



DOWNTOWN STATION AREA PLAN
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 1 SUMMARY

This memo summarizes the community input collected during the first Community Workshop hosted by City of Merced staff for the Downtown Station Area Plan effort on October 23, 2025.

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Photos from the DSAP Workshop #1

OVERVIEW

As part of the ongoing community engagement process to develop the **Merced Downtown Station Area Project**, the City of Merced and its consultants hosted a Community Workshop at the Merced Civic Center (Samuel Pipes Room) on October 23, 2025, from 6:00–8:00 p.m. The workshop focused on the draft development **Scenarios** for the Downtown Station Area Project.

Format

The workshop provided participants with opportunities to learn about both the City's General Plan and the Downtown Station Area Project. In the Civic Center lobby, attendees explored boards about the broader General Plan. In the Samuel Pipes Room, the focus shifted to the Downtown Station Area boards, which presented more detailed concepts and ideas specific to downtown, and provided more interactive opportunities.

The interactive display boards, translated into English, Spanish, and Hmong, were organized around the following themes:

- General Introduction & Welcome
- Vision
- Downtown Revitalization
- Land Use
- Mobility



Photos from the DSAP Workshop #1

Community members actively participated through several feedback methods, including:

- Writing comments on sticky notes placed directly on the boards.
- Voting with dot stickers to indicate preferred options or positions along a planning spectrum.
- Adding additional written comments on large flip charts to capture broader ideas and perspectives.

To extend participation beyond the event, attendees were provided with postcards containing QR codes linking to online surveys available in English and Spanish, as well as printed survey copies for those who preferred paper responses. The boards also included a QR code linking to the project website: <https://imaginemerced.com/>, where community members could share ongoing feedback and stay informed about project updates.

Refreshments and seating were provided, creating a welcoming environment where participants could gather, exchange ideas, and discuss the concepts demonstrated.

Community Open House #2 Key Performance Indicators

KPI	#
Approximate Attendees	60
Poster Sticky Note Comments	68
Extra Comments Written on The Flip Charts	14
Total Dot Sticker Votes	392

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT

The following paragraphs provide a high-level summary of recurring themes and key takeaways gathered from community feedback during the Merced Downtown Station Area Project Community Workshop #1. Input was collected through interactive boards, dot-voting exercises, sticky note comments, and facilitated discussions.

1. Introduction: The Downtown Station Area Project

A. Board Picture

THE DOWNTOWN STATION AREA PROJECT

EL PROYECTO DEL CENTRO DE LA CIUDAD Y LA ZONA DE LA ESTACIÓN

What's DSAP Project?

¿Qué es el Proyecto DSAP?

The Downtown Station Area Plan (DSAP) will inspire and regulate change near Merced's historic downtown and a future downtown train station with high speed rail service. The project focuses on both downtown revitalization and opportunities for new infill development, and how to enhance established residential neighborhoods in the areas. In recognition of the local economic development potential of future high speed rail service, the DSAP is funded by the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA).

El DSAP para el área de la Estación del Centro (DSAP) inspirará y regulará el cambio cerca del centro histórico de Merced y de una futura estación de tren de alta velocidad. El proyecto se centra tanto en la revitalización del centro como en las oportunidades para nuevos desarrollos de infill y en cómo mejorar las barrias residenciales establecidas en las áreas. En reconocimiento del potencial de desarrollo económico local del futuro servicio de tren de alta velocidad, el DSAP está financiado por la Autoridad de Trenes de Alta Velocidad (HSRA).

The DSAP will emphasize access to downtown and the future rail station not only by car, but also by bicycle, bus, and on foot. Relatedly, the project considers how to enhance pedestrian and bicycling connections between South Merced and downtown, and ways that South Merced can benefit from its proximity to downtown and high speed rail.

The DSAP will be discussed by Merced's Citizens Advisory Focus Group on November 10. Completion of the DSAP is expected in spring 2026.

El DSAP hará énfasis en el acceso al centro de la ciudad y a la futura estación ferroviaria, no solo en coche, sino también en bicicleta, autobús y a pie. En relación con esto, el proyecto analiza cómo mejorar las conexiones peatonales y ciclistas entre South Merced y el centro de la ciudad, así como las formas en que South Merced puede beneficiarse de su proximidad al centro y al tren de alta velocidad. El DSAP será discutido por el Grupo Consultivo de Ciudadanos del Condado de Merced el 10 de noviembre. Se espera que el DSAP esté terminado en la primavera de 2026.

Nov 2023 Aug 2024 Nov 2024 Jan 2025 Apr 2025 Jan 2026

ANALYSIS SCENARIOS PLAN FRAMEWORK PLAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING/DOWNTOWN CITY COUNCIL

City of Merced and the Plan Area

Vicinity Map of the Plan Area: The planning area is surrounded by residential neighborhoods and more of the area is within walking distance of Applegate Park.

