



SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

Livable Places NEWS

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

Crank Up Your Tractor With A Positive Vision

The Valley is hosting several national leaders this spring and summer who have found that a positive vision can turn around their communities – City Councilmember David Crockett (Chattanooga, TN) and Fort Pierce (Florida) Planning Director Ramon Trias.

The Chattanooga Experience

Councilmember David Crockett spoke in Fresno last month to a community forum sponsored by the Fresno Business Council and the Local Government Commission. As an elected official from a city that transformed itself from an economically troubled city where people were “down” on themselves, to a nationally recognized, model community, Crockett said he learned, “Crisis isn’t the thing that cranks your tractor; it’s opportunity that motivates change in the long run.”

Crockett lived through Chattanooga’s transformation from a “troubled, raw river town to global model.” The turning point began in the early 1980’s when 1,700 people attended 65 public meetings and discussed their fears and good ideas about their city. Festivals and events to restore confidence in the downtown followed. Other communities attempting revitalization were studied and visited. A “Vision 2000” emerged, providing a blueprint for the city as it evolves today.

Of the 40 goals Vision 2000 approved in 1984, 37 had been partially or wholly completed by 1992. In 1993, a repeat of the public participation process generated 27 new goals. And in 1996, another 3,000 people were involved in a visual preference (or community image) survey. Afterwards, the Chamber of Commerce moved ahead to rewrite local ordinances and codes to encourage the kind of development citizens said they wanted, and discourage the kind they didn’t want.

The city center now has a strong sense of place accentuated by a renovated theater, a new riverwalk, a set of walkways, plazas and fountains, a museum and a new aquarium. Plans for road expansions have been scrapped to keep the community walkable. The dreadful air and water pollution, which plagued the city, have been cleaned up.

Chattanooga’s slums are being transformed to make the city “fit and livable” for all. Almost 500 renters are being turned into homeowners each year. Crockett gives much of the credit to the public/private partnerships, created as a result of the business community and the people coming together to develop a positive vision.

In the 1980’s, a large proportion of high school graduates planned to leave Chattanooga as soon as they could. A recent survey shows a dramatic turn around – almost all plan to stay.

Fort Pierce Fights Back

The City of Fort Pierce, Florida, a primarily Latino, agricultural community, once had a thriving downtown but suburban sprawl had sucked the life out of it. In January 1996, City leaders decided to fight back, holding a set of planning sessions or “design charettes.” A team of urban designers and architects came in to work with Planning Director Ramon Trias, local citizens, and businesses, to create a better vision for the future. The group decided what was needed: After-hours entertainment to keep people downtown at night, more pedestrian friendly streets, a change in the city’s building codes to allow mixed-use including housing, and a special emphasis on preserving the town’s historic character.

The results are now becoming visible. An “Ethnic Alley,” a row of ethnic eateries, is flourishing. Small businesses are doing well. The City has repaved its main street, laid light-colored sidewalks and planted new trees. A new Manatee Center attracts tourists who come to watch these endangered aquatic mammals in their natural habitat. Historic buildings have been renovated, including City Hall, and several new buildings have been built to fit in with existing historic buildings.

PROJECTS. Stockton Has Downtown Renaissance.



To revitalize its downtown, the City of Stockton is taking advantage of a rare but precious asset, the Port of Stockton on the San Joaquin River. The City envisions transforming the Stockton Channel/ Weber Point area into a pedestrian-friendly waterfront complex of shopping and services with a AAA ballpark added to keep the atmosphere lively.

A 1913 downtown apartment building, listed on the Historic Register, is slated to be renovated for market-rate rentals. Its location – near the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) Stockton stop – will give Silicon Valley commuters transportation choices.

Entertainment is also in Stockton's plans. The old Fox Theatre was renovated and the city is looking forward to the arrival of a 20-screen cineplex – having put theater owners on notice that no new movie houses will be built in Stockton until one goes downtown. With an ample supply of lovely historic buildings and river access, downtown Stockton has the ingredients needed to become an outstanding asset to the regional economy.

For details:

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(209) 464-5246

PLANS. Cities Work to Retain Individual Identities.



With almost 10 million more people expected in the Valley by 2020, cities risk merging with their neighbors. A number of Valley cities are taking preventative action by establishing community edges. Among those thinking ahead are Visalia and Tulare, who are working together to establish a large green belt of protected farm land to buffer themselves from urban expansion. The Cities of Lodi and Stockton, fearful of becoming a megalopolis, are doing the same. Escalon purchased property along the river to assure that it will never merge with Modesto. And the City of Turlock is exploring options to protect agricultural land so that Turlock, Keyes, and Denair remain freestanding communities surrounded by farms and orchards.

For details:

- Lodi Councilmember Phil Pennino, (209) 942-1730
- Escalon planner J.D. Hightower, (209) 838-4110
- Wayne Clausen, Tulare County Resource Management Agency (559) 733-6790 x 4204
- Turlock planner Mike Cooke, (209) 668-5560

PLANS. Modesto/Stanislaus Counties Share Revenue.

The fiscalization of land use can be identified as a major barrier to better planning, as jurisdictions are forced to site businesses in otherwise inappropriate areas in order to obtain needed sales tax revenues. Proposition 11, adopted by the voters last year, gives local government officials the freedom to address this problem by sharing revenues from local sales tax with other jurisdictions. Using this measure, two Valley jurisdictions – Modesto and Stanislaus County – resolved a dispute about the location of businesses. In the short run, the two have resolved to share tax revenues in one area, North McHenry; however, they have committed to work on long term issues including countywide tax sharing, preserving agricultural land and maintaining compact development.

For details:

Modesto City Manager
J. Edward Tewes,
(209) 577-5221

PLACES. Bakersfield Brings School Downtown.



When a survey of parents revealed that they would like their children to go to school close to where they work, Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Kelly Blanton, reexamined the normal practice of locating schools only in residential neighborhoods. He brought a school to downtown Bakersfield. Calling this move a “two-fer” because bringing the school downtown brought children closer to their parents while helping to bring activity to a declining city center, Blanton notes that the popular school has a long waiting list.

Downtown businesses have adopted classrooms, parents are more involved, and students’ achievement levels in this school are outpacing that of any other educational facility in the area.

For details:

Dr. Kelly Blanton,
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