

# Fresnans attend first planning meeting for high-speed rail station

By George  
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The first planning meeting for Fresno's newest train station ran like clockwork.

Now if construction of high-speed rail can somehow follow suit.

About 60 people showed up Tuesday evening at fire department headquarters to pitch ideas, offer hopes and express worries for downtown's proposed bullet-train station.

History was much on everyone's mind. Fresno got its start in the late-19th century as a railroad hub for farmers making the most of a rich land. Six or so generations later, Fresnans must figure out how to make the most of a station serving an unbelievably speedy iron horse.

Assistant planning director Dan Zack told the audience to find ways to "catapult Fresno into its next 100 years."

That kind of mission can turn strong legs into jelly. Fortunately for the volunteers, event organizers gave the event an easy-to-grasp structure.

High-speed rail is coming, officials said. Fresno's bullet-train station in the area of H and Mariposa streets will be a trailblazer.

High-speed rail leaders want something that fits the needs of a unique transportation system. City Hall wants something that fits into Fresno's revitalized future.

Both sides want something dramatic that captures the world's attention.

Tuesday's event, billed as a workshop, began with a name. Imagine, people were told, that the area within a half-mile radius of the proposed station is a district of unique character.

This new district is to be called the Fresno Station District. A half-mile radius would take in Fulton Corridor, Chukchansi Park, the Convention Center, Warnors Theatre and Chinatown. All are within a 10-minute walk of the station.

Downtown Fresno already is embracing considerable change. Mayor Ashley Swearingin expects this year to begin replacing Fulton Mall with a two-way street open to vehicles. The long-awaited bus rapid transit system is on the horizon. The Cultural Arts District continues to fill with new housing.

The question at hand: How is this new train station to fit most effectively into everything — Fresno Station District, downtown, inner-city Fresno, the entire metropolitan area?

None in the audience had to worry about immediate answers. AECOM, the city's consultant for this work, figures it will take eight or nine months to finish a report.

Some early challenges are obvious.

Chinatown, for instance, will be on the station's west side. It's been many years since this historic part of Fresno got serious attention from City Hall. The Chukchansi Park-Fulton Corridor neighborhood, by contrast, is always on City Hall's radar. Will the Fresno Station District turn into a tiny version of Fresno's deplorable land-use map — growth and vibrancy on one side, decay and despair on the other?

Tuesday's workshop kicked-off with a walking tour of the Fresno Station District's highlights. Some two dozen walkers lingered the longest around the clock tower in the middle of Fulton Mall. It was at that site on Sept. 1, 1964 that leaders of yore dedicated a unique pedestrian mall billed as downtown's savior.

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