

Chapter 7: HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

Community health and well-being are – and will continue to be – a principal quality-of-life issue for residents and businesses in Downtown Fresno. Both people and property are greatly affected by how the City is built and designed. Obesity, concerns over the homeless population, neighborhood crime, and poor air quality (and its associated high levels of lung disease and asthma) are all reasons that Fresno’s decision makers have taken a renewed interest in promoting policies and programs that improve community health. Instead of addressing individual health outcomes and decisions, the focus of this chapter is on how the City’s pattern and design - as well as its environmental conditions - can influence and affect community health behaviors and outcomes. The chapter begins by providing context about the health and the built environment connections in Fresno’s Downtown Neighborhoods, then identifies Key Deficits in the Downtown Neighborhoods, followed by a Vision for Change for the entire Plan Area, and concludes with goals, policies, and actions for various sub-topics.

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B. CONTEXT

Academic research from both the public health and city planning fields demonstrates a strong connection between the built environment's characteristics and health behaviors and outcomes particularly in neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty such as in Fresno's Downtown Neighborhoods. Decisions about, and characteristics of, the built environment in a neighborhood – such as the density of development, the mix of uses, the availability of healthy foods, access to transit, proximity to sources of air pollution and quality of housing – impact an individual's lifestyle, transportation decisions, and environmental exposures. These, in turn, result in strong correlations with a variety of community health behaviors (such as physical activity, nutrition, alcohol consumption) and outcomes (such as obesity, asthma, and cardiovascular disease). This Plan seeks to improve the Downtown Neighborhoods' physical conditions so that residents have the opportunity to live in an environment that supports, rather than harms, their health.

Due to its location and the socioeconomic status of its residents, the Downtown Neighborhoods face indisputable health challenges and are disproportionately suffering from health and socioeconomic burdens. For example, data from the State of California shows that the Downtown Neighborhoods have higher rates of heart attack hospitalizations than the City as a whole. Asthma hospitalizations in the Downtown Neighborhoods are also higher than the City, County or State. In addition, in Fresno County, approximately half of youth under 18 years of age are obese or overweight and one in three children have asthma.

There are numerous other factors that are influencing the health of residents in the Downtown Neighborhoods. Some of the housing is substandard and in need of repair, and there is a lack of parks and open space. Existing parks are perceived as unsafe or are in need of repair. Fast food restaurants and liquor stores far outnumber grocery stores and other healthy food outlets. The area also has some of the lowest incomes and small proportions of residents with at least a high school education in the City. Additionally the area has some of the highest rates of unemployment, teen pregnancies, and crime in Fresno. Finally, there are a significant number of families living below the poverty level, including many who are homeless.

Addressing the community health and well-being in the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan acknowledges the profound impact of the built environment and socioeconomic conditions on health outcomes. This Community Plan strategically plans to prevent further disease and injury and improve health and the quality of life for the residents in this area¹.

¹ An extensive analysis of the Plan Area's health conditions and outcomes by subarea is available in a separate document entitled the *Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan Health Impact Assessment*. Much of the above information, including cites for sources of information, is from that document.

