

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

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ECONOMY ERODES MEASURE T: The economy continues to take its toll on the city of Visalia's public safety sales tax fund, Measure T, and prospects are not good it will turn around any time soon. In a meeting last week, Administrative Services Director Eric Frost said money generated by the quarter-percent sales tax approved by voters has greatly dwindled as sales in the city of Visalia are off nearly 30 percent from a couple of years ago. Income from taxable sales items in the city will be about \$18.5 million for the 2009-10 fiscal year – down from \$23.7 million at its height in 2006-07. Measure T revenues are tied to sales and sales are down – especially sales of big ticket items such as vehicles. For the first time ever, property values will be flat next year., and the City has taken a big hit in property tax revenues as well. As a result of the drop in revenues, the city has had to make significant cuts and indications are more are coming. Last July, the city council declared a fiscal emergency . As a result of that 5-0 vote, the city cut \$1.5 million from the Police Department's budget and \$700,000 from Fire. The drop in Measure T revenues also means dipping into Measure T reserves, called the "uncertainty fund," to pay for current programs. If the current trend continues, Frost said the city won't be able to fund what is in the Measure T plan. Since the measure was passed, much has been accomplished, including the construction of two police substations, the hiring of 26 new officers, the construction of Fire Station 55 and the fire training facility, the purchase of a new ladder truck and the addition of four new firefighters. However, the hiring of more police officers and firefighters and the construction of a new fire station are in jeopardy until the economy turns around.



CITY OFFICES TO BE CLOSED WEDNESDAY, NOV. 25: City of Visalia offices will be closed on Wednesday, November 25, as general employees serve a non-paid furlough day. In July, the City Council implemented a variety of cost reduction methods designed to save money, including a 3 work shift/day non-paid furlough for all full-time employees. In order to implement this furlough, the following public City offices and facilities will be closed on Wednesday, Nov. 25: City Hall West, 707 W. Acequia; City Hall East at 315 E. Acequia Ave., the Transit Center and Administrative Offices at 425 E. Oak Ave.; Fire and Police Departments for walk-in traffic; Recreation, Senior and Youth Centers; and the City Corporation Yard. According to City Manager Steve Salomon, "It is very important for the public to know that the City's Police and Fire Departments will continue to operate on a 24 hour/7 day schedule and 911 emergency services will not be interrupted on the City furlough program. In addition, utility services such as solid waste collection, will not be affected. The City of Visalia will continue to efficiently operate during this financial crisis which is affecting us all."

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.

VINTAGE VISALIA POSTCARDS AVAILABLE: Hundreds, if not thousands of old Visalia photographs are locked away and only a select few get to see and enjoy them. Visalia historian Terry Ommen and local photographer Bill Dillberg have found such photographs and have turned them into a set of high-quality collectible postcards. Patterned after vintage postcards, they measure 3-1/2 inches by 5-1/2 inches and feature an historical description on the back. Available in limited quantities, each sealed pack includes postcards of the Ringling Bros. Circus Parade on Main Street (circa 1903), a Southern California Edison truck in the floodwaters of 1945 at Main and Court Street, the Visalia Fire Department with a hose cart (circa 1882), and Visalia Public School (circa 1885). The cost of the postcard packs are \$4.99 each, not including shipping costs. Information: Terry Ommen at 901-3227 or email histry@comcast.net. Proceeds from the sale of these postcards will help finance the creation of future postcard packs.

RECYCLE YOUR HOLIDAY TREES: From Dec. 26 through Jan. 10, you can recycle your holiday trees free of charge at any one of nine locations in the City. Drop-off locations: SaveMarts at Campus and Demaree and Akers and Goshen; College of the Sequoias Farm; Food 4 Less at 2025 N. Dinuba Blvd.; Neighborhood Church at 5505 W. Riggin Avenue; Parkside Chapel at 3200 W. Walnut Ave.; the parking lot at St. Johns and Lovers Lane; the northwest parking area behind Sequoia Mall; and Sierra Baptist Church at 1437 E. Walnut Ave. Please remove all ornaments, lights, tinsel, and stands. These events are for holiday trees only. For information, call the City of Visalia Natural Resource Conservation Division at 713-4532 or go to www.GoGreenVisalia.com.

