

Officials respond to high-speed rail concerns in Fresno's Chinatown

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The Fresno Bee September 26, 2013

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2013/09/26/3521077/officials-respond-to-high-speed.html?sp=/99/406/263/1256/>

The tone was frustration and confusion from many of about 50 people at a high-speed rail meeting in downtown Fresno Thursday, held at the Fresno Fire Department headquarters.

Some didn't know if their properties were in the path of the high speed rail route. Others said they didn't want to relocate because of the challenge of starting somewhere new, or because of a personal connection.

"I love it and I work here," said one downtown G Street business owner. "I've been a good-standing business owner until now. You've taken my life away."

Don Grebe, director of real property for the California High Speed Rail Authority, was empathetic.

Grebe said a man in the high speed rail's path told him he planted his garden at 3 a.m. and that "you can't compensate me for that."

"You're right, I can't," Grebe said.

Grebe and Diana Gomez, Central Valley regional director for the rail authority, fielded most of Thursday's questions and worked to calm many nerves. They talked about how officials are trying to help people through the difficult process, mailing informational notices, and talking with property owners about relocation assistance.

Thursday's meeting was hosted by Chinatown Revitalization Inc. of Fresno. Kathy Omachi, a board member and founder of the group, was concerned that some historic buildings in the Chinatown area could be in jeopardy because the route runs close by the community -- with properties between F and G streets in question.

Dead end streets and divided communities are also a concern, said Jeremy Brownstein, board chair for Chinatown Revitalization.

Among the confusion was a 90-day notice that went out, which was meant as informational only, not an eviction notice, Grebe said. It stated that once the authority owned a property, tenants would have 90 days to vacate.

Officials said they've been reaching out to the community since 2009, including information about possible routes, and again once the route was chosen in May 2012.

Lee Ann Eager, president and CEO of Economic Development Corporation, has been helping with high speed rail outreach. About a month ago, she hired four people -- who also speak Spanish, Chinese and Hmong -- who will be going door-to-door, she said, in an effort to personally connect with people who will be affected and get them further assistance.

Railway concerns

Business and property owners in Fresno's historic Chinatown neighborhood worry about the effects of a high-speed-train route through the district.



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