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Title: HEARING - To consider the adoption of the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy, which pertains to approximately 1,092 acres in the DA-1 South Development Area: (Council District 3)
1. Environmental Assessment - A determination that the proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 as a feasibility and planning study for possible future actions which the City has not yet approved, adopted, or funded; and
2. RESOLUTION - Adopting the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy: A Brownfields Area-Wide Plan.

Sponsors: Planning and Development Department

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. Exhibit A - Project Area Map, 2. Exhibit B - Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy, 3. Exhibit C - Environmental Assessment of Elm Avenue Strategy, 4. Exhibit D - Planning Commission Resolution, 5. Exhibit E - City Council Resolution, 6. PowerPoint - Elm Avenue.pdf

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
10/10/2019	1	City Council	adopted	Pass

REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

October 10, 2019

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SUBJECT

HEARING - To consider the adoption of the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy, which pertains to approximately 1,092 acres in the DA-1 South Development Area: (Council District 3)

1. Environmental Assessment - A determination that the proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 as a feasibility and planning study for possible future actions which the City has not yet approved, adopted, or funded; and
2. RESOLUTION - Adopting the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy: A Brownfields Area-Wide Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council take the following actions:

1. ADOPT a finding that there is no possibility that adoption of the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy will have a significant effect on the environment and is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262;
2. ADOPT RESOLUTION adopting the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed project is the adoption of the Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy. This report describes the planning process as well as the key elements of the project. The purpose of the Strategy is to develop a “Roadmap to Development” for key brownfield sites on the Elm Avenue Corridor. The project area is located in Southwest Fresno. The Strategy provides implementation actions to achieve the community’s vision for the corridor and for three key catalyst sites along the corridor. This Strategy will be helpful to the City of Fresno (City) and stakeholders as a guide to development along the corridor, site clean-up actions, and funding sources for the City and stakeholders. The Strategy does not include any plan amendments or rezoning.

BACKGROUND

Origins. The Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy (the Strategy) is the outcome of a \$175,000 Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The City received the grant in 2015 to build upon the Redevelopment Agency’s previous EPA Brownfields grant which created the West Fresno Brownfields Action Plan (2011). That plan described the need to identify, prioritize and create a vision for brownfield sites in West Fresno that would lead to site clean-ups and provide a community driven reuse plan for these sites. The Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy is the logical next step that grew out of that initial brownfields Action Plan. In addition, the Strategy implements the Fresno General Plan by addressing key components in the Economic Development and Urban Form Elements. In 2017 a consultant team was selected to assist with outreach, conduct research, and draft the Strategy. The primary consultant was Wallace Roberts and Todd, LLC. (WRT), Habitat for Humanity was a subgrantee that assisted with the outreach efforts. The entire consultant team is listed on the acknowledgements page in the Strategy.

The Benefits of EPA Brownfields Planning Grants. The EPA defines brownfield as “a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.” The EPA’s Brownfields Program is designed to empower communities and stakeholders to partner through economic redevelopment to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. The program, on average, leverages \$16.86 for each EPA Brownfield grant dollar spent and 8.6 jobs per \$100,000 expended on assessment, cleanup, and revolving loan fund cooperative agreements. Once brownfield properties have been cleaned up, residential property value increases have been observed between 5% and 15.2% within 1.29 miles of the sites and a 2017 study found that an estimated \$29 to \$97 million

in additional tax revenue was generated for local governments in a single year after properties had been cleaned up. Properties that have been identified as brownfield sites and that are included in an EPA area-wide plan gain access to additional support from future EPA Brownfield planning and clean-up efforts. For example, The Strategy provides the following benefits for property owners and residents in the project area:

- Prioritizing catalyst sites in the project area for additional EPA assessment and remediation funds;
- Providing financial feasibility studies for potential developments along the corridor;
- Creation of conceptual site designs and development concepts for catalyst sites; and
- Aligning the catalyst site development concepts with the community's vision

Planning Process. The planning process was kicked off in December 2017 and was intended to be a community-driven process. It is described on pages 8-15 in the Strategy and is summarized below.

Steering Committee. A 22-member Steering Committee (Committee) made up of stakeholders, residents, advocates and property owners was appointed by the District 3 Councilmember. The Committee met four times during the planning process, and was invited to attend several of the outreach activities throughout the process. All meetings were noticed and open to the public.

