

Local News Round-Up August 22, 2013

CITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

[\\$65.8M Courthouse Breaks Ground in Yuba City \(*Appeal Democrat*\)](#)

The future site of a \$65.8 million courthouse for Sutter County didn't look like much at a groundbreaking Tuesday — it was only a field full of star thistle — but just envisioning the new facility was enough to build excitement.

[Highway 32 Widening on Hold \(*Chico Enterprise-Record*\)](#)

A project to widen Highway 32 between the freeway and Yosemite Drive is on hold, after the Chico City Council opted this week to not risk spending money it doesn't have to further the project.

[S.J. Residents Get Multiple-Choice Growth Plans \(*Stockton Record*\)](#)

After almost five years of mostly behind-the-scenes work, officials are giving the public its first look at how our communities might grow in the future - and you're invited to join in the discussion.

Maps unveiled Wednesday by the San Joaquin Council of Governments depict four ways in which cities might grow through 2035. These "scenarios" range from continuing to build mostly single-family homes on farmland to a significant shift toward denser neighborhoods within the footprints of existing cities.

[Walnut Creek West Downtown Specific Plan Taking Shape \(*Contra Costa Times*\)](#)

A blueprint for future development of the western downtown area is closer to becoming a reality. A City Council-appointed community group has been working for months to map out commercial and residential development uses and transit ideas for the western area of downtown. The area north of Olympic Boulevard stretching to the Walnut Creek BART Station will likely become a higher-density urban area, with new links to transit.

PUBLIC SAFETY

[It's Not Just Federal Prisons: State Prisons Are a Mess, Too \(*National Journal*\)](#)

California's prison problem is also fundamentally economic. In May, a judge ordered California to reduce its inmate population by 9,600 to prevent overcrowding. California unsuccessfully appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court. Gov. Jerry Brown on Monday said that California wouldn't "do a mass release" and a spokesman said the administration is "working with the Legislature to avoid the prospect of inmate releases." That could mean spending hundreds of millions of dollars to stem overcrowding. But even just releasing prisoners can come at a huge cost. According to the LAPD, it costs about \$18 million to keep track of felons who are released from state prisons to the counties, and more than half of the thousands who are already released annually are eventually sent back to prison.

HEALTHCARE REFORM

[Field Poll: Low Awareness of Health Coverage Opportunity \(*The Press-Enterprise*\)](#)

Covered California, the state's new health insurance exchange, has budgeted \$85 million over the next 16 months to spread the word about benefits available under the federal healthcare law.

A new survey suggests it will need every penny.

ENVIRONMENT

[Time is Running Out on Meaningful CEQA Reform \(Fox & Hounds\)](#)

With three weeks left in the 2013 legislative session, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) reform is waiting on the sidelines while the list of public and private projects being stalled under the allegation of CEQA violations continues to grow.

[California Clean Energy Drive Will Increase Prices \(M Powered – CMTA Blog\)](#)

California is a national leader in pushing renewable energy, lower greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficiency. State manufacturers have contributed to the effort by installing cost-effective technologies and instituting lean manufacturing processes to reduce their demand for electricity, natural gas and transportation fuels.

[CEQA Roundup: What Would Steinberg's Bill Actually Do for Infill? \(California Economic Summit\)](#)

In last week's contentious final committee hearing on CEQA, Sen. Darrell Steinberg emphasized that his reform efforts, in the waning days of the legislative session, would remain focused on a singular goal--streamlining the CEQA process for the infill developments California needs to reduce urban sprawl and reach its climate goals. "When in doubt," Steinberg said, alluding to the still-elusive compromise he seeks between business, labor, and environmentalists, "do good policy."

[Free California Permits Drive Carbon to 2013 Low \(Bloomberg News\)](#)

Carbon prices in California are at the lowest level this year as the state weighs increasing the number of free permits offered to polluters in an effort to kick-start the fledgling market.

ELECTIONS

[Redwood City Council Race Off to a Sizzling Start \(Contra Costa Times\)](#)

Bail bonds business owner Corrin Rankin filed a petition asking San Mateo County Superior Court to direct the city clerk of Redwood City to prevent Ernie Schmidt from putting "Chairman, Planning Commission" next to his name on the Nov. 5 ballot.

Election law allows candidates to state an elected office or their "professions, vocations or occupations" in their ballot designation. The petition Rankin filed asserts that a seat on the planning commission isn't tantamount to an income-producing job.

