

MIDPINES PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FINAL MEETING MINUTES

DATE: WEDNESDAY, July 12, 2023
TIME: 6:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.
LOCATION: Midpines Community Center
Midpines Park, 6364 Highway 140
Midpines, CA 95345

1. Roll Call

Present: Gary Francisco, Candy O'Donel-Browne (arrived at 6:17 pm), Heather Huppe, Charles Lammers (arrived at 6:12 pm), Adam Ferguson, Angela Heiss, Caroline McGrath, Eileen Collins, and Rosemarie Smallcombe (Supervisor)
Staff: Steve Engfer, Polina Pivak
Guests: Nancy Parke, Matt Larson

Seeing a quorum, the regular meeting of the Midpines Planning Advisory Committee (MPAC) was called to order at 6:08 pm by Chair Francisco.

2. Approval of Minutes:

a. Meeting of June 14, 2023

By a unanimous vote, the committee approved the June 14, 2023, meeting minutes with corrections with a motion by Huppe and a second by Ferguson.

3. Public comments

Francisco stated that the Midpines Post Office is now open.

4. Committee Business

a. Community Plan

i. Draft CEQA Framework and Community Plan Review Presentation by Steve Engfer

Francisco introduced the item. Engfer gave a presentation.

Engfer stated that the CEQA framework will need a narrative to describe the proposed changes to land uses in the Community Plan.

Huppe made a recommendation that the plan should show existing and proposed land uses and zoning.

ii. Potential Action to Establish Ad-Hoc Committee

Francisco appointed himself, Huppe, Ferguson, and Lammers to the ad-hoc committee to review the draft Community Plan by a unanimous vote with a motion by Huppe and second by Collins.

b. Seeking Fire-Wise Recognition Discussion

Smallcombe introduced item. Smallcombe explained that the benefits of Fire-Wise recognition are reduced fire risk, issuance of certificate that may reduce fire insurance costs, and an increase in community engagement. The biggest hurdle is obtaining a list of people who would be willing to discuss this issue.

Smallcombe explained that everyone who is part of the Fire-Wise committee records how much they have worked on reducing fire risk (hours worked, money spent, etc.) and record all mitigation efforts for the community. 2-3 people are needed to start the program and then they would continue to add people over time.

The County GIS specialists can help provide a list of parcels within the community area and basic assessor/tax information, like the property ownership. A map of the community will be needed for the final application sent to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA).

Smallcombe further explained that the committee would consult with fire professionals to determine areas for improvement as part of a risk assessment. Then the committee would create a 3-year action plan based on this risk assessment. Generally, the committee picks 3-4 areas to focus on, such as education and engagement, home hardening, evacuation planning, and fuel reduction. The application is submitted to NFPA and then immediately routed to the local CALFIRE office. The local office will provide recommendations. Then NFPA issues a certification.

Smallcombe asked, are Francisco and Lammers still interested? Who else would like to help? Does anyone else have any questions, comments, and or ideas?

Francisco was unable to meet with Lammers but did his research. Francisco stated that it would be important to discuss the benefits.

McGrath and Francisco stated that the community and residences within the program would be safer.

Smallcombe stated that improved safety and greater community connectivity for those that are vulnerable are the main benefits.

Francisco explained how the program works. There are four phases in the process:

- 1. Organize – create a committee, identify a program leader, identify area of interest, identify a fire expert*
- 2. Risk Assessment – property by property, create a 3-year action plan*
- 3. Complete the action plan*
- 4. Annual report to Fire-Wise*
 - a. Every 3 years update action plan*

Francisco asked how the committee wants to approach obtaining Fire-Wise recognition. McGrath suggested outsourcing outside of the committee to recruit other members of the community to participate.

Lammers thinks everyone needs to Google Fire-Wise and understand the program.

Huppe suggested advertising the program initially and holding a public meeting to gauge interest.

Smallcombe stated that she can coordinate a meeting with the public with a presentation by the local fire agency, as was done within Mariposa Town, Greeley Hill, and Wawona. Huppe said there should be a good turnout due to the interest in fire protection and the recent Oak Fire that is fresh in everyone's minds.

Parke stated that there is an existing mailing list for Oak Rd.

McGrath stated that the Midpines Post Office would be a great way to advertise.

Smallcombe stated that the GIS Division can provide a map and mailing list of the area of interest.

Francisco and Lammers agreed to meet to discuss the subject further. Lammers stated more of the community needs to step-up and that it would be great to find one person who can lead the charge.

Smallcombe stated that obtaining those distribution lists would be helpful to identify individuals who are interested.

