

Richard W. Johnson
P.O. Box 533
Talmage, CA 95481
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The Planning Team
Mendocino County Planning Department
Room 1204
501 Low Gap Road,
Ukiah, CA 95482

Recommendation on the Draft General Plan Update: SUSTAINABILITY

Dear Planners,

I am a 27-year resident and taxpayer of the county with current residence address of 203 North State Street in Ukiah.

I am the editor/publisher of the MENDOCINO COUNTRY Independent newspaper, an environmentalist, acting chair of the Green Party of Mendocino County and secretary of the Voters Union, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to electing environmentalists to the Mendocino County board of supervisors.

In my opinion, the Mendocino County Draft General Plan Update as prepared by consultants PMC Inc. and submitted to the board of supervisors is totally insufficient, inadequate and obsolete. It should be scrapped and a different planning process begun to produce a completely new General Plan fit for the 21st century.

The proposed so-called Update is in fact just a boiler plate tweak of the 1981 General Plan, which itself was a remake of that written in 1971. The underlying social, environmental, economic and scientific assumptions are those of 40 years ago, not simply obsolete but fallacious and counterproductive in today's context.

Under the former General Plan, outside corporations were allowed to devastate our forest lands, creating a 40-year "timber gap" before they achieve their former productivity – if they are allowed to recover. This is the direct result of the decision of county supervisors to reject special forest practice rules in the 1990s. As a result, the salmon fishery has been decimated as spawning streams were allowed to silt up.

Residential and commercial development has been allowed to proliferate with little or no regard for the General Plan under innumerable special interest variances and amendments or with no permits whatever, cutting off the possibility of future use of such lands under sound planning principles.

Traditional land use patterns supporting mechanized, chemical dependant and livestock rearing emphasize large holdings, many of which are fallow. However, our survival in a Post Carbon era depends on massive conversion to small scale intensive organic vegetable and grain agriculture that may involve multiple ownerships integrated with residential communities.

Some major air polluters such as Masonite and Georgia Pacific have gone, while smaller sources of emissions such as two stroke motors, off-road vehicles, motor boats and racing engines have metastasized without regulation.

If the proposed GPU is approved, it is likely Mendocino County will be laid waste for the next 20 years as it has for the last 40, with even more devastating consequences to the public interest, environmental sustainability, economic viability and social welfare.

The Mendocino County General Plan must be founded on our historical experience, as well as an objective, unbiased, scientifically sound assessment of all relevant land use facts, including population growth, planned and unplanned development, resource depletion, and decayed decrepit infrastructure.

Fundamentally, the GP must take into account the approaching crises known as Global Climate Imbalance and Peak Oil. ;

Specific Objection: THE GP DOES NOT INCORPORATE THE MENDOCINO MODEL OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Staff Report on the Mendocino Model of Sustainability defines the term as “any process or activity which can be maintained over long periods of time without harm to community (pollution) and depletion of resources is considered sustainable.”

The report written by the Planning Team recommends the following:

1. Include as a goal for the draft General Plan, the development of land use and circulation policies that lead to far more efficient use of transportation-related energy. By pursuing such strategies as encouraging mixed-use planning, requiring compact development, making transportation systems balanced and creating opportunities for alternatively powered vehicles to operate, Mendocino County can reduce the amount of energy needed for the transportation of its citizens, goods and services
2. Lead the way by requiring that development-related decisions consider energy implications for both the present and future. Accounting for energy consumption during the lifespan of any given project or decision will allow decisionmakers to better understand the cost of operation for a development or program and recommend mitigations.
3. Craft an economic policy that recognizes the challenges of an energy constrained future and offers a viable local alternative. By accepting the realities of our future, the county can craft an economic policy that has a better chance of long-term success than one that ignores the fact that oil and natural gas-based products will continue to become ever more expensive
4. Encourage more local generation of energy by harnessing sources that are currently underutilized. 4 Make it a goal to encourage and/or facilitate county residents and businesses to generate electricity.
5. Make energy efficiency a priority in county government operations and building codes. Leading by example, the county can reduce its energy expenditures (and budgetary outlays) while mandating that private development also become more efficient in its use of energy.
6. Investigate the possibility of creating a joint powers authority tasked with the responsibility for countywide energy planning. Some energy decisions are best made at the local level.
7. Investigate creating a Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) area or municipal utility that will stimulate the local production of electricity. A CCA purchases electricity on behalf of a community and would be in position to sign contracts with local producers of electricity or implement important demand reduction strategies.

Goal D-8 Transportation mentions sustainability but to my knowledge, there are no policies or action items to implement the model.

Recommendation:

The current proposed GP Update must be rejected, and a new document written by a process not driven by consultants but instead relies on ad hoc citizen advisory committees to be appointed by supervisors. These committees and the Planning Team would regularly report to a special committee of the BOS to assure timely progress.

The current “financial crisis” actually provides a temporary respite from development pressures in order to accomplish this task. A realistic timeline for the

presentation of a Draft General Plan for Mendocino County would be April of 2010.

Verification:

I am the author of this letter and I have personal knowledge of the facts alleged therein, and swear and affirm under penalty of perjury of the laws of the state of California that all statements within it are true, except to those that are alleged to the best of my knowledge and belief, and those I believe to be true. Signed,

RICHARD W. JOHNSON,

Date: November 18, 2008