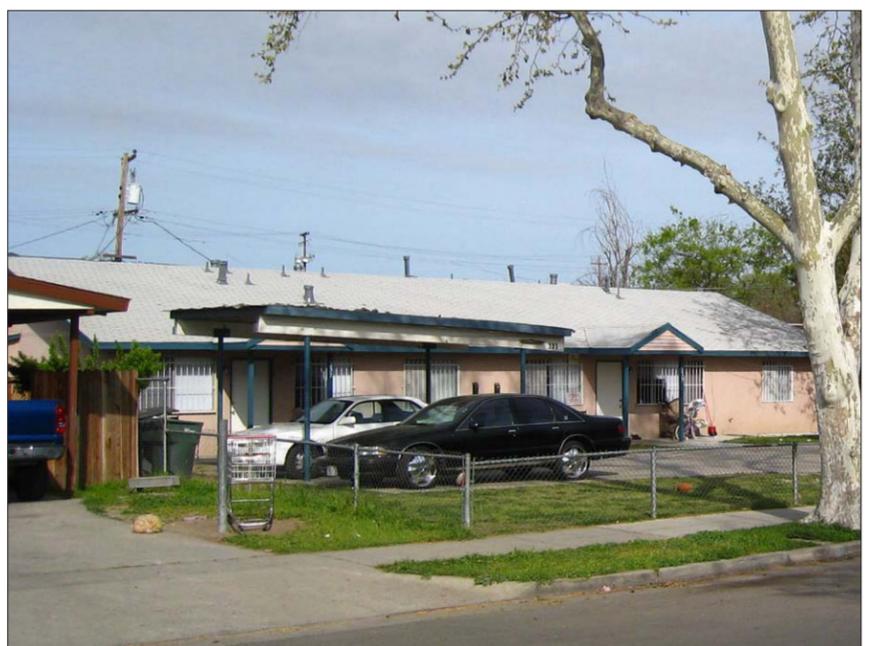


Wide streets with narrow sidewalks promote high vehicular speeds, discourage pedestrian activity, and increase the amount of pedestrian and bicycle injuries.

C. KEY DEFICITS

The following are some of the key deficits related to community health and well being in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

- **Concentrations of poverty.** Poverty directly impacts health as those with lower incomes have fewer resources to cope with acute or chronic health conditions and are more susceptible to environmental hazards. According to a Brookings Institute report based on 2000 Census Data, Fresno had the fourth highest poverty rate of a U.S. City, but the highest “concentrated poverty rate.” Concentrated poverty refers to the double burden faced by poor families who also live in high poverty neighborhoods. The concentrated poverty rate measures the proportion of individuals below the poverty line who live in neighborhoods where more than 40 percent of people live below the poverty line.
- **Wide disparities in health outcomes.** There are strong differences in health outcomes between lower- and higher-income residents and neighborhoods. This suggests other underlying disparities such as access to adequate and high-quality goods, services, and public infrastructure.
- **High levels of asthma and respiratory health issues.** Like many areas in the San Joaquin Valley, the residents of the Downtown Neighborhoods suffer from high rates of asthma and respiratory illnesses due to a variety of factors including air pollution, the quality of housing, and proximity to freeways, industrial, and agricultural areas.
- **Lack of quality housing.** A large number of the housing stock in the Downtown Neighborhoods are in disrepair. High renter-occupancy and low rents in the area have allowed landlords to defer maintenance and neglect the needs of their tenants. Mold, pest infestation, improper ventilation, cooling, and heating are pervasive problems that impact health as identified by community members.
- **High level of code violations.** There are a large number of code violations in the Downtown Neighborhoods including many in multi-family rental housing, which result in negative health impacts to residents.
- **Higher rates of heart disease.** On average, residents of the Downtown Neighborhoods experience significantly higher rates of cardiovascular disease than the City, County, or San Joaquin Valley. Obesity, diabetes, and other chronic conditions are the primary risk factors for cardiovascular disease.
- **Lack of access to affordable, nutritious foods and concentrations of unhealthy foods.** The Downtown Neighborhoods have many food outlets that serve high-calorie, low-nutrient foods. They also have very limited access to nutritious, affordable food retail choices.



Within the Plan Area there are many substandard multi-family residences. Better design and continued maintenance should be provided for residents.

- **Limited access to parks and open spaces.** Parks, open space and schools with publicly accessible areas offer residents opportunities for physical activity and provide a place for enhancing community trust and social networks. Designated open space is severely lacking in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- **High rates of homelessness and unmet social service needs.** Homelessness is a widespread issue in the Downtown Neighborhoods. The majority of social services used by Fresno's homeless residents are located in the Downtown Neighborhoods, contributing to the concentration of homelessness in the area.
- **Car-focused, instead of people-focused streets.** The streets of the Downtown Neighborhoods are wide, are designed with intersections that have large turning radii, and lack curb bulb-outs at important intersections. This encourages cars to drive faster, placing cyclists and pedestrians at particular risk, since accidents involving pedestrians or cyclists are more likely to result in injury or death than automobile-only collisions.

D. VISION FOR CHANGE

The Downtown Neighborhoods and Downtown Fresno contain safe, attractive, and healthy neighborhoods with a variety of goods, services, and employment opportunities. The neighborhoods offer quality housing that reflects the social and familial needs of the tenants and are located within walking distance to nutritious food, markets, open space, appropriate medical and social services, and reliable transit. Well-maintained sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and a pedestrian-scaled walking environment promote sustainable, alternative modes of transportation for residents and create opportunities for residents to exercise, to engage in social interaction and to nurture community trust, while decreasing air pollution and injuries. The design of the Downtown Neighborhoods and Downtown Fresno support positive lifestyle choices and behaviors that support health, prevent disease, and enhance longevity for current and future residents in the years to come.



Bicycle lanes promote sustainable alternative modes of transportation for residents while decreasing air pollution.



