

Let's Consider the Facts When Planning the County's Future

By Virginia Vigil, Commissioner, District 2 Santa Fe Board of County Commissioners

On Tuesday, Nov. 9, the community is invited to comment and participate in a second public hearing on the Final Draft of Santa Fe County's Sustainable Growth Management Plan (SGMP). After that hearing, the Board of County Commissioners will consider a resolution adopting the Plan.

Much has been said and written about the SGMP. Before this important hearing, I think it's time to set the record straight and clarify some misperceptions about the Plan.

The Sustainable Growth Management Plan is a comprehensive plan which promotes resource management towards sustainable growth. Sustainability means meeting the needs of our present residents while at the same time preserving our land, history, culture and natural resources for future generations. The plan is designed to direct future growth to areas with adequate public facilities such as roads, water and sewer systems, and public safety. With the Plan, Santa Fe County can:

- Improve community well-being,
- Sustain and restore the natural environment upon which our people and economies depend, and
- Enhance economic opportunities

As a roadmap for Santa Fe County, the Plan provides a framework for policy development and for decision making. If adopted, implementation will be accomplished through the Land Development Code and establishment of a work program to include a Strategic Plan and an Action Plan.

The Plan is based on input from over 100 meetings including workshops, charrettes, public hearings and study sessions involving citizens, nonprofit organizations, community groups and others. One key feature of the Plan is creation of *more*, not less, opportunities for community participation, including the creation of a number of different kinds of community-centered organizations through which we can work together more effectively.

There are some things that the Sustainable Growth Management Plan does ***not*** do.

Specifically:

It doesn't raise taxes. The Plan strives to make sure developers and/or new residents pay for the costs of new development up front, rather than placing a financial burden on current residents.

It doesn't violate individual property rights. The Plan does not place limitations on property owners. In fact it protects property owners in that development will be

predictable and property owners will have the benefit of knowing what resources are available if he or she chooses to develop. The Plan does, however, call for a code that will enforce zoning, health and safety and other aesthetic limitations. This is nothing new. Since 1981, the County has had a code that limits, to a degree, what property owners can do with their property based on safety issues and the effect of their actions on surrounding property owners. Again, this code would be an update of the existing code and would be shaped with significant community input.

It doesn't increase the size of government, it makes government more efficient. The plan does not add County employees. It is intended, however, to create more streamlined processes for new community planning and development to improve efficiency for County staff and for all community residents involved.

It doesn't raise property taxes. The Plan will create the option of Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) for developments that *choose* to pay for infrastructure in that way. In the case of PIDs, homeowners in a development would pay a special assessment for infrastructure they use themselves. However, this assessment would not be county-wide and would most likely apply only to future growth and development. Current residents would not see their property taxes change from current levels based on the assessed value of their property.

Finally, the Plan's requirement for water storage tanks and sprinklers in homes in fire prone areas is *not* new. Homes in fire prone areas are already required to have these in place for their own protection as well as the protection of our firefighters.

What the Plan *does* provide is important strategies for assuring the County's future sustainability! Planning is essential to our future. Adopting a plan that can provide a reasonable and appropriate framework in which we can all grow and prosper while we protect what is unique and irreplaceable about Santa Fe County is one of the most important things we can all do!

We encourage everyone interested in the Sustainable Growth Management Plan to take time to review the 2010 SGMP Revised Final Draft Plan on the County's website at: http://www.santafecounty.org/growth_management/sgmp. Make plans to attend Tuesday's hearing at 6 p.m. at the County Chambers. Written comments can also be submitted to rgriero@santafecounty.org or by calling Robert Griego, Project Manager, 505-986-6236.