FALL DROP-OFF EVENT KICKS OFF NOV. 27: The City of Visalia's annual free Fall yard waste recycling event kicks off Friday, Nov. 27, and runs through Saturday, Dec. 19. The event is free to all Visalia residents and commercial gardeners. Residents must provide proof of residency with either a utility bill or driver's license. All commercial gardeners must provide a City of Visalia Business License. Drop offs are at the Tulare County Compost and Biomass at 24478 Road 140 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays, and at Wood Industries at 7715 Avenue 296 from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 7 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. The following is acceptable as yard waste: branches; grass clippings; leaves; lumber; prunings; yard trimmings; and wood. Bamboo, palm fronds and yucca trees are NOT recyclable and should be placed in the garbage side of split can containers. Visalia residents will receive one free yard of compost for each load of material recycled. For information, call 713-4500.

GRANT AIMS TO PREVENT DEATHS FROM DUIs: The Visalia Police Department has been awarded a new traffic safety grant for a year-long anti-DUI program aimed at preventing deaths and injuries on our roadways. New enforcement measures to combat impaired driving are coming as a result of a recent \$108,000 grant awarded by the California Office of Traffic Safety to the City of Visalia. The special DUI Enforcement and Awareness grant is to assist in efforts to reduce the number of persons killed and injured in alcohol and other drug related collisions. The grant activities will specifically target impaired driving offenders as well as educate the public on the dangers of impaired driving. This will be done through the use of DUI/driver's license checkpoints, warrant searches and stakeouts for repeat DUI offenders, saturation patrols, and court stings targeting DUI offenders with suspended or revoked driver licenses who get behind the wheel after leaving court. Visalia Police Officers will be conducting specialized enforcement efforts throughout the course of the next year. Extra officers will be on duty patrolling areas frequented by motorcycles. Officers will be cracking down on traffic violations made by motorcyclists, and other vehicle drivers, that result in far too many motorcycle collisions, injuries and deaths. Funding for the grant comes from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS INSTALLED ON DEC. 1: The swearing-in ceremony of Visalia's three new Council members, Warren Gubler, Michael Lane and Steve Nelson, will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 1, at City Hall Council Chambers, at 707 W. Acequia Ave. The public is invited to attend this ceremony. The Council will also select Visalia's new mayor and vice mayor.

COALITION SEEKS SIGNATURE BALLOT MEASURE FOR NOVEMBER 2010 BALLOT: Californians to Protect Local Taxpayers and Vital Services filed an initiative ballot measure on Oct. 20 with the State Attorney General in a move to protect local revenue at the County, City, Special District and School District levels. The Local Taxpayer, Public Safety and Transportation Protection Act, if passed by voters, would close loopholes and prevent the State from borrowing, raiding, or otherwise redirecting local government (local taxes, property taxes, redevelopment), transportation (HUTA and Proposition 42 funds) and public transit funds. The need for this measure comes after the state came close to taking \$1 billion in local gas tax revenues and actually did borrow \$2 billion in local property taxes from local governments, seized billions in redevelopment agency funds, and took \$697 million of transit funds. Filing the measure with the Attorney General's office is the first step to qualify a measure for the November 2010 ballot and secure voter approval. After receiving the official Title and Summary in late November or early December 2009, the Coalition can proceed with collecting about 1 million signatures needed to qualify for the November ballot. If the effort proceeds, a strong grassroots and fundraising effort will be needed.

BEN MADDOX WIDENING 'ON THE MOVE': A groundbreaking ceremony for the Ben Maddox Widening project will be held on Friday, January 8, at 10 a.m. at the northeast corner of Ben Maddox Way and Noble Avenue. In case of rain, the ceremony will be held at the Visalia Ford Showroom at 1300 E. Mineral King Ave. The project is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and funder funds from SAFETEA-LU, the Safe Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy For Users, and local funding including Measure R.

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