



Around Tulare County

DELIVERING INFORMATION ABOUT TULARE COUNTY – OCTOBER 2013

Supervisor's Message: Loss of Ag Land a Concern



The magician's ability to deceive begins by calling attention to one act which holds the audience's attention while simultaneously performing an unseen sleight of hand. A recent study by the Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) staff recently uncovered a similar deceptive act concerning loss of valuable farmland in Tulare County.

The public is constantly bombarded by the popular media with the sins of urban encroachment chewing up our valuable farmland. Such evil requires a continuing parade of new regulations and laws to mitigate this loss of valuable farm lands. There is no question that farm land annexed to cities will ultimately reduce the number of acres devoted to farming. But is this the whole story on the loss of such lands?

The Tulare County LAFCO study revealed that during the period from 1998 to 2013, 21.6 square miles of Tulare County were annexed into the 8 incorporated cities in our county. Surprisingly, the amount of acreage going

into Federal and State ownership during this same period was 24.7 square miles. That's right, more privately held land, was lost to government takeover than all urban encroachment! Has there been any publicity, any public outcry about this loss of valuable crop land to public ownership which exceeds urban encroachment? As of today, 52 percent of Tulare County belongs to these two governmental entities and there is no indication that this continuing increase of government ownership will stop any time soon.

While the public, the press, non-governmental organizations, and governments themselves focus on urban encroachment and its consequent destruction of farm land, the same governments which seek further restrictions of private property rights are buying up or requiring "donations" of farm land in order to gain approval of development rights.

I support the county's general plan which seeks to continue the legacy of protecting our number one industry in Tulare County. My purpose here is not to propose wholesale development across the countryside. However, we do need to broaden our

discussions concerning protection of farm land; not just from our growing cities, but from our governments which are impacting more and more of our privately held property, including farm lands.

Once property goes into public ownership, the loss of our tax base and opportunities for future development has a direct impact on the county's ability to provide needed services to our residents, both rural and urban.

I believe all 58 counties (well maybe not San Francisco) should engage in a study like that conducted by Tulare County LAFCO. If their studies reveal a similar large scale taking of private lands into public ownership, perhaps it is time to broaden the public discourse and examine all that impacts our farmlands. The magician's magical charms may have deceived us up until now, but there is still time to take meaningful action to protect our remaining farmland from governmental takeover.

Steve Worthley, District Four Board of Supervisors

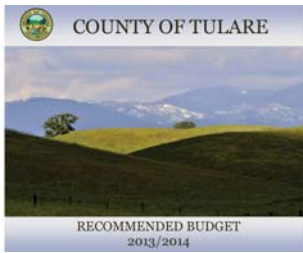
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Supervisors Approve \$1 Billion Balanced Budget



“Not facing a budget deficit for the second straight year means we can focus on improving our organization as a whole and continue to provide important services to Tulare County residents.”

Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Pete Vander Poel

Tulare County will begin to put more money into reserves, pay down more debt, and fund one-time projects to improve services thanks to a balanced \$1 billion spending plan approved by the Board of Supervisors on Sept. 17.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Pete Vander Poel said for the second straight year Tulare County did not face a General Fund deficit going into the budget process.

“Not facing a budget deficit for the second straight year means we can focus on improving our organization as a whole and continue to provide important services to Tulare County residents,” Chairman Vander Poel said. “I would like to thank all department heads and employees for their excellent work.”

County Administrative Officer Jean Rousseau, who prepared the FY 2013/14 Recommended Budget, said fiscally conservative spending policies from the Board of Supervisors and a statewide

economic recovery allowed Tulare County to take a positive approach in budgeting this year. For example, the County was in a position to offer a 3 percent salary increase to employee groups whose contracts were up for negotiation this year and, in some cases, equity adjustments were offered to employees who were behind in salaries compared to other counties.

“While the economy is turning around, we will still remain conservative to ensure we can continue to avoid drastic measures while facing unknown economic circumstances,” Rousseau said.

