

# Planning in the Eastern Sierra

## Improving Intergovernmental Coordination, Public Involvement, and Land Use Decisions

### APPENDIX

#### Proceedings of the Eastern Sierra Land Use Planning Workshop June Lake, California September 8 and 9, 2001

#### 1. The Eastern Sierra as Place

Panel: Connie Millar, Sierra Nevada Research Center, USFS, PSW Research Station  
Steve Addington, Bureau of Land Management, Field Office Manager, Bishop Greg  
James, Inyo County Water Department  
Greg Newbry, Mono County Planning Department  
Steve Frisch, Sierra Business Council  
Scott Burns, Mono County Community Development Director  
Bill Taylor, Mammoth Lakes Senior Planner.

Facilitator: Linda Dalton, California Planning Roundtable (with the California Planning Foundation at the time of the workshop)

To set the stage for the discussion of planning in the Eastern Sierra, this panel provided an overview of the area's characteristics and issues regarding natural resources, water, economy, transportation and housing.

#### Natural Features

Connie Millar used four terms to capture the special character of the Eastern Sierra: First, it has distinct *edges* within and around it – geologic, biotic, climatic, and cultural – particularly as shaped by the crests of the Sierra and White Mountains and the valleys of the Great Basin desert. Second, the region has a highly *readable landscape*, in its stark landforms (e.g., mono craters), vegetation (e.g., bristlecone pine), and human markings (e.g., petroglyphs). Third, the Eastern Sierra *transgresses time*, providing lasting evidence of change through geologic uplifts, volcanic formations, glacial deposits, landslides, and erosion. Finally, the area remains fundamentally *wild* – fragile and sensitive to human impacts.

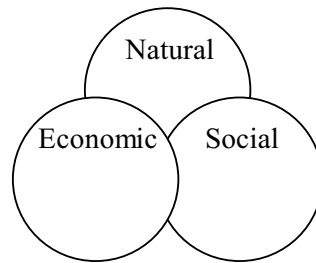
Steve Addington explained that “sustainable landscapes depend on sustainable communities.” While he agreed with Millar that human impact has been limited thus far, there are causes for concern, particularly as the natural resources of the region continue to be its primary attraction. He called attention to several indicators of environmental health: endangered species at risk; invasive exotic plants; water quality; and the very limited amount of privately owned land in the that region makes development decisions particularly important.

## **Water**

Greg James and Greg Newbry focused on the political and legal role of water in the region. While recent agreements have reversed some of the impacts of water exportation on Mono Lake and the Owens Valley, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power remains a major property owner and political force in the area. Further, development in both California and Nevada stimulates demand for water in the desert. Water rights and watershed management are thus critical regional issues.

## **Economy**

Steve Frisch demonstrated how the wealth of the Eastern Sierra depends on achieving a balance among its natural, economic and social assets. Using the following diagram, Frisch argued that we need indicators to measure how development and policy decisions contribute to the desired balance.



He also noted that the Eastern Sierra is less diverse economically than the rest of California, services are limited (especially health care), the population is stable, and per capita income is low.

## **Transportation**

Scott Burns noted the lack of public transportation and high dependency on the automobile in the Eastern Sierra. Aviation is a major source of controversy, with unsettled tension regarding airport expansion in Mammoth Lakes or Bishop.

## **Housing**

Bill Taylor expressed concern about the increasing gap between housing costs and the ability of local residents to afford homes. He argued that the provision of affordable housing should be considered part of the infrastructure in a community, particularly one with a strong tourist industry.

## **Session Summary**

Linda Dalton summarized the discussion, calling attention to several broader issues that the region needs to address:

The distinctive characteristics of the region are a challenge as well as a strength. Resource exportation can deplete the economic assets of the region, while resource attraction can draw so many people that the natural and aesthetic values become diluted. What constitutes sustainable development in this context? How can projects be created that increase the ability of economic, social, and natural features of the area to reinforce rather than drain one another?

How does the Eastern Sierra work as a region? Route 395 is a unifying “lifeline” that connects communities in the three counties. Yet, each area also has important ties to other neighbors – e.g., Alpine County to the Tahoe area, Inyo County to the Great Basin Desert. The sense of the group was that the Eastern Sierra shares an identity through its natural amenities and common dilemmas. However, particular issues and opportunities may be addressed by sub-regions drawn around natural features such as watersheds and airsheds as well as by sub-regions defined politically or economically. In other words, the core identity of the Eastern Sierra captures its essence, while not requiring a universal set of boundaries.

