

## San Joaquin County's next 20 years

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by TP staff

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Tracy and Mountain House are expected to grow along with other nearby communities in the next 20 years as San Joaquin County is predicted to hit 1 million people. The question is, how will those people be accommodated, and where will their future jobs be created?

Those queries are at the crux of a discussion regarding the update to the county's general plan, the county's basic blueprint for growth.

Planners are now seeking public input on the in-the-works revision, which offers four growth alternatives, each with varying impacts on farmland, city density and sprawl.

All four envision Tracy growing from its 2010 Census-tagged population of 83,000 to above 125,000, Mountain House adding about 38,000 people to its current population of 9,600, and the county increasing by more than 330,000.

But the quartet of plans differ by varying degrees about how much cities will push outward, how much housing expansion will be directed to rural communities and where job development will be focused.

The "base case" — essentially maintaining the status quo — would see the largest expansion of city footprints across the county. That includes building residential homes in Tracy toward the southwest — generally in the area of Tracy Hills and where the Ellis development had been planned.

But "Alternative B" would most reduce sprawl and demand on water, land and other resources the most, concentrating both residential and job growth mostly in cities and well-traveled corridors, according to the plan's analysis section.

When it comes to Tracy, that means focusing on infill residential development and fostering job growth within city limits, as well as enticing employers to locate in the industrial areas along Interstate 580 and due west of the city. Maps projecting future growth under this alternative seem to ignore the Tracy Hills and Ellis areas as prime areas for growth.

Alternative B also calls for significant expansion in Mountain House.

Alternatives A and C are somewhere between, with A calling for rural communities like Farmington to boom and C also focuses on "unincorporated community growth ... over city-centered growth," and foresee at least some expansion of Tracy to the southwest. But according to the report, Alternative C might be "the least efficient use of residential land of the three alternatives."

The qualitative analysis included in the county's report seems to give Plan B the highest overall rating when it comes to land use, energy and fuel consumption, housing diversity, conversion of agricultural land to urban land, environmental protection and impact on county infrastructure. However, the analysis concludes it could have the most adverse impact on "community character."

Supervisors will eventually decide which plan to follow, though county staff explain in the alternatives report that the elected officials can mix and match strategies.

But before that happens, there are several workshops in which county residents can voice their concerns and opinion about the proposals and the county's future growth in general.

The first is at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 29, at the multipurpose room of the Public Health Department at 1601 Hazelton Ave., in Stockton. The second is at 7 p.m. Robert J. Cabral Agricultural Center, 2101 E. Earhart Ave, near the Stockton Metropolitan Airport in Stockton.

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