

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Date: February 16, 2022

To: State Clearinghouse and Interested Public Agencies, Parties, and Organizations

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Program Environmental Impact Report for the Southeast Development Area Specific Plan, Fresno, California

Lead Agency: City of Fresno

Contact: Jennifer Clark, Director, Planning and Development Department
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Comment Period: February 16, 2022, to March 18, 2022

PURPOSE OF NOTICE

The City of Fresno (Lead Agency and/or City) will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) for the proposed Southeast Development Area (SEDA) Specific Plan (proposed project), located in the City of Fresno. The Program EIR will address potential environmental and physical effects of the proposed project for each environmental topic listed in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City of Fresno will use the Program EIR when considering approval of the proposed project. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15082, the project history, description, location, and potential environmental effects of the project plan are described in the attached materials.

PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD

The City is soliciting comments from public agencies, organizations, and members of the public regarding the scope and content of the Program EIR. In accordance with CEQA time regulations, the Notice of Preparation (NOP) 30-day period of public review will begin February 16, 2022, and will end on March 18, 2022. The City will hold a public scoping meeting to inform the public and interested agencies about the proposed project and solicit comments on the scope of the environmental factors addressed in the Program EIR, along with alternatives that are being considered. The meeting will be held on March 3, 2022 and will only be conducted electronically due to COVID-19 restrictions. Meeting details are as follows:

Web link: <https://zoom.us/j/92678285600> Call-in Information: [(669) 900-9128

Webinar ID: 926 7828 5600

Meeting Date: March 3, 2022

Meeting Time: 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, copies of the NOP may be reviewed at the following locations:

- ▶ Online at: <https://www.fresno.gov/cityclerk/notices-publications/> or
- ▶ www.fresno.gov/SEDA

For information on additional viewing methods, contact Project Manager, Planning and Development Department, Summer Rooks (contact information above).

Your views and comments on how the project may affect the environment are welcomed and encouraged.

PROJECT LOCATION

The regional location of the nearly 9,000-acre SEDA Specific Plan Area (Plan Area) is in the southeast portion of the City, in Fresno County (County), California as shown in Exhibit 1. The Plan Area with the proposed land use designations in the proposed project, are shown in Exhibit 2. The Plan Area is bounded on the north by the Gould Canal, on the east by McCall and Highland Avenues, on the south by Jensen and North Avenues, and on the West by Locan, Temperance, and Minnewawa Avenues.

PROJECT HISTORY

The Southeast Development Area (SEDA), previously known as the Southeast Growth Area (SEGA), was approved for incorporation into the City in 2006 by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) with several provisions that included preparation of a Specific Plan and associated environmental assessment before any annexations of land to the City could be approved. The City initiated the process of preparing a Specific Plan for SEGA but put it aside amidst the uncertainty of the recession in 2008. Concepts from the SEGA planning process were rolled into the current Fresno General Plan that was adopted in 2014. The Fresno General Plan includes the SEDA as one of several growth areas.

Located in Growth Area II, SEDA was conceived to be developed after other infill initiatives, to give those time to gain momentum. SEDA's later time frame is reflected in the General Plan's buildout numbers, which include one third of SEDA's residential capacity (approximately 15,000 dwelling units) to accommodate Fresno's anticipated 2035 population. It is assumed that the remaining residential capacity of 30,000 dwelling units will not be developed until after 2035. While there is still ample residential capacity within the current city limits and in Growth Area I (which includes the Southwest Fresno and the West Area Neighborhoods Specific Plan areas), there is a sense of urgency about the current housing crisis and the City's ability to provide housing for existing population and its natural growth as well as the unanticipated in-migration occurring at this time.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The predominant use in the Plan Area is agriculture, with the primary crops being vineyards, orchards and vegetables. The Plan Area also contains agriculture-related and commercial operations, such as plant nurseries, wineries and other various agricultural businesses. The second most predominant use is rural residential development, which is primarily concentrated in the area between State Route (SR) 180 and McKinley Avenues, but also scattered throughout the Plan Area.

In addition to these uses, schools, churches, and other uses also occupy the Plan Area. The Plan Area includes land that falls within both the Sanger and Clovis Unified School Districts, with Fowler and Fresno Unified School Districts bordering the Plan Area. Clovis Unified is constructing an educational center for middle and high school students in the northern portion of the Plan Area on a site along the Clinton Avenue alignment between Leonard and Highland Avenues, with phased opening expected in 2024.

The current roadway network is mainly comprised of two-lane county roads at ½-mile intervals,

interspersed with local streets. Major roadway access corridors include Temperance, Clovis, and Jensen Avenues. Each accommodate four lanes of traffic with a central turning lane. The SR-180 has been extended eastward along the old Kings Canyon alignment from Temperance Avenue to Academy Avenue in Sanger. This route extension provides an east-west connection to Interstate 5 (I-5), serving commuters and the movement of agricultural goods from eastern portion of the County. Temperance Avenue has been expanded to 4 lanes where needed to serve new development.

The Plan Area is traversed by several constructed drainage features and natural waterways: Gould Canal, Redbank Slough, Dry Creek Canal, Mill Ditch, Fancher Creek Canal, and Briggs Canal. Some canals in the Plan Area are mostly unvegetated and the banks are enforced with rock or broken asphalt and concrete, with some portions fully concrete-lined. In addition, there are several small ponds and numerous lateral irrigation ditches present that deliver water from the canals to agricultural fields.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project is a Specific Plan for the SEDA which would provide for increased density and accelerate housing production throughout the Plan Area. The proposed project would offer flexibility in meeting the evolving needs of households in the region through a multimodal transportation network and diverse housing types and affordability levels.

The proposed project land use categories are shown in Table 1 along with the total proposed acreage. A detailed description of the proposed project and these associated land use categories are provided in the discussion below.

Table 1: Proposed Specific Plan Estimated Acreages

| Land Use | Proposed Plan Acres | Percentages |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Rural Cluster Residential | 265.8 | 3.2 |
| Rural Residential (existing) | 2,037.7 | 24.5 |
| Neighborhood Residential | 1,434.9 | 17.3 |
| Mixed Residential | 1,026.3 | 12.3 |
| Community Center | 273.9 | 3.3 |
| Regional Center | 291.7 | 3.5 |
| Office Center | 154.5 | 1.9 |
| Flexible Research & Development | 1,304.1 | 15.7 |
| Neighborhood Center | 491.4 | 5.9 |
| Institutional | 266 | 3.2 |
| Buffer | 766.5 | 9.2 |
| TOTAL | 8,312.8 | 100 |
| <i>General Plan Land Use</i> | <i>8,794.5</i> | |
| <i>SEDA Boundary Change</i> | <i>-24.9</i> | |

* Rounded to the nearest acre. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

The SEDA Specific Plan

The proposed project provides a vision and implementation mechanisms for a sustainable future for the

Commented [A1]: I'm concerned that open space isn't mentioned here, although it is mentioned in the narrative at the bottom of page 7.

Commented [A2R1]: Sophia, we do need the City to provide input on this. See my comment below that has been in the draft NOP since this first time we sent this to the City.

Commented [A3]: City, please confirm this number. This was the number in the Table provided to us for the existing GP land use. But is this number supposed to reflect the difference in existing land use designation acres and the SEDA land use designation acres?

