



# TOWER DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE DRAFT DOCUMENT UPDATES

March 20, 2025



# PRESENTATION AGENDA

1. Orientation to Today's Work
2. Health and Equity Framework
3. Other Changes



01

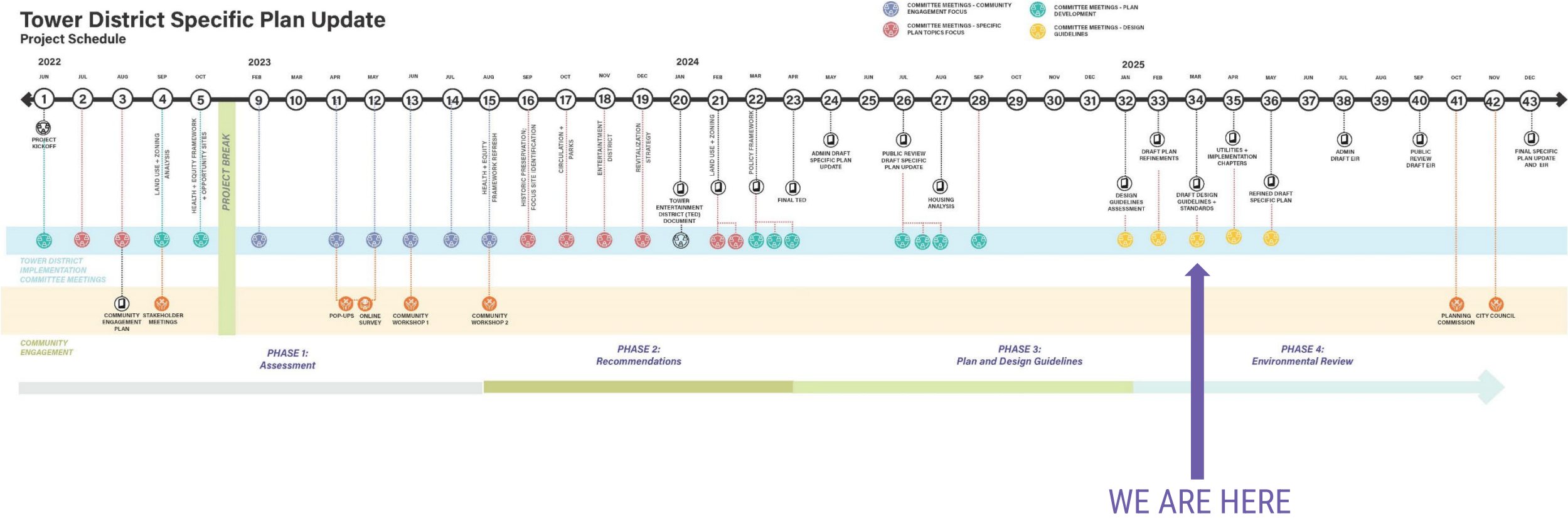
# ORIENTATION TO TODAY'S WORK



# ORIENTATION TO TODAY'S WORK

## Project Schedule

### Tower District Specific Plan Update Project Schedule



# ORIENTATION TO TODAY'S WORK

## Draft Tower District Specific Plan Update Edits

EXHIBIT H: COMMITTEE COMMENT MATRIX						
NOTE: Red text indicates actual text revisions, highlighted text indicates committee comments						
Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee Draft Plan Update Comments - 9/3/2024, 9/9/2024 & 9/17/2024						
Chapter	Page Number	Plan Text - July 2024 Public Draft	Committee Recommendation	Staff Recommendation	Revision	Page
Acknowledgements			Add staff member acknowledgements	Recommend with revisions		
Table of Contents			Include Implementation Chapter	Recommend with revisions		
Introduction		<p>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 singlefamily estates, to bungalows, to apartments over retail shops.</p> <p>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 singlefamily 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 9 food festivals.</p>	More mention of quality of the housing and resilience of designs in its bungalows and cottages.	Recommend with revisions	Language added to highlight cottages.	9
Introduction	12	Figure 1.4 Community Character <b>[SEE MAP ATTACHMENT]</b>	Proposed Historic District? Old Plan Producers. Industrial and commercial uses verified in the area south of Belmont. Correct on this map?	Recommend with revisions	Map edited to highlight commercial areas.	12
Introduction	13	Figure 1.5 Demographics	Should we be comparing these to Fresno as a whole? Add those stats?	Recommend with revisions	Fresno demographics added for comparison.	13
Introduction	15	<p>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.</p> <p>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."</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Since this document replaces the existing plan, we need to make sure nothing is missing that still needs to be done.</p> <p>Items missing so far:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Implementation Chapter</li> <li>-More emphasis that Tower is not dominated by the automobile</li> <li>-Improving the district's infrastructure</li> <li>-Completing the landscape of all major streets, median islands, and buffer strips</li> <li>-Missing infrastructure items</li> </ul> <p>Further comparison to ensure all items are covered</p>	Recommend with revisions	Implementation chapter added.	
Introduction	19	Community vision for Tower District from Community Workshop 1	Include more examples of these work products	Recommend with revisions	Community feedback example from Workshop 2 added.	19



02

HEALTH AND  
EQUITY  
FRAMEWORK



# HEALTH AND EQUITY FRAMEWORK





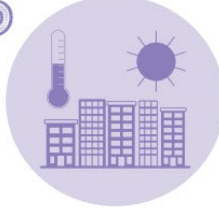

## Health & Equity Indicators

Air Quality was introduced as an indicator instead of Safety. Safety topics related to road safety have been addressed under Active Lifestyle.

*Old Indicators*

01  HOUSING BURDEN	02  ACCESS TO JOBS
03  ACTIVE LIFESTYLE	04  ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD
05  ENVIRONMENTAL COMFORT	06  SAFETY

*Revised Indicators*

01  HOUSING BURDEN	02  ACCESS TO JOBS
03  ACTIVE LIFESTYLE	04  ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD
05  ENVIRONMENTAL COMFORT	06  AIR QUALITY

# Health & Equity Considerations

Health and Equity Considerations are integrated at the beginning of each chapter to highlight key issues to be addressed.

Topic-specific Health and Equity narratives have been added to each chapter introduction to provide context on community impacts.

## 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.



Typical residential street



Human-scaled main street along Olive Avenue

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, sidewalks, and trees provide a healthy 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. Improving walkability and keeping pedestrians safe is a top priority. Although "walkability" and "accessibility" are not exactly interchangeable and can have different meanings in different contexts, when this plan discusses places that are walkable the intended meaning is that they are accessible: nearby and safely accesses on foot.

