



The VOICE

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Greater Shasta County, CA

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Did you know...

- The recession is starving the federal government of tax revenue, just as the President and Congress are piling a major expansion of health care and other programs on the nation's plate and struggling to find money to pay the tab. Tax receipts are on pace to drop 18 percent this year, the biggest decline since the Great Depression. Individual income tax receipts are down 22 percent from one year ago, and corporate income taxes are down 57 percent. Social Security tax receipts could drop for only the second time since 1940.
- "Homeless Across America" and the Redding/Shasta County Alliance for the homeless have opened a shelter with all services in one building. Located at 4001 Eastside Road, this large commercial building will be used as a year-round shelter and job training center, and a "Safe Parking Lot" with program rooms for men and women with children, rooms for domestic violence victims, and a day-time center.

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Public Pension Forum Tickets Now Available

Don't delay! Tickets for the upcoming Shasta VOICES annual event, a "**Public Pension Forum**," are now available for purchase. The event will be held on Thursday, **September 24, 2009**. Lunch will be provided, and we will be eating as we listen and learn to maximize time spent with our featured panelists. Here are the details:

SHASTA VOICES PUBLIC PENSION FORUM

A Working Lunch (food included)

Date: **Thursday, September 24, 2009**

Time: **11:30 am—1:30 pm**

Location: **Holiday Inn, Redding
1900 Hilltop Drive, Redding, CA 96002**

Featured Panelists:

- Gene Bell** (Becker and Bell Consultants) - Union Negotiator for Shasta County
- Marcia Fritz** (her representatives) from the CFFR
- Ed Bond** (Ed Bond Consulting) - Private Sector Pension expert
- Chris Darker** (UPEC, Joint Council of Redding Employees Union)
- Larry Lees** (CAO for Shasta County)
- Kurt Starman** (City Manager, City of Redding)

The purpose of the forum is foster a better understanding of public pension systems, and provide an opportunity for open discussion.

Ticket Information

\$25 each or \$250 to reserve an "up front" table (seats 8 people)

Tickets must be purchased in advance.

To secure your tickets, contact:

Mary Machado

Phone: (530) 222-5251

Email: mary@shastavoices.com

Please note: There will be no tickets sold at the door. Seating is limited.

This forum is particularly timely to address issues that our local cities and the County are currently struggling with. At the Redding City Council meeting held on August 4th for instance, the Council voted 3-2 to implement a **new policy** to **cap** all general fund personnel costs (which include all salaries and benefits) to an amount **not to exceed 73 percent** of the total general fund budget. While this percentage still seems high, it forces the City to look at alternative ways to provide public employee benefits, and remain fiscally responsible to its taxpaying citizens.

Perhaps this Forum will serve as the catalyst for a long needed overhaul of the existing pension and benefit systems, which have proven to be unsustainable.

Privatization Controversy Erupts Shasta VOICES Study to be Released End of August

At the Redding City Council meeting on August 4th, the controversial appointment by Councilman Dick Dickerson of Ken Murray to the newly formed Privatization Committee was discussed. The issue centered around consulting services that Mr. Murray has been providing to the IBEW union for the past few months. Councilors and staff agreed that this creates a conflict of interest in determining if the Redding Electric Utility (REU) is a candidate for privatization. Mr. Dickerson didn't agree, and refused to remove his appointee from the committee, who will not begin meeting until August 17th. Other councilors felt that Mr. Murray needs to choose one or the other to represent, and were not comfortable that he would be objective in his study of this particular department. The other appointees include Dave McGeorge (by Bosetti), Marie Whitacre (by Jones), John Gorman (by McArthur), and Peggy O'Lea (by Stegall).

Mr. Dickerson further opined that privatization of the REU is "off the table" as far as he is concerned. The committee has not even begun their work, and he has already tainted the process and undermined the committee's work with such a statement. It speaks volumes as to why the issue of privatization has not been pursued in the past.

Shasta VOICES, on the other hand, after about four months of research, will be releasing the "***Privatization of Public Services***" study at the end of August. This inclusive study defines the various types of privatization, explains how the process works, and addresses the pros and cons of privatizing public services locally through the words of our City and County Managers and elected officials, the public employee union leaders, and the business and community at large. An official statement of release will be forthcoming when the Study is finalized.

Assessed Value of Local Properties Questioned

Throughout the month of July, 2009, Shasta County property owners were mailed "Notification of 2009-2010 Assessed Value Change" letters from the Shasta County Assessor's office.

