



NEVADA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION **STAFF REPORT**

APPLICANT: County of Nevada

HEARING DATE: January 12, 2023

FILE NO: PLN22-0190; GPA22-0002; RZN22-0002; ORD22-3; EIS22-0014

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Public hearing to consider a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors for the Greater Higgins Area Plan, including: 1) approving a Negative Declaration (EIS22-0014); 2) approving a General Plan Text Amendment (GPA22-0002) to adopt the Area Plan and to update references to the Area Plan within Chapter 1. Land Use Element of the General Plan; 3) approving a Zoning Map Amendment (RZN22-0002) to correspond with the proposed expansion of the Area Plan boundaries to add the Site Performance (SP) Combining District zoning to specific parcels to reflect the applicability of the Area Plan, and; 4) approving a Zoning Ordinance Amendment (ORD22-3) to amend Sec. L-II 4.2.3 of the Nevada County Zoning Ordinance to update the reference to the Greater Higgins Area Plan.

PROJECT LOCATION: The Greater Higgins Corner area is an unincorporated community in Western Nevada County. The Lake of the Pines Village Center is located across California State Highway 49, twelve miles South of Grass Valley and two miles North of the Nevada-Placer County line.

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER: Various. See Appendix B Attachment 1 for a list of parcels in the Area Plan.

PROJECT PLANNER: Kyle Smith, Senior Planner

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Resolution: Initial Study/Negative Declaration (EIS22-0014)
 - A. Draft Initial Study/Negative Declaration
 - B. Project (Plan Area) Notification Map
 - C. Public Comments received during Comment Period
2. Draft Resolution: General Plan Text Amendment (GPA22-0002)
 - A. Draft General Plan Text Amendments
 - B. Greater Higgins Area Plan
3. Draft Ordinance: Zoning District Map Amendment (RZN22-0002)
4. Draft Ordinance: LUDC Sec. L-II 4.2.3. Design Guidelines (ORD22-3)
5. Greater Higgins Area Plan
6. SCMAC Recommendation
7. Existing Conditions Technical Analysis
8. Market Study for the Greater Higgins Area Plan
9. Traffic Analysis for the Greater Higgins Area Plan
10. Community Workshop 1 Summary
11. Community Workshop 2 Summary
12. Community Workshop 3 Summary
13. Community Workshop 4 Summary
14. Greater Higgins Area Plan FAQ

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission make the following recommendations to the Nevada County Board of Supervisors:

- I. Environmental Action:
 1. Adopt Negative Declaration (EIS22-0014)

 - II. Project Actions:
 1. Approve the General Plan Text Amendment (GPA22-0002)
 2. Approve the Zoning District Map Amendment (RZN22-0002)
 3. Approve the Amendment to the Zoning Regulations (ORD22-3)
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The proposed project is an Area Plan for the Greater Higgins Corner area, with land use regulations focused on the Lake of the Pines Village Center as established by the County of Nevada General Plan, but also extending to the surrounding area to assist in establishing a connection from the Greater Higgins Corner area to the Southern boundary of Nevada County. The project builds upon and overhauls the existing 2000 Higgins Corner Area Plan as a comprehensive Area Plan that is more than just an update to the prior planning policy document. The Area Plan utilizes the 2020 Penn Valley Area Plan as the starting point and template for this Plan. The 2022 Greater Higgins Area Plan (Area Plan) is a focused policy and design document that supplements the Nevada County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. It serves as the comprehensive land use and zoning plan for the community of the Greater Higgins Corner area and embodies the expressed goals of residents and business owners to help shape the future of their community. The Area Plan will provide objectives and recommendations to guide the area’s future development, access to housing, community character, and recreational opportunities. The Plan focuses on areas where future development can be focused, and which may have potential for more-compact residential and commercial development.

The Greater Higgins Area Plan is comprised of the following land use entitlements and discretionary actions:

- **General Plan Text Amendment:** To Adopt the Greater Higgins Area Plan.
- **Zoning Map Amendment:** Parcel rezoning to correspond with the proposed expansion of the Area Plan boundaries to add the Site Performance (SP) Combining District zoning to specific parcels to reflect the applicability of the Area Plan (479-parcels).
- **Zoning Ordinance Amendment:** Amending Sec. L-II 4.2.3 of the Nevada County Zoning Ordinance to add a reference to the proposed Greater Higgins Area Plan design guidelines and standards.

Project Location and Surrounding Land Uses:

The Greater Higgins Corner area is an unincorporated community in Western Nevada County. The Lake of the Pines Village Center is located across California State Highway 49, twelve miles South of Grass Valley and two miles North of the Nevada-Placer County line.

Most of the Plan Area is located east of Highway 49 (or State Route 49), which is the main route for north/south ingress and egress. Magnolia Road, which turns into Dog Bar Road, also provides north/south access. The Area Plan incorporates a larger area into the Plan boundaries with the intention to guide the area's future development, access to housing, community character, and recreational opportunities. An additional 479-parcels have been added to the Plan boundary. Topography within the Higgins Area varies from gentle-to-moderate slopes along the northern and southern boundaries to sloping and relatively flat terrain along the Combie Road corridor; prominent ridgelines generally parallel Combie Road north and south.

This area is the most visible and commonly frequented area for residents and visitors, as it includes the commercial establishments to the north and south of Combie Road. It includes the major intersection of Combie Road at Highway 49 and extends until the intersection of Combie Road/Hacienda Road/Magnolia Road. Higgins Corner is located at the intersection of Highway 49/Combie Road and has commercial land uses at every corner of the intersection. Additionally, the Higgins Fire Protection District Station 21 is located at the northeast corner. Higgins Village is a significant commercial shopping center on the south side of Highway 49 and includes a commercial center with CVS as the anchor at the southeast corner. Higgins Marketplace shopping center is located south of Higgins Village with the Holiday Market.