## **2. Public Participation in the Planning Process**

Panel: Scot Burns, Mono County Planning Director  
Darin Dinsmore, Sierra Business Council  
Elizabeth Tenney, Eastern Sierra Advocates Network  
Rick Leslie, Lone Pine Design Review Board.

Facilitator: Tom Jacobson, California Planning Roundtable.

Public participation has become a mainstay of planning in California; but there remain significant challenges in how to make public participation effective and meaningful. The goal of this panel was to highlight examples of public participation in planning processes in the Eastern Sierra, including the associated successes, obstacles encountered, and lessons learned. These examples represent a variety of creative techniques for meaningfully integrating the public into planning decisionmaking.

### **Examples of Public Participation in Eastern Sierra Planning**

**Mono County -- Regional Planning Advisory Committees.** Scott Burns, Mono County Planning Director, described that County’s Regional Planning Advisory Committees (RPACs), and their role in developing the County’s General Plan. Appointed by the Board of Supervisors, the RPACs served as advisory groups to the Board and provided the public with a forum for speaking to policy questions to be addressed in the General Plan. Each RPAC, operating under its own procedures, attempted to reach consensus on critical issues, which in turn was reflected in recommendations to the Board. One RPAC voted to dissolve when it could not agree on certain recommendations.

With the adoption of the General Plan, the RPACs' focus shifted to General Plan implementation. The RPACs were instrumental in meeting the challenge of adopting zoning consistent with new General Plan. They will now have an ongoing role in the County's planning process, with the potential of addressing a wide range of issues – design review, community character, etc.

The RPAC process has provided an important forum for public input. Its success has been attributable to the support of the Board of Supervisors, the commitment of the time and talents of professional staff, and the involvement of RPAC members and the public at large.

Past experience suggests several factors that will be important to the RPACs' ongoing success. One is the continued support of the Board. This can be reflected in a commitment to "honor the system," by ensuring, for instance, that projects identified for RPAC review, in fact, receive that review. Another is the importance of providing the RPACs with adequate resources, such as education and outside expertise, to continue to inform their work.

**The PESTER Network (Preserving the Eastern Sierra Tradition of Environmental Responsibility).** Elizabeth Tenney described the development and operation of this unique approach to public participation. She started the network in 1998, in response to a mining ordinance then being considered for adoption. Although she was aware of public interest in being involved in the process, attendance at meetings was low. She developed a strategy for disseminating information about meetings – when, where, and how to participate.

Initially relying on e-mail, fax, and regular mail, the network has evolved to being primarily Internet based. It serves as a central location for notices and agendas for planning-related public meetings, and is used by both full-time residents and the owners of second homes who might otherwise find it difficult to stay apprised of public meetings and opportunities to be heard on planning issues.

The success of these efforts in more effectively engaging the public have been evident in planning decisions themselves. There have been attendant challenges, as well. Initially, when fewer people had e-mail access, this limited the utility of this approach. As e-mail usage has increased and people receive more e-mail messages, the problem has become a different one: it has become more difficult to get people's attention through the volume of e-correspondence they receive. One remedy to this has been to use the "subject line" concise title summarizing each PESTER e-mail message, in the hopes that recipients will read messages before deleting them, and while they are still timely.

Another potential limitation to an e-mail-based effort is that when a message is broadcast widely (the network exceeds 400 recipients), there may be a greater tendency to assume that "someone else will deal with it." Furthermore, e-mail may have inherent limits as a means of conveying public opinion compared with more personal approaches, such as phone calls.

Finally, simply responding to public hearing notices may be too late in the approval process to have meaningful effect. PESTER's experience indicates the value of the public being involved earlier in planning processes.

*[Note: In November 2001, the PESTER Board of Directors voted to change the name of the 501(c)3 organization to the Eastern Sierra Advocates Network. Their website is [www.easternsierraadvocates.org](http://www.easternsierraadvocates.org).]*

**Inyo County Design Review Ordinance / Lone Pine Design Review Board.** Rick Leslie, member of the Lone Pine Design Review Board, described the creation and operation of that board. The impetus of the Lone Pine Design Review Board was the construction of a "generic" fast food restaurant / service station in that community. The County did not resist the developer's insistence that it could not diverge from its standard design, despite local concerns that the proposed design had little to do with the character of Lone Pine.

