

Visalia

General Plan Update

Executive Summary

Existing Conditions Report

For the General Plan Update Review Committee

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DRAFT

DYETT & BHATIA
Urban and Regional Planners

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1 INTRODUCTION



The City of Visalia is updating its General Plan—the City’s “constitution” that will guide the growth and development of the city through 2030. Successful completion of the General Plan Update requires in-depth knowledge of the existing conditions and key issues that the City is facing today. This knowledge is gained through a combination of outreach to the community, to assess the main issues and priorities from the public’s perspective, as well as technical research and analysis.

The Existing Conditions Report is the first major piece of technical work completed for the Visalia General Plan Update, complementing the public outreach process. It assesses all aspects of the City’s built form, economy, infrastructure, service provision, and natural environment, and after the introduction, includes chapters on:

- Sustainability and Economic Vitality
- Socioeconomic and Market Conditions
- Land Use and Urban Form
- Development Potential
- Transportation
- Public Facilities and Services
- Environmental Resources and Hazards

This Executive Summary includes an overview of the technical research. Each section in this summary also includes the main themes and planning implications associated with that particular topic, which

also draw on the emerging themes from the public outreach effort. These will guide the development of Sketch Plan Alternatives (the next major phase in the process).

To a large extent, the themes and planning implications revealed through the existing conditions research mirror those heard from members of the community during the public outreach conducted in Spring 2010 (interviews with community leaders, a mail-in survey, and the first public workshop). The fact that the technical research and the voice of the community reinforce each other will provide the City, the General Plan Update Review Committee (GPURC), and the consultant team with clear direction on guiding principles and policy formation for the new plan. These themes include recognizing and protecting existing community assets; providing new opportunities for economic growth and educational attainment; maintaining function of public services and infrastructure; and accommodating growth in a sustainable and efficient manner with minimal environmental impacts.

The Existing Conditions Report is a working document meant to be used as a reference throughout the remainder of the General Plan update process. Greater synthesis of the topics addressed in this report will take place when Sketch Plan Alternatives are designed and evaluated. Comments by the GPURC and others will help inform subsequent work and ensure that it meets the City's needs.

Planning Boundaries

The planning area is the geographic area for which the General Plan establishes policies about future urban growth, long-term agricultural activity, and natural resource conservation. The boundary of the planning area was determined by the GPURC. It comprises all land within the city limits as well as neighboring unincorporated land, including the community of Goshen (Figure 1). It encompasses approximately 104 square miles or 66,640 acres. It is roughly bounded by Avenue 328 to the north; Road 158 and Mariposa Avenue to the east; Avenue 264 and Avenue 260 to the south; and Road 64 and Road 52 to the west.

Contained within the planning area is Visalia's Sphere of Influence (SOI). The SOI is a boundary that encompasses lands that are expected to ultimately be annexed by the City as determined by the Tulare County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). Portions of the planning area beyond the SOI may or may not be annexed to Visalia, but are still considered to be related to and influenced by the City's planning.

2 SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMIC VITALITY



The Sustainability section of the report introduces the concept of sustainability and how it would apply to the General Plan Update. In this context, sustainable development is not only about the “natural” environment, but also about the “built” environment; it is not only about animals and plants, but also about people; it is not about making buildings cost more, but about designing efficient systems so Visalia’s quality of life and economic vitality can be assured over the long-term.

What is Sustainability?

One of the most commonly-accepted definitions of sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own

needs.”¹ Sustainability is also often described in terms of carrying capacity, or the population size of a species that the environment can sustain indefinitely. A sustainable community is one that is prosperous and economically viable, and improves the quality of life, while living within the means of supporting natural systems. Over time, most definitions of sustainability have also come to include some variation of the following three spheres of influence, sometimes called the “three Es of sustainability” or the “triple E” approach: economy, ecology, and enrichment. Other concepts commonly associated with sustainability include smart growth, conservation and stewardship, green building and development, and the ecological footprint.

¹ *World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987.*

TABLE 1: KEY ARENAS OF SUSTAINABILITY, POTENTIAL INDICATORS, AND STATUS IN VISALIA TODAY

Key Arena	Potential Indicator	Status in Visalia Today	Desired Direction
Economic Development, Equity, and Opportunity			
Income and Jobs	Household median income	\$54,000, higher than the County median but lower than the State.	Up
Housing	Proportion of households at least moderately burdened by housing costs	43% based on a U.S Census Bureau Survey	Down
Education	VUSD average annual performance index (API)	For Visalia Unified School District: 2009 = 745 2008 = 737 2007 = 716	Up
Energy and Water Resource Management			
Energy Demand	Community energy use per capita	11,000 kWh per capita in 2000 (electricity)	Down
Water Demand	Daily water consumption rate per capita	228 gallons per day (gpd) (2009)	Down
Recycled or Reclaimed Water	% of reclaimed water as proportion of total community water supply	Negligible today, based on the most recent Urban Water Management Plan	Up
Environmental Stewardship			
Air Quality	Ozone, particulates (PM-10, PM-2.5), and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions levels	2008 Ozone 1-hr = 44 days over state standard 2008 PM-10 24-hr = 160.8 measured days over state standard 2008 PM-2.5 24-hr = 52.3 measured days over national standard 2000 GHG = 1,140,724 metric tons of CO2 equivalent for Community Sector, 17,412 for Municipal Sector	Down
Land Management, Habitats, and Wildlife	Ratio of parks and natural open space to population	2010 Acres of parkland: 546 2010 Population Estimate: 126,000 2010 Ratio: 4.3 per 1,000 residents	Up
Waste Stream	Landfill diversion rate	2006 = 54%	Up, 75% by 2020
Sustainable and Safe Transportation			
Mobility	Share of workers 16+ who drive alone to work	81% based on a U.S. Census Bureau Survey	Down
Location Efficiency	Mean travel time to work	19.4 minutes based on a U.S. Census Bureau Survey	Down
Health and Safety	Traffic accident rate	2009 accident rate = 18.4 per 1,000 population	Down
Health and Quality of Life (QOL)			
Neighborhood Quality	Converted score on Community Advisory Committee (CAC) public opinion survey overall QOL question	2008 = 81 2007 = 85 2006 = 83 2005 = 83	Up
Crime and Perceptions of Safety	Violent crime rate	2007 violent crime rate of about 556 per 100,000 population	Down
Public Health	Death rates by disease	2008 Overall Death Rate = 692 per 100,000 By Heart Disease = 203 By Cancer = 130 By Stroke = 42	Down

Source: Dyett & Bhatia, 2010

Key Arenas of Sustainability

Building on these definitions, coupled with the emerging themes described by community leaders and the public, five key arenas of sustainability are suggested for consideration in Visalia’s General Plan Update:

- Economic Development, Equity, and Opportunity
- Energy and Water Resource Management
- Environmental Stewardship and Conservation
- Sustainable and Safe Transportation
- Health and Quality of Life

Table I describes some suggested indicators of sustainability, organized into the five key arenas listed above.

Emerging Issues and Planning Options

Visalia has a strong, diversified economy that supports a high quality of life for residents, and it is making considerable progress on meeting environmental conservation and stewardship objectives in the current General Plan. However, more could be done to address emerging issues and ensure overall community sustainability through leadership opportunities.

Emerging Issues

Emerging issues are those issues that Visalia will need to tackle aggressively in order to move in a sustainable development direction. These include:

- **Urban form**, to ensure a balance of complimentary residential and non-residential uses, access to services, and preservation of important agricultural and environmental resources;
- **Water supply**, to ensure adequate quality and quantity in a groundwater basin that is already in overdraft condition;
- **Jobs**, to ensure a living wage for local workers and a robust overall economic future, and if possible to reduce the need for workers to commute elsewhere;
- **Quality of life**, to ensure that children stay in Visalia after college, and that there continue to be health, education, social, and cultural resources for existing and future residents.

Leadership Opportunities

At the same time that the City is implementing policies and programs for a more sustainable future, Visalia also has the potential to continue its leadership role in the Central Valley as the ‘go-to’ town for advancing progressive strategies toward a more sustainable outcome. Leadership opportunities are those areas where Visalia—due to its location, unique urban form, or community values—can put in place sustainable development models for other communities to emulate. As it is early yet in the General Plan update process, leadership opportunities are only touched upon in very preliminary form. Later on, with more community input, this list of leadership opportunities will be revised, expanded, and elaborated upon in the form of potential General Plan policies. Three key areas where Visalia could exhibit leadership in sustainability planning include financial incentives and support for energy and water efficiency; organic waste reduction and reuse; and partnerships with agencies, institutions, and service providers.

3 SOCIOECONOMIC AND REAL ESTATE MARKET CONDITIONS



This chapter provides a profile of the socioeconomic and real estate market conditions and trends within the city and surrounding region, which provides a foundation for economic development initiatives that could be in the General Plan Update.

Community and Demographic Overview

As the oldest city between Los Angeles and San Francisco (incorporated in 1874), Visalia is Tulare County's population center with about 123,700 residents in early 2009 (about 28 percent of the County total). Before 2000 Visalia's growth trajectory was typical of, albeit slightly below, most Central Valley communities at about 2 percent per year, although faster than the State as a whole. However, Visalia's population began to expand rapidly after 2000, growing at about 3.4 percent a year compared to 2.1 percent for the Central Valley and 1.4 percent for California as a whole.

