

Fresno and Clovis city councils meet to discuss water, jobs

By George Hostetter



A cyclist rides past a recharge basin at the northwest corner of Shepherd Avenue and avenues on Thursday, Sept. 25, 2014 in Fresno, Calif. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

-
-
-



Jobs and recreation played second fiddle Tuesday evening at Fresno City Hall to the issue on just about everyone's mind: water.



For the second time this year, the Fresno and Clovis city councils held a joint meeting to discuss topics of mutual interest.

The first topic was reaffirming the cities' commitment to working together in a difficult world. Fresno Council President Steve Brandau welcomed everyone to Fresno City Hall. Clovis Mayor Lynne Ashbeck led everyone in the flag salute. Mission accomplished.



The second topic was economic development in general and job-creation in particular.

Lee Ann Eager, chief executive of the Economic Development Corp. serving Fresno County, walked the council through familiar territory. Shovel-ready land for new businesses is good, she said. So, too, are prudent but decisive incentives to companies looking for a place to build, she added.

But, Eager emphasized, it's hard to beat a city with a talented, disciplined, ambitious workforce.

The third topic was trails.

Mark Keppler, executive director of The Maddy Institute for Public Affairs at Fresno State and a longtime champion of trails, said there's widespread public support in the region for well-conceived walking and biking paths. Liability worries and maintenance challenges hamper the growth of trails, he said. There's considerable progress in resolving both, he said.

The fourth and final topic was water. Council members and officials from both city halls perked up on this one.

The reason was obvious to anyone listening attentively to Clovis Public Utilities Director Luke Serpa. The San Joaquin Valley in this past year (Oct. 1 to Sept. 30) suffered the worst drought in recorded history, he said. The past three years are the worst three-year drought in the Valley, he said.

There's a lot of water in the aquifer. But, Serpa said, state regulators will soon put an end to unbridled pumping of that treasure.

Serpa and Fresno Public Utilities Director Thomas Esqueda sat side-by-side as they reviewed each city's water situation. Their words made for a stunning contrast.

Clovis in a typical rain year gets 27,000 acre feet of river water and makes use of every drop thanks to a marriage of treatment plant and recharge basins, Serpa said. Clovis has a water bank for drought emergencies, yet got through this dry season without dipping into that asset, he said.

Fresno also has a system of treatment plant for river water and recharge basins, Esqueda said. But, he added, the system is insufficient in size. Fresno is nowhere close to having the infrastructure in place to handle the 180,000 acre-feet of water it gets in a typical rain year, Esqueda said.

These are among the reasons that Fresno is now over-drafting its aquifer by about 40 million gallons per day, Esqueda said.

"Wow," Ashbeck said.

Esqueda said he hopes the Fresno City Council on Thursday approves a plan to begin fixing this problem.

Contact George Hostetter: ghostetter@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6272 or [@GeorgeHostetter](https://twitter.com/GeorgeHostetter) on Twitter.

Copyright

© 2014 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>