

KERN REGIONAL BLUEPRINT PROGRAM TOWN HALL MEETING—PHASE 2

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

RIDGECREST/INYOKERN November 14, 2007

I. INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday, November 14, 2007, Kern Council of Governments (COG) hosted a Town Hall Meeting for the Kern Regional Blueprint Program at the Kerr McGee Center in Ridgecrest. 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 Ridgecrest/Inyokern meeting was held from 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. at the Kerr McGee Center, 100 W. California Avenue in Ridgecrest. 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 42 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: Steve Morgan, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Ridgecrest; Dan Clark, Council Member, City of Ridgecrest; Nellavan Jeglum, Planning Commissioner, City of Ridgecrest; Lois Beres, Planning Commissioner, City of Ridgecrest; Jim McCrea, Community & Economic Development Director, City of Ridgecrest; Matthew Alexander, City Planner, City of Ridgecrest; 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

Ridgecrest 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

Participants generally agreed there was a need for efficient use of available land and reuse/redevelopment of older areas. Some participants thought this principle promoted concentration of energy and sustainability. Some participants expressed the opinion that contractors benefit from compact development not the public. Some participants expressed the opinion that population density will never grow to allow services to grow.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate Effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
8	17	8	2	1

Provide a variety of housing choices





Participants generally agreed there was a need to broaden the variety of housing to include housing for students, seniors and young families. Some expressed the need more senior housing and different types of housing such as equestrian (large animal) friendly housing. Participants recognized the market

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate Effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
17	16	1	2	1

has a roll in driving the mix of housing types. Others expressed a concern over affordable (low income) housing and the potential for dwelling deterioration and increased crime.





Provide adequate and equitable services

Participants agreed all areas of services were important especially education (including higher education opportunities), medical/dental, public safety, recreation, and performing arts. Some participants identified a need for veteran’s and social security services.

 Major effect	 Moderate Effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X</i> Delete
31	4	0	2	0





Use and improve existing community assets and infrastructure

Participants agreed this was an important principle that contributes to all other principles. Participants agreed good water infrastructure was need, streets needed repair and the sewer system needed to be expanded. Some participants expressed the opinion that since most taxes go to higher levels of government, local tax measures must pass to provide self-help. Some participants expressed the opinion that neighborhood schools are community assets and need to be updated.

 Major effect	 Moderate Effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X</i> Delete
25	10	0	0	1





Provide a variety of transportation choices

Many participants expressed the opinion that public transportation needs in the area need improvement. Some participants suggested there needed to be a hybrid fixed route that linked services between the city and the base. Some participants identified the need for senior developments to include easy transportation routes. Other participants identified the need for interconnectivity for out of town trips. Some participants expressed the opinion that Ridgecrest will never be a bicycle community. One participant expressed the opinion that public transportation at taxpayer’s expense was not needed and should be left to the private sector.

 Major effect	 Moderate Effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X</i> Delete
16	9	11	1	0

Enhance economic vitality

Participants generally agreed vocational and mid-level job training was needed. Some participants identified a need for a four-year college either public or private. Some expressed the concern that no high-end salaried jobs were available and there was a need to diversify trades.

 Major effect	 Moderate Effect	 Small effect	 No effect	<i>X</i> Delete
17	16	2	2	0

Some expressed the opinion that the base and the college should increase cooperation. Some expressed the opinion that base support for job shadowing and mentorships would be effective.

Conserve energy and natural resources, and develop alternatives

Participants generally agreed the technology exists for alternative energy and it should be implemented: solar, wind, geothermal. Participants also agreed water sustainability must be preserved.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate Effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
30	1	3	1	2

Conserve undeveloped land and spaces

Participants agreed the desert creates a positive quality of life and is valuable to the residents. Participants agreed natural areas and vistas need to be preserved and growth balanced with protection of open spaces. Participants also agreed the military air space needed to be protected and the mission of the military preserved.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate Effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
20	10	4	1	2

Increase civic and public engagement

Participants collectively agreed public involvement was critical. Some identified a need for the community to be involved with the police in watching for crime and reporting it. Some participants identified a need for better advertisement of meetings.

♣ Major effect	♦ Moderate Effect	♥ Small effect	♠ No effect	X Delete
16	14	3	2	2

Missing principles

Participants identified the following missing principles:

- Illegal dumping
- Graffiti
- Enhance community safety and security
- Diversify Ridgecrest economics

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 (0)

Participants did not support the major change scenario. Participants expressed the opinion that the community is good and doesn't need a lot of change. Others stated that if there was major change in the community no one would want to live there.

Moderate Change (10)

Participants who selected the moderate change scenario felt it would provide more housing for seniors close to chopping and conserve energy and water. Others expressed the opinion that the major change scenario was too radical and that flexible growth was needed.

Some Change (8)

Participants who selected the some change scenario expressed the opinion that some housing choices were needed such as single family condominiums and more market driven development. Other participants expressed the need to preserve the rural area and China Lake. Participants want to preserve the small town, neighborly community, low crime rate and at the same time recognize the concern for water availability.

No Change (1)

The participant who selected the no change scenario wanted to protect the country areas and rural lifestyle.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES AND COMMENTS

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

- Indian Wells Valley – Density is when you can see your neighbor.
- Indian Wells Valley – Centrally isolated.

- Further subdivision of county lots is detrimental to the development of Ridgecrest.
- Because there is such a major difference between the needs of the eastern side of the mountains and the western, there was little relevance of the county-wide effects to Indian Wells Valley.
- The need for academic development versus major industry will provide the research, development tests and evaluation support structure for the Navy/Department of Defense Mission.
- This process is biased and driven by a hidden agenda.
- I believe there is a trend to increased energy costs and scarcity of potable water. We need to conserve and promote sustainability.
- I oppose things that will block the view.
- This is a “Delphi” technique.
- We are a federally driven community – highly educated and progressive unlike the rest of Kern County which is industrial and agricultural. I would like to see Ridgecrest and the Indian Wells Valley treated as the unique area it is rather than incorporated into the larger Kern view.

