

# THE SUN-GAZETTE

## Farmersville ranks lowest financial risk in Tulare County

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**The city of Farmersville has one of the best financial situations in Tulare County, according to the state's Fiscal Health of California Cities report**

FARMERSVILLE – After years of wading their way through financial hardship, Farmersville ranked the best in the county in the state auditors report.

At the April 10 city council meeting, Steve Huntley, finance director for the city of Farmersville, reported that the city was rated “low risk” from the State Auditor’s Fiscal Health of CA Cities, where they ranked 356 out of 430 cities. The higher the number, the better in this ranking system. The state of California ranks cities from high, moderate and low risk depending on their financial situations. Only half of the cities audited were in the low risk category, and among them was Farmersville.

“Back when I got here in 2012, the very same auditing firm declined to give us an opinion on how we did [on our financial statements], because we were that bad. They couldn’t even say it could be modified, they couldn’t even say it was adverse. They just said, ‘You know what, we’re just not even gonna go there,’” Huntley said.

Fast forward to now, and Farmersville ranks better than all cities in Tulare County. Across the board, Farmersville was green in all but one of the state’s criteria. The categories that the city ranked green in were general fund reserves, liquidity, pension funds, other postemployment benefits (OPED), revenue trends and future pension costs. They did rank poorly in the debt burden category, but that is due costs for the water treatment center.

The water treatment center is a 10-year project, and perhaps the largest and most expensive infrastructure project in Farmersville history, sitting at about \$23 million. The newly-updated wastewater treatment facility will switch from percolating basins to updated technology, like digesters and clarifiers to meet the city's growing population and updated state requirements.

However, though Farmersville seems in debt right now, Huntley said he's forecasting to be within 1% of their budget when it's all said and done. Farmersville can apply for reimbursement on the millions in grants and loans the city received to complete the wastewater treatment facility upgrades, in combination from the state and the federal United States Department of Agriculture.

"[State auditors] are just saying, based on our size, and the amount of revenue we bring in, that is an outsized amount of debt. Does it mean that we're in crisis? No, but it just means it's a concern that the auditors are aware of," Huntley said.

#### IN OTHER NEWS

The council also got a sneak peak of the newest transit center that is being built in the city. The plans had been approved last year 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.

"One of the key components of this transit center was we were trying to make sure that if, or when, the Cross-Valley Railroad does come into existence, that we're able to serve as the cross Valley Railroad from this facility," John Doyle, a representative and planner at QK Incorporated said.

The approval of the project allowed 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.

"The intention of this facility was to make it look like the old original Farmersville train station," Doyle said. "The Farmersville transit sign, which is kind of a nod to the old Farmersville train station sign."

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. Not only that, but there will be EV charging stations for cars and buses at the transit center, as well as a space for a coffee shop, or general restaurant-style shop.

The plans are roughly 90% complete, as some adjustments do have to be made. One adjustment is the building has to be built two feet above the adjacent ground, since it's in a flood zone. There will be some ramping and stairs added into the plans to make the facility more accessible due to the flood zone changes.