

EDITORIAL: Don't rush to a vote on Fresno development plan



Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin

FRESNO BEE FILE PHOTO

We understand why Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin wants quick approval of the 2035 General Plan Update that utilizes her strategies for making the urban core more attractive to residents and investors.

A compressed review and approval schedule can be used by the mayor to her political advantage because it provides opponents with less time to rally their forces. In addition, the composition of the Fresno City Council is changing in January, as Swearengin ally Blong Xiong terms out of his District 1 seat and is replaced by Esmeralda Soria, the victor over Cary Catalano, who was endorsed by the mayor.

The new general plan, however, deserves time to be absorbed and understood by key stakeholders and the public at large. The schedule calls for a public hearing at 5 p.m. Thursday in the Convention Center's New Exhibit Hall followed by a City Council vote Dec. 18.

This fast-track handling of the plan that will guide where and how Fresno grows is not the way to attract buy-in from residents, developers and investors.

It is telling to us that a developer lobbying group, the Building Industry Association of Fresno and Madera Counties, and 20 nonprofits that are proponents of urban revitalization are asking for more time to review and comment on the plan. When groups that rarely align are holding up a stop sign, the mayor and the council members should take notice and apply the brakes.

In addition, this is the holiday season. People are focused on vacations, shopping and getting together with friends and relatives. This is hardly the time for contemplating population densities, remaking fading business corridors and the pluses or minuses of development incentives.

Mary Savala, vice president of the League of Women Voters of Fresno, wrote in a Dec. 5 op-ed in The Bee that the only reason given by City Hall for the rush to approve the plan was that “city staff needs to move on to other projects.”

Given the plan’s importance to Fresno’s economic, social and cultural health, City Hall should allow citizens time to fully digest the plan and consider the impacts. This requires delaying a council vote for at least 30 days.

Don’t misunderstand: We agree with Swearingin’s conclusions and goals and those of the plan’s City Council supporters. Fresno must become smarter about development. To continue growing out while failing to rebuild older parts of the city will only gobble up more valuable farm land, raise the costs of providing public services and increase the challenges for Fresno Unified School District.

We ask the mayor and other plan supporters to stand firm in their convictions, but allow residents adequate time to learn about this proposal. If it is as sound as advertised, we’re confident that the votes for approval will be there.

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