Numerous factors contribute to Visalia's continued strong rate of growth. The Central Valley is the fastest growing region of California, driven not only by natural increase (births minus deaths) but also by in-state, domestic, and international migration. As home prices, overall cost of living, and cost of development increased in coastal California, the Central Valley remained a relatively inexpensive alternative. Residents of higher priced coastal areas have increasingly relocated to the Central Valley over the last decade, allowing Valley cities' economies to diversify, and thus attracting more residents. Additionally, the Valley's affordability and its agricultural and industrial employment base attract immigrants from outside the United States.

In terms of its demographic profile, Visalia is slightly less diverse and older than the county, but younger than California as a whole. The

city has a smaller Hispanic population than the county as a whole (41 percent compared to 57 percent) but higher than California (36 percent). Mirroring other socio-economic indicators, the average income and education levels of Visalia residents exceed those of Tulare County as a whole, but fall below the California average.

Economic Profile

The current economic environment is an important issue affecting growth and development in Visalia and introduces a higher level of economic uncertainty than is typically the case for most general plan updates. Given this circumstance, our focus is on Visalia's longer term economic fundamentals and emerging trends that may present challenges or opportunities from a planning perspective.

Regional Economic Characteristics

Visalia is largely defined by its position at the heart of the Central Valley economy. Although the City possesses a number of unique attributes, its general economic prospects are closely linked to the fundamental trends affecting this larger region. The current economic downturn notwithstanding, job growth in the Central Valley over the last 15 to 20 years has been strong, although it has not kept pace with population growth. Key industries in the region include agriculture; manufacturing; warehousing and distribution; healthcare and professional services; retail, leisure, and hospitality; and government.

County and City Economic Characteristics

Similar to countywide trends, Visalia's economy is based on distribution and agriculture, as well as manufacturing, education, and healthcare. However, as the county's population center core and the County Seat, other significant occupations include social assistance, management, and professional jobs. The city's largest employers include

Tulare County, Kaweah Delta Healthcare, College of the Sequoias, and CIGNA HealthCare. Potential economic focus areas for the city include tourism and hospitality and higher education opportunities.

Real Estate Market Conditions

Residential

Visalia has maintained its regional desirability despite a recent depreciation in home values. Home prices in Visalia have historically exceeded the county prices, with the citywide average price of \$156,200 in 2009 approximately 11 percent above the county average. The city has historically been dominated by lower density housing, with single-family residences accounting for about 80 percent of all units. In fact, the share of multifamily units has actually declined over the last 20 years. The viability of higher-density housing over the long term, either as condominiums or apartments, will depend a variety of economic, market and demographic factors.

Office

Visalia contains between 1.0 million and 1.3 million square feet of office space with most of this space located in Downtown. Most of the office space is low-rise with surface parking. Office users include financial institutions, real estate, insurance, healthcare, accounting and legal firms. New development plans in Downtown include private medical offices and in East Downtown a new Civic Center, public safety building, and park space.

Retail

The city has a relatively large and well-diversified retail base with a significant amount of regional-serving tenants located in the south and north parts of the city. Major retailers include Winco, Cost Plus, Tar-

get, Smart & Final, Kohl's, Home Depot, Best Buy, and two Lowe's stores. Future success of the retail sector's performance will be heavily driven by population growth and ability to continue competing with neighboring jurisdictions by taking full advantage of the remaining retail opportunities while upgrading existing ones. Visalia competes for sales directly with Tulare and Exeter and indirectly with many other cities in the region, including Fresno. Despite the competition, however, the city's share of county retail sales has remained relatively constant over the last 11 years at about 45 percent.

As the population of Visalia continues to grow, there may be opportunities for the development of one or several additional neighborhood commercial centers to serve new or expanding neighborhoods. The market viability of a neighborhood center generally depends on the supermarket anchor and thus the population density within a one-mile radius; however, other factors such as geographic boundaries and distance to competition also play a role.

Industrial

Most of the industrial uses in the city are located in the industrial park, a 1,600-acre area zoned for heavy and light industrial uses in the western portion of the city. Many businesses are in warehouse, distribution, and manufacturing industries with most of the land estimated to be developed. The City recently completed the annexation of more than 160 acres of prime vacant industrial land to accommodate future growth. Opportunities for expansion may also exist near the municipal airport, especially if tenants are offered "through the fence" access for shipping and receiving of goods by air.

Visalia Population and Employment Projections

According to TCAG, Visalia will add 65,500 new residents and 25,500 new jobs over the next 20 years, a respective increase of 46 percent and

39 percent above existing levels. From the 2009 population of 123,670 to the projected 2030 population of 207,600, population is projected to grow at an annual rate of 2.6 percent, assuming that the majority of this growth takes place within or immediately adjacent to the urbanized area. This projected growth exceeds that projected for the county, so Visalia will capture a higher share of countywide population and employment by 2030.

The largest absolute employment increase in Visalia is projected in service, industrial, and retail categories, with total increases of 9,500, 5,400, and 4,300 jobs, respectively. The fastest annual growth is projected in education, industrial, and retail categories. Education jobs are projected to grow fastest, at 2.7 percent annually. The amount, type, and precise location of this growth will depend on future economic and market conditions as well as implementation of local land use policies and broader regional employment trends.

Issues and Planning Implications

Many of the qualities that contribute to Visalia's success and livability are derived from its social and demographic conditions and its underlying economic strengths. These include its vibrant Downtown; strong employment sectors, such as healthcare, education, and government; and its relative affordability. As the city grows, the new General Plan must facilitate new economic opportunities and respond to the needs of a changing population.

Emerging Issues

Research and analysis of existing socioeconomic and market conditions in Visalia have revealed the following emerging themes that need to be addressed in the General Plan Update:

- **Changing demographics.** Increased migration (both domestic and foreign), aging baby-boomers, and a growing number of young families means that Visalia’s demographic profile will continue to change over the next 20 years, with implications for housing types, services, and education and employment needs.
- **Educational attainment.** Both demographic research and feedback from community members have identified educational opportunity and attainment as a critical issue for Visalia. Education has wide-ranging effects on job attraction, career opportunities, and regional competitiveness as well as the city’s cultural vitality and general well-being.
- **Employment differentiation.** While Visalia’s economy is largely driven by that of California as a whole and specifically the Central Valley region, much of its success has been due to its ability to capitalize on its agricultural heritage, differentiate itself from other Valley communities, and supply unique goods and services to worldwide markets. Identifying continued opportunities for economic differentiation will be critical in an increasingly competitive global economy.
- **Support Downtown and the existing retail base.** Downtown Visalia is almost universally recognized as being one of the City’s greatest strengths, both socially and economically, and East Downtown will contribute to this vitality. The new General Plan needs to continue to support this asset, as well as development in East Down-

town, the existing regional retail base along Mooney Boulevard, and neighborhood shopping.

Planning Implications

Each of these emerging themes has important implications for the General Plan Update. The city’s future demographic profile will dictate what the residential real estate market will support, and will thus determine the types and densities of housing that should be provided. The need for increased educational opportunities for Visalia residents means that the General Plan should consider allocating a site for a future four-year college or other educational institution, coupled with supportive policies for encouraging its establishment. The need to support Downtown, East Downtown, and existing retail corridors means that we must carefully determine what the appropriate total supply of retail sites is, and not over-zone for this use. The new General Plan must also identify specialized market niches where Visalia’s economy can grow and thrive, while still supporting its agricultural base. An Agricultural Enterprise Zone is one idea that may have merit. Overall, the General Plan Update will be supportive of new ideas and directions, while not being overly prescriptive or creating unrealistic policy goals.

4 LAND USE AND URBAN FORM



This chapter provides information on Visalia’s current land uses, the physical form taken by current development in the city, and details on ongoing planning processes that will continue to influence land use and urban form in the future. Community design and urban form is examined on a range of scales, from the citywide down to the neighborhood, to the individual street and block. Also examined is the existing land use pattern across the planning area. Finally, Visalia’s historic resources and its approach to historic preservation are discussed.

