



The VOICE

Your independent news source

Greater Shasta County, CA

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Did you know...

- The Economic Development Corp. of Shasta County has created an impressive new marketing video for this area. It runs about three and one-half minutes, and can be viewed on their website: shastaedc.org. Take a look—it's inspiring!
- The Exchange Club of Redding donated \$5,000 to the City of Redding's General Fund on February 7th in thanks for the extra police and fire patrols during the 2011 Air Show.
- Paving firm Tullis, Inc. is consolidating all operations into a facility located within the City of Redding on Clear Creek Road. They have purchased an 8,000 square foot shop building and are preparing to construct a 4,800 square foot administrative office. They will create at least 10 new jobs with an average wage exceeding \$18 per hour. Tullis will get job credits and fee waivers totaling \$57,000 using the City of Redding's Industrial Development Incentive Program.

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Incentives Are Working—Fee Waiver Expanded!

At the Redding City Council meeting on April 5, 2011, Shasta VOICES proposed an **elimination of the annual inflationary increase** being applied to building and impact fees, beginning with the 4.2% increase scheduled for January, 2011. This was suggested as a way to address the huge disparity in the price of existing homes versus those that are newly constructed, and create motivation and incentive for new construction to occur once again and stimulate the local economy. The request was **approved** and on April 19, 2011, the Council **adopted** an ordinance that provides for a two year suspension of inflation adjustments applied to building and development impact fees, beginning with the January 2011 fees. This in effect froze the fees through 2012.

Additionally, on November 15, 2011, the Redding City Council once again listened, **approved and adopted** a second Resolution implementing a temporary **waiver** of wastewater and traffic impact fees on new single-family dwellings. The waiver is limited to the first 50 building permits issued for those dwelling units prior to June 30, 2012. The units must be completed prior to March 31, 2013 under the program. The intent of this program was to again stimulate the local economy and the construction industry.

As of February 7, 2011, **29 new single family home permits have been issued** under the programs. To put that in perspective, there were a total of 26 single family dwelling permits issued in **all** of 2011, 59 issued in all of 2010, and 68 issued in all of 2009.

Finally it appears that something is actually working to generate new construction once again and put people back to work in our community. And now, these successful programs are being expanded.

Developer Ron Mygrant requested that new duplexes be added to the temporary fee waiver program at the Council meeting held on February 7, 2012. He has twelve duplex foundations (a total of 24 units) already poured and wants them included in the fee waiver program. This presented a challenge because it would mean that 24 units would be counted towards the current waiver program maximum of 50, using up all of the remaining waivers.

So, Council members discussed how the City could include properties that were already permitted prior to the implementation of the fee waiver program. If they agreed to add these 24 units for just one builder, how would that be fair to others out there who also had permits issued prior to the implementation of the fee waiver program?

Because the program has had such success, Council member Bosetti suggested that the City add **another 50 units** to the current program for all active existing and new permits to be fair to every builder. This will include both single family and duplex dwellings, but not larger multi-family units, apartments or commercial buildings. With double the number of permits available for the fee waiver program, construction will keep going, more people will get back to work, and the local economy will continue to improve. Council voted in favor of this proposal unanimously, and the actual Resolution for final action and approval occurred at the Council meeting on February 21, 2012, which gave staff an opportunity to prepare the appropriate and necessary documents for implementation.

One Too Many Apologies Erodes CSAC Confidence

A consistent pattern of being provided with misinformation and faulty data has caused the Board members of Redding's Community Services Advisory Commission (CSAC) to officially request they work with a different City staff member.

Community Services Director Kim Niemer has been assigned to support the Commission for the past 18 months. At the CSAC meeting on January 25, 2012, former CSAC Chairman Adam McElvain did a presentation showing a multitude of different instances that occurred in the past 14 months where Ms. Niemer provided incomplete and inaccurate information to the Commission, and acted contrary to the direction given by both the Commission and the City Council. In fact, this very item was "left off" the agenda when it was first posted, again demonstrating that the relationship between Ms. Niemer and the Commission is not working well.

Two of the issues that were well documented were the misinformation relating to the existing Riverfront Specific Plan and the ignored recommendations regarding the outsourcing of parks maintenance to private local firms.

