

## Community Planning Citizen Outreach Summary Report

El Dorado County enjoys a diversity of unique places, each with their own passionate citizens looking to the future. Conversations with more than 40 people in nine community areas surfaced interesting trends for consideration by the County. The areas surveyed include El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park, El Dorado/Diamond Springs, Cool/The Divide, Coloma Lotus, Camino, Pollock Pines, Meyers and two areas in south county, Pleasant Valley and Fair Play. Overall the tone of the citizens, in regards to future localized community plans was hopeful; each area recognizes that they have unique assets that can be leveraged.

### **Current Planning Efforts**

The community areas differed most by where they were on the planning scale. The range extends from no discernable community planning efforts underway, to being highly charged with the intent to create a formal plan. Some were self-organized, preferring to stick to issues that did not need regulatory oversight but still gathered citizens to build community engagement in very robust ways. One great example of this is Coloma Lotus where monthly community potlucks and dances keep citizens connected and informed, while also creating a pathway to resolve differences in an informal but positive way.

Some wanted just a few key changes that could begin to tip the scale on their economic fortunes, while others were focused on resolving divisions in the community so they could move forward. Some were simply looking for support for private efforts that help drive the economy. As an example, Camino wishes for better coordination between the County and the Apple Hill growers. As a major economic engine for the County, the Apple Hill season takes place in the fall, but the roadsides are cleared in the spring. The thousands of visitors that walk the roadsides are forced to wade through a summers worth of weed growth. Road repairs are also often timed in a way that does not support the increased traffic.

The level of knowledge about current County planning efforts and potential resources for community areas varied widely, and was fairly well correlated with the level of trust in County officials. As a general finding, those with the least knowledge and little recent interaction had the least trust, while many who have been engaged have a renewed sense of hope about the future. One specific suggestion was to move the CEDAC meetings around to different parts of the County so more people can be involved in those important discussions. Stories about development projects and the feeling that policies were not being followed created low trust, but in all cases there was an openness to work in partnership with the County if the community area could benefit from the process.

Several community areas were much further along on the path to a formal community plan, and just needed more resources and guidance from the County to ensure their efforts are successful. Meyers and Diamond Springs/El Dorado are the

best examples of this and have put in great effort to get to the point they have reached. El Dorado Hills has a highly energized group of citizen planners that have completed many of the necessary steps to a formal plan and engaged hundreds of citizens in the process. The most recent task, supported by AIM Consulting, was a comprehensive survey to the community. The areas that had plans that had been done many years ago no longer relied on them, if in fact they ever did, so the need to do some focused planning exists in every community area studied. Since Shingle Springs is formally part of the Cameron Park area there was not a special meeting, but there is a great deal of planning activity there and growth issues that need resolving. Taking the right steps to a formal plan can pave the way for these decisions.

## **Key Trends**

While each area had some unique wishes, there were several items that touched every area, and can serve as a focus for a countywide effort on economic development:

Building on existing assets, with special attention to what is unique to an area was the main takeaway from the conversations. Whether it was the Divide recognizing they have exactly the right terrain and infrastructure for equine activities, or Diamond Springs and El Dorado building on the deep history of their small towns, the citizens of each area were not focused on imitating someone else, but instead becoming more of who they already were. In some cases this means integrating assets that were historically viewed as distinct from each other. In Coloma Lotus the State Park is partnering tightly with the rafting industry and lodging in the area to create an integrated experience for area visitors. They imagine a future where raft guides are also history docents, and packages are built to create a seamless tourism interface.

The main economic engine that community areas are focused on is tourism. To realize their potential these areas need assistance with marketing, website development, planning for pedestrians and cyclists, and parking solutions. However three issues rose above all others in these conversations.

- *Lodging* is a critical need for expanded tourism, and many areas cited it as the top barrier to growth. South County is an example of an area with very limited lodging, particularly with moderate pricing. They feel they could organize assets to be a weekend destination with the support of more lodging.
- *Signage* is the second item that rose to the top in the support of tourism. The ordinances are confusing, some were aware they were being revised but not everyone, and overall they felt this was an area that was a major gap in county support. Most backed the idea of an integrated signage plan that covers the county and paints a picture of an area rich with diverse opportunities.

- The third item that was on every wish list was widespread *Broadband*. As the county tries to attract younger visitors they felt having so much of the county either off the grid or with spotty coverage was a major disadvantage.

In the commercial corridors the top issue was facelifts. Both Cool and Pollock Pines hope for help with a facelift so they can create a more pleasing commercial corridor, while Cameron Park would like to have strong design standards so they can begin to have a coordinated look and feel.

The aging population was also on the minds of many citizen planners and several ideas for again in place were offered. Camino would like to have an area rezoned for small dense homes that those currently managing large properties could move to without having to leave their community, and The Divide and South County would like to ease the rules on second homes on existing lots to accommodate aging relatives. An interesting observation is that none of the communities interviewed expressed a need for housing or jobs to attract or retain younger workers, and only the more urbanized areas were concerned with facilities for youth. Issues like public gathering places and arts and culture were absent from the discussions as well as access to health care, managing poverty and public safety.

### **Other Needs**

In addition to noting areas where the County could provide more assistance the communities also identified needs that would require consultants. They all fell into three general areas: planning and design, marketing and community facilitation and surveys.

### **Conclusions**

The visits to the community areas were very well received; citizens were impressed the County was listening and hopeful that the conversations would result in some new processes and support. In general the community needs need better information on how to best interact with the County and what is possible if they organize themselves in partnership with the County.