

Douglas County struggles with Master Plan update



Douglas County commissioners disagree about the Master Plan process and its contents. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – For those hoping Douglas County’s Master Plan update was going to be certified by the Board of Commissioners this week, just the opposite and then some occurred.

Not only did the electeds not vote on the update Dec. 21, they chose to methodically go through each of the remaining elements in late January and then will schedule a joint meeting with the planning commissioners to tell them what to do. By that time, though, there are likely to be three new planning commissioners who have had nothing to do with this update.

The current plan was adopted in April 1996 and was last updated in 2011.

It is state law that dictates some of the process. Counties with more than 45,000 residents are mandated to have a

planning commission. That entity is tasked with preparing a master plan that must be updated every five years.

The seven-member Planning Commission, which is appointed by the Board of Commissioners, has conducted multiple meetings in this two-year update process, gathered public input at the meetings and via a survey.

The two bodies met together at the beginning of the year with the purpose of making sure they were on the same page. That didn't last long.

All changes the electeds make must go back to the Planning Commission for approval, with the Board of Commissioners having the ultimate say.

A change to this year's document is there was more supporting material to explain how they came to their conclusions

Not all of the electeds believe that much detail should be part of the Master Plan. Some want to revamp the entire process, while others said that should be done prior to the next update.

Others don't like that the plan is presented as a wish list instead of being more concrete. Others see this as an umbrella document, with the master plan as a guiding document from which precise code can be written. Others questioned if the electeds are going to have this much input, then what is the purpose of the Planning Commission? Others don't want to be a rubber stamp.

Of the 11 elements in the Master Plan, housing and agriculture have been vetted, with proposed changes to go back to the Planning Commission. The remaining elements are conservation, economic development, growth management, historic preservation, land use, parks and recreation, public facilities and services, public safety, and implementation.

At this rate, adoption of the Master Plan is not expected until spring at the earliest.