SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION - GPAC MEETING #1

About the Meeting

The first meeting of the General Plan Advisory Committee was held on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, from 6 pm to 8 pm. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the project, the project team, and the committee members, review the roles and responsibilities of the GPAC, discuss the issues that are most important to the city, and begin to understand how those issues may be addressed through the general plan update process. After a one-hour presentation addressing these items, each GPAC member was asked to share three to five things they would like to preserve and protect in Shafter and three to five things they would like to see change; ideas were discussed as a group.

Summary of Ideas

The tables below include a summary of ideas discussed, grouped by topical category and divided into current and future preferences & needs, current and future concerns, and planning considerations within each category. The summaries document key discussion points and begin to extrapolate discussion issues to identify priorities and ideas for future policy direction that will be further explored, amended, and refined as part of the general plan update process.

NOTE: THE TABLES BELOW SUMMARIZE AND EXTRAPOLATE ON THE IDEAS DISCUSSED DURING THE FIRST GPAC MEETING. THE CONTENT HEREIN IS NOT A COMPREHENSIVE RECORD OF THE GPAC'S DISCUSSION OR A COMPLETE ACCOUNT OF GPAC'S THOUGHTS.

TABLE 1. LAND USE

Residential

Current preferences & needs

- Current Shafter residents like estate-style, single-family homes and the accompanying lifestyle.
- People move to Shafter for lower costs and single-family homes that are near Bakersfield.
- There is a growing need to provide more housing options for people in all stages of life (including young adults and seniors).

Current concerns

- 'Middle housing' housing options (such as duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, cottage courts, condominiums, etc.) are extremely limited.
- Multifamily rental properties, especially those with absentee property owners, can suffer from poor maintenance.
- New higher-density housing may dramatically change the character of existing residential areas.
- Rising home prices have made formerly affordable housing options less affordable, and this trend is expected to continue.

Future preferences & needs

- The easiest residential product to sell in Shafter will continue to be single family homes, though such housing will be affordable to a decreasing portion of Shafter's existing and future residents.
- The demographic and employment characteristics of the future residents may shift future home priorities (e.g., lower-maintenance homes, typically with smaller lots/yards, may be more popular in the future).

Future concerns

- Rising home prices mean that more variety of housing types (such as smaller lot single family, townhomes, "missing middle" housing, and multi-family units) is needed to provide more affordable options. This will be increasingly important in the future for those growing up in Shafter and those looking to move to Shafter for employment opportunities.

Planning considerations

- Areas of new growth should include mixed-density housing to reserve land for higher density homes while limiting impacts on current neighborhoods.
- Leverage community engagement to help reposition perception of multifamily housing.
- Where possible, mixed and higher density housing should be comprehensively planned, borrowing from examples of other cities that have successfully integrated a variety of housing types.

- The City should explore options to require both high-quality development (development standards) and on-going maintenance (code enforcement) to ensure private property reflects community pride.

Non-residential

Current preferences & needs	Current concerns
• Industrial and agricultural uses currently fuel the city's economy. • Expanded commercial uses are needed, with a full-service grocery store highlighted as a long-desired use. • Access to health services/hospital (beyond urgent care) in Shafter is needed.	• Desirable uses must also be balanced by potential issues that can accompany new development, including traffic, changes in neighborhood character, and public safety concerns • Locating industrial and agricultural uses near sensitive receptors (housing, schools, parks, etc.) creates health risks and nuisance issues. • It may be difficult to attract a large-scale healthcare operation due to regional competition and the complex nature of hospital planning.
Future preferences & needs	**Future concerns**
• Industrial and agricultural uses remain the driving economic forces in the community. • Commercial offerings provide residents with access to healthy food (esp. grocery). • Health care is accessible to Shafter residents.	• As urban development grows near existing agricultural uses and existing/planned industrial uses, health risks, nuisance issues, and other land use compatibility considerations will become a bigger issue.

