

Fresno Councilmember Maxwell kicks off tree plantings

By Frank Lopez

The Business Journal, Monday, Feb. 8, 2021

Fresno District 4 Councilmember Tyler kicked off his "100 Days 100 Trees" initiative at Cary Park on Saturday to help beautify and clean the air in Central Fresno

The initiative is being done in collaboration with the City of Fresno Public Works and PARCS Departments and Tree Fresno.

The 100 trees will be donated by Tree Fresno and will be planted with the help from schools, children and community volunteers.

Maxwell said he grew up in Central Fresno and saw the maintenance of parks and public greenery lapse over the years, and that it was a major concern he heard from residents when he was campaigning for office.

"People are no longer are using our parks. People don't want to do business in our district anymore because of all the blight. 100 Days 100 Trees is seeking to make the parks an enjoyable place for families to go again and rejuvenate and restore major corridors so people want to do business in our district again," Maxwell said.

Drip irrigation systems for the trees will cost a few thousand dollars, Maxwell said.

The first 10 trees were planted at Cary Park on Saturday.

Trees will continue to be planted along the Cedar Avenue Corridor from Gettysburg Avenue to the Shields avenue median islands.

The last tree-planting event will be at Robinson Park at 4 p.m. April 22 — Earth Day.

"Our district's parks and green spaces have gone neglected for years. It's long past due that we reinvest back into them, beautify our neighborhoods, clean our air, and reclaim our public spaces from neglect," said Maxwell. "By planting 100 new trees and installing water efficient irrigation, we'll make meaningful strides toward that vision. This is an effort our office hopes to continue for years to come."

Bioenergy interest heats up in Kern County

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Feb. 8, 2021

Kern County business developers have seen a surge of interest lately from companies looking to build waste-to-energy projects that could create hundreds if not thousands of new local jobs in producing fuels that cut greenhouse-gas emissions.

Four new bioenergy proposals came to the attention of the Kern Economic Development Corp. in the last half of 2020, joining four other prospects under active consideration. Most of the projects would employ more than 100 workers. One would dwarf the others with as many as 1,390 jobs across 100 to 200 acres.

Bioenergy has attracted substantial local investment in recent years as state lawmakers offer subsidies and favorable policies to promote big spending on infrastructure necessary to convert food waste, ag trimmings, dairy manure and even dead forest trees into cleaner-burning fuel whose environmental benefits can add up to be carbon negative.

KEDC Vice President of Business Development Melinda Brown said the projects crossing her desk lately represent a variety of "green energy" technologies inspired by state mandates. Together, she said, they amount to a noticeable shift in interest in local manufacturing and industrial property.

"They're telling me this is all new industries" under development, she said Monday.

State legislation in 2016 targeted reductions in methane and other short-lived pollutants by forcing local jurisdictions to cut the amount of organic material they send landfills by three-quarters. The best way to do that depends on the feedstock.

Food and food-processing waste can be treated as dairy waste increasingly is, by fermenting it and refining the gas it produces into an easily stored fuel.

Because that doesn't work as well with waste such as vineyard prunings and almond hulls, another approach is to super-heat dry, fibrous, feedstock. That produces an energy-dense fuel and biochar, which can then be buried, or sequestered, to achieve carbon-reduction gains. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory has estimated this technology could become a central tool for meeting California's aggressive climate-change goals.

The executive director of the Bioenergy Association of California, Julia Levin, said Kern is "the perfect place for it," not only because of the county's large supply of ag waste but also its inventory of elected and appointed government officials who recognize the industry's benefits, value and the opportunity it presents.

Some environmental groups have actively opposed biofuels, in part because they usually entail emitting at least some pollution and older production techniques release relatively high levels of particulate matter. Many climate-change activists are pushing for an end to internal combustion altogether.

Levin said new technologies are much cleaner and that the alternative in much of the Central Valley is open burning.

"You're going to see a lot of growth in Kern County (bioenergy), but I think we're going to see a lot of growth statewide," said Levin. She added that significant government investment may yet be needed to meet California's bioenergy potential.

The California Energy Commission said it has invested more than \$27 million since 2007 in research and development in renewable natural gas, a common form of bioenergy that is basically methane, a particularly potent greenhouse gas. The commission said it has given an additional \$77 million in taxpayer money to biomethane projects.

A number of dairies in Kern County have worked with Visalia-based California Bioenergy LLC to turn several thousand cows' manure into biomethane. And on Millux Road, Denver-based Crimson Renewable Energy LLC has a refining plant making biodiesel entirely from waste such as used cooking oil.

Last year Torrance-based Global Clean Energy Holdings Inc. bought the former, 67,000-barrel-per-day refinery on Rosedale Highway and announced a \$365 million project to reopen the plant by early 2022 with about 100 employees producing 10,000 barrels per day of biodiesel from cooking oil. It said the refinery will later make the product from a ground-cover plant called camelina.

The head of 155-employee Kern Oil & Refining Co., which makes renewable diesel and other fuels at its 26,000-barrel-per-day refinery near Lamont, said leveraging conventional fuel production with market knowledge has helped the company emerge as a leader in renewable fuel production.

President and CEO Jennifer Haley said she encourages policymakers to cultivate a wide-ranging energy portfolio in the state. By attracting public and private investment, she said, Kern can demonstrate that "we can both address climate change and set the table for perpetual regional economic success."

California Adds New Electric Vehicle Charging Stations Along Highway 99, Creates Climate Corps

By Rich Ibarra

Capradio.org, Thursday, February 4, 2021

The Central Valley is playing a role in two new programs designed to push forward California's climate goals.

Caltrans has installed 22 new electric vehicle charging stations along Highway 99 and Interstate 5 from Madera to the Grapevine. Chargers have been placed at nine locations approximately 40 miles apart on 99 and one at Kettleman City along I-5.

The new installations are part of California's plan to phase out emission-causing vehicles by 2035. Caltrans Public Information Officer Jim Medina says that stations are green and easy to use.

“The chargers have dual plugs, so a Tesla can use them with an adapter, so they basically suit all electric vehicles,” Medina said.

The \$4.5 million project is funded by Caltrans and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Seventy percent of California’s transportation greenhouse gases come from passenger cars and light-duty trucks, according to the state’s Air Resources Board.

Many of the E.V. chargers are located in Caltrans district offices, maintenance yards, and rest areas. People can expect them to be operational around the clock.

“There’s no time limit. There’s a touch screen that is pretty easy to use,” Medina said. “[With chargers in] rest areas, you can make a stop, use the facilities, you can plug in, charge, take maybe a 20-minute break and then be on your way.”

The Central Valley is also contributing to another project focused on climate action, with volunteers from the area joining the nation’s first-ever statewide climate corps. The newly minted group will spend the next eight months advancing climate action across the Golden State.

California Climate Action Corps members will be working on urban tree planting, food sustainability, and wildfire resilience in some of the state’s most vulnerable communities. The group is also a part of the state’s California Volunteers program.

Gov. Gavin Newsom addressed the volunteers virtually, many of which hail from five regions, including Stockton, Fresno, San Jose, Redlands and Los Angeles.

“The smashmouth realities of climate change where we are increasingly heating up, choking up, burning up as a state,” Newsom said. “Our hots are getting hotter, and the dries, so much drier; the wets even wetter with these atmospheric rivers.”

Sixty-three fellows took on an oath to work in their communities for change.