In the aftermath, Lone Pine residents mounted a successful attempt to implement the County's dormant ordinance for a Design Review Overlay Zone. A petition drive, not without its own controversy, called for designating a Design Review Overlay Zone in Lone Pine, and establishing design guidelines and a design review board. After a series of public meetings, and ultimately substantial support for the petition, it was presented to the County, which established the Lone Pine Design Review Board. The Board established design guidelines addressing architectural style and details, landscaping, lighting, signage, colors, and materials. The County then prepared a guideline handbook reflecting the concerns of the Design Review Board.

With these guidelines in place, Lone Pine has successfully faced an application by a second national fast food chain. McDonalds submitted an application and was told to submit a proposal consistent with the design guidelines; and they returned with a design in tune with the community's vision.

### **Some General Thoughts on Public Participation**

Darin Dinsmore of the Sierra Business Council offered insights on a number of factors related to effective public participation. These included nine fundamental principles (the "Nine C's"): credibility, commitment, contribution, competence, collaboration, continuity, conscience, conversation, celebration.

He went on to identify three main points to consider in building a successful public participation process. First, establish a credible process by involving effective representatives of critical stakeholders. Often this will require a vigorous outreach program, and may entail developing a visible identity, perhaps including a website. Second, provide multiple opportunities for input. For instance, these could include workshops with opportunities for submitting both oral and written comments, holding one-on-one interviews, and providing the ability to interact easily with a website via e-mail. Third, strive to ensure that the process leads to concrete policies and action.

### **Questions to the Panel and Audience**

Panel facilitator Tom Jacobson of the California Planning Roundtable posed this question to the panelists:

*Despite having a range of opportunities to participate in planning processes, members of the public throughout California are often still concerned that their voices are not being heard (“We speak, but how do we know that the policymakers listen?”). Based on their experiences, what sorts of processes can we use to make sure that public input is integrated into the planning process?*

Rick Leslie responded that, in the case of the Lone Pine Design Review Board, the process operates on such a small and intimate scale that everyone with an interest is heard by the Board.

Elizabeth Tenney noted that we have to be realistic and often must find a middle ground through a collaborative process. Sometimes a great idea only works for a few people.

Scott Burns explained that each RPAC appoints a secretary, so they have an ongoing record of its actions. Specifics derived from the RPAC's process can then be incorporated into the RPAC's recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. This helps the public to see and understand the entire process, beginning to end.

Darin Dinsmore proposed having a self-documenting process. Have people work in small groups, each with its own official minutes, so they have ownership of the work they produce. He recommended having a facilitator at meetings to aid this process. He also proposed preparing a summary of input received, which would be communicated back to participants via e-mail and/or a print newsletter. A full report, including all letters and comments, would be sent to policy makers prior to their decision. He recognized the substantial workload involved with these approaches and the possible need for volunteers for implementation.

The same question was then posed to the audience. Their responses were:

It's important to follow up – have a second process where you try to focus on what people said in the first round. Time must be allocated for this.

Use a workbook as a tool to implement vision. This then becomes a work plan.

Different kinds of comments should be made in different kinds of ways. Get answers to questions before going to Board. Figure out what is, and is not feasible for people to respond to. Relate to the comment and what you are trying to communicate.

Decision makers need to be at public meetings. Disclose how comments are used and referenced in the document. Disclose your rationale for the decision, so people know the thought process in making a decision.

Develop a matrix or other approach for creating accountability. This will help to answer the question, "What did you do with my issue?"

There are "secret public meetings." Sometimes legal notice is put out, but the real agenda is hidden.

### **3. Collaboration in Planning**

Panel: Chuck Thistlethwaite, Inyo County Planning Director  
Byng Hunt, Mono County Supervisor  
Jeff Bailey, Inyo National Forest Supervisor  
Nancy Upham, Chair Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra (CURES)

Facilitator: Janet Fairbanks, California Planning Roundtable

Panel members were asked to discuss collaborative planning from their perspective and experiences, and to tell the group what it means to them. They were asked to share successes and obstacles, lessons learned and how collaborative planning can be used in the future.

#### **Why collaborative planning?**

The panel agreed that collaborative planning is needed. Collaborative planning is a way to bring everyone together – neighbors, communities, developers, environmentalists, and agencies working together to conceptualize the project as one team with common goals. Success can be measured whether a project is profitable, and enhances property values and the quality of life in adjacent neighborhoods.

The panel agreed that collaboration, if done correctly, avoids compromise. Compromising is a “half empty” solution because values are sacrificed and everyone must make concessions. Collaboration is when people work together based upon common interests to achieve a common goal. Common goals draw people together in order to achieve successful outcomes in the collaborative planning process.