Many property owners are questioning the new 2009-2010 assessed value amount, and are looking for a reduction. When they contact the Assessor's office, they are told that it is too late to appeal last year's tax valuation, but that the Assessor's office would look into the value for next year to make any changes needed. Most property owners are not familiar with the appeal process, nor the system or deadlines to appeal. Here is information that should be useful to all those questioning their assessed values and looking for an opportunity to appeal the assessment (*taken from the Shasta County Assessor's Office website*).

The first step when questioning your assessed value would be to contact the Assessor's office at **(530) 225-3600** and request an ***informal review*** of your property. You may wish to file this "Request for Review" of the property before filing an official Appeals Application.

To determine an estimate of a property's market value, arm's length comparable sales are used. However, it is important to consider the circumstances of such sales—perhaps the seller was desperate to "unload" the home, or the buyer paid much more than the asking price because there were other interested parties. Market value and sales price are not always the same.

Once you have determined that you want to file an appeal, you must file the ***assessment appeal application*** with the Clerk of the Board no later than ***November 30th*** of each year. The necessary forms are available from the ***Clerk of the Board, 1450 Court Street, Suite 308B, Redding, (530) 225-5550***. The application must contain your opinion of value of the property. It must also contain the facts relied upon to support your claim for a reduction in value. If you are being represented by an agent other than an attorney, you must sign the authorization section of the application. You will be notified a minimum of 45 days before the hearings, of the time and place scheduled for your appeal. You or your authorized agent must be present at the hearing or the application will be denied for non-appearance.

Assessment appeals hearings are conducted by a Board composed of three members of the community, appointed by the Shasta County Board of Supervisors. The function of the AAB is to determine the taxable value of property based on evidence presented at the hearing by the Assessor and the applicant. The AAB acts in a judicial capacity and, therefore, must render its decision based solely upon facts presented. It is bound by the same principles of valuation that are legally applicable to the Assessor. Acting on evidence presented at the hearing, the AAB will determine the taxable value of the property. The decision may be given at the conclusion of the hearing, or taken under submission, in which case you will be notified of the decision in writing.

Despite the fact that you have filed an application for reduction, you are still obligated to pay your property taxes on the disputed value when taxes are due. If you are granted a reduction through the appeals process, you will receive a refund of any taxes overpaid. If you do not pay your taxes when due, late payment penalties and interest can be applied.

Economic Stimulus Funds Causing Quite a Stir Locally

President Obama's Economic Stimulus package, referred to officially as the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), has made available federal funds for a variety of transportation projects throughout the nation. Shasta County is no exception. So far, approximately **\$25 million** in ARRA funds has been given to Shasta County area projects. Here is a list of transportation projects funded so far:

- Shasta County: 37 miles of road maintenance projects, \$2.6 million (J.F. Shea Construction, Inc. awarded bid)
- City of Anderson: road pavement projects, \$400,000
- City of Shasta Lake: road pavement projects, \$400,000
- City of Redding: I-5/Oasis Road Interchange Reconstruction Project, \$2.6 million
- Cal Trans: Widen SR 44 at Viola, \$6.6 million
- Regional Transit Project: \$2 million for additional buses for RABA
- Lassen Park: Rehab roads, \$9.3 million
- College View Bike Lanes: \$200,000

There are many other "pots of money" available through the ARRA program. This is creating a tremendous amount of competition between cities and counties throughout the nation, the State, and locally.

Within ARRA, there is a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program for highway, bridges, port, rail, and transit projects. It is project specific, and is looking for candidates that have project costs of \$20 million or more. Applications are due to the U.S. DOT September 15, 2009. There appears to be about \$1.5 billion available nationwide for this program. California's share would be up to \$300 million. Caltrans will be conducting an interim process to winnow all TIGER candidates in the State down to a handful of projects.

And, this is where the local controversy begins. By way of background, the Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency (SCRTPA) previously submitted the South Redding Six Lane project for *another* type of funding (*not stimulus funds*) called Federal High Priority Funding (HPP) in the amount of \$22 million. This is the project that will widen I-5 to six lanes from Bonneyview Road to the SR 44/Lake Boulevard interchange, a stretch of 6 miles. The Six Lane project was officially nominated in July, 2009, by Congressman Wally Herger for these funds over any other local projects. These funds would be distributed over six years. Even though it appears that funding has been identified for this project through the HPP program, and the local share of gas tax revenues will be used for this project in addition, the SCRTPA is *also* submitting it for TIGER grant funding.

