

Noise

Issue: Complaints from residents, impacts to law enforcement, impacts to quality of life (noise from traffic, emergency sirens, construction, dogs, ATVs/ dirt bikes, music/ parties, etc.)

Constraints: no clear policy in General Plan, no Noise Ordinance

Documentation: 'Sheriff: County needs Noise Ordinance' article

Opportunities: outline noise policy in General Plan

Sheriff: County needs noise ordinance

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By CAT SIEH

The Union Democrat

The lack of a countywide rule is hampering Calaveras County sheriff's deputies when it comes to noise complaints.

Calaveras County Sheriff Dennis Downum has asked county supervisors to consider adding a noise ordinance as they update the county's General Plan. That plan lays out where and how future development will occur within the county.

County officials agree noise is an issue, but what the ordinance would cover and how it would be enforced remains in question.

"We go out on a lot of disturbing-the-peace calls that involve music, generators, gunshots," Downum said in an interview. "(A noise law) would be a good tool to take some misery out of people's lives."

Under state codes, he said, deputies can cite noise makers between the hours of 9 p.m. and 7 a.m., but only if a complaint is lodged. State codes say unreasonable noise between those hours amounts to disturbing the peace.

"All we can do is state 'you're disturbing the peace, can you quiet the party down?' " said Calaveras County Supervisor Merita Callaway. "What if it's a noisy party and it's 8 in the evening?"

A county noise ordinance would enable law enforcement to warn and cite violators, likely with a fine. The county's current General Plan deals only with noise under the government code, such as roads, airports and service plants.

"We don't have something that says 'you can work on a construction site from 6 a.m. to sundown in winter and 7 a.m. to 6 in the summer,'" said Callaway, adding that she also receives noise complaints from residents.

As Calaveras County becomes more urbanized, Callaway said, it faces more noise-related issues, and the standard of acceptable noise levels may vary across the county.

"What is accepted in more urban areas is a lot different than if you're out on five or 10 acres," Callaway said.

She added that the General Plan would not be the place for an enforceable ordinance, but that the plan could outline noise policy and how to implement it.

"My concern is you put in an ordinance, then how do you enforce it?" Callaway said. "I'd like to be able to give the (sheriff's) department a tool that will help them without having to get into hiring a decibel patrol."

The county General Plan is scheduled for completion in two years.

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