

Catalyst project gone; Meyers' future undecided

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – “The catalyst project is dead. You have my word on it. If you want, I’ll put it in writing.”

That’s how El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago started Wednesday night’s meeting about the Meyers Area Plan.

It ended with local resident Steve Bannar pointing out the good aspects of Meyers, that the policymakers are not the enemies, and that it is time to concentrate on the positives and for people to get involved. His words were met with the loudest round of applause during the two-hour meeting at the CCC offices.



El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago pulls the plug on the catalyst project for Meyers. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In between those two speakers was an hour of Q&A where about 30 of the nearly 150 people in attendance spoke. At times it was contentious, but mostly it was passion that came through.

In the audience were South Tahoe High students getting extra

credit for their AP environmental studies class.

The first hour of the Feb. 26 meeting was county and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency officials comparing the 1993 community plan to the draft area plan.

Catalyst project shelved

The so-called catalyst project was something Santiago spearheaded. She is the one who directed Kim Kerr, assistant county administrative officer, to process the contract that was then signed by CAO Terri Daly.

It was \$25,000 worth of taxpayer money that is now in the trash.

“I caused a lot of angst, anxiety, fear and all kinds of things in this community, even divisiveness. I am sorry for that,” Santiago said in her apology for having pushed the catalyst project through.

Symbolically, she then crossed the project off the board.

While One Globe’s idea is off the table, the draft Meyers Area Plan as it stands today would allow anyone to come forward with a similar idea. Santiago only has the power to nix this particular idea because she was the driving force behind it.

Santiago later said it’s possible to add to the area plan that the community does not support a large development.

Differences between 1993 and 2014

Adam Lewandowski with TRPA went over the basics:

- Meyers has about 33,000-square-feet of commercial floor area.
- There are 17 leftover tourist accommodation units from a former hotel. Ten new TAUs are available.

- Eight residential units may be built.

“Those numbers are not set in stone. You can transfer development rights,” Lewandowski said.

He said the TRPA Regional Plan update did not change the density and height for Meyers, but instead allows Meyers to have a say in what the rules will be.

The old plan had five special districts. The new plan condenses them. The old plan allowed lodging in specific areas. The new one allows it in more areas.

The draft plan includes a recreation district that encompasses the campground and golf courses. New residences would not be allowed in that zone, whereas the old plan would allow that use.

The draft plan adds 357 acres of conservation land that includes land for hiking, trails and other recreation.

A big change from 21 years ago is the two-tiered incentive program.

“It’s definitely the most controversial part of the area plan based on comments and the petition that is circulating,” Lewandowski said.

If developers met certain criteria, they would be allowed to build a taller, denser building than the baseline regulations.

Meyers used the TRPA standard for height in the community plan. The range is 24 to 42 feet, with a slew of factors determining what can go where.

The draft plan calls for 35 feet to be the maximum, but 45 feet if incentives are met.

The CCC building is 35-feet tall and Lira’s is 36 feet.

The existing plan calls for motels to allow 40 units per acre,

apartments 15 per acre.

The draft calls for 30 hotel units per acre or 40 if incentives are met. Apartments would be 20 per acre or 25 with incentives.

Going forward

Scenic issues are a big concern for residents that go beyond the typical TRPA definition.

While the view corridor will be protected so a building does not obscure the mountain vistas, the whole look of the area could be improved through the area plan. This includes landscaping and signs.

No matter what plan is approved, Caltrans this summer will be putting in major water quality improvements. Included in this is a crosswalk on Highway 50 at Apache Avenue.

The county has money to improve the Pat Lowe bike trail.

Grants are being sought for other projects.

Brendan Ferry, chief planner for the county, said implementation is a huge component of the area plan. That is one reason he is actively seeking grant money to make Meyers a more walkable, bikeable community.

A couple people questioned whether there could be wiggle room with the height in case a unique project came forward that would need more space, such as a climbing wall or ski ramp like Woodward at Boreal has.

Some want to keep the old plan as the law of the land.

John Friedrich asked who is going to decide whose ideas eventually end up in the final document. Santiago did not have a concise answer, but instead said it will be based on general consensus.

Bruce Grego proposed the voters have final say. Santiago told him he was free to do just that, adding that she would not bring it to the Board of Supervisors to consider placing it on the ballot.

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Notes:

- The next meeting on the draft area plan is March 19 at 6pm at the CCC building.
- No deadline has been set for when comments will end.
- Comments and responses will be posted on the county's website.
- Comments may be emailed to MeyersAreaPlan@edcgov.us.