

Council member Skip Barwick won't seek re-election

By Luis Hernandez, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Saturday, May 24, 2014

Skip Barwick has announced he won't seek Tulare City Council re-election in November.

Barwick, who served one council term, said he decided against a council seat run to avoid a split on District 4. Mayor David Macedo, the longest tenured council member, also lives within district 4.

"We have a lot of the same supporters," he said. "It would make for a divided city and I wouldn't like that. I like the city too well."

In November, Tulare residents will take part in the first by-district elections since the city dropped the at-large system. Macedo already announced he plans to run again.

Vice Mayor Carlton Jones, who replaced Barwick in the position, said he hopes Barwick reconsiders.

"I hope he gives voters a chance to decide," he said. "He's doing a good job. I wish he could serve as mayor."

Jones said Barwick brought unique perspectives to the council, insights that helped other council members.

Barwick said he's at peace with his decision.

"I am not leaving upset, mad or anything," he said. "It's a privileged to serve in the council."

Barwick said he's not resentful towards the by-district system. He said he supported the effort to change from open, citywide elections to by-district.

Barwick said he's pleased with his tenure in council. He said he counts the resolution of the Sunrise Estate Park issue and the outcome on the Cartmill Avenue Highway 99 Interchange as highlights.

Promised by a home developer when the Sunrise Estate was built, the park remained in limbo for years until residents, the developer and the council worked together.

Using state and federal funds, city staff came up a funding source to supplement commitments from the residents and developer.

"That's a good example of what you can accomplish," he said.

Next week, the council will meet to consider awarding construction contracts for the interchange.

Barwick said he was hesitant about supporting the construction project as the city was to put up \$7.5 million. The price tag was too high and Barwick said he preferred the project be put on hold.

However, city staff, teaming up with Tulare County Association of Governments, worked on finding a funding source and the effort led to securing state and federal moneys.

"We pushed until we found it," he said.

Barwick said he plans to remain active in the community. He said he's interested in the Tulare Regional District Hospital and wants to be involved in the development of Commercial Avenue, located south of Paige Avenue, near the International Agri-Center.

"I am saddling a new horse," he said. "I intend to be very involved."

Jones said TRMC will lose a big advocate if Barwick goes ahead with his decision.

"Skip is so close to the hospital," Jones said. "I really hope he changes his mind."

Barwick will also step down from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. He's terming out as chairman.

Tulare Clerk Jennifer Gomez said the time to file for candidates seeking a council position on District 2 or 4 is between July 14 and Aug. 8. The election is on Nov. 4.

Wind advisory issued for Valley; blowing dust predicted

By Jim Guy, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, May 28, 2014

The National Weather Service issued a wind advisory Wednesday in the central San Joaquin Valley.

The forecast is for winds blowing from the northwest from 15 to 25 mph with gusts as high as 40 mph. The alert is in effect until 8 p.m. Wednesday. Drivers of high profile vehicles were advised to proceed cautiously.

Motorists should be on the lookout for blowing dust, particularly where fields have been newly plowed as well as wind-prone areas like the west side, said the NWS.

The possibility of blowing dust also prompted the San Joaquin Valley air district to issue a health advisory for Fresno, Tulare, Kings, Madera, Merced, Kern, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties.

Dust can be inhaled in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller (PM10). Particulate pollution leads to health problems, aggravates lung disease, triggers asthma attacks and bronchitis, and increases risk of respiratory infections.

Seniors and children should avoid exposure to blowing dust, and people with heart or lung disease should seek medical attention if exposed to particulates, the air district said.

Lighter winds, lower temperatures expected in Merced area

Staff reports

Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 29, 2014

Winds and temperatures for the rest of the week should be more favorable for those with respiratory problems.

According to David Spector, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, winds are expected to be "relatively light" for the next few days.

Blowing dust caused by Wednesday's high-gust winds prompted the region's air pollution officials to issue a cautionary statement throughout the eight-county air basin: Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials warned residents that areas of blowing dust can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter. Exposure to particulate pollution can cause serious health issues such as lung disease, asthma attacks, bronchitis and respiratory infections.

