

CHAPTER 2: A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN FRESNO IN 2035

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A great downtown is more than the sum of its parts. This Specific Plan is written with the knowledge that if the City of Fresno, the private sector, and our community get the basics right, something phenomenal will happen: a great downtown that makes everyone proud.

Through an extensive public process that included a week-long Design Workshop and numerous meetings with the Community Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, and the City Council, a vision for the Fulton Corridor, and the values that should shape its revitalization were established. These statements form the basis for this document and the City of Fresno goals and policies it contains.

The Community's Vision

Fulton is the vibrant destination at the core of Fresno and the central San Joaquin Valley. The vitality of Fulton is built on commerce and culture; it connects our community; it is authentic to our past; and it provides opportunities for the future.

The key to making Downtown great is attracting many people to it: residents, workers, and visitors. This plan sets out to do just that by adding over 7,000 residential units, which in turn raises the Plan Area's resident population from 3,877 people to 17,470 people. In addition, the introduction of up to 3.9 million square feet of office space, 1.5 million square feet of retail space, and 145,000 square feet of industrial space will bring in just short of 20,000 new jobs to Downtown. This translates into over 33,500 new non-visitor people in Downtown. The visitor population – restaurant and entertainment patrons, tourists on their way to Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon, Fresno Convention Center attendees, High-Speed Train riders, to name a few – will raise the number of people in Downtown even more. More people translates into vibrancy, vitality, and increased income for the City.

But new residents, workers, and visitors will not come to Downtown unless it is an attractive, appealing, vibrant place with beautiful tree-lined, multi-modal streets; inviting parks and plazas; and handsome buildings – both old and new – that face and are entered from the street and accommodate a variety of uses. This plan is a blueprint for transforming Downtown into such a place.

2.2 COMMUNITY VALUES FOR REVITALIZATION

The community's vision for revitalizing Downtown and transforming it back into a truly great place is based upon ten fundamental values. These values, generated by the community, are:

1. Getting the Basics Right

A great downtown is more than the sum of its parts. But to be great, the basic parts must be in place. In many ways, our Downtown missed being great for decades because our community was missing the basics.