5. Updates and Activity Reports

a. Muir Lodge Site –Status Update

Smallcombe introduced the item and read an email from Corrina Miranda, Code Compliance Technician: the July 5th date had to be pushed back due to ongoing issues with the homeless encampment. The individuals refused to cooperate. County Council was consulted on how to proceed with a judicial process to remove the trespassers. The Sheriff's Office has also been consulted to move forward with the process.

Lammers stated that he saw that a new trailer was put on the property and called Corrina Miranda to inform her. Corrina Miranda told Lammers that the previous owner of the Muir Lodge property gave the BIA an easement in 1932, which presents an issue. Waylon Coats is willing to finance gates to be installed around the Indian allotment. Smallcombe stated that the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation is very interested in reducing wildfire risk.

Heiss stated that she heard there was a bonfire on the property and asked if anyone else was aware. Heiss stated that there is no time to be wasted with this due to the fire risk.

Lammers stated that trash has started to accumulate by the bridge.

b. Oak Fire – Update, Evacuation Routes and Lessons Learned Discussion

Smallcombe stated that she spoke to Leigh Westerlund, who told her story of attempting to evacuate during the Oak Fire. A Sheriff's deputy was redirecting people away from Sherlock Road, which led to people trying to evacuate at the same time others were entering on the Whitlock Road side.

Lammers stated that brushing and signage needs to be addressed. Sherlock is the viable exit route and needs to be made safe.

Smallcombe stated that she can speak to Sheriff Briese.

Lammers stated that it would be easier to do traffic control with assistance from the California Highway Patrol and CALTRANS, which should be part of the discussion with Sheriff Briese.

c. KOA/Terramor Status Update

Engfer stated that there is nothing new to report.

d. Whispering Pines/Bear Creek Cabins Update

Francisco asked Matt Larson to provide an update. Francisco read the press release published by the County Public Information Officer regarding the forced evacuation and closure of residents. Power will be turned off within 72 hours of the notice.

Larson stated there are 5 people left to evacuate. There are currently very limited resources and he is trying to communicate between the County and the residents. 3-4 evictions are currently occurring. The buildings were secured, however tenants continue to break in. Tenants of Whispering Pines are yelling at tenants of Bear Creek and other issues continue to occur. Tenants are upset about the 72-hour notice. There is now a squatter on-site that needs to be legally removed. Larson has been in communication with the Sheriff and Corrina Miranda continuously.

Collins asked what happens after the 72 hours. Larson stated that the Sheriff will come and forcibly evict people and lock-up the structures. Larson is aware of people who will continue to fight this. Sheriff's Office has become more involved.

Smallcombe stated it has become a health and safety issue, which gives the County the power to step-in.

Larson stated that they have applied for and received FEMA assistance for clean-up, after an initial denial. Larson's focus is repairing access. Next would be establishing formal easements, including a fire wise plan. Anything short of demolition is the target at the moment. Demolition will occur when the Whispering Pines project is approved.

O'Donel-Browne asked when the 72 hours began. Larson stated that it started yesterday.

Lammers asked is there is going to be someone living on-site after the tenants are evicted. Larson stated yes, there is one person who will continue to be on the property as long as Bear Creek Cabins continue to operate. Bridge replacement to meet code is currently a discussion.

e. Oak Road Bridge Project Update

Parke stated that she got an email from a highway professional to discuss the bridge proposal but has not heard back further after trying to set-up a meeting.

Smallcombe stated she would follow-up with Shannon Hansen at Public Works.

f. CALTRANS Project/Study Update

Smallcombe read an email from Gregoria Ponce. The study is currently being worked on.

g. Ferguson Update

Smallcombe obtained permission to send out the study to everyone. Now that it has been signed off by everyone at CALTRANS, funding can now be requested for the project.

h. Midpines Post Office Update

The Committee reiterated that the Midpines Post Office is open.

i. Planning Commissioner Update

Art Baggett was not present.

j. Supervisor Updates

Smallcombe relayed that there was a presentation by the president of the Community Alliance for Health at the last Board of Supervisors meeting. The County will have a community member seated on the board at the Community Alliance for Health. Smallcombe stated that she can provide the presentation to the group. Approximately 6400 people of the community are eligible for assistance from the health organization.

6. Future agenda items

The next meeting is August 9th.

Francisco directed staff to keep the existing list on the agenda with the following edits:

Add an item for the Ad-hoc Committee report. Remove Post Office item.

Francisco welcomed Larson to return at the next meeting.

7. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 pm with unanimous approval of a motion by Mcgrath and a second by Heiss.

Respectfully Submitted,

Polina Pivak, Planner II