

Sandra Celedon-Castro: City planning isn't a bore

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By Sandra Celedon-Castro

People throw around a wide variety of technical terms to describe, discuss and debate the city of Fresno's General Plan. There is always lots of talk about infill, infrastructure, high-density this, low-density that.

All of the jargon and inside-speak usually conspire to dull the senses, bore citizens and simply turn people off.

Here is all you need to know about the General Plan: It guides how we grow as a city and how we use our land. That's it; but what does this mean for average citizens?

Fresno Building Healthy Communities, comprised of a variety of organizations, civic leaders and Fresno residents, recognizes the incredible importance of the General Plan and has watched the development of the latest draft very closely, because unfortunately, Fresno has a poor track record when it comes to city planning and growth.

Due to the out-of-control and reckless growth of industrial development in south Fresno, thousands of our fellow citizens live in the most unhealthy neighborhoods in the entire state. A tool developed by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), the by now infamous CalEnviroScreen 2.0, says our city has 15 of the 20 worst places to live in California and many of these areas are in south and west Fresno.

According to an investigation by The Trust for Public Land, our city is dead last in providing residents access to green space such as parks and playgrounds.

The American Lung Association's annual report on air quality shows the Fresno-Madera metropolitan area with the worst particle pollution in the nation.

A shoddy and irresponsible General Plan will only contribute to our city's decline because where we live affects our health both in good and bad ways. Also important to remember is where we live has a tremendous impact on how we live.

Fresno Building Healthy Communities understands this, which is why we've been engaging and partnering with residents — primarily in southeast, southwest and central Fresno because these areas and the people who live there are the most affected by bad development and, boy, have residents responded.

Thousands have taken an interest in the General Plan process by attending dozens and dozens of Planning Commission meetings and City Council hearings over the past couple of years, or by taking part in community gatherings.

These citizens have been involved for a long time and will stay involved for as long as it takes. Meanwhile, we're glad to see others join the effort.

For example, Fresno Building Healthy Communities is delighted to see the Foundation for Fresno's Future join the cause. We are happy to see a diversity of voices rise in a chorus for One Healthy Fresno because our entire city can't be healthy if one area is suffering.

We can build One Healthy Fresno by having plenty of safe parks throughout the entire city, making sure

established neighborhoods receive resources that make them equal to other locales before adding new developments, and creating a public transit system that serves more people more often more quickly. It starts with a General Plan that not only has sound values, but values all of Fresno's citizens.

So who else stands with us? You are cordially invited to join thousands of Fresnans who do not accept the conditions of our city and have been working hard to see real meaningful change.

To see the latest draft of the General Plan and to see how to comment, visit Fresno General Plan, or to learn about the work Fresno Building Healthy Communities and our partners have been doing on the General Plan and a range of other issues, visit www.fresnobhc.org.

Welcome to the future of your city.

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