Community Engagement. Community input was an essential element to the development of the strategy. The outreach process was designed to overcome common barriers of public participation such as planning fatigue from two planning efforts recently completed in the project area: the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan (2016) and the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan (2017). The Strategy process relied on integrating outreach efforts into existing community meetings and events as well as conducting new outreach approaches with the help of Technical Assistance providers from the EPA. All Steering Committee meetings were noticed according to the Brown Act. Radio announcements in English, Spanish and Hmong were used to announce the upcoming workshop and community events. Hard copies of key documents were placed in the West Fresno Library and various community centers in the Plan Area. The components of the outreach conducted can be summarized as follows:

- *PhotoVoice.* City Staff, Groundwork USA, and Habitat for Humanity carried out a program for local high school students that involved documenting Elm Avenue through photography. The students were given training over the course of several weeks, and presented their work at the Project Kickoff meeting. A selection of these photos are shown in the Strategy on pages 9-11.
- *Project Kickoff Workshop.* A community workshop was held in December 2017 at the West Fresno Family Resource Center. The PhotoVoice students, the project team, and Steering Committee members led a workshop session in which small groups identified issues and priorities for future development.
- *Existing Meeting Integration.* Following best practices and advice from community members, city staff conducted a majority of the outreach efforts by participating in existing community meetings, events and activities. City staff attended over 15 meetings in and near the study area, receiving input from residents. In April 2018, the project team had a booth at the Southwest Fresno Earth Day Festival. The team showed initial concepts for catalyst sites and a preliminary “corridor vision,” and invited community members to share their input on what would make great public spaces, businesses, and buildings along Elm Avenue.

- *Community Build Project.* One of the catalyst sites owned by Saint Rest Church became the site of a community-built public space. The church members' goals for serving the community came together in the creation of a new, temporary, Elm Avenue Plaza. In November 2018, the project team assisted at two build days at the plaza location where approximately 250 community/church members participated. Its creation marked the beginning of turning the revitalization strategy actions into reality. The Plaza has had several festivals and activities on the formally vacant lot at the corner of Elm and Rev. Chester Riggins Avenues.
- *Technical Assistance.* The planning process was supported by Technical Brownfield Assistance Providers (TBA) for the project. The TBAs were essential value-adds to the project team providing services from consultants with decades of brownfields experience. The TBAs services were provided free of charge through the EPA. GroundworkUSA provided direct technical assistance to the project team and steering committee, leading a workshop for community leaders in December 2017. In February 2018, the Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA) made site visits and met with key stakeholders to explore financial feasibility of development along the corridor. CDFA's resulting report, "St. Rest Campus & Elm Avenue Corridor Roadmap to Redevelopment," is an important source for this Strategy.

Plan Features

Plan Area. The Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy focuses on the 2.25-mile Elm Avenue Corridor and adjacent neighborhoods in Southwest Fresno. The 1,092-acre Study Area is generally bounded by Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to the west, Highway 41 to the east, California Avenue and Ventura Street to the north, and North Avenue to the south.

Relationship to Other Plans. The Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy is not a land use plan or a specific plan. Instead, its purpose is to help implement the General Plan, the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan, and the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan. The northern portion of the Strategy's project area overlaps with the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan and southern portion overlaps with the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan.

Corridor Vision. The Corridor Vision reflects the values and priorities expressed by members of the community, including youth who participated in PhotoVoice, Steering Committee members, and others. The vision of the Corridor includes establishing a positive image through murals, signage, tree planting, and streetscape improvements, as well as attracting a variety of stores and businesses, making it convenient for neighborhood residents to access goods and services. Elm Avenue and the adjoining neighborhoods would provide places for youth and people of all ages to recreate. This vision and the Corridor's revitalization relies on community initiatives, assisted by creative partnerships and funding.

