

CITY OF FRESNO

# WEST AREA SPECIFIC PLAN

---

EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

REVISED ADMINISTRATIVE DRAFT MARCH 2018



# CONTENTS



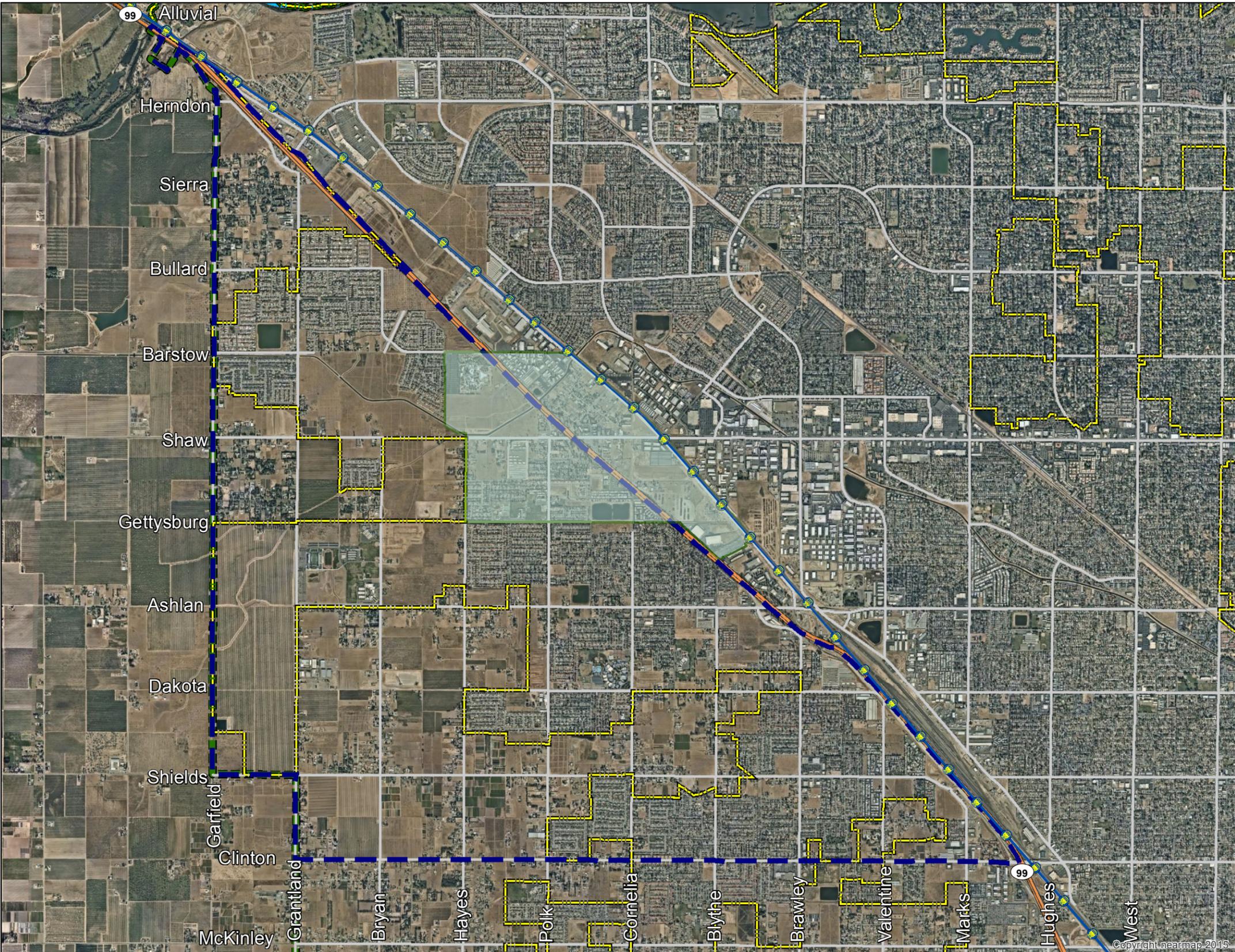
Report Published By  
LONG-RANGE PLANNING DIVISION

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. CURRENT SOCIAL CONDITIONS</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3. LAND USE</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4. TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>5. WATER RESOURCES</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>APPENDIX A- DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>APPENDIX B- MEDIA REPORTS</b>	<b>70</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION



AGRICULTURE IN THE WEST AREA



- Aerial**
- Highway City Specific Plan Area
  - West Area Specific Plan Boundary
  - Fresno City Limits
  - Fresno Sphere Of Influence
- Circulation**
- State Highway
  - Major Streets
  - Rail Lines
  - High Speed Rail Alignment



0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

Source: Aerial; Nearmap, October 27, 2017  
<https://www.nearmap.com.au/legal/copyright>

Copyright nearmap 2015

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a simple and easily readable objective report on the existing planning and development conditions for the West Area. This document lays the foundation for the creation of a Specific Plan for the West Area. The West Area has two existing plans which are the West Area Community Plan and the Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan. The current West Area Community Plan was adopted on February 1, 2002 under Appendix W of the City of Fresno's 2025 General Plan. The West Area Community Plan consists of a thirteen (13) page document detailing policy goals and initiatives to develop the West Area as a planned community in conjunction with a range of services and facilities for community residents. The Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan which was adopted on January 6, 1998 sought to strengthen and improve livability within the neighborhood. The following terms: Plan Area, West Area, West Planning Area, and Planning Area describe the project area and are used interchangeably.

This report will provide an overview of existing and current land uses within the Plan Area. Policymakers and interested parties will be able to use this document as a snapshot of what is currently in the built environment, and the amount of development capacity within the Area. This document is not meant to serve as a policy document, but rather to guide planning policy within the West Area. This document should be used for the following purposes:

- 1) Facilitating public involvement in the planning process for the West Area Specific Plan;
- 2) Provide greater understanding to policymakers and community stakeholders of the present development opportunities within the Plan Area;
- 3) Help create a Specific Plan that encourages consistent and compatible development, and maximizes parcel utilization;
- 4) Assist Area residents, community stakeholders, and policymakers to develop and create an identity for the Area;
- 5) Cooperate and coordinate with County policymakers to implement planning and development goals of the Fresno General Plan, and the policies developed for the West Area Specific Plan; and
- 6) Create the foundation for the Program-level Environmental Impact Report.

For information on how you can get involved in this project, please contact the Development and Resource Management Department for the City of Fresno at 559-621-8181.

# 1.1 HISTORIC INFORMATION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND HISTORIC INFORMATION

Fresno was founded after the California Gold Rush ended and twenty-two (22) years after California became a State by the Central Pacific Railroad Company in 1872. Fresno was described as being a barren sand plain in all directions. Leland J. Stanford, a Director for the Railroad, is credited with selecting the site of the new station. Impressed with the 2,000 acre wheat field belonging to A.Y. Easterby, Stanford announced, "Wonderful! Here we must build the town!" Fresno experienced a population boom with settlers arriving from the eastern and southern states, and abroad. The Chinese were the earliest foreign settlers, and continued to grow in numbers such that Fresno, at that time, had the second largest Chinatown in California. Fresno became the County seat in 1874 and was incorporated in 1885. In 1875 the Central California Colony was established south of Fresno, and encompassed approximately 3,840 acres.

Later in the 1880's Fresno saw an increase in settlers from Armenia, Germany, and Japan. Other groups arrived and established colonies throughout the city. The early 20th century witnessed a large increase in the Hispanic population. Today, Fresno celebrates a diverse citizenry of more than seventy (70) different ethnic groups in the metropolitan area. Tracts of land were subdivided into 20-40 acre parcels, irrigated from a system of canals and often landscaped with boulevards of palms, eucalyptus, figs, walnuts, oranges, and drought-

resistant trees. By 1903 there were 48 separate colonies in Fresno County. Portions of subdivisions of the Perrin colonies and the Muscatel Estate are within the Planning Area. In 1910, the colony system lost its popularity and large land holders began selling off portions of the land to farming families.

James Clayton Forkner moved to Fresno in 1912, and helped establish Highway City, a neighborhood for industrial and farm workers to live. A southwest portion of Highway City is within the Plan Area. Highway City excluded, a significantly large portion of the Plan Area remained farmland until the installation of Highway 99, which encouraged increased land development. The advent of the automobile encouraged continued growth and development to occur north of the city's urban core. The City annexed land west of Highway 99 as recent as the early 21st century, which includes undeveloped and underutilized lands adjacent to established commercial corridors in the Plan Area.



IMAGE OF ORIGINAL CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL LOCATED IN THE WEST AREA

# 1.2 ANNEXATION HISTORY

## 1.2

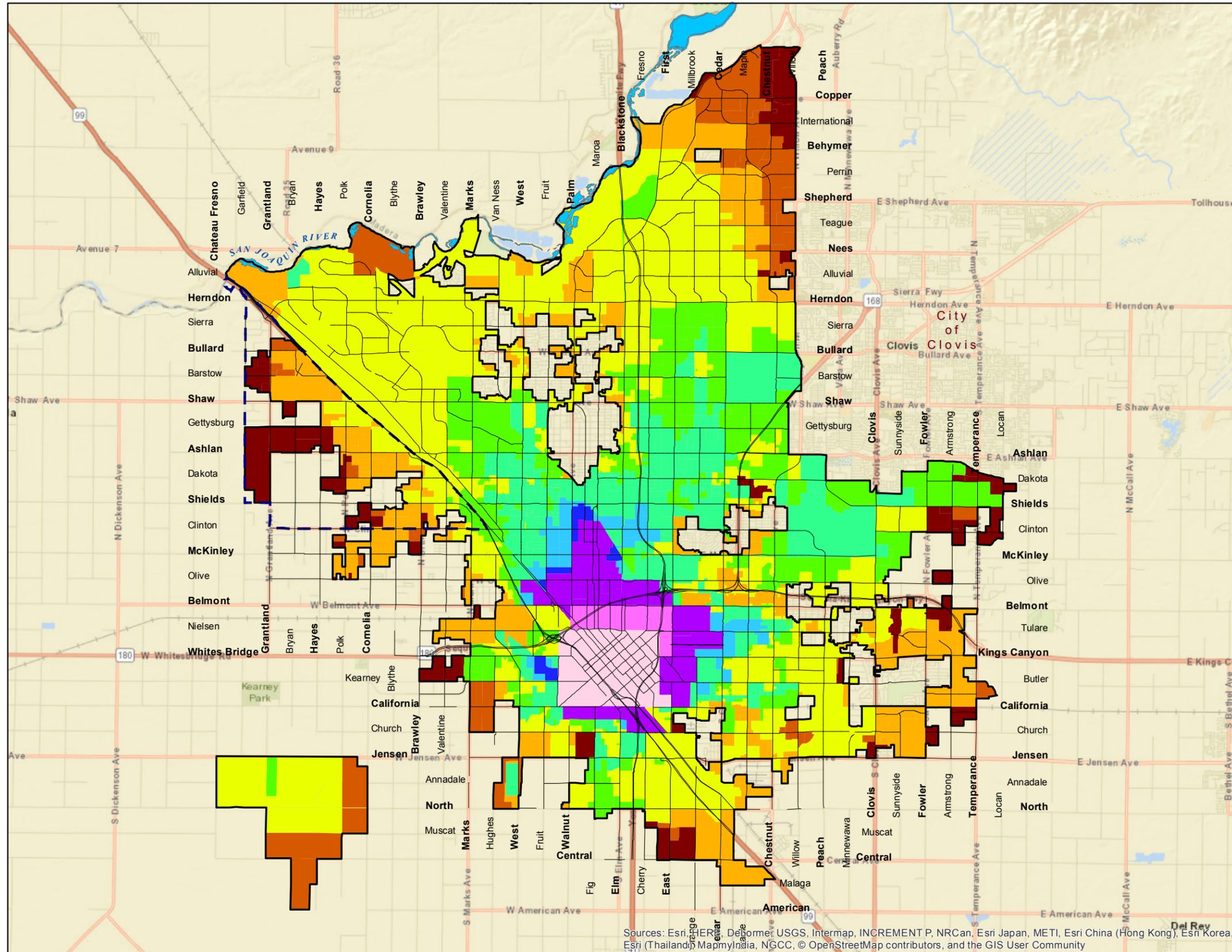
### ANNEXATION HISTORY

Fresno has continued to develop and grow north of Downtown, including into the West Area. With development came annexation into the unincorporated county areas. The city's only natural border is the San Joaquin River to the north and the municipal border of the city of Clovis to the northeast. As a result of this, annexation has spread northeast and west into rural and agricultural land. With unplanned development and annexation in the West Area comes a hodge podge of confused and incompatible mixture of complete neighborhoods, vacant land, and intense commercial or industrial uses.

Most annexation within the Plan Area occurred within the last forty-five years, with the majority occurring within the last thirty-five years. The only exception is the Highway City neighborhood which was annexed to the City on June 1, 1981, twenty-six years after being bisected by the installation of Highway 99. The existing conditions report for the General Plan and Development Code Update (August 2011) mentions that irregular rural patterns have continued to constrain and discourage development in the West Area. This development condition also creates an identity issue for the Planning Area. Except for the small portion of Highway City neighborhood, the Planning Area lacks identity. As annexation expanded the city's border into rural areas, defining the area has become even more of a challenge.



WEST CLINTON AVE.



### Annexation History (Updated May 2017)

- Boundaries**
- Fresno City Limits
  - West Area Specific Plan Boundary
- 1885 - 1897
  - 1898 - 1909
  - 1910 - 1921
  - 1922 - 1933
  - 1934 - 1945
  - 1946 - 1957
  - 1958 - 1969
  - 1970 - 1981
  - 1982 - 1993
  - 1994 - 2005
  - 2006 - 2017



0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles

Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017

Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), MapmyIndia, NGCC, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

# 1.3 OVERVIEW

## 1.3A- BACKGROUND

### POLITICAL INFORMATION

The West Area is situated in the 16th Congressional District, the 8th State Senatorial District, and the 23rd and 31st State Assembly Districts. The Plan Area is also situated in County Supervisorial District No. 1. In addition, the Plan Area, excluding the Sphere of Influence (SOI), is represented within Council Districts 1, 2, and 3. Council District 1 covers a significant central portion of the Plan Area with 2,568 acres or approximately four (4) square miles. Council District 2 covers the most northern portion, excluding the SOI, with approximately 996 acres or one and a half (1.5) square miles. Finally, Council District 3 covers the most southeastern portion of the Plan Area with approximately 654 acres or a little more than one (1) square mile. The SOI covers approximately 2,859 acres within the Plan Area. Figure 1.3A shows the breakdown of these population divisions within each

Council District and SOI. The Plan Area is served by the Central Unified School District; however a small portion of Trustee District No. 5 of the Fresno Unified School District touches the most southeastern portion of the Plan Area which is largely commercial uses.

### 1.3B- GENERAL

This existing conditions report lays the groundwork for the West Area Specific Plan, and exhibits the current conditions of the area. The Plan Area is located west of State Route 99 or more commonly known as Highway 99 which runs diagonally north and south at the Plan Area's most eastern edge. Vehicular trips may head north to Sacramento or San Francisco, or south to Bakersfield or Los Angeles. The Plan Area is within

Development Area No. 1 – North (DA-1 North), and is bounded by West Clinton Avenue, thenceforth west to Grantland Avenue, thenceforth north to Shields Avenue, thenceforth west to Garfield Avenue, thenceforth north to Parkway Drive, and thenceforth southeast abutting Highway 99 to West Clinton Avenue. The Plan Area includes the southwest portion of Highway City along Highway 99. The Sphere of Influence (SOI) includes the most northern, westward, and southwestward portions of the Plan Area, and is considered county land adjacent to the city of Fresno's municipal boundary line (Fresno city limits).

### 1.3C- LAND

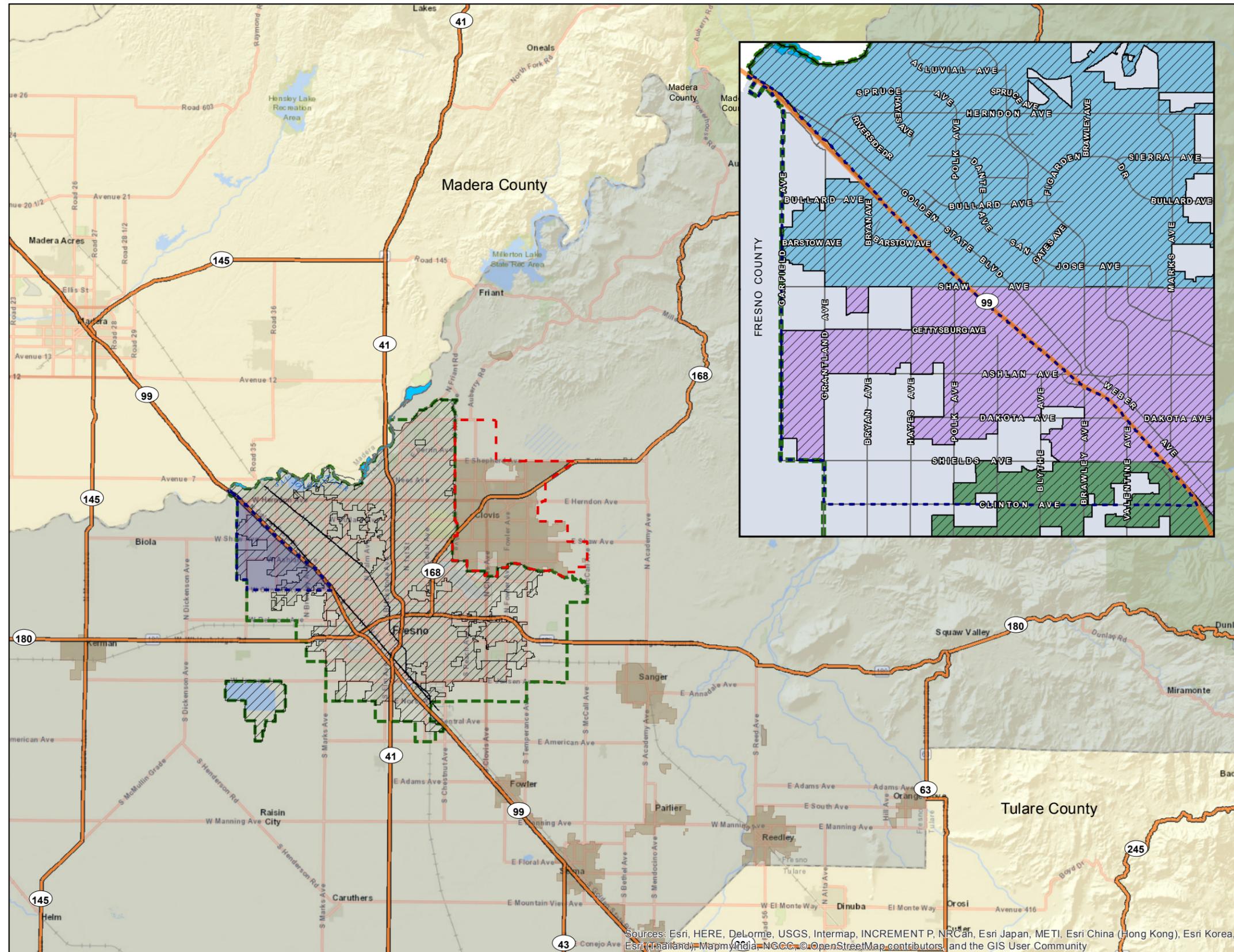
The West Area is vast in land. The land size of this Planning Area is larger than combined land areas of three Fresno county cities, including: San Joaquin (1.20 square miles), Sanger (5.75 square miles), and Kerman (3.27 square miles). With 7,077 acres or slightly more than eleven (11) square miles, a significant amount of land is farmland or rural residential lots with large, uneven, and underutilized parcels. This existing conditions report will examine tentative and final maps, which will impact potential land use changes within the West Area. Along with depicting land use within Chapter 3, a map accompanied by analysis will be included to show parcels protected by the Williamson Act Contracts between property owners and the County.

