

Community Comment
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The Planning Process

I graduated from HSU with a degree in forest management. The work I was doing in the summer with the forest service made it clear to me that the commercial part of forestry was not my area of interest. Fortunately for me, there were faculty members in the department that shared some of my interests and the forest service was beginning to really push the idea of hiring foresters with a perspective of doing more large scale planning to better include the other areas of wildland management into an overall planning process. The forest service wanted foresters for this work because they wanted their core staff to be familiar with the forest ecosystem and the principles of commercial management. I took a master's degree in Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning to pursue a career with the forest service.

I had the opportunity to teach at Utah State while working on my Master's and that changed my career choice. I came to Humboldt to teach for a year and found myself designing a curriculum for resource planning in a new department. This was in the early 70's and there were few programs of this type. For a time, the department wanted to emphasize environmental or natural resource planning on public lands or in rural counties. Urban planners were plentiful; rural planners with knowledge of managing natural resources were a new idea.

I had the pleasure and the honor of teaching this new area of study for the next twelve years. At one time, our graduates occupied the position of Planning Director in three of California's more than Fifty counties.

I mention this background because I want to comment on the general plan that is in the news so often these days. My perspective includes this academic background plus ~~from~~ having served on a planning commission and on the Arcata City Council for 16 years.

The general plan has become an onerous process to go through. Every country has to do the same elements even though Humboldt and Modoc Counties have very little in common with the planning needs of Los Angeles County. The why is simple. We have law makers in Sacramento who know nothing of these differences at the worst case or just want everything to be the same; to be fair. But we have to conform to these laws because we exist as a county or a city at the will of the state.

The regulations that have filled in these laws don't fit this diversity of entities. We are not L.A. and L.A. is not us. The result of this one size fits all approach of planning has gotten away from the local and practical service it once was and is now just an offshoot of the political process. We elect Council members and Supervisors who answer to their

political base and make plans with an agenda. Humboldt is no different. I look at the Board of Supervisors and I see a mixed political group. It shouldn't surprise anyone that the plan they must approve will be difficult to agree on. That's probably a good thing. Perhaps it means that a common ground can be found. It will probably make a better plan; one that fits a more diverse view of the future.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.