

Fresno City Hall seeks public input on development code

By George
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Fresno's new blueprint for growth finally has its soul mate in sight.

But this marriage of an idealistic 2035 general plan and a reformed development code might first need a legion of marriage counselors.

City officials on Tuesday released a draft of what they're calling the first major update of Fresno's development code in more than 50 years.

City Hall wants Fresnans to dig into the code and come up with ideas to improve it.

"This update was long overdue," said Jennifer Clark, director of the Development and Resource Management Department (DARM). "We took an outdated, arcane document and made sensible changes that not only reinforce our new general plan, but also allow properties to be developed in ways that enhance the quality of life in our community."

The draft code is available online (www.fresno.gov/code) and at City Hall (Development Department, third floor). City officials plan to have copies at libraries and community centers around town.

People have until 5 p.m. Monday, June 1 to make comments.

Development staff will rework the code to reflect the best suggestions. A formal proposal could go to the City Council in July. More than one public review is likely. The council may take a vote in August.

The city is entering unexplored territory.

The council in December approved the 2035 general plan. That culminated six years of effort by Mayor Ashley Swearingin and nearly three years of public debate.

Fresno has had its share of general plans, but none generated the hopes of this one. The new plan is to rejuvenate older neighborhoods while ending sprawl. This plan won't collect dust. It will make or break reputations.

But how to turn the 2035 general plan's lofty vision into deeds?

That's where the development code comes in. It implements the general plan.

The code will list the rules for development in every corner of Fresno. Commercial, residential, industrial — you name it, the code will tell developers what's expected as far as things like parking spaces or building heights. The code has hundreds of pages.

The code will give developers a prudent balance of flexibility and certainty, said DARM Assistant Director Dan Zack.

Fresno has never had a general plan with such high public expectations. The city's last major overhaul of the development code came in the early 1960s.

The general plan and the development code can't work as designed unless they merge seamlessly. City Hall has never tried such a merger on such a grand scale.

Said DARM's Clark: "We're looking forward to getting comments and suggestions from Fresnans that will help make our development code work for everyone."

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