



# REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

AGENDA ITEM NO. VIIC  
COMMISSION MEETING 12-19-12

December 19, 2012

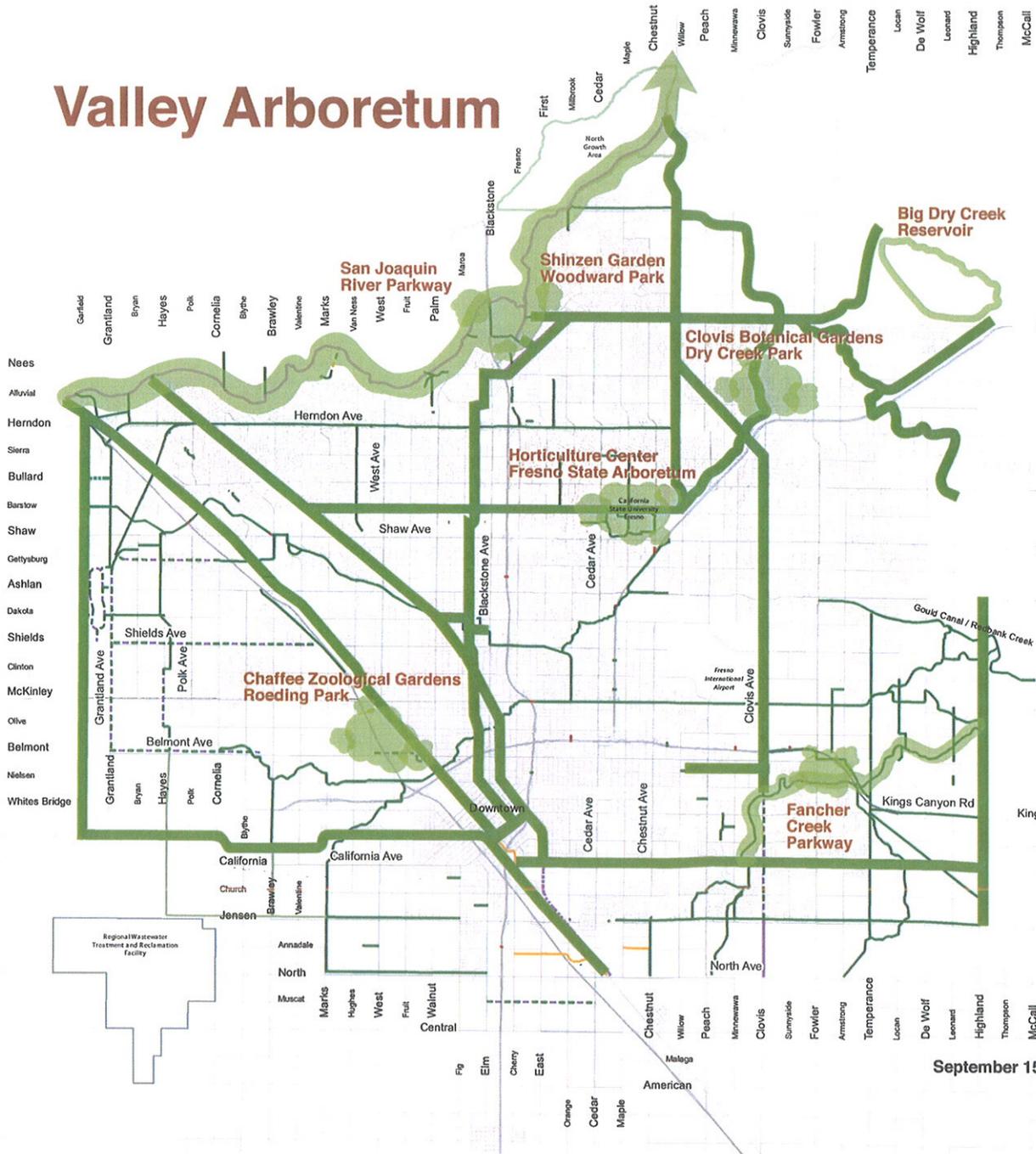
FROM:   
MIKE SANCHEZ, Planning Manager  
Development & Resource Management Department

APPROVED BY  
  
DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: WORKSHOP ON PARKSCORE AND VALLEY ARBORETUM PRESENTED BY  
LEE AYERS, JOHN VALENTINO AND MARK KEPPLER

