



Chalfant

A COMMUNITY GROWING TOGETHER

Chalfant Community Visioning Process Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Prepared by:
Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc
800 Hearst Street
Berkeley, CA 94710

March 2007

Summary Report of Stakeholder Interviews

The County, in partnership with CalTrans and other local agencies, is launching a public process to engage Chalfant residents in developing a vision for the future of their community. To help inform the strategy for the public involvement process, County staff identified approximately 20-25 local residents and agency staff to be interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the issues facing the community, and to seek advice and candid feedback about how to develop and implement a successful community process. Joan Chaplick, from MIG Inc., conducted the interviews and was accompanied by representatives from the County or CalTrans.

The following report summarizes the key findings and results of interviews conducted with approximately twenty residents and local agency representatives. Most of the interviews were conducted in person during the period of February 20 – 23. Additional interviews were conducted by phone in early March to include those who were not available for in-person interviews. MIG will continue to conduct select interviews by telephone as recommended by the project team. The key findings, major themes and recommendations are summarized below.

Chalfant – Desirable Features and Qualities

Participants were asked to share what they liked best about Chalfant and to describe the qualities that make the community a desirable place to live. Overwhelmingly, participants highlighted Chalfant's rural characteristics, surrounding open space and small town feel. Most residents interviewed commented favorably that the area did not have sidewalks, streetlights or other urban amenities and that the community was free of the rules and regulations associated with more populated areas. Generally, most residents expect limited services in Chalfant. For example, while they value the convenience and immediacy of the local market, they expect they will have to drive to Bishop for most goods and services. Several residents interviewed indicated that they had moved away from more urban areas and had selected Chalfant because of its affordability, large lots and surrounding open space and agricultural lands. The majority of the residents interviewed indicated they planned on staying in Chalfant over the long term, while at least three suggested they would most likely sell their property and move away from the area.

Vision for Chalfant

Most interviewees indicated they recognized it was important for the community to discuss its preferred future; otherwise they would eventually have to deal with the cumulative impacts of decisions made over time. Several participants noted they prefer a future for Chalfant that maintains its current rural character and includes the current one-acre zoning. Others desired a future that maintains the rural character, but includes some variety of housing types, lot sizes and amenities. It was suggested that some future subdivisions may include a mix of lot sizes, from 0.5 to 1 acre, to allow for clustering that creates open areas and pathways connecting properties. Several participants commented favorably on the variety of features included in the proposed development of the Mize property. Regardless of whether the lot size is 0.5 acres or 1 acre, most participants noted they did not want “cookie cutter” development in the community; a variety of designs were preferred.

There was no clear agreement on the level of services that would be expected or available in Chalfant in the future, with the exception of the market. At a minimum, most participants commented they hope the variety of products and services available at the market will increase, and some participants noted they would shop at the market more frequently if certain goods were regularly available.

Several participants noted the need to provide increased medical and emergency services. Chalfant is remote, and in the event of an accident on Highway 6, it is assumed some level of service is available in the community.

Other respondents noted the need to beautify derelict and neglected properties. While some interviewees wanted some yards cleaned up, they also did not want to encourage regulations or requirements for homeowners to enforce this request. Other amenities suggested as part of a future vision included bike lanes, pathways, a restaurants and additional transportation.

Issues Facing the Community

The most frequently mentioned issues included:

- **Access and safety issues on Highway 6.** Most participants noted the dangerous conditions on Highway 6 caused by trucks and other vehicles traveling at high speeds. Several participants also noted the dangerous conditions caused by drivers making U-turns or slowing to make a left turn.
- **Water supply.** Several participants shared concerns that Chalfant's water supply is at capacity. Additional demands on the water table may lead to current residents being forced to dig deeper wells, and contamination issues related to existing septic systems. It was suggested that Chalfant may need to develop a community water system to meet current and future water needs of the community, including the school.
- **Limited developable land.** There is very little developable land available in Chalfant. Given the small size of the community, just about any development will have an impact of some kind. For additional land to become available will require a land sale or exchange with two public agencies, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP). Both agencies have very specific requirements. Land sales or exchanges are possible, but they require that specific conditions are met, including meeting state and federal environmental review requirements. The process for these actions can take upwards of 5-10 years to complete.
- **Proposed school.** The Mono County School District is considering developing an elementary school in Chalfant. Currently, a site on land owned by BLM is under consideration by the District. County staff have identified an alternate site on land owned by the Department of Water and Power (DWP). DWP policies and Los Angeles City Charter requirements permit the sale of property, but not the water rights. The school district would need to identify a suitable water source for the school before a land sale would be considered. For the BLM property to become available, the District will need to complete environmental

review, and potential impacts to the aquifer and related federally protected species at Fish Slough will be a concern. In either scenario, it is anticipated that a land exchange or sale with either agency could take between 5-10 years to complete. Conversation with District staff indicated they were not aware of this extended timetable.

The proposed school will initially serve grades 1-4 and then grow to serve grades 1-12. Concerns were expressed about safety since some students will need to cross Highway 6 to get to school. Several participants questioned the need for the school since most parents work in Bishop and drive their children to school. They noted that parents might prefer to be closer to their children during the work day so they can be more responsive if their child is ill or if there is an emergency situation.

The interviews did not reveal a general consensus around a preferred school site, and it was not clear if there was even general support for the school. District interaction with the community around the proposed school appeared to be limited. This topic may require additional, focused discussion during the community visioning process.

- **Population growth will stretch existing services.** Participants are concerned that existing services will not be adequate to meet future demand. Some interviewees commented on Chalfant's current power outages, noting it will only get worse as the population increases. Chalfant's growing population can be a catalyst for developing a coordinated approach to increasing local capacity for services such as fire protection, water, and power.

