

# Mayor Swarengin to skeptics: A restored Fresno is coming

By George Hostetter  
ghostetter@fresnobee.com

Mayor Ashley Swarengin on Thursday gave the City Council a half-hour overview of her “Restore Fresno” initiative.

She might well have subtitled it “Enough With The Cynicism.”

The name, of course, says it all. Restore Fresno is a series of fine-tuned policies wrapped in an overarching vision of inner-city revitalization and fueled by a city budget finally done with fears of bankruptcy.

\$1.2 billion

The amount of spending in Mayor Ashley Swarengin’s proposed Fiscal Year 2016 budget

Swarengin said she knows the chatter of recent years: The mayor wants to rebuild older neighborhoods; those places are a mess; they will be forever; she’s kidding no one.

The conventional wisdom, Swarengin said, is “we can’t there from here.”

The truth, Swarengin added, is that Restore Fresno begins “the long journey to restore the older parts of our community.”

Council Member Sal Quintero tells the mayor to do something about litter and illegal dumping, especially in business areas.

The mayor kicked things off by redefining a concept that has been something of a parlor game over the decades: Where’s the geographical line that separates Old Fresno (blight-plagued) from New Fresno (growth-blessed). Some 30 years ago, she said, the line was McKinley Avenue. Today, she said, it’s Herndon Avenue, some five miles to the north.

Fresno, Swarengin said, can’t go on this way.

Restore Fresno’s parts are many. All are connected in some fashion. For example, the council recently adopted a vacant-building law that sets up the following scenario:

- Landlords are put on legal notice to keep their empty houses in good shape.
- That requires a code-enforcement division with money and staffing, something Swarengin promises in next year’s budget.
- Private investors, noticing a neighborhood’s new vibes, pour money into the area.
- Confidence builds among residents in City Hall’s commitment.
- Neighbors vow to take more control of their own neighborhoods.
- One sustainable neighborhood builds on another.

Swarengin said the coming year will see a focus on the Lowell, Yokomi and Jefferson neighborhoods on the north edge of downtown, El Dorado Park near Fresno State and southwest Fresno’s Kirk neighborhood.

City Hall also will begin work on specific plans for southwest Fresno, the Roosevelt High School area in southeast Fresno and a big portion of the area west of Highway 99.

City officials haven't been idle even during the Great Recession. The 2035 general plan is finished, two new parks are on the horizon and public safety is getting more resources. This, too, is part of Restore Fresno.

It's a huge challenge. Where do we start?

Mayor Ashley Swearengin, who answers her own question with "Restore Fresno"

Sounds like a lot, Swearengin said, but it's "just the beginning."

Budget hearings begin in June.

In other action, the council:

- Postponed a decision on a lease at Manchester Center that would be headquarters for the Police Department's Violent Crime Impact Team. No reason was given. The rebirth of the historic but struggling shopping center in central Fresno is key to Swearengin's plans for the Blackstone Avenue business corridor. This, too, is Restore Fresno.
- Authorized Police Chief Jerry Dyer to buy 400 body cameras. Dyer said dozens of officers already have the devices. He said the cameras will help retain trust between citizen and officer. This, too, is Restore Fresno.

George Hostetter: [\(559\) 441-6272](tel:5594416272), [@GeorgeHostetter](https://www.instagram.com/GeorgeHostetter)