to attract economic development instead of only basing economic development on new growth. Educate the public that ranch marketing, agriculture, tourism and forestry help to retain our rural atmosphere.
- Alleviate Environmental issues by identifying those resources and protecting them by zoning rather than impacting the entire county.
- Cooperation and coordination with water and fire districts in conjunction with the County departments needs to be implemented so folks wishing to develop have a clear picture of the requirements, available resources and cost.

- Find ways for our natural resources to be a viable income producing entity therefore preserving that resource.
- When creating development plans, encourage lots rather than tract homes in order to promote income for local builders. These types of homes also help to retain our individualism.
- Major and minor projects need to be treated differently in the review process.
- Keep the Planning and Building Departments separate. Put competent Directors in charge of each of those departments that can communicate with each other and the public. Hold those Directors responsible if those departments are not functioning, instead of leaving them in for years.
- We need clear, simple brochures to hand out for each planning and building permit situation. The instructions and requirements need to be simplified.
- There needs to be a coordination process between all county agencies establishing a true one stop shop for the county and the applicant.
- Once area plans are in place, clear direction needs to be given to Planners in order to give better direction to the public before so much time and money is wasted on incorrect information.
- Go back to the simpler Grading/Site Plan for small commercial developments and residential plans in order to give relief to small development.
- Billing needs to be fee based rather than time & material.
- The front counter needs to remain open until 5:00 p.m. The hours between 4:00-5:00 p.m. can be for basic information only. Educate the counter person with enough information to explain and provide brochures to the public.
- Instead of leaving people hanging in the Planning Maze, tell them yes or no much earlier in the process.
- Don't take in incomplete projects. It usually ends up burning everyone in the end.
- And last I would close the doors to the Planning department until the Zoning issues are resolved.