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Agenda Item: ID#19-1715 (5:00 P.M.)

Date: 6/27/2019

2019 JUN 24 A 11:30
CITY OF FRESNO
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FRESNO CITY COUNCIL



Late Submission Information Packet

Agenda Related Item(s) – ID#19-1715 (5:00 P.M.)

Contents: Specific Plan of the West Area – Initiation Report

Item(s)

CONTINUED HEARING to consider initiation of the Specific Plan of the West Area, pertaining to approximately 7,077 acres in the West Development Area of the Fresno General Plan, filed by the Development and Resource Management Department Director

1. RESOLUTION – Initiating the Specific Plan of the West Area Draft Land Use Map and Guiding Principles and the corresponding amendment of the General Plan, and repeal or amendment of the West Area Community Plan and Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan pertaining to approximately 7,077 acres located in the West Development Area to allow for future adoption of the Specific Plan of the West Area pursuant to Fresno Municipal Code Sections 15-5803-C and 15-4902-B.

Supplemental Information:

Any agenda related public documents received and distributed to a majority of the City Council after the Agenda Packet is printed are included in Supplemental Packets. Supplemental Packets are produced as needed. The Supplemental Packet is available for public inspection in the City Clerk's Office, 2600 Fresno Street, during normal business hours (main location pursuant to the Brown Act, G.C. 54957.5(2)). In addition, Supplemental Packets are available for public review at the City Council meeting in the City Council Chambers, 2600 Fresno Street. Supplemental Packets are also available on-line on the City Clerk's website.

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SPECIFIC PLAN OF THE WEST AREA

INITIATION REPORT | MAY 2019

Alternate formats of this document will be provided by the City upon request.

To request alternate formats contact:

Shannon M. Mulhall, Certified Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator at (559) 621-8716.

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1

PLAN INTRODUCTION



image taken by City staff of West Area agriculture on Shields Ave and Grantland Ave

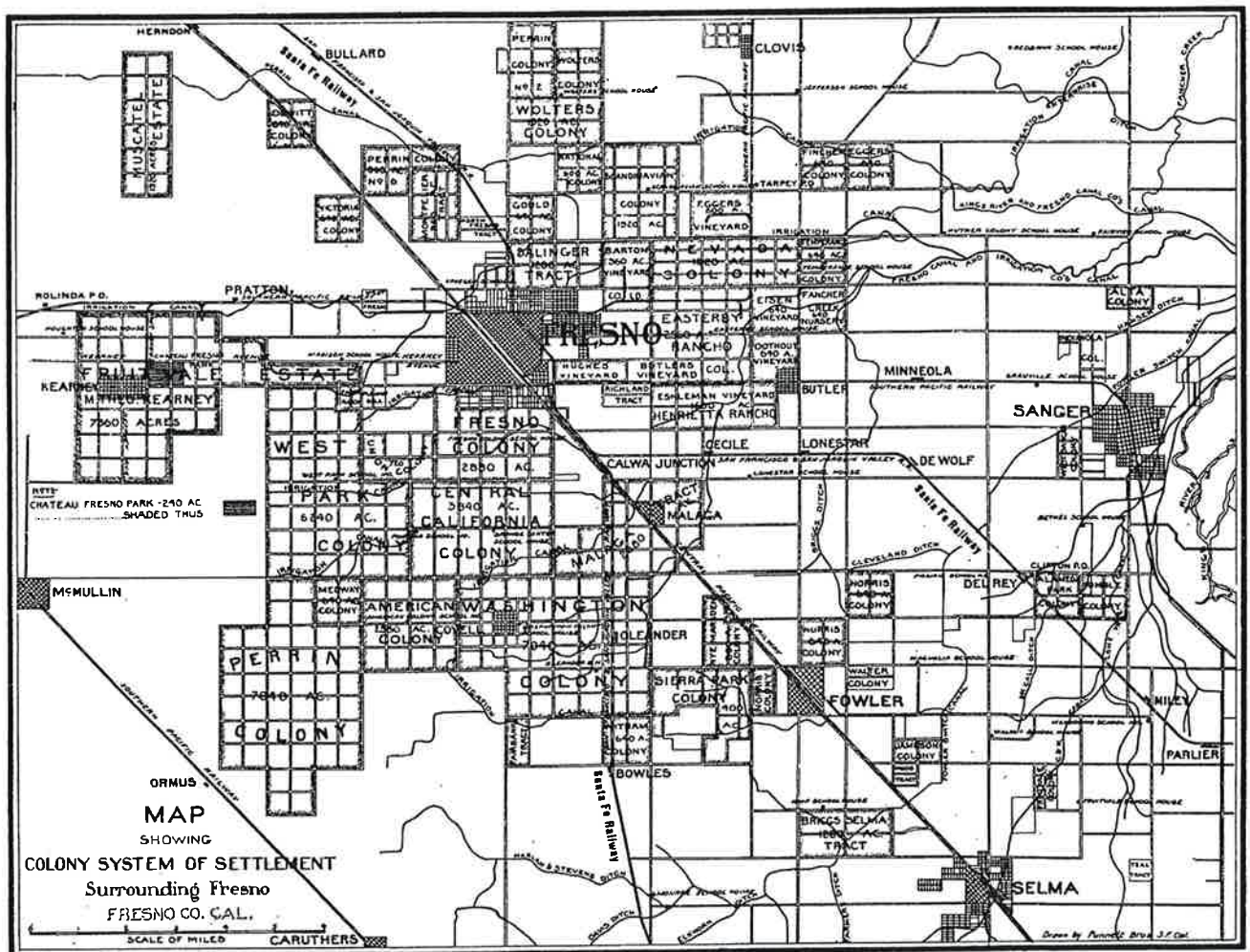
1.1 Introduction

The last time the West Area was comprehensively planned for was in 2002 when city leaders adopted the 2025 General Plan. That Plan included the West Area Community Plan which consisted of 13 pages of policies and goals. Before the Community Plan was adopted, a small portion of the Plan Area was included in the Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan which was completed in 1998. However, that plan applies to only 5% of the West Area. The people of the West Area wanted a new long-range planning tool that updated the vision provided in these older plans that addressed current issues.

