

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

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CITY OF VISALIA AWARDED TWO SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

GRANTS: The City of Visalia was awarded two grants totaling \$500,760 for projects designed to give children a safer way to get to school. The grants were awarded by the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), and were funded through the state's Safe Routes to School program, designed to give students in grades K-12 easier and healthier ways to safely travel to and from schools. The Veva Blunt Elementary School project will install sidewalks on both sides of Chinowth Street and an in-pavement lighted crosswalk at Chinowth Street and Meadow Avenue. A project at Four Creeks Elementary School will install sidewalks on Burke Street from Houston to Harold Avenues. The funding for the 10% local match will come, in part, from Measure R, a ballot measure approved by Tulare county citizens in November, 2006. Measure R set aside \$100,000 to be used in the City of Visalia for sidewalk projects near schools. Grants were also awarded to the cities of Lindsay, Tulare and to Tulare County for a total of more than \$1 million.



OAKS BALLPARK STADIUM GROUNDBREAKING HITS HOMERUN:

More than 100 City leaders, businesspeople and devoted Visalia Oaks took part in the Groundbreaking Ceremony held March 17 at Recreation Park Stadium. The ceremonies mark the beginning of the Park's most ambitious renovation project, a \$9.6 million effort along the right field line which features new seating, concessions, restrooms, and administrative offices. Construction is expected to take most of the upcoming season, and seating capacity will be reduced from 2,100 to about 1,300 until at least August. Oaks owner Tom Seidler said the Single-A California League team and farm club for the National League's Arizona Diamondbacks will show the city that its investment is worthwhile. The Park is warmly appreciated by baseball purists and enthusiasts. In the newly published book, "101 Baseball Places to See Before You Strike Out," author John Pahigian included the Stadium as one of only 10 minor league ballparks mentioned. Recreation Park was recognized for its unconventional construction, extreme intimacy and new fan dugout. As part of the first phase of renovations completed before the 2007 season, Visalia added the only dugout just for fans in all of professional baseball. The dugout brings spectators less than 30 feet from the third baseman.

WORD ON BUDGET—STATUS QUO: “When you don’t know, you have to slow down,” Visalia’s Administrative Services Director Eric Frost told City Council during his midyear budget update at the March 17 regular meeting. Frost and staff reported that to date in the 2007-08 budget year, the income for its general fund is running more than \$500,000 behind where it was expected to be. The decrease is due in part to an \$844,000 decrease in sales tax revenue, and a \$675,000 dip in income from licenses and permits due to the construction slowdown. Property taxes are up so far and ahead of budget estimates by about \$630,000. While income from other taxes, fees, and fines are up, it’s not enough to offset the losses in sales tax revenues. The City is still waiting to see the effects of the final negotiated state budget on Visalia—which could take as much as \$800,000 away from Visalia. The state also could borrow up to \$2 million from the city, which would be repaid at some point although when is uncertain. The anticipated effects in Visalia amount to less than 2% of the general fund. Frost urged caution as the city formulates a budget for the 2008-09 and 2009-2010 year as well. “We need to prepare a status quo budget with few, if any, increases.”

NORTHWEST FIRE STATION GROUNDBREAKING SET FOR APRIL 7:

A groundbreaking at 3 p.m. Monday, April 7, will kick-off construction of the Northwest Visalia Fire Station and Training center at Shirk Street and Ferguson Avenue. The City Council approved a \$6.87 million financing package, with \$314,695 from fire impact fees, \$162.115 from Measure T, and a \$3 million advance from the city’s General Fund, which will most likely be converted to a loan through a local bank.



ARBOR DAY PLANTS TREES FOR THE FUTURE: The City of Visalia’s Park and Recreation Department, the Urban Tree Foundation, and the Visalia Beautification Committee will celebrate Arbor Day at 9 a.m. Saturday, April 5, at the riparian area of St. John’s River, located just east of McAuliff Avenue on the setback of the St. John’s River. The community is invited to bring shovels and join in this tree planting celebration. This is the City’s 25th year of being named a Tree City USA Community by the National Arbor Day Foundation in honor of its commitment to community forestry. “Tree City USA designation recognizes the work of elected officials, staff and citizens who plant and care for the community forest,” said John Rosenow, president of the Foundation. For more information, call 713-4384 or visit the City’s website at www.ci.visalia.ca.us.

EARTH DAY: The City of Visalia’s Natural Resources Conservation Division will co-sponsor Earth Day 2008 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 19, at Recreation Park, 345 N. Jacob St., in Visalia. The free event features demonstrations, information booths, and collection for E-Waste and free compost for Tulare County residents (bring your own containers, gloves and shovel). Pre-registration is required. Call 713-4531.

