

## Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Tower District Specific Plan Update

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**Date:** May 7, 2025

**To:** Responsible Agencies, Interested Parties and Organizations

**Subject:** Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Tower District Specific Plan Update

**Lead Agency:** City of Fresno

**Contact:** Sophia Pagoulatos  
Planning Manager  
City of Fresno – Planning and Development Department  
2600 Fresno Street, Room 3043  
Fresno, CA 93721  
(559) 621-8062  
[Sophia.Pagoulatos@fresno.gov](mailto:Sophia.Pagoulatos@fresno.gov)

**Notice is Hereby Given:** The City of Fresno (City) is the Lead Agency for the Tower District Specific Plan Update (proposed project) and has prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The NOP is intended to solicit the views of the public, interested parties, and/or agencies as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is relevant to you or your agency’s statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Specifically, the City is requesting that commenters identify environmental topics (and/or special studies) that they believe need to be explored in the forthcoming EIR, and to identify other relevant environmental issues related to the scope and content of the forthcoming EIR.

**Project Title:** Tower District Specific Plan Update

**Project Location:** The Tower District (District) is an approximately 1,869-acre area located near the center of the city of Fresno and establishes the Specific Plan Area for the proposed project. The Specific Plan Area is generally bound by East Shields Avenue to the north, North Blackstone Avenue to the east, State Route 180 to the south, and North Fruit Avenue and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks to the west. Figure 1, Regional Location and Local Vicinity Map, shows the boundaries of the city of Fresno in its regional context. To the north of Fresno is Madera County, to the northeast and adjacent to Fresno is the city of Clovis, and unincorporated land is located to the east, south, and west. Figure 2, Project Location, shows the location of the District within the city of Fresno.

**Project Description:** The proposed project aims to provide strategic and comprehensive guidance for making decisions regarding District’s built environment and landscape character, land use and activities, public open space, community facilities and transportation. The City previously adopted the 1991 Tower District Specific Plan which emphasized conservation and historic preservation throughout the District and remains a focus of the proposed project. The proposed project would update the 1991 Specific Plan to respond to issues in the District that have remained, changed, and emerged over the ensuing decades.

The proposed project aims to provide a focused outline for implementing the broader goals of the City's General Plan in a manner that fits the needs of the District, as well as streamlining development within the Specific Plan Area by providing updated environmental analysis pursuant to CEQA requirements.

To achieve the goals of the proposed project and address the various needs of the District, the Tower District Specific Plan Update is divided into six key chapters, which are briefly described below:

- 1. Introduction.** This chapter provides a brief history of the Tower District including its regional context, development patterns, community character, and resident demographics. It also provides an overview of the planning process for development of the Specific Plan Update and key issues identified during the community engagement process and establishes the guiding principles of the Specific Plan Update.
- 2. Conservation and Historic Preservation.** This chapter provides an overview of historic resources within the District, and how future development should preserve and protect the historic and cultural identity of the District.
- 3. Land Use.** This chapter considers existing land use patterns in the District and evaluates proposed focused land use changes. It sets parameters for allowable activities and the characteristics of future development within the District while providing a framework for how future development should meet the District's needs and aspirations.
- 4. Parks and Open Spaces.** This chapter examines the state of parks and other public facilities such as trails, schools, and libraries within the District and how those spaces should be expanded and improved.
- 5. Circulation.** This chapter evaluates the effectiveness of existing circulation infrastructure across multiple modes of transportation and how infrastructure should move people and goods throughout the District. This chapter focuses not only on circulation across the overall street network, but street designs themselves and guidelines for improving existing streets.
- 6. Utilities.** As the District is largely a built-out environment, this chapter examines the current state of existing utility infrastructure.

Additionally, the proposed project would include updated Design Standards and Guidelines that are built upon historic development patterns, the Citywide Development Code, the original Design Guidelines, and the updated Specific Plan, in order to guide development projects to make positive contributions to the District's uniqueness, beauty, and walkability. The updated Design Standards and Guidelines are intended to preserve the essence of the District while facilitating compatible infill development and addressing the needs, considerations, and practices that have emerged since adoption of the original Design Guidelines.

**Areas of Potential Environmental Effects:** Potentially significant environmental impacts of the proposed project include, but may not be limited to, the following: Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Energy, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Noise, and Recreation.

