



# The VOICE

Your independent news source

Greater Shasta County, CA

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**Did you know...**

- The Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce Presents "Business Under the Big Top" Business & Health Expo 2009 on Saturday, June 27th, from 10:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m. at the Redding Convention Center. This will be an opportunity to explore the many businesses showcased, as well as to have an on-the-spot health screening provided by area Health Industry businesses.
- The City of Redding will have its 2009-2010 budget meeting on Thursday, June 11th at 9:00 a.m. in the City Council Chambers. Budget cuts are expected in all departments.
- The City of Redding has selected the former KMS building at 4712 Mountain Lakes Blvd. as the preferred retrofit candidate for a new police facility. They will now proceed to do an in-depth analysis in order to make an informed decision as to the best way to provide a new, affordable police facility, whether it be building a brand new building or the alternative retrofit building.

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## TEA PARTY REFUNDS, LLC

**Because it's your money!**

Whether it is water, garbage, traffic, building permits, sewers, telephones (the list goes into the thousands), government agencies at all levels, including cities, counties, state and federal, are taking every opportunity to squeeze higher and higher fees out of us all.

There is now a way to get back some of the hard earned money you have paid to the government for these fees. Tea Party Refunds, LLC is a new firm started by our own local expert attorney, Walt McNeill.

Walt McNeill and Tea Party Refunds, LLC have the expertise to cut through the bureaucratic double-speak that government agencies use to try to justify and conceal the illegal exaction of excessive fees. "Unless a fee has been specifically voted on and approved as a "tax," the laws require that the fee be no more than the reasonable cost of providing the service or product you get from the government."

Here's how Tea Party Refunds can help:

- Go to the website at [teapartyrefunds.com](http://teapartyrefunds.com).
- Check the "Pending Refund Recovery Cases" section of the website (which will be available in July, 2009).
- If you have paid a fee that is being challenged in one of those Cases, follow the directions you see there.
- You will make a full, complete, and irrevocable assignment of your refund claim to Tea Party Refunds, LLC.

That's all you do! There is **no charge** for attorney's fees, or anything else. Tea Party Refunds makes all the efforts to collect a refund of the illegal or excessive portion of your fee payment from the government agency that received it. This includes negotiations, mediation, and/or litigation to recover the money. So, their incentive is to do the best they can to recover as much as possible, for your benefit and theirs. If and when they do recover on the claim, you will receive no less than 50% of any monetary recovery, and Tea Party Refunds keeps the remainder for their efforts.

For the benefit of everyone who wants a refund, the company has designed a super-efficient web based model for pursuing refunds for large groups of assigned claims. This is explained in full on the website, along with other information:

**[teapartyrefunds.com](http://teapartyrefunds.com)**

What more could we ask for? This is a brilliant way to hire an expert attorney—without having to pay for it!

## *South Redding Six-Lane Project? (no longer "Fix 5" or SCRIP)*

On Tuesday, May 19, 2009, Cal Trans held a "Public Open House" at the Parsons Junior High School cafeteria to showcase their newest project, the South Redding Six-Lane Project. The what, you may ask? We will explain.

This project proposes adding a 12-foot lane, 10-foot shoulder and a cable barrier in the median in both the northbound and southbound directions on Interstate 5 (I-5). The project extends northbound from Bonneyview Road to just South of Lake Blvd., and southbound from the I-5/SR 44 interchange to Bonneyview Road. In plain English, this means they will add a third lane to both sides of I-5 on a six-mile stretch through central Redding. Sound familiar?

According to Cal Trans, this section of I-5 has the highest traffic volumes and the highest levels of congestion north of Woodland to the Oregon border. That is why only this 6 mile stretch of I-5 has been selected for expansion. They say this project will reduce congestion and enhance safety, it is currently funded through the environmental phase only, and is estimated to cost of \$25,700,000. The open house was held as part of the environmental impact review process to gather comments from the general public. Their target date to begin construction is 2013.

For the past 3 years, our local Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency (SCRTPA) spent the better part of \$500,000 trying to convince the general public (and elected officials) in the area that it was our responsibility to pay for such improvements, by proposing "Fix 5" and then SCRIP local impact fees. Apparently, the **Federal Government** doesn't feel that way. They are, in fact, providing the funding for federal highways that serve the entire nation.

And now, the SCRTPA, with the defeat of "Fix 5" and SCRIP, are hurriedly applying for available **federal funds** to pay for these improvements. The valid arguments presented by Shasta VOICES in defeating local impact fee programs are now being utilized by the SCRTPA to obtain funding from the very source that we continually have said **should** pay for such improvements! And we couldn't be happier.

