

NOTICE OF PREPARATION AND SCOPING MEETING

To: INTERESTED PARTIES
 (Agency)

 (Address)

Subject: Notice of Preparation for a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Scoping Meeting

Lead Agency:		Consulting Firm (if applicable):	
Agency:	<u>City of Fresno, DARM Department</u>	Firm Name:	<u>PlaceWorks</u>
			<u>1625 Shattuck Avenue, Suite</u>
Street Address:	<u>2600 Fresno Street, Room 3065</u>	Street Address:	<u>300</u>
City/State/Zip:	<u>Fresno, California 93721</u>	City/State/Zip:	<u>Berkeley, California 94709</u>
Contact:	<u>Sophie Pagoulatos, Planning Manager</u>	Contact:	<u>Kyle Simpson, Senior Associate</u>

The City of Fresno hereby gives notice to the public, agencies, and Native American tribes that the City of Fresno intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Project located in the City of Fresno, Fresno County, California.

Project Title: Southwest Fresno Specific Plan EIR

Project Location: Fresno Fresno
 City (nearest) County

Project Description (brief): The City of Fresno intends to introduce and adopt a new Southwest Fresno Specific Plan (the Plan) for the 3,255 acre area located southwest of the Downtown Planning Area.

The Southwest Fresno Specific Plan emerged from community concern about numerous issues in southwest Fresno. The last comprehensive planning effort that had been undertaken in the area besides the update of the General Plan in 2014 was the Edison Community Plan, adopted in 1977. In 2015 the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan process began. A 21-member steering committee appointed by the District 3 Council Member worked with the community to develop the Southwest Specific Plan Draft Preferred Alternative, which contains proposed land uses and guiding principles for the full development of a specific plan. The Draft Preferred Alternative of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan envisions the interplay of "Complete Neighborhoods," "Corridors," and "Magnet Cores" to create a vibrant and desirable community for both existing and new residents. The Plan sets aside the majority of land for single-family residential uses and locates higher density residential uses at neighborhood nodes, near magnet uses, and along corridors. This will allow walkable access for greater numbers of residents to shopping, schools, parks, and transit.

Additionally, the Plan envisions that the most optimal locations for large-scale, regional-serving retail are those that have good proximity, visibility, and access from the greatest number of people, while having enough distance away from other similar types of retail to avoid competition. In the Plan,

regional retail is shown in two locations: with access from Highway 180 at Marks and Whites Bridge Avenues and from Highway 41 near Jensen Avenue and MLK Jr. Boulevard. These locations would allow new retail businesses to draw customers from areas beyond Southwest Fresno. On the other hand, smaller scale community commercial, including neighborhood retail shops, would be more dispersed at many of the neighborhood nodes, adjacent to magnet uses, and near mixed use.

Furthermore, larger scale employment uses such as offices, a college, and medical facilities are concentrated along higher-intensity corridors and within magnet cores, while opportunities for smaller scale offices are allowed along a less intensive corridor. While more jobs in Southwest Fresno are desirable, the types of businesses that provide them must be healthy, safe, and good neighbors to nearby residents. To avoid potential conflicts between residents and employment uses, new employment areas and all previously "Light Industrial," "Heavy Industrial," "Business Park," or "Regional Business Park" areas would be planned and zoned "Office".

This Notice of Preparation is being issued to provide maximum transparency and opportunity to comment given the changes in planning context described above.

The City of Fresno will act as the lead agency in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The EIR will be prepared to satisfy requirements of CEQA (Public Resources Code 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations 15000 et seq.) (hereinafter, collectively referred to as CEQA unless otherwise specified).

All interested parties are invited to comment on the scope and content of the EIR. Additionally, in compliance with CEQA, this Notice is being sent to notify Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, and involved federal agencies.

Comments on the scope of the Draft EIR should focus on what significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives to the Project, and mitigation measures should be identified and analyzed in the Draft EIR. The City of Fresno Development and Resource Management Department shall consider comments received in response to this Notice of Preparation in determining the scope and content of the EIR for this project.

A more detailed project description, location description including diagrams, and statement of the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the Initial Study is is not attached.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

Based upon its preliminary evaluation of the Project, the City of Fresno has determined that the Project has the potential to cause significant environmental impacts to the following environmental factors, which will be specifically identified and analyzed in the EIR for this project:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources, including Tribal Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing

- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

The City of Fresno Development and Resource Management Department has made this NOP available to the public online at www.fresno.gov/southwestplan. Additionally, hard copies of this NOP are available for public review at the following civic institutions within the City of Fresno: City Clerk, City Hall (2600 Fresno Street, Room 2133 Fresno, California 93721), Central Library (2420 Mariposa Street, Fresno, California 93721), and West Fresno Branch Library (188 East California Avenue, Fresno California 93706).

The City of Fresno Development and Resource Management Department considers comments received in response to this Notice of Preparation in determining the scope and content of the EIR for this project. Any comments provided should identify specific topics of environmental concern and your reason for suggesting the study of these topics in the EIR. **The 30-day public comment period for this NOP is from Tuesday, February 28, 2017 through Thursday, March 30, 2017.**

The City of Fresno will host a public scoping meeting for this proposed project's EIR scope at Gaston Middle School, 1100 E. Church Avenue, Fresno, CA 93706 on March 1, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. This public scoping meeting will provide a brief overview of CEQA and its processes as they pertain to the proposed project as well as provide a venue to solicit comments from the public and other governmental entities regarding the scope and content of the EIR.

Please provide your NOP comments in writing to:

City of Fresno Development and Resource Management Department
Attention: Sophia Pagoulatos, Planning Manager
2600 Fresno Street, Room 3065
Fresno, California 93721

Thank you for your participation in the environmental review of this project.

Date: February 23, 2017

Signature:

Title: Planning Manager

Telephone: (559) 621-8062



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Southwest Fresno Specific Plan EIR

Notice of Preparation

PLAN AREA AND BOUNDARIES

The area addressed by the Specific Plan lies within the southwestern most part of the City of Fresno, within Fresno County (see Figure 1). The Specific Plan Area is bounded by Highway 180 in the north and by Highway 41 in the east (see Figure 2). It does not include the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan Area, nor does it include the land currently in Fresno County that is considered within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) of the City's General Plan. The county land in the SOI is anticipated to become part of the City of Fresno in the future. However, as shown in Figure 2, there is one area in the SOI that is part of the Specific Plan Area: the Martin Luther King Junior Boulevard (MLK) Activity Center, identified as one of the "Magnet Cores" in the Specific Plan. The MLK Activity Center was identified in the Fresno General Plan as a higher density neighborhood district that would serve the Southwest Development Area, established neighborhoods in Southwest Fresno, and areas beyond southwest Fresno and the city. Although the MLK Activity Center is currently located on SOI land, it was included into the Specific Plan Area because of its proximity to the Plan Area and its role in providing retail and services to the Southwest Fresno community. The following maps and graphics show and consider the SOI as a matter of good planning, but the scope of the project, including the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), will focus on the Specific Plan Area only.

PLANNING HORIZON

To ensure rational, managed development of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan, the planning horizon for the Specific Plan is the year 2042, consistent with a 30-year planning horizon.

EXISTING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Initially agricultural land, Southwest Fresno has gradually transitioned with more residential, industrial, and commercial uses sprinkled throughout. Today, Southwest Fresno is made up of a patchwork of land uses that abut each other, such as existing subdivisions, industry, and farmland. Many pockets of residential land uses are adjacent to vacant land, agriculture, and/or industrial uses. Incompatible land uses are located near one another, including truck routes, noise or odor-producing industrial facilities, and land with hazardous materials. The area within the City's SOI contains a significant amount of vacant land that is residentially designated, but the area has not yet exhibited much market demand to develop typical suburban neighborhoods with desired commercial and retail services.

