

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** San Benito County General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) Members

**FROM:** Dan Amsden, Project Manager, Mintier Harnish

**DATE:** March 9, 2010

**SUBJECT:** **GPAC HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT – DRAFTING GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

**CC:** Art Henriques, Planning Director, San Benito County  
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On September 22, 2009, the GPAC members worked together in preparing a draft Vision Statement for the General Plan (see attached). Similar to a vision statement, guiding principles express the overarching themes of the general plan. This memo gives some background information about the purpose and format of guiding principles and serves as a template to help the GPAC draft guiding principles for the San Benito County General Plan.

**What are Guiding Principles?**

Guiding principles are fundamental ideas that represent the county’s philosophy about growth, development, and sustainability. Guiding principles are usually written early in the general plan update process, so that they can guide the development of land use alternatives, policies, and programs. The guiding principles should provide the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors with a foundation for selecting the preferred growth and land use alternatives. Guiding principles must also be broad enough to continue to guide the County throughout implementation of the general plan. All general plan goals, policies, and implementation programs must be consistent with the vision and guiding principle statements.

The guiding principles can be organized in different ways. They can be structured by general plan element, so that each element will have a single principle that drives the development of policies and programs. They can expand on main ideas in the vision statement, so that important concepts are given more weight. They can also be organized based on geography or community typology. The following shows examples from other jurisdictions, each organized in a different way.

## **Merced County, CA—Draft Guiding Principles**

Merced County has five guiding principles that capture the core issues facing the county.

### ***Agriculture***

*Agriculture is an essential part of Merced County’s economy and way of life that must be supported and protected to assure the industry’s continued vitality.*

### ***Economic Development***

*The Merced County economy must expand and diversify to create job and business opportunities that enable existing and future residents to improve their quality of life.*

### ***Environmental Quality***

*The natural resources of Merced County, including air, water, energy, wildlife, and scenery, must be protected and sustainably used to assure a high quality of life for Merced County residents today and in the future.*

### ***Public Facilities and Services***

*New growth and development in Merced County must have access to and fully fund all essential public facilities and services, including water, sewer, storm water drainage, schools, safety, and recreation.*

### ***Transportation***

*The Merced County transportation system, including highways, streets, bike and pedestrian pathways, transit, airports, and rail, must be coordinated, connected, and adequate to meet the needs of residents and businesses.*

## **Calaveras County, CA—Draft Guiding Principles**

Calaveras County has a set of guiding principles that complement a relatively succinct vision statement but do not directly align with general plan elements.

### ***Vision***

*The historical character of the county’s communities, the value of its productive resources, and the distinction of its physical beauty will continue to create a high quality of life for residents and a remarkable and memorable experience for visitors to the county.*

### ***Guiding Principles***

- *The history of the Gold Rush era will be alive in the culture of distinctive communities that provide a high quality of life for generations of residents.*
- *Open space, wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, agricultural lands, forests, rivers, and lakes will be protected and maintained for wildlife habitat, productive grazing and agricultural lands, and recreation.*

- *Communities will have clear boundaries and be separated from one another by working landscapes, greenbelts, or parks.*
- *Communities will have distinct centers where shopping, medical services, childcare, schools, jobs, and infrastructure are available. They will provide a range of housing types and affordability so people of all income levels can live in the same community.*
- *Businesses will thrive in a strong local economy based on sustainable natural resources and innovative industries. New opportunities for economic development will capitalize on advanced technology and catalyze growth and innovation.*
- *Visitors from around the state will be attracted to Calaveras County's historic communities, local businesses, recreation areas, and wineries. Tourism will play major role in the local economy and protection of natural and scenic resources.*
- *Development will not outpace the ability of County government to provide adequate services and infrastructure or reduce the level of service provide to existing communities.*
- *Highways and streets will be well-maintained and well-connected. Public transit, bike and pedestrian facilities will provide choices for travel within communities and to major destinations.*
- *Water quality and water rights will be protected to ensure that they are sustained for future generations.*
- *The risks of flooding, fire hazards, and climate change will be mitigated to the greatest extent possible to protect residents.*
- *Residents will have access to medical and emergency services, and opportunities for life-long learning and enrichment at educational institutions.*
- *Government services will be efficient and effective with measurable results. Through community involvement and volunteerism, residents will be active participants in guiding Calaveras County towards a common vision for the future.*

### **Compact Development/Transit Oriented Development Planning Principles**

These principles were handed out during the December 10, 2009, GPAC meeting for consideration in the San Benito General Plan.

#### ***Protection of Prime Farmland***

- *As a priority, sites for future growth in the county will be located to avoid impacts to Prime Farmland and the long term viability of farming units. Where Prime Farmland is impacted, a minimum of 40 percent of the Plan Area must be in public uses such as Parks, Open Space, Trails, transportation corridors, schools, community/civic buildings and other public uses that may be integral to the establishment of a sense of place and the support of a multi-modal, pedestrian accessible, transit oriented, compact community.*

### **Regional Transportation**

- *Sites for future growth in the county should be located on or near existing transportation infrastructure such as the rail corridors, state highways and other major transportation routes.*
- *Sites that are located near more than one form of transportation infrastructure that supports alternative forms of transit shall be given precedence.*

### **Urban Form**

- *As a priority, sites for future growth in the county will be located to avoid impacts to Prime Farmland and the long term viability of farming units. Where Prime Farmland is impacted, a minimum of 40 percent of the Plan Area must be in public uses such as Parks, Open Space, Trails, transportation corridors, schools, community/civic buildings and other public uses that may be integral to the establishment of a sense of place and the support of a multi-modal, pedestrian accessible, transit oriented, compact community.*

### **Utilities and infrastructure**

- *Sites should be located near available water and sewer resources or be suitable for new improvements that are economically feasible.*
- *Sites should be located proximal to public utilities (i.e. electric, gas, telephone).*

## **GPAC Homework Assignment: Drafting Guiding Principle Statements**

The following pages show **example** guiding principles that have been organized into four broad categories: land use and community character, natural resources and agriculture, transportation and infrastructure, and growth and economy. Please review these example guiding principles prior to the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. Please feel free to edit, delete, or expand any of these guiding principles as you feel appropriate. You may also add new guiding principles as necessary. The GPAC will discuss these principles and make revisions during the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Land Use and Community Character**

- New residential developments will be directed towards cities or the edges of cities.
- New residential or commercial growth will be directed away from prime farmland or agricultural areas.
- Clear boundaries (e.g., agriculture buffers, greenbelts, parks) will maintain separation between communities and cities.

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**Natural Resources and Agriculture**

- Open space areas will be protected from development or incompatible uses.
- Prime agricultural lands will be protected in perpetuity from all development.
- New agricultural technologies will significantly increase the efficiency and productivity of commodity farming.

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**Transportation and Infrastructure**

- Future growth in the county will be located on or near existing transportation infrastructure such as the rail corridors, state highways, and other major transportation routes.
- Future growth will be located near available water and sewer resources or be suitable for new improvements that are economically feasible.
- Future growth will be located near existing public utilities (i.e., electric, gas, telephone).

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**Growth and Economy**

- Agricultural and agricultural-related industries will remain the county’s largest economic sector.
- Business growth will be based on innovative, high-tech, or “green” industries.
- Tourism will play a major role in the local economy.

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