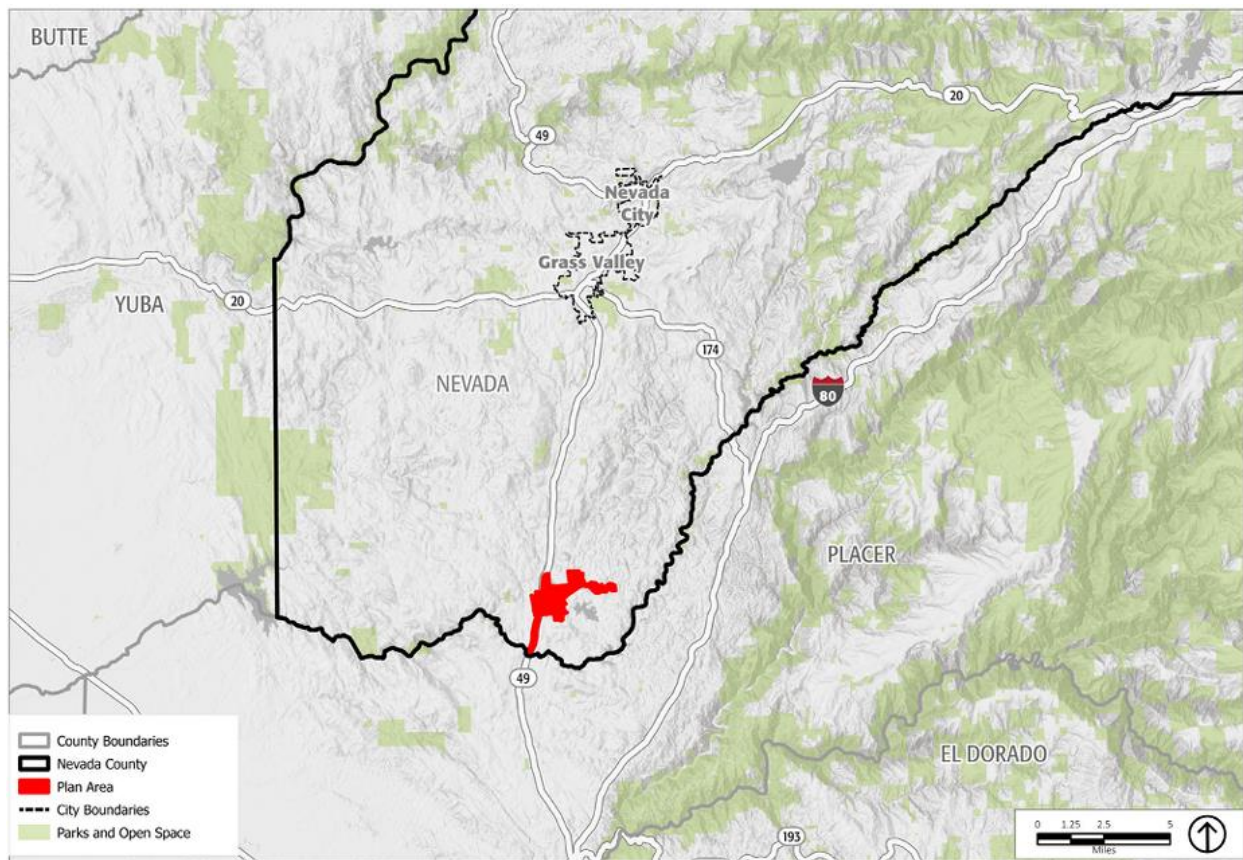


Figure 1: Regional Context Map

Along Combie Road to the east, there are occasional commercial buildings and a small shopping center (Combie Plaza) along Combie Road, with Armstrong Road serving as its entry drive. There is also a single-family residential community (Cascade Crossing), with 80 homes ranging between

1,500 and 3,000 square feet, within the Plan Area off Combie Road. The area along Combie Road runs south from the intersection of Combie Road/Hacienda Road/Magnolia Road to Timber Ridge Road. It includes the Lake Center, which is an older shopping center on the east side of Combie Road. South of Lake Center, the backs of houses in Lake of the Pines are visible. There is no access to those houses or to Lake of the Pines along south Combie Road. The area continues south to the entrance to Timber Ridge Drive and the entry to the Lake of the Pines Sewage Treatment Plant, which is surrounded by low density residential and rural land.

A 200-foot-wide section on either side of Highway 49 (a County-designated scenic corridor) from the Bear River to Higgins Corner is included in the Plan Area. In this area, Highway 49 is a fast-moving four-lane highway with a center turn lane. Although almost all property bordering the highway is zoned for agricultural land, there are some areas zoned Residential Agriculture and a single parcel for commercial at the southern County border. Visible development is mostly intermittent residential or agricultural buildings along the highway. The draft Area Plan provides a detailed review of land uses in the Plan boundary.

BACKGROUND

The Greater Higgins Area Plan (Area Plan) describes a comprehensive future vision for the Greater Higgins Plan Area and serves as the comprehensive land use and zoning plan for the Greater Higgins region and community. The Area Plan focuses on future growth in key areas that would contribute to community vitality and create a more compact residential and commercial development.

This Area Plan is an update and expansion to County of Nevada's (County's) 2000 Higgins Area Plan, building upon and superseding the 2000 Plan and augmenting the countywide General Plan. This Area Plan identifies community goals related to different topics such as land use, circulation, and economic development that will be used to help implement private and public projects and programs within the Plan Area to address those needs. Each chapter contains goals, policies, and implementation actions, which are based upon assessments of current and future needs and available resources, that will help guide County stakeholders and decision-makers on implementing future improvements on public and private property in the Plan Area.

Legal Authority:

The Greater Higgins Area Plan (Area Plan) is designed to meet State of California requirements for specific plans and to facilitate the implementation of development goals and policies by establishing zoning districts, standards and criteria for development, and to set the distribution, location and extent of planned land uses consistent with the adopted Nevada County General Plan. The authority for preparing Area Plans is founded in California Government Code §65301(b) which allows the general plan to be adopted as a single document or as a group of documents relating to subjects or geographic segments of the planning area, and in Government Code §65303 which allows the general plan to include any other elements or address any other subjects which, in the judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county. Local authority is founded in the goals and policies of the Nevada County General Plan. The existing 2000 Area Plan has outlived its lifespan and as a result the Area Plan was prepared at the direction of the County Board of Supervisors.

The Area Plan was developed consistent with California State law which permits cities and counties to adopt specific plans for the “systematic implementation of the general plan” (Government Code Section 65450 et. Seq.). The law requires the following:

- A specific plan shall include a text and diagram or diagrams which specify all the following in detail:
 - The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan.
 - The proposed distribution, location, extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.
 - Standards and criteria by which development will proceed and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources where applicable.
 - A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out the above referenced requirements.
- The specific plan shall include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

California Government Code Section 65452 provides that the specific plan may address any other subjects which in the judgment of the planning agency are necessary or desirable for the implementation of the general plan.

As a policy document, the Area Plan supplements and becomes part of the County General Plan, providing a comprehensive framework for making land use decisions within the Higgins Corner/Lake of the Pines Village Center and influencing decisions in the surrounding geographic area within the Higgins Corner/Lake of the Pines Community Region. Any proposed development should be reviewed for consistency with these policies. All projects in the Plan Area, as in the entire County, shall be consistent with the General Plan.