**FIGURE 1.3A- COUNCIL DISTRICT/ SPHERE OF INFLUENCE INFORMATION**

Council District	Population	Square Miles	Population Density
District No. 1	21,133	4	5,283 ppl per sq.mi
District No. 2	5,548	1.5	3,669 ppl per sq.mi
District No. 3	8,635	1.02	8,466 ppl per sq.mi
Sphere Of Influence	3,187	4.5	708 ppl per sq.mi
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,503</b>	<b>11.02</b>	<b>3,211 ppl/sq.mi</b>

Source: ArcGIS & United States Census

ppl per sq. mi. = people per square mile



### Regional Setting

**Boundaries**

- West Area Specific Plan Boundary
- Fresno City Limits
- Fresno County
- Fresno Sphere of Influence
- Clovis Sphere of Influence
- California Cities
- San Joaquin River

**Council Districts (Inset Map)**

- District 1
- District 2
- District 3

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016

# 2. CURRENT SOCIAL CONDITIONS



CENTRAL LEARNING ADULT SCHOOL SITE

# 2. CURRENT SOCIAL CONDITIONS

## 2.1 RACE AND GENDER

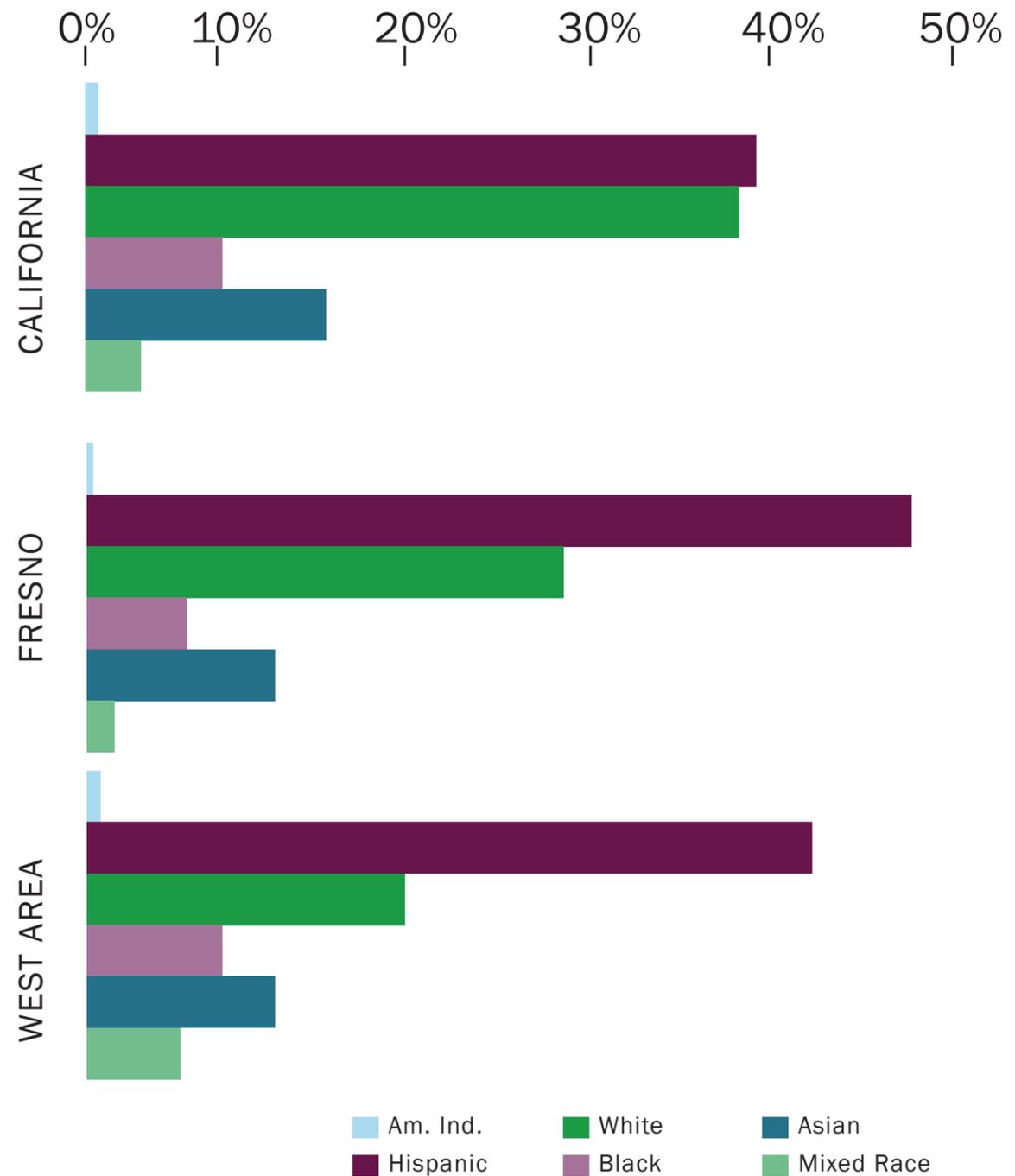
According to the United States Census Bureau, the Hispanic community represents the majority race in Fresno, and the West Area. The Hispanic ethnic group includes Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and any other Hispanic or Latino groups. In 2015, the Hispanic community slightly edged out Whites as the largest ethnic group in the state of California. That demographic swing is reflected in the city and Plan Area as shown in Figure 2.1A. Figure 2.1B shows the female populace with an even balance or slight edge over the male population in the state, city, and Plan Area.

**FIGURE 2.1B- GENDER**

Location	Male	Female
State of California	50%	50%
City of Fresno	49%	51%
West Area	49%	51%

Source: The United States Census Bureau, 2016 Population Estimates

**FIGURE 2.1A- RACE**



Source: The United States Census Bureau



WEST AREA LOCAL ALMOND FARM

## 2.2 EDUCATION

### 2.2A- CENTRAL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

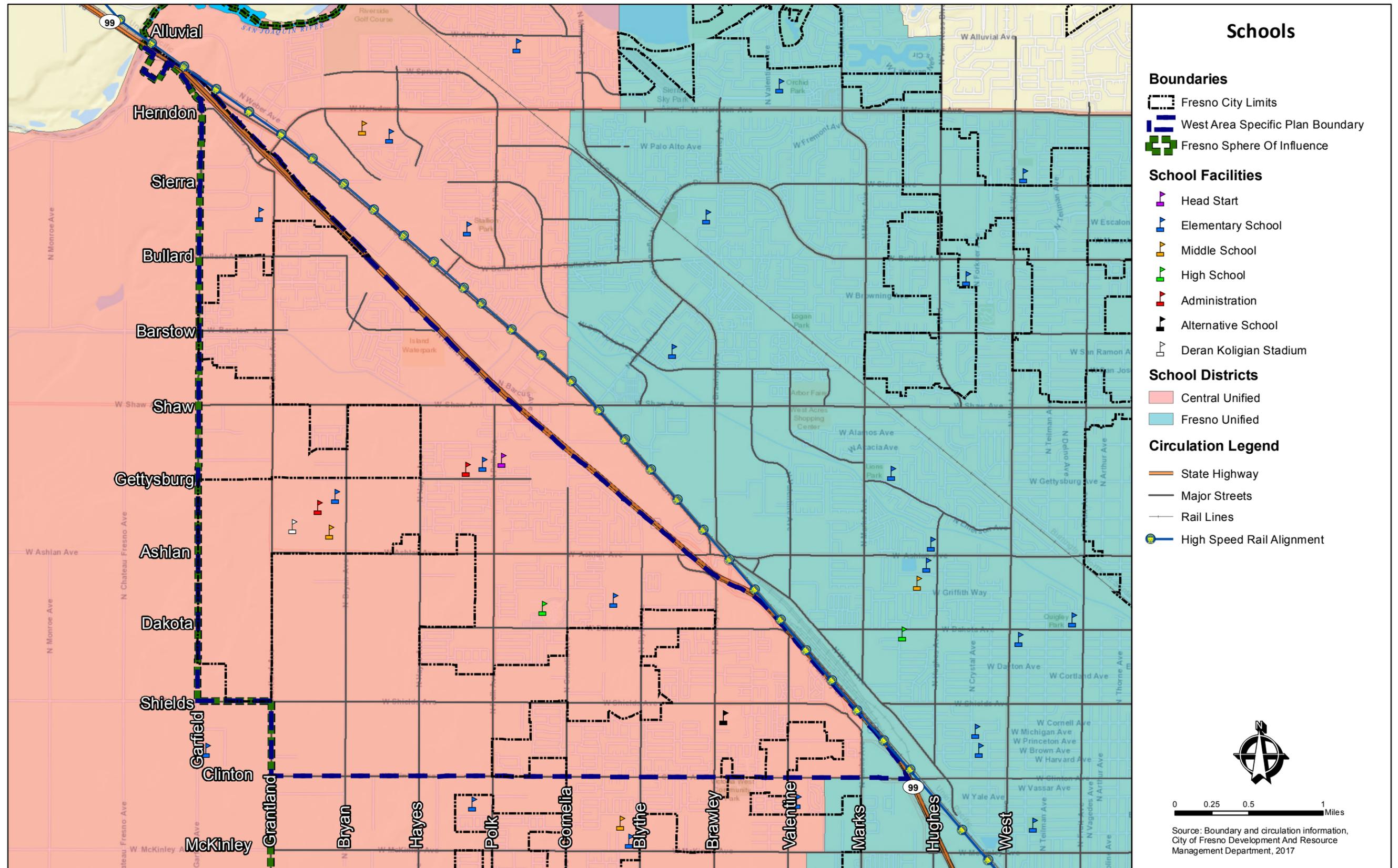
Public education is serviced by twenty-one (21) schools within Central Unified School District (herein referred to as “the District”). The day-to-day affairs of the District are managed by a full-time superintendent. The Board of Trustees serves as the District’s governing body. The Board is comprised of a seven (7) member board, each elected from and representing an area, three (3) Board areas are located within the Plan Area. The District, as a whole, spans approximately eighty-eight (88) square miles, and primarily services suburban and rural residents. The District is one of the Plan Area’s largest employers. District staff reports that for the 2016-2017 school year, Central Unified had approximately 663 teachers for 15,772 pupils equating to a nearly 23-to-1 student-teacher ratio. Enrollment has increased to approximately 15,900 for the 2017-2018 academic year. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the District employed 1,405 individuals. For the 2017-2018 academic year, the District’s payroll has increased by 167 to 1,572.

It can be assumed that as development occurs in the Plan Area, the District will be required to provide additional building and staffing resources to meet increased enrollment. Residential development has modestly continued to occur. At the time of adoption of the General Plan, the District had nineteen (19) schools; today the District has increased to two (2) additional schools. The District has large tracts of undeveloped developable land available for additional school

buildings. Within the Plan Area, the District’s schools are located both within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) and within the city limits. District schools within city limits of the Plan Area are primarily located within Council District 1. No school buildings or facilities are located in Council District 2. The only school building currently located in Council District 3 is the Central Learning Adult School located near Shields and Brawley Avenues.



HERNDON BARSTOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



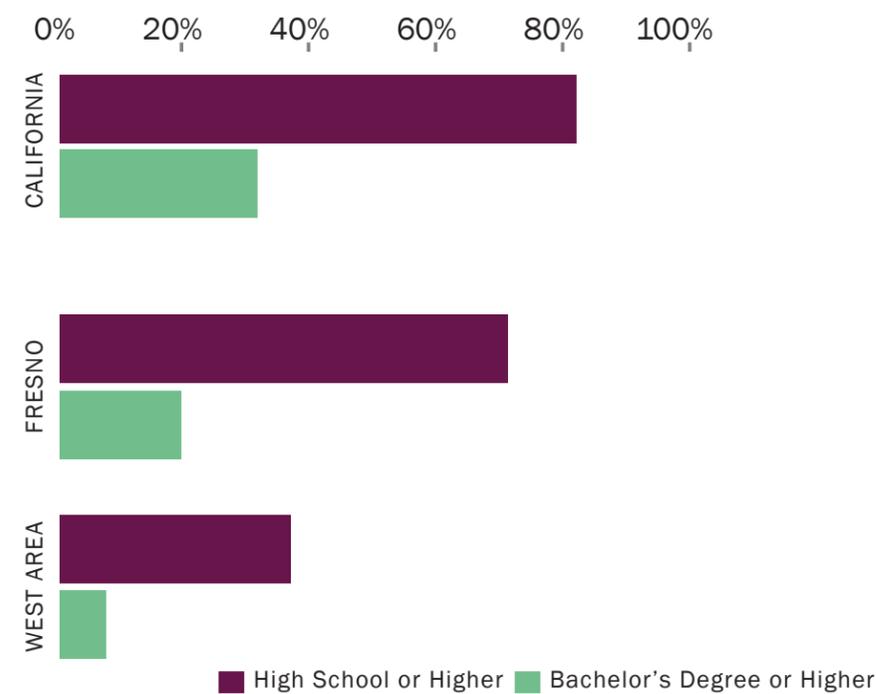
**2.2B- EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

Figure 2.2B shows where the West Area’s educational attainment level is in comparison to the educational attainment of the state of California and the city of Fresno. Approximately 82% of the state’s population has a high school education or higher, to include some college or an associate’s degree. 31% of the state has attained a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education. Educational attainment levels are lower in the city as compared to the state. 75% of city residents have attained a high school education or higher, and 20% have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher. The West Area’s educational attainment is lower than both the state and city. In the high school or higher category, 37% of West Area residents have attained a high school education or higher and slightly more than 8% of West Area residents have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher level.

**2.2C- HIGHER EDUCATION**

The city of Fresno is home to several institutions of higher learning. However, none are located within the Plan Area. Individuals residing in the Plan Area would need to commute more than ten miles to colleges and universities within the city. The only vocational school within the Plan Area is A-1 Truck Driving School. A-1 provides educational assistance to students seeking to obtain a commercial driver license from the California Department of Motor Vehicles in order to operate large commercial vehicles for a career. Figure 2.2-C shows the approximate distance to higher learning institutions, and the estimated travel time it takes to get to those institutions.

**FIGURE 2.2B- EDUCATION**



Source: United States Census Bureau

**FIGURE 2.2C- DRIVING DISTANCES**

University/ College	Approximate Miles/Time
Fresno Pacific University	17.4 Miles/Approximately 23 minute commute
California State University- Fresno	12 Miles/Approximately 29 minute commute
San Joaquin Valley College	12 Miles/Approximately 22 minute commute
Fresno City College	13 Miles/Approximately 19 minute commute

Source: Directions, Google Maps



GLACIER POINT MIDDLE SCHOOL

## 2.3 INCOME AND JOBS

While the education level is lower than both the city and state, the median household income levels of the Plan Area are fairly higher than the city's median household income level. Figure 2.3A shows the median household income for residents of the state of California, city of Fresno, Council Districts within the Plan Area, and the Sphere of Influence (SOI). The figure shows that the median household income of Council District No. 2 surpasses the median household income level of both the state and the city. It could be assumed that low education levels will translate to lower income levels. However, over 50% of the Plan Area population is employed within the healthcare, agricultural, blue collar, or service sectors. These kinds of jobs typically require only a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) in order to receive vocational instruction or certification which leads to a stable career.

Blue collar employment is defined as having a job that is not performed in an administrative setting and is skills-based such as a welder, plumber, warehouse personnel, or maintenance. It is believed the reason income levels are fairly high in the Plan Area even though education levels are lower is because of blue collar and service sector employment. For example, 44% of those working within the blue collar employment sector listed in Figure 2.3B have transportation jobs. According to a 2015 report from the American Trucking Association (ATA), the median annual wage for a truck driver is approximately \$73,000. The ATA has noted compensation for truckers has increased approximately 12% per year<sup>1</sup>. This is one example of an industry where the job may require only a high school diploma or GED, but the earning potential can exceed \$70,000 per year.

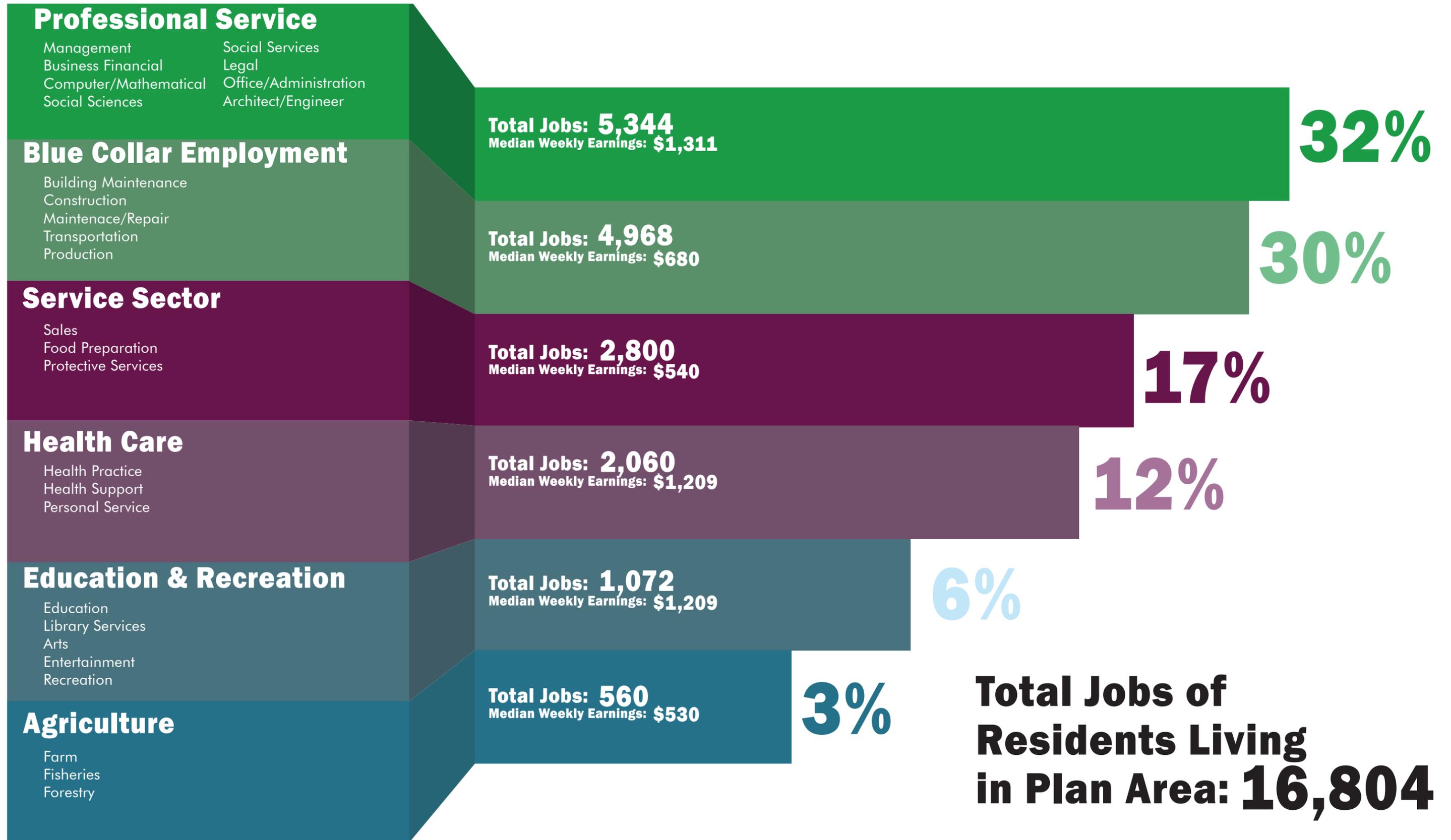
**FIGURE 2.3A- MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