**Document Availability and Public Review Timeline:** Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response to the NOP must be sent no later than 30 days after publication of this notice. The review period for the NOP will be from May 7, 2025, to June 9, 2025. Copies of the NOP can be reviewed at the City of

Fresno, 2600 Fresno Street, Room 3043, Fresno, CA 93721. Electronic copies can also be accessed on the City's website at: [www.fresno.gov/TDSP](http://www.fresno.gov/TDSP).

**Public Scoping Meeting:** The CEQA process encourages comments and questions from the public throughout the planning process. Pursuant to Section 15083 of the CEQA Guidelines, a Public Scoping Meeting will be held to solicit public comments on the scope and content of the EIR. A public scoping meeting for this project will be conducted on May 27, 2025 at 5:30 PM at the following address below:

Fresno City Hall  
2600 Fresno Street  
Room 2120  
Fresno, CA 93721

**Submitting Comments:** Comments and suggestions as to the appropriate scope of analysis of the EIR are invited from all interested parties. Written comments or questions concerning the EIR for the proposed project should be directed to the Planning and Development Department at the following address by 5:00 PM on June 9, 2025.

Fresno City Hall, Attn: Sophia Pagoulatos

2600 Fresno Street, Room 3065

Fresno, CA 93721

[longrangeplanning@fresno.gov](mailto:longrangeplanning@fresno.gov)

Please include the commenter's full name, address, phone number and/or email so that we may contact you for clarification, if necessary.