THE AREA PLAN:

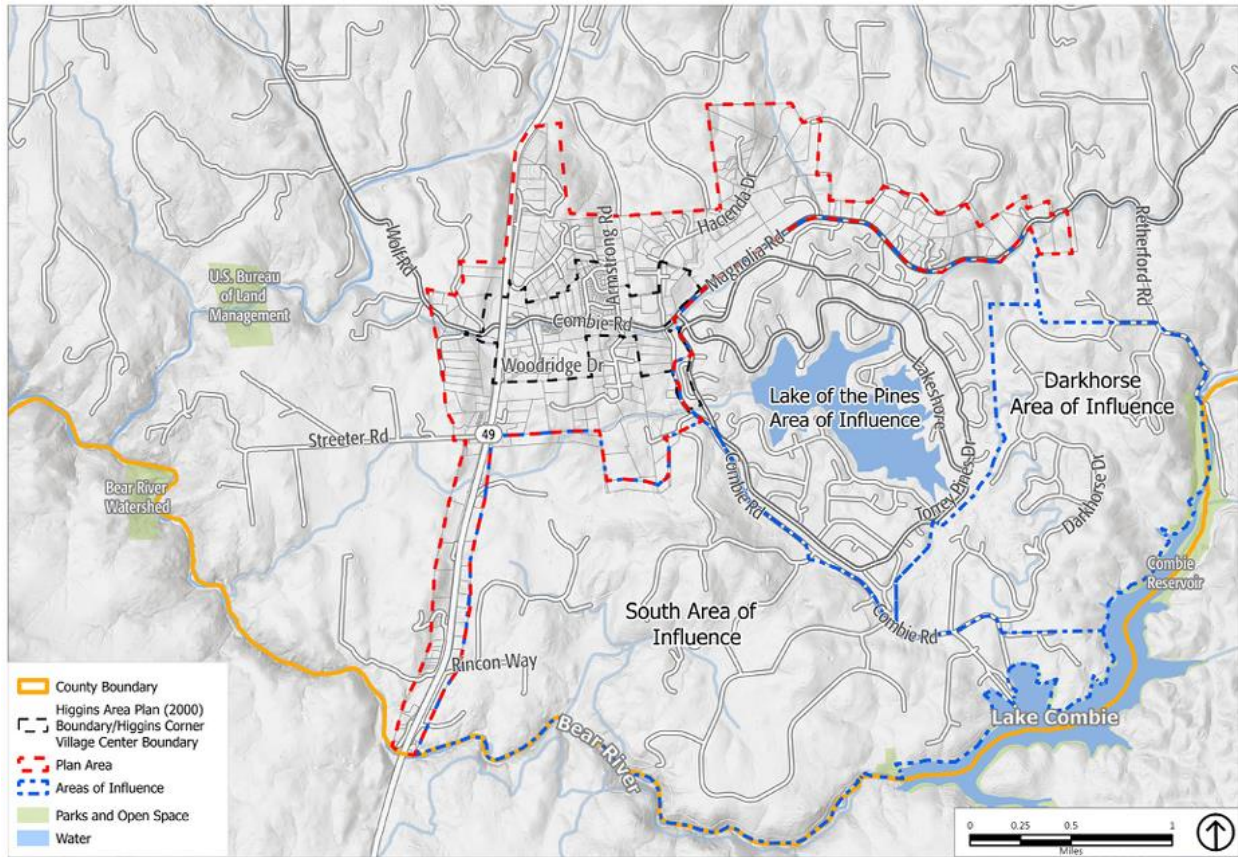
The County has prepared the Area Plan with collaboration from the Greater Higgins community, which includes those who live in the Plan Area and just outside of the Plan Area, including the communities of Lake of the Pines, Darkhorse, Lake of the Pines Ranchos, and more.

The South County Area Municipal Advisory Council (SCMAC) served as a key partner in the development of the Plan, meeting monthly to discuss the project and providing comments on product deliverables to incorporate ideas and recommendations into the Plan. Their roles included advising and informing on issues in and around the Plan Area, ensuring the Area Plan promotes the community’s vision, engaging the community in an inclusive participatory process, and promoting public workshops.

As previously mentioned, this Area Plan is an update and expansion to the County’s Higgins Area Plan, adopted in 2000, whose study area was specifically delineated by the General Plan land use map and encompassed approximately 246 acres extending from the village area along Combie Road to the entrance to Bear River High School, as well as the Lake of the Pines subdivision (see

Figure 1.2). After 20 years, many of the concepts and policies in the Higgins Area Plan are still relevant, but some have been eclipsed by new development and new community needs.

Plan Area:



Source: Nevada County, 2021; PlaceWorks, Inc. 2021.

Figure 2: Greater Higgins Plan Area

The Plan Area is an expansion of the 2000 Higgins Area Plan’s study area. Both plan areas include parcels fronting Combie Road areas, but this Plan Area also includes peripheral residential and public institutional areas, as well as a portion of scenic Highway 49 that extends from the northern end of the Plan Area to the southern County boundary.

While not a part of the Plan Area, there are several “Areas of Influence” to the southeast of the Plan Area. These Areas of Influence are made up primarily of established residential neighborhoods, including Lake of the Pines (a gated community), Darkhorse, and Lake of the Pines Ranchos (within the South Area of Influence). Lake of the Pines, Darkhorse, and Lake of the Pines Ranchos have their own Homeowners Associations. Furthermore, Lake of the Pines has its own planning document, the 2019 Lake of the Pines Long-Range Strategic Plan. The Plan Area and Areas of Influence are generally surrounded by agricultural land. In addition to residents of the Plan Area, residents of the Areas of Influence are considered those who use or would use existing and future services within the Plan Area. These residents were part of the engagement process that shaped this Plan, and the views of these residents should also be considered when reviewing future development proposals within the Plan Area. All new development should also

consider the impacts of development on the Areas of Influence around the Plan Area. Together, the Plan Area and Areas of Influence make up the Greater Higgins community.

Opportunity Sites:

During the existing conditions process, the Greater Higgins Area Plan team identified several development opportunity sites within the Plan Area, clustered at the two Design Districts. Development opportunity sites are parcels that are currently vacant or underutilized and have a planned General Plan land use designation of commercial, office, or high density residential. Redevelopment of any of the sites would require agreement with the property owner, approval of a development proposal, and adequate infrastructure. Several of these sites already have plans for redevelopment which are included in the conceptual design of the Plan’s Design Districts.

Concept plans for the two Design Districts were developed to illustrate a long-term vision that will likely take the Area Plan planning horizon before build-out. These concepts do not show an actual development project, as the properties involved are primarily private properties and the property owners would dictate development of their land, if desired. However, these concepts are intended to provide guidance and a flexible roadmap for property owners and developers for future development with a community-supported vision. To provide additional guidance, the Design Guidelines in Appendix A includes specific guidelines for each of the two Design Districts.

