



The VOICE

Your independent news source

Greater Shasta County, CA

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Did you know...

- There are a total of 26 different school districts in Shasta County, each with a separate office and budget. Their proposed 2011-2012 budgets are available for inspection and hearings will be held in the month of June. The Shasta County Office of Education has a very long list of each District's hearing information: (530) 225-0200.
- The median sales price of a home in Shasta County in the month of April 2011 was \$148,000, with sales driven by the foreclosure market. 47% of all sales in April were foreclosures.
- The unemployment rate for Shasta County at the end of April 2011 was 15.6%, down from 16.2% in March.

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Shasta VOICES Celebrates 4th Year

For the past four years, Shasta VOICES, a private non-profit organization now well over 800 strong, has been successful in our mission to have an impact on decisions being made locally that affect our economic opportunity in the Shasta County area. This includes:

TASK	RESULT
Defeating Fix 5/SCRIP Traffic Impact Fees	\$25 million (so far) coming from State and Federal government instead of local fees—first 6 miles now under construction <i>with local contractors and suppliers.</i>
Defeating Joint Shasta County/City of Redding Facilities Impact Fees	Saved \$4,681 per single family dwelling—up to \$93,620 for a commercial dwelling.
Supported/assisted in obtaining Stimulus Funds in lieu of local fees for local projects	Saved \$25 million of local \$\$ (and hundreds of local jobs created).
Succeeded in obtaining suspension of annual inflationary increases in City of Redding impact fees through 2012	Saved \$2,500+ per single family dwelling, and up to \$51,440 for commercial office or retail building and/or remodel.
Generated Commercial Construction Incentive Program	Closes financing gap, reduces interest costs, allows businesses to open and create new jobs.
Supported 5% Local Preference Policy in the City of Redding	Better opportunity for local businesses.
Radical 10 in '10 participation	Brought forward a series of job creating ideas that are works in progress now.

Additionally, we created and circulated these informational publications, which brought exposure and influence to the decision-making process:

1. **"The Matrix"** - cumulative impact table of traffic and other impact fees in Redding.
2. **"Do You Care About the Future of Redding" White Paper** (November 2008 elections).
3. **"Privatization of Public Services"** Study (on our website, August 2009).
4. **"Public Pension Reform"** (aiding pension plan reform, September 2009).
5. **"City of Redding Salary and Benefits Survey"** (September 2010, on our website).

This organization really works. We continue to speak up when most choose not to do so. We help eliminate potential repercussions to others by taking the heat on their behalf. We research, study, monitor, and ask questions about issues that are affecting our livelihood and quality of life.

We are looking forward to continuing our pattern of success throughout 2011 and beyond. Thank you for your continued interest and support!

Charter City Committee Ends Process in Deadlock

Not surprisingly, the Charter City Exploratory Committee (CCEC) selected by Redding City Council to explore the pros and cons of becoming a Charter City, deadlocked on the issue. The 10 member committee voted 5-5 when asked if they should continue the process of pursuing the charter city status.

Included in the agenda packet for the last meeting was a 16 page summary of the pros and cons that have been discussed since the first meeting in February. There have been a total of 7 meetings, with plenty of opportunity for the public to weigh in on the subject. Some of the meetings continued for over 5 hours. To say that there are some passionate people on both sides of the issue is an understatement.

The 16 page document noticeably includes “bad” examples of other City’s experiences when outlining the “con” side of becoming a charter city, without including the “good” examples on the “pro” side of the argument. And, the composite list does not reflect the personal views of each committee member on each item, but rather those of the “author” according to the written and filed action minutes of the final meeting on May 12, 2011. The author is Elin Klaseen.

But what we do know after going through this long, grueling process is that there is no consensus on either side of the issue when it comes to what would actually be written into a Charter even if everyone agreed that a Charter was needed. So, the committee will punt the issue back to City Council, more than likely without any specific recommendations.

As we learned when this subject was brought up for discussion by City Council in February, the Council was also split on whether or not to even explore the issue of becoming a Charter City. So, it appears that we have a split Council, a split committee, and a split general public.

The City Council may or may not even take a vote on this issue. If they do, three likely scenarios will occur:

- They vote no; Pro-Charter proponents will try to gather enough signatures in the community to put their own Charter on the ballot for the next general election.
- They vote yes and craft their version of the Charter to be put on the ballot for the next general election; Pro-Charter proponents may not like this version and will write their own version, and try to gather enough signatures in the community to put their competing version on the ballot for the next general election.
- They vote no; the issue will just go away and nobody will move forward with their own version.

