



The VOICE

Your independent news source

Greater Shasta County, CA

Volume III, Issue XI

www.shastavoices.com

April 2010

Did you know...

- On April 9th, Redding officials cut the ceremonial ribbon at **Stillwater Business Park**, as the first phase of the project is completed. Phase I represents more than 10 years of planning, construction delays, and a cost of \$20.7 million.
- There were **15 building permits for new single family units** in the City of Redding for the month of March, 2010. The year to date total number of single family permits is 25, a **19% increase** over the same period last year.
- On **April 27, 2010**, there will be a Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency (SCRTPA) meeting at **4:00 pm** at the **City of Redding Council Chambers**. One of the many items on the agenda is an informational meeting about a regional **greenhouse gas emission target setting workshop** and **“sustainable communities strategy.”** Anyone who drives a car or small truck should participate in these discussions.

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Google-Eyed in Redding

Since announcing their plans to build experimental, ultra-high speed broadband networks in interested communities of at least 50,000 and potentially up to 500,000 people on February 10, Google has received a tremendous response.

Redding is now officially **one of 1,100** communities that have expressed their interest in the project by completing Google’s “Request for Information” application by the March 26, 2010 deadline. More than 190,000 individual nominations from across the country were sent to express their interest in the project, including many from the Redding area.

Google is displaying a map on its website that shows where the responses were concentrated. Each small dot represents a government response (and Redding is one of them), and each large dot represents locations where more than 1,000 residents submitted a nomination (Redding is not one of them...yet). Google plans to share a complete list of government responses soon.

An all-out local effort, spearheaded by the Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce in support of the City of Redding, took place to develop community support for the Google project from March 11th through the deadline of March 26th. Mary Machado and Jim Zauher coordinated the community engagement portion of the application process, which was every bit as important to Google as the official City application. They are seeking local support to use this ultra-speed internet and demonstrate just how it could transform this community.

The result of this effort was an **outpouring of support** that included the County of Shasta and all the cities in Shasta County, all 27 school districts, 200 local non-profit organizations, all Redding Rotary groups, Shasta VOICES, Mercy Medical Center, Shasta Regional Medical Center, Simpson University, Shasta College, MD Imaging, Shasta EDC, MGMA (doctors), Shasta Builders Exchange, Chamber of Commerce, Shasta Technology Association, Shasta Association of Realtors, Smart Center, CHP Patriot Guard Riders, Redding Tea Party Patriots, Turtle Bay Members and Friends, and multitudes of others.

A special **Facebook** page was created and hosted by Shasta.com that allows for individuals to sign up as fans and post comments (positive please!). People can continue to access that site and support the project: www.facebook.com/pages/Bring-Google-Fiber-to-Redding/376136385835?ref=ss.

A creative, fun, silly and highly memorable YouTube video was put together by Sabrina Morgan of Morgan Telecom at our local Need 2 Speed Raceway. Thousands of people have viewed the video already. It can be accessed from the Facebook page or from here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up1u8cj-SE8&feature=channel.

Through this all-out two-week effort, public awareness of the project increased to a level rarely seen in Redding. The community now has a better understanding of the importance of broadband for our future competitiveness. Even if we are not chosen as a Google test city, our hope is that we will continue efforts to expand our high-speed infrastructure in Redding.

If one message has come through loud and clear, according to Google, it’s this: people across the country are hungry for better and faster internet access.

Square Peg, Round Hole, Big Hammer... **Convention Center and CVB Update**

On March 23rd, the Community Service Advisory Commission (CSAC) voted to complete work on an official recommendation to the Redding City Council on how to improve the financial condition and improve the operational efficiency of the Redding Convention Center. After nine months of studying, meeting, receiving public testimony, exploring privatization, and evaluating all options, they are ready to make final recommendations.

Action was already taken at their last meeting to recommend merging the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) with Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association (SCWA), a private non-profit organization. This privatization will save the City as much as \$200,000 per year, while maintaining a high standard of tourism promotion. The CVB and SCWA serve a similar purpose. The CVB is primarily responsible for marketing Redding. The SCWA is responsible for marketing the region. The City's Tourism Officer also serves as the General Manager of the SCWA. Therefore, it may not be difficult to consolidate the two. The City would close the CVB and contract directly with SCWA for this service. Steve Gaines, President of the SCWA and as Chairman of the Redding Hospitality Group, addressed the Commission in strong support of this consolidation. His groups also support partnering with Turtle Bay for marketing and visitor services.

The Commission further recommended that a performance-based contract be negotiated between the City and SCWA to ensure proper funding levels and a proper maintenance of effort in specifically marketing Redding and its attractions. The Council voted 4-1 to accept the merger and contract recommendations, adding that they supported the inclusion of a Turtle Bay marketing partnership. The contract would be funded entirely from TOT (hotel) taxes.

