




Search site for:

HOME


NEWS 

- News Archive
- City/County
- Nation/World
- Crime & Courts
- Police Calls

SPORTS 

LIFESTYLES 

OBITUARIES

BUSINESS 

OPINION

CLASSIFIEDS

- Jobs
- Homes
- Autos

'Valley Blueprint' topic of Thursday evening meeting

Plan will be completed in the next two years and forwarded to governor

By Corey Pride
CPRIDE@LOSBANOSENTERPRISE.COM
 Last Updated: February 27, 2007, 01:15:46 AM PST

The Merced County Association of Governments hosted an informal meeting of politicians, former politicians and concerned citizens Thursday night.

They discussed the long-term future of Los Baños and its surrounding area.

The workshop, which was held in the O'Banion building at the Los Baños Fairgrounds, focused on crafting a vision that will eventually be included in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint plan. The plan will establish goals in the area of economic development, land use patterns, transportation, infrastructure and environmental planning.

"People are talking about the San Joaquin Valley more than ever. Stars are aligned for the San Joaquin Valley and we need to determine our future, or it's going to be determined for us," said Marjie Kirn, MCAG deputy executive director.

The first step MCAG took in helping determine the future of Los Baños and its surrounding area was asking the people at the meeting about the area's strengths and weaknesses.

Meeting attendees sat in groups at different tables trying to make their list. Los Baños resident and former Mayor Michael Amabile could be heard trying to trim the number of items his group had chosen.

"It's almost like small-town feel, ag base, what can we live without? Probably neither of them," he said.

Answers that were finalized had a few common themes like small-town atmosphere, agriculture, location and wildlife habitat.

Former Councilman Roger Pruitt said he believes the natural resources surrounding Los Baños could benefit the city economically in the future.

"As this state develops there's going to be less and less places to go to see that wildlife," he said. "It's going to be a tourist thing."

There were also a number of people who had similar lists of the area's problems. Frequent responses included traffic, overcrowded schools, increased crime and population growth.

City Manager Steve Rath addressed the importance of getting control of growth at the beginning of the workshop.

"As you know there is a tremendous amount of pressure. This is the confluence to the South Bay," Rath said. "For the last year, maybe two years, we've been talking about this being the outer Bay Area, and we are definitely getting noted as such."

Kirn said by 2040 the 3.3 million people living in the San Joaquin Valley is projected to more than double, becoming 7 million.

Kirn asked attendees to consider what they would like 2040 to be like.

"Think about somebody sitting on their porch and they're like 'thank god they thought of that,'" she said.

Answers included the Highway 152 bypass, adequate school growth, a jobs/housing balance and managed population growth.

Kirn said the exercises are being repeated at workshops through the entire Central Valley. She said the activities serve a very serious purpose.

"All the issues are important and need to be worked on, but this gives us a sense of where we have commonality throughout the valley," she said "These things we can share and get behind valley-wide will help us focus our attention," she said, mentioning agricultural protection as a concern the region shares.

Kirn said different growth scenarios will be formed based on the information gathered at the workshops. She said within the next two years a preferred scenario will hopefully be chosen and place in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint plan.

Enterprise staff writer Corey Pride can be reached at 826-3831 ext. 106 or cpride@losbanosenterprise.com