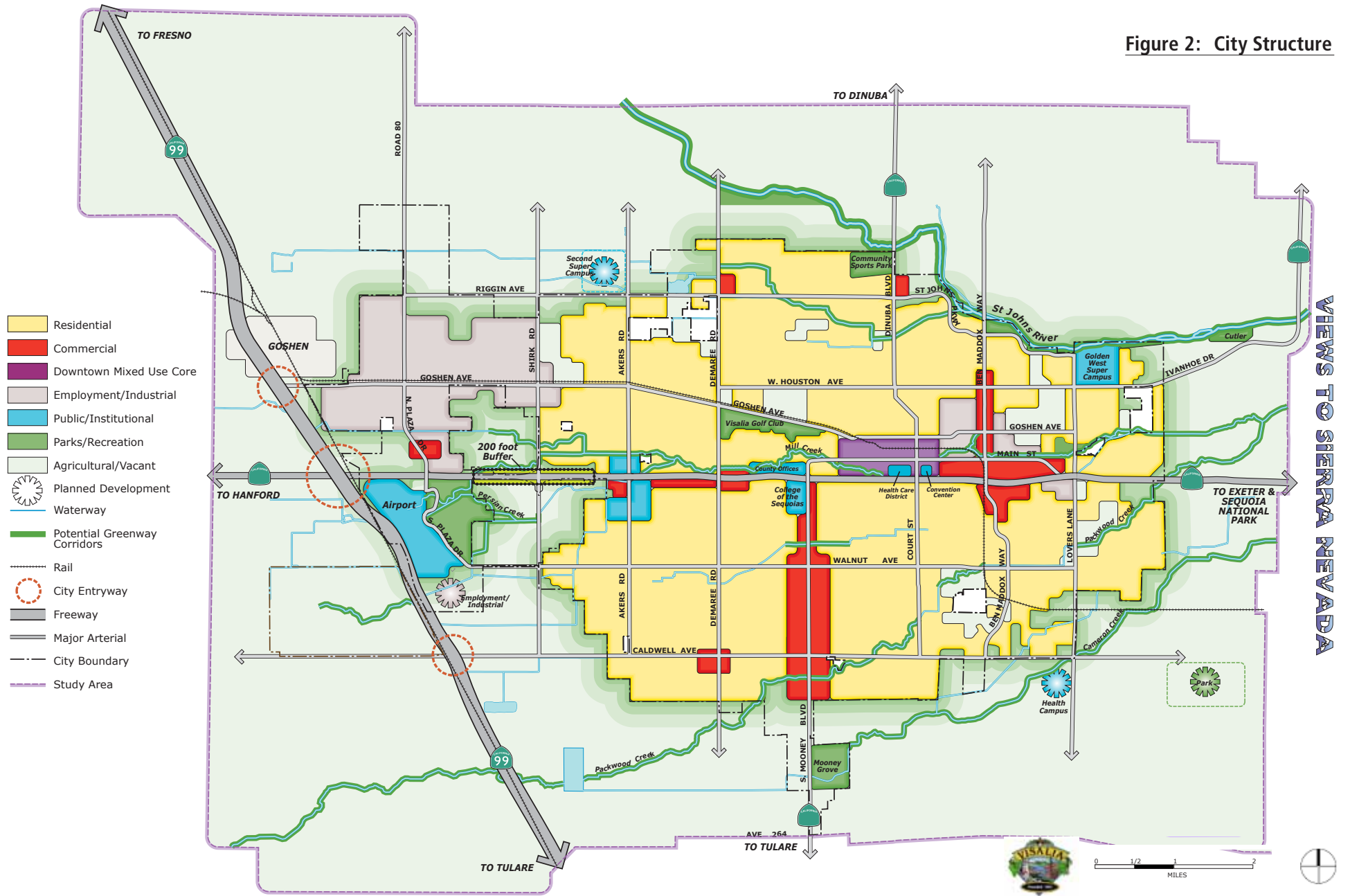
City Form and Community Design

In 2010, Visalia has a population of over 125,000; yet, an overwhelming number of residents identify Visalia as a “small town,” or as a growing city that has maintained its “small town feel.” This shared

sentiment is testament to the City’s success in maintaining the quality attributes of a neighborly, close-knit community even in the face of rapid growth.

As shown in the City Structure diagram in Figure 2, the majority of the city is comprised of residential neighborhoods with much of the city’s non-residential development oriented along key travel routes. Highway 198 is the city’s primary east-west route, and it is an important regional connection to Sequoia National Park and the Sierras. The highway also serves as the southern edge of the city’s downtown mixed-use and eastern commercial core, focused around Main Street and Ben Maddox Way. Perpendicular to the Highway 198 corridor, Mooney Boulevard, or State Route 63, acts as the primary community and regional commercial core in the city. Expansion and improvement

Figure 2: City Structure



of the downtown core, East Downtown (along Ben Maddox Way), and Mooney Boulevard will be a priority as the City works to redefine and improve key neighborhood and community destinations and promote revitalization of older shopping centers.

The city's gridded network of development overlays the natural Kaweah River delta, which once defined the Visalia region. Preserving and re-establishing the city's natural system and Valley Oak tree groves with parks, conservation areas, and trailways will be important in retaining the city's unique character and high quality of life.

Existing Land Use Pattern

Existing land use in the planning area includes a mix of uses typical of many Central Valley cities, with agricultural and low density residential uses heavily represented. Higher density residential, commercial, industrial, public, and vacant land comprise the remainder.

- **Agriculture** is the predominant existing land use in the planning area, with 39,518 acres comprising 65 percent. Over 90 percent is outside of current city limits.
- **Residential** land uses make up 18 percent of the land in the planning area, but 43 percent of the land within city limits. Of the total residential land, the majority—60 percent—is low density (typically two to seven dwelling units per acre). One percent is medium density, and 4 percent is high density. The remaining 37 percent is rural residential, on lots greater than one acre, most of which is outside city limits.
- **Commercial** uses comprise 2 percent of the land area in the total planning area, equaling 1,341 acres, but 6 percent of the land in city limits. Around 60 percent is general retail/commercial uses, such as grocery stores, personal service establishments, neighbor-

hood shopping centers, restaurants, etc. The remaining 40 percent is service commercial, such as automotive services and fast food establishments.

- **Industrial** land is concentrated in the northwest and consists of a mix of light (85 percent) and heavy (15 percent) industrial uses, totaling 1,770 acres.
- **Public, semi-public, and institutional** uses comprise 1,960 acres in the planning area, making up 3 percent of the total. These uses include schools and universities, City and County government facilities, utilities, and medical facilities.
- **Vacant** land comprises 5 percent of the planning area (12 percent of land within city limits) with 2,917 acres overall. It ranges from small infill sites less than an acre in size in older sections of the city to larger sites of 10 acres or more.

Current Relevant Plans and Regulations

Land use planning in Visalia is guided by the City's current General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Unincorporated land outside of city limits, but within the planning area, is subject to the Tulare County General Plan, and Tulare County zoning. Specific plans that provide more detailed standards and guidelines for smaller sections of the city include:

- Togni Towne Centre Specific Plan (1993)
- Demaree/Caldwell Specific Plan (1999)
- South Packwood Creek Specific Plan (2002)
- The Village at Willow Creek Specific Plan (2006)
- Orchard Walk Specific Plan (2007)
- Draft Southeast Area Specific Plan (not yet adopted)

Other area plans include the East Downtown Strategic Plan, the East Downtown Park and Infrastructure Master Plan, the Civic Center Master Plan, the Kaweah Delta Health Care District Hospital Expansion Plan, the West 198 Corridor Concept Plan, the Comprehensive Airport Land Use Plan, and the Visalia Industrial Park Implementation Plan.

Historical Resources

As the oldest Central Valley city south of Stockton, Visalia hosts an impressive collection of historic sites and structures. The City's Historic Preservation Element in the current General Plan, adopted in 1979, remains the City's source of policies regarding historic preservation and development within the historic district. The current delineation of the historic district overlay resulted from a comprehensive survey of historic sites and structures conducted in the 1970s. Approximately 152 structures and sites are on State and national preservation lists. These include residential and commercial buildings, significant sites and archaeological artifacts from native populations, and irrigation canals.

Issues and Planning Implications

Land use and urban form constitute the physical embodiment of a general plan, and are in some senses the "heart" of the overall General Plan Update. A good plan for the community evokes good design and enables the types of neighborhoods and public spaces that contribute to a high quality of life, but does not overly prescribe design direction and architectural details.

Emerging Themes

The following themes regarding land use and urban form have emerged from this research and public input into the planning process:

- **Provide choice in neighborhood type and design.** Community design should be a physical reflection of what people like and value in their neighborhoods, which may differ across the population.
- **Plan for neighborhoods, not subdivisions.** Residential areas should form cohesive neighborhoods and not be treated as a collection of subdivisions. Connectivity, a mix of uses, and shared public spaces should be emphasized.
- **Explore new structural ideas.** Planning for complete neighborhoods will explore some new ideas for structuring residential areas, focusing on neighborhood parks and schools as anchors, and "right-sized" retail spaces. Similarly, for non-residential areas, land use mix can create strong anchors around activity nodes, such as the College of the Sequoias, the hospital, a new 4-year college, or a new Civic Center.
- **Honor the past; support existing neighborhoods.** At the same time that the General Plan creates guidelines and direction for new growth areas, it must not forget the older existing neighborhoods that precede it. Safety, public realm improvements, and historic preservation must be given equal weight with new development efforts moving forward.
- **Take advantage of natural resources as form-giving elements.** Visalia is fortunate to be located in an area of natural beauty and resources, from the Valley Oak trees to the waterways that wind through town. Moreover, these are elements that residents recognize and value. The General Plan Update provides an opportunity to more closely link the built environment to the natural environment.

Planning Implications

The new General Plan will provide diagrams and policies that determine the location, type, and design of new residential and non-residential growth areas. At the same time, it will provide support for those areas of the city that exist currently, and identify ways to foster their preservation and continued improvement. Rather than adopt one design ethos, the plan could provide adequate flexibility in design standards and guidelines so that current and future residents are provided with a full range of housing and neighborhood types to suit their lifestyles. The next section, Development Potential, will evaluate the city's current capacity for new development and compare it to the land demanded by a growing population and local economy. More work on this topic also will occur during alternatives evaluation phase of the planning process.

5 DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL



Over the next 20 years, Visalia is expected to attract a substantial number of new residents and new jobs. Historical and recent trends give some indication of the amount and type of physical development that Visalia can expect to see. One of the purposes of the General Plan Update is to determine how much land for housing and employment growth will require, and determine how and where the demand for land should be accommodated. Estimates of demand for new land are driven by demographic and economic projections for Visalia and the region as a whole; the supply side is determined first by looking at current and proposed development in the “pipeline” and then by identifying sites within the planning area that are appropriate for new development. Comparing densities under the current General Plan with reasonable assumptions about compact development can then inform discussions with the GPURC and the community about plan-

ning alternatives and the best way to achieve the community’s vision for the future.

Current and Proposed Development

As of January 2010, approximately 2,440 acres of land in Visalia were in the process of being developed, in a range of projects from those with only subdivision or parcel map approval to those nearing completion of construction.

