

Downtown Farmersville Specific Plan

Existing Conditions Chapter of the Specific Plan

2021

Prepared by:

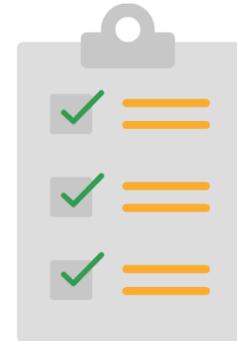


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OVERVIEW

This chapter profiles the existing conditions within the planning area of the Farmersville Downtown Specific Plan, including:

- Land uses
- Zoning
- Circulation Features
- Infrastructure
- Environmental Setting
- Potential for Development
- Opportunities and Constraints



EXISTING LAND USES

The existing land uses in the planning area of the Farmersville Downtown Specific Plan are detailed in Map 2-1. The planning area is currently dominated by a combination of commercial, vacant, street right-of-way, and residential uses between the 69 parcels within the approximately 22.7-acre boundary.

Commercial uses occupy the most area with 40 parcels, 8.18 acres (55%), just over half of the total parcel area of the downtown. Vacant land occupies the next largest area with 15 parcels, 3.19-acre (22%), nearly a quarter of the total downtown parcel area. There are 9 residential dwellings on parcels downtown with at least 2 of those dwellings vacant, occupying 1.76 acres (12%). The remaining land uses include Public/Quasi-public, 3 parcels at 1.12 acres (8%) and Mixed development, 1 parcel at 0.49 acres (3%). The remaining approximately 8 acres is dedicated to public right-of-way, meaning primarily the streets, sidewalks, and alleys.

The abundance of vacant land amidst commercial uses acts as a double-edged sword. The vacant lots provide ample opportunity for developers to pursue their projects in the Farmersville Downtown planning area, however as long as they remain vacant, they depress the surrounding value and create social vacuums that interfere with the walkability and sense of place so critical to a downtown district. The existing residential units represent a large proportion of the nonconforming uses in the planning area and are expected to gradually transition to commercial or mixed-use developments.

EXISTING ZONING

The Farmersville Specific Plan covers an area zoned almost exclusively within the Central Commercial (CC) District. The southernmost parcels within the planning area are zoned General Commercial (GC), as is almost all of Visalia Road within the City. The CC and GC districts are distinct insofar as they are designed to achieve different goals and prioritize different uses and standards. The CC district is generally somewhat more restrictive in types of use and requires more of businesses, however, reduces some requirements such as parking to incentivize development. By contrast the GC district tends to be more lenient with types of use and attracts the kinds of businesses that are less dependent on pedestrian traffic.

The expectations of the Central Commercial District are defined below. These standards define the character of the downtown, as all but four parcels in the planning area are zoned this way.

Key Standards- Buildings are required to be situated along front (and in corner lots, side) property lines and feature display windows so that businesses will create a consistent frontage of shops characteristic of a downtown. Standards also include requirements for parking to be located to the rear and side of the building, refuse containers to be screened from view, and other performance standards, like maximum noise levels.

