

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS about the FULTON CORRIDOR SPECIFIC PLAN and DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY PLAN

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## **What is the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan?**

A downtown lives or dies on its ability to attract investment. In Fresno, high difficulty, high costs, and high uncertainty make our downtown the hardest place in the city to develop. This makes it very difficult to attract new downtown investment.

The Fulton Corridor Specific Plan is a new set of laws that will reduce development difficulty, costs, and uncertainty, making good projects easier to build downtown.

## **What is the Downtown Neighborhoods Plan?**

Concentrated poverty will persist in our inner city unless and until neighborhoods surrounding downtown become attractive places for people from a range of backgrounds to live and invest.

The Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan will protect our city's well designed, walkable, historic urban neighborhoods, requiring that future development fit in and contribute to the health, livability, and value of its surroundings. The Plan will provide a level of certainty about the future that helps attract investment to these neighborhoods.

## **Why are these plans our best approach?**

Cities across the country have adopted clear development laws targeted to their downtowns and historic neighborhoods. In California such laws are called "specific plans" and "community plans."

In Fresno, many of our development laws were designed with suburban growth areas in mind, but applied citywide. Yet revitalizing older urban areas often requires very different laws from the suburbs. The proposed plans will finally provide appropriate development laws for the urban areas they serve.

Fresno's Tower District is one example of a thriving urban area served by a strong specific plan that has successfully supported investment and livability by preventing bad development over time.

## **Hasn't Fresno had too many plans already for downtown?**

A great number of "plans" have been written over the years, often to sit on a shelf unimplemented, gathering dust. These plans were essentially studies and compilations of (usually) good ideas, but without any "teeth" for enforcement and follow-through.

The Fulton Corridor and Downtown Neighborhoods plans, when adopted, will be the City's regulation for development in the areas they serve. The name "plan" is a misnomer; these are actually regulatory documents that will control the everyday actions of developers and the City. Just as

development up to now has occurred in compliance with our current zoning codes, development under the new downtown plans may only occur as prescribed by these laws.

## **Are these new plans a luxury or a necessity in the downtown revitalization process?**

They are a necessity in part because they include many elements that are essential to the downtown area's success. Beyond new investment-friendly development laws, the plans will:

- Determine the future of the Fulton Mall, which will require an environmental study like this plan provides. The environmental analysis will help reduce problems for future development.
- Find the best policies to manage downtown's water capacity, parking system, and historic assets. These issues urgently need attention.
- Set development patterns around the new High Speed Rail station to support pedestrian and transit access, and nearby housing and commerce.

## **With City finances so scarce, how will these new plans ever be implemented?**

In rich times and lean times, there is always some amount of federal, state, local, and private money flowing for investment and development. With a clear plan for how to focus such investment, every dollar that comes to urban Fresno can be used to improve the area. All investments, private and public, will support the vision that has been adopted in the plans.

Investors crave certainty. Private developers and businesses want to know the future value of their projects is secure. Meanwhile public agencies are more likely to make grants when it is clear that many funding sources are working in parallel with the goals of the grant.

By providing certainty to investors, specific and community plans help to attract more funding than might otherwise be available for implementation.

## **Why was the lead firm chosen for this project?**

Moule & Polyzoides is a national and world leader in urban planning, and has created model specific plans for the central areas of cities such as San Antonio, Santa Ana, Paso Robles, and Ventura. M&P also has deep expertise in involving the community in the planning process, which is a major component of creating Fresno's plans.

Though none of the 21 planning firms that vied

for the job is headquartered locally, six local firms are part of the overall team performing work for this project.

### **How long will it take to create these plans?**

Done on their own, the Fulton Corridor Plan or the Neighborhoods Plan would each take about two years to create — or four years for both. Combining these plans into one process reduces the time for completion to about two and a half years.

### **What are the steps to adoption of the plans?**

Extensive public input on the vision for the Downtown Neighborhoods and the Fulton Corridor area is the first step. Recent charrettes, or weeklong workshops, have provided an opportunity for the public to give input on the future these plans will deliver to the areas they serve.

Based on this input, the consultant team will work with the City to draft plan documents that support the vision within the limits of the natural and economic resources available.

After the drafts are released to the public in approximately spring 2011, and revised based on public input under the guidance of the two appointed Community Advisory Committees (CACs), an environmental review process will begin and take about a year. Upon conclusion of this review, in the spring of 2012, each CAC will recommend adoption of its plan. Various City commissions will review the plans before they go to the City Council for adoption in mid-2012.

### **What will these plans cost?**

Creating these two plans and legally required environmental studies will cost approximately \$2.6 million. If certain grant applications are successful, the City's obligation toward this total is reduced.

Retaining M&P's leading planners also creates value by giving Fresno the opportunity to learn new skills that can be applied to other efforts. For example, the plans will include a new "form-based code" that regulates the design of future buildings. As local planners learn how to write such codes from M&P's experts, they will be able to create them for other neighborhoods throughout our community without hiring additional consultants, saving the City money in the future — and permanently enriching the quality of local planning and design.

### **If it requires spending up to \$2.6 million, is revitalization really worth it after all?**

Yes. The cost to our community of not following a proven path to revitalization far exceeds the price tag of these plans. A 2008 economic analysis reported that the Fulton Mall area is operating at only 6% of its economic potential. Our underperforming

downtown costs everyone through lost city revenue and business creation. The plans will encourage hundreds of millions of dollars of private development that will, in turn, make for a more vibrant city center that will, in turn again, help retain the kinds of smart, well paid workers who have a choice of cities in which to live and invest.

Downtown, when revitalized, will provide an exceptional level of new revenue to bolster City finances. Property, sales, hotel, and casino taxes, as well as revenue from parking, the Convention Center, and Chukchansi Park, all will increase as downtown becomes more economically successful.

Also, recent state laws will, in coming years, direct cities and regions to grow more densely or lose critical transportation funding. These laws explicitly identify new specific and community plans as key tools to help revitalize urban areas and make cities sustainable. Without development-friendly urban plans in place, it will be harder for Fresno to comply with state and federal mandates for sustainable development.

## **More about the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan**

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### **1. Why will we succeed this time?**

- Political leadership with focus on Downtown vitality
- We've identified significant demand for housing/office/retail
- A community supported vision
- Coordinated public & private actions
- An effective form-based code to guide future development
- EIR pre-approved projects

### **2. What is the strategy?**

- Marketing and branding Downtown
- Institutional and business recruitment
- Resolving the Mall challenge
- Targeted developments in the CBD
- Urban development standards with limited project processing
- Annual review of progress based on concrete metrics

### **3. How is the Plan implemented?**

- Coordination of City departmental resources
- Coordination of redevelopment powers and funds
- Public investment in infrastructure & streetscape
- Private investment in market-driven projects
- Effective code enforcement
- Parking management