

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

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COMPREHENSIVE VS. FOCUSED GENERAL PLAN: There was substantial discussion among Council members and staff and input from 15 stakeholders present on comparing focused and comprehensive general plans at the Jan. 24 session of the annual City Council retreat held at the Visalia Convention Center. The Council had previously authorized proceeding with a Focused Update approach on the premise that the best course is to extend the effective life of the current 129,000 urban density boundary by five or more years. However, the Council also discussed the value in updating the entire General Plan to better address contemporary growth and community issues. The cost for a comprehensive (\$1.5 million) versus a focused (\$500,000) general plan update is also of high concern though these costs would be funded over multiple years. While the downturn in the economy may provide a good bidding environment, the cost could still be substantial. Issues raised by Council members included that, given the current inventory of approved but as yet undeveloped residential subdivision lots and undeveloped land available in the current urban development boundary, could it sustain the City under the current plan for a long period. Other issues: Green house gases, Smart Growth, future circulation needs of commercial and industrial land demands, high speed rail station, planning and others. Recognizing the multitude of issues that affect this important community decision, Council directed staff to prepare a scope of work on a General Plan Update that merges concepts from both the focused and comprehensive approaches and return to Council in 30-45 days.

FINANCIAL PICTURE: Bottom line, this year's 08/9 budget hasn't fallen off the map—yet. The concern, according to Administrative Services Director Eric Frost, is what will happen next year. In a presentation to City Council members at the public at Friday's retreat, Frost said the adopted 2009/10 budget assumes the growth of \$700,000 in sales tax and \$400,000 in property tax, respectively, which in light of the city's current economic downtown, seems unlikely. The revenue forecast will need to be scaled back in next year's budget. Smaller revenues, such as the Transient Occupancy Tax or Bed Tax declined slightly, and revenues are likely to remain flat to down. The City has already bridged the revenue gap by holding open positions, which will save the City \$1.8 million this year and \$2.4 million next year. In addition, the City has frozen \$1 million in General Fund capital. Holding positions vacant, reworking programs and postponing General Fund capital projects will probably prevent the use of reserves. Subtracting some \$1.1 million from the revenue picture in sales and property taxes and offsetting the loss with management actions leaves the gap at \$900,000. It's clear that holding open positions, although substantial, will not be enough to bridge the revenue gap as projected.

VOICE YOUR CHOICES FOR THE SANTA FE OVERCROSSING: Visalia citizens will get an opportunity to provide their input on the choice of color, brick pattern and oak tree logo for the new Santa Fe Overcrossing. Now through Friday, Feb. 6, a display board will be set up on a rotating schedule at the Visalia City Hall and the Visalia Transit Center showing the three options in colors and oak tree logo and two options for the brick pattern on the bridge. Selection sheets will be provided. The board can be viewed and selection sheets submitted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Friday, Jan. 30 at City Hall, 707 W. Acequia Ave., and Monday Feb. 2 through Friday, Feb. 6 in the lobby of the Visalia Transit Center, 425 E. Oak Ave. All ballots must be signed in order to be eligible for considera-

tion. The groundbreaking for the Santa Fe Overcrossing is set for 10 a.m. Friday, Feb. 20, and the selections will be announced at that time. For information, contact Fred Lampe at 713-4270 or Nancy Loliva at 713-4535.

FATHER-DAUGHTER DANCE SET FOR FEB. 13: The City of Visalia Parks and Recreation Department will be hosting its 4th Annual Father-Daughter Dance at the Visalia Convention Center (Exhibit Hall) on Friday, Feb. 13, from 6 to 9 p.m. The dance is for girls ages 4-16, escorted by their dads. Tickets are \$45 per couple and \$20 per additional children. Couples can participate in dancing and games and hors d'oeuvres will be served. Photos will be available on site for an additional charge. For more information contact Michelle Fitzgerald at 713-4336 or email mfitzger-ald@ci.visalia.ca.us.