Shasta VOICES has been asked for letters of support to send to our congressmen and senators as part of the application process to obtain the available Federal funds. We are thankful that our local and regional transportation agencies recognize that we stand behind our suggested solutions, and will do whatever we can to assist.

## *He Drank the Water!*

On May 13th, the City of Redding held a public meeting to provide property owners with an overview and answer questions relating to the pending Water, Wastewater, and Solid Waste Utility Rate Increases, as required by Proposition 218. This preceded the actual public hearing and subsequent vote by Council on May 19th to raise the rates as proposed.

Assistant City Manager Barry Tippin presented 65 slides to illustrate why it was necessary to increase these user rates. There were only 5 people in attendance, including yours truly (Mary Machado). Of particular interest was the fact that the City has continually raised rates over the years, saying they need more money to replace aging pipes and improve water quality, yet never seem to fix anything unless it actually breaks.

To illustrate this, Mary brought a jar of tap water from a home in the Enterprise area, which is serviced by aging wells. The water was almost orange in color, and had debris floating in it. She wanted to know when the persistent water quality problems coming from the wells would be fixed. Mr. Tippin agreed that improvements such as well-head filtration systems needed to be done, but said the problem was "aesthetic" and the water was perfectly safe. When asked if he would drink that jar of water, he not only said he would, but he actually did! He drank the tainted water, and continued on with his presentation without missing a beat, explaining that there isn't enough money to make all the improvements necessary, and they must prioritize by putting the most pressing needs first. And he lived through the night, without incident. Now, that's a response not soon to be forgotten!

But at the actual public hearing on May 19th, there was no public outcry to keep rates from increasing. Of the 33,000 property owners and customers who had an opportunity to vote "no" on the proposed increases, only about 1,800 did so. Therefore, beginning on or about July 1, 2009, utility rates in the City of Redding will increase by about \$5.00 per month for the average homeowner, and an equally proportional increase to commercial users. Local Attorney Walt McNeill did an eye-opening presentation that showed just how high this increase really was (**25% over 3 years**), how much actual additional revenue would be collected (**\$160 million**), spoke to the questionable use of late fee charges, and the disclosure that approximately 25% of the rate increases are devoted to capital improvements that will expand the utility infrastructure to serve future customers and new development, rather than the existing rate payers.

Is anybody out there paying attention? We more than likely have not heard the end of this story yet.

## *Who and What is TANC and TPP? And why the public outrage?*

The Transmission Agency of Northern California (TANC) is a joint powers transmission agency comprised of publicly-owned (not-for-profit) electric utilities in northern California, formed in 1984 to plan, develop, finance, construct, and operate electric transmission projects.

TANC members include the City of Alameda, City of Biggs, City of Gridley, City of Healdsburg, City of Lodi, City of Lompoc, Modesto Irrigation District, City of Palo Alto, **City of Redding**, City of Roseville, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, City of Santa Clara, Turlock Irrigation District, City of Ukiah, and Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative.

TANC is proposing what they refer to as the TANC Transmission Project (TPP). This involves building and upgrading about 600 miles of high-voltage electric transmission lines and substations in northern California. They say it would increase California's electric system reliability and provide increased access to local California-based renewable energy resources, and that it would improve the state's transmission system.

The problem is that there are **6,200** property owners in the path of the proposed new high-voltage transmission lines, and they are outraged at the prospect of losing their properties to eminent domain, diminished property values, diminished land use, loss of homes, health issues caused by electro-magnetic fields, ruined views, loss of the area's aesthetic beauty, and a multitude of negative effects on the natural environment.

The preliminary project transmission line routes, which seem to change weekly causing even more distress, run through primarily rural areas including Round Mountain, Cottonwood, Olinda, and rural Tehama County.

Each of the public scoping meetings held so far have packed the rooms with outraged property owners who will be negatively affected by this project. There is an official public comment period, which has been extended through July 30, 2009 because so many people have come forward to make their feelings known. They want to know how to stop this project, or at least consider alternatives, when they are up against such a large coalition of government agencies, including TANC, the US Department of Energy, and the Western Area Power Administration.

Here is a case where the Environmental Review Process could actually *help* the 6,200 property owners, once they learn to utilize the process as it is intended. Under both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), anyone can assess the potential impacts of the proposed project and send **written comments** that must be included in the Draft and Final EIR report. Reasonable **alternatives** that could reduce or avoid environmental impacts, including **human** environment, must be analyzed and documented in the Draft and Final EIR report. These documents have to be approved, and there is an opportunity to present your alternatives.

If the affected property owners could gain consensus and submit a reasonable alternative to the proposed plan that would accomplish the stated goals of the project without the devastating environmental impact, it would definitely be considered and more than likely approved. Is this an easy task? Absolutely not. Is it doable? Absolutely yes. If the passion and emotion we have witnessed so far is poured into finding an alternative solution that works for everybody, the "alterative task" would be accomplished before any new transmission lines are constructed or designed.