The panel discussed the fact that collaborative planning is not mandated, yet it is very much a process, a beneficial process. There was recognition that “quality of life” is linked to the developer – assurance

that the built environment will respect open spaces and the values, benefits and experiences that ecosystems provide. Thus community members must define shared visions in order to sustain both the community and the environment.

### **What is collaborative planning?**

Chuck Thistlethwaite provided the nuts and bolts of collaboration: Don't argue your position, simply state your needs and concerns. Don't question the other person's values, logic or assumptions, or interpret or analyze their position. Instead ask for clarification. Don't fight back and be defensive. Ask them to clarify their criticisms. Don't focus on personalities. Focus on problems. Don't fight for a single solution. Encourage raising new ideas and don't avoid confrontation or be submissive. Stand up for your own feelings and concerns and be open to others too. Celebrate your success and maintain enthusiasm and motivation for collaborative planning. Document, acknowledge positive change, and be sensitive. Maintain a stable structure to reassure members that the collaborative partnership is accountable to them and that something will get done. Build on sources of community pride. Demonstrate that the benefits of collaboration will offset any loss of autonomy. Continually revisit and stress achievements. Finally, make it fun.

Nancy Upham provided an excellent example of collaborative planning. The Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra (CURES) have been working together for over 10 years. The group has very divergent viewpoints on the opportunities and the potential for recreation in the Eastern Sierra. The group consists of people who had never sat down together before – yet they were all in the business of providing recreational opportunities in the Eastern Sierra. One of the first things they did was come up with a vision statement as a way of identifying common ground. They agreed that they needed to be together, they needed to share their visions on recreation, and they needed to prioritize projects in the hope that the counties and the federal agencies would use their work in planning the Sierra. The vision statement ended up being two pages long and it took a solid year of meetings to come up with it.

Mono County Supervisor Byng Hunt gave another excellent example of a successful collaboration model. He is chair of the Mono County Collaborative Planning Team. The team includes federal, state and local agencies, Indian tribes, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. In 1996 the team prepared a Memorandum of Understanding which includes what collaborative planning means to them: "while the specific missions of the entities involved in this collaborative planning process may differ, there are many more similarities and resources, social and economic responsibilities, concerns and opportunities. By working in a collaborative manner in selected areas of emphasis, a synergistic effect will occur and as a result of our efforts as a whole will far exceed what we may expect to accomplish as individual signatory agencies. We recognize that our ability to meet these objectives is dependent on significant public involvement in both planning and implementation. Success is equally dependent on those individuals who are responsible for caring out the mission of each of these signatory agencies . . ."

### **Success and Obstacles**

Supervisor Hunt shared his thoughts on successes and obstacles of the Mono County Collaborative Planning Team. One of the big successes is the value of information sharing. Because information comes their way they have been able to embark on watershed management studies, community interface planning, wetlands preservation and restoration. One of the biggest successes has been that Mono County and this team has effectively institutionalized collaborative planning between government agencies in the county. Before an agency begins a project, they come to the team to tell

them what they want to do. It gives everyone a chance to input on this. The agencies benefit, the media and the public hear about it, so it becomes a collaborative effort not just between agencies, but also between the county, the media and the public. This makes people feel good because we were moving in the direction of involving a lot of different people.

One of the obstacles has to do with turf protection. At the beginning of the process some agencies had to work hard to be allowed to join the team. It is a natural human tendency to protect your own interest as an agency. Therefore there is fear, or skepticism that there would be some form of losing control if certain agencies joined. Through the years, fortunately the team has learned that there is real value of having everyone sit at the table.

Jeff Bailey, Inyo National Forest Supervisor offered his thoughts on the obstacles to collaborative planning. Each agency must be responsive to the expectations of its leaders and the public it serves. Thus, the leaders need to value and practice collaboration, otherwise it is meaningless to people below that leader. Also, collaboration doesn't happen if people don't know how to do it. It needs to be part of the cultural norm for an agency. The environmental movement in the United States forced the forest service to the table, it forced them to open up the process to the public. They had to start thinking about how they function, how they relate internally and externally to the public. Another reason collaboration may not work is mistrust - probably one of the biggest barriers that we face. Many Forest Service employees feel like outsiders, they are new to an area occupied by fourth or fifth generation Sierrans. For collaboration to be successful they need to establish friendships, they need to work and play together. If interpersonal relationships do not develop, mistrust follows.