**Attachments:**

**Attachment 1: Figures 1 and 2.**

**Attachment 2: Proposed Land Use Updates.**



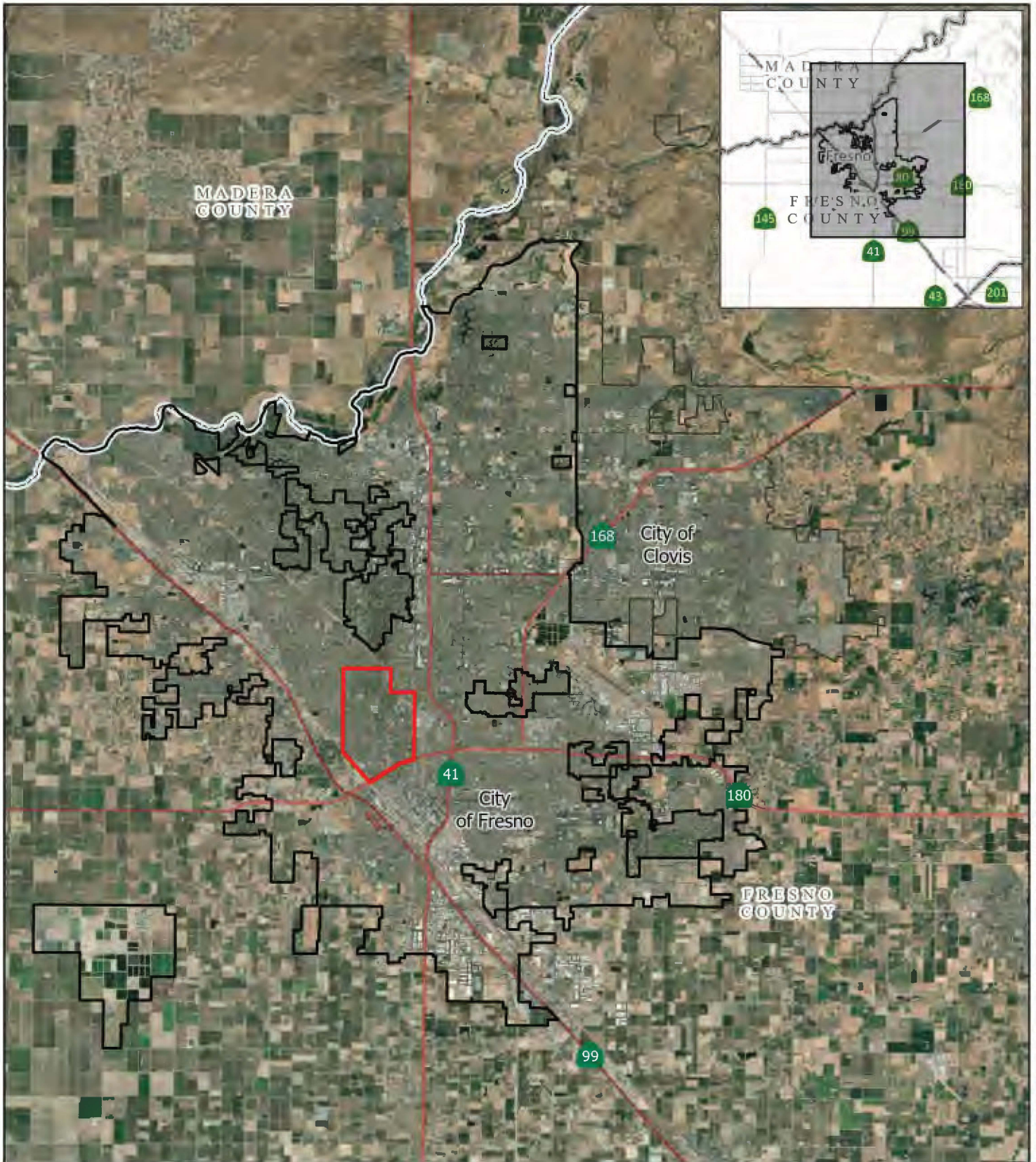


FIGURE 1

LSA

- City of Fresno
- Tower District Boundary
- County Boundary



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SOURCE: Esri World Imagery (2025)

*Tower District Specific Plan Update*  
Regional Location and Local Vicinity



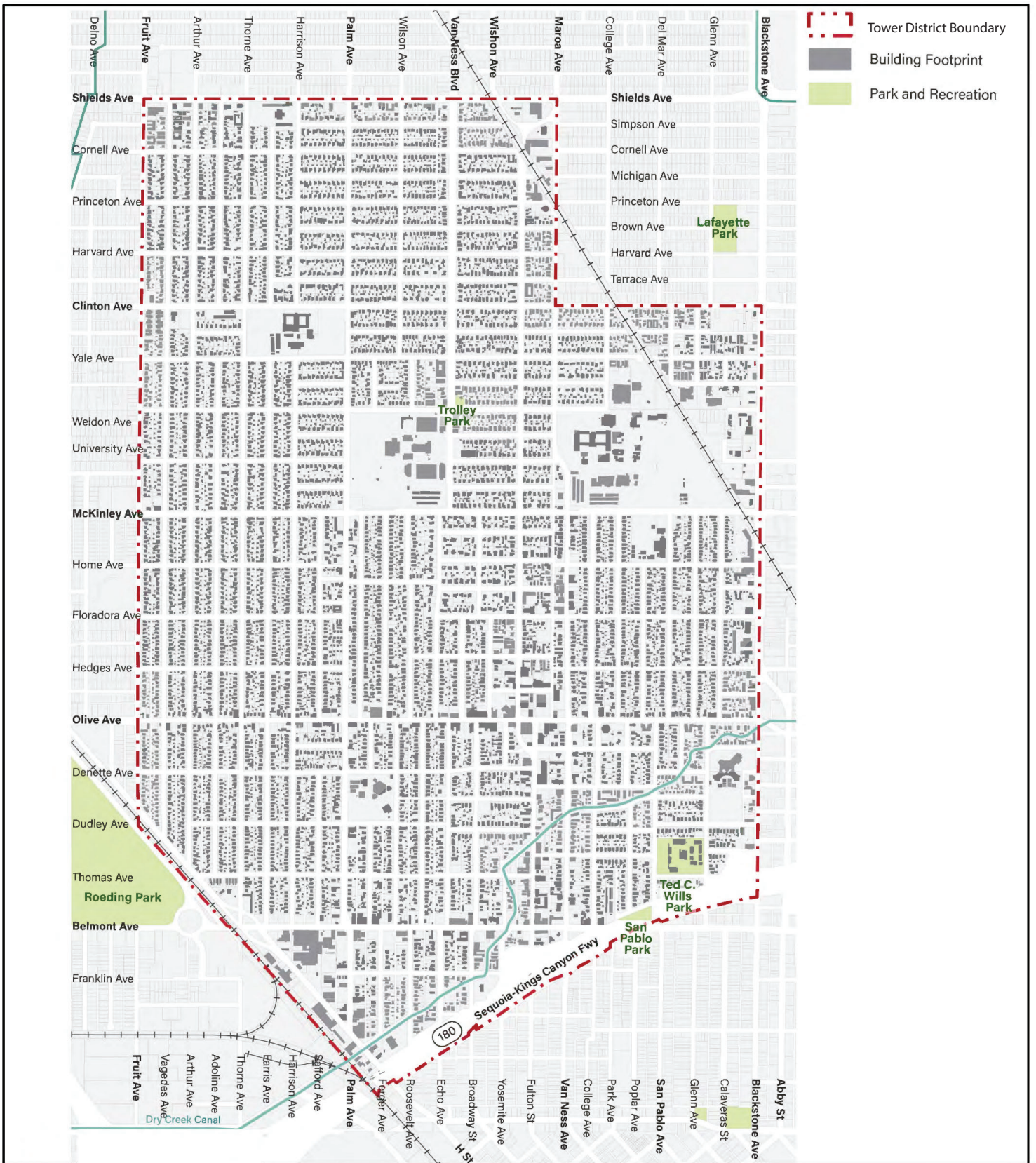
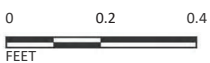