- **Residential** pipeline projects include approximately 6,300 units, 84 percent single family at an average density of four units per acre, and 16 percent multifamily at an average density of 13 units per acre.

- **Non-Residential** development projects in the pipeline comprise approximately 3.9 million square feet on 840 acres, with an average floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.23.

Construction of below market rate housing is facilitated by policies in the General Plan Housing Element, which was updated in 2009. It identifies land available in Visalia to support over 13,000 units across all income levels. (However, even though the land for this housing is identified, the Housing Element does not guarantee that it will all be built.)

Development Capacity and Potential Development Sites

Within Visalia's planning area, land that can accommodate new growth and development over the next 20 years falls into a number of different categories. These include:

- Vacant land within the city limits;
- Underutilized parcels that may be candidates for change or redevelopment in the future;
- Developable land under the existing General Plan outside the city limits but within the current Urban Development Boundary (UDB), as well as in Goshen;
- The West Highway 198 corridor; and
- Urban Reserve land to the east of city limits, north of the St. Johns River and along the City's southern limits that is also designated in the existing General Plan for urban uses.

Figure 3 shows the location of sites that have been identified as potential development areas, color-coded by their existing General Plan land use designation.

Capacity for New Residential Development

Using the typical gross densities of residential development for sites with existing General Plan residential designations, and reasonable assumptions about residential development potential in the West Highway 198 Corridor and the Urban Reserve, the following calculations were made:

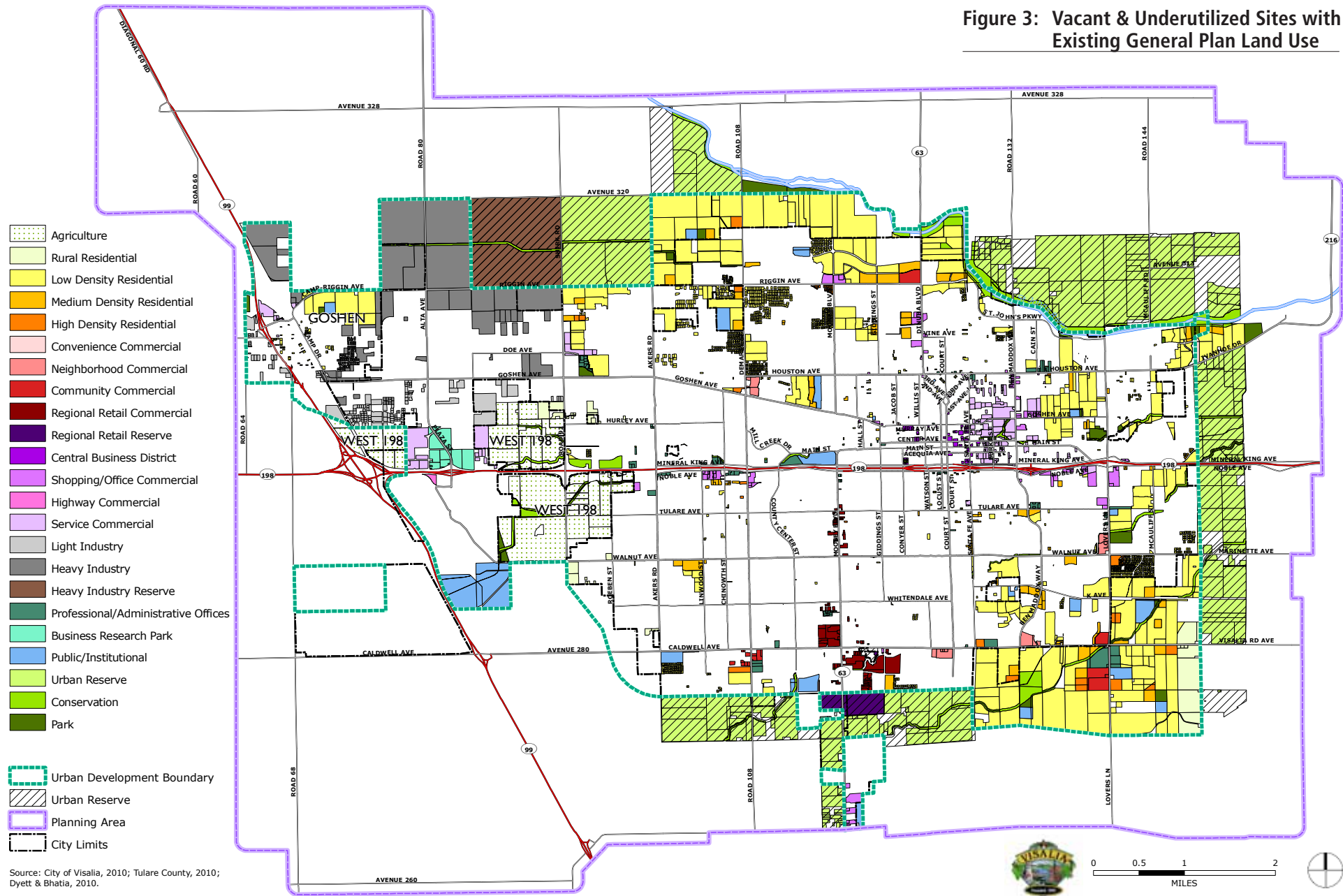
- Within the current Urban Development Boundary (UDB) approximately 35,900 housing units could be developed, with 69 percent low density and 31 percent medium and high density.
- Outside the current UDB, another 26,400 units could be accommodated. Around 45 percent of these would be low density, and 55 percent medium and high density.
- The overall residential development capacity is around 58,800 units, with 60 percent low density and 40 percent medium and high density.

Capacity for New Commercial, Office, Industrial, and Community Uses

To calculate the development capacity of land available for non-residential uses, the typical FAR for each land use type was used. Where the land does not have existing General Plan designations, an assumption about land use mix was made.

Overall, land within the planning area designated for possible future non-residential development could support over 42 million square feet of commercial, industrial, and public/institutional development.

Figure 3: Vacant & Underutilized Sites with Existing General Plan Land Use



Source: City of Visalia, 2010; Tulare County, 2010; Dyett & Bhatia, 2010.

Approximately 23.1 million square feet, or 63 percent, is in the current UDB, with a mix of 38 percent commercial/office, 54 percent industrial, and 8 percent public/institutional. Land in the West 198 corridor and in the current Urban Reserve area could support around 13.7 million square feet, or 37 percent of the total. The proposed mix of development in this area would be 19 percent commercial, 55 percent industrial, and 26 percent public/institutional.

Urban Land Demand

Two scenarios for future land demand are posited for discussion: the first represents “current trends,” assuming that land development patterns (density and mix) remain similar to recent years and reflect existing General Plan designations; the second represents a “compact mix,” wherein future development patterns have a slightly greater percentage of medium and higher density development, resulting in higher densities overall.² The calculations also include a 10 percent cushion to allow for a faster growth rate and flexibility within the real estate market, which builds in an additional 500 to 750 acres. Because future development may fall somewhere in between these two scenarios, they result in low- and high-end projections that bracket the range of total expected land demand.

Residential

Residential land demand is fundamentally based upon projected population growth. The number of new people, or households, is then translated into housing units using assumptions about housing types and densities. The “current trend” scenario assumes more people will live in lower density, single family homes; the “compact mix” scenario assumes

a slightly higher percentage of more compact housing types. The “current trend” scenario would result in 5,400 acres needed for housing development. The “compact mix” scenario forecasts 3,900 acres needed, a savings of 1,500 acres that could remain in agricultural use.

Residential land demand also includes land needed for schools and parks. These were calculated using the Visalia Unified School District’s estimates of student generation rates, and the City’s current park standards, respectively. Both scenarios project approximately 400 acres needed for new schools and 260 acres needed for new parks.

Non-Residential

Land demanded for non-residential uses is based upon job growth and retail sales. Again, two scenarios are used, which vary in their development intensity assumptions. Other inputs such as the number of new jobs projected and vacancy rates are held constant.

Land demanded for office and R&D uses is projected to range from around 115 to 150 acres. Land demanded for retail and business commercial uses is projected to range from around 130 to 310 acres, and land for manufacturing and warehousing uses is projected to range from 420 to 630 acres. Altogether, demand for non-residential land ranges from 670 to 1,100 acres.

Supply versus Demand

Finally, acreage estimates of land demanded are compared to the supply of available land in order to understand the extent to which Visalia will need to physically grow and designate land in order to accommodate projected growth. The purpose of this exercise is not to predict precisely the type and amount of development that will occur over the next 20 years. Rather, the analysis helps evaluate the adequacy of the currently defined UDB, and the existing General Plan designations,

² The density and housing mix assumptions for the “compact mix” scenario, while higher than the “current trend” scenario, are not as dense as those proposed in the Southeast Area Specific Plan.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF LAND SUPPLY VERSUS URBAN LAND DEMAND (ACRES)

	Gross Acres Available in UDB ¹	Gross Acres Demanded		Remainder Needed	
		Current Trend	Compact Mix	Current Trend	Compact Mix
Residential					
Low Density	4,262	4,987	3,357	725	(905)
Medium & High Density	440	416	520	(24)	80
Schools ²	442	392	392	(50)	(50)
Parks	140	262	262	122	122
TOTAL RESIDENTIAL	5,284	6,057	4,531	847	202
Non-Residential					
Office/R&D ³	236	151	114	(85)	(123)
Retail/Commercial ⁴	717	311	133	(406)	(584)
Warehousing/Industrial ⁵	1,391	630	420	(761)	(971)
TOTAL NON-RESIDENTIAL	2,345	1,092	667	0	0

1. This supply versus demand analysis only compares land demanded to supply available in the current UDB. An additional 22 acres of Low Density Residential, 25 acres of Service Commercial, 288 acres of Park and Conservation area, and 611 acres of Heavy Industry Reserve are currently designated in the Urban Reserve and West 198 Corridor areas, in total.

