

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

VOLUME 13

NOVEMBER 2, 2010



THE HABIT BURGER GRILL IS COMING TO VISALIA

Former Mearle's site to get modern-day makeover that pays tribute to historical significance of 70-year-old structure

Melding the memories of the past—the Shake on the Sign Stays—with a modern day look, Visalia residents got a sneak-peek at the renderings of The Habit Burger Grill prior to the Site Plan Review meeting Oct. 27.

“The Habit is excited to be moving forward with our preliminary plans for a new restaurant in Visalia,” said Russ Bendel, CEO for The Habit Burger Grill. “We appreciate the historical significance of this site and are looking forward to working toward the creation of a new Habit Burger Grill that will recognize and honor the beloved legacy of Mearle’s and the impact it has had on the City and its residents. As The Habit continues to grow, Visalia is a wonderful community for us to be a part of and we look forward to serving future generations of burger lovers here.”

The historical significance of this 70-year-old structure will be shown with a scale model display of Mearle’s encased within the dining area, and a historical photographic gallery just off of the main seating area. The Habit will maintain Mearle’s footprint with access from Mooney Boulevard and Myrtle Avenue. It will feature a drive-through window and indoor and patio seating. Plans will be reviewed by the City’s Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. A conditional-use permit for the restaurant and drive-through is also needed.

“Over the years, Mearle’s College Drive-In has been a remarkable place and has meant so much to so many people,” said local historian Terry Ommen. “Within its walls, relationships were formed, friendships were strengthened and business deals were made.

“Now this Visalia icon is about to begin a new chapter. Officials of The Habit recognize the historic treasure they are about to occupy and promise to ‘preserve as much of Mearle’s history as we can.’ Once again, this building known as Mearle’s will bring people together and new memories will take shape.”



VISALIA TRANSIT EXPANSION NOW OPEN: After breaking ground in the summer of 2009, the much anticipated Visalia Transit Center expansion officially opened to the public on Oct. 29. The 31,371 square foot area, just south of the existing Transit building, features 12 new bus bays, a much needed addition for the many routes and transit services that utilize the Transit Center. Above each bus bay and inside the Transit Center, new monitors display “real time” bus arrival and departure predictions. The new expansion also features solar voltaic panels to power outdoor lighting, a public plaza, a water feature, storm drainage cleansing at the bus lanes as well as ground water recharging for the pedestrian areas.

CITY OFFICES CLOSED NOV. 11: City of Visalia business offices will be closed on Thursday, Nov. 11th in observance of Veteran’s Day. There will be no change in either Residential or Commercial refuse service.

COMPENSATION AGREEMENTS COMPLETED: Agreements have now been reached with all of the city’s five bargaining units. On Nov. 1, the City Council approved a Memo of Understanding with the 61 members of the Firefighter’s Association, which includes:

- Giving up 4.1% in various benefit concessions, including discontinuing an annual 12-hour comp time allocation as of Jan. 1, 2011, eliminating the Disability Avoidance Program as of July 1, 2010 and reducing holiday pay from 5.5 shifts to 4 shifts.
- A two year agreement with no compensation increase in the second year;
- A new retirement tier for new employees and calculating retirement on a 3-year versus 1-year basis.
- A trial work schedule of 48/96 between Jan. 1 and April 1, 2011.

At the time the City’s 2010/11 budget was adopted, the Council established a goal that this year’s budget solution include a permanent reduction in employee compensation. Sales tax, the fundamental resource for providing services, has diminished by \$5 million in the last three years. Combined with a drop in property tax revenues, this results in about a \$2.5 million deficit in the 2010/11 General Fund, the third budget deficit in as many years. Faced with either increasing revenues—ie. higher taxes—or cutting expenses, the Council made the tough decision to cut expenses, including city employees’ salaries which account for about 70 percent of the General Fund expense. Through a combination of negotiated agreements and impositions, city staff have taken a 4 percent pay decrease and retirement

benefits for new hires were lowered, resulting in a budget savings of about \$1 million. Because of the concessions, no lay-offs were required and services provided by the City were not compromised. To balance this year's budget, \$1.5 million is also being used from Emergency Reserves.

OTHER COUNCIL NEWS: During a joint session with the Planning Commission, the Council accepted the Existing Conditions Report for the General Plan Update, and the process now moves to its next phase of developing alternative growth strategies. The Council also unanimously voted to deny the appeal by Verizon Wireless of the Planning Commission's denial of a conditional use permit for a proposed 60-foot tall cell tower. If the applicant wishes to re-file at this location, they would have to wait one year.

CITY AWARDED TWO STATE SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS GRANTS: City of Visalia staff recently received word that it was awarded \$98,420 for two grants which will provide crosswalks, flashing beacons and construct curb ramps near Crestwood and Hurley Elementary Schools and construct curb, gutter, sidewalks and a bicycle lane at Fairview Elementary School. Lighted crosswalks, including ADA compliant pedestrian ramps, pole-mounted flashing beacons, signage and striping will be installed at the intersection at Sunnyside Avenue and County Center Drive at Crestwood Elementary and at the Hurley Avenue and Marcin Street intersection at Hurley Elementary. Grant funding awarded for these two intersections was \$48,740. The second project involves the construction of curb, gutter, sidewalk and a bicycle lane along the east side of Quail Drive adjacent to Fairview Elementary School, and the City received \$49,680 in state funding. California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) awarded \$24.2 million statewide for 85 Safe Routes to School projects to help reduce injuries and fatalities among children in grades K-12 who walk and bicycle to school.

WESTBOUND WHITENDALE CLOSED WEST OF MOONEY UNTIL NOV. 12: Westbound Whitendale Avenue will be closed for two weeks west of Mooney Boulevard for construction of a new storm drain main line and paving operations. Westbound traffic approaching Mooney from the east will have to turn north or south on Mooney. The Mooney northbound left turn and southbound right turn onto Whitendale also will be closed. Eastbound traffic lanes on Whitendale west of Mooney will remain open, but will be reduced to one lane dedicated to left turns to northbound Mooney, and another lane that will serve both through traffic and right turns to southbound Mooney.

VICE MAYOR TO HOLD OFFICE HOURS ON NOV. 3: Vice Mayor Amy Shuklian will hold her regular monthly office hours on Wednesday, Nov. 3. Office hours will be held from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the large conference room at City Hall, at 707 W. Acequia Ave. 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 Gladys Ramirez at 713-4314.

GRAND OPENING OF LIONS PARK: Celebrate the grand opening of Lions Park, at West Ferguson and Denton Streets in Visalia from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 13. Enjoy food, music, local vendor booths and raffle drawings.

BATTLE OF BADGES BLOOD DRIVE ON THROUGH NOV. 9: The Central California Blood Center's 9th annual South Valley Battle of the Badges Blood Drive will be held through Nov. 9, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., at 1515 S. Mooney Blvd., in Visalia. Donors will receive a commemorative T-shirt and donor reward coupons. For information on donating blood, call 625-3121.