



CITY OF FRESNO

DRAFT TOWER DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE

JULY 2024



E Simpson AVE 600

DRAFT TOWER DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF FRESNO

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Introduction

1.1	Tower District Today.....	8
1.2	Purpose of the Specific Plan.....	15
1.3	Planning Process & Community Engagement.....	16
1.4	Health & Equity Emphasis.....	20
1.5	Plan Organization and Summary.....	23
1.6	Guiding Principles.....	25

02

Conservation and Historic Preservation

2.1	Historic Context.....	28
2.2	Historic Survey & Resource Protection.....	31
2.3	Historic Districts & Statements of Significance.....	31
2.4	Compatible Infill Development	35
2.5	Objectives & Policies.....	36

03

Land Use

3.1	Role of Land Use Planning.....	46
3.2	Local Setting.....	46
3.3	Community Character.....	49
3.4	Diverse & Affordable Housing.....	52
3.5	Commercial Activity.....	54
3.6	Industrial Employment & Compatibility.....	55
3.7	Recreation & Education.....	57
3.8	Development Opportunities & Feasibility	57
3.9	Objectives & Policies.....	65

04

Parks and Open Spaces

4.1	Background.....	74
4.2	Existing Parks & Park Needs.....	74
4.3	Park Opportunities.....	81
4.4	Public Schools & Libraries.....	81
4.5	Public Art & District Identity.....	84
4.6	Objectives & Policies.....	86

05 Circulation

5.1	Tower District Context.....	92
5.2	Street Classifications.....	94
5.3	Complete Streets.....	96
5.4	Placemaking & Streets.....	96
5.5	Pedestrians.....	102
5.6	Bicycling.....	106
5.7	Public Transit.....	108
5.8	Motor Vehicles.....	110
5.9	Trucks.....	113
5.10	Parking & Transportation Demand Management.....	114
5.11	Planned Improvements.....	114
5.12	Objectives & Policies.....	116

06 Utilities

6.1	Water.....	128
6.2	Sanitary Sewer.....	128
6.3	Stormwater & Drainage.....	128
6.4	Solid Waste	129



01

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tower District Today

The Tower District (District) is situated near the center of Fresno, California – the fifth largest city in the State. Known for its ethnic and cultural diversity, the District lies immediately north of Downtown Fresno and the State Route (SR) 180 freeway, and about one mile east of State Route 99. The Specific Plan area is generally bounded by SR 180 to the south, Blackstone Avenue to the east, Shields Avenue to the north, and Fruit Avenue and Union Pacific Railroad tracks to the west.

Built as an early 20th-century streetcar suburb, the District's combination of walkable streets and diversity of places to go has contributed to its reputation as a highly livable place. It offers a mix of multi-family and single-family housing, small businesses, industrial employers, schools, and parks.

The Tower District is also one of Fresno's leading cultural and entertainment destinations. The District is named for the historic neon-lit Art Deco Tower Theatre, which stands in the heart of the District at the intersection of Olive Avenue and Wishon Avenue. It sits at the north end of Fulton Street, the Tower District's initial transit and commercial link to Downtown. These and other human-scaled "main streets" are dotted with independent shops, eateries, and entertainment venues, providing destinations for local and regional visitors.

FIGURE 1.1 | Tower District in Fresno

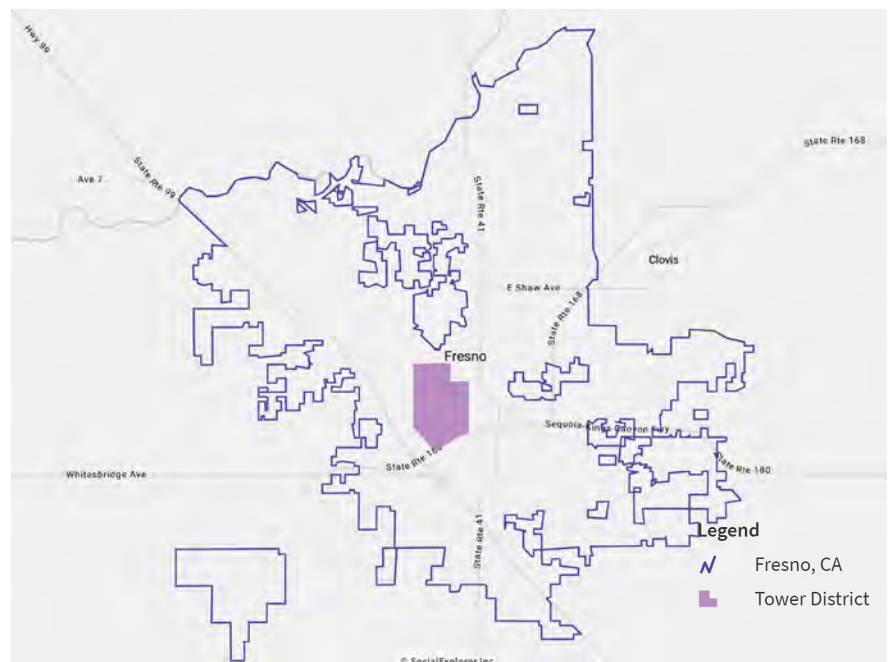


FIGURE 1.2 | Tower District and its Context

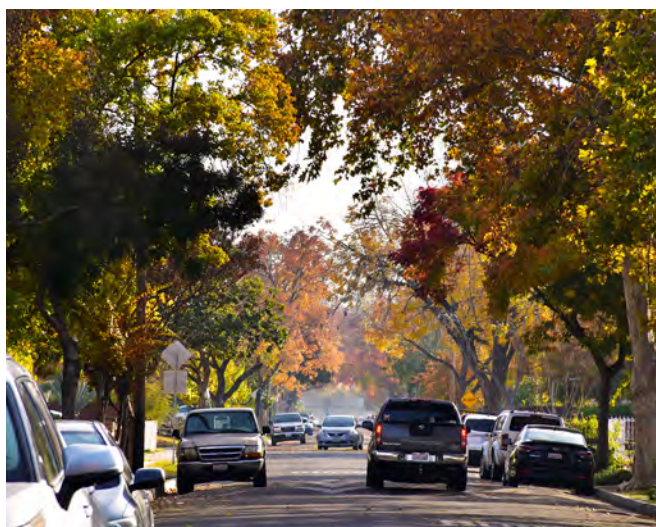
The District's vitality extends to its residential neighborhoods. The earliest subdivisions were within walking distance of a streetcar and offered pedestrian-oriented streets lined by trees and porch-front homes. The District's residential fabric is diverse -- from vibrant single-family estates, to bungalows, to apartments over retail shops.

The Tower District is distinguished by its vibrant and diverse community, encompassing a rich mosaic of ethnic groups, families, singles, retirees, students, artists, and workers from various professions. Unlike many other neighborhoods, it thrived during the post-World War II years, maintaining its role as a cultural and entertainment hub. The District features unique Art Deco architecture, pedestrian-friendly streets, and a lively mix of cafes, nightclubs, theaters, bakeries, and specialty retail shops. Beyond the bustling commercial areas, the neighborhood offers a dense blend of offices, apartments, and single-family homes. The broad range of housing options, from granny flats to mansions, ensures accessibility for all economic strata and life stages. The dynamic lifestyle of residents manifests through regular art events, live performances, and food festivals.

FIGURE 1.3 | Patterns of Development



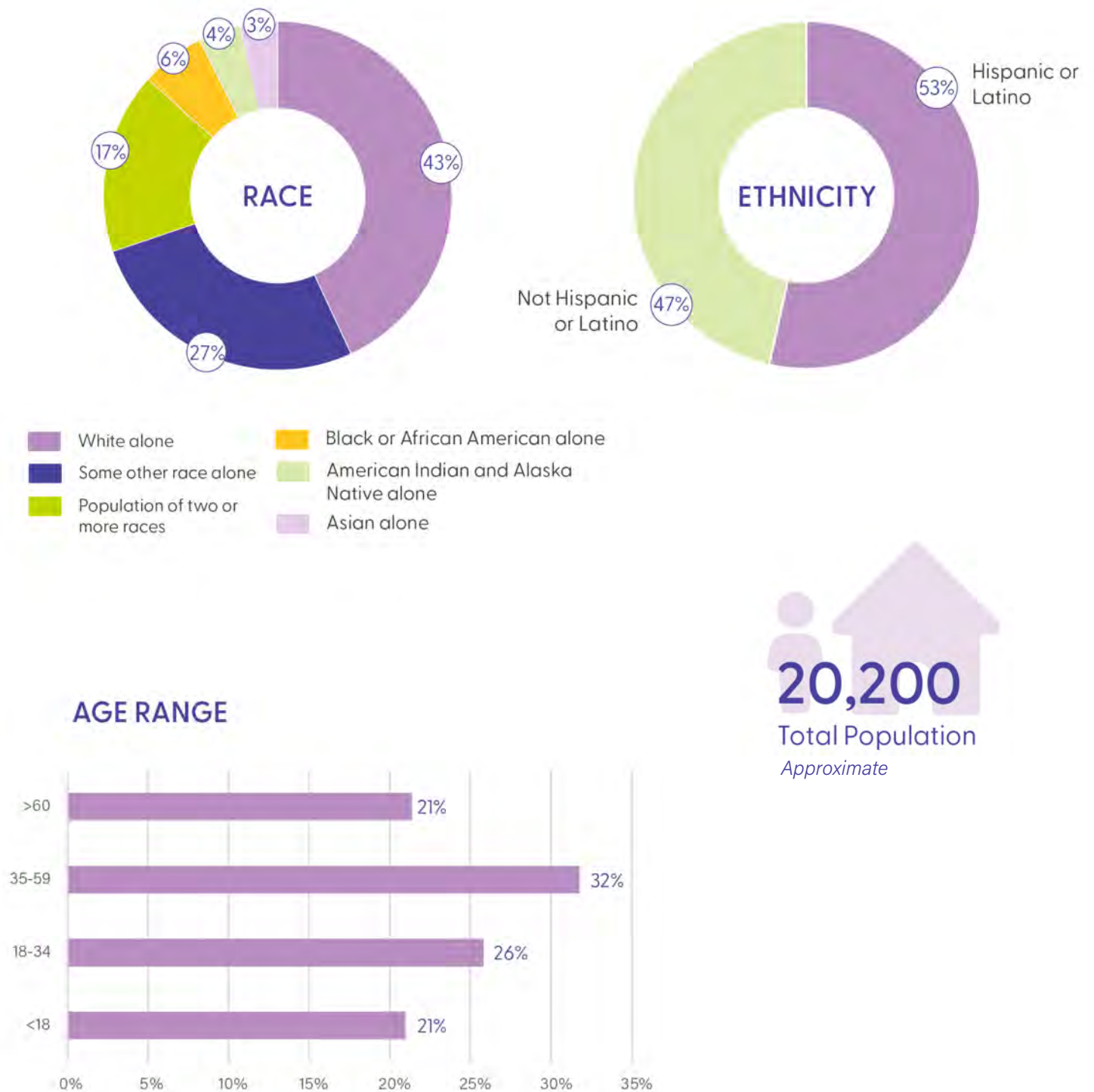
The active neighborhood associations and numerous community events underscore strong community engagement and pride, nurturing a deep sense of belonging among its inhabitants. The annual Tower District Mardi Gras Parade, one of Fresno's most anticipated events, highlights the area's festive spirit and draws participants from across the region. Additionally, the District is home to several art galleries, studios, and performance spaces, making it a magnet for creative individuals and a hub for artistic expression. The presence of Fresno City College nearby also infuses the area with youthful energy and educational opportunities, contributing to the neighborhood's dynamic and inclusive atmosphere. With its tree-lined streets, historic charm, and ongoing revitalization efforts, the Tower District remains a testament to the enduring appeal of urban living that balances cultural richness with a close-knit community feel.



Tower District's combination of walkable streets and diversity has contributed to its reputation as a highly livable place.

FIGURE 1.4 | Community Character



FIGURE 1.5 | Demographics

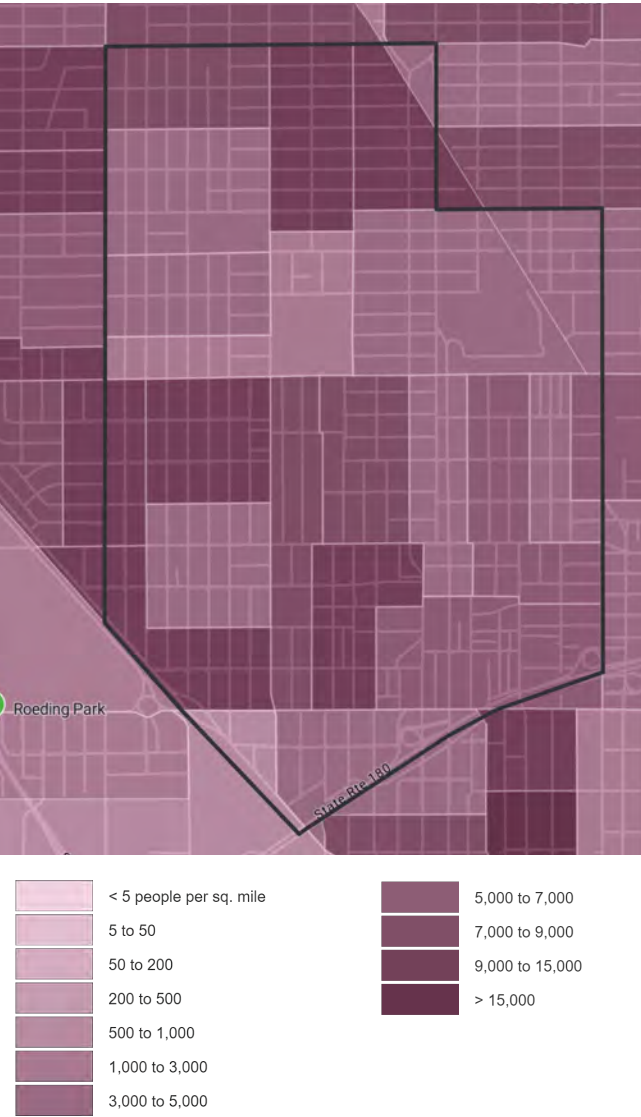
Data reflects all census tract block groups whose population is all or mainly in Tower District.

Source: US Census, 2020

The Tower District’s demographic tapestry is rich and varied, with 17 percent of residents belonging to two or more races and over 50 percent of the community identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The area is home to a mix of long-time residents, young professionals, artists, and families, all contributing to its unique cultural mosaic. The community’s age distribution shows that 21 percent of its members are over 60 years old, and an equal percentage are under 18. This blend of people from different backgrounds and walks of life fosters a strong sense of community and inclusiveness.

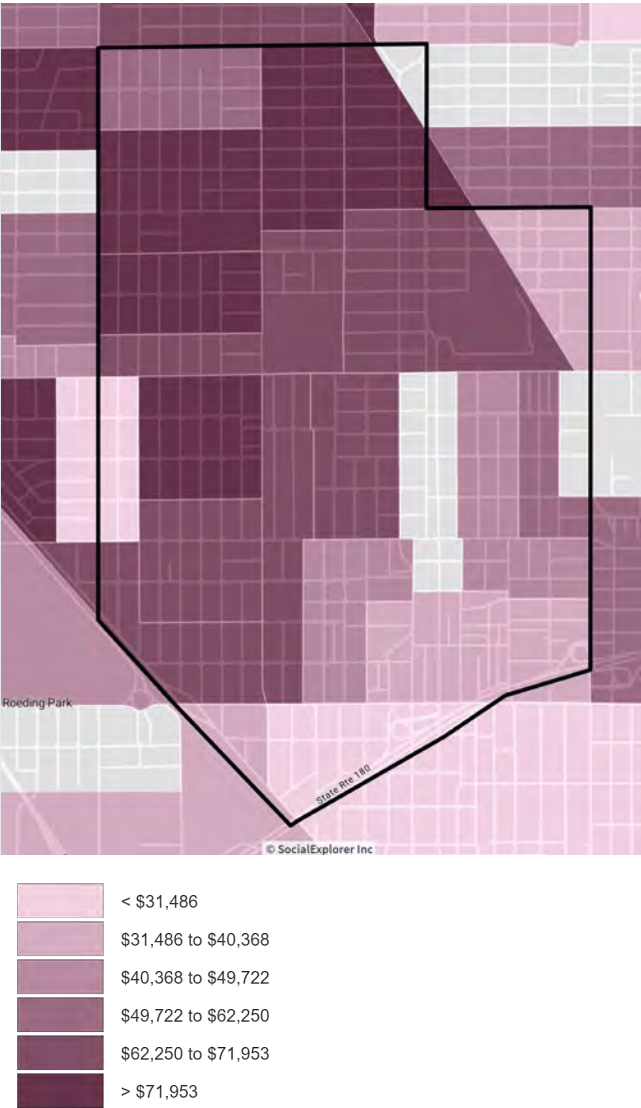
To many, the Tower District is more than just a neighborhood; it represents the heart and soul of Fresno’s cultural and social life. The community character of the District is defined by its artistic flair, progressive spirit, and a welcoming atmosphere that embraces all people. This inclusiveness is not just a characteristic but a defining feature of the District.

FIGURE 1.6 | Population Density (2020)



Source: US Census, 2020

FIGURE 1.7 | Median Household Income (2020)



Source: US Census, 2020

1.2 Purpose of the Specific Plan

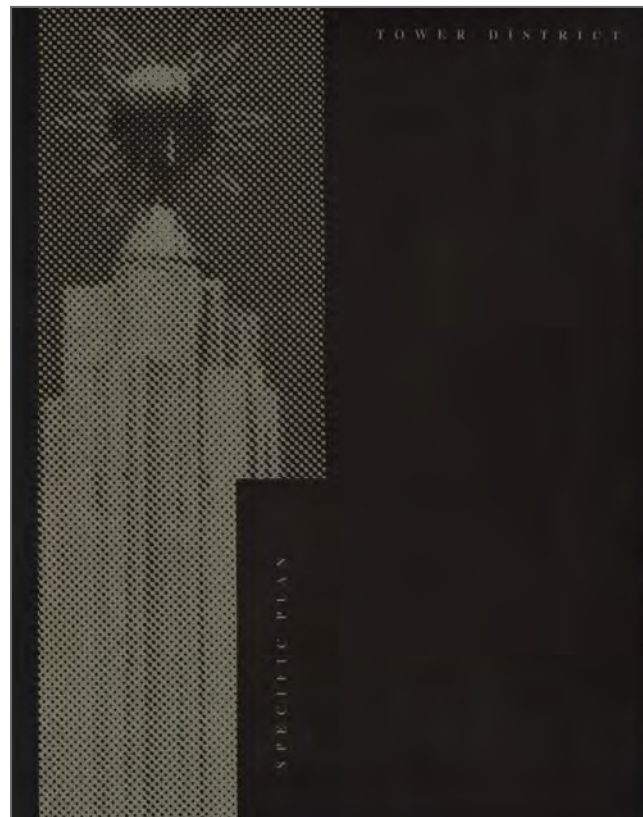
The Specific Plan (the Plan) provides strategic and comprehensive guidance for making decisions regarding Tower District's built environment and landscape character, land use and activities, public open space, community facilities, transportation and other forms of infrastructure. It describes a shared set of goals, objectives, policies, and implementing actions.

The Specific Plan also helps to implement goals and policies contained in Fresno's General Plan, in ways that can be more specific to the District and provide additional planning control. California Government Code Section 65451 authorizes local jurisdictions to adopt specific plans "for the systematic implementation of the general plan for all or part of the area covered by the general plan."

This Plan updates the 1991 Specific Plan, to respond to issues that have remained, changed, and emerged. Recent decades have led to greater emphasis on housing availability and affordability, expanding recreational opportunities, calming auto-oriented roadways, and other issues addressed by the Plan. At the same time, this Plan continues the 1991 Plan's focus on neighborhood character, walkability, and historic resources.



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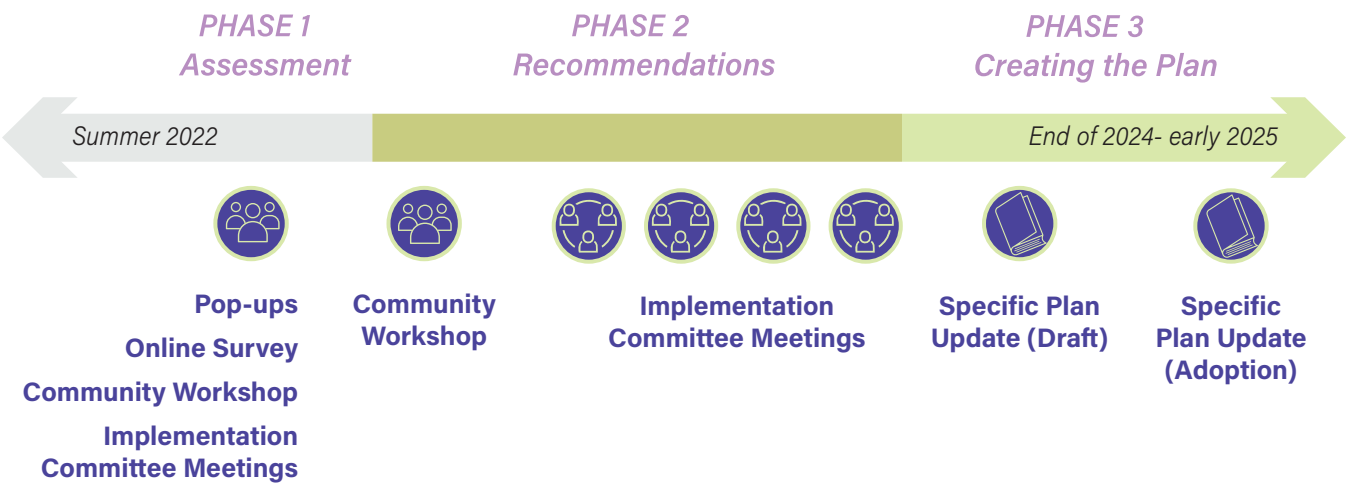
1991 Tower District Specific Plan

1.3 Planning Process & Community Engagement

Outreach and engagement were fundamental to understanding community members’ aspirations and developing a Specific Plan to help achieve them. Through a process that included public meetings, community workshops, stakeholder interviews, and online surveys, the Plan identifies issues, explores options, formulates recommendations, establishes priorities, and cultivates a sense of shared stewardship of the plan and the place. Engagement is summarized here.

To help understand issues and existing conditions, interviews were conducted with residents’ representatives, property owners, merchants, restaurateurs, real estate professionals, affordable housing developers, land trusts, social service providers, and the local transit agency. A community survey was administered online and in-person at neighborhood “pop-up” events like the Tower Farmer’s Market, the Porchfest and Hearts of Fire, where people from all walks of life tend to congregate. The community survey received over 650 responses. A community workshop, held in the backyard of the Let’s Roll ice cream shop, gave participants a common understanding of existing conditions and a chance to say which issues felt most important.

FIGURE 1.8 | Project Schedule



City staff canvassed in the neighborhood prior to both workshops, distributed surveys and flyers, and reached over 7,250 people. The workshops had a combined attendance of 331 community members who actively provided feedback.

As the Plan entered a “recommendations” phase, a second workshop gave community members a chance to help shape the Specific Plan’s vision and objectives. The second workshop also explored placemaking opportunities in specific parts of the District. City staff canvassed in the neighborhood prior to both workshops, distributed surveys and flyers, and reached over 7,250 people. The workshops had a combined attendance of 331 community members who actively provided feedback.

All of this community feedback guided planning decisions throughout the process and were the basis for draft recommendations.

The Specific Plan was guided from the beginning by the Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee, comprised of Tower District residents and businesses. Initially created to implement the 1991 Plan, the Implementation Committee brought deep knowledge of the planning area and its issues, and had a strong hand in formulating this Plan’s objectives and policies. The Committee’s work was informed by thorough review of draft objectives and policies by its subcommittees for land use, circulation, public space, and historic preservation.

Community engagement findings are infused in the plan’s guiding principles (Section 1.6), and in the goals and policies for each subject area.

Community Workshop 1 at Let’s Roll



Flyers posted in high activity locations helped raise visibility and boost community participation.





The second community workshop, attended by over 200 Tower District residents, featured energetic small-group discussions (top and middle left). A "pop-up" booth at Porchfest provided another opportunity for feedback (above and at left).

1) Animal clinic
- low cost spay/neuter clinic
- street medicine
- fix the plumbing
- Take care of the TREES

Like Amsterdam
by + better diverse
+ more inclusive.
+ more trees

Preserve
Historic
Buildings

Hold empty lot/building
owners accountable. Too many
dreams of amazing spaces
exist to leave spots empty.
(and value tax?)

More/Faster
Bus service
E/W

Ted C. Willis
Community Gym!
LET'S GET HEALTHY & Fit!

Small business/
Minority owned
historic focus
Light + inclusion
Mixed income
Protection

water
fountains

resources to
highlight all the
awesome ANTIQUARIAN
shops!

Grocery
Store

More
indep.
boko
eclectic
Cade
little
cloth

More family
friendly VENUES
on olive

More protected
bike lanes
and cross walks

LESS
SMOKESHOPS

SHADED SIDEWALKS ✓

Local med. Clinics (open service)

More healthy food options (non-restaurant)
(community gardens, grocery)

More trees along streets.

More
trees
along
streets.

