

Southwest Fresno Specific Plan

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING #1 SUMMARY

- Date of Meeting:** July 25, 2015
- Location:** Park Grove Community Hall
- Members Present:** Juan Esquivel; Alex Belanger; Shaneece Childress; Sabrina Kelley; Sharon Williams; Leonicio Vasquez Santos; Debbie Darden; Tate Hill; Tom Beggs; Eric Payne; Sylvestra Hall; Donna Middleton; Michaelynn Lewis; Maria Lizaldo (with son Angel); Jane Carretero
- Project Team Present:** Gregory Barfield (Council office); Sophia Pagoulatos, Luis ? (FHA); Sheila Scheitrum (FHA); Margarita Rocha, Lucio Avila (Centro La Familia); Bob Mitchell; Steve Cancian (Shared Spaces); Bruce Brubaker (PlaceWorks)
- Special Guest:** Councilmember Oliver Baines

Meeting Summary:

Introductions. This was the first meeting of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Steering Committee.

Councilmember Baines gave an introduction and an overview of goals for the project. SC members then introduced themselves, followed by introductions from the Project Team members.

Guidelines for Good Meetings. The first item of business was to brainstorm guidelines for future meetings. Steve Cancian facilitated the discussion for this and other parts of the meeting. Steering committee members provided many ideas. Some of the guidelines discussed were:

Be respectful, listen to others, no crosstalk, keep meetings to the point

Understanding Planning, and the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Process. The Committee heard a presentation from Greg Barfield, Sophia Pagoulatos and Bruce Brubaker on Understanding Planning and the scope and schedule of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan. This was followed by a Q&A session. Many of the questions concerned environmental review and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Southwest Specific Plan will have an Environmental Impact Report done as part of the process.

Lessons Learned. A presentation, followed by discussion, focused on lessons learned from previous planning done in the Southwest Fresno area. The presentation was from Margarita Rocha, Bob Mitchell and Greg Barfield, and all of the committee members participated in the follow-up discussion. Here are some key points from the discussion:

Many plans have been well intentioned

Be careful about overpromising, and make sure the promises are kept

Councilmember presence is critical

After plans are set, and things are quiet, when things do happen they sometimes don't follow the plan – ensure that the community is on top of what is happening

The plan should be achievable – that will give opportunities for development to come if it is achievable. This got the response - but we should set our sights high and not settle - and - the goal of planning is to make the unreasonable, reasonable

Expectations should be managed

Set standards high

Parallel was drawn to sharecroppers - sharecroppers do the work but do not reap the benefit – in the Southwest, the business owners should be from the community, not just the workers

We should think about the kids and young people

There has been a loss of trust – some “affordable” houses are difficult for employed people to qualify for

Ensure benefits for current community members

Teach financial literacy so more can participate in economic success

One lesson learned in Southwest Fresno is that the Plan needs substance and teeth – it should be required

There is some mistrust between whites and blacks

Some black business owners in Kearny Palms went out of business – why didn't they have more patronage from black customers?

The plan should encourage business, but not necessarily Walmart – maybe smaller businesses – this lead the discussion to – we need to set a standard

Everyone who participates on the committee – your projects and viewpoints should be clear – no agendas – should be transparent

Lunch. Lunch was served and committee members learned about other members over their food. After lunch, stories that were learned about each of the committee members were told to the large group.

Issues and Opportunities. The committee then broke into groups to discuss what the key issues and opportunities are for five topics in the Plan Area.

Public Amenities. Issues identified by committee members were - *incomplete streets, lack of sidewalks, lack of street lights, overhead utilities, vacant lots, public safety, flooding, repair existing amenities.* Opportunities were - *Bus Rapid Transit, should be new walking trails with bikes and trees*

Housing. Issues were - *quality of housing, vacant pockets with no housing, too much low income housing, no incentives to maintain housing, blighted homes, absentee landlords.* Opportunities were - *to encourage quality housing, to have ownership workshops, to provide new green space, to have a mix of housing types, to implement curb gutter sidewalk improvements so developers can come in and build*

Jobs/Economic Development. Issues were – *workforce development, lack of job training, business displacement, should new development benefit only West Fresno residents or draw people in from outside.* Opportunities were – *area should be “branded”, we should engage business owners, there should be a mix of residential/business, have not only large businesses but small and large*

Environmental Justice. Issues were – *concentration of unhealthy factors in Southwest – liquor stores, penny loans, drug houses, boarded up houses.* Opportunities were: *there are opportunity sites including 116 acres along Church and 3.5 acres at Jensen and Elm.*

Healthy Neighborhoods – Issues were – *blighted areas, public safety, lack of access to healthy food, homelessness.* Opportunities were – *the schools can be community centers, parks and libraries.*

Summary - For each of the topic areas, the issues and opportunities from the committee members was compared to issues and opportunities from the project team’s draft Existing Conditions Profile report. There was a lot of overlap, but some issues were brought up by committee members that were not addressed in the draft report.

Next Steps. The next Steering Committee meeting will be Monday, August 17 at 5:30. Location will be determined. For the next meeting, the following materials were requested:

An updated timeline

A summary of applicable useful information from past plans

Current and relevant data

A tour of the Plan Area

Map with overlays