	Median Household Income
State of California	\$61,818
City of Fresno	\$41,531
West Area	\$59,482
Council District No.1 within Plan Area	\$49,862
Council District No.2 within Plan Area	\$79,566
Council District No.3 within Plan Area	\$47,412
Sphere of Influence	\$61,071

Source: ArcGIS and United States Census Bureau



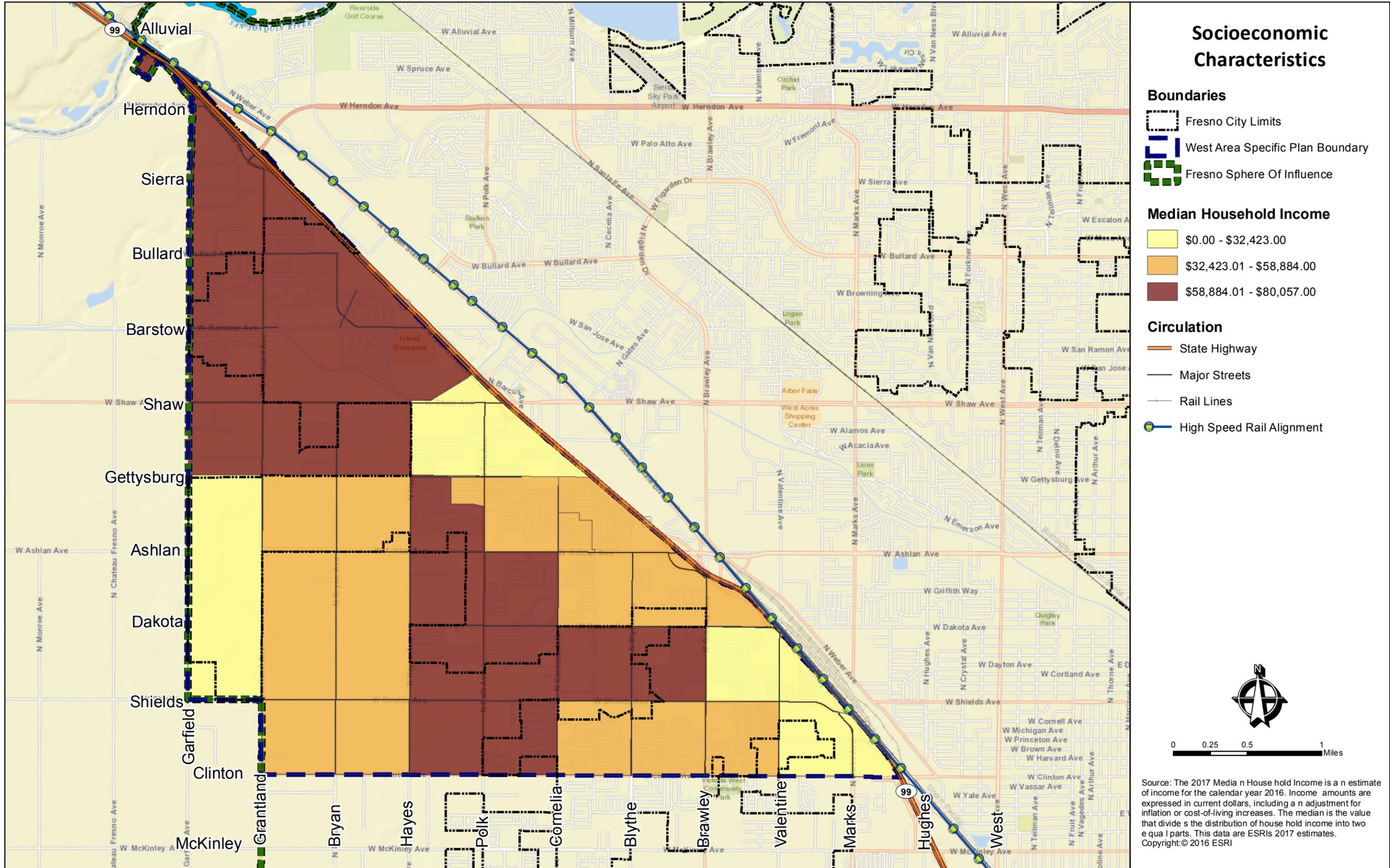
ISLAND WATER PARK



Source: 1. ESRI; Vintage 2017; 2017 Jobs (ESRI)  
 2. Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers- Third Quarter 2017. Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Department of Labor. October 18, 2017.



MARKS AND CLINTON BUSINESSES



## 2.4 PUBLIC SAFETY

### 2.4A- FRESNO POLICE DEPARTMENT

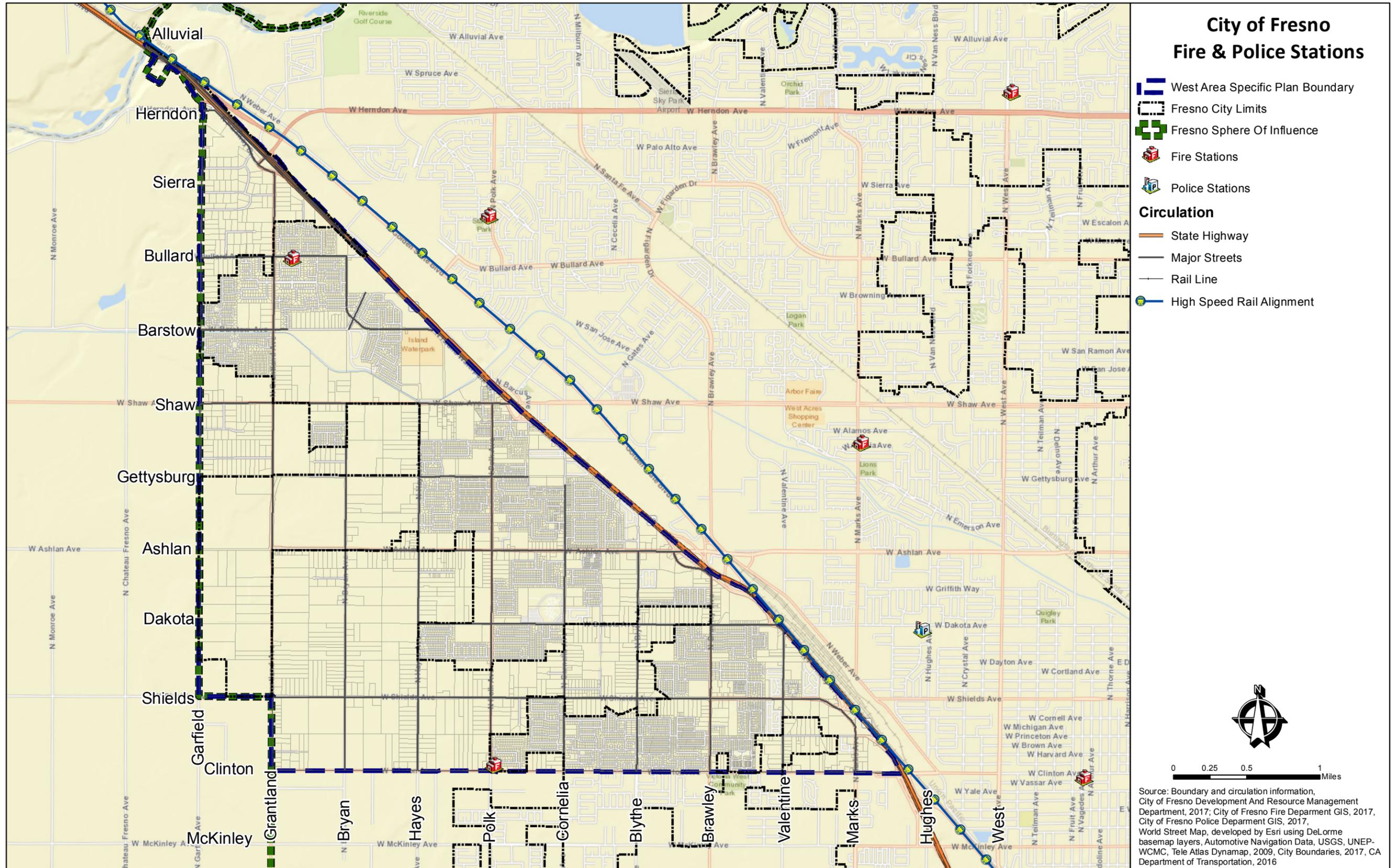
The City of Fresno provides two vital public safety services to its residents, police and fire protection. The Police Department is under the leadership and direction of Police Chief Jerry Dyer. The Department's principal headquarters is located at 2323 Mariposa Street at what once was Fresno's City Hall. Fresno has five policing districts and the West Area is located in Police District 5 – Northwest, but the police district office is not located in the Plan Area. It is located approximately 2.5 miles east.

### 2.4B- FRESNO FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Fire Department is under the leadership and direction of Kerri L. Donis, and is headquartered at 911 H. Street. In order to provide effective and timely service to city residents, the Fire Department has 23 stations located across the City of Fresno. The department has two stations located within the Plan Area. Fire Station No. 16 is located in a former residential structure at the intersection of West Clinton Avenue and North Polk Avenue (2510 N. Polk Street). In the northern portion of the Plan Area, Fire Station No. 18 is located off of West Bullard Avenue at 5938 North La Ventana Avenue. The Fire Department reports that this station is temporary, and will permanently be relocated to Shaw and Grantland to strategically ensure the Department's "4 Minutes to Excellence" response time goal.



WEST AREA FIRE STATION 16



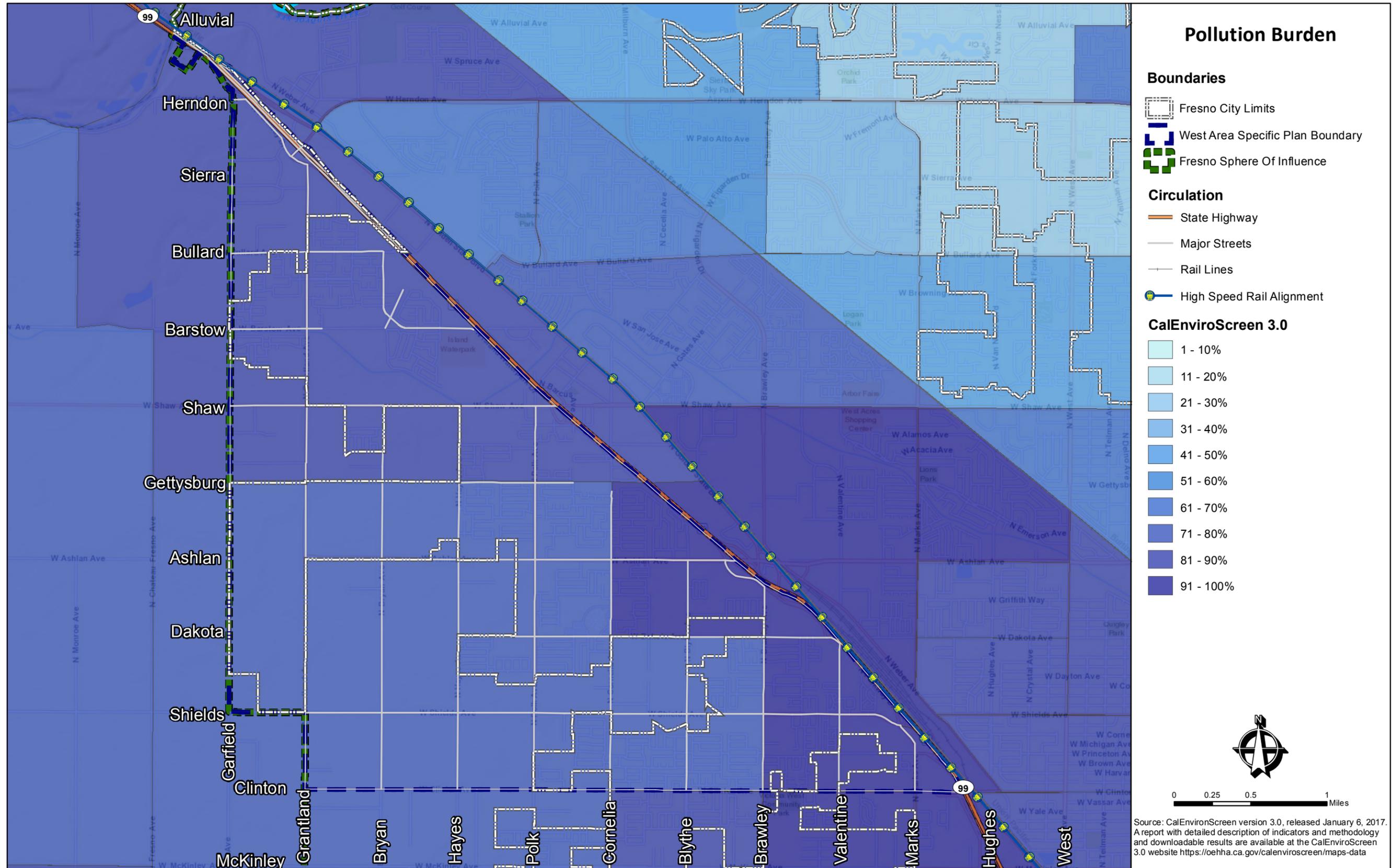
## 2.5 HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), on behalf of the California Environmental Protection Agency, provides CalEnviroScreen 3.0. This tool is used to designate disadvantaged communities in accordance with Senate Bill 535 of 2017. This tool helps the State of California and communities like the city of Fresno to determine core areas in need of immediate reinvestment to mitigate pollution and advance environmental improvements. Disadvantaged communities may receive 25% of the proceeds from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund to go toward projects that provide a benefit to disadvantaged communities. The city, including the entire Planning Area is shown as a disadvantaged community.

In fact, CalEnviroScreen 3.0 also exhibit high pollution, low population areas of the state as being a disadvantage community in accordance with SB 535. CalEnviroScreen 3.0 scores communities on a 10-tiered percentile for air pollution. Most of the West Area is in the 80th and 90th percentile for pollution burden representing the potential exposures to pollutants and the adverse environmental conditions caused by such pollution. Areas along a major highway tend to be in the highest percentile for poor air quality due to pollutants from commercial and motor vehicles. The farther away one is from Highway 99, the railroad, and major arterial roads, the higher the likelihood that the air quality is better.



INSPIRATION PARK

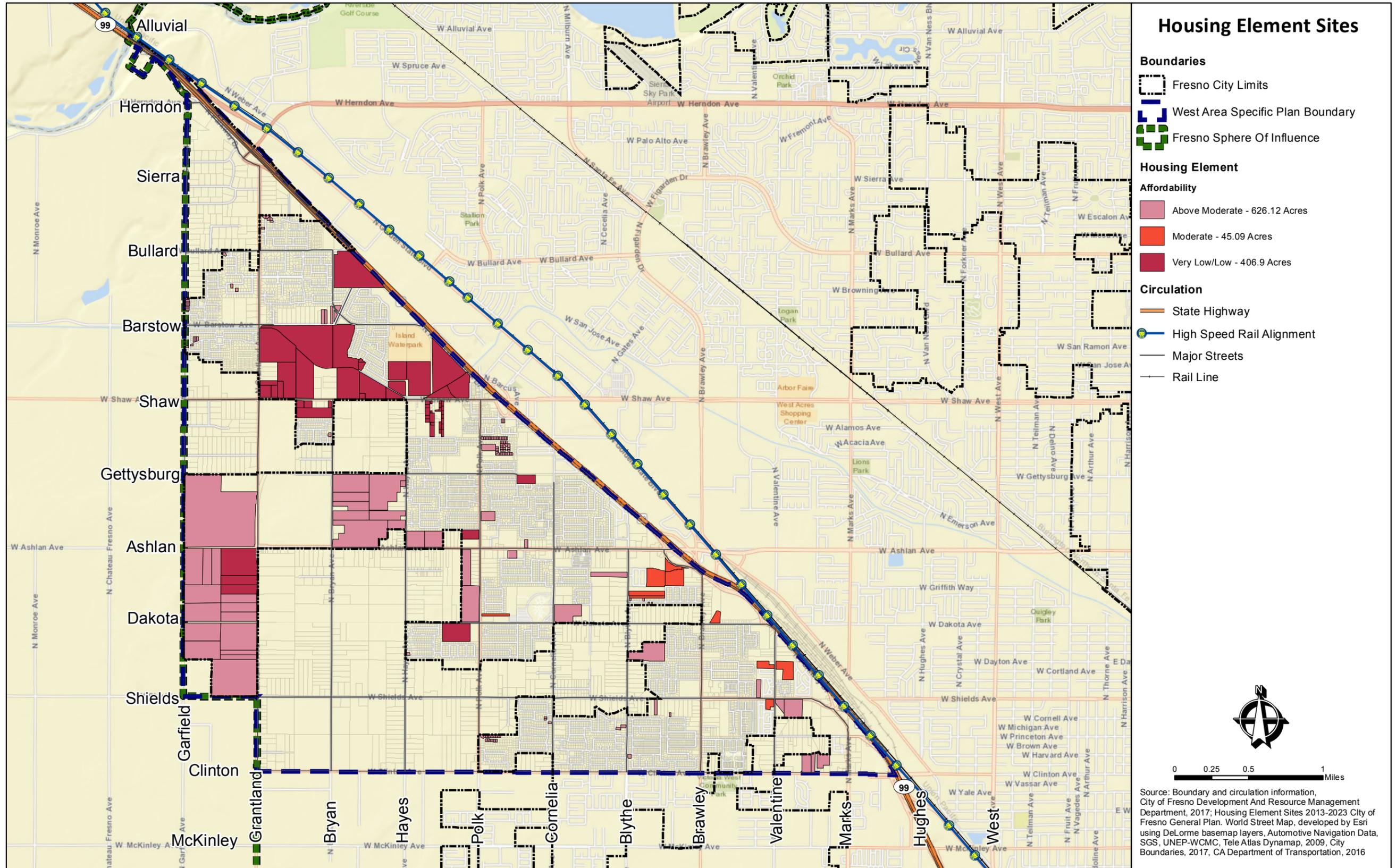


## 2.6 HOUSING ELEMENT

In 2017, the City of Fresno adopted the Fresno General Plan 2015-2023 Housing Element. The Housing Element provides a comprehensive plan to encourage development of affordable and safe housing for all residents of the city. The Housing Element is explicitly developed for the City of Fresno; parcels within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) will be under the County's policy and implementation program. The Housing Element sites map identifies the acreage of land available to accommodate affordable residential development. Many of the Housing Element sites within the Plan Area are on vacant or underutilized lots. Some Housing Element sites have approved tentative maps or final subdivision maps and are planned for development in the near future. 38% are considered Very Low/Low Density, which per State requirements, are situated in high density and urban neighborhood residential or mixed used zone districts.