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,

### Health and Equity Considerations

- Traffic Safety and Injury Risks:** Wide streets and high vehicle speeds on major corridors create unsafe conditions for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists, increasing the risk of traffic-related injuries and fatalities. In the Tower District, key roads like McKinley Avenue, Belmont Avenue, and Blackstone Avenue experience a high frequency of collisions, especially at intersections. Cut-through traffic in the neighborhoods adds to safety hazards in the area. Tower District is a very walkable neighborhood, but gaps in pedestrian infrastructure pose safety risks for the community.
- Public Transit Accessibility:** While the Tower District has multiple bus routes, transit frequency and coverage may not fully meet the needs of residents who rely on it for jobs, healthcare, and daily necessities, particularly shift workers and lower-income populations. Transit users often experience long wait times, limited late-night service, and inadequate stop infrastructure such as shelters and seating. These issues disproportionately affect those without cars, including seniors, students, and low-income residents.
- Impact of Regional Freeways on Connectivity and Neighborhood Disruption:** The construction of regional freeway infrastructure, including State Route 180, has influenced mobility patterns in and around the Tower District. Like many freeway projects in urban areas across the country, the expansion of Highway 180 introduced significant changes to the built environment, altering the connections between neighborhoods, shifting commercial activity, and increasing traffic-related air quality

concerns. The freeway's alignment created a physical separation between South Tower and adjacent neighborhoods such as Lowell and Downtown, affecting historical community ties and the economic vitality of nearby commercial districts. Over time, changes in transportation infrastructure and regional development patterns have contributed to shifting land use trends, including reduced investment in older commercial corridors and localized air quality challenges near high-traffic roadways for part of the south and eastern Tower District.

- Disproportionate Exposure to Air Pollution:** Residents living near major roadways face elevated pollution levels that can lead to serious health issues such as respiratory illnesses and heart disease. In the Tower District, those living near Highway 180, Blackstone Ave, and designated truck routes face some of the highest concentrations of vehicle emissions, including diesel particulate matter from heavy freight traffic. In South Tower, the combined effects of being close to freeways and increased truck traffic have created a significant environmental burden for the residents, many of whom belong to historically underserved communities.
- Lack of Shade and Heat Exposure:** Many streets in the Tower District lack sufficient tree canopy, intensifying the urban heat island effect and making walking, biking, and waiting for transit uncomfortable, especially in the South Tower area. Key routes like Olive Avenue, Belmont Avenue, and Blackstone Avenue show increased heat exposure for pedestrians and transit users. This issue disproportionately impacts lower-income residents who often lack access to air conditioning or personal vehicles.



## Health & Equity Effects

Health and Equity Effect summary added at the end of each chapter after the objective to summarize positive and negative impact on each indicator.

### Health and Equity Effects

The Circulation policies strive to improve accessibility, mobility, and safety while promoting health and equity for all residents. These policies support a more walkable, bike-friendly, and transit-oriented environment, reinforcing social equity while reducing vehicular dependence. Below, we analyze the impact of these policies on essential health and equity categories to gain a clearer understanding of their overall effect on community well-being. For a detailed breakdown of policy-specific impacts, refer to Appendix A, which provides a matrix evaluating each circulation policy across key health and equity indicators.



#### ENVIRONMENTAL COMFORT

Environmental comfort is a critical consideration in circulation planning, particularly in addressing urban heat island effects and pedestrian experience. Policies such as **C 8.5: Planting street trees and C 4.5: Enhancing landscape buffering** help reduce heat retention on streets and sidewalks, improving shade coverage and overall climate resilience. These efforts are especially important in low-income areas, where limited tree canopy and cooling infrastructure make residents more vulnerable to heat stress and extreme temperatures. Additionally, policies that promote pedestrian-friendly design, such as **C 2.1: Adding pedestrian safety elements** and **C 2.2: Conducting a Sidewalk Gap Study**, enhance walkability by addressing gaps in infrastructure and ensuring safer, more comfortable routes for non-motorized users. Together, these strategies contribute to a healthier and more livable urban environment, reinforcing equitable access to safe and comfortable public spaces in the Tower District.



#### ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

The Circulation policies play a significant role in promoting an active lifestyle by making walking, biking, and public transit more safe, accessible, and convenient. Policies such as **C 1.3: Encourage active transportation modes** and **C 2.1: Add pedestrian safety elements** directly support physical activity by improving bike lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian crossings, encouraging more people to walk and bike instead of drive. Additionally, **C 1.10: Encourage Green Alleys** enhances safe, comfortable spaces for walking and biking, while **C 8.5: Plant street trees** improves shade and environmental comfort, making active transportation more appealing in hot weather. Some policies, such as **C 6.2: Evaluate demand and location for bicycle parking** and **C 2.2: Conduct a Sidewalk Gap Study**, have an indirect impact by removing barriers to active mobility, ensuring that infrastructure improvements support walking and biking as viable transportation options.



#### AIR QUALITY

Many circulation policies have positive impacts on air quality by reducing reliance on private vehicles and minimizing exposure to harmful emissions. Policies such as **C 1.3: Encouraging active transportation modes** and **C 1.10: Encouraging Green Alleys** expand pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, helping lower transportation-related emissions by shifting trips away from cars. **C 5.1: Rerouting truck traffic** specifically aims to reduce pollution exposure in residential areas, particularly in South Tower, where designated truck routes contribute to high concentrations of diesel emissions and particulate matter. Similarly, **C 4.1: Vehicular improvements at McKinley and Blackstone** helps mitigate congestion, which can reduce localized emissions hotspots.



#### ACCESS TO JOBS

Access to jobs is strengthened by policies that improve transit connectivity and expand multi-modal options. Policies such as **C 1.5: Increasing transit frequency** and **C 1.6: Increasing late-night transportation options** improve job accessibility, particularly for service and shift workers who rely on public transportation at non-peak hours. Additionally, **C 1.7: Establishing mobility hubs** creates centralized transfer points that improve last-mile connectivity, making it easier for residents to commute to employment centers beyond the Tower District.