Play ground with
Paw. The old

More mixed-use
community for housing
more mixed-use
community for housing
more mixed-use
community for housing

A park!
open space
across from
Tower Bldg!!

Preserve and protect
the things that make
Tower special (welcoming
community with lots of
cultural activities, and a
built environment with lots
of character). Additionally
grow these features through
(from Raining Park to Bluebird)

Community Library
Grocery Store

moar
malls

Plant/replace
trees when they
die
throughout the
neighborhood

More
trees
along
streets.

Small/Local
Businesses -
No Chains

Green Space w/
room for
Live Performance Arts
+ Cultural Events
Removable Bollards
to make closing down
for events easier

Be innovative
with rooftop
spaces. Can
be in historical
spaces.

More
indep.
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Removable Bollards
to make closing down
for events easier

Be innovative
with rooftop
spaces. Can
be in historical
spaces.

1.4 Health and Equity Emphasis

As recommended by the Implementation Committee to ensure health and equity were the underpinning of the Specific Plan, the objectives and policies of this Plan encourage positive health and equity outcomes. As a planning outcome, health reflects a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Equity gives every individual an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives by eliminating barriers. Together, health and equity mean that “everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.”¹

Built environments relate to health and equity in many ways. For example, when land use and transportation patterns require people to use a vehicle to access basic life needs, this has implications for both health and cost of living. An average low-income American household spends nearly 40 percent of its budget on owning, insuring, and fueling cars. In comparison, a walkable community offers local destinations that are accessible by pedestrians. Land use patterns also influence the availability of grocery stores with healthful foods. Street design

FIGURE 1.9 | Health & Equity Framework



¹Urban Institute, “Leveraging the Built Environment for Health Equity,” online at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/leveraging-built-environment-health-equity> (as of June 2024).

plays a critical role in providing protected pedestrian and bicycle routes and discouraging motor vehicles at unsafe speeds. Rates of obesity are lower in more walkable locations as daily routines provide physical activity. To study the present health and equity conditions of Tower District, six broad categories were used. These are described below.

1. HOUSING BURDEN:

Economic equity directly affects an individual's or a family's financial stability and overall well-being. High housing costs can lead to housing insecurity, frequent moves, overcrowding, and homelessness, all of which have detrimental effects on physical and mental health. Overcrowded living conditions can increase the spread of infectious diseases, create stressful environments, and exacerbate chronic health conditions.²

2. ACCESS TO JOBS:

Employment provides the financial resources needed for individuals and families to maintain their health and well-being. Job accessibility affects economic stability, enabling people to afford adequate housing, nutritious food, healthcare, and other necessities. Proximity to employment opportunities also reduces the time and money spent on commuting, which can improve quality of life and reduce stress.³ Employment is also linked to social determinants of health, as it often provides a sense of purpose, social connections, and opportunities for personal growth.

3. ACTIVE LIFESTYLE:

Obesity rates are lower in more walkable locations as daily routines provide physical activity.³ Community planning affects the ease with which people engage in recreation, such as ensuring homes are within a 10-minute walking distance from existing parks and planned public open spaces using public streets and free from barriers such as railroad tracks and freeways.

² American Hospital Association, "Housing and Health: A Roadmap for the Future," Chicago IL, online at <https://www.aha.org/system/files/media/file/2021/03/housing-and-health-roadmap.pdf> (as of June 2024).

³ ScienceDaily, "Walkable Neighborhoods can Reduce Prevalence of Obesity & Diabetes," online at <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/02/220224091123.htm> (as of June 2024).

4. ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD:

Land use controls can influence the availability of grocery stores with healthful foods, impacting dietary health and equity. Communities with limited access to grocery stores that offer fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious options often face higher rates of diet-related illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension. Food deserts, areas where healthy food options are scarce, disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities, exacerbating health disparities. Ensuring all communities have access to affordable, nutritious food can improve dietary habits and improve health outcomes.⁴

5. ENVIRONMENTAL COMFORT:

Excessive heat from direct sunshine on asphalt and concrete surfaces can be mitigated with tree canopy and greenery. An estimated 41 million Americans live in “heat islands,” putting them at greater risk of heat-related injuries and deaths, disproportionately affecting poorer neighborhoods.⁵

6. SAFETY:

Street design plays a critical role in providing protected pedestrian and bicycle routes and discouraging motor vehicles at unsafe speeds. Another factor related to safety is that older and poorly ventilated buildings can lead to unhealthful interior air quality, causing headaches and higher asthma rates. Air quality is also influenced by proximity to freeways and other places where pollution is concentrated. Pollution contains harmful chemicals that can penetrate the lungs and contribute to health problems, including eye, throat, and nose irritation, heart and lung disease, and cancer.

⁴ US Dept. of Health & Human Services, “Access to Foods that Support Healthy Dietary Patterns,” Washington DC, online at <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/access-foods-support-healthy-dietary-patterns> (as of June 2024).

⁵ Climate Central, “Urban Heat Hot Spots,” Princeton NJ, online at <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/urban-heat-islands-2023> (as of June 2024).

1.5 Plan Organization and Summary

Every objective and policy in this Plan has been considered from a health and equity perspective through analysis and community engagement – metrics which were determined by the Implementation Committee at the start of this planning process. As the Plan was developed, the Implementation Committee and its subcommittees assessed the performance of draft objectives and policies as they relate to air quality, environmental comfort, access to food, housing burden, access to jobs, safety, and land use.

The Tower District Specific Plan contains the following chapters after this introduction.

CHAPTER 2: CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Tower District's built character is cherished by its community and embodies periods of historic growth, such walkable streetcar suburban tracts developed in the early 20th century. In response to development in the latter half of the 20th century, which was oriented to the car and disrupted the District's character, the 1991 Plan emphasized conservation and historic preservation. This Plan maintains this important focus.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

The land use chapter considers how land should be used in the Tower District. It sets parameters regarding allowable activities and the character of new development. The land use chapter established a framework for how the District should work to manifest community aspirations and better address community needs.

CHAPTER 4: PARKS AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

Parks and other public facilities, like schools, support community life and contribute to the physical and psychological well-being of those who frequent the District. In this chapter, the Plan describes how parks and other public facilities should be improved through physical improvements and programming activities.

CHAPTER 5: CIRCULATION

The Tower District’s street infrastructure provides access and mobility across its principal transportation modes: driving, walking, bicycling, and using transit. The circulation chapter explains how streets should work to move people and goods, while they also serve to support community life as vital public spaces. The chapter focuses on circulation across the overall street network and the design of streets themselves.

CHAPTER 6: UTILITIES

Existing utility infrastructure is currently in place - no new policies were needed for this plan, however, a more detailed description of existing utilities will be included in the final plan.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following high-level principles that guide the Specific Plan's policy approach and should remain always in view throughout implementation. Some of these principles remain in place from the 1991 Tower District Specific Plan, representing continuity of values and needs.

-  Enhance the **livability and social diversity** of the Tower District's residential neighborhoods, and create housing opportunities that make the District inclusive and welcoming.
-  Nurture the mutually supportive relationship between the Tower District's residential neighborhoods and **vibrant commercial areas**.
-  Conserve and revitalize the Tower District's **historic resources**.
-  Shape the **character of new development** to complement the Tower District's character as a walkable place not dominated by the automobile.
-  Provide **effective transportation access** for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users, and emphasize the importance of pedestrian-friendly environments.
-  Increase **opportunities for recreation** within walking distance of Tower District residents.
-  Promote **environmental sustainability and climate resilience**.

02

**CONSERVATION
AND HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**

CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

2.1 Historic Context

The Tower District is an exemplary representation of a longstanding pre-World War streetcar suburb. The District began to develop in the early part of the 20th century as one of Fresno's first suburbs, facilitated by streetcar lines that extended from Downtown Fresno and provided access to what was once farmland at the edge of the city.

When the Fresno Traction Company's streetcars extended into the area, a mix of apartment houses, small bungalows, and large homes evolved. As property values rose, the neighborhood became denser and more diverse, and commercial areas were established in locations near streetcar service.



Historic streetcar running along Fulton Street
Source: *Interurbans Publications*



Commercial storefront with big windows to engage pedestrians
Source: *Fresno Bee Editorial Archives*

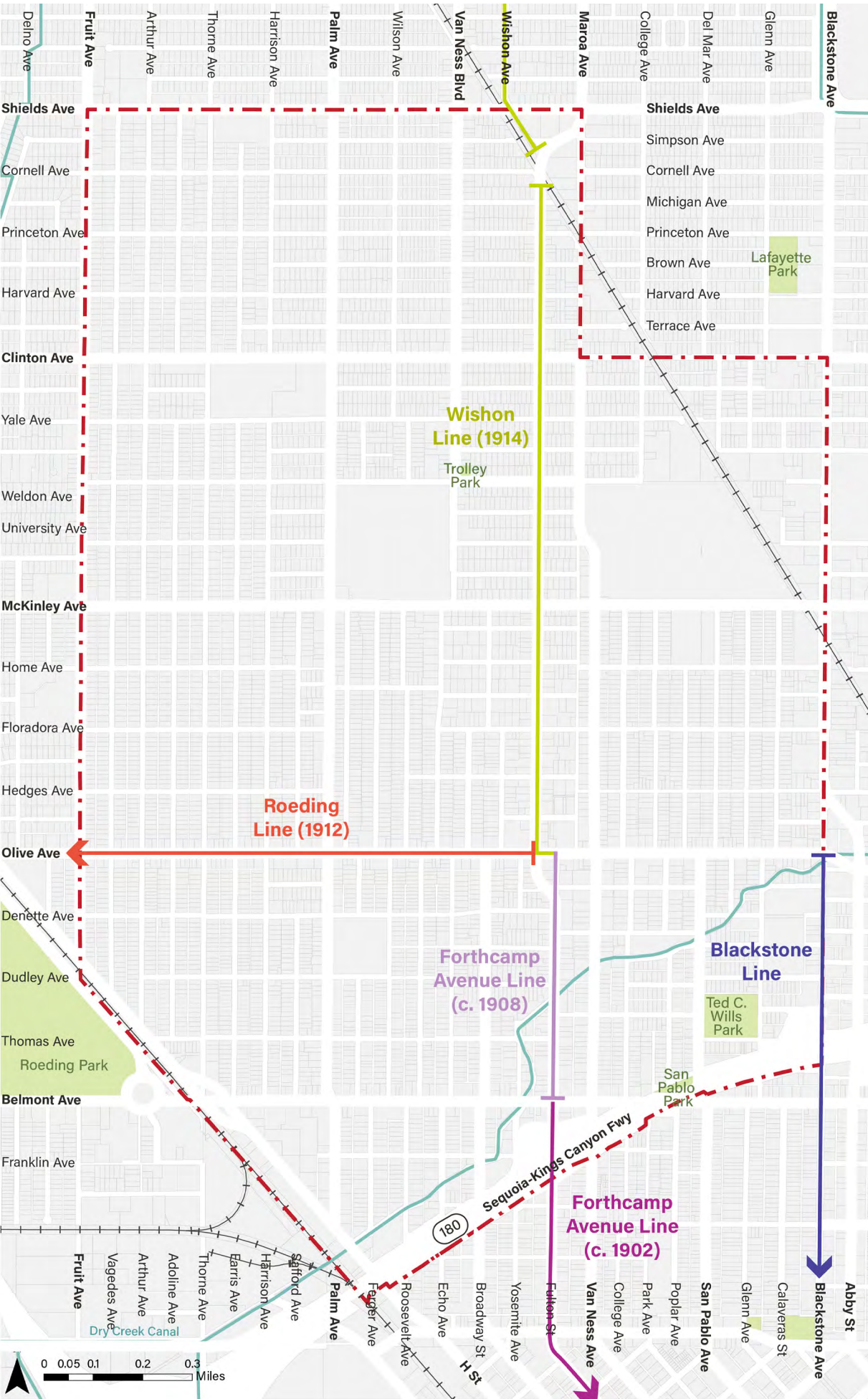


Royce Hall, Fresno High in 1906s



Van Ness Boulevard
Source: *Wayne Paperboy & Printing Corp.*

FIGURE 2.1 | Historic Streetcar Lines in Tower District





Tower Theater

During the decades after World War II, conventions in development and neighborhood design changed dramatically. As emphasis shifted from streetcars and pedestrians to the automobile, traditional building style changed from street-facing patterns to parking lots which lined public streets, changing the District's character. The Tower District remained resilient, as the walkable traditional fabric of the District remained mostly intact.

Against this backdrop, Tower District community members organized to protect the District's traditional fabric – beginning in the 1980s and leading to the adoption of the District's first Specific Plan in 1991. Community member involvement – and strong interest in the area's history and historic preservation – continues to this day.

As if anticipated by the 1991 Specific Plan, cities across the country experienced a renaissance during recent decades. In many cities, downtowns and more urban neighborhoods gained population for the first time since the 1940s, as people increasingly valued traditional architecture and walkable neighborhood design. In the Tower District, new shops and restaurants appeared, and homes and apartment houses were renovated. The area began to host special events and blossomed into an important cultural center for Fresno.

Preservation and use of historic resources are important in the following ways:

- Preservation helps to retain a community's distinct character and sense of place and creates ties with the past that speak of other times and cultural roots.
- Conserving existing buildings can be part of a "green" strategy, as preservation and rehabilitation are more sustainable than new construction and keep demolition waste out of landfills.
- Preservation is good for the economy and for property values because it stimulates reinvestment.
- Older buildings tend to offer distinctive retail experiences with special facade character, taller ceiling heights, and deeper retail space.
- Older buildings provide much of Tower District's affordable housing.

In a 2023 survey **99 percent** of respondents said it is important to preserve and protect historic buildings and resources in the Tower District.

Preserving architecture in the Tower District holds significant value.

I'm proud to continue the care of my 1924 California adobe and count it a responsibility to the neighborhood to do so.

Historical preservation is very important to retain the rich character of the district.

TOP COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR PRESERVATION

- More art and history focus
- Reuse existing buildings
- Maintain historic quality of neighborhood

2.2 Historic Survey and Resource Protection

The Tower District has an exemplary heritage of buildings and site features from the early decades of the 20th century. Much of their scale, massing, and visual character remains. Some older buildings and other features have been formally designated as local landmarks and some are listed in the national Historic Register. See Figure 2-2 for historic resources and districts located in the Tower District.

A survey of historic resources was a principal focus of the 1991 Specific Plan, which evaluated and catalogued structures and site features of historical importance. This work draws attention to not only the age and architectural merit of structures, but also identifies building types and arrangements characteristic of Tower District's initial development during the first three decades of the 20th century, such as single-family bungalows, courtyard arrangements, and street-facing commercial buildings. The 1991 historic survey continues to guide planning decisions and protect resources. The online "Guide to Historic Architecture in Fresno"⁹ may be referred to for more information about specific resources.

2.3 Historic Districts and Statements of Significance

The cityscape of the Tower District contains numerous and diverse subareas. Some of them have a strong visual identity from noticeable concentrations of historic buildings. The 1991 survey was also used to consider clustered ensembles of historic buildings for inclusion within designated historic districts, as distinctive subareas illustrate District history and patterns of neighborhood life. The planning area includes two formally designated historic districts: Porter Tract and Wilson Island.

⁹ <https://historicfresno.org/>



Porter Tract



Wilson Island



Wilson's North Fresno Tract

The 1991 historic resources survey delineated six subareas as historic district candidates that, taken together, represent a cross-section of Tower District's history and architecture. Some districts present a great deal of architectural variety, while others are unified instead by their concentration of structures representing a distinct building type or a unique facet of urban growth. Some subareas are determined by the boundaries of original subdivisions. Of the six noteworthy subareas, two historic districts were subsequently designated: Porter Tract (also known as College Addition) and Wilson Island (a portion of Wilson's North Fresno Tract). Four subareas remain under consideration: the remainder of Wilson's North Fresno Tract, Terrace Gardens, Adoline-Palm, and Lower Fulton - Van Ness.

Porter Tract. Porter Tract was designated as an historic district in 2001. Largely built by contractor John G. Porter, development began around 1914-1915 and was encouraged by construction of the Fresno Normal School (now Fresno City College) and Fresno High School, at its edges. The Porter Tract contains a diverse collection of architectural styles including Prairie Style, Spanish Revival, Neoclassical, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Italian Renaissance, and Craftsman. (Adapted from "A Guide to Historic Architecture in Fresno.")

Wilson Island. Wilson Island comprises six westerly blocks within Wilson's North Fresno Tract. Homes in Wilson Island date from 1910, and include among the finest examples of Period Revival and Prairie architecture in Fresno. This historic district was settled by many of Fresno's most influential families, with important ties to banking, architecture, and commerce. Many of the homes were designed by influential architects of the period.

Wilson's North Fresno Tract. George D. Wilson's North Fresno Tract subdivision is an 18-block area in the geographical heart of the Tower District. The historic district includes many of the historic structures identified in the survey and captures many of the characteristics associated with the Tower District, perhaps most notably the 1926 Tower Theatre and the Tract's substantial porch-front homes and bungalows. Opening in 1912, the Roeding streetcar line helped to make development feasible and first anchored the commercial district centered at Olive and Wishon. Retail commercial architecture of this period is referred to as "showcase architecture," in light of its extensive use of storefront glazing and prominent display areas.

Sources: <https://historicfresno.org/>

FIGURE 2.2 | Historic Resources and Districts





Terrace Gardens



Adoline-Palm



Lower Fulton - Van Ness

Terrace Gardens. This potential historic district illustrates the kind of suburban growth that typified the Tower District following development farther south. Original well-crafted homes are largely intact and expressed in a variety of styles, but perhaps most notably those which employ Mediterranean motifs.

Adoline-Palm. Adoline-Palm is a potential historic district that includes blocks where the bungalow building type is highly concentrated. Most of the bungalows in this area date from the 1910's and 1920's, during a time where they represented an important form of moderate-cost housing in Fresno. More than other parts of the Tower District, the bungalows on these blocks remain in much of their original condition and are interrupted by relatively few contrasting housing types. Their modest character stands in contrast to the wealthier neighborhoods that developed to the north.

Lower Fulton-Van Ness. Situated just north of Fresno's original city grid, the Lower Fulton – Van Ness area possesses an outstanding collection of late 19th-century and early 20th-century housing types ranging from two-room cottages to some of Fresno's best-known mansions. In 1902, the Fresno City Railway Company opened its Forthcamp Avenue line, thereby tying the newer suburban additions north of town to the original Fresno city grid and helping engender a building boom there that continued at least until the advent of the First World War. Forthcamp Avenue (later renamed North Fulton Street) and North Van Ness Avenue have long served as entry corridors from Downtown Fresno into the Tower District. The potential historic district is characterized by vibrant single-family estates in the Greek Revival and Craftsman styles, as well as bungalow neighborhoods, worker cottages, and streets edged by commercial storefronts.

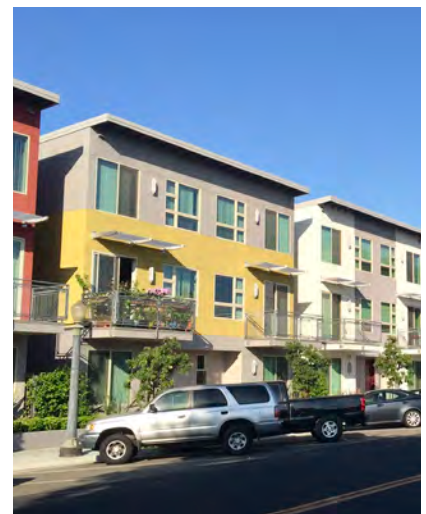
Courts Thematic Group. One additional historic type was described in the 1991 Plan and deserves mention. The Courts Thematic Group was defined by the construction of bungalow courts in locations throughout Tower District. First developed on the West Coast around 1910, the bungalow court arranged separate dwellings around a central open space. While many courtyard buildings were comprised of simple cottages, some were designed in the Art Deco and Moderne architectural styles that were fashionable in the 1930s.

2.4 Compatible Infill Development

The character of new development needs to be considered through the lens of human-focused design and its emphasis on walkability. This character is embodied by Tower District's traditional urban fabric, built at a time when walking and streetcar use were principal modes for getting around. Generally, older commercial buildings have ground floors that front directly onto public sidewalks and maintain a continuous intimate pedestrian scale, in contrast to more recent auto-oriented development where commercial entrances face parking lots and are farther from the street. Older residences also have street-facing entrances and are accompanied by covered porches and landscaped yards. Street-facing windows also accompany traditional buildings and give a sense of safety and inhabitation.

Newer infill development can continue these development patterns in ways that help activate streets and other public spaces and support community life, as new buildings house more residents who add vitality and help support the local shops that people enjoy walking to. Infill development can fill gaps in otherwise continuous streetscapes and heal scars imposed by vacant and underutilized properties.

Additionally, infill development can reinforce the District's historic sense of place. New construction can complement historic districts by using compatible materials, massing, entry patterns, fenestration, cornice lines, roof form, architectural motif, and setback continuity.



Context-sensitive new development in and near Tower District includes The Link at Blackstone (left) and Fulton Village (right).

2.5 Objectives and Policies

CHP 1: RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT THE TOWER DISTRICT'S HISTORIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY.

CHP 1.1 Develop a historic context statement for the Tower District.

A comprehensive historic context statement should be developed by a qualified cultural resource professional, which describes: the district's physical, social, and cultural development; identifies physical patterns associated with those developments; and recommends eligibility criteria and integrity thresholds for the designation of historic resources. The context statement should provide a consistent foundation for decisions about the identification, evaluation, and designation of historic properties in the community. The historic context statement should be developed in accordance with the standards and guidance provided by the National Park Service and the California Office of Historic Preservation. The historic context statement should be developed with the input of community members, local historic and cultural organizations, local social and educational institutions, and should consider the large body of previous historic resources studies developed for the City of Fresno, including studies within the Tower District.

Recognize that the historic context statement will be used to evaluate whether a potential historic resource should be designated, and that, by identifying character defining features within subdistricts, the statements can guide the development of context-appropriate development standards and guidelines. Also note that the historic context statement should address contributions by persons and populations that have previously been overlooked or marginalized, such as women, communities of color, and the LGBTQ+ community.

CHP 1.2 Protect the Tower District's cultural history and resources.

Using historic context statements as a guide, continue to apply standards and procedures that regulate the alteration of designated historic resources, whether buildings and/or site features, and seek to prevent their loss. Encourage the character of infill development to be compatible within its historic context.

Consider the adoption of context-appropriate design standards, in recognition that some new housing projects may not be exempt from

discretionary review. Note that incompatible new construction could distract from historic buildings, especially when adjacent to historic buildings, and could alter the character within historic districts. Also reinforce the historic character of the Tower District public streets and open spaces, by establishing design standards for features like lighting, furnishings, trees, and landscape.

CHP 1.3 Conduct new historic resources survey(s) of the Tower District.

Update historic resource surveys for the area. An updated historic resource survey should be used to establish a new baseline for historic preservation within the Tower District.

CHP 1.4 Revive designation efforts for previously proposed historic districts.

The 1991 Tower District Specific Plan proposed several areas as potential historic districts that have not been formally listed or designated in the intervening years. The identified potential historic districts include:

- Adoline-Palm District (proposed)
- Terrace Gardens District (proposed)
- Wilson's North Fresno Tract District (proposed)
- Lower Fulton-Van Ness (proposed)
- Bungalow Court District (proposed)
- Area bounded by Olive and Van Ness, down to Elizabeth and San Pablo - east of Van Ness
- South of Belmont, West of Broadway

Prioritize these areas for historic resource surveys and the evaluation of designated and potential resources, to provide for their potential designation as historic districts.

CHP 1.5 Evaluate designation of potential resources in the public right of way.

Using historic resource survey(s) and community engagement for guidance, identify and evaluate public realm design elements that

may be eligible for historic designation. These elements should be researched for their historic significance and, if eligible, nominated for designation accordingly. Elements located in the Tower District that have been discussed as potential resources include but are not limited to the following:

- Historic hitching posts
- Van Ness Avenue “pineapple” streetlights
- Historic signage
- Sidewalk WPA stamps
- Stone gateway features on Palm and Van Ness

CHP 1.6 Highlight assets important to community identity

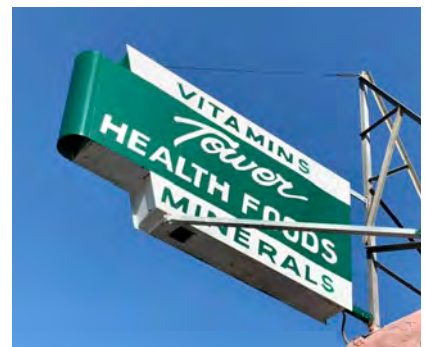
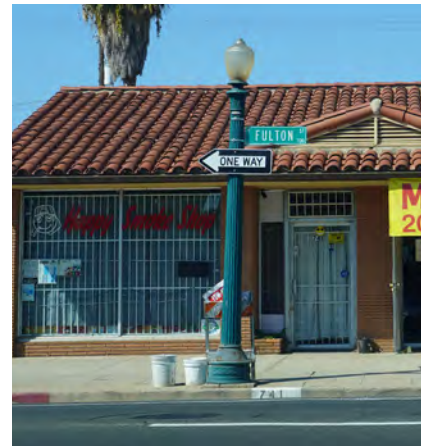
Buildings, structures, objects, and sites that are not eligible for listing or designation as historic resources may still contribute to the character and identity of the community. These can include:

- Buildings that house or once housed long-term local businesses or institutions.
- Neighborhood-serving commercial nodes such as Weldon and Echo avenues near Fresno High School, the intersection of Van Ness and Floradora (Van Ness Village), and Fulton Street (south of Olive).
- Street features such as streetlights, street signs, street trees, sidewalk parkways, and street medians not distinguished as historically significant.
- Recognize historic businesses and institutions which continue to operate in the district.

