

EDITORIAL: Fresno's 2035 General Plan deserves support

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The Fresno Bee Editorial Board



Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin and council members have listened to the public and made improvements in the 2035 General Plan.

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The city of Fresno's 2035 General Plan has been available for the citizens to look over and chew on since July 2.

This week it will receive three full-scale public airings: 6:30 p.m. today at Fresno City College's Old Administration Building, 6 p.m. Wednesday during a Planning Commission workshop at City Hall and 2 p.m. Thursday during a Fresno City Council workshop.

If you care about Fresno's future and having a development guide that attempts to rebuild older, deteriorating neighborhoods and finally apply the brakes to urban sprawl, you should support this plan.

It no longer is the document approved by the City Council in spring 2012. Some developers complained that they had been left out of the plan's formulation. They said they would bolt Fresno for surrounding communities — especially Clovis — because the plan offered them little chance to make a buck.

The market (meaning home buyers) simply won't support what city officials have drawn up, was a common developer refrain.

Mayor Ashley Swearengin and City Council members listened to the criticisms and returned to the drawing board. The result, according to a passage in the modified 2035 General Plan now under consideration, is this:

"The Council's modified (plan) shifted more development to single-family housing and with more focus on growth west and southwest of State Route 99, but maintained a strong commitment to Downtown and major corridor revitalization, Complete Neighborhoods, and more compact development."

These are sensible changes. It is wise to offer a broad portfolio of development opportunities and to provide strong infrastructure support and other incentives to investors interested in rebuilding neighborhoods.

If this new plan is followed — and there is no guarantee that it will be, given the developers' historical hold on Fresno politics — our city will become more prosperous, healthier and safer.

Fresno can't afford to repeat its grievous planning mistakes of the past.

When neighborhoods and properties aren't properly maintained, they are a blight to the community and a drain on the public treasury. When neighborhoods lack grocery stores, banks and medical services, residents must travel farther to access them — thus increasing air pollution. When neighborhoods lack quick reliable public transit, residents struggle to land and keep jobs, and further their education.

One of the biggest reasons that Fresno struggles to adequately fund police and fires services, street repairs and parks is that too many of our properties fail to generate the property tax revenue that they should. The most underachieving of these buildings are downtown, which is why Swearengin correctly has put such a great emphasis on revitalization there.

A strong 2035 General Plan that seeks investment in older neighborhoods coupled with the continued improvement of Fresno Unified School District will result in a better city for all residents.

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