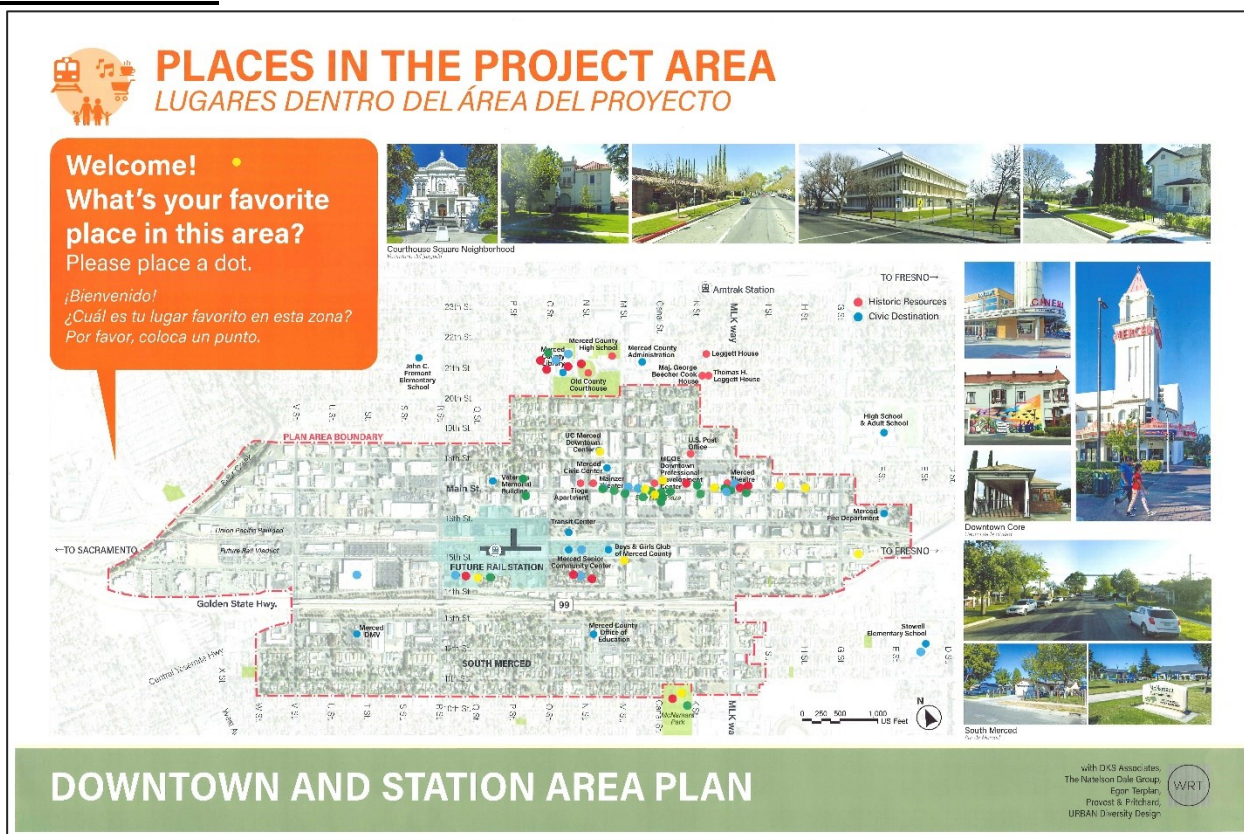
DOWNTOWN AND STATION AREA PLAN

with DKS Associates, The Natchez Group, Egan-Tarkenton, Prosser & Prosser, URBAN Diversity Design

The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #1

2. Places In The Project Area

A. Board Picture



The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #2

B. Board Summary: Favorite Places in the Plan Area

Overview:

Participants were asked to identify their favorite destinations within the Downtown Merced Plan Area by placing colored dots on the map. The results highlight strong community appreciation for the pedestrian-oriented downtown core, historic landmarks, civic destinations, and social gathering spaces across both Downtown and South Merced.

Key Takeaways:

- **Vibrant Downtown Core:** The highest concentration of dots was along Main Street, reflecting strong public attachment to the city's pedestrian-oriented Downtown Core. Popular destinations include The Tioga, Mainzer Theater, and the Merced Theatre, all serving as anchors of local culture, entertainment, and community activity.
- **Historic and Civic Heritage:** Participants expressed strong support for preserving key civic and heritage buildings, particularly the Merced County Library near Courthouse Park. These locations are valued as cultural landmarks and symbols of Merced's identity.
- **Future Rail Station Area:** The area surrounding the Future Rail Station received notable public preference, indicating high public expectation for this project and its potential to stimulate downtown revitalization.
- **Community Gathering Places:** Several dots clustered around Boys & Girls Club of Merced County, the Senior Community Center, McNamara Park, and nearby schools,

reflecting residents' appreciation for inclusive, family-oriented, and recreational spaces in Plan Area.