These and other features may be highlighted using signage, maps, online resources, walking tours or other means..

CHP 1.7 Elevate the visibility of historic elements in the Tower District.

Actively promote historic resources in the Tower District through walking tours, brochures, online resources, interpretive signage, plaques and displays. Use the District’s rich history as a draw for economic activity, including historic tourism, and community enjoyment.



Some public realm design elements such as stone gateway features and "pineapple" street lights may be eligible for historic designation. Street signs and other features important to community identity should also be celebrated.

CHP 1.8 Heritage Trust and Historic Preservation Fund.

Study the creation of a City of Fresno Heritage Trust and Historic Preservation Fund to support acquisition, rehabilitation, and maintenance of historic resources. Evaluate the feasibility of a right-of-first refusal program for the Trust to acquire historic properties.

CHP 1.9 Historic museum

Consider supporting the establishment of a museum in the Tower District, representing the Tower District, using a historic building or building as an interactive place of learning.


**CHP 2: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE NEIGHBORHOOD
CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS.**
CHP 2.1 Provide historic preservation information, training and accountability.

Provide information and training to help community members, new buyers, real estate professionals, government officials, staff, and other stakeholders to better understand the benefits, responsibilities, and potential difficulties of owning and managing historic properties. Work to preserve historic properties that have fallen into disrepair due to the neglect of their owners. Information readily available and helpful to community members should include the following:

- Basics regarding historic context, significance, integrity, and eligibility for historic listing on both local and national registers.
- Processes and requirements for nomination and designation of historic resources.
- Conformance with existing preservation standards and guidelines.
- Available preservation incentives including Mills Act contracts, use of the California Historic Building Code, and technical assistance.
- Environmental benefits of reusing existing materials and infrastructure.
- Potential economic benefits of preservation, by creating new

opportunities for education, cultural activities, and a recognizable destination.

- Education to City leaders, community members, real estate professionals and other stakeholders on the value of historic preservation.

CHP 2.2 Protect and maintain existing character-defining streetscape elements.

Provide protection and maintenance, including replacement when necessary, of existing character-defining streetscape elements such as streetlights, tree lawns, and street trees in addition to elements as referenced in CHP 1.5. Consider reinstallation of elements that have been removed such as granite curbs, "pineapple" streetlights and other features.

CHP 2.3 Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in historic properties

Work with the Historic Preservation Commission and the Tower Design Review Committee to create ADU design standards to maintain ADU compatibility within historic districts.

CHP 2.4 Affordable housing

Work with affordable housing developers to consider acquiring historic and/or vacant buildings for the creation of affordable, multifamily housing through appropriate modernization and adaptive reuse.



CHP 3: USE ZONING AND DESIGN STANDARDS TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER.

CHP 3.1 Refine design standards.

Work with the Historic Preservation Commission and the Tower Design Review Committee to craft design standards and guidelines as may be used for historic properties, districts and renters. Recognize that California law has eliminated discretionary authority over the review of qualifying multifamily housing and residential solar projects and that, in such instances, objective standards may be needed to maintain compatibility.

CHP 3.2 Pedestrian-oriented commercial development.

Restrict opportunities for development of suburban-style, strip commercial uses. Establish development standards that support the creation of new and maintenance of existing pedestrian-oriented storefronts, by regulating ground-level use, entry, and window patterns.

CHP 3.3 Encourage the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

Continue to establish streamlined approval processes, clear standards, guidance, and example plans for the reuse of historic buildings to allow alterations that maintain the building's historic significance and integrity. Standards should address typical reuse strategies such as additions to historic buildings, adaptive reuse of historic buildings for new uses, conversion of historic single-family properties for multi-family use, and the construction of ADUs. These standards can be tailored to specific property types within the Tower District.

CHP 3.4 When necessary, pursue Code Enforcement to ensure historic resources are adequately maintained.
CHP 4: COORDINATE PLANS AND PROGRAMS OF THE TOWER DISTRICT AND DOWNTOWN FRESNO TO EMPHASIZE THE HISTORIC CONNECTION.
CHP 4.1 Connection to Downtown.

In all facets of development including streetscape, land-use and urban form, reinforce the historic relationship between Fulton and Van Ness Corridor and Downtown, through building form, street design, and signage.





Old Administration Building, Fresno City College



03

LAND USE

LAND USE

3.1 Role of Land Use Planning

Land use planning establishes standards for types, uses and activities, as well as their relative intensity and density, in the context of a community's values and needs. Land use policies and regulations are used to avoid potential conflicts and provide community benefits. They provide a valuable tool for addressing a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Land use intersects with all other aspects of the urban environment, from transportation to housing, economic development, infrastructure, and urban design.

In this Specific Plan, the land use map and objectives and policies help achieve the community's desired character, diverse and affordable housing, commercial activity, industrial employment and compatibility, recreation and education and economic development and feasibility.

3.2 Local Setting



Pedestrian oriented commercial use



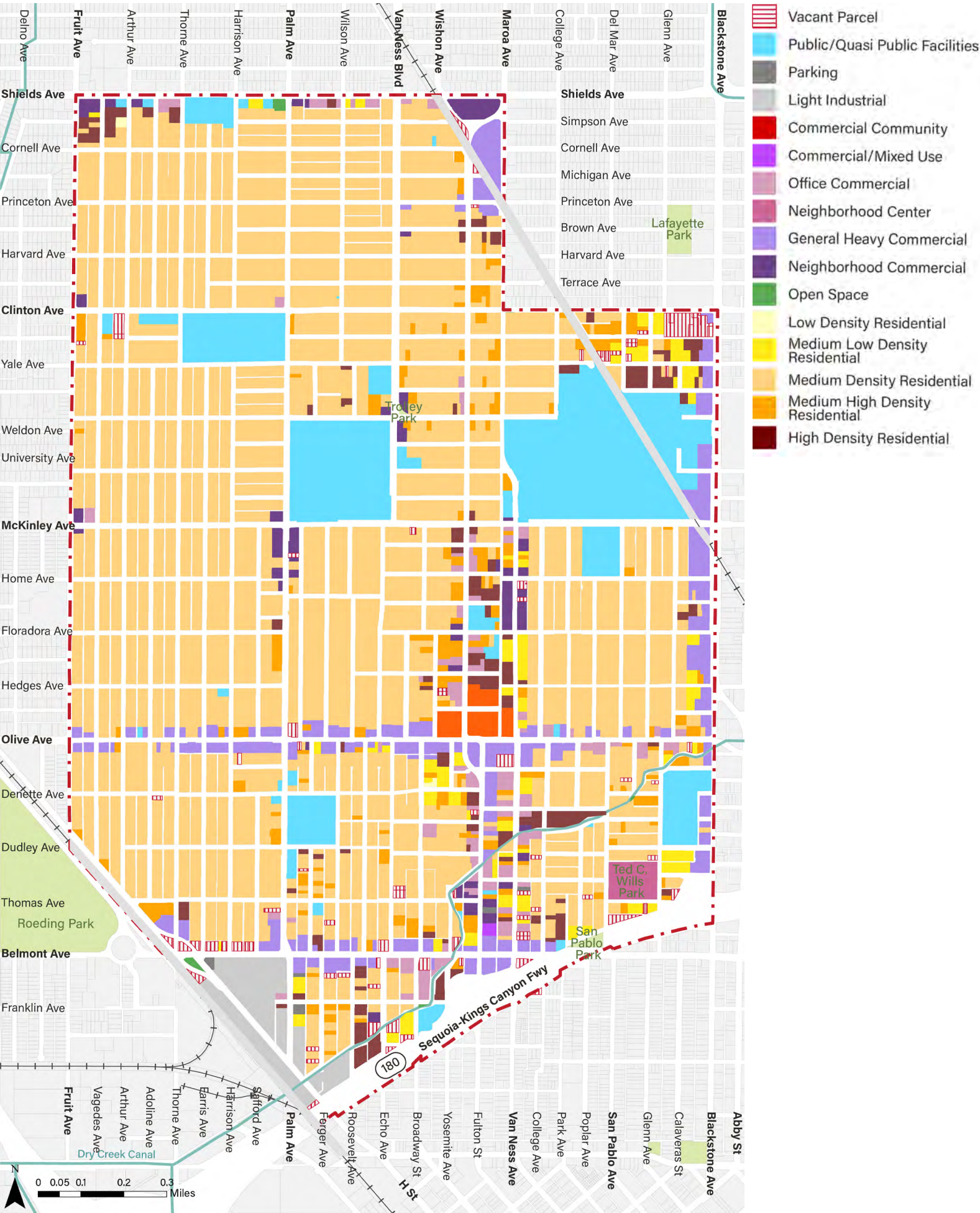
Auto-oriented commercial use

Land use patterns in the Tower District are typical of American streetcar suburbs. Residents would walk to streetcar stops on foot, so residential growth was compact. Because residents converged at stops along the streetcar line, commercial development coalesced in those locations and formed Tower District's commercial corridors along Fulton, Olive, Belmont, Wishon, and Blackstone. Some of the buildings with commercial uses were accompanied by upstairs apartments that provided workforce housing.

Single-family residential uses comprise over half of the District's land area. Detached single-family homes are situated on lots that are typically 5,000 to 8,000 square feet -- about 5 to 8 dwelling units per net acre. In the Tower District, most residential neighborhoods have houses and multifamily buildings whose principal entrances and porches face the street. Some commercial streets retain their original pattern, with storefronts along the edge of public sidewalks. The walkability that accompanied this period of streetcar suburb development has left a legacy of livability that is enjoyed today.

Over time, many parcels with pedestrian-oriented commercial uses were redeveloped to make way for auto-oriented commercial developments that put parking lots near the street and position building entrances to face the parking lots. Parking lots generally comprise more than half of auto-oriented sites, which results in lower development intensity than pedestrian-oriented commercial.

FIGURE 3.1 | Existing Land Use



Public uses also serve the area. Fresno High School stands near the geographic center of the planning area. Fresno City College occupies a large site east of the high school. The Tower District also has four public elementary schools: Hamilton, Heaton, Muir, and Dailey Charter School.

The District has a number of parks and recreation sites, including Ted C. Wills Community Center, San Pablo Park and Trolley Park. The Tower District is also served by parks outside of the District’s boundaries, with Roeding Regional Park to the west and Lafayette Park to the east. The Parks Master Plan identifies the District as lacking in adequate park land. (see Chapter 5, Parks and Public Facilities).

The Tower District also contains a cluster of light industrial uses along the southwest edge of the planning area adjacent to the Union Pacific Railroad. Some of the industrial uses are accompanied by railroad siding tracks showing the historic importance of railroad accessibility.

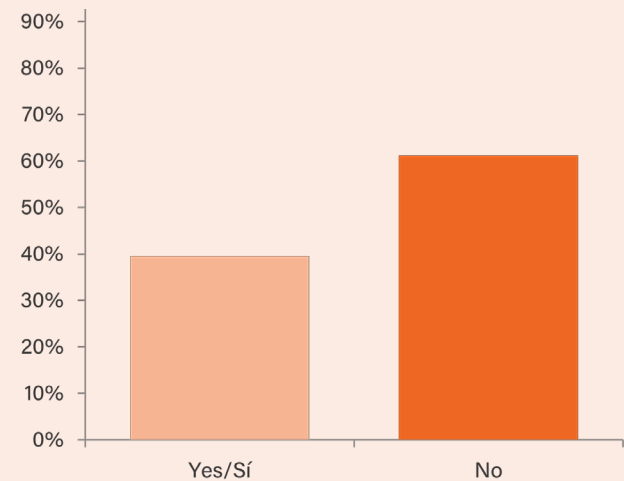
What We Heard

Community character was considered important by over 650 respondents to a 2023 survey:

73% of respondents saw the need to create an environment that promotes health and well-being.

58% saw the need to create more mixed-use development along “main streets.”

DO YOU THINK THERE IS ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE TOWER DISTRICT?



About **75%** respondents regularly travel outside of the area for **services** (medical, dental, auto service, childcare, postal services, education and for **healthy food** options.

TOP COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR HOUSING AND BUSINESSES

- Grocery store/ healthy food access
- Public restrooms
- Non-bar late night gathering spots
- Focus on local businesses
- Affordable housing/ housing programs for new homeowners
- Limit investment purchases of homes/ require buyers to live in their homes
- Less smoke shops and liquor stores
- Streamline permitting to encourage small business
- More high density and mid density housing

3.3 Community Character

A principal challenge for the Tower District is how to retain its character, while promoting new investment. New development along commercial corridors can present favorable opportunities to strengthen those streets' economic health and vitality, and reinforce nodes where activity is concentrated. "Missing middle" multifamily housing can maintain the scale of the district, while increasing housing supply and affordability. Community character also depends on the design and arrangement of buildings, especially whether the building fronts with entrances and windows line public streets.

The following sections summarize this Plan's intentions for land use in the Tower District and relate to Figure 3-2: Planned Land Use and Figure 3-3: Planned Overlay Districts.

Community oriented commercial development and "missing middle" housing in Tower District



FIGURE 3.2 | Planned Land Use

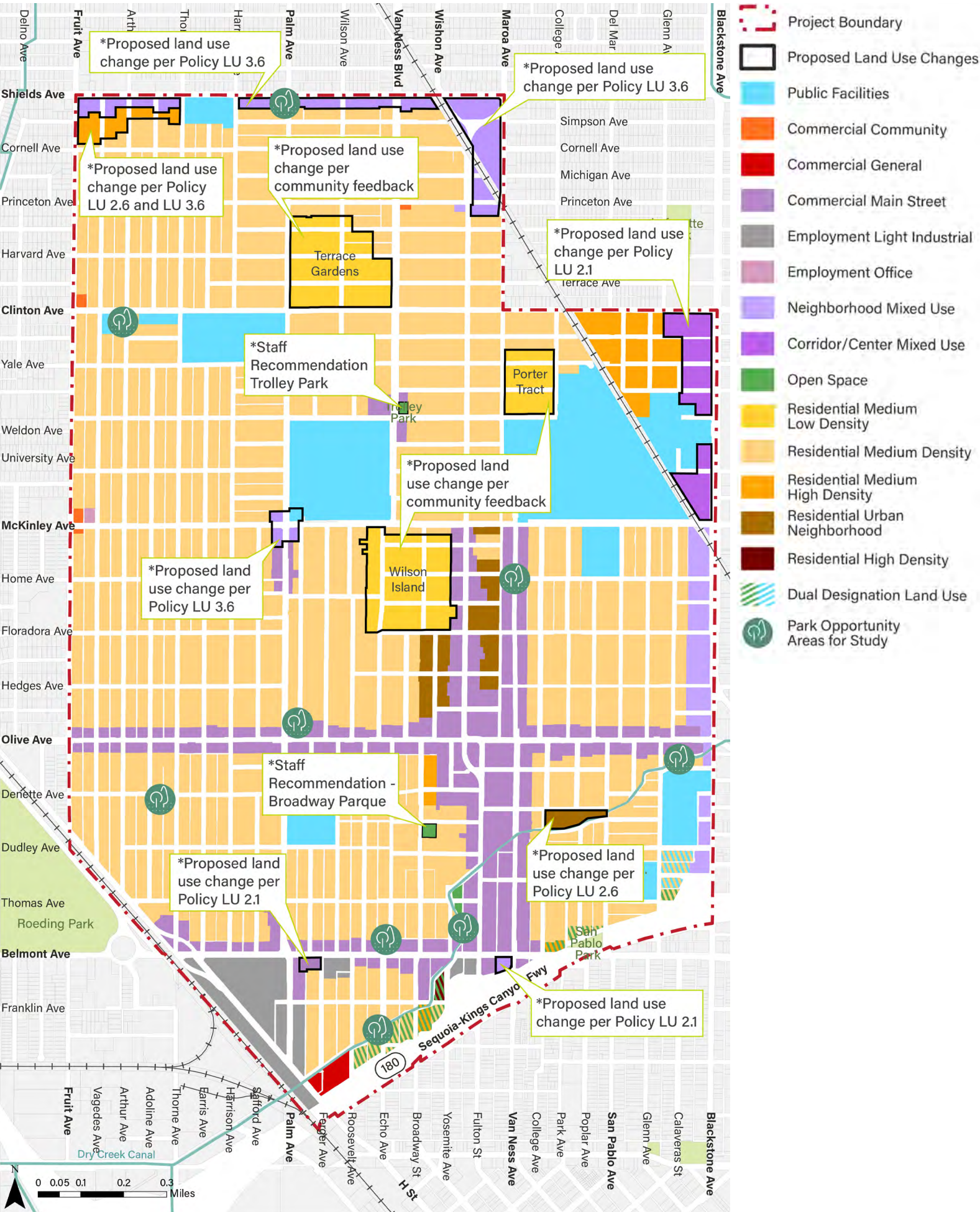
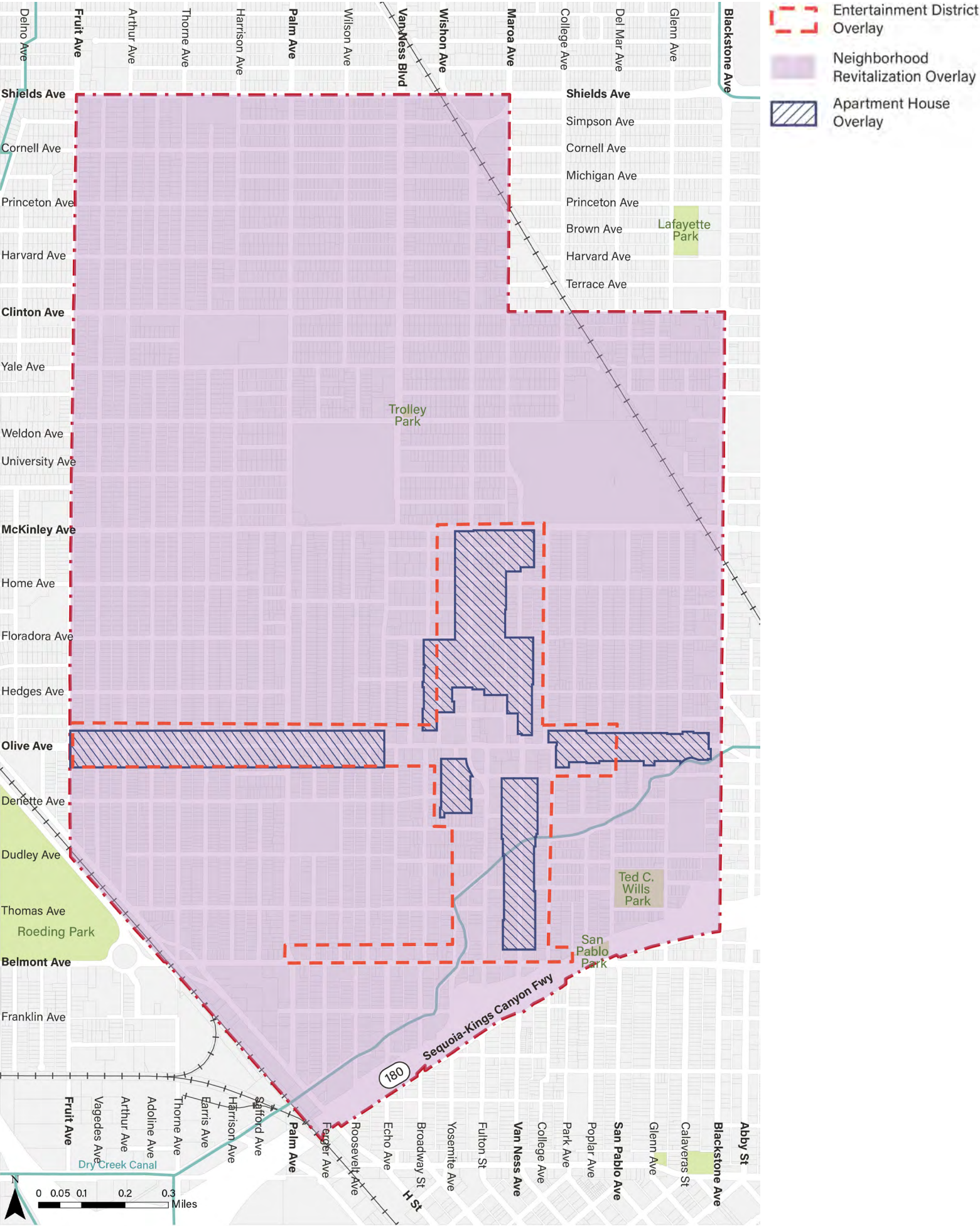


FIGURE 3.3 | Planned Overlay Districts



3.4 Diverse and Affordable Housing

Housing addresses the human need for shelter and is foundational to more livable neighborhoods. Household needs and preferences vary, as do wealth and income – highlighting the need for a diversity of housing options. Affordable housing addresses challenges that arise when existing housing is in limited supply relative to demand, and costs of developing new housing are high.

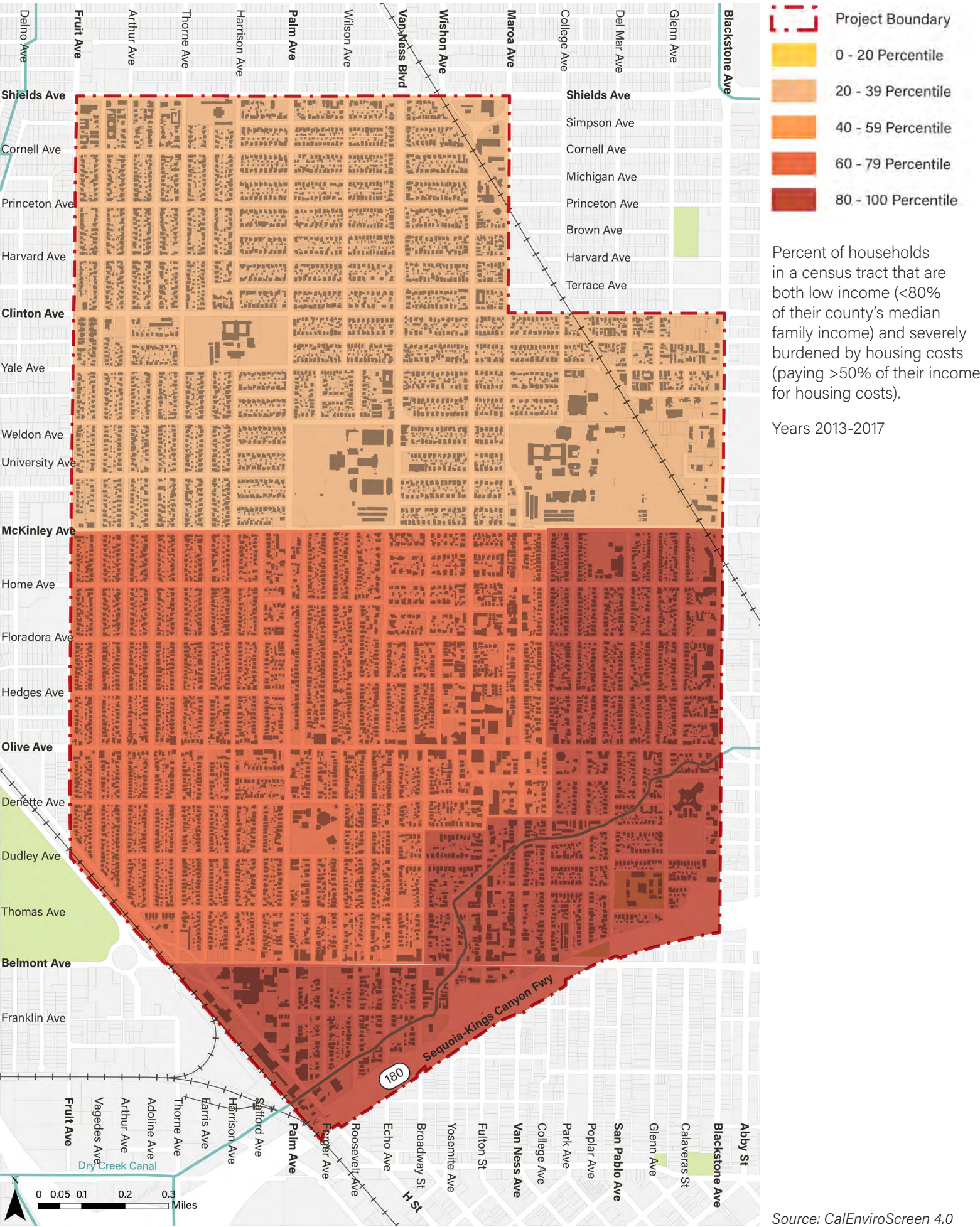
In response, the predominance of single-family housing in the Tower District may need to be balanced with the creation of more multi-family dwelling units and “missing-middle” housing. Missing-middle housing describes multi-family housing types that are comparable in scale with larger single-family homes. Varieties include duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, courtyard apartments, bungalow courts, townhouses, multiplexes, and live/work units.

Housing at higher densities is more affordable by design, and is also important in that it provides patrons who support the local shops and services that residents can walk to. Housing also activates communities with around-the-clock presence.