Farmers' markets provide access to locally grown fruits, vegetables, and nutritious foods.

E. GOALS AND POLICIES

7.1 Promote high levels of health and well-being for residents and employees.

Intent: Promote and facilitate high levels of health and well-being for all residents and employees of the Downtown Neighborhoods.

- 7.1.1 Use data generated by the county to monitor the overall health status and built environment-related conditions in the community and encourage the participation of local organizations and schools.

7.2 Actively involve and engage all members of the community to improve health and quality of life in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

Intent: To ensure that the wide diversity of residents and businesses in the Downtown Neighborhoods are involved in civic life and engaged through a process that is sensitive to diverse ethnicities, education levels and linguistic abilities.

- ▶ 7.2.1 Engage the public (including residents, property owners, businesses, community organizations, and other stakeholders) as a key partner in the City’s decision-making process.
- ▶ 7.2.2 Work with health care providers in the City – including the Department of Public Health, local health clinics, non-profit organizations, and hospitals – on decisions related to public health in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- ▶ 7.2.3 Create and support a mechanism that enables a select number of residents and key stakeholders in each different Downtown Neighborhood to help guide City policy for that neighborhood. One proposed mechanism for accomplishing this is a series of neighborhood councils that provide recommendations to the City Council on development and policy decisions for each subarea. The neighborhood councils, or similar structure, should have the following characteristics:
 - Be comprised of citizens, business owners, and property owners in the subarea.
 - Be advisory in nature and not regulatory.
 - Serve as a sounding board to staff, the City Council and/or City commissions on the implementation of the DNCP.
 - Cover all topics related to the implementation of the DNCP.

- 7.2.4 Hold regular community open houses in each Neighborhood, semi-annually, to discuss the progress of the Community Plan implementation and identify new programs and actions to improve the quality of life in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

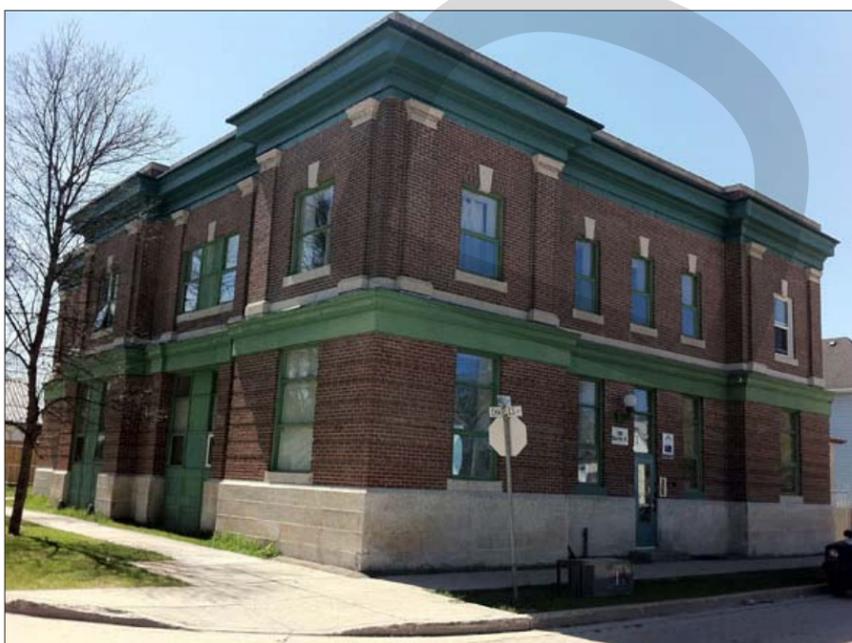
- 7.2.5 Ensure that outreach and educational materials used in the Downtown Neighborhoods are culturally and linguistically appropriate to the community members in these neighborhoods.

- 7.2.6 Seek assistance from local community colleges and CSU Fresno to work with the local school districts to monitor and improve student health over time.

7.3 Eliminate concentrations of poverty and blight in the Downtown Neighborhoods and create a quality of life that is comparable to other neighborhoods in Fresno.

Intent: To improve current socioeconomic conditions, reduce or eliminate poverty, blight, and crime; and improve quality of life for residents of the Downtown Neighborhoods.

