

State senate OKs bill to give Shafter control over 'inland port'

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Feb. 1, 2006

A bill to give the city of Shafter control over a proposed new "inland port" that would make Kern County an import-export center appears to be moving smoothly through the Legislature.

The bill by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, would allow Shafter to form a special district that would handle day-to-day operations of the California Integrated Logistics Center, as it would be called.

The facility is planned to take imports in cargo containers from the Port of Oakland, which would be carried there by rail, for distribution to Southern California. The empty containers then could be filled with valley farm products or other items destined for export and shipped back to Oakland, officials say.

The major goal is to ease worsening congestion at ports in Southern California by routing more cargo to Oakland.

The bill passed the state Senate Monday 33-3. It now moves to the Assembly for further consideration.

Panel discusses trails

By JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Feb. 1, 2006

Do you like the idea of a small "pocket" park just down the street from your new house?

Would you put a strip of grass lined with trees between your sidewalk and the street in front of your home?

Would you use a system of walking and bicycling trails that connected your house to most of the rest of Bakersfield?

How much would you pay for all of these wonderful "quality of life" improvements?

These questions have been bouncing around the heads of city of Bakersfield officials for several years.

Plans are beginning to come together. But they aren't done yet. On Tuesday three members of the Planning and Development Committee struggled to find a balance between big dreams and the bottom line.

"Over and over people say they like the way the downtown looks," said downtown Councilwoman Sue Benham.

Paying for that, and maintaining a massive forest of city trees, could be costly, city staff warned. Should neighborhoods pay the maintenance fees? Should new homes cost more to make up for better trails?

Simply designing a citywide system of public walking trails could cost \$1 million, said Recreation and Parks Director Dianne Hoover. Even developers like the idea of more pedestrian-friendly communities, roads and neighborhoods.

"Nobody wants to increase fees," said Castle & Cooke president Bruce Freeman.

His company is trying to build parks and trails into its developments. But he said thousands of acres are being converted and city leaders must move quickly to ensure residents there have a green, pedestrian-friendly place to live.

But the panel, and the city itself, face a tough job trying to pull together rules for street trees and smaller parks.

The committee referred a number of developing plans back to city staff and the planning commission for further study and public input.

To offer input call the Bakersfield City Council at 326-3767 or by e-mail at City_Council@ci.bakersfield.ca.us.

Fresno rejects plans for shopping center

City Council considers what to do with vacant land near airport.

By Matt Leedy / The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, February 1, 2006

The Fresno City Council on Tuesday night rejected a Target-anchored shopping center proposed for northwest Fresno, leaving city leaders with a decade-old question: What should be done with 17 acres of vacant city-owned land across Herndon Avenue from the Sierra Sky Park airport?

A 1994 legal settlement required the city to buy the land on the southwest corner of Herndon and Brawley avenues because its development was restricted by a "clear zone" for the airport.

Developer David Paynter was willing to pay \$4.5 million for that land, but he wanted it rezoned so an 186,150-square-foot shopping center could be built. That shopping center would have included a new Target and five other buildings.

The council, in a 6-1 vote Tuesday night, denied the zoning and general plan changes Paynter needed for his project.

Before casting his vote against the Target project, Council Member Tom Boyajian asked: "Is there going to be a project, other than a park, that we'll be able to agree on?"

He suggested the council meet during a workshop to answer that question.

A commercial project that would invite more traffic, pollution and noise to the area isn't the answer many nearby residents and city staffers are looking for. About 50 people who live near the 17 acres sat in the council chambers for hours to voice their opposition to the Target proposal.

Two months ago, Cynthia Simms paid \$900,000 for her home near the vacant site. She doesn't want Target as a neighbor and sees many problems with commercial development of the area.

Said Simms: "I see congestion. I see traffic, noise. I see litter. I don't see serenity."

Her comments to the council echoed the sentiments of about a dozen residents who spoke against the Target project.

Paynter said he would try to alleviate the feared traffic problems, but added that he received little cooperation from the city's traffic engineering department. Although a neighborhood meeting last year showed overwhelming opposition to the project, he said telephone polls and petitions in the area showed many residents supported a new Target.

"There's a lot of support out there," said Paynter, who added he was willing to perform detailed environmental studies for the project.

But the zoning and planned amendment changes that would have made a new Target possible were voted down by the Planning Commission on Jan. 18 and city staffers recommended the City Council vote against them, too.

Council Member Brian Calhoun, who represents northwest Fresno, said Paynter didn't make a strong enough case for changing the city's general plan.

"The fact is, this land is planned for residential and office uses," Calhoun said.

The city of Fresno, in a sale information packet, gives an idea of its hopes for the 17 acres: neighborhoods on 8 acres in the southern section, commercial/office building on the 3 acres in the northern section and open space in the middle 6 acres.

There is a diagonal strip in the middle of the property that must be left open, city officials said, so pilots could use it if they needed to make an emergency landing. The Sierra Sky Park airport is northwest of the land and is used primarily by single-engine planes.

There's only a remote chance one of those planes would need to make an emergency landing, according to city staffers who disagreed with the Target plan to put a parking lot in the clear zone. Paynter's \$4.5 million offer was one of only three received by the city last year.