Diverse multi-family housing options available in Tower District.



FIGURE 3.4 | Low Income Housing Burden





Mardi Gras parade along Olive Avenue



Van Ness Village

3.5 Commercial Activity

Tower District's merchants, restaurateurs, and cultural venues are integral to community life. Most are small business entrepreneurs who attract patrons for the goods and services provided, but also because they help create a positive sidewalk experience. The availability of local commercial destinations makes the District more walkable and pleasurable, and contributes to the District's sense of place.

Businesses benefit from having continuous storefronts along the District's "main streets." The Specific Plan's Commercial Main Street (CMS) land use and zoning designation requires ground-floor commercial uses in the heart of Tower District's commercial nodes, while the AH (Apartment House) Overlay zoning designation allows multifamily development without ground-floor commercial in locations where greater flexibility is needed.

At the same time, Tower merchants and residents would benefit from business attraction. Business attraction often includes programs, like sidewalk cleaning and shared marketing programs, and physical improvements, like enhanced streetscapes and wayfinding signage. Local residential growth helps to support business attraction as well, by adding to the pool of patrons from which businesses can draw.

The heart of the Tower District is in its lively entertainment district, centered along Olive Avenue near Wishon, where the Tower Theatre stands. The 761-seat theater hosts film screenings, concerts, and community events. The entertainment district around it offers restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and specialty shops like art galleries and vintage clothing stores. Several events bring the community together in celebration and attract visitors, including the Rogue Festival, the Fresno Film Festival, and the annual Pride and Mardi Gras parades.

The entertainment district's businesses, events, and lively atmosphere are community assets but can sometimes conflict with the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Because the district contains late-night uses (bars, nightclubs, etc.), some residents living in or near the entertainment district can experience noise and disruption. Varying last call and closing time regulations amongst businesses in the district make it difficult to regulate and enforce. Residents, visitors, and businesses in the entertainment district may benefit from other types of businesses coming to the area. Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) currently restrict the hours and uses of businesses in the District.

3.6 Industrial Employment and Compatibility

The Tower District's light industrial uses are clustered near the southwest boundary of the planning area. They bring economic vitality and employment opportunities to the community. Producers Dairy has been in the neighborhood for many decades since 1932; Producers Dairy, La Tapatia Tortilleria, and other industrial businesses are important to Fresno's economy and provide centrally-located jobs for Fresno residents, including many who live in the District – reinforcing a primary objective of the health and equity framework to provide access to jobs.

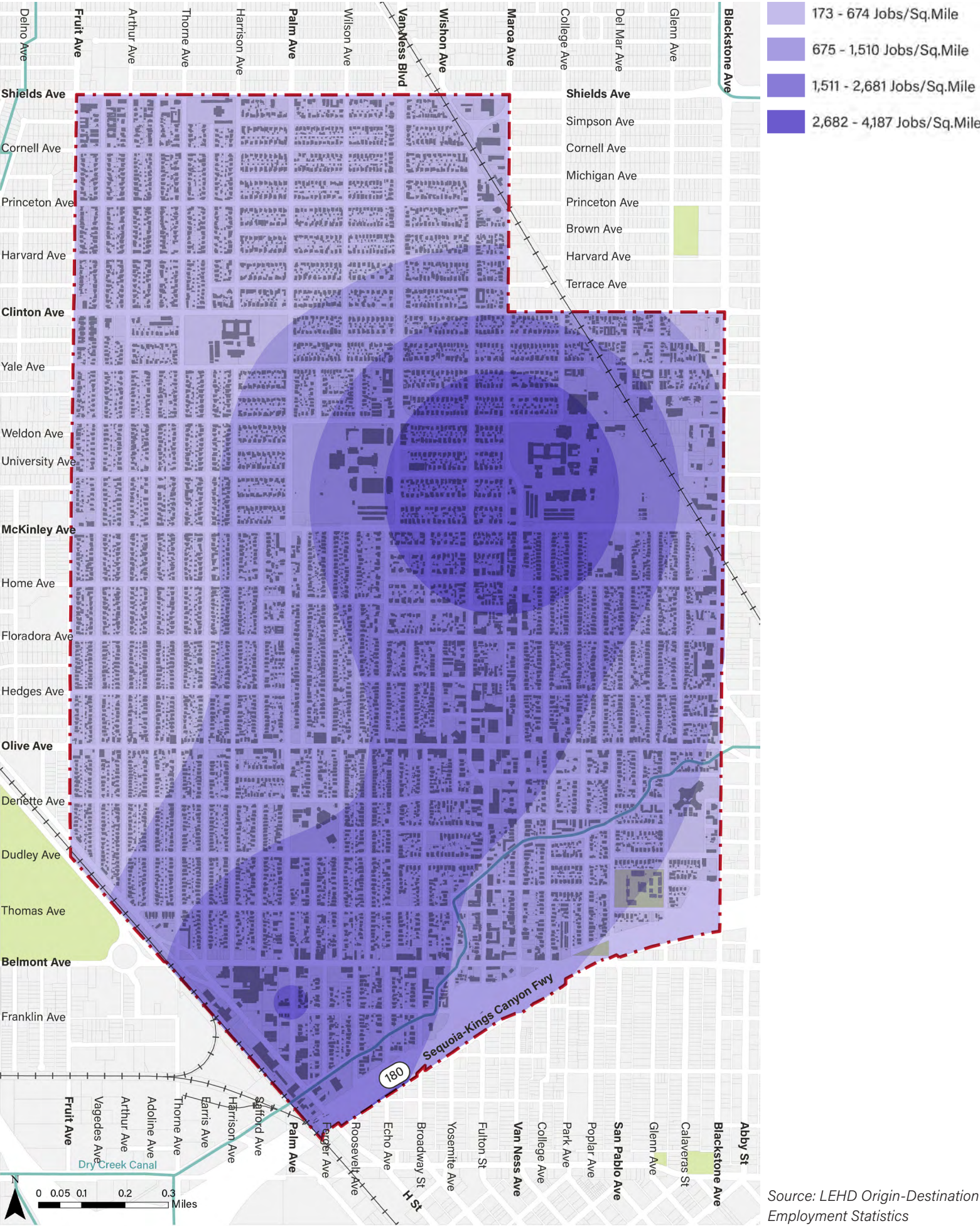
Grain silos in southwest corner of Tower District



Aerial view of industrial cluster in southwest corner of plan area



FIGURE 3.5 | Access to Jobs



3.7 Recreation and Education

Parks and schools play a vital role in the community. These land uses are addressed in Chapter 5, Parks and Public Facilities.

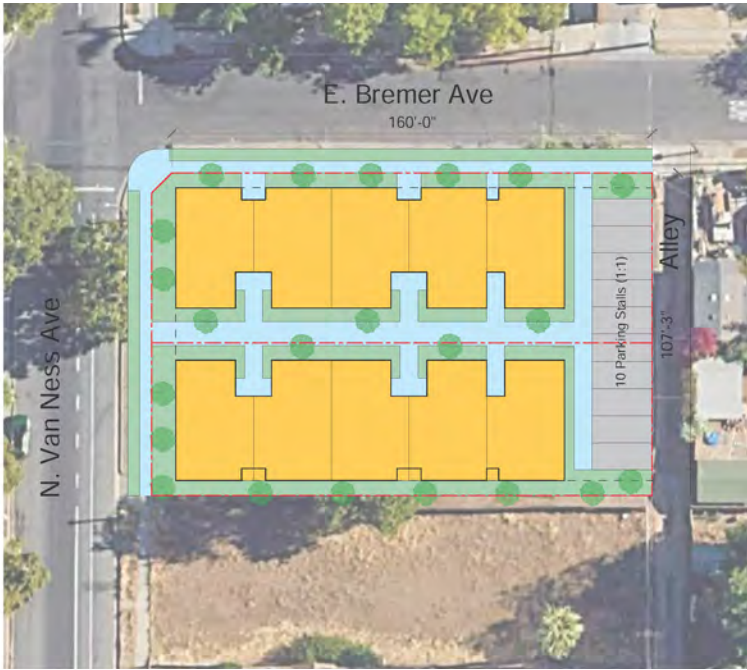
3.8 Development Opportunities and Feasibility

Retention of housing, employment and population growth will provide for the Tower District's continued vitality and help support its local shops, restaurants, and services. Underutilized sites, which tend to be concentrated along the District's commercial corridors, are prime candidates for investment and reinvestment. Enlarging existing buildings through adaptive re-use is an approach that allows development while reusing existing structures. Underutilized sites have buildings that are in poor condition or have low economic value. An Indicator of low economic value is when the assessed value of a building is low relative to land on which it sits.

While there are many benefits, attracting new development can be difficult, often inhibited by the high cost of labor and materials and the relatively lower value of land. Consequently, the financial feasibility of development projects - whether housing, commercial, or mixed use - deserves consideration as land use policy and development standards are crafted. Standards that influence development feasibility include density, floor area ratio, building height, on-site parking, on-site open space, and objective review procedures. To stimulate the production of affordable housing, California law addresses these factors by granting density bonuses for affordable housing, eliminating minimum parking requirements near high-quality transit, and mandating streamlined review of development applications.

Development feasibility is also influenced by site characteristics, such as location, lot size, street access, and land use adjacencies. To understand how these site characteristics might influence development in the context of Tower District, the Specific Plan process analyzed how infill development scenarios might be physically accommodated on representative sites. This "test fit" exercise also served to illustrate anticipated building types and hear community concerns regarding the character of infill development.

FIGURE 3.4 | Conceptual Development on Opportunity Sites - Typical Residential Infill Site



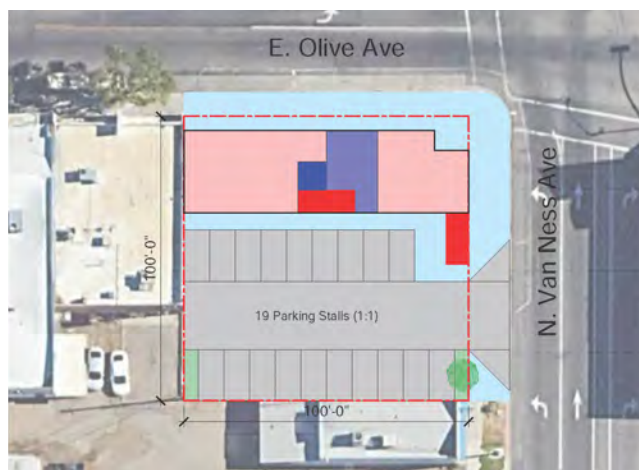
Townhouses and courtyard apartments were tested on a typical residential infill lot.

Ground Floor

FIGURE 3.5 | Conceptual Development on Opportunity Sites - Typical Mixed Use Infill Site



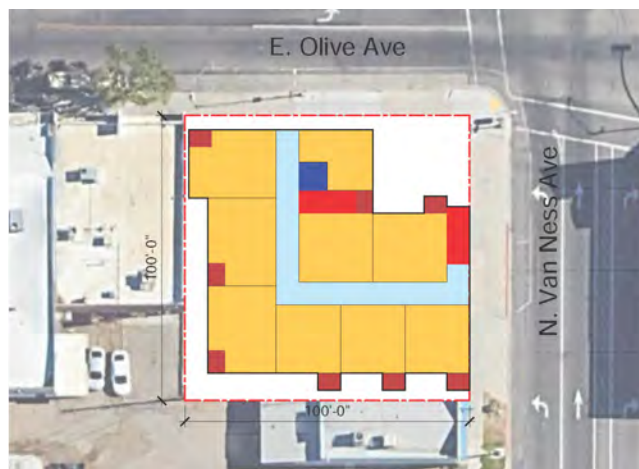
3- and 4-story mixed-use buildings were tested on a typical commercial corridor site.



Ground Floor



Second Floor



Third Floor



FIGURE 3.6 | Conceptual Development on Opportunity Sites - Blackstone Avenue



Ground Floor

Horizontal and vertical mixed-use site concepts were tested for a typical large site on Blackstone Avenue.

- Property Line
- Landscape
- Parking
- Circulation
- Residential
- Commercial
- Stairs



Second Floor

FIGURE 3.7 | Conceptual Development on Opportunity Sites - Creekside Site



Different site plans were tested that would create commercial and residential opportunities as well as access to Dry Creek.



Ground Floor



Second - Third Floor



FIGURE 3.8 | Conceptual Development on Opportunity Sites - Gateway Site



Podium Level

Multiple concepts were tested for potential redevelopment of a large site in a “gateway” location.



Second - Fourth Floor

Several plausible mixed-use and multi-family building types were considered, which along with streets and open spaces, are the building blocks of communities. These building types represent common ways to approach housing architecturally, and consider elements such as physical form, building entry and public-facing frontage, arrangement of on-site parking, and landscaped areas. Physical building form and on-site parking are principal determinants of density.

Common building types were designed for five development opportunity sites to which design studies considered two different building types on each site, as further described in Table 3-1 and Figures 3-7 through 3-12. The amount of development estimated by the design studies was used to evaluate financial feasibility. The financial feasibility analysis discovered the following for new development in the Tower District:

- **Residential ownership products**, both for-sale townhomes and bungalow court prototypes, appear to be marginally-to-likely financially feasible, as achievable sales prices in the Tower District are high enough to offset the development costs.
- **Multifamily rental products**, including 3-story walk-up apartments and 3- to 5-story podium apartments (where upper stories are constructed above a concrete podium for parking and street-facing storefronts), were estimated to be financially infeasible because construction and other development costs exceed what rental income would justify. As of 2024, walk-up and podium rental apartments would need significant financial subsidies to be developed.
- **Neighborhood-serving retail** - both single use and mixed-use projects, appeared to be financially infeasible because retail rents are not sufficient to offset the high costs of construction. As of 2024, neighborhood-serving retail would require significant subsidy for it to be developed.

High construction costs are tied to California's larger economy, while local rent revenues are modest compared with other California regions. Consequently, the Plan considers ways to cut development costs for desirable forms of development, while maintaining development quality and community character.

TABLE 3.1 | Common Building Types Illustrative of Development on Opportunity Sites

	Building Type (pedestrian-oriented)	Arrangement of Use (generalized)	Arrangement of Parking	Relative Density (du/ac) ¹⁰	Financial Feasibility
1	Duplex (2 units, 2 stories)	Attached or Stacked	Varies	15-20	Yes
2	Townhome (3+ units, 2 stories)	Attached Frontage faces Street or Paseo	Surface/Detached Garage/ Tuck Under Garage	20-25 25-30	Yes
3	Bungalow Court (6+ units, 2 stories)	Attached Frontage frames Courtyard	Surface/Detached Garage/ Tuck Under Garage	15-20 25-30	Yes
4	Small Multi-Plex (4-6 units, 2 stories)	Attached and Stacked “Big House” in Profile Frontage faces Street or Paseo	Surface/Detached Garage/ Tuck Under Garage	25-30 30-35	Not Studied
5	Garden Apartments (12+ units, 3 stories)	Attached and Stacked Frontage frames Paseo	Surface/Detached Garage/ Tuck Under Garage	20-25 30-35	Not Without Subsidy
6	Apartment Blocks (12+ units, 3 stories)	Attached and Stacked Frontage frames Paseo	Shared Parking Garage Structure	50-60	Not Without Subsidy
7	Podium Mixed Use (20+, 4 stories)	Attached and Stacked Over Concrete Parking Structure Frontage frames Paseo	Shared Parking Garage Structure	50-60	Not Without Subsidy
8	Commercial Shops (stand-alone & mixed-use)	Shops In Line, Facing Sidewalk	Behind, Below, To Side (with restrictions); or a Public Facility	N/A	Not Without Subsidy
9	Grocery Store	Small & Large Formats	Below, To Side	N/A	Not Studied

¹⁰ Higher density possible through dramatic reductions in on-site parking or small dwelling unit size.

3.9 Objectives and Policies

LU 1 MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TOWER DISTRICT AND ITS VARIOUS SUBDISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS.

LU 1.1 Require that new housing respects the character of existing housing stock.

Incorporate character-defining elements in development standards such as using similar materials, cadence/modulation, fenestration and entry patterns, cornice lines, massing, roof form, building "build-to lines," or architectural features and motifs.

LU 1.2 Implement code enforcement as violations occur, particularly as they relate to public safety and the condition of buildings and landscaping.



LU 2 RETAIN AND EXPAND THE EXISTING INVENTORY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE TOWER DISTRICT AND DISCOURAGE DISPLACEMENT OF ITS RESIDENTS.

LU 2.1 Promote mixed-use development along commercial corridors.

Along the Tower District's corridors, promote mixed-use development such that ground level commercial uses front onto public streets and sidewalks, while residential uses are located above commercial uses ("vertical mixed use") and/or are located behind commercial uses ("horizontal mixed use"). Specifically, enable high-intensity development along Blackstone Avenue between Clinton and McKinley. Emphasize commercial frontage where commercial frontage now exists and at intersections, such as to create a major mixed-use node at Shields and Maroa. Allow ground-floor residential in locations that are not adjacent or nearly adjacent to existing commercial frontage.

LU 2.2 Enable development of well-designed "missing middle" housing within single-family and other areas.

Allow small multiplex buildings with six or less units on infill sites where their massing can have a positive effect on "density tolerant" sites that

include street corners, along collector and arterial streets, adjacent to open space, and on larger properties where building mass can transition in scale to adjacent single-family homes.

LU 2.3 Discourage the redevelopment of existing residential uses for commercial-only development.

Do not allow auto-oriented uses, such as drive-through restaurants, and develop standards to minimize their disruption to walkability if they are conditionally allowed. Where residential units are lost to commercial development, require that new units replace not less than the number of units lost.

LU 2.4 Support reinvestment in older building stock to support affordability and maintain neighborhood character.

Provide building rehabilitation programs or encourage community land trusts (CLTs) and/or forms of collective ownership.

LU 2.5 Encourage the application of citywide anti-displacement policies within the Tower District.

Continue to work with residents to understand displacement as it occurs and how it can be better addressed. Consider strategies to strengthen neighborhood stabilization policies, such as establishing a local resource center to facilitate access to tenant protection and buying assistance programs.

LU 2.6 To be consistent with existing use, consider rezoning of existing legal non-conforming multi-family residential uses to the density-appropriate zoning district.

Rezone property with legally non-conforming multifamily residential uses to zoning consistent with the existing use, and encourage the current number of units and the mitigation of potential impacts on surrounding residential uses and require prior review and comment by the Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee and the Tower District Design Committee.



LU 3 ENCOURAGE APPROPRIATE MIXED-USE AND MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENT BY REDUCING OBSTACLES TO FEASIBILITY OF POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

LU 3.1 Streamline residential project review through the adoption of objective development standards and environmental clearance as required by California law.

LU 3.2 Consider regulatory changes to reduce costs and risks associated with mixed-use and multifamily development, such as to reduce parking requirements where justified by TDM measures (see Chapter 6) and anticipated parking demand, and provide greater flexibility in addressing private open space requirements.

New developments will be required to comply with Fresno Municipal Code parking standards and applicable State law.

LU 3.3 Consider ways to increase potential residential yields, such as by increasing allowable densities and building heights as appropriate.

Pursue increasing the allowable building height limits in the Commercial Main Street (CMS) and Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMX) Zone to 45 feet to allow three-story mixed-use buildings with sufficient ceiling height for ground-floor retail feasibility.

Consider the height of landmark structures (i.e. Tower Theatre) and incorporate transitional height requirements adjacent to those structures.

LU 3.4 Emphasize placemaking in Tower District.

Emphasize placemaking through development to make the Tower District a desirable place to live and invest in, such as to provide a mix of local commercial and cultural destinations, street-facing architecture, and character-defining elements that emulate the District's historic character. Also encourage public interventions that result in more pedestrian-friendly streets (see Chapter 5) and easy access to parks (see Chapter 4).

LU 3.5 Actively increase the affordable housing inventory in Tower District.

Continue to pursue potential funding sources for constructing affordable housing, such as government and philanthropic grants, and consider new programs to assist with development project financing, such as a revolving loan fund.

LU 3.6 Proactively identify underutilized parcels for affordable housing and mixed-use development where appropriate.

Evaluate underutilized parcels for the development of workforce and affordable housing, such as to encourage the creation of mixed-use nodes at the Shields/Maroa and Palm/McKinley intersections and replace low-intensity uses along Shields (between Fruit and Del Mar) with mixed use and multifamily development.



LU 4 MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE EXISTING AND PROMOTE NEW NEIGHBORHOOD-SERVING PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED RETAIL SERVICE BUSINESSES WITHIN THE TOWER DISTRICT, WHICH IS CONSISTENT WITH HISTORIC PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT. MAKE COMMERCIAL AREAS SAFE, CONVENIENT AND WELCOMING FOCAL POINTS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES AND PUBLIC LIFE.

LU 4.1 Support small commercial businesses.

Provide guidance for more effective marketing and merchandizing and promote festivals/events and heritage tourism.

LU 4.2 Require commercial projects to place pedestrian-oriented storefronts along public sidewalks and restrict parking along public sidewalks.

Generally, locate surface parking behind street-facing buildings and allow larger stores midblock where they can face off-street parking.

LU 4.3 Emphasize the creation of active frontage on Palm Avenue between McKinley Avenue and Olive Avenue.

Consider the addition of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) frontage requirements along Palm Avenue to create an engaging street frontage through beautification efforts with property owner support.

LU 4.4 Use design standards to promote safety for both daytime and nighttime (after dark) activities.

Use design standards to require street-facing windows/entrances, wall-mounted lighting, and to avoid obstructions to provide greater visibility between activities for “natural surveillance.”

LU 4.5 Encourage grocery stores that offer fresh produce and other healthful foods. Consider incentives such as streamlined permitting for changes in use and new development projects that result in grocery stores that commit to at least one fresh produce aisle.



LU 5 BALANCE NEIGHBORHOOD SERVING COMMERCIAL NEEDS AND QUALITY OF LIFE WITH THE CULTIVATION OF A SUCCESSFUL CULTURAL AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT.

LU 5.1 Encourage restrooms that are available to the public, such as in public buildings and parking garages.

Require portable toilets at significant events.

LU 5.2 Utilize zoning standards to mitigate conflicts and potential noise impacts, and support business owners by providing clear sound mitigation guidelines and strategies to ensure code compliance.

Appropriate noise mitigation approaches will be proposed.

LU 5.3 Encourage increased police presence at night and during major events.

LU 5.4 Permanently implement the Sidewalk Vendors Pilot Program in the Tower District, with adjustments.

LU 5.5 Support the Tower Marketing Committee or other Business Improvement District (BID) or Public Business Improvement District (PBID) to support on-going commercial area marketing, organization of festivals and other events, enhanced landscape maintenance and sidewalk cleaning, graffiti abatement, and other beneficial programs.



LU 6 Ensure compatibility among light industrial and residential uses in the Tower District.

LU 6.1 Maintain industrial zoning for existing industrial uses, while striving to mitigate their negative effects on residential areas.

Examples of mitigation can include buffering using landscaping and trees, also see policies in Chapter 4: Circulation.

- Engage industrial business owners and nearby residents in dialogue regarding needs and impacts.
- Consider expanding the City's noticing system to increase transparency and civic participation.
- Consider ways to reduce and mitigate truck traffic on surrounding residential streets, as described in Chapter 4: Circulation.
- Encourage light industrial uses to adopt improved technology.
- Provide compatible transitions between light industrial and surrounding uses and consider limiting further expansion of light industrial zoning.

LU 6.2 Allow light industrial uses to have neighborhood-serving retail.

LU 6.3 Support the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in monitoring emissions.

Regularly monitor the data collected by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) under the Community Air Monitoring Plan and Community Emissions Reduction Program for South Central Fresno which includes the South Tower neighborhood.

LU 6.4 Significant improvements to properties should be accompanied by streetscape improvements and neighborhood landscape buffering, also see Chapter 4. Circulation.

