



GANG UPDATE: COUNCIL APPROVES ACCELERATED HIRING OF TWO OFFICERS:

In a unanimous decision, the Visalia City Council approved a loan from the General Fund for \$242,000 to the Measure T Fund to accelerate the hiring of two additional sworn police officers to allow the Police Department to advance its anti-gang strategies while minimizing impacts on general patrol operations. Council also approved the release of monies frozen in the 2009/10 budget to lease an office building for the Department's Special Enforcement Bureau, which includes the Gangs and Narcotics units. The combined efforts of gang suppression, intervention and prevention has been effective in the last three years in reducing gang-related violence in the City. A recent increase in both gang-related violence and the number of validated gang members from 972 in 2007 to 1,184 in 2010 has prompted the development of new strategies. Federal funds are being sought to build on the Department's gang intervention/prevention strategies, and the School District is allocated Stimulus funds to continue the Neighborhood Youth Counselor project for an additional 18 months to hire five counselors to work with at-risk youth in Visalia schools.

COUNCIL HEARS UPDATES ON CURRENT GROUNDWATER CONDITIONS, WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS:

Natural Resources Conservation Manager Kim Loeb provided the Council with an update on current groundwater conditions and water conservation efforts by the City at its Feb. 1 work session. Average water levels beneath the City have declined from less than 20 feet below the ground surface in the 1950s to 114 feet as of December, 2009. Decreasing water supplies, increasing population demand, and regional agricultural use are responsible for the decline. Without the City's long-time conservation efforts, water levels would be much lower. Water conservation efforts need to be stepped up in order to significantly contribute to reversing the water shortage problem. The majority of water used by citizens is for landscaping. California Water Service Company has made a request to the California Public Utilities Commission for a 60 percent increase in water rates over the next three years. Cal Water's request includes an increase to their water conservation budget to \$500,000 a year, four times more than their current budget. The City has yet to take a position on the proposed rate hike and there's no guarantee that Cal Water, which provides all of Visalia's drinking water, will be able to raise rates that high. City staff is strongly encouraging Cal Water to focus its water conservation program on outdoor use as this is where the majority of water is used and such programs have been successful in other parts of the state.

- **IN OTHER COUNCIL NEWS:** City Council members voted unanimously to adopt a resolution pledging support for the Local Taxpayer, Public Safety and Transportation Protection Act of 2010 to be placed on the November ballot to further prevent the State from seizing, diverting, shifting, borrowing, transferring, suspending, or otherwise taking or interfering with tax revenues dedicated to funding local government services . . . Approved postponing the non-profit grant application process until after Council approves a set amount for the grant and qualifications for organizers to receive funding for the 2010-2011 fiscal year and to allow the Citizens Advisory Committee time to make recommendations for revisions to the grant qualification and application process . . . And authorized the City

Manager to enter into a professional services agreement not to exceed \$70,000 with Northwest Hydraulic Consultants for technical engineering analysis of the FEMA flood maps, with URS Corporation for liaison services with FEMA to identify flood projects to reduce flood insurance impacts to Visalia property owners, and to pursue up to \$7 million in federal funding toward “long-term” flood mitigation measures.

MONTHLY OFFICE HOURS WITH VICE MAYOR: Vice Mayor Amy Shuklian continues to hold monthly office hours on Wednesday, Feb. 3, to allow the public to meet and discuss issues one-on-one. Monthly office hours are held from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the large conference room at City Hall, at 707 W. Acequia Ave., and will continue the first Wednesday of the month. She can be reached through 713-4400, then enter 8313, or by email at ashuklian@ci.visalia.ca.us. You also can receive information and updates from Vice Mayor Shuklian through Facebook. During the monthly office hours, the first hour, from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. will be a time for drop-in visits, and appointments can be scheduled in advance for the second hour, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. To schedule an appointment, contact Office Assistant Gladys Ramirez at 713-4314.

COUNCIL WORKSHOP SET FOR FEB. 5-6: The public is invited to the session, set for noon to 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 5, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 6, at the Visalia Convention Center, 303 E. Acequia Ave.

PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVES NEW HOTEL: Visalia's newest hotel, a 125-bed Residence Inn by Marriott, will break ground in March with an opening planned for Spring of 2011, said Heidi de Guzman with MSW Architectural & Engineering Services, Inc., the architectural firm for the project. The new hotel at West Cypress Avenue, across the street from the Visalia Adventure Park, won approval of the Visalia Planning Commission at its Jan. 25 meeting. The four-story hotel will be situated on 2.68 acres of the Village West Commercial Shopping Center development first approved by the city several years ago, and will feature an indoor multi-functional lobby/study room, a breakfast room, an outdoor patio area, a spa, a swimming pool and a basketball court.

BUILDING PERMITS OFF 8% IN JANUARY COMPARED TO SAME TIME LAST YEAR: Despite a strong showing in new single family dwellings—up 89% in January over the same month in 2009, the total number of building permits issued by the City was down 8%, from 231 in January 2009, to 212 in 2010. Total valuation of all permits was off 19%, from \$9,938,607 in 2009 to \$8,058,013 in 2010.

CITY SEEKS APPLICATIONS FOR COMMITTEES, COMMISSION VACANCIES: The City of Visalia is accepting applications from interested citizens for its City committees. The following committees currently have vacancies:

- **Citizen's Advisory Committee** acts as a liaison between the general public and the City Council concerning community issues and has openings for three alternate members.
- **Disability Advocacy Committee** advises the City on the needs of disabled people. The committee promotes physical, social, communication and attitudinal access for every citizen of Visalia and has openings for three regular members and two alternate members.
- **Environmental Committee** heightens environmental awareness and conservation in Visalia. Issues addressed include air quality, hazardous waste, recycling, water conservation and all other natural resources. The Committee has vacancies for one regular and one alternate member.
- **Historic Preservation Committee** administers and carries out the standards and specifications of

the Historic Preservation Ordinance and promotes historic preservation by encouraging building owners to initiate preservation efforts. The Committee has two regular member vacancies.

- **North Visalia Neighborhood Advisory Committee** serves as a liaison between the City and the North Visalia community. The Committee has openings for two regular members.
- **Parks & Recreation Commission** advises the City Council and City staff in matters pertaining to parks, playgrounds and recreation centers. The Commission currently has one alternate vacancy.
- **Transit Advisory Committee** researches and analyzes the community's continuing transit needs, reviews operations, markets the transit program and makes recommendations about the business affairs of the transit system. The Committee currently has two vacancies for regular members and two vacancies as alternate members.
- **Waterways and Trails Committee** advises on matters related to the Bikeway Master Plan and the Waterway and Trail Master Plan, and advocates for policies, programs, and projects that enhance bicycle and pedestrian opportunities, reviews projects, and advocates to secure additional resources. The Committee currently has four regular member vacancies.

Applications are accepted on a continuous basis and kept for a period of two years. For more information, go to the City of Visalia's website at www.ci.visalia.ca.us "Committees/Commissions" to view the informational handbook and application or contact the City Clerk's Office at 713-4512.

NEW FUNDS RELEASED TO HELP FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYERS: Funding for a state program to assist first time homebuyers has been released this January, after being on hold since January 2009. The City of Visalia's First Time Homebuyer Program, which is administered by CSET, offers free homebuyer education workshops that are open to the public and can provide gap financing to individuals who purchase a home in the City Limits. The program will be offered until the funds are exhausted. Homebuyer Education Workshops occur on a monthly basis, and are divided into two four-hour sessions. Topics range from credit and budgeting to the home buying process and understanding loan language. CSET and the City of Visalia have also partnered to administer a similar program offered by the federal government. The federal program has been used to gap finance 21 homes since October of 2007. Enrolling in the First Time Homebuyer Program still allows the borrower to qualify for the federal tax credit of up to \$8,000, which is available to buyers who close escrow by April 30th, 2010. For more information about the First Time Homebuyer Program or to attend a Homebuyer Education Workshop, call CSET's hotline at (559) 741-4641.

