



# Southwest Specific Plan | City of Fresno

## Community-Driven Planning for Equitable & Healthy Neighborhoods

Key Themes | Environmental Exposures, Food Access & Healthy Food Systems, Healthy Homes, Health & Economic Opportunities, Health & Climate Change

### SUMMARY

The Southwest Fresno Specific Plan (SWSP) was initiated by the City of Fresno in 2015 and was adopted by the City Council in October 2017. The SWSP replaces the 1971 Edison Community Plan and was developed through a robust resident and stakeholder engagement process involving dozens of community meetings, focus group sessions, steering committee meetings, workshops and hearings. Key outcomes of the SWSP development process include a new zoning map that prohibits further industrial development in the community, allows for a balanced mix of housing, a community college, commercial and retail opportunities, and park space to meet the community's needs. In addition, the SWSP established policies to support public transit improvements, community greening, and public health.



### LEAD AGENCY AND PARTNERSHIPS

The City of Fresno served as the lead agency and assembled a consulting team comprised of one resident community leader, city staff, the local community-based organization (CBOs) Centro La Familia Advocacy Services, Pop-Up Design & Development, Church & Flynn and state-wide firms Placeworks, Fehr & Peers, and Shared Spaces. Shared Spaces developed a draft community engagement plan and served as a primary facilitator for meetings, both for steering committee and larger community meetings, throughout the process.

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, together with the Fresno Building Healthy Communities coalition and Communities for a New California (CNC), worked throughout the process to provide information to the community and support the achievement of robust community engagement and promote responsiveness by the City and consultants to resident priorities and concerns.

## DRIVERS

---

Before the adoption of the SWSP, the city of Fresno had the 1971 Edison Community Plan for West Fresno and a Downtown Specific Plan which was adopted within the last few years and covered only part of West Fresno. Decades of public and private disinvestment in West Fresno, incompatible industrial development mixed in with residences, schools, parks and places of worship, and community desire for basic infrastructure, services, and retail options lead the community to drive efforts for a specific plan for West Fresno to be “the first major planning effort and environmental review to focus on major issues such as land-use planning, development and design, parks and open space, transportation and utilities for the Southwest Fresno area,” following the City of Fresno’s adoption of the 2014 General Plan. Many residents in Fresno participated in the 2014 General Plan process and saw that specific planning was necessary in order to address the particular issues and priorities of the West Fresno community, such as access to a variety of housing options, improved transit services, complete streets, and environmental health, many issues that local governments are now required to consider under **SB 1000**; to establish the planning and zoning and prioritize public investments necessary to support desired private investments and services; and to position West Fresno to seek state and federal funding available to it as one of the most disadvantaged communities in the state in order to realize projects prioritized by the community. The Councilmember for West Fresno, Oliver Baines, championed the specific planning process, beginning by securing the City’s commitment to dedicate Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in an amount sufficient enough to allow for a strong community engagement process and allow for the development of the SWSP. Additionally, the Councilmember supported and secured other Councilmembers’ support for the plan as developed through the community engagement process and as recommended by the SWSP community stakeholder steering committee.

## ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

---

The key stakeholders in the SWSP development process included residents of West Fresno in the City of Fresno, CBOs, school district representatives, business owners in the plan area, and developers. The SWSP’s development was driven by a robust community stakeholder engagement process, leading to the formation of a 21-member Project Steering Committee. The Steering Committee worked collaboratively with consulting teams and City staff in the development of the broader community engagement process. The Steering Committee voted to approve themes, zoning maps, and a preferred “hybrid” alternative from several SWSP concept alternatives. This concept alternative was based on input provided at community meetings and other key aspects of the SWSP community engagement process. All Steering Committee votes had to secure a 75% supermajority for the proposal to pass, which resulted in extensive dialogue and the achievement of near consensus on all issues before moving forward. The voting majority was determined by the Steering Committee when it established its decision-making process.