FIGURE 2

LSA



SOURCE: City of Fresno

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## ATTACHMENT 2: PROPOSED LAND USE UPDATES

### Existing Land Uses

Existing land use patterns within the District are typical of an American streetcar suburb allowing residents to walk to their destination or to public transit stops. Because of this, commercial corridors developed along the paths where streetcar lines previously existed such as along Fulton, Olive, Belmont, Wishon, and Blackstone Avenues. While some commercial areas have retained their pedestrian-oriented design, many sites have been redeveloped over time to reflect an auto-oriented design.

The Fresno General Plan, adopted in 2014, includes land use patterns and policies that encourage infill development and revitalization of older neighborhoods. The following provides a description of the General Plan land use categories that are utilized in the Tower District Specific Plan:

**Residential.** Residential land use provides for a wide range of neighborhoods and housing types. Residential land uses also allow as permitted uses neighborhood-serving community facilities such as parks, churches, schools, family day care, libraries, community gardens, and farmers markets. Residential uses are designated by density as follows:

***Medium Low Density.*** The Medium Low Density designation is intended to provide for single-family detached housing with densities of 3.5 to 6 units per acre.

***Medium Density.*** Medium Density residential covers developments of 5 to 12 units per acre and is intended for areas with predominantly single-family residential development, but can also accommodate a mix of housing types, from small-lot starter homes, zero-lot-line developments, and duplexes, to townhouses. Much of the city's existing neighborhoods fall within this designation.

***Medium High.*** Medium High Density residential is intended for neighborhoods with a mix of single-family residences, townhomes, garden apartments, and multi-family units intended to support a fine-grain, pedestrian scale. This land use accommodates densities from 12 to 16 units per acre overall— individual parcels may have densities outside of that range so long as a master planned neighborhood has an average density that conforms.

***Urban Neighborhood.*** Urban Neighborhood residential covers densities from 16 to 30 units per acre, which will require multi-family dwellings but still allows for a mix of housing types including single-family houses. This land use is intended to provide for a compact community that includes community facilities, walkable access to parkland and commercial services, and supports efficient, frequent transit service. Urban Neighborhood is designated for targeted areas with complementary land uses adjacent.

***High Density.*** High Density residential is intended to accommodate attached homes, two- to four-plexes, and apartment buildings, supported by walkable access to frequent transit, retail and services, and community facilities such as parks and schools. High Density allows for 30 to 45 units per acre.

**Commercial.** Commercial land use designations allow a wide range of retail and service establishments intended to serve local and regional needs. Only mixed-use designations allow residential with a commercial component.

**Main Street.** Main Street commercial encourages a traditional “Main Street” character with active storefronts, outdoor seating, and pedestrian-oriented design. This designation promotes primarily one to two story retail uses, with moderate office and minimal multi-family as supportive uses. It also preserves small-scale, fine-grain character in neighborhoods where single-family residential and townhomes are predominant. The maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is 1.0. A FAR is the ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of a site. An example is a 3-acre site with a 1.0 FAR could have up to approximately 130,000 square feet of floor area within a building (equivalent to 3 acres or one to one ratio).