Privatizing the Convention Center, however, has proven *not* to be an option. This conclusion was reached after efforts to attract a company interested in managing the Convention Center failed. Therefore, both a short-term and long-term strategy to maximize revenues and the overall operational effectiveness of this important community amenity will be completed and presented to the City Council as early as April 20th.

Among the findings during these last nine months: Both for-profit and non-profit groups who testified praised the work of staff and recognized that the rate structure may have to be adjusted upward. The current rate structure is not adequate to cover operating expenditures. Part of the economic challenge of the Convention Center is a debt burden of \$573,134 to outside sources and \$1,621,260 in internal loans. Approximately \$2.5 million worth of capital improvement expenditures will have to be made over the next ten years. Marketing opportunities exist that staff has not yet pursued. There is no other venue of equal size or capability (2072 seating capacity) that can offer the variety of uses for the community.

The short-term suggestion is to implement a new marketing plan, and increase the fees by 25% for both for-profit and non-profit groups. Some of the needed repairs will be done by capable in-house staff members. CSAC refers to these recommendations as "band-aids" that will offer a workable solution for the next 2-3 years. The remaining capital improvements will become part of a new long-term plan to be implemented over the next 10 years. This could include a scheduled shut-down for necessary maintenance and repairs to be made (with plenty of advance notice to any and all users of the facility).

The Commissioners have gone through the painful process of performing an in-depth study and making a recommendation to reduce the Convention Center and CVB budget deficits and dependency on Transient Occupancy Tax. It has taken more than nine months and perhaps a dozen public meetings. Nobody ever said it would be an easy task, but they deserve a standing ovation for their efforts! Square peg, round hole, big hammer...an accurate description.

Public Works Projects Keep Local Contractors Busy

There is a glimmer of light in the midst of this dark recession in Shasta County. A multitude of public works projects are getting started, with local contractors winning the bids to do the work.

The most significant project is the Cottonwood Hills Truck Climbing Lanes, which will add lanes in both directions on I-5 from around the Gas Point Road intersection to the Deschutes Road interchange in Anderson. Local contractor Tullis, Inc. was the winning bidder. Thirteen other local subcontractors will also be doing work on this project.

Other significant projects include construction of the Mary Street lift station, a roundabout at Shasta View Drive and Old Alturas Road, improvements to Buenaventura Blvd. at Hwy. 273, the Clear Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant Phase 6, and later this summer, the Stillwater Treatment Plant.

Another major project that will be officially put out for bid on April 22nd is the construction of the first phase of the Oasis Road Interchange improvements. These include constructing a loop on-ramp and retaining wall, with traffic signals that should be working later this fall.

Unilateral Implementation Imposed After 60 meetings, No Agreement

A historical meeting took place in Redding on March 15th. After more than 60 meetings between City management and labor negotiators for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1245 (IBEW), an impasse was declared. They were not able to reach an agreement on a new contract for the employees in this bargaining unit who work for the City of Redding after 18 months of negotiations.

The City Council chambers was packed with everyday citizens and city workers for the first **public** impasse hearing ever held here. Nobody really knew what to expect.

The IBEW contract with the City of Redding had expired in August, 2008. The general public seemed surprised to learn that this impasse occurred over seemingly minor changes (at least to the average citizen) to the expired contract.

At issue were requested changes by the City that would help address serious financial issues, not only during this unprecedented Great Recession, but in the future.

The initial requested changes (that were at issue) were to have these employees pay 10% of their health insurance premiums (offset by an additional \$.078 hourly wage increase), increase their co-pay for generic drugs from \$7.50 per prescription to \$10.00 per prescription, and change the health insurance retirement benefit for employees hired in the future (they would pay 100% of their retiree health insurance premium upon retiring, rather than the current 50%). This is commonly referred to as a “*two-tiered*” system). Other City employee unions have already made these concessions.

To the average citizen, these seem to be reasonable re-

quests, and should not take 18 months and over 60 meetings to discuss. But to the IBEW, this was not acceptable.

At the March 15th hearing, the IBEW agreed to pay the 10% of their health insurance premiums and the \$10.00 co-pay for their prescriptions. They still, however, refused to accept the two-tiered system for future hires.

Since the IBEW consistently and vehemently rejected a two-tier system that would **not** have affected any existing employees, the City proposed a modification to the retiree health care benefit for *current* and new IBEW employees that would give 2% credit for each year of service, not to exceed 50%, with a 5-year vesting requirement.

The IBEW had counter-proposed that any **newly** hired IBEW employees would vest at the rate of 2.5% for each year of service up to a maximum of 50%, with a 10 year vesting requirement. The City would not agree to this version of a vesting schedule, based in large part on the vehement objections of IBEW over the past 18 months to such a two-tier system.

