

KERN REGIONAL BLUEPRINT PROGRAM TOWN HALL MEETING—PHASE 2

S U M M A R Y R E P O R T

KERN RIVER VALLEY October 24, 2007

I. INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday, October 24, 2007, Kern Council of Governments (COG) hosted a Town Hall Meeting for the Kern Regional Blueprint Program at the Kern River Veterans/Senior Building in Lake Isabella. The purpose of the meeting was: (a) to educate participants about the purpose of the Blueprint; (b) to provide results of Phase 1 outreach efforts regarding the visions, values, and top issues for the future; and (c) to present and facilitate discussion and collect input about draft principles and draft illustrative “scenarios” for future growth.

Background

Kern COG is an association of city and county governments primarily created to address regional transportation issues. Its member agencies include the County of Kern and the eleven incorporated cities within the Kern Region and ex-officio members representing Caltrans, Golden Empire Transit District and the Congestion Management Agency.

The Town Hall Meeting is one of a series throughout the Kern Region as part of the Kern Regional Blueprint Program, which is designed to engage policymakers and citizens to create a regional vision and growth principles for the integration of transportation, housing, land use, economic development and environmental protection that will inform local decision-making and guide growth over the next 50 years. **The Kern Regional Blueprint is not a City General Plan or a County Specific Plan; it is a 2050 visioning project designed to complement other planning processes.** Elected officials from the county and each city throughout the Kern region will determine how their jurisdictions will accommodate the regional vision through local decision-making and planning efforts. The Kern Regional Blueprint will also be included as part of the Central California Blueprint Program, which will integrate the outcomes of the Blueprint programs from the seven other Central California counties.

Phase 1 of the outreach process focused on introducing the Blueprint Program, developing a regional vision for the future of the region and its communities, and understanding the participants’ priority issues related to growth. Phase 2 of the process is focused on developing principles for future growth and a preferred

illustrative scenario for development in each sub-region, all of which builds from the regional vision and priority issues developed in Phase 1.

Community Outreach

To build community awareness of and involvement in the Blueprint Program, Kern COG initiated an extensive outreach program as part of these Town Hall Meetings, which will carry and expand into future phases of the process. With outreach and coordination support from Odyssey, a California-based nonprofit organization focused on transportation policy improvements, Kern COG implemented a number of outreach measures to advertise the meeting, including:

- Direct phone calls to a broad range of community-based organizations including business, social service, cultural, and other interests;
- Targeted mail and email of a project newsletter and meeting notice;
- Coordination with government agencies' outreach efforts and networks;
- Inserts in local and community-based newsletters and media publications;
- Media campaign.

These efforts will continue to build Kern COG's outreach database over time, leading to ever-expanding outreach measures in future phases of the process.

Town Hall Meeting Agenda and Format

The Kern River Valley meeting was held from 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. at the Kern River Veterans/Senior Building, 6405 Lake Isabella Blvd., in Lake Isabella. Upon entering the meeting facility, participants signed-in and received a nametag and handout materials including an agenda, comment form, and evaluation form (handout materials may be found at www.kerncog.org). Approximately 25 community members representing residents, businesses, local government agencies, and community-based organizations attended the meeting.

Participants then reviewed the “open house” portion of the meeting, which featured display materials of local area maps and data related to existing conditions and future growth projections, as well as other general information from Kern COG. Becky Napier of Kern COG served as the meeting facilitator and initiated the meeting with brief welcoming remarks and an agenda overview. She then recognized local officials in attendance: Judy Hyatt, Assistant to the Supervisor, Supervisor Jon McQuiston's Office; and introduced Kern COG Senior Planner, Robert Ball.

Mr. Ball delivered brief introductory remarks describing the relationship of the Blueprint to local planning activities followed by a slideshow presentation that provided an overview of the purpose of, need for, and process for developing the Blueprint. The slideshow included results of the Phase 1 Town Hall Meeting in Kern River Valley including the sub-region's visions and values. The slideshow also introduced the draft principles for growth in the Kern region, which provide guidance and direction about how to manage future growth, as well as illustrative pictures to further describe each principle's meaning and intent.

