

NOTICE OF PREPARATION
of a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report for the
Fresno County General Plan Review and Zoning Ordinance Update

Date: January 15, 2021

To: State Clearinghouse, Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, and Interested Parties

From: County of Fresno, Department of Public Works and Planning
Development Services and Capital Projects Division
2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
Fresno, California 93721

Project Title:

Fresno County General Plan Review and Zoning Ordinance Update (General Plan Amendment No. 529 and Amendment to Text No. 372)

Project Location:

Entire unincorporated portion of Fresno County – see Figure 1

NOP Comment Period:

January 15, 2021, to March 1, 2021, by 5:00 PM

Lead Agency/Contact:

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Introduction:

The County of Fresno (County) is reviewing its General Plan and updating its Zoning Ordinance. As Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County has determined that the review and update may have a potential significant effect on the environment and that a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared to evaluate these potential effects.

The County first circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Programmatic EIR for the General Plan Review and Zoning Ordinance Update Project (proposed project) in 2018. However, after circulating the NOP in 2018, the Project was temporarily paused for additional changes in project scope. A revised Project Scope of Work was authorized by the Board of Supervisors on April 14, 2020. The County has prepared this NOP to inform

agencies and interested parties that the County has resumed the General Plan Review and Zoning Ordinance Update Project and a Programmatic EIR will be prepared for the proposed project. This NOP solicits guidance from regulatory agencies about the scope and content of environmental information to be included in the Programmatic EIR related to the agencies' statutory responsibilities. The agencies will use the Programmatic EIR when considering their permits or other approvals related to the General Plan Review and Zoning Ordinance Update. The NOP also provides an opportunity for interested parties to inform the County what environmental issues they think should be addressed in the Programmatic EIR.

Project Description:

The existing 2000 County General Plan consists of multiple documents: the countywide General Plan Background Report, the countywide Economic Development Strategy, the countywide General Plan Policy Document, and over 40 regional, community, and specific plans. The General Plan Background Report, which inventories and analyzes existing conditions and trends in Fresno County, provides the formal supporting documentation for General Plan Policy Document. The countywide Economic Development Strategy formalizes objectives, strategic actions, organization responsibilities, and work plans to expand business activity and employment in the county. The countywide General Plan Policy Document contains explicit statements of goals, policies, and implementation programs that constitute the formal policy of Fresno County for land use, development, open space protection, and environmental quality. The current General Plan Policy Document is organized by and consists of the following seven countywide elements: 1) Economic Development; 2) Agriculture and Land Use; 3) Transportation and Circulation; 4) Public Facilities and Services; 5) Open Space and Conservation; 6) Health and Safety; and 7) Housing.

The General Plan functions as a guide for future development. The General Plan addresses a range of immediate, mid-, and long-term issues. The General Plan is intended to allow land use and policy determinations to be made within a comprehensive framework that incorporates public health, safety, and "quality of life" considerations in a manner that recognizes resource limitations and productive agricultural land, and the sensitive habitats of the community's natural environment. It outlines policies and programs and sets out plan proposals to guide day-to-day decisions concerning the County's future. Under State law, the General Plan must serve as the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based, and must also be comprehensive, internally consistent, and have a long-term perspective.

The County's Zoning Ordinance is officially known as Division VI of the Ordinance Code of the County of Fresno. The stated purpose of the Zoning Ordinance is "to classify and regulate the highest and best use of buildings, structures, and land located in the unincorporated area of the County of Fresno in a manner consistent with the Fresno County General Plan." The Zoning Ordinance is effectively the principal tool for implementing the County's General Plan, and by State law, must be consistent with the General Plan.

The proposed project consists of a review and update of the County General Plan's Background Report and Policy Document, and a comprehensive update of the Zoning Ordinance. The revised General Plan is intended to build on the major policies of the current 2000 General Plan but expand and strengthen them to meet the challenges and community needs through planning horizon year 2040. The revised General Plan would accommodate County population growth projected through 2040. The revised General Plan seeks to preserve agricultural land and natural resources; conserve public spaces and recreational resources; promote the wellbeing of County residents; maintain economic vitality and balance; and direct land use policies that enable sustainable and forecasted growth in the County. The revision includes only minimal changes to the land use designations and land use maps in the existing 2000 General Plan. The majority of revisions are to goals, policies, and implementation programs of the General Plan. The revision also includes addressing laws affecting the General Plan, including the addition of an Environmental Justice Element to the General Plan Policy Document. The Zoning Ordinance update includes provisions, development standards, and guidelines for consistency with the revised General Plan, pursuant to State law. Figure 1, attached below, provides the Draft Countywide Land Use Diagram. Additional land use designation maps and diagrams for specific areas in the County are provided at the link at the end of this NOP.

Probable Environmental Effects and Scope of the EIR:

The EIR for the review and update of the General Plan and a comprehensive update of the Zoning Ordinance will describe existing environmental resource areas and conditions in Fresno County. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15125, existing conditions will be described as they exist when this NOP is circulated based on the most recent available data and information. The EIR is intended to be a program-level document that will analyze the broad environmental effects of the proposed General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Update, considering broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures. The EIR will evaluate the potentially significant environmental impacts of implementing the proposed General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Update and will evaluate whether there are feasible mitigation measures that may lessen or avoid identified significant impacts. No specific development projects are being considered. Rather, the analysis will focus on the reasonably foreseeable direct and indirect physical environmental effects compared to existing conditions that could result from adoption and implementation of the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Update. Effectively, the EIR will analyze potential impacts from buildout of the General Plan on the existing environment. The EIR will also identify and evaluate alternatives to the proposed project.