Table sent to us on 9/21/21:

| General Plan Land Use | Acres | Per |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-----|
| Corridor - Center Mixed Use | 315.4 | |
| Regional Mixed-Use | 209.8 | |
| Employment - Regional Business Park | 1219.7 | |
| Employment - Business Park | 12.8 | |
| Employment - Light Industrial | 0.3 | |
| Employment - Office | 144.4 | |
| Open Space | 568.8 | |
| Open Space - Community Park | 47.5 | |
| Open Space - Neighborhood Park | 0.0 | |
| Open Space - Ponding Basin | 262.7 | |
| Public Facility - College | 116.3 | |
| Residential - Low Density | 1700.8 | |
| Residential - Medium Density | 1469.9 | |
| Residential - Medium Low Density | 0.1 | |
| Residential - Urban Neighborhood | 891.3 | |
| Roads | 545.2 | |
| Railroad | 11.2 | |
| SEGA Buffer | 715.0 | |
| SEGA School with Park | 563.2 | |
| Total | 8794.5 | |
| | | |
| SEDA Boundary Change | -24.9 | |

Commented [A4R3]: I don't know the answer to this question. Perhaps we have a quick chat before we finalize the NOP?

Southeast Development Area. It has the potential to accommodate approximately 45,000 homes and 37,000 jobs within the 9,000-acre planning area by the year 2050. Framed within three interrelated goals: fiscal responsibility, social equity, and environmental sustainability, the proposed project would link a series of complete communities and mixed-use centers with a multi-modal transportation network. The proposed project would include major transit lines, mixed-use centers, diverse residential districts, employment districts, open space, agriculture, and green infrastructure.

Vibrant Mixed-Use Town Centers

The proposed project is based upon a hierarchy of walkable mixed-use town centers supported by a multimodal transportation network. Town Centers, which would serve as commercial and civic focal points for the Plan Area, are designed to include a mix and intensity of uses. Town Centers are human-scaled and defined by quality design features and a rich mixture of uses. They incorporate living and working opportunities with entertainment, cultural activities, and shops serving the daily needs of residents and employees.

Regional Town Center

The Regional Town Center is at the top of the mixed-use center hierarchy in the Plan Area, serving 40,000 to 60,000 households across the site and within the surrounding communities. The Regional Town Center features region-serving retail and office activity, as well as medium- and higher-density housing. It is well served by a high-capacity transit service.

Community Town Centers

Seven Community Town Centers dispersed across the Plan Area would provide commercial, civic, and other services to meet the needs of Community Town Center residents and employees, as well as those of surrounding neighborhoods. Community Town Center services, including grocery stores, support between 5,000 and 10,000 households. Community Town Centers feature a variety of medium-density housing options. Some Community Town Centers are focused on major rapid transit stations.

Neighborhood Town Centers

Neighborhood Town Centers are dispersed throughout the Plan Area and would serve as focal points of adjacent residential areas. Neighborhood Centers include employment and residential uses, but primarily provide a majority of the Plan Area residents with essential walk, bike, transit, and short-drive access to civic services and amenities, including elementary schools, local parks, community gardens, and other services.

Each Neighborhood Town Center would serve approximately 1,500 to 2,000 households and include a range of housing options.

Diverse Residential Districts

The Plan Area includes a rich and complete fabric of residential communities that support mixed-use centers and include a variety of housing types and affordability levels. The proposed project would distribute a variety of housing across the Plan Area to accommodate current and future housing needs. The range of housing types and densities throughout the communities would provide flexibility to meet the evolving needs of households in the region.

Mixed Residential

Mixed Residential districts support the Regional and Community Town Centers with a variety of medium- and higher-density housing, including a diverse mix of attached and detached single-family and multi-family homes.

Neighborhood Residential

Neighborhood Residential districts surround Neighborhood Town Centers and support the retail,

employment, and other services provided throughout the Plan Area. Neighborhood Residential areas include a variety of detached and attached single-family housing types, as well as multi-family housing options.

Rural Cluster Residential

Rural Cluster districts, located along the eastern edge of the Plan Area, concentrate residential lots within a small, clustered area of a larger parcel or groups of parcels. This clustering of homes preserves the continuity and viability surrounding land for agricultural uses and open space conservation. Rural Cluster districts serve as a transitional buffer between more intense urban uses within the Plan Area and the commercial agricultural operations outside of the Plan Area.

Rural Residential

There are approximately 1,700 acres in the Plan Area currently developed as very low-density rural residential homes and ranchettes. These homes are designated in the proposed project as Rural Residential.

