



The VOICE

Your independent news source

Greater Shasta County, CA

Volume IV, Issue XIX

www.shastavoices.com

February 2011

Did you know...

- The Cypress Avenue Bridge Replacement Project is complete. It took 3 years and \$62 million. The new bridge has a 70 year designed life and includes 8 foot shoulders, 8 foot sidewalks, a Vista Point, bike lanes, and a staircase from Cypress Avenue down to Park Marina Drive. A total of \$2.7 million was spent on soffits, decks and the "lanterns" that light the bridge at night, as well as for other aesthetics.
- Last year, lawmakers replaced California's 6% sales tax on gasoline with an excise tax of 17.3 cents per gallon. But Prop 26, which voters passed last November, requires all tax changes approved in 2010 to pass with a two-thirds vote within a year. Officials now believe they need to pass the gas-tax swap again, or else it will be null and void in November.

Inside this issue:

That Elusive Parks Maintenance RFP	1
To Charter or Not To Charter Committee Update	2
Media Missed the Mark on REU Lawsuit Story	2
Knighton Road-Churn Creek Development Delayed	3
Funding Sought for SCS	3
South Redding Six-Lane Project Update	4
Pension Reform Proposals in Process	4

That Elusive Parks Maintenance RFP

At a marathon Redding City Council meeting on December 7, 2010, as the clock struck midnight, a majority of Council members directed the Parks Maintenance staff to work with members of the Community Services Advisory Commission (CSAC) to choose 4 or 5 neighborhood City parks and produce a Request for Proposal or Quotation (RFP or RFQ) from as many private firms as possible to perform basic landscape maintenance functions such as grass mowing, leaf blowing, shrub pruning, and trash collection.

Fast forward to the CSAC meeting of February 9, 2011. With only three of the five commissioners in attendance, Community Services Department Director Kim Niemer once again made a report on the subject of the Parks Maintenance RFP. And once again, the process of creating this seemingly elusive RFP has been corrupted.

Apparently, staff felt the need to "delineate a scope of work for the RFP that would be appropriate for contracted work and that could result in labor savings. Through this process, it was determined that four neighborhood park sites would be an insufficient number of parks to bid out as it would not have an impact on labor costs. Staff will include 30 sites in the RFP, the workload of a full-time temporary worker." Kim Niemer went on to say that since there would be no promise of a contract award, this would be prepared as an "informational" RFP only.

In addition, "staff will provide the budget available for the work described in the RFP document." That is government speak for "don't bother to respond unless you can beat this number." Even our Mayor, who was in attendance at this meeting, raised an eyebrow at that one. It remains to be seen if this dollar amount will or will not appear.

The only person from the general public in attendance, not counting the Mayor and some City staffers, was yours truly...Mary Machado. Someone had to bring the questions from the community forward, and bring them I did. How did we get from the Council directed RFP to this? Why does staff keep referring to their ability to hire temporary workers for less, when their history shows otherwise (I did have documentation in hand)? Why is the staff making assumptions on what the private sector can and can't do? How do they know whether or not the private sector can have a positive impact on labor costs without having asked them first? Why do they feel that the only area where an outside contractor might be considered is for extra help during the summer season? Apparently, staff has already made such determinations, and feels that this whole RFP process is unnecessary. The only answers to my questions were that staff has studied this very carefully to come up with their conclusions. The Commissioners had no answers, and no questions for staff.

And once again, Kim Niemer insisted that "staff" is the final authority for preparing an RFP. She even suggested that the commissioners needn't see or review this RFP before it was put out for bid. Commissioner John Wilson made a motion that a CSAC subcommittee review the final document before it actually goes out...which will consist of two of the CSAC members. That motion passed.

So, in about 30 days, the so-called RFP, in one form or another, will be released and bids will be solicited. One has to wonder what will happen if the private sector does, in fact, demonstrate that they can provide the requested services at a reduced cost to the City, in spite of all the efforts made to dissuade them from trying.

To Charter or Not to Charter Committee Update

The Redding City Council unanimously voted on February 1, 2011 to establish a 10-member City Charter Exploratory Committee to spend the next four months studying the pros and cons of Redding becoming a Charter City. Their job will be to produce a report and make recommendations to Council based on their findings.

Each Council member appointed two people to the committee:

Mayor Missy McArthur: 1) **Erin Ryan** (Redding Tea Party Partiot, field rep for State Senator Doug LaMalfa, and book-keeper/trainer for Teccora Business Process Design. 2) **Dr. Lea Tate**, clinical psychologist at Dept. of Veterans Affairs and Patient's Surgical Hospital.

Dick Dickerson: 1) **Doug Latimer**, retired Shasta County Administrative Officer. 2) **Richard Cary**, labor compliance investigator for Northern California Carpenters.

Rick Bosetti: 1) **Roger Janis**, retired banker and former Redding Chamber of Commerce Chairman. 2) **Marcus Partin**, Asset Manager for Western Resources Partners, Inc.

