

# Swearingin to Fresno: Believe in yourself and your city

By George Hostetter  
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Fresno is headed in the right direction, despite its many challenges.

That was the message from Mayor Ashley Swearingin and three community leaders at a town hall meeting of sorts Tuesday night in downtown.

Swearingin at one point championed the growing entrepreneurial spirit among Fresnoans.

“Take your destiny in your own hands,” she advised Fresno and the adventurous in the audience of about 150.

He created an opening that we had to run through.

Mayor Ashley Swearingin on former Mayor Alan Autry’s impressive efforts to improve older neighborhoods

The 90-minute event at Frank’s Place in the Cultural Arts District was billed as an exchange of ideas on the question “Can Fresno Win The War On Poverty?” The event was put on by [Zócalo Public Square](#), a not-for-profit ideas exchange that blends live events and humanities journalism, and [The California Wellness Foundation](#).

Joe Moore, director of content at Valley Public Radio, was the moderator. Swearingin was joined by veteran public-policy expert Pete Weber, Poverello House Executive Director Cruz Avila and Bitwise Industries co-founder Irma Olguin.

Moore asked the questions; the four panelists responded. The audience finished things with questions.

The War on Poverty, a term that dates back to the mid-1960s and the ambitious social vision of President Lyndon Johnson, may have had top billing on this night. But the four panelists almost immediately changed directions. Swearingin’s word to the wise – take your destiny in your own hands – was at the core of most comments.

Most questions were directed toward Swearingin. No surprise there since she is the chief executive of a city with 515,000 people and an annual budget of more than \$1 billion.

Swearingin said former Mayor Alan Autry did an excellent job in raising Fresno’s awareness of the struggles in older neighborhoods. She said she ran for mayor in 2008 to keep the momentum going strong.

I think the next decade is the most important.

Swearingin on Fresno’s long struggle to make all of the city great

Fresno needed updates for its general plan and development code. These aren’t the most exciting of topics to the average Fresnoan, Swearingin said, but they are pivotal to the rebirth of the urban core.

The City Council has already approved the 2035 general plan with its focus on inner-city development. The development code’s overhaul will soon head to the council.

Swearingin said Fresno has worked hard to improve itself over the last 20 years.

“I think we have another 20 to go,” she said.

These are giant steps forward.

Swearingin on successful efforts to get housing for many of the homeless in Fresno

Weber said the Fresno Bridge Academy (which he founded) is helping disadvantaged families regain the stability necessary for its members to be proud and productive citizens.

Olguin said the Valley's youth, especially in rural communities, need to be exposed to the opportunities available to those who work hard.

Avila said public institutions and private groups are making big strides in helping the homeless find housing and better lives.

"It's only going to get better as long as we continue to work together," Avila said.

Jobs, education, public safety, hard work and compassion are among the keys to Fresno's future, the panelists said.

No one guaranteed an end to poverty. All are confident of progress.

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