Planning considerations

- Location and fee structure for new uses should carefully consider trade-offs of new development, minimize negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, and consider fiscal implications to city services.
- The City's land use pattern should minimize conflicts between industrial and agricultural uses and existing/future sensitive receptors (housing, parks, schools, etc.).
- The City should proactively plan for and clearly define buffer zones between incompatible land uses (such as agriculture/industrial and residential/other sensitive receptors) to prevent creation of adverse health risks and nuisance issues.

Downtown

Current preferences & needs	Current concerns
• The historic character of downtown should be preserved, but reinvestment and support for downtown businesses is needed. • More variety and density of retail/dining options are needed.	• Many buildings are not up to code and bringing them up to code is difficult and expensive. • Development of commercial uses outside of downtown may compete with downtown businesses. • The status of grade separations associated with high speed rail is uncertain, meaning existing traffic and connectivity issues in and around downtown may remain unaddressed.
Future preferences & needs	**Future concerns**
• Downtown is revitalized as the commercial heart of Shafter.	• As urban development continues, the community may eventually outgrow its historic core, needing additional areas for commercial uses.

Planning considerations

- Consider programs to support reinvestment in historic downtown including structure rehabilitation and establishment of new/local businesses (e.g. grant programs, incentives, establishment of business improvement district, technical assistance, streamlined permitting, reduced permitting fees, etc.).
- Right-size commercial uses outside of downtown and provide complementary rather than competitive uses.
- If the city outgrows the historic core, the logical direction for the commercial center of Shafter to expand is east.

TABLE 2. TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

Current preferences & needs

- Some formerly unincorporated areas need improved roads.
- Kids, seniors, and residents without vehicles or unable to drive need more ways to get to local parks, schools, and recreation facilities (especially residents in unincorporated communities), including bike and local transit/van/dial-a-ride service.
- There are growing concerns around pedestrian safety, especially around school sites. During pick up and drop off, it has been observed that a growing number of parents are opting to drive children to school, which is creating increased conflict between students arriving on foot or bicycle (particularly those unaccompanied by an adult) and drivers.

Current concerns

- Roadway improvements in some formerly unincorporated areas are difficult to implement due to inadequate right-of-way widths (established before the area was part of Shafter).
- Rail tracks limit east-west connectivity; when crossings are closed, long detours are needed.
- The uncertainty of federal funding and high speed rail may delay or eliminate planned construction of grade-separated crossings.
- The large number of parents driving students to school creates safety issues on roads around schools.
- A new regional compost facility at the landfill will increase the number of trucks traveling to/from the landfill daily.

Future preferences & needs

- Shafter is a walkable, bikeable, connected community, including:
  - More west to east connections, with grade separated rail crossings,
  - More direct connections between the southern portion of the city and future development to the east and the core,
  - Options to link new development in southeast Shafter to the core,
  - Biking/walking facilities to serve established areas as well as new development.
- Truck routes for truck traffic support regional goods movement, local industrial areas, and city/regional services
- Rail crossings are accessible and safe.
- Safe routes to school provide parents and educators with convenient, safe options to drop off children.

Future concerns

- Truck traffic will increase, and truck routes will be increasingly important to balance the truck traffic required to fuel the city and regional economy while maintaining a high quality of life for Shafter residents.

Planning considerations

- Update the future roadway network to create a connected, safe network of streets for residents, visitors, businesses, and goods movement.
- Establish a future citywide bicycle network, prioritizing improvements linking to parks, community and recreational facilities, and schools. Consider also how to extend facilities to serve unincorporated communities and link southeast Shafter with the city core.
- Considering multiple planning scenarios, those that include high speed rail and those that do not.
- Prioritize safety and connectivity at rail crossings.
- Consider options to address safety around and along routes to schools.
- Evaluate strategies to link southeast Shafter to the historic core physically and culturally.
- Establish and enforce truck routes to limit impacts of truck traffic on sensitive receptors and consider buffers/other preventive measures to avoid future adverse health and nuisance issues. Consider all heavy duty vehicles, including public services (e.g. solid waste vehicles), in planning for truck traffic, routes, and associated impacts (including coordination with responsible and adjoining agencies for road maintenance).
- Coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions to identify truck routes where each responsible agency can comfortably maintain the regional network (pavement conditions, etc.) given the anticipated traffic and truck volumes.