In any case, a final Council decision should occur at one of the Redding City Council meetings scheduled in June 2011.

Parks Maintenance Outsourcing Quotes Finally Received

The long awaited Request for Quotation (RFQ) to see if local landscape maintenance companies might be able to provide City of Redding parks maintenance for less money was finally produced.

The bid document asked for quotes that included basic maintenance services for four neighborhood parks for a duration of 12 months (as had been directed by Council).

All landscape contractors, totaling seventy-eight, with current City of Redding business licenses were mailed a notice of the RFQ. There was a mandatory pre-bid meeting for interested contractors on May 3, 2011. Eleven firms were represented at this meeting. The deadline for submitting bids was May 19, 2011. Eight bids were received.

The lowest bidder proposed an annual cost of \$5,977.50, and the highest bidder proposed \$47,580.00.

The City concluded that their cost to provide the same basic services was \$4,286.92 per year, or \$34.57 per hour. This estimate was arrived at by using temporary employees who are defined as “employees hired for occasional of seasonal work for a period not to exceed one thousand hours in a fiscal

year...but shall not be eligible for sick leave pay, holiday pay, vacation pay, insurance coverage, retirement plan participation or items of a similar nature.”

The City will implement a new “model” in the Parks Maintenance Department starting this season (now). This model is to utilize temporary workers (full time up to 1000 hours per year and part time) to provide the basic mowing, blowing, pruning, and trash collecting duties. Two full time gardeners have been eliminated in the department and replaced with temporary employees who will make around \$15.96 per hour in the 2011-2012 fiscal year. Because temporary employees are not eligible for City benefits, costs can be greatly reduced. Additionally, the bargaining unit that represents public maintenance workers (IBEW) gave approval for year-round part-time employees to perform these tasks beginning this season.

The private sector was unable to compete with this new model of using City-hired temporary employees. Had this new model not been implemented, they may have proved to be more competitive. Their numbers would offer savings to the City if compared to a regular full-time City gardener.

Biennial Budget Meeting Scheduled 6-22-11 **Closing Convention Center/Utilizing Volunteer Firefighters up for Discussion**

There are no easy ways to solve the continuing budget crisis at City hall. The Redding City Council will meet on **Thursday, June 22nd at 2:00 p.m.** in Council Chambers to discuss how they will deal with the lack of revenue to pay for existing City services. This meeting is open to the public.

One suggestion made by City Manager Kurt Starman to help close the \$3 million budget gap is to close the Redding Convention Center at the end of 2011. This has proved to be one of the more controversial suggestions as far as the general public is concerned.

Currently, the Convention Center runs a deficit of \$300,000 each year, even with the over \$800,000 of Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue that is devoted to it each year. There are many issues to be explored if this option is officially considered, such as making sure the Convention Center is available for large community events such as Kool April Nites. It is estimated that the City could save at least \$500,000 to the General Fund by closing the Convention Center, at least temporarily, while providing minimum maintenance of the facility in the event that it could be reopened.

Since hearing about this suggestion at the April 19th Council meeting, a concerned community group has formed to share ideas and come up with a comprehensive and creative financial plan to bring to City Council showing that the Convention Center can be sustained on its own. Their first meeting is scheduled at the Convention Center on **Wednesday, June 8th at 8:00 a.m.** The group has been formed by two locally committed advocates, Valerie Long and Ginnie Mistal. They have set up a website where interested parties can sign an online petition (or alternately Google *Redding Convention Center Petition*):

www.ipetitions.com/petition/convention_center

Another item up for discussion at the Biennial Budget Meeting on June 22nd is the possibility of utilizing volunteer firefighters to keep Fire Station No. 2 open on Buenaventura Boulevard. This Station was a casualty of the last round of budget cuts, and was shut down. Council member Patrick Jones brought this idea forward at the May 17th Council meeting.

Conceptual approval was given to City staff by Council to implement such changes as closing City Hall for one day per pay period, or at least two days per month; have all departments except public safety and enterprise funds develop budget reductions up to 11 percent; through the collective bargaining process, realize at least some savings by having employees pick up a portion of their retirement plan costs.

So, City Council certainly has their work cut out for them. For those of you who want to bring forth possible solutions to the table, you will have an opportunity if you attend the June 22nd budget meeting.

REU Lawsuit Has City on Defensive

A lawsuit filed against the Redding Electric Utility (REU) by local REU ratepayers in February 2011, claims that the 7.84% rate hike approved last year is illegal since it includes an almost \$6 million transfer of "in-lieu property tax" funds from the utility to the General Fund without voters approval. The collection company for these and any other ratepayers who would like an eventual refund of the overcharges to their account is Fee Fighter LLC.