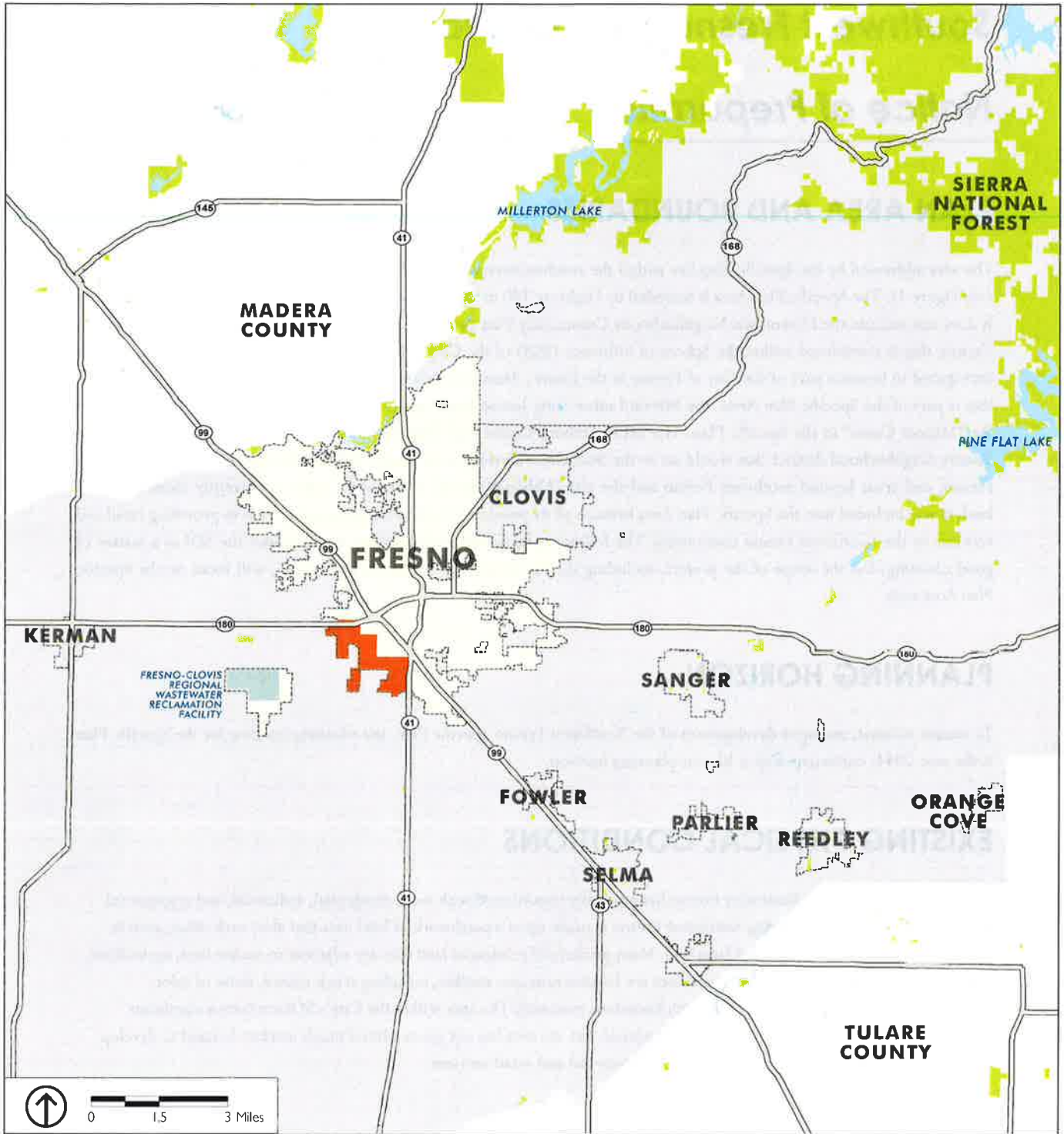


Figure 1 Regional Location Map

 Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Area

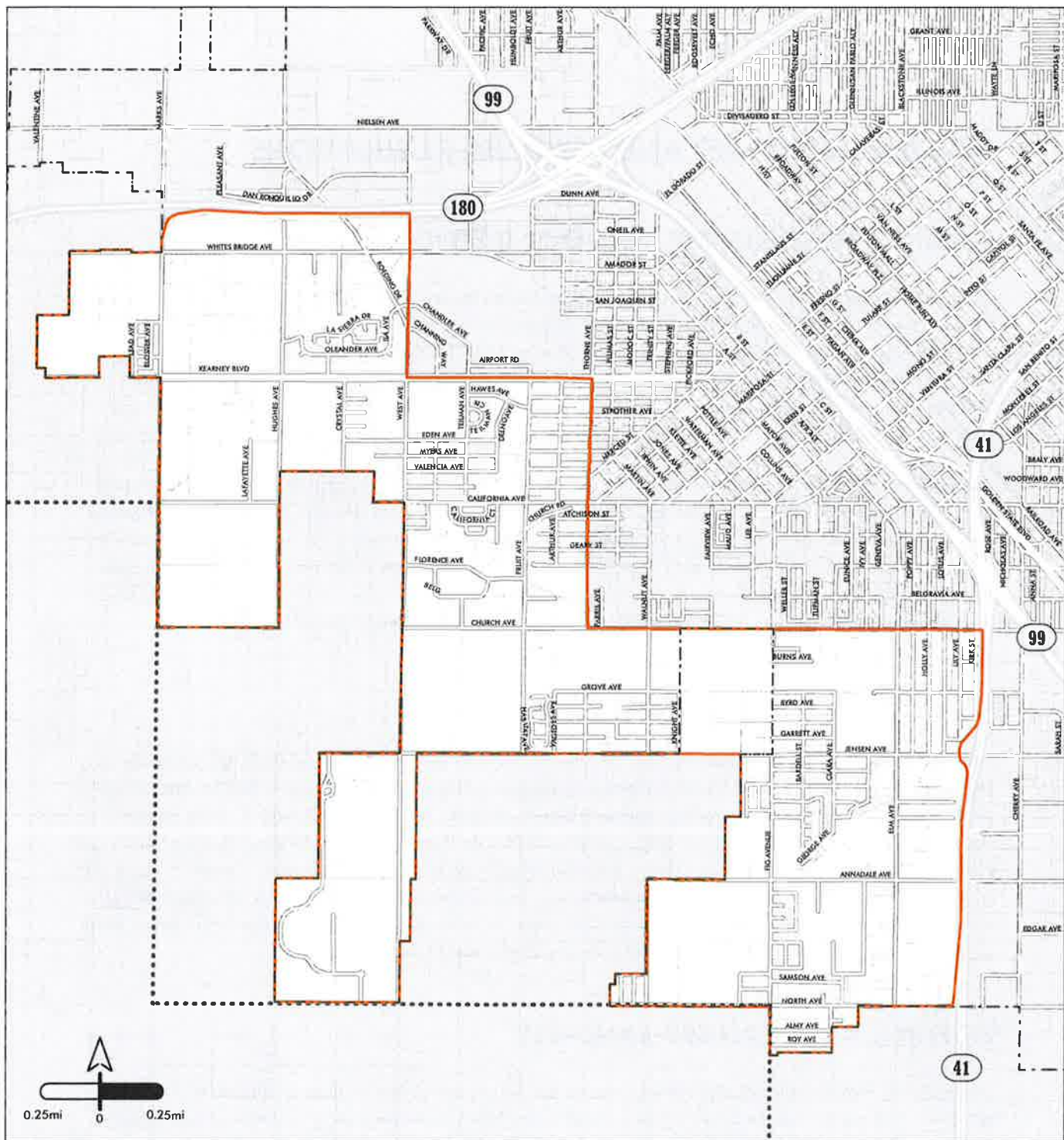


Figure 2 Plan Area Map

- City Limit
- Sphere of Influence
- Plan Area

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EXISTING LAND USES AND LAND USE REGULATIONS

EXISTING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The Plan Area is made up of three school districts, but predominantly Fresno Unified in the northern half and Washington Unified in the southern half. The Central Unified School District is located to the west of the Plan Area, but overlaps a minimal number of existing residential properties within the Plan Area. The Plan Area consists of two elementary schools (Sunset and West Fresno), two middle schools (Gaston and West Fresno), and no high schools. The remaining schools (Bethune Elementary and W.E.B Dubois) are charter schools. W.E.B Dubois Charter School serves students from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

Edison High School is located outside, but very proximate, to the Plan Area. Edison High School is spatially located within two districts, but belongs to Fresno Unified School District. Washington Union High School serves the Washington Unified District, but is located outside of the Plan Area and approximately four miles south of the Plan Area's southern edge. Near the freeway intersection of Highway 41 and Highway 99, the school district boundaries of Fresno Unified and Washington Unified alternate in the east-west and north-south directions. It is likely that many of this area's residents may live in close proximity of each other, but are assigned to different school districts, and thus attend different schools.

EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Among Southwest Fresno's community facilities, churches are the most prevalent and can be found throughout the area. The majority of these churches are located in Downtown and west of Highway 99, just outside of the Plan Area. Similarly, many other community facilities, including community centers, museums, and the regional medical center are located in Downtown. Two large churches of different faiths are located within the Plan Area: St. John Victory Fellowship Church and Fresno Westside Seventh-Day Adventist Church. A number of parks are located in the Plan Area. It should be noted that Hyde Park and the Regional Sports Complex are located on or near landfills; there are also several ponding basins that serve seasonally as parks. However, there is no central park or urban center for the whole region. A new health facility which serves the Southwest Fresno community is located at the corner of Elm and Annadale Avenues.

EXISTING AND PLANNED LAND USE

Land within the Plan Area is not clearly organized into distinct uses or patterns. Instead, there is a mixture of industrial, agricultural, commercial, and residential land uses throughout the Plan Area. Properties located at the eastern end of the Plan Area carry over the largely residential land use pattern found in Downtown, west of Highway 99. The pattern transitions into agricultural uses towards the western end of the Plan Area, closer to land outside the city limits within the City's SOI and County-owned land. Pockets of commercial and employment uses are scattered throughout the Plan Area and SOI. Industrial uses, such as Foster Poultry Farms, are located immediately adjacent to, or enclosed by, residential

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neighborhoods, which have led to incompatible uses and noise and air quality concerns. Additionally, there are large areas of vacant lands across the Plan Area.

The recently updated General Plan devotes much attention to the Plan Area and calls for a more cohesive land use pattern. The central theme for the Plan Area is to achieve what the General Plan defines as Complete Neighborhoods; in essence, neighborhoods that are self-sufficient, interconnected, and walkable. Planned land uses are envisioned to support new medium- and medium-low-density residential development adjacent to existing residential uses. New development is anticipated to be infill, served by local streets, centered by parks, multi-family housing, townhomes, and schools in hopes of building a network of Complete Neighborhoods. Major streets such as California Avenue are intended to support Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the future and include Complete Street systems that will accommodate Transit Villages along them.

Overall, the planned land use designations center on two key ideas: 1) create unique, self-sustaining neighborhoods that provide residents with day-to-day services, and 2) create strong commercial arteries with a healthy street network that feeds into neighborhoods.