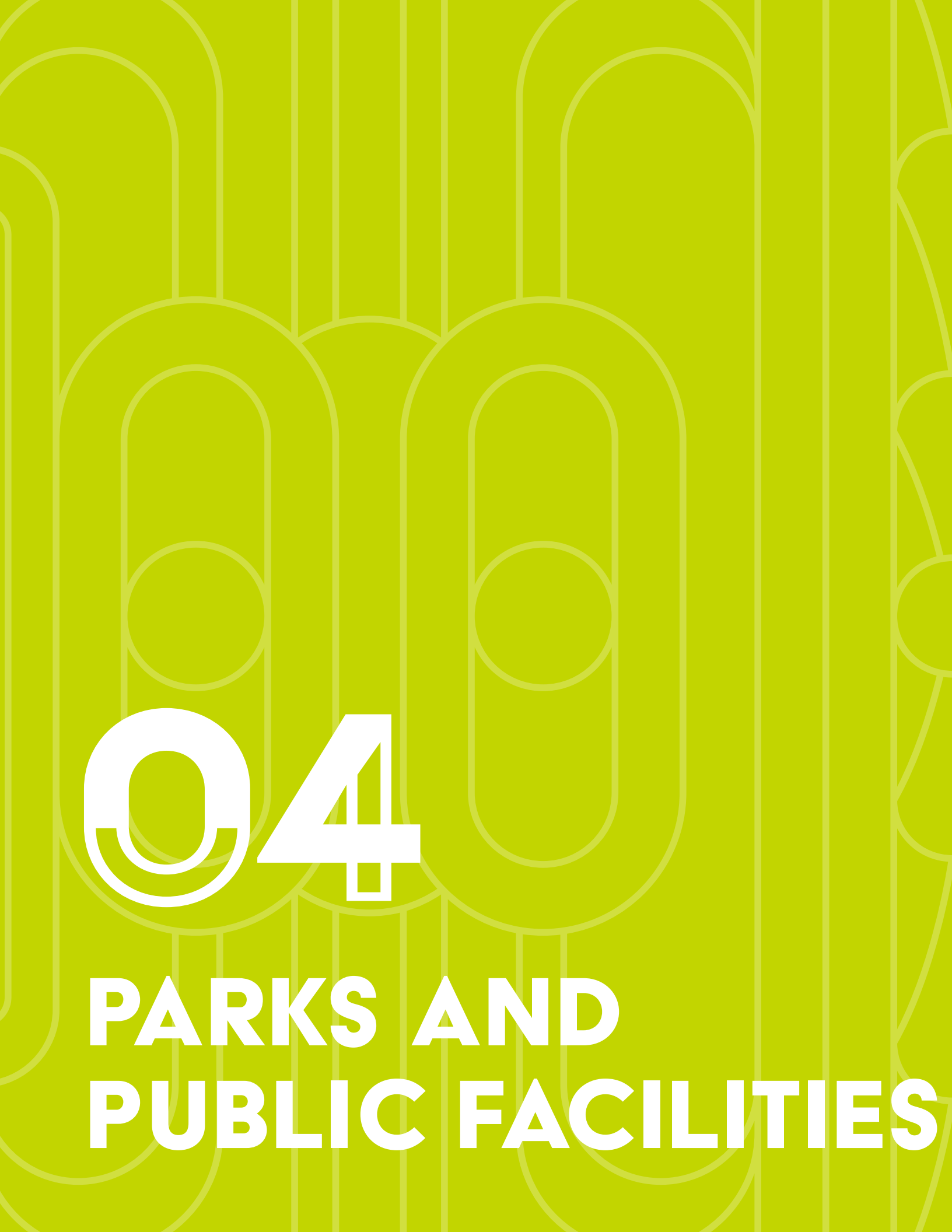


LU 7 RECOGNIZE THE UNIQUE STRENGTHS AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF TOWER DISTRICT'S SUBDISTRICTS AND CORRIDORS.

LU 7.1 Reinforce Fulton Street and Van Ness Avenue as major corridors with commercial destinations that serve Tower District's Central Area and adjacent neighborhoods.

LU 7.2 Encourage land use intensification that takes advantage of Tower District's unique position within Central Fresno and convenient transit connections to Downtown along Fulton Street and Van Ness Avenue.





04

**PARKS AND
PUBLIC FACILITIES**

PARKS AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

4.1 Background

The Parks and Public Facilities chapter provides a framework for making decisions on how parks and public facilities can better address community needs today and in the future. It focuses on the location and extent of public open spaces, matching spaces to community needs, improving pedestrian and bicycle access, and leveraging co-benefits like ecological health and economic revitalization. This chapter also addresses additional public facilities, like trails, schools, and libraries.

Parks and public facilities support community life and contribute to the physical and psychological well-being of residents (particularly youth and families), workers, and visitors. Parks and public facilities can offer a range of activities and can be improved to provide things that community members need most, whether active recreation like playfields, passive recreation like lawns and picnic tables, event areas like small amphitheaters, and natural areas. When easy-to-access and inviting, parks and public facilities add value to the properties in their vicinity. They offer lifestyle choices and amenities that make urban neighborhoods more attractive and livable. Parks also make neighborhoods, cities, and regions more sustainable and resilient. They can also contribute to the ecological health of the watersheds to which they are connected.

Schools are valuable community assets that support human development, the economy and social health of communities. Outside of school hours, schools may serve as community centers and their schoolyards may be used for recreation. Like schools, public libraries provide more than one service and can also serve as community centers and support adult education.

4.2 Existing Parks and Park Needs

Tower District contains 6 acres of park land at three sites: Ted C. Wills Community Center, and San Pablo Park are both located near the southeast corner of the District; and Trolley Park at N. Van Ness Blvd and E. Weldon Avenue was recently completed. This translates to 0.36 park acres per resident, far below the City's standard of 3.0 acres per 1,000 people for pocket, neighborhood and community parks. One new park is under development (Broadway Parque) which will add 0.6 acres of park land to Tower District. Parks outside of the planning area that can be walked to include Lafayette Park to the east and Roeding Regional Park to the west. Roeding Park is separated from the District

by the Union Pacific Railroad, which constrains pedestrian crossings and puts fewer homes within walking distance. Quigley Park is located approximately 0.5 miles north of the District.

Walking distance to parks is critical to their ease of use and integration within community life. One measure for this is the extent to which homes are within a 10-minute walking distance from parks using public streets and free from barriers such as fences, railroad tracks and freeways. Today, a large number of Tower District residents live more than one-half mile walk of an existing park, as indicated in Figure 4-1, which points to a need for more park land and recreation amenities in the District.

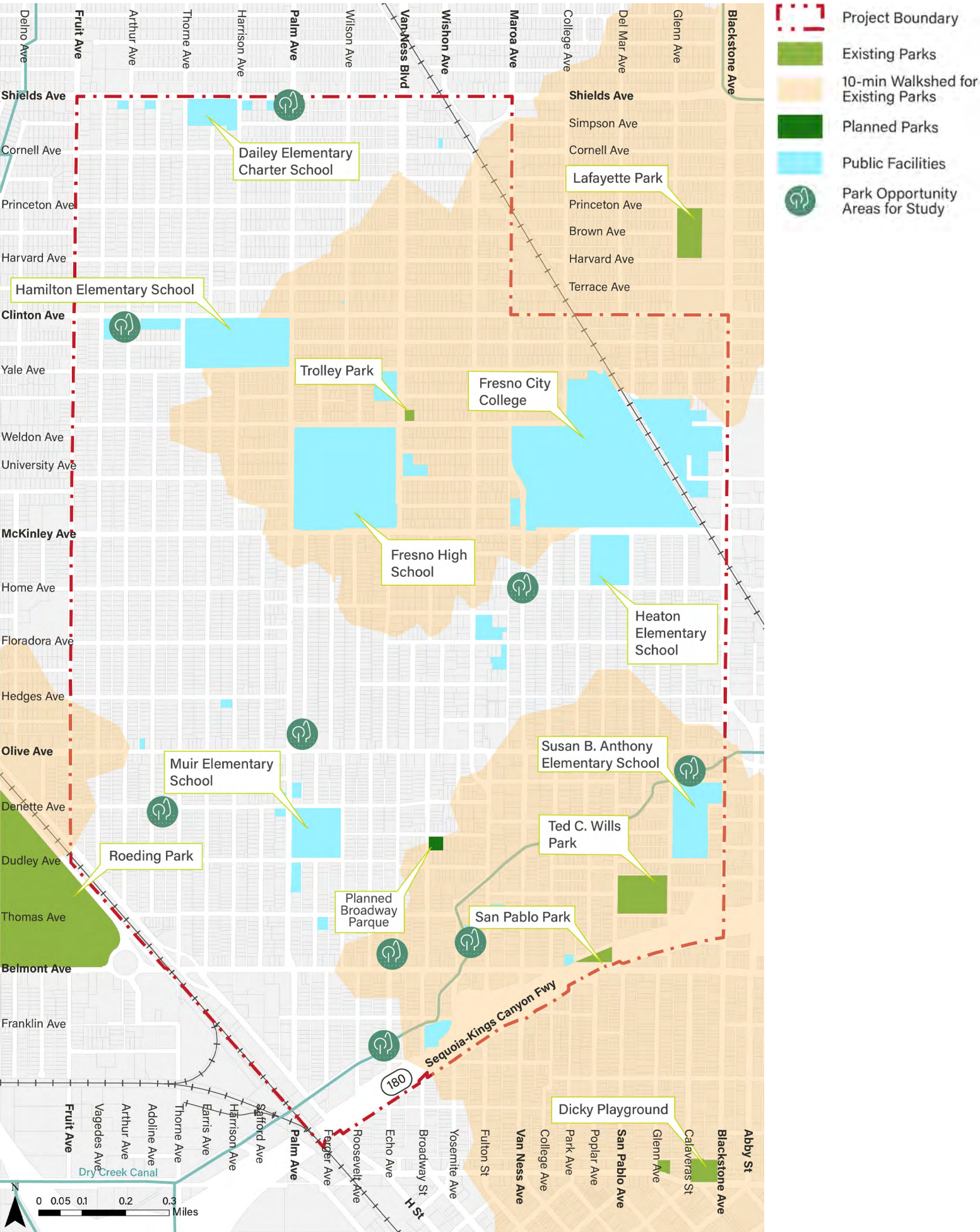
Park programming considers the type of facilities that are offered at a given park and the activities they support. Play equipment for small children addresses a different programmatic need than playfields for organized sports, and Fresno Chaffee Zoo in Roeding Park serves a different need than the daily needs of Tower residents. Trees, lawns, and other greenery are another aspect of parks that support psychological well-being. In summary, park needs in the Tower District include:

- unmet demand as the acreage of parks in the Tower District is just six percent of the City's standard, and one planned parks will not make up this deficit;
- underutilized park space, such as insufficient active recreation amenities in Ted C. Wills Park; and
- gaps in walkable access as most of the District is not within a 10-minute walk of a park.

Tower District contains just 6 acres of park land at three sites: Ted C. Wills Community Center (left), San Pablo Park (right), and Trolley Park.



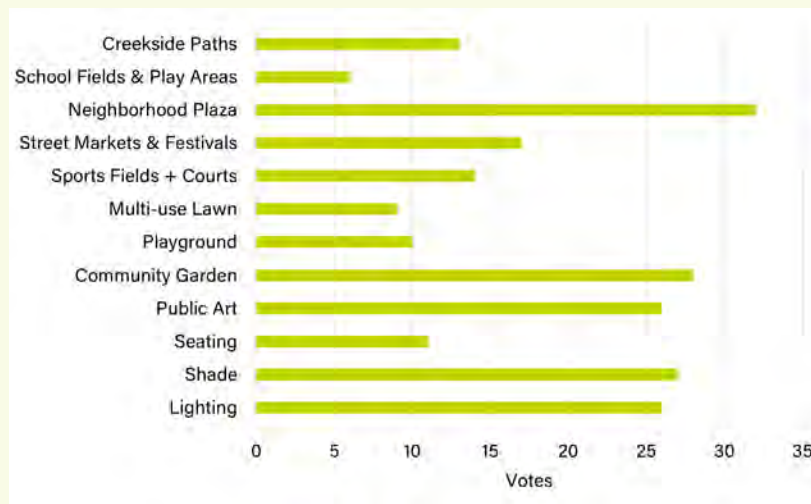
FIGURE 4.1 | Existing and Planned Parks, Schools, and Park Walksheds



What We Heard

89% of all survey respondents believed that Tower District has insufficient green spaces and recreation.

WHAT PUBLIC SPACE ELEMENTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN THE TOWER DISTRICT?



TOP COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR PARKS AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

- Access to green space
- Tower public library
- Community garden
- Playgrounds for kids
- Recreational opportunities at Ted C Wills
- Dog park
- Build Broadway Parque
- Open schools for evenings and weekend green spaces
- Parks/public space with native drought tolerant plants, public art
- Diverse street trees
- Sports courts

More parks, more parks, more parks!

Ted C Willis needs a garden, aquatic center, back entrance and to turn the dirt to a court/football field with more events

Need for more garbage cans

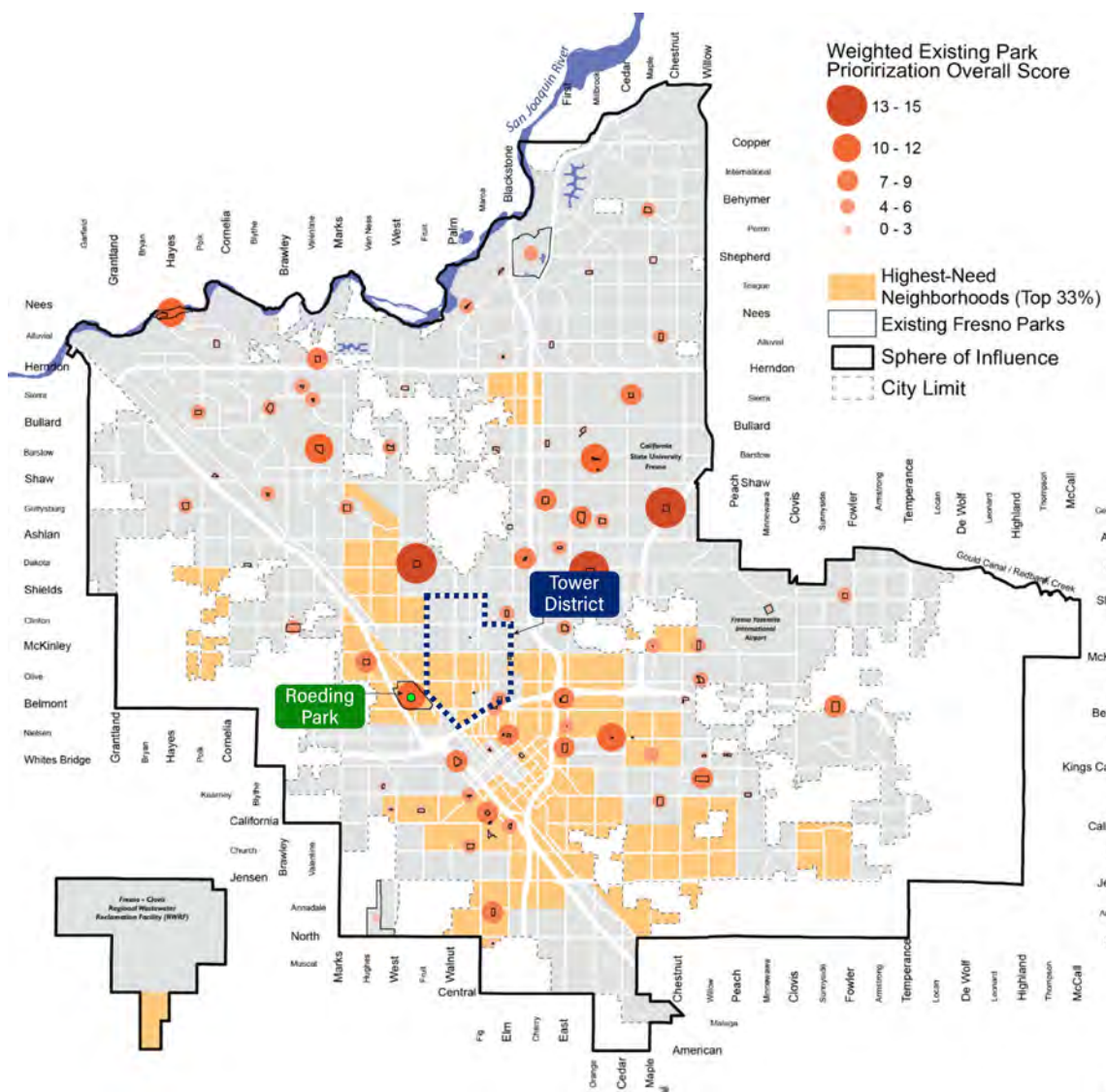
BELMONT AVENUE PARK & OPEN SPACE RECOMMENDATION FROM THE COMMUNITY



FRESNO CLEAN & SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS (MEASURE P)

Measure P is a 2018 voter-approved sales tax measure that generates revenue to fund improvements and maintenance of existing public parks, build and maintain new parks and trails, and support local arts and cultural amenities. Measure P also funds programs for children, and at-risk youth, seniors, and veterans. Measure P funding responds to findings in the City's 2018 Parks Master Plan showing that about 80 percent of Fresno's existing parks are in fair or poor condition. The 3/8-cent sales tax measure raises an estimated \$46 million per year in a standard economy towards projects approved by the City's Park, Recreation & Arts Commission, with 46% of the funds expected to go toward improving and maintaining existing parks.

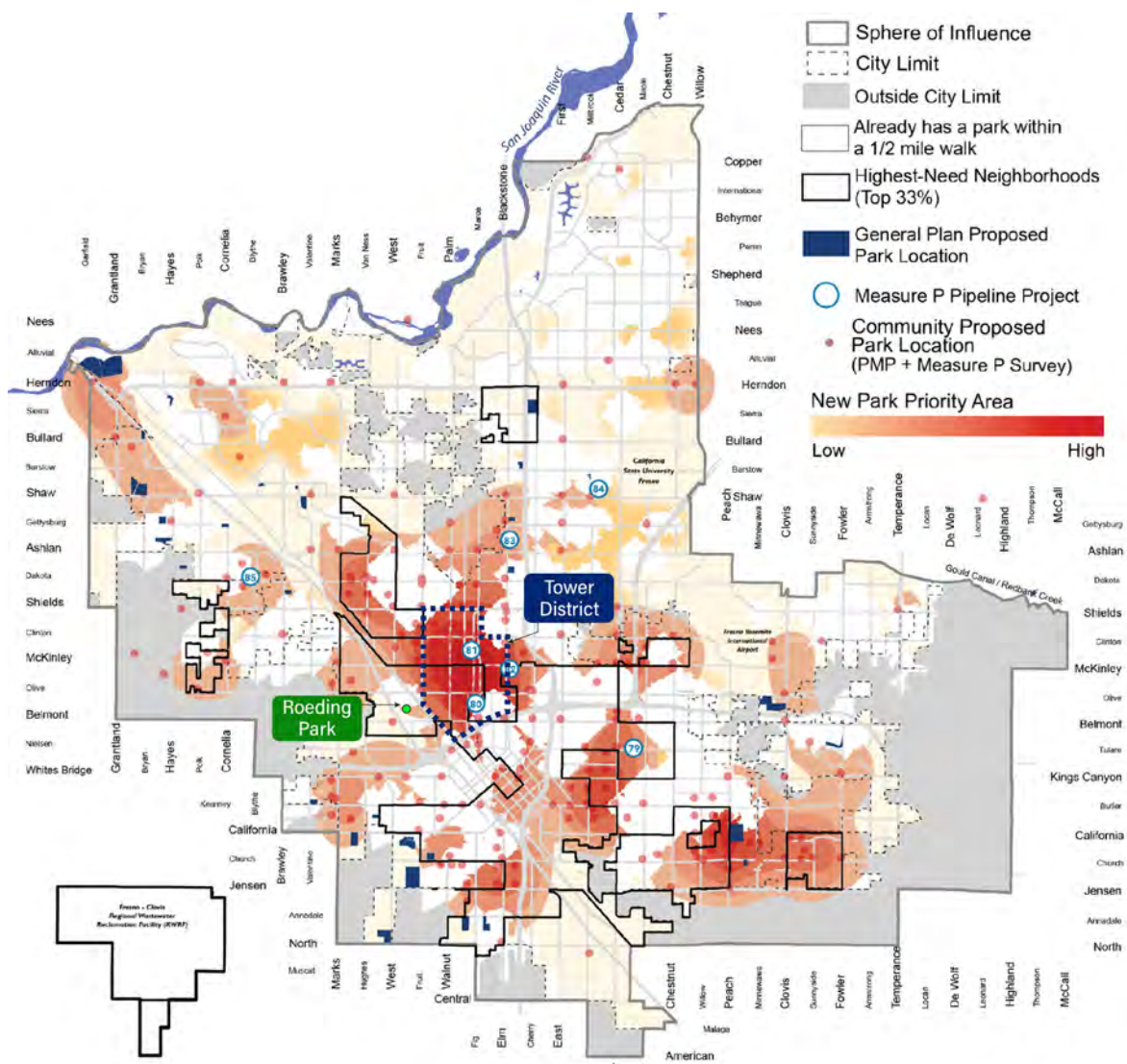
FIGURE 4.2 | Measure P Highest-Need Neighborhoods, and Prioritization of Existing Parks (2022)



Measure P requires that no less than 50 percent of funds are dedicated to “highest-need neighborhoods” that were defined using multiple factors that include: low park acreage per 1,000 residents, concentrated poverty, pollution burden, large numbers of youth and seniors, and more than one-half mile walking distance. This definition is revised every three years. Based on the 2023-2025 equity-based assessment definition, none of the existing parks are located within a “highest-need neighborhood,” nearly however all of half of the area south of McKinley Avenue within the Tower District is considered a “highest-need neighborhood” as of 2024.

The Measure P process has also included a framework for evaluating specific parks that should be prioritized for new investment.

FIGURE 4.3 | Measure P Park Prioritization for Future Parks



Roeding Regional Park is listed as the seventh highest priority in the city, which was based on factors including: parks in poor condition, parks without neighborhood amenities, parks that were prioritized by the community through community engagement for the Parks Master Plan, “flagship parks” identified in the Parks Master Plan, parks near access gaps, parks where improvements are already planned, and emerging community priorities from the Measure P implementation process.

The process took a similar approach to identifying areas of greatest need for new parks, taking into consideration park access gaps, community priority areas, parks in the pipeline or proposed by other plans. Much of the Tower District is rated as a high priority for new parks.

PLANNED PARKS

Trolley Park, which was completed in 2024, adds a small play area and outdoor seating at the corner of Van Ness Boulevard and Weldon Avenue. Broadway Parque will add small-scale neighborhood recreation options at the corner of Broadway and Elizabeth Street. The combined acreage of these two parks is small and will not bring Tower District in line with the City's park acreage standard, however, these parks will provide new amenities such as play structures, exercise stations and picnic areas. While Roeding Regional Park is a priority for Measure P funding, pedestrian access from the Tower District to Roeding Park is limited to two railroad overcrossings along auto-oriented segments of Olive and Belmont Avenues.

Trolley Park, at the corner of Van Ness Boulevard and Weldon Avenues, was completed in 2024.



4.3 Park Opportunities



Fulton Street segment for potential central plaza location



Shaded plazas with seating and space for activities can be added along commercial corridors.

Concept for joint use sites from Parks Master Plan

City-owned land, unused parts of school sites, and privately-owned vacant parcels may be candidates for creating pocket parks or community gardens. Examples include the vacant lot adjacent to the Fire Station at Clinton and Arthur; vacant parcels in Van Ness Village; and the northeast corner of the Hamilton School site at the corner of Clinton and Palm. A scattering of vacant parcels large enough for pocket parks are present in the District, mainly in the South Tower area. Specific opportunities are described below.

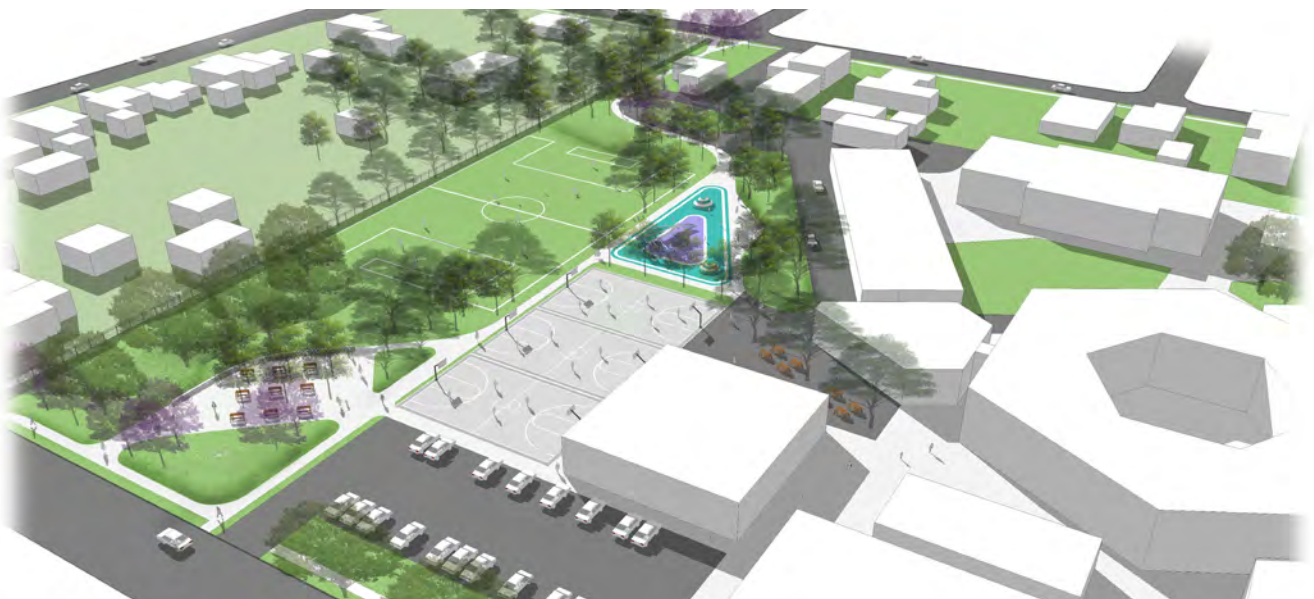
CENTRAL PLAZA

Many community members expressed a desire to create a public plaza in the core commercial area near the Tower Theatre. With thoughtful programming and design, a new urban plaza could elevate the vibrancy of the commercial area and enhance Tower District livability.

Locations that were considered in the 1991 Specific Plan include the north side of Olive Avenue between Maroa and Wishon Avenues, and the south side of Olive at Fulton Street. A segment of Fulton Street itself could be converted to a flexible or pedestrian space.