3. Vision for Downtown Station Area

A. Board Picture

VISION FOR DOWNTOWN STATION AREA
VISIÓN PARA LA ZONA DE LA ESTACIÓN DEL CENTRO DE LA CIUDAD

Who are we today?
 ¿Quiénes somos hoy?

Who do we want to be?
 ¿Quiénes queremos ser?

Place a dot on the vision that aligns with yours.
 Marca con un punto la visión que coincide con la tuya.

CITY HUB
 Live, shop, and gather in Merced's civic hub
 Vive, compra y reúne en el centro cívico de Merced.

CULTURAL DESTINATION
 Arts, culture, dining, and events for the North Central Valley
 Arte, cultura, gastronomía y eventos para el Norte del Valle Central.

URBAN LIVING DISTRICT
 Downtown living with walkable streets and amenities
 Vida en el centro con calles transitables y servicios

INNOVATION DISTRICT
 Jobs, education, and new opportunities connected by high-speed rail
 Empleos, educación y nuevas oportunidades conectados por tren de alta velocidad.

DOWNTOWN AND STATION AREA PLAN

with DKS Associates, The Nishan-Dale Group, Egan Tomlin, Powell & Pritchard, URBAN Diversity Design

The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #3

B. Board Summary: Vision for Downtown Station Area

Overview:

This board invited participants to imagine the future of Downtown Merced by selecting one of four potential visions for the area. The vision was illustrated with descriptions and photos of existing signature local places and events to inspire community dialogue. There are 4 options: **City Hub**, **Cultural Destination**, **Urban Living District**, and **Innovation District**. Participants were asked to vote for their one preferred vision by placing a dot beside the concept that best reflected their aspirations for Downtown's future.

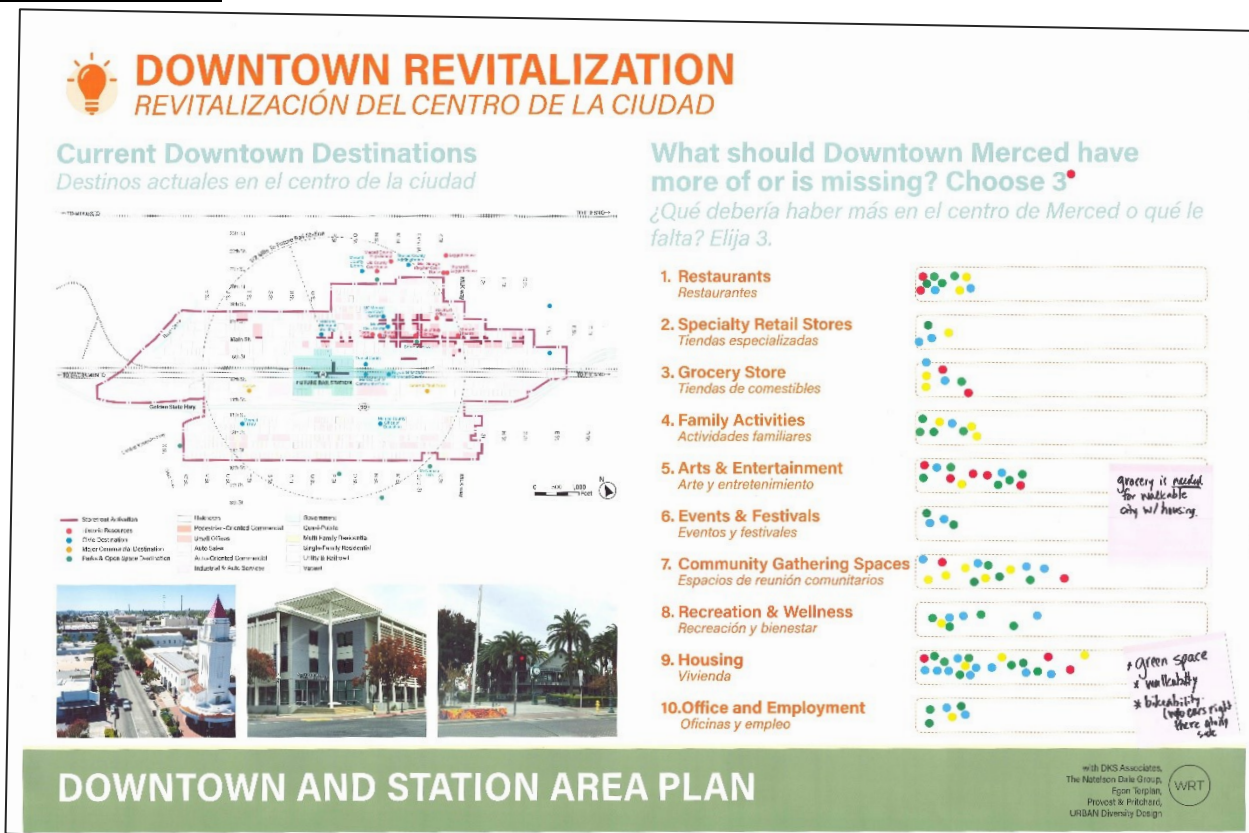
Key Takeaways:

