



Board Agenda Item 4

DATE: August 24, 2021

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBMITTED BY: Steve Brandau, District 2
Buddy Mendes, District 4

SUBJECT: Fresno County Business and Industrial Campus

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

- 1. Consider and approve a location consisting of approximately 2,940 acres generally bounded by North Avenue to the north, Peach Avenue and State Route 99 to the west, Fowler Avenue to the east, and American Avenue to the south, for further County staff study for a proposed future Fresno County Business and Industrial Campus (Fresno County BIC); and**
- 2. Direct staff to develop an Initial Infrastructure Assessment assessing infrastructure availability and needs to serve the proposed future Fresno County BIC, and return to the Board of Supervisors with the assessment information and for further direction; and**
- 3. Determine that approval of Recommended Actions Nos. 1 and 2 are exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act, Public Resources Code 2100, et seq., and direct staff to file a Notice of Exemption with the Office of the Fresno County Clerk.**

Approval of the Recommended Actions would direct staff to begin studying the feasibility of a proposed future Fresno County BIC by developing an Initial Infrastructure Assessment assessing infrastructure availability and needs to serve a proposed future Fresno County BIC at the location identified above, and to return to your Board for further direction.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

Your Board may determine not to approve the Recommended Actions which would result in no additional work being undertaken relating to studying the feasibility of a proposed Fresno County BIC. Additionally, your Board could determine to modify the proposed boundary or identify other unincorporated areas in which to locate a proposed future Fresno BIC.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Approval of the Recommended Actions represents a Net County Cost. Funding to prepare the Initial Infrastructure Assessment is anticipated to be allocated in Org 2540 - Interest and Miscellaneous Expenditures as part of adoption of the FY 2021-22 Recommended Budget.

DISCUSSION:

Fresno County General Plan:

The adopted Economic Development Strategy and Element of the Fresno County General Plan centers on the following three important goals:

Job Creation

The first goal seeks to increase the number of jobs available to County of Fresno residents in quantities equal to or above growth in the labor force. This goal seeks to increase job creation through regional leadership, agricultural productivity, and development of high value-added processing firms. Achievement of this goal will provide the personal income, profits, and tax revenues necessary for continued investment in sustainable growth. In turn, this growth will provide for continued improvement in the standard of living and quality of life for County residents, consistent with the County's Economic Development Vision and will also aid in decreasing historically high unemployment rates for the County.

Economic Base Diversification

The second goal seeks diversification of the economic base of County of Fresno to reduce dependency on agriculturally related businesses for employment and wealth creation. This specific goal seeks to diversify the economic base through the expansion of non-agricultural industry clusters.

Labor Force Preparedness

The third goal seeks to ensure that the County of Fresno labor force is well prepared to meet the requirements of the industries targeted for recruitment, expansion and/or new enterprise development.

Fresno County Business and Industrial Campus:

Based on feedback from the Economic Development Corporation serving Fresno County (EDC) and other entities involved in the attraction and recruitment of new businesses to the Fresno area, a major deficiency of the Fresno County region is the lack of large, contiguous industrial sites that can accommodate the needs of businesses desiring to move or expand to Fresno.

The County has previously evaluated opportunities to locate a large industrial park in unincorporated area of Fresno County. In 2007, the County identified a 1,000-acre area in south-central Fresno County to develop a regional industrial park. Ultimately, in 2008, the Board of Supervisors decided not to pursue this location. Subsequently, in 2017, the Board of Supervisors received a staff presentation regarding the County's past efforts to identify and develop a regional industrial park and directed staff to proceed with evaluation of options to develop an industrial area within the unincorporated area of Fresno County with initial focus on the Malaga, Calwa, and the Golden State Industrial Corridor.

Recently, a series of meetings were convened with industry and real estate representatives, the EDC and County staff to better understand market demands, current inventory of vacant industrial lands, and general interest in developing a large industrial campus. Based on feedback received, the area east and south of the existing Malaga industrial area, outside the Spheres of Influence of the Cities of Fresno and Fowler, were identified as a potential location for future industrial and commercial uses.

The existing Malaga industrial area (See Exhibit A) encompasses approximately 2,300 acres dedicated to and mostly developed with industrial and commercial uses in the unincorporated area of Fresno County. The proposed location of the Fresno County BIC is generally bounded by North Avenue to the north, Peach Avenue and State Route 99 to the west, Fowler Avenue to the east, and American Avenue to the south (See Exhibits B-D). This area was identified because of its proximity to existing water, sewer, and roadway network infrastructure. Further, portions of the proposed Fresno County BIC are located within areas designated as Opportunity Zones where new investments may, under certain conditions, be eligible for preferential Federal tax treatment or preferential consideration for Federal grants and programs. Also, the area is comprised of large parcels making it more attractive to assemble and develop industrial and

commercial uses. The area is primarily designated and zoned for agricultural uses and existing land uses in these areas consist of industrial, commercial, agriculture, and rural homesites. The proposed Fresno County BIC is approximately 2,940 acres in area, although a portion of this area (980 acres) overlaps with the existing Malaga industrial area.

If the proposed Recommended Actions are approved, the Department of Public Works and Planning will prepare an Initial Infrastructure Assessment that will provide your Board with preliminary information regarding sewer, water, storm drainage, roadway, fire protection, and electrical and natural gas needs to serve the proposed area.

To comply with the State's and the County's land use laws, regulations, and requirements, the areas identified for possible development would require, at a minimum, a general plan amendment, rezoning, or other discretionary land use action by your Board as well as compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Because the County is also in the process of conducting its General Plan Review and Zoning Ordinance Update, these laws, regulations, and requirements may change in the future. Compliance with CEQA may, depending on the ultimate location, type, and scope of any development project, require the preparation of an initial study, negative declaration, mitigated negative declaration, or environmental impact report.

California Environmental Quality Act

Direction to conduct administrative activities and expend staff time and resources to examine the feasibility of a proposal by the preparation an Initial Infrastructure Assessment for a possible future project is not a commitment to that project or to any activity that will result in direct or physical changes to the environment at the identified location or anywhere else. The activity described in the Recommended Actions is therefore not a "project" as that term is defined by the CEQA. (See, e.g., CEQA Guidelines, § 15378, subs. (b)(4) and (b)(5).) Because the Recommended Actions do not qualify as a project under CEQA, it is not subject to review.

Furthermore, the Recommended Actions are exempt from review under the CEQA under Section 15061, subdivision (b)(3) and Section 15306 of the CEQA Guidelines, because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, and the preparation of an Initial Infrastructure Assessment would be limited to information gathering purposes only.

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AND/OR ON FILE:

Exhibit A - Existing Zoning
Exhibit B - Location Map
Exhibit C - Location Map
Exhibit D - Location Map

REFERENCE MATERIAL:

BAI #17, April 25, 2017
BAI #06, August 14, 2007
BAI #25, December 5, 2006

CAO ANALYST:

Ron Alexander