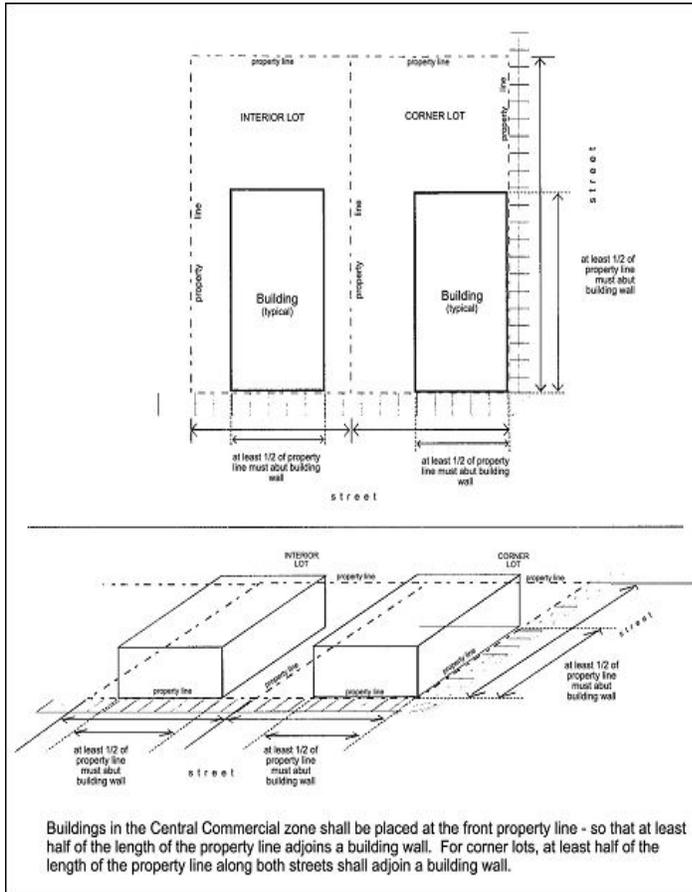
Permitted Uses- The CC district allows a wide array of permitted uses, primarily commercial uses that are not expected to result in potential nuisances and are generally compatible with the purpose and surrounding uses within the CC district. Examples include bakeries, barber shops, cafes, financial institutions, grocery stores, laundromats, medical/dental clinics, offices, schools, social halls, and more.



Purpose of the CC District from the Farmersville Zoning Ordinance

Ordinance - *“To help strengthen the character and vitality of Farmersville’s downtown commercial district by establishing an appropriate list of permitted uses, regulating the size and location of buildings, parking lots, landscaping, and other improvements, in a manner that promotes a vibrant pedestrian-oriented shopping environment. In general, new buildings shall front onto the public sidewalk, with on-site parking located to the rear or side of buildings, large merchandise-display windows are required along the public sidewalk, as opposed to blank building walls”.*

Conditional Uses- The CC district also includes uses that are only permitted conditionally to ensure that they are consistent with the purposes of the district. Examples include prescription pharmacies, thrift shops, boarding houses, pool halls, fortune tellers, smoke shops, tattoo shops, etc.



Prohibited Uses- Prohibited uses are disallowed and consists of uses that are incompatible with the purposes of the CC district. Examples include adult-oriented businesses, auto sales, recreational vehicle and boat storage, and welding shops among others.

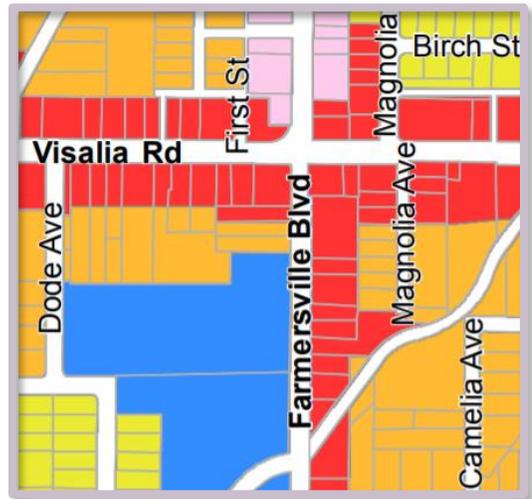
Yard requirements- See illustration below. Structures are generally required to be placed so that building walls adjoin with lots lines along public streets. The requirements for lot area and width are generous (6,000 sq. ft. minimum lot area and 60-70 ft. width) however there is a major exception which allows these requirements to be abridged so long as other yard and structure requirements are met.

Parking Requirements- Parking stall requirements are related directly to the type of use to provide reasonable requirements and adequate parking. Regardless of use, in the CC district, parking requirements on businesses are reduced by up to 25%, and shared parking agreements are encouraged. Additionally, on-site parking is required to be situated behind or at least to the side of structures to maximize shop frontages and walkability between businesses.

Design Guidelines- Farmersville also has design recommendations contained in the Farmersville Design Guidelines, which influence many aspects of commercial design, from lot design to signs and landscaping. These design standards help to shape the visual character of the existing downtown.

Purpose of the GC District from the Farmersville Zoning Ordinance – “*To provide a general commercial area for the sale of commodities or the performance of services*”.