HOUSING ON CLINTON



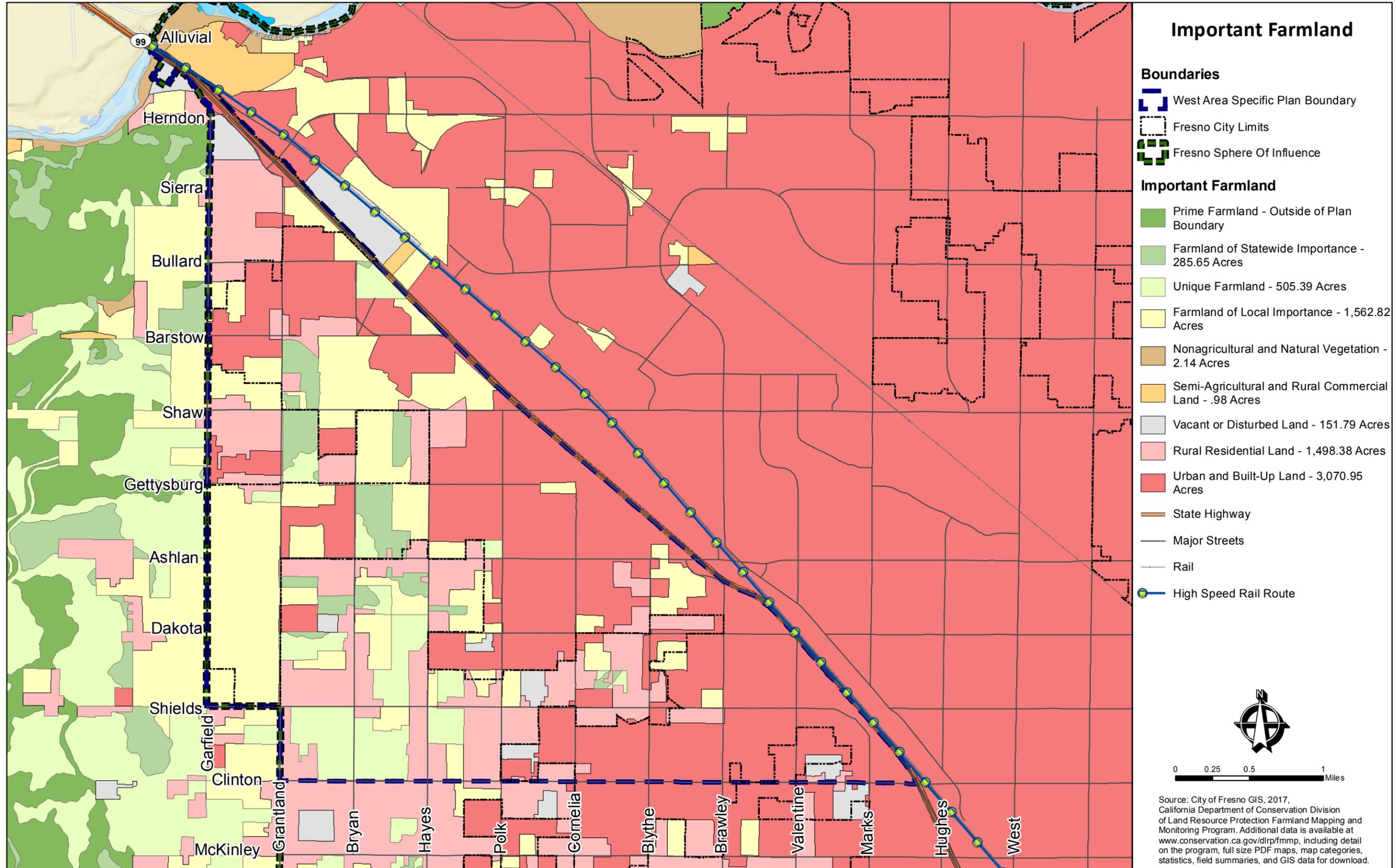
## 2.7 PRIME FARMLAND

Fresno county is ranked as one of the top agricultural counties in California. In 2017, county produce had nearly \$6.1 billion in crop value. A majority of the crops are grapes, almonds, cotton, and citrus. The Fresno region has a rich history in agriculture that spans from A.Y. Easterby's lush wheat field to Sicilian immigrant Baldassare Forestiere's Underground Garden. Currently, residential and commercial development in the West Area abuts farmland. For many years the West Area was largely Fig Orchards. The West Area Specific Plan could potentially incorporate planning policies that recognizes and celebrates Fresno's agricultural farmland and agricultural history.

The West Area has approximately 3,070.95 acres of land within the built environment that is classified as Urban and Built-Up. Prime farmland is located primarily outside of the Plan Area. The West Area has 285.65 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance which is located primarily in Council District 1, Council District 2, and the Sphere of Influence (SOI). Unique Farmland has 505.39 acres within the Plan Area and is located within the southwest portion of the West Area. Farmland of Local Importance has 1,562.82 acres situated throughout the entire Plan Area. Vacant or Disturbed Land and Rural Residential Land account for approximately 1,650.17 acres within the Plan Area's SOI. Nonagricultural and Natural Vegetation, and Semi-Agricultural and Rural Commercial Land account for 3.15 acres of land in the Plan Area.



AGRICULTURE LOCATED IN THE WEST AREA



# 3. LAND USE



LOCATED ON WEST CLINTON AVE.

# 3. LAND USE

## 3.1.

### OVERVIEW

The West Area has over 2,859 acres or approximately 4.5 square miles of county land that is located within the SOI. Fortunately, there are no county islands located within the Plan Area. Figure 3.1 exhibits the population for the area has increased as projected by the Fresno General Plan and appears to be on track to an overall estimated population of 64,650.

## 3.2.

### EXISTING LAND USES

The City of Fresno maintains an inventory of existing land uses within city limits and the sphere of the influence. Depending on prior development, existing land uses may conflict with the Plan Area's planned land uses. This inventory serves the following purposes:

- 1) Informs policymakers and planners how property owners are currently using their property;
- 2) Helps policymakers and planners determine land capacity, density, and land utilization within the Plan Area; and
- 3) Describes current potential real estate trends within the Planned Area.

The West Area has approximately eight (8) different existing land uses which include the following: rural/estate residential, multiple family residential, single family residential, vacant land, public/government facilities, open space/agricultural land, industrial uses, and commercial uses.

### Rural/Estate Residential:

27% of the existing land uses within the Plan Area is currently used as rural/estate residential. Of the 6,109 acres of developable lands within the Plan Area, 1,640.68 acres are low density single family homes that are occupied lots with a size of 2-9 acres per dwelling units.

### Multiple-Family Residential:

Approximately 2% of the West Area account for multi-family residential development. These uses are primarily located adjacent to arterial roads with easy access to Highway 99, and FAX service lines.

### Single Family Residential:

This use accounts for approximately 21% of the existing uses within the Plan Area. These uses are located primarily within the city's boundary, especially Council District No. 1 which represents the city's largest land area and population in the Plan Area.

### Vacant:

15% of the land or 911.34 acres account for vacant lands within the Plan Area. Vacant areas are located throughout the Plan Area, in both the city and SOI. Vacant areas represent infill opportunities within the Plan Area's densest neighborhoods.

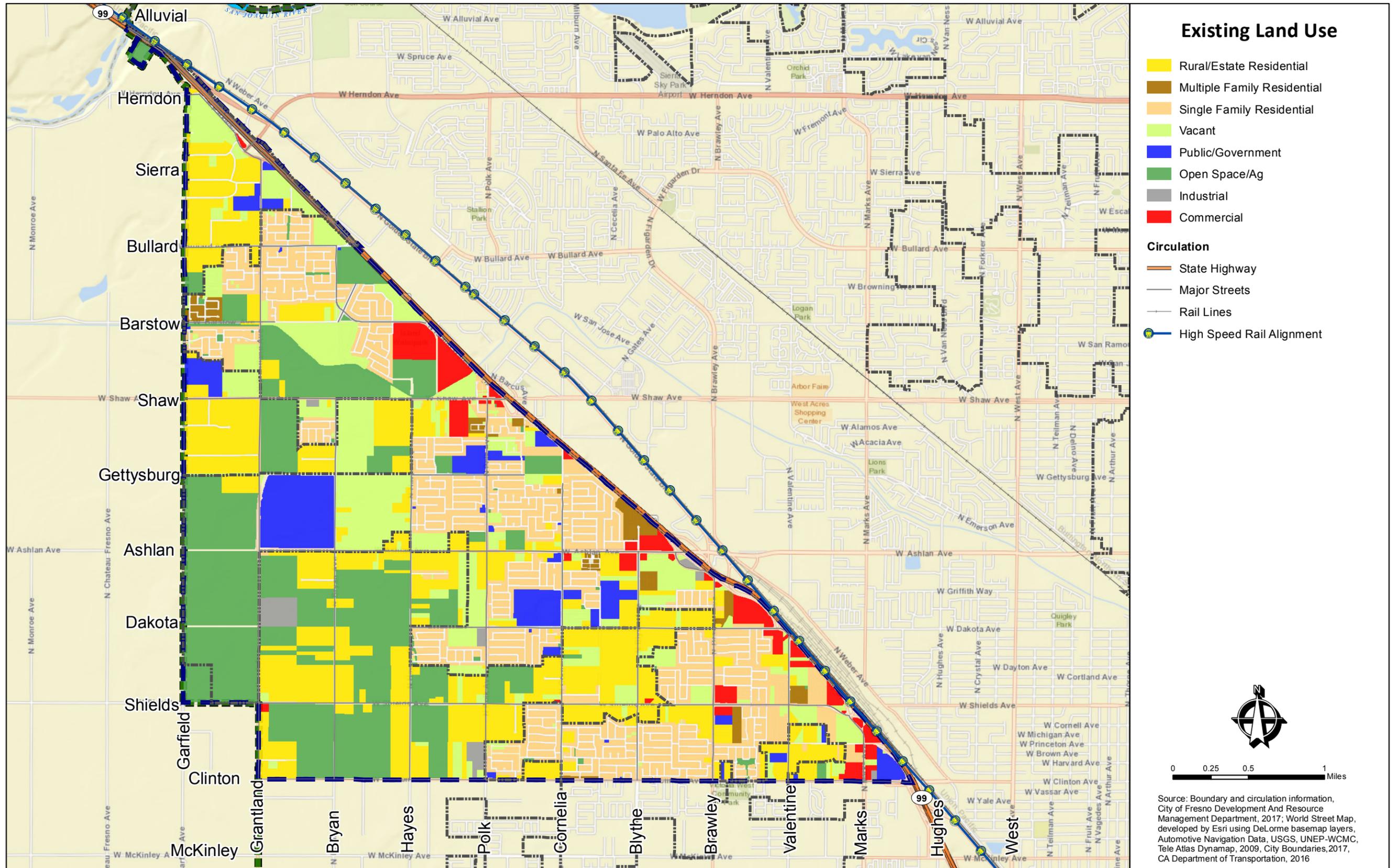
### Public/Government:

These uses account for approximately 6% or 337.83 acres of land. These land uses include Central Unified School District facilities, churches, the Dante Club, and the Hacienda facility.

**FIGURE 3.1- POPULATION ESTIMATE**



Source: 1. ESRI; Vintage 2017; 2017 Household Population (ESRI); populationtotals.HHPOP\_CY  
 2. Percentage of population increase by development area from 2017 through 2035 extrapolated from General Plan Table  
 1-3: Residential Development Capacity under General Plan Horizon  
 3. 2035 population based on the average annual growth rate of 1.24% to the General Plan Horizon Year of 2035 provided in the Fresno General Plan



WEST AREA EXISTING LAND USE

**Open Space/Ag:**

These uses account for 25% or 1,554.06 acres in the Plan Area. While there are some open space land uses within the city, most of these uses are primarily located in the Sphere of Influence. These uses include parks and ponding basins. Public parks located within the Plan Area. Development Area 1 – North (DA-1 North), which primarily includes the Plan Area, has fifteen (15) acres of existing parks. The Plan Area needs an additional ninety one (91) acres of parks, or a total of one hundred six (106) acres of parks to meet the current level of service requirements of 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The Fresno Parks Master Plan proposes various methods to meet current and future park needs.

**Industrial:**

1% or 57.33 acres of the project area account for industrial uses. The largest industrial land use in the Plan Area belongs to an agricultural business located at the intersection of West Dakota Avenue and North Grantland Avenue.

**Commercial:**

3% or 219.76 acres of the project area account for commercial uses. Commercial uses are spread throughout the eastern and southeastern portions of the Plan Area, closer to Highway 99.

**3.3 COUNTY ZONING V. CITY PLANNED LAND USES**

Some planned land uses within the West Area encourage more intense land uses and heavier development away from commercial corridors and heavily trafficked arterial roads with low density

land uses facing major arterial roads. Furthermore, the current planned land use map also shows low density residential uses surrounding public facility spaces and other intense land uses such as residential urban neighborhood. This kind of development has encouraged builders to set homes further back from the street with walls surrounding the subdivision to mitigate noise and pollution. County zoning conflicts with the City’s planned land uses for the the West Area. The City’s lowest residential density for a dwelling unit(s) per acre(s) is substantially denser than the County’s Rural Residential Zone District. The City’s lowest density is 1-3.5 dwelling units per acre, compared to one (1) dwelling unit per two (2) acres in the County’s Rural Residential District.

**3.4 FRESNO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN**

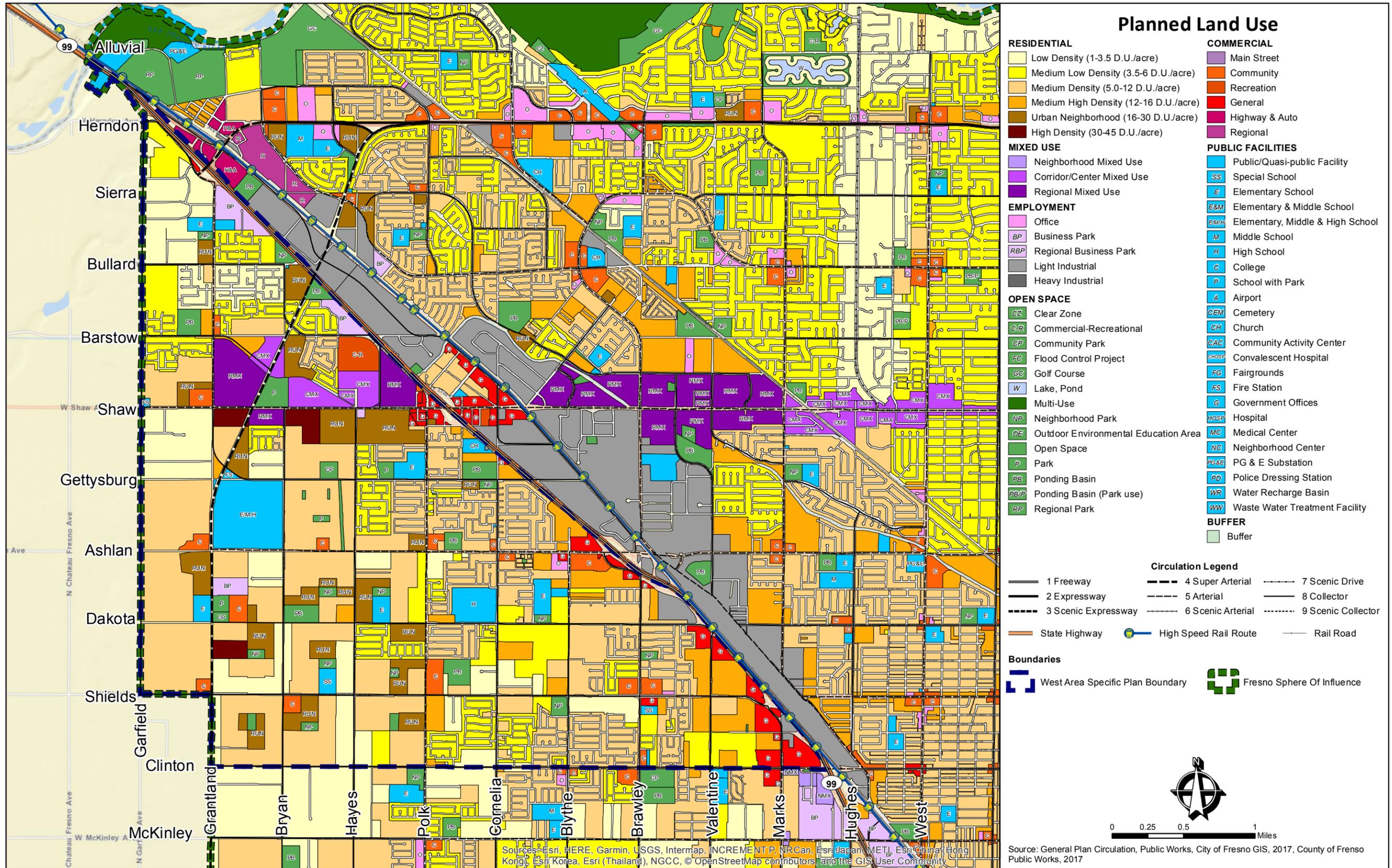
Within the Plan Area, just outside Fresno’s City Limits and within its SOI, is land largely zoned Rural Residential by Fresno County.

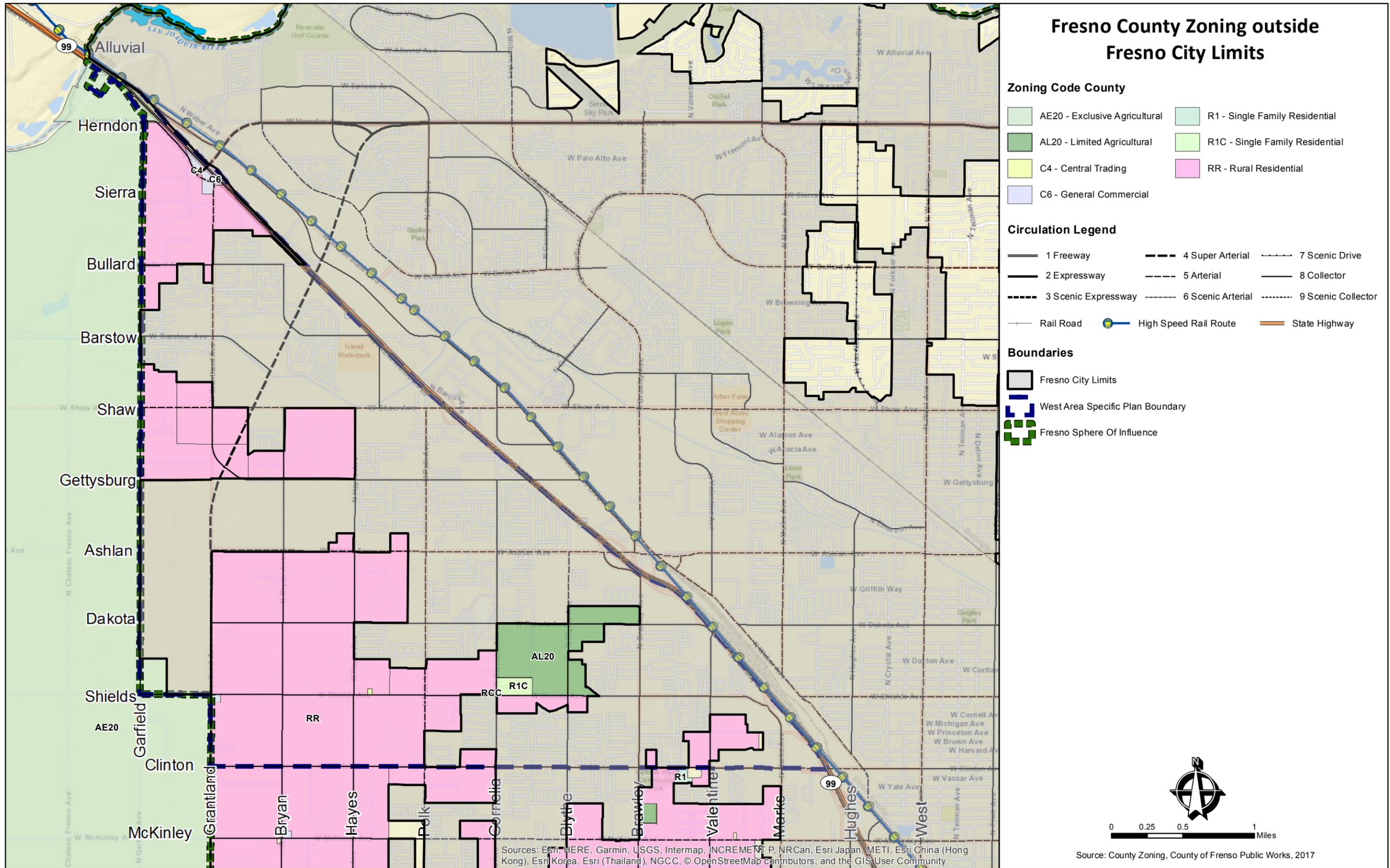
The County’s General Plan acknowledges an overabundance of rural residential lots, and encourages policymakers from designating any additional areas for such development. The County’s General Plan calls for development standards to be augmented to allow for mixed-use pedestrian and transit-oriented development in urbanized and urbanizing areas. The County has adopted policies to encourage and promote development of higher-density housing in areas located along major transportation corridors and transit routes. Despite development policies and initiatives promulgated within the County’s General Plan, a significant amount of land within the Plan Area remains zoned Rural Residential.

