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Workshops hope to change the community for the better

By Chuck Preble
Ramona Sentinel

Community workshops were held on Friday and Saturday, June 13 and 14, to discuss, review and accept ideas for the possible, future look of Ramona's Old Town as well as new town. The two-day workshop was organized by the Ramona Community Planning Group and orchestrated by members of the architectural firm of Robbins Jorgensen Christopher.

Ivan Holler, deputy director of the Department of Planning and Land Use, welcomed the 42 people in attendance, stating, "We have been planning these workshops for a year. Workshops like these af-

ford the opportunity to fine-tune and enhance the downtown community of Ramona." Holler went on to say that the workshops were only the beginning of the process. "We have a chance to create customized zoning to be applied to Ramona."

Slides were shown of communities that have improved the appearance of their towns through workshops such as these. One of the success stories mentioned by Holler was that of Fallbrook. "We set up similar workshops for the town resulting in a revitalization plan, and we were able to pass zoning designed specifically for that area," he said. That plan altered the community in a positive way while still main-

taining Fallbrook's village appeal. Holler expressed hope that the Friday evening workshop would be "very design-oriented."

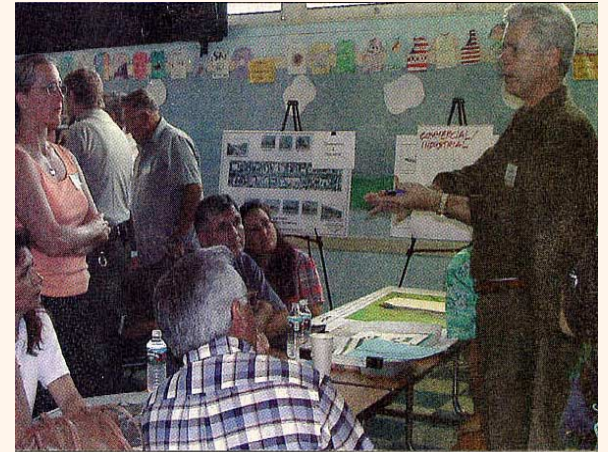
Five members of the Robbins Jorgensen Christopher firm served as facilitators, with firm member Patricia Trauth serving as spokesperson. Trauth is director of environmental planning and landscape architecture at the firm.

"We can look to the future with the workshops," she said. Trauth was asked about recent closed-door meetings held by the San Diego County Department of Planning and Land Use without proper 72-hour notification to members of the RCPG. "Those meetings

were to get us, the facilitators, up to speed with what is going on in Ramona," she said. Trauth further stated that at those meetings, facilitators were given the opportunity to consolidate information, and that no decisions regarding the future of Ramona were made. "We are here to serve you," she said. "Please give us a chance."

The workshops featured five tables, each with a facilitator to help coordinate the discussion and planning of one of five "concerns" of the town: traffic and vehicular circulation, commercial and industrial, housing, pedestrian, and sensitive habitats. Those in

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Sentinel photo/Chuck Preble
Facilitator James Robbins makes a point in Friday's workshop

Planning

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attendance were asked to break off into groups and approach the table that interested them. There they would begin discussing issues of concern to the community. The format suggested by Trauth dictated discussing and identifying issues, and then turning those issues into a project. "All ideas are good. Just remember to concentrate on the future and not dwell on the past," she said. Trauth also specified that groups not yet discuss the potential cost of a project. "Once you begin talking 'cost,' it takes away from the creativity."

Over the next few hours, topics such as traffic calming, vernal pool preservation, senior and affordable housing, equestrian trails, public footpaths, and transforming Main Street into a more pedestrian-friendly environment were but a few of the issues discussed and formulated into potential projects.

At the close of the first workshop, each facilitator presented what their individual groups had identified as concerns and the proposed suggestions to alter to alter or improve the situations. "Tomorrow's workshop will further define these issues," Trauth said.

The second half, the "Visualization Workshop," was held the following morning. Trauth suggested that groups begin to break down their projects from the previous evening into specifics. "Discuss all the topics and issues presented by each group," she said. Trauth asked that everyone look at the "big picture" and begin creating graphic images with their facilitators as to what they envisioned as an improvement or new look for specific areas in Ramona.

By the end of the workshop, a plan for a potential future appearance for Old Town as well as new town began to emerge.

