

Council setting eyes on 2016, Fulton Street

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There are always themes to a Fresno City Council meeting agenda.

Mastery, accountability and hubris will take center stage when the council meets Thursday.

Let's take a quick look at the excitement.

1.) City code says a candidate for mayor or a council seat may not accept any contribution totaling more than \$4,100 per election from another person.

The code also says a candidate may not accept any contribution totaling more than \$8,200 per election from what's called a "small contributor committee."

The council will debate whether to raise these limits to \$4,200 per person and \$8,500 per small contributor committee.

I'll do the math for you.

SEE ALSO: [City Hall, in emergency mode, has change to flex turnaround muscle](#)

City Hall might boost the campaign contribution ceiling by 2.4% for individual donors and 3.7% for committees.

There's no staff report on the City Clerk's website – only the proposed tweak to the ordinance. So, there's no telling who gets credit for this idea.

And the item is on the council's consent agenda. Unless a council member specifically asks for a public debate, the change along with a half-dozen other routine items will get approved in a single vote without discussion.

The proposed boost is pretty much chump change. Why bother?

Perhaps a better question is why City Hall bothers with contribution limits at all. The left-leaning candidates with name value always get healthy checks from the unions. The right-leaning candidates with name value always get healthy checks from the developers.

The smart unions and the smart developers play both sides of the street.

The council always has a mix of left- and right-leaning legislators.

In other words, regression to the mean seems to be more powerful than idealism.

I'm guessing each side thinks contribution limits hurt the other side the most. Each side thinks that's the key to getting in the saddle and staying there.

2.) Another proposed change to local laws touches on a familiar topic – code enforcement.

The city attorney has broad authority to go to court to ensure that landlords maintain their properties according to municipal code. The law also enables the city to recover damages.

The city attorney's stated options include a temporary restraining order and a preliminary (or permanent) injunction. But city law doesn't specifically mention receivership.

That will change if the council approves the proposed change.

The proposal adds a paragraph explaining when the city might pursue the receivership option. This would be when the property's owner "has shown an unwillingness or inability to correct the violations."

Receivership is when someone is placed in custodial responsibility for the property of others.

Reporters have heard a lot of talk about receivership from city officials over the past week. The property in question is Summerset Village apartments, the 220-unit complex in central Fresno that is pretty much falling apart even as people continue to live there.

City officials want every legal tool possible to force Summerset owner Chris Henry to fix things according to code.

I thought City Hall already had the receivership tool at its disposal. Based on the proposal going to the council, perhaps I was wrong.

3.) Mayor Ashley Swearingin wants the council to hire American Paving for \$22.4 million to rip up Fulton Mall and return the six-block stretch from Tuolumne Street to Inyo Street to its once-glorious Fulton Street status.

The only problem: Swearingin and the council for years have figured the cost would be only \$20 million. In fact, that's all that was budgeted.

What to do?

The Administration says the wisest course is to go ahead and buy the object of its desire – Fulton Street – and assure taxpayers that things in the end always turn out for the best as long as the motivation is pure.

"City staff is recommending the award of the construction contract to American Paving Company with a base bid amount that exceeds the current project funding amount," the staff report says.

"Public Works Staff will work diligently with American Paving Company to implement cost-saving measures or eliminate line items from the scope (i.e. wayfinding, benches, bike racks, etc.)."

Boy, those must be expensive signs, benches and bike racks — \$2.4 million of them.

You've got to hand it to the mayor – she's got a lot of confidence. Then again, the ancient Greeks called it something else.

Two thoughts.

First, friends of Fulton Mall have pending two legal actions – a federal-level lawsuit and the appeal of a state-level lawsuit decision.

Second, the election to select Swearingin's successor figures to heat up in January or February. Let's say the lawsuits go Swearingin's way and the council on Thursday decides to essentially go into debt to end the half-century-old Fulton Mall experiment.

It will be the lot of the new mayor to take this "Fulton-Mall-turned-into-Fulton-Street" scenario and make it the social and economic success that Swearingin has promised to Fresno almost from the day she took office in January 2009.

Fulton Street was really something back in 1950. Fresno is a lot different heading into 2016.

Would a mayoral candidate want that kind of pressure?

One declared candidate currently represents Council District No. 6.

Perhaps Lee Brand will answer that question from the dais.