One offer fell short of the city's \$2.5 million minimum, and the other was for \$2.7 million. The city approved an agreement of sale with Paynter last February, but it wasn't clear what he proposed to build in the area. The terms of that sale agreement expired Tuesday.

Council Member Mike Dages, who cast the lone dissenting vote, said the city took too long to tell Paynter his proposal wouldn't work in the area. The developer should have been told immediately what type of project would be allowed, he said.

After the Target plan was defeated, Nick Yovino, the city's planning and development director, said Fresno could again try to sell the 17 acres or come up with another plan for the property.

This time of year we're living in a fog

By Megan Gladden, Staff reporter
Manteca (Calif.) Bulletin Feb. 1, 2006

Tule Fog is as unique to the Central Valley as riparian rabbits.

While fog is prevalent throughout California and the world, the specific brand of tule fog is not. According to Jane Null, founder of Golden Gate Weather Services, it gets its name because of its prevalence in marshy areas populated by tule reeds or cattails.

It is an especially thick and unruly fog that arises from a set of unique conditions, most commonly found in the Central Valley.

According to the National Weather Service, tule fog forms during night and morning hours in late fall and winter months following the first significant rainfall. When the sky is clear, the ground is moist, and the wind is calm, the ground cools rapidly. In turn, the moist air above it cools and causes water vapor to condense. Once it has formed, the air must be heated enough to either evaporate the fog or lift it above the surface so that visibility improve.

Tule fog is a leading cause of weather-related casualties in California. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the visibility in tule fog is often less than an eighth of a mile, but can be less than ten feet. Visibility can vary rapidly in any area, with sudden decreases to near zero in only a few feet.

It is situations like these that often lead to multi-car accidents where one car follows another into a fog bank and doesn't see the stopped car in time to brake before greeting the bumper of the car in front of them.

One such case happened in February 2002 when two people were killed in an 80-plus car pile up

on Hwy 99 near Fresno when the visibility was zero.

Tule fog is a new experience for many Valley residents who have relocated here from the Bay Area.

Mary Crescini, librarian at Ripona Elementary in Ripon, moved to the Valley five years ago from Sunnyvale. She said that the fog here is thicker than in the Bay Area, which makes driving a hair-raising experience.

"If you don't know the area, then it's more dangerous," she said. "I'm a lot more cautious and aware when I drive in fog, especially because I have kids."

Despite the dangers of driving in tule fog, Crescini says that she would rather drive in the Valley fog than battle with Bay Area traffic.

Besides traffic problems, another big problem associated with tule fog is that the density of the air at the inversion layer [traps pollutants below it, leading to poor air quality and the formation of photochemical smog](#). This is particularly concerning for Valley residents because the source of the pollutants includes not only exhaust gases, but a plethora of other chemical compounds sprayed as fertilizers and pesticides by farmers.

This sort of pollution is a major contributor to the large number of "bad air days," and the high occurrence of asthma and other respiratory illnesses in Valley communities.

The California sunshine that is fortunately a more frequent forecast than tule fog has many health benefits. Moderate amounts of UV exposure can do everything from improving heart and bone health to preventing cancer to enhancing mental health. With such benefits, Desiree Morse of A Perfect Tan Tanning Salon in Manteca wonders why more people don't tan in the winter months.

"A lot more people tan once the sun come out," said Morse. "You'd think the cloudier it is, the more people would want to tan."

Morse speculates that it is the unsafe driving conditions that prevent people from seeking out the UV rays on foggy days.

With spring right around the corner, we should only have a few more weeks of foggy weather. The official time frame for tule fog is from Nov. 1 to March 31. In the mean time, count down the days until the sunshine returns and find those UV rays to escape the winter blues.

Dock union pushes for cleaner air at West Coast ports

In the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, February 1, 2006

Long Beach, Calif. (AP) -- The nation's largest dockworkers' union called for curbs on pollution during a conference on the freight industry's environmental impact.

Leaders of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which represents some 60,000

West Coast dockworkers, joined Monday with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to push a plan to cut pollutants emitted by diesel-burning ships by 20 percent before 2010.

"We also live in this area, and we want clean air," union president James Spinosa said during the first day of the "Faster Freight Cleaner Air" conference at the Long Beach Convention Center. Union leaders said they want to reach that goal by requiring ships that visit the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to use environmentally friendly technologies, like clean-burning fuels and more efficient engines.

They also called for efforts to cut pollution from trucks and other machinery located on the docks themselves.

Cleaner technologies are already available, and just need to be implemented, the emissions curb's union backers said.

But some environmental advocacy groups and representatives of seaside communities were skeptical.

"Ports and the goods movement industry are deceiving the public by inferring that they are using the best available technologies to prevent air pollution," said Jesse Marquez, who directs the Coalition for a Safe Environment in Wilmington, a harbor-area section of Los Angeles.

Some study results featured at the conference linked diesel fumes and other types of port pollution to cancer, respiratory illness, stunted growth among children, and other medical problems.

Without pollution controls, the growing port complex that encompasses the Long Beach and Los Angeles facilities will be responsible for 20 percent of the pollution in the Los Angeles Basin by 2025, according to state air officials.