Key Standards- Users are required to conduct activities wholly within enclosed buildings with specific exceptions (i.e., vehicle sales) and design uses to be compatible with any adjacent residential zones. Other requirements include maximum noise levels, hours of operation, and visibility requirements along intersections.



Permitted Uses- Many of the same uses permitted in the Central Commercial District are also allowed in the General Commercial District, uses that the GC district permits while the CC district does not, include auto leasing, truck and trailer rentals, auto sales and repair (not within an enclosed building), auto and truck service stations, glass sales and service, hardware stores, plant nurseries, taxicab service, upholstery, among others.

Conditional Uses- Likewise, many of the conditional uses in the GC district mimic those in the CC district, however those that are not present in the CC district include ambulance service, car washes, heating and air conditioning sales and service, miniature golf, produce stands, skating rinks, among others.

Yard Requirements- The requirements for yards include a minimum of 6,000 sq. ft. total lot area and a minimum width of 60-70 ft. These requirements do not apply if yard setbacks and minimum structure requirements are met. The only structural requirement is a maximum building height of 40 ft., and the setback requirements are as follows.

- Front – Buildings may be no closer than 4 feet to the front property line
 - No front setback may be required in the case of a conditional use permit.
- Side –
 - Interior – None
 - If abutting a residential zone, then not less than required for that zone.
 - Street side – Same as front yard with the addition of the visibility triangle required by §17.76.030 of the Farmersville Municipal Code.

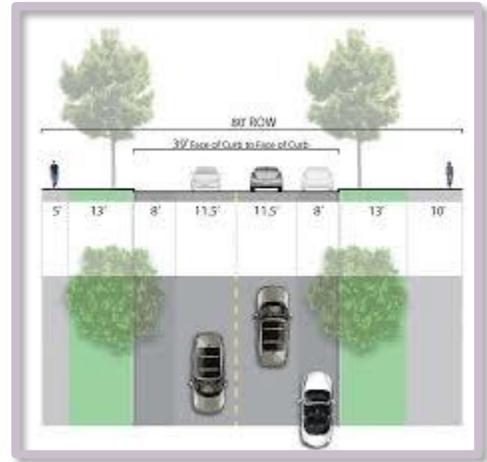
- Rear – None

CIRCULATION FEATURES

Street Designations from The General Plan-

Farmersville Boulevard runs north south and is designated as an Arterial roadway by the Circulation Element of the Farmersville General Plan. Within the planning area, Farmersville Boulevard is a four-lane road with two travel lanes in each direction and on-street parking on both sides.

There are two 4-way stop signs each way within the planning area; one is at the intersection with Front Street, and the other at the intersection with Ash Street. There is also a full traffic signal at the intersection of Farmersville Boulevard and Visalia Road.



The northernmost extent of Farmersville Boulevard (within the planning area) includes some aesthetic features including a small median with potential for additional landscape features and crosswalks with stamped concrete. The crosswalks at Ash Street also include stamped concrete.

A traffic analysis conducted in 2020 concluded that a road diet (e.g., reduction in travel lanes) along Farmersville Boulevard in the downtown will still allow an acceptable level of service to be maintained.

Visalia Road runs east/west and is designated as an Arterial roadway by the Circulation Element. Within the planning area, Visalia Road is a four-lane road with two travel lanes in each direction and one shared turning lane. The intersection with Farmersville Boulevard is the only section of the road within downtown the planning area and traffic is controlled by a traffic signal. This intersection represents a transitional zone from the City’s downtown area to the general commercial districts that dominate the zoning along this road and along Farmersville Boulevard to the south.



All other streets in the planning area are classified as “Local” streets and intersect Farmersville Boulevard running east-west. The most significant of these are Front Street and Ash Street, as they form four-way intersections with Farmersville Boulevard, while most other local streets have T-shaped intersections. The greater volumes of local traffic along Front and Ash Streets necessitates the four-way stops at these intersections. Crosswalks are present at both of

these intersections, as well as decorative streetlights and planters (or bulb-outs) along the corner curbs.

The other local streets include Cottonwood Street, E. Pepper Street, W. Yew Street, W. Elm Street, Costner Street, and W. Birch Street. These exist in the planning area where they intersect with Farmersville Boulevard. They are consequential insofar as they provide parking and access to the north-south running alleys that stretch behind many of the parcels along the downtown. They also offer a way for residents to walk or bike to the downtown from adjoining neighborhoods.