#### ACCESS TO FOOD

The Circulation policies impact access to food by improving connectivity and mobility, making it easier for residents to reach grocery stores and food retailers. Policies such as **C 1.1: Improve multi-modal functions of key corridors** and **C 1.5: Increase transit frequency** enhance transportation options, ensuring that more people—especially those without cars—can access food more conveniently. Additionally, policies like **C 2.1: Add pedestrian safety elements** and **C 6.2: Evaluate demand and location for bicycle parking** have indirect benefits by improving walkability and biking access, making trips to food sources safer and more convenient. However, while these policies improve physical access, they do not directly address food affordability or food deserts.



#### HOUSING BURDEN

Housing burden is minimally affected by circulation improvements, with most policies having a neutral impact. However, some parking and transportation demand management policies **C 6.6: New development** may indirectly alleviate housing costs by reducing the need for excessive on-site parking, potentially lowering housing construction costs and increasing residential density.

# Redlining and Tower District

## 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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

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. Development choices, like freeway alignments and redlining practices, have an impact on the health and equity of a community and some of Tower District’s present day outcomes reflect that.

Redlining was a discriminatory housing practice that systematically denied home loans and insurance to people based on race and neighborhood demographics rather than financial qualifications. This practice, formalized in the 1930s by the federal government’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), labeled neighborhoods with high numbers of immigrants and people of color as “hazardous” for investment, limiting their access to homeownership and financial stability. These maps had lasting effects, shaping patterns of segregation, economic inequality, and environmental burdens that persist today.<sup>2</sup>

FIGURE 1.9 | Redlining Map of Fresno, 1936

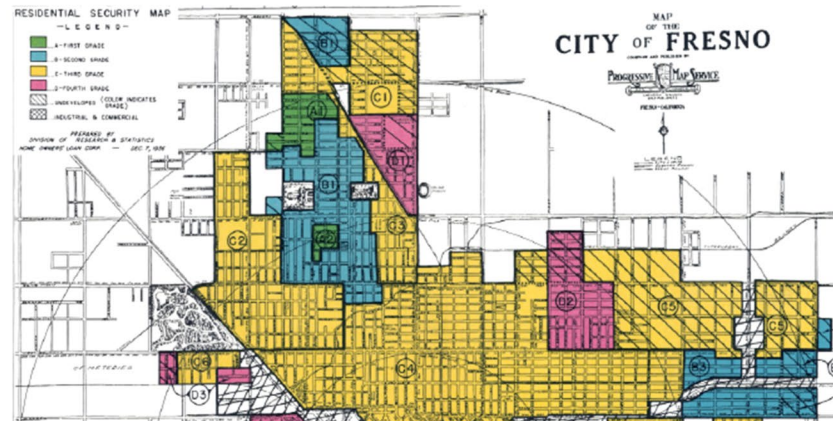


Figure 1.9 shows the Redlining map of Fresno from 1936, focusing on the Tower District. At that time, the HOLC categorized neighborhoods into four grades: A (Best), B (Still Desirable), C (Declining), and D (Hazardous). In the Tower District, areas labeled A1 and A2 were considered the most desirable, while B1 was marked as stable but slightly lower in investment potential. In contrast, C2 and C3 were deemed “declining” due to older housing stock and working-class residents, making them riskier for loans. These classifications were not just about property conditions; they were based on racial and ethnic composition, with neighborhoods that had Black, Mexican, Armenian, and Asian populations automatically receiving lower ratings.

A1, now part of what includes Wilson Island, was identified as “the best residential district in the city,” home to business and professional men. Racially restrictive covenants legally barred nonwhite and immigrant residents from purchasing homes in these areas, ensuring that only white families benefited from homeownership opportunities. A2, a small but affluent section, was similarly exclusive, with homes priced significantly higher than surrounding neighborhoods. B1, encompassing parts of what is now Fresno High and surrounding

<sup>1</sup>Urban 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).

<sup>2</sup>Rothstein, R. (2017). *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright Publishing.



# 03

## OTHER CHANGES

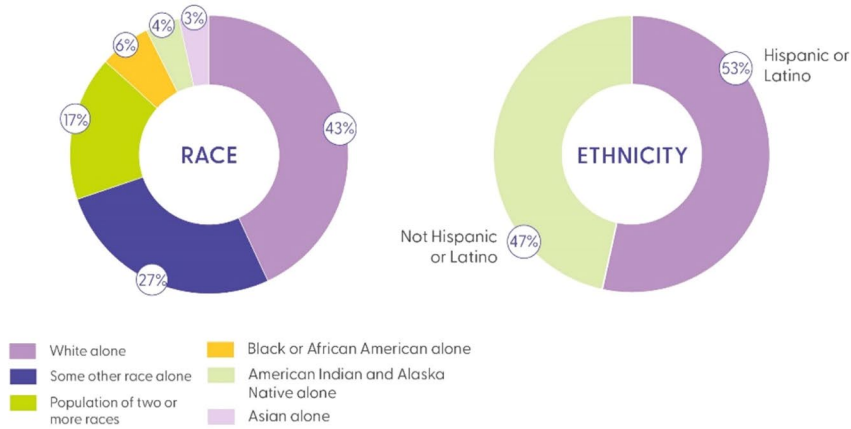


OTHER CHANGES

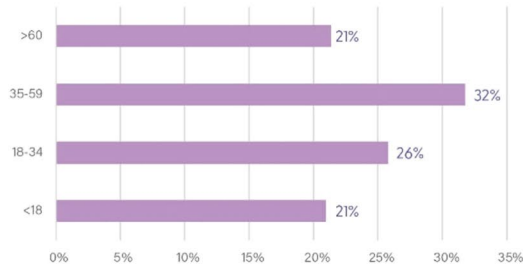
# Fresno Context

## Old Plan

FIGURE 1.5 | Demographics



AGE RANGE



**20,200**  
Total Population  
Approximate

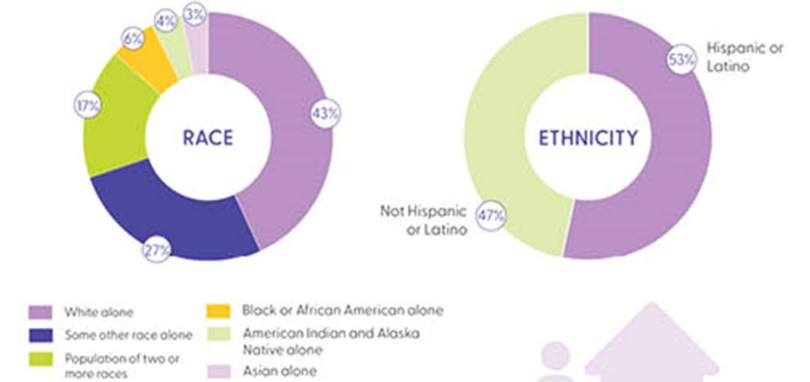
Data reflects all census tract block groups whose population is all or mainly in Tower District.