Winds are expected to calm to 5 to 10 mph by Thursday afternoon in Merced and Mariposa counties, Spector said.

Temperatures are also expected to drop. The high 90s experienced in recent days in Merced will give way to low 80s by the weekend, and Mariposa's high 80s will become mid-70s, according to forecasters.

Spector said residents can expect a "cooler than normal weekend."

Dust carried by gusty winds prompts health caution

Staff reports

Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 28, 2014

Dusty air as a result of gusty winds has prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health cautionary statement through Wednesday evening throughout the eight-county air basin: Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern counties.

Winds may produce areas of localized blowing dust, which can result in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller (PM10). Exposure to particulate pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and bronchitis and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on their local conditions.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a district office in Modesto, (209) 557-6400; Fresno, 559-230-6000; or Bakersfield 661-392-5500.

Officials warn gusty winds could create unhealthy levels of dust

Staff reports

Stockton Record, Wednesday, May 28, 2014

Air-quality officials are warning that gusty winds this afternoon could create unhealthy levels of dust throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

The warning will remain in effect through tonight, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

Winds could kick up tiny particles that can cause serious health problems, including asthma attacks and a higher risk of respiratory infections.

Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion in dusty areas, officials said.

Californians may get more incentives to buy all-electric vehicles

Staff reports

Central Valley Business Times, Wednesday, May 28, 2014

The state may make it cheaper for Californians to buy all-electric vehicles, under a bill approved by the state Senate.

SB 1275 would put in place an extended and improved Clean Vehicle Rebate Project, which has been credited with bringing a third of the nation's plug-in cars to California. The CVRP currently provides buyers with a \$2,500 rebate for zero-emission purchases, but the program has been plagued by insufficient funding.

SB 1275 would help secure the funding needed to ensure California is the first state in the nation with one million electric vehicles, but would step down rebate levels over time as technology costs go down.

The bill zipped through the Senate on a bipartisan vote of 27-9.

As it stands heading to the Assembly, the bill would:

- Make it easier for fleet managers to replace polluting trucks, buses, and heavy-duty tractor-trailers with clean electric ones
- Funds Air Quality Improvement Plan grants to make the transition more affordable
- Increases access to clean transportation in disadvantaged communities

- Establishes car sharing programs, deploys charging stations in apartment complexes, provides access to financing options that would mean lower combined monthly car payments and fuel costs, and offers incentives for the replacement of gas-guzzling “clunkers” with new or used electric cars or vouchers for transit and car sharing.

“To clean up our dirty air, we need to make electric cars more accessible for our middle- and low-income families, not just the wealthy,” says the bill’s author, state Sen. Kevin de León, D-Los Angeles.

Max Baumhefner, a clean vehicles and fuels expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council, predicts that the initiative will improve access “to a cleaner fuel that’s the cost equivalent of dollar-a-gallon gasoline, which is especially important for households that spend a disproportionate share of their income at the gas pump.”

Proponents say that electric vehicles have an immediate benefit not just in terms of air quality, but also for jobs and California’s economy.

Putting one million electric vehicles on the road could create up to 100,000 additional California jobs by 2030, they claim.

“Californians shell out \$70 billion on gas and diesel each year, \$40 billion of which leaves the state in payments to the corporations and foreign countries that produce the oil,” said Vien Truong, director of environmental equity with the Greenlining Institute. “Transitioning to zero-emission transportation means keeping more transportation dollars — and jobs — right here in California.”

Friant Ranch gets rebuff by appellate court

Staff reports

Central Valley Business Times, Wednesday, May 28, 2014

Developers of a 2,270-home and commercial development for elderly residents near Millerton Lake east of Fresno must rework the air pollution mitigation aspects of their environmental impact report and statement, the California 5th District Court of Appeal says.

“We conclude that the EIR was inadequate because it failed to include an analysis that correlated the project’s emission of air pollutants to its impact on human health; the mitigation measures for the project’s long-term air quality impacts violate CEQA because they are vague, unenforceable and lack specific performance criteria; and the statement that the air quality mitigation provisions will substantially reduce air quality impacts is unexplained and unsupported,” the ruling says. “These defects must be cured by the preparation of a revised EIR.”