Francie Sullivan: 1) **Chris Darker**, United Public Employees of California Local 792 CEO. 2) **Elin Klaseen**, systems analyst/software engineer for SRI International and Parkview neighborhood activist.

Patrick Jones: 1) **Tim Pappas**, Shasta County Assistant Public Defender and pro bono attorney for the North State Tea Party Alliance. 2) **Dick Fyten**, semi-retired phone system sales engineer.

The committee had their first meeting on February 10th. Two of the ten members, Roger Janis and Tim Pappas, were absent from this first meeting. One of the first orders of business was to choose a committee Chairperson and Vice-Chair. Dick Fyten nominated Tim Pappas for Chair, but he won only the vote of Fyten. Instead, the committee selected Dr. Lea Tate as the Chair, and Elin Klaseen as the Vice-Chair.

One of the next agenda items was to set a meeting schedule. They chose to meet on the **2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month (for the next 3-4 months) at 5:30 p.m. in the Redding City Council Chambers**. These meetings will be open to the public, and more than likely videotaped for those who are not able to attend the meetings. Council is in the process of approving \$5,000 in funding to pay for the video taping service.

This first committee meeting was an organizational meeting only. Even so, discussions already began about committee members with "strong views" on the subject of Charter cities. That certainly set the stage for much controversy to come. If you have an interest to participate in these discussions, plan on attending the upcoming meetings.

The next meeting is scheduled:

Thursday, February 24, 2011, 5:30 p.m. Redding City Council Chambers, 777 Cypress Avenue.

Media Missed the Mark on REU Lawsuit Story

As we reported last month, a lawsuit has been filed against the Redding Electric Utility (REU) by Citizens for Fair REU Rates, seeking refunds for REU customers for excessive rate charges that began in January, 2011.

But, the real story is that, if successful, **every** Redding Electric rate payer, residential or business, can get a refund of these overcharges.

Fee Fighter LLC, a local special purpose collection company that helps ordinary citizens and businesses get refunds of illegal and excessive fees, is taking assignments of refund claims **now** for anybody who wants a refund of their REU overcharges.

You may be entitled to a refund, but you must file a claim to be eligible. Here's how to file your claim:

Once you have received and paid your February, 2011 Redding Electric bill, you can file an "assignment of refund claim" form through Fee Fighter LLC, so that **they** can pursue your refund claim. You can choose from two options:

1. **Online**—go to feefighterllc.com. Click on the REU Overcharges button for details and follow instructions on filling in the blanks and submitting your claim.
2. **Mail-in**—go to feefighterllc.com. Click where indicated to download the claim form. Complete the form manually, sign at the bottom, then mail to the address on the form (P.O. Box 994790, Redding, CA, 96099-4790).

That's all you do! Then, you can follow the status of the case on the feefighterllc.com website as it progresses. If successful, you will get a refund when the case settles.

Knighton Road/Churn Creek Development Delayed

The re-circulation of the traffic portion of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the proposed 740,000 square foot retail center at the northeast corner of Knighton Road and Interstate 5 (referred to as the Churn Creek Commons Retail Center) ended on January 31st.

All comments that have been received regarding this portion of the DEIR will now be answered by the consultant for this process. Once that has occurred, a time will be set for this project to go before the Shasta County Planning Commission for a hearing and potential approval. It has been estimated that it will take around two months for the comments to be answered. In the meantime, the project applicant, Hawkins Company Development, remains in a hurry up and wait mode.

One of the comment letters sent by Cal Trans reiterates their original concerns that the document does not adequately identify and mitigate project impacts to State highway facilities. Their letter states, in part, "As a Responsible Agency, Caltrans does not accept the DEIR or Traffic Impact Study (TIS) conclusions and ***cannot make the type of findings necessary for project approval*** to issue an encroachment permit or allow modifications to the interchange overcrossings and ramps." It goes on to say, "A Project Study Report (PSR) and encroachment permit will be required to modify the interchange. In order for Caltrans to

approve the PSR and encroachment permit, Caltrans will require that a traffic analysis be provided that satisfactorily addresses the interchange and mainline I-5 operations for the proposed use and future use. Failure of the EIR and TIS to satisfy Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) may severely delay construction of the improvements to the State highway facilities."

The City of Redding also sent a comment letter stating concerns that the project will create "significant impacts on multiple intersections within the City of Redding" and that the project will not participate in "fair share mitigation of project impacts because a guaranteed funding source for the improvements has not been indentified or secured." The letter goes on to say that "we believe the revisions to the DEIR traffic analysis will not support the conclusions presented in the document."

The environmental review process began in February, 2009. It's difficult to ascertain how long it will continue. It is safe to say, however, that it is taking longer than the project applicant anticipated.

At least ten days advance notice will be given to the general public before this project eventually goes before the Shasta County Planning Commission for discussion. We will keep you updated as more information becomes available.