Rousseau said the 2013/14 Adopted Budget reflects a \$28.7 million, or 4.5 percent, increase in General Fund expenditures over last year’s adopted budget. The increase in the general fund spending can be attributed to additional social services provided, an increase in workers compensation spending, salary increases, and the addition of 17 new

positions.

Other highlights from the 2013/14 Adopted Budget include:

- An additional \$2 million was added to reserves, which now stands at \$22 million.

- Debt payments were increased by \$1 million.

- \$1.5 million was set aside for a new Sheriff’s substation in Porterville.

- \$1 million was set aside for facilities to house criminal justice departments in Porterville as a result of the new Porterville Courthouse.

The Board of Supervisors is responsible for reviewing and approving budgets for all County operating funds, internal service and enterprise funds, County Service Areas, and dependent special districts. The State Controller issues guidelines for the organization and presentation of county budgets so that they are standardized among all counties.

County Health Insurance Rates Increased



San Joaquin Valley Insurance Authority officials recently approved 5 to 12 percent increases to its participant’s health, dental, and vision plans. The overall increase equates to 5.1 percent and leaves members of the SJVIA paying up to 7 to 9 percent less for health insurance costs compared to industry trends of 12 to 14 percent increases.

Tulare County Board of Supervisors Chairman Pete Vander Poel, who is also a SJVIA board member, said the main factor behind the

rise in health insurance can be attributed to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). For example, of the proposed 5.3 percent rate increase to Tulare County’s Anthem PPO/HMO plans, 3 percent can be directly attributed to ACA taxes and fees.

“While rates have increased, the bottom line is we have been able to keep health care costs down over an extended period of time,” Chairman Vander Poel said.

Chairman Vander Poel credits participation in the SJVIA as

the main reason for keeping costs down.

For example, employees enrolled in SJVIA plans did not have increased rates in 2012. The SJVIA was formed by Fresno and Tulare counties in October 2009 for the purpose of achieving greater critical mass for health insurance volume purchasing and reduced administrative costs. Since the SJVIA was formed, the cities of Ceres, Reedley, Sanger, San Joaquin, Shafter, Tulare, and Waterford have joined.

Employee Spotlight: Johnny Wong



Johnny Wong gives thanks following his promotion announcement.

Longtime Resource Management Agency (RMA) employee Johnny Wong was recently promoted to Tulare County Chief Engineer.

Wong's first day on his new job was September 22. At the September 24 Board of Supervisors meeting, it was officially announced.

"I've spent 25 wonderful years with the County," Wong told the Board of Supervisors.

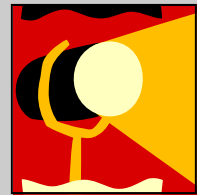
"I wouldn't be the person I am with the County if it weren't for staff, friends and colleagues within Tulare County and RMA. I appreciate it big time."

The Chief Engineer is responsible for planning, organizing, supervising, and inspecting the activities of the Traffic Engineering, County Transit and Airport Management functions within RMA.

Wong's County Career

Wong, a CSU, Fresno alumnus, started his 25-year career with Tulare County in June 1988 as an Engineer I in the Graphics/Design Division. In 1990, he was promoted to Engineer II in Contract Administration and administered road

construction projects. In 1998, Wong was promoted to Engineer III where he managed staff and was responsible for the materials lab, bridge maintenance and construction, as well as culverts and pipe crossings throughout the County. In 2007, Wong was promoted to Engineer IV, a Division Manager position in which he was responsible for budget management, oversight of more than 100 employees, maintenance and construction of the County's 3000-mile road system, 340 bridges and culverts, heavy equipment, a materials lab, contract administration, and traffic control and transit divisions.



There are many County employees who are doing outstanding things for their community outside of their job.

Do you know a County employee who should be in the spotlight? Let us know at:

newsletter@co.tulare.ca.us

Program Spotlight: Red Ribbon Week

The Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency and the Tulare County Office of Education is partnering to host the 4th Annual Red Ribbon Week celebration.

The event will take place from noon to 4 p.m. on Oct. 26 at the International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Laspina St. in Tulare.

Students and their families are invited to attend the free event featuring urban graffiti artist Eric Gonzalez along with other local performers, games, hands-on activities, and snacks.

Red Ribbon Week was established by Congress to

commemorate Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent Enrique S. Camarena. After serving in the military, Camarena became a police officer aspiring to work for the DEA. Amid protests from family, he declared, "I am only one person, but I want to make a difference." Camarena was hired by the DEA and became an undercover agent in Mexico, investigating drug cartels. In 1985, Camarena was abducted and killed by drug traffickers.

Camarena's friends and family wore badges of red cloth to honor him, and newly forming anti-drug coalitions

began to take Camarena's story as inspiration that one person can make a difference. Red Ribbon Week is nationally recognized and takes place from Oct. 23-31 every year to promote and celebrate a sober and healthy lifestyle.

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors will proclaim Oct. 23-31 as Red Ribbon Week in Tulare County. During this time, you may see schools and other organizations participate in Red Ribbon Week events and showcasing their activities.



Want your program to be in the spotlight? Please send suggestions to:

newsletter@co.tulare.ca.us

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County Library Awarded Statewide Recognition



CSAC staff (left) presents the Merit Award.

Two Tulare County Library programs have received statewide recognition for providing digital access to teens and more access to books for all residents.

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) awarded Tulare County's "Teen Digital Media Lab" with a Challenge Award and the "Your Library in More Places" program also received a Merit Award for its efforts to place book machines in rural, unincorporated communities as part of its annual Challenge Awards program. CSAC staff presented the awards at the September 24th Board of Supervisors meeting .

"CSAC is validating something that we already knew here in Tulare County: our Library is doing a great job in finding innovative ways to promote their programs and keep the community engaged," said

Pete Vander Poel, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors. "We are extremely honored to receive these accolades and are proud of the Library staff."

The statewide Challenge Awards program honors innovation in county government. This year, CSAC received more than 200 entries from California's 58 counties. The entries were evaluated by an independent panel of judges closely affiliated with counties and the programs and services they deliver, according to CSAC. Tulare County was one of two counties with a population between 200,001 and 700,000 to receive a Challenge Award. Three other counties in the same population category received Merit Awards.

"These awards demonstrate that the library is on the

cutting edge in finding new ways to reach every citizen in Tulare County," said Jeff Scott, County Librarian. "Whether they are teens, residents of rural communities or other special groups, we look for programs and events that will interest and inspire them."

CSAC President David Finigan, a Del Norte County Supervisor, issued the following statement:

"Innovation is alive and well in Tulare County. I'd like to offer my congratulations to the County for being honored with two special awards from the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), which annually recognizes innovative, cost-effective county programs that improve service."



CSAC staff (left) presents the Challenge Award.

AROUND TULARE COUNTY

Around Tulare County is published once a month as a service to the public. Unless otherwise noted, articles are written by County staff. For additional information, contact Jed Chernabaeff.

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OCTOBER COUNTY ACTIVITIES, DEADLINES, EVENTS, MEETINGS

Meeting: (Date/Time)

Board of Supervisors' Meeting: 9 a.m. Oct. 1, 8*, 15, 22, 29
Tulare County Water Commission: 3 p.m. Oct. 14
Tulare County Association of Governments: 1 p.m., Oct. 21
Tulare County Planning Commission: 9 a.m. Oct. 9, 23

More Information:

559/636-5000
559/636-5005
559/624-7274
559/624-7000

*The October 8th Board of Supervisors meeting will start at 10 a.m.



Places to Go Play: Woodlake is located among citrus and olive orchards at the base of the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The city is a short drive from Sequoia National Park. Close by, Woodlake enjoys the amenities of Lake Kaweah and the Kaweah and St. John's rivers. Bravo Lake, an irrigation facility located within city limits, provides bird watching and walking opportunities. Learn more about Woodlake and other places to "Go Play" at www.tularecountymap.com.