Fee Fighter LLC has been gathering necessary assignment of claim forms from any REU customer who wants to try and get their money back since February 2011. Apparently, REU is becoming nervous about this. They ran a full page ad (likely using ratepayer funds) in the May 22, 2011 issue of the Record Searchlight. The ad highlights how REU has been serving the community for 90 years, and tries to explain why they have been charging this illegal fee (tax) over the past several years.

REU goes on to say that although they know the law no longer allows such transfers (if it ever really did), they can continue to do it anyway because that is what they have always done.

Really? That's an interesting defense. Good luck with that!

Updated News and Notes

Shasta VOICES is continuing to monitor and follow many issues of interest to our supporters and the community. As part of our efforts to keep you updated and informed, here is a brief update of some of these issues:

- **Regional Climate Action Plan (RCAP)** - Back in January 2011, Russ Mull, the Shasta County Air Pollution Control Officer, presented his RCAP plan at a City Council meeting. When asked if the purpose of his plan was to restrict development because it would not be possible to have 0% growth in vehicle emissions if our community continues to grow, Mr. Mull replied “it’s gonna be a challenge.” Fast forward to May 11th. A public workshop was held to collect ideas on how to improve the air. The usual suggestions about promoting bicycle travel, carpooling, improving bus service, planting shade trees around buildings were discussed—good ideas, all. But, other ideas seemed not so good. Although renovating buildings and homes to make them more energy efficient is not a bad idea, trying to force such requirements on existing structures is “unfair” as one participant said. Forcing people to do something to their property (upgrade) if they need or want to sell it would create financial hardships at the very least. A full 58% of homes in Shasta County were built before 1980, and it has been suggested that all of them would need to be upgraded before they could be resold. If you have more feasible suggestions on how to cut greenhouse gas emissions in the county, contact Adam Fieseler at the Shasta County Air Quality Management District: 225-5674 or email him at sfieseler@co.shasta.ca.us.
- **Municipal Library Leafleting Policy**—A Shasta County judge temporarily blocked a city policy restricting leafleting outside the Redding Library. Two separate lawsuits against the City of Redding have been filed claiming the new policy is unconstitutional and should be overturned. The policy would set aside less than 10 percent of the entrance space for leafleting, would require groups to reserve the space in advance, and would require any literature to be on topics of public interest. It further would prohibit approaching library patrons in the parking lot, leafleting windshields, or handing out coupons or other advertising. The ACLU has filed a brief that says “courts have consistently rejected permit requirements as a prerequisite to the exercise of First Amendment rights.” The Library is sure to be tested by those wishing to hand out leaflets while the City is prevented from enforcing their policy, and the case makes its way through the courts.
- **Churn Creek Bottom/Knighten Road Retail Center**—A “Notice of Intent to Circulate Petition” has been filed with Shasta County to circulate a petition for the purpose of preserving agriculture, watershed, and prime farmlands in the Churn Creek Bottom area of Shasta County. This initiative seeks to reinforce the provisions of the current Shasta County General Plan, which designates most of the Churn Creek Bottom as agricultural lands; it seeks to protect the open space lying between the City of Redding and the City of Anderson; and it would expire on December 31, 2036. Additionally, a request has been made that the text of the petition be transmitted immediately to the County Attorney for the preparation of a ballot title and summary, not to exceed 500 words, accurately expressing the purpose of the proposed measure, within 15 days of filing. The initiative measure is to be submitted directly to the voters. The Measure is designed to prevent commercial development in Churn Creek Bottom beyond existing limits, and states that it is intended to protect air and water quality, pollution, congestion, and flood risks. If passed, it would amend the Shasta County General Plan. There is a map available showing which areas are affected. This entire notice was filed May 24, 2011 by the following people: **Rodney B. Evans, Elin Klasseen, Ronald E. Reece, Randall R. Smith, and Mary Stegall**. All five listed Redding, California as their place of residence. The next general election isn’t until 2012, and this Measure, if placed on a ballot, would normally coincide with the general election. It is unclear at this point if an earlier special election is being investigated.

Join Shasta VOICES today.

We depend on membership and other contributions.

If you are viewing this issue of “**THE VOICE**” on our website, click on the **membership tab** for information and to download a membership application or contributor form. Or, you can obtain more information by going to our website, **www.shastavoices.com**, or calling **(530) 222-5251**.

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