Another obstacle is polarization. This happens when issues aren't addressed soon enough in the process, when people don't come to the table early on. People start drawing their own conclusions, many times not based on facts but on perception which then suddenly become very strong personal beliefs. Another obstacle is skill-building. People need skills in collaboration. They need to be trained mentors and facilitators. And finally, time. Collaboration takes a lot of time. Democracy takes a lot of time. Too often we are too eager to reach a decision, we need to back up, we need to give of ourselves, we need to give folks who work for us time to collaborate and the public time to collaborate.

### **Lessons Learned**

Jeff Bailey stated that it is difficult to maintain collaborative planning over large geographical rural areas. Decision-makers must be able to speak for their agencies. Meetings must be open and noticed to the public. It is necessary to self-evaluate your process. Successful collaborative planning means we don't sacrifice values of have confrontations in the courts.

Nancy Upham, suggested that two basic foundations are needed for successful collaboration – a community of place, and a community of interest. People in the Sierra have a passion to take care of it – they love it. The Sierra provides a sense of place, a community of place, there is success because they can identify with a sense of place. In the case of CURES, they came together because of a common interest – recreation. They don't view recreation as the same, but the organization is strong because of the various perspectives and divergent views, and the respect in dealing with each other over a 10 year period of time.

Members of CURES learned to listen to one another. By truly listening they started to build relationships. They learned that the process is just as important as the product. The process of meeting for an entire year just to talk about what they valued and where they saw recreating going in the Eastern Sierra was truly valuable as a final product.



Another lesson learned was the value of time. Time is valued in different ways by different people and agencies. CURES spent in hundreds of meetings trying to work out problems together. This was a difficult commitment for the private sector to make. Chuck Thistlethwaite is involved in the Mojave Plan, a collaborative planning process that is estimated to take about ten years. The group is very dedicated to the effort and recognizes that it will be very time-consuming. They also recognize that they may need to compromise, they will need to look at alternatives if the collaborative effort fails. Collaborative planning may not be the right solution for every problem. Some issues are so complex that there must be a recognition that there may not be any upfront solutions.

Each group learned early on that they weren't necessarily going to reach consensus on every issue, but as they moved ahead everybody would agree on what they were going to do. There are no cookie cutter approaches to collaboration. There is no one answer that works for every group. When you are involved in a collaborative effort, you take the situation you have in front of you.

The panel discussed litigation with the audience. It was stated that we need to learn from litigation – what went wrong in the process, what could we have done differently that may have solved this problem without moving into the court arena. And if litigation does occur, how do we keep the collaborative process ongoing and recognize the importance of these relationships. We don't want the end result to be winners and losers because we don't need any more losers. The unanswered question: Is the end result the best result whether it came out of the lawsuit or out of the planning process?

Another lesson learned is the value of a facilitator. Facilitators can keep the discussion focused on the goals of the people at the table, rather than alternative solutions. You need a cheerleader, someone who really believes in the collaborative process. Without it, the group can bog down.

You also need to agree on a decision making process. If you cannot get everyone to agree, there needs to be levels of agreement, procedures in place to move the process forward.

Chuck Thistlethwaite provided his approach to creating a group. First, make sure that people who are at the table represent what you can call stakeholders. Have all the important interests involved in the collaborative planning process up front. Those are people who can in turn have some kind of credibility with the people they are supposed to represent so they can take the message back and bring feedback back into the collaborative planning process. Publicize your process, if you get the media attention up-front, then you're actually in a sense preempting coming along at the last minute. Identify deal-breakers or project killers or whatever else might come along. Get all issues identified up front.

### **Collaboration in the Future**

The panel concluded by agreeing that we are in the infant stages of collaboration. We need to learn to collaborate on large scales, like the Sierra, but we don't have the tools yet to do this. We are in the process to develop those tools.

Sometime collaborative planning will not lead to a solution, which should not view it as a tool that will work in every situation. There are some issues that don't lend themselves to collaborative planning

Supervisor Hunt would like to see collaboration carried beyond what it is today. Beyond partisan politics, political philosophies, to try and make land use decisions on local needs integrated into the state and national land use policies. He would like to see opportunities for more public participation

in the planning process. And he would like to see the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments re-established. He would like to see the counties start to think regionally rather than locally, and this would be a good opportunity to do that.

Institutionalize collaborative planning outside of a MOU. Have county-town liaison committees. Bring people to the table to address issues of common concern, and its become almost expected by most of the agencies that they will report their activities before they actually embark on them. Have local governments and local agencies define what the regional context should be. COGS, LAFCOs, collaborative planning. The edicts from Sacramento don't really apply to rural areas.