The Specific Plan of the West Area (the Plan) will serve as the catalyst for development as well as a vital instrument for much needed infrastructure improvements. The West Area has long been considered “Forgotten Fresno” due to limited commercial amenities, a fragmented roadway system, and leapfrog development. The residents of the West Area continue to advocate for transportation improvements, development that respects agriculture, and commercial amenities.

The Plan lays the foundation to make the West Area a complete neighborhood that moderates residential development and increases opportunities for commercial growth.

The Plan reiterates, and in some instances, refines policies from the General Plan on a range of topics that include land use and development, transportation, the environment, parks, and public utilities. The Plan will be used by policymakers to guide decisions about the future of the Plan Area, to make land use determinations, and to acquire federal and state grant funding for public projects. The Plan will also be used by community organizations, developers, and residents as a basis for future partnerships and planning.



The following excerpted from an exposé on “Fresno Vineyards” from The Examiner, San Francisco on April 6, 1890 provides a narrative glimpse of Fresno’s origins in agricultural vibrancy:

"It is not many years ago that the vast expanse of level plains that constitute the valley of the San Joaquin was by most people considered a barren desert of little or no value. If the winter season had been a sufficiently wet one there would be a little pasture for large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle that roamed about at will in the wild and unsettled region until the intense heat of a July sun, withering and scorching every bit of herbage, would compel them to resort to the foothills and mountains again. If, however, the season had been a dry one, these thousands of acres were at best

deemed utterly worthless. / Enterprise, combined with push and energy, have wrought miracles, and to-day Fresno county - the principal portion of which lies in the valley of the San Joaquin - is the scene of agricultural industries of all kinds. / Here there are wheat fields - through which one may drive all day without reaching the end.

Fruits of every variety flourish here, and yield prolifically. In this valley are grown and dried the finest white figs produced in the State. Peaches, pears, apricots and nectarines have all been planted and have produced marvelous results. / The product, however, which will cause the name and fame of Fresno to be sounded far and wide is the grape. Without exception, the natural advantages afforded here for the cultivation of



Fresno Vineyards, The Examiner San Francisco, 1890.

The sign of course became obsolete over the years, as did the series of improvements to the roads that followed leading to the construction of the freeway.

Several landmarks in Fresno were associated with old Highway 99 that ultimately became bypassed with the construction of the freeway including the Van Ness Entrance Gate welcoming motorists to Fresno; Belmont Circle that routed traffic from H Street via an underpass onto Motel Drive and alongside Roeding Park; one of the Richfield Beacons located approximately every fifty miles along Highway 99 that aided in guiding motorists as well as flyers; and more relevant to the West Area – the recently-demolished Astro Motel, located on the north end of what was known as Motel Drive between W Ashland and W Dakota avenues. The Astro was one of many motels along Motel Drive, an example of the numerous motel strips that “sprang up at entryways to cities along the highway... The bright neon beckoned nighttime travelers to stop for the night and grab some shut-eye” (Provost, Highway 99, 159).

The West Area currently has one designated historic resource. The Brewer Adobe, also referred to as the José García Adobe, is located near the southwest corner of West Shaw Avenue and North Hayes Avenue - within the boundaries of Highway City and fairly central within the West Area. The Brewer Adobe was constructed between 1923 and 1937 as a residential property type and is the only extant example of a vernacular building in the Fresno area that employs three construction techniques: traditional adobe brick, board and batten over frame, and hardpan with brick masonry construction. José García was the first known tenant and owner. The property was first evaluated as a historic resource in 1996 and referred to as the Brewer Farm, with Les Brewer as the property owner.



1.3 The Plan Area

The Plan Area is triangular in shape and located west of Highway 99. It is bounded on the south by the north side of West Clinton Avenue, and to the west by Grantland and Garfield Avenues. The Plan Area includes the southwest portion of Highway City adjacent to Highway 99. Figure 1.1 shows the Plan Area in relationship to the region.

The West Area is vast in land area which presents opportunities for development. For purposes of comparison, the size of the West Area is larger than the Capitol cities of Maryland (Annapolis), New Jersey (Trenton), Pennsylvania (Harrisburg), and Vermont (Montpelier). The West Area encompasses 7,077 acres or a little more than 11 square miles. A significant amount of land in the Plan Area is farmland or rural residential lots with large, uneven, and underutilized parcels. Of the eleven square miles, 6.9 square miles are in the city limits and 4.1 square miles in the growth area. The growth area is land outside the city limits but within the city's Sphere of Influence boundary, which is the adopted limit for future growth.

1.4 Farmland

Fresno County is ranked as one of the top agricultural counties in California. In 2017, county produce had nearly \$6.1 billion in crop value. A majority of the crops are grapes, almonds, cotton, and citrus. The Fresno region has rich history in agriculture that spans from A.Y. Easterby's lush wheat field to Sicilian immigrant Baldassare Forestiere's Underground Garden. Currently, residential and commercial development in the West Area abuts prime farmland. For many years the West Area was largely fig orchards. This Plan will incorporate policies that respect agriculture, and incorporate components of agriculture into the West Area's future.

The West Area has approximately 3,070.95 acres of land that is classified as Urban and Built-Up, according to the State Department of Conservation. Prime farmland is principally located outside of the Plan Area. The West Area has 285.65 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance which is located primarily in the western edge of the Plan Area. Unique Farmland has 509.39 acres within the Plan Area and is located within the southwest portion of the Plan Area. Farmland of Local Importance has approximately 1,562.82 acres located throughout the entire Plan Area. Vacant or Disturbed Land and Rural Residential Land account for approximately 1,650.17 acres within the growth area.

