

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

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FUNDING AWARDED FOR HIGHWAY 198 WIDENING PROJECT: The California Transportation Commission has awarded \$77 million of Prop. 1B funding to Tulare and Kings counties to begin construction of the Highway 198 corridor project. "This is very good news because it keeps this important project on schedule," said Ted Smalley, Executive Director of the Tulare County Association of Governments. "This corridor is so important for people living in our area and soon, it will better connect two counties and their growing urban areas." The Highway 198 corridor project will widen Highway 198 from two to four lanes between Hanford and Highway 99. Construction is expected to begin in November and should take 24 to 30 months to complete. Passed in 2006, Prop. 1B approved \$19.9 billion in future bonds for transportation.

LEAVE THE DRIVING TO SEQUOIA

SHUTTLE: For the past two years, the Visalia Transit Department and the National Parks Service has operated the Sequoia Shuttle. Beginning Memorial Day Weekend, the 2009 season, its third, kicks off. The round-trip shuttle service from Visalia to Sequoia National Park and within, departs from various locations in Visalia several times a day, seven days a week between Memorial and Labor Day weekend. Tickets, \$15, include the park entry fee and unlimited shuttle service within the park. For the first three weeks of service—from May 23 through June 12—tickets are only \$10 per person, except weekends and holidays. Tickets can be purchased online, by phone or in person at any of the pick-up/drop off points. For more information, visit www.sequoiashuttle.com or call (877) Bus-Hike (287-4453).



POLICE SEE SPIKE IN PHONE SCAMS: In recent weeks, the Visalia Police Department has been contacted by victims that have expressed concern over some phone calls that they have received. The phone calls are from a person who pretends to be a grandchild of the victim and tells them that they have a problem and that they need money. The victim is instructed to wire the money from one Walmart to another. The majority of the Walmart addresses being used by the suspects are in Canada, with a few recently being used in Texas. The Visalia Police Department recommends that anyone who receives a phone call like this to make contact with family members and confirm that it really is another family member that will be receiving the wired money. If you are unable to speak with other family members, contact the Visalia Police Department for assistance. Never ask if this is a specific person—always make someone on the phone provide you with their name first. Anyone with any information or questions about this phone scam is encouraged to contact the Visalia Police Department.

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GENERAL FUND DEFICIT GROWS: Sales tax forecasts were revised down \$1.4 million for FY 2008-09 and \$1.3 million for FY 2009-10, leaving the General Fund with a \$4.4 million budget deficit from just sales and property tax. This increased revenue loss drives the General Fund deficit another \$1.2 million in the hole. Despite changes that are expected to save the City \$2.8 million next year, the remaining shortfall has increased to \$5.7 million, mainly due to the decline in Sales Tax. In addition, the State may borrow 8 percent of the City's property tax, or about \$2 million, which is supposed to be repaid within three years. In the early 1990s, the State took away \$1 million in property taxes, which continues today and equals \$3.4 million for Fiscal year 2008/09. The City Council approved a resolution to State legislators which opposes any borrowing of City property taxes, but given the sheet size of the State budget problem, the City expects the State to impose the property tax borrowing.

COUNCIL APPROVES ACTIONS TO BALANCE 2009/10 BUDGET: In addition to the resolution opposing any borrowing of City property taxes, City Council unanimously authorized staff to take the following actions to balance the 2009/10 budget:

- Adopt a policy of not increasing City-paid retiree health care contributions unless directed by Council in the future;
- Implement employee cost savings in the General Fund for 2009/10 equal to \$1.45 million from either a 5% furlough or a 4% wage concession. Wage concession is a bargaining unit option;
- Develop a city-wide lay-off policy;
- Seek cooperative funding or discontinue the Hazardous Material Response program by Jan. 1, 2010;
- Approved a proposed Recreational Fee setting policy approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission, set to return to Council for final approval in the June rates and fee hearing;
- Approved proposed freezing and reallocation of General Fund capital funding to save \$522,466 in FY 2009/10, and;
- Decrease matching funding from a maximum of \$50,000 to \$40,000 annually to the Visalia Economic Development Council.

FEMA PROCESS ADDS LEGISLATIVE COMPONENT: City staff received approval on all recommendations made to City Council regarding FEMA's revised Flood Insurance Study and Flood Insurance Rate Maps. The maps, which take effect June 16, will bring 8,900 parcels into the Special Flood Hazard Area, requiring them to purchase flood insurance. At its May 4 meeting, Council approved seven recommendations and directed the City Attorney to research issues related to FEMA's due process and proper noticing. In addition to those recommendations, City Council approved:

- Support of Congressman Devin Nunes' request to have FEMA extend the period of the Preferred Risk Policies from one to two years;
- Further investigate FEMA's Community Rating System and the possibility of lowering flood insurance rates;
- Send letters to Sens. Barbara Boxer and Diane Feinstein and Rep. Nunes to support HR 1316, which increases noticing requirements for FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map elevation changes and request sponsorship of federal legislation requiring a reasonable percentage of revenues from the National Flood Insurance Program be designated for local flood management projects, and;
- Reopen a comprehensive review of the Flood Insurance Rate Maps if a peer review study of the mapping methodology initiated by City staff reveals flaws or incomplete data in the FEMA study.

WORK ON SANTA FE OVERCROSSING CONTINUES: Regular updates will be provided as work progresses and significant aspects of the project occur. Agee Construction is the General Contractor hired by the City of Visalia to do the work on the Santa Fe Overcrossing. The resident engineer is David Vallejos with Mendoza and Associates. The project manager for the City of Visalia is Fred Lampe.

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Timeline for the next two weeks:

- **Week of May 18-May 22:** Construction on Highway 198 will include both daytime and nighttime work. Removal of the existing bridge decking will be done at night and will cause highway lane closures and elevated noise levels. Residents near the construction area will be subjected to construction noise at night. Nighttime highway traffic will be detoured onto Noble and Mineral King Avenues.
- **Week of May 25-May 29:** Following the Memorial Day Holiday, daytime demolition work will remove the remaining concrete columns and bridge footings. Earthwork will begin for the new bridge foundation. Sheet piles will be driven to allow for excavation on the highway slopes. Pile driving will be done in daylight hours.