Source: US Census, 2020

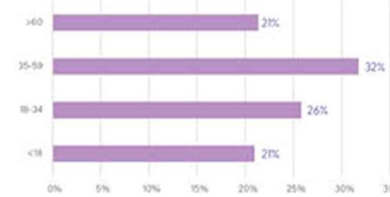
## New Plan

FIGURE 1.5 | Demographics

### TOWER DISTRICT



AGE RANGE



**20,200**  
Total Population  
Approximate

### FRESNO



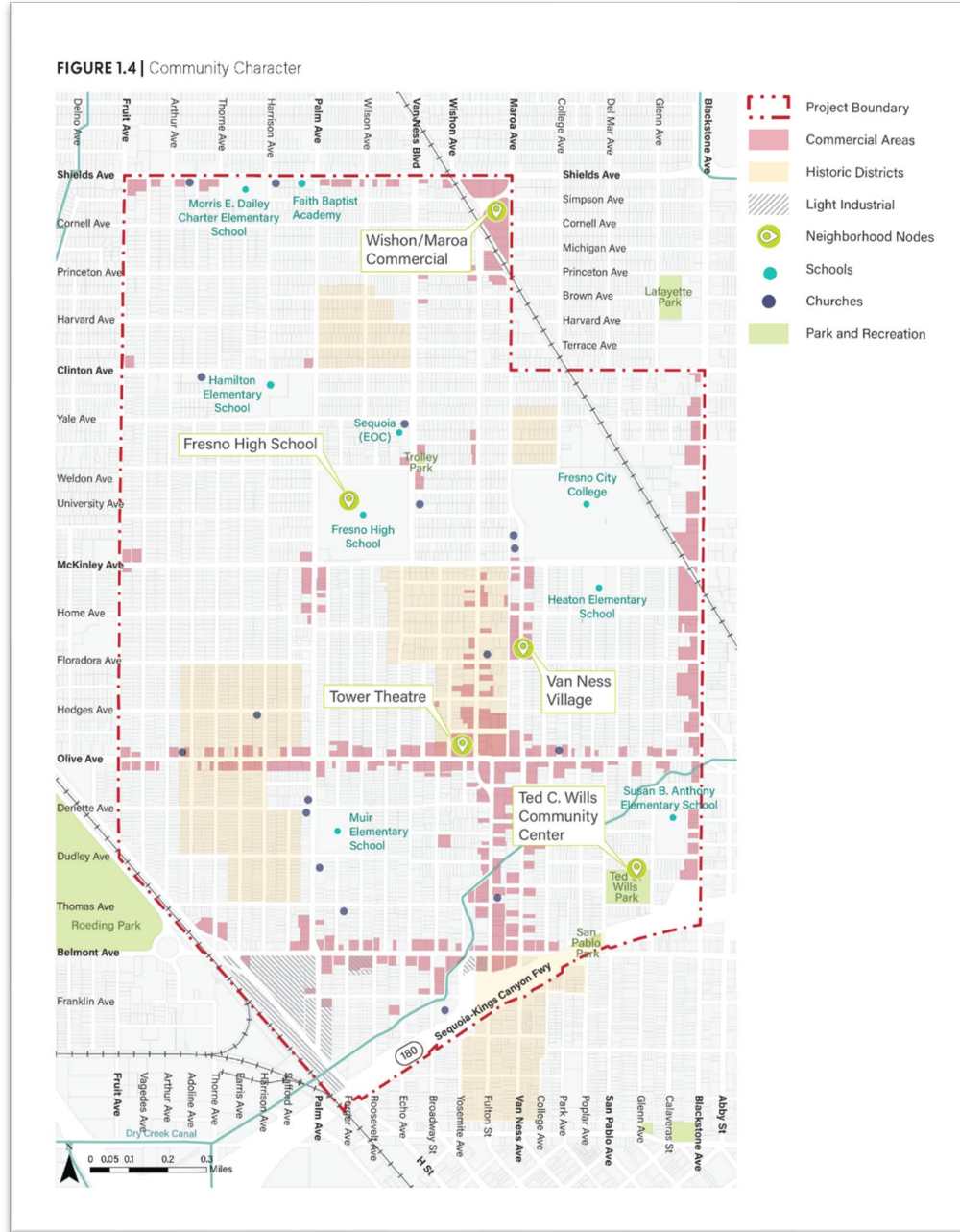
Data reflects all census tract block groups whose population is all or mainly in Tower District.

