

Public can weigh in on growth of county

By Tony Biasotti

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Sometime in the next few decades, Ventura County will have more than 1 million people. Starting Monday, residents will get a chance to tell their political leaders where all those people should live and work and how they ought to get around.

Experts disagree on when Ventura County will hit seven figures — predictions range from 2030 to 2040. But it's bound to happen sooner or later, and with a state-estimated current population of 836,080, the county is getting closer every year.

The Compact for a Sustainable Ventura County started in 2007 as a way to plan for that population growth, and it began with a public planning workshop. The following year, the compact of officials from local governments and the nonprofit Ventura County Civic Alliance issued a report outlining the group's goals, which include affordable housing, a better transportation system, preservation of agriculture and open space, and a diversified economy.

Now, Phase 2 of the project is starting. The compact will hold six public workshops across the county, starting Monday and ending Sept. 29, to gather input on exactly where residents want to see new housing, which land should be preserved, which freeways and transit lines need expansion, and other growth-related questions.

There was one workshop in Phase 1, but this time the public involvement will be much deeper, said Darren Kettle, executive director of both the Ventura County Transportation Commission and the Ventura Council of Governments. Both groups are made up of representatives of various local government agencies, and both are major participants in the Compact for a Sustainable Ventura County.

"This is a level of civic engagement and stakeholder involvement that's unsurpassed, as far as I'm aware, in Ventura County's history," Kettle said.

The compact is being paid for by a \$100,000 grant from the Southern California Association of Governments and a \$25,000 contribution from the Civic Alliance, Kettle said.

The goal, he said, is to assemble some sort of consensus from the public workshops, then encourage city councils and other local agencies to plan growth according to the compact's guidelines.

The first workshop will be held at 1 p.m. Monday at the County Government Center in Ventura. The others will be held over the following week in Oxnard, Santa Paula, Camarillo, Thousand Oaks and Simi Valley.

To view the report on Phase 1 of the compact, visit <http://vccf.org/civicalliance>.



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