Alleys run parallel to Farmersville Boulevard north-south, about half of a block or just over one-hundred feet to the east and west of the street. These alleys are generally unpaved and uneven; however, they do allow for parking spaces behind buildings and free up space dedicated to shop frontages along the boulevard.

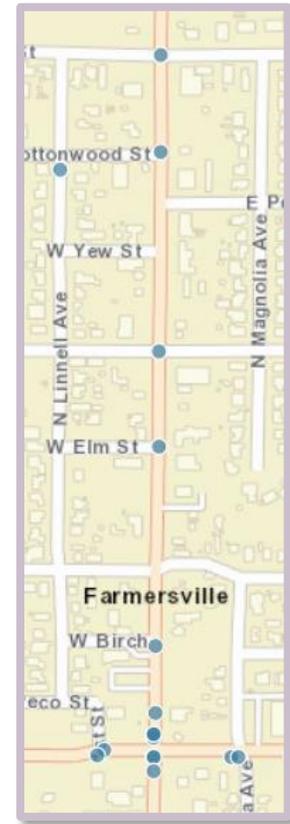
Intersections along the downtown planning area are relatively safe. Data from the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System has been developed into an interactive map by University of California, Berkeley SafeTREC program, called the Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS), which allows the city to identify streets and intersections with an abundance of crash data aggregated over time, indicating levels of traffic safety. The design of Farmersville Boulevard both contributes to and diminishes the safety of the roadway, depending on the aspects one focusses on. The modified grid structure ensures that most of the east/west local streets that connect with Farmersville Boulevard do so at a “T”- shaped intersection, thereby slowing traffic. The local streets that do form a proper four-way intersection with Farmersville Boulevard (Front Street and Ash Street) have four-way stop signs, and crosswalks across three and four of those streets respectively. The exception is Costner Street, which forms a diagonal four-way

intersection containing stop signs for east/west traffic and only a single crosswalk running east/west on the north side of the street.

Reviewing the TIMS crash data from between 2015-2020, it becomes evident that the intersection of Visalia Road and Farmersville Boulevard is by far the most dangerous intersection within the planning area. The remaining intersections appear comparatively safer, and there does not appear to be a significant difference in the traffic safety between “T”- shaped and four-way intersections within the downtown.

Public transit in the City of Farmersville is limited. Visalia and regional transportation providers do operate within the city, however the city itself does not act as a provider of public transit. Buses rely on the Dial-a-Ride system, and are also scheduled

Bicycles have not been especially encouraged within the planning area. Farmersville Boulevard and all other streets downtown do not include bicycle lanes, and as a result, bicyclists are often forced to ride on sidewalks. There are also no bike racks or designated areas for the parking of bicycles.



The sidewalks within the Downtown Specific Plan planning area are a good example of a well-constructed improvement that the community utilizes. Sidewalks run along the public right of way north-south for nearly the entirety of Farmersville Boulevard. These sidewalks include ramped surfaces at intersections (accommodating those in wheelchairs, walkers, and with strollers). At the intersection of Visalia Road and Farmersville Boulevard these ramps feature corrugated domes to increase accessibility. The sidewalks (particularly on the east side of Farmersville Boulevard) tend to follow the pattern of the frontages of businesses, creating a meandering pathway, with occasional planters, refuse bins, and signs. Gutters run alongside the curbs, and also along the local streets that intersect the boulevard, to convey water to storm drainage basins. The overall condition of sidewalks is fairly good, and they appear well-used by the residents.

Truck Routes- Both Farmersville Boulevard and Visalia Road are designated truck routes. At this time the impact of trucks (particularly on Farmersville Boulevard) is not considered to be significant.

Railroad- The east-west San Joaquin Valley railroad line runs across Farmersville Boulevard north of Front Street. This is a low-speed freight rail line with one or two short trains per day, typically carrying agricultural products (citrus, etc.), produced in the surrounding farms areas. Of note, this line is being studied for conversion. While the area is currently not usable or especially welcoming to pedestrians, the opportunity for a potential multi-modal transit feature within the downtown corridor is possible.