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TABLE 3. CONSERVATION & AIR QUALITY

Current preferences & needs	Current concerns
• Industrial and agriculture are the primary economic drivers in the community.	• Agricultural uses can create pesticide drift, which can impact air quality. • Industrial uses generate truck trips which impact air quality not only near the development project but also along the routes that trucks travel. • Locating industrial and agricultural uses near sensitive receptors (housing, schools, parks, etc.) creates health risks and nuisance issues.
Future preferences & needs	**Future concerns**
• Agricultural and industrial uses continue to drive the local economy. • Regional goods movement, including truck traffic, increases as industrial development continues to grow. • New development must consider appropriate provisions to minimize air quality impacts on existing and planned sensitive receptors while allowing economic drivers to thrive.	• If not carefully planned, industrial and agricultural uses and truck traffic could unintentionally impact existing and future sensitive receptors (housing, schools, parks, etc.), creating health risks, nuisance issues, and inhibit the ability of industrial and agricultural uses to operate. • Plan for truck routes to minimize air quality impacts.

Planning considerations

- Organize land uses to minimize potential air quality impacts of industrial/agricultural uses on existing/future sensitive receptors.
- Require and clearly define buffer zones between agriculture/industrial and residential/other sensitive receptors to minimize air quality impacts. Agricultural buffer zones should consider pesticide drift.
- Establish and enforce truck routes that minimize air quality impacts on sensitive receptors and consider buffers around truck routes /other preventive measures to mitigate air quality impacts. Consider all heavy road users, including public services (e.g., solid waste vehicles), in planning for truck traffic, routes, buffers and mitigating associated impacts.

TABLE 4. SAFETY & NOISE

Current preferences & needs	Current concerns
• Shafter is viewed as the safest community within the region. • Shafter has a high ratio of residents to police relative to neighboring areas. • WESTEC is an important safety/training resource.	• There are known code enforcement and maintenance issues in the community today (especially in housing managed by absentee owners and in buildings downtown where many upgrades and improvements may be required for a new tenant to operate their business and obtain necessary permits).
Future preferences & needs	**Future concerns**
• Safety standards are maintained, even as new development occurs, and the community grows. • Code enforcement and maintenance are improved to ensure private property reflects the high quality and standard of life in Shafter. • New air-conditioned community and recreation spaces help to mitigate impacts of extreme heat.	• New developments (including desirable uses) may increase the safety resources required to maintain service levels and quality of life for Shafter residents.

Planning considerations

- Plan for and allow for uses with consideration for potential community safety issues associated with the use.
- Maintain a fee structure to ensure new development pays for its fair share of safety-related services.
- Explore options to require both high-quality development (development standards) and ongoing maintenance (code enforcement) to ensure private property reflects community pride.
- Coordinate plans to expand recreation and community facilities with opportunities to address environmental safety concerns like extreme heat.

TABLE 5. OPEN SPACE & PUBLIC FACILITIES

Current preferences & needs

- Existing parks and recreation facilities, like school sites where recreational programs are held, the Youth Center, and the pool (currently under renovation) are heavily used and provide an important outlet and resource for the community, especially youth.
- Expanded healthcare services/options in Shafter are desired.
- WESTEC is an important community educational /training resource.
- A new regional compost facility at the landfill will help fulfill solid waste requirements in compliance with State law.

Current concerns

- Recreation facilities are aging and struggling to meet community needs.
  - The Blue Gym at Richland School supports many community programs, but it is not open to the public. It was built when the city's population was 7,000, today more than 22,000 people live in Shafter.
  - More indoor/conditioned recreation spaces are needed (especially in the summer).
- Some community members, especially those without access to a car in unincorporated areas, have difficulty getting to facilities, especially for seniors and outside of dial-a-ride hours.
- High school students in vocational training programs are bussed to other communities.