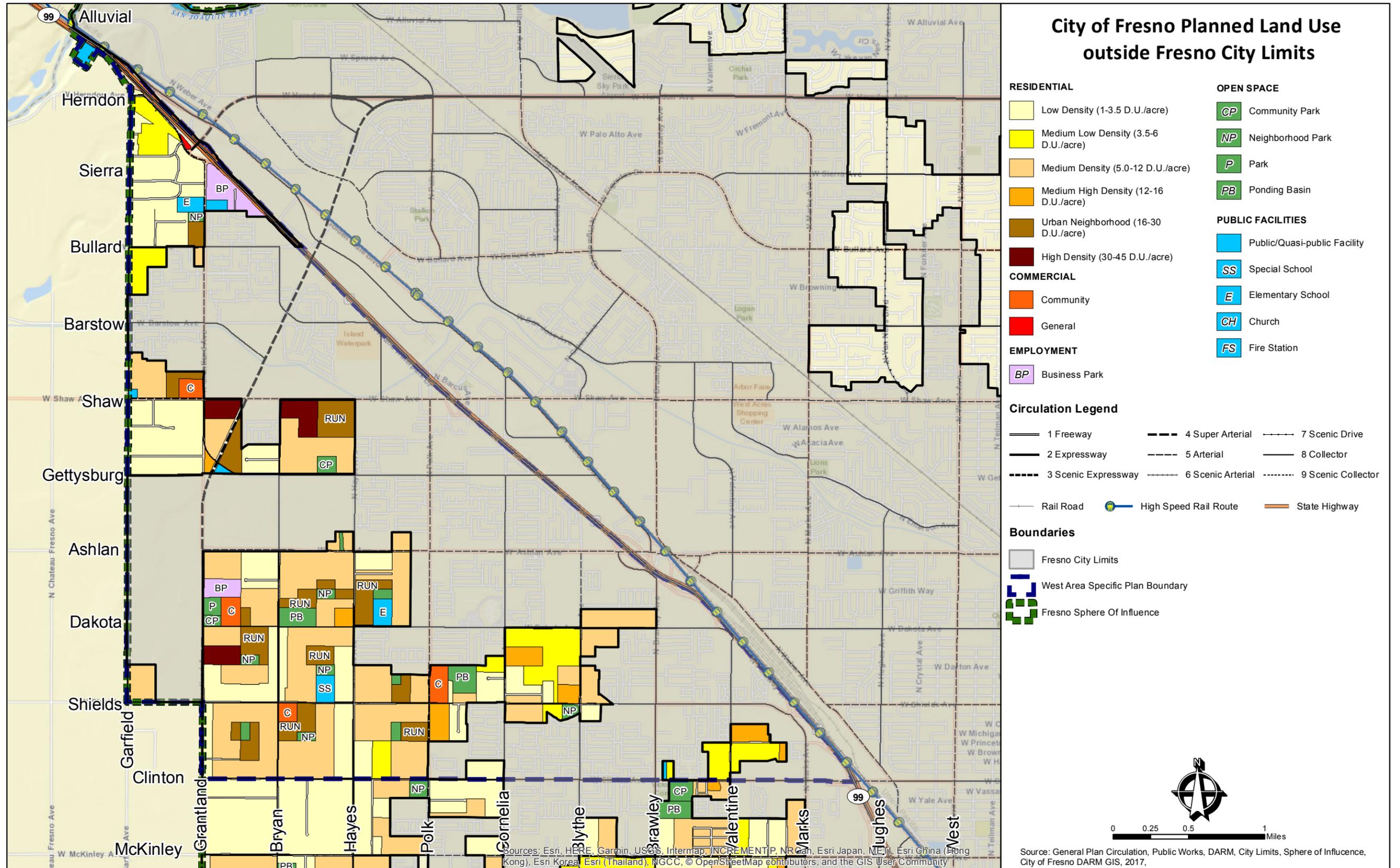
**FIGURE 3.3- LAND USE & DENSITY OF RESIDENTIAL COUNTY LAND WITHIN THE PLAN AREA (Residential Only)**

Fresno County Zone District	Total Dwellings Allowed	Per Acre(s)/Square Feet	Total Acres in Plan Area
Rural Residential District	1	2	2,454
Single Family Residential District	1	37,500	20
Rural Community Center District	1	2	1.3
Trailer Park Residential District	1	2,400	2.6

Source: *The Ordinance Code of the County of Fresno*







### 3.5 THE GENERAL PLAN FOR THE CITY OF FRESNO

The General Plan calls for the West Area to be developed into complete neighborhoods and incorporating existing subdivisions into each neighborhood evolution. The Plan called out three goals:

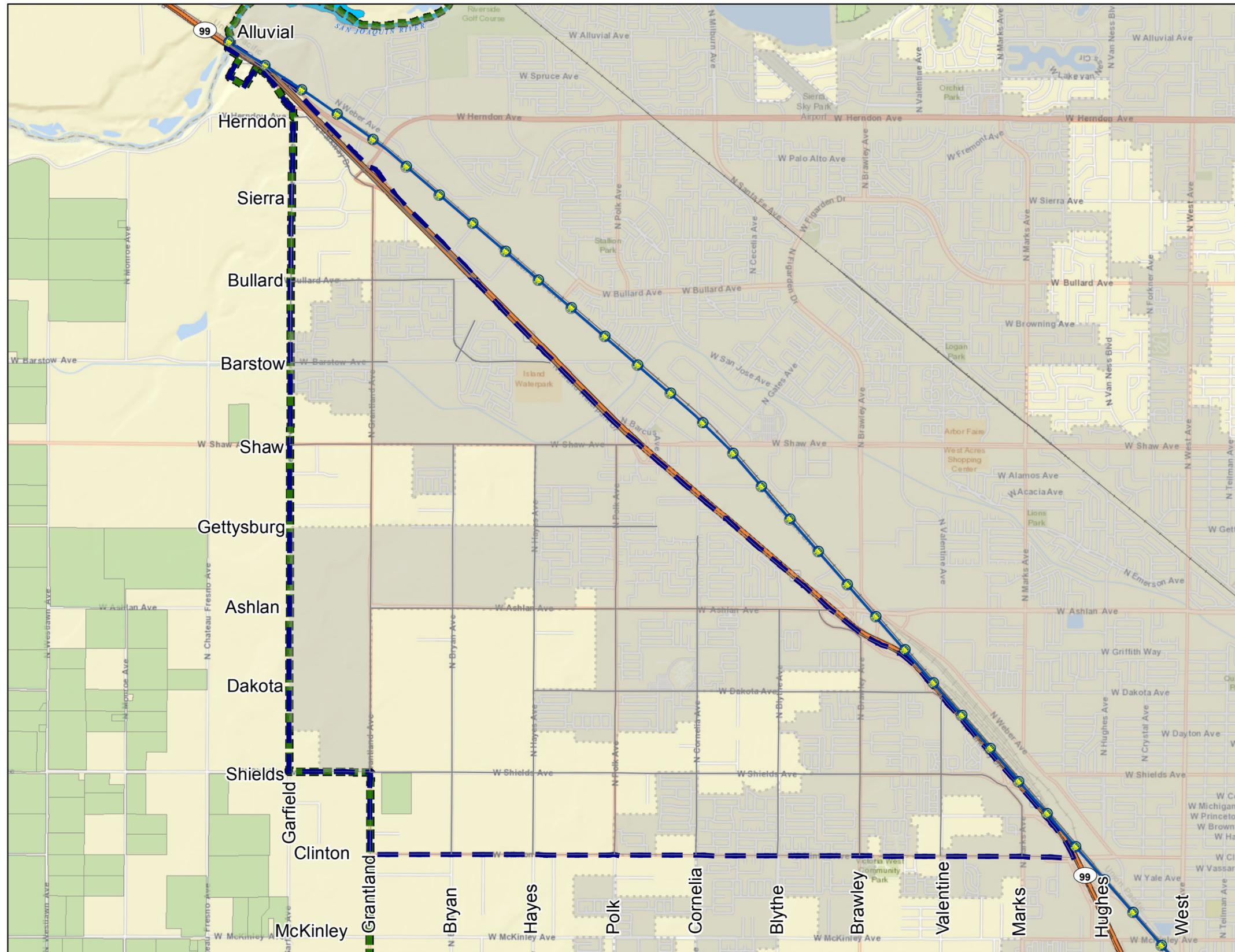
- 1) Shaw Avenue Corridor from Highway 99 to Grantland Avenue intersection will be developed as a mixed-use corridor supported by enhanced transit service. This corridor is designed to support higher residential density, retail, employment centers, and civic uses. A large regional mixed-use center is designated between Veterans Boulevard and Grantland Avenue with a 40-acre community park to be located on the east side of Veterans Boulevard. These land uses were designed to be mixed both vertically and horizontally, and represent the transit-oriented cores of Complete Neighborhoods connected with surrounded neighborhoods.
- 2) The development of a Grantland Avenue Transit Village that has mixed-uses along the transit center east of Grantland Avenue between Ashlan and Shields Avenues, as part of the proposed Grantland-East communities. Initial development calls for retail, multi-family, parks, and school uses along the east side of Grantland Avenue.
- 3) Coordination of development within the Grantland-East Communities that is cohesive with the Grantland Avenue Transit Village. The Plan states that the City will work with developers to capture the Complete Neighborhoods concept, and to encourage multi-family development clustered around parks and schools.

### 3.6 WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTS

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act, enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land for agricultural uses or open space in exchange for lower than normal market value property tax assessments. The length of time for each contract is ten (10) years and automatically renews on each anniversary date of the contract, this provision essentially continues the contract indefinitely. Property owners or the local government can initiate the process to not renew the contract. During the nonrenewal process, the annual tax assessment continually increases each year until it is paired with the current tax rates at the end of the nonrenewal period. Annexation or eminent domain can result in the termination of Williamson Act Contracts. Contract cancellation requires comprehensive review and payment by the property owner consisting of 12.5 percent of the full market value of the parcel.

This greatly impacts any future development from occurring on the property. Private landowners will receive lower property tax assessments because the parcel(s) is not used in accordance with its full market value. Fresno County currently has over 7,500 Williamson Act Contracts that amount to 1.5 million acres of land and over 15,000 parcels designated for open space or agricultural uses. The county has three parcels in which there are Williamson Act Contracts totaling a little over 38.3 acres within the SOI of the West Area; none are within the city's limit. On September 18, 2012,

the Board of Supervisors directed County staff to audit existing Williamson Act Contracts on an ongoing basis for possible removal of parcel(s) from the program that do not meet the State or County's eligibility requirements to remain within the program. The three parcels identified within the Plan Area do not appear to be in the process of being removed from the land conservation program.



### Williamson Act

#### Boundaries

-  West Area Specific Plan Boundary
-  Fresno City Limits
-  Fresno Sphere Of Influence
-  Williamson Act Properties

#### Circulation

-  State Highway
-  Major Streets
-  Rail Line
-  High Speed Rail Alignment



Source: Williamson Act, Fresno County Assessor Data, 2017; High Route Data, Fresno County Public Works, 2017; Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016

**3.7 DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL**

Developed land accounts for 37% of the Plan Area’s built environment. Developed land exhibits the formation of a complete suburban neighborhood with a roadway network connecting to an arterial road. These complete neighborhoods are surrounded by intense land uses such as commercial uses or undeveloped land. Developed land is primarily located within the city’s boundary whereas nearly 30% or 1,669.12 acres of land identified as underutilized primarily situated within the Sphere of Influence (SOI). A significant portion of the Plan Area within the SOI has remained largely agricultural and rural residential.

The West Planning Area has over 62% or 3,807.59 acres of developable capacity. Planned land uses provide for low to medium high density surrounding higher uses proposed along West Shaw and West Clinton Avenues and adjacent to Highway 99. Approximately 53 acres of land is undevelopable because they are ponding basins used for the sole purpose of capturing stormwater to prevent flooding and for recharging the City’s groundwater supply. Large ponding basins are located within Council Districts 1, and 2.

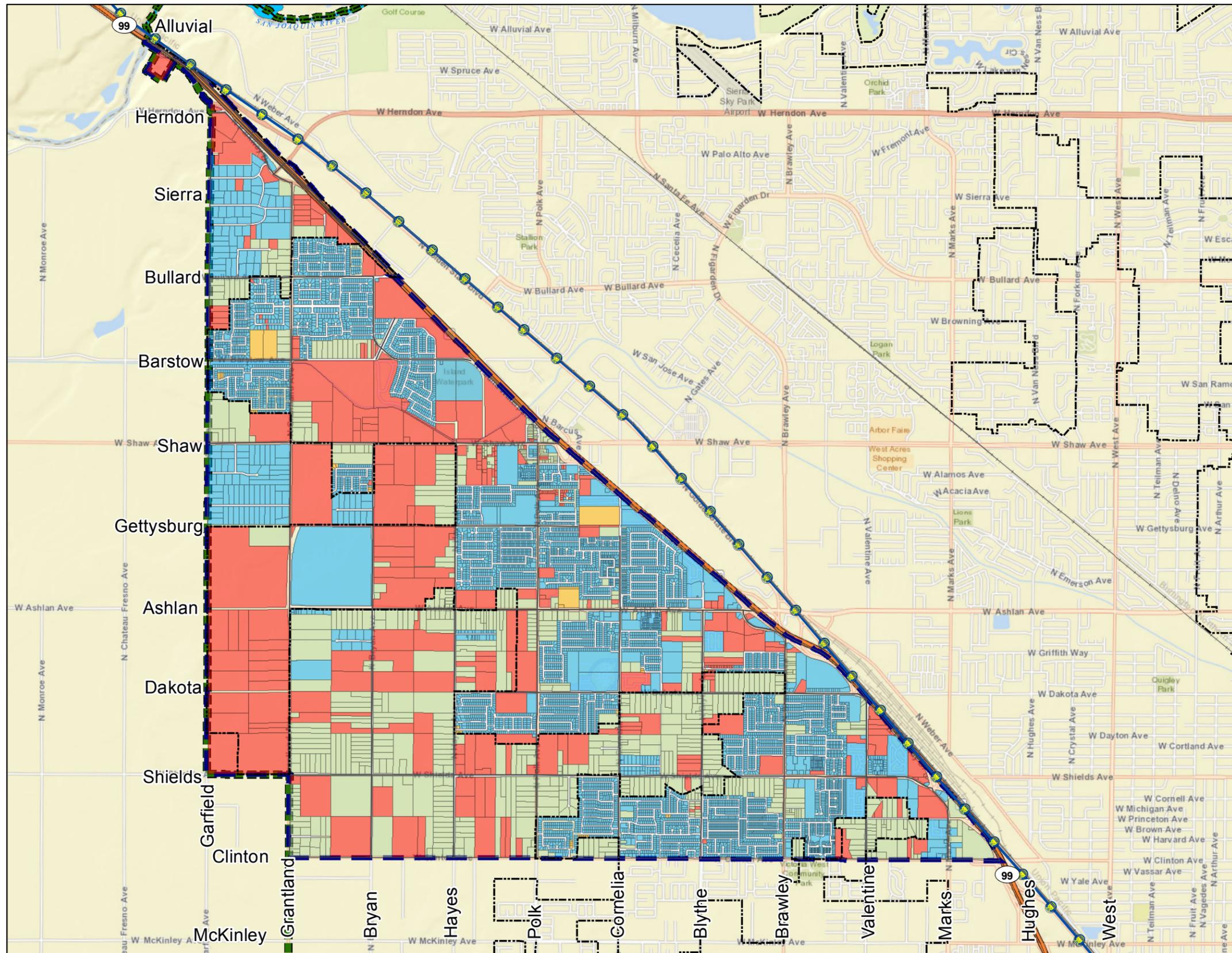
**FIGURE 3.7- DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY**

Development Pattern	Percentage	Acreage
Developed Land	37%	2,264.76
Ponding Basin	0.87%	53.47
Underutilized Land	27%	1,669.12
Vacant Land	35%	2,138.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6,125.82</b>

Source: ArcGIS



CLINTON MARKS CENTER LOCATED ON N. MARKS AVE AND W. CLINTON AVE.