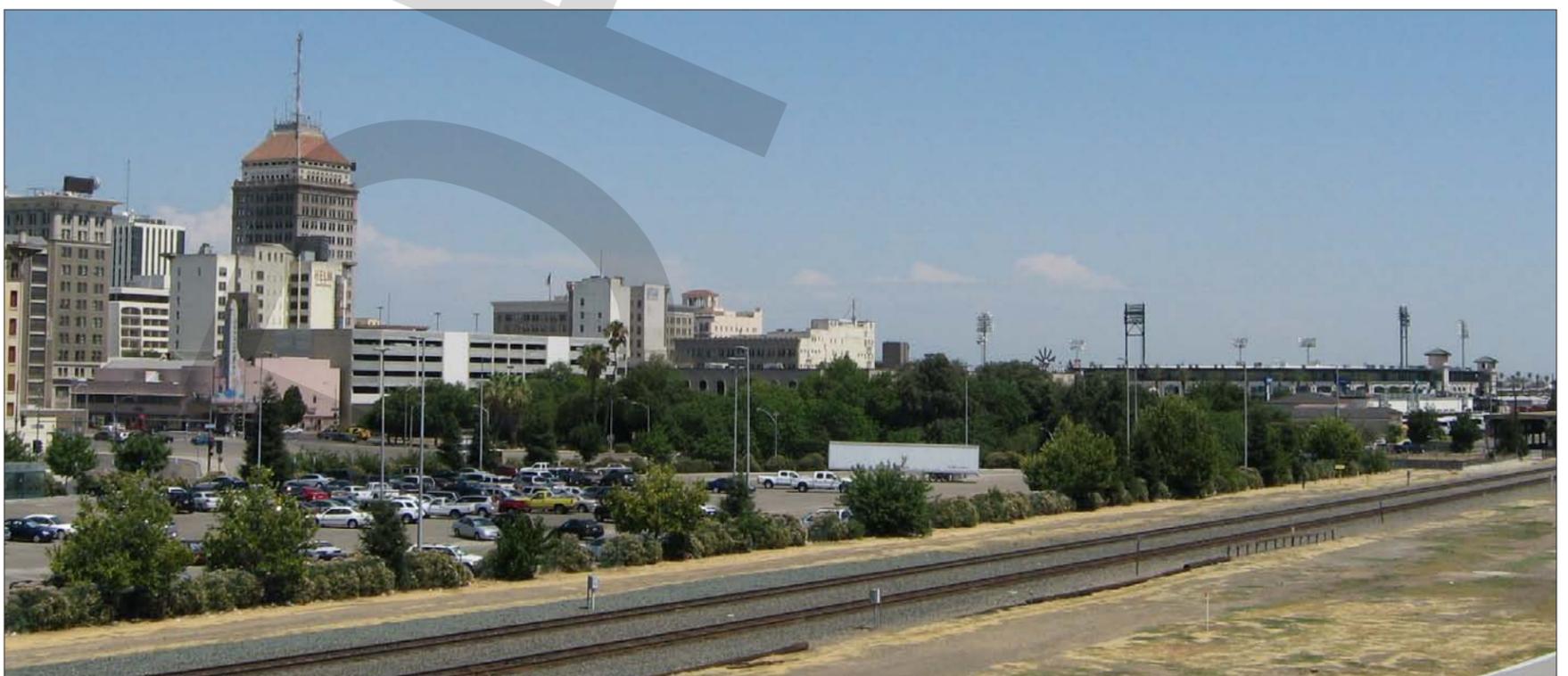
This Specific Plan, with the accompanying Downtown Development Code, brings Fresno back to the basics by introducing a clear vision for revitalization, easy-to-understand rules for urban development, a simplified permitting process, public improvements aligned with private sector investments, and the infrastructure needed for economic growth.

This Specific Plan provides important incentives for investors and property owners to build new buildings, revitalize existing ones, start new businesses, and relocate businesses to Downtown. It guides the parts that make up the sum of what happens in our Downtown. Put it all together, and you have a downtown where investors feel confident about investing, where every taxpayer dollar produces the maximum benefit toward revitalization, and where the urban core becomes an asset rather than a drain on City finances.

2. A Regional Destination

Since its beginning, Downtown Fresno has served the entire central San Joaquin Valley. In its heyday, Downtown was the center of government, banking, commerce, and entertainment. Even today, despite Fresno's suburbanization, Downtown is still a place that offers services and activities that cannot be found elsewhere in the region.

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown whose relationship with the Valley's cities and towns runs two ways. In exchange for the amenity Downtown provides, all the people of the Valley – not just residents of Fresno – support Downtown with the dollars they choose to spend. To rekindle and nurture this economic relationship, Downtown must provide something of value to people throughout the surrounding area. Residents of the metropolitan area, nearby towns, and rural areas are all stakeholders in the revitalization effort.



The Downtown skyline with the Union Pacific right-of-way in the foreground. Chukchansi Park is to the right in the background.

2.2 COMMUNITY VALUES FOR REVITALIZATION (continued)

The public and private sectors must both recognize that the market for almost anything that happens in Downtown extends well beyond Fresno. An event, concert, or other attraction on a weekend evening can and should draw people from the surrounding region – in the 2010 Census, the Counties of Fresno, Madera, Tulare, and Kings, had a combined population of almost 1.7 million people. This Specific Plan provides a blueprint for creating a Downtown that attracts people from this large area by being a unique place, a fun place, and a place where many different kinds of experiences – business, dining, entertainment – can all happen within a short walk in the same visit.