JOINT USE OF SCHOOL SITES

Tower District's public schools are vital for education and could play an increasing role in addressing other community needs. Fresno High School stands near the center of the Tower District and is a great source of pride in the community. Through a joint use agreement between the Fresno Unified School District and the City, the High School's playing fields are accessible to the public when not in use by the School. The City offers aquatics programming at the School's





Vacant land adjacent to Dry Creek Canal to create creek access points and overlooks.



Privately-owned public open spaces can be created as part of future development.

swimming pool during the summer swimming season. The District's four other public schools sites—as well as the athletic fields and indoor recreation facilities at Fresno City College—may be considered for additional community joint use.

CANALSIDE PARKS

Dry Creek Canal runs near and roughly parallel with the southern boundary of the Tower District. Owned and maintained by the Fresno Irrigation District, the Canal has long been regarded as an opportunity for public open space. While canalside parks can enhance areas, physical constraints may make this goal of the 1991 plan infeasible.

While community use of service roads continues to be a possibility—as demonstrated by the Midtown Trail along Mill Canal—opportunities can be pursued outside of the Canal right-of-way. Streets adjacent to the Canal can be designed as “shared streets,” that prioritize pedestrian use while vehicles move through the same space slowly. Future development that is adjacent to the Canal can incorporate a pedestrian access easement and small viewing/seating areas. Trail segments and parks space can be created through City land acquisition. Thoughtful design and durable design elements can contribute to a recognizable canalside identity.

PRIVATELY-OWNED PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Privately-owned public open spaces are on private land but open to the community, such as to create a plaza adjacent to cafes and building entrances. Privately-owned public open spaces can be incentivized or required, particularly where there is high pedestrian activity. While larger privately-owned public spaces can be created on larger development sites, such as along the Blackstone Avenue corridor, smaller sites can offer paseos and seating areas.

STREETS

Streets are another important form of public space when they are designed for pedestrian activity, comfort, and safety, and if accompanied by trees and amenities. Walkability and the quality of the sidewalk experience were ranked among the most important issues for this Plan to address, particularly along the District's pedestrian-oriented shopping streets.

Many communities develop street and open space master plans to

4.4 Public Schools and Libraries



Gillis Library Branch

guide street improvements as they occur. Master plans work through circulation issues across transportation modes and establish a palette for trees, landscape, light poles, and other elements that help set community character. Street function and design are further discussed in Chapter 5: Circulation and Streetscape.

Fresno High School stands near the center of the Tower District and is one of the District's most historic and recognizable buildings, in addition to educating generations of Fresnans. Tower District also has four other public schools: Heaton, Muir, and Dailey Charter School (elementary schools) and Hamilton Middle School.

Fresno City College (FCC) occupies a large site generally bounded by McKinley and Weldon avenues on the south and north, and Maroa and Blackstone to the west and east. The College offers many kinds of adult education opportunities in the arts and sciences, features a police academy and also includes the largest nursing program in California and the second largest program in the USA¹¹. The College also cultivates community partnerships with area businesses, industries, and non-profits, and its performing arts program serves as a cultural center to the Tower District. FCC was established under another name in 1910 and shortly thereafter combined with the Fresno Normal School, a teacher education college that was subsequently absorbed by the California State University system. Dating from 1915, the Old Administration Building has historic significance, but the community identity of the City College largely consists of parking lots as seen from public streets.

While the Tower District has no public library branch at this time, the community has been working with Fresno County Public Library district to create a new branch, relocate an existing one, or enhance the quality of the Gillis Library Branch, located on west Dakota Avenue that currently serves the District. A new library would be not just a community amenity and educational resource, but could be designed to serve as a community center and could house a museum on Tower District history.

¹¹Fresno City College, "Registered Nursing Associate Degree Program," Fresno CA, online at <https://www.fresnocitycollege.edu/academics/divisions/apa-division/registered-nursing/index.html> (as of June 2024).

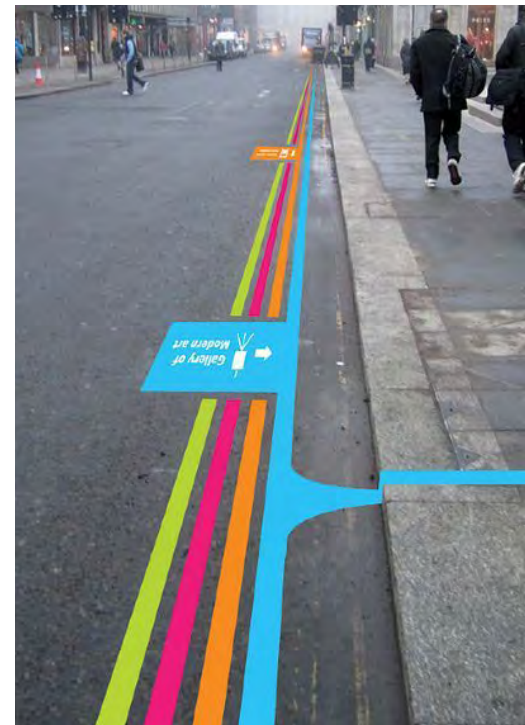
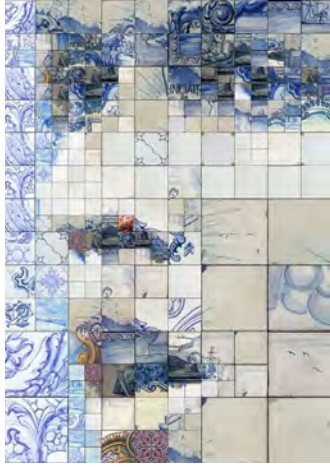
4.5 Public Art and District Identity

The Tower District's sense of place and unique identity can be enhanced through public art and other urban design elements. Art can delight and create more appealing destinations, and it can express a community's history and culture. Art can also contribute to the Tower District's identity – its public spaces, main streets, centers of activity, and boundaries. Public art is not only limited to large permanent sculptures, but can also be incorporated into features like utility boxes, bike racks, benches, and transit shelters. Temporary installations add dynamism and can be associated with special events, attractions, or festivals. The City's Measure P-funded Arts and Culture grant program is administered by the Fresno Arts Council and overseen by Fresno's Parks, Recreation and Arts Commission, and its staff.

District identity can also be accentuated with gateway features and wayfinding signage. At the boundaries of the Tower District, distinctive signage, landscape, and architecture can welcome people as they arrive. Wayfinding allows residents, workers, and visitors to navigate the District, and explore its cultural, commercial, and recreational destinations. Signage in street rights-of-way is administered by Fresno's Public Works Department.

Murals around Tower District add to its vibrancy and appeal.





Public Art Illustrated in Public Realm Elements

4.6 Objectives and Policies

POS 1 INCREASE AND ENHANCE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AREAS AND AMENITIES IN THE TOWER DISTRICT.

POS 1.1 Provide parks in accordance with the Parks Master Plan.

Pursue opportunities for new parks and public spaces in the Tower District according to the policies and the standards adopted in the Parks Master Plan. Give priority to improvements in park-deficient areas, consistent with the Measure P implementation process.

POS 1.2 New park acquisition.

Strategically pursue land for the acquisition and establishment of new parks. Two new parks have been developed or are near completion: Broadway Parque and Trolley Park. These projects will be valuable additions for Tower District residents. Future opportunities that should be explored include:

- A public plaza in the central core near the Tower Theatre.
- Mini parks and community gardens on vacant land, City-owned land, and unneeded portions of school properties. Explore opportunities in Van Ness Village, adjacent to the Fire Station at Clinton and Arthur and at the corner of Clinton and Palm, at the northeast corner of the Hamilton School site.
- Privately-owned public spaces created as part of new development on large sites, which might be required of larger development projects like Blackstone Avenue corridor.

POS 1.3 Work in partnership with public agencies and the community to enhance existing parks, and other types of open space, for greater recreational value.

- Ted C. Wills. Advocate for a park master planning process and redesign that could make better use of the space and provide more amenities. Reuse of the parking lot and the school campus should be considered.
- Roeding Park. Roeding Park lies directly west of the Tower District and has been identified in the Measure P implementation process as a top priority for park improvements. Advocate for a park master planning process and redesign that could make this park a more valuable asset for the City as a whole.

POS 1.4 Measure P funding.

Leverage Measure P funding for acquisition and development of new parks and improvements to existing parks. Measure P generates sales tax revenue to fund improvements and maintenance of existing public parks, build and maintain new parks and trails, and support local arts and cultural amenities.

POS 1.5 Pursue joint-use partnerships with schools and basin sites in the Tower District.

The City has a joint-use partnership for community use of athletic fields and aquatic facilities at Fresno High School, which should be expanded to include other sites in the District, thereby helping to implement the “closing the gaps” strategy defined in the Fresno Parks Master Plan. New joint-use partnerships should be designed to improve the capability of utilizing the District’s open space for passive and active recreational and leisure opportunities by adding landscaping, lighting, picnic facilities, and other appropriate amenities, and by extending hours of use. Joint-use agreements should not diminish the need to create new parks in the Tower District.

POS 1.6 Clean up Dry Creek.

Develop and implement a clean-up action program for Dry Creek that engages neighboring residents and businesses.

POS 1.7 Greenway and parks along Dry Creek.

Initiate a dialogue between the City of Fresno, the Fresno Irrigation District, and residents to reach agreements around opportunities for access and visibility along Dry Creek. Study the feasibility of increasing public access to Dry Creek. Seek to acquire vacant or key parcels along Dry Creek to act as greenway nodes, enhancing the corridor and providing more access. Include further planting of trees and vegetation along the Dry Creek Canal in addition to trash cans, pet pick up stations, and public benches to ensure ADA compliance is met.

POS 1.8 Transportation impact mitigation and funding.

Work with Caltrans to ensure that rights-of-way adjacent to major transportation facilities are landscaped to help protect the neighborhood from visual, air quality, and noise impacts from freeways and rail corridor. Seek Federal and State funding to provide

transportation mitigation and environmental enhancement along major transportation facilities (i.e., Highway 180, High Speed Rail).



POS 2 IMPROVE ACCESS TO PARKS FOR TOWER DISTRICT RESIDENTS

POS 2.1 Remove barriers to access parks.

Ensure that parks in the Tower District are designed and managed in a way that maintains access and a sense of welcome from the street. Specifically, minimize the use of fences and gates along the street edges of parks, and address safety by improving lighting and visual sight lines.

POS 2.2 Pedestrian and bike overcrossings.

Advocate for high-quality pedestrian and bike access to Roeding Park with Olive and Belmont Avenue overcrossings of the rail corridor at the district’s western edge. Explore opportunities for a separate bike and pedestrian overcrossing linking the Tower District with Roeding Park.



POS 3 RECOGNIZE THAT STREETS SERVE AS PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND PROVIDE FOR THEIR IMPROVEMENT IN TOWER DISTRICT.

POS 3.1 Sidewalks as public space.

Plant trees and make other streetscape improvements to enhance pedestrian environments, particularly along the Tower District’s commercial corridors. See also Circulation policies. Refer to the City’s Urban Forestry Management Plan for a list of approved street trees.



POS 4 ALIGN PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES WITH COMMUNITY NEEDS TO SUPPORT QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE TOWER DISTRICT.

POS 4.1 Tower Public Library.

Work with Fresno County to bring a library back to the Tower District, by relocating an existing branch or creating a new branch. Support this effort through actions that may include, but are not limited to, zoning to allow for a library and allowing for the joint use of City-owned facilities.

POS 4.2 Public safety patrols.

Recommend maintaining consistent police presence through a combination of Patrol Officers, Bicycle Patrol Officers, Traffic Officers, and Contract Law Enforcement Services and explore a stand-alone budget to additionally support entertainment district peak hours and special events.

POS 4.3 Safe and welcoming public open space.

Design and program parks, plazas, and other public open space to be welcoming to all users. Strategies to employ include: space activation using design features and programmed activities, adequate lighting, uninterrupted lines of sight from streets into the space, absence of subareas that can be readily appropriated for unwanted activities, and on-going high-quality repair and maintenance.





05

CIRCULATION

CIRCULATION

5.1 Tower District Context

The Tower District was settled as a streetcar suburb in the early 20th century before the rise of the automobile. Streetcar lines extended northward along Fulton Street to Olive Avenue, north along Wishon Avenue, west along Olive Avenue, and north along Blackstone Avenue. Development over time occurred within an expanding street grid, with major streets spaced uniformly every half mile. The District's street pattern offers motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians a variety of possible routes to get to local destinations. The connective street grid makes walking and bicycling routes more direct, and disperses vehicle traffic among multiple routes rather than concentrating traffic on wide arterial roadways.

Tower District streets serve a variety of transportation modes, from motor vehicles (including trucks), bus transit, to micro-mobility (including bicycles). Transportation improvements starting in the mid-20th century have generally sought to accommodate vehicles, often sacrificing sidewalks and pedestrian comfort. Still, the grid pattern, human-scaled streets and sidewalks provide a walkable, bike-friendly environment in much of the area.

Ambitious programs for bicycle improvements have emerged as a priority both nationally and locally, as bicycle-related infrastructure improvements have been implemented in Tower District.



Human-scaled main street along Olive Avenue



Typical residential street

The Tower District is also served by multiple bus routes and high-frequency service along Blackstone Avenue. Bus service is provided by Fresno Area Express (FAX), which provides transit service in Fresno and surrounding communities. As of 2024, the Tower District is served by eight fixed-route local bus lines, as well as enhanced bus rapid transit (BRT) service along Blackstone Avenue, and several of these lines provide direct service to destinations downtown. FAX also offers a paratransit “Handy Ride” service designed to meet the transportation needs of eligible persons with limited ability, who would find it difficult to use of FAX’s fixed-route bus system.

Across transportation modes, much still needs to be done to serve the community needs in effective and balanced ways. To that end, Fresno’s General Plan promotes “complete streets” that enable safe, attractive, and comfortable access and travel for all street users, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, children, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and users of public transit.

What We Heard

Nearly **60%** of all respondents got around on foot and a **24%** got around by bike.

But over **27%** respondents did not feel safe getting around on foot, and by bike in Tower District.

Tree and sidewalk maintenance pose hazards for our community.

A continued effort is needed to make Olive Ave walkable, bike-friendly, and safely drivable.

Safety! Please! At night it is not safe to walk through the Tower District because of the bars.

TOP COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR CIRCULATION

- Safer speeds through neighborhoods
- Safe routes to school
- Walkability
- Shaded sidewalks, more trees
- Better biking infrastructure
- Parking availability for residents
- Alleys should be developed or blocked off
- More public transit/ light rail/ weekend trolley
- Better maintenance - street trees, sidewalks, lighting, streets, garbage
- Speed cameras on street light poles, more bike cops, security cameras; more security to keep civilians safe

5.2 Street Classifications

The General Plan describes a street classification system to categorize the character and function of roadways within the context of the entire transportation system. For each street type, the City has design and performance standards that address travel demand, available rights-of-way, appropriate travel speeds, and land use context. The Tower District has roadways with the following classifications.

Freeway (State Route 180): Multiple-lane divided and median-divided roadways servicing through and crosstown traffic, with no access to abutting property and no at-grade intersections. SR 180 is under the jurisdiction of the State, outside the control of the City.

Arterials (Blackstone, Shields, McKinley, Weber/H Street): Typically 4 to 6 lanes, arterial roadways accommodate both through traffic and local traffic. Center medians restrict where left turns can be made, and access points to abutting properties are limited. Signalized intersections along arterials are also limited, generally spaced one-half mile apart.

Collector (Fruit, Palm, Maroa, Broadway, San Pablo, Clinton, Olive, Belmont, Wishon): Two to four-lane undivided roadways without medians that serve local areas. Collector streets connect local streets to nearby destinations and to arterial roadways for longer trips. Access points to abutting properties are more frequent than for arterials. Many collectors have center lanes for left turns in both directions.

Local: Local streets are two lanes wide, with few exceptions. They provide direct access to properties, while discouraging excessive speeds and volumes of vehicle travel incompatible with the neighborhoods being served. Local streets are not specified in the General Plan, but play an important role across transportation modes.

Scenic Drive (Fulton/Wishon, segments of Van Ness Avenue & Van Ness Boulevard): A street that, in addition to its transportation function, serves as a scenic resource. Scenic resources in the Tower District are comprised of distinct architecture and streetscapes, while natural areas comprise scenic features in some other parts of the city.

FIGURE 5.1 | Street Network



5.3 Complete Streets

Fresno General Plan's Mobility and Transportation Element calls for "Complete Streets." Complete Streets represent a balanced approach to planning and designing streets, so they serve all street users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders.

Complete Streets design has many advantages. When people have more transportation options, the overall capacity of the transportation network increases and there is less traffic congestion. Complete streets promote equity in that they serve people who don't drive because of age, physical abilities, or lack of access to a car. Complete Streets encourage transit use, health through walking and biking, and provide human scale and a sense of place.

Most of Tower District's local streets are "complete" with tree-lined sidewalks and relatively narrow travel lanes, which slows motorists and improves pedestrian and bicyclist safety. Many arterial and collector streets are not pedestrian- or bike-friendly, as travel lanes have been expanded and widened over time. Here, there are important opportunities to reconfigure street cross-sections, to improve streets for all users.

5.4 Placemaking and Streets

Physical environments shape human perception and behavior - "placemaking" is concerned with making places that invite and engage people in positive ways. Physical design is capable of capturing attention and inviting people to stay and participate in community life.

The Tower District's streets can be places where people pause, appreciate their environment, interact with others, and enjoy life. While District streets have functions related to movement, they can also serve to enrich people's lives and support social coming together.

There are particular kinds of streets in the Tower District that are noteworthy. As described below, traditional "main streets" bring people and commercial activity together within pedestrian-friendly environments that have small city scale; Olive Avenue is an example of a main street. Blackstone Avenue has the potential to become a mixed-use boulevard. Local streets can be "outdoor living rooms" where residents greet each other, and children play.



Streets, trees, vegetation, sidewalks and buildings creating a sense of place.

MAIN STREETS

“Main streets” have been and continue to be centers of community life, where commercial storefronts front directly onto streetside sidewalks. With generous display windows, these storefronts capture the attention of passers-by, particularly those on foot. A main street also forms an outdoor room, as buildings frame streets and sidewalks spatially.

The commercial health and revitalization of main street areas can be encouraged by street improvements like sidewalk widening, street lighting, and pedestrian amenities. Street trees shade pedestrians and can contribute to main street identity. Commercial health and revitalization are also encouraged by programs that organize events, curate commercial offerings, and provide incentives for façade improvements.

The intersection of Olive Avenue and Fulton Street is generally recognized as the heart of the Tower District. Parts of Olive and Fulton are main streets that historically arose around streetcar lines. Olive Avenue has a commercial main street that extends from east of Fulton

to west of Palm Avenue, with older buildings that front onto the street with frequent entrances and generous display windows. Street trees and building awnings shade sidewalks and contribute to an inviting sense of place. Temporary street traffic closures on Olive Avenue allow its Pride and Mardi Gras festivals to add vitality to the community.

Tower District offers several other main streets that are not as long or intact as Olive. Fulton Street and Wishon Avenue have main street fabric near where they intersect Olive, and Fulton Street has several blocks of main street fabric in the southern part of the planning area. Van Ness contains a block-long main street north of Floradora Avenue. Belmont Avenue has physical fabric that meets the main street definition but contains relatively few retail destinations.

BLACKSTONE CORRIDOR

Blackstone Avenue has remnants of main street fabric that predate its widening into an urban arterial roadway, along its western edge. Most of Blackstone is lined with auto-oriented commercial development and lacks main street character as it has parking lots between streets and building entrances. From a functional perspective, however, Blackstone Avenue is arguably the transportation “backbone” of North Fresno as it serves the area with high-quality transit service.



Farmers market along Olive Avenue



Sidewalks with generous storefront windows to engage shoppers, leading to an ideal main street environment.

Fresno is working to transform Blackstone into an advanced multimodal corridor. In order to promote community livability and economic revitalization, the City changed zoning along Blackstone Avenue from auto-oriented commercial to pedestrian-oriented mixed-use zoning. Zoning calls for buildings to be situated close to public sidewalks to place building entrances and display windows next to where people walk.

The Southern Blackstone Avenue Smart Mobility Strategy is a community-led vision to improve the length of the Blackstone corridor. It recommends complete street improvements that benefit all travel modes. The Strategy places special emphasis on active transportation (walking and biking) by focusing on better access, safety, transit use, street-oriented development, and District identity. Multimodal design recommendations are tailored to different conditions and needs along the corridor. The Strategy also considers how roadway improvements should be phased and funded. The phases of the strategy are now fully funded from design to construction.

Fast and reliable, bus rapid transit (BRT) infrastructure and service uses technology and design for faster and more reliable operations. To finance the infrastructure associated with Blackstone BRT, the City has established an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (EIFD). EIFDs help fund catalytic infrastructure improvements capable of leveraging public benefits and attracting private sector investments. In addition to bus infrastructure, the EIFD will fund streetscape enhancements, improve wayfinding signage, and economic development projects that are expected to stimulate development of 1,300 housing units within the EIFD area by 2050.

SCENIC DRIVES

Fresno's General Plan has designated a "scenic drive" that traverses Tower District along Fulton Street/Wishon Avenue, Van Ness Avenue, Weldon Avenue, and Van Ness Boulevard. Fulton/Wishon follows a former streetcar route. Van Ness Avenue parallels Fulton/Wishon, and both street corridors possess a noteworthy collection of late 19th- and early 20th-century buildings – from two-room cottages to single-family estates. Weldon and Van Ness Boulevard have wide landscaped medians with distinctive trees.

LOCAL STREETS AND ALLEYS

Local streets hold significant value in shaping community life and enhancing residents' quality of life. Local streets also serve as complete streets that serve people who walk, cycle, drive, and use public transit. Well-designed local streets – with street trees, ample sidewalks, and relatively narrow traffic lanes -- foster community interaction, providing spaces for neighbors to meet, socialize, and engage with one another. In the Tower District, local streets also contribute to District connectivity and walkability. They “connect through” without the use of cul-de-sacs, and provide direct connections for getting to local destinations.

The Fresno General Plan describes local street fundamentals. Policy D-3-c says to develop local streets as urban parkways, with landscaping and pedestrian spaces, and Policy MT-1-i says to address particular characteristics including street width, traffic calming, public safety access, and quality of life.

The Tower District has numerous alleys, which are another street network element. They provide vehicle access to properties, which avoids street-facing driveways that diminish pedestrian comfort and safety along streetside sidewalks. Alleys also serve as service and loading areas that might otherwise face streets, and they can provide direct access to accessory dwelling units.

During Plan development, community members expressed interest in the potential of alleys, particularly green alleys. Alleys offer a casual neighborhood space adjacent to backyards and away from traffic, places where children ride bikes and play basketball. Across multiple streets, a continuous line of alleys can also serve as safe corridors for pedestrians and bicyclists.

“Green alleys” can address community drainage and stormwater needs. As a form of green infrastructure, green alleys use permeable pavers and pavement that allow rainwater infiltration and filter pollutants from run-off. By including subsurface retention, a network of green alleys can even help municipalities avoid needing to expand stormwater infrastructure capacity, which can be costly.



Open and closed segments of the alley network in the District.



Using alleys to enhance the bike and pedestrian network, access ADUs and create greenways.



5.5 Pedestrians

The Tower District is one of the San Joaquin Valley's most heavily walked neighborhoods – a legacy of its early history when walking and streetcar use were dominant modes. The District offers local destinations close to where people live and work, and its gridiron street pattern affords fairly direct routes to those destinations.

“Walkability” was mentioned the most by residents when asked “what are your top priorities for change,” and shaded sidewalks came in second. Walkability is particularly good around Olive Avenue’s main street fabric, as evidenced by its high “Walkscore.” Walkscore is a metric-based index that accounts for the number of destinations in an area and the number of available travel routes. It is widely used by community planners and others as a reliable indicator of neighborhood livability.

Sidewalks are important public spaces, and the degree to which people walk and bike is influenced by the quality of walking environments. In this regard, many Tower District streets are tree-lined and lined by building fronts rather than parking lots and garage doors.