1.5 Political Background

The Plan Area is situated in the 16th Congressional District, the 8th State Senatorial District, and the 23rd and 31st State Assembly Districts. The Plan Area is also situated in County Supervisorial District No. 1. In addition, the Plan Area is represented by three City Council Districts. Council District No. 1 represents a majority of the Plan Area's population and covers a significant portion of the land in the middle of the Plan Area extending from the south side of West Shaw Avenue to the north side of West Shields Avenue. Council District No. 2 covers land in the northern portion of the Plan Area extending from the north side of West Shaw Avenue to the northern edge of the city's boundary. Council District No. 3 includes land in the southeast portion of the Plan Area extending from the south side of West Shields Avenue to the north side of West Clinton Avenue.

1.6 Other Planning Efforts Impacting the West Area

This Plan serves as the first major specific planning effort, environmental evaluation, and infrastructure analysis for the West Area. However, other planning efforts have occurred or are in process as described below.

- **The Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan (1998)**

The Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan was adopted January 6, 1998 and was prepared to address problems, issues, and opportunities of the Highway City neighborhood, especially for individuals who live, work or have a long-time involvement in the community. One of the guiding principles for the Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan encouraged development of traditional neighborhoods characterized by a diverse but compatible arrangement of residential, commercial, industrial, and public uses that was to be reinforced by existing and established single-family residential areas. The Specific Plan of the West Area would repeal a portion of the Highway City Neighborhood Specific Plan to avoid overlap and confusion with the Specific Plan of the West Area, but would carry forward any relevant area-specific policies.

- **The West Area Community Plan (2002)**

The West Area Community Plan was adopted on February 1, 2002 as “Appendix W” of the 2025 General Plan. The core goals of the Community Plan were to develop the West Area as a planned community with a complete range of services, facilities and public infrastructure development, and to minimize land use conflicts between agriculture and urban uses. This Plan would replace the Community Plan, but would carry forward any relevant policies.

- **The General Plan (2014)**

The General Plan was adopted on December 18, 2014 and sets the stage for the initiation of this Plan. This Plan refines the General Plan’s vision for the West Area. The General Plan created policies and implementation plans to achieve a long-term vision which emphasizes infill development, complete neighborhoods, and multi-modal transportation.

The General Plan emphasizes supporting established neighborhoods in Fresno with safe, well maintained, and accessible streets, public utilities, education and job training, proximity to jobs, retail services, health care, affordable housing, youth development opportunities, open space and parks, transportation options, and opportunities for home grown businesses. Another key goal of the General Plan that will be reiterated in this Plan is to resolve existing public infrastructure and service deficiencies, make full use of existing infrastructure, and invest in improvements to increase competitiveness and promote economic growth.

The Shaw Avenue Corridor from Highway 99 to Grantland Avenue is envisioned to be developed as a mixed-use corridor supported by enhanced transit service. This corridor includes high density and urban neighborhood residential components, along with retail, employment and civic uses. The General Plan proposes the location of a 40-acre park along the east side of the Veterans Boulevard between Shaw Avenue and Barstow Avenue, which will anchor a West Shaw Transit Village. The proposed park is bisected by a Class I bike trail along the Herndon Canal. This vision is supported by the West Area community and will continue in this Plan, albeit with lower density and possibly with integration of more open space.

