

Fresno Council Member Lee Brand seeks tighter control of big projects

By George
Hostetter



Fresno City Council Member Lee Brand as shown in a 2010 photo.

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

- Fresno City Council Member Lee Brand unveils his Construction Management Act Tuesday
- The bill would change how City Hall oversees big projects
- Brand sees the act as another asset in his 2016 mayoral campaign

Fresno City Council Member Lee Brand wants stronger oversight of expensive public construction projects.

That three high-profile jobs — Fulton Corridor, the water-system upgrade and Bus Rapid Transit — are rushing this way explains part of his motivation.

That Brand is already gearing up for the 2016 mayoral race explains the rest.

Brand has scheduled a news conference Tuesday morning at City Hall to unveil his Construction Management Act,

the 17th (by his count) bill from his pen designed to improve the way government works.

His act “will mean projects will be completed on time and on budget,” Brand said Monday. “When that happens, taxpayers benefit, ratepayers benefit and city government is more efficient.”

Brand said he will take his proposal to the City Council this month.

City Manager Bruce Rudd said the administration of Mayor Ashley Swearengin worked closely with Brand on the act.

“Over the next six months the city of Fresno will begin construction on a number of high-profile capital projects, such as a new surface water treatment facility, Fulton Street reconstruction and Bus Rapid Transit,” Rudd said.

“Therefore, it is important that we adopt policies and procedures that help to ensure that these kind of investments are delivered both on time and on budget in a way that provides the public with a higher level of accountability and transparency.”

Brand said there are typically two ways a city gets into trouble on big construction projects.

The first is saying yes in the first place. For example, Brand said the city should have built a less expensive downtown stadium.

The second is failing to keep a sharp eye on the project’s progress. Brand points to construction of the Fresno Yosemite International Airport concourse about 15 years ago, a project whose delays and cost overruns led to ruined careers.

Protecting the taxpayer on construction projects is not a new idea at City Hall. However, Brand said, the current process has gaps.

Brand and Council Member Clint Olivier tackled similar issues in February with their Enterprise Accountability and Oversight Act. Among other things, this bill requires the creation of a committee of experts charged with making sure taxpayers get their money’s worth on the biggest projects.

Brand on Monday said this act doesn’t go far enough. Highlights of his new act include:

- Contractors, architects and engineers will be prequalified.
- The project contractor must have at least five years of experience.
- The project’s design will get a thorough review of costs and timelines.
- City Hall will do an inventory of existing facilities. Those in the worst shape should be considered for replacement.
- Change orders must meet certain guidelines.
- Periodic reports on the progress of big-ticket projects will help keep surprises to a minimum.

Brand joined the council in January 2009, just as the city was entering the Great Recession. He almost immediately began crafting legislation intended to improve City Hall’s decision-making process on money matters. For instance, his Better Business Act raised the bar for businesses seeking big taxpayer subsidies.

Brand is termed out in January 2017. He wants to be mayor. He’s not shy about his ambition nor his pride in his long list of acts.

“These acts are starting to form a foundation of long-term sustainable fiscal management that will bind councils and mayors for years to come,” Brand said. “That’s the political piece, but it’s also the reality.”

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