## SOUTHWEST SPECIFIC PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

---

In consultation with the Steering Committee, the City held a series of public workshops where the vision and themes for drafts of the SWSP were developed. Over one hundred people attended the first workshop and many of these residents continued to participate throughout the SWSP’s development. The results of the workshops were presented and discussed at Steering Committee meetings where further direction was provided to consultants for the preparation of the vision and SWSP themes. The City also held focused iCal topic group sessions on subjects such as “Housing,” “Transportation,” “Economic Development,” and “Environmental Health” at a community space in West Fresno. During these meetings, Steering Committee members, residents, and stakeholders could provide input on the SWSP’s themes and policies. The community workshops, steering committee meetings, and topic group

sessions continued in an iterative manner, wherein draft visions and themes were presented to the community for further review, input, direction, and revision.

The SWSP development process included a total of 17 steering committee meetings, 6 community workshops, 10 topic focused iCal group meetings, and 3 community conversations. All meetings were open to the public and noticed in English, Spanish, and Hmong. The last three Steering Committee meetings and workshop were part of a supplementary phase of engagement based on community and Steering Committee requests to continue to provide input for further refinement of the plan. In addition, a community office was established in a vacant storefront as a convenient venue for community members to meet and provide input on the Plan and where various events were held such as a youth art workshop and mobile food vendors.

To promote and enable robust community participation, the Steering Committee was asked to promote the workshops and focus groups to their networks. Additionally, notice was provided in key locations in the community, such as through the distribution of fliers at schools, and Spanish and Hmong translation was provided at all events.

Throughout the development of the SWSP, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, in partnership with the Building Healthy Communities Coalition and CNC, conducted monthly meetings with resident neighborhood groups in West Fresno, at parent's coffee hours at elementary schools, and a local high school to provide residents with updates on the planning process and facilitate discussion on issues, priorities, and next steps.

## HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND/OR CLIMATE IMPACT AREA

---

West Fresno has historically been surrounded by industrial land uses and zoning, has a meat rendering plant located in the heart of the residential community, and is bordered on three sides by highways. Additionally, the neighborhood has a significant share of dilapidated housing and housing with unremediated lead paint and is also home to various brownfield sites, closed dumps (now covered with grass and used as "parks"), and hazardous waste sites. The community has very limited park space, park amenities, and recreational opportunities compared to other areas of the City.

The Brookings Institute and other research organizations have identified Fresno as having one of the highest rates of concentrated poverty in the State of California and the U.S. Additionally, under [CalEnviroScreen](#), West Fresno is home to some of the highest ranked census tracts in California for pollution burden. The West Fresno community is also disproportionately comprised of people of color and has a greater share of linguistically isolated households compared to the City as a whole and North Fresno in particular. The Central Valley Health Policy Institute has found that residents of West Fresno live on average 20 years less than residents in the more affluent North Fresno Woodward Park neighborhood, a neighborhood with relatively limited pollution exposure pursuant to CalEnviroScreen and with high quality regional and neighborhood park space.

## FUNDING SOURCE

---

A total of \$818,337 was spent on the SWSP's development, of which \$750,000 was CDBG funds and \$68,337 was from the General Fund.



## RESEARCH AND DATA

---

The City used [California Health Interview Survey](#), [American Community Survey](#), [CalEnviroScreen](#) and other data to prepare a community plan area profile, which was used to inform SWSP community engagement and development of the SWSP vision and policies.

The SWSP includes an implementation section with timelines, responsible parties, and sources of funding. While stakeholders sought additional specificity in the implementation section, the section includes a number of action items that can be used to track success over time. For example, Implementation Measure M-10A, “Establish Truck Routes,” calls for the City to “Complete a comprehensive planning process to engage Fresno County, business owners, schools, and residents to confirm appropriate truck routes in Southwest Fresno” and “adopt an ordinance establishing agreed upon routes.” Measure M-10-A identifies the Mayor or City Manager and the Public Works Department as responsible parties, identifies a completion deadline of 2018 and provides for use of the City’s existing resources to complete the measure.

## CHALLENGES

---

Major challenges included effectively promoting and achieving participation in the planning process by the diverse set of residents and stakeholders effected; advancing major policy changes in support of public health that were supported by the community but at odds with long-standing city policy that allowed industrial development within the community; and to ensure that the plan was sufficiently detailed with action steps to provide for effective implementation.