3. A Regional and International Destination

Each year, thousands of visitors from all over the world pass through Fresno on their way to Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon National Parks. Though they stay overnight in Downtown hotels, the primary reason they do so is that Fresno happens to be the closest big city to these parks. Similarly, thousands of Californians and some from farther afield attend various events and meetings at the Fresno Convention Center. When these visitors venture out of their hotels at night, the streets are virtually empty of people and cars and almost every store and restaurant is closed.

The Fresno community envisions Downtown's transformation into a vibrant, mixed-use place that offers unique restaurants and retail opportunities during the day and the night, making Downtown Fresno a destination that people want to visit on their way to these parks or as a place where they want to hold or attend conventions.

For those within the region, the presence of Downtown's various government offices, courts, and supporting businesses ensures that thousands of people come to Downtown to work or to conduct government business. This population is indispensable in transforming Downtown into an active, vibrant, popular place. Though currently the majority of this population leaves Downtown at the end of the work day, many are potential residents and after-work and weekend restaurant and entertainment patrons that, as Downtown transforms, will one day live, work, shop, and play in Downtown.

Since the construction of the original Fresno County Courthouse and the original City Hall, governmental offices have been vital to the identity of Downtown Fresno. There is no other location in the City of Fresno or the Central Valley that has the same concentration of government offices. The central location and easy routes of travel into Downtown Fresno continue to be important reasons for various government entities to locate Downtown.

4. Vibrancy and Vitality

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown full of life and energy. The goal of revitalization is to turn the Fulton Corridor back into a prosperous place where people live, work, shop, and have access to a variety of entertainment options. As in other great cities, our Downtown is a place of intensity, where even the ways to relax are exhilarating.

Much of Downtown's explosive energy comes from mixing extremes together. Downtown is to be a home for lively artistic expression – and a clean, orderly, well-maintained place where people feel comfortable walking around. Downtown is to be a hotbed for small local retail stores – as well as a place for big business that draws in national brands. Downtown is to be a prosperous urban center and a place where Valley residents of any means can enjoy the services that it provides. Downtown is to be a place for every ethnic group, income class, and age bracket to mix together.

Under this Specific Plan, no activity is isolated, and every investment is turned into something larger than itself: a source of vitality for the Fulton Corridor, helping to create a Downtown that functions in a vibrant way.

5. Commerce

Business activity is integral to Downtown's past as well as its future. For many years Downtown was home to a wide variety of professional services, administrative offices of prominent banks, broad retail opportunities from specialty shops to department stores, and entertainment venues that included several elaborately crafted commercial theaters.

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown that once again attracts businesses new and old, large and small. Rather than relying on large "silver bullet" projects, the revitalization of Downtown occurs on the scale of one business and one building at a time.

Through the accompanying Downtown Development Code, this Specific Plan makes it easier than ever before to understand the rules for development in order to obtain an entitlement, rehabilitate a historic structure, or build a new building. The Plan lifts the burden of providing for parking for each business by allowing different buildings to share street parking and garage space. By making it less expensive and easier to invest, this Specific Plan makes Downtown an ideal place for entrepreneurship, while enabling the construction of high quality buildings.



An event at the Fulton Mall brings vitality to Mariposa Plaza.



Outdoor dining and pedestrian activity on Kern Street.

Downtown Fresno will never compete on cost alone, however. A great downtown's biggest incentive for businesses and developers is the ability to make money there. Our community envisions Downtown Fresno as such a place. By building a more vital Downtown that attracts more people, this Specific Plan helps create and sustain the regional demand for retail, housing, dining, entertainment, and other commerce in the Fulton Corridor that will make businesses there successful.

6. Community

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown that serves diverse groups of people with distinct sets of interests. Residents will find opportunities for high-quality housing, food, recreation, health care, and worship. Business and property owners will find organizations formed to support their investment. Artists will find ready outlets for expression. Daytime visitors will find a convenient place to meet many needs at once from businesses, government agencies, and other offices. Evening visitors will find excitement in the form of good food, drink, and entertainment. Those of limited means or special needs will find alternatives to homelessness through the work of effective social service agencies and the proactive management of the urban area. People of different ages, ethnicities, religions, talents, skill sets, incomes, and beliefs will find a place to mix and learn from one another. In addition, various festivals and events, ranging from weekly farmers' markets to seasonal music festivals to annual Chinese New Year's Day parades, will provide opportunities for bringing all these Fresnoans together.