Ms. Napier then reviewed the format of the small group discussions before convening participants to their small groups. After brief introductions among the participants, a facilitator at each small group table guided participants through a discussion of participants' reactions to the draft principles. As a discussion tool, the facilitators introduced a "card game," which is designed to allow participants to share their beliefs of how effective each principle would be in achieving the visions for future growth. The small group facilitators recorded participants' discussion points and the card game tallies during the small group discussion on flip chart pages, and participants also recorded comments on their own comment forms, all of which are summarized in the following pages of this report.

Following this small group discussion, participants heard a brief presentation from Robert Ball regarding draft "scenarios" for future growth in the sub-region. Mr. Ball explained that each of the four scenarios represented varying levels of compact development, or the amount of development that is focused on existing urban areas. He also provided data regarding performance measures for each scenario, including the relative change in air quality, energy use, water consumption, and other measures.

Ms. Napier then asked participants to reconvene in their small groups to review the scenarios and data in more detail, which were provided as handouts and on large posters at each small group table. She asked that each participant indicate their preferred scenario and to share their ideas and reasons as part of the small group discussion. The small group facilitators guided these discussions and recorded comments on the flip chart pages, and participants also recorded comments on their own comment forms, all of which are summarized in the following pages of this report.

Participants then reconvened in the large group format to hear brief summary reports from a volunteer from each group regarding the Draft Principles and scenarios. Ms. Napier facilitated the discussion and also recorded a summary of the reports on flip chart pages at the front of the meeting room.

The following pages summarize comments captured on the flip chart pages from the small group discussions, as well as those submitted by participants on comment forms. Original copies of these documents are on file with Kern COG.

II. DISCUSSION: DRAFT PRINCIPLES

Participants discussed the draft principles in terms of their beliefs of how effective each would be in achieving the visions and values for future growth. The small group facilitators asked participants to provide any overall comments about draft principles, and then proceeded to review each principle in turn.

Each participant received a set of five cards as part of the “card game.” The facilitator explained that the suited cards represent levels of effectiveness in achieving the visions for future growth. The suited cards were labeled as:

- ♠ **Spades** represent “No effect”
- ♥ **Hearts** represent “Small effect”
- ♦ **Diamonds** represent “Moderate effect”
- ♣ **Clubs** represent “Major effect”
- “X” represents “Delete this principle”

As the small group facilitator introduced a draft principle, each participant raised the card that represented his belief in the effectiveness of the principle. After tallying the results on the flip chart pages, the facilitator asked participants to comment on why they played their respective cards, which the facilitator recorded on the flip chart pages. The facilitator also encouraged participants to record their card play and associated comments on their comment form. Following is a summary of card game results and participants’ comments on each principle:

Use compact, efficient development and/or mixed land uses

Some participants thought locating housing and transit routes in close proximity would have a major effect on the community. They wanted to see space used efficiently with sustainable green building guidelines. Some participants expressed the opinion that density would retain the vitality of the community and a walkable community would allow the seniors to be self sufficient. Participants discussed adding more bicycle/walking paths and include access for electrical carts for the older population.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
15	6	1	1	1

Provide a variety of housing choices

Most participants agreed a mix of housing choices including townhouses, condos and apartments is needed for the growing population. Others identified a need for senior housing. Some identified a need for a rehabilitation program for existing residential units. Some expressed the opinion that a healthy community consists of all income levels, but that affordability is an issue. One participant stated this was not the vision for the community and requested the principle be deleted.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
9	8	4	0	1

Provide adequate and equitable services

Participants agreed recreation was the life blood of the community. Participants generally agreed adequate and equitable services were the key to economic development. They also agreed there was a need for better medical and EMT services especially for middle income. Some participants wanted vocational education, higher standards for K-12, and long distance education through the internet. Some participants stated there was a need for better internet services in the Kern River Valley area.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
20	3	0	0	0

