

City Hall News

From the desk of

Fort Bragg City Manager Linda Ruffing

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- 1. Downtown Streetscape Project and Street Tree Vandalism.** By now most people are aware of the senseless vandalism of the new street trees on North Franklin Street. Not only is it costly to replace the trees, but the vandalism is a slap in the face to the hundreds of local residents and merchants who participated in the visioning of the City's downtown streetscape project. For many years, folks have sought to revitalize our downtown, and the streetscape improvements are a big step towards that goal. The City has worked very hard to secure funding for the downtown streetscape project and reconstruction of North Franklin Street and installation of wider sidewalks, old-fashioned pedestrian lights, street trees, and other features have been funded entirely by grants and redevelopment funds. Next spring, the City will begin construction of streetscape improvements on the east-west streets in the downtown, with Main Street improvements installed in subsequent years. The entire downtown streetscape is estimated to cost roughly \$8,340,000, and almost 90% of that funding is already secured through a variety of Caltrans and Mendocino Council of Government grants. The voter-approved ½ cent sales tax for street repairs has NOT been used on the downtown streetscape project.
- 2. Half Cent Sales Tax for Street Repairs.** The first two years of the voter-approved half cent sales tax for street repairs was used to fund the reconstruction of South Franklin Street. This summer, the City will be spending another two years of half cent sales tax revenue to repair the following streets: Oak Street (from Harold to city limits), Cedar Street (from Harold to city limits), Whipple Street (from Bush to Walnut), Harrison Street (from Bush to Walnut), McPherson Street (from Bush to Walnut), Taubold Court, Oak Terrace, Boatyard Drive, and if funds are available, Alder Street.
- 3. More Bad News for the Wastewater Enterprise.** Over the past several weeks, lab sampling results have identified levels of suspended solids and Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) in excess of the limits established by our current Wastewater Permit. Our Treatment Operators have taken numerous steps to resolve the problem including changing the piping gates at the facility; installing chlorine injection to the secondary clarifier; injecting polymer into the clarifier; and attempting to clean below the rock media of the primary biofilter. This work has uncovered a bigger problem...The primary biofilter consists of three feet of rock media that sits on top of a redwood framework that spans concrete foundations that are one foot high, and which allow air to pass under the media, creating the necessary environment for optimal operation. During the inspection and cleaning of the primary biofilter, staff discovered that most of the channels under the media are blocked by failure of the redwood frame structure and subsequent collapsing of the rock onto the concrete slab. It appears that some sort of reconstruction or replacement of the primary biofilter will be necessary to get the plant back into full compliance.
- 4. Mill Site Remediation Update.** City and State Coastal Conservancy staff met with Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Division Chief Barbara Cook and her staff two weeks ago to discuss the status of the Mill Site remediation project.

DTSC has asked Georgia-Pacific (GP) to sample the seeps in the sea caves on the property. GP is formulating a workplan for DTSC approval and they hope to conduct the work in June. North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (WQCB) staff have raised some (belated) concerns about the technical specifications for the proposed consolidation cell. Specifically, they have asked for a thicker liner and a leachate collection system. DTSC and GP are continuing to confer with WQCB staff to discuss this and to determine what, if any, changes will be needed. DTSC staff reiterated their commitment to helping the mycoremediation bench test study move forward. A meeting/teleconference will be held next week with DTSC and their Department of Pollution Prevention (P2) staff, Paul Stamets, New Fields Laboratory staff, GP and Arcadis-BBI, and City staff and consultants to define the next steps in defining a work program for the study.

5. Sales Tax Review for the 4th Quarter 2007. Finance Director Pat Frost and I received our quarterly on the City's sales tax receipts. Some items of note:

- Overall, sales tax receipts for 2007 were down 0.9% from 2006.
- When comparing 4th Quarter 2007 to 4th Quarter 2006, the biggest decline was in the Construction sector which was down -12.6%. Together, wholesale and retail building materials sales comprise about 22% of taxable sales in the City, and a decline of this magnitude is cause for concern. Unfortunately, the decline is directly related to the collapse of the housing market and it will likely be some time before a full recovery is made.
- The good news is that restaurants and food markets, which each represent about 12% of the City's taxable sales, appear to be relatively stable. Given recent increases in the costs of groceries, this is not surprising.
- "Energy sales" remains a top performing economic segment, although the volatility of oil prices directly corresponds to quarterly performance.
- As a visitor destination, Fort Bragg could be impacted by the economic downturn if tourists stay home due to increased gasoline costs, and other financial hardships. However, it is also possible that folks who had considered more distant vacation locales may stay closer to home, given escalating airfares and the weak dollar. We'll be tracking both sales tax and Transient Occupancy Tax revenues closely over the coming months to assess the impact of the economic downturn on the City's revenue base.