- **Strong Interest in a Vibrant City Hub and an Urban Living District:** The City Hub and The Urban Living District visions received the highest concentrations of votes. This result indicates that most participants envisioned Merced's future Downtown Core as a lively, walkable hub that blends living, working, and gathering spaces. They supported a human-scaled, mixed-use core with housing, shops, cafés, and cultural venues that foster daily activity, accessibility, and community identity.
- **Moderate Interest in Cultural Destination and Innovation District:** While the Cultural Destination and Innovation District visions received fewer votes, participants still

appreciated their focus on arts, culture, education, employment and economic opportunity. These ideas were seen as complementary to the broader goals of creating a vibrant, inclusive, and economically resilient downtown.

4. Downtown Revitalization

A. Board Picture



The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #4

B. Board Summary: What should Downtown Merced have more or is missing?

Overview:

This board displayed the current active frontages and destinations within Downtown Merced, showing key civic, cultural, and commercial anchors around Downtown Core. Participants were invited to vote for three uses they would like to see more or introduced as part of the area's revitalization. The voting exercise revealed clear priorities from the community for future investment and activation.

Key Takeaways:

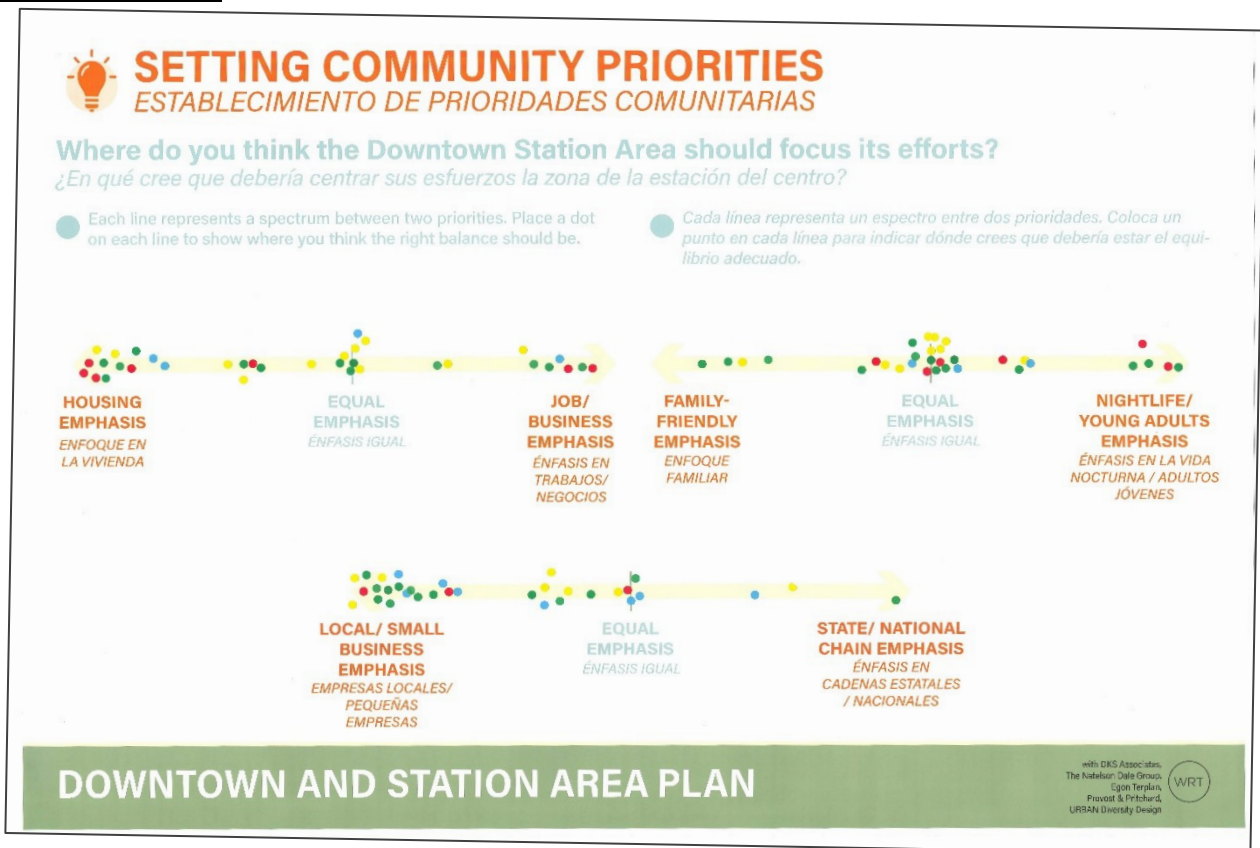
- **Strong Demand for Housing, Community Gathering Spaces, and Arts & Entertainment Spaces:** The highest number of votes on housing, community gathering spaces, and arts and entertainment reflected a shared vision for a vibrant, inclusive, and livable downtown. Because of the future station area plan, participants expressed a desire to bring more workforce housing and affordable units into the downtown area, supported by active ground-floor uses that foster daily activity and safety.
- **Moderate Interest in Food, Family, and Wellness Amenities:** Categories such as restaurants, family activities, grocery stores, and recreation and wellness spaces received