[Council Election a Real 'Horse Race' \(The Ceres Courier\)](#)

With the entry of a third candidate, a real horse race has developed for the two open seats on the Ceres City Council this fall.

WATER

[Editorial: Strip Political Handouts from Bloated Water Bond \(The Press-Enterprise\)](#)

A bloated, pork-filled water bond has little chance of winning approval from skeptical taxpayers. But California does need to ensure a reliable water supply for the state's future. So legislators should craft a less costly, better targeted bond measure that focuses on the state's most pressing water needs.

[Woodland City Council OKs Bonds for Water Project, But They May Never be Sold \(Daily Democrat\)](#)

Some \$155 million in water utility revenue bonds were approved Tuesday by the Woodland City Council to pay for a tap into the Sacramento River. But it's possible the money won't be needed or the bonds sold.

[Tougher Federal Stormwater Permit Fees Could Cost L.A. County Cities Millions \(Pasadena Star-News\)](#)

City officials in Monrovia estimate it will cost \$1.2 million this year to implement a federal stormwater permit approved by Congress in November. Next year officials predict costs will increase anywhere from \$2 million to \$5 million.

[Sunnyvale to Expand Recycled Water System, Service Apple Campus 2 \(San Jose Mercury News\)](#)

The city of Sunnyvale will move forward with expanding its recycled water system after approving a plan last week to create a loop of pipes connecting areas within the city and beyond the city limits.

REDEVELOPMENT

[State Returns Some Development Funds \(Visalia Times-Delta\)](#)

More money is streaming into local government budgets this month with the dissolution of redevelopment agencies throughout California — but the funds are a drop in the bucket compared to the millions that were once spent on development projects.

[Oakland Told to Hand Over \\$170 Million in Former Redevelopment Asserts \(San Francisco Business Times\)](#)

Oakland improperly took control of \$170 million in cash and property when California abolished its redevelopment agency last year and should relinquish those assets, a state review has found.

[Oakland Says \\$170 Million Redevelopment Tab Wont's Hurt Bottom Line \(Oakland Tribune\)](#)

State Controller John Chiang voided nearly \$170 million in asset transfers from Oakland's former redevelopment agency on Wednesday, but city leaders said the move, which had long been anticipated, would not impact city finances or services.

CITY ORDINANCES

[Manhattan Beach City Council Set to Ban Polystyrene Food Containers \(Easy Reader News\)](#)

With strong backing from the city's environmentalists, Manhattan Beach City Council on Tuesday introduced a ban on polystyrene containers intended for distribution of prepared food in the city.

[El Cerrito Ponders Stricter Smoking Regulations \(Inside Bay Area\)](#)

The city is exploring the idea of matching Contra Costa County and other East Bay communities in enacting an ordinance regulating smoking in multifamily housing and outdoor areas.

State law prohibits smoking in enclosed public places, including bars and restaurants, and within 20-feet of entrances to public buildings.

HOUSING

[Windsor Council Supports Reduced-Density Housing Project \(The Press Democrat\)](#)

In a sign of a rebound in the construction of single-family homes, developers on Wednesday proposed as many as 90 new houses on land just north of the Windsor's Wal-Mart, in a presentation greeted with enthusiasm by most of the Town Council.

[Pope Street Affordable Housing is OK'd \(St. Helena Star\)](#)

An 8-unit affordable housing project on Pope Street has the green light after the St. Helena Planning

Commission approved it Tuesday in a unanimous vote.

Commissioner Grace Kistner praised the project as “a step in the right direction” for a city that needs more low-income housing. All eight units will be rent-controlled, and tenants will have to meet income requirements to be eligible.

[Opponents of Palo Alto Housing Project Say Ballot Language is Biased \(*San Jose Mercury News*\)](#)

Discord over a project that would bring a mix of market-rate and affordable housing to south Palo Alto has already spilled over into the Nov. 5 election that will ultimately decide its fate.

Opponents of the Palo Alto Housing Corporation's plans for 72 units at 567-595 Maybell Ave. say the ballot question drawn up by City Attorney Molly Stump is biased. A handful of them, including Barron Park resident Bob Moss, met with her this week to present alternate wording for Measure D.

PENSIONS / EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

[Retirement Board's Change to Boost Fresno County's Pension Bill \(*Fresno Bee*\)](#)

The board that oversees Fresno County's \$3.1 billion pension fund on Wednesday lowered the fund's projected annual investment return by half a percent -- a decision that could cost the county an additional \$30 million per year.