The proposed timetable for the EIR process (and beyond) looks like this:

1. Public scoping through July 30, 2009.
2. Draft Environmental Impact Review document—Spring 2010.
3. Draft EIR public comment period—Summer 2010.
4. Final EIR document issued—Spring 2011.
5. NEPA Record of Decision and TANC Commission Decision—Fall 2011.
6. Secure easements and rights of way—2011-2013.
7. Conduct preconstruction surveys, obtain permits—2011-2013.
8. Begin construction—2013.
9. Targeted in-service date—2014

How can you get involved? You can learn more about the overall project at the TANC website: [www.tanc.us](http://www.tanc.us). There are several other websites offering more information: [www.stoptanc.com](http://www.stoptanc.com); [www.antitanc.com](http://www.antitanc.com); [www.tuleyomne.org](http://www.tuleyomne.org); [www.noptpp.org](http://www.noptpp.org); [www.sencal.org](http://www.sencal.org); and <http://www.aspengooglemaps.com/TTP/Final/ttpadd1.php> to see where the path of the transmission line will be. But more importantly, **send your written comments** by letter, fax or email to:

Mr. David Young, NEPA Document Manager, Western Power Administration, Sierra Nevada Region: 114 Parkshore Drive, Folsom, CA, 95630. Fax: (916) 353-4772; Email: TTPEIS@wapa.gov.

## ***Privatization of Public Services Subject of Shasta VOICES Study***

What is privatization? How does it work? Does privatization of public services save taxpayer dollars? Can private companies make more efficient use of public funds and eliminate waste? What are the pros and cons of privatizing in Shasta County? Do our government and elected officials support the idea?

These and many other questions will be explored in a new study being conducted by Shasta VOICES.

Privatization, the process of private, for-profit businesses taking over the provision of public services, has been the subject of much debate these days. In the last two decades, public employers have expanded their use of the private sector to deliver public services.

Types of government contracts that have been privatized include prisons, water utilities, trash collection, clerical jobs, food service, information systems jobs, job placement for welfare recipients, libraries, and fire services. Both political and economic situations at many levels of government have aided privatization efforts.

There are plenty of differing opinions on privatization of public services. Most of what we hear about such efforts is that privatizing is good. But there are many who do not feel this way, including organized labor, who generally believe that assumptions of cost savings are not accurate, and that privatization undermines organized labor and worsens the outlook for the public sector.

The Shasta VOICES study will take a look at some of the most commonly held beliefs about privatizing public services. It will focus on privatization issues in the Shasta County area. It will be an informative, educational, and all-inclusive view of the benefits and/or pitfalls of privatizing public services in the Shasta County area.

The study will be conducted over the next 2 months, with the final report targeted for late August, 2009.

## ***Good News and Notes...***

There are some very **good** things happening around us, in the midst of all the economic recession news:

- The City of Redding has received about \$1,475,000 from FAA Grants and Economic Stimulus Funds to pay for a remodel project of the ***Municipal Airport Terminal***. This includes the replacement and repair of roofing and eaves, gypsum board, kitchen exhaust fan, HVAC controls, AC tiles, HVAC units, painting, electrical work and other miscellaneous work. The building is 28 years old and in need of these repairs. The project bid process has been completed and ***awarded to a local firm*** (J.H. Mack Construction), creating much needed jobs in the area. This is our first area "stimulus" construction project to begin!
- The City Council has approved a plan to ***defer the annual inflation increases of traffic impact fees*** for approximately six months, and for changing the annual date of all future increases (or decreases) to January 15th each year for these fees as well as for storm drainage impact fees. These two fee adjustments will now coincide with all other impact fee adjustments on January 15th each year. This will simplify the process of costing out a project and provide an accurate financial picture for those who are planning to build. Perhaps before January of 2010, the CCI will be less than it is now, reducing the percentage of increase from the current 5.3%. Let's hope!
- Obtaining about \$893,000 from federal stimulus funds is in process to create a weatherization program in the Redding and Shasta County area. The money would be used to ***train, educate, and hire local people*** to install energy-efficient measures in 200-300 qualifying homes. Once installed, these measures will save the homeowners many dollars in future utility bills. The Shasta Builders Exchange is partnering with the City of Redding to bring this program forward.
- The Shasta VOICES "***Public Pension Forum***" has been tentatively scheduled for September 24, 2009. Stay tuned for more details in our next issue!

***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](http://www.shastavoices.com)**, or calling **(530) 222-5251**.

Mary B. Machado, Executive Director