moderate votes, which suggested a strong interest in supporting day-to-day livability and local-serving amenities that make downtown more convenient and enjoyable for all ages.

- **Lower Priority for Offices and Specialty Retail:** There were fewer participants prioritized office uses, specialty retail, and large events or festivals, indicating a community preference for spaces that encourage social interaction and cultural expression over more traditional commercial or employment uses.
- **Extra Emphasis on Walkability and Green Spaces:** In addition to the listed categories, participants added comments emphasizing the importance of walkability, bikeability, and accessible open space.

5. Setting Community Priorities

A. Board Picture



The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #5

B. Board Summary: Where do you think the Downtown Station Area should focus its efforts?

Overview:

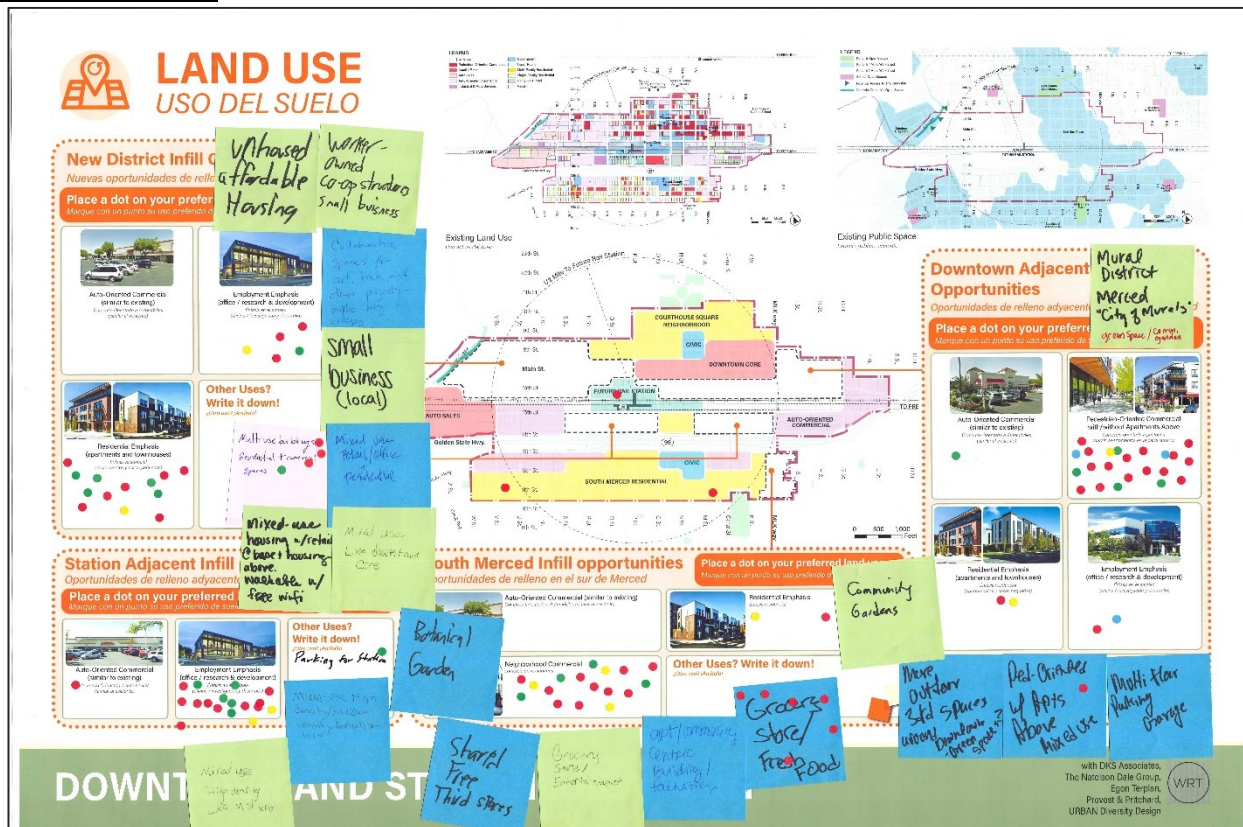
This board introduced an interactive priority spectrum, allowing participants to place dots along three scales to indicate their preferred balance of different elements for the Downtown Station Area Plan. The spectrums compared (1) **Housing vs. Job/Business emphasis**, (2) **Family-Friendly vs. Nightlife/Young Adult emphasis**, and (3) **Local/Small Business vs. State/National Chain emphasis**. This engagement method encouraged participants to reflect on trade-offs and identify where future planning efforts should concentrate.

