

COUNCIL APPROVES OPERATIONS PLAN FOR PROPOSED VISITOR

CENTER: In a 5-0 vote, Visalia City Council approved an operations plan for the proposed Sequoia Shuttle Visitor Center and authorized staff to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sequoia Riverlands Trust to lease the building, and apply for grants to fund the construction and interpretive activities within the Visitor Center. The Visitor’s Center would be a destination facility that would be a visual, educational, and informational draw to a target market that passes through Visalia every year. It will also be used to promote the Sequoia Shuttle, encouraging longer stays in Visalia rather than just passing through on the way to the Park, Forest or other attractions. In addition, it helps improve air quality and traffic congestion in the Park. During the season, visitors can be encouraged to use the Shuttle and in the off-season, it can be promoted as a reason to return to Visalia. The Acequia Street location was recommended by a Council-appointed task force because of its accessibility from the freeway, proximity to the downtown, cutout parking on Acequia for RV trailers, etc., available vehicular parking at the Center and the parking structure across the street, adjacency to the two hotels and the Convention Center, and land availability. At least three organizations have committed to being housed in the building: The Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCVB), a trade association which focuses on selling Visalia as a convention and tourism destination, and to servicing these visitors while here; Sequoia Riverlands Trust, a non-profit regional land trust that operates in Tulare, Kings, Fresno and Kern Counties, and; McKellar Farms, which would lease space to offer ag tours from the Visitors Center, and selling produce and other ag-related products at the Center. An Engineers estimate for the building construction cost shows that the cost of all phases of the building, including the Plaza, water feature and Convention Center upgrade, would be approximately \$4.3 million, plus approximately \$340,000 in permits and fees. No phase of the construction would involve general fund dollars. Instead, staff will not propose issuing bid documents until the proposed construction can be fully paid for by non-general fund revenues such as grants, state bond funds as Prop 1B, or specific transit capital funds including Federal Transit Grants and/or Local Transportation Funds.

VISALIA TRANSIT RIDERSHIP UP FOR THIRD STRAIGHT MONTH:

Exciting things are happening with Visalia Transit. Beside the new stylish CNG vehicles that gave passengers something to be happy about, the Transit Division also has something to cheer about! For three months straight, fixed route ridership increased 4-5% each month (February 4%, March 4% and April 5%) compared to the year prior. In addition, it’s the first increase in ridership fixed routes have seen since March of 2009. “I think Visalia Transit is doing a great job getting the community involved in different events” says Susan Cook, a frequent Visalia Transit Rider. “I think the stigma of riding public transportation is starting to change and more people are willing to use it for all of its benefits. I know it saves me money.” Visalia Transit is doing many things to promote community involvement and peaking interest in public transportation; like the latest “Make an Impression” campaign where over 80 green footprints were painted around town prompting the largest Earth Day event to date. Or, the Dare to Spare campaign that had double the community involvement than the year prior. In addition, Visalia Transit has a very active and ever-growing Facebook page that interacts with fans each day, giving them different tips, facts, updates and promotions. “Almost every time we get someone new to try public transportation, they become re-users of our service” says Gamaliel Anguiano of the Visalia Transit Division. “The community involvement marketing campaigns have been very effective and we will have more to come within the next couple months” he adds. For more information on ridership increases contact Gamaliel Anguiano at the Visalia Transit Division at 713-4594.

FLOOD INSURANCE AGENT PROVIDES INFORMATION FOR

PREFERRED POLICY HOLDERS: Rona Swanson with American National Insurance in Visalia advises as to the possible outcomes for those who bought preferred policies before the June 16, 2009 deadline.

“The people who bought preferred policies prior to the new flood map effective date of June 16, 2009 did well because they can now have their coverage re-written with the “grand-fathered” preferred zone. What that means is they get a rate reduction for purchasing coverage before it was required.

However, many of those homeowners are now receiving renewal bills that are at the preferred rate once again because many of the mapping firms have not caught up with the complexities of the new flood map and the multiple layers of elevation designation for our area. If your home IS in a flood zone, you will want to have your coverage re-written appropriately.

I know that it is tempting to just pay the \$355 (or less) that you have been billed for, but if you do...and if your lender challenges it, stating the obvious – that you no longer QUALIFY for a preferred policy, you will be required to have it rewritten.

That may not seem so bad UNTIL you discover that if you re-write a preferred policy once the policy term is in effect, you are required to not only purchase coverage on the structure, you must purchase coverage on contents as well. On the typical preferred policy, dwelling is covered for \$250,000 and contents at \$100,000. It is a package deal but when you re-write the coverage you can choose to insure the structure only and carry a \$5000 deductible. The cost for the structure only coverage is \$725 for \$250,000. If you wait and are forced to re-write – the cost for \$250,000 on the home and \$100,000 on the contents is \$1,498.

SO...the joy of paying only \$355 can quickly become heartburn if you are required to re-write the entire policy for a total cost of \$1498. They would credit the \$355 you have already paid....but \$1143 is a steep price to pay instead of the additional \$370 to have it re-written prior to the renewal of the plan correctly.”

Swanson stresses that each policy is different, depending on a variety of factors including the construction date of the home, whether or not a preferred policy was purchased, etc. The best course of action is to check with your own insurance representative as to what is applicable to your own policy.

FIVE ARRESTS MADE THROUGH DUI CHECKPOINTS:

From Saturday through Sunday, May 15-16, members of the Visalia Police Department DUI Enforcement Team, Traffic Unit, Reserve Unit, Patrol Division, and Volunteer Unit conducted a DUI checkpoint in the area of Court and Race in the city of Visalia. There were 541 vehicles checked, and 5 DUI arrests were made, 21 citations for unlicensed drivers were issued, 26 vehicles were towed, and 21 additional citations were issued for other offenses. Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

AMGEN TOUR STAGE 5 START THURSDAY ON MAIN STREET:

Come early, like 6 pm Wednesday night when the Stage 5 Start activities actually get started. The community is invited to join in family activities centered around preparations for the official start the next morning. Watch the Tour team construct the stages and start-line apparatus. Chalk supporting messages to the riders on the street. Music and refreshments will be available in the Garden Street Plaza. Several of the Farmers Market merchants have agreed to come and set up as well. The official race starts on Thursday, at 10:45 a.m. Hospitality events including the VIP tent (featuring refreshments provided by the Vintage Press!), merchandise opportunities, autograph opportunities, a “pit row,” and booths featuring the City, County, Jeff Barnes Brain Injury Foundation, and American Cancer Society, will start between 9 and 9:30 a.m. A pre-race featuring local riders and dignitaries will run at 9:30 a.m., followed by the official opening ceremonies. During this time, riders will be checking in and getting into position for the race start at 10:45 a.m. Come early for the pre-fun!