- The ParkScore for the 40 largest cities in the US was computed by the Trust for Public Lands and published in March, 2012. Fresno ranks last. Details can be found at <http://parkscore.tpl.org/>
- Valley Arboretum Map and Narrative, attached.
- Opinion Letter by John Valentino, Fresno Bee, August 23, 2012, attached and available at <http://www.treefresno.org/john-valentinos-letter-editor>
- Bill McEwen column of September 27, 2012, attached and available at [www.treefresno.org](http://www.treefresno.org)
- Fresno Bee lead editorial on October 5, 2012, attached and available at [www.treefresno.org](http://www.treefresno.org)
- Vision for Tree Fresno, attached and available at [www.treefresno.org](http://www.treefresno.org)

# Valley Arboretum



September 15, 2012

November 17, 2012

RE: **Valley Arboretum**

Presented herewith is the Valley Arboretum for consideration in the General Plans. The Valley Arboretum map PDF is enclosed. We seek to establish a signature amenity for our region: a system of linear parks, like the Sugar Pine Trail, with no single standard, which improves our ParkScore and helps make our region investment worthy. On September 15, 2012 Tree Fresno Board of Directors adopted the Vision for Tree Fresno with the Big Goal to establish the Valley Arboretum to include our "botanical brothers:" the Fresno State campus arboretum and horticulture center, the Clovis Botanical Gardens at Dry Creek Park, the Shinzen Garden at Woodward Park, and the Chaffee Zoological Gardens at Roeding Park. We foresee an expansion to include Kearney Park, Avocado Park, Lost Lake Park, and other "botanical brothers" and trails in the 4 county region. **Immediate opportunity:** allocate an additional amount of Fresno County Measure C funds for trail right of way acquisition and maintenance purposes.

- **The Eaton Trail; Woodward Park:** 23 miles from Friant Dam to US 99 via Woodward Park. **Immediate opportunities:** complete the EIR, craft a CFD plan, and work with the Clovis Veterans Memorial District on a strategic property acquisition.
- **Sugar Pine/Old Town Clovis Trail:** 13 miles from River Park SC to Dakota via downtown Clovis; connect to Woodward Park via Sheppard and Cole. **Future opportunity:** 8 miles of enhanced streetscape from River Park to Fulton Mall via Old Fig Garden & the Tower District.
- **Willow Avenue:** Barstow Avenue north to the Eaton Trail.
- **Enterprise & Dry Creek Trails:** As provided in the Clovis General Plan and illustrated on the enclosed map.
- **Kearney Trail:** From west city limits to Eaton Plaza via Fresno Street; use wide sidewalks along Fresno Street for pedestrians only. Eventually extend to Kearney Park and Kerman. **Immediate opportunity:** spruce up trail, improve connection of Kearney Trail with Fresno Street, and upgrade sidewalks under HSR.
- **Golden State Trail:** Modify the present right of way of Golden State Blvd, south city limits to G Street to Fresno Street; dedicate the outside 1/4, on each side, to landscaping and a trail for pedestrian and bicycle use. North of Fresno Street would be conceptual along H Street, Weber, and the US99/HSR corridor to the San Joaquin River. **Immediate opportunity:** Incorporate trail in the plans for the US99/HSR corridor.
- **Bankside Trail:** From Blackstone & Shields to West & Ashlan along the Herndon Canal.
- **Fancher Creek Parkway:** 15 miles from Clovis Avenue east to the Kings River; 1 ¾ miles west and south from Clovis Avenue to the SJV RR via the Sunnyside neighborhood. **Immediate opportunity:** multi-party collaboration to build a section of the Fancher Creek Parkway at Fowler Avenue.
- **Old Town Clovis Trail Connector:** 3 miles between Dakota and Fancher Creek built to the same standard as the Old Town Clovis Trail; rails to trail near Gallo; pedestrians use wide sidewalk under Highway 180.
- **McKinsey Trail:** connects to Old Town Clovis Trail at the Fancher Creek Regional SC site.
- **Barstow Avenue:** FSU to BNSF. Designate for enhanced streetscapes, traffic calming devices, and lower speed limit; to invite more bicycle and pedestrian use; retain bike lanes next to auto travel lanes.
- **SJV RR Trail:** About 4 miles. East city limit to downtown Fresno, along California Street. Acquire when RR is abandoned. To eventually connect with Sanger.
- **BNSF Trail:** About 8 miles. Downtown Fresno to the San Joaquin River. Acquire when RR is abandoned.
- **Greenbelt Trails:** Build trails within the greenbelts on the southeast and the west boundaries of the city.