#### **4. Community and Resort Development**

Panel: Brian Peters, Alpine County Planning Director  
Rick Pucci, Bishop Administrator/Planning Director  
Mike Vance, Mammoth Lakes Community Development Director  
Benno Nager, MMSA/Intrawest

Facilitator: Stan Hoffman, California Planning Roundtable.

This panel dealt with the issues surrounding resort development while maintaining a sense of community for the full time residents. As resort areas become larger and attract more visitors on a year round basis, the economic forces on the land market and the need for a more diverse labor force generates problems familiar to more urban areas – increasing the need for public services, such as schools, parks, neighborhood beautification, cultural activities, public works and traffic control. The clash between the demand for relatively higher priced resort housing and the more moderately priced worker housing increases in-commuting of retail, construction and service workers and creates other development impacts on both the resort and nearby communities.

#### **Examples of Community and Resort Development**

Brian Peters, Alpine County Planning Director, spoke about the changing demographic trends of aging baby boomers and their life style choices, and how this has increased the demand for second homes. You can't be just a ski area anymore because we have become year-round, full services resorts that to a large degree are driven by economic spin-offs from other counties. "Whatever happened to the off season?" The emphasis has now shifted to building community. Lift line reductions have translated into traffic congestion increases. Further, CEQA should not be used as a substitute for good planning.

Rick Pucci, Bishop Administrator/Planning Director, City of Bishop, talked about the need to finance public services and the trade offs inherent in attracting "big box" retail users for their sizable sales tax revenues, while continuing to maintain a sense of community. He cited the K-Mart Center development as a prime example of how they lessened the impacts of drawing business away from downtown and avoided strip mall development. The K-Mart was located as close to the downtown as possible, and an extraordinary effort was made at creating an effective partnership.

Mike Vance, Mammoth Lakes Community Developer, put together a work plan for implementing the City's vision. They needed a financial strategy and an approach for bringing tourists into the City while also addressing the housing demand from new, full time residents; he also talked about broadening the monitoring efforts. The lessons learned included: 1) "plan for the challenges of success;" and 2) "we can't be successful on our own -- partnerships are essential."

Benno Nager, MMSA/Intravest, was the one private sector representative on the panel. The firm he represents recently purchased the Mammoth Mountain ski resort and is in the process of transforming it into an international, destination ski resort. He stressed the need for ongoing monitoring and assessment. Make adjustments now and anticipate changing lifestyles. He also questioned, what are the key indicators? Finally, make adjustments as changes are needed.

### **Questions to the Panel and Audience**

Panel facilitator Stan Hoffman of the California Planning Roundtable posed the following question to the panelists and the audience:

*Are the planning tools for Community and Resort Planning adequate? And, what else is needed?*

The responses ranged across a variety of planning issues. Foremost was the issue of the provision of affordable housing for a wide range of workers followed by alleviating the increasing in commuting from workers not able to afford to live in Mammoth. Also, airport travel, including the planned expansion of Mammoth Airport and the potential expansion of Bishop Airport, illustrated the need for more effective regional cooperation and planning, even if it is on a focused issue such as “airports.” The increased air travel will change the profile of the visitor and thus the demand for lodging, recreation and entertainment services.

Additionally, as the community character changes with growth, the need to better integrate diverse activities into the community further emphasizes the importance and effectiveness of partnerships. Maintain the community character while at the same time balancing the needs of expanding resort development. Ongoing monitoring and the use of key indicators were frequently mentioned techniques. And finally, CEQA should not be a substitute for good planning.

## **5. The Economics of Rural Government**

Panel: Brian Peters, Alpine County Planning Director  
John Wohlmuth, Mono County Chief Administrative Officer  
Steve Julian, Mammoth Lakes Town Manager

Facilitator: Stan Hoffman, California Planning Roundtable

Discussion of the economics of rural government centered around the issues of limited dollars and limited resources, and how to pay for increasing demands on public infrastructure and public services. The aftermath of the Proposition 13, and subsequent legislation have served to constrain most local governments in providing expanded services. In general, the rural communities in the Eastern Sierra have become overly dependent on retail sales taxes and hotel lodging taxes. How can a community expand its financial base to meet demands for increased public services from resort travelers, while at the same time meeting the needs of a growing worker population?

