

Case Study: The Southwest Fresno Specific Plan

Why Fresno Planned for Environmental Justice

The *Southwest Fresno Specific Plan (SWFSP)* was initiated by the City of Fresno in 2015 to guide future development in a historically underserved residential area of Fresno that bears multiple environmental impacts from heavy industrial uses. The plan aimed to address the following concerns:

- **Hazardous Sites.** Contaminated sites have released hazardous materials into the groundwater, which requires remediation and intervention by State and federal agencies.
- **Air Pollution.** The area is one of the most polluted regions in California. Major pollutants include diesel particulate matter and ozone.
- **Toxic Emissions.** Southwest Fresno is ranked in the worst 5% of all CalEnviroScreen census tracts when it comes to toxic releases.
- **Groundwater Quality.** Fresno's drinking water contains contaminants caused by septic tanks and nearby agricultural land uses, while several areas still remain without sewers.

Community Engagement Process

Over the course of two years, the SWFSP's iterative community engagement process included several meetings and workshops in which over two hundred residents helped shape the preferred land use scenario map that was adopted by the city council. Planning staff held "office hours" so that community members could drop in to learn and share input on several topics,



such as land use and transportation. Core to this community engagement process was the SWFSP Steering Committee, which was authorized by the City to be a decision making body in the process. The SWFSP Steering Committee is made up of representatives from the community, community-based organizations, local agencies, developers, and other stakeholders.

Outcome

In addition to providing a vision for Southwest Fresno that focuses on healthy land uses and development capacities, the SWFSP specifically promotes EJ through three guiding principles.

- **Guiding Principle 8:** Employment areas in Southwest Fresno should be planned and zoned for "healthy" businesses. While more jobs in Southwest Fresno are desirable, the businesses that provide them must be healthy, safe, and good neighbors to the surrounding community.
- **Guiding Principle 11:** The transportation network should be improved to serve all members of the community whether they wish to travel by car, bus, bicycle, foot, or wheelchair. Transit should be focused on corridors that have more intensive land uses. Truck routes should be located away from residential uses whenever possible.
- **Guiding Principle 12:** Urban greening should be applied to Southwest Fresno to create more environmentally healthy places. These actions should:



- Improve environmental health.
- Create outdoor spaces that people care about.
- Integrate the natural environment with the built environment.
- Facilitate alternative modes of transportation, such as safe walking, biking, and transit use.
- Increase urban tree canopy.
- Manage stormwater on-site.

Key Lessons

The following lesson can be drawn from the SWFSP planning process:

- Community Development Block Grant funding was used to support this planning effort.
- The steering committee's cross-sector makeup encouraged diverse perspectives and interests, which motivated decision makers to embrace the preferred land use scenario.
- Community-based organizations promoted the planning workshops through their networks and held meetings at times and locations where the community felt comfortable. They were also successful in making the topics and materials widely accessible and understandable.
- The City and Steering Committee members were committed to seeing the process through, and an outside facilitator was provided to lead Steering Committee discussions.
- The Steering Committee created clear roles and used a two-thirds majority voting rule to ensure that deliberations move forward on schedule.
- The process was championed by an elected official who helped sustain momentum, regularly attended meetings, and provided a key link between residents and decision makers.

Case Study Summary: Southwest Fresno

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| Location | Central Valley |
| Community Type | Urban |
| Population Size | 494,665 |
| Geographic Area | 114.39 sq. mi. |
| EJ Issue(s) Addressed | Hazardous sites, air and water quality |
| Community Engagement Process | Steering Committee |
| Community-Based Organization Actively Engaged | Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability (LCJA) |
| Outcome | Integrated policies within a Specific Plan |
| Adopted | October 2017 |