CENTER AVENUE IMPROVEMENTS SLATED TO BEGIN; PARKING

IMPACTED: Work on the Center Avenue improvements will commence on February 8. Regular updates will be provided as work progresses and significant aspects of the project occur. Lockwood General Engineering is the General Contractor hired by the City of Visalia to do the work on the Center Avenue Improvements. The work consists of installing new landscape curbs along the south side of Center Avenue, between Bridge Street and Conyer Street. There will also be irrigation mains installed along this area, to serve the planter islands.

Generally, work will commence on the east end of the project, at Bridge street, and proceed west in 2 block increments. The south travel lane (westbound) and adjacent parking will be impacted with this project. The project manager for the City of Visalia is Rebecca Keenan.

Timeline for the next two weeks:

Week of Feb 1-Feb 5: Initial survey markings and USA markings to be completed. Letters to Businesses in the work corridor will be sent out this week.

Week of Feb 8-Feb 12: Construction is scheduled to start on this week. Traffic control devices will be installed in the two-block area from Bridge Street to Church Street. Initial demolition will begin, and installation of new curb and irrigation will begin.

Funding: This Project is funded by Community Development Block Grant Recovery Act (CDBG-R)

funds through the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD).

KAWEAH DELTA MEDICAL CENTER COUNTY'S FIRST TRAUMA

CENTER: Tulare County has officially designated Kaweah Delta Medical Center as its first Trauma Center, awarding Kaweah Delta with a Trauma III designation. The designation came today after a Jan. 26 meeting held with the Tulare County Board of Supervisors and Kaweah Delta Health Care District CEO, Lindsay Mann. Plans to make Kaweah Delta Medical Center a certified Trauma Center began 7 years ago. As Tulare County noted a rapid growth and population, the number of trauma patients treated in the Emergency Department began to rise. The volume and severity of injuries seen, prompted the hospital's administrative and medical staff to make changes to meet the needs of the community. Those changes include: expansion of the emergency department, including 4 trauma bays with specialized equipment to accommodate the most critical trauma patient; expansion of the ICU; additional operating rooms; recruitment of general surgeons and orthopedic surgeons for 24/7 coverage; and plans for the construction of a helipad to transport critical patients to and from the facility for immediate treatment.

FIREFIGHTERS, CITY'S COST-SAVING PLAN OMITTS FURLOUGHS:

Visalia firefighters and the City have agreed to cost-saving measures that enables the permanent suspension of furloughs which would have taken one fire engine out of service for a temporary period of time. City Manager Steve Salomon and Fire Chief Mark Nelson had suspended furloughs for firefighters from Dec. 18 through January 18 to allow time to come up with an alternative cost-saving plan. The Visalia Firefighters Association, comprised of 59 employees, now will make financial contributions through payroll deductions through June 30, 2010. "The efforts of labor and management working together found solutions to minimize the negative effects of furloughs on public safety emergency response," said Visalia Fire Chief Mark Nelson. Through furloughs in all City departments, the City has saved \$380,000 this year.

DOWNTOWN CIRCULATION UPDATE: The City Council and members of the Kaweah Delta Medical Center board received an update on transportation circulation projects at the Jan. 25 joint meeting. The Burke Street extension from Houston to Roosevelt should be completed by the end of 2010, and the Watson Street (Central Visalia) off-ramp CalTrans project is scheduled to be completed by October 2011. City Council has authorized staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to conduct a Downtown Transportation Circulation Study to develop a comprehensive long-range plan that would analyze, and make specific recommendations regarding transportation circulation, on-street parking, signal coordination corridors, bike lanes and mass transit needs in the downtown area. The scope of the RFP would include analyzing and discussing the impacts of the possible street closures (West Street between Mineral King and Acequia, and Willis Street between Mineral King and Acequia) needed to accommodate the Kaweah Hospital's Master Plan. The RFP is being advertised this week. Once a consultant's proposal has been selected, staff will return to Council to request an authorization to proceed with the study.