Source: US Census, 2020

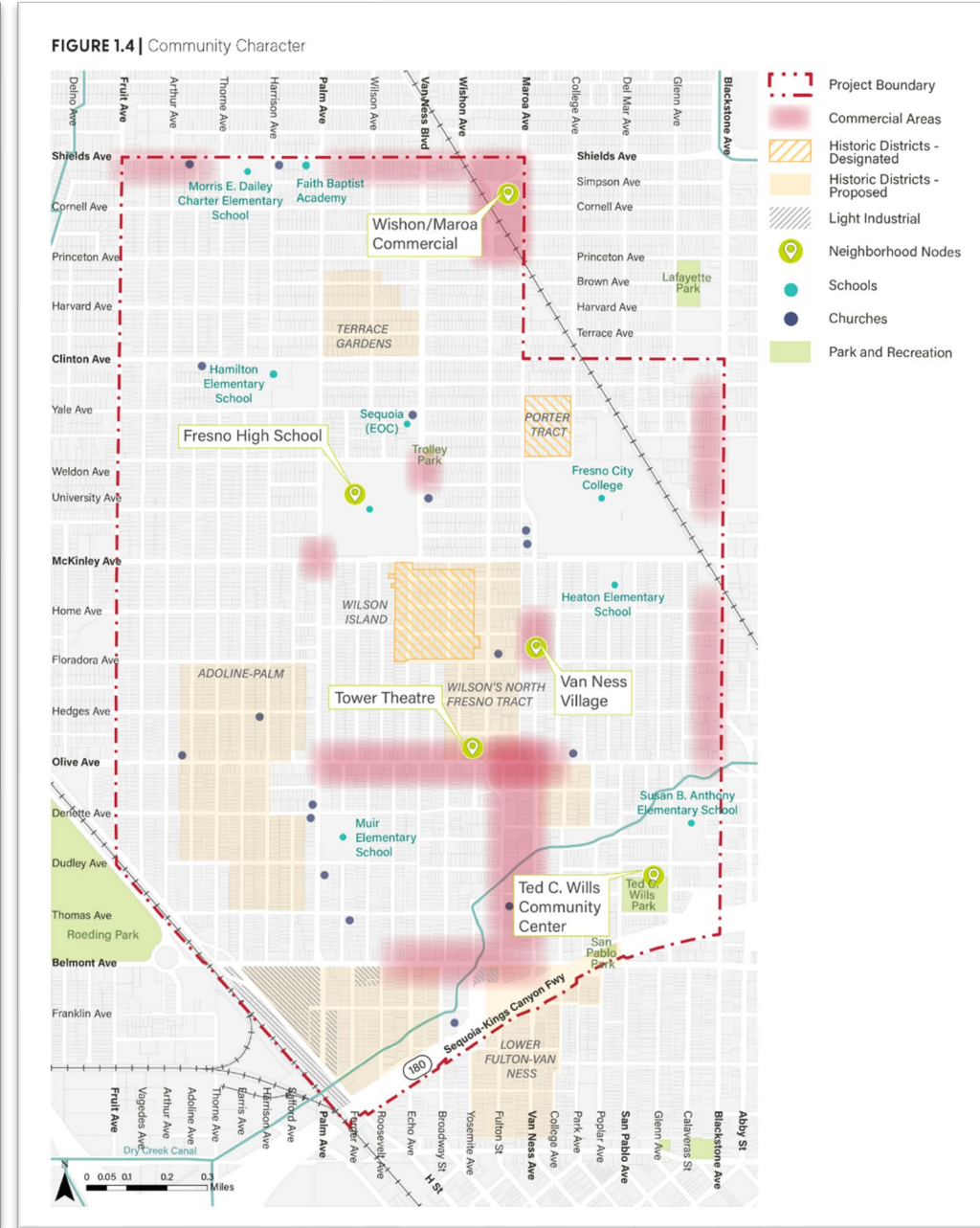
# OTHER CHANGES

# Community Character

## Old Plan



## New Plan

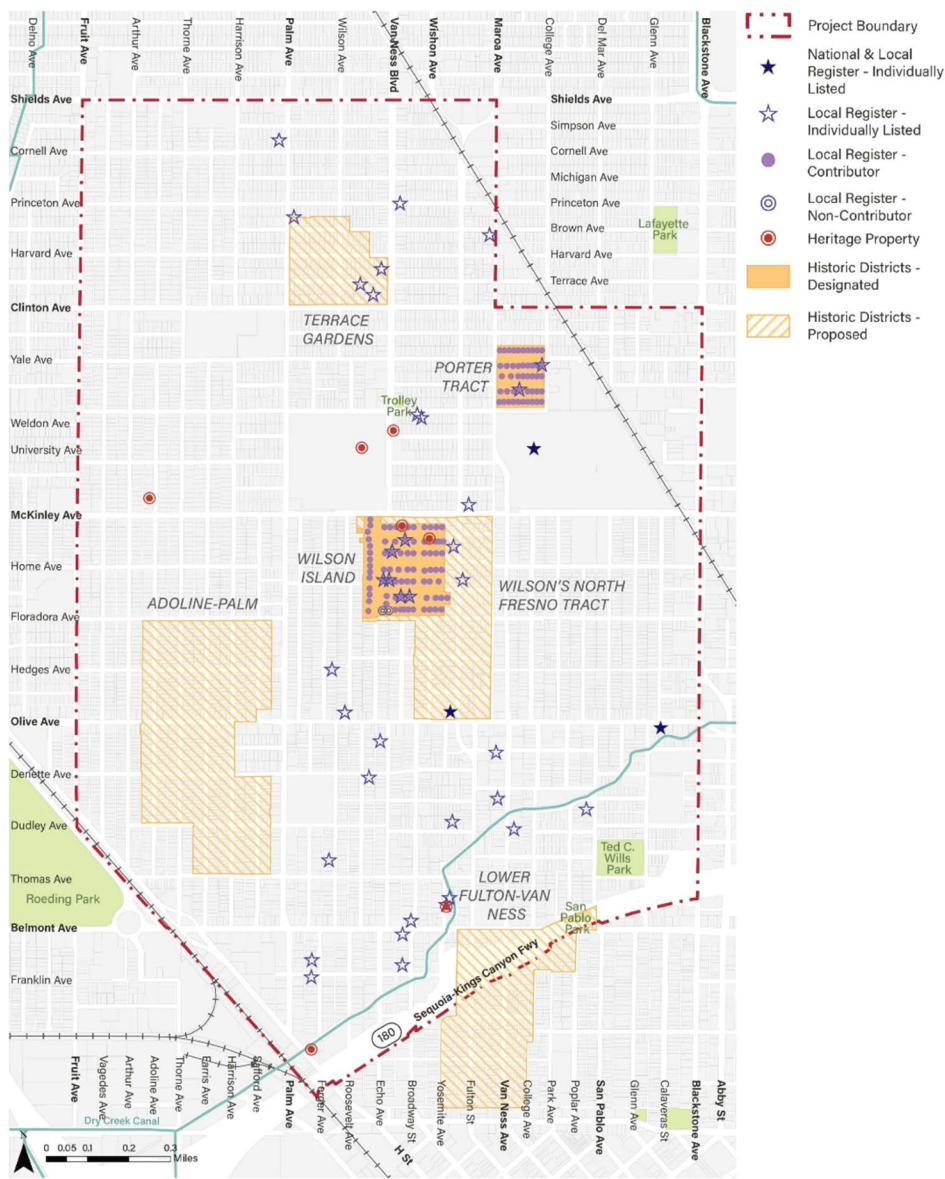


# OTHER CHANGES

# Historic Resources and