EXISTING ZONING

Based on the City's Citywide Development Code Chapter of the Municipal Code (Chapter 15), the Plan Area falls within the following zoning districts:

- Residential Single-Family, Low Density (RS-3)
- Residential Single-Family, Medium Low Density (RS-4)
- Residential Single-Family, Medium Density (RS-5)
- Residential Multi-Family, Medium High Density (RM-1)
- Residential Multi-Family, Urban Neighborhood (RM-2)
- Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMX)
- Corridor/Center Mixed-Use (CMX)
- Commercial - Community (CC)
- Commercial - Regional (CR)
- Office (O)
- Office Restricted (O-No Auto)
- Office* (O*)
- Open Space (OS)
- Parks and Recreation (PR)
- Public and Institutional (PI)

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DRAFT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The guiding principles below were used as a framework for the development of the Draft Preferred Alternative.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. *Existing residential properties in the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan are assumed to remain residential. Uses other than existing residential are subject to change.*
2. *In general, locate higher intensity uses in magnet cores and along corridors, while allowing the rest of the area to have a residential neighborhood focus.*
3. *Create two magnet cores that would attract a significant amount of new development and would accommodate regional retail stores, educational and/or medical facilities, and a range of housing types.*
4. *Enhance existing key corridors in Southwest Fresno, building off the existing character and potential of the streets to attract new development and to connect neighborhoods and magnets.*
5. *Strengthen existing neighborhoods and create new complete neighborhoods by providing centers, or nodes, within walking distance of residents. Nodes should consist of a park, a school, and retail stores; these nodes should be surrounded by residences.*
6. *New residential development should be primarily single-family residences. Where appropriate, new multi-family condominiums and apartments should not be overly concentrated in a single location and should be located close to neighborhood nodes, near magnet cores, and along corridors.*
7. *New retail development should be a mix of larger regional retail at a few key locations and neighborhood stores in neighborhood nodes and along corridors.*
8. *Large-scale office and institutional uses, including, educational facilities, and medical facilities, should be located where vehicles and transit have access, and where they will attract other similar uses. Smaller scale employment uses such as professional offices can be located in more remote locations and along corridors.*
9. *Employment areas in Southwest Fresno should be planned and zoned for “healthy” businesses.*
10. *Park improvements for Southwest Fresno’s existing parks should be the highest priority, followed by the creation of new parks within walking distance of residential areas.*
11. *The transportation network should be improved to serve all members of the community whether they wish to travel by car, bus, bicycle, foot, or wheelchair. Transit should be focused on corridors that have*

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more intensive land uses. Truck routes should be located away from residential uses whenever possible.

12. *Urban Greening ideas and actions should be applied to Southwest Fresno.*

DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

Development capacity numbers were calculated for the Draft Preferred Alternative based on the Draft Preferred Alternative’s land uses, using the General Plan’s dwelling unit per acre (du/acre) and floor area ratio (FAR) capacity numbers (see Table 1). The General Plan’s development capacity numbers are also shown in Table 1-1 for comparison.

The table contains the development capacity of the land uses proposed in the Specific Plan Area over the Specific Plan’s 30-year timeframe. It should be noted that, like the General Plan, the development capacities above are for new development and only take into account the development of parcels that have higher opportunities for development, such as parcels that are vacant, open agriculture, or rural residential (partially vacant).

The development capacities for the General Plan are also shown in the table for comparison against the Draft Preferred Alternative’s development capacities.

TABLE 1-1. DEVELOPMENT CAPACITIES FOR THE PLAN AND GENERAL PLAN IN THE SOUTHWEST FRESNO SPECIFIC PLAN AREA

	Single-Family Housing (DU)	Multi-Family Housing (DU)	Housing Total (DU)	Commercial (Bldg. SF)	Employment (Bldg. SF)	Parks/Open Space (Acre) ^c	Public Facilities (Acre)	Public Facilities (Bldg. SF)
Specific Plan Area ^a	4,307	1,840	6,148	1,552,676	748,820	78	192	2,411,064
Specific Plan Area included in General Plan ^b	4,108	2,616	6,723	1,330,831	1,780,080	184 ^d	57	643,377

Notes: DU = dwelling units. SF = square feet.

a. Includes the MLK Activity Center.

b. Development capacity numbers for the General Plan were calculated using the planned land uses shown in the General Plan Land Use map approved February 29, 2016.

c. Excludes land uses designated as “clear zone,” “ponding basin,” and “ponding basin park.”

d. Includes approximately 112 acres of landfill located directly east of the Regional Sports Complex. The Steering Committee does not consider this land to be parkland and therefore the Plan shows this acreage designated as “public facility.”