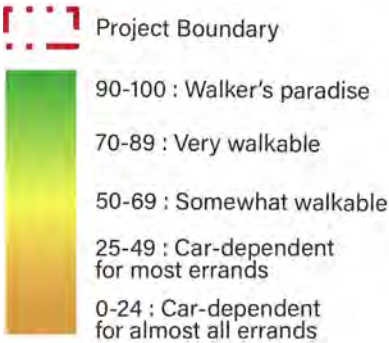
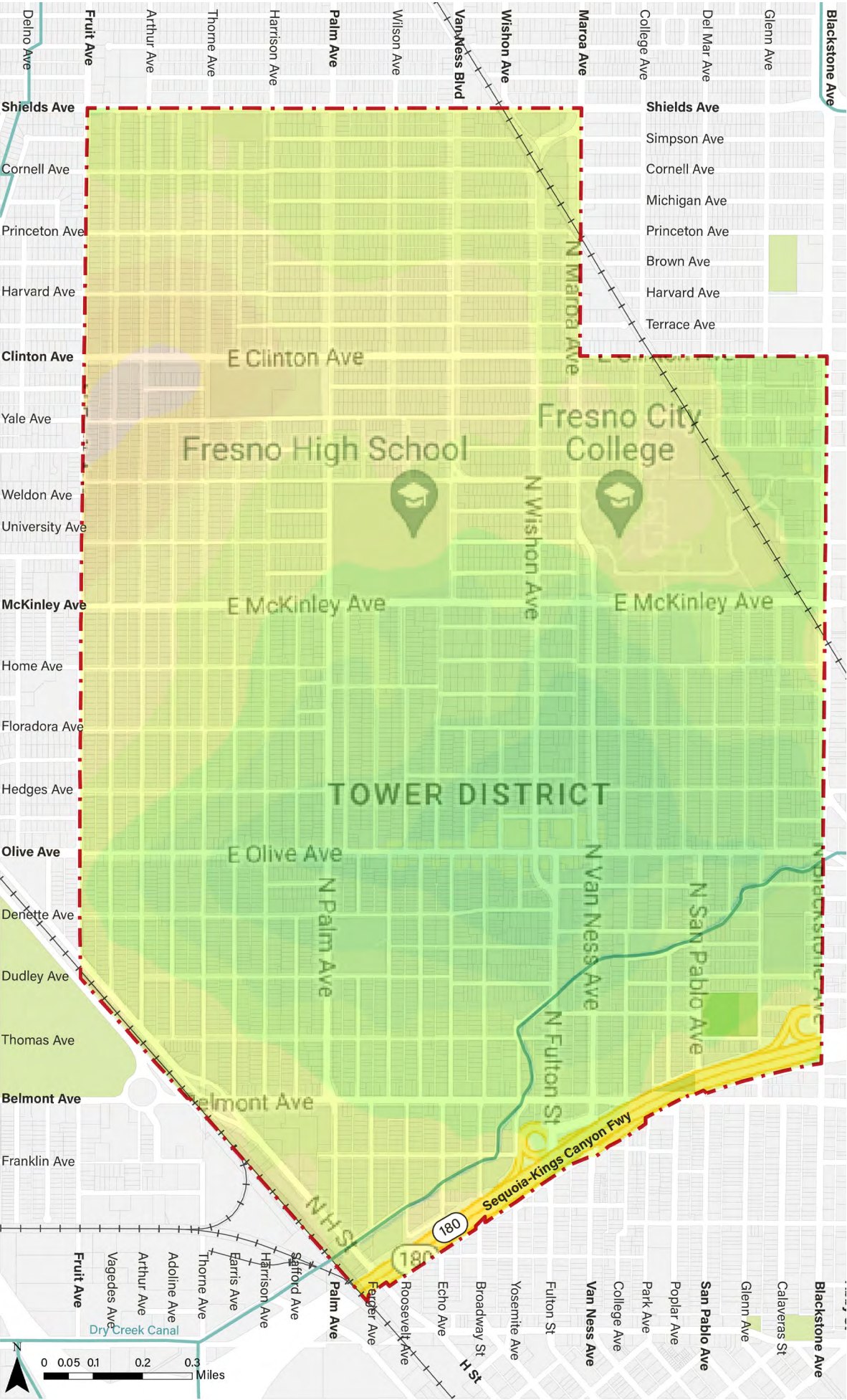
Sidewalk gaps, as in the south Tower District area, are a barrier to pedestrian comfort and safety.

While Tower District remains largely walkable, facilities for pedestrians get mixed reviews. Twenty-nine pedestrian-involved collisions were reported between 2018 and 2022, collision hot spots were centered around State Route 180 freeway ramps and Belmont Avenue near Palm Avenue.¹² In many locations, sidewalks and crosswalks are missing or inadequate,¹³ which can be dangerous for pedestrians. An absence of midblock crosswalks requires pedestrians to walk long distances, resulting in some pedestrians crossing at unmarked/uncontrolled locations at increased risk. The area also lacks high-visibility crosswalks, ADA-accessible curb ramps, and pedestrian push buttons with countdown timers.

¹²CHS Consulting, “Streetscape and Circulation Analysis: Hot-Spot Identification,” PowerPoint dated June 2023, analysis resulting from Transportation Information Management System (TIMS) tool developed by UC Berkeley SafeTREC.

¹³City of Fresno, 2016 “Active Transportation Plan,” Figure 52, Fresno CA, online at https://www.fresno.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/170022FresnoATPFinal2017Amended042022_compressed-1.pdf (as of June 2024).

FIGURE 5.2 | Walkscore Map

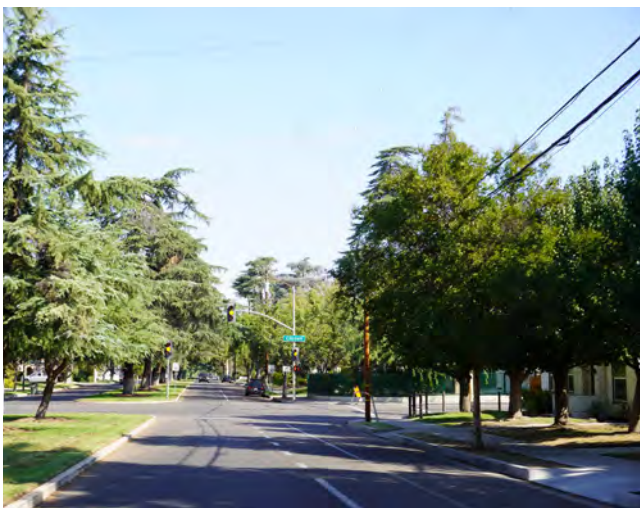


Walk Score measures the walkability of any address by analyzing walking routes to nearby amenities. Points are awarded based on the distance to amenities in each category. Walk Score also measures pedestrian friendliness by analyzing population density and road metrics such as block length and intersection density.

Safe and inviting walking networks are especially important for persons with low incomes or unable to drive because of age or disability. This is the case in the western part of the District just south of McKinley, where 30 to 40 percent of households do not own a car.¹⁴ For these and other households without cars, having safe and agreeable walking and biking environments is a matter of social equity.

Fresno has made a strong citywide commitment to improving the City for pedestrians and bicyclists. In 2017, the City adopted an Active Transportation Plan (ATP) that sets goals and objectives that guide funding for transportation improvements citywide. Because pedestrians travel shorter distances than bicyclists, the ATP prioritizes pedestrian network improvements in locations with the greatest need, such as to add missing sidewalks in disadvantaged neighborhoods, where there are high levels of pedestrian activity, and at intersections with a high frequency of pedestrian collisions.

Another aspect of pedestrian comfort and street design is the extent to which asphalt and concrete is unshaded and creates urban “heat islands”. Analysis for this Plan shows heat islands along portions of Belmont and Olive Avenues. Trees and other landscaping are one way to reduce the heat island effect.



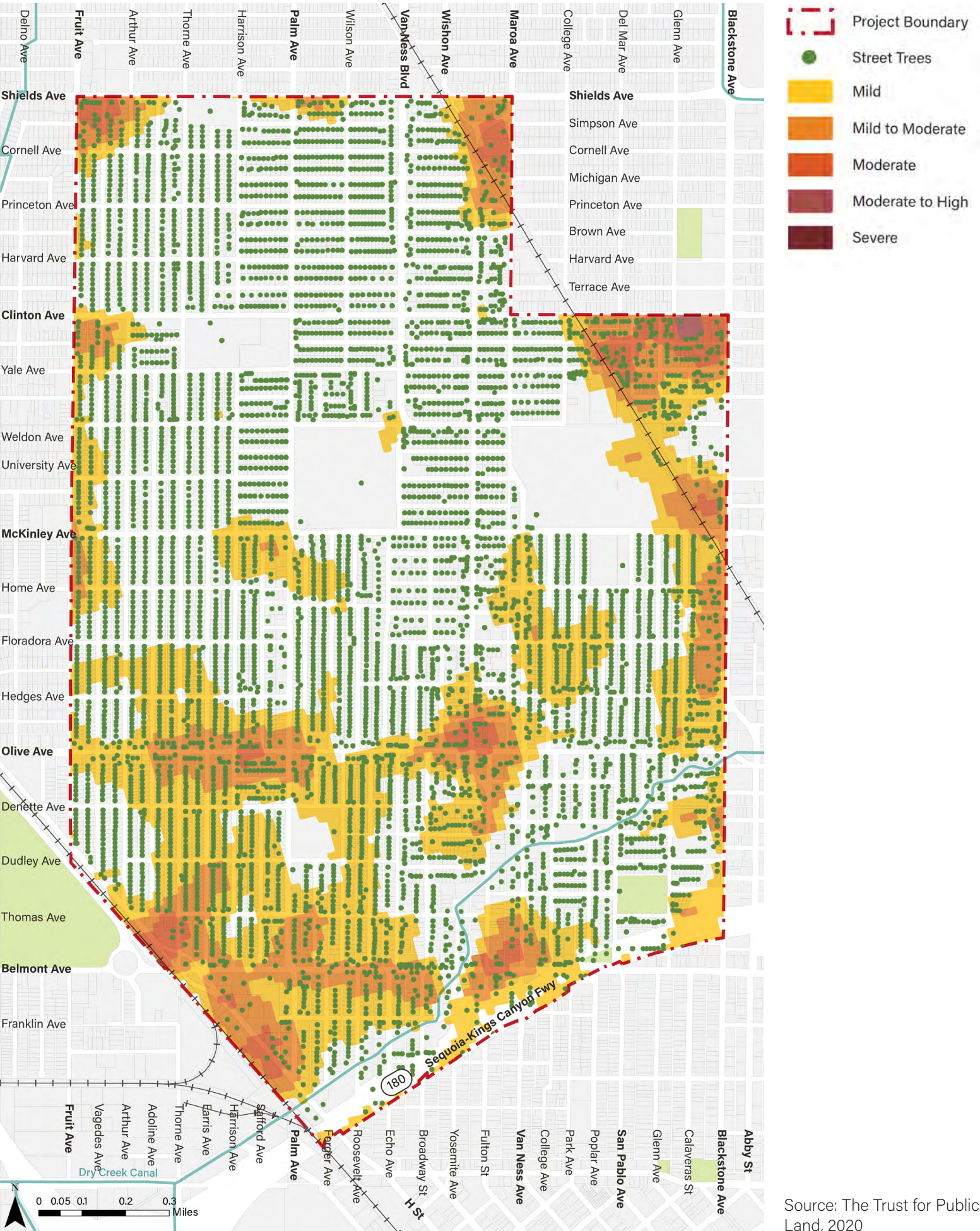
Shaded streets creating a comfortable pedestrian walking environment.



Wide sidewalk lines by building frontage with active uses, enhancing the quality of walking environment.

¹⁴Ibid, Figure 37.

FIGURE 5.3 | Urban Heat Islands



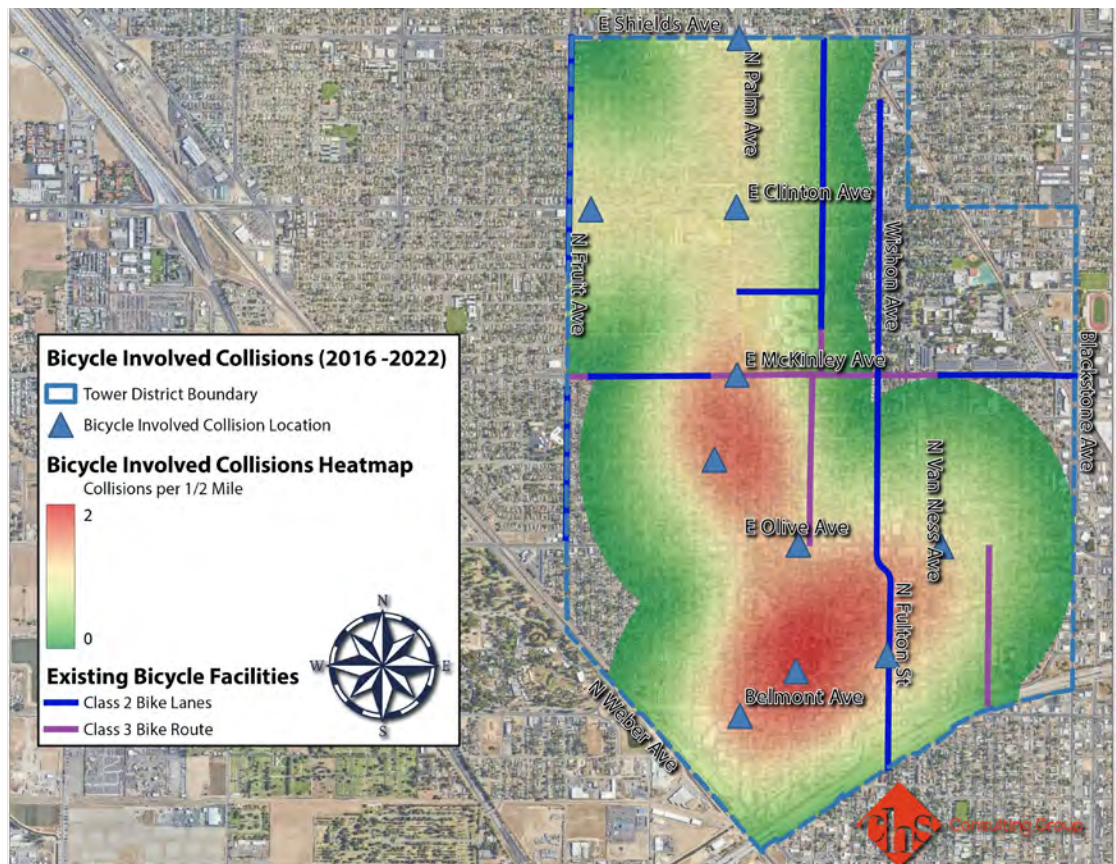
Source: The Trust for Public Land, 2020

5.6 Bicycling

Tower District supports bike riding in many respects – and more can be done to promote bicycle use and bike safety. The District's network of streets offers bicyclists direct routes to destinations along local streets that have relatively slow traffic speeds. But while most streets in Tower District have low traffic volumes and speeds conducive to riding a bike, there are many locations where bicyclists are unprotected and report that fast-moving vehicles pass too close. The highest rate of bicycle-involved collisions occurred in the southern portion of the Tower District, near freeway ramps to State Route 180. Secondary hot spots are located along Palm Avenue, between McKinley and Olive Avenues. Most collisions (80%) occurred on roadways with no bicycle facilities.¹⁵

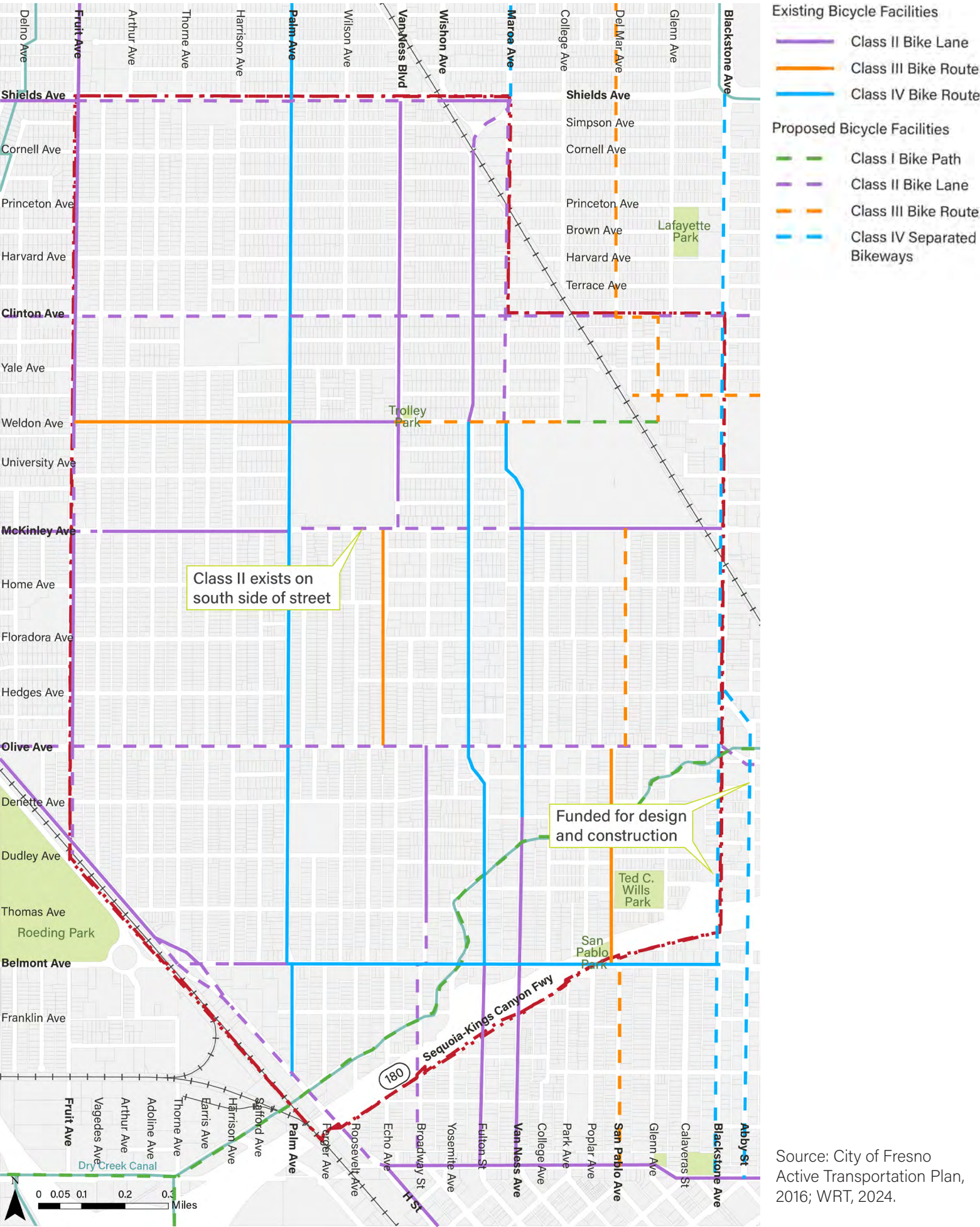
The District features dedicated bike lanes along some collector streets and arterials, such as along Van Ness, Wishon, Palm, and Belmont.

FIGURE 5.4 | Bicycle-Involved Collisions



¹⁵CHS Consulting, UC Berkeley SafeTREC, 2023.

FIGURE 5.5 | Existing and Planned Bike Lanes



Source: City of Fresno
Active Transportation Plan,
2016; WRT, 2024.



Class IV separated bikeway along Van Ness Boulevard creating a safer biking network.

5.7 Public Transit



Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along Blackstone Avenue provides frequent service between Downtown and north Fresno neighborhoods.

Bike lanes (Class II facilities) use pavement striping to set aside dedicated space for bicycle use. The District also has bike routes (Class III facilities) where bikes and vehicles share lanes space, and pavement markings and signage ask motorists to yield. An absence of bicycle facilities on other streets discourages bicycle travel in the District and results in potentially dangerous conditions.

The City's Active Transportation Plan (ATP) prioritizes bike-related investments, such as "priority bikeway" improvements along Fulton/Wishon (implemented before this writing), and planned improvements along Van Ness Avenue and McKinley.¹⁶ Priority bikeways are often prioritized for funding and implementation because they provide low-stress and high-quality infrastructure for bicyclists.¹⁷ The ATP also identifies long-term opportunities for trails, such as paths along canals and inactive railroad alignments.

Public transit plays an important role in the mobility of residents within and around the Tower District. Transit improves the quality of life of Tower District residents, workforce, and visitors by providing an alternative to car use and ownership, which is particularly important to persons with limited income, those who can't drive because of age (such as young students and older seniors) or disability. Public transit also benefits people who don't use it by reducing traffic, congestion, air pollution, and noise. Transit also helps to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas generation.

Fresno County's Regional Long-Range Transit Plan establishes a framework for continued investments and enhancements to service throughout the City and region. Specifically, it strives to operate an efficient and fiscally responsible system by matching available resources to demonstrated demand for services, which often follows land use decisions that increase numbers of residents and employees.

The Transit Plan also focuses on ways to enhance users' experience. While all parts of Tower District benefit from nearby transit lines and transit stops, service delays can occur. Physical improvements can

¹⁶City of Fresno, 2016 "Active Transportation Plan," Figure 49.

¹⁷Ibid, pp. 101-104.

FIGURE 5.6 | Transit Routes



improve transit, as reliable and distinctive design of transit shelters can aid placemaking. Street improvements, such as pedestrian infrastructure, can also encourage transit use by making transit stops easier to access.

Fresno Area Express (FAX) provides bus routes along most collector and arterial streets, such that few locations are more than a quarter-mile from transit. Along the east edge of the District, Blackstone Avenue serves as a high-frequency bus corridor with longer hours of service. Fresno Area Express (FAX) has constructed a 15.7-mile bus rapid transit (BRT) route that connects Downtown to North Fresno. The BRT services decrease travel times by:

- giving buses priority in mixed traffic by using signal priority; and
- having fewer stops by increasing their spacing and providing more frequent service.

5.8 Motor Vehicles

Driving remains the dominant way of “getting there,” particularly for longer trips. In a 2023 survey that informed development of this Plan, 85 percent of respondents said that vehicle use was the transportation mode they used most.

The District’s street pattern offers a greater variety of possible routes getting to local destinations, which helps to distribute traffic among multiple routes. Street connections that connect beyond District boundaries are more limited, as they cross Union Pacific rail tracks to the west, BNSF rail tracks to the northeast, and State Route 180 freeway to the south. Street widening has occurred over time to accommodate higher traffic volumes, which often leads to higher vehicle speeds. Higher traffic volumes are generated along arterial and collector streets leading to and from freeway interchanges along SR 180 and along SR 99.

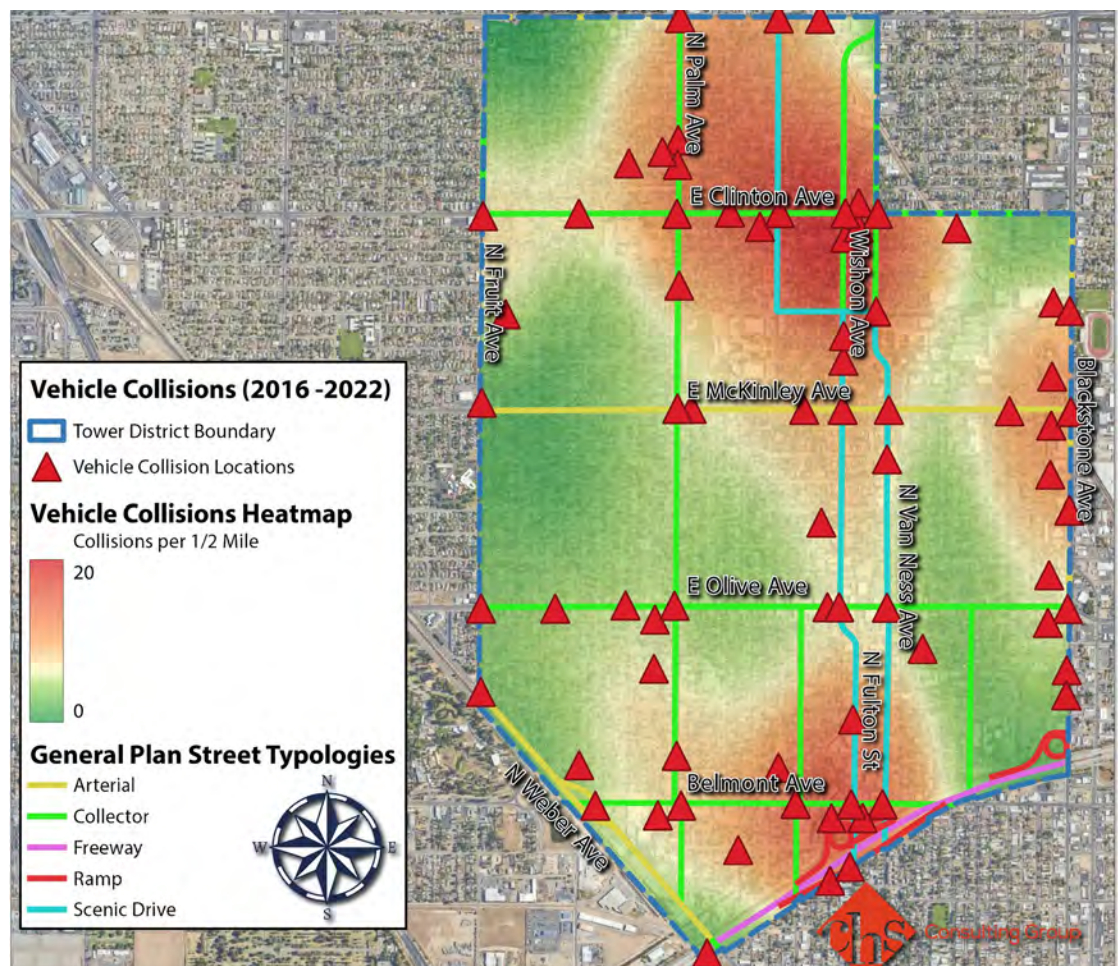
Vehicle collisions were concentrated along arterial and collector streets, which have wider travel lanes and higher vehicle speeds. As of 2023, the highest collision rates were: McKinley near Blackstone, Clinton near Van Ness Avenue, Belmont near Fulton and Van Ness Avenues, and Palm between Shields and Clinton Avenues. Principal reasons for collisions include unsafe speeds and traffic controls at intersections.¹⁸

¹⁸CHS Consulting, UC Berkeley SafeTREC, 2023.

