

## Editorial: Don't delay Fulton Mall reconstruction any longer

BY THE EDITORIAL  
BOARD

After years of spirited citizen debate on the future of the Fulton Mall, the Fresno City Council, on a 5-2 vote in early 2014, decided that downtown's historic street should welcome back vehicle traffic.

But the question has returned as the council will decide Thursday whether to approve a bid by American Paving Co. of Fresno to reconstruct a six-block stretch of Fulton.

American Paving's low bid of \$22.4 million is \$2.4 million higher than what city leaders have budgeted for the job. That fact, quite understandably, has energized project opponents, who want the mall to remain solely for pedestrians.

We urge the council to move forward with opening the mall to traffic.

It is especially important that City Hall keep its promise – made before the 2014 City Council vote – to properly exhibit and care for the mall's many valuable pieces of art.

Starting the process all over again is unlikely to produce savings. Time is money. A delay would only drive up costs, thus forcing officials to settle for a bare-bones project that fails to enhance downtown's appeal.

A delay also would discourage investors who have purchased buildings and planned renovations based on improving customer access to Fulton.

And a delay would send a message throughout California that Fresno, once again, can't get out of its own way. Businesses invest in cities that follow through on their plans. Cities that take two steps backward for every step forward deservedly get left behind.

Federal and state grants are providing \$20 million for Fulton reconstruction. The City Council should not pass on this opportunity to leverage this assistance because the low bid came in higher than expected.

Mayor Ashley Swearengin has said that City Hall will work with the contractor to shave costs. We always applaud government efficiency and being a watchdog of taxpayer dollars.

However, this must project must be done right. It must be first class in every way. Otherwise, why bother?

It is especially important that City Hall keep its promise – made before the 2014 City Council vote – to properly exhibit and care for the mall's many valuable pieces of art.

The city has budgeted \$5 million to do this, and Swearengin told The Bee's John Ellis last month that the art collector is "100 percent funded, and it must be. ... It's a treasure."

We will hold the mayor to her promise to restore the mall's fountains and to faithfully preserve and present the art.

Fresno is a city of great artists and, all too often, government leaders have failed to fully capitalize on their talents to benefit our culture and economy.

Instead of being obstructionists, City Council members should work hand in hand with Swearengin and her administration to see this project through to a successful on-time and on-budget conclusion.