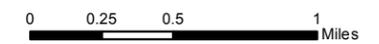


**Development Potential**

- Developed - 2,264.76 Acres
- Ponding Basin - 53.47 Acres
- Underutilized - 1,669.12 Acres
- Vacant - 2,138.47 Acres

**Circulation**

- State Highway
- Major Streets
- High Speed Rail Alignment
- Rail Lines



Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016

### 3.8 IMPROVEMENT TO LAND VALUATION RATIO

This subsection will contribute greatly to policy discussions pertaining to proposed land use changes within the Plan Area. This map will aid planners and policymakers to determine land use allocation for residential densities, commercial uses, and mixed-uses within the West Area. The map in this subsection shows the areas within the West Area that has one of the following:

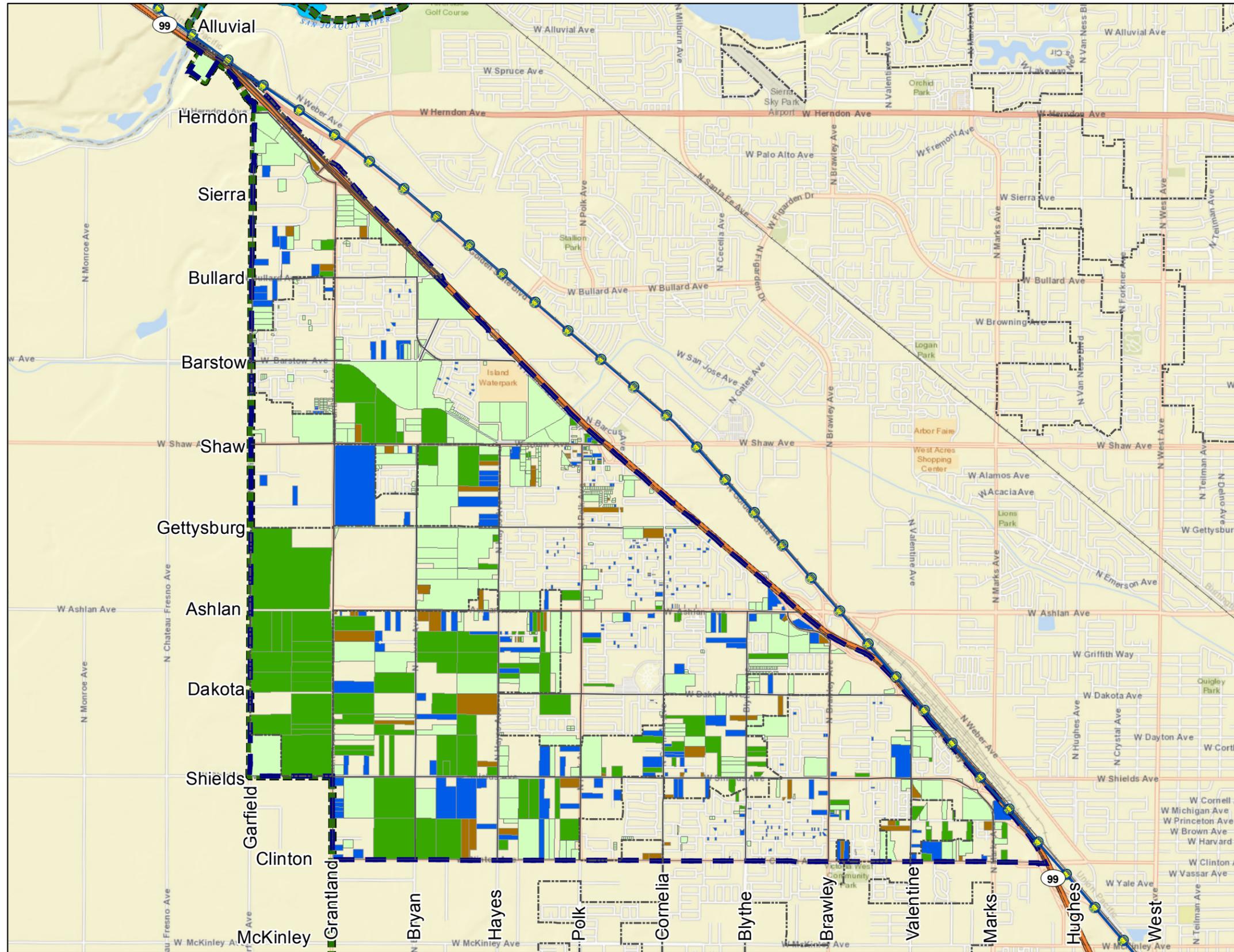
- 1) Good utilization
- 2) Underutilized
- 3) Very underutilized
- 4) Vacant lands

The West Area is comprised of land uses allowed within the Sphere of Influence that contravenes the City's planned land uses. Conflict with rural residential and agricultural land uses coupled with fragmented development discourages development of a complete suburban neighborhood.

The tool used to identify utilization ratios within the West Area is to calculate the ratio of the assessed value of improvements to the assessed value of the land (improvement ÷ land value = utilization ratio). If a parcel or group of parcels have a valuation ratio of .50 or less, it can be assumed that the value of the land is higher than the improvement(s) on the land. This will make redevelopment more likely to increase valuation ratio and good utilization of the land. Parcels with a valuation of 1.5 or more show improvements having a higher assessed value than the land; this signifies good utilization and makes redevelopment less likely to occur.



MARKS AND CLINTON BUSINESSES



### Improvement to Land Valuation Ratio

- Boundaries**
- Fresno City Limits
  - West Area Specific Plan Boundary
  - Fresno Sphere Of Influence

- Valuation Ratio (Improvement/Land)**
- 0 - Vacant
  - < 0.5 (Very Underutilized)
  - 0.5 - 0.9 (Underutilized)
  - 1 - 1.5 (Good Utilization)

- Circulation**
- State Highway
  - Major Streets
  - Rail Lines
  - High Speed Rail Alignment

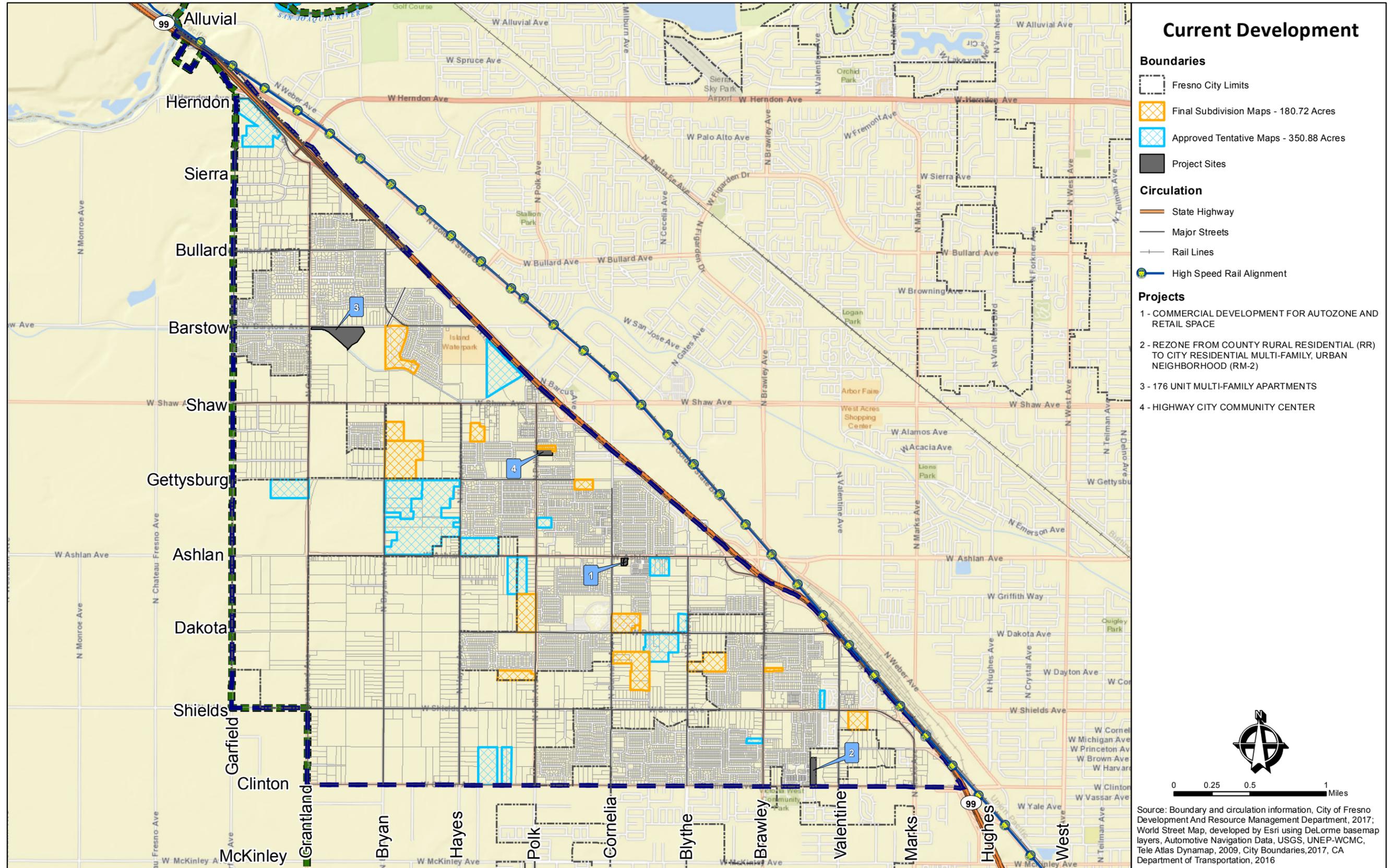


Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016

**3.9  
CURRENT DEVELOPMENT**

As policymakers and planners assess land use changes within the West Area, unexpired tentative and final maps will need to be accounted for because land use changes proposed by the City or any locality cannot supersede an approved tentative or final map. The Plan Area has a total of 531.60 acres of land that are either tentative maps or final maps. Additionally, approved tentative maps account for approximately 350.88 acres of the plan area. Tentative and final maps meet subdivision requirements of the State and City of Fresno to provide for future design and improvement. Tentative and final maps are scattered throughout the Plan Area and do not follow a land use pattern. In the West Area, there are approximately 180.72 acres of land that have approved final maps. The proposed uses are specified within the map’s legend and include improvements such as commercial buildings and residential dwelling units.





Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016

# 4. TRANSPORTATION



HIGHWAY 99 ENTRANCE AND EXIT AT SHAW AND N. ISLAND WATERPARK DRIVE

# 4. TRANSPORTATION

## 4.1

### OVERVIEW

The City of Fresno is served by different modes of transportation used to move people and goods across the city, region, state, and Western United States region. The City serves as a gateway to San Francisco in the north, Los Angeles to the south, the coast to the west, and Las Vegas to the Southeast. Major highways that traverse the city include Highway 99, Highway 168, Highway 180, and Highway 41. Highway 99, running north and south, is the central roadway network for residents to access the other portions of the city for education needs, medical services, retail sales and purchases, access to other cities within the state, and work. Highway 99 divides the West Area from the rest of the city.

## 4.2

### ROADWAY CIRCULATION

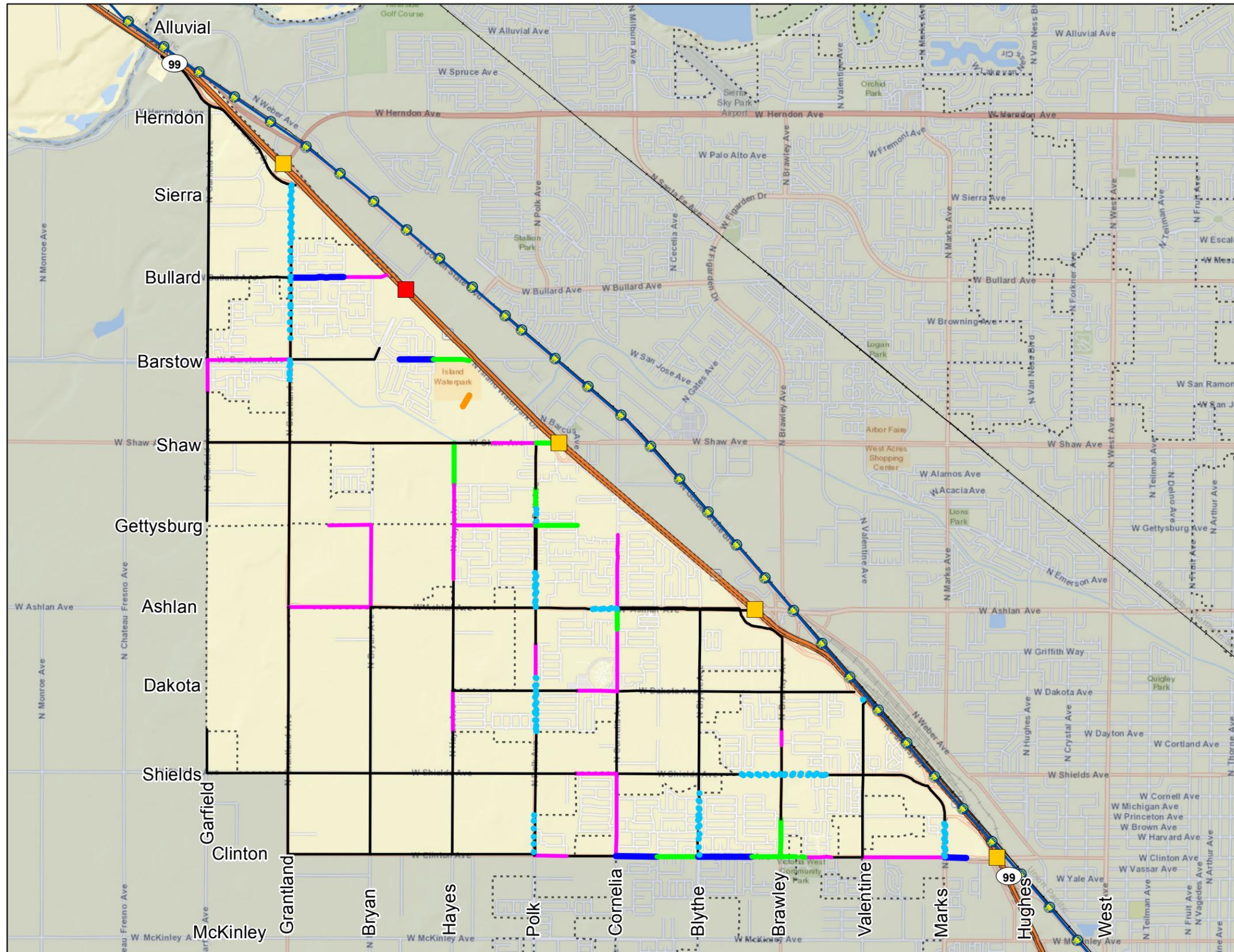
To cross over Highway 99, motorists can use the West Clinton Avenue overpass, the West Ashlan Avenue overpass, the West Shaw Avenue overpass, and the West Herndon Avenue underpass, or proceed south to access Highway 180. The City of Fresno, Fresno County, and the State of California are responsible for the maintenance of roads and bridges located within the West Area. There are approximately three local bridges in the Plan Area that serve as connectors over the highway or canal. An overview of the

roadway system is exhibited on the circulation map. An overview of the existing roadway system is exhibited on the Number of Lanes (Bottleneck) map. The map also shows potential bottlenecks on arterials that go from having four lanes to two lanes at various locations throughout the Plan Area. Roadway widening and improvement is most commonly driven by proposed development. The

City is currently planning to construct Veterans Boulevard to connect West Shaw Avenue with Herndon Avenue serving as an additional overpass over Highway 99 north/south access.



SHAW AVE AND POLK AVE LOCATED IN WEST AREA



### Number of Lanes (Bottleneck)

**Boundaries**

- Fresno City Limits
- Fresno County

**HWY 99 Crossings**

- Existing
- Future

**Number of Lanes**

- 1 ( oneway or 1 lane ea. side of lanscape or median future widening)
- 2 ( 2 lane ea. side of left turn median or local street)
- 3 (3 lane ea. side of left turn median or 2 lane w/ cont. left turn)
- 4 ( 2 lane ea. side off painted double divider line)
- 5 ( 4 lane w/ cont. left turn lane)
- 6 Lane Super Arterial
- State Highway
- High Speed Rail Alignment
- Rail Lines

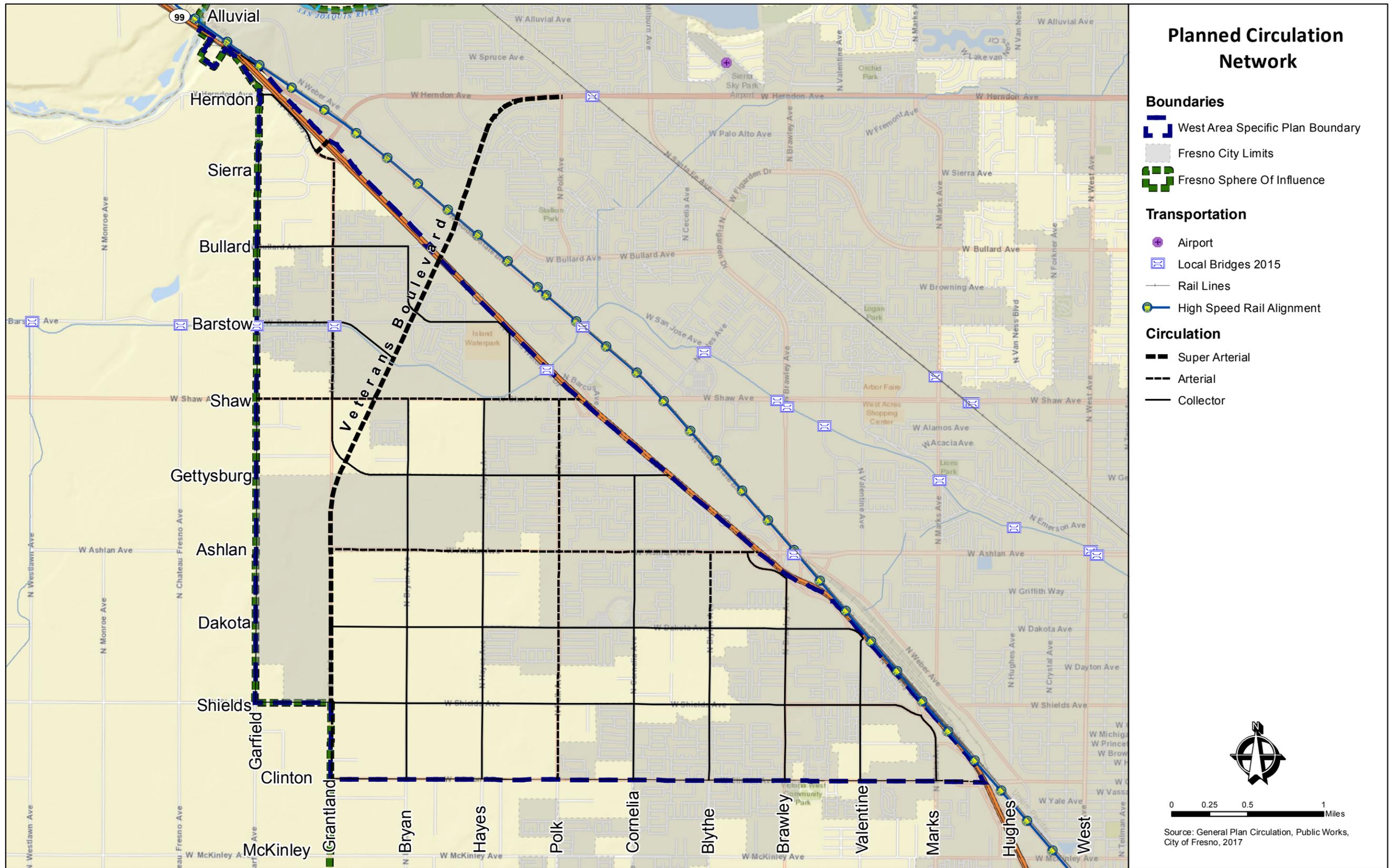


0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; City of Fresno Public Works Department GIS, 2017. World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016



