

# Madera County aims to become Central Valley's next logistics hub



Photo courtesy of City of Madera | Freedom Industrial Park in Madera offers entitled, shovel-ready parcels for industrial development.

**Dylan Gonzales** - STAFF WRITER

Madera County is making a deliberate push to become one of California's premier logistics and industrial destinations — and real estate brokers and county officials say the county's willingness to say yes to warehouse and distribution projects may be its biggest competitive advantage.

With direct Highway 99 access, available entitled land and development-friendly zoning, the county is positioning itself to capture industrial investment that other California communities have turned away.

"Logistics is a key industry along the 99 corridor and has been for generations," said Ethan Smith, senior vice president at Newmark Pearson Commercial. "The fact that Madera

raises its hand and says, as a county, we would like to explore more of these uses, is a really big deal."

## Warm welcome?

Smith said some communities have developed reputations for resisting logistics and warehouse projects, pushing developers to look elsewhere. "I do believe the business community has heard loud and clear where they are or are not welcome," Smith said. "Communities that remain open-minded about the full spectrum of jobs and industries create more opportunities to be competitive."

Madera County Administrative Officer Matthew Treber said one of the county's core advantages is a general plan and zoning framework built around property rights and economic growth.

"If you look at our policies, our zoning

ordinances and our general plan, they are very friendly toward property rights and development," Treber said.

Treber said several county sites are already entitled for industrial development, meaning projects can move directly into permitting.

"I can point out a number of properties that are shovel-ready right now," he said. "You can get a building permit and build a 400,000-square-foot warehouse distribution center."

## Infrastructure remains a hurdle

Not every advantage comes without a caveat.

"The biggest Achilles' heel on the county side is our lack of regional infrastructure," Treber said. "So we have to think outside the box and get creative."

Water and sewer capacity are the primary constraints. Treber acknowledged that attracting large-scale logistics users will require long-term utility investments and public-private partnerships.

The county has pointed to transportation improvements — including the Highway 99 and Avenue 12 interchange — as signs of infrastructure momentum.

"Highway 99 has been the massive focus of our regional transportation improvements," Treber said. "That's the lifeline for the Valley and for this county."

Smith echoed that point.

"Those companies are looking for proximity to a transportation corridor," he said. "Ideally, they want to be as close as possible to Highway 99."

Treber said the Avenue 7 and Highway 99 corridor is already zoned for industrial use and has drawn

interest from major logistics operators.

"Avenue 7 and 99 is going to pop one of these days, sooner rather than later," he said. "It's strategically located."

## AutoZone as a proof of concept

Mike Matter, vice president with Jones Lang LaSalle, said a pivotal moment for Madera's logistics identity came when AutoZone selected Chowchilla for a major distribution center after conducting regional site-selection research.

"When you get a company or major retailer that puts that type of investment into a market like Madera, it puts it on the map as far as logistics distribution," Matter said.

"That kind of breaks the seal," he added. "It shows other companies that Madera works."

## Population growth adds to the pitch

Madera Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Kristina Gallagher said rapid population growth is another factor supporting industrial expansion.

Master-planned communities throughout the county include requirements for commercial and industrial development, intended to align job creation with residential growth.

"Communities that remain open to business and are willing to work toward solutions will benefit long term," Smith said.

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Photo courtesy of Madera County Economic Development Corporation | The AutoZone distribution center in Chowchilla put Madera County on the map for logistics and distribution investment, brokers say.