Key to making Fresno a vibrant, attractive place is ensuring a sense of safety at all hours of the day and night. Physical design plays an important role in creating such an environment. Buildings are designed to provide "eyes on the street" to watch over the sidewalk. They face and are accessed from the street and provide transparent, street-facing windows. Meanwhile in the public realm, pedestrian and bicycle safety improves as vehicles are slowed down through the introduction of attractive center medians, bike lanes, on-street parking, pedestrian bulb-outs, crosswalks, and other amenities.

7. Cultural Arts

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown where the arts are on full display.

Downtown already is home to a rich array of cultural assets, including a remarkable collection of older buildings (including many listed on the Historic Registers), museums, world-class sculptures throughout, and numerous entertainment venues that host genres from classical music, ballet, and opera to rock, Mexican banda, and

hip-hop. The Valley's rich cultural traditions form the basis for festivals and events such as Cinco de Mayo and the Chinese New Year Parade. But in Downtown Fresno, the arts are not just for special occasions. The Cultural Arts District is home to a lively community of local artists, with buildings where artists can live, work, and show. Buildings throughout the area are painted with large murals.

The arts cannot function or exist in a vacuum. Indeed, arts and culture depend heavily on the prosperity of Downtown and our region. As in other sectors, artists have a bottom line: paintings to sell and theater seats to fill. Cultural festivals must be able to attract attendees. It takes money to maintain the public arts that the community treasures, and to invest in good design for the public realm. This Specific Plan helps make all of these things happen by revitalizing the economy of Downtown. In addition, a vibrant, economically successful Downtown helps make Fresno a place that retains and attracts young people who support and engage in the arts over time.

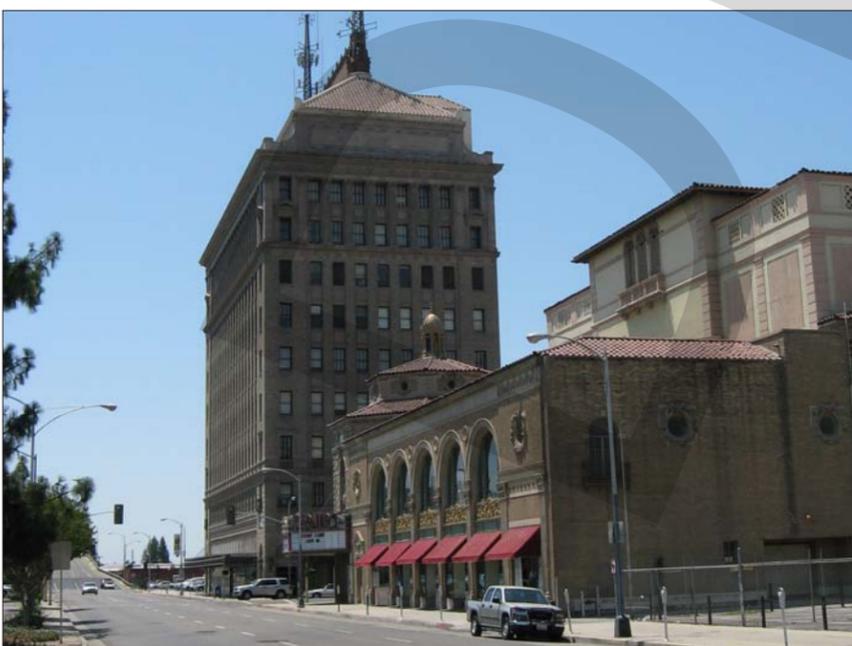
Accordingly, Downtown's economic revitalization is leveraged on its cultural assets. To build vitality, people coming from far away for cultural offerings must find other reasons to stay in Downtown: for a meal, to have a glass of wine, to shop, maybe even to live. This Specific Plan enhances this connection by ensuring that a broad variety of buildings and activities – cultural, economic, residential, hospitality, governmental, financial – take place in proximity to each other and are designed to support each other.