PARTIALLY BUILT VETERANS BLVD. AT VETERANS BLVD. AND BARSTOW LOOKING NORTHEAST

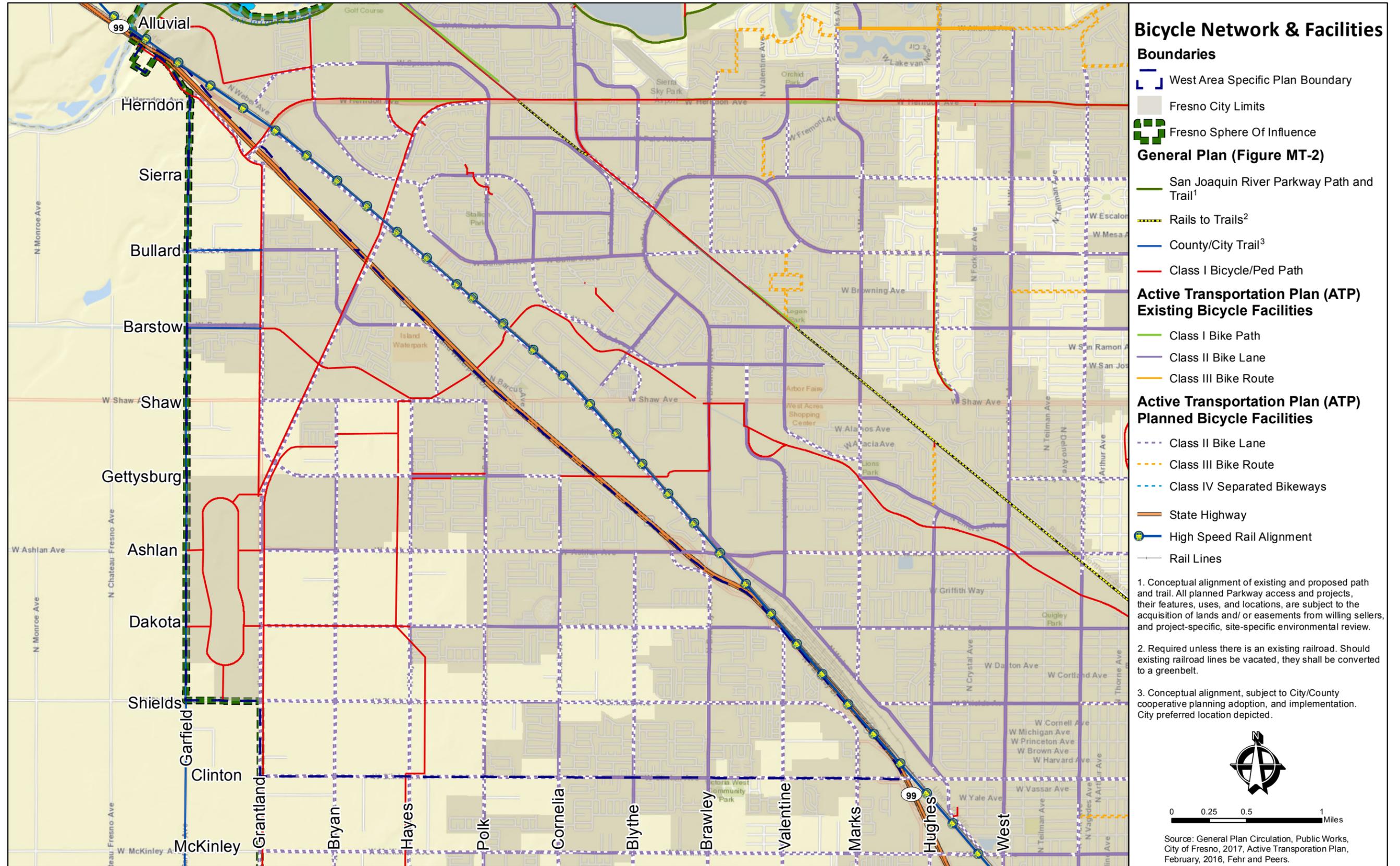


### 4.3 TRAILS

The City of Fresno has recognized complete street designs provide people with more transportation options beyond the vehicle. The City's General Plan promotes transit ridership, walking, and biking trails as an alternative mode of transportation. At a later period, the City approved the Active Transportation Plan on March 2, 2017. The Active Transportation Plan (ATP) serves as a comprehensive planning document outlining a vision for a complete, safe, and comfortable network of trails, sidewalks, and bicycle pathways that serve city and regional residents. As a result of the City's long-term commitment to alternative modes of transportation, the West Area has Class I Bicycle Paths and Class II Bicycle Lanes planned throughout the project area that connect to the City's existing and planned paths and trails network.



SHIELDS AVE LOCATED IN THE WEST AREA



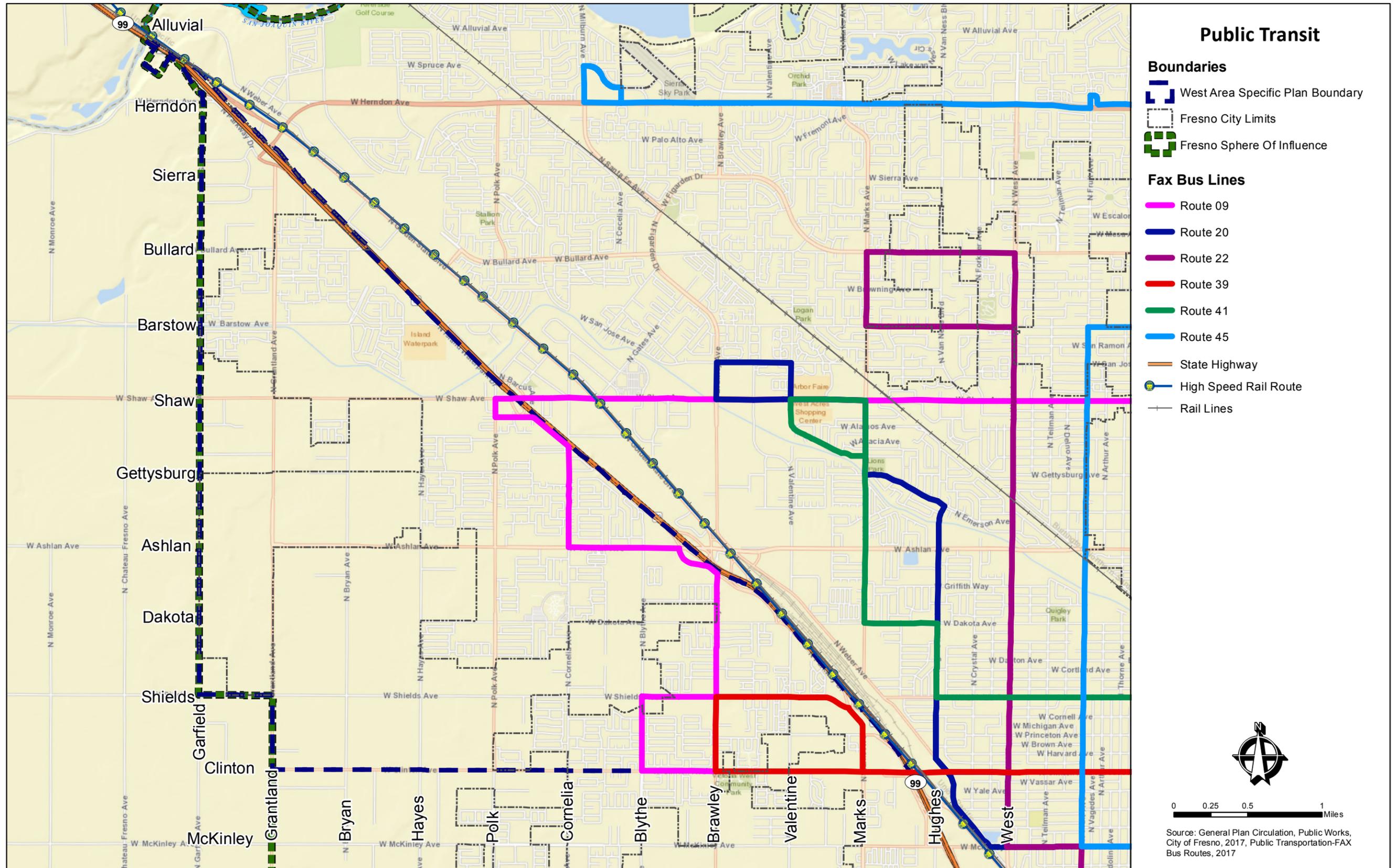
WEST AREA BICYCLE NETWORK AND FACILITIES

**4.4  
FAX**

The Fresno Area Express (FAX) is the City’s principal public transit system that services Fresno residents and a portion of the City of Clovis. FAX has a dedicated 16 fixed-route bus line and Handy Ride Paratransit Service. Bus routes 09 and 39 are the only bus routes within the West Area. Route 09 service extends from West Clinton Avenue to West Shaw Avenue, continuing service along Shaw Avenue into Clovis. This bus route will connect riders to the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service corridor along Blackstone Avenue. Route 39 provides east and west services from the Plan Area, to include the Central Adult School, to the Fresno Yosemite International Airport. Route 39 also connects riders to the BRT corridor. The BRT corridor will connect riders to North Fresno and Downtown in less than thirty (30) minutes.



BUS STOP ON SHIELDS AVE AND SELLAND AVE LOCATED IN THE WEST AREA



# 5. WATER RESOURCES



MARKS AVE WATERMILL EXPRESS

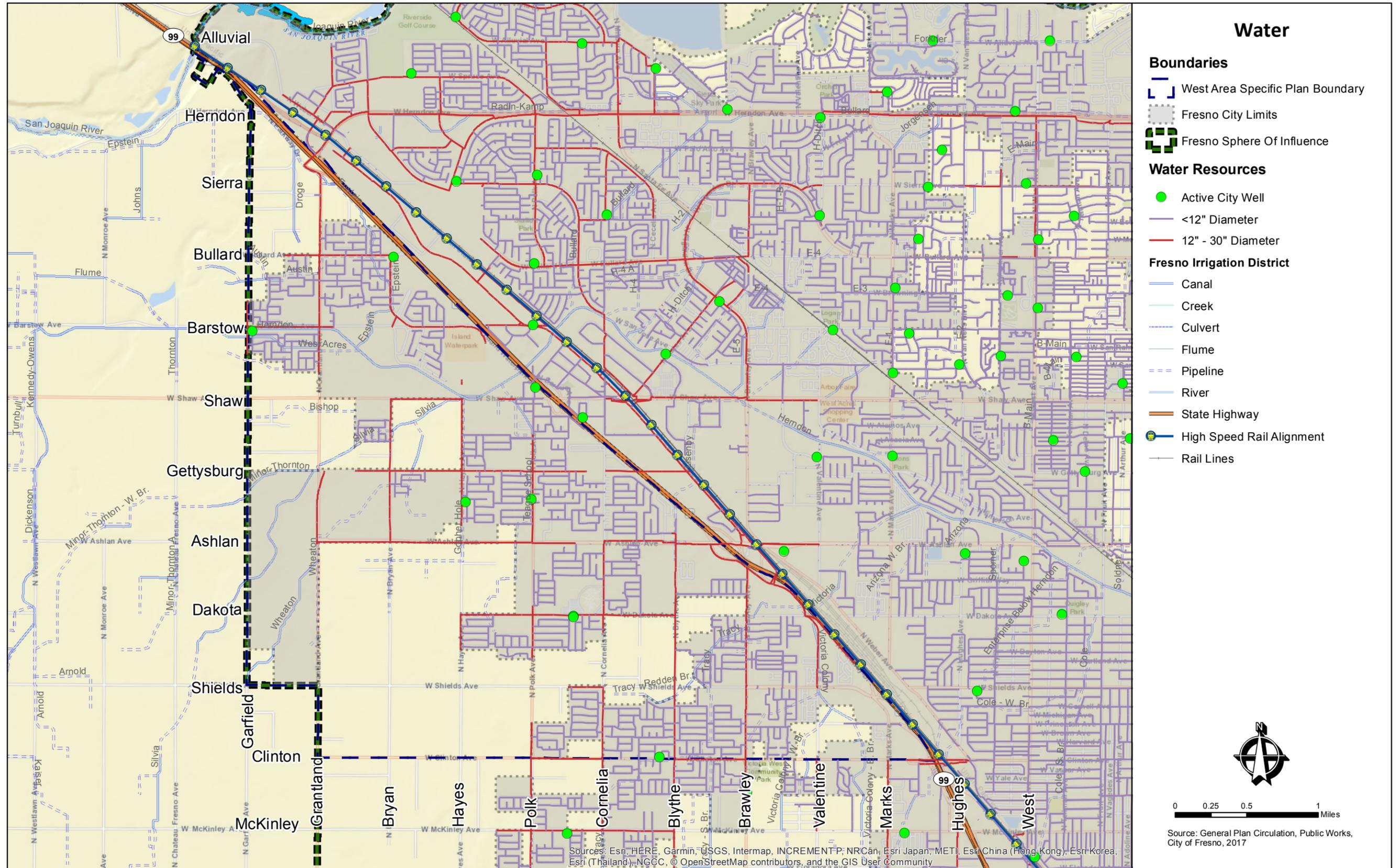
# 5. WATER RESOURCES

## 5.1 WATER

The Department of Public Utilities is tasked with providing potable water to Fresno residents and some residents located within the Sphere of Influence amounting to 500,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers. The City of Fresno is responsible for the maintenance of water pipelines that are buried in the street in front of a property. The primary source of water is derived from the King's Subbasin, Fresno's sole source aquifer, a large underground water system that supplies many communities within the Central Valley. The City operates over 260 wells that draw water from this aquifer. However, the City is swiftly transitioning from ground water to surface water to preserve valuable Water Resources for long-term sustainability and to accommodate future growth and development. There are several thousand miles of piping that are used to convey water to the homes and businesses within Fresno. The water resources map shows the location of active wells and water pipes within the West Area and surrounding neighborhoods. Repair and replacement of water pipelines and aging wells is part of the City's capital improvement plan.



ISLAND WATERPARK

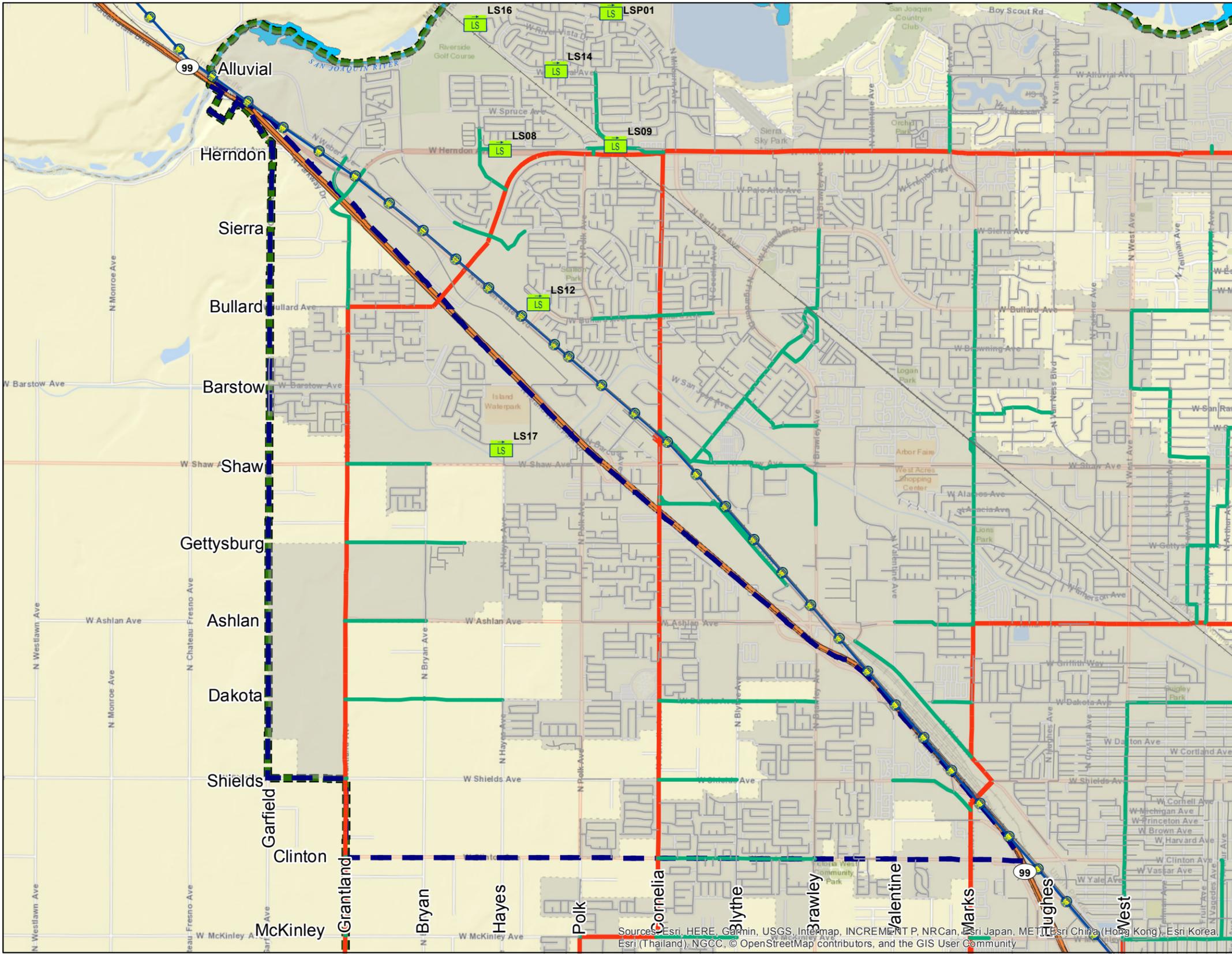


## 5.2

### WASTEWATER

The Fresno - Clovis Regional Wastewater Reclamation Facility is the seventh largest facility in the state of California. Over 1,500 miles of sewer pipes and other sanitary collection system infrastructure is necessary to help clean wastewater in order for it to be reused. The system treats approximately 68 million gallons of wastewater every day, with some of the recycled water being directed into 1,700 acres of ponding basins to percolate into the ground. The wastewater infrastructure located in the Plan Area includes sewer pipes and a lift station. Sewer pipes sizes range from smaller than 12" in diameter to 33" in diameter or larger. The wastewater infrastructure appears to be present in the West Area to accommodate future growth and development.