- **The Parks Master Plan (2017)**

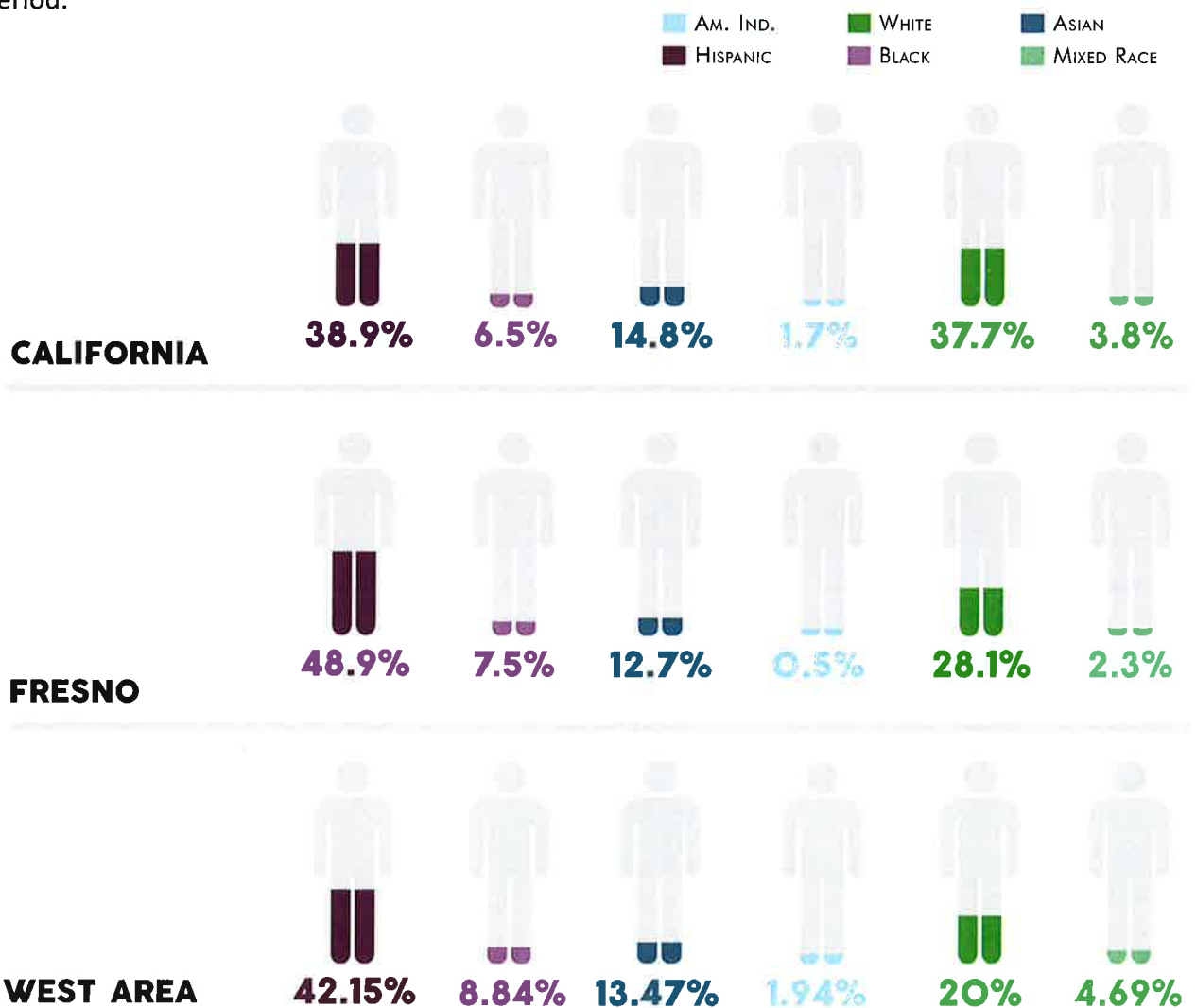
The Parks Master Plan (PMP) was adopted on December 14, 2017 and serves as a community-based vision and road map for planning a complete and functional park system in the city of Fresno. It examined the General Plan's level of service goals for park land and determined the amount of acreage needed for the city's existing and future population. The PMP articulates a vision for improving Fresno's park and open space system formed by public input and based on thorough analysis. Priorities of Fresno community members, institutional leaders, and policy makers are reflected in the PMP. The goals and recommendations of the PMP for the Plan Area will be mentioned at a later period.

1.7 West Area Profile

1.7 A. Race and Gender

According to the United States Census Bureau, the Hispanic community is the largest ethnic group in Fresno, and the West Area. The Hispanic ethnic group includes Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and any other Hispanic or Latino groups. This trend is also representative throughout the entire state of California and is not limited to the city of Fresno and the West Area. In 2015, the Hispanic community edged out Caucasians as the largest ethnic group in the state of California. Gender dynamics in the state of California, city of Fresno, and the Plan Area show a nearly even divide between male and female portions of the population.

FIGURE 1-2 RACE



Source: The United States Census Bureau

1.7 B. Secondary Education

Public education is provided by 21 public schools within the Central Unified School District (CUSD) serving approximately 15,772 pupils. The following schools located in the Plan Area are:

- **Central High School – East Campus.** This school was built in 1996 to accommodate rapid growth and development within CUSD’s coverage area.
- **Central Learning Adult School Site (CLASS).** CLASS is an alternative high school located on a campus it shares with the adult school. CLASS is a hybrid independent study program that incorporates direct instruction into traditional independent study model.
- **Glacier Point Middle School.** Glacier Point Middle School enrolls approximately 893 students and provides a rigorous learning environment.
- **Harvest Elementary School.** Harvest Elementary educates approximately 680 pupils in grades transitional kindergarten through sixth.
- **Herndon-Barstow Elementary School.** Herndon-Barstow Elementary was originally a rural school without a natural population within its boundary to fill it to capacity. However, an increase in development has caused enrollment to spike.
- **Teague Elementary School.** Teague Elementary School is located in close proximity to Inspiration Park and the proposed Highway City Community Resource Center.

- **Polk Elementary School.** Polk Elementary was named after former President James K. Polk, and is the first Fresno County schools to be themed on Californian history and the Westward Movement.
- **Preschool.** Preschool services are provided for children who are 4 years of age.

CUSD, as a whole, spans across and beyond the Plan Area amounting to a coverage area of approximately 88 square miles. CUSD primarily serves rural and suburban populations. Fuel by increased residential development since the early 2000’s, CUSD has experienced a hike in enrollment and as result has built new schools. The Board of Trustees serves as CUSD’s governing body, each elected from and representing an area, 3 trustee areas are located within the Plan Area. CUSD is preparing to build a new high school which is scheduled to open for the 2021-22 school year. In addition, CUSD is also preparing to construct two new elementary schools totaling approximately \$50 million. At the time of adoption of the General Plan, CUSD had 19 public schools; today CUSD has 2 additional schools.

1.7 D. Educational Attainment

Approximately 82% of the state's population has a high school education or higher, to include some college or an associate's degree. 31% of the state has attained a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. Educational levels are in the city as compared to the state. 75% of city residents have attained a high school education or higher, and 20% have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. The West Area's educational attainment level is lower than the state of California and the city of Fresno in all categories. 37% of West Area residents have attained a high school education or higher. Furthermore, a little over 8% of West Area residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher level. This subsection describes the educational attainment levels of the West Area population, as compared to the City of Fresno and the State of California.