- ▶ 7.3.1 Actively involve the community in cleanup and neighborhood improvement efforts.
- 7.3.2 Encourage broad-based public and private initiatives aimed at the root causes of the Downtown Neighborhoods’ socio-economic problem, promoting education, job training and placement, mental health, transparent access to government decision-making, and efficient public spending.
- ▶ 7.3.3 Maximize the effectiveness of code enforcement staff working in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- 7.3.4 Conduct proactive annual housing inspections for multi-family housing in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- 7.3.5 Mitigate conditions of blight and improve the quality of the built environment in the Downtown Neighborhoods.



A small police substation provides increased police presence.



Easy access to playing fields encourage residents to lead physically active lifestyles.

7.4 Increase safety in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

Intent: To improve the health and well-being of Downtown Neighborhood residents through policing, crime prevention and other measures.

- ▶ **7.4.1** Increase the police presence in the Downtown Fresno neighborhoods while improving the quality of police-neighborhood relations to make these areas safe for residents and visitors.
- ▶ **7.4.2** Improve collaboration between the police department and code enforcement to address issues of health, wellness and public safety in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- ▶ **7.4.3** Implement Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and strategies (including windows facing the sidewalk, good night lighting, and improved sight lines) in all new development projects in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

7.5 Nurture a skilled and adaptable local workforce.

Intent: To provide additional training and education to prepare residents for positions with greater economic potential to elevate residents out of poverty. Such positions can be found in the medium- and high-wage industry categories.

- ▶ **7.5.1** Work with the Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board, educational institutions, employers, and training institutions to train local residents.
- ▶ **7.5.2** Identify funds to support institutions and non-profits dedicated to job creation, job retention, and workforce training in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- 7.5.3** Link residents to existing training programs at local educational institutions.
- ▶ **7.5.4** Build and strengthen relationships with existing community-based organizations and Community Development Corporations (CDCs) active in the neighborhood.
- ▶ **7.5.5** Investigate opportunities to align philanthropic activity with capacity-building programs in the neighborhood.

7.6 Improve health outcomes through land use and transportation decisions.

Intent: To promote land use and transportation decisions which reduce air pollution and encourage residents to lead physically active lifestyles.

- ▶ **7.6.1** Encourage land use, urban form, and transportation decisions that promote physical activity, reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and improve air quality.
- ▶ **7.6.2** Encourage compact neighborhood centers, mixed land uses, pedestrian-oriented building design, and other land use and design features that support walking, cycling, and public transportation.
- ▶ **7.6.3** Create a well-connected, safe, and attractive pedestrian and cycling environment for all ages and abilities to enhance safety and encourage physical activity.
- ▶ **7.6.4** Direct new industrial activity to appropriate Plan Area, and ensure there is no significant negative impact to the health of residents prior to project approval. The analysis should include not only the operation of the facility but also trucks and other vehicles traveling to and from the facility.
- ▶ **7.6.5** Require that new industrial or large-scale agricultural uses or expanded activities on existing parcels create appropriate buffers from residential areas, schools, health clinics, and other sensitive uses to shield them from undue exposure to noise, air pollution, or release of toxic materials. Community gardens and other small-scale agriculture are explicitly not addressed by this policy.
- ▶ **7.6.6** Where feasible and funds are available, increase the amount of landscaping and other buffers to separate existing sensitive uses from freeways, rail lines and heavy industrial facilities.



A community open house provides a forum for neighborhood residents to discuss the progress of the Community Plan implementation.



A neighborhood center is easily accessible via bikes, foot, and transit.

E. GOALS AND POLICIES (Continued)

7.7 Minimize exposure to hazardous pollution.

Intent: To minimize community exposure to hazardous and potentially hazardous air, soil, or water contaminants whose exposure can lead to delayed, chronic and/or acute health effects, especially asthma and other respiratory conditions.

- ▶ **7.7.1** Prohibit the location of the following within 500 feet of the edge of the public right of ways of freeways: new public, private, and charter K-12 schools; childcare centers; and nursing homes.
- ▶ **7.7.2** Do not locate truck routes on primarily residential streets or near parks, playgrounds, schools, or other sensitive uses and create a map that highlights how existing truck routes impact existing and future development patterns.
- ▶ **7.7.3** Minimize residents' exposure to pesticides, toxic materials associated with agricultural or industrial production, and other carcinogens.
- ▶ **7.7.4** Improve the health and well-being of the community by locating sensitive uses – such as houses and housing, schools, health facilities, and parks – an appropriate distance away from building uses that generate toxic pollutants.
- ▶ **7.7.5** Do not locate new residential or non-residential development on or near toxic hazardous sites without proper evaluation and mitigation.
- ▶ **7.7.6** Modify the City's standards to use only integrated pest management techniques at City-owned or operated properties to ensure that these locations are free of herbicides and pesticides.