**Community.** Community commercial is intended for pedestrian-oriented commercial development that primarily serves local needs such as convenience shopping and offices. Many of the city’s current commercial districts fall into this designation. Specific uses allowed include medium-scale retail, office, civic and entertainment uses, supermarkets, drug stores and supporting uses. The maximum FAR is 1.0.

**General.** This designation is intended for a range of retail and service uses that are not appropriate in other areas because of higher volumes of vehicle traffic and potential adverse impacts on other uses. Development such as strip malls would fall into this designation. Examples of allowable uses include: building materials, storage facilities with active storefronts, equipment rental, wholesale businesses, and specialized retail not normally found in shopping centers. The maximum FAR is 2.0.

#### **Employment.**

**Office.** The Office land use designation is intended for administrative, financial, business, professional, medical, and public offices. This designation is mainly intended to apply to existing office uses on smaller lots, generally located on arterial roadways. This designation is also considered compatible with existing residential neighborhoods given the smaller level of noise and traffic generation than commercial uses. Retail uses would be limited to business services and food service and convenience goods for those who work in the area. The maximum FAR is 2.0.

**Light Industrial.** The Light Industrial designation accommodates a diverse range of light industrial uses, including limited manufacturing and processing, research and development, fabrication, utility equipment and service yards, wholesaling, warehousing, and distribution activities. Small-scale retail and ancillary office uses are also permitted. Light Industrial areas may serve as buffers between Heavy Industrial and other land uses and otherwise are generally located in areas with good transportation access, such as along railroads and freeways. The maximum FAR is 1.5.

**Mixed Use.** Mixed-use land use designations are based on commercial uses and require a residential component.

**Neighborhood Mixed Use.** The Neighborhood Mixed Use designation is similar to the Main Street and Community commercial land use designations; however, it allows a minimum of 50 percent residential uses, whereas the commercial districts do not allow residential uses. This designation provides for mixed-use districts of local-serving, pedestrian-oriented commercial development, such as convenience shopping and professional offices in two- to three-story buildings. Development is expected to include ground floor neighborhood retail uses and upper-level housing or offices, with a mix of small lot single family houses, townhomes, and multi-family dwelling units on side streets, in a horizontal or vertical mixed-use orientation. The built form will have a scale and character that is consistent with pedestrian-orientation, to attract and promote a walk-in clientele, with small lots



and frequent roadway and pedestrian connections permitting convenient access from residences to commercial space. Automobile-oriented uses are not permitted. Residential densities range between 12 and 16 units per acre and the maximum FAR is 1.5.

**Corridor/Center Mixed Use.** The Corridor/Center Mixed Use designation is higher intensity than Neighborhood Mixed Use, and is intended to allow for either horizontal or vertical mixed-use development in multiple story buildings along key circulation corridors in the city where height and density can be easily accommodated. Ground-floor retail and upper-floor residential or offices are the primary uses, with personal and business services and public and institutional space as supportive uses. Development will facilitate the transformation of existing transportation corridors into vibrant, highly walkable areas with broad, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, trees, landscaping, and local-serving uses with new buildings that step down in relationship to the scale and character of adjacent neighborhoods. This designation will largely apply along arterial streets, at targeted locations between regional activity centers. Residential densities range between 16 and 30 units per acre with a minimum 40 percent residential uses and the maximum FAR is 1.5.

**Open Space.** These designations apply to open space areas that are not parks or trails, such as riparian corridors, the clear zone around Fresno-Yosemite International Airport, and the San Joaquin River bottom, which is primarily designated as open space even though it includes a limited number of existing homes. Within open space, there is a Multi-Use designation that is located along the San Joaquin River Corridor that allows parks, open space, bathrooms, launch areas for canoes, parking, and sand/gravel facilities.

**Public Facilities.** These designations apply to lands owned by public entities, including City Hall and other City buildings, county buildings, schools, colleges, the municipal airport and hospitals. They also include public facilities such as fire and police stations, City-operated recycling centers and sewage treatment facilities. In addition, these designations apply to public facilities, including neighborhood, community and regional parks, recreational centers, and golf courses. It also applies to multi-purpose trails that serve both regional and neighborhood level needs, some of which are paved while others, in particular those found along the San Joaquin River Bluff Environs, may be unpaved.