### Wastewater

**Boundaries**

- West Area Specific Plan Boundary
- CityLimits
- Fresno Sphere Of Influence

**Wastewater**

- SewerLift
- < 12" Diameter Sewer
- 12" - 33" Diameter Sewer
- > 33" Diameter Sewer
- State Highway
- High Speed Rail Alignment
- Rail Lines



0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

Source: City of Fresno, Department of Public Utilities, 2017

Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), NGCC, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

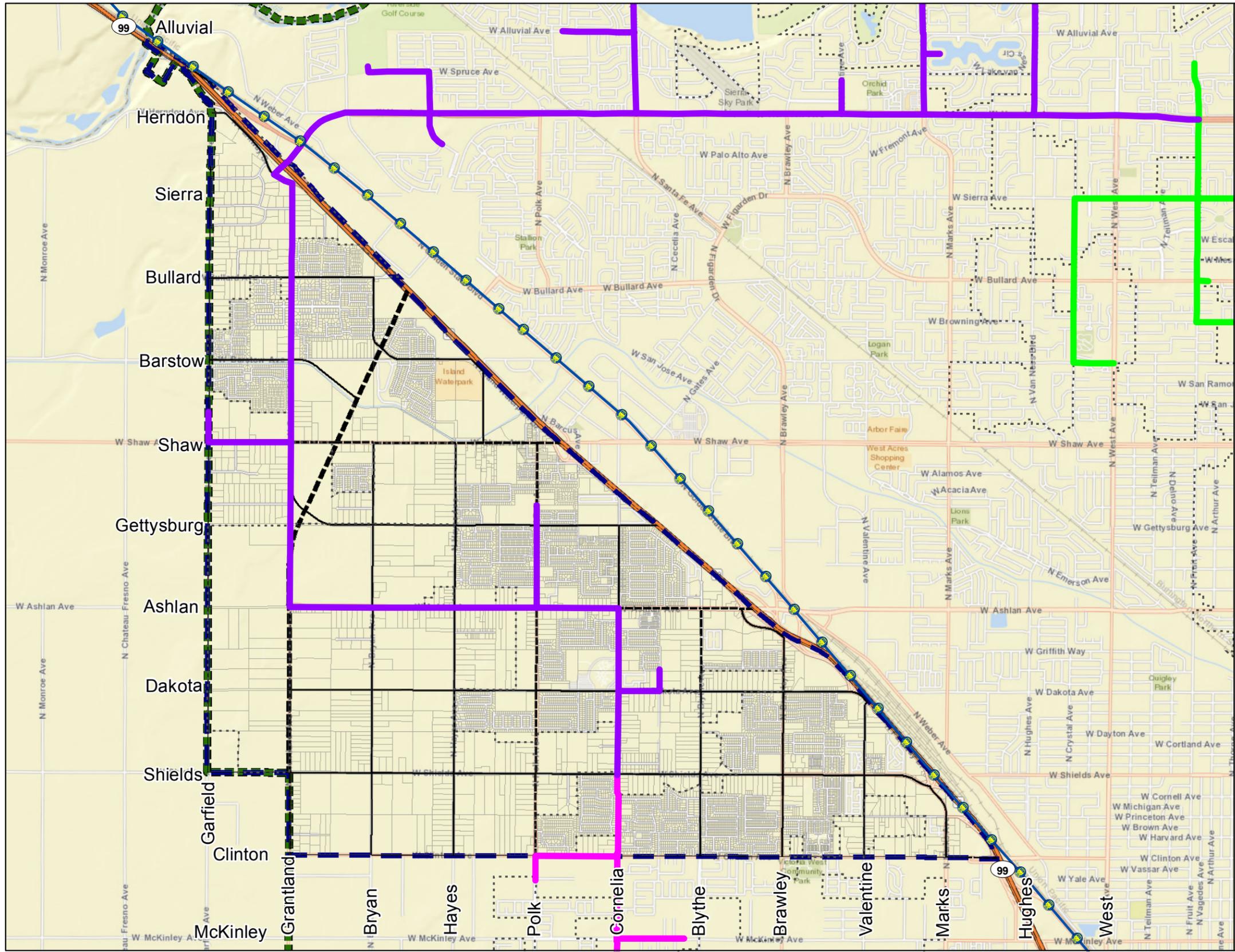
### 5.3

#### RECYCLED WATER

Use of recycled water is a major component of Fresno's strategy to ensure a sustainable water supply and reduce overuse of groundwater by treating and reusing water for non-potable purposes. Non-potable uses include watering golf courses, cemeteries, open space and parks, street medians, and other pervious surface areas throughout the region. The City plans to use 25,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water for those types of uses to reduce reliance on groundwater. The City has planned for constructing a Recycled Water System which includes the Northwest Quadrant Recycle Water projects which goes through the West Area (Council Districts 1, 2, 3, and Sphere of Influence). The Northwest Quadrant Recycle Water projects, although preliminary, includes approximately 23 miles of recycled water pipelines and three pump stations, and carries an estimated cost of \$6,478,861. The projects are scheduled to start in June 2019. Many of the other segments of the overall project have concluded construction or are currently under construction.



INSPIRATION PARK



### Recycled Water

- West Area Specific Plan Boundary
- Fresno City Limits
- Fresno Sphere Of Influence

### Recycled Water

- NW - Preliminary Alignment
- SW1C2 - Under Construction
- SW1D - In Design

### Circulation

- 4 Super Arterial
- 5 Arterial
- 8 Collector
- State Highway
- High Speed Rail Alignment
- Rail Lines

Source: Boundary and circulation information, City of Fresno Development And Resource Management Department, 2017; City of Fresno Fire Department GIS, 2017, World Street Map, developed by Esri using DeLorme basemap layers, Automotive Navigation Data, USGS, UNEP-WCMC, Tele Atlas Dynamap, 2009, City Boundaries, 2017, CA Department of Transportation, 2016

# APPENDIX A- DEFINITIONS

**Central Unified School District:** A school district located within the West Area. The terms the district, Central Unified, and School District to be used interchangeably.

**City (Capitalized) and city (non-capitalized):** Capitalized "City" refers to the municipal entity and its functions as a local government entity which is also referred to as "City of Fresno" while non-capitalized "city" refers to the geographical area or the people of Fresno which is also referred to as "city of Fresno."

**City of Fresno (Capitalized City) and city of Fresno (non-capitalized city):** See City (Capitalized) for "City of Fresno" and city (non-capitalized) for "city of Fresno" definitions.

**City Council:** The City Council is the legislative body of the City of Fresno and, except where expressly limited by the City Charter, is vested with all legislative powers in municipal affairs. As the legislative body, the City Council is responsible for adoption of the West Area Specific Plan, subject to Mayoral veto or referendum, and any amendments to the West Area Specific Plan.

**Council District:** A term used to determine a specific area represented by a member of the Fresno City Council.

**Commercial:** Property or land used for the engagement of business transaction(s).

**FAX:** Fresno Area Express.

**Fresno County:** Non-capitalized county refers to the geographical area or the people of the county of Fresno. Capitalized County refers to the local government which is also referred to as either the County of Fresno or Fresno County.

**Industrial:** Land used for light or heavy industrial production and uses.

**Sphere of Influence (SOI):** An area surrounding the City of Fresno which can impact or affect development, although it has no formal power or authority. Sphere, SOI or Sphere of Influence is to be used interchangeably.

**State:** Non-capitalized state refers to the geographical area of the people of the state of California. Capitalized State refers to the state government which is also referred to as the State of California.

**West Area:** Specific plan project area with the following terms: Plan Area, West Area, West Planning Area, and Planning Area to be used interchangeably.

**Resources:**

City of Fresno. *1984 Fresno General Plan*. Prepared by the Development Department. Fresno: City of Fresno, November 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_. *2025 Fresno General Plan*. Prepared by the Planning and Development Department, Advance Planning. Fresno: City of Fresno, February 2002.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Fresno General Plan*. Prepared by Dyett & Bhatia Urban and Regional Planners. Fresno: City of Fresno, December 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Fresno General Plan 2015-2023 Housing Element*. Prepared by the Development and Resource Management Department, Long Range Division. Fresno: City of Fresno, April 2017.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Fresno High-Roeding Community Plan*. Prepared by the Department of Planning and Inspection. Fresno: City of Fresno, December 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan*. Prepared by the Development Department, Planning Division, Fresno: City of Fresno, January 13, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Map Atlas: Existing Conditions Report*. Prepared by the Long Range Division. Fresno: City of Fresno, August 2011.

County of Fresno. *General Plan Annual Progress Report*. Fresno; County of Fresno, March 2017. [www.co.fresno.ca.us](http://www.co.fresno.ca.us).

J & R Environmental. *Historic Property Survey for the Vesting of Tentative Subdivision Map Tract No. 5479, Fresno, California*. Prepared by Jon L. Brady. Clovis: J& R Environmental, August 2005.

State of California, Department of Conservation. "The Land Conservation Act." Last updated 2017. [www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/lca](http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/lca).

State of California, Governor's Office of Planning and Research. 2001. *The Planner's Guide to Specific Plans*. Sacramento: State of California, Governor's Office of Planning and Research, January 2001.

Hostetter, George. Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design. Fresno Bee. June 6, 2015.

Rodriguez, Robert. Tulare County slips from its perch as California's top agricultural county. Fresno Bee. September 19, 2017.

# APPENDIX B- MEDIA REPORTS

10/19/2017

Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design | The Fresno Bee



LOCAL

## Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design

BY GEORGE HOSTETTER  
ghostetter@fresnobee.com

JUNE 06, 2015 7:00 AM

Fresno will soon draft plans to ensure that the area west of Highway 99 and north of Clinton Avenue develops in a wise and creative way.

Let's pause for the laughter.

Seriously, this chunk of land sometimes called Fresno's last frontier (when it's not altogether forgotten) is slated to get its own specific plan. Mayor Ashley Swearengin has set aside money in her proposed fiscal year 2016 budget to get the time-consuming process started.

ADVERTISING

10/19/2017

Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design | The Fresno Bee



Council Member Steve Brandau, whose northwest Fresno district includes part of this area, got things rolling recently when he asked the council to seek the mayor's support for such a plan.

### Breaking News

Be the first to know when big news breaks

Enter Email Address

SIGN UP

"It's a hodgepodge out there," Brandau told his council colleagues April 30. "A specific plan would clean all that up and create a vision that people could develop. We're overdue for an overhaul."

Brandau even has a brand name for the area. It's to the west of much of Fresno. The San Joaquin River is nearby.

"I'm thinking of calling it River West," Brandau says.

No one agreed with the name. But no one came up with anything better.

District 1 Council Member Esmeralda Soria, who serves the center of River West, is a supporter.

"We see a lot of traffic and congestion," Soria says. "We've left a lot of neighborhoods with partially improved roads and a lack of sidewalks and bike lanes. We've heard these concerns for a number of decades. This is the right time to do it."

Council President Oliver Baines, whose District 3 reaches into the southern edge of River West, says good planning is key to economic development.

"That area has really complex land-use issues," Baines says. "This type of planning should have been done a long time ago."

With a 7-0 vote, River West was born.

But there's more going on here than another study destined (in a skeptic's mind) for the City Hall basement. To wit:

- Remember SEGA? City officials once debated whether Fresno's newest suburbia would be the Southeast Growth Area or something to the west of 99. River West appears to have settled that question for now.
- The city is turning into specific-plan heaven. Fresnans for the past six years have chewed on the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan. City officials say it's almost here. Specific plans for the southwest and southeast portions of Fresno also are in the pipeline.
- The River West Specific Plan figures to reignite interest in two proposed projects that have largely dropped out of public sight — Veterans Boulevard and Granville Home's Westlake master-planned community.

### Plans complement each other

A specific plan makes no sense without a general plan. Fresno got a new general plan in December. This growth blueprint for the next 20 years emphasizes reinvestment in older neighborhoods and promises an end to mindless sprawl.

City officials often describe a general plan as the view from 20,000 feet. Execution depends in large part on the development code (a new one for Fresno is also on the horizon). Specific plans are another part of turning a dream into reality.

A specific plan will, among other things, define land uses, describe transportation elements and address infrastructure challenges such as water and sewage.

10/19/2017

Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design | The Fresno Bee

But the adjective says it all: You've got a certain area, there's something distinctive about its physical and cultural character, but a binding agent either withered over the years or never took root. The place just doesn't work at its best. The solution is a plan tailored by residents and experts to the community's specific needs and assets.

City Hall has probably never had a chief executive as committed to such detailed and codified planning as Swearingin. She hasn't always had allies on the council dais. Perhaps these memories explain why she asked for the microphone on April 30 as council members prepared to vote.

"It does my heart good to hear council members asking for land-use planning in their districts," Swearingin said with a smile.

Brandau voted against the mayor's general plan.

### Fresno's forgotten land

River West is like a huge triangle.

There is the 99/Union Pacific railroad corridor on one side. Fresno's city limit (anything but a straight line) is on the other side. They meet in the north at the river to form the tip. The base in the south is near the tangle of Roeding Park, cemeteries, industrial sites and Highway 180.

Ideally, Brandau says, 180 or Roeding Park would have been River West's southern boundary. But, he adds, city officials told him that is too much to handle in one specific plan. So, everyone settled on Clinton.

The northern boundary to the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan area (think of Edison High School at its heart) is 180. That means a substantial niche of Fresno west of 99 (think of the Jane Addams Elementary School neighborhood near McKinley and Hughes avenues) is a specific-plan orphan.

Brandau had to define what ails River West.

For many residents there, Brandau told the council, "it's a long way to get your ice cream."

He got the expected courtesy laugh. Still, Brandau had memorably summed up City Hall's planning challenge for the past quarter-century.

This part of metropolitan Fresno for much of the 20th century was known mainly as home to Central High School, whose farm boys always played a tough brand of football. Then Fresno's residential growth in the 1980s and 1990s began spreading west as well as north.

Al Solis, a former city of Fresno planning director turned local development consultant, describes these pioneering projects as "arms" of rooftops extending in haphazard fashion into farmland. In-between, Solis says, were "fjords" of rural life, be they crops or 2- or 3-acre lots with house, two-car garage, swimming pool and room for a horse.

City and county officials had a land-use mess on their hands.

Government officials weren't indifferent to events. Solis says Fresno County in this period created a plan for west of 99. "It didn't go anywhere," he says.

City Hall for much of the 1990s worked on a specific plan for Highway City, the one-time railroad shipping burg at 99 and Shaw Avenue that evolved into something of a trucking center. The planning area, most of it west of 99, was tiny compared to River West. But inspiration for the effort remains familiar.

"The nature of the neighborhood's intermittent and conflicting development pattern has inhibited the neighborhood's growth and vitality," said the plan, adopted in January 1998.

This effort went nowhere, as well. Need proof? River West is the place with a firehouse in an honest-to-goodness house.

River West's development ebbed and flowed according to broader economic trends. City Hall's 2025 general plan, adopted in 2002 after Solis had left for the private sector, recognized yet again the need for planning.

For the most part, though, nothing stopped the advance of residential "arms" and the creation of rural "fjords." Solis says the jigsaw-puzzle nature of the area's city boundaries means lots of "chopped-up parcels. It's very difficult to assemble land for development."

### So much potential

River West has its attractions.

10/19/2017

Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design | The Fresno Bee

Developers know the value of Central Unified School District to home-buying parents. That's why owners of the failed Running Horse housing project in southwest Fresno insisted 10 years ago that their huge project, originally straddling Fresno Unified and Central Unified, be moved entirely into the latter district.

Gateway Ice Center, on Marks Avenue north of Clinton, is in River West. So, too, is Island Waterpark on Barstow Avenue next to 99.

The opening of the much-anticipated Universally Accessible Park (also called Inspiration Park), on Gettysburg Avenue near Polk Avenue, isn't far away.

But whether you're heading to River West to live or enjoy a good time, Solis says, "you've got to get there."

Highway 99, the railroad and Fresno's uneven growth along the east side of this corridor form a wall of sorts.

For example, Shaw is a major street to the east of 99 and little more than a country lane on the west side. Only River West's brave or foolhardy use Herndon Avenue as a path across 99. Between Shaw and Herndon, River West residents have no other cross-highway option. They feel like the traveling salesman who, after asking a farmer for directions, was told, "You can't get there from here."

River West residents need more of the neighborhood retail that proper planning would accelerate, Brandau says. The residents also need better paths to the rest of Fresno, he says.

For these reasons, Brandau says, government officials should fast-track the construction of Veterans Boulevard. He's not being sarcastic.

### Promises, promises, promises

Veterans Boulevard has been on the drawing board under that name since the mid-1980s. Small pieces have been built, some already getting traffic. Right-of-way has been purchased. Environmental studies are done. Plans for overpasses to span the 99/railroad corridor are moving through the system.

But the boulevard's fundamental purpose — connect with style and convenience Fresno proper and River West — remains but a promise.

Public Works Director Scott Mozier says Veterans Boulevard could be shovel-ready next year. Shovel-ready isn't the same as fully funded. The cost of the boulevard's phase one, Herndon to Shaw, figures to be about \$130 million. Securing every cent will depend on the vagaries of government sentiment. Full-scale construction might start in 2020 or 2021, Mozier says.

### THE BULLET TRAIN COULD BE ZIPPING PAST RIVER WEST AT 220 MPH WHILE RESIDENTS STRUGGLE TO GET AN ICE CREAM CONE IN A TIMELY FASHION.

Some 18 months later, he adds, motorists could be zipping along Veterans Boulevard at 50 mph.

What will it look like? Mozier points to a 10-minute Veterans Boulevard video produced by the Fresno Council of Governments that visualizes the miracle. What is perhaps most amazing isn't the artist's trucks and SUVs moving effortlessly between Herndon and Shaw but the thought of what happens far into the 21st century when an expanded Veterans Boulevard reaches all the way to 180 in southwest Fresno.

At that point, metropolitan Fresno would be encircled — Herndon, Veterans, 180, Highway 168 — by modern thoroughfares.

### The rich get richer

This raises the last factor in Brandau's mission. He didn't focus on Granville Homes in his April 30 speech to the council, but the Assemi family's powerful and wealthy empire almost certainly will benefit when order comes to River West.

Westlake had been on Granville's to-do list for years. The project was to be more than 400 acres of master-planned homes, green space and retail in a rectangle bounded by Gettysburg, Garfield, Shields and Grantland avenues. Though not yet in the city, this site is clearly part of River West's area of influence.

But Granville Homes President Darius Assemi surprised everyone last fall when he said an uncertain market was forcing him to postpone the project for as much as a decade. Almond trees would take the place of front yards.

## \$3,900

Contribution made on Oct. 4, 2012 from Granville Homes President Darius Assemi to Steve Brandau's City Council campaign

# APPENDIX B- MEDIA REPORTS

10/19/2017

Fresno's 'River West:' Big hopes, big money ride on its design | The Fresno Bee

At the same time, Assemi left the Westlake door ajar, saying the project would wait until "it's financially feasible and the right components are in place."

Granville isn't the only developer to have built in River West. It's not the only developer with plans for more construction.

Still, Granville game-changing dominoes are in place, just waiting for the first one to tip: River West specific plan gets done; Veterans Boulevard from Herndon to Shaw is built; Westlake's almonds give way to houses; Veterans Boulevard gets extended to 180; Granville's vow to turn the old Running Horse site (now called Mission Ranch, also covered with almond trees) into a master-planned community suddenly makes sense.

Granville already is a major player in downtown Fresno, north Fresno, east-central Fresno and southeast Fresno. When the last River West domino falls, it won't be only a multi-lane ribbon of asphalt and concrete that encircles the city.

Brandau is more than halfway through his first term in office. His 2012 council campaign was boosted by more than \$10,000 from various Granville connections.

The contributions were important, Brandau says, but they don't explain his River West concern.

"My concern comes from talking to people on their doorsteps during the campaign. That's where I first heard of the problems west of 99. I made a promise to the people: If I got elected, I would do my best to do something about it."

Brandau says he and Granville in many ways think alike on planning.

"There's a connection there," Brandau says. "They appreciate what I do. I think they do fantastic work in the city, as do our other developers. Beyond that, there is no connection."

Assemi says it's way too early to talk about turning the trees of Westlake and Mission Ranch into houses. He says Brandau is "driven" to help River West residents.

"We connected with Steve because he's a breath of fresh air," Assemi says. "He wants to do the right thing."

Nothing gets Fresno's political pot boiling like a public rapport between City Hall and a developer.

Veronica Garibay, co-director of Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability, says City Hall can't let River West hoopla sap the new general plan's commitment to inner-city Fresnoans.

"Our concern is this: How is the city going to make sure existing communities get their fair share?" Garibay says.

First things first, and that means the River West Specific Plan. Jennifer Clark, head of the city's Development and Resource Management Department, says she is ready to begin work when the next budget takes effect July 1. Money and community participation are vital, she says.

So, too, is patience.

Says Clark: "It doesn't happen overnight."

*George Hostetter: (559) 441-6272, @GeorgeHostetter*

## IF YOU GO

Fresno City Budget hearings begin at 8:30 a.m. Monday in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, 2600 Fresno St.

### Never miss a local story.

Sign up today for a free 30 day free trial of unlimited digital access.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

## IN OTHER NEWS

| John Kelly Just Praised This Movie For Its Depiction of How the Military Handles Death



