



MEMORANDUM

To: Citizens Advisory Focus Group (CAFG), City of Merced
From: Matt Taecker, Senior Associate, Wallace Roberts and Todd
Date: November 3, 2025
Re: Downtown Station Area Plan (DSAP) – Project Overview
cc: Frank Quintero, Jonnie Lan, Leah Brown, City of Merced
Mintier-Harnish and DSAP Consultant Team Members

The Downtown Station Area Plan (DSAP) Project

“Area plans” are comprehensive planning documents for smaller areas or neighborhoods. Based on a community’s vision for an area, area plans establish goals and policies that address a variety of issues, such as economic development, land use, transportation, parking, recreation, infrastructure, placemaking, and more. Area Plans allow for street-by-street consideration of future activities, access by car and other modes of transportation, building and street design, and economic development programs. Most plans also provide a road map for implementing adopted policies.

The DSAP is intended to describe how to bring about positive change through goals, policies, programs, and public improvements. The Plan Area is in and around Merced’s historic downtown and a planned rail station with high speed rail service (HSR). The project focuses on both downtown revitalization and opportunities for new infill development, and how to enhance established residential neighborhoods in the area. The historic character of the Downtown Core will be examined and can be the basis for design-related zoning standards.

New infill development provides a way that Merced can generate more housing, add jobs, and increase patronage of commercial destinations in the area. Housing affordability can occur with new construction, and because studies have shown that households spend less money on auto-related expenses when they are near a variety of walk-to destinations and transit options. Possibilities for infill development are presented by a significant number of vacant parcels and aging commercial uses. The DSAP will also consider opportunities to increase open space amenities in the Area.

The DSAP will emphasize access to downtown and the future rail station on foot and by bus, bicycle, and other vehicles. The project will emphasize pedestrian connectivity, safety, and environments, such as how to enhance pedestrian (and bicycle) connections between South Merced and Downtown so South Merced can benefit from its proximity to downtown and the new train station. The new station will feature: HSR to LA and the Bay Area via San Jose, Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) service to the Bay Area via the Tri-Valley, and Amtrak San Joaquin service to Sacramento. In recognition of the local economic development potential of future high speed rail service, the DSAP is funded by a High Speed Rail Authority grant that stipulates project completion before the end of June 2026. The Plan will consider and recommend traffic calming and other street improvements in the Area.

The DSAP project team is comprised of consultants and City staff. Frank Quintero is the DSAP project manager for the City. The lead consultant is Wallace Roberts and Todd (WRT), which specializes in urban design, land use, street design, open space, and community engagement. Other members of the team include: The Natelson Dale Group for economics; DKS for mobility; Provost & Pritchard for infrastructure; and Urban Diversity Design for outreach to community-based organizations. The DSAP effort is integrated within Merced's General Plan Update, which is being led by Mintier Harnish, a planning firm with 40 years of experience.

Citizens Advisory Focus Group

The DSAP will be shaped by Merced's Citizens Advisory Focus Group. The CAFG will have an opportunity to take positions on DSAP issues, its process, and policies once drafted. CAFG actions will be forwarded to Merced's Planning Commission and City Council to inform decisions they may take and to give direction to the DSAP team. In addition to formal actions, the DSAP will forward a summary of comments made by individual CAFG members during meetings.

A general outline of anticipated project CAFG milestones, and their relationship to Planning Commission and City Council decision-making, include:

<u>November</u>	CAFG orientation to DSAP, community engagement to date, and CAFG member brainstorming on key issues to address.
<u>December</u>	CAFG consideration of "Framework Recommendations," a broad outline of preliminary policy recommendations.
<u>January</u>	Joint Planning Commission and City Council (PC/CC) consideration of Framework Recommendation, informed by CAFG comments and actions.
<u>February</u>	CAFG consideration of PC/CC direction regarding the Framework and draft policy options to carry it out.
<u>March</u>	Plan development.
<u>April</u>	Joint PC/CC consideration of the public review draft of the Plan.
<u>May & June</u>	Planning Commission and City Council DSAP Hearings.

The DSAP timeframe may shift in response to unanticipated needs. Note also that final adoption of the DSAP cannot occur until an Environmental Impact Report for the General Plan Update is completed and certified, but that individual measures in the DSAP measures could move forward if environmental clearance is not required, subject to City Council approval.

Materials for CAFG's November Meeting

Materials that have been provided in the CAFG's agenda packet, which are in addition to this project overview, include:

Existing Conditions and Needs Analysis. Technical assessments of DSAP considerations are provided for land use and community character, economic development, mobility, and infrastructure, along with a summary overview.

Community Workshop Notes. On October 23, community members had an opportunity to consider information and scenarios pertaining to an overall vision for the Plan Area, economic development and Downtown revitalization, land use and infill opportunities, and mobility. For each topic, a graphic presentation of pertinent conditions was provided along with hands-on exercises to understand community member preferences.

Community Survey Results. To inform DSAP decisions, individuals can complete a survey that can be found on the MGPU-DSAP website: www.imaginemerced.com. The survey will end on November 9, so that the CAFG can be provided with final results. Results as of November 3 are provided in the agenda packet.

Draft Goals. To help initiate discussion and debate, a working draft of goals are provided. The goals are a synthesis of current General Plan policies, 2007 Downtown Strategy goals, goals commonly associated with tourism business improvement districts (TBIDs), HSRA station community principles, and urban planning practices. Discussion on goals was also in the agenda packet for CAFG's previous meeting.

DSAP Visioning. Each CAFG member will have an opportunity to describe their vision for the Downtown Station Area, which might be to highlight critical issues to discuss and/or aspirational statements of what the Area can become. If time allows, general discussion can follow comments by individual members. This open ended discussion item is not accompanied by any agenda packet attachments.