

# Fresno City Council OKs Fulton Mall road

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The Fresno City Council has voted to restore the Fulton Mall into Fulton Street.

The Fresno City Council took the plunge last night in its decision to transform the 50-year-old Fulton Mall back into a street.

After hours of deliberation and public comments, the council voted 5-2 in favor of a project that would use a \$15.9-million federal grant awarded last September to lay down asphalt on the six-block corridor.

The vote represents the council's approval of an environmental impact report for the project, which calls for two lanes of traffic running straight from Toulumne to Inyo streets bordered by parallel parking spaces, sidewalks and relocated mall features like trees, sculptures and benches.

The side streets of Kern, Mariposa and Merced would also be opened to merge with traffic along the new Fulton street except in certain cases like the Mariposa Street underpass leading to the underground parking garage at Van Ness Avenue and Kern Street adjoining Chukchansi Park.

Rejected was a second project on the table envisioning two lanes of traffic winding around existing trees, sculptures and fountains.

Many also spoke in favor of third option to refurbish the mall in its current layout, however only the two street alternatives would have been able to utilize the federal grant matched by \$4 million in local funding sources like Measure C.

Although reluctant at the loss of the pedestrian mall built in 1964 by architect Garrett Eckbo, council members Steve Brandau, Blong Xiong, Clint Olivier, Lee Brand and Oliver Baines agreed it was a necessary move to bring economic prosperity back to the area where 70 percent of the buildings sit vacant and existing stores struggle to lure customers, especially in the evening.

Sal Quintero voted no, but not before pitching a third option that would open just two blocks at either end of the mall. He was joined in opposition by Paul Caprioglio.

With the council's approval, the city's Downtown Revitalization Manager Elliott Balch estimated the final design and environmental process would likely be done by June and a contract could go out to bid later this year.

Construction would then be slated to begin in March 2015, he said, with work finally wrapping up by mid-2016.