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## Mayor hails energy-saving drive

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Mayor Heather Fargo doesn't think "being green" is just hip or trendy. And, she said, it's certainly not a fad or a catchphrase.

In fact, she told a group of 600 downtown leaders Thursday that slowing emissions and dealing with climate change need to be Sacramento's top priority.

"I want to ask you to help make this the agenda for Sacramento," Fargo said as part of her annual State of the Downtown address at Memorial Auditorium. "Every household, every person, even every business needs to join us in our efforts."

Fargo said in December the City Council passed two of her long-term goals for Sacramento: a sustainability master plan to reduce the city's energy use and carbon emissions and a green building program to promote sustainable, private development.

Downtown, with its walkable grid, its tree canopy and transit-oriented development, is leading by example, Fargo said. "It's the greenest neighborhood in Sacramento."

The push for green – in an environmental and economic sense – is being taken up regionally, Fargo said. Several organizations are working together to bring clean technology businesses to the area.

Matt Mahood, president and CEO of the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, said his group and others see green energy as a key economic engine for the area.

"As we look to 2008 – and the economy may look a little cloudy – this is our opportunity to grow the economy," Mahood said in an interview.

Robert Burris, deputy director of the Sacramento Area Commerce and Trade Organization, said his group over the past two years has been able to help persuade three new alternative energy companies to make their national headquarters in the Sacramento area.

Fargo said she's been a speaker at several sustainability conferences talking about the city's efforts, and is "in leadership positions helping Sacramento secure its reputation."

She pointed to the city's ranking as the 13th greenest city out of the country's 50 largest cities as an indicator that Sacramento is being recognized as a sustainability leader. The honor came from SustainLane, a nonprofit environmental organization, Fargo said.

"We're committed, and we're good," she said. "Together we can change the future of our planet. It's our obligation."

Fargo, who is running for re-election, also noted that the cause was a popular one. "Polls show that (voters) like us to lead in this regard," she said.

Downtown also was making progress in other ways, Fargo said.

City officials are close to sealing a deal that would move the downtown Greyhound bus station, a magnet for crime and the homeless, to a city-owned location on Richards Boulevard. A letter of intent between the city and the owner of the Greyhound site, Danny Benvenuti, needs to be signed.

"I'd hoped to hold it up and tell you it had been finalized, but we're not quite there yet," Fargo said. The mayor added she hoped the interim station on Richards could be opened in 2009.

And the mayor had some conciliatory words for Westfield, the owner of the Downtown Plaza.

Just last month, after the company had threatened to sue the city over its approval of the downtown railyard project, Fargo said the company had better deliver soon with its promises to revamp the mall. Otherwise, she said, the company should sell to "someone who cares."

On Thursday, Fargo said she was "excited about Westfield's commitment to move forward with the first phase" of redeveloping the plaza, which includes opening up the mall at Seventh and K streets with a new food court and shops.

Conspicuously absent from the mayor's speech was any substantive mention of the economic problems that have slowed or killed several key projects downtown, including high-rise condos. Other speakers, while remaining upbeat on downtown's ultimate renaissance, weren't as circumspect.

Michael Ault, executive director of the Downtown Sacramento Partnership, which sponsors the yearly address, said 2007 was "a challenging year downtown, particularly with high-profile projects."

But he pointed to the steps made over the last five years, including adding 1,000 housing units, more than 200 businesses and 3 million square feet of office space.

Sacramento County Supervisor Roger Dickinson, who represents the downtown, noted the development disappointments in 2007 and acknowledged that there were people who wondered if "the vision will ever be reached."

Dickinson, however, said the area has made huge strides over the past 10 years.

"The road before us is shorter than the road behind," Dickinson said.

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