Future preferences & needs

- Park, recreation, and cultural facilities grow proportionally with population increases and improve upon current service levels.
- Expanded park/rec/open space amenities, including:
  - More family-oriented open spaces,
  - An improved dog park (accommodating larger dogs),
  - New outdoor theater,
  - New regional sports complex,
  - New community center/gym (like McDermont X in Lindsay or the RAC in Corcoran)
- More local vocational/training opportunities to support the local workforce.

Future concerns

- Parks and recreation facilities must be maintained, improved, and expanded as the city grows.
- Open space buffer areas may be required between industrial and agricultural uses and incompatible land uses (like homes, schools, and other sensitive receptors) to mitigate air quality, health risks, and nuisance issues.

Planning considerations

- Maintain and expand the City's parks and recreation offerings as the community grows to ensure an adequate quantity, location and variety of amenities are offered.
- Require new development to pay for its fair share of increased service.
- Establish a future bicycle network, prioritizing improvements linking to parks, community and recreational facilities, and schools. Consider also how to extend facilities to serve unincorporated communities.
- Consider opportunities to expand local transit service to seniors in unincorporated areas.
- Consider opportunities to coordinate with local businesses and educational institutions to expand local vocational training programs.
- Consider the role of open space, if any, in addressing issues that may arise from growth that brings incompatible land uses close together.

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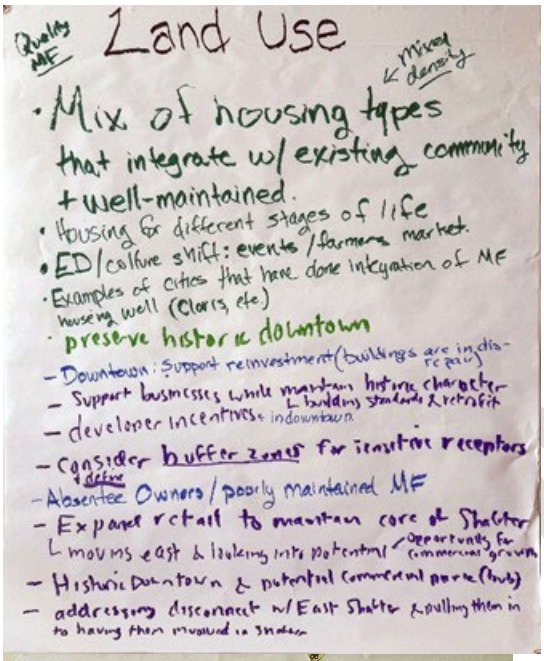
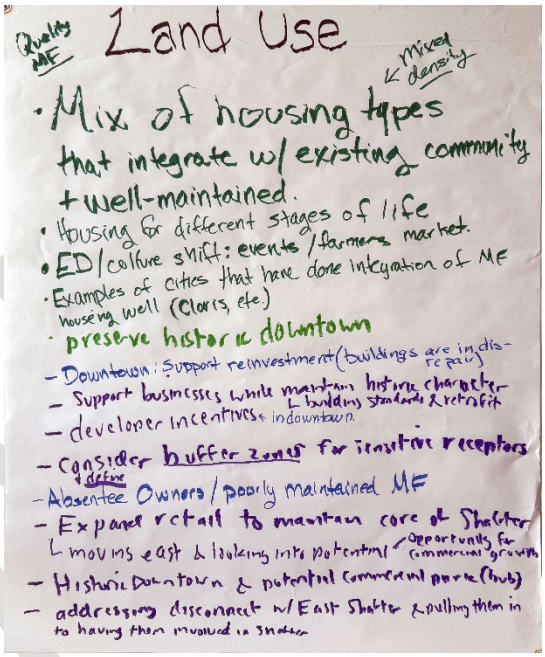
Photo Documentation of Group Discussion Notes

Figures 1-5 include photos of the short-hand notes taken on the wall during the meeting. Issues recorded on these notes were more fully documented in the tables above to reflect the interrelated nature of the general plan topics and to adequately report the content and direction of the discussion about what should be preserved and protected, where changes are needed, and related planning considerations discussed by GPAC at the meeting on February 25, 2025.

Figure 1. Land Use Notes