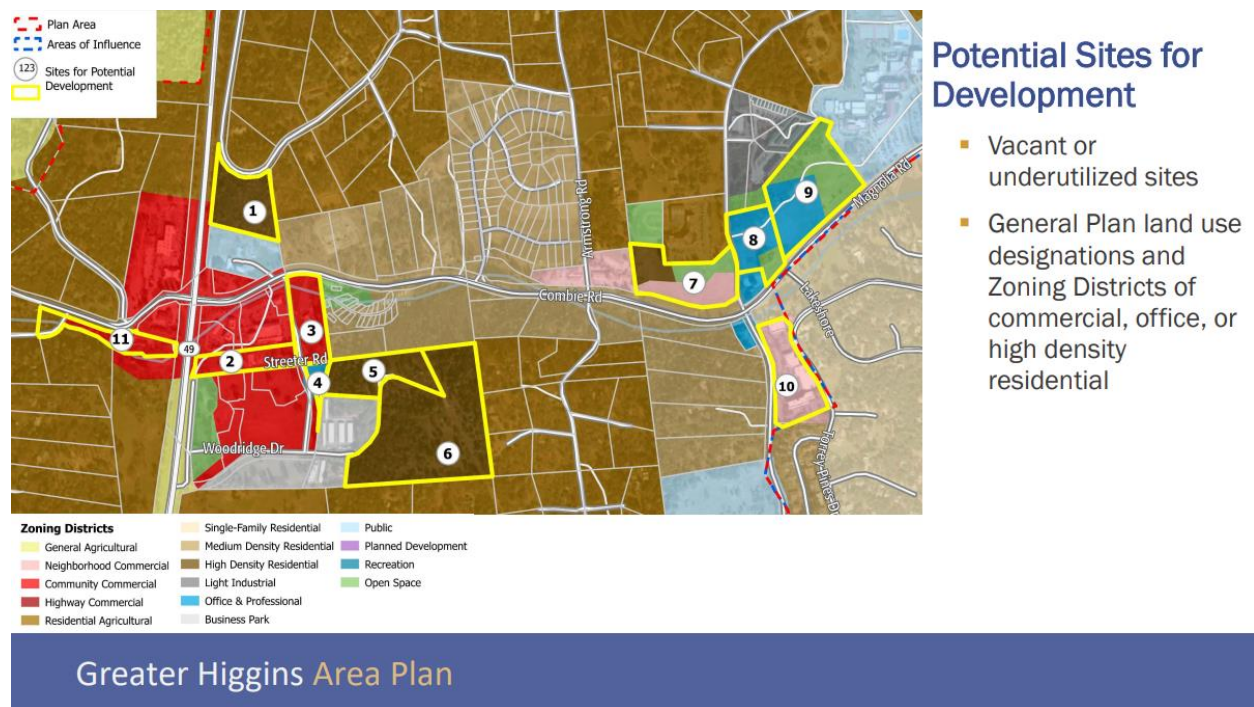


Figure 3: Opportunity Sites

Two additional locations were discussed by the South County Area Municipal Advisory Council (SCMAC) but were not identified as development opportunity sites: 1) the Industrial node west of Highway 49, and 2) the parcel that creates a break between East Hacienda Drive and West Hacienda Drive.

The Industrial node west of Highway 49 includes three parcels and an industrial park accessed via Streeter Road. All subject parcels are currently developed with existing commercial and industrial

businesses on both sides of Streeter Road. Although additional tenant improvements could be successful in creating opportunities for new businesses, this area was not considered a development opportunity site because all parcels within the Industrial node are developed. The parcel that creates a break between East Hacienda Drive and West Hacienda Drive is zoned Residential Agricultural and is currently developed with a single-family residence and accessory structure. Although this location could be an appropriate location for multi-family housing which would be located nearby schools and commercial areas, this parcel was not considered a development opportunity site because sewer, water, and transportation easements and infrastructure do not exist in this area to support more dense residential development

PLAN ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT:

This Area Plan is organized into seven chapters and an appendix. Each chapter contains goals and policies to help facilitate future development. The contents of each chapter are summarized below.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter provides an introductory overview to the Plan. It includes a summary of the Area Plan’s purpose, organization, preparation process, legal authority, relationship to the General Plan, description of the Plan Area, and its vision and guiding principles.

The community shaped and guided the Plan by developing a vision statement and guiding principles that set the tone for the Area Plan. The vision statement is as follows:

The primary goal of the Plan is to retain the rural, small-town character of the Greater Higgins area, while serving the basic needs of the surrounding community and providing a gateway to those entering southern Nevada County. As it develops, the Plan Area will continue to function as the crossroads of South County and as a gateway to the county from the Sacramento Valley.

The following guiding principles were developed from key takeaways from community discussions at various community meetings, and steered the development of the recommended goals and policies and improvements in this Area Plan:

- Allow the Greater Higgins community to flourish while retaining its unique, rural, small-town character and natural landscape and views.
- Preserve the identity of the Greater Higgins area as a scenic, tranquil, family-oriented community.

These principles articulate the vision for the community and are the standard by which the appropriateness of the Area Plan’s goals (listed below) and policies are tested.

Chapter 2 – Land Use and Community Character

This chapter describes the existing character of the Greater Higgins Plan Area (Plan Area) and defines the framework for future development to foster a vibrant built environment that is consistent with the character and goals of the community. The Plan seeks to concentrate future growth in two Design Districts within the Plan Area: 1) the Higgins Corner Design District and 2) the Lake Center Design District, which would provide opportunities for new commercial, high density residential, office, and mixed-use development. This chapter features the conceptual designs for the Design Districts and provides a set of strategies to help establish the Design

Districts. This chapter also includes the Area Plan goals related to land use and community design which reflect the overall community vision, and establishes policies and actions to achieve those Land Use and Community Character Goals identified below:

- Goal LU-1: Concentrated Growth

Concentrated growth in existing commercial areas of the Plan Area, including the two Design Districts (near the Combie Road/Highway 49 and the Combie Road/Magnolia Road intersections) as well as Combie Plaza, to minimize sprawl and to create pedestrian-friendly environments that are easily accessible by walking, biking, and riding NEVs.

- Goal LU-2: Multi-family Housing

A variety of multi-family housing types in the Plan Area that fit with the rural character of existing development, including, but not limited to, garden apartments, townhouses, duplexes and triplexes, cottage home developments, and accessory dwelling units.

- Goal LU-3: Single-Family Housing

New single-family housing in areas that will help increase the vitality of the Design Districts and is designed to be aesthetically pleasing along public corridors.

- Goal LU-4: Experience-Oriented Commercial Areas

Experience-oriented improvements in existing and new commercial development within the Plan's Design Districts that provide experiences beyond just shopping so that they will be more competitive with Internet shopping businesses. Experience-oriented improvements could include outdoor dining, shaded outdoor seating, pocket parks and play areas, plazas and open spaces for events, and recreation and entertainment opportunities.

- Goal LU-5: Design Consistency

Consistent and compatible use of building materials and design elements appropriate to the visual and scenic qualities of each site.

- Goal LU-6: Complementary Landscaping

Landscaping that complements and accents development.

Chapter 3 – Economic Development

This chapter includes an overview of the existing economic conditions within the Greater Higgins area, including the potential for population/housing growth and new residential and non-residential development. Many Greater Higgins residents work in more urbanized areas, yet they have chosen to live in a more rural area. The Plan Area lacks some of the shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities that are easily found in the more urban areas, but many of these types of uses can be found a mere 10- to 15-minute drive to the north or south. The challenge for economic development and implementing the Greater Higgins Area Plan (Plan) is attracting and sustaining businesses to complement and improve the quality of life while protecting and strengthening the rural character of the area. This chapter summarizes key findings of the economic analysis conducted for the preparation of the Greater Higgins Area Plan, establishes the Plan's goals for community economic development, and identifies goals policies to work toward the Economic Development goals identified below:

- Goal ED-1: Business Development

Business development that attracts new businesses to Greater Higgins and creates opportunities for economic growth in Greater Higgins.

- Goal ED-2: Marketing and Organizational Capacity

Development of local organizational capacity and implementation of a communication and marketing strategy to make southwest Nevada County residents aware of the programs to assist with establishing a new business.

