

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

Volume 24

April 8, 2008

GROUNDBREAKING KICKS OFF

NEWEST FIRE STATION :

City officials and community members gathered Monday to break ground on a new fire station in northwest Visalia. The future station, at Ferguson Avenue and Shirk Street, is designed to cut response times, while giving firefighters a new place to train. Interim Fire Chief Greg Glass said the three-person fire crew based there will help provide better coverage for the city's booming northwest side. The station also will provide primary coverage for the city's nearby industrial park. Chief Glass said the station should cut the area's average response times cases down to about five minutes. When Measure T was approved by voters in March 2004 to provide extra money for additional police and fire services in the city, the price tag for the northwest fire station and training center was pegged at \$4.9 million. But in 2006, city officials discovered that cost had ballooned to more than \$7 million after the housing market boom raised construction costs. City Council members voted to economize the station's design several ways, including reducing the number of equipment bays in the main station house. Its smaller size will still allow the station to easily meet the city's needs. The station's new training area includes a tower where firefighters can set training fires and conduct rescue drills. The state-of-the-art complex also will include areas where firefighters can learn more specialized skills, such as trench cave-in rescue tactics. The funding for the \$6.87 million will be paid through fire impact fees, Measure T funds and a \$3 million advance from the city's general fund, which later could be converted into a loan.



CITY RECEIVES \$394,000 PERFORMANCE AWARD:

Officials announced Monday that the City is the recipient of a \$394,000 Economic Development Administration (EDA) Performance Award. This award represents 10 percent of the \$3.94 million dollar EDA grant that was awarded to the City to partially fund construction of the West Acequia Parking Structure. The EDA Performance Award is given in recognition of outstanding performance in generating private investment, creating jobs, timely project completion, organizational leadership, innovation, regional collaboration and economic strategy to compete in the global marketplace. The EDA is under the U.S. Department of Commerce. "Visalia's commitment to collaborative and effective economic development promotes the growth of their regional economy and generates jobs," said U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Sandy K. Baruah. "I congratulate them on their achievements." Construction on the parking structure began and ended more than a year ahead of the EDA schedule for the project, and private sector investment significantly outpaced expectations. The performance award can be used to fund EDA-approved economic development activities.

CITY'S RIGHT-OF-WAY STANDARDS UPDATED: After more than a year in the works, the Engineering Division of the City of Visalia Public Works Department released the Engineering Design and Improvement Standards and the Standard Specifications. The Design and Improvement Standards updates the City's Right of Way improvement standards. Updates were released in July 2004 and June 2007, but this revision encompasses many more areas of valid right of way improvements and includes construction practice updates. The Standard Specifications contains contractual provisions and written specifications to go with the drawings in the Improvement Standards. It's the first time this information has been compiled in one document for all City of Visalia Public Works projects to follow. This information is available for purchase from City Hall East, located at 315 E. Acequia or available as .pdf files on the City's web site at: http://www.ci.visalia.ca.us/departments/engineering/engineering_documents. The City has notified all utilities, engineers, designers, contractors, and developers of these updates as it may affect their work. For more information, contact Norm Goldstrom at 713-4638.

LOOP PROGRAM HONORED BY STATE PARKS AND RECREATION



SOCIETY: The City of Visalia's LOOP Program was recognized with an Outstanding Program Award by the California Parks & Recreation Society (CPRS). This award is presented to one agency within CPRS District VII which has developed a unique and innovative program that has benefited the community and improved the quality of life locally. Over 15 different Parks and Recreation agencies from throughout the southern San Joaquin Valley area participated in the program. Recreation Manager Jeannie Greenwood accepted the award on behalf of the City citing the "tremendous collaborative effort" that took place in Visalia to make this program a reality. The LOOP bus program was developed to provide Visalia area youth with a free and easy way to access

community recreation centers within the community. LOOP --- which stands for Local Organizations Outreach Program --- was developed as a collaborative effort as a safe alternative to walking. Besides the driver, the bus is staffed by a Recreation Leader to build relationships, ensure policies are followed, provide additional security, and promote programs and activities. The LOOP also allows students to visit multiple centers and programs (there are four youth centers in the program). Students often go from one center to another to participate in different programs. This also helps with "territorial" issues that are often associated with the centers. The program was developed by the City's "Gang Intervention Task Force Committee" which was established in May, 2006. The committee earmarked a \$100,000 grant from the Visalia City Council for the free youth bus transportation program. The program operates on a year-round basis.

PRELIMINARY FEMA FLOOD PLAIN MAPS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC

REVIEW: FEMA maps are being updated across the County. The draft FEMA maps for Tulare County have recently been released for public review. During this time, the City of Visalia and other government entities also will be reviewing and commenting on the maps. The public can also send comments regarding the maps to FEMA during the appeal process, which goes through June 18. Maps can be viewed at City Hall locations at 315 E. Acequia Ave., or 707 W. Acequia Ave., between the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. FEMA put together the revised map, which identifies the county's low-, medium-, and high-risk flood plains. Risk factor is based on how close a given area comes to having a 1 percent chance of flooding, said Jon Bartlett, a natural hazards program specialist for FEMA. "In layman's terms, it's the 100-year flood," he said. FEMA will accept comments on the preliminary maps through June 18, and after that, officials will make revisions and issue a final flood-plain map.

COUNCIL DENIES HOME DEPOT APPEAL: On a 3-2 vote, the Visalia City Council Monday denied an appeal by Home Depot of the Visalia Planning Commission's ruling prohibiting it from unloading trucks after 10 p.m. at its new store at Riggins and Dinuba Highway. The commission Feb. 26 denied the request (3 to 0) concerned over the noise impact on surrounding neighborhoods because of late night fork lifts and truck activity.