In accordance with *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15063(a), the County did not prepare an Initial Study, but advises that the EIR will evaluate potentially significant environmental effects on each of the environmental topics outlined in Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. The topics include the following:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Air Quality
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

In addition, the EIR will address cumulative impacts, growth inducing impacts, and other issues required by CEQA.

NOP Comment Period:

In accordance with the time limits identified in State law, please respond to this NOP with your comments on the scope and content of the EIR at the earliest possible date, but **no later than 5:00 P.M. on March 1, 2021**. March 1st is 45 days following the date this NOP was first posted and published. Please include the name of the contact person for your agency and submit written comments to:

Chris Motta, Principal Planner
 County of Fresno, Department of Public Works and Planning
 Development Services and Capital Projects Division
 Policy Planning Unit
 2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
 Fresno, California 93721
 Email: gpr@co.fresno.ca.us

Scoping Meeting:

To facilitate responses to the NOP, the County will hold a scoping meeting on January 27, 2021. The meeting will begin at 5:30 PM and end at 7:00 PM. Due to ongoing public health concerns associated with the COVID 19 pandemic, the scoping meeting will be a web-based video conference that can be accessed at the following link during the aforementioned date and time:

<https://zoom.us/j/92088949930>

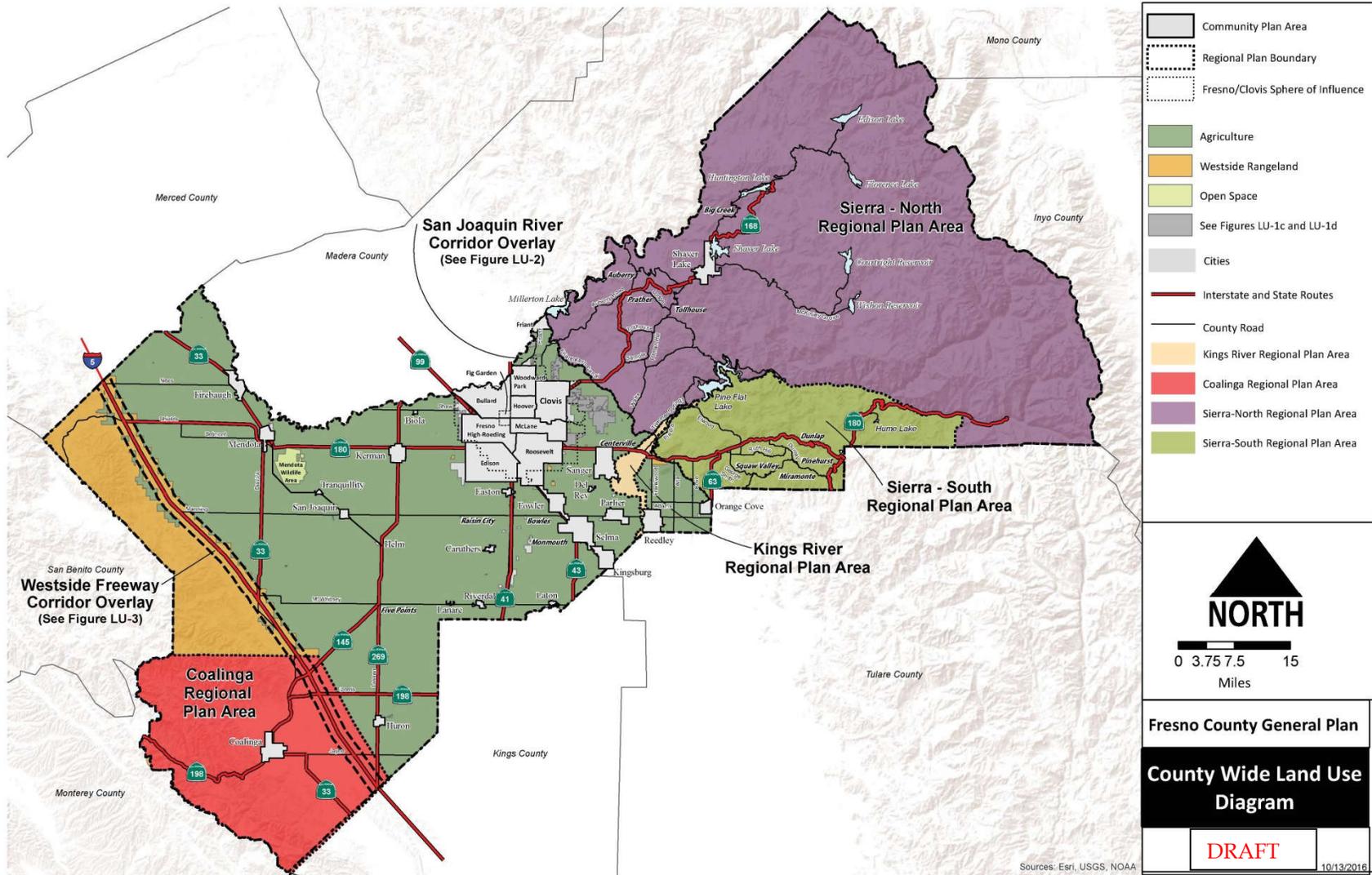
Passcode: 199024

The meeting can also be accessed via telephone at 1-669-900-9128, using the webinar ID of 920 8894 9930 and the passcode, above. Please note, the meeting will be presented in English language, but a translator will be present during the meeting to translate between English and Spanish languages, as needed.

Additional Information:

Please visit the dedicated General Plan Review/Zoning Ordinance Update webpage at www.co.fresno.ca.us/gpr

Figure 1 Draft Countywide Land Use Diagram



Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA