

Farmland Working Group

Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.

Stanislaus County leaders give approval for Wood Colony MAC



Some of the combatants in Wood Colony's struggle with Modesto were present Tuesday, but they kept silent.

Without discussion, Stanislaus County's Board of Supervisors voted 4-0 to set the ball in motion for forming a municipal advisory council for a 15,560-acre area west of Modesto. Supervisor Kristin Olsen cited car trouble in not attending the meeting.

The county could create the MAC after holding a Feb. 28 public hearing.

Proponents have said the MAC will give the rural community a voice and information on zoning proposals and land-use matters within the vast territory, where about 2,500 residents live. The boundaries stretch from Highway 99 and Morse Road to Gates Road, north of Highway 132. Bacon Road forms the northern boundary.

According to a county staff report, the five-member council will advise county leaders on "matters of public

health, welfare, safety, planning, public works" and other possible issues.

"We are just a neighborhood that is trying to communicate with our neighbors," said Lisa Braden, who has worked on forming the MAC. "It is to keep us better informed.

We are an advisory council for what is going on in our area."

Municipal advisory councils have no authority but can serve as a collective voice for influencing local government decisions or policy.

Before Tuesday's action, Modesto land-use attorney George Petrulakis warned Wood Colony landowners in letters that their property rights and plans for their land could be negatively affected.

Modesto Mayor Ted Brandvold expressed disappointment that Wood Colony residents didn't inform the city they were forming a MAC. Modesto's general plan has plotted some development west of the city in what's regarded as Wood Colony territory.

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Continued page 2

Our Mission: To preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action.

Although a staff report for Tuesday's board meeting included times for four meetings at which the MAC was supposedly discussed, county staff members said the report was in error. Two meetings were held: on March 13, 2014, and on Sept. 14 of last year.

Invitations for the March 2014 meeting at Hart Ransom School said in bold letters that news media were not invited. The residents attending the September meeting at the Woodland Avenue fire department indicated their support for forming the MAC.

Ruben Imperial, a staff member in the county chief executive's office, said letters were sent to residents within the proposed MAC boundaries to notify people of the September meeting. "We did not publicly notice it as a regular Brown Act meeting," Imperial said, referring to the state's public meeting law.

The notification letters were not sent to Modesto or

representatives of any other city, staff members said.

The packet for Tuesday's board meeting included proposed bylaws for the Wood Colony MAC. The council has to meet at least four times a year "at a regular convenient time and a place" and must comply with the Brown Act.

The Board of Supervisors will appoint the members of the advisory council. The county has seven other MACs.

Members of the Salida MAC have opposed annexation of the unincorporated community to Modesto and host presentations by local officials on everything from water service to sidewalk repairs. The South Modesto MAC has recently served as a forum for raising concerns about a scrap metal recycler on South Ninth Street and reviewing plans for community improvements.

By Ken Carlson
The Modesto Bee
January 31, 2017

Turlock's most outstanding woman: Ferrari to be honored at AAUW event



The name Jeani Ferarri is well-known around Turlock, and the long-time champion of goodwill is being recognized for her contributions to the community as the Turlock/Modesto Branch of the American Association of University Women's Outstanding Woman of the Year.

"She is somebody who is really outspoken about what she thinks is right, and is willing to do something about it," said Hanna Renning, co-program vice president of AAUW. "She has worked very hard and devoted a great deal of her energy and time to many great causes."

To be honored by the AAUW is incredibly meaningful, said Ferrari.

"So many women in that group do so much, so this coming from that group is especially significant," she said. "As I look at my community, I notice that women have such a heart for their community and that makes me really proud."

A Turlock resident for 51 years, Ferrari has made it her mission to give back to her hometown since 1974, when her community work began with volunteering in her son's kindergarten class. She was an instrumental part of many events at Julien Elementary school, such as Earth Week and the annual Halloween Carnival, and also served in the parent-teacher association. Ferrari helped to develop Turlock Unified School District's GATE program as well, and assisted in the passage of Measure N in 1997, which helped to add a second high school in Turlock...

Ferrari has not only helped shape the youth of the city, but also its land. A founding member of the Farmland Working Group, she works to preserve the area's farmland and sustainably grow Turlock's urban communities. She was a pivotal member of the Turlock Downtown Revitalization Committee, and helped to bring a downtown farmers market to the area as well and has served on the Turlock Certified Farmers Market Committee since its inception. Ferrari also played a huge role in the reconstruction of the Carnegie Arts Center, knocking on doors around the community to raise funds for the building.

While Ferrari's past contributions to the city could fill the pages of a novel, her current focus is the Turlock Library. By working to raise funds, her hope is that the library is expanded and updated by 2020.

"I love living here for so many reasons," said Ferrari. "I love our downtown, I love our farmers market, I love the Carnegie...I love all of the things that this town offers. It's such a great community."

Ferrari will be honored by AAUW at 7 p.m. March 23 in Berg Hall at Covenant Village, 2125 N. Olive Ave. in Turlock. Ferrari will be speaking at the program, and all are invited to attend the free event.

By Angelina Martin
Turlock Journal - March 16, 2017

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State of California

<http://www.ca.gov/>

CalTrans held a workshop in Modesto recently for public review of two alternative plans for the ever-ongoing Highway 132 expansion. Both plans use the same general area that parallels the existing route along Maze Boulevard. Both plans have extensive interchange plans with high costs that connect Hwy 132 and Fwy 99. Additionally, more acreage is needed for right of way drainage. Even the dug out portion requires more off site drainage according to CalTrans plans.

Stanislaus County

www.co.stanislaus.ca.us

The Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the formation of a MAC (Municipal Advisory Council) for the Wood Colony area, west of Modesto. People living in the area expect to get more of a notice and voice regarding land-use and other government related actions. The City of Modesto, during its planning process three years ago, surprised many residents of the Wood Colony area with urban expansion plans. A grassroots effort sprang up and started a political movement to "Save Wood Colony." The Wood Colony MAC will have members on a board that is to be kept informed of government actions that may affect the area.

City of Modesto

www.modestogov.com

A general plan review and update is continuing through a long and drawn out process. The latest staff recommendation is for the Council to reaffirm the use of the existing 1995 General Plan and its land-use element. That plan shows an intention for Modesto to consume the Salida area and the so-called Beckwith Triangle on the westside of Fwy 99. The Beckwith Triangle is entirely within the boundaries of the new Wood Colony MAC.

By reaffirming the use of the existing General Plan, the City can continue to update items within the general plan needed for planning purposes within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) and the larger General Plan areas. The Modesto SOI currently has a northern boundary at Kiernan Road and a western boundary at Morse Road. The Wood Colony MAC area abuts the western Modesto boundary. The Salida Community Plan abuts the

northern Modesto boundary. Expansion attempts by the COM have generated years of political storm upon the Modesto City Council.

An urban limit initiative, called Stamp Out Sprawl, lost by 215 votes at a 2015 ballot. That initiative would have restricted Modesto from overtaking the Salida and Wood Colony areas.

City of Riverbank

www.riverbank.org/

The City continues to develop massive urban plans with western and eastern expansion. Despite an obvious distinction between the high quality prime farmland soils on the west and the lesser soils to the east, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), approved a new SOI for Riverbank that included all the area. Upon build out the City will nearly double in size. Currently the City is 2663 acres, expanding by 2187 acres, to total 4850 acres. Nearly half of that total is prime farmland going west, between Oakdale Road and Coffee Road, Claribel Road and Patterson Road. The southern boundary of the plan is the northern boundary of the SOI for the City of Modesto. The North County Corridor is a CalTrans Hwy 108 road project that will likely separate the two cities from the west then angle up, through the expanded eastern Riverbank, to join into Hwy 120 east of the City of Oakdale.

City of Patterson

<http://www.ci.patterson.ca.us/>

Master Plan Update status: City staff expects to make presentations to the City Council early this year.

City of Ceres

<http://www.ci.ceres.ca.us/>

General Plan meetings and updates continue within the public process. Current plans show no request for expansion beyond the existing SOI. For specific information updates contact marjorie.blom@ci.ceres.ca.us <<http://ci.ceres.ca.us>>



2017 High School Senior Scholarship Winner

Stephanie Stewart - Buhach Colony High School

Explore the topic: Recently, LAFCo (Local Agency Formation Commission) approved a request from city of Riverbank to expand its sphere of influence (SOI) east and west. The easterly direction is mostly inferior soils; the westerly expansion is on prime farmland, should LAFCo have approved the expansion in both directions? Why?

Please see: www.stanislauslafco.org and reference its Agriculture Preservation Policy in your response.



I recently read an article stating that the United Nations reports that the world's population will add another four billion people by 2100, and there is a major concern by food scientists about where food will be grown for all of those people.

A significant issue that we all face is the dangers of city expansion. One of the main reasons why urbanization is such a problem

is because farmland surrounds these cities. Stabilizing the urban edge is something that continues to be a battle between cities and farms. There appears to be a lack of limits on the outward expansion of cities.

As cities increase their "sphere of influence," some damaging effects include: land price inflation, and disinvestment in agriculture around the urban edge. Protecting our farmland should be a top priority to us as agriculturists. Because of the rapidly rising population there will continue to be an increased demand for food, which results in an increased demand for farmland. According to the American Farmland Trust, nearly forty acres of farmland are lost every hour. Once farms are replaced, and building begins, that land is gone forever. This should be a major concern to us all, we need to be taking the necessary steps, using our voices to change what has been occurring.

Recently, Stanislaus County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) approved a request from the City of Riverbank to expand its sphere of influence. Located to the east are mostly inferior soils, however, prime farmland is located to the westwardly direction. The decision made by LAFCo was to approve the expansion

of the City of Riverbank's sphere of influence to both the east and west direction of Riverbank. I do not agree with the decision made by LAFCo, with the approval of expansion not only to the east, but also to the west. This is against what is stated in their Agriculture Preservation Policy, which is where they claimed they would be protecting farmland!

Public officials and planners need to get together to develop a plan where the most important farmland in the valley needs to be set aside as an agriculture reserve where growth is prohibited. Farmers, developers, public officials, and the general public need to develop a plan to promote ways to achieve more compact growth.

According to the Stanislaus County's LAFCo Agricultural Preservation Policy, it states, "LAFCo's mission is to discourage urban sprawl, preserve open space and prime agricultural lands, promote the efficient provision of government services and encourage the orderly formation of local agencies." It also states that the Government Code Section 56668(e) requires LAFCo to consider "the effect of the proposal on maintaining the physical and economic integrity of agricultural lands." After reading the mission statement and goals outlined by LAFCo, it makes us wonder why they approved the request to expand the City of Riverbank's sphere of influence to the westwardly section which contains prime farmland.

Protecting our farmland should be a top priority to us as agriculturists. Because of the rapidly rising population there will continue to be an increased demand for food, which results in an increased demand for farmland.

In a way, expansion to the east and west could have been a give and take decision. Since land is needed for urbanization because of our ever increasing population, LAFCo could have compromised by approving the increase of Riverbank's sphere of influence to the east, but deny any building to the west. There has to be a line drawn between how much land we are willing to give up for urban expansion. Instead of treating farmland as if it is being temporarily used, public officials and planners should be designating specific areas used primarily for construction, and areas permanently used for agriculture. LAFCo's Agricultural Preservation Policy defines Agricultural Lands as "Land currently used for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity for commercial purposes, land left fallow under crop rotational program, or land enrolled in an agricultural subsidy or set-aside program (Government Code Section 56016)." Since the land located to the westwardly expansion is prime farmland, it does not make sense to me why LAFCo would completely ignore their Agriculture Preservation Policy, and approve the urban expansion!

I am familiar with the land located within the City of Riverbank; I go there often to visit my grandparents who are farmers and own a ranch located on the east side of Riverbank off of Highway 108. I have always noticed how much land is used for farming in that general area. Before any government commission like LAFCo considers a plan for urban expansion, there should be a plan and requirements set before it is approved. Should this land be conserved for agricultural purposes? According to LAFCo's Agricultural Preservation Policy, it says,

"The purpose of a Plan for Agricultural Preservation is to assist the Commission in determining how a proposal meets the stated goals of this Policy (Section A, pg. 1)." The plan also includes several goals that they promise when considering urban expansion. It says that there would be an examination of the agricultural lands that will be affected, and an analysis of mitigation measures that could offset impacts to agricultural resources. The plan goes on to propose several strategies that LAFCo would execute when trying to minimize the loss of agricultural lands.

What I found to be disturbing was that LAFCo's Plan for Agricultural Preservation states under the Commission Evaluation of a Plan for Agricultural Preservation that, "Insufficient alternative land is available within the existing sphere of influence or boundaries of the agency and, where possible, growth has been directed away from

prime agricultural lands towards soils of lesser quality. (Section B, 1a)" Under this section of the plan it goes into detail as to how a decision would be made based off of the conditions of the land inside the sphere of influence. This excerpt from LAFCo's plan states that if a certain area inside of the sphere of influence containing soils not as desirable for farming and are available for construction, then that land should be used instead of prime farmland.

This is the exact situation that has recently occurred with the City of Riverbank. If this is something that LAFCo includes in their plan to protect farmland, then why are they completely ignoring it? Before LAFCo approves of decisions that take away prime farmland, maybe they should consider their own Plan for Agricultural Preservation. This would have aided them in making the correct decision relating to the City of Riverbank expanding its sphere of influence.

Land should be used in the most efficient ways possible. Once farmland is converted into urban use, it is irreversible. This leads to a waste of essential resources and energy that could be used for the production of food to consumers. It should be of our utmost priority to prevent the unnecessary conversion of prime farmland to non-agricultural uses. Since 1982, nearly 24 million acres of agricultural land has been developed. At what point will cities stop their expansion? Those who we place in authority need to hear our voices as agriculturists, and it should be our responsibility to speak out against decisions such as the one recently made by Stanislaus County LAFCo.





Farmland Working Group

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www.farmlandworkinggroup.org

Agriculture is not crop production as popular belief holds - it's the production of food and fiber from the world's land and waters. Without agriculture it is not possible to have a city, stock market, banks, university, church or army. Agriculture is the foundation of civilization and any stable economy.

Allen Savory

EARTH DAY
April 22

Why are California farms and ranches so important?



THE FOOD WE EAT

California leads the nation in 79 different farm goods – from strawberries and grapes to lettuce and milk. The state produces over a third of our vegetables and nearly two-thirds of our fruits and nuts.

Much of the state has a Mediterranean climate ideal for growing fruits, nuts and vegetables - a climate found in only four other places in the world.

It's now the nation's most populous and fastest growing state. But the popularity comes at a price.

In the last 25 years, California has paved over more than a million acres of land, much of it prime farmland.

Source: American Farmland Trust