The main concern of all in attendance was to improve the community while still retaining its rural appeal. Of the numerous ideas and suggestions, several key issues surface from the groups. Though the five groups were discussing very different topics, common themes began to overflow into each group's presentation. Those agreed-upon themes became the potential projects for the community. A few of the projects were:

- Traffic congestion on Main Street seemed to dominate all groups. It was suggested that possible one-way streets running parallel to Main Street be established. This would help funnel traffic away from a section of the historic district, resulting in a traffic-free area.

- Establish several "pocket parks" throughout the community to allow the public and residents areas of relaxation and entertainment.

- Design parking areas behind buildings, out of view from the center of town, with pedestrian alleyways featuring arcades and small businesses leading to the center of Main Street.

- Establish a nature center with walking trails skirting preserved vernal pools, and the Town Hall serving as a potential visitor center.

- Equestrian trails as well as safe street-crossing areas for riders.

- Setting design standards for Old Town to maintain its historic appearance, with colors and buildings reflecting a western motif and trees and benches lining widened sidewalks.

- Creating welcome signs placed at each end of town to greet visitors as they enter Ramona.

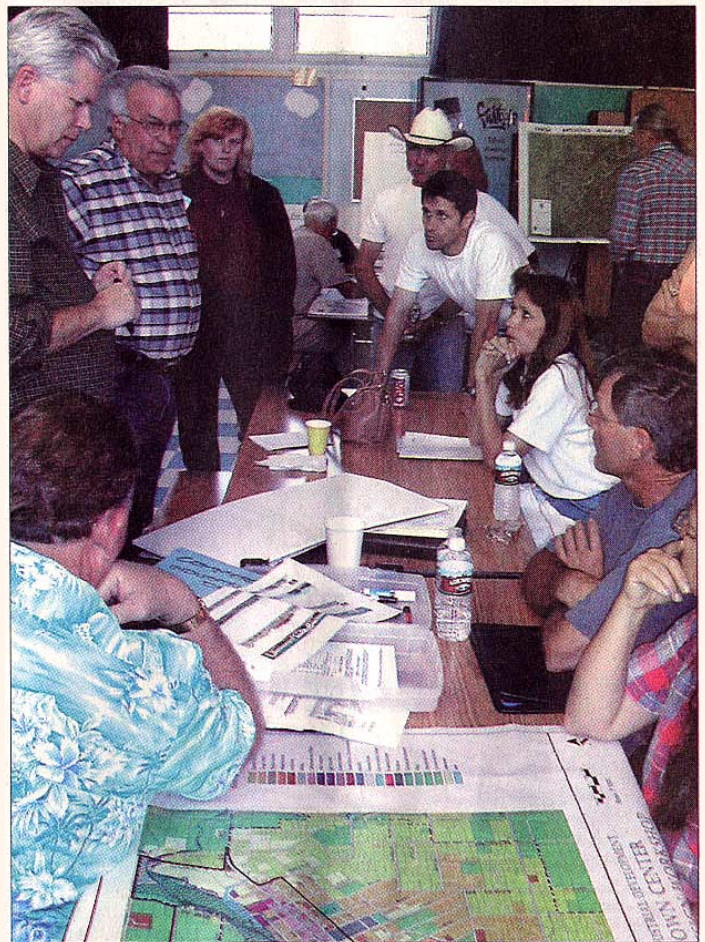
- Constructing affordable senior housing adjacent to shopping and medical facilities.

The architectural firm will now take all the information and sugges-

tions, consolidate them into a single plan that identifies the locations discussed, and incorporate them into a poster or artist's rendition of a future community. "Once we have the poster designed," Trauth said, "we will present it at another meeting for further discussion and address additional issues until we have it refined."

The workshops appear to have garnered positive suggestions for improvements from those who par-

ticipated. Planning Commissioner Bryan Woods seemed pleased with the results. "these are commonsense solutions that are apolitical. We have the chance to rewrite the zoning ordinance next year and pool these ideas into the plan," he said. After that, resolutions must be written and lobbying begins for the County Supervisor's office. "these suggestions and improvements could become reality," Woods said.



Sentinel photo/Chuck Preble

Maps, charts and illustrations helped those sitting at the five workshop tables come up with potential community projects