8. Connectedness

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown where people and places are strengthened by their connections to one another.

Connectedness does not happen by accident. While the variety of Downtown's stores, restaurants, residences, and offices is always changing, the underlying street and block structure and the transportation network that uses it is much more constant. This Specific Plan, with the accompanying Downtown Development Code, also regulates and coordinates this street, block, and transportation network.

By improving Downtown, this Plan helps to expand access and make Downtown more inviting and attractive to everyone. Over time, Downtown's wide streets are put to better use, creating space for public transit, bicycles, and pedestrians, and connecting and creating synergy with adjacent neighborhoods and institutions that are within walking and biking distance of Downtown: Lowell, Jefferson, Southwest, Jane Addams, and Southeast Neighborhoods, the Tower District, and the Community Regional Medical Center. Street trees make the pedestrian experience pleasant by providing shade as



Historic resources, such as the San Joaquin Light and Power Company Building (1923) and Warnors Theater (1929) have been renovated.



This historic photo of Broadway Street in 1925 shows buildings with ground floor awnings and canopies that shade storefront windows and passing pedestrians during hot summers. Upper floor awnings shade upper floor rooms. Credit: San Joaquin Valley Library System

2.2 COMMUNITY VALUES FOR REVITALIZATION (Continued)

well as generating a sense of place. As vacant lots are developed, they turn from forbidding pedestrian barriers into buildings that add a sense of safety, more light, and more eyes onto the sidewalk. The experience of walking, biking, and driving through Downtown becomes memorable and enjoyable in itself.

Downtown Fresno also connects our Valley's people to one another. Bringing restaurants, performance spaces, and businesses from many cultures together in proximity gives more visitors the opportunity to explore something new. Providing a well designed place for festivals and public gatherings ensures that more cultures find Downtown an ideal place to celebrate and invite others to join in. Better accessibility on foot and by public transit attracts a mix of those who can and cannot drive, as well as those who choose not to drive. Finally, making Downtown an easy, predictable, inexpensive place to start a business or develop a building helps make it possible for people from different national origins and backgrounds to participate in the vitality of the urban core. Thus, at every step, making connections within our diverse community is embraced as both a deeply held value and an asset for revitalization.

9. Authenticity and Our Past

The unique heritage of Fresno and our Valley is wrapped up in Downtown. The Fresno community envisions a Downtown that embraces this heritage and shares it proudly with the wider world.

Downtown is the oldest part of Fresno and contains some of the area's richest history. What is now the Cultural Arts District was once home to some of Fresno's wealthiest citizens. Downtown was also home to various ethnic enclaves, including Armenian Town (in what is now the South Stadium District), Chinatown, and German Town. The great collection of notable, older buildings in the heart of the Fulton Corridor represents a golden age in Fresno's development.

All aspects of Downtown – from its overall size, to the size of its blocks, to the design of its sidewalks, to the scale of its buildings – were designed with the pedestrian in mind. The public realm of beautiful streets and spacious public parks was just as important as the buildings which defined the public realm's edges. The block pattern and size was walkable, which not only promoted easy navigation, but also provided multiple ways of getting from place to place.

Street-facing building facades were constructed of high-quality and durable materials and expressed the particular uses of the building. Ground floors, generally retail in use, had easily identifiable entrances and large storefront windows to show off their goods. Upper floor windows, smaller in size and usually vertical in orienta-

tion, conveyed the residential or office uses that went on inside. Many of the buildings had canopies or galleries which protruded over the sidewalk, providing shade on hot summer days and cover on rainy winter days. Storage and garbage facilities were found at the backs of buildings.