Given these challenges, solutions that were created included significant investment in and creative thinking to develop an effective public engagement strategy. Numerous meetings were held in the community and outreach was conducted by steering committee members with deep community ties. Despite this, there was

little engagement by the significant Southeast Asian immigrant community, which signals an important learning opportunity and need for continued revision of City outreach practices to ensure that public engagement and decision-making processes reach the City’s diverse populations.

A strong community engagement process was key to building and sustaining the constituency necessary for the community’s desired policy changes. For example, the community succeeded in advancing policies preventing new industrial development in the community and promoting public health through sustained advocacy on these issues over the course of the two-year plan development process.

In addition, additional community and Steering Committee meetings held after the release of the draft SWSP allowed for further refinement of the plan to more accurately reflect community desires for policies supporting public health, neighborhood greening, and amenities and resources currently lacking in the community. This further refinement resulted in improvements to the implementation section of the plan to include additional detail and clarity. For example, the revised draft SWSP defined the plan’s goal to locate new parks within walking distance of all residences to mean building out parks within a 1/2 mile radius of all residences; identified the elimination of specific truck routes that pass through residential neighborhoods; clarified that the SWSP’s policy to prohibit new industrial development in the Plan Area and for the City to comprehensively assess the impacts of existing industrial uses in the community and develop strategies that may include urban greening, relocation, and amortization to mitigate and eliminate impacts; and called for the City to create a policy providing for the establishment of an anti-displacement strategy and relocation program to minimize and avoid physical and economic displacement of existing residents outside of the Plan Area caused by new development and investment.



## OUTCOMES

The desired outcome was to facilitate the West Fresno community's development of a new specific plan for the area that would reflect and advance the community's vision for development and promote a safe and healthy environment with both public and private resources and amenities necessary for community members to thrive. The SWSP adopted in October 2017 does just that, identifying locations for and defining proactive strategies to support the development of fresh food retailers, a new community college, public transit improvements, housing accessible to all residents, new park space, neighborhood greening, workforce training programs, and more.

The adoption of the SWSP has opened the door to major funding opportunities for West Fresno. First, Fresno was selected as a recipient of \$70 million in the first round of funding pursuant to [AB 2722](#), the Transformative Climate Communities Program (TCC). During the TCC planning process, community residents voted overwhelmingly to direct the majority of the \$70 million to Southwest Fresno to implement the vision of and projects included in the SWSP. This includes neighborhood greening, active transportation, and a new community college which was included in the SWSP land use diagram, which the local community college district has voted to pursue as a result of funding support provided for the project through TCC.

In addition to TCC funding, adoption of the SWSP will position the City to pursue other sources of state, federal, and private funding to implement the SWSP.

The SWSP realizes a long time goal of residents by prohibiting new industrial development within the community and prioritizing neighborhood greening as a tool to promote public health. Since the SWSP's adoption and following extensive advocacy and litigation by community leaders, the operators of the meat rendering plant in West Fresno have agreed to close the plant, which opens the possibility for the development of land uses on the site which serve the community's every-day-needs. These changes, along with investments in basic resources and amenities, such as fresh food outlets, have the power to significantly improve access to opportunity and health outcomes for West Fresno residents.

Finally, the deep and sustained engagement of residents and community stakeholders in the development of the SWSP, from initiation of the planning process to Council adoption and implementation, which was made possible through an inclusive and well-resourced planning process sets a new standard for public engagement in Fresno and will hopefully serve as an example and guidepost for future planning efforts.

---

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Ashley Werner**  
Senior Attorney  
Leadership Counsel for Justice and  
Accountability  
(559) 369-2790  
awerner@leadershipcounsel.org

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**WRITTEN BY**  
**Ashley Werner**  
Senior Attorney  
Leadership Counsel for Justice  
and Accountability

### EDITED BY

**Sefanit Mekuria**  
Policy Fellow  
**Elizabeth Baca**  
Deputy Director  
Governor's Office of Planning  
and Research