The Sierra Club, the League of Women Voters of Fresno, and Revive the San Joaquin had sued Fresno County and the developer, Friant Ranch LP, to stop the development of “Friant Ranch,” described as a planned retirement community for adults 55 and older on a 942-acre site in north central Fresno County, just south of the San Joaquin River. The development would include single- and multi-family residential units that are age restricted, some residential units that are not age restricted, a commercial village center, a recreation center, trails, open space, and parks and parkways.

The appellate court has ordered Fresno County Superior Court to issue a peremptory writ of mandate that compels Fresno County to vacate or set aside its approval of the Friant Ranch project and directs the county not to approve the project before preparing a revised EIR that contains an analysis of the adverse human health impacts that are likely to result from the air quality impacts identified in the EIR; addresses the deficiencies concerning vagueness, enforceability and lack of specific performance standards and addresses the issues related to the statement that those mitigation provisions will substantially reduce air quality impacts.

Kids, parents are embracing the walking school bus

By Jennifer McDermott, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 28, 2014

(Providence, R.I.) As a group of children walked home together from school in Providence, they held hands and played the "I Spy" guessing game. When they reached a busy intersection, an adult accompanying them prodded, "What's the rule?"

"Behind the line!" they said in unison, as they stepped back from the edge of the curb and waited for the walk signal.

Shortly after, the group stopped in front of 8-year-old Jaiden Guzman's house. He said goodbye to his friends and raced to his front door. His mother waved and the rest of the walking school bus continued on its way.

For a growing number of children in Rhode Island, Iowa and other states, the school day starts and ends in the same way — they walk with their classmates and an adult volunteer to and from school. Walking school buses are catching on in school districts nationwide because they are seen as a way to fight childhood obesity, improve attendance rates and ensure that kids get to school safely.

Ten-year-old Rosanyily Laurenz signed up for the Providence walking school bus this school year.

Before, she said, she was sometimes late to school when her grandmother didn't feel well enough to walk with her.

But now, "I get to walk with my friends," Rosanyily said. "Plus, I get snacks."

Many programs across the country are funded by the federal Safe Routes to School program, which pays for infrastructure improvements and initiatives to enable children to walk and bike to school.

Robert Johnson, of the Missouri-based PedNet Coalition, a nonprofit that advocates for transit alternatives, said the success of the programs reflects a growing interest in getting kids more active.

"Every parent is looking for ways to make their child a little healthier, and walking to school is one," he said.

In 2012, about 30 percent of students living within a mile of school walked there in the morning and 35 percent walked home in the afternoon, according to the National Center for Safe Routes to School. Those numbers have increased by about 6 percentage points since 2007.

Organizers in Providence are also motivated by high rates of chronic absenteeism. Thirty-seven percent of Providence students missed 10 percent or more of the 2010-11 school year.

The nonprofit agency Family Service of Rhode Island targeted Mary E. Fogarty Elementary School for its first walking school bus in 2012 because it's located in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. Children who live within a mile of school don't qualify for the bus.

In Sioux City, Iowa, nearly 1,000 children in 10 elementary schools use walking school buses during the spring and fall, said Alison Benson, spokeswoman for the district. Benson said the program has helped the schools incorporate fitness into the morning routine and build a sense of community.

Elementary schools in Columbia, Missouri, were among the first in the nation to have walking school buses. Piloted in 2003, the program, at its height, involved 450 children, 13 schools and about 200 volunteers. It was canceled this year because of funding issues, according to the PedNet Coalition.

Johnson said he is working with 15 school districts in Kansas on what may become the largest walking school bus project in the United States.

Some districts have been able to cut school bus routes and save money because of the program, he said.

On the milelong route in Providence, the program's manager, Allyson Trenteseaux, and another volunteer recently led Jaiden, Rosanyily and six other children through busy intersections and around broken glass littering the sidewalks.

On the walks, Trenteseaux said, she mends relationships among the kids, builds relationships and intervenes when there are problems. During the winter, a walk leader noticed some of the children were wearing slippers and bought them all boots.

Last year, 11 of the 14 students who participated and completed a survey attended school more often. The program now has a waiting list, and Family Service plans to expand into more schools next year.