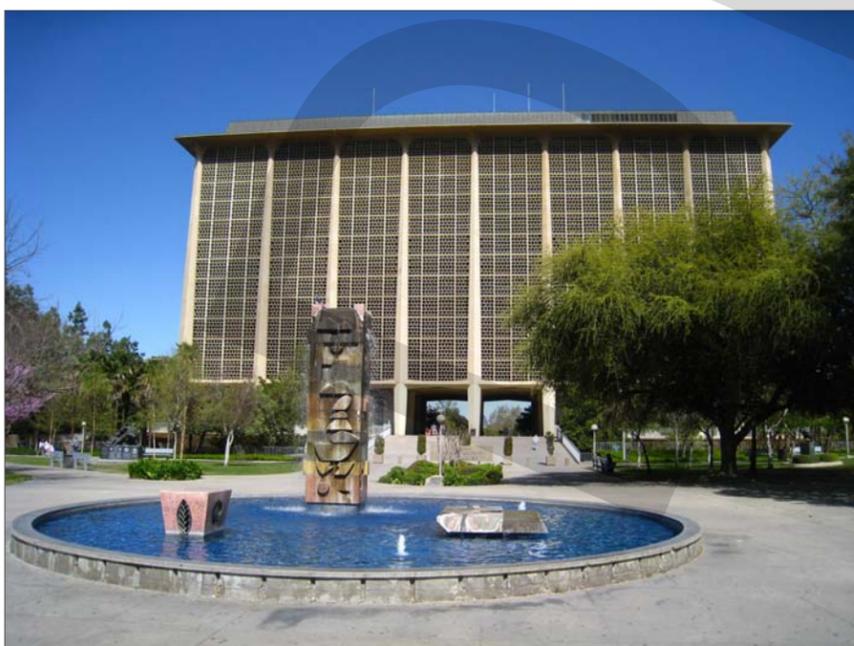
Downtown's history has not been static. Much has changed over the past 125 years. Stately residences in the Cultural Arts District were replaced with commercial and industrial buildings. Residents of Armenian Town and German Town were displaced to make way for industry and freeways. Fulton Street, the Valley's main street, was transformed into the Fulton Mall in an effort to compete with suburban shopping centers.

This Specific Plan recognizes that change will always occur – but also that it must occur in a manner that respects the past and serves the City for the long term, not the short term. Downtown's future should build on the best of our past.

For instance, our agricultural prowess – in the past, present, and future – provides the impetus for once again making Downtown the hub for the Valley's agriculture business. It presents opportunities to create festivals that celebrate the Valley's crops, to host world-class farmers' markets, and to introduce a market hall, urban gardens, and urban agriculture.

We can also celebrate our climate in ways that Fresnans did a hundred years ago by making our parks and plazas inviting and usable and using passive techniques for shading and cooling buildings. As seen in historic photographs, ground-floor canopies extended over sidewalks to shade passing pedestrians, reduce window glare, and keep interiors cool. This Specific Plan and the accompanying Development Code, encourage buildings to be designed to shade ground floor windows with awnings, canopies, arcades, and porches, and to protect upper floor windows, especially south and west facing ones, with awnings.

Without its past, without the authentic character of our region, Downtown Fresno would be just another urban place in another American city. It is our history that makes Downtown Fresno our own.



The County Courthouse is one of the most recognizable Mid-Century Modern buildings in Downtown.



Downtown is the oldest part of Fresno and contains a great collection of notable, older buildings.

10. Opportunities for the Future

The Fresno community envisions a Downtown that looks forward and welcomes progress toward the future. As Downtown welcomes entrepreneurship and the business owners and investors of the future, Downtown must also be a place for innovation by the public sector and our community.

Innovation in Downtown can and will take many forms. New technology promises continually improving systems for parking management, lighting, signage, and much more.