The existing Riverfront Specific Plan covers about a 500 acre area along the Sacramento River. That area stretches from just south of the Cypress Avenue Bridge to the Turtle Bay Exploration Park and Civic Auditorium campus to the north. The plan outlines the types of businesses and recreational areas that a select citizens committee recommended as best suited for the area. The Plan was adopted by the City Council in 1990 after more than three years of work. The controversy surrounding this Plan surfaced when Director Niemer distributed the wrong copy to CSAC members, which wasn't discovered until December of 2011. A review of the correct and incorrect documents shows significant differences, including a more detailed plan for a hotel on the Turtle Bay campus. The incorrect plan was an early draft version, and City staff has no explanation as to why the "cover" from the correctly approved version was placed on the incorrect version and filed in the Planning Department's library. The Commissioners did not have an opportunity to review the correct Plan before they made a recommendation to approve the Turtle Bay Hotel, which is now under construction. Apologies have been issued by all staff members involved, but leaves the Commissioners in the uncomfortable position of having made their decision based on inaccurate information.

Outsourcing parks maintenance to local landscape companies to save the City money was also studied by CSAC for the majority of 2010. Throughout the process, Director Niemer continuously put forth misinformation regarding the true cost to the City to provide basic parks maintenance services. When City Council directed her to develop a Request for Quotation (RFQ) for four neighborhood parks to be used for comparative analysis with current actual costs for work being done by City employees, not only did she prepare the RFQ differently than she was directed, she compared the data received to what it would cost the City to utilize *in-house temporary employees* rather than existing City employees who performed these duties, effectively corrupting the process. There was even a "side-letter" negotiated without the knowledge of CSAC or the Council members by Ms. Niemer and labor leaders to allow the City to hire temporary workers without the same pay and benefits afforded to other parks maintenance employees at the City.

Although Director Niemer has apologized for these and other errors made, the members of CSAC voted 4-1 to work with City Manager Kurt Starman to resolve the matter, including the possibility of having a different staff member assigned to support the Commission. So far, Kurt Starman has agreed to now have all information/documents go through him first for review before being given to the Commission.

Quirky Personnel Rule Proves Expensive for Shasta County

Usually, when a member of the private sector has a beef with a staff member at the City or County, they can take their concerns to his or her boss whose job is to hear all sides of the issue and come to a successful resolution. Having such procedures in place diffuses most situations and spares all parties involved from the time, expense and emotional trauma of dealing with lawsuits.

Unfortunately, there is a quirky "personnel rule" on the books at Shasta County that prevents this from happening when it comes to issues with the Resource Management and Public Works Department Directors. These two Directors are actually *appointed* by and serve at the pleasure of the Board of Supervisors. The County "boss" (CAO Larry Lees) has no authority over these two individuals. If he did, for example, local vintner Revere Anselmo, who is in the proc-

ess of building and expanding his winery and ranch in eastern Shasta County, would have been able to have his permit and zoning issues resolved without having to file a lawsuit against Russ Mull, the Resource Management Director.

Now the County is forced to defend the actions of Russ Mull at the expense of the taxpayers, all because there was no alternative offered or available to resolve the issues experienced by Mr Anselmo.

A simple change in the "personnel rule" that would allow the CAO to step in when these issues occur and negotiate a resolution could save the County and ultimately the taxpayers a large amount of money. Perhaps its time for the County Supervisors to have such a discussion.

County Posts Primary Election Notices for Measures A & B

On February 19, 2012, the Shasta County Clerk posted public notices that Measures A & B will be included in the Presidential Primary Election to be held on June 5, 2012. Below is the verbiage for each of the measures as they will be submitted to the voters.

“Measure A”

Shall Resolution No. 2011-091 (General Plan Amendment 08-002) be Adopted?

Allows development of the Knighton & Churn Creek Commons Retail Center by changing the land use designation in the Shasta County General Plan from Part-Time Agricultural (A-cg) to Commercial (C) on approximately 86 acres in the Churn Creek Bottom Area.

Yes

No

“Measure B:

Shall the Churn Creek Bottom Agricultural Lands General Plan Amendment Initiative Be Adopted?

Imposes the following restrictions in the Shasta County General Plan that may **not** be amended except by the voters of Shasta County: (1) until December 31, 2036, prevents changes to the designation of land in the Churn Creek Bottom area designated as agricultural lands (A-C, or A-cg) on the General Plan Map, adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1984 and in effect at the time of the Initiative, with certain limited exceptions; (2) until December 31, 2036, **prevents** agricultural lands from being reviewed every five years for possible land use changes; (3) strictly limits commercial development in the Churn Creek Bottom area to those parcels designated as “commercial” (C) and located immediately adjacent to the I-5 Interchange/Knighton Road intersection; and (4) exempts from its coverage any project that has obtained a vested right pursuant to state and local law, any project for the construction of public schools or public parks, and any land that, under state and federal law, is beyond the initiative power of local voters.