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Innovative Employment Districts

The proposed project provides opportunities to attract diverse high-quality employers and job opportunities while meeting the environmental challenges associated with growth in the City and the Central Valley. Many jobs would be located within a short distance to amenities in Regional and Community Town Centers, Office Centers, and in Flexible Research and Development districts.

In these locations, they can be closely linked to regional transit service and trail systems. The proposed project would put a significant portion of Plan Area residents within walking distance of major employment areas and high-capacity transit service that links to regional employment centers, including Downtown Fresno.

Reducing reliance on the automobiles for work trips would significantly reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, playing a significant role in meeting the proposed project's sustainability goals.

Office Center

Office Center districts are located adjacent to Regional and Community Centers or along regionally significant transportation corridors (e.g., SR-180, Kings Canyon Boulevard, Clovis Avenue). Office Centers accommodate professional offices and compatible commercial uses such as restaurants, coffee shops, cafés, banks, and book shops. Some residential uses could be permitted in Office Centers.

Flexible Research and Development

Flexible Research and Development districts are primarily located west of the Briggs Canal and/or south of Jensen Avenue and are intended to contain uses such as research and development, light manufacturing, product testing centers, and office development. The area may also include compatible commercial uses such as restaurants, coffee shops, cafés, printing and publishing, dry cleaners, and other supporting businesses. Access to regional transportation corridors (both road and rail) is critical. Residential uses are not allowed in Flexible Research and Development areas.

Transportation Choices

The multi-modal circulation network in the proposed project includes a hierarchy of transportation options, ensuring that residents would have real choices for their daily travel needs.

Complete Streets

The Plan Area will be served by a network of Complete Streets as defined by City's Complete Streets Policy adopted in 2019. A Complete Street is defined in the policy as a transportation facility that is planned, designed, operated and maintained to provide safe mobility for all users - including

bicyclists, pedestrians, transit vehicles, trucks, and motorists - appropriate to the function and context of the facility while connecting to a larger transportation network.

Transit Service

Transit Corridors/arterials with high-capacity public transit would serve major town centers, while collectors and local streets provide safe, convenient options for local trips. The Kings Canyon high frequency Q Bus Route is planned to extend into the Regional Town Center and eventually terminate service in the Community Town Center located on South DeWolf Avenue.

Bicycle/Pedestrian Trails

A network of pedestrian and bicycle routes, including dedicated trails and multi-purpose paths will serve work, school, and recreational trips. This extensive non-auto travel network will be coordinated with existing and proposed regional trails. Trail systems connect regional and sub-regional destinations for bicyclists, pedestrians, and equestrians (where appropriate). Multi-use trails are parallel to canals and other east-west open space networks within the Plan Area.

There will also be a network of bicycle lanes reflective of the Fresno Active Transportation Plan (ATP). This will consist of at least Class II Bike Lanes and other bicycle facilities as described in the Caltrans Bikeway Classification Guide.

Open Spaces, Agriculture, and Green Infrastructure

The proposed project features an integrated system of natural and developed open spaces that would serve many vital uses, from recreation to community farming and agriculture, to stormwater management. The open space system is designed to be a valuable amenity accessible to the entire community.

Parks and Open Spaces

The proposed project's open space system provides places for active and passive recreation and includes corridors for trails and paths that connect many areas of the Plan Area.

Sustainable Infrastructure

Sustainable infrastructure components capture and retain runoff, then treat the water by allowing it to move slowly through natural systems, such as constructed wetlands and rock filters. Stormwater management systems help reduce impacts on the environment and regional infrastructure systems can also be designed as visual and active amenities for residents in the Plan Area.

Community Farming and Agriculture

The proposed project integrates community-scale farming and agriculture into the urban fabric. Agricultural activities range from neighborhood gardens to agricultural education, and from small farming operations in green belts to those on the rural cluster edge.