The City of Anderson and the City of Redding are both submitting TIGER projects for funding. Their projects are in direct competition with the Six Lane project being submitted by their own Regional Planning Agency. Anderson's project is the I-5/Deschutes Interchange Improvement project, and Redding's is the I-5/Oasis Road Interchange Reconstruction project.

The purpose of the ARRA program is to give priority to projects that are expected to quickly create and preserve jobs and stimulate rapid increases in economic activity, particularly **jobs that benefit economically distressed areas**. More weight will be given to the long-term outcomes and job creation criteria, and projects that are unable to demonstrate a likelihood of **significant long-term job gains** beyond the construction phase are less likely to be successful.

The SCRTPA is suggesting that the top priority to create long-term jobs in the Shasta County Region is the Six Lane project. It is difficult to see any long-term jobs created beyond the construction phase. But, both the Anderson and Redding projects can clearly demonstrate the creation of long-term jobs because of the public improvements to be made. Logic would say those are the projects that the region should support for this particular **stimulus** funding.

The SCRTPA Board of Directors consists of three County Supervisors, two Redding City Council members, and one City Council member each from Anderson and Shasta Lake. To say that they can be "conflicted" in their decision-making process is, at best, an understatement. They voted as a Regional Board to submit the South Redding Six Lane project as their top priority project for TIGER funding. After much controversial discussion with the cities of Anderson and Redding, they also agreed to send letters of support for their projects as well.

Shasta FORWARD Project Marches On

The Shasta FORWARD project that we have been monitoring and reporting on over the past two years or so is getting closer to completion, \$715,000 in grant money later.

What's left is to bring the Shasta County Regional Transportation Agency (SCRTPA) Board approved "alternative scenarios and modeling outputs" to the public for their review and a **voting period** to select a "preferred regional growth vision" for the year 2050.

If this sounds like a mouthful, it is. As a matter of fact, the voting "brochure" is so complex that the average person will have a difficult time even understanding what they are supposed to do with it. But hey, this is nothing new.

To simplify, for those of you who prefer to actually understand why they are doing this, your regional transportation staff is trying to use this project as a "tool" to provide input to the elected officials and land use planners in Shasta County. The "input" is supposed to demonstrate the view and general consensus of the public when it comes to transportation issues having to do with new growth and development through the year 2050. The local cities and the County already have planning processes in place to address these issues, so this "project" will do nothing to change that. But, the SCRTPA plans to use this "tool" as an attempt to change the way decisions are made. For some reason, they believe that if they can generate a response from just 3,500 of all the 180,000 residents in Shasta County, it will be representative of the views of all of the general public, and should be enough to literally change the way our community develops in the future. The assumption is that people living here do not like our community the way it is.

What is supposed to happen is that the SCRTPA will print 37,000 brochures, which will serve as the voting form. The voting period will be for 5 weeks beginning in late August and ending on September 30th. Most brochures will be inserted in the newspaper. Some will be located at the libraries and other public access points. There will be an electronic version that can be accessed on the Shasta FORWARD website. KIXE Channel 9 will air a television special on the subject matter during the 5 week voting period. Open houses will be scheduled to try to explain the brochure to those who choose to vote. The hope is that perhaps collectively, people will feel comfortable participating in the vote. At this point, the Shasta FORWARD staff are not sure how many actual votes they will end up with. A wrap-up meeting with the results and recommendations will be held after the voting is completed, and may not occur until 2010.

In reviewing the voting brochure at the SCRTPA Board meeting held on July 28th, Shasta County Supervisor Les Baugh noted that it was a pretty brochure, but was designed with a specific outcome in mind. The questions asked were **predetermined for a specific response**. He said that the way the scenarios are laid out, the implication is that the world is going to fall apart if you choose this. He did some research and googled several other blueprint planning scenarios on line. What he found is that they had the exact same scenarios with the exact same responses to choose from. He has no faith in the process that has occurred. He said he would offer a public apology if, in fact, the current trend is chosen. He was the only member of the Board of the SCRTPA to vote an emphatic "NO" on moving this project forward.

Having studied this project and participated in the process for over 2 years, it is difficult not to agree with Les Baugh.

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**.

Mary B. Machado, Executive Director