

Mayor Swearengin puts a label on effort to rebuild neighborhoods: Restore Fresno

By George
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Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin is leading a new effort to renew older neighborhoods in town.

FRESNO BEE FILE PHOTO

- *City officials announce Restore Fresno initiative*
- *Focus on neighborhood investments and community participation*
- *Key ideas debated at budget hearings*

Ashley Swearingin now has a brand name to go with her long-running mayoral vision — Restore Fresno.

Swearingin and a handful of top city officials gathered Wednesday morning near downtown to explain City Hall's plan for transforming Fresno's most challenged neighborhoods.

There are lots of moving pieces, and many are already in place. They range from a renewed emphasis on neighborhood associations to City Hall's promise of more public investment.

The bottom line is simple, the mayor said.

"We're going to make sure our neighborhoods make a comeback," Swearingin said.

Fresno City Council Members Esmeralda Soria, Clint Olivier and Paul Caprioglio joined Swearingin at the news conference.

The coordinated efforts of many will "give our neighborhoods hope and direction," Soria said.

Olivier said Fresno finds itself at a unique moment in history "where so many stakeholders are coming together to improve our city."

Caprioglio said Fresnans are going to "march and march" through struggling neighborhoods "until we have restored the entire city."

The news conference was held in front of Yokomi Elementary School, next to Community Regional Medical Center. It was an apt choice. The area some 25 years ago was thought to be on the verge of a revitalization spurred by an expanding hospital campus. The hospital blossomed, but the surrounding neighborhood continued to struggle as it had since Fresno growth headed north.

Today, though, the quality of housing in the Yokomi neighborhood is seeing a measured and eye-catching comeback.

How this has come to pass, and the desire to see such renewal accelerate and spread throughout the city, is at the heart of Restore Fresno.

The initiative's nuts and bolts will be familiar to anyone who closely followed the evolution over the past two years of the 2035 general plan. The recipe in essence takes big portions of public and private investment, adds a firm shake of land-use regulation and tops off everything with commitment from neighborhood residents.

Hearings for Swearingin's proposed fiscal year 2016 budget begin next month. This debate about the lifeblood of public policy was the context for Wednesday's event at Yokomi.

The mayor's spending plan includes money for specific plans (southwest Fresno, Roosevelt High School area, west of Highway 99 area). It spurs revitalization work in the Lowell, El Dorado Park, Yokomi, Kirk and Jefferson neighborhoods. It pursues incentives to boost private investment in older areas. It supports the growth of leadership among neighborhood residents.

"There's much more to be done," Swearingin said. "But we're excited about our progress."

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