Funding Sought for Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)

The Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency (SCRTPA) is the local agency charged with the State requirement to prepare a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) for determining how the region will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles and small trucks. No dedicated, ongoing funding source exists for such planning and implementation. But, there are some grant funding opportunities out there, and the SCRTPA is in the process of submitting joint applications with the cities of Redding, Anderson and Shasta Lake for two grants.

One of these grants is from Cal FIRE Urban Forestry. If successful in obtaining this grant, the funds would be used to develop urban forest GIS data in order to assist with tree maintenance programs and urban tree planting projects. These programs could assist with carbon reduction targets. Up to \$30,000 in funding is available.

The other grant opportunity is a Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grant. Up to \$300,000 of funding is available. This would be used for an update of the Downtown Redding Specific Plan and its portion of the future SCS.

The primary goal of the SCS is to reduce passenger vehicle miles traveled by encouraging transportation-efficient land use patterns. In English, this means that plans must be put on paper to show the State how our community will influence where people live and how they travel. The State is seeking policies that promote infill, higher densities, mixed uses, improved pedestrian and bicycle connections, and open space preservation. They want to see an increased use of public transit, rail transportation, and non-motorized transportation. And, they want to avoid "adverse social consequences" of changing land use patterns such as increased housing costs. Really?

Is any of this possible in rural Northern California? Clearly, we don't suffer from the same congestion issues in the Southern part of the State. Nor do we have a population base to support mass transit. But, we are being forced to do this, so the least the State can do is provide the funding necessary for us to try and comply.

Our SCRTPA staffers have proved to be part magicians when it comes to obtaining grant and other funds. Their talents are now graciously being shared with our three incorporated cities. This is a welcome trend. Perhaps collectively, our cities and the county will be able to figure out a way to meet greenhouse gas reduction target goals while maintaining the high quality of life that brought people here in the first place. But, it's sure to bring controversy...stay tuned!

South Redding Six-Lane Project Update

The South Redding Six-Lane Project is quickly becoming a reality. This project will add an additional lane in both directions to Interstate 5 from just south of the Bonnyview interchange and north to Lake Boulevard. The project is totally funded, primarily with Prop 1b monies. No local fees were needed.

On February 22, 2011, Caltrans will begin the advertisement period for bids. There is no pre-bid mandatory meeting. The actual bid opening is scheduled for April 5, 2011. Construction should begin shortly thereafter, and is expected to be complete by November of 2012.

In conjunction with this project, there will also be work done at the Interstate 5/Highway 44 interchange. A concrete barrier is being constructed there (among other improvements). This project has already gone to bid, and Tullis, Inc., a local contractor who also won the bid for the Cottonwood Truck Climbing Lanes currently underway on Interstate 5, won this bid.

Multiple local contractors, subcontractors, and their employees have obtained work through these projects. We anticipate they will continue to be successful in the upcoming bidding process.

Pension Reform Proposals In Process

The California Foundation for Fiscal Responsibility (CFFR) has drafted two alternative pension reform proposals and a set of reforms that work with both alternatives. A constitutional amendment would be necessary to enact these reforms, and they would apply to all public pension systems in California, including state and local governments, school and special districts, and universities.

Alternative A:

- Employees hired after July 1, 2013 shall be eligible for a Defined Contribution (DC) plan (i.e. 401k).
- Defined Benefits (DB) pension (the current plan) for new employees is capped at median state household income (\$56,344 in 2009).

Alternative B:

- A fiscal emergency is declared. State and local DB plans are frozen until fully funded.
- Current employees with DB plans would earn a pension equal to 1.25% of qualifying compensation (multiplied by years of service) after age 65 (as well as those not covered by Social Security).
- Peace officers and firefighters with DB plans would earn a pension equal to 1.6% of qualifying compensation (multiplied by years of service) at age 55 (as well as those not covered by Social Security).
- New public employees could join a DC plan that provides an employer-paid match up to 5% of salary.
- No benefit exceeding \$40,000 per year shall be paid, adjusted 2% annually.
- No benefits paid while receiving a salary from a state or local government employer.

Provisions included in both alternatives:

1. Current and future employees pay half the cost of retirement benefits.
2. Benefits are integrated with Social Security and other public retirement plans.
3. DB benefits based on average of 3 years of qualifying compensation, which excludes overtime, sick, vacation, bonuses, and severance.
4. No retroactive benefit increases.
5. New employees may not receive lifetime medical benefits prior to age 65.
6. Public employees may discontinue participation in their retirement plan and select a lower-cost option.
7. Legislature and public employers must enact plans to fully fund public pension plans by January 1, 2020 without increasing taxes.
8. Public employers are not required to increase plan contributions by more than incremental revenue growth until 2020.

The Foundation has said that it will take \$2 million to collect enough signatures to get the proposal on the 2012 ballot, and another \$28 million or so to fight the ad war with unions that will ensue. But they feel the support is out there.

To learn more about these proposals, you can go to:

californiapensionreform.com

Join Shasta VOICES today.

You can obtain more information by going to our website, **www.shastavoices.com**, or calling

(530) 222-5251.

Mary B. Machado, Executive Director