### **Discussion of the Economics of Rural Government**

Brian Peters, Alpine County Planning Director, started the discussion of limited dollars and limited resources. He said that Alpine County’s economy is visitor driven with a heavy reliance on outside funding sources. Some funding is institutionalized, such as gas taxes for both road capital costs operations and maintenance. However, the General Fund is viewed as untouchable because the level

of funding can fluctuate with economic cycles and the General Fund typically falls short of fully providing for basic police, fire, general government and community services. As the demand for services increases, the shift is made to the delivery of urban services. Some of the negative spin offs of rapid growth include what is called the “down valley” syndrome. That is, workers that must live outside the community and commute in because they can’t afford the local housing. Some discussion has occurred about regional approaches to revenue sharing to better distribute needed public revenues among incorporated and unincorporated areas, but nothing has happened yet.

John Wohlmuth, Mono County Chief Administrative Officer, began by discussing the importance of retail sales taxes and the ineffective attempts to rationalize its distribution from a situs-based, or point-of-sale, tax to one that includes a population component in addition to the situs based approach. In Mono County about \$200 million in sales taxes is collected followed by about \$50 million in hotel occupancy taxes. Methods for financing government services post-Proposition 13 and Proposition 218 have led to the charging of increased processing and development impact fees, but they have generally charged less than the fair share. This has presented major challenges for local jurisdictions in providing increased services in critical areas such as: police protection, parks and recreation and maintenance of capital facilities. Also, there is usually a wide gap between the capital facilities needed and their funding sources, much of which has come from outside funding sources.

Mr. Wohlmuth mentioned the need for fiscal reform, but he is not optimistic about it happening. He also indicated that the property and sales taxes are not increasing as fast as income tax, which is a major revenue source for the State of California. He sees the demand for second homes increasing as the population ages, resulting in continuing growth pressure on the Eastern Sierra. And finally, several solutions he would like to see are: a) charge more on visitors via the transient occupancy tax and sales tax; b) more effectively streamline the delivery of public services; and c) annually update the development impact fees to cover the fair share.

Steve Julian, Mammoth Lakes Town Manager, talked about understanding financial flows and tailoring them to increasing service needs. State government largely controls local governmental finance since Proposition 13 and its resultant property tax limitations. Subsequent reductions in property taxes in the early 1990s, through the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) shift, further weakened local jurisdictions revenue raising ability. Collaboration is needed, but very difficult to achieve. Jurisdictions and developers usually have narrow perspectives. Problem solving all relates to economics. If the economics are right, then you can get people to collaborate. Counties used to get money from the U.S. Forest Service from timber cutting, providing services and managing them for cyclical population changes. To solve problems, more money is needed for public infrastructure and services.

### **Questions to the Panel and Audience**

Panel facilitator Stan Hoffman of the California Planning Roundtable opened the discussion to the audience after the panel presented the dilemma of local jurisdictions' need to expand the level of public services provided versus their inability to raise sufficient revenues on their own.

To address the economics of rural governments, better financial tools are essential for cities and counties. ERAF is one problem that has been difficult to solve. CSAC is pursuing changes in State law to cap ERAF and have growth in property taxes above that cap returned to counties. Local governments need to have their revenue sources insulated from State intervention in order to bring some stability to their budgeting process. Other ideas that were discussed include: 1) reducing the State special tax requirement for a 2/3 vote, because it is near impossible to achieve; and 2) a “water

diversion tax” for water leaving the county. Additionally, the tax base has to be rationalized to reduce the fiscalization of land use phenomena in order to avoid making bad land use decisions for solely tax revenue raising purposes. Also, regional financing systems need to be explored, at least for selected infrastructure and services. And finally, the impacts of growth need to be charged on a fair share basis through updated processing and development impact fees.

## **6. Planners’ Gut Level Shop Talk**

Panel: Marshall Rudolph, Mono County Counsel  
Chuck Thistlethwaite, Inyo County Planning Director  
Scott Burns, Mono County Community Development Director  
Rene Mendez, Inyo County Administrator  
Brian Peters, Alpine County Planning Director  
Mike Vance, Mammoth Lakes Planning Director

Facilitators: Susan DeSantis and Tom Jacobson, California Planning Roundtable

The focus of the Planners’ Gut Level Shop Talk was to discuss ideas for building capacity within the Eastern Sierra governmental structure to more effectively address growth and development issues. The question was asked: what tools are needed to help you do integrated planning?

