

Mehmet Noyan: Move downtown forward by returning traffic to Fulton Mall

By Mehmet
Noyan

Downtown Fresno is poised for greatness, and one of its crucial needs is more access to its main street.

Through the years, we've seen Fresno grow in every direction with a number of successful projects leading the way. The one project we haven't seen, the one that is critical for Fresno's continued growth, is a fully revitalized downtown.

There is tremendous potential in downtown Fresno, thanks to Mayor Ashley Swearengin's vision and the Fresno City Council's leadership. They voted to open the Fulton Mall to vehicle traffic, and I jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the future there.

My partner, Terance Frazier, and I are ready to move on a project at the south end of the Fulton Mall, but it's predicated on the removal of the outdated pedestrian mall and the reintroduction of traffic to Fulton. It's a mixed-use project, including apartments, restaurants and parking.

The idea is to create something different than what's offered at River Park, Fashion Fair or the Tower District, a venue that takes advantage of a state-of-the-art baseball park that's the home of our Fresno Grizzlies.

It's a synergy that needs more accessibility – but it won't happen without opening the mall to traffic. That's why I'm joining the growing call for the City Council to approve the Fulton Mall bid Thursday and finally begin construction on the centerpiece of downtown revitalization.

Retail and restaurants rely on visibility and access. We have seen this in city after city. Over 90 percent of downtown pedestrian malls failed and have been removed. Those downtowns were revitalized within four years after restoring traffic to their downtown.

They've created the right framework for business, and people are flocking back to downtowns around the country. Fresno isn't any different.

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We are ripe for revitalization. In the last year since the City Council approved opening the Fulton Mall to traffic, over \$66 million has been invested in properties in and adjacent to the mall.

Lofts are filling up, businesses are starting to stay open at night, another brewery is opening, and more tech companies are moving downtown. However, there are many more investors who want to be part of that momentum and are anxiously waiting for Fresno to take the last step before breaking ground.

Small businesses and developers are all investing in our downtown because change is coming. We would not be investing if things were going to stay the same.

Earlier this week, I stood with an impressive collection of city leaders, downtown advocates, small business owners, labor representatives and investors like me, who all want to see this project move forward.

All great cities have great downtowns. It's time for Fresno to finally start realizing its potential as America's next great

city.

We spoke from the heart in the heart of downtown.

I heard Liz Sanchez, owner of the wildly successful Casa de Tamales, describe her decision to open another location in the heart of the mall. She's investing in our downtown because she sees the potential for growth after the plan was approved to bring traffic back to Fulton, and she decided that now is the time to act.

Entrepreneurs look for change. We seek opportunity and avoid uncertainty. We do not want to be in a place that is stagnant.

I was also fascinated to hear Mick Marderosian, a local attorney, talk about his lifelong history with the Fulton Mall. He recalled how his mother brought him to the Fulton Mall dedication in 1964 and shared the perspective from his office building on the mall as he witnessed its decline because of its lack of access.

Mick, like many businessmen downtown, is seeing renewed interest in the Fulton Mall area because of the decision to open it up to traffic. It's brought plenty of positive national attention to downtown Fresno by experts who see our city arriving at a historic tipping point.

Tipping points can be dangerous. We can tip forward or fall back. Now is the time to move our city and our downtown forward. Fresno has always had the ability to shape its own destiny, and the only missing ingredient has been willpower at the leadership level.

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Join me in urging the City Council to approve the bid from American Paving so we can start construction. It will be good to say the Fulton Mall is truly open for business.

Mehmet Noyan is a Fresno-based commercial real estate developer with 40 years of experience developing in Fresno and other parts of Central California.

Downtown vote

What: Fresno City Council will decide on \$22.4 million contract to open Fulton Mall to vehicle traffic

Where: City Hall, 2600 Fresno St.

When: 1:30 p.m. Thursday