Innovation can also involve reintroducing the wisdom of the past. As an alternative to outward suburban growth, which consumes taxpayer resources, plows under our agricultural economy, and undermines property values in the central city, this Specific Plan welcomes a “new” approach to planning that builds upon the urban character of our Downtown, encourages foot traffic on the sidewalk, and finds ways to bring Downtown’s water use into balance with its water supply. This includes employing building and site design strategies to reduce natural resource consumption, decreasing energy and water use, reducing the money spent on public services infrastructure, and enhancing indoor environmental quality for building occupants.

The result is a lasting city center – innovative in our day, but nothing new. As Downtown Fresno fulfills our community’s vision, it becomes more like the great cities people have been building for generations.



Fourth of July fireworks at Chukchansi Park. Credit: Don Davis

2.3 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Based on the community’s vision for the Fulton Corridor, this Specific Plan and the accompanying Downtown Development Code apply the following ten principles to the design of the Plan Area’s buildings, public spaces, landscape, and infrastructure: infill development, mix of land uses, distinct character, quality of the public realm, interconnected street system, walkability and bikability, housing variety, effective transportation and parking, efficient building and site design, and urban agriculture.

These principles mark a return to the kind of place-making design that has shaped Downtown Fresno for most of its history. The Plan emphasizes designing dwellings, shops, offices, entertainment venues, schools, parks, and civic facilities that are not only within close proximity, but that also relate to one another. Buildings are not isolated objects. They are neighbors that form the public realm, provide “eyes on the street,” shape the skyline, create shadows and generate foot, vehicular, and transit traffic. In addition, when development projects are related to their surroundings, each new project builds value for surrounding land and buildings, encouraging spin-off development and hastening the build-out of complete, revitalized areas.

These principles form the basis for the Downtown Development Code as well as the goals, policies, and actions that are described in this Plan.

1. **Infill Development.** Effective use of existing private and public land and infrastructure investments.

Development fills in available urban sites to create a more vibrant public realm. More people within walking distance of multiple uses support a more efficient utilization of services and resources, and create more opportunities for entrepreneurship and for shopping, working, and entertainment close to home.

In addition, infill development takes advantage of existing infrastructure, including streets, parks, and water, sewer, and storm drain pipes.



The Iron Bird Lofts District introduces higher density housing in the Cultural Arts District.

2. **Mix of Land Uses.** Synergistic relationships between a variety of destinations and activities.

Downtowns and neighborhood centers that accommodate a variety of uses in close proximity to one another utilize land efficiently, provide neighborhood convenience, create a uniquely urban experience, and encourage people to come and go throughout the entire day. The accompanying Downtown Development Code removes current restrictions and allows and encourages a compatible mix of uses at the neighborhood, district, or corridor scale, and takes advantage of opportunities for shared parking. This yields a rich mix of building types and uses that are accessible in the same visit through many transportation modes. Key to creating this environment is focusing investment and concentrating businesses, offices, visitors, residents – i.e., people – in one area. As the initial area becomes vibrant, activity will expand to the rest of Downtown.



A diverse mix of land uses within close proximity utilizes land efficiently, provides neighborhood convenience, and creates a unique urban experience.

3. Distinct Character. Places with their own distinct identity.

Preservation and renewal of Downtown’s unique buildings, districts, and landscapes affirm the continuity and evolution of urban society. New development enriches the quality of existing urban places. New design is a complement to such settings, creating a unique sense of place that reflects history, as well as changing market trends.



Preservation of Downtown’s unique buildings affirms the continuity and evolution of Fresno’s urban and cultural traditions.

4. Quality of the Public Realm. Appealing and heavily used outdoor public spaces between buildings.

A primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets, squares and parks that serve as places of movement, gathering, and celebration for people. Public open space is designed as a series of outdoor rooms and a landscape that enables public interaction, provides a place to enjoy fresh air and exercise, and improves the physical and aesthetic quality of urban neighborhoods.

Surrounding buildings naturally keep parks safe by providing eyes on what is happening. In return, parks boost the values of surrounding properties.



Buildings at Civic Center Square face an urban green that provides a place for office workers and convention visitors to gather.