Districts

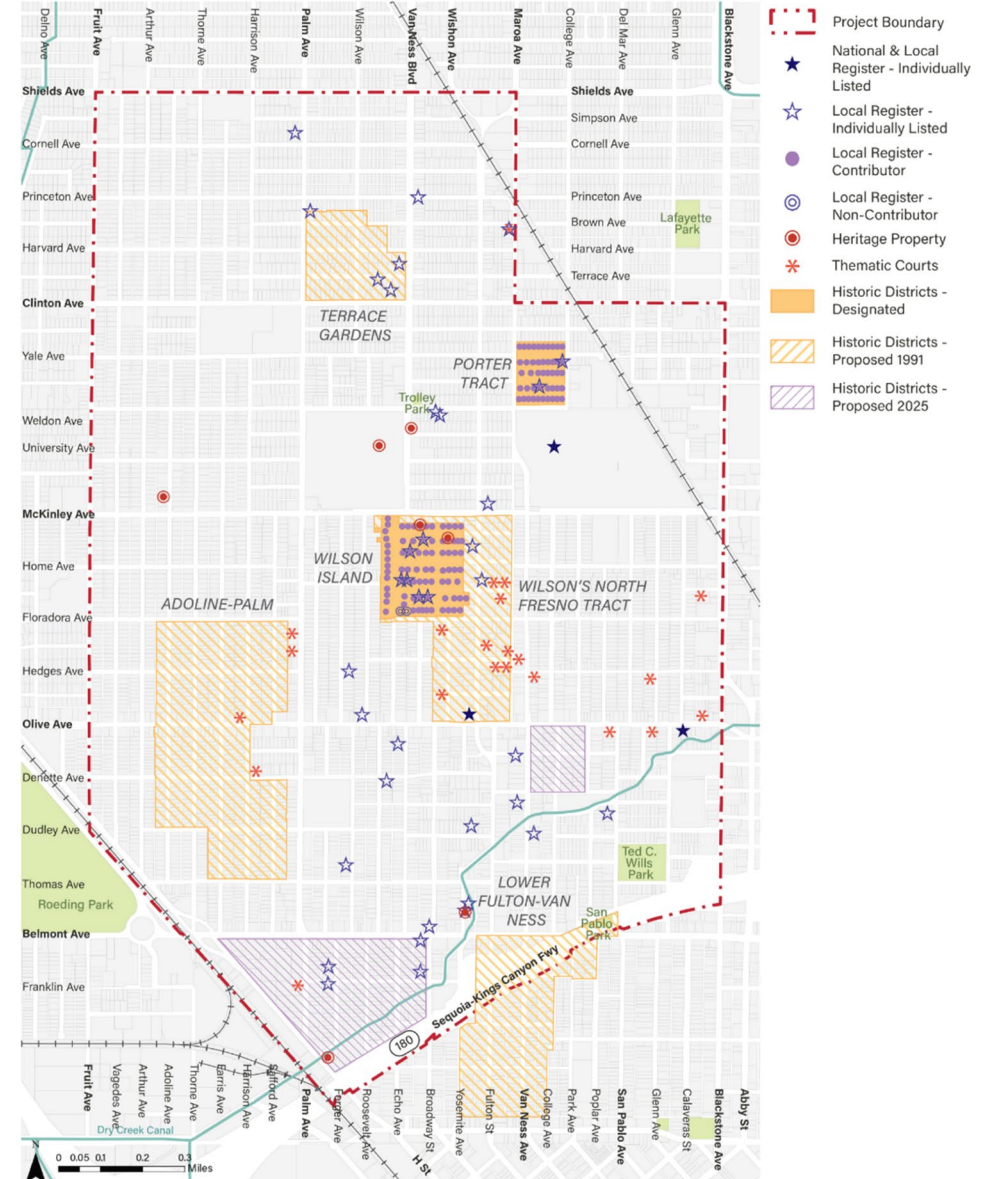
## Old Plan

FIGURE 2.2 | Historic Resources and Districts



## New Plan

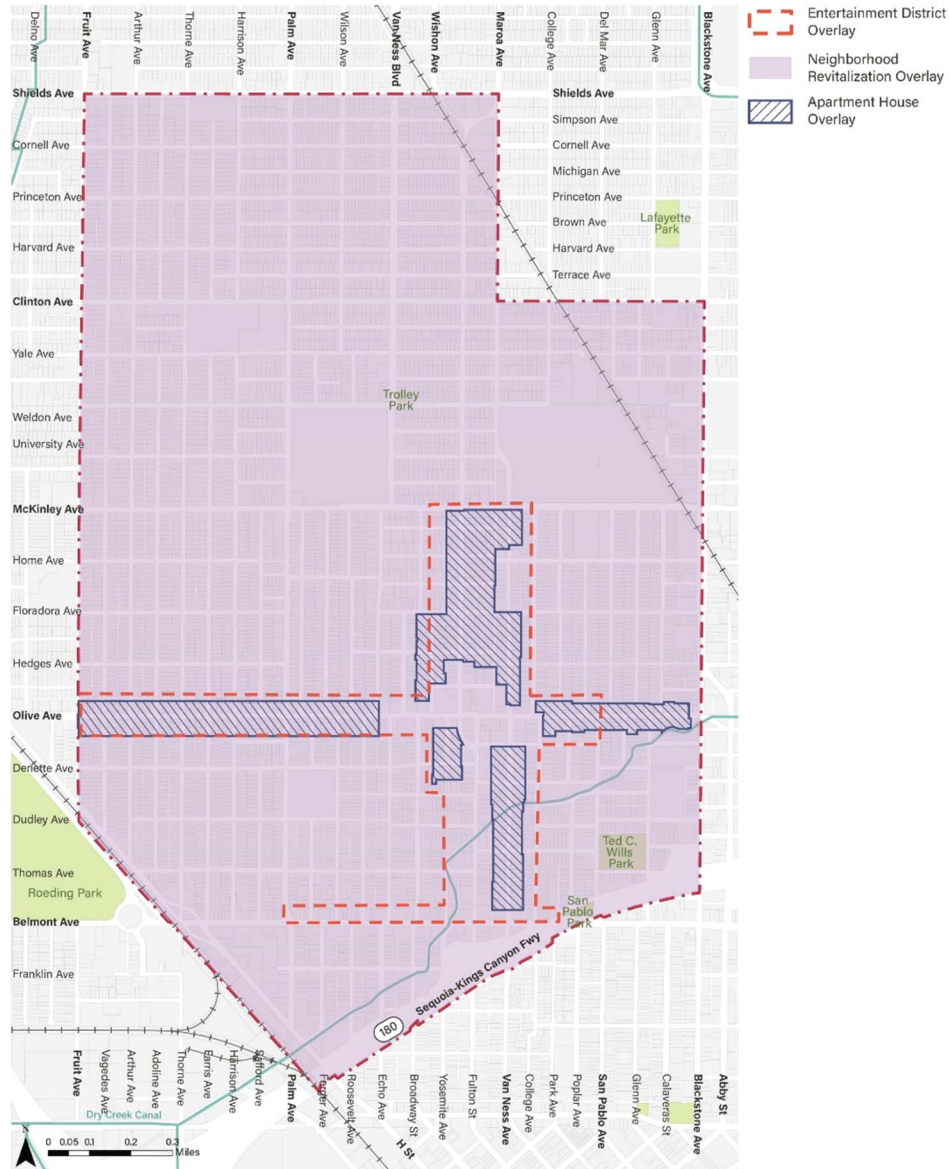
FIGURE 2.2 | Historic Resources and Districts