2. Gross Acres Available for schools includes all land designated for Public/Institutional uses. While schools fall into this category, there may be other uses that require this land use designation as well.

3. General Plan designations for the "Office/R&D" category include Professional and Administrative Office and Business Research Park.

4. General Plan designations for the "Retail/Commercial" category include Convenience Commercial, Neighborhood Commercial, Community Commercial, Regional Retail Commercial, Highway Commercial, Service Commercial, Shopping/Office Commercial, and Central Business District.

5. General Plan designations for the "Warehousing/Industrial" category include Light Industry and Heavy Industry.

Source: Dyett & Bhatia, 2010

as guides for the future growth that projections deem likely to occur. The actual form, intensity, and location of new growth will be considered in depth throughout the Alternate Sketch Plans and throughout the General Plan update process, and ultimately determined by the policies written for the new General Plan.

Table 2 summarizes the comparison of available developable land to acres demanded under both the “current trends” and the “compact mix” scenarios. The table shows that the supply of land within Visalia’s current UDB that has appropriate General Plan land use designations is largely sufficient to meet the urban land demand needs over the next 20 years.

Housing Units and Square Footage Comparison

- **Residential:** The 20-year demand is for 28,300 new housing units. Land within the current UDB with residential land use designations could provide around 35,900 new housing units, more than enough total housing units to meet the needs of the future population. However, desired housing types, densities, mix, and location will ultimately determine whether the available land is appropriately allocated.
- **Non-Residential:** Employment growth over the next 20 years indicates demand for a total of 7.9 to 10.9 million square feet across all sectors. Land within the UDB with non-residential General Plan land use designations could support development of over 23 million square feet of non-residential uses, more than double the amount needed. This means that Visalia is well-equipped to supply its future employment growth needs, and may be able to reallocate some land towards residential or mixed uses as necessary. Again, the development and evaluation of alternatives will explore these options further.

Issues and Planning Implications

Evaluating the balance of urban land supply (development potential under current General Plan land use designations) and urban land demand (the amount of land needed to support 2030 population and job growth based on projections) forms the baseline conditions for the Alternative Sketch Plans, the next major phase of the General Plan update process.

Emerging Themes

The following themes and conclusions emerged from this analysis:

- **Visalia is well-positioned to accommodate future growth.** The comparison of land supply to land demand is favorable and well-balanced, meaning that the City will be able to explore numerous options for accommodating future population and employment growth without sacrificing other goals and priorities. Depending on the type and density of residential development, some land may need to be reallocated from the land inventory for non-residential development in order to accommodate all of the new housing that will be required. However, a more than sufficient supply of non-residential land provides opportunity for flexibility, and the alternatives can look at re-designating and/or allowing mixed use, where appropriate.
- **Recognize the value of compact development.** Compact development will play a role in serving the housing needs of Visalia’s future population, as well as help accomplish the City’s environmental conservation goals by requiring fewer resources and converting less farmland and the City’s fiscal goal of maximizing use of existing infrastructure through infill development. However, moving forward, the General Plan must find a supportable degree of compact development that still has public buy-in and does not fight the real estate market.

Planning Implications

The major “takeaway” from the land demand and development potential analysis is that the current Urban Development Boundary (UDB) is essentially still adequate as a boundary for future growth, although minor adjustments may be appropriate. Because the UDB is likely still a valid long-term urban “edge,” the City will have greater flexibility regarding the future use and designation of land along the West 198 corridor and in the Urban Reserve (as these areas will not be required to be used to accommodate imminent growth). The Alternative Sketch Plans will analyze land use type and location options that span the range of growth scenarios, from “current trend” to “compact mix” or a “neighborhood center” concept. This next stage of the planning process will go into more detail on precise density and location options for new growth, as well as the characteristics of new neighborhood centers, open space linkages, and community amenities.

6 TRANSPORTATION



The current transportation facilities and circulation system in Visalia are described in the context of a regional setting and existing traffic service levels, including daily and peak hour traffic volumes. Existing pedestrian facilities and bicycle routes also are discussed, and Visalia’s local transit facilities and linkages to regional transit routes are identified. Finally, rail and air transportation access is addressed.

Streets and Highways

Visalia’s circulation system includes freeways, expressways, arterials, collectors, and local streets. The city’s roadways were evaluated using average daily traffic (ADT) counts for the 2008 to 2010 period. Intersections were evaluated for the AM and PM peak-hour using 2010 peak-hour turning movement counts. Traffic conditions and deficien-

cies were identified by calculating the level-of-service (LOS), a measure of traffic operating conditions, whereby a letter grade “A” through “F” is assigned to an intersection or roadway segment. The existing General Plan establishes LOS “D” as the minimum acceptable LOS standard on city facilities.

Overall, the city’s automobile circulation system operates very well. All of the 25 intersections evaluated were shown to operate acceptably based upon data collected and the City’s LOS standard. The same was true of the roadway segments evaluated, with the exception of one: Mineral King Avenue between Main Street and Lovers Lane (operating at LOS E).

Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation

The city's flat topography is ideal for bicycle and pedestrian travel. Besides standard sidewalks that have been developed in residential and non-residential areas, several bike/pedestrian facilities are found throughout the city, including multi-use trails along St. Johns Parkway, Mill Creek, Goshen Avenue, and several other roadways. The Waterways and Trails Master Plan outlines additional proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities, emphasizing connectivity along the city's waterways and between popular destinations. Challenges to bicycle and pedestrian circulation in Visalia include the hot summer climate as well as roadways that are auto-dominated and have limited connecting facilities for bicycles.

Public Transportation

The City of Visalia has a variety of public transportation options including fixed route service and demand-responsive systems as well as local and regional systems, allowing residents to travel between neighborhoods, major shopping centers, schools, and work sites. Transit systems include:

Visalia Transit (VT), formerly Visalia City Coach: local fixed route system

- Dial-A-Ride Visalia: para-transit service
- Visalia Towne Trolley: local fixed route trolley bus
- Sequoia Shuttle: bus service to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
- Tulare County Area Transit (TCaT): fixed route system between County communities

- Kings Area Rural Transit (KART): fixed route system connecting Visalia to communities in neighboring Kings County

Rail and Air Facilities

The Union Pacific, Burlington Northern & Santa Fe, and San Joaquin Valley Railroad provide freight service for Visalia, connecting it with major markets within California (San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, and Los Angeles) and other destinations. Passenger rail service (six round trips daily) in the county is provided by AMTRAK on its San Joaquin service, with the nearest rail station facility located in Hanford (Kings County). AMTRAK provides twice-daily bus connections to and from Visalia and Goshen Junction to the Hanford station. Additionally, the California High Speed Rail Authority is currently in the process of developing a high-speed rail system that would provide passenger transportation and goods movement services throughout much of California. The nearest station to Visalia is proposed to be in Hanford, 20 miles west.

Visalia owns and operates the Visalia Municipal Airport (VIS). The airport provides commuter airline and general aviation services, with daily service to Ontario (ONT) provided by Great Lakes Airlines. Two charter service operators are also located at the airport.

Issues and Planning Implications

Visalia has a generally well-functioning circulation system, moving people and vehicles quickly and efficiently through and around the city. The challenge for this General Plan Update will be to improve conditions for cross-town circulation as well as for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, while still maintaining the functionality of the existing auto-oriented transportation system. While Visalia has made

many positive strides towards improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities, especially Downtown, more can be done. The City must also consider how, in the long term, it wishes to create stronger connections to regional locations (possibly through light rail) and statewide transportation systems (such as high speed rail) and what might be done to make the airport a more viable regional facility.

Emerging Themes

The following themes, identified in the existing conditions research and through public participation, will guide the transportation component of the General Plan Update:

- **Create “Complete Streets.”** Complete streets are those that adequately serve and support all modes of transportation, from pedestrians and cyclists to automobiles and transit. Currently, a number of Visalia’s roads function well for cars to the detriment of other modes of travel. Especially in residential and small shopping areas, well-functioning complete streets can vastly improve all users’ experiences.
- **Address deficiencies in citywide circulation.** At the citywide scale, certain improvements can be made to fill in gaps, and provide better synchronization of traffic flow. These types of improvements are high priorities for residents, business owners, and the community leaders interviewed. Maintaining smooth and functional citywide circulation will be especially important as new growth areas are added to the city.
- **Support regional links.** A successful transportation system not only moves people locally, but regionally and beyond as well. Visalia has infrastructure and systems in place for robust regional transportation: the municipal airport, rail lines, regional transit links, and some additional available rights of way through town; the chal-

lenge will be to take advantage of these assets and prioritize expansion efforts. Strengthening regional transportation links will also support the city’s economic position, improving its ability to attract new employers and differentiating it from nearby communities.

Planning Implications

Transportation planning in the General Plan Update will take place at multiple scales: the neighborhood, the city, and the region. At the neighborhood and district scale, the emphasis will be on increasing mode share and improving facilities. “Pedestrian priority areas” can be identified for focusing efforts on improving the experience of those walking to destinations. Citywide, planning efforts will focus on improving connections north and south, maintaining traffic flow, and seamlessly integrating new growth areas. Regionally, Visalia has the opportunity to better serve residents and businesses by bolstering connections to more distant locations through a variety of modes: air, rail, and transit—but it must make use of the infrastructure that it has in place in order to do so.