5. Interconnected Street System. Access to daily destinations that are reached by multiple routes.

Interconnected streets reduce congestion by dispersing vehicular traffic rather than concentrating it only on major arteries. They encourage pedestrian activity, provide multiple routes for getting places, and increase the routes emergency personnel can use to reach distressed locations. When open to all – pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles – they are more active, safer, and better for businesses that line them.

Alleys provide access to parking and services at the back of building lots, reducing the number of conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles along sidewalks.



Interconnected streets reduce congestion by dispersing vehicular traffic.

6. Walkability and Bikability. Compact urban form, environments designed for people, not cars, and multiple pedestrian and bicycle destinations within close proximity.

In urban areas, most daily uses are within a 5 minute walk from home or work. The Downtown Development Code directs buildings to define street edges and corners, enliven street frontages to enhance the pedestrian experience, and create memorable urban places where people enjoy being. Pedestrian-scaled street lighting, street trees, and street furniture further enhance the pedestrian experience.

An extensive network of bike lanes and trails and their associated amenities, such as bike racks and lockers, extend the reach of daily uses.



Buildings define and enliven the street and sidewalk edge, enhance the pedestrian experience, and create memorable urban places.

2.3 DESIGN PRINCIPLES (Continued)

- 7. Housing Variety.** Housing that appeals to a wide demographic across a broad income spectrum within the market.

A variety of dwelling types – houses, bungalow courts, row houses, live/work units, lofts and apartments – ensure that younger and older people, singles, families, those of limited income and the wealthy may all find places to live.



Historically, Downtown Fresno has provided a wide variety of housing choices, ranging from houses to bungalow courts, to lofts in an historic office building, to flats in a mixed-use building.

- 8. Effective Transportation and Parking.** Multi-modal streets, built for cars, buses, bicycles, and people, and a variety of parking options that help generate an economically viable, mixed-use Downtown.

Rights-of-way are more than simply utilitarian channels for the movement of vehicles. They are also places for pedestrians and cyclists. With the goal of generating vibrant, people-filled places, streets accommodate public transit and are designed with narrow widths to promote economic activity, encourage slow vehicular speeds, provide attractive streetscapes, and curb-side public parking.

Parking is limited by the intensity of development it serves. Parking in intense areas such as the Central Business District – where people can park once and partake in multiple activities, or arrive by bike, foot, or bus – is shared rather than being exclusive to each use or activity.



Multi-modal streets help generate a vibrant, diverse, mixed-use Downtown.

- 9. Efficient Building and Site Design.** Smart building and site design strategies, construction techniques, and building operation practices that significantly reduce the money spent on utility bills, improve local air quality, and reduce resource consumption.

Fresno’s older buildings are adaptively reused. New and renovated buildings incorporate passive solar strategies that respond to Fresno’s climate; use alternative energy sources; are constructed of permanent building materials; employ low-water use fixtures and appliances; and utilize efficient heating and cooling systems and building envelopes. Efficient stormwater strategies cleanse run-off, recharge the aquifer, and reduce the size of or eliminate the need for storm water pipes, thereby lowering the cost of construction. Drought-tolerant plants and efficient irrigation systems reduce water and pesticide use and reduce utility bills for property owners.



An office building utilizes rooftop solar panels and natural light and ventilation from rooftop light monitors.

- 10. Urban Agriculture.** Local agriculture, including within private gardens, community gardens, farmers’ markets, market halls, and specialty food stores, that expose and celebrate Fresno’s agricultural past and present, provide residents with access to affordable healthy food, promote positive social interaction, create local economic activity, and engender increased physical activity.

Local agricultural production is introduced within all building types and densities. For more dense types it is incorporated on rooftops, on balconies, and within window boxes. For less dense building types it is introduced in front and back yards and within common yards. Urban gardens and orchards are introduced on vacant parcels, subject to the proper ordinances and procedures.



A rooftop accommodates a colorful flower garden.