Setting the Stage for Implementation

The proposed project sets a vision for how the Plan Area would develop over time. It defines where Mixed-Use Town Centers, residential neighborhoods, and employment areas would be located, the types of travel options, and transit and roadway infrastructure that would serve and connect these areas. It also sets standards for how districts would be organized and how streets would be designed to enhance walkability and meet the needs of all users. Above all, the plan enforces the targets established by State and federal policies that address water and energy conservation, reduced air quality and GHG emissions, available parks and open space, housing opportunities, and many other important elements.

The following components will be part of the planning process and will be required prior to construction:

1. Complete a phasing plan that would define the optimal sequence of development for various

areas within SEDA.

2. Complete a comprehensive Infrastructure Plan. Working from the SEDA Land Use Plan as its starting point, the Infrastructure Plan must delineate the specific bounds and design of the Plan Area's overall flood control and green infrastructure plan; identify bicycle and pedestrian trail alignments; specify the location of high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools; establish the specific alignments of arterial, and collector roadways, and identify the location of major transit stations along transit routes and corridors. This plan must be accompanied by a comprehensive and detailed financing and implementation strategy that includes the phasing and financing of development and all major infrastructure. The City would convene all requisite agencies in the development of the Infrastructure Plan, including the following, and others as required:
 - Fresno Municipal Flood Control District
 - Fresno Irrigation District
 - City of Fresno Department of Public Utilities Water Division
 - City of Fresno Department of Public Works Streets Division
 - City of Fresno Parks After School, Recreation, and Community Services Department
 - Clovis and Sanger Unified School Districts
 - Fresno Council of Governments
 - Fresno Area Express (FAX) transit agency
 - California Department of Transportation
3. Address Annexation with Fresno County, the Local Agency Formation Commission, and the State of California. This includes addressing all issues to allow strategic and proactive annexation into the City of designated portions of the Plan Area targeted for planned and financed extension of infrastructure development by the City. The typically fragmented annexations associated with incremental private development proposals, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and inter-jurisdictional competition would not promote the coherent, sustainable, and fiscally sound development of the proposed project.
4. General Plan Amendment and Development Code Change. Amend the General Plan and Development Code to implement the land use and zoning described in the proposed project.

RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

For the purposes of CEQA, the term "Responsible Agency" includes all public agencies other than the Lead Agency (that have discretionary approval power over the proposed project (State CEQA Guidelines § 15381).

Discretionary approval may include such actions as issuance of a permit, authorization, or easement needed to complete some aspect of the proposed project. Responsible agencies may include, but are not limited to:

- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

- ▶ California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)
- ▶ California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
- ▶ Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
- ▶ Fresno Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)
- ▶ San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (Valley Air District)
- ▶ Fresno Municipal Flood Control District
- ▶ Fresno Irrigation District

AREAS OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The Program EIR will analyze the significant environmental effects associated with adoption and implementation of the proposed project. Specific areas of analysis would include the following topics based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ▶ Aesthetics | ▶ Mineral Resources |
| ▶ Agricultural and Forestry Services | ▶ Noise |
| ▶ Air Quality | ▶ Population and Housing |
| ▶ Biological Resources | ▶ Public Services |
| ▶ Cultural / Tribal Cultural Resources | ▶ Recreation |
| ▶ Energy | ▶ Transportation |
| ▶ Geology and Soils | ▶ Utilities and Service Systems |
| ▶ Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change | ▶ Wildfire |
| ▶ Hazards and Hazardous Materials | ▶ Mandatory Findings of Significance |
| ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality | |
| ▶ Land Use and Planning | |

The Program EIR will also include a discussion of environmental justice issues and identify and evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, including a No Project Alternative, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS

Comments and suggestions as to the appropriate scope of analysis in the Program EIR are invited from all interested parties. Written comments or questions concerning the Program EIR for the proposed project should be directed to the City's Environmental Project Manager at the following address by 5:00 p.m. on March 18, 2022. Please include the commenter's full name and address.

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Figure 1 Regional Location

Figure 2 Specific Plan Map

6 City of Fresno Southeast Development Area Specific Plan