Key Takeaways:

- **Balanced Focus Between Housing and Employment:** Most dots clustered near the center and were equally distributed on both ends, showing equal emphasis between housing and employment, with a slight tilt toward housing. This aligns with feedback from earlier boards, where participants prioritized affordable and workforce housing within a revitalized downtown core, supported by new job opportunities near the future rail station.
- **Inclusive Environment for All Ages:** Votes along the Family-Friendly vs. Nightlife spectrum were nearly evenly distributed, indicating a shared interest in creating a balanced downtown that provides activation for all age groups.
- **Strong Support for Local and Small Businesses:** The Local/Small Business vs. State/National Chain spectrum showed a clear preference for locally owned enterprises. Participants emphasized the importance of nurturing Merced's homegrown businesses and unique cultural identity.

6. Land Use

A. Board Picture



The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #6

B. Board Summary: Preferred Land Use on Future Infill Opportunities

Overview:

This board invited participants to share input on future infill opportunities across four key areas identified in the Downtown Station Area Plan: **New District**, **Station-Adjacent**, **South Merced**, and **Downtown-Adjacent**. Each subarea was illustrated with possible future development types,

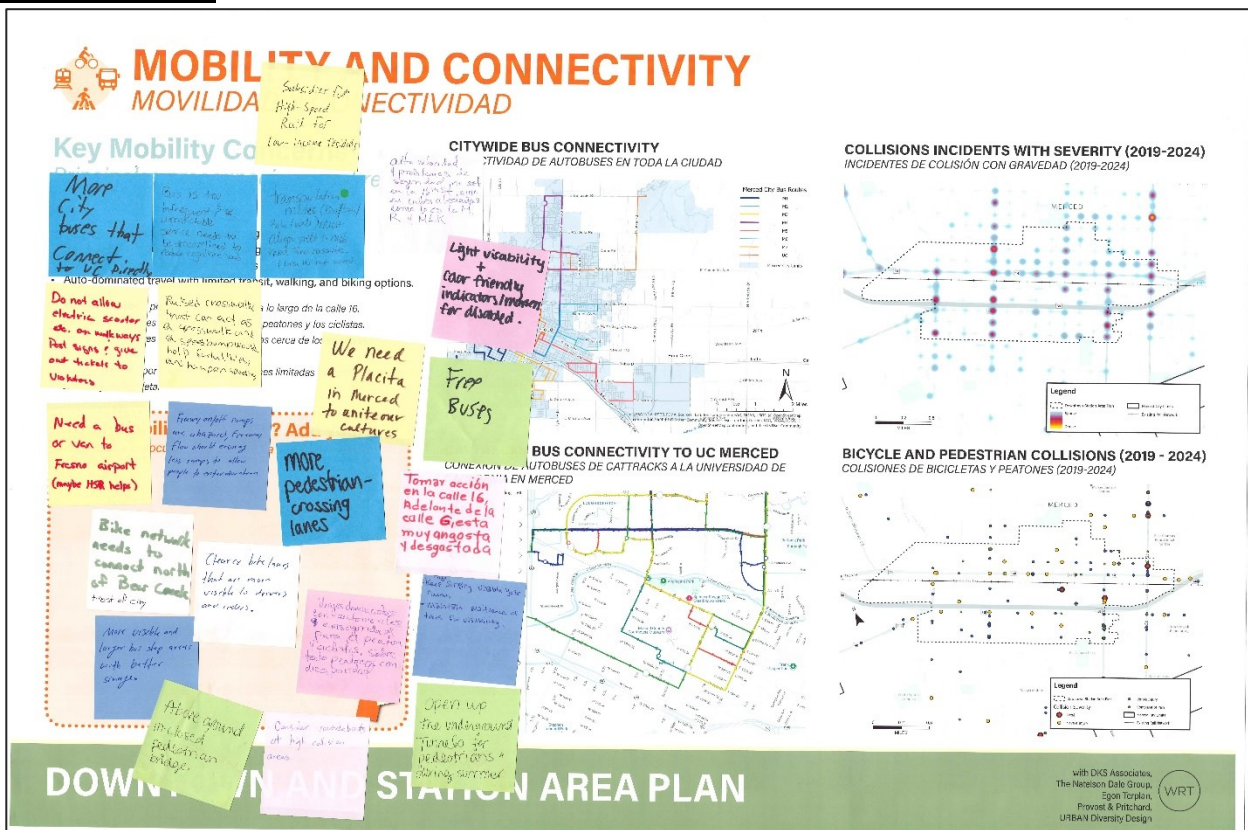
allowing participants to vote for their preferred land use options and add written comments or sticky notes suggesting additional ideas. The resulting feedback offered valuable direction for refining the city's future land use scenarios and infill development strategy.

