

Blueprint planners look forward to implementation of smart growth

The document will impact business development from all levels

Michael Sullivan — Staff Writer

The Blueprint Roundtable, a long-term smart-growth regional planning committee in Fresno, has embarked on the next phase of taking conceptual ideas and making them a reality.

The process took off last year and produced several smart-growth scenarios that will be brought to the public this spring. In December 2008, the top one will be presented to the eight counties of the Central Valley at a regional summit as the preferred smart-growth strategy.

The growth scenarios include a status quo development base of "business as usual"; the high-density urban core development focused in the Fresno/Clovis metro area; high-density urban core—rural option: development mainly in smaller cities and the corridor development along major transportation routes.

Other scenarios embrace the concepts of possible development di-

rected to three "new town" sites, protecting environmental resources and another scenario protecting farmland.

According to Barbara Steck, senior transportation planner for the Fresno Council of Government (COG) and project manager for the Blueprint, Fresno residents have voiced their opinions about what is most important for the future.

"The top of the list are the environment, health and sustainability," she said. "The preservation of agricultural land also came in very high."

All scenarios include how future growth will affect traffic and air quality.

John Wright, Clovis Planning and Development Services director, has also taken a leadership role in the Blueprint process.

He's taken on the task of forming discussion groups of Valley wide planners in order to produce a standard template for smart growth. A

standard template could be applicable in each county and their cities, and would help save millions of dollars in completing major smart-growth studies.

"We're trying to agree and come to a consensus of what the plan is for the future of the Valley," he said. "Fundamental issues are not going to be like the past issues. A whole series of economic, environmental and demographic issues will have a profound effect on the future. We will have to deal with and navigate those changes to be a strong region in a competitive global economy."

One of the scenarios is the Metro Rural Loop, a multi-modal, energy- and water-efficient transportation system. It includes a variety of options in itself from wrapping around Fresno County to a loop connecting Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties.

The quad-county system seems to be the most popular, said Keith

Bergthold, the City of Fresno acting director of the Planning & Development Department. Bergthold has taken over the community outreach efforts for the Metro Rural Loop scenario.

"The big deal is cooperation with the Blueprint and the loop doesn't mean anything unless these are told as strategic for outcomes for our Valley," Bergthold said. "They are conceptual now; however, as we build good relationships, we have a good chance towards implementation."

Currently, Bergthold has about 50 stakeholders backing the Metro Rural Loop even in its conceptual and modeling stage.

He believes the right smart-growth strategy has to be bold one and the Loop is indicative of that for a cleaner and greener future economy.

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