IN OTHER COUNCIL NEWS: City Council provided staff with funding concerns on the draft 2008-09 Action Plan budget for the use of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnership Grant Funds (HOME) from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Council members expressed interest in coming up with strategies to maximize community benefits in the Oval Park and Washington School area. Staff will assess what funding sources are available to finance lighting for the Washington School area, and will also need to assess the deficiencies in lighting and whether a solar lighting program will work. Staff will return to Council on April 21 with strategies to utilize alternative forms of financing for enhancing these two neighborhoods . . . Comments from the Council members on the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process will be forwarded to the Tulare County Association of Government (TCAG). Among concerns voiced by Council members to Assistant City Manager Michael Olmos included the effect of future population growth on the buffers between Visalia and the cities of Tulare and Farmersville and the need to maintain a buffer between the cities. Vice Mayor Bob Link recommended the population growth, which is anticipated to increase significantly, to move to the north to maintain a boundary between the three cities and the need for the city to plan wisely to maintain the separation from nearby cities. Mayor Jesus Gamboa said "city-centered" growth is preferred as the most responsible growth pattern for Tulare County.

'CONTACT US' ON THE WEB: Have a question for a City department director or a City Council member? The City of Visalia's newly designed website features an interactive component that allows anyone to ask questions and receive responses on any issue related to the City. On the website, at www.ci.visalia.ca.us, each department's home page features a "Contact Us" link, allowing website visitors to ask a question of a specific department. Click on the link, fill out the information requested and press "Send." Your question should be answered within 24 to 48 hours. In addition, the web pages for each of the five City Council members feature an email link allowing individuals to ask questions or communicate with the city's elected officials. All questions that are not department-specific are routed to the Community Relations Manager for a response. In addition, questions that are asked on a frequent basis are added to the website's "Frequently Asked Questions" section. This new feature allows easy accessibility to city staff and information on city services.

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. 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. 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."

WHACK THOSE WEEDS BY APRIL 14: It'll be here before you know it. April 14 is the deadline for having weeds down. The Visalia Fire Department reminds property owners of their responsibility to care for their property. Those properties not cleared by April 15 will be issued a \$100



citation, then be cleaned by the City of Visalia, and the property owners will be billed and a lien attached to the property. Courtesy notices were sent reminding vacant lot owners of the April 15 deadline. These letters were sent to the address of record with the County Assessor's office. Whether or not a letter is received, property owners are responsible for cleaning their property. What's a weed? It is any undesirable plant of rank or profuse growth growing upon streets, alleys, sidewalks or private property in the city and including, but not limited to, weeds which bear or may bear seeds of a wing or downy nature and weeds and indigenous grasses which may attain such growth as to become, when dry, a fire menace to adjacent property. Property maintenance is required year-round and the City of Visalia can abate any problem that becomes a fire or health hazard or contributes to neighborhood blight. To report a problem in your neighborhood, call the abatement hotline at 713-4207. Include the address of the violation, cross street, type of problem, your name and phone number in case follow-up is needed, and other information that will assist the inspector.

DTV TRANSITION UPDATE: On Feb. 17, 2009, full power broadcast stations will stop broadcasting in analog format and will continue broadcasting in digital only. This change, known as the DTV transition and mandated by Congress, will require many consumers with analog television sets who receive only free over-the-air television through either a rooftop antenna or "rabbit ears" to take action in order to continue to receive a television signal. Any consumer with an analog television who is not connected to cable or satellite has three basic options for preparing for the DTV transition.

1. Purchase a digital-to-analog converter box and connect it to their analog set. A program has been established to assist consumers in purchasing converter boxes. It entitles every household to two \$40 coupons, each of which can be used to help purchase a converter box. Coupons may be requested from www.dtv2009.gov or by calling 888-DTV-2009.
2. Buy a digital television, which is a TV with a built-in digital tuner. High Definition TV (HDTV) is not needed to receive digital television programming.
3. Subscribe to a paid TV service. A digital-to-analog converter box will be needed for any analog TV set that is not connected to a paid service.

For more information, go to www.dtv.gov.

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.



BUILDING PERMIT UPDATE: Commercial construction is on the rise in Visalia as work progresses on new projects around the city. But it's not enough to offset the continuing decline in the number of new homes being built in the community through the first three months of 2008. Figures released by Visalia's building division show that contractors received building permits for 138 homes between Jan. 1 and March 31 -- a 36% drop from the same period a year ago, when 214 permits were issued, and down nearly 63% from the 371 permits in 2006. Tuesday's report indicates the average construction value of new homes is dropping, from about \$235,400 in 2006 to \$226,500 in 2007, then to about \$225,000 over the early part of 2008. The thousands of new homes erected in Visalia during the building boom of the previous few years are now spurring commercial construction as retail, service and office businesses move to take advantage of the city's growing population. Visalia building

officials issued 33 building permits for new commercial structures with a total estimated construction value of \$22.1 million from January through March -- both significant boosts from the 22 permits and total value of just \$12.4 million from the same quarter of 2007. City officials have pointed to new shopping centers under construction in north Visalia as reason for optimism for the overall building climate. But because home-building remains the largest single segment of construction, the upsurge in commercial building cannot take up all the slack. Overall, Visalia's combined total of all building permits -- new homes and apartments, residential remodeling, new and renovated commercial construction, and miscellaneous permits such as those for demolition, electrical, gas, plumbing and wells -- during the quarter was 1,030 with a total estimated valuation of \$65.1 million.

Inside City Hall is a publication of the City of Visalia.

For more information, visit the City's website at www.ci.visalia.ca.us, email nloliva@ci.visalia.ca.us or call 713-4535