# OTHER CHANGES

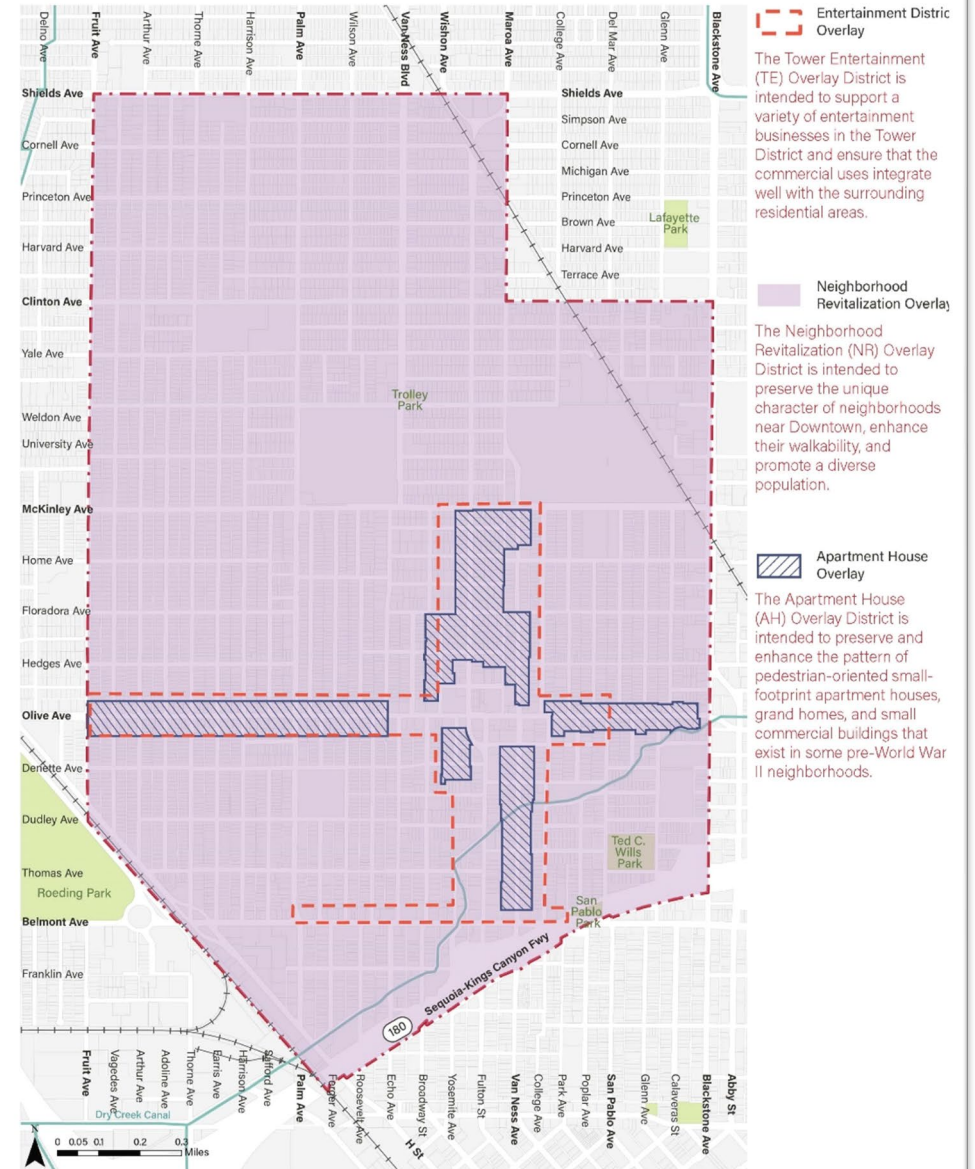
## Old Plan

FIGURE 3.3 | Planned Overlay Districts



## New Plan

FIGURE 3.3 | Planned Overlay Districts



# Overlay Districts

## OTHER CHANGES

# Diverse and Affordable Housing

## Old Plan

52 | TOWER DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN

### 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.



## New Plan

LAND USE | 55

### 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 - *although in relation to other neighborhoods, Tower has a larger mix housing types 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.

*Newer modes of housing, like module housing and tiny homes, can increase both the variety of available housing and density. Although the Specific Plan cannot directly impact housing affordability, providing a variety of land use types can set the stage for a variety of types and affordable housing.*

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. Many buildings in Tower were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s and, due to age and other factors, housing conditions vary throughout the District.

*Housing affordability in Tower is especially important for the LGBTQ+ community, who face higher barriers to housing generally, and for whom the district has long been one of the safer areas to live in.*

Diverse multi-family housing options available in Tower District.