Therefore, after 18 months of failed negotiations, a public impasse hearing was held. After again failing to come to an agreement, the City Council imposed their Last, Best and Final Offer, which is referred to as a “unilateral implementation.” This includes a 3% general wage increase, equity adjustments for certain classifications (more raises), and the health insurance modifications presented by the City.

The City will experience a one-time decrease of \$572,000 in accrued liability for future retiree health insurance, and an ongoing decrease of \$260,000 to the City’s normal cost for future retiree health care with this contract.

Council Commends Mayor For Trip to Washington D.C.

City of Redding Mayor Patrick Jones took 3 days off work in March and flew back to Washington D.C. at his own expense to lobby on behalf of the City for federal funding to expand the Oasis Road/Interstate 5 interchange, which is the City’s top priority for infrastructure improvements. This interchange was built 40 years ago, and has had no improvements made to it since it was built. Approved subdivisions and other mixed-use projects cannot go forward without improvements to this interchange.

This interchange also leads to the last open freeway frontage in the city limits, and is Redding’s last hope to retain its advantage as the north state’s retail hub in the future, as the major chains battle for position along the interstates and other large travel corridors.

Controversy surrounded this trip because Jones was invited by developer Don Levenson (who wants to build one of those retail centers here), who offered to pay for it. But after learning that this was against FPPC regulations, Jones promptly paid for his own trip. He met with 13 people in D.C., including Senators Boxer and Feinstein, and several transportation officials. Senator Feinstein expressed support for the City of Redding, and a desire to help. She requested that the Mayor submit a \$5 million appropriations request for inclusion in the 2011 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill, to be used to fund project development activities associated with Phase 2 of the Oasis Road Interchange reconstruction project. Phase 1 construction will commence this June, funded with federal stimulus monies.

On April 6th, the Council commended Mayor Jones for his efforts, and voted to authorize the request for this no-strings-attached \$5 million in funding. Appropriate letters of request will now be sent immediately.

Positive News, Notes, and Updates

Shasta VOICES continually tracks many issues that affect economic opportunity in the area. Here is a progress report on some of the issues we have been following:

- Need a new car? Now is the time to buy it, and Redding is the place. Another “Radical 10 in 10” idea has moved forward. The Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce and local new car dealers are sponsoring the **“Buy a New Car or Truck in Redding”** campaign. This special promotion is designed to stimulate sales and encourage individuals to purchase their new cars and trucks in Redding. The campaign officially kicks off on May 1st. Anybody who goes to a new car dealership in Redding to purchase a new car will be eligible to enter a drawing for a **\$10,000.00 cash prize**. The winner will be drawn and announced on Labor Day, 2010. The funds for this prize were contributed by each of the new car dealers in Redding, the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Redding, and each of the 10 “Radical” committee members. Look for more details and promotion starting on May 1st!
- **Commercial building incentives** to support commercial construction activity in 2010 have been **expanded** and enacted by Redding City Council. Back in June of 2008, incentives to stimulate residential construction activity were enacted. At that time, Shasta VOICES suggested that similar incentives should be offered to also stimulate commercial building activity. In 2009, the City did enact a partial commercial incentive in the form of a deferral of water and sewer impact fees. Because banks are rarely lending these days, our suggestions were to provide more flexibility in the permit and impact fee programs, such as deferring impact fee collections and reassessing traffic impact fees. Allowing these fees to be paid at time of final occupancy, rather than up front, would allow many commercial projects to move forward without having to gain additional bank financing for their project. So, on April 6th, the Council approved these recommendations presented by staff, which will provide more flexible cash flow and financing options for commercial project:
 1. Continuing a deferral payment program of water and wastewater impact fees in Redevelopment areas.
 2. Phased collection of traffic impact fees, requiring only 25% of the fee to be collected at time of permit issuance, and the remaining 75% of the fee would be due prior to occupancy.
 3. Allow collection of traffic impact fees at time of issuance of tenant improvement permits for commercial shell buildings.
 4. Grant an additional six-month extension to the life of all building permits and applications that are currently active.
- **South Redding Six-Lane Project Update:** The Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency (SCRTPA) has been aggressively pursuing available transportation funds from the State and Federal governments to add an additional lane in each direction on I-5 in Redding from just south of the Bonneyview interchange to the Lake Boulevard exit. Shasta VOICES has been supporting this effort, having suggested such an effort during the “Fix 5” and “SCRIP” hearings. It appears that the **full design and construction costs** for expanding this stretch of I-5 may, in fact, be funded by one of the available State and Federal programs. Thanks go out to Dan Little, Executive Director of the SCRTPA, whose persistence and expertise in obtaining these funds will ultimately make this future improvement to the freeway a reality, benefiting all who drive I-5.

Join Shasta VOICES today.

We depend on membership and other contributions.

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