

# Steve Brandau: Proposed general plan ignores what Fresnans want

By SteveBrandau

Fresno's 2035 General Plan Update is that itchy Christmas sweater you'll wish you had kept the receipt for.

This plan establishes guidelines on where and how Fresno will grow over the next 20 years. It is safe to say that it is the most ambitious general plan in decades. This time the city is also changing the zoning ordinances and updating development codes — all the while increasing urban density to a level never previously imagined in our community.

I have some serious disagreements with this plan. Primarily it is not free market friendly. Instead it is an effort of government to force its schemes upon the community. In this case, government wants more people packed closer together in high density housing and driving less by being made more reliant on bicycles and buses. These aren't necessarily bad goals, but it is highly unlikely that most Fresnans will embrace this radical change. Our citizens have always preferred bigger homes on lots with a backyard for barbecuing. They like driving cars while listening to music.

This general plan would be more at home in Sacramento or San Francisco. It is now popular in California for public policy to be made on the whimsical notions of the "intellectual elite." They live off high six-figure salaries and have less common sense than the average Walmart clerk.

At a League of Cities breakout session I attended this summer the keynote speaker on sustainability announced with glee, "I don't even own a car!" I laughed and thought to myself, "He'd never make it in Fresno." Tony Boren, with the Fresno Council of Governments, says that we have invested \$1.16 billion in the Fresno metropolitan area to make traveling around extremely easy. Now we are supposed to forsake that investment because some pansy in Sacramento thinks we need to live closer together and ride the bus?

Social engineers think they can reinvent society and then bully everyone into going along with their theories. Usually these theories fail miserably and create bigger problems. The Law of Unintended Consequences is almost as sure as the Law of Gravity.

If Fresno puts its major focus on something unwanted and financially unattainable while discouraging market-tested housing, we will send our people elsewhere where they can find what they want. Clovis, Madera, Sanger and Kerman are already calling out, "Come here! Come here!" Madera and Fresno counties are actively planning whole new communities. People don't mind a 20-minute commute to live in the home that they want.

Fresno will suffer the unintended consequences of more cars traveling more miles and creating more pollution. Indeed a new form of sprawl — regional sprawl — will be created with this plan. Also, middle-class families, the building blocks of any healthy community, by moving away to desirable neighborhoods, will leave Fresno poorer than ever without the property tax base to improve our schools and public services.

I'm not just here to criticize — I have a different way forward. I envision a 2035 General Plan that is in line with what people in Fresno really want, and will help Fresno thrive in an age of region-level competition.

First, we need a master plan for the west of Highway 99 section of our city. It is one of the few directions we can still grow. Now it is a hodge-podge of semi-rural neighborhoods. Let's draw up a long-term growth plan here that makes sense and can actually be accomplished.

Second, I would directly connect our general plan to attracting more jobs to Fresno. We should immediately begin plans for a 1,000-acre industrial park ready to entice companies. If we want to get serious about rebuilding mid-city

neighborhoods, we should hyper-focus on creating the opportunities that will lead to more jobs for more of the people living in those neighborhoods. Washington, D.C., can give us grants and Sacramento can loan us money but nothing about that is permanent or ongoing. We should take that money only if we can parlay it into jobs and needed infrastructure.

Not everything in this plan is horrible and I am not crying “the sky is falling!” The motives are well intentioned and the mayor has made some compromises that help this plan. In the latest version, the infill development numbers are not mandates but just targets to be striven for. There will also be some opportunities for the kind of housing that I am asking for.

That said, this general plan is still focused on high-density infill development that is diametrically opposed to the free market. Until that fact changes, I cannot support this 2035 General Plan Update.

Fresno City Council President Steve Brandau represents District 2.

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