[Milpitas City Council Approves Short-Term Contract \(*Milpitas Post*\)](#)

The city union representing public works department employees saw a new one-year contract agreement approved this week.

Milpitas City Council voted 4-0 on consent Tuesday to adopt a resolution approving a memorandum of understanding with the 36-member Milpitas Employees Association, effective Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2013.

[Last City Contracts, With Raises, Will Wait Until After Budget Approval \(*Gazettes*\)](#)

Contract negotiations with the four unions that have not agreed to pension reform, including the managers association, are nearing conclusion, but likely will not be ready for ratification until after the city's Fiscal 2014 budget has been passed, according to Long Beach City Manager Pat West.

[DWP Labor Contract in Dispute \(*Canyon News*\)](#)

Talks in regards to a new labor pact for Department of Water and Power workers are occurring between key figures involved in the negotiations, and significant stances are being drawn among the opposing sides of the debate.

[CalPERS Puts Weights Behind Opposing Biosimilar Medication Notification Bill \(*Sacramento Business Journal*\)](#)

California's giant pension fund weighed in on biosimilar medications Wednesday, suggesting the stakes are high before they are even approved for sale.

REVENUE & TAXATION / FINANCE

[Monterey Count Head Start Feels Budget Ax \(*The Californian*\)](#)

The impact of the federal sequestration on Monterey County Head Start has been slight but significant. Though the local preschool program did not have to abandon transportation services or close centers as in some parts of the nation, there were consolidations and layoffs locally, officials said. And the cutbacks may not be over.

[Backing for BART Tax or Bond, Poll Finds \(*San Francisco Chronicle*\)](#)

Voters in three Bay Area counties support BART, even if they don't ride it, and would back ballot measures boosting sales or property taxes to improve the transit system, a public opinion poll shows.

HOMELESS ISSUES

[Palo Alto's Opportunity Center Provides Housing for Silicon Valley Residents Who Previously Were Homeless \(*San Jose Mercury News*\)](#)

Mae Law has a pretty good idea of where she would be if not for The Opportunity Center of the Midpeninsula.

"I would be at the train station, sleeping in the field," said Law, 50. "I'd have nowhere to go, and it's the same way for most people here."

[Homeless Shelter Cutbacks \(*Santa Barbara Independent*\)](#)

When administrators of Casa Esperanza homeless shelter sent out a desperate call for financial help three years ago, part-time Montecito resident and Texas industrialist Harold Simmons — also a major funder of right-wing causes — wrote a check for \$220,000 on the spot and has sent annual checks of \$25,000 since. Today, Casa finds itself in an even deeper hole and would need at least two Harold Simmonses to offset the \$500,000 in service cuts that shelter operators announced will take effect September 3.

IN OTHER CITY NEWS

[Fast-Food Worker Strikers Coming to Los Angeles; Higher Wages Sought \(*Los Angeles Times*\)](#)

The fight for higher fast-food wages is coming to Los Angeles.

Just a few days before Labor Day, restaurant workers plan to walk off the job at big-name chains around Southern California to demand \$15-an-hour pay, according to organizers.

The protests, part of a nationwide day of strikes called for Aug. 29, would be the latest in a series of one-day, rolling walkouts that have occurred in major cities in recent weeks. Workers have picketed McDonald's, KFC and Taco Bell and other restaurants during peak mealtimes to demand better pay and the right to organize.

[Job Killer List Gets Shorter as Lawmakers Race to Finish Session \(*Sacramento Business Journal*\)](#)

The California Chamber of Commerce has kept a list of bills this year the organization says will hurt the economy and kill jobs. The list, [which is available here](#), originally included more than 30 bills introduced earlier in the session. Now that list has been whittled down to 12 after lawmakers pulled the plug on the other proposals.

[FBI Continues Probe into Central Basin Water District's Records \(*Los Angeles Times*\)](#)

The FBI served new subpoenas on the Central Basin Municipal Water District this month, expanding a corruption investigation that began with a raid on state Sen. Ronald S. Calderon's office in June.

[Dunsmuir Councilors Stay Out of Arth v. Raine Lawsuit \(*Mt. Shasta News*\)](#)

Dunsmuir councilors did not approve a resolution last week that would have directed city attorney John Kenny and city manager Brenda Bains to facilitate "mediation" in the Arth v. Raine lawsuit.