



Organizations for Rural Quality

of Nevada County

Let's all Respect and Protect the 150,000 CAPACITY LIMIT For Nevada County

Everyday we encounter capacity limits:

Classrooms, meeting halls, movie theaters, buses, trains, airplanes

These capacity limits are not set to punish those who:

Arrive late (Star Wars movie premier), or would financially benefit by packing in more people (the airlines)

These capacity limits are set to provide and protect the:

Comfort, safety, and welfare of the people within.

Our County has a capacity limit of 150,000. This number was wisely set by the General Plan to insure the comfort, safety, and welfare of the people within Nevada County.

We all must protect that limit!

Join the Organizations for Rural Quality

150,000 General Plan Build-Out Cap – What Does it Mean?

Preparation and ultimate adoption of the 1995 General Plan took five contentious years and spawned formation of the Rural Quality Coalition. I was a frustrated County land use planner assigned to the painful General Plan Process. Clearly, the Plan adopted by the pro-growth majority Board ended up being more a fulfillment of influential property owner expectations than a Plan that truly balanced a reasonable rate of healthy residential growth and services and enough jobs against infrastructure capabilities (such as, roads, sewer and water service) and environmental protection.

But there were many important victories attained by the public through the leadership of the RQC in the General Plan Steering Committee and later in the six-person, final hour Resolution Committee, whose members sat around a table and negotiated gives and takes that would make the Plan “endurable” for each interest group. The Committee’s work allowed the Board of Supervisors to proceed with acceptance of the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) and adoption of the General Plan with many last minute land use map density changes.

As a mitigation measure intended to mitigate numerous County-wide impacts, the Board of Supervisors set a build-out population cap of not more than the Environmental Superior Alternative in the certified Final EIR. This cap was estimated then to be 150,000. The Board found that this mitigation measure would assist in reducing the level of both unavoidable and avoidable impacts. Examples of reduced impacts include traffic, noise, erosion, wildlife habitat, and the demand for numerous public facilities and services. As part of the Plan adoption process, the Board made changes to the land use maps and text that reduced this cap further to 140,000.

Subsequently, more technologically accurate estimates were made, based on the same land use maps and policies, which showed that the original estimates were low. The most recent was done by a University of Oregon professor, Dr. Peter A. Walker, who calculated that the 1995 General Plan’s build-out population would be closer to 233,000 people.

What does this mean to those who may want to amend the General Plan to increase development? It means that a new and very expensive Environmental Impact Report must be done, or densities in one area could be reduced in order to increase them in another, but this would be resisted strongly by those who are counting on a certain development potential. It also puts a greater burden on Cities that want to expand beyond their existing General Plans to evaluate impacts more comprehensively throughout the County.

Sharon Mahoffey Boivin is a retired Nevada County Planner.