Let's promote bicycling and walking by implementing the Bicycle Master Plan, foster leadership by the FSU Arboretum Committee, and encourage subdivisions with narrower streets, collector streets each ¼ mile and more open space. Let's provide alternative routes for pedestrians and cyclists away from major arterials due to air quality, noise, and safety.

Thanks,  
Lee Ayres, CEO / Executive Director, Tree Fresno

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<sup>1</sup> Route to downtown: west along wide sidewalk on the south side of Nees to N. San Pablo (pedestrian only); as a *sharrow* south on N San Pablo to W El Paso; west to Maroa using existing sidewalks and bike lanes; south on Maroa to Herndon crossing light; cross Herndon using existing cross walks; resume *sharrow* south on Maroa Avenue to Fairmont, south on Wishon to Olive Avenue, transition to Fulton Avenue, south to the Fulton Mall. Designate for enhanced streetscapes and traffic calming to invite more bicycle and pedestrian use; retain the bike lanes next to the auto travel lanes. **Immediate opportunity:** implement a "road diet" between Herndon and Bullard on Maroa.

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# JOHN M. VALENTINO: Poverty, park space connected

Thursday, Aug. 23, 2012 | 11:38 AM

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The Trust for Public Land developed a comprehensive rating system called ParkScore to measure how well the 40 largest U.S. cities are meeting the need for these community amenities. Fresno was ranked dead last (40th) with a score of 21.5 out of 100.

When I analyze recent scholarly efforts to understand these poverty and related issues, I have concluded that there is a direct link between this dismal Parks & Livability ranking and our decades long inability

to address our chronic problems.

The Fresno region continues to be one of the most poverty-stricken regions in the nation. Sociologist and criminal justice scholars find a direct correlation between poverty and our other problems. It is clear that poverty is the enemy of good communities. As the years and decades pass, I can't help but wonder, is there something fundamentally absent in our approach to improving the prosperity of our community?

At Tree Fresno, we believe our built environment is the backbone of our quality of life and our ability to prosper. Parks and community landscapes encourage business investment/relocation, increase community pride, reduce crime and help bring neighborhoods together.

Poverty-stricken cities usually have low street tree and park maintenance budgets. But who wants to move to a city or invest in a city of dead trees and unkempt or barren landscapes?

In our effort to meet short term budget needs, we forget that our city budgets inadvertently exacerbate our poverty. If we want to strengthen the tax base and enjoy first-rate city services, we need to make our community attractive for investors. Imagine the predicament of a city manager when he takes a prospective CEO investor on a tour of the city and is confronted by median islands and parks that look like nobody cares!

The good news is we have a lot going for us. We can build and maintain community landscapes as well as anyone. We are blessed with great soil, good water, abundant sunshine and a high level of knowledge, ingenuity and expertise. We are in the middle of the most fertile valley on Earth. Let's leverage these advantages and make our community investment worthy.

We invite you to join us at Tree Fresno in establishing a goal to achieve a top 10 ParkScore within 10 years.

"From worst to first!"

We are proposing a Trail System Arboretum to add acres of accessible open space; a signature amenity that unifies our region and links major destinations such as the San Joaquin River, the Kings River, the regional parks and the entertainment districts. This would foster beauty, exercise, health and, most importantly, private investment.

Over the last 27 years, Tree Fresno has planted 39,000 trees throughout our four-county region. As a voice for trees, trails and open space, our work is essential to the well-being of our region. Yet, we need to do more. So in order to increase our impact, we recently moved to the campus of Fresno State this spring to create a center for community forestry and landscapes. We would like to lead the way in promoting education and conservation, and creating vibrant neighborhoods, while we demonstrate the link between attractive outdoor environments and civic prosperity.

If our ParkScore continues to be dead last (40th out of 40), research indicates we will remain near the bottom in education, crime and unemployment.

We can change that.

Our Valley's heritage of food production needs to be anchored by green, active, prosperous communities.

Let's build a different -- and better -- kind of community.

John M. Valentino is a co-founder of Tree Fresno, [www.treefresno.org](http://www.treefresno.org).

