

Growth . . .

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encourages development within the city limits and prevents costly urban sprawl. They say it also prevents speculation on land outside the UGB and lessens pressure for development in rural areas.

A committee of citizens, who have been meeting for the past two years, may indeed launch a petition drive to place UGBs on the November ballot. Kathy Oetinger said the group will meet this month to discuss its plans.

"I think there is a good change that there could be a petition drive," she said. "The question is, is this the right time for Sebastopol?"

She said the committee is not a Sebastopol Tomorrow group, but added that "Sebastopol Tomorrow will probably go along with what the group decides."

Oetinger said she favors adoption of the existing urban growth boundary line that is in the city's General Plan.

"One of the problems we have in Sebastopol is a limited sewer capacity," she said. "If someone outside of the line gets sewer service, someone inside the city won't be able to have it. Those kinds of issues have to be looked at if we want to give justification and merit to the (UGB) line."

An outspoken critic of the 20-year UGB is Kathy Austin, a member of the city Planning Commission. She said the idea

may be dangerous for the city if a strict UGB forces pressure for development inside the existing city limits but prevents development of moderate and high density housing.

"If we get ourselves in the position for 20 years where we can't accommodate moderate densities, then we'll have to try to accommodate higher densities and there's a lot of opposition to that," she said. "It's an artificial pressure valve that gives us very little flexibility and leaves us open to legal challenges."

The state requires every city to provide a certain amount of affordable housing. If these requirements aren't met, the city could be open to a legal challenge.

Oetinger said that higher densities within the city limits should be pursued. "I'd like to see development of the core properties with higher densities," she said. "And some reinvestment in existing properties that are sitting there with older tax assessments ... development of properties along existing transit lines, that are already adjacent to businesses, services and utilities, rather than expanding to meet needs. That is the best way to grow."

But Austin can't see drawing a line for 20 years when it isn't needed.

"I don't feel it's necessary at this time," Austin said. "The city is not in imminent danger of sprawl."

She points out that any annex-

ation requests to develop land outside the city's sphere of influence, in addition to city approvals, must also be approved by the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), which is never an easy task.

"If you don't trust the City Council, if you don't trust the Planning Commission, perhaps you can trust LAFCO," Austin said. "They're more disinterested because they have nothing financially to gain," she said.

Austin also said that many of those who would force development into the city limits are the same people who oppose high-density housing.

She added that LAFCO also has a list of policies that prevent leapfrog development, creation of urban "islands," and cities must also have transportation plans in place to accommodate new annexations.

Critics, however, point out that all boards and commissions change and policies change along with them. Having a 20-year UGB will guarantee that anti-sprawl policies remain in place and development is centered in cities.

"That's the key with the UGB, it creates that instinct to have more investment in already urbanized areas," said Oetinger. "The focus should be

on in-fill for all of Sonoma County for the next 20 years. I see it as a way of halting growth across valuable wetlands, farmlands and scenic ridges."

Fifth District Supervisor Ernie Carpenter said he is prepared to address the issue early this year. He plans to persuade his colleagues on the Board of Supervisors to place a countywide measure on the November ballot that would freeze its so-called "community separators" for 20 years.

The community separators, already in the county General Plan, are designed to prevent development in the open space between cities. Carpenter said the idea is that UGBs and the community separators should work together.

"The issue that has come up with many cities is that if they look at their growth boundaries, what is the county going to do?" said Carpenter.

He is familiar with the argument that UGBs eliminate flexibility, but that is part of the bargain.

"You may want some flexibility in the future to make some adjustments," Carpenter said. "But on the other hand you don't want the flexibility to make mistakes they've made in places like the Central Valley where shopping centers pop up

next to farm land."

He admits that tying urban growth to the community separators, which have had development approved within them despite the policy, may not be the best solution.

"But I have to find the lowest common political denominator on the Board and I think it will be the community separator,"

Carpenter said. "It's probably the best we're going to get, given all the political points of view ... if we establish it by the ballot, it will give Sonoma County a unique look for the future. We may look back in 10 years and think we need more flexibility. But I think the pros outweigh the cons."