7 PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES



Planning for the adequate provision of public facilities and services is a major component of the City's General Plan. We start by examining the current status of parks, open space, and recreational facilities; schools; community and social services; police, fire, and emergency services; the water and sewer system; stormwater management; and solid waste generation and disposal in Visalia. A key task for the General Plan Update will be to ensure the maintenance of high standards of service in the face of population and job growth, while doing so in an efficient and increasingly environmentally sustainable fashion.

Parks, Open Space, and Recreation

Visalia has a large network of parks and public open space, including:

- Mini-Parks (seven, totaling 6.6 acres)
- Neighborhood Parks (21, totaling 85 acres)
- Community Parks (five, totaling 55 acres)
- Regional Parks (three, totaling 389 acres)
- Linear Parks and Trails/Bikeways (Not quantified)

In addition, there are 80 acres of undeveloped regional parkland (Phase 2 of the Riverway Sports Park) as well as three general community centers and the Visalia Senior Center.

The City's park standards are 4.0 acres of city parks per 1,000 people, 3.0 acres of school sites per 1,000 people, and 0.6 acres of private open space per 1,000 people, for a total of 7.6 acres per 1,000 people overall. Currently, the City exceeds this standard, but parkland is not evenly distributed throughout the urbanized area. As described in Chapter 5, Visalia will need to add approximately 260 acres of new parkland by 2030 to maintain this standard for the projected future population. New park sites in infill areas are also needed to better serve some existing neighborhoods.

Schools

Primary and Secondary Education

Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) provides public education from Kindergarten through 12th Grade in the planning area, the communities of Goshen and Ivanhoe, and nearby rural areas. The District includes 24 elementary schools, four middle schools, and four traditional high schools. Two of the District's elementary schools are outside the planning area, but students from these outlying areas attend middle and high school in Visalia. Altogether, just over 25,000 students attend public schools in the planning area. Additionally, VUSD operates several alternative schools, including the Charter Alternatives Academy and two adult schools.

Visalia will need approximately 400 acres of new school sites to serve its projected population by 2030. This corresponds to 27 new schools: 21 elementary, three middle, and three high schools. The District currently owns eight undeveloped parcels totaling 241 acres, where five

new elementary schools, two new middle schools and a new high school are planned. Locations for planned school sites may need to be reexamined depending upon the preferred location for future housing development.

Higher Education

College of the Sequoias (COS), a division of the Community Colleges of California, provides public post-secondary education in Tulare County. Its 62-acre main campus is located on South Mooney Boulevard in Visalia. Enrollment in the fall semester of 2009 was 13,620, an increase of 3,200 students or 29 percent in ten years. The College projects that enrollment on the main Visalia campus will grow to 15,000 by 2012, 17,000 by 2020, and 20,000 by 2030, matching added educational capacity. A 100,000-square foot academic facility is planned for Tulare, to include the library, student services, lecture and computer labs, which is to become the hub for programs in automotive technology, construction technology, architecture, and agriculture.

Five private, multi-campus institutions have local facilities in Visalia: University of Phoenix, Brandman University, Fresno Pacific University, San Joaquin Valley College, and the Milan Institute.

Many members of community cited increasing access to higher education as a top priority for Visalia that General Plan should address. The Alternative Sketch Plans will consider where a site for a new four-year college or university may be feasible.

Community and Social Services

Community and social services in Visalia, which include child and family support, youth engagement, housing assistance, employment assistance, health care, and emergency food and shelter are administered by a number of Tulare County agencies, City departments, and

nonprofit service providers. Short descriptions of some of these areas of care are described here.

- **Child Care:** Six Child Development Centers in Visalia operated by Tulare County Office of Education follow national Head Start performance standards. However, the Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency estimates that approximately 16 percent of the total need for subsidized child care is not being met.
- **Family Support:** First 5 Tulare County receives approximately \$6 million annually to create and support programs for child health and development and family support. Family Services of Tulare County also provides services to victims of domestic violence and child abuse.
- **Youth Engagement:** Key providers of youth enrichment programs include VUSD, YMCA of Visalia, the Boys & Girls Club, and Tulare County Community Services & Employment Training (CSET). Programs involve academic enrichment, recreation, leadership training, community service, and counseling.
- **Employment Assistance:** Tulare County is responsible for administering California's CalWORKs program, which provides cash aid to eligible families with children, while assisting in job placement. The Job Opportunities for Young Adults program specifically targets youth at risk of gang activity.
- **Housing Assistance:** The Housing Authority of Tulare County provides housing to income-qualified families in the County, either in public housing, affiliated affordable housing, or with Section 8 vouchers for private housing. The Housing Authority manages five properties in Visalia, with a total of 114 units. Four affordable housing properties managed by others have another 197 units. Housing assistance programs also include homebuyers'

assistance, weatherization, neighborhood stabilization, and code enforcement. The City also works with the Continuum of Care to survey and serve the homeless population.

- **Health Care Services:** Kaweah Delta Health Care District (KDHCD) is the primary provider of medical services in the planning area. KDHCD's outreach programs include public awareness and support for good management of Type 2 diabetes; outreach to frequent Emergency Department users, and an annual dental clinic at an elementary school. Numerous other nonprofit health service providers serve the community as well, offering clinics, mental health services, and obesity prevention.
- **Food Assistance:** Organizations involved in food assistance include Food Link for Tulare County, the Visalia Emergency Aid Council, Visalia Rescue Mission, and the Good News Center.

Police and Fire Services

Police Services

The Visalia Police Department (VPD) recorded 6,849 serious crimes in 2009, down 10 percent from 2008. The Department has 143 sworn officers working out of two districts, as well as seven reserve sworn officers, 64 civilian officers, and 65 volunteers. The Department reports that its response times in 2008 were under 15 minutes for 85 percent of all calls, and the average response time for Priority 1 calls was 4.2 minutes.

Fire Services

The Visalia Fire Department (VFD) handles emergency and fire calls in the City. In 2008, the Department responded to over 10,000 alarms and calls, the majority of which (94 percent) was not fire-related. VFD

has 66 uniformed and three non-uniformed personnel, with at least 19 on duty at all times. Its goal is to respond to 95 percent of calls within five minutes, including one minute of “turnout” and four minutes of driving. The Department currently has an average response time of 5 minutes 37 seconds. Additional fire stations are needed in the southwest, northeast, and southeast sections of the city.

Water and Sewer System

Potable Water

Groundwater is the primary source of drinking water within the planning area, which means Visalia’s water comes from large, underground aquifers, rather than rivers, lakes, or reservoirs. The groundwater supply is distributed by California Water Service Company (Cal Water). Cal Water’s Visalia District wells extract groundwater from the Kaweah Groundwater Sub-basin. The quality of the groundwater that underlies the City is excellent for domestic and agricultural uses, but several wells have become contaminated with constituents such as nitrate, volatile organic compounds, and MTBE from gasoline, resulting in the wells’ closure.

While the current Urban Water Management Plan indicates that groundwater will continue to supply Visalia’s water for the foreseeable future, the groundwater basin from which the City draws is in a long-term overdraft condition (meaning that annual withdrawal exceeds recharge). As population continues to grow, and farming practices continue at the current rate, groundwater levels will decline unless recharge is increased. Additionally, reductions in available surface water supplies to the region have occurred as a result of settlement of the flow and fishery issues involving the San Joaquin River and the Friant Division of the Central Valley Project. As irrigation surface water supplies shrink in the surrounding farming areas, irriga-

tion practices will become more dependent on groundwater pumping. Groundwater levels in Visalia and the surrounding areas in all directions are expected to be affected negatively.

A factor that will encourage conservation and potentially reduce water demand for the area is a new State law requiring a 20 percent reduction in urban per capita water use in California by December 31, 2020. In addition to offering numerous conservation programs for urban customers, Cal Water is in the process of converting its non-metered flat rate customers to metered service connections. Cal Water has also expressed interest in partnering with the City in establishing a reclaimed water system. Future phases of the recycled water system could greatly expand the use of recycled water and directly affect reductions in groundwater pumping for irrigation of landscaping.

Sewer Collection and Wastewater Treatment

The City owns and operates a Water Conservation Plant (WCP), located west of Highway 99 and south of Highway 198. Presently, the WCP’s permitted capacity established by the Regional Water Quality Control Board is 20 million gallons per day. As of the beginning of 2010, the plant operates at an average daily flow of 13 million gallons per day with effluent treated to a secondary treatment level, disinfected, then discharged into Mill Creek and/or stored in basins owned by the City.

The City’s Sewer System Master Plan was completed in 1994. The city-wide system was divided into eight service areas based on proposed and existing sewer trunk lines. The proposed improvements in the Master Plan were also divided according to three growth rings established for the 2020 General Plan. Anticipated issues that will need to be addressed in this General Plan Update include the need to analyze and upgrade the Sewer System Master Plan to accommodate higher

development densities within existing areas. Also, additional water conservation measures will likely cause reductions in average daily flows to the WCP. This will help delay the need for future expansions of the Plant and give the City potentially more flexibility in determining the types of development it deems appropriate.

Stormwater Management

Visalia's stormwater management system takes street and lot drainage into a storm drain pipeline system that is directed generally by gravity and augmented with lift pumps toward the main drain system. The system relies on detention basins and several retention basins to slow and divert storm water from larger storms, allowing the creeks and ditches to convey storm water both during and after a storm and permitting the existing creek and ditch system to handle larger storms than would otherwise be the case. Currently, the system is designed to manage stormwater from city buildout to the 2020 urban development boundary.