Chapter 4 – Public Services and Infrastructure

This chapter addresses the public services and facilities that serve development within the Area Plan boundaries, including utilities, vehicular circulation, evacuation routes, and transit services, and contains goals and policies that strive to augment or streamline these services. Existing residential, commercial, industrial, and other development in the Greater Higgins Plan Area requires supporting infrastructure including roadways and other transportation infrastructure, water, sewer, and stormwater drainage. It also requires public services such as schools, health, and safety programs. Existing conditions for each of the infrastructure systems or public services are described and improvements, if proposed, are discussed for each element. This chapter also includes the Area Plan goals related to public services and infrastructure which reflect the overall community vision, and establishes policies and actions to achieve those Public Services and Infrastructure Goals identified below:

- Goal TR-1: Balanced Circulation Network

A balanced circulation network that accommodates all transportation modes, including vehicles, transit, bicycles, pedestrians, and Neighborhood Electric Vehicles (NEVs).

- Goal TR-2: Connected Circulation Network

A network of routes and measures that allow for ease of circulation and safe evacuation for residents and employees in case of natural disaster or other emergency.

- Goal PS-1: Public Services

Public Services that efficiently serve the entire community in the Plan Area.

- Goal INF-1: Utility Infrastructure

Utility infrastructure that is well maintained and provides services to accommodate growth envisioned in the Plan Area.

Chapter 5 – Recreation and Trails

This chapter describes the existing recreational facilities with the Plan Area and includes a framework and strategy to create opportunities for new facilities or expanded use of existing facilities to meet the needs of the community. This chapter includes recommendations to expand and enhance recreational facilities, including parks and trails and paths for pedestrians, bicycles, and golf carts. This chapter summarizes key findings of the community outreach and engagement conducted for the preparation of the Greater Higgins Area Plan, establishes the Plan's goals for community recreation and trails, and identifies goals policies to work toward the Recreation and Trails goals identified below:

- Goal REC-1: Expanded Multi-use Path Network

A well-connected, multi-use path network that connects Higgins Corner to Bear River High School by extending the existing multi-use trail, and, in future phases, extends the multi-use trail further to the south, located on South Combie Road and to the east on Magnolia Road, to link with a future regional trail network. The multi-use path shall accommodate alternative modes of travel, including walking, biking, and/or driving NEVs, and provides linkages between residential areas and local key destinations such as schools, parks, shopping, and transit. Modifications to any roadway shall comply with County of Nevada Department of Transportation Standard Drawings and Caltrans Standards, where applicable.

- Goal REC-2: Multi-use Path Design and Management Measures

Shared-use path design, management measures, and education to residents and visitors on how to safely share the multi-use path among different modes of transportation.

- Goal REC-3: Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

The use of alternative modes of travel on local and regional connections so that people may walk or bicycle as a viable mode of transportation.

- Goal REC-4: New Parks

More park space within the Plan Area to allow for gathering areas and recreational activities.

Chapter 6 – Historical, Cultural, Natural, and Scenic Resources

This chapter describes the rich historical background of the Greater Higgins area and its natural landscape and rural development. It was clear through the community engagement process that residents of the Plan Area and surrounding Areas of Influence choose to reside in the Greater Higgins area for its rural and natural environment. This Plan seeks to preserve the area's historic, cultural, natural, and scenic resources, and reinforce policies contained in the Nevada County General Plan that emphasize the protection of ridgeline views, slopes, oak woodlands, and riparian corridors. At buildout, it will be the retention and enhancement of natural resources that make the Greater Higgins area a desirable place to live. This chapter also sets forth policies for the Area Plan and lists strategies to achieve the Historical, Cultural, Natural, and Scenic Resources Goals identified below:

- Goal RP-1: Scenic Resource Preservation

Preservation of scenic resources that characterize the Highway 49 and Combie Road corridors, including oak woodlands, steep slopes, important ridgelines, streams, riparian habitat, and wetlands.

- Goal RP-2: Ragsdale Creek Protection

Protection of Ragsdale Creek to become a common design theme throughout the Greater Higgins Area to preserve drainage, visual, and habitat resources.

- Goal RP-3: Community Identity

Community identity for the Greater Higgins area that incorporates and celebrates its cultural and historical context.

- Goal RP-4: Tribal Coordination

Plan process that recognizes the significance of the Native American Tribes that are historically and culturally affiliated with the Greater Higgins area.

Chapter 7 – Implementation

This chapter provides a framework for implementing improvements recommended in preceding chapters of the Greater Higgins Area Plan. The first section of this chapter provides guidance on the Plan’s priority policies and guidance for implementation and identifies the Plan’s high priority policies identified by the South County Municipal Advisory Council (SCMAC), who met throughout the Plan’s planning process to guide the development of the Plan. The second section describes federal, State, regional, and local funding opportunities that may provide ways to fund the policies and action items recommended in this Plan.

This chapter contains a prioritized list of recommendations/improvements for the Plan’s implementation in different timing targets of short-term, medium-term, and long-term identified below:

Land Use and Community Character

- Policy LU-2.1: Senior Housing:

Prioritize providing affordable housing options for seniors to allow aging residents to stay within Greater Higgins and to free up housing stock for new, younger families and individuals to move in.

- Policy LU-2.2: Housing for Young Families:

Provide affordable housing types that could accommodate young families, such as duplexes and attached townhomes, to attract these families to reside in Greater Higgins and support local school enrollment.

Public Services and Infrastructure

- Policy TR-2.1: Roadway Improvements:

Prioritize near-term roadway improvements in the County’s Capital Improvement Program on planned and potential evacuation routes to improve their emergency function (e.g., widening, adding passing zones on narrow routes, and adding pull-outs). Improvements should be considered for the eastern segment of Magnolia Road and opening emergency access over the private bridge at Wild Iris Lane.

- Policy TR-2.2: Roadway Connections:

Add new roadway connections, where feasible, beneficial, and/or needed to accommodate increased population from new development and to convert dead-end roads to continuous routes, providing improved access for both every day and emergency functions. New connections should be explored for Egbert Hill Road, East to West Hacienda Drive, and Sharonjack Road. All potential new connections should be reviewed and coordinated with neighboring property owners as described in Policy TR.2-3.

- Policy INF-1.3: Broadband Internet.

Implement recommendations from the countywide Broadband Strategy for the Combie/Wolf Road priority area, including construction of a new wireless tower, extension of Optimum wired infrastructure, and requiring new development to provide fiber connectivity.

Recreation and Trails

- Policy REC-1.1: Multi-use Path Along Combie Road and Magnolia Road.

New development proposals on the north side of Combie Road and Magnolia Road shall include multi-use paths, which prioritize use by pedestrians and bicyclists, along property frontages that allow for shared public use pursuant to the Greater Higgins Area Plan Design Guidelines. Existing multi-use paths along these segments may need to be widened to allow for shared use between pedestrians, bicyclists, and potentially NEVs. The trail will be constructed through a combination of public funds and as part of private development.

- Policy REC-1.2: Use with NEVs.