Some findings from the development capacity analysis are described below:

- **Housing.** The total number of housing units in the Draft Preferred Alternative is less than the General Plan’s total number of housing units. The main reason for this decrease is because of the community and Steering Committee’s desire for a shift in ratio for a larger amount of single-family housing compared to multi-family housing. The General Plan’s ratio of single-family housing to multi-family housing within the Specific Plan Area is 61 percent single-family housing to 39 percent multi-family housing. The Draft Preferred Alternative’s ratio is 70 percent single-family housing to 30 percent multi-family housing in the Specific Plan Area. The Draft Preferred Alternative results in 575 fewer dwelling units than the General Plan’s total dwelling units within the Specific Plan Area.

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- **Commercial.** The amount of commercial development in the Specific Plan Area is greater in the Draft Preferred Alternative than in the General Plan by approximately 222,000 square feet. Several factors contribute to this increase, including new corridor/center mixed use, neighborhood mixed use, regional commercial, and community commercial areas.
- **Employment.** The amount of employment space in the Specific Plan Area (i.e., office, business park, regional business park, light industrial, and heavy industrial uses) in the Draft Preferred Alternative is significantly less than in the General Plan; the Preferred Alternative shows approximately 1 million square feet less in employment uses in the Specific Plan Area. The reason for this decrease is because of the change of business park and regional business park uses to other land uses such as residential, park, mixed use, and commercial.
- **Parks/Open Space.** The Specific Plan Area's total park acreage in the Draft Preferred Alternative is less than in the General Plan because the General Plan counts the approximately 112 acres directly east of the Regional Sports Complex as parkland. The Steering Committee expressed that this land should not be considered parkland since it is landfill. The removal of this "parkland" is a more accurate reflection of the amount of usable parkland in Southwest Fresno. With the exclusion of the 112 acres of landfill from the General Plan's parks/open space development capacity, the amount of parkland within the Specific Plan Area for the Draft Preferred Alternative is slightly higher by 6 acres compared to the General Plan's park acreage. The amount of parks/open space in the SOI increases more significantly in the Draft Preferred Alternative by 55 acres, largely because of the new parkland located directly to the west of the Regional Sports Complex, which was a decision made by the Steering Committee. Although this large amount of new parkland is located in the SOI, it could still serve Specific Plan Area residents since it is adjacent to the Regional Sports Complex.
- **Public Facilities.** The amount of public facilities development in the Draft Preferred Alternative is significantly larger than the amount in the General Plan. The primary reasons for this increase include the re-designation of the aforementioned 112-acre landfill from park to public facilities, the inclusion of a new college in the MLK Activity Center, and the redesignation of single-family housing to public facilities along North Avenue in an effort to create a buffer between residential areas and nearby industrial uses.

ANTICIPATED DISCRETIONARY ACTIONS FOR ADOPTION OF THE SOUTHWEST FRESNO SPECIFIC PLAN

Adoption of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan is proposed to be enacted by resolution of the City Council. The following discretionary actions are anticipated:

- Adoption of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan
- Amendment of the Fresno General Plan
- Repeal or Amendment of the Edison Community Plan
- Potential Text Amendment to the Citywide Development Code
- Rezoning for proposed Regional Retail Corridor, Historic Corridor, Mixed-Use Corridors, Jobs Corridors and Mixed-Use and Jobs Corridor