



SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

# Livable Places NEWS

Linking land use, transportation, clean air, and community participation to make livable communities

## National Experts Offer San Joaquin Valley Leaders Assistance in Creating More Livable Communities

### Problems with Growth

Around the nation, the amount of developed land is growing much more quickly than the population—in many communities up to ten times more land/ per person is being consumed compared to 1970 development patterns. This is largely due to our current land use patterns which separate housing from offices from retail from schools, making the automobile the only way to get around. It takes a lot of space to accommodate a car -both when it's on the road and when it's parked.

A Transportation Research Board study revealed that the street space used to accommodate 120 persons in 100 cars is 33 times greater than the space needed if the same amount of people used two transit vehicles.

In the San Joaquin Valley, this phenomenon is of particular concern to state and federal governments as well as to local communities. Central Valley farm lands are particularly valuable, contributing more than \$22 billion a year in commodity value, and additional billions in associated activities, to the state's economy. No one wants to repeat the experiences of the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay regions where several hundred thousand acres of cropland were lost to urbanization.

Should urbanization similarly affect the Valley in the future, no other region in the state has the soil and other resource conditions to pick up the resulting slack.

There is cause for concern in the Central Valley. Over 12,000 acres of farmland were converted per year between 1984-94. And because population growth is expected to be high in the Valley, it has been projected that 1.4 million acres of cropland will be converted to urban uses by 2040, diminishing the current cropland base by about one-fifth.

While few propose stopping population growth, many believe that it would make sense to return to historic patterns of land use which were more compact, more diverse, more walkable, and more easily served by transit patterns which don't consume inordinate amounts of land. In particular, this means revitalizing our historic town centers and older neighborhoods rather than discarding them by the wayside.

### Tackling the Problem through Infill Development

Lack of financial resources is often cited by San Joaquin Valley officials as a major barrier to restoring downtowns and older neighborhoods. In response, the Local Government Commission, with funding from the EPA, -presenting solutions to money problem at two workshops for decision-makers, one to be held March 25th in Visalia and the other March 26th in Ceres. Speakers will include experts who have been involved in financing innovative projects including the former city manger of Mountain View and Cathedral City, Bruce Liedstrand; Kathie Head, a specialist in Financing affordable housing; and Kirk ten Grottenhuis, a municipal bond expert.

### Making Walkable and Bikeable Streets

Over the past few years, the philosophy of street design has often been, "The wider the better." Not only does this consume valuable land, it also creates situations where walking and biking are not safe. Dan Burden, nationally known planner of walkable, bikeable neighborhoods, has been working with a group from the Valley to develop new street design guidelines for Valley communities. He will be unveiling the "Streets of San Joaquin" on March 19th in the Visalia Convention Center (1:30-4 PM) and March 20th in the Ceres City Council Chambers (1-4 PM). This project is funded by the U.S. EPA, Region IX.

## Creating Better Neighborhoods

**W**e can do a better job of designing new neighborhoods. Narrowing streets not only slows traffic, making it safer to walk; it also allows the neighborhood to stay cooler in the summer. A Visalia planner estimated that reducing streets from 40 to 32 feet lowered ambient temperatures 10 degrees to 15 degrees Fahrenheit. Shade trees can keep the neighborhood cooler, reducing air conditioning bills and drought tolerant landscaping can reduce water bills and maintenance costs.



Conservation measures installed in the home keep energy bills low. The Local Government Commission, with funding from several utility companies, will be developing the Neighborhood Economic and Energy Decision-making System (NEEDS), a computer model which will analyze proposed development maps or specific plans to determine the economic savings which might be accrued to the city, their residents, and or the developer through specific design changes. We will, free of charge, use this system to provide an analysis of pending plans in six communities in the Central Valley.

For details:

Local Government Commission

(916)448-1198

## PROJECTS. Lodi Created a Magnificent Town Center .



**V**isit Lodi some evening and you will find yourself in a beautiful place—bold arches form gateways to an exciting new town center, lights embedded in the wide, colorful sidewalks shine up through the trees, antique lamp posts line narrow streets, lovely plazas and places to stop and rest are everywhere, and local businesses offer everything from women's specialty clothing to great places to eat. Welcome to downtown Lodi, a San Joaquin Valley success story!

Downtown Lodi didn't always look this way. Just five years ago, new shopping areas on the outskirts of town—WalMart, Target, and Penneys—were slowly killing the city's historic center and the small businesses that were located there. However a defining moment occurred in 1993, when Mayor Phil Pennino and his city manager and economic development director attended a livable communities conference sponsored by the Local Government Commission and PG&E.

Pennino was so inspired by a presentation given by urban planner Michael Freedman that he went home and talked seventeen downtown businesses into putting up the necessary funds to bring Freedman to Lodi for a symposium on how to create great community places. The attendance was excellent and the downtown business owners suddenly had a compelling new vision of what the future could be -if they were willing to take aggressive action.

Businesses located near the entrance to the city decided they didn't want to be left out and donated funds for a second symposium to focus on their portion of town—Cherokee Lane. Inspired and motivated, Lodi's business leaders began to work with the city council and city staff to realize their vision. A consultant was hired who prepared a master plan for the downtown and a beautification plan for Cherokee Lane. After seven community workshops, many meetings with an appointed citizen committee, and a study session with councilmembers and planning commissioners, the plans were approved by the Council on a 5-to-0 vote.

Responsibility for funding the project was split 50/50 between the City and the businesses. Funds came from an assessment district, capital improvement funds, and impact fees. The Central City Revitalization

Project was submitted to the voters in April 1996, won approval and the construction phase began. Individual business owners were provided with assistance in redesigning their facades, and the entire streetscape was dug up and transformed.

Today, downtown Lodi looks great. A total of nine downtown blocks have been revitalized, 30 new businesses have opened, ten businesses have expanded and five have relocated downtown, the new "place to be." A three-million dollar multimodal transit stop is planned and a historic, 76-room hotel is being brought back to life to house the seniors of Lodi in style.

According to the now-Councilmember Phil Pennino, "success was a result of consistent support for the plan by the city council, staff, and businesses, including the Chamber of Commerce." Clearly, it took an enthusiastic city councilmember and the hard work and dedication of the entire community to bring this vision to fruition. And the cynics in the crowds- "It'll never work" -must now adopt a new vision of the possible.

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### **ORGANIZATIONS. The Great Valley Center: A Great Organization for a Great Valley.**



**T**he Great Valley Center, a not-for-profit located in Modesto, opened its doors last year with the mission of promoting the economic, social, and environmental well-being of this wonderful region of California.

Under the guidance of Carol Whiteside, former Mayor of Modesto and former Director of Governor Wilson's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Great Valley Center is in the process of awarding its first series of LEGACI (Land Use, Economic Development, Growth, Agriculture, Conservation, and Investment) grants to local governments and community organizations. The Great Valley Center looks to collaborate with these entities to meet the myriad challenges facing the Valley and to create a future that will benefit all Valley residents. In May, the Center will put on its first conference to discuss the many issues facing the Central Valley.

For details:  
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