The existing land use designations in the District include a mix of residential, commercial, public institutions, and pockets of industrial uses. The District is generally surrounded by urban, built-up areas consisting of similar land uses to those found within the District, including a mix of residential, commercial, public institutions, and pockets of industrial uses. Additionally, Roeding Regional Park is located west of the District, immediately adjacent to the Union Pacific Railroad line and Golden State Boulevard.

### **Existing Zoning**

Based on the City's Citywide Development Code Chapter of the Municipal Code (Chapter 15 of the Municipal Code), the Specific Plan Area contains the following zoning districts

- Residential Single-Family, Medium Density (RS-5)
- Residential Multi-Family, Medium High Density (RM-1)
- Residential Multi-Family, Urban Neighborhood (RM-2)
- Residential Multi-Family, High Density (RM-3)
- Commercial Main Street (CMS)
- Commercial Community (CC)



- Commercial General (CG)
- Office (O)
- Light Industrial (IL)
- Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMX)
- Park and Recreation (PR)
- Public and Institutional (PI)

### **Planned Land Use Changes**

The Specific Plan aims to retain the character of the District while promoting new investments. The proposed land use patterns and policies are designed to address a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges within the District. Further, the proposed changes are designed to help maintain and improve the community’s desired character, provide diverse housing types at various affordability levels, promote commercial activity, maintain compatibility with industrial employment, promote recreation and education, and improve overall economic development and plan for future growth opportunities.

**Diverse and Affordable Housing.** The Specific Plan aims to create more multi-unit housing that has the potential to be more affordable for residents and provides more access to the local community.

**Commercial Activity.** The District contains merchants, restaurateurs, and cultural venues that are integral to community life and provide a distinct sense of place. The Specific Plan retains the existing Commercial Main Street (CMS) land use and zoning designation that requires ground-floor commercial uses in the heart of the District’s commercial areas. However, the Apartment House (AH) Overlay zoning designation would allow multi-unit development without the ground-floor commercial requirements.

**Industrial Employment and Compatibility.** Light industrial uses are located along the southwest boundary of the Specific Plan Area. Some of these businesses have been in the neighborhood for many decades and provide employment to local Tower District residents.

The Specific Plan would implement land use changes that would maintain and enhance the character-defining elements associated with the Tower District while allowing for future growth. The Plan would promote more mixed-use development along commercial corridors by creating corridor/center mixed use and neighborhood mixed use areas, specifically on Blackstone Avenue and Shields Avenue. This would allow for ground level commercial uses fronting public streets and sidewalks, while residential uses would be located above or behind. This would continue to promote the walkability of the District while allowing for greater residential development. Additionally, medium low density residential uses would be allowed at Terrace Gardens, Porter Tract, and Wilson Island to allow for the development of slightly denser housing where building mass can transition in scale to the adjacent single-family homes.

### **Development Capacity**

The majority of the area within the Specific Plan is already developed and not expected to change. The Specific Plan would highlight underutilized sites as candidates for investment and restoration. Underutilized sites are generally located along the District’s commercial corridors. Enlarging or redeveloping existing buildings would allow for buildings in poor condition or low economic value to be improved. Many factors impact potential for new development, such as location, size, access, density, floor area ratio, building heights, parking, and open space. Redeveloping underutilized sites would allow for decreased development costs while maintaining quality and community character. **Table 1** below

provides a summary of development capacity based on proposed land use designations under the proposed project.

**Table 1 – Development Capacity by Proposed Land Use Designation – Vacant and Underutilized Sites**

<i>Existing Land Use Designation</i>	<i>Vacant and Underutilized Land (acres)</i>	<i>Existing Units</i>	<i>Projected New Units (gross)</i>	<i>Projected New Units (net)</i>	<i>Existing Non-Residential Floor Area</i>	<i>Projected New Non-Residential Floor Area (gross)</i>	<i>Projected New Non-Residential Floor Area (net)</i>
<b>Residential</b>							
Residential Medium Low	0.0	-	-	-	0	-	-
Residential Medium Density	5.1	-	45	45	2,000	-	-
Residential Medium High	1.2	-	19	19	0	-	-
Residential Urban Neighborhood	0.3	-	8	8	0	-	-
Residential High Density	0.0	-	-	-	0	-	-
<b>Mixed Use</b>							
Neighborhood Mixed Use	6.8	0	437	437	46,672	119,006	72,334
Corridor/Center Mixed Use	8.8	9	659	650	55,808	191,446	135,638
<b>Commercial</b>							
Commercial Main Street	34.1	44	1,639	1,595	257,420	594,792	337,372
Commercial Community	0.9	0	-	-	6,274	24,306	18,032
Commercial General	0.0	0	-	-	0	-	-
<b>Employment</b>							
Employment Office	0.0	0	-	-	0	-	-
Employment Light Industrial	13.1	6	-	-6	138,558	456,143	317,585
Public Facilities	0.0	0	-	-	0	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.3</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2,807</b>	<b>2,748</b>	<b>506,732</b>	<b>1,385,694</b>	<b>880,962</b>