Catalyst Sites. Three properties are identified as catalyst sites because of their potential to revitalize the neighborhood. Catalyst sites were chosen after a community stakeholder meeting and a tour of the corridor, and informed by previous research efforts and the priority sites listed in the West Fresno Brownfields Action Plan. The three catalyst sites and proposed design concepts are listed below; further detail can be found in Chapter Three of the Strategy:

- *Reverend Chester Riggins Avenue and Elm Avenue (Saint Rest)* The Strategy envisions four potential concepts for the site that build upon current plans for the site created by the church,

which include:

- A park and community building for youth and other programs;
 - An “airnasium” (an open air gymnasium), and
 - Additional green spaces on the southern portion of the property.
 - A mixed-use building on the corner of Elm and Rev. Chester Riggins Avenue with commercial and community uses on the ground floor including a food distribution center and affordable senior housing above.
 - Additional housing and educational concepts for the adjacent vacant properties.
- *Church Avenue and Elm Avenue* The Strategy envisions two potential concepts for the site, which include 136 residential units in 17 two-story, eight-unit buildings and a live/work building facing Church Avenue.
 - *North Avenue and Elm Avenue* The strategy envisions a business incubator space, a food cart pod and gathering space, and potentially a demonstration garden where site owner Mid Valley Disposal’s state-of-the-art composting process could be applied to community food production.

Implementation Actions. The Strategy identifies series of implementation action items to achieve the Corridor Vision and development on key sites. The Strategy is organized to be a playbook so that all stakeholders can utilize the document to easily find ways to help with implementation. Symbols are used for each type of stakeholder to help guide them to particular actions that would be feasible and appropriate. The corridor implementation actions intend to bring about positive development, improve public realm, and create new green spaces and places in the project area. The catalyst site implementation actions illustrate how potential development could occur in a way that would be financially feasible, provide the steps necessary to clear each catalyst site and its component parcels of potential environmental issues, satisfy the needs of property owners, realize the community’s vision and contribute to improving the character of the corridor as a whole.

Public Comment on the Plan

June 2019 Public Draft. The public draft of the Plan was made available for a 30-day public comment period from July 1 - August 2, 2019. No Public comment on the plan has been received to date.

Steering Committee. The Steering Committee met on July 18th to discuss the plan, provide feedback and prioritize implementation actions. The Steering Committee has also identified to staff the implementation actions they are willing to help carry out.

Council District 3 Project Review Committee. The Council District 3 Project Review Committee considered the Strategy at its regularly scheduled meeting on September 24, 2019 and recommended adoption of the Strategy.

Planning Commission. On October 2, 2019 the Fresno City Planning Commission held a noticed public hearing to consider the Strategy. Two persons spoke in support of the applications and no persons spoke in opposition. After deliberation, the Planning Commission recommended adoption by a 5-0-1 vote.

General Plan Consistency

The Strategy is a road map for development based on the vision and policies of the General Plan, the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan, and the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan. All three plans include principles, objectives and policies that reflect the needs and desires of residents and stakeholders. The implementation actions in the Strategy are consistent with the Economic Development Element, Land Use/Urban Form Element, and Healthy Communities elements of the General Plan as well as the corresponding sections of the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan and the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL FINDINGS

CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 exempts projects involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the agency, board, or commission has not approved, adopted, or funded does not require the preparation of an EIR or negative declaration but does require consideration of environmental factors.

The proposed Strategy qualifies for this exemption because it is a roadmap to development and clean-up of key brownfield sites on the Elm Avenue Corridor and provides implementation action resources for the city and stakeholders. The Strategy does not propose any land use changes or rezoning, it does not commit the city to any particular actions set forth in the document, and it does not include funding for future project approvals. However, it does provide a resource for the City, partner agencies, and private sector applicants, which can be used in planning for the rehabilitation and reuse of Brownfields sites. In addition, it provides a comprehensive summary of potential uses that reflect the vision of the adjacent communities and summarizes the steps that would be needed to implement various components of the community vision. This toolkit allows the City and its partners to determine the feasibility of reuse concepts and is available to guide the preparation of possible future actions for consideration by the City.

Therefore, The Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262.

LOCAL PREFERENCE

N/A - No purchasing.

FISCAL IMPACT

N/A - No expenditures.

Attachments:

- Exhibit A - Project Area Map
- Exhibit B - Elm Avenue Revitalization Strategy
- Exhibit C - Environmental Assessment of Elm Avenue Strategy
- Exhibit D - Planning Commission Resolution
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