

FRESNO AND THE MALL





Early sketch of Fulton Mall expressing concept of active and varied pedestrian spaces.

SHAPING A VISION

Given the urban conditions of today, the complexity of government, the complications of municipal and private finance, the intricacy of the physical framework, how does a city set out on such a task—the task of achieving a complete renewal of its central area?

First, it is necessary to shape a vision. But even before the “vision shaping” can begin, it is necessary to start bringing people together, to establish a broad understanding of the problems, to set up new organizations and new channels of communication, and to select the governmental programs and techniques which will permit the most direct and effective approach.

This part of the story has no exact starting date. Some persons saw the challenge soon after World War II and started then to shape the vision of a renewed Center City. But the years of 1957 and 1958 appear as the time when the renewal effort first gained momentum.

By this time the master plan to guide the future land use development of the metropolitan area had been completed. Citizens adopted a modern City Manager Charter. The Redevelopment Agency of the City of Fresno was named and, from the first meeting, set a vigorous pace for the rest of the community to follow. Downtown businessmen and property owners gave themselves an organizational shot in the arm, first as Fresno's Hundred Percenters, and now the Downtown Association of Fresno.

Also at this time urban problems, and especially central area problems, were causing increasing concern throughout the country. In 1956 the “Fort

Worth Plan” had been published and had stimulated fresh thinking on downtown revitalization (its authors were to become the planners for the Fresno central area). And by 1958 the Federal Urban Renewal Program, which had made a slow start in the residential field, had evolved sufficiently to serve as an effective tool in downtown renewal efforts.

Thus the stage was set for the action to follow. But, where other cities faced with similar conditions have floundered or adopted timid expedients, Fresno moved decisively.

The next major step was to establish a method for shaping the plans. To do this the City, the Hundred Percenters—now known as the Downtown Association, and the Redevelopment Agency executed simultaneous but separate contracts with a single planning consultant: Victor Gruen Associates. Working with the City and City staff, Gruen was to define the plans for the central area—an area of approximately 2,000 acres. With the Downtown Association the task was to evolve solutions for the prime 60 to 80 acres making up the core within the central area. Working with the Redevelopment Agency and the Agency's other consultants, the planners were to define the scope for Federally assisted renewal in what was originally outlined as a 36 acre redevelopment project within the core.

This method of undertaking the planning seems now, in retrospect, very simple and direct, but in 1958 such an arrangement was unique. It signified the cooperative approach which was to be vital throughout the entire renewal effort.

As work progressed, many elements of the community joined in to help: the State Highway Department, the County government, the Civic Center Committee, the Convention Bureau, the Fresno Municipal Bus Line, the Trucking Association, the League of Women Voters, the American Institute of Architects, the local representatives of Federal agencies, and, at all stages, the various departments of the City.

This closest of cooperation between government, property owners, businessmen, citizens, and the professionals has been the hallmark of the Fresno Program since the start. Through this broadly-based, cooperative and intensive effort the vision took shape.

The key elements of the plans were:

For the central area:

Strengthening of the entire city; any approach which would have over-emphasized the central area at the expense of the outer areas would have been self-defeating.

Programming of future land and building needs for all central area uses and designation of best locations and directions of expansion for these uses.

Resolution of future freeway alignments to provide optimum service for the renewing central area while still meeting the needs of the adjoining city areas.

Design of an entire street and roadway network within the central area with related parking and with best possible service for all land uses.

For the core area:

Design of separated routes for automobiles, buses, trucking, and the pedestrian. The proposed Mall was a vital part of this design.