**Residential.** Land uses allowing for residential growth within the Specific Plan Area include Residential Medium Low Density (RS-4), Residential Medium Density (RS-5), Residential Medium High Density (RM-1), Residential Urban Neighborhood (RM-2), and Residential High Density (RM-3), as well as Commercial Main Street (CMS), Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMX) and Corridor/Center Mixed Use (CMX).

Under current zoning within the District, residential development is estimated to have a capacity of 2,271 new housing units. Because this capacity takes into account the redevelopment of areas currently identified as underutilized sites, the net gain of residential units under the existing zoning capacity is 2,212 new residential units. The rezoning proposed under the specific plan would result in an increased capacity totaling 2,807 residential units, which would total a net increase of 2,748 residential units when existing units on underutilized sites are taken into account. The proposed designations would increase residential development capacity by an estimated 537 units compared with current zoning and land use designations. **Table 2** below shows a summary of residential development capacity within the District under the proposed project.

**Table 2 – Residential Development Capacity-Underutilized Sites**

<i>Tower District Specific Plan Area</i>	<i>Existing Units</i>	<i>Projected New Units (gross)</i>	<i>Projected New Units (net)</i>
<b>Current Land Use Designations</b>	59	2,271	2,212
<b>Proposed Land Use Designations</b>	59	2,807	2,748
<b>Change</b>	-	<b>537</b>	<b>537</b>

**Non-Residential.** The majority of commercial development within the District lies within the southern half of the Specific Plan Area with major development corridors along Van Ness Avenue, Fulton Street, Olive Avenue, and Belmont Avenue. Additional pockets of commercial development can be found throughout the Specific Plan Area including the Trolley Park area, along Maroa Avenue, the McKinley and Palm Avenue intersection, as well as on isolated parcels. Mixed Use corridors within the Specific Plan Area are located on the northern boundary along Shields Avenue as well as on the eastern boundary along Blackstone Avenue. Under current zoning, the District has an estimated capacity for 1,406,600 square feet of new non-residential floor area, which translates to just under 900,000 square feet of net new non-residential floor area when the loss of existing development on underutilized sites is accounted for. The proposed zoning would result in approximately 1,385,700 square feet of non-residential development, with a net increase of 881,000 square feet after existing development is accounted for. The proposed designations would decrease non-residential development capacity by an estimated 18,800 square feet compared with current land use designations. **Table 3** below provides a summary of the non-residential development capacity within the District under the proposed project.

**Table 3 – Non-Residential Development Capacity-Underutilized Sites**

<i>Tower District Specific Plan Area</i>	<i>Existing Non-Residential Floor Area</i>	<i>Projected New Non-Residential Floor Area (gross)</i>	<i>Projected New Non-Residential Floor Area (net)</i>
<b>Current Land Use Designations</b>	506,732	1,406,600	899,800
<b>Proposed Land Use Designations</b>	506,732	1,385,700	881,000
<b>Change</b>	-	<b>-20,900</b>	<b>-18,800</b>



### **Anticipated Discretionary Actions for Adoption of the Tower District Specific Plan Update**

Adoption of the Tower District Specific Plan Update is proposed to be enacted by resolution of the Fresno City Council. The following discretionary actions are anticipated:

- Certification of the TDSP EIR and adoption of the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- Repeal of 1991 Tower District Specific Plan
- Specific Plan Amendment Adoption of the Tower District Specific Plan
- Amendment of the General Plan Land Use Map to incorporate the land use changes of the Specific Plan
- Amendment of the Tower District Design Guidelines
- Rezone of parcels requiring a zone change for consistency with land use changes
- Amendment of the Development Code