Study how to allow the safe and responsible use of NEVs on the multi-use path network, including needed right-of-way width along Combie Road and Magnolia Road, through the creation of a Golf Cart or NEV Transportation Shared Plan, per Street and Highways Code Section 1950. It is optimal that the off-street pathways for NEVs and pedestrians and bicyclists are separated to reduce potential conflicts.

- Policy REC-4.3: Potential Park Adjacent to Bear River High School.

Explore the feasibility of formalizing the open space on the parcel to the west of Bear River High School into a new park space with passive use.

- Policy REC-4.6: Funding.

Support the creation of a new park facility with grants and/or property assessments via an assessment district, Landscaping and Lighting Maintenance District (LLMDs), or special tax. Creation of a special tax would require a significant outreach and educational awareness effort to inform residents of the current financial structure of BRRPD and its constraints in providing new facilities to the Plan Area.

Historic, Cultural, Natural, and Scenic Resources

- Policy RP-1.2: Site Design.

Base site design for new development on analysis of the site's characteristics and influences, maintaining as much as possible the natural topography, drainage features, and native trees. Projects should be designed to complement rather than dominate the natural landscape.

- Policy RP-2.1: Integrated Creek Design.

Preserve, incorporate, and enhance Ragsdale Creek into the design of any new infrastructure and site-specific improvements for new development along Ragsdale Creek to help retain the rural character of the Greater Higgins area

- Policy RP-3.1: Community Sign.

Install a new gateway community sign at the northeast or southeast corner of the Highway 49/Combie Road intersection to welcome residents and visitors to the Greater Higgins area. The design of the gateway community sign should include community input on its design and funding for implementation

Appendix A – Design Guidelines

The appendix contains design guidelines for new public, commercial, and multi-family projects in the Greater Higgins Plan Area. These guidelines are not comprehensive; new development should

follow the Western Nevada County Design Guidelines and the guidelines herein are supplemental to the Western Nevada County Design Guidelines. In any case of conflict between guidelines, the Greater Higgins Area Plan's design guidelines shall prevail. Incorporating similar design features in new developments will result in a coordinated and cohesive community appearance. No particular style or theme is mandated for the Plan Area, so the focus of design should be on constructing high quality buildings and landscape that is sensitive to the rural character of the community. The use of complementary building materials, textures, roof shapes, lighting, and colors can tie buildings of varying shapes and sizes together. This chapter also includes guidelines for each of the two Design Districts and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which is a crime prevention philosophy based on the theory that the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, as well as an improvement in the quality of life.

Supporting Documents and Background Reports:

PlaceWorks, Inc. staff developed additional technical reports to identify the existing conditions within and around the Plan Area, to determine the development potential the Plan Area can viably support, and to analyze the transportation network within the Plan Area:

- Existing Conditions Analysis (Attachment 7) describing existing conditions of the Plan's study area including land use, physical form and community character, environmental conditions, development potential, and mobility or transportation. The existing conditions analysis informs the planning process for development within the Plan Area.
- Market Study (Attachment 8) provides estimates for the number of housing units and the amount of non-residential development that the market will likely support in the Greater Higgins Area Plan's plan area (Plan Area). The report also discusses types of housing, household types and ages of residents, types of non-residential development, and the types of businesses and stores that the Plan should consider.
- Traffic Analysis (Attachment 9) describing intersection and road segment operational levels during peak and non-peak hours. The analysis also includes traffic count volumes to determine what capacity exists to support future development within the Plan Area.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT:

To help guide development of the Area Plan, the Nevada County Planning Department contracted with PlaceWorks, Inc. through a competitive bidding process to develop the plan and conduct outreach efforts to engage the Greater Higgins Corner area community, business owners and residents in the Area Plan public planning process. This included individual and group interviews with local officials and residents, participating in nineteen (19) South County Municipal Advisory Council (SCMAC) meetings, and facilitating four (4) community public workshops. The overarching goal of this outreach was to develop key strategies to be implemented to maintain a rural quality of life while encouraging investment and sensible growth of the area. All workshops and select SCMAC meetings were advertised in a variety of ways to maximize participation: on the project-specific website; by sending emails to individuals and entities who requested notification via the website or Planning Department staff; by emailing Homeowners Associations, Service Organizations, and other groups with large followings; by conducting interviews with local radio stations and the local newspaper; via social media posts on county-operated profiles; by publishing information in county-sponsored news blasts from the CEO and the Community

Development Agency, and; word-of-mouth, leveraging the SCMAC members and flyers in community areas.

Prior to commencing the community workshops and interviews, on June 16, 2021, Planning Department staff presented a “Planning 101” presentation and update on the competitive bidding and government contracting process to the SCMAC. The purpose of this discussion was to educate the members of the SCMAC about the value of the Area Plan, to engage them and encourage them to be “champions” for the Area Plan process, to network with the community and to develop a list of potential interviewees. Following this meeting, interviews were conducted, and key concepts, common themes and guiding principles began to develop.

Community Workshop #1:

On October 21, 2021, the first of four workshops was held virtually via Zoom where more than 60 households participated. The meeting began with a welcome greeting from Ed Scofield, Nevada County District 2 Supervisor, followed by a PowerPoint presentation led by PlaceWorks (consultant) that included project/planning background, purpose and objectives, site area boundary considerations, and overview of the main topics to be covered during the focus group discussion portion of the workshop. After the brief presentation, attendees participated in “breakout room” visioning exercise in groups of 10-15 people and discussed five topics: (1) Plan Area; (2) Community Strengths and Identity; (3) Housing and Development Vision; (4) Recreation and Public Space, and; (5) Transportation. PlaceWorks, Inc. staff developed a summary of the meeting made available on the project website (Attachment 10).

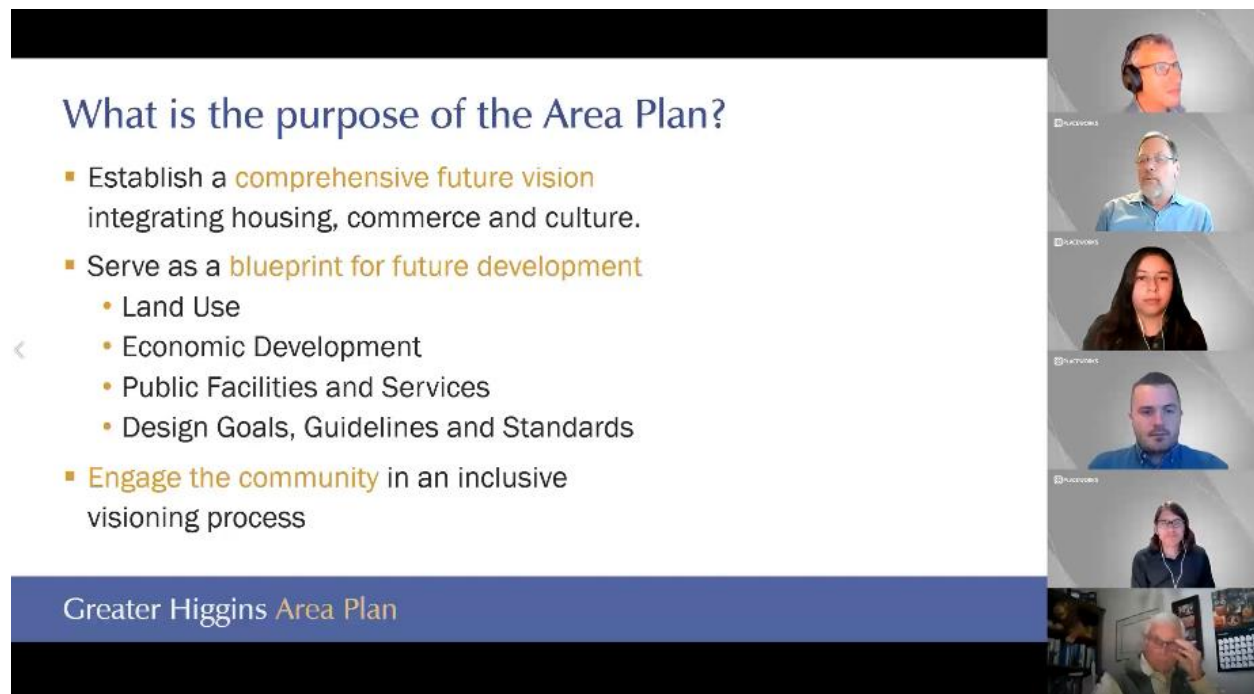


Figure 4: Workshop 1 Screenshot

Community Workshop #2:

The second community workshop for the Greater Higgins Area Plan was attended by approximately 75 households and took place in an online format via Zoom. The meeting began

with a welcome greeting from Nevada County Supervisor Ed Scofield (District 2), followed by a PowerPoint presentation led by PlaceWorks (project consultant) that included project/planning background and timeline, purpose and objectives of the Area Plan, Plan Area boundary, feedback received from the first workshop, and an overview of the completed existing conditions analyses. A brief Q&A session followed the presentation. Each group discussed a series of three questions about new development, new housing, and mobility, with Google Jamboard maps of the Plan Area screen-shared by the facilitator to help guide discussion (located at the end of this report). Each Jamboard also had graphic icons representing different types of improvements that could be moved onto the map by the facilitator based on comments made by community participants. PlaceWorks, Inc. staff developed a summary of the meeting made available on the project website (Attachment 11).

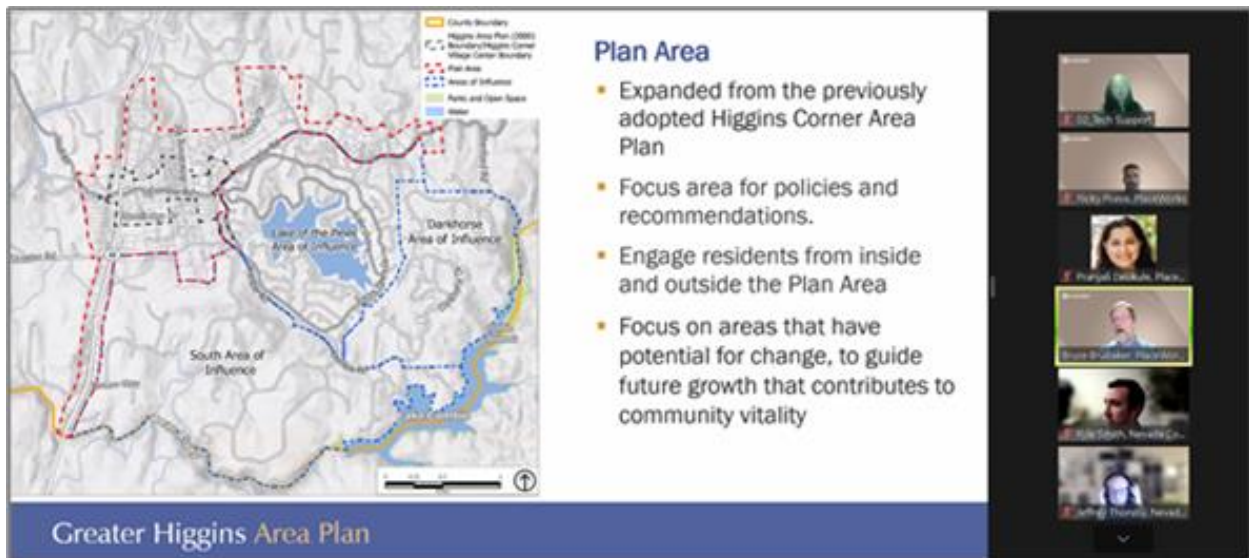


Figure 5: Workshop 2 Screenshot

Community Workshop #3:

The third community workshop for the Greater Higgins Area Plan was attended by approximately 70 households and took place in an online format via Zoom. The meeting began with a welcome greeting from Chair of the South County Area Municipal Advisory Council (SCMAC) Erin Sullivan, followed by a PowerPoint presentation led by Bruce Brubaker of PlaceWorks (project consultant) that included: project/planning background and timeline, purpose and objectives of the Area Plan, Plan Area boundary, feedback received from previous workshops, development and circulation scenarios for the Plan Area, and examples of different types and densities of multifamily residential and mixed use development. Attendees participated in a “breakout room” focus group exercise in four randomized groups of 12-15 community members each. Each group reviewed concept scenarios in two areas: 1) Combie Road/Highway 49 and 2) Combie Road/Magnolia Road on the Google Jamboard platform. For each area, maps of Scenario A and Scenario B were shown side by side for comparison. The facilitator for each group walked through the key differences between the scenarios and took notes of community comments directly on the maps/Jamboard. PlaceWorks, Inc. staff developed a summary of the meeting made available on the project website (Attachment 12).



Figure 6: Workshop 3 Screenshot

Community Workshop #4:

The fourth and final community workshop for the Greater Higgins Area Plan was attended by approximately 70 community members with 30 households online and 40 people in person. The online component took place in an online format via Zoom. The purpose of the meeting was to present an overview of the contents of the Draft Plan and receive comments from the public. The Draft Plan was released several weeks ahead of the meeting so that the public could review the plan prior to the meeting. PlaceWorks, Inc. staff presented an outline of the Draft Greater Higgins Area Plan and gave an overview of the contents within each of the seven chapter and Design Guidelines appendix. There was a time for Questions and Answers in which there were questions about funding, future Lake Center development, evacuation routes, and accessory and junior accessory dwelling units. Questions were submitted both online and in-person. After the Q&A, meeting attendees had an opportunity to provide verbal comment on the contents of the Draft Plan. Comments were received both from online and in-person attendees. PlaceWorks, Inc. staff developed a summary of the meeting made available on the project website (Attachment 13).

Greater Higgins Area Plan Chapter 3: Economic Development

- Existing economic conditions
- Market potential for residential and non-residential uses
- Key goals and policies
 - Business development
 - Marketing and organizational capacity

CHAPTER 3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Table 4.3: Market Potential for Non-Residential Use (excluding Retail) in Square Feet of Building Area, 2022-2042


	Low-Range Projection (s.f.)	High-Range Projection (s.f.)
Other Commercial	4,700	8,830
Office	9,610	17,640
Light Industrial	6,570	12,060
Total	20,900	38,300

Source: PlaceWorks, 2022.

potential for nonresidential uses (excluding retail which was discussed in the previous section). The other commercial uses in Table 4.3 would likely be developed as part of new retail development. It is worth noting that the Plan Area need not accommodate the demand for office and light industrial uses as these businesses could easily serve households within the Plan Area and Areas of Influence even if developed in more urban areas, such as Grass Valley or North Auburn.

The analysis estimates that projected household growth in and around the Plan Area could support the development of 4,700 to 8,830 square feet of building space for other commercial uses, which might include arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and personal services.

The analysis estimates that projected household growth could support the development of 9,610 to 17,640 square feet of building space for



Example of dining restaurant with outdoor seating office, which could include professional offices but is mostly medical office. The office uses could also be developed as part of retail development or could be developed as stand-alone office buildings.

Finally, the analysis estimates that projected household growth could support 6,570 to 12,060 square feet of light industrial building space, which could include auto repair and service, construction businesses, and other light industrial types of businesses.

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Greater Higgins Area Plan

Figure 7: Workshop 4 Screenshot

Draft Plan Development and Review:

The SCMAC held five (5) public meetings in the Summer and Fall of 2022 to review the Administrative and Public Drafts of the Area Plan, take public comment and provide feedback to the Planning Department and PlaceWorks, Inc. staff. On August 24, 2021, at a regularly scheduled meeting, Planning Department staff gave a presentation on the organization and layout of the Administrative Draft of the Area Plan and requested feedback on plan implementation priorities in preparation for the fourth Community Workshop. SCMAC. The individual SCMAC members and the public asked questions about the content of the plan, the applicability of the design guidelines and how the Area Plan is applied. On September 14, 2022, following the fourth Public Workshop at a regularly scheduled meeting, SCMAC provided individual feedback on the Administrative Draft including their top priorities, and to define implementation priorities for inclusion in the Final Draft of the Area Plan. On October 12, 2022, at a regularly scheduled meeting, PlaceWorks, Inc. staff gave a presentation on the outputs and results of the fourth community workshop and solicited feedback from individual SCMAC members and members of the public in attendance. PlaceWorks, Inc. staff utilized the information gathered at these meetings to develop the Final Draft of the Area Plan.

On November 9, 2022 at a regularly scheduled meeting, Planning Department Staff gave a presentation including an overview of the substantive changes between the Draft and Final Area Plans based on community input, including the development of Chapter 7: Implementation and other changes as a result of final feedback from the community and SCMAC. The individual SCMAC members and the public asked questions about the plan and the primary feedback was related to fixing typos and other grammatical errors. Finally, on December 9, 2022, at a special meeting, the complete Area Plan was presented to the SCMAC and community members present. The feedback received was positive and SCMAC and the community expressed appreciation for the fact that the completed Area Plan truly followed the input, guidance, and vision provided by the community. Following taking public comment and making comments on the Plan, the SCMAC

voted unanimously to recommend approval of the Greater Higgins Area Plan with some minor clarifications (Attachment 7).

GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING CONSISTENCY:

The Greater Higgins Area Plan supports, furthers and augments the Nevada County General Plan. It is drafted to help support the economic and social well-being of the Greater Higgins Area and surrounding community as it grows overtime. It is intended to act as a policy guide for which future development projects will be tested for consistency with the Area Plan goals and policies. The Nevada County General Plan has several goals that are directly applicable to the Higgins Corner/Lake of the Pines Village Center, Community Center, and Rural Region. These goals are supported and implemented through a series of policies and programs that are contained within the individual chapters of the General Plan.

To ensure consistency with the General Plan and Zoning Regulations proposed amendments are a part of the project to ensure internal consistency. These include removing references to the 2000 Area Plan within Chapter 1: Land Use Element of the General Plan that are contained within the Planning Supporting Documents (Volume I – Page 1-4), Polices 1.3.13 (Volume I – Page 1-26), 1.4.3 (Volume I – Page 1-29), and Section L-II 4.2.3: Design Guidelines of the Land Use and Development Code. The approach taken for the proposed General Plan Text Amendment, as shown in *Attachment 2* is to remove all date specific references to all Area Plans so when future Area Plans are updated or adopted it will not require additional General Plan policy or text amendments. These sections and policies of the Land Use Element still include a reference to the Area Plan and its applicability, but no longer include a specific date for when they were adopted. For the Zoning Text Amendment, staff took a more surgical approach and only addressed the Higgins Corner Area Plan, by removing the reference name and date to the year 2000.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

The Greater Higgins Area Plan and its associated actions were reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. A draft Initial Study and proposed Negative Declaration were prepared for the project and routed for public review between September 23, 2022, and January 3, 2022. The draft CEQA document is intended to provide a program-level review of the Greater Higgins Area Plan while disclosing any foreseen environmental impacts that may occur as a result of the project’s General Plan Land Use Map and Zoning District map amendments. The analysis determined that the project would not result in a negative environmental impact because the project does not issue any entitlements or authorize physical disturbance of the environment. Future project-level environmental review within the Plan boundaries would be based on consistency with the County General Plan, Land Use and Development Code, applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations and the Greater Higgins Area Plan. No specific development projects are proposed at this time or were analyzed as a part of this project. Subsequently staff has determined that the proposed Negative Declaration (EIS22-0014) is the appropriate level of environmental review for this project.

SUMMARY:

The proposed Greater Higgins Area Plan was developed based on a community input provided through series of interviews and public community meetings held in 2021 and 2022. The Plan serves as the comprehensive land use and zoning plan for the Greater Higgins Corner region and surrounding community. It embodies the expressed goals of residents, business owners, and elected officials and establishes concrete and achievable actions. The drafting of the Area Plan is

a tool to advance the goals and policies for the Nevada County General Plan while benefitting the local community. The Area Plan provides long-term guidance that is intended to improve the prosperity of the region in a way that supports a healthy economy, environment, protects the rural quality of life and the social fabric for the residents and general public.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission take the following actions:


I. Environmental Action:

1. Recommend the Board of Supervisors approve the attached Resolution for the Negative Declaration (EIS22-0014) for the Area Plan and associated actions pursuant to Section 15074 of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines making the findings contained within the draft Resolution (*Attachment 1*).

II. Project Actions:

1. Recommend the Board of Supervisors approve the attached Resolution for General Plan Text Amendment (GPA22-0002) to adopt the Greater Higgins Area Plan and amend the General Plan Land Use Element for internal consistency (*Attachment 2*).
2. Recommend the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached Ordinance for the amendments to Zoning District Map (RZN22-0002) described in the project description including adding the “SP” Site Performance Combining District to parcels that have been included in the expanded Plan boundaries making the findings contained within the draft Ordinance (*Attachment 3*).
3. Recommend the Board of Supervisors approve the amendment to Sec. L-II 4.2.3 of the Nevada County Zoning Ordinance (ORD22-3) to update the reference to the applicability of the Greater Higgins Area Plan making the findings contained with the draft Ordinance (*Attachment 4*).

Respectfully submitted,



Brian Foss, Director of Planning