Potential Impacts

Participants were asked to share their opinions of the potential impacts facing the community or identify the potential consequences of not addressing these issues in the future.

- **Highway 6.** Participants suggested that safety and traffic issues will only increase, and they are concerned about injury to a neighbor or loss of life. They also expect safety issues to be addressed upfront if Chalfant is going to have a school.
- **Water supply.** Several participants expressed concern that continued demands on the water table may force current residents to dig deeper wells. Along with the additional expense that would be incurred, there were also concerns expressed about potential contamination issues related to existing septic systems. It was suggested that Chalfant may need to develop a community water system to meet current and future water needs, especially if a new school is developed.
- **Incremental development.** Some concerns were expressed that the community will suffer cumulative impacts if development is approved on a piecemeal basis. It is likely that proposed developments could be unpopular and opposed by a portion of the community. Chalfant is a small community, and development can be a divisive issue that leads to negative feelings between neighbors. This is significant since most new development may be proposed by current residents who intend to remain in the community.

- **Conflicting land uses.** Chalfant’s historically agricultural land uses are challenged by increasing residential development and increased traffic on Highway 6. Residents commented on the volume of dust in the area, much of which they attribute to local farms. Dust storms have also caused reduced visibility, creating dangerous conditions on Highway 6. Farmers are concerned that they are being blamed for the dust and may be held liable for traffic accidents that occur during a dust storm. These legal issues and related financial and insurance impacts could greatly limit the viability of future farming activities. Most residents value the agricultural landscape and acknowledge it was one of the features that attracted them to the area. At the same time, some residents are quick to criticize any impacts they perceive as being caused by the farmers.

Community Perspectives

Participants were asked to share their opinion about the different perspectives on land use planning within the community and the issues that might arise from these different perspectives.

- **Differing expectations for service levels.** Most participants indicated they had limited expectations of having services in Chalfant. However, two participants hoped the availability of services would increase in the near future. They commented that when they reach their senior years, they assume they would have less mobility and would be better served by a community that could offer some additional services. They specifically requested transportation services for seniors.
- **East/West divide.** Participants noted that long-time residents live on the east side of town while newcomers live on the west. It was noted that recent migrants have differing attitudes and intentions when moving to the area. It was also noted that there are increasing economic disparities between residents that may impact attitudes towards land use planning.
- **Minimum lot size.** Participant perspective was mixed regarding minimum lot size. Some would like to see the 1-acre minimum lot size kept, while others are interested in variety and the opportunity to consider a smaller minimum lot size.
- **Demographic shifts.** Participants noted that the demographics of Chalfant are in flux and these changes may impact perspectives on land use planning. Chalfant is home to both retirees and working families. These residents may have different expectations for the future of Chalfant.
- **Newer residents/long-time residents.** Newer residents, while attracted to Chalfant’s rural qualities, are also interested in some additional services and some variety in development patterns that manage density without limiting lot sizes to one acre.
- **Land tenure issues.** It appears the public agencies including BLM and DWP are willing to help identify appropriate parcels and consider land sales or exchanges that will direct

development in optimal locations, as long as the result is consistent with their mission and agency requirements.

Key Community members who should be involved

Participants were asked to identify key individuals, organizations or agencies that should be involved to ensure the success of the community visioning process. Some of these community members were interviewed. A few were asked to participate but declined. Several others will be contacted in the next month by telephone. The following were identified:

Individuals

Denise Grindel –Booster club contact
Gilbert Gay
George Snow
McKenzie and Janet DeFlyer
Margaret and Chuck Phelps
Beverly Cheeseboro
Steve Blair-Nursery
Brett Wiley- Dental hygienist at Toyabi
Lo Lyness
Mike Conklin- Asst P.W. for Inyo County (lives in Chalfant)
Steve Toomey

Organizations

Red Hat Club (Chalfant)
Inyo County newspapers
Realtors
Booster club
Market

Agencies

Fire Department
RPAC
City of Bishop representative
Rick Scholl-Mono City Sheriff

Strategies for a successful visioning process

Participants were asked to describe the most effective ways to engage the community in the visioning process, what the process needs to achieve in order to be considered a success, and the best ways the project team can keep the community informed about the process.

- **Be authentic.** Participants noted a desire to meet and work with people who they could relate to in terms of general attitudes about rural communities, appearance and style. For example, it was suggested the consulting team dress informally and make an effort to understand the priority the community places on rural character and its small town feel.

- **Be inclusive.** The success of the visioning process is dependent in part on community members feeling included in and advised of the process. Community members suggested posting meeting notices at the local market and community center and developing a public service announcement (PSA) that can be aired on the local radio station. Residents should also be reminded of upcoming meetings via email, regular mail and telephone calls at least one month in advance of the meeting dates. It was suggested we use multiple methods concurrently so community members hear about the process from several sources.
- **Help people feel listened to.** Participants explained that the process would be considered a success if residents gained a sense that they were being listened to and that their concerns would be addressed. Overall, participants expressed a desire for a greater sense of connection with decision-makers at the County level.
- **Clearly define topics.** It was explained that the community visioning process will be most successful if topics are clearly defined and discussed individually. Some of these topics include: water, development patterns, school site, and natural amenities like the night sky.
- **Solicit proactive participation.** The community visioning process will be successful if residents are asked to “create their future” by participating in the process. Participants explained that meeting notices should advise residents that “we need your input” and that participation in the meetings will help the community avoid challenges in the future associated with uncoordinated development.
- **Encourage recent arrivals to participate.** Some participants were enthusiastic that the incoming population of young professionals and families should be encouraged to participate in the process.
- **Develop agreement on a shared future for Chalfant.** Participants noted that a successful visioning process will result in a vision that works for at least 10 years and provides a common sense of purpose.