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June 21, 2007

Humboldt County Planning Commission

My comments tonight are on the Economic Development Element. I was relieved to see the draft acknowledge that federal, state and local regulatory policies and codes have a significant effect on the local economy. I hoped that I would see policies and goals which would encourage and reward economic development that would create large numbers of jobs which pay well and provide good benefits and security and stability. Unfortunately I did not find any encouragement for such projects.

Small businesses and home based businesses are vital to every economy, and I am glad to see them encouraged, but it is very difficult for small business to pay high salaries or provide great benefits to their employees. They cannot support Humboldt County's economy alone.

On page 11-9 is an estimate that 244 acres would be required to meet anticipated future development needs for industrial and other employment-related uses. Of this, 15 acres would be needed for retail space, 181 acres for office and business park space, and a whopping 48 acres for industrial purposes. Talk about thinking small. A general plan which plans for so little growth in these sectors discourages any new business from considering Humboldt County as a place to locate. It demonstrates an anti-business and anti-development mentality.

Section ED-P9 relates to Commercial Retail. The version recommended in Alternative A would clearly prohibit big box development in the unincorporated area. Alternative B says "Include standards for discretionary review of large format "big box" commercial uses to reduce their land use impact." I agree with Mr Emad's comment last month that this is "OK". Then I read Staff's analysis which states "Consistent with the direction for developing Alternative B, policy (ED-P9) directs inclusion of development standards which discourage big box retail uses in the unincorporated area." So while the text reads "reduce their land use impacts" staff interprets this to "discourage big box retail uses". Is this the way staff will interpret all of the general plan? It is obvious that the language in the general plan needs to be very specific, not subject to interpretation.

Once again this element proposes to implement permitting and licensing processes that are more responsive to the needs and timelines of the marketplace (ED-G5) and to provide regular review and improvement of ordinances and permit processes to increase efficiency and reduce permitting processing times (ED-IM5) however these are not intended for all permit applications, but only for strategic targets such as microenterprises, home based business and workforce housing. As I have said before, an efficient, and timely permitting process should be required for ALL projects and applications, not just those which are "politically correct".

The goals of this element are discriminatory. They target opportunities for “young talent” and “workforce” housing. We also need to attract and retain “older” and more experienced talent as well and to provide housing for their needs. I heard the other day of six doctors and two attorneys who are now leaving Humboldt County. I have heard from several developers that they are focusing on projects in other locations, and a couple of long-time builders have told me that they will never do another subdivision in Humboldt County. Others have left already for greener pastures. We need to encourage these people to stay and allow them to thrive in Humboldt County.

I ask again that you keep in mind the importance of property rights. The land owners in this County have invested their lives in their property and their rights should be respected.

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