

OPINION

Editorial board

- ▶ Amy Pack, president and publisher
- ▶ Linda Green, executive editor
- ▶ Paul Hurley, senior editor, community conversation

First Amendment quote

"It was the First Amendment that made the march on Washington, the march from Selma to Montgomery, the freedom ride(s) possible, the sit-ins. The protests were all expression of the right to dissent."

— John Lewis, U.S. representative, D-Ga., 2008

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EDITORIAL

Crafting a downtown vision

Fast forward to downtown Visalia in about 25 years, circa 2035. Imagine what it would be like driving around town.

Better yet, imagine what you would want Visalia to look like in 2035.

The bad news is that chances are you would not recognize downtown Visalia in 2035. And if you were abruptly forced to drive there, you might get lost. You would definitely find yourself going the wrong way on some streets, or discovering that streets you thought were there weren't there any longer.

That is typical of the evolution of any urban landscape. Any large city changes significantly over the course of decades.

Downtown Visalia, itself, for instance, has changed dramatically over the past 25 years. There are several streets that no longer exist — parts of Garden and Willow, for instance. There are other new features that didn't exist in 1986 — the Visalia Convention Center, Marriott Hotel, Santa Fe overcrossing, parking structures and the Kaweah Delta hospital expansion.

The good news is that you can participate with others in determining how downtown Visalia develops and contribute your part of the vision to the one that is forming.

A draft version of the Downtown Visalia Comprehensive Transportation Study will be presented at 6 p.m. today at the Visalia Convention Center. It is the result of a study conducted by TPG Consulting to analyze traffic patterns, pedestrian walkways and other features in the downtown area, defined as Murray Avenue on the north and Noble on the south, and by Hall Street on the west and Ben Maddox on the east.

"A key component of the study is how future development could impact the downtown, including Kaweah Delta Medical Center's planned west end expansion," said a news report about the study.

The release specifically mentioned the changes in downtown circulation that will result when West and Willis streets are closed on the campus of Kaweah Delta Medical Center.

This is most likely a situation of when, not if. Kaweah Delta's long-range expansion plans, adopted in the past century, were for increasing the size of its hospital by four times.

As with any time when change is being considered, there are also opportunities.

The first step of that expansion was the multi-story Acequia Avenue addition. It also included the administration building at Mineral King and West.

The hospital plans that its campus will eventually include a stretch to Stevenson Street. Three more towers similar to the Acequia addition will be added to the hospital, along with other structures. The expansion will eventually include closing West and Willis streets between Acequia and Mineral King.

That's a long way off, but the city is already planning for it. That is part of the discussion that is taking place.

As with any time when change is being considered, there are also opportunities. In this case, there are opportunities to improve circulation and other transportation features, such as bike lanes or other dedicated routes.

One thing is certain: Allowing large development without anticipating the ramifications is an invitation to trouble. Over the next 20 to 40 years, downtown Visalia will be subjected to dramatic transforma-

HOW TO ATTEND

The Downtown Transportation Study will be discussed at 6 p.m. Wednesday at the Visalia Convention Center, 303 E. Acequia Ave. For more information, call TPG Consulting at 559-739-8072 or email tpgconsulting@tpgconsulting.net.

tions in building, business, transportation and numbers of people.

Visalia has always prided itself on looking forward as far as possible to be prepared for change. This is part of that process. It's a way to add the individual perspective to plans so that at least the community will be prepared for adjusting to the change.

What entrance to the west part of downtown would replace West Street? Where will traffic off Highway 198 be routed?

How can circulation throughout downtown be adjusted to benefit businesses, employees, customers and visitors?

Imagine what a visit to downtown Visalia would be like without West or Willis. Imagine what you want it to be.

Here is the chance to make that vision part of the planning. If it's done right, nobody will get lost.