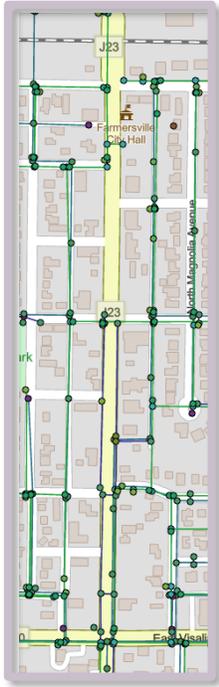


Street Trees and Pedestrian Environment

Farmersville Boulevard and adjoining streets have a total of 66 street trees in small, landscaped planters along sidewalks on both sides of the street. Many of the landscaped areas with street trees are placed at corners of intersections, bulbed-out from the sidewalk, creating a shady space for pedestrians and narrowing the roadway to make for safer traffic circulation. The types of trees include Accolade Cherry, Chinese Pistache, and others. Many of these street trees are deciduous (losing their leaves seasonally) meaning welcome sunshine warms the sidewalk during the winter. These street trees are situated predominantly in the northwest quadrant of the downtown planning area, which contains 41 trees or approximately 62% of all street trees downtown.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Water- Water in the City of Farmersville is provided by seven city-owned water wells that produce up to two million gallons of water per day. The existing water lines and wells are able to sufficiently service peak demand, however increased water storage capacity is recommended by the city's Water Master Plan.



Sewer- The City’s wastewater treatment plant is located about a mile south of Visalia Road along the extension of Virginia Avenue and consists of headworks and aerated ponds first constructed in 1967. The plant was recently expanded to treat 2.1 million gallons per day (mgd). Within the downtown planning area existing sewer lines run parallel to Farmersville Boulevard

Storm Drainage- The City of Farmersville is divided into 26 individual drainage sub-areas, which primarily discharge storm flows into one of the canals, creeks, or retention basins throughout the city. Farmersville Boulevard in the downtown area constitutes Sub-Area D.

Private Utilities (gas, electric, cable, etc.)- Electrical access is provided by above ground utility poles that run along the alleys parallel to Farmersville Boulevard. These utility poles also connect cable and telephone lines, which includes internet.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Flooding- The area on the west side of Farmersville Boulevard lies within the 100-year floodplain (“AH” designated FEMA flood zone) and is therefore subject to mandatory flood insurance purchase requirements. The east side of Farmersville Boulevard is within an area of minimal flood risk (“X” designated FEMA zone, meaning minimal risk of flooding).

Archaeological- No known archaeological resources exist within the subject area, and the likelihood of archaeological artifacts having survived urban activities to the present is low. However, the territory was inhabited historically by the people of the Southern Valley Yokut, and there is a possibility that buried artifacts exist, hence State law requires that such artifacts be preserved in the event that they are discovered (such as during construction).

Noise- The existing noise levels in the subject area are primarily a function of motor vehicle traffic along Farmersville Boulevard and fluctuates throughout the day as such. Other noise sources include that of the businesses including restaurants hosting events, live music, occasional railroad traffic, and other noises characteristic of small-town activities.

Air Quality- The City of Farmersville lies within the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD), which is in non-compliance for several criteria pollutants. Local air quality is largely a function of the geography of the Central Valley, which is prone to temperature inversions that (in concert with surrounding mountains) trap pollution close to the ground. The abundance of automobile traffic and particulate matter emissions from farming and construction in dry conditions negatively impact the air quality. The pollutants for which the SJVAPCD is in nonattainment for include ozone and particulate matter.

POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT



Opportunity Sites- The parcels depicted in Map 2-2 have been designated as opportunity sites and represent areas that could be the focus of change and revitalization to benefit the community. Opportunity site refers to all parcels that are either underdeveloped (vacant), those with non-conforming uses, or designated as soft sites (explained further below). The vision for these sites is an intensification of uses and the addition of new multifamily residential and mixed-use projects to densify the downtown core.

