

THE SUN-GAZETTE

Farmersville gets wheels rolling on future transit center

October 12, 2022

By: Danielle Gutierrez



Farmersville City Council approves Self Help Enterprises taking the lead on construction for new transit center in the city

FARMERSVILLE – City council has approved agreements to get the city a multi-modal hub, or transit center, in the center of town to expand transportation opportunities and prepare for the upcoming High Speed Rail.

Farmersville is getting everything in order for the addition of the transit center, referred to as the multi-modal hub, in the city. On Oct. 10 at the Farmersville City Council meeting, council authorized city manager Jennifer Gomez to execute a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the city and the nonprofit organization Self-Help Enterprises (SHE). The agreement established that SHE will take the lead on construction for the transit center project.

“With the current plan of the bus system, we’re hoping to have more efficient, convenient [transit] services for our residents,” Gomez said. “Bottom line is, we’re working with these other agencies to provide more affordable and efficient options for public transportation.”

According to the staff report, the multi-modal hub will be located on Front Street, between North Ventura Avenue and North Kern Avenue, to provide a central location for transit services in the city as well as surrounding communities. The hub will include a minimum of two bus bays for current city buses and any buses added in the future to pick up and drop off pedestrians, a bus shelter—or bench—for pedestrians to rest as they wait for transits and there will be public restrooms. There will

also be improvements made to the area with the addition of bike lanes and crosswalks for pedestrian use, but the locations for those are still under review, according Gomez.

The city will have a say on the hub's design and any other major decisions, but SHE will handle the day-to-day operations and manage the overall project. However, the nonprofit will eventually handoff operations to the Tulare County Regional Transit Agency (TCRTA) since Farmersville current transit services are provided by Visalia Transit, according to Gomez.

According to Gomez, the transit center is the first step to a larger vision. She said there is a plan to convert an existing railroad in Farmersville, which is only for freight train use now, into a system that will transfer passengers across the valley to the future location of the anticipated High Speed Rail in Hanford. Once passengers make it to the High Speed Rail station they can travel to their desired locations from there.

"That's why they are referring to it as a multi-modal hub," Gomez said. "Because the idea is that, essentially, it is multiple modes of transportation."

As the developer of the Los Arroyos project, which is being worked on by SHE to bring a rental housing complex to Farmersville, SHE was able to apply for a grant from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) through the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) program because of the addition of a new transit center in Farmersville. In addition to the affordable housing project, the incorporation of the transit center in the city fulfills the criteria from the AHSC program to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions in the community. The HCD released a notice of funding availability for roughly \$405 million sometime in the spring, according to Gomez.

Additionally, council also approved a supplemental agreement with the Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) to utilize Measure R revenue to fund a portion of the multi-modal hub. Measure R, which was approved by Tulare County voters in 2006, is a half-cent sales tax that addresses regional, local and transit, bike and environmental transportation needs in the county. Although the project is primarily funded by a state grant from AHSC, the project's tight timeline led to a pledge from TCAG in the AHSC grant application in the amount of \$910,000. The timeline will have the project completed by July 2024. According to the staff report, this agreement with TCAG will allow the funds already pledged in the grant application to be used to get the project started.