### **Insights from Yesterday’s Discussions**

In spite of the different roles that each of us play, we all have certain fundamental values, a caring for our communities, the Eastern Sierra region, and the environment surrounding us. “We need a vision for the Sierra region. “

A lack of resources is a constraint in undertaking progressive planning projects. “We are all on the same page, we want to pursue aggressive projects, but we don’t have the resources to do so.” An annual audit or monitoring program is needed.

The most effective way to build more durable public policy that can survive the shifting political winds is to invest the time upfront to build strong relationships. “Why are we not working together? We need to find ways of finding the time to work together, and look beyond our own community borders to identify impacts on our environment.

The concept of integrated and collaborative planning is a good. Attempts to do planning across city, county and state lines, has met with limited success. “We may need to move toward a more formalized regional planning structure in order to do collaborative planning effectively.”

### **Key Issue: Housing**

The panel agreed that the single largest issue for the Sierra, like all mountain resort areas, is an adequate supply of affordable employee housing. Resorts that house their employees within the community have a sense of community. Mammoth Lakes has made it a priority to have land and money available to help generate adequate employee housing. The City currently requires all major developers to provide 100% of the housing need for the employees generated by each project. But financing tools to pay for employee housing are still needed. The City Council is considering an increase in the transient occupancy tax (TOT) to provide a stable source of revenue that could be used for housing purposes. However, the TOT is the primary financial resource available to the City, and

projections indicate that in future years, it will be the source of almost 90% of the City's general fund. The City is also setting up a Joint Powers Authority to address housing issues.

Despite these efforts, there are still people who live in Bishop and other parts of the region who are commuting into Mammoth Lakes to work every day because of the lack of affordable housing in the resort town. The housing demand generated by new projects in Mammoth Lakes is responsible for escalating housing prices in Bishop and other parts of the region. Some school and fire agencies are addressing the problem by purchasing housing units for their workers.

### **Solutions Discussed**

Establish a COG that would address housing issues. In 2003, the COG would develop the Regional Housing Needs Assessment in lieu of having the RHNA imposed by the State Department of Housing & Community Development. Pursue an Inter-Regional Partnership Grant from State HCD to fund the effort.

Work collaboratively on a region-wide housing element that provides an integrated approach to addressing the affordable housing issue. Utilize services of County Counsel to draft MOU and by-laws to set forward a collaborative planning team similar to the

### **Key Issue: Airport**

A second key issue is the inadequate capacity of existing airports to meet the needs of the Mammoth Lakes, and the region as a whole. Today, Inyo County and Mammoth Lakes are not doing a good job working together on the airport issue. They look at it as a competition – who can get there first. They have different goals. For example, Mammoth Lakes is in competition with other resorts, and needs expanded airport capacity in order to be competitive – that is why they purchased the Mono County airport in the first place. Plans are underway to extend a runway or build a terminal. In addition, the City will pursue a charter airline to bring people to Mammoth mid-week. At the same time, Bishop and Inyo County are preparing an airport master plan to expand that airport and to build a new terminal building. The planning process is taking a long time. The airport authorities don't talk to each other even though they are only 45 minutes away. Additionally, there is pending litigation related to safety issues that may ultimately affect the outcome on a location of a regional airport.

### **Solutions Discussed**

There needs to be a regional solution for transportation. A regional approach, one that might succeed in attracting a commuter airline for instance, would be better for the region. Let the FAA decide: if the FAA says that one location is safer, then the other county should rally behind it in support of a regional solution for transportation.

## **7. Public's Gut Level Shop Talk**

Facilitator: Linda Dalton, California Planning Foundation

In the final session, Linda Dalton called for a discussion of public participation. The comments of the participants identified and discussed the following issues.

- The need for more timely media coverage, especially in advance of decisions. E-mail distribution lists like the Eastern Sierra Action Network meet some of this immediate need, but cannot reach a full range of potential participants who aren't regular Internet users.
- The need for citizens who participate in the decision-making process to feel that their involvement matters – that it is not just to meet a legal requirement. Agencies should indicate how they use input, even when they cannot act on all the advice and comments they receive.
- Local decision-making and the role of Planning Commission meetings as compared to a City Council or Board of Supervisors. Public input needs to be able to reach appointed and elected officials before the officials have made up their minds. Public hearings occur too late in the process for the testimony to make a difference.
- Legal procedures sometimes inhibit rather than help open discussion. For example, Brown Act requirements for public notice and disclosure do not necessarily create a climate for discussion. Also, Environmental Impact Reports can provide extensive amounts of information, but can also be confusing in the way that comments are sought and addressed.

In sum, participants seek more ways to become engaged in a timely manner on issues that affect them and their communities.