FIGURE 1-5 EDUCATION

WEST AREA

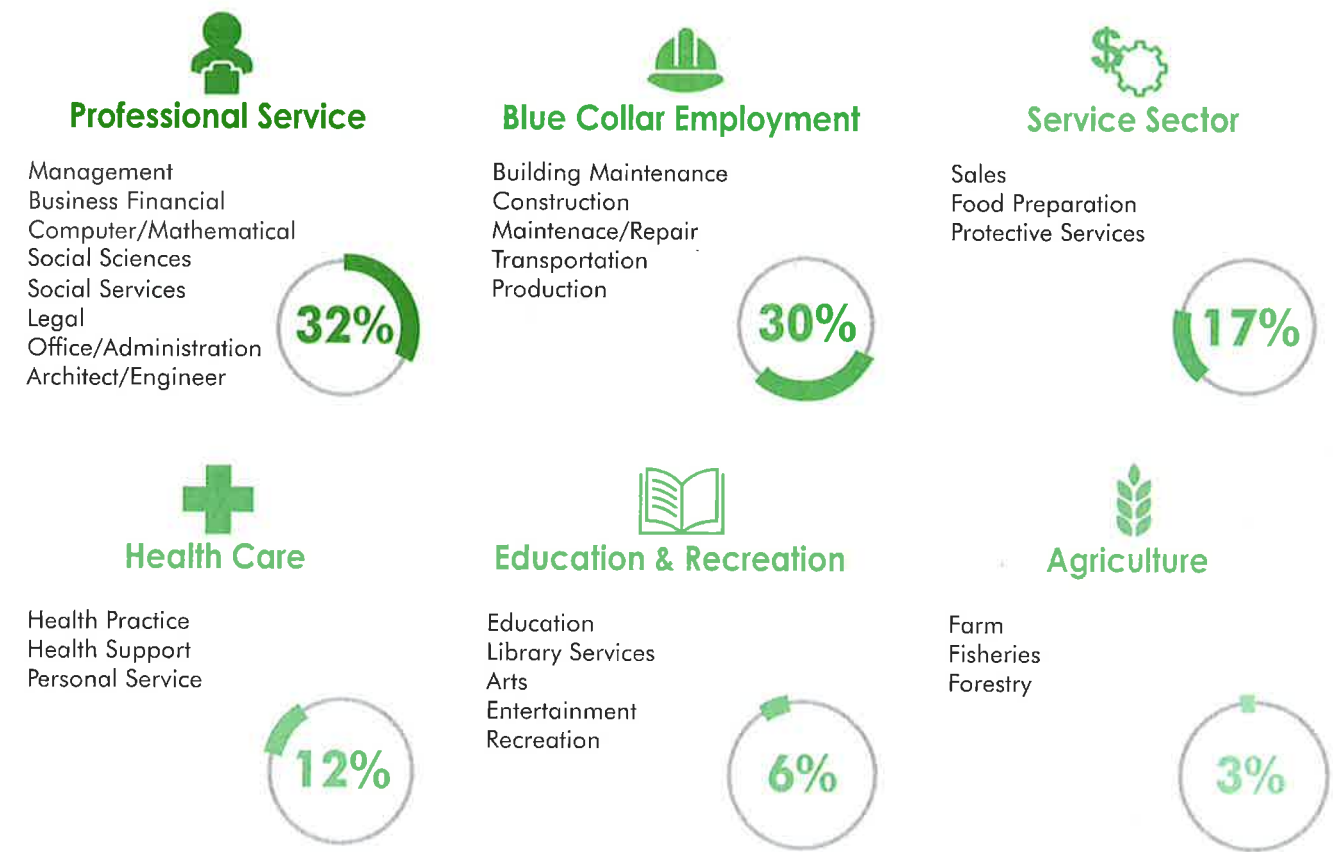


CITY OF FRESNO

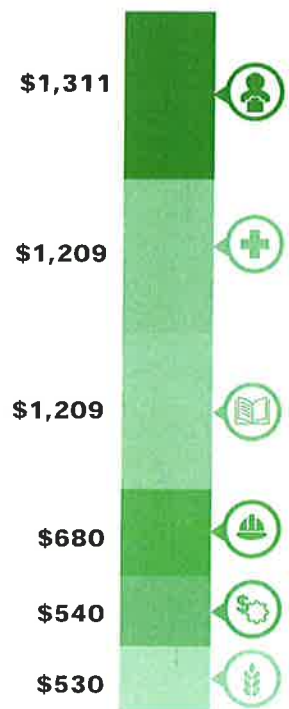


Source: *United States Census Bureau*

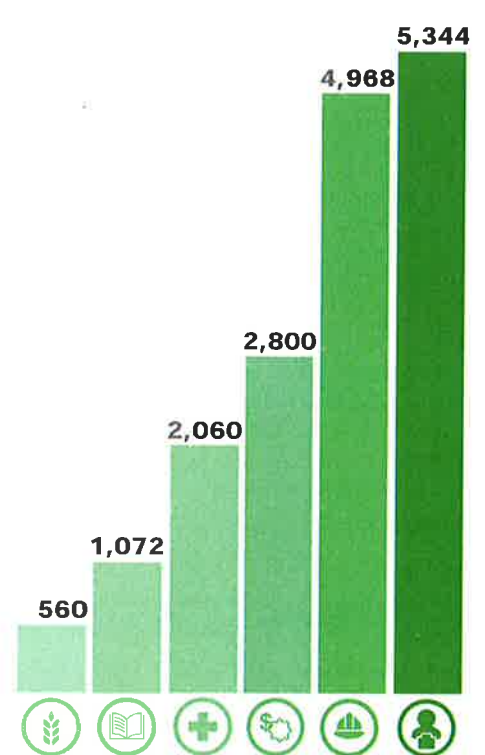
FIGURE 1-7 JOBS



MEDIAN WEEKLY EARNINGS



TOTAL AMOUNT OF JOBS

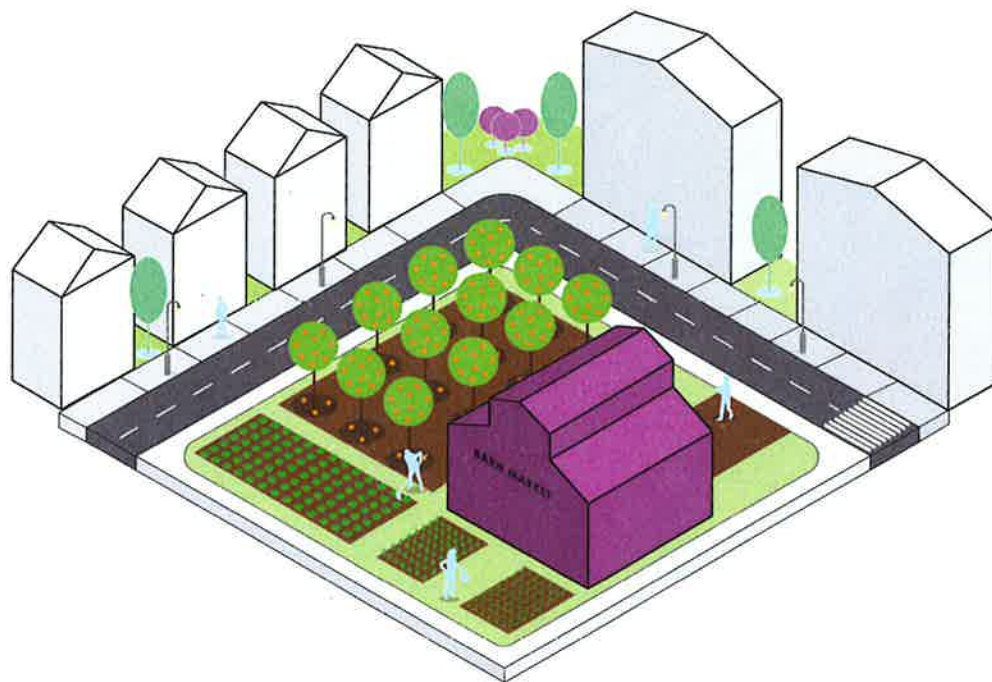


Source: 1. ESRI; *Vintage 2017; 2017 Jobs* (ESRI)
2. *Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers- Third Quarter 2017*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Department of Labor. October 18, 2017.



2

PLAN PROCESS & VISION



Graphic example of a Agrihood

Why are we doing this plan?

The Specific Plan of the West Area (Plan Area) currently consists of a large amount of developable land within city and county limits. The West Area has the potential to grow and develop into its own vibrant community. The Specific Plan of the West Area (the Plan) seeks to provide for the orderly and consistent development that promotes and establishes the West Area as a complete neighborhood with enhanced transportation infrastructure, development of core commercial centers, creation of additional parkland, and encouraging the development of a diverse housing stock. The Plan Area does not have needed commercial amenities, forcing residents to travel east of Highway 99 for retail services. The Plan Area also lacks a complete roadway network and parkland.