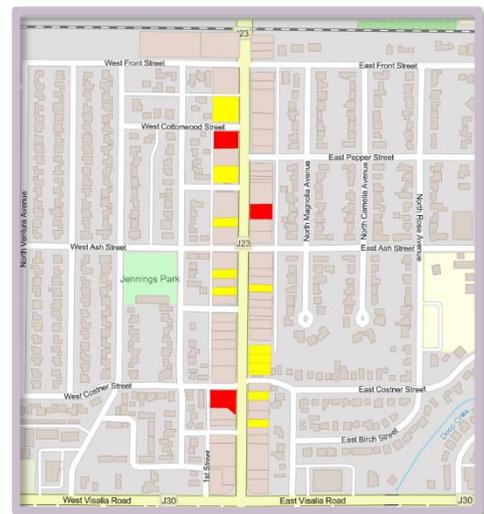
There are 28 opportunity sites identified, with the majority located in the southeast and northwest quadrants of the planning area. As developers apply for entitlements from the city, staff should be encouraged to direct them to these sites.

Soft Site Analysis- Soft sites are parcels that are targeted for redevelopment because the value of the land exceeds the value of the improvements thereon. Out of 68 total parcels in the Downtown Specific Plan planning area, over 30 are designated as quantitative soft sites, and 16 as true soft sites, about 23.5% of total parcels. Quantitative soft sites meet the mathematical criteria of a soft site, with improvement values of the parcel lesser than the value of the land itself. True soft site is defined as qualitative soft sites that do not serve a purpose for the community, and therefore should be prioritized for development. With nearly a quarter of all parcels within the planning area representing opportunities for developers to come in, there is a viable economic incentive to attracting prospective businesses to these lots. What's more, the soft sites are concentrated in the southeastern

quadrant of the planning area, and least concentrated in the northwestern quadrant. This offers an opportunity to concentrate short term efforts where there are few soft sites and long-term plans where the soft sites are abundant and may take years to convert to developed use regardless.

Underdeveloped Parcels- Parcels without structures and/or other improvements are considered underdeveloped or vacant. There are a total of 16 underdeveloped parcels within the planning area, and many of them are already identified as soft sites. The lots identified as underdeveloped parcels are largely located for downtown retail uses and should be targeted for infill development.

Non-conforming Uses- A non-conforming use is the legal use of a particular property or structure for something that was permitted at the time it was established but is no longer permitted by the current zoning ordinance. Thus, the use is allowed to continue until, in the case of Exeter, discontinued use for a continuous six-month period, or destruction of more than 50 percent of the value of the use or structure. By this means non-conforming uses are expected to transition gradually to uses permitted by the district, and as a result are potential targets for developers that wish to conform to the zoned uses.



Economic Analysis- The current real estate market is fair and strong, and downtown Farmersville has ample vacant lots that may be targeted for small to medium scale infill development. Areas of the city within the planning area represent some of the most commercially viable and certainly walkable areas of the entire city.

Farmersville is not currently under economic strain and could fund capital improvements in the downtown planning area in part with grants from HCD, Caltrans, TCAG and others depending on the nature of the projects involved.

Sustainability Outlook- The City of Farmersville has made some recent efforts toward becoming a more sustainable community. The incorporation of sustainability initiatives focused on water, energy, air quality, waste, advocacy, environmental justice, climate change adaptation and mitigation represent an opportunity for the city to become a

regional leader in strategic sustainability. The city has already begun its efforts by prioritizing low emissions vehicles for staff and enforcing Title 24 Green Building Standards on development within city limits, which requires new single-family homes to be outfitted with solar panels among other important regulations. Likewise, Farmersville has increased its commitment to groundwater conservation with the expectation of major developers to include drainage and retention basins in their projects, by proxy reducing risk from potential flooding and ground subsidence.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

It is important to identify opportunities and constraints to improving the downtown, as these can help to ground planning efforts in reality to shape realistic policies and actions that the City can undertake.

Opportunities

-Undeveloped Land – There is an abundance of level, vacant/underdeveloped parcels that are relatively free of constraints for new development. The analysis determined that there are 16 existing parcels (containing 4.59 acres) that are vacant in the downtown. Some of these parcels are adjacent to one-another and could be combined relatively easily to make for a larger developable area, specifically 0.68 acres of three contiguous parcels with over 300 feet fronting onto Farmersville Boulevard, in the southeast quadrant of the planning area.