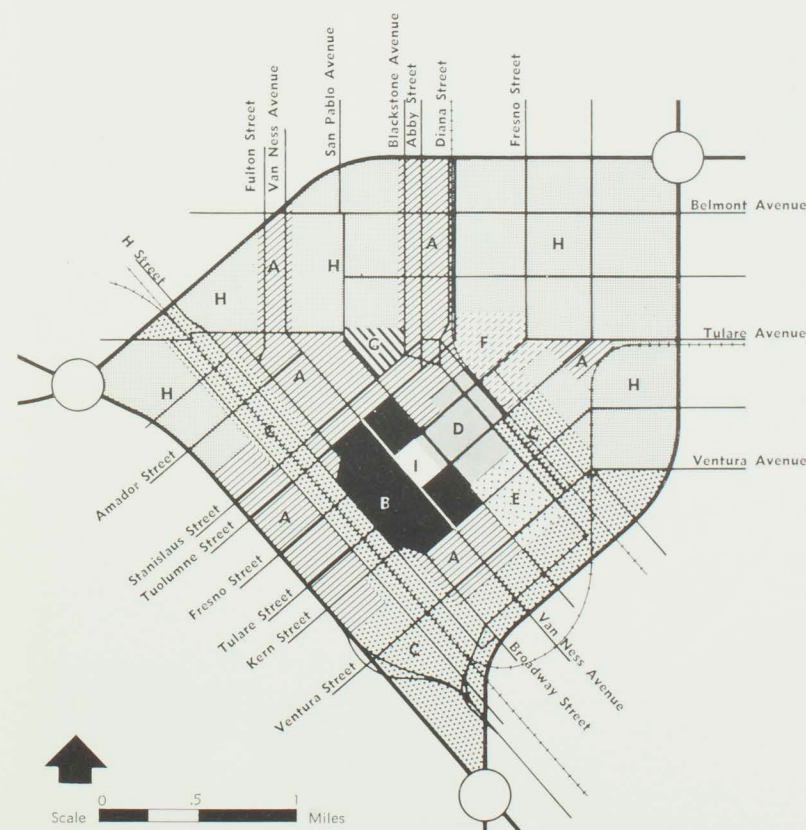
Designation of assets which could be retained and arrangements for new development. Provision for adequate parking in strategic locations.

Provisions to link the core with the adjacent central area uses.

For the redevelopment project:

Definition of the minimum necessary acquisition and clearance.

Provision of analyses, justifications and guarantees which must accompany any program which preempts private ownership for public good.



Schematic Land Use

- A Outer Commercial
- B Inner Commercial
- C Industrial, Wholesaling, and Warehousing
- D Civic Center
- E Convention Hall
- F Medical Complex
- G Institutional Complex
- H Residential
- I County Park

Thus, a program for action was established; action to counteract obsolescence and blighting trends; to achieve a new urban environment and urban esthetic based on a careful blending of old and new; to build a renewed and vital metropolitan center.

The vision-shaping process produced extensive plans and drawings and statistics, but it also achieved much more. Most significant was that all elements of the community participated actively in the planning and that

agreement was achieved as to the future directions for central city growth. The plans demonstrated that under optimum conditions a community and the State Highway Department could work together to great advantage. The planning techniques were more advanced than those required by the Urban Renewal Administration, and the plans called for certain legal and financing tools not yet available, such as those necessary for Mall implementation. In other words, the planning effort was geared not only to the minimum governmental regulations or limited to what could be accomplished by existing legislation. Instead, the work was undertaken in a thorough and bold manner in the confidence that State and Federal actions would subsequently recognize the logic of this approach.

Also, the planning and the economic studies by Western Real Estate Research Corporation substantiated the two initial working assumptions:

1. That Fresno's opportunity was not only citywide or countywide, but it was an opportunity to play a significant role in the entire West Coast region. The increasingly unwieldy size of the Los Angeles and San Francisco urban areas pointed up the need for another major metropolis at some mid-point location.
2. It appeared that the costs of implementing the plans would be only slightly more than the cost of proceeding as in the past on an ad hoc planning and development basis. (It appeared, in fact, that the latter approach would be much greater in both social cost and dollar cost in the long run.) Against this small, short range cost differential the benefits of implementing the plans overwhelmingly favored going forward to start to make the vision into reality!



Consultant meeting with representatives of State Highway Department, City, Redevelopment Agency, and Downtown Association.

Nov. 1956	Fresno Redevelopment Agency established.
Nov. 1957	Harris Hogenson starts as first Executive Director of Redevelopment Agency.
March 1958	Advance Planning Grant for CBD Project One.
April 1958	City adopts Council-Manager form of government.
July 1958	Robert Klein starts as first Chief Administrative Officer.
July 1958	Council adopts Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area General Plan.
Sept. 1958	Victor Gruen Associates contracts approved with City, "Hundred Percenters," and Redevelopment Agency.
March 1959	Exploratory central area plans presented.
Feb. 1960	Consultants complete central area plans.
Feb. 1960	"Hundred Percenters" approve central area plans.
Feb. 1960	Council approves central area plans.
Feb. 1960	URA gives tentative approval to CBD Project One plans.
Feb. 1960	Mayor's Civic Center Committee supports central area plans.
Feb. 1960	Planning Commission approves central area plans.