

# Fresno's future growth area could be carved up

By Marc Benjamin  
mbenjamin@fresnobee.com

More than a quarter of Fresno's future growth area was on the verge of being lopped off by county officials before an 11th-hour lobbying effort stopped it.

The Local Agency Formation Commission – which arranges future boundaries for cities, special districts and other agencies – was proposing to carve out about 2,560 acres of land. An earlier recommendation had suggested that no acreage for future homes be removed from the area.

A subcommittee was appointed last year to examine Fresno's future Southeast Development Area. The nearly 9,000-acre Southeast Growth Area, as it was previously known, was approved by the commission 10 years ago, but the city of Fresno has yet to begin planning for development. When done, the Southeast Development Area will have about 45,000 homes.

On Wednesday, the commission's board voted to wait until next month before making changes to the area on the eastern edge of Fresno's borders. The commission wants the city to defend its position for keeping the land for future development and report on its ability to provide water.

## ADVERTISING

In 2014, city officials announced that they would shift the focus of future development to filling in undeveloped space in urbanized parts of Fresno and west of Highway 99, removing its emphasis on the southeast corridor.

County Supervisor Henry R. Perea, who is on the commission, said members want to know the plans for the southeast and timing for the city's adoption of a specific plan. The city is supposed to generate land-use maps and substantially develop a community within 20 years of annexation approval.

If the city plans to "land bank" the area and wait 40 years, the commission wants to know "so we can make our decision," he said.

The land slated for removal is between Kings Canyon Road, Jensen, DeWolf and Highland avenues.

We purchased 120 acres, worked with the city on its infrastructure and still have \$30 million in our 2002 bond that we haven't used yet.

Bryan Speece, State Center Community College District

That idea met with opposition from local school districts, the development community and city representatives.

Officials with Clovis and Sanger unified school districts and State Center Community College District, which have invested tens of millions of dollars in land, said they were concerned about their taxpayer-funded investments for

## Growth plan eyed

*Fresno's plans to build on 9,000 acres east of the city, stalled for years, now might face revision.*



The Fresno Bee

future growth, which were encouraged by city officials when they were eager to grow into the southeast.

State Center was planning to build a campus and paid about \$9.6 million for land at Clovis and North avenues.

“We purchased 120 acres, worked with the city on its infrastructure and still have \$30 million in our 2002 bond that we haven’t used yet,” said Bryan Speece, assistant to the chancellor for capital projects for the State Center district.

He said the district is interested in establishing a timeline for the campus to develop.

Clovis Unified is in a similar position after buying 159 acres for \$17.5 million near Clinton and Highland avenues, said Don Ulrich, assistant superintendent.

“If it doesn’t happen and we’ve made those major commitments, our concern is that our taxpayers, our constituents, have made a major investment in a bond measure and planning that worked in conjunction with the city,” Ulrich said.

Sanger Unified officials are worried because the 2,560 acres of land are within their district boundaries.

We will send a strong signal that we are preserving ag land and slowing down sprawl.

Henry R. Perea, Local Agency Formation Commission member

Sanger district planning consultant Scott Odell said the district was relying on students coming from homes in the growth area to fill a new 4,000-student middle school and high school. He said the district has acquired most of the 120 acres for the project at Jensen and Fowler avenues.

Odell also said Sanger Unified needs developed properties in that area to enhance the district’s ability to improve its bond capacity by raising its overall property tax base.

“The district would like to see those areas developed, it would be very beneficial to the assessed valuation,” he said.

Fresno city officials didn’t comment during the meeting, but in a letter to the commission, City Manager Bruce Rudd said the city has 10 years remaining to reach the 20-year deadline for building in the southeast area. He said the city’s general plan suggests that growth will begin within the next 10 years with 9,000 homes built by 2035.

“The city will work on determining an appropriate timeline in which a specific plan may be warranted based on our underlying goal of financial and environmental sustainability and taking a more balanced approach in which infill and green field developments are approved,” he said in a statement.

Rudd said the city supports the original recommendation, keeping all land in the southeast area. He added the commission can’t justify the removal of the 2,560 acres south of Kings Canyon.

But Perea said he thinks the commission can.

“We will send a strong signal that we are preserving ag land and slowing down sprawl,” he said.

Marc Benjamin: [559-441-6166](tel:559-441-6166), [@beebebenjamin](https://www.instagram.com/beebebenjamin)