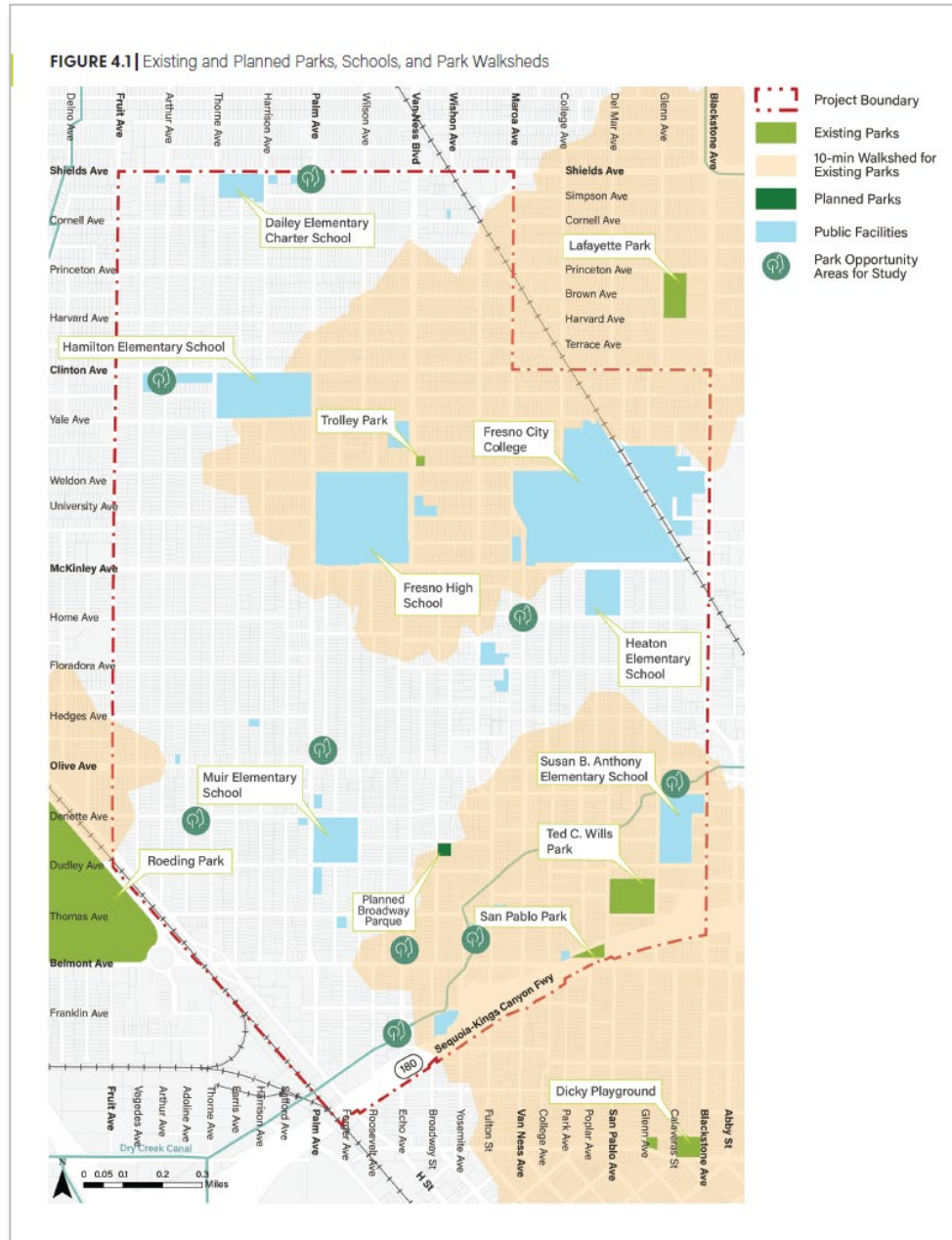




# OTHER CHANGES

# Parks Map

## Old Plan



## New Plan



# OTHER CHANGES

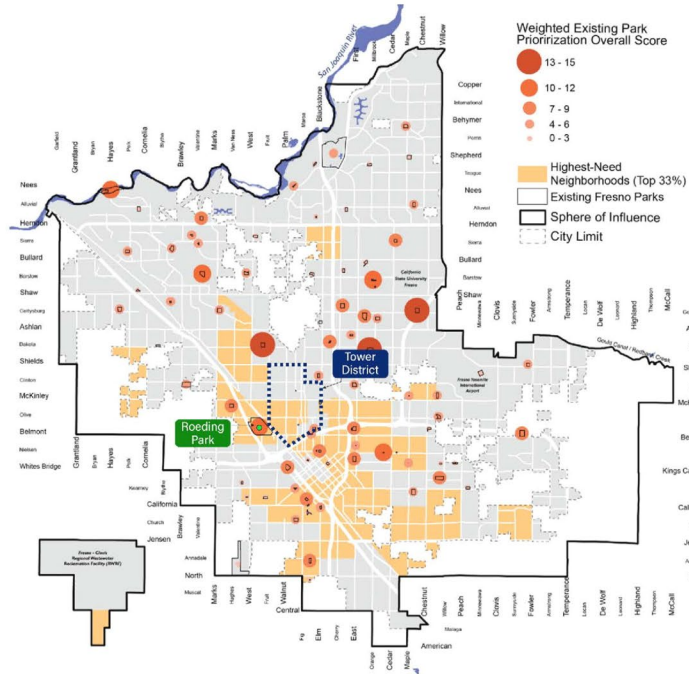
# Measure P Maps

## Old Plan

### 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)

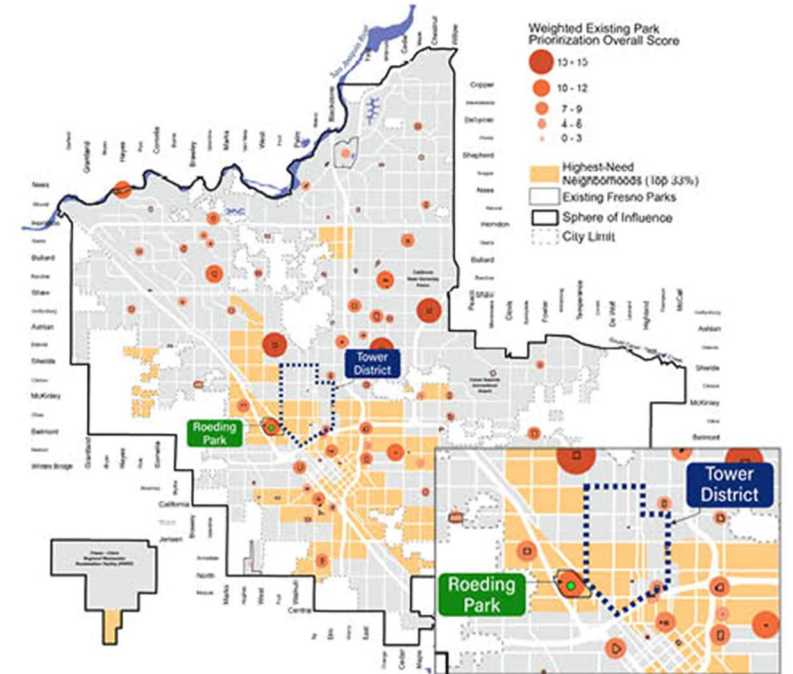


## New Plan

### FRESNO CLEAN & SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS (MEASURE P)

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



**THANK YOU!**