

News

S.J.'S ROAD AHEAD: CRAFTING A GENERAL PLAN

5,000 PEOPLE LIVING IN FARMINGTON IS AMONG THE OPTIONS ON OFFICIALS' TABLE AS THEY TRY TO MAP OUT COUNTY'S 20-YEAR PLAN

By **Zachary K. Johnson**

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Record Staff Writer

STOCKTON - Les Strojan's family has made a living in Farmington for about a year shy of a century. The community first appeared as a stop for wagons and stage coaches about 60 years before his ancestors began farming and ranching.

The rural town about 15 miles east of Stockton is still surrounded by agriculture. And it remains a convenient stop for provisions, although the horse-drawn conveyances have been replaced by automobiles.

Many stop for gas at the station managed by 59-year-old Strojan and his wife Mary Anne, 57.

On a wall inside the market, underneath the slogan "We serve the world @ Circle K Farmington," is a map of the world stuck with red push pins in every continent except Antarctica.

The town of about 300 has changed, Strojan said. More change is probably inevitable and, he admits, it could be good for Farmington.

"We'd like to see progress. There are more homes falling down in this town than are being built," he said. "This wouldn't be a bad place for a little larger community."

But, he added, "The number 5,000 kind of blows me a way a little."

Farmington: Population 5,000.

That's one of the possibilities as San Joaquin County continues into the third year updating its General Plan, a sort of constitution on how the county will plan for and accommodate growth over the next 20 years.

Options are laid out in a report created by the Sacramento-based consulting firm of Mintier Harnish. There are four different models, including one that maintains the status quo set in motion the last time the county updated its General Plan in 1992.

Before an alternative is selected, the final plan must run a gantlet of focus groups and community workshops.

"The preferred alternative will most likely be a hybrid," said Ray Hoo, senior county planner.

Four outlines

The report contains four separate approaches to how the county will grow by 2030.

(1.) Base case: The first alternative builds on the county's existing plan. "A lot of it was pretty forward thinking when it was adopted in 1992," Hoo said.

The "base case" emphasizes city-centered growth, and growth in unincorporated county is mostly directed to existing urban communities like French Camp, Morada and Woodbridge. It discourages growth in areas like Acampo and Vernalis.

(2.) Option A: The plan encourages growth in existing urban communities and predicts slightly less growth at the fringes of cities as a result. This option leaves most of the county's rural communities static. The notable exception is Farmington, which could grow to more than 5,400 people.

Other towns see the most growth under this scenario, with Linden's population tripling, French Camp's doubling and Lockeford nearly doubling.

(3.) Option B: This alternative directs more commercial and industrial growth to cities.

This earns the highest marks in nearly all the evaluation criteria, although it requires more buy-in from cities.

This option is an interpretation of the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process. That eight-county regional plan encourages, among other things, sustainable growth and protection for agriculture.

This option sees the most growth in cities and on their fringes. It also preserves the most farmland.

(4.) Option C: This idea allows for expansion of mining in the southern reaches of the county, and it calls for commercial and industrial growth along highways in places like Flag City, Stockton Metropolitan Airport and the land between Manteca and Ripon. This option creates 1,000 additional jobs within unincorporated county.

Contact reporter Zachary K. Johnson at (209) 546-8258 or zjohnson@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/johnsonblog.

How to get involved

To download the alternatives report for the San Joaquin County General Plan update, go to sjcgpu.com.

Public meetings have been scheduled and more are on the way.

The first two community workshops scheduled are:

- For the east Stockton-Delta area, 7 p.m. on March 29, Public Health Department multipurpose room, 1601 East Hazelton Avenue, Stockton.
- For the French Camp/South Stockton Area, 7 p.m. March 31, Robert J. Cabral Agricultural Center, 2101 East Earhart Avenue, Stockton.

The public can sit in on a series of rescheduled focus group meetings. They will be held at the County Public Health Auditorium, 1601 E. Hazelton Ave., Stockton.

March 29

- Services, utilities and safety, 10:15 a.m.
- Natural resources and the Delta, 1:15 p.m.
- Transportation and circulation, 3 p.m.

March 31

- Land use, housing and economic development, 1:15 p.m.
- Agriculture, 3 p.m.