Key Takeaways:

- **New District Infill Opportunities:** Participants showed a strong preference for residential emphasis. Community members also support mixed-use development that combines housing with community-serving retail and small local businesses. Comments also called for affordable and workforce housing, shared third spaces, and walkable neighborhoods with public amenities such as green spaces and Wi-Fi access.
- **Station-Adjacent Infill Opportunities:** Votes centered around employment emphasis, reflecting the community's recognition of the future transit hub's economic potential and a desire for more job opportunities in Merced. Participants envisioned this area as a major employment center with offices, and innovation-oriented uses that can support workforce growth while leveraging rail connectivity and transit access.
- **South Merced Infill Opportunities:** Participants favored neighborhood commercial uses that improve local access to fresh food and groceries. The emphasized the need for community-oriented amenities, including comments highlighted the need for community-oriented amenities, such as grocery stores, community gardens, and shared public spaces.
- **Downtown-Adjacent Infill Opportunities:** The pedestrian-oriented commercial option received the most votes, supported by calls for mixed-use buildings with residential units above active ground-floor retail. Participants emphasized the importance of preserving Merced's local cultural identity through arts, murals, and entertainment spaces, while enhancing walkability, bikeability, and public gathering opportunities along key corridors.

7. Mobility & Connectivity 1: Key Mobility Concerns

A. Board Picture



The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #7

B. Board Summary: Key Mobility Concerns

Overview:

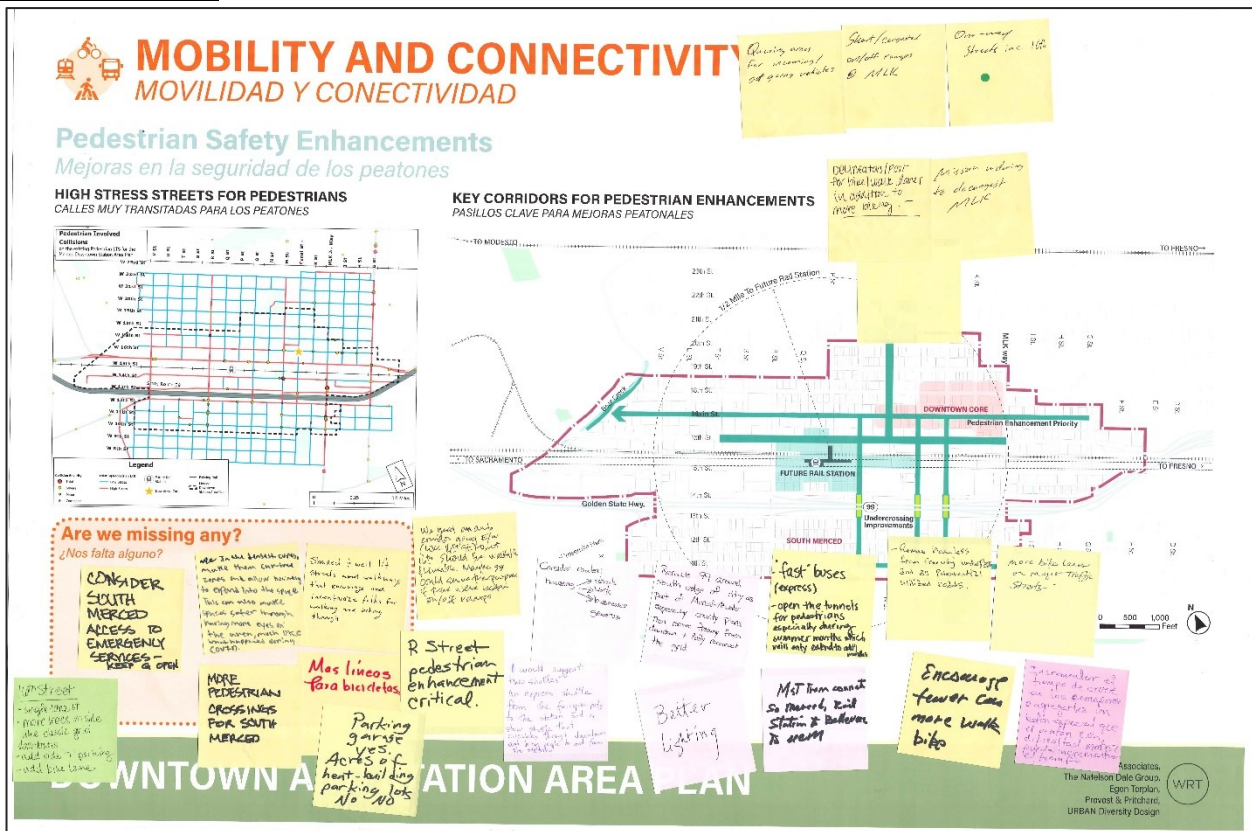
This board focused on identifying key mobility and connectivity challenges within the Downtown and Station Area. Participants reviewed existing data on bus routes, bicycle and pedestrian collisions, and connectivity to UC Merced, then provided feedback on how to improve safety, access, and circulation. Through written comments and sticky notes, community members shared ideas to enhance public transit reliability, walkability, and bicycle infrastructure, while also addressing accessibility and community cohesion.