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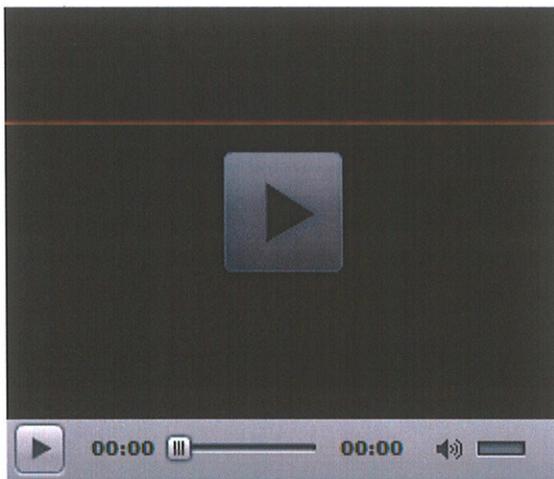
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## McEwen: Tree Fresno reboots efforts to improve our quality of life

By Bill McEwen - The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, Sep. 26, 2012 | 11:24 PM

It's not like Tree Fresno has been in witness protection. The nonprofit has lived up to its name by planting 39,000 trees over 27 years, including 4,100 on school campuses.

But the organization is beginning to rebrand itself, anyway, and preach to local leaders about how raising Fresno's quality of life would invigorate an underperforming economy.

Their strategy -- creating more trails and greenbelts while continuing to add to the urban forest -- will be unveiled this afternoon with a reception and tour of Tree Fresno's new office across from the Gibson Farm Market at Fresno State.

"We're proud of our accomplishments," says John Valentino, president of Tree Fresno's board of directors. At the same time, he says Tree Fresno is frustrated about high crime, unemployment and dropout rates.

Says Tree Fresno board member Mark Keppler: "The status quo is unacceptable. If we improve our quality of life, we will see economic development."

These aren't radical ideas. They echo what economists cite when analyzing why some cities prosper and others stumble along or deteriorate.

"Trees, trails and greenbelts make our region investment-worthy," says Lee Ayres, Tree Fresno's chief executive officer.

To its credit, Tree Fresno is thinking big.

Its leaders want to vault Fresno from last in parks among the nation's 40 largest cities to the top 10 over the next decade. They want to build partnerships with every high school in the region. They're talking about developing a Valley Arboretum that would be a signature amenity for the region. And they're planning to plant groves of trees honoring military veterans on the San Joaquin River and Fancher Creek parkways.

All of these efforts require money, as well as elbow grease from scores of volunteers.

Getting people out to plant trees has never been a problem for Tree Fresno. For example, 2,800 volunteers turned out for the Great Rail Tree Planting in 2000.

Money? Well, that's always a problem -- but the cupboard isn't as bare as you might think. Before voters overwhelmingly passed Fresno County's 20-year transportation sales tax extension in 2006, proponents touted that \$53.3 million would go to trails in urban and rural locations.

The recession has knocked down that total. Tony Boren, executive director of the Fresno Council of Governments, says the half-cent tax is on track to generate about \$42 million for trails -- a total that would rise as the economy picks up.

But Fresno's financial plunge and slow recovery have delivered a double whammy. Not only have local governments cut back on park and trail maintenance to balance budgets, the county and its cities lack money to service new trails that could be built today with Measure C funds.

In addition, the Measure C spending plan strictly regulates trail funds: "They must be spent on new trails," Boren says. "Meanwhile, Fresno and Clovis are saying, 'We can't afford to maintain what we have now.' "

A solution: How about the people who lobbied for Measure C trails go to COG and ask for a tweak that would allow some funds to be used on trail maintenance? In return, the Fresno and Clovis city councils could agree to make new trails and greenbelts a higher priority when the economy picks up.

Our county is greener than it was in 1985 when Tree Fresno's first volunteers raised \$27,000 with a telethon and planted trees in downtown and the Tower District.

We need to get greener still. Think of it as a down payment on prosperity.

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## How to help

**What:** Tree Fresno, nonprofit founded in 1985

**Membership:** \$50 a year

**Details:** (559) 221-5556, [www.treefresno.org](http://www.treefresno.org)

The columnist can be reached at (559) 441-6632, [bmecwen@fresnobee.com](mailto:bmecwen@fresnobee.com) or @fresnomac on Twitter. Listen to his talk show daily at 4 p.m. on KYNO (AM 940).

# Trees, trails, greenbelts can make us investment worthy.

Friday, Oct. 05, 2012 | 12:00 AM

For almost three decades, Tree Fresno has been making our community greener by planting thousands of trees and encouraging residents and businesses to join the effort. Now the reinvigorated organization is pushing local leaders to understand that trees, trails and greenbelts can help improve the local economy by improving the quality of life.

