



# The Fresno Bee



Dallas Blanchard talks about his alleged Fulton Street vandalism

Dallas Blanchard tells Bee staff writer Brianna Calix why he poured paint on new Fulton Street sign, his views of downtown and gentrification.

By John Walker

LOCAL

## Task force to take on gentrification in Fresno. But is it enough?

BY BRIANNA CALIX  
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December 03, 2018 01:39 PM

A task force to tackle gentrification in Fresno is on the horizon — but some residents say the gesture is too, too late.



the city must establish the task force by year's end to department of Housing and Development and meet



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16-17, Dallas Blanchard told Bee staff writer Brian Calixty he poured paint on new Fulton Street sign, his views of downtown and gentrification. Plan, also call for the task force. By John Walker

The council voted unanimously to create the task force, but it also attached some teeth to ensure the members have oversight.

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The resolution authorized the mayor to appoint the task force members. On the recommendation of Councilman Luis Chavez, who represents District 5 in southeast Fresno, the council amended the action so the appointees will require their approval.

Residents and advocates during public comment expressed the need for the task force, but they asked the council to consider focusing on community members and put in an effort that goes beyond the minimum state requirements.

Much of the discussion during public comment and from the council dais used the terms displacement and gentrification interchangeably.

Dallas Blanchard, a Chinatown resident, pointed out the resolution was narrow in the way it defines displacement.

The resolution outlines the task force will convene to “provide opportunities for low-income residents and merchants to remain in their neighborhoods if displacement is observed due to substantial and sustained increases in rent.”

But Blanchard said other factors lead to displacement, such as prolonged construction and outdated zoning.

Blanchard said that downtown areas that have been closed for long periods of time for other construction, leading to decreased vehicle and foot traffic, and the loss of businesses or creating inconveniences for residents.

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Blanchard, who was accused of vandalism by little hipsters' overrunning and ruining downtown, accused the city of being a vandal says



“These things can be expedited, and that would help in alleviating the displacement taking place,” he said.

Blanchard opposed the Fulton Street project and spoke out about minority-owned businesses and people of color being pushed out of the area.

Diane Smith, a southwest Fresno resident and advocate with the group H.E.A.T. (Hope, Effort, Appropriate and Thriving), said she was disappointed it took the city so long to discuss the task force.

“It’s disgusting and a shame that it takes the federal government or the state of California to force the city of Fresno to do what it needs to do,” she said.

Smith said the Southwest Specific Plan will lead to gentrification, particularly the plans that call for a retail corridor between Whitesbridge Avenue and Highway 180.

“I want you to know, me, as a long-time resident – raised my son there, went to school over there – is going to stay,” she said. “So I will fight you by whatever means necessary.”

Lucio Avila, a policy advocate for Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability, encouraged city officials to engage the community on the issue, particularly people who have faced displacement firsthand.

“... community involved right from the beginning and structure  
ity is residents instead of developers or city folks,” he

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commercial tenant from downtown; a commercial tenant from Chinatown or southwest Fresno; an affordable housing developer; a market rate developer; a community development corporation developer; an advocate from a nonprofit; an advocate from a neighborhood organization and an individual who’s not affiliated with any groups.

Avila also recommended the city take a preventative approach rather than a reactionary approach and form a citywide task force since Fresno is one of the fastest growing cities statewide.

Councilman Oliver Baines, who represents District 3, said gentrification is a complicated issue, and there’s no one thing the city can do to prevent it.

“I’ll tell you where it can start. It can start by having a task force made up of community members working alongside this council, the mayor’s office and staff to actually bring forth recommendations,” he said. “...Somebody mentioned it should’ve been done a long time ago. That is absolutely true.”

The housing element required the task force to meet before the end of 2018. City officials were reassured by the state Department of Housing and Development that there would be some leniency as long as the task force was in the works.

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