

To: Honorable President of the City Council, Honorable Members of the City Council,
Members of the Public

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From: Keith Woodcock, Planning Consultant

Subject: Proposed Resolution regarding the City of Fresno's General Plan (HD16-11608)

2019 DEC -5 A 8:54

CITY OF FRESNO
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The City's General Plan that was adopted in 2014 was a watershed moment in Fresno's Planning History. Previous General Plan Updates, the latest one before the current General Plan was the 2002 Update, were essentially a continuation of more than 50 years of Green Field development, taking agricultural land out of production and producing instead extensive low-density development. Indeed, in the 1980's Fresno was the fastest growing city in the nation. Not population wise but area wise.

The Introduction to the 2014 plan highlights the necessity for the City to address changes in environmental conditions such as groundwater sustainability, reducing greenhouse emissions as called for in Assembly Bill 32 and Senate Bill 375, economic concerns and issues related to the City's fiscal stability, and paying attention to the City's inner neighborhoods that have long experienced neglect, economic disincentives and have been marginalized.

As the proposed Resolution notes periodic review of the General Plan is called for in Chapter 12. This is of importance to ensuring that the General Plan remains current. Of concern, however, is that the reopening of the General Plan may lead to expanding the City's Sphere of Influence under the guise that it is necessary in order to provide for greater housing opportunities. It has been argued in several media reports that much development has escaped from Fresno and has gone to other towns and counties; and, that fault lies with the current General Plan.

To all of that, I would like to share my thoughts:

First, about myself: I have been a city and regional planner in the Central Valley for 30 years. Four significant projects that I have worked on for the City of Fresno include the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Federal Courthouse in Downtown Fresno; The EIR for the Grantland Expressway (now called Veteran's Boulevard); the EIR for the Grantland Trunk Sewer and Expansion of the Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant; and, the EIR for the creation and financial merger of four new redevelopment project areas.

As a result of these and other projects I have been a witness to the growth and development of the City and surrounding region for an extensive period of time.

Regarding the perceived need to expand the City's Sphere, I would like to offer that the City's General Plan already designates sufficient land within its existing Sphere as evidenced by the Southeast Growth Area. Just in the area south of Jensen to North Avenue and west of Temperance are three square miles of land within the existing sphere of influence. In the greater southeast planning area is another approximate four-square miles of area.

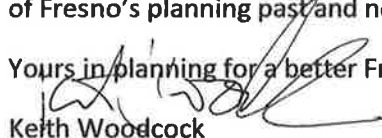
Prior to annexation and development of this area, a necessary requirement by LAFCo is that the City prepare a Specific Plan. Rather than looking at expanding the Sphere, my recommendation is that the City look to develop what is already within its Sphere and allocate resources for the development of the Specific Plan for the Southeast Growth Area.

Development in eastern Fresno has not been forgotten as evidenced by a planned 349-lot residential subdivision at E. Shields Avenue and N. Temperance (Prezone Application No. P18-03343 and related entitlement applications). This item is also on the Council's agenda for today. Further, development in west Fresno is occurring.

The development north of the City in Madera County is not a new idea. This has been considered since the 1980's and adopted by Madera County in the 1990's, long prior to the 2014 General Plan. I would contend that this development boom as it is being described by some is a consequence of Fresno's past planning practices to continue its northward march with low density development. To argue that the Madera County development would have or should have occurred in Fresno and thus justifies an expansion of Fresno's Sphere of Influence is not accurate in my opinion.

In closing, the 2014 General Plan was developed over an extensive multi-year process. It is a significant step forward in reexamining the relationships between the City's built environment and its environmental constraints and the revitalization of its neighborhoods and downtown. It may not be perfect, but it does set a new path forward that is needed for the City to be environmentally responsible. It does challenge the old development models that have led us to point. Let us be mindful of Fresno's planning past and not set ourselves up to repeat yesteryears planning missteps.

Yours in planning for a better Fresno


Keith Woodcock
