

Fresno's Southeast Growth Area will be focus of committee

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A committee is now formed to review whether Fresno needs a nearly 9,000-acre area east of the city for future growth and whether to reduce the size of the site.

The two-member committee was formed by the Local Agency Formation Commission and will consist of commission members Mario Santoyo and Henry R. Perea, who last month led the discussion about reducing the Southeast Growth Area's size.

Beginning next month, a workshop is scheduled for the committee to meet with farmers who own land in the area, school districts that bought land to meet future growth, developers who own land for future housing, government agencies and others with interest in the 14-square-mile area.

The Southeast Growth Area is part of the city's future sphere of influence, a logical extension of the city's boundaries, but the city hasn't made any progress in undertaking planning for the area since it was approved by the Local Agency Formation Commission in 2006.

If built out, it would result in 45,000 homes. The city is still years – perhaps decades – away from building, because it hasn't submitted documents for the area specifying how the city will develop it and pay for infrastructure.

The city has now decided to focus its development efforts toward downtown Fresno, west Fresno and the Blackstone Avenue corridor, where infrastructure exists and there is a more efficient way to use mass transit and reduce vehicle miles traveled by motorists.

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Square miles covered in the city of Fresno's Southeast Growth Area

Fresno City Manager Bruce Rudd said the meetings will bring together potentially clashing interests.

Farmers want certainty for planting crops and using water, while developers and school districts will want to leverage and justify their property purchases, he said.

Clovis Unified, Sanger Unified and State Center Community College District have invested in tens of millions of dollars for existing and future schools to serve future residents of the Southeast Growth Area.

Manuel Cunha, president of the Nisei Farmers League, said farmers must get consideration when the committee meets.

"We have to think more about what our farms are faced with and what our communities are faced with rather than just suddenly throwing out 10,000 acres and I don't even know what to grow," he said.

David Fey, LAFCO's executive director, said the future of the Southeast Growth Area lacks clarity after a decade without growth. Typically, the commission makes decisions with the idea that significant building in a growth area will occur within 20 years.

But the commission's job is to examine boundaries, not land-use issues, because LAFCO has no land-use authority, Fey said.

He said the committee wants to know where “SEGA fits into the city’s plans in terms of the commission and its 20-year horizon for a sphere of influence.”

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