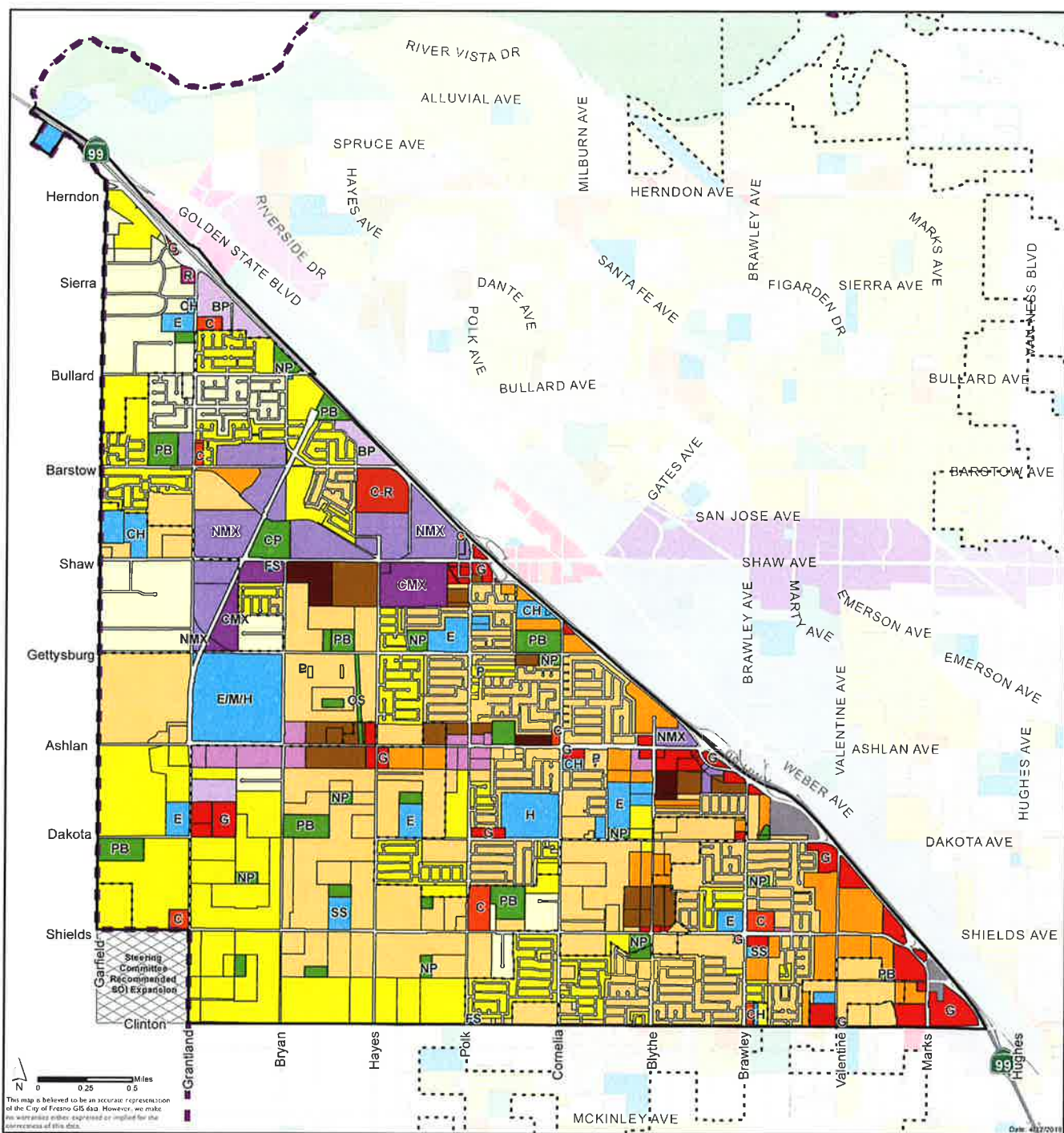


FIGURE 2-2 Proposed Land Use Map

RESIDENTIAL

- Low Density (1-3.5 D.U./acre)
- Medium Low Density (3.5-6 D.U./acre)
- Medium Density (5.0-12 D.U./acre)
- Medium High Density (12-16 D.U./acre)
- Urban Neighborhood (16-30 D.U./acre)
- High Density (30-45 D.U./acre)

COMMERCIAL

- Community
- Recreation
- General
- Regional

EMPLOYMENT

- Office
- Business Park
- Light Industrial

MIXED USE

- Neighborhood Mixed Use
- Corridor/Center Mixed Use
- Regional Mixed Use

OPEN SPACE

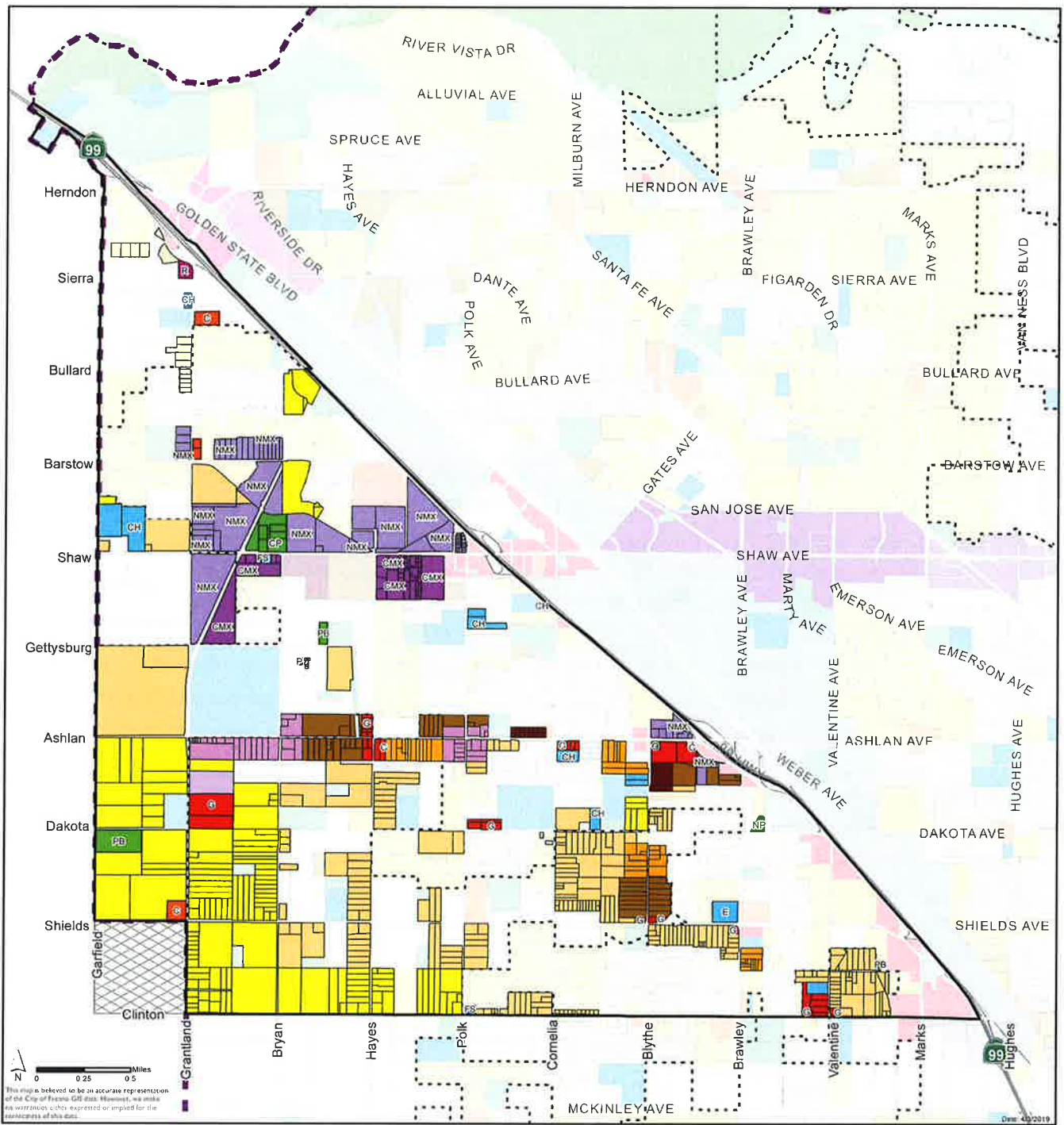
- Community Park
- Pocket Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Open Space
- Park
- Ponding Basin

PUBLIC FACILITIES

- Public/Quasi-public Facility
- Special School
- Elementary School
- Elementary & Middle School
- Elementary, Middle & High School
- High School
- Church
- Fire Station

BOUNDARIES

- Fresno City Limits
- Specific Plan of the West Area
- Sphere Of Influence



Transportation

- Accommodate and improve roadway access, connectivity and mobility among all modes of transportation, and prioritize roadway widening where bottlenecking exists.
- Accommodate planned transit services in the West Area by locating routes near or adjacent to the community centers, schools, parks, and retail centers.
- Provide a complete, safe, and well-maintained sidewalk network from residential neighborhoods to commercial centers, schools, parks, and community centers.
- Provide a complete, safe, and well-maintained roadway network that allows for efficient and smooth access from the West Area to other sections of the city and region.