Use and improve existing community assets and infrastructure

Participants agreed this principle was economically efficient and infill and development of already planned areas was needed. Some thought most people wanted things to remain the same and this principle would help them achieve that desire. Participants generally agreed water and water quality was a key issue for the Kern River Valley. Most identified cost as a problem. Some participants identified the need for a sanitary sewer system and undergrounding of electrical lines.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
20	1	1	0	0

Provide a variety of transportation choices

Participants generally agreed there needed to be an alternative to driving. Bike lane and sidewalk networks are needed for the safety of those who choose this mode of transportation. Some participants expressed the opinion that efficient community centers alleviate the need to go to other communities for services.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
11	11	1	0	0

Enhance economic vitality

Participants identified a need for vocational education and job training as a means to enhance economic vitality in the area. Participants expressed a need for higher paying jobs. Some

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
7	9	6	0	0

expressed the opinion that growth would take care of enhancing economic vitality.

Conserve energy and natural resources, and develop alternatives

Participants identified water as the natural resource critical to the community. Participants agreed the lake is the life of the valley and natural resources bring in tourism. Some participants that wind and solar energy production was possible in the Kern River Valley. Some identified the need to preserve the air quality and conserve water and minerals.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
18	3	0	1	0

Conserve undeveloped land and spaces

Participants agreed that the undeveloped land and spaces makes Kern River Valley what it is with snow and streams. Participants expressed a desire to protect the Kern River Valley watershed. Participants also agreed that generally they want to keep the night skies visible – no light pollution.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
20	3	0	0	0

Increase civic and public engagement

Participants collectively agreed there was a need to get the public involved. A few thought things worked fine as they are.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
12	10	0	1	0

Missing principles

Participants identified the following missing principles:

- Protect/preserve historical and prehistoric sites and artifacts.
- Unsafe Intersection – Lake Isabella Blvd. and Elizabeth Norris intersection is too dark and dangerous.

III. DISCUSSION: DRAFT SCENARIOS

Following Mr. Ball’s presentation of the draft scenarios and associated performance measures for the sub-region, participants indicated their preferences for the draft scenario of compact development and associated performance measures that best reflect the visions for growth and appropriate level of implementation of the draft principles. The four scenario options included:

- **No change**, or maintaining development patterns as projected in today's local land use planning policies
- **Some change**, or some increase in compact development
- **Moderate change**, or a moderate increase in compact development
- **Major change**, or a major increase in compact development

After tallying participant's preferences for scenarios, the small group facilitator asked participants to comment on their choices, which the facilitator recorded on the flip chart pages. The facilitator also encouraged participants to record their scenario choice and associated comments on their comment form. Following is a summary of participants' scenario choices (with tallies noted next to the scenario names) and comments:

Major Change (6)

Participants who selected the major change scenario suggested increasing density only in the central area of town with a two to three story maximum height. They identified a need for duplex and granny units. Participants also acknowledged that people are drawn to walkable communities. Participants identified a need for more user friendly transportation to Bakersfield. Participants acknowledged that if growth is inevitable it needs to be accommodated correctly to retain the rural life style. Some participants thought this scenario was too urban.

Moderate Change (11)

Participants who selected the moderate change scenario suggested it maintained the rural atmosphere and preserves the economic base of tourism while seeking diversity in small industry. They also identified the need to reuse existing assets.

Some Change (3)

Participants who selected the some change scenario suggested that market forces would make the decisions and if market forces demand multi-family residential then multi-family residential will be built. Participants also stated the school system has a bus system because it is too rural of an area to walk.

No Change (0)

Participants did not support this scenario. They felt this scenario would be self-destructive and leave out housing choices for seniors and the disabled.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES AND COMMENTS

Participants provided additional comments during the small group discussions and via comment cards.

- We would like to see a dog park.
- We need a crosswalk or stop sign by Nelda's restaurant.
- We don't want any more growth, compact or otherwise.