Yes

No

Verified arguments for and against these measures may be submitted to the County Clerk at her office at 1643 Market Street in the Market Street Promenade not later than March 2, 2012 which has been determined by the County Clerk under the authority of Section 9163 of California Elections Code to be a reasonable date based on the time reasonably necessary to prepare and submit the arguments. No argument shall exceed 300 words in length. Arguments may be submitted by the Board of Supervisors or members authorized by it, any individual voter, any bona fide association of citizens or a combination of such voters and association of citizens.

Pursuant to Section 9162 and 9166 of the California Elections Code, **one** argument for and **one** argument against each measure will be selected for printing and distributing to the voters in the voter pamphlet. Preference and priority in selections will be given to arguments as follows:

- (a) The Board of Supervisors or a member of the Board.
- (b) The individual voter, or bona fide association of citizens, or combination of voters and associations, who are the bona fide sponsors or proponents of the measure.
- (c) Bona fide associations of citizens.
- (d) Individual voters who are eligible to vote on the measure.

Then, March 15, 2012 will be the last day to submit Rebuttal Arguments (250 word max). These must be received in the Office of the County Clerk by close of business. March 16, 2012 through March 26, 2012 is the designated public examination period for arguments, rebuttals, impartial analysis and a fiscal impact statement.

Renewed Conflict Forces RTPA Independence... and More Conflict

Back in October, 2011, it appeared that a conflict between Shasta County and the Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) had been settled successfully when County Administrative Officer Larry Lees stepped in to resolve the issue. At that time, the County agreed to reinstate two planners they had “taken” from the RTPA. Through this conflict, it was determined that the absence of a structured agreement with the County needed to be addressed, as the RTPA Board expressed a desire to have direct authority over its staffing levels.

An RTPA board subcommittee consisting of Chairman Len Moty, Vice-Chair Greg Watkins, and Past Chair Dick Dickerson had been meeting to consider some sort of memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize staffing arrangements between the RTPA and Shasta County. Unfortunately, they were unable to come to terms.

On January 24, 2012, a special meeting of the RTPA Board was called to consider the approval of an independently staffed RTPA and related actions. The discussions with the County had centered around reimbursement for the costs of hosting the RTPA staff. The County was asking for an additional \$151,178 in reimbursement costs annually. Cost comparisons were then prepared to show how much was currently being reimbursed to the County for salaries, benefits, workers compensation and operating expenses vs. the projected costs for RTPA to become independent of the County and pay their own way. In the end, the difference in total costs for County administrative support vs. an independent RTPA and RTPA provided support was shown to be \$30,036 annually. This figure did not include one-time start-up costs or transition costs associated with becoming an independent agency.

The RTPA Board voted to become an independent agency, beginning July 1, 2012. While this will eliminate the real or perceived conflicts with Shasta County, it will more than likely cost more to operate independently.

In the meantime, more conflict has developed. As the transition process has begun, questions have come up regarding the pay and benefits of the RTPA staff. It had been assumed, as all the documentation indicates, that the existing RTPA staff would transition into an independent agency with the same level of pay and benefits that they currently enjoy through Shasta County. Now, there seems to be some question as to whether or not this will occur. It remains to be seen if these employees are willing to continue working for the RTPA if their pay and benefits are not as attractive as what they currently enjoy. A quick check of the other RTPA's in California (all of which are independent) provide in the way of pay and benefits for their employees indicates consistency with traditional government entities.

That brings up an interesting twist to this seemingly unending controversy. Our region has benefitted tremendously from the efforts of the existing RTPA staff, with hundreds of millions of dollars brought in for major road and bridge improvements and replacements, including the SR44 bridge over the Sacramento River, Dana to Downtown, the widening of I-5 in Redding to six lanes, and the Cottonwood Hills truck climbing lanes, to name just a few. It will be up to the RTPA Board to determine just how important they feel it is to retain the existing staff.

The next RTPA Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 28, 2012 at 4:00 pm at the Shasta County Board of Supervisors Chambers. There will be an agenda item to discuss the existing staff controversy. Transitions are never easy, but this one appears to have all the signs of a difficult task.

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We depend on membership and other contributions.

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