

# Tehee: Street or no, the time is right for Fulton

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By Joshua Tehee

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For many downtown supporters, last Thursday's Fresno City Council vote on the future of the Fulton Mall was a historic win for an area long subjected to neglect and/or plain apathy.

Of course, the vote, which sets the path for the Fulton Mall to be open to traffic, came with fierce debate and the ultimate outcome is still in question. At least one group has threatened legal action and created a crowd-funding campaign to help pay the costs.

You have to appreciate the sentiment and determination, but the mall is not a museum. There is an opportunity to transform Fulton Street and it's not just tearing up the concrete. This is no time to stand in the way.

Nor is it time for magic bullets.

Fulton won't succeed without a change in mentality. Adding a street won't put a big-name, hip retailer in the old Gottschalks building. It won't get us a Regal cinema downtown.

Given the right incentives, however, we could have (and support, I'm convinced) an independent art-house theater in a place like The Crest Theatre. Think Fresno Filmworks, but full-time. The idea has been kicked around for years. Now would be the time for film fans to let it be known: We want it to happen and we want it downtown.

Downtown dreamers have long salivated over the idea of a restaurant/bar on the roof of the building that used to house Luftenburgs Bridal.

That would be a place people would go, especially if it were open past 10 p.m. They'd even pay for parking, I'm sure, with the view of the stadium. It would be something that could not exist anywhere else in Fresno.

City code and its permitting process have kept such a place from ever being feasible. What if the city's red tape were cleared? Could the building's new owner be convinced to let it happen? Could a restaurateur be convinced to give it a try? Dave Fansler comes to mind.

Kiel Schmidt, posting on his Arc Hop blog ([archop.org](http://archop.org)) has a set of recommendations for how the city can help Fulton succeed. His words were written just prior to the mall vote and were meant to show a workable alternative to adding traffic. It's an informative read and the ideas merit mentioning (and implementing) nonetheless.

**Waive conditional use permit fees.**

"This incentive would reduce start-up costs and free up an entrepreneur's resources to pay for renovations or pay a higher rent to a building owner willing to pay for improvements amortized into the lease," he writes.

**Have an amended outdoor dining ordinance that makes it easy for restaurants and cafes to serve (alcohol mostly) on patios.**

Actually, there is a version of this moving through the City Council now.

Fulton Street isn't suited for the retail developments that define most of Fresno. It will not become another River Park, or Fashion Fair, or even El Paseo, the shopping center that just opened at Herndon Avenue and 99.

Nor should we want it to. It should be home to the mom-and-pop shops, sidewalk cafes and one-of-a-kind restaurants. It should be a hub built on the strength of the architecture and history that was the original center of Fresno.

We deserve to have that kind of place.

If we're watchful, this infusion of money (and more importantly the attention that comes with it), could make that a reality.

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