

HOPE - Helping Our Peninsula's Environment

Box 1495, Carmel, CA 93921

831/ 624-6500

Info@1hope.org

www.1hope.org

Downsize Monterey County

by David Dilworth, Executive Director

HOPE's objections to the "the 12 overall Guiding Objectives" for the Monterey County General Plan Update. 12/20/01, Updated 8/24/04.

I grew up here on the Monterey Peninsula in the 60s and 70s -- before the last Condor was taken out of wild, before the Carmel River ran dry, before rust colored water came out of our faucets, before water rationing, before electric supply emergencies, before traffic jams, before traffic lights in Carmel Valley and Pacific Grove, before road rage, before the constant noise of construction, chainsaws and bulldozing, when more than half the Monterey pine forest was still intact and healthy.

I am not alone in wanting the healthy parts of our Peninsula back. Thousands of our neighbors, residents, business people and even tourists want the Peninsula to return to being a community - not another Tokyo, San Jose, or a La Jolla. **Every time peninsula voters get the opportunity to do so - they firmly vote down growth.**

The 12 overall General Plan Guiding Objectives (which we never got to vote on) have **fatal flaws** --

Objective 1. Preserve the unique character of areas throughout Monterey County as represented by the different Area Land Use Plans.

1. HOPE generally agrees with Objective 1. However, it also implies support for the "unique character" areas now infested with deforestation, golf courses, dying rivers, and traffic jams - which we firmly oppose. This ambiguity needs to be fixed before we can support objective one.

Objective 2. Identify land that is adequate and appropriate for the residential, commercial, and industrial development needs of Monterey County during the next twenty years, taking into account land located within the cities, existing legal lots of record, and resource and infrastructure constraints.

2. We fiercely oppose objective 2. Monterey County is already massively overbuilt and **overzoned** at a current population of about 400,000. The existing General Plan (1982) zoning allows the buildout of about one million people (990,000 page 112). **Monterey County needs downsizing and widespread downzoning** - not tens of thousands of more houses, more subdivisions, more golf courses, more hotels, and more freeways.

Monterey County's next 20 years should be spent in serving the people who live here now! - not forcing current residents to subsidize people who don't live here. It should also achieve returning those who have been forced away by greed driven housing costs.

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While one could argue the last phrase in objective 2 supports establishing a carrying capacity and a sustainable County, it is massively overwhelmed by the beginning of objective 2 mandating more, more and more development.

We can see no way to fix objective two so that we would support it.

Objective 3. Preserve a distinction between urban and rural areas. Channel new growth to areas already committed to an urban level of development (e.g., cities, areas directly adjacent to cities, and densely developed unincorporated communities). Preserve rural areas for resource-based industries (e.g., farming, livestock grazing, mining), natural resource protection, and open space recreation uses.

3. We do not object to sentence one in objective three. For the reasons stated above we do object to any "new growth" described in sentence two -- whether inside or outside of cities.

In case someone hasn't noticed, we're out of water, we're out of traffic capacity and the blind greed of developers and the votes of their shameless rented elected officials has forced 49 animals and 19 trees and plants into an officially imperiled state. Those animals and plants, which have peacefully lived here for thousands of years before we did, are now imperiled to the point of needing official protection by Federal and State laws because Monterey County has persistently and flagrantly fought lifting so much as a finger to protect them.

We also object to preserving rural areas for oil wells, logging, mining, grazing and industrial ecotourism required by sentence number three.

Objective 4. Strongly encourage new commercial, industrial, and residential development to provide actual, new, permanently affordable living quarters, including housing for people with low, very low, and moderate incomes who live and/or are employed in Monterey County. Promote density, creative and innovative design concepts, and employer-produced housing which will increase affordable housing opportunities convenient to the workplace. Promote a healthy job and housing balance in all areas.

4. While we may support the wholesale conversion of hundreds and possibly thousands of existing buildings to permanently affordable living quarters, including "housing for people with low, very low, and moderate incomes who already live or work in Monterey County," we could not more strongly oppose the bulldozing of any further natural habitat or the construction of any further buildings.

Objective 5. Promote the development of walkable communities that meet the daily needs of their residents, offer a high quality of life for their residents, and reduce the need for automobile trips.

5. We support the conversion of existing communities to making them "walkable and bikeable;" but for the reasons stated above we object to the creation of new communities.