Key Takeaways:

- **Improved Public Transit Access:** Participants emphasized the need for better citywide and regional bus connectivity, particularly more frequent and reliable service connecting Downtown Merced to UC Merced and Fresno Airport.
- **Enhanced Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety:** Many comments focused on safety improvements such as raised crosswalks, clearer bike lanes, and additional pedestrian crossings. Participants called for better lighting, visibility, and roundabouts at high-collision intersections to reduce crash risks.
- **Infrastructure for Walkability and Accessibility:** Residents highlighted the need for walkable, accessible streets, including above-ground pedestrian bridges, and sidewalk improvements. Comments also noted the importance of ADA-friendly design and car-friendly indicators for people with disabilities.

8. Mobility & Connectivity 2: Pedestrian Safety Enhancements

A. Board Picture



The Photo of The DSAP Workshop #1 Board #8

B. Board Summary: Pedestrian Safety Enhancements

Overview:

This board focused on identifying key pedestrian safety concerns and priority corridors for improvements within Downtown and South Merced. Participants reviewed maps highlighting high-stress streets and collision data and were invited to share suggestions for enhancing walkability, crossings, and lighting. The feedback revealed a strong desire for a safer, more connected pedestrian network.

Key Takeaways:

- **Enhancements along Key Corridors:** The **Main Street** corridor and **16th Street** were identified as critical for pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Suggestions included adding bike lanes, converting select streets to one-way, and implementing traffic-calming measures such as delineators and narrower lanes.
- **Focus on South Merced Connections:** Participants stressed the importance of improving pedestrian access to South Merced, particularly emergency services and community destinations. Safer, well-marked crossings, and better lighting were repeatedly mentioned as urgent needs.
- **Infrastructure and Safety Features:** Participants called for better lighting, shaded sidewalks, and clear pedestrian paths across major intersections. They highlighted highway ramps as safety hazards, recommending redesigns to slow down traffic and protect

walkers. Raised crosswalks, signage, and pedestrian signals were also suggested to improve visibility and reduce collisions.

APPENDIX

A. Additional Comments

OTHER COMMENTS ?

- Provide clear definitions for the various topics
(Ex. Small Business emphasis could mean limiting space to not encourage large chains vs. restricting national chains)
- Would like to know the trade-offs, or weaknesses/threats that would be tied to said innovation. (make clear to general public)
- Invest in better overall connection in the city, stop catering to outsiders while ignoring the plights of locals, and respect local culture and tradition when we do have to stray away.
Bike routes need to connect to rest of city
Can you add more Dog Parks?
- would like to see city & county investment in ^{worker-owned} co-ops in Community Gardens & worker-owned ~~small~~ businesses & co-op structures

Honor the agricultural land + heritage
we have in Merced. Protect it for future generations (don't build over it!)

We need ~~equitable~~ equal
distribution of manufacturing &
industrial zone in both South &
North Merced. Not just in south
with POC & low income communities.

 NO AI Data centers.

We need dedicated, quality low
income housing. The general plan
is the perfect opportunity to select
areas in every council district that
can be used for low to medium density
housing.

Don't privatize libraries!!

Bicycle transportation infrastructure for commuters
workforce housing / affordable units