

Police training center gets OK - Fresno City Council allocates \$15 million for project to serve region.

Fresno Bee, The (CA) - December 3, 2008

Despite worries about a recession and California's financial emergency, the Fresno City Council on Tuesday pledged \$15 million to build a regional police **training facility** at Central and Hayes avenues.

Officials said conservative budgeting strategies and a state mandate for law enforcement **training** would combine to allow the city to build the new center even as other cities face budget shortfalls.

"This decision is extremely important for the **training** of our officers. We don't have the facilities to train them adequately now," Police Chief Jerry Dyer said.

Other agencies throughout Central California will pay to use the center, Dyer said, which will eventually allow the city to profit by as much as \$80,000 each year, even after making debt payments.

The 80-acre center will feature firing ranges, driving courses and other law-enforcement **training** facilities. Officials say it will be the only one of its kind between Bakersfield and Sacramento.

In a related move, the council approved issuing \$45 million in lease-revenue bonds to build the **training facility** and police and fire projects throughout the city. The bonds will be repaid with developer impact fees the city began collecting in 2005. Besides the regional law enforcement **training** center, the bonds will fund a northeast police station, two new fire stations and renovation or expansion of 14 other fire stations.

The City Council approved plans for the **training** center in October, but a vote on funding the **facility** fell short of approval over concerns that the recession would leave the city unable to pay for it.

Mayor Alan Autry asked the council to reconsider that vote, but those same

economic concerns nearly derailed the project Tuesday. Council Member Mike Dages, who opposed it in October, said he needed proof that he should change his vote.

Deputy Chief Roger Enmark and City Manager Andy Souza won him over, telling the council the **facility** would generate enough revenue to help repay the bonds. Developer impact fees would cover the rest of the debt. Souza said sufficient reserves exist to meet debt payments for two years even if impact fees don't meet expectations.

"We're confident that it will generate the revenue it needs to in order to help pay for construction costs," Enmark said.

Enmark said police agencies are required to do **training** each year, and much of that **training** is funded by the state. Enmark said many local agencies will train at Fresno's center.

"This is a big day for the Police Department. We recognized the need for this **facility** in 1996, and it's finally happening," Enmark said.

Jacky Parks, president of the Fresno Police Officers Association, spoke in favor of the **facility**, telling the council that his officers currently have to do **training** in what he called a hodgepodge of facilities.

"This will give us a central **training** location, and also allow us to train alongside those other agencies, so that when we respond to calls together, we're in sync," Parks said.

No one on the council spoke against the need for the **training facility**, but council members Jerry Duncan and Henry T. Perea said the timing was not right. Perea voted in October to fund the **facility** and said the changes in the economy had made him think the city should wait.

"I've been a consistent supporter of this project, but I am concerned about the funding," Perea said.

Duncan urged the council to hold off on the project for six months, but his colleagues disagreed.

Autry praised the council for the vote, and the city staff for being conservative in its budgeting.

"We've lived by a policy to give most of the money paid in taxes back to our residents in the form of services such as police and fire. There are challenges on the horizon, but we've prepared for tough times, and we can grow when every other city cannot," Autry said.

Enmark said work will begin on the **training facility** within two months, and construction is expected to take about a year.

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INFOBOX

In other action

The Fresno City Council directed the city staff to study how the payday loan industry affects low-income residents.

The council earlier voted down a proposed moratorium limiting new payday loan branches from opening for 45 days.

The emergency action needed six votes to pass, but failed 4-3, with council members Jerry Duncan, Mike Dages and Henry T. Perea voting no.

Council Member Brian Calhoun's second motion to ask the state to reduce the interest rate that consumers pay for the loans failed to gain a second, and no vote was held.

Both items were proposed by Calhoun, who said the industry's presence in Fresno is too strong. Fresno is home to 78 payday lenders.