Stormwater is also used to help recharge the groundwater basin. The City, in conjunction with Kaweah Delta Conservation District, has begun using the City's existing storm water basins as surface water layoff basins for groundwater recharge.

Over time, storm water treatment measures will become more important. Low Impact Design measures are already being proposed in some areas of the city, and this will likely be replicated to some degree throughout the city with increased demand for higher quality storm water discharge and the need to reduce storm water impacts with higher density development.

Solid Waste Generation and Disposal

Regionally, the Tulare County Resource Management Agency manages solid waste disposal in accordance with the Tulare County Integrated Waste Management Plan. Programs include household hazardous waste disposal, electronics recycling, tire recovery, yard waste recycling, metal recycling and appliance recovery programs. Locally, Sunset Waste Systems provides solid waste collection and recyclable material processing services to several municipalities and commercial enterprises located throughout Fresno, Kern, Tulare and Kings counties, including the City of Visalia.

The City provides split containers for trash and recycling. In 2006, the Consolidated Waste Management Authority serving Visalia recorded a diversion rate of 54 percent. Recent figures from the Visalia Solid Waste Division suggest the city-only diversion rate is lower than for the CWMA service area as a whole. In an effort to increase the diversion rate in the city, Visalia very recently inaugurated a household compost collection program. The City is hoping to achieve an additional 20 percent diversion once this program is fully and correctly implemented.

Issues and Planning Implications

The provision of adequate public facilities and services to residents and businesses is a key role that cities play, and the General Plan provides the framework for doing so. By and large, the City of Visalia has done a very good job in service provision, and has maintained fiscal stability at the same time. Residents who participated in the outreach efforts recognized the City's accomplishments and provided their opinions on what facilities and services they would like to see expanded.

Emerging Themes

For the General Plan, policies and programs will be based upon the themes identified in this research, interviews with City staff and other service providers, and public input:

- **Cure existing deficiencies.** Some public facilities and services are currently experiencing deficiencies, in funding for ongoing maintenance, failure to meet current standards, or even residents' desires and expectations. Despite having added capacity in recent years, the Visalia Unified School District still has nearly 8,600 inadequately housed students per State standards. Similarly, new parks have been developed and are extremely popular amongst residents, but some older neighborhoods are underserved and still lack adequate access to neighborhood park facilities.
- **Meet future needs.** New residents and businesses will put increased demand on all public facilities and services, from schools and parks to sewer capacity. New facilities, such as police substations and fire stations, will likely be needed; their locations must be coordinated with the location and intensity of new growth. Existing service standards should be analyzed and revised, if necessary. In some cases, such as potable water provision, concerted efforts must be made at a system-wide level to ensure the continued availability of resources over the next 20 years.
- **Emphasize conservation, reuse, and recycling.** In Visalia, environmental stewardship and conservation are important to residents. With this in mind, Visalia's new General Plan will need to take an integrated approach to achieving sustainability goals, of which efficient provision of services and use of resources will be an important part.

- **Partner with providers to ensure high quality and efficient service.** The City already has several successful partnerships with other agencies and external service providers, such as the School District, that enable it to share resources and efficiently provide for its residents. Over the next 20 years, the City should maintain and expand these working relationships and look for new opportunities to work with other agencies such as Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District, Cal Water and the County in ways that support the City's planning goals.

Planning Implications

For public facilities and services, the General Plan Update will seek to address existing deficiencies, identify the service needs of new residential and employment growth, and provide these services in the most efficient, environmentally sound, and economical way possible. Beyond merely identifying needs and setting standards, the plan will also outline strategies for implementation, so that the City's fiscal stability is maintained, and costs are spread amongst users, developers, and the City itself.

8 ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND HAZARDS



Environmental resources and hazards in Visalia include biological resources; agriculture; air quality; greenhouse gases and climate change; water quality, surface hydrology, and flooding; fire hazards; noise; and hazardous materials. The General Plan Update considers natural resource management concurrently with other aspects of planning and growth management to ensure that the quality of the City's natural environment is maintained or improved for future generations.

Air Quality

The city is located near the southern end of San Joaquin Valley Air Basin, which is under the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (Valley Air). The topographic features of the air basin affect pollutant concentrations and dispersion of pollutants into and out of the basin; the area's geographic and meteorologi-

cal characteristics make the basin highly susceptible to pollutant accumulation over time.

The only air quality monitoring station located in the planning area is the Visalia monitoring station, which monitors for NO₂, ozone, and particulates (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}). During the 5-year monitoring period for which complete monitoring data are available, Visalia exhibited violations of the following standards:

- 1-hour ozone (State standards);
- 8-hour ozone (State and federal standards);
- PM₁₀ (State particulate standards); and
- PM_{2.5} (Federal particulate standards).

Visalia is home to many industries, processes, and actions that generate emissions of criteria pollutants. The Air Resources Board compiles an emissions inventory for all sources of emissions within Tulare County. This inventory is used by Valley Air and ARB for regional air quality planning purposes and is the basis for the region's air quality plans. City emissions are estimated to be 23 percent of the total Tulare County emissions.

Biological Resources

The planning area is located in the center of the Central Valley in the western part of Tulare County. Several rivers and creeks flowing from the Sierra Nevada Mountains have created a watershed landscape within the city. The city was historically dominated by oak forest and emergent and riparian wetlands. Today, much of the original forest is gone, but scattered valley oaks still exist in and around the city and along watercourses creating riparian corridors with other riparian trees. Areas of pristine valley oak woodland and valley oak riparian woodland still exist.

The dominant land use within the planning area is developed urban, associated with annual grassland, valley oak woodland, wetlands (valley oak riparian woodland, freshwater marsh, seasonal wetland, and vernal pool), open water, drainages, and agriculture. Of these, valley oak woodland, wetlands, open water, and drainages are considered sensitive natural communities.

Special-status species are plants and animals that are legally protected under state and federal Endangered Species Acts or other regulations, and species that are considered sufficiently rare by the scientific community to qualify for such listing. Four special-status plant species and 15 special-status animal species have the potential to occur in the planning area. Policies to protect these species and enhance any

remaining natural resources would be ecologically beneficial to the region and aesthetically beneficial to the city.

Agriculture

Farmland is the most prominent land use in the planning area, and agriculture has been and continues to be an important contributor to Visalia's economy and character. The region contains rich soils, available water, good geography, and climatic conditions that allow farms to be highly productive. As of 2007, Tulare County was ranked second in the U.S. in terms of its total value of agricultural production, closely behind Fresno County.

The majority of land encircling the urbanized area of Visalia is categorized as Prime Farmland (the most valuable category according to the California Department of Conservation). To the far northwest there is a band of land classified as Farmland of Statewide Importance. Many parcels immediately adjacent to urbanized Visalia are included in the Farmland of Local Importance category.

Currently, 511 parcels in the planning area, totaling 25,724 acres (65 percent of the total agricultural acreage in the planning area) are under Williamson Act contracts. Farmers with land under Williamson Act contracts agree not to develop their land for 10 years, and in exchange, they are taxed according to the land's farm income-producing value, as opposed to its "highest and best use." Of these, 65 parcels, totaling 2,417 acres, are in non-renewal, meaning that at the end of their 10-year period, they will not renew their contracts. Most of the parcels whose contracts are not renewing are located just north of the city limits, near the Highway 99/198 interchange, in the West 198 Corridor area, and adjacent to the city boundary on the southeast. The non-renewal status is likely due to landowners' anticipation of forthcoming residential and commercial development in these areas.

Geological Hazards

The planning area is in a geologic basin bounded by the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains to the east and the Coast Ranges to the west, and filled with deep layers of sediment from the Sierra Nevada. The St. Johns River flows through the northeastern portion of the planning area, along with smaller streams and canals; these form alluvial fans. The area is basically flat, lying at an elevation of 330 feet above sea level.

Soils

Surface soils exhibit various characteristics dependent on location, slope, parent rock, climate, and drainage. Some soils have the potential to present moderate geologic hazards to building, due to their susceptibility to erosion or to expansion and contraction. Excessive soil erosion can eventually damage building foundations and roadways. Most surface soils in the planning area have moderate potential for erosion by water; in some areas, the erosion potential is considered low to moderate, depending on soil depth.

Expansive soils create a shrink-swell hazard, expanding in volume when water is absorbed and shrinking as the soil dries. Four of the planning area's soil types are considered to have a moderate shrink-swell potential. These soils underlie about 2,480 acres and are located on the western edge of the planning area near the Highway 99/198 interchange, north of the St. Johns River, and in the northwest near the intersection of Road 80 and Avenue 328.

Soils also vary in terms of how quickly they carry water downward from the surface. Development on poorly-drained soils (soils with high water infiltration rates) is likely to require a greater degree of stormwater management. Drainage may be a more important consideration in site planning, and more land may need to be set aside

for drainage facilities. Most soils in the planning area are considered well-drained or moderately well-drained. The Grangeville sandy loam, which underlies about 26 percent of the planning area, especially along the St. Johns River and Packwood and Cameron creeks, is classified as "somewhat poorly drained."

Seismic Hazards

The planning area is in a seismically stable region of the State. While the southern San Joaquin Valley contains some small faults, the closest of these are 30 miles away, and none are known to be active. The primary seismic risk in the area is the potential for ground shaking caused by earthquakes along the San Andreas fault to the west or the Owens Valley fault to the east. Because the planning area is a considerable distance from major faults, these ground shaking hazards are considered low.

