



# Livable Places NEWS

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

## Valley Communities Tackle Growth Issues

Author and planning critic William Fulton has noted, unless the civic leaders from the Valley confront the issue of urban growth head-on, it is likely that the Valley will adopt the sprawling and inefficient land use patterns that characterize Los Angeles and California's other coastal metropolitan areas. While the lion's share of the Valley's new development is still occurring in patterns of urban sprawl, a new, more livable alternative is gaining momentum.

### Downtown Revitalization

When the Local Government Commission first began bringing livable communities workshops to the San Joaquin Valley early in this decade, there was only a handful of downtowns that had maintained their vitality – a result of careful municipal concern and policy. Hanford, Visalia, Merced, and Newman were notable examples. However, since then, downtown revitalization efforts have spread like wildfire throughout the Valley. Today, over half the cities in the San Joaquin Valley are in one stage or another of a revitalization effort. Downtown Lodi, an exciting example, has attracted 37 new, relocated, or expanded businesses downtown since the City decided to make the center of their community more attractive and pedestrian-friendly. In essence, the city has regained its heart.

### Downtown Housing

Housing is an important element of a vital downtown because a downtown that is never deserted is safer and friendlier. The idea of bringing housing downtown is gaining momentum throughout the Valley. Many communities now provide seniors and others with a place to live where they can meet their daily needs without having to use a car. The Local Government Commission, under a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Remove grant and a grant from the California Center for Land Recycling has been facilitating downtown housing development in the cities of Stockton, Modesto, Lindsay, and Fresno. Among the other communities that already have or are developing downtown housing are Stockton, Lodi, Newman, Visalia, Woodlake, Clovis, and Kerman.

### Multimodal Transit Stops

Another valuable element for a vital downtown is a multimodal transit stop where buses connect with one another and with trains (and on which bicycles can be stored). Modesto and Lodi now sport attractive multimodal transit facilities and are assuring their accessibility and success by intensifying development in adjacent areas.

### New Patterns of Residential Development

Rather than reacting to piecemeal development proposals, a few cities are taking charge by deciding where new development should logically be located and what it should look like. This approach is critical if Valley communities are to remain compact, separated by agricultural lands and natural landscapes.

Under the leadership of Mayor Pat Kuhn, the City of Oakdale adopted a set of "livable communities" land use principles in their general plan. They chose two sites for new residential development which would "fill in the blanks of the city." They determined that new growth would not occur, however, until a developer produced a specific plan which meets the livable communities principles of the general plan. Today, the first development to be built following this policy is under construction.

The City of Reedley has also initiated a proactive planning process, directing new residential development to land immediately adjacent to the existing built areas of the city. The city is now preparing specific plans for properties in that area, to make certain that development proceeds in a compact, mixed use form served by narrow, tree-shaded streets.

Led by Mayor Bill Baker, the City of Taft has prepared a precise plan for a site, prime for development, one mile from their revitalized town center. The plan implements the city's vision of a compact, residential neighborhood, served by narrow, tree-shaded streets, and laced with orchards. A bike path will run through the orchards and connect to the downtown.

### **Regional Bike Paths**

Bike paths are on the agenda in a number of communities. The City of Reedley recently celebrated the opening of a "rails to trails" project which will eventually connect residential areas with schools and the downtown. Others currently working on such trails are Tulare, Modesto, Porterville, Fresno and Clovis.

### **Preserving Open Space**

Efforts are being made to stop the loss of farm land and preserve community identity by preventing cities from growing together. Lodi and Stockton, Visalia and Tulare, Turlock, and Escalon are among the Valley cities at work on this critical issue.

Will the San Joaquin Valley look like Southern California 20 years from now, or will our civic leaders confront the issue of urban growth head-on, as Bill Fulton suggests is necessary? While sprawl is still the dominant pattern of growth in the Valley, the leadership, vision, and models for better development are all there. Our bet is that the tentacles of sprawl will, in the future, remain largely confined to the southern side of the Tehachapis.

## **PROJECTS. Exeter Is Painting the (Down)town.**



The City of Exeter, (pop. 8,500) is incorporating a unique strategy in its comprehensive downtown revitalization effort: blank walls in the area are being painted with murals.

Using professional artists, the murals cover topics of local history, residents and the environment. So far, ten have been completed. The redevelopment agency paid for the first mural. Since then, a nonprofit organization called Festival of the Arts has been raising funds and overseeing the effort.

Since its mural project began almost three years ago, residents have noted an improvement in downtown business. Media coverage of the murals has also helped to attract visitors passing by on their way to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Local residents also now find downtown a more attractive place to be.

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## **PLANS. Cities Work to Strengthen Their Economies.**



This August, the Local Government Commission brought in Ramon Trias – an architect and the economic development director in Fort Pierce, Florida – to work with the cities of Parlier and Lindsay to strengthen their local economies by investing in the design of their downtowns. Though each community was unique, there were goals that both cities decided were very important to them. These objectives included:

- Restoring the existing historic buildings in their downtowns to maintain the unique character of the community.
- Redesigning downtown streets to be safe, attractive, and walkable to attract people downtown.
- Creating civic spaces which would become a site for community events and general community interaction.

After defining these goals, Trias, returned in November to offer his recommendations, including:

- Narrowing streets, widening sidewalks, and adding landscaping and other pedestrian amenities;
- Preparing design guidelines to help rehabilitate historic buildings and make sure that new buildings were in keeping with the old;
- Planning events to bring people downtown and encourage the use of newly developed civic spaces;

### **Hiring a consultant to develop a downtown marketing plan.**

Based on his personal experience in revitalizing Fort Pierce, Trias emphasized the importance of demonstrating the city's commitment to creating an attractive downtown to attract private investment. He prepared sketches of each city's downtown to help the community visualize what a revitalized downtown could look like.

The postcard test was high on Trias' list of recommendations: Do you have a public space, building or street that would look good on a postcard? If not, it's time to create something that would make you proud enough to want to show it to the world.

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- Carl Schlaudt, Lindsey Planner, (559) 562-7138

### **PLACES. City Leaders Take A Tour of Livable Places.**



On November 5th, 20 councilmembers, staff and planning commissioners from the City of Reedley climbed on a bus, organized by the Local Government Commission, to take a look at new patterns of development. Their purpose was to get ideas for the specific plans that the community is preparing for their city's new growth areas. They looked at downtown redevelopment in San Jose, transit-oriented development in Mountain View, and the revitalized, neotraditional town of Suisun City. In Davis, they toured a highly acclaimed example of sustainable neighborhood development. The group walked around a new neotraditional, residential infill project while in Sacramento, and finished with a tour of Lodi's newly transformed downtown.

Tour participants felt that seeing built examples was a powerful way to visualize the kind of development that would be most appropriate in Reedley.

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