

Fresno Council Member Olivier to City Hall: Paint the Art Museum

By George Hostetter
ghostetter@fresnobee.com

Coats of paint and sweetheart leases took center stage Wednesday at Fresno budget hearings.

Council Member Clint Olivier asked City Hall to do its duty by painting the outside of the Fresno Art Museum.

The city-owned building at Radio Park (southwest corner of First Street and Clinton Avenue in central Fresno) hasn't been painted in 14 years, Olivier said. The museum's lease mandates fresh paint every seven years. Mayor Ashley Swearengin's proposed \$1.2 billion budget for fiscal year 2016 doesn't include money to fix this mismatch.

"The building is showing signs of neglect," said Olivier, whose district includes Radio Park.

Olivier's motion directs the Public Works Department to quickly get an estimate. The maximum is \$10,000, though Olivier made clear he'd be willing to spend more if necessary.

This part of Fresno has a handful of revitalizing agents, Olivier said. The popular Sam's Italian Deli is on First, north of Clinton. Veteran's Hospital is a short walk to the west of Radio Park. The park itself is getting more attention from City Hall.

Olivier said a city focused on neighborhood revitalization is foolish to think it's saving money by ignoring legal commitments to a regional treasure such as the Art Museum.

Council Member Steve Brandau delivered the second, and Olivier's motion went into the "hopper" along with a handful of other motions. They will get an individual vote, perhaps next week.

Michelle Ellis Pracy, the museum's executive director, left the council chamber with a smile.

First, though, City Manager Bruce Rudd reminded Olivier and his council colleagues that public finance isn't as simple as majority vote.

Rudd said the Art Museum is merely one of several community assets housed in city-owned structures and blessed with unusually low rent.

The Art Museum pays \$1 a year. The museum takes care of everything inside the building. The city handles the building's exterior and the grounds.

This subsidy comes out of someone's hide, Rudd said.

Public Works Director Scott Mozier said his staff will begin calling painting contractors.

Rudd said he'll make sure the council and administration "start assessing" if it's smart policy to have a bunch of \$1-a-year leases, especially when City Hall needs all the maintenance money it can find.

The third day of budget hearings suggest that million-dollar motions are in style.

Hearings in recent years have been bleak affairs. Revenues were down and expenses maddeningly stable. Bankruptcy loomed. Council members, inclined by nature to spend, were reduced to moping.

But these days are financially brighter.

Council Member Esmeralda Soria on Tuesday moved to spend an extra \$1.5 million on parks.

Brandau on Wednesday moved to spend an extra \$1.4 million on streets.

And more departments come to the table Monday.

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