Greenhouse Gases

Background

Global climate change (GCC) is currently one of the most important and widely debated scientific, economic, and political issues in the United States. GCC refers to a change in the average climate of the earth that may be measured by wind patterns, storms, precipitation, and temperature. The rate of temperature change has typically been incremental, with warming and cooling occurring over the course of thousands of years. In the past 10,000 years the earth has experienced incremental warming as glaciers retreated across the globe. However, scientists have observed an unprecedented increase in the rate of warming over the past 150 years, roughly coinciding with the global industrial revolution.

Although GCC is now generally accepted as a concept, the extent and speed of change to be expected, and the exact contribution from human sources, remains in debate. Nonetheless, the world's leading climate scientists, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have reached consensus that global climate change is "very likely" caused by humans, and that hotter temperatures and rising sea levels will continue for centuries no matter how much humans control their future emissions.

Visalia's Existing Conditions and Climate Change Initiatives

An inventory of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Visalia in 2000 indicates that emissions by sector are: commercial and industrial uses, 49 percent; transportation, 30 percent; residential uses, 20 percent; solid waste, 1 percent; and other uses (primarily propane consumption), less than 1 percent. Based on this inventory and projected growth rates, the City's Preliminary Climate Action Plan includes an estimated "business-as-usual" emission forecast. If no additional efforts are made, the GHG emissions could increase more than 2.6 million tons or approximately 16 tons per person. This would represent 131 percent growth in community emissions, or more than double the rate of population growth.

In January 2007, Visalia's Mayor signed the "Cool Cities" pledge, part of the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. By signing this pledge, the City adopted the goal of reducing citywide emissions to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. In 2008, the City also became a partner in the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization (SJV-CEO), non-profit serving the eight-county region.

The City is also a member of the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) campaign sponsored by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. The CCP campaign is a global coalition of local governments working to reduce greenhouse gases at the community level.

Documented in the City's preliminary Climate Action Plan are measures that the City has implemented since 2002 that have reduced GHG emissions. These measures have the potential to reduce future emissions by almost 42,000 metric tons, which is not sufficient to meet GHG reduction goals.

Surface Hydrology, Water Quality, and Flooding

The planning area is located on relatively level terrain typical of the Tulare Lake Basin. However, Visalia does rest in the heart of the Kaweah River's Delta system, so many rivers and creeks flow through the city. Surface runoff generally flows from east to west and terminates in the Tulare Lake Basin. Major surface water resources in the area include St. Johns River, Modoc Ditch, Mill Creek Ditch, Mill Creek, Tulare Irrigation District (TID) Canal, Packwood Creek, Cameron Creek, Deep Creek, Evans Creek, Persian Ditch, and some other local waterways. Except for the TID Canal, most watercourses are intermittent drainages that receive a significant portion of flow from storm water runoff during the rainy season. This intermittent flow is typically supplemented from water released from the Terminus Dam. When drier conditions return in the spring, groundwater generally provides base flow for a portion of the summer.

Visalia experienced several major floods in 1950, 1955, 1966 and 1969. The City's waterways have historically been used for flood control, storm water conveyance, riparian and recreational uses. In addition, the City maintains parks and detention ponds that serve to detain storm water runoff when significant storm events occur.

In June 2009, FEMA updated the Flood Insurance Rate Map panels for Visalia to reflect the infrastructure improvements made to capture and convey storm water within the city. Most of the city is located in defined as areas of moderate to low risk of flooding. However, some

areas along the creeks and drainages are within Zone A and Zone AE, which are high risk areas prone to flooding from a 100-year storm event. Some of these areas along Mill Creek and St. Johns River are urbanized and would be affected by flooding if the 100-year event were to occur.

Fire Hazards

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) maps areas of significant fire hazards in the state. These areas are identified based on weather, terrain, fuels (e.g. type of ground vegetation), and other factors. The CDF designates land as State or Local Responsibility Areas (SRA and LRA), based on population density, land use, and land ownership. CDF has legal responsibility for SRA land and local jurisdictions have responsibility for LRA land. LRA land generally includes densely populated urban areas and agricultural land. The planning area is classified as LRA, meaning that the City and County are responsible for incorporated and unincorporated areas, respectively.

Fire risk is considered low for the great majority of the planning area. The threat of wildland fires is very small because of the area's flat topography and relative absence of grassland, forest, and brush. The threat of urban fires is also low due to the generally good condition of the building stock and the ability of the City's Fire Department to provide adequate service. Three very small portions of the Planning area are classified by CDF as having moderate fire hazards. These are adjacent to silos and above-ground tanks north of Goshen; a landscaped corridor adjacent to large industrial facilities along Plaza Drive; and a section along Highway 99.

Hazardous Materials and Sites

Sites where hazardous chemical compounds have been released into the environment can pose health threats. Historic or current activities, most often associated with industrial or commercial uses (including gas stations and dry-cleaners) may result in the release, leak, or disposal of toxic substances on or below the ground surface, where they can then contaminate soil and ground water. Furthermore, disturbance of the ground through grading or excavation can result in exposure of these chemicals to the public. Improper handling of contaminated sites may result in further exposure via airborne dust, surface water runoff, or vapors.

EPA, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) have identified 42 contaminated sites in the planning area (with some sites tracked by both agencies). Most of the identified sites are either current or former dry-cleaning operations where voluntary cleanups overseen by the DTSC are underway, or leaking underground storage tank cleanup sites at current or former gas stations administered by the SWRCB. There is one federal Superfund site in the planning area, as well as four sites which have been subject to State Response. A handful of other sites are being handled by the SWRCB as Cleanup Program Sites.

Noise

The General Plan Noise Element will serve as a guide for establishing a pattern of land uses that minimizes the exposure of community residents to excessive noise. The General Plan must quantify the noise levels of sources including highways and major roads; railroad operation; airport operations and aircraft overflight; industrial areas; and

any other ground stationary noise sources identified by local agencies as contributing to the noise environment.

To establish current baseline noise conditions in the City, a three-step process was used:

- Quantifying existing noise levels from major noise sources;
- Identifying existing land uses that are sensitive to noise, including residential areas, hospitals or healthcare facilities, libraries, parks and schools; and
- Identifying conflicts between noise sources and noise-sensitive uses.

A community noise survey was conducted to document noise exposure at sites in the city containing noise sensitive land uses and for major roadways. Noise monitoring sites were selected to be representative of typical residential, commercial, or recreational areas within the city. Short-term noise monitoring was conducted at eight sites on April 15 and 16, 2010. Noise measurements from stationary sources included one manufacturing plant, three food processing plants, a crop dusting operation, and numerous parks and schools. Additional noise contours and measurements were developed for:

- **Roadways:** Traffic noise levels for major roadways were calculated for based on traffic volumes, percentage of trucks, and Federal Highway Administration methodology in order to develop baseline noise contours.
- **Railroad:** Railroad activity in the City occurs along two railroad lines: the Union Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe. Because the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad is used so infrequently, only noise from the Union Pacific Railroad was quantified.

- **Airport:** Noise from operations at the Municipal Airport was analyzed in the 2004 *Airport Master Plan*. The Master Plan developed noise-level contours for 20-year projected average daily airport activity levels. This scenario will be used in developing and evaluating land use proposals for the airport environs to ensure conflicts do not arise that would affect future airport operations.

Issues and Planning Implications

Visalia's natural resources are an important community asset and provide the City with a unique identity. Features such as the river, creeks, Valley Oak trees, and the nearby Sierra Nevada range were frequently cited as some of the city's most important qualities by the public. Moreover, environmental resources and hazards have important ties to public health. Their recognition and appropriate management are critical components of the General Plan Update.

Emerging Themes

The following themes emerged from the existing conditions research and feedback from public outreach efforts.

- **Recognize and protect resources.** Many members of the public quickly identified Visalia's natural resources as important assets and key contributors to the city's high quality of life as well as a potential draw for tourism and convention center business. Conservation and stewardship of these resources was a clear theme throughout the initial public outreach process. Care and protection of the environment extends to both the more tangible aspects—trees, creeks—to the more intangible, such as air and water quality and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Avoid hazards.** Visalia is at a relatively low risk for many natural hazards that threaten other communities in California, such as

earthquakes and wildfires. However, certain natural conditions do pose risks to the city and must be dealt with from both physical planning and policy perspectives. These include, for example, flooding, contaminated sites, and health risks associated with poor air quality.

- **Minimize impacts.** Certain environmental impacts are associated with urban growth and development at any level. These include consumption of land and resources, reduction of habitat, and creation of noise. Steps can be taken in all environmental arenas to minimize the impacts associated with these consequences of development; for example, properly locating noise-sensitive receptors and promoting compact and infill development that converts a minimum of greenfields.

Planning Implications

The natural environment is as much a part of the city as its built environment, giving structure and value to the community as a whole. Residents of Visalia are keenly aware of their environmental resources and seek to conserve and protect them. The General Plan Update will comprehensively analyze and write new policies, as needed, for all natural resources and hazards, as they affect public health, economic and community vitality, and ecological functioning. A three-pronged approach that conserves resources, avoids hazards, and minimizes impacts associated with urban development will form the plan's approach to environmental issues. Additionally, a program-level Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be written simultaneously with the General Plan, ensuring that all impacts associated with the plan are accounted for, and that the plan's policies are "self-mitigating."

DYETT & BHATIA
Urban and Regional Planners

755 Sansome Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, California 94111
☎ 415 956 4300 📠 415 956 7315