

Chris Moran and Matthew Jendian: Fresno's General Plan — how to ensure it succeeds

By Chris Moran and Matthew Jendian

There is much debate about the merits and demerits of Fresno's 2035 General Plan Update.

What matters most? We believe it is the real hope and encouragement the overall plan concretely provides and that, if we as citizens take the time and energy to ensure significant investment in our existing neighborhoods and districts, Fresno can indeed become a healthier and more prosperous city for all who live and work here. It is also the awareness raised that if “this time will be different,”— if this plan will make a substantial difference for Fresno's future — we all must be involved, collaborate and be vigilant about the implementation of this plan. “The plan” cannot implement itself.

We believe the General Plan Update is a good thing for Fresno, and, after a long process, it was encouraging to witness last Thursday's City Council hearing — a Fresno Convention Center full of people who all want to see a more equitable and accessible city that shares the burdens and rewards while investing in itself and shifting how we grow to have a more balanced, safe, and sustainable urban form and pattern. A diverse range of people of all ages who care deeply voiced repeatedly the desire to work to change Fresno for the better. Many good ideas to address challenging problems were offered up from every sector. Students, bankers, developers, neighborhood residents, faith leaders, and leaders from business and community benefit organizations all came together last Thursday night to be part of the solution.

The real challenge moving forward is preserving and implementing the thoughtful policy framework now contained in the 2035 General Plan. This proposed framework admirably balances and encourages much-needed infill and revitalization investments in the existing city limits with more measured and fiscally-responsible new growth area greenfield development. It contains policies requiring fiscal-impact analyses and fair and proportional payments from new developments requesting annexations that are as important as priorities for public infrastructure, services, and new parks in existing neighborhoods and districts in achieving and maintaining a healthy balance and mix of long-term growth, environmental quality, and economic development for our city.

Whenever a General Plan is adopted, the never-ending work that follows will require us to match public budgets and private investments to General Plan vision, goals, and policies, and to constantly monitor and champion refined policies, plans, programs, and projects that incrementally implement the General Plan to build and revitalize one healthy Fresno. We need to add dedicated citizen-leadership capacities and an organizational structure to these ongoing and necessary implementation tasks. To be successful, we believe Fresno needs a diverse “General Plan Citizen's Implementation Committee” with members appointed by the mayor and council members as a standing city committee, similar to the City Planning Commission, and made up of intentionally diverse members to appropriately represent the diversity of sectors and people in Fresno. We imagine a committee of 17-19 members from diverse demographic backgrounds of our communities who meet monthly and proportionally represent sector leaders from neighborhood associations, faith communities, local businesses and the development industry, and area public institutions.

The primary charges of the General Plan Citizen's Implementation Committee should include not only helping focus community and sector interests and priorities in General Plan implementation activities, but strategically integrating the work of city departments and budgets with championing and encouraging specific plans, programs, and projects that meaningfully implement and sustain our city consistent with the General Plan vision.

Now is the time to give all who care about Fresno permission to begin implementing the vision, goals, and policies of the 2035 General Plan Update. We ask the Fresno City Council to maintain the integrity of the proposed plan to achieve balanced growth and investment in all parts of our city. We look forward to building partnerships with neighborhoods, businesses, institutions, and resident leaders and working together to collectively implement the plan so this time will be different.

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