Tree Fresno has moved its offices to the Fresno State campus, and is pushing several proposals, including developing a Valley Arboretum that the group's leaders say would be a signature amenity for our region. The trail system arboretum could link the San Joaquin River, the Kings River, regional parks and entertainment districts.

Lee Ayres, Tree Fresno's CEO/executive director, said the Valley Arboretum should be in the new General Plans for the cities of Fresno and Clovis and Fresno County.

We support the mission of Tree Fresno and believe the Valley Arboretum would improve the region's quality of life.

Our region hasn't always appreciated the importance of greenbelts and open space. It seemed that undeveloped land needed to be paved, and strip malls on every corner was our version of signature amenities. That's why Fresno ranks last in parks space among the nation's 40 largest cities.

Fortunately, Tree Fresno has been working to change that score, and has a goal of Fresno being in the top 10 over the next decade. Ayres says this isn't just about making our region greener. It's about making it "investment worthy" by improving property values and broadening the tax base.

"Parks and community landscapes encourage business investment/relocation, increase community pride, reduce crime and help bring neighborhoods together," John M. Valentino, co-founder of Tree Fresno, said in a commentary in The Bee. "Poverty-stricken cities usually have low street tree and park maintenance budgets. But who wants to move to a city or invest in a city of dead trees and unkempt or barren landscapes?"

Trees, trails and greenbelts are investments in our economy. We appreciate the commitment of Tree Fresno, and for working to remind us that appearance matters when a business is considering moving to our region.



## Vision for Tree Fresno

**Purpose:** We are a regional resource for trees, trails, and greenbelts.

**Mission:** to mobilize resources for five strategic priorities to achieve eleven Big Goals.

- ❖ **Investment Worthy:** There is a link between green space, community appearance and prosperity. Impacts: properties values, investments, jobs, crime, health, the tax base, and level of services.
  - Big Goals:**
    - Raise the Fresno ParkScore to the top ten in ten years!
    - Develop the Valley Arboretum to create a signature amenity for the region.
  - Community Engagement Events:**
    - "Tree Fresno Renaissance Dinners" throughout the city
    - "Cityscape+" in the spring
  
- ❖ **Vibrant Neighborhoods:** Landscaping partnerships can transform neighborhoods. Tree planting and tree care build a sense of community and add value.
  - Big Goals:**
    - Transform a rural community with trees and flowers.
    - Transform an urban neighborhood with trees and flowers.
  - Community Engagement Events:**
    - "The Fall Invitational" at Belmont Nursery
    - "Christmas Tree Lane Walk Nights"
    - "Jingle Bell Run"
  
- ❖ **Memorial Groves:** The California Central Valley has made extraordinary sacrifices for our nation; let's honor those who have served; let's plant trees as a tribute to friends and family.
  - Big Goals:**
    - Establish Veteran Memorial Groves on the San Joaquin River Parkway and on the Fancher Creek Parkway.
    - Establish Tribute Groves in a Fresno Park, in a Clovis Park and in a County Park.
  - Community Engagement Event:** Kearney Park to Eaton Plaza Run
  
- ❖ **Resource Conservation:** For the sake of our health and the future of our children, let's clean the air, conserve our water, and save energy.
  - Big Goals:**
    - Qualify the community forest and tree agriculture for air quality carbon offset benefits.
    - Co-sponsor the preservation of a greenbelt and the construction of water storage and treatment facilities to recharge the aquifer and save energy.
    - Engage residents to plant shade trees on the south and west side of every home.
  - Community Engagement Events:** Arbor Day, Earth Day, Water Wise Plant Exchange

❖ **Education:** We Love Trees! Tree, trails, and greenbelts are essential to the wellbeing of our community. They can help solve our most difficult problems.

**Big Goals:**

- Build a Tree Fresno partnership with every school district in the region.
- Help the Fresno State Horticulture Center become an inspiration for the region.

**Community Engagement Events:** Annual Homecoming Event, Community Outreach events throughout the year.

**Communicate our core messages:**

- Right tree, right place
- Trees, trails, and greenbelts make our region investment worthy
- People thrive in landscaped homes, workplaces, schools, medical facilities, and neighborhoods.

**Leverage our assets:** brand name, strategic partners, website, social media, networks, agriculture, public lands, cultural heritage, technology, diversity, and geography.

**Engage the community:** to educate, entertain, and earn financial support.

Thanks for being part of Tree Fresno

Lee Ayres  
CEO/Executive Director