Off ramp to Clinton Ave from Highway 99.



FAX bus stop on Shields Ave and Brawley Ave.



Graphic of a Complete Street

Retail

- Attract desired and needed local retail establishments to serve the needs of the West Area community. Such establishments include grocery stores, bakeries, restaurants other than fast food places, and boutiques.
- Discourage the expansion of undesirable retail establishments such as liquor stores, tobacco and vapor stores, short-term loan and pawn shops, and adult stores.
- Encourage the development of retail establishments along commercial corridors



Image taken by City staff, Fresh Food Center

Housing

- Encourage a variety of housing types and styles.
- Encourage the development of housing to accommodate an aging population including, multi-generational houses and other elder housing options.
- Reaffirm the City's commitment and obligation to affirmatively furthering access to fair and affordable housing opportunities by strongly encouraging equitable and fair housing opportunities to be located in strategic proximity to employment, recreational facilities, schools, neighborhood commercial areas, and transportation routes.



Image taken by City staff, West Area Neighborhood.

Catalytic Corridors

- Encourage the orderly and consistent development of civic, parkland, retail and commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family uses along West Shaw Avenue, West Ashlan Avenue, Veterans Boulevard, West Shields Avenue, West Clinton Avenue, and Blythe Avenue.



Fresno City College's \$89 million southwest campus has a 2023 completion date. (Artist Rendering/SCCCD)

Education

- Attract much needed educational opportunities for the residents of the West Area, especially for post-secondary education, and access to programs for life-long learners.



3

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Image taken by City staff, West Area Community Conversation.

3.1 Stakeholder Input

Meetings with community stakeholders provided key information to City staff about the Plan Area during the early portion of the outreach process. City staff learned about the immigrant history that dates back to the early 20th century. Stakeholders shared their concerns for the West Area including limited amenities, limited housing stock, and poor infrastructure. The concept of agri-tourism was received positively. Stakeholders discussed the lack of identity for the Plan Area and how the identity would need to be created and supported by the community.

Positive Impressions

All of the community stakeholders interviewed shared positive perspectives of the West Area, and link the area to having a sense of place and community, in spite of its overall lack of identity. The common positive theme was that the West Area has the potential to preserve and enhance neighborhood cohesiveness as it continues to grow. Many of the residents interviewed reported feeling the connection to neighbors through events and activities hosted by the Central Unified School District or local religious facilities. Based on the feedback provided to City staff, the West Area community mainly relies upon these two institutions as the primary channel for people to develop close-knit relationships with their neighbors.

Historic Discussion

Several stakeholders mentioned that the West Area is home to many first-generation families relocating from foreign countries, principally Italy and India. Italian immigrant families that settled in the West Area were principally from Tuscany. The Sikh Institute that is located within the Plan Area provides essential immigration services to Indian immigrants looking to permanently settle in the United States. The first thing many new immigrants did when they arrived in Fresno was acquire land to farm and raise a family. Some community stakeholders interviewed mentioned longstanding farmland heritage and tradition in their family that dates back to the 1902's.



Image taken by City staff, West Area Community Conversation.



Image taken by City staff, West Area Community Conversation.

community members expressed support for removing higher density land uses from the center of the quarter sections as it currently appears in the General Plan. It was at this meeting where residents began to express support for the location of Regional Park within the Plan Area; this desire has been translated into a formal recommendation from the Steering Committee. Community expressed support for land use changes that provided opportunities for higher education facilities, retail, and agri-tourism to be principally located within the Plan Area, predominantly situated on and south of West Shaw Avenue.

Coffee with the Clergy

City staff held a meeting with local church leaders in the West Area called “Coffee with the Clergy” that shared the progress of the project, and encouraged them to be a part of the plan process. This meeting, coordinated by the Mayor’s Office, provided a safe forum for church leaders to discuss concerns they have received by their church members. Many of the concerns were echoed by community stakeholders during individual interviews and community members during the Community Conversations. However, pastoral staff members that work directly with youth and their families shared an interest for the location of organizations that support positive recreation and after-school programs such as a Boys and Girls Club or YMCA be planned for within the West Area.



Do you agree with the idea that West Shaw Avenue, from Highway 99 to Grantland Avenue, should serve as the town center for the West Area?

Nearly 70% agreed with the idea that West Shaw Avenue should serve as the town center or main commercial hub for the Plan Area.



Agri-tourism is a mix of two industries – agriculture and tourism. Agri-tourism has gained popularity in recent years. Activities can include wagon rides, farm tours, bed-and-breakfasts, wineries/breweries, farmers markets, wedding and special events venue, festivals, and much more. Do you believe the concept of agri-tourism should be incorporated into the Specific Plan of the West Area?

Close to 80% of respondents support the concept of agri-tourism being incorporated into this Plan.



What name do you think should be used to identify the West Area?

The leading choice by a plurality result is River West with only 35% supporting the name. Community members did not seem to settle on the name River West as the identity for the West Area. The result of this portion of the survey pairs with the response from community stakeholders and other community members.



A section of Sendero Farm where 63 households from the Rancho Mission Viejo development participate in farming and learn about agriculture, Image by The Orane County Register.