

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Mayor looks toward results despite uncertain economy

By Paul Bugarino
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PITTSBURG — This Delta city is pushing ahead on redevelopment, business and capital improvement endeavors this year, though it must continue to be prudent with its purse strings during uncertain times. That was the message delivered by Pittsburg Mayor Will Casey on Wednesday during his State of the City address. Casey said the team of Pittsburg city staff and elected officials is moving forward on projects to improve public amenities such as streets and water, while revamping areas such as Pittsburg's downtown and marina. He also acknowledged there may be some difficult times ahead as the city faces a budget deficit.

"We're poised to continue our progress to results, but by no means are we sitting on our laurels," he said during the luncheon at Delta View Golf Course. The event was hosted by the Pittsburg Chamber of Commerce.

As a result of 2004 and 2006 redevelopment bonds, Pittsburg has invested in 139 redevelopment projects, including affordable housing, at a cost \$234.7 million. Thirty-five of those projects were concentrated in the Old Town Pittsburg area and totaled \$100.9 million.

Among the completed Old Town projects Casey mentioned were a new Elks Lodge, the Entrata Project at Railroad Avenue and 10th Street, and improvements to the Marina Promenade.

"Things are definitely changing down there for the better," Casey said, adding that the city and downtown merchants have taken to saying "pardon our dust" in Old Town

"We know the end result is going to be well worthwhile," he said.

Casey also mentioned that the first phase of the Vidrio mixed-use project would be completed this year but briefly lamented the slow progress of the second phase.

"It would be nice to say the second phase of that project was under construction," he said.

The mayor alluded to that project in his assessment of the city's potential budget problem. Casey said staff would be looking at what expenditures would be absolutely necessary before doling out money for other programs.

A PowerPoint presentation that coincided with the mayor's presentation also warned of possible reductions in city resources, streamlining with city staff, and other "belt-tightening" measures.

He also expressed confidence that the city's financial staff is "not asleep at the switch" and would help guide Pittsburg's budget through the economic uncertainty — noting recent efforts to restructure city bonds.

Sales tax revenue from WinCo Foods and expansion of the Century Auto Mall could help offset the economic downturn, Casey said, mentioning the city was bringing in more job opportunities along the waterfront.

The mayor also lauded the city's police department and Police Chief Aaron Baker for advances in public safety, pointing to a 9.4 percent decline in serious felonies from 2006 to 2007 and a 34 percent drop in violent crimes in the first three months of 2008 compared with the year before.

"Our crime now is on the same level as Brentwood and is a little bit better than Concord," said Casey, a former police chief in Pittsburg and San Francisco.

A major factor is the installation of a state-of-the-art video surveillance camera system, Casey said. In 2005 police started installing cameras to monitor intersections, parks, shopping centers, banks and the marina. Thus far, 38 cameras have been added, which have "efficiently helped solved many cases," Casey said.

Paul Bugarino covers Pittsburg and Bay Point. Reach him at 925-779-7164 or pbugarino@bayareanewsgroup.com.