

Stockton gets \$400,000 grant

Stockton Record, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010

Stockton will receive a \$398,423 grant to help plan a more environmentally sustainable community.

The award was announced by California's Strategic Growth Council, which gave millions of dollars in voter-approved Proposition 84 funds to dozens of regions.

The money can be used to help Stockton prepare for climate change by updating its General Plan. Transportation, water conservation and greenhouse gas emissions are among the factors that will be considered.

The Strategic Growth Council is a committee that coordinates the actions of state agencies to promote natural resources, agriculture and sustainable communities.

Teamsters warn about VWR project in Visalia

By Gerald Carroll, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010

The Teamsters union says city officials should be careful about a company that wants to build a 500,000-square-foot medical-products distribution center in northwest Visalia.

The Teamsters, which has about 700 members living in the Visalia area, told the Visalia City Council this week that the company could bring negative environmental and worker-safety implications.

VWR International LLC is a Pennsylvania-based global distributor of research laboratory products to pharmaceutical and biotech companies.

The company reached agreement in August 2009 with the city to build the center. It's planned for the city industrial-park property on 151 acres along Riggan Avenue near Kelsey Street.

"This is a matter of the public's right to know," said Doug Bloch, political director of San Francisco-based Teamsters Joint Council No. 7. "We ask that the city of Visalia find out more about a facility of this size, and how it affects the environment, worker safety and air quality."

Reviews not needed

VWR — which stands for Van Waters and Rogers, the company's founders — does not have to prepare and file an environmental impact report and does not have to go through the Visalia Planning Commission, said Steve Salomon, Visalia city manager. That's because the plant is planned for land already zoned for the industrial park.

"The company has followed all guidelines," Salomon said after Monday's council meeting. However, state permits for the handling of hazardous chemicals and other research-related materials will likely be needed as construction of the center nears completion.

Salomon, Mayor Bob Link and other Visalia officials have hailed the project as providing new jobs for area residents. Salomon said about 200 jobs would be created, but VWR officials have yet to offer any details on the work force.

VWR officials could not be immediately reached for comment Tuesday.

Air-pollution concerns

Bloch contends that a review of VWR's plans by environmental experts shows that an EIR should be done on the site.

Matt Hagemann, a Santa Monica-based environmental engineer, provided a report for the Teamsters. His report, dated Dec. 20, stated that such a 500,000-square-foot facility "has the

potential to generate emissions of oxides of nitrogen at levels above the 10 tons/year threshold that has been established by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District."

The district has already assessed Tulare County residents a \$15 surcharge on vehicle registration fees because of excessive vehicle-related air pollution.

"That air pollution will increase considerably with 5,000 truck trips per day going through the VWR facility," Bloch said.

On Monday, council members voted to approve the final parcel map on the 151 acres, with construction to start next month.

Bloch said the Teamsters will ponder filing a lawsuit to delay construction should city officials decide not to look further into safety and environmental concerns of the project.

"The goal is to obtain a more detailed environmental review," Bloch said.

Worth noting in education: Reading project, new buses, new pool and more

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2010

The Kern County Superintendent of Schools' Transportation Services has received five new compressed natural gas buses to transport special needs children to and from school.

The new buses will replace older, environmentally unsuitable diesel buses. The new arrivals bring the number of replacement buses to 57 to the 84-bus fleet.

The purchase of the latest buses was made possible by a combination of grants from the Environmental Protection Agency, Rose Foundation and the California Department of Education small schools bus replacement program.

Natural gas buses provide cleaner air to breathe for both drivers and student passengers, and costs less to fuel. The diesel buses will be taken out of service and scrapped.

Planners approve sustainability plan

The Tracy Press, Monday, Dec. 20, 2010

Revisions to Tracy's blueprint for growth were given a unanimous OK by the city's planning commission Wednesday, Dec. 15, and will soon be sent to the City Council for final approval.

According to city staff, the proposed changes to the general plan will help the city meet carbon emission standards approved by the state Legislature, reduce per-capita energy consumption, decrease vehicle miles traveled and guide Tracy to more "sustainable" growth.

Those updates, outlined in a so-called sustainability action plan, will set standards for future residential, commercial and industrial growth while providing the city and developers flexibility, said Bill Dean, a city of Tracy planning manager.

The sustainability plan is more of a policy guide than a detailed set of instructions for future growth, Dean said, and its success will depend largely on how the city is able to put it into action — according to city staff, the sustainability plan will be enacted "over the next 10 years as resources become available."

The plan — which includes 20 targets and 84 measures — promotes energy-efficient design; calls for more walkable and connected neighborhoods; seeks to expand public transit; and implement other environmentally friendly initiatives.

In the same meeting, the commission paved the way to fold a 2,250-home development into city limits. The Ellis property southwest of the city isn't yet within the city's boundaries. But that could

change this year with City Council and Local Agency Formation Commission approval.

The planning commission also approved in its 5-0 vote a reduction in the city's sphere of influence — the region in which the city will likely expand in the next 30 years. Large sections of the sphere of influence to the east of city limits will disappear, while they will mostly remain intact to the west of Tracy, the planned direction of the city's future growth.

Those changes also require the OK of the council and LAFCo.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wed., Dec. 22, 2010:](#)

Rail funding a gift from Ohio and Wisconsin

California's high-speed rail system is slowly coming together, thanks to a commitment to 21st-century progress and political games over federal funding by the Republican governors of Ohio and Wisconsin.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority initially approved a 65-mile segment of the train in the Valley. But then the board sent the Valley more good news by adding another segment after governors in Ohio and Wisconsin refused their states' federal stimulus funding for high-speed rail. The Federal Railroad Administration took the money back and reallocated more than half of the \$1.2 billion to California.

Rail Authority Vice Chairman Tom Umberg was correct in calling the latest federal funding "as early Christmas present" to California from Ohio and Wisconsin. If those states want to throw other federal funding our way, we'll take it.

The high-speed rail funds could increase the length of track being built starting in 2012 to as much as 123 miles. That would create an initial phase running from just south of Madera to the edge of Bakersfield, according to rail officials.

The California project is envisioned as an 800-mile system that would link the state's major urban centers with trains moving at speeds up to 220 mph. It would run through the Valley and give our region a major economic boost, as well as high-speed rail transportation to other parts of the state.

The project is expected to generate 80,000 temporary construction jobs. Fresno County also has an excellent opportunity to be the site of the high-speed rail maintenance facility, which would provide 1,500 permanent jobs.

Economic development experts say the maintenance facility would be a "billion-dollar-a-year game-changer" for Fresno County's economy.

High-speed rail is the most promising public-works project to come along in decades. It not only will create high-paying jobs, but will also transport people around the state efficiently and help improve air quality.

California's high-speed rail leaders have been steadily moving forward while many other states act as if high-speed rail is an untried technology. Europe and Japan have been using it for years. As Californians, we are delighted to show the way in this country.