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## Divide residents speak out on high county building fees

Concerned citizen Ron Wolsfeld initiated a meeting regarding the “Rural Communities Survival and Recovery Action Plan” which was held at the Cool Community Church Feb. 16 with El Dorado County Supervisors Ron Briggs and Ray Nutting.

The meeting was called in response to the fees for new home construction including small-scale projects such as fencing, decks and granny flats.

Wolsfeld argues the current fees are so astronomical that El Dorado County is single-handedly destroying its building community.

“El Dorado County has long been known as a ‘Don’t go there’ county, discouraging people from moving up here, or expanding on the property they currently own,” he said to the gathering of approximately 75. “We’re hoping to demonstrate the severity of the problem and pose some solutions.”

The meeting kicked off with a prayer by Pastor Ed Kennedy of Mother Lode Church in Coloma in which he ended saying, “A lot of things separate us, but many bring us together; our love of the area and raising our families here is just one of them.”

Kennedy’s prayer set a peaceful tone for the meeting, which included speakers from local business sectors, churches, the Black Oak mine Unified School District and the El Dorado Builders Exchange. Guest speakers shared their experiences with new home construction projects and the woes that have fallen upon them. Many speakers also came prepared with some astonishing statistics.

Examples that were presented included a sample of builder’s fees from the Rescue area, where in 2002 building fees were around \$14,700 and in 2008 they were up around \$60,500. When the construction economy was booming, fees were increased, but after the market crashed, fees were never reduced accordingly.

The goal of the meeting was to present some of the concerns and problems with the current building fees and offer solutions to help spur the economy for local builders and contractors. This discrepancy is creating a situation where local contractors are finding themselves with less work, as local people cannot afford to build new homes, and cannot even afford to do small scale construction projects, such as granny flats.

Ken Calhoon, president of the Divide Chamber of Commerce, explained the concept of the sandwich generation.

“Twenty percent of our community has parents living with them, and children living with them,” he said. “They are financially supporting more people within their home, with less space. This is why more people want to use their property to build granny flats.”

The single largest line item within the fees is what’s referred to as a TIM fee (Traffic Impact Mitigation) and accounts for more than 40 percent of all the fees. Jack Borba, president of the El Dorado Builders Exchange put this statistic into perspective.

“Traffic has decreased to its lowest level since 2003, people are moving out of our community, and yet TIM fees keep going up,” he said.

Wolsfeld pointed out that in 2005 there were only 50 building permits issued in Garden Valley, which, while not impressive, is substantially more than the seven that were issued in 2010. The key actions presented to the Board of Supervisors was a multi-step process, which was to be enacted by March and included the following:

Lower Building Department fees for five years, streamline and simplify the permit process, eliminate TIM fees

for granny units for five years, create an amnesty program (for homes which in the past had not been fully permitted), and eliminate school district fees for granny units and additions.

Jerry Hoyt, owner of Divide Supply in Greenwood, provided some comedic relief at the meeting, by suggesting the supervisors consider thinking outside the box.

“In my business, the retail world, we’d have a big sale on permits to fix this problem.”

Supervisor Briggs joined in the laughter that filled the room, and told Hoyt he’d take it back as a suggestion. “I believe Jerry is onto something with thinking outside the box, that is something we do need to do.”

Bob Day explained the phenomenon when he said, “It’s all about the multiplier effect: Every dollar spent within the community touches the hands of someone else...I pay my landscaper, who then goes to Divide Supply and buys something for \$5, then an employee of Jerry’s (Divide Supply) goes to Mar-Val and buys groceries.”

Supervisor Briggs explained that in the recent months, thanks to this very initiative, TIM fees had already been reduced by 14 percent for the Divide’s fee zone.

According to the El Dorado County Website, the current TIM fees for the local area (Fee Zone 4) are set at \$15,430, [edcgov.us/DOT/TIM/Resolution070-2010.aspx](http://edcgov.us/DOT/TIM/Resolution070-2010.aspx), and “generally” include:

- All the interchanges from Ponderosa Road/South Shingle west to the county line, and the El Dorado and Missouri Flat road interchanges;
- High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on Highway 50 from Cameron Park Drive west to the county line;
- Improvements to the county’s main arterial roads (e.g., Missouri Flat, Green Valley, Latrobe Road, Cameron Park Drive, Cambridge Road, Pleasant Valley Road, Mother Lode Drive, Highway 49);
- Intersection improvements (e.g., Latrobe and White Rock, several along Cameron Park Drive);
- Transit requirements (e.g., purchase of additional commuter buses, park ‘n ride lots);
- Safety improvements (e.g., South Latrobe Road improvements);
- Bridge improvements (e.g., Sly Park Road Clear Creek Bridge replacement).

“This is what local government is all about,” Briggs added. “We want to work with the community, but as elected officials we become ‘one of them.’ We are trying, but we can’t make it perfect right away. We hope to have a new model within the year.”

Briggs also pointed out that there is a hardship program for people in need, which is frequently overlooked.

Jim Stewart, a lifelong resident of the Georgetown Divide summed up the meeting when he posed the question, “Where will we leave future generations, if our kids are unable to build here?”

For information on the issue, call 334-0880.

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