7.8 Support healthy, affordable production of food.

Intent: To support the health and community benefits of local gardening and agriculture, including increased physical activity, access to affordable healthy food, positive social interaction, and local economic activity.

- ▶ **7.8.1** Support the creation of new community gardens in the Downtown Neighborhoods, in accordance with the Downtown Development Code.
- ▶ **7.8.2** Allow front yard gardens to provide raised planting beds.

- ▶ **7.8.3** Work with local public schools or parks and recreation department to create and implement educational programs on healthy eating, agriculture and farming, harvesting, and healthy cooking for the Downtown Neighborhoods residents.
- ▶ **7.8.4** Promote pesticide-free, large-scale urban agriculture on vacant and underutilized parcels within the Downtown Neighborhoods, and consider partnering with job training programs to train area residents in urban agriculture management and production.
- ▶ **7.8.5** Evaluate an ordinance that would provide specific information on the number of chickens, the location of coops, the size of coops, and other topics to address potential noise, odor and other impacts.

7.9 Improve access to and selection of nutritious food sources.

Intent: To ensure that all residents and employees in the Downtown Neighborhoods have convenient access to safe, affordable, and nutritious foods.

- ▶ **7.9.1** Strive for all residents and employees to be within walking distance (e.g. 1/4 mile), to food retailers that provide safe, affordable, and nutritious foods; especially full-service grocery stores, produce markets, health food co-ops, and farmers' markets.
- ▶ **7.9.2** Actively pursue the creation of new farmers' markets in the Downtown Neighborhoods. Explore opportunities for collaboration with local farms, local hospitals, or health clinics to sponsor farmers' markets in the Downtown Neighborhoods.
- ▶ **7.9.3** Encourage and incentivize full-service grocery stores and smaller scale health food or produce stores in the Downtown Neighborhoods. Incentives could include reduced parking ratios and expedited permitting, among others.
- ▶ **7.9.4** Increase awareness of and participation in federal food assistance programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps).
- ▶ **7.9.5** Work with the Fresno County Department of Public Health to simplify the process for new and existing food retailers and farmers' markets to accept federal food assistance electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards such as WIC and SNAP.



A vegetable garden in this house's front yard provides healthy food for its residents.



Farmers' markets provide residents with convenient access to locally harvested food while supporting local farmers.

- ▶ **7.9.6** In order to maintain a pedestrian-friendly, healthy food environment, prohibit new drive-thru restaurants and other businesses within the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan area and within residential neighborhoods. Permit new drive-thru restaurants and businesses at freeway exits, within Neighborhood Centers, Town Centers, Special Districts, and along Corridors, subject to location and site plan requirements as defined by the Downtown Development Code.
- ▶ **7.9.7** Limit the presence and concentration of off-site alcohol sales within 500 feet of K-12 schools.
- ▶ **7.9.8** Promote healthy food options at all City-sponsored events where food is served.

7.10 Increase access to health care and health care facilities.

Intent: To improve the health of Downtown Neighborhood residents by providing appropriate distributions of health care facilities and health care coverage to the uninsured in order to encourage timely medical care focused on culturally-competent prevention of illness, disease, and injury.

- ▶ **7.10.1** Actively support the expansion of the Fresno Community Medical Center and locate ancillary medical uses in proximity to the hospital. Require that the Medical Center and other ancillary medical facilities fit into the character of the Jefferson subarea.
- ▶ **7.10.2** Support transit improvements that improve physical access to health care facilities.
- ▶ **7.10.3** Inform the community of available health care options in and around the Downtown Neighborhoods. Include education to the public about the location of health care facilities, access to such facilities and available health care programs. Advertise information on the City's web site and in print.

7.11 Increase access to social and mental health services for all populations, including the homeless.

Intent: To improve the health outcomes of and decrease homelessness in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

- 7.11.1** Avoid concentrations of social services in any one subarea in the Downtown Neighborhoods.

- 7.11.2** Ensure homeless shelters are built throughout the City and ensure that these shelters provide a safe environment for the homeless population.

- 7.11.3** Explore partnerships with local job training organizations and programs.

- ▶ **7.11.4** Design homeless housing and services into discreet, small-scale buildings that blend into the surrounding context.



Produce stores provide residents and workers with convenient access to safe, affordable, and nutritious foods.



Community gardens promote health and community benefits, including increased physical activity, access to affordable healthy food, positive social interaction, and local economic activity.

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