

# Fresno City Council says no to grant for farmland planning

By George  
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The state is offering cities grant money to help pay for developing a Farmland Preservation Program. Such a program would require a developer aiming to build on a piece of farmland close to the city to protect another piece of farmland of similar size from development.

ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — Fresno Bee file photo [Buy Photo](#)

- *Fresno City Council Member Steve Brandau says agriculture preservation policies need a thorough public vetting — a position the council supported on a 4-3 vote.*
- *Council President Oliver Baines says protecting Valley's farmland from unwise development is a no-brainer.*
- *In other action, the council rejected the adoption of a bill that would have allowed medical marijuana users to grow up to four marijuana plants.*

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A divided Fresno City Council said no Thursday morning to a state grant for farmland preservation.

The issue was whether to [give the city planning department a green light](#) to apply for a state Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program grant of \$100,000.

The money would be spent on developing a Farmland Preservation Program with the help of a consultant. Such a

program would require a developer aiming to build on a piece of farmland close to the city to protect another piece of farmland of similar size from development.

The policy would add to development costs. Farmland preservation is an important part of the new general plan.

Council Member Steve Brandau led the opposition to the grant, saying the city has not firmly decided how it wants to tackle farmland preservation. He said the presence of a Sacramento-funded consultant would only generate an unstoppable momentum for a Sacramento-style preservation program.

Brandau said the city should postpone the grant application until farmland preservation ideas could be vetted at a City Hall workshop.

Council President Oliver Baines led the support for the grant, saying the other side was making a mountain out of a molehill. He said it's foolish to ignore state money to help City Hall do something that is part of the 2035 general plan.

The vote was 4-3 to reject the application. Baines and Council Members Esmeralda Soria and Sal Quintero voted to file the application.

The lengthy debate got heated at times. Three points made this one of City Hall's more memorable hearings:

- Everyone agreed that farmland preservation is a favorite of a state government that, when it comes to land-use policy, has a lot more trump cards than Fresno.
- The grant application has been in the works for at least a month, yet no one on the council or in the administration of Mayor Ashley Swearengin apparently figured a workshop on land-use policy (merely a hot-button issue at City Hall for a hundred years) was the smart way to begin the legislative process.
- City staff said the application couldn't be delayed even a week to accommodate a workshop, apparently confirming this as the first time in history that Sacramento is refusing to wait a few extra days to spend money on something Sacramento very much wants.

Pot ordinance rejected

In other action, the council rejected the adoption of [a bill that would have allowed medical marijuana users to grow up to four marijuana plants](#).

Brandau, Quintero and Council Members Paul Caprioglio and Lee Brand voted to reject the bill, which was successfully introduced last month.

Caprioglio and Brand switched sides. They acknowledged that some patients need medical marijuana, but said the bill is not in the best interests of Fresno.

Olivier probably came closest to explaining the council's change of heart when he said the issue of legal marijuana use (medical or recreational) almost certainly will be decided next year by California's voters.

This story will be updated. Thursday afternoon issues include discussion of the [Fresno Grizzlies' lease at Chukchansi Park](#).

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