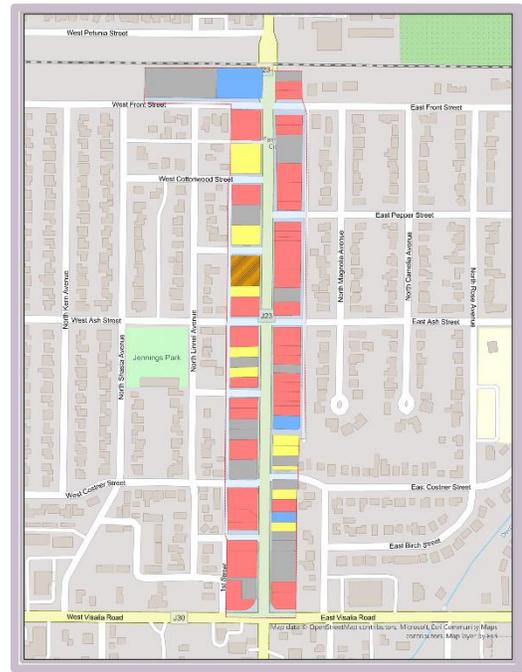


-Good Street Access – All parcels have access to Farmersville Boulevard which provides a ready stream of vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic.

-Access to Utilities – Utility systems are fully developed in the downtown area and do not need to be installed to accommodate new development projects.

-Open Space Facilities – The possibility of opportunities regarding public works in the city is dependent on the city’s desired level of involvement. If interested the opportunity for an open space feature such as a plaza or park could help centralize the downtown and provide a communal space for events and leisure (i.e., farmers market).

-Farmersville Boulevard Improvements – The city has the opportunity to pursue grant funding to facilitate the improvement and beautification of Farmersville Boulevard. This could include a number of specific improvements, for example, a “road diet” for the reduction of lanes to include bicycle lanes, a landscaped median, and/or wider sidewalks, diagonal on-street parking, and parkways with street trees would slow traffic down. These in turn would offer opportunities such as pedestrian refuge islands within medians, which may be valuable where a landscaped median already exists south of the railroad crossing. It could also include stamped or pervious concrete crosswalks, wayfinding signage, decorative or seasonal street lighting, or other improvements.



-Marketing – The potential for development and commercial opportunities in the Downtown Farmersville planning area suggests that the City has the opportunity to prepare marketing materials for prospective businessowners to streamline the process of their approval. These materials could range from simple pamphlets and fliers to slideshow presentations or other guidance to help illustrate the application process, expectations for regulatory compliance, or provide other resources to prospective applicants.

-Regulatory Relief – The city could also take the opportunity to fine-tune zoning standards, creating additional policies or exemptions for certain types of businesses or buildings. These standards may, for example, further reduce parking requirements or offer financial incentives for transit-oriented or mixed-use development.

Constraints

-Existing Vacant and Dilapidated Properties – The existing proportion of properties vacant or dilapidated can depress the potential for development and activity around them. Emphasizing opportunity sites to prospective developers and eliminating barriers to developing these parcels is paramount to the revitalization of the downtown, economically and socially.

-Shallow Parcels – Existing parcels are relatively shallow in the downtown (ranging from 149 to 279 feet deep). This can limit the number of uses and size of buildings. These parcels likely won't be attractive to typical chain retailers and more likely will be attractive to local “mom and pop” firms.



-Existing Vehicle-Oriented Design – As Farmersville Boulevard currently exists, it is completely oriented toward motor vehicles to the detriment of the pedestrian experience. The width of the roadway and speed of the vehicles thereon is far and away the greatest barrier to pedestrian accessibility. Lane reduction may receive a mixed reaction by the public and represents a long term and costly project on the part of the city.

-Low Purchasing Capabilities – The City of Farmersville is a community of people that, on average, have lower incomes than comparable nearby communities such as Exeter or Visalia. This reduction in purchasing power means that developers are potentially less likely to locate their projects in Farmersville if they think that the purchasing power of its community will have a negative impact on business.