

Discussion Summary

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP MEETING NO. 1

This summary provides an overview of the October 2, 2025 Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG) meeting. The EJWG is a focused working group with appointed members. While these meetings are not open to the general public, outcomes are summarized and shared with the broader community to ensure transparency in the planning process. The following summarizes the outcomes of the first EJWG meeting.

About the Meeting

The City of Shafter held its first EJWG meeting as part of the ongoing General Plan Update process. The EJWG is charged with providing input on environmental justice issues, reviewing planning alternatives, and helping to identify critical issues and opportunities to overcome barriers affecting disadvantaged communities in Shafter.

EJWG Membership

EJWG members were appointed in collaboration with key area stakeholders, including the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, the Shafter Recreation and Park District, and the Committee for a Better Shafter. A majority of the members also participated in a prior working group that was convened to advise staff on the development of the 2021 Draft Environmental Justice and Health Program (Element). This draft Element was not adopted, with the City and stakeholders seeking a broader range of policy and environmental analysis, which led to the comprehensive General Plan Update. Still, this draft Element forms a starting point for environmental justice considerations.

EJWG Members:

- Refugio Valencia, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (Community Organizer)
- Gustavo Aguirre Jr., Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (Assistant Director)
- Maria Anabel Marquez, Committee for a Better Shafter (President)
- Jorge Lopez, Shafter Recreation and Park District (Board Member); 746 Sport Foundation (Board Member) (Alternate: Amando Chavez)
- Dora Hernandez-Jara, AB 617 (Community Representative); La Colonia non-profit (President)
- Angelica Lopez, AB 617 (Community Representative)
- Fernando Marquez, Shafter Area Community Member
- Luis Casablanca, Shafter Area Community Member
- Luis Gonzalez, Shafter Area Community Member

Presentation

The project team provided an overview of the EJWG's role, the General Plan Update process, and state requirements under SB 1000 for addressing environmental justice. The presentation covered key issues identified in the 2021 Draft Environmental Justice and Health Element, including infrastructure challenges in disadvantaged communities (DACs and DUCs), pollution concerns, and the distinction between what the City can and cannot do for unincorporated areas. Staff also summarized community input from previous engagement efforts and market data showing the need for smaller housing units and approximately 931 low-income housing units to meet state requirements, as well as other statutory considerations such as the establishment of truck routes that minimize exposure to sensitive receptors.

Questions and Comments

Following the presentation, EJWG members asked questions and engaged in a dialogue with project team members prior to working through the design exercise. A summary of what the project team heard during that discussion is divided under the three topical headings below.

Preference for Integrated Environmental Justice Approach

EJWG members expressed a clear preference for having environmental justice topics addressed throughout the General Plan rather than as an independent element. This approach would ensure that environmental justice considerations are woven into all aspects of planning rather than treated as a separate issue.

Desire for More Retail and Shopping Options

There was strong interest in bringing more retail and shopping opportunities to Shafter. Members noted that residents currently travel to Wasco and Bakersfield for shopping, and bringing retail options to Shafter would reduce traffic and keep spending local. This was identified as an important community need that would improve quality of life and economic vitality.

Land Use and Circulation Design Discussion

To facilitate the land use and circulation design discussion, the project team shared land use and circulation design considerations. These focused on the strategies identified in the current General Plan as well as land use and roadway alternatives for consideration. Ideas under consideration include two options for the regional roadway network. Alternative 1 featured a Cherry to Merced Alignment, while Alternative 2 included multiple considerations with a potential SR 99 interchange between Lerdo Highway and 7th Standard Road. Neither alternative identified truck routes west of Cherry Avenue (south of Riverside Drive).

Maps showing preliminary input gathered from the General Plan Advisory Committee meeting #3 on September 23, 2025 were also shared. These included locations for potential housing growth areas and a preliminary land use strategy.

The EJWG responded to the materials shared for consideration through group discussion. The key points identified during the design discussion are summarized below.

Unanimous Support for Roadway Alternative 1 (Cherry Ave to Merced Ave)

The working group unanimously preferred Roadway Alternative 1 (Cherry to Merced Alignment). Members expressed significant concerns about Alternative 2 and other options, particularly regarding traffic impacts along Lerdo Highway. Members noted that many residents use Lerdo Highway to access other destinations, and increased truck traffic would impede residents' access to services.

The group also expressed concerns about how trucks and other vehicles travel east-west between SR-99 and I-5, which some members noting that trucks already use the shortest possible routes, which can route them along county roads that are not designed to carry such vehicles and pass by disadvantaged communities. The preference for Roadway Alternative 1 was also supported by the belief that routing truck traffic along Merced Ave would result in fewer trucks attempting to traverse between SR 99 and I-5 on Lerdo Highway or county roads, and members felt that trucks traveling between SR 99 and I-5 should utilize 7th Standard Road rather than country roads or Lerdo Highway.

Support for lower-income housing opportunities

Members strongly supported the opportunities for higher-density and lower-income housing that GPAC identified in Meeting 3, emphasizing the need for more affordable housing to address community needs.

Concerns about industrial growth

The group expressed concern about the amount of growth designated for industrial land uses, questioning whether the balance between residential, commercial, and industrial development adequately serves community needs. One member pointed out the amount of land designated for industrial use on the current general plan appears to be nearly twice the size of core Shafter.

Members also identified a gap in services for the trucking industry, related to affordable parking, and overnight accommodations, and locations to pull over/idle while waiting to make a delivery. The group noted that additional truck-related services would benefit the local economy and reduce potential conflicts with residential areas.

Summary of Key Takeaways

- **Clear roadway direction:** The unanimous preference for Roadway Alternative 1 provides clear direction for the project team, reflecting serious concerns about traffic impacts on Lerdo Highway and protecting resident access to services and destinations.
- **Integrated approach to environmental justice:** Rather than creating a standalone element, environmental justice considerations should be integrated throughout all aspects of the General Plan to ensure comprehensive consideration in planning decisions.
- **Affordable housing emphasis:** While the general growth strategy is supported, there is strong emphasis on the need for more lower-income housing options to meet community needs.
- **Balance in land use:** Questions remain about balancing industrial growth with residential and commercial needs while protecting existing neighborhoods and providing necessary services for all sectors.