Objective 6. Promote, preserve, and support agriculture and the industries that serve it. Promote industries that preserve and support environmental quality or serve the local needs of our communities.

6. We are highly suspicious of objective number six to "promote, preserve and support agriculture and the industries that serve it." We support sustainable, clean and safe farming, and oppose the conversion of ag land to pavement, buildings or golf courses, but we fiercely oppose the existing chemical intensive agriculture that every year deposits ten million pounds of deadly toxins in the Salinas Valley on our soils, in our clean air, and in our rivers and streams.

Objective 7. Minimize development of commercially viable agricultural land. Ensure that recognized needs for growth are met by infill and contiguous, compact development.

7. We object to number 7 since there are no "recognized needs for growth" - only "wants for growth." We do oppose the conversion of agricultural land to pavement, buildings or golf courses.

Objective 8. Provide adequate infrastructure and public services for existing residents and businesses. Ensure that infrastructure and public services are available, fully funded, and constructed concurrently with new development. Ensure that new development neither increases the infrastructure and public service cost for existing residents and businesses nor reduces their quality of service by any significant amount.

8. We support "ensuring that new development neither increases the infrastructure" or "public service cost for existing residents and businesses" and does not "reduce their quality of service by any amount." The original says "by any significant amount."

We object to providing "adequate infrastructure" for existing residents and businesses unless the existing residents get to vote on it.

Objective 9. Provide long-term protection of identified resource-rich and critical habitat areas.

9. There are three problems with this seemingly positive environmental statement.

A. "Identified." Monterey County refuses to identify imperiled species or their habitat at all, let alone "critical habitat areas." They do this even in the face of absolutely clear law requiring them to do so. A recent example is County Planning Director Hennessey refusing to protect our imperiled orchids (Yadon's piperia) in spite of the Coastal Commission's diplomatic advice that he doesn't have a choice.

B. "long-term" is undefined. It is entirely possible that Monterey County Planning dept. could define long-term as one year.

C. "Critical Habitats" are not the only areas that need to be protected in order to ensure that the ecosystems that have existed here for millennia before we arrived do not unravel.

An objective HOPE could support would read "permanently protect all remaining native ecosystems so they are sustainable without human management, and provide genuine restoration to those native ecosystems to a without-human-management sustainable-state that we have put in an imperiled state."

Objective 10. Protect the visual integrity of ridgelines, designated scenic corridors, and other identified sensitive visual resources throughout Monterey County.

10. We support objective 10.

Founded in 1998, and known for helping with hundreds of environmental and democracy successes, H.O.P.E. is a non-profit, tax deductible, public interest group protecting our Monterey Peninsula's natural land, air, and water ecosystems and public participation in government, using science, law, education, news alerts and advocacy.

Objective 11. Seek to provide an adequate and sustainable water supply while protecting the county's watersheds and marine environment, including surface water, ground water, and aquifer recharge areas.

11. Objective 11 is conceived and written backwards.

Remembering that we live in a semi-desert, and that our actions have caused the officially recognized imperilment of some 70 species, we must first establish the water needs to permanently protect this phenomena as a life-support system for the wildlife and the ecosystems that have been depending on it for millennia. Only then may we take what water remains for human use. The amount that remains will fluctuate dramatically from year-to-year. This area has endured two droughts in 100 years in the last thousand years. So to prevent human health and safety emergencies we must not be allowed to build things which use water beyond that amount which is available over a 100 year drought.

Objective 12. Provide a clear statement of county land use values and policies to provide clarity in the county's permit processing system and to simplify review of projects that are consistent with the General Plan.

12. We support "providing a clear statement of County land use values and policies to provide clarity in the County's permit processing system." We oppose simplifying review of projects that are consistent with the General plan. We support rejection of any project, at the counter, which is in any way potentially inconsistent with the General plan.

In the 12/18/01 draft two additional policies were recommended.

For Policy 13, HOPE supports creation of multimodal transportation networks within communities and between employment centers.

However we will oppose it unless communities are made walkable and bikable before any other transportation "improvements" are approved.

For Policy 14, HOPE fully supports "Protecting public health and safety by minimizing risks related to natural hazards (seismic, geologic, fires, flooding, erosion) and man-made hazards (e.g. hazardous materials, noise, aircraft hazards)."

If anyone thinks our concerns are mere nit-picking, we can provide abundant examples of how Monterey County "Planning" and its Supervisors have literally paved the way for our deep objections described here.