

The Healthy Humboldt Coalition

July 14, 2004

All County Supervisors
825 5th Street
Eureka, CA 95502

Re: General Plan Alternatives

Dear Supervisors,

I would like to thank your Planning Department Staff for their recent General Plan workshops which they produced for the public. These workshops allowed county residents to gain a reasonable understanding of the four Sketch Plan Alternatives which have been produced so far. The workshops were quite helpful and informative, and I would like to commend both Tom Hofweber and Martha Spencer for doing an excellent job of presenting a large amount of complex and detailed information in a brief yet understandable format.

It is encouraging to see the overwhelming public support which has been expressed for Sketch Plan 3, the 'Focused Growth' alternative. Presumably, this support is due in large part to the language in its narrative description, which reads:

Sketch Plan 3: Focused Growth Patterns:

SP3 promotes urban development patterns. SP3 provides higher development potential in urbanized areas with public sewer and water services. This alternative also provides for a modest expansion of existing water service areas above the existing Framework Plan. SP3 provides protection of resource production lands by directing homesite development to urbanized areas and by establishing clearer boundaries between urban and resource production areas than the existing Framework Plan.

Unfortunately, Sketch Plan 3 falls somewhat short of its narrative description, and even further from what should be truly possible under a focused growth plan. SP3, as with the other sketch plans, is handicapped by the use of the existing framework as a 'baseline' for further allowable subdivision. This effectively says that all currently allowable subdivision would continue to be allowable (though there are a few exceptions), making it difficult to achieve any significant improvement over the status quo. This is apparent in table 3 from the County's *Sketch Plan Alternatives June 2004 Draft*, attached below. The current framework plan (SP1) would allow for 8,366 new rural units being built on 195,159 acres. SP3 would only reduce that number marginally, down to 7,864 new units on 199,971 acres.

Table 3. Rural Residential Buildout Comparison

RURAL	Sketch Plan 1		Sketch Plan 2		Sketch Plan 3		Sketch Plan 4	
	Acres	Units	Acres	Units	Acres	Units	Acres	Units
RE1-5	8,206	1,840	13,942	4,751	6,008	1,490	14,383	3,646
RE2.5-5	0	0	804	2,353	3,581	437	2,037	247
RR160	5,638	50	5,490	49	5,490	49	5,490	49
RR20	22,134	1,691	23,718	901	24,771	943	23,778	901
RR40	118,096	1,855	121,958	1,925	118,336	1,855	121,341	1,913
RR5-20	39,807	2,917	41,114	3,125	40,433	3,077	40,588	3,152
RR60	1,278	13	1,352	13	1,352	13	1,352	13
TOTAL	195,159	8,366	208,378	13,117	199,971	7,864	208,969	9,921

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What is missing from the County's sketch plan alternatives is a truly 'city centered' plan, one that makes a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the County and those of the cities, and clearly defines the difference between what is urban and what is rural. This is the Healthy Humboldt Plan.

The Healthy Humboldt Plan would put the cities in charge of growth on their borders. New subdivision and development would be limited to those areas within the city limits, their spheres of influence, and those areas already served by both sewer and water. Development would be discouraged outside of these areas by limiting it to existing legal lots of record. These kinds of city centered plans have been adopted by numerous counties throughout California, many of which have learned from their past mistakes. A selection of sample policies from around the State is attached.

The Healthy Humboldt Plan would protect our wild and working open spaces, prevent sprawl, and create compact, walkable communities at higher densities. Healthy Humboldt would improve both the affordability of housing and the livability of communities by focusing development where services already exist. This city-centered approach would also reduce County infrastructure costs, provide certainty and predictability for builders, and strengthen our local economy.

Healthy Humboldt, the Humboldt Economic and Land Plan (HELP), and the broad majority of the public have all expressed an overwhelming desire to see a General Plan that embraces focused growth, infill, preservation of open spaces, and prevention of sprawl. The only differences are on how we should achieve this. The County's current sketch plans do not restrain rural subdivision below its current potential, and HELP does not contain any policies which would actually guide development, relying instead upon the marketplace to decide where development does or does not happen.

With such broad consensus on the vision, it would not make sense to leave achieving this vision up to chance. We must have strong policies which will ensure that the vision that we all share is the future that we will create. We must have a strong General Plan that makes our shared vision a reality.

Given this, it seems prudent to investigate further the possibilities of a truly city-centered plan, as proposed by the Healthy Humboldt Coalition, as described in the narrative portion of Sketch Plan 3, and as supported by the public. We have the shared vision. All that is needed now is to assure that the details of the plan live up to that vision.

I thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Mark Lovelace

Healthy Humboldt Coalition
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