The City's General Plan emphasizes safety by prioritizing funding for improvements in areas that have reported fatalities and injuries, such as with “traffic calming” improvements. Traffic calming slows traffic to speeds where vehicle-pedestrian injuries are less common and less likely to result in fatal or serious injuries when they occur. Traffic calming design elements include crosswalk curb extensions, landscaped islands, speed humps, and traffic circles.

Other General Plan priorities include improving travel time reliability instead of focusing on speed, and reducing the miles that households drive by providing better transportation options and having local destinations close to where people live and work – as is the case in many parts of the Tower District.

FIGURE 5.7 | Vehicle Collisions



Source: CHS Consulting, UC Berkeley SafeTREC, 2023.



Traffic calming measure to create safer streets.

Clockwise from top left: speed hump, traffic circle, chicane, Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), bulb-out and raised crosswalk.

5.9 Trucks

While truck access is vital for light industrial and some commercial operations, truck traffic has had a detrimental effect on the Tower District's residential neighborhoods and its main streets. During the planning process, many community members complained of excessive truck speeds, truck noise while idling at intersections, health related concerns due to deteriorating air quality and not enough separation from trucks while riding bicycles. Trucks also damage street surfaces and contribute to potholes.

Thoughtful planning can help mitigate truck-related impacts. The South Central Fresno AB 617 Community Truck Reroute Study Truck Routing and Implementation Strategies Report (2024) evaluates impacts and summarizes potential strategies for abating truck impacts on the community, especially as they relate to residential uses and schools. The Study's recommendations build upon truck routes established by the City in 2005 and analyze whether the effects of heavy-duty trucks travelling within the community can be mitigated to improve residents' health and safety, by addressing air pollution, traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, and noise.

An air pollution health impact study was conducted by UC Merced's Community and Labor Center to assess the effects of truck-generated air pollution to health outcomes in the community and document residents' needs. The study's health impact analysis used quantitative methods informed by a community health survey, and determined that residents in the South Fresno community who lived closer to freeways and truck routes were on average exposed to higher traffic, diesel particles, fine particles, and ozone, resulting in additional risk of asthma, cardio-cerebral vascular events, pre-term births, and infant mortality.¹⁹

The Study proposes "truck regulated areas" that would restrict truck traffic and operations in the Plan area between Belmont and McKinley. The Study also recommends the following treatments along truck routes:

- new sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes,
- traffic calming to reduce truck speeds,
- optimizing traffic signals to improve traffic flow,
- roadway maintenance,
- technology to monitor trucks in regulated areas, and
- strong enforcement.

¹⁹Arcadia, Padilla & Associates, and UC Merced, "South Central Fresno AB 617 Community Truck Reroute Study Community Meeting," PowerPoint, January 2024.

5.10 Parking and Transportation Demand Management

The Fresno General Plan promotes efficient use of parking and ways to reduce demand for parking. Ways to use parking more efficiently include: the physical design of parking facilities, sharing parking among different land uses, and information technology that indicates where parking is available.

Demand for parking can be addressed by promoting alternatives to car use and by charging for parking in locations where it is in high demand. Reduced parking demand can help make infill development more feasible, particularly affordable residential development, and can reduce the amount of area that parking takes up, which is why parking consuming two-thirds of a site is of typical auto-oriented commercial projects.

Parking benefits districts are noted in the General Plan as ways to manage parking demand and fund consolidated public parking, such as in multi-level parking garages. Net revenues collected from on-street parking pricing can be dedicated to funding public parking improvements, as well as street enhancements that support local businesses.

5.11 Planned Improvements

BNSF BLACKSTONE/MCKINLEY GRADE SEPARATION PROJECT

An average of 37 trains cross the intersection of Blackstone and McKinley each day, which has caused traffic delays of 2 minutes 48 seconds on average. The Blackstone-McKinley Grade Separation Project will create a new roadway underpass below the BNSF tracks to allow the uninterrupted flow of traffic along Blackstone and McKinley. The project will increase roadway capacity and enhance safety across transportation modes, by adding pedestrian crosswalks at key locations and providing bicycle paths (Class IV bicycle facilities).

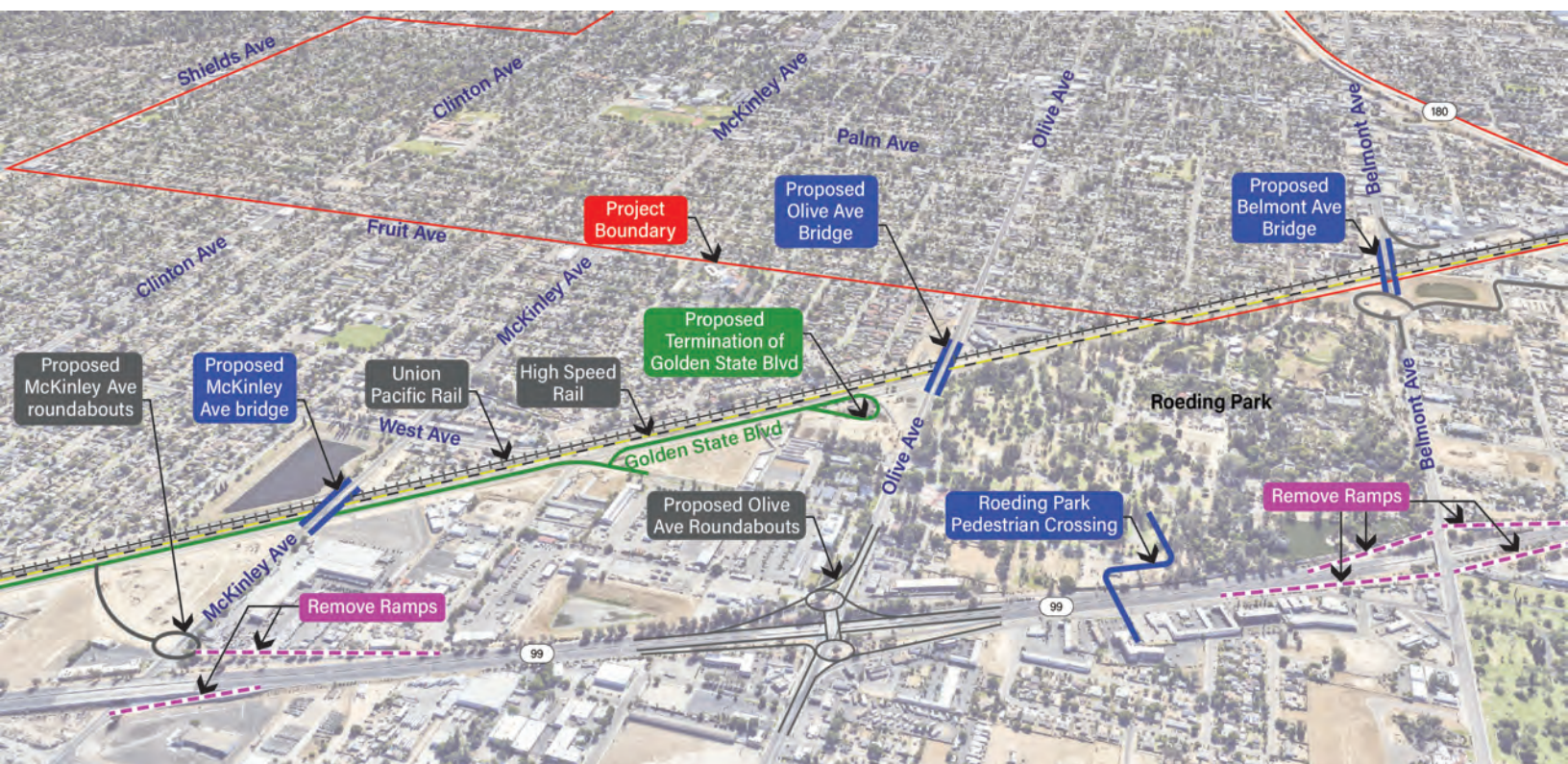
SR 99 INTERCHANGES & HIGH SPEED RAIL

Construction of California's High Speed Rail system in Fresno requires the grade-separation of Belmont and Olive Avenues where they cross the Union Pacific right-of-way. Bridges would be built over the railroad in these locations and will be accompanied by pedestrian sidewalks and bike lanes.

Meanwhile, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) plans to close freeway on- and off-ramps where State Route (SR) 99 intersects Belmont and McKinley Avenues, to increase freeway safety and reduce congestion. As a consequence, roadway connections in and out of the District will be altered and will have an effect on traffic patterns after project completion expected in 2029. With the closure of the Belmont and McKinley interchanges, traffic volumes on Olive Avenue may increase.²⁰

Truck circulation patterns will also be altered, as the nearest freeway access to Tower District's light industrial area will be where Olive meets SR 99 and where Fulton meets SR 180. Specifically, truck traffic could increase along Weber Avenue between Belmont and Olive, with effects on adjacent residential neighborhoods.

FIGURE 5.8 | Circulation Effects of SR 99 Interchange and HSR Improvements



²⁰ Caltrans, "Final Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Assessment and Section 4(f) Evaluation with Finding of No Significant Impact," dated February 2023, online at <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/district-6/documents/d6-environmental-docs/06-0w800/sr99-el-dor-clnt-rehab-f-060w800-0223-a11y.pdf> (as of June 2024).

5.12 Objectives and Policies

C 1 IMPROVE TOWER DISTRICT STREETS TO ENHANCE ACCESS USING ALL MODES OF TRANSPORTATION AND CREATE A BETTER ENVIRONMENT.

C 1.1 Improve the multi-modal functions of key corridors.

Using Fresno's Active Transportation Plan as a starting point, evaluate road diet and bicycle facility designs with residents and business owners who live along key corridors to improve safety and reduce collisions while supporting adjacent land uses. The co-created designs should elevate pedestrian safety as the highest priority, while also establishing a unique, visual identity for each corridor. The following corridors should be prioritized for study:

- **Olive Avenue, Fulton Street, and Wishon Avenue south of McKinley.** Create a strong pedestrian-oriented environment along these important "main streets." Adjacent to properties zoned Commercial Main Street (CMS), consider relative merits of Class II bike lanes versus Class IV bike lanes, if curb-to-curb widths would allow on-street parking to be retained. If Class II and Class IV bike lanes would result in the loss of on-street parking, consider Class III bike routes to retain on-street parking.
- **Clinton Avenue.** Implement traffic calming measures to slow traffic to address safety issues.
- **McKinley Avenue.** Implement traffic calming measures and Class IV bike lanes.
- **Belmont Avenue.** Consider traffic calming for a safe and comfortable pedestrian environment. See POS 4.2 Public safety.

C 1.2 Enhance Main Streets

Enhance streets serving Commercial Main Street (CMS) zoned properties. Along Olive Avenue, establish a traditional commercial "main street" environment that creates a sense of place and prioritizes pedestrian activity. Strengthen Olive Avenue by making the following improvements:

- Limit the number of travel lanes to no more than three, with one lane in each direction. While shared center left-turn lanes may be needed, the preferred arrangement of lanes is to have two travel lanes with one lane in each direction and on-street parking lanes to support street-facing retail land use.
- Limit travel lane widths to no more than 11 feet, except when implementing Class III bike routes on Commercial Main Street zoned properties, travel lanes should be no more than 12 feet wide to accommodate vehicle maneuvers around bicyclists where no protected bike lane is provided.
- Provide bicycle facilities, subject to study as described above.

C 1.3 Encourage active transportation modes by improving bicycle access, safety, and comfort for users of all ages and abilities.

Establish a well-connected bicycle network that provides safe, convenient, and comfortable bike routes through and to the Tower District. Expand and enhance Tower District's Bicycle Network. Establish Primary Bikeways that provide through routes for bicycles and connect to the larger bicycle network.

- Design bicycle facility type dependent on primary roadway designations to address roadway design speed, while not oversizing facilities which would diminish the quality of abutting pedestrian routes.
- Discourage excessive vehicle speeds and volumes by implementing complete street designs that reduce adjacent vehicle travel lane widths to no more than 11 feet with a 7-foot-wide parking lane.
- Widen sidewalks to at least 10 feet with a minimum 6-foot clear walking zone and buffer zone of at least 4 feet, where street trees can be planted between the sidewalk and parking lanes, travel lanes, or bike lanes.
- Where observed travel speeds exceed the posted speed limit, apply appropriate traffic calming measures to reduce vehicle speeding and increase safety and access for active modes.

C 1.4 Provide universal accessibility.

Ensure full access for mobility impaired persons in all parts of the Tower District, especially in areas which are centers of public and community life.

C 1.5 Increase transit frequency.

Work with FAX evaluate potential increase transit access and frequency enhancements in the Tower District.

C 1.6 Increase late night transportation options.

Work with FAX, other providers, and stakeholders to increase late night transportation options after midnight to serve residents who work late and don't drive a car, and to provide a safe ride home rather than driving while intoxicated. The service should have a user-friendly online interface with real-time location and estimated arrival time information.

C 1.7 Establish mobility hubs.

Work with the community to determine locations for a network of community mobility hubs in the plan area. Potential locations include the core of Tower or Fresno City College. Mobility hubs are places to move from one transportation mode to another, and where the user experience is welcoming.

C 1.8 Improve transit amenities.

Improve transit waiting areas with better shelters, seating, and real-time arrival information.

C 1.9 Coordinate curbside activities.

Conduct a curbside management study of the commercial core, and define locations for where commercial loading needs to occur and pickup/drop-off such as for ride-sharing vehicles. Consider time-of-day restrictions to make best use of curbside zones.

C 1.10 Encourage "Green Alleys."

To encourage walking and biking and active underused alley infrastructure, establish a new green alleys program. Encourage community engagement by creating safe corridors for slower modes of travel that allow residents to interact.



C 2 FOCUS CIRCULATION IMPROVEMENTS ON PEDESTRIAN SAFETY.

C 2.1 Add pedestrian safety elements.

Work with Public Works to install street lighting, crosswalk striping and installation of pedestrian safety measures, particularly at frequently used but unmarked pedestrian crossings.

C 2.2 Conduct a Sidewalk Gap Study.

Undertake a detailed sidewalk gap study focused around schools, and seek funding to address gaps. Recommendations should locate and describe needed features, including high-visibility crosswalks at intersections, ADA-accessible curb ramps, pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, and raised speed tables at crosswalks.



C 3 ENHANCE SAFETY ON LOCAL INTERIOR NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS.

C 3.1 Calm vehicular traffic.

Install traffic calming measures within the residential neighborhoods to improve their safety and enjoyment. Such measures may include, but are not limited to, speed humps, traffic circles, bulb-outs, neck-downs, stop signs, and other effective methods. Methods should be carefully considered for both their potential effectiveness as well as visual aesthetic consistent with the visual character of each neighborhood.

C 3.2 Consider mid-block crossings in critical locations.

Provide safe mid-block pedestrian crossings where pedestrian safety would be significantly improved, such as near schools and in the middle of particularly long blocks in main street areas, if consistent with the City's uncontrolled crosswalk standards. Accompany mid-block crossings with high-visibility crosswalks and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs).



C 4 INITIATE PROJECTS THAT HELP MITIGATE ADVERSE IMPACTS RESULTING FROM REGIONAL CIRCULATION IMPROVEMENTS.

C 4.1 Coordinate with the Department of Public Works to complete the planned vehicular improvements at McKinley and Blackstone Avenues and support the installation of enhanced bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Evaluate the number and width of vehicle travel lanes to reduce vehicle speeds through areas with significant pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Ensure that planned improvements feature comprehensive pedestrian and bike infrastructure. Implement traffic calming measures in neighborhoods surrounding adjacent development projects.

C 4.2 Initiate pedestrian improvements at the SR 180 Access Ramps.

Implement complete street improvements on Fulton Street, Van Ness Avenue, and Belmont Avenue near the SR 180 access ramps. Sidewalks should be provided on both sides of the street, at least 8 feet with a minimum 6-feet of clear walk area, with broader cross-sections preferred, and including street trees, places to sit, pedestrian-scaled street lighting in keeping with the character of historic streetlamps in the District, and gateway elements. Work with Caltrans to redesign the off-ramps of Fulton Street and Blackstone Avenue, to remove right-turn slip-lanes that allow high-speed vehicular traffic to continue at high speeds onto city streets.

C 4.3 Address change to local traffic from High-Speed Rail improvements.

Evaluate potential traffic impacts on Olive Avenue due to the High-Speed Rail State Route (SR)-99 ramp closure at Belmont Avenue, such as to make streetscape improvements along Olive Ave.

C 4.4 Address motorist needs and potential impacts from vehicles during special events.

Designate detour routes and provide consistent wayfinding signage to help visitors navigate the Tower District during special events. Protect neighborhoods from cut-through traffic.

C 4.5 Enhance and maintain landscape buffering.

Develop landscape improvement programs for streets to beautify Tower District, encourage walking, and address potential adverse impacts on adjacent residential properties and neighborhoods.



C 5 MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF TRUCK TRAFFIC ON THE RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE TOWER DISTRICT.

C 5.1 Rerouting of truck traffic.

Evaluate potential impacts from rerouting truck traffic due to High-Speed Rail and closure of SR99 interchanges, particularly health and equity-related concerns. Study potential effects of truck traffic at the local level and mitigate potential negative impacts, such as to make multimodal street improvements and designate truck routes away from residential neighborhoods. Specifically, study the potential effects of truck use of Weber Avenue following the closure of Golden State Boulevard, particularly its potential effects on residential areas, notably South Tower.



C 6 DEVELOP AND ADOPT A PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT (TDM) STRATEGY FOR THE TOWER DISTRICT THAT SUPPORTS COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY AND ENHANCES THE PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED CHARACTER OF THE DISTRICT.

C 6.1 On-street parking

Maximize on-street parking while providing adequate sidewalk widths and continuous street trees. Preserve existing on-street parking wherever possible. Consider ways to increase on-street parking, such as by introducing diagonal parking along streets that do not include bicycle lanes with curb-to-curb dimensions, in excess of what is functionally required.

C 6.2 Evaluate demand and location for bicycle parking.

To build on the multi-modal nature of the Tower District, encourage non-motorized modes of transportation. Require off-street bicycle parking with new development.

C 6.3 Surface parking fronting major streets.

Establish development standards that dramatically limit on-site surface parking where it fronts major streets, such as to require that at least three-quarters of a parcel's street frontage be lined by building or community open space.

C 6.4 Residential parking permit district.

Explore the creation of Residential Parking Permit Districts to manage spill over parking from commercial and institutional uses.

C 6.5 Shared parking for the Entertainment District.

Consider establishing shared off-street parking to support the commercial core area and reduce demand for on-street parking.

C 6.6 New development.

Require that new development incorporate TDM measures to reduce parking demand and allow parking configurations that reduce site area dedicated to parking, such as tandem parking and use of mechanical lifts. All new development will also be required to comply with the Fresno Municipal Code parking standards.



C 7 ENHANCE THE UNIQUE IDENTITY OF THE TOWER DISTRICT WITH PLACEMAKING.

C 7.1 Create unique gateways to signal entry into the Tower District

The Tower District has many distinct entryways. Enhancing the sense of place at gateways can create pride among residents and highlight the district as a cultural hub of Fresno. Gateway locations may include:

- Van Ness, Wishon/Maroa, and Palm Avenues on the north
- Van Ness, Fulton, and Broadway on the south

- McKinley, Olive, Belmont (at San Pablo), and Maroa on the east
- McKinley, Olive, Belmont (at HSR crossing), and Shields on the west

C 7.2 Wayfinding and signage.

Develop wayfinding and signage branding for the Tower District to allow residents and visitors to explore the neighborhood. Help people navigate the district with its historic and cultural sites, public parking, retail areas and Fresno City College. Develop street signs in line with historic Tower elements in coordination with Public Works.

C 7.3 Support public art in the Tower District.

Include public art in the Tower District along sidewalks and in plazas and parks to tell the story of the neighborhood and reflect its culture. Public art should include installations and integrated elements like paving, lighting, and seating.

Require that new development along key corridors integrate public art elements or contribute to a public art fund. Public art will be administered through the Parks, Recreation and Arts Commission.

C 7.4 Consider a demonstration program from alley enhancements.

Consider a demonstration program for alley enhancements to support alley paving and enhancement for walking, biking, and access for garages and to potential accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Enhance the spaces with landscaping and public art where possible.

C 7.5 Enable temporary street traffic closures and slow streets.

Continue temporary street traffic closures on Olive Avenue to enable the Pride and Mardi Gras festivals that bring life to the community. Consider additional temporary traffic closures (i.e. Sunday Streets) and/or traffic slowing programs (i.e. Slow Streets) that can support neighborhood walking, biking, and quality of life. Note that such closures are subject to the City's special events approval process.

C 7.6 Public events.

Develop a program of public events to take place in Tower District neighborhood shopping areas.



C 8 CREATE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS IN THE TOWER DISTRICT.

C 8.1 Provide streetscape elements, public plazas, and open space to engender public activities and functions.

Design and program streetscape elements, plazas, and other public open space to be welcoming to all users. Strategies to employ include: space activation using design features and programmed activities, adequate lighting, uninterrupted lines of sight from streets into the space, absence of subareas that can be readily appropriated for unwanted activities, and on-going high-quality repair and maintenance.

C 8.2 Add features that bring comfort, safety and attractiveness to the public realm.

Develop a palette of high-quality public space furniture like trash cans, benches, bicycle stands, light fixtures, tree grates, planters, etc. to develop a cohesive public realm for the Tower District, as might be implemented by a Business Improvement District (BID) or other similar mechanism. Borrow from historic elements where possible to maintain the character of the neighborhood.

C 8.3 Adequate Seating.

Through a Business Improvement District (BID) or other similar mechanism, provide adequate public seating along major corridors. Specifically, add seating in the core commercial area of the Tower District along Olive Avenue.

C 8.4 Trash Cans.

Through a Business Improvement District (BID) or other similar mechanism, add adequate trash cans along commercial streets including Olive, Van Ness, Belmont and Blackstone Avenues. Extend the addition of trash cans to one block into the neighborhood around the core of the entertainment area.

C 8.5 Plant street trees to enhance tree canopy and maintain uniformity within plan areas.

Trees are essential in providing respite from urban heat, and infusing nature into the urban environment. Specific actions include:

- Examine the tree trimming policies and tree replacement policies to maintain tree health and shade in the Tower District. Add the tree data to the public data portal to allow residents to help report on tree health or surrounding issues.
- Plant street trees along sidewalks where missing, especially along Olive and Belmont Avenues and in the South Tower neighborhood, to mitigate the urban heat island effect in these areas.
- Through property owner support, a Business Improvement District (BID) or other similar mechanism, require the planting of trees in plazas and parking lots.
- Choose street trees with large canopies to provide adequate shade where planted. Use drought-tolerant, native species as much as possible to reduce maintenance needs.





06

UTILITIES

UTILITIES

The Tower District is supported by an established infrastructure network that serves existing land uses. Many utilities are aging and in need of upgrades to ensure proper long-term function and to accommodate intensification of uses as infill development occurs. Additionally, the City is moving toward a more sustainable and resource-efficient future, for which infrastructure will play a critical role. This chapter provides a general description of infrastructure conditions and needs.

6.1 Water

The City relies on groundwater and surface water -- and to a lesser extent recycled water -- to meet the water supply demands of the community. Groundwater levels have been declining since 1930, and the rate of decline has accelerated in recent years. Surface water that serves the City comes from outside of the City limit line at Pine Flat Reservoir and Millerton Lake. While the City has an active and successful history of water conservation, the City as a whole needs to improve the reliability and resiliency of its water supply resources.

6.2 Sanitary Sewer

The City of Fresno is the Regional Sewer Agency for the Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area (FCMA), which owns and maintains a wastewater collection system that serves Fresno and other communities. The Sewer Agency has a program for upgrading facilities to halt and remedy the effects of age, deterioration, and corrosion.

6.3 Stormwater and Drainage

The Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District (FMFCD) is responsible for managing urban stormwater runoff in the Fresno metropolitan area. FMFCD's flood control program consists of control facilities and related streams and channel features. Some localized flooding occurs during periods of heavy rain, and a large part of the planning area has a 0.2% annual chance of flooding or 1% annual chance of flooding not more than one foot.²¹ There is one detention basin within the District's boundaries, near the intersection of McKinley and the Union Pacific railroad.

²¹ Flood Maps | FEMA.gov

Stormwater quality is another consideration, particularly since pollution drains from streets and parking lots as urban runoff and can degrade downstream habitat if not treated. In response, FMFCD and other local public agencies have developed a storm water quality management program in compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

6.4 Solid Waste

The Solid Waste Management Division handles the collection of municipal solid waste, recyclables, green waste, and Operation Clean-up for 118,915 residential customers, which includes the Tower District area. In addition, the division oversees litter collection and responds to FresGO customer queries across 103 square miles within the city limits. These collection efforts generate about 4,918 tons of material weekly.

Moreover, responding to community needs, the division has implemented various initiatives including: Beautify Fresno, Oil Payment Program, Beverage Container Recycling, Organic Waste Recycling, Used Oil Program, Landfill Operating—Remediation and Oversight Services, and CalRecycle Household Hazard.

There is no planned capital expenditure associated with solid waste in Tower District. Any future development would need to be constructed to conform to standard specifications for solid waste (i.e. trash enclosure, space for sufficient turn radius, etc.)

