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ACEQUIA CONVERSION OPTIONS: Three options for converting one-way eastbound Acequia Avenue to a two-way street from Conyer to Bridge Streets will be presented to City Council in March. The options, all of which include single traffic lanes each way, are: 5-foot-wide bike lanes on each side of the street with a 12-foot-wide middle turn lane and no street parking; no bike lanes with a contiguous middle turn lane and the parallel-parking spaces would remain; and bike lanes except for areas such as the Willis Street-Acequia Avenue intersection, where a new traffic light and “left turn pockets” will be needed. The downtown traffic artery currently serves both City Hall and City Hall East, the Visalia Convention Center, and the expanding Kaweah Delta Hospital. Consultant Robert Trout is preparing a comprehensive report to be presented to Council in March. City staff has solicited input on the project from businesses, emergency services personnel, and bicyclists, to name a few. “This has been looked at closely for a very long time,” said Adam Ennis, manager of Visalia’s engineering development division. “The best possible choice will be made regarding the future of Acequia Avenue.”

PRELIMINARY PARKS, INFRASTRUCTURE MASTER PLAN FOR

EAST DOWNTOWN UNVEILED: At the Feb. 11 Council meeting, a draft of the Parks and Infrastructure Master Plan was presented for the portion of East Downtown that runs east-west from Ben Maddox Way to Santa Fe Street and from Main Street north to Goshen Avenue. The purpose of the plan is to lay the groundwork for the eventual development of both a Public Safety Complex and Civic Center and attract private investment to the area. Housing and Economic Development Director Ricardo Noguera told Council members that the primary source of funding for the project will come from proceeds from Measure R. Infrastructure upgrades and road extensions and parcel acquisition will be needed before construction can begin. A series of community workshops and focus groups were held during the development of the plan. In addition, an East Downtown Task Force was formed, made up of property and business owners, City Council members and city staff, which served as a sounding board during the plan preparation process. Following adoption of the Civic Center and Infrastructure and Parks Master Plans, next steps include: Design and construction of utilities and roadways in the Civic Center block; development of a new Public Safety Complex which is estimated to be completed by 2012; and the development of studies for a more detailed park plan including trails, an amphitheater, and other amenities.

SCHOOL DISTRICT, POLICE TEAM TO TACKLE TRUANCY: Getting kids off the streets and staying in school is the focus of a joint effort between Visalia police and the Visalia Unified School District. Details are still being worked out, but one option is to use the Youth Service Officers program at middle and high schools to track truant students, make home visits, and keep in contact with parents. Another is to have the officers conduct sweeps during the school day, something that hasn’t been done in five years. Sgt. Ernie Villa said this is doable since officers are already in place at the schools, and it allows patrol officers to focus on crime-related calls. Visalia Police Chief Bob Carden said the goal is clear: Keeping youth in school gives them a greater opportunity to be productive.

‘GANG WATCH’ OFFERED TO NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH GROUPS:

In our continuing effort in combating gang issues within the community, the Visalia Police Department has implemented a new educational program called “Gang Watch.” This program is based on the gang awareness program taught to all 2nd – 6th grade students in the Visalia Unified School system. The intention and design of the program is to educate community members in recognizing, identifying, and reporting gang activity in their neighborhoods. All members of the police department have received training in the subject matter and they in turn will utilize the information they received along with personal experience to instruct community members. The program is designed to be taught in a small group setting as part of an existing Neighborhood Watch group by their sector officer. If anyone is a member of an existing Neighborhood Watch group or would like to start a Neighborhood Watch group, and receive the “Gang Watch” training, please contact Neighborhood Watch coordinator Angie de Alba at 713-4945 or Lt. Michele M. Figueroa at 713-4303.



HIGH SPEED RAIL STATION EARNS SECOND STUDY: The California High Speed Rail Authority approved a more detailed study be done for a possible station in the Visalia-Tulare-Hanford area. The recommendation resulted from a preliminary study done at the urging of a coalition of officials from Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties. Discussion at its Feb. 6 meeting centered around whether the station should be in a downtown area or located outside the cities. The delegation of more than a half dozen local representatives, including Assistant City Manager Carol Cairns, support a regional station accessible by car, bus, other trains, or even airplanes if located at the Visalia Municipal Airport. Cairns said debate over the specific location of a local station will come as the more detailed study is done. For now, she said they're pleased just to get that next study. "Over the next 20 years, the Tulare-Kings county area will have a population of over 1 million. We are one of the areas of the state that will continue to increase in population and ridership demands." Cairns added that this station has the capability to become a multi-modal center, with connections to the Visalia Airport, the Transit Center, and Highway 99 which runs adjacent to three of the identified potential station sites. "It's imperative our area be connected to the rest of the state," she said. "We continue to support the High Speed Rail Project to improve transportation and circulation, environmental challenges, and economic enhancements."

RECREATION PARK STADIUM RENOVATIONS REVIEWED: The City Council sub-committee on the Recreation Park Stadium renovation, consisting of Vice Mayor Bob Link, Council member Don Landers, Special Projects Manager Phyllis Coring, and Assistant City Manager Carol Cairns, will bring a recommendation for consideration by City Council at its Feb. 19 meeting. The recommendation will be based on meeting the goals of retaining major league baseball in Visalia by achieving renovations to the stadium that are within the overall budget for the project. Specifically, City Council will consider awarding the project to construct the Right Field Improvements phase of the project. This phase consists of construction of a two-story brick clad building adjacent to Giddings Street that has a grass seating berm adjacent to the first base line. The building would house a VIP hospitality lounge, concessions, restrooms, team store, and office space for the team, and provide about 400 permanent seats. Two bids were received for the Right Field Improvements: \$7.74 million from Seals/Biehle General Contractors of Visalia and \$8 million from Oral E. Mitchem Inc., of Woodlake. Seals/Biehle was the contractor on the city's newest parking structure which was completed last Spring. Council has previously approved \$11.6 million for the latest renovations, which were to include replacement of the grandstands and the right field project adjacent to Giddings. The consideration by City Council will focus on how best to utilize the appropriation to achieve the best overall solution to the renovation of the stadium. Options will be presented to Council that include proceeding with the award of the Right Field Improvements project along with modifications to provide two needed dugouts, or to only replace the grandstand with modifications for concessions and the team store.

SPORTS PARK CONTRACT AWARDED:

The Sacramento company that designed the first phase of the 83-acre Riverway Sports Park was awarded a contract to begin drawing up the second phase. At its Jan. 29 meeting, City Council members awarded a \$382,290 contract to the HLA Group, which calls for designing construction plans and specifications for four youth baseball fields, additional concession and restroom facilities, lights for a bicycle motocross track and additional parking. In his presentation to the City Council, Parks and Recreation Department Director Vince Elizondo said the goal is to have the construction plans ready by late July, with construction to begin in the fall, and the baseball fields completed by Fall 2009. Lights for two more fields are part of the Phase II effort, making five soccer fields available for nighttime play. The initial cost estimate to build Phase II is about \$5.8 million. Funds would come from park impact fees paid by developers for new homes built in the city and from reserves in Visalia's General Fund. Future plans call for a lighted softball complex, another playground, another group picnic shelter, more restrooms and concession stands, and an events courtyard. The additional fields will also relieve the growing strain on the limited number of facilities available for local youth sports programs.



‘CLICK IT’ CAMPAIGN CITES VISALIA POLICE: In 2007 the Visalia Police Department Traffic Unit participated in the nationwide seatbelt campaign "Click it or Ticket". The Office of Traffic Safety released statistics for citations issued and the Visalia Police Department issued the most citations of the 22 participating agencies in cities with population between 100,000 and 150,000. The goal of the "Click it or Ticket" program was to reach a statewide seatbelt compliance rate of 93.7% by the end of the 21 day project. Visalia increased its compliance rate from 90.75% to 96%. Members of the Traffic Unit issued a total of 1,722 citations to motorists who failed to comply with the state seat belt requirements. The police department encourages motorists to continue to wear restraint devices properly. In 2008 the department will once again participate in the "Click it or Ticket" campaign.



PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS: The City of Visalia provides weekly updates on city public works projects involving major city roadways on the Visalia Times-Delta website (www.visaliatimesdelta.com). For the week of Feb. 11, the following new and updated Public Works/Development projects are being conducted and may interrupt major routes of transportation within the City of Visalia.



1. Omni Means for Tulare Co. will have a contractor boring soil samples for future street improvements along Demaree Street from Caldwell to the south City Limit line. Work to be done from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday; work expected to be completed by March 15; work is being done for future street improvements; and the responsible contractor is Fugro W. Giopalani at 916-733-2600.
2. Overlay of street paving on Bridge Street from Main Street to Acequia. Work to be done from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to Feb. 15 (extended due to weather); work is being done in conjunction with SCE and the City of Visalia to re-new the deteriorated paving; and the responsible Contractor/Contact is Irish Construction, Ed Grant at 661-343-0867 or City of Visalia, Mike McCoy, Street Supervisor 713-4186.
3. Road widening and median island installation on Walnut Avenue from Simon Street to Casablanca Street. Work to be done from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday; completion date extended to Feb. 29, 2008, due to developer-driven water main tie-in issues and weather delays; work is being done for the new subdivision on the south side of Walnut Avenue; and the responsible Contractor/Contact is Crawford Construction, Russ Anderson at 908-9949.
4. Building remodel construction at Garden, Center, and Bridge Streets. Work to be done from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday; expected completion date extended to Feb. 29, 2008, due to weather-related issues and developer extension request; work is being done to replace curb and gutter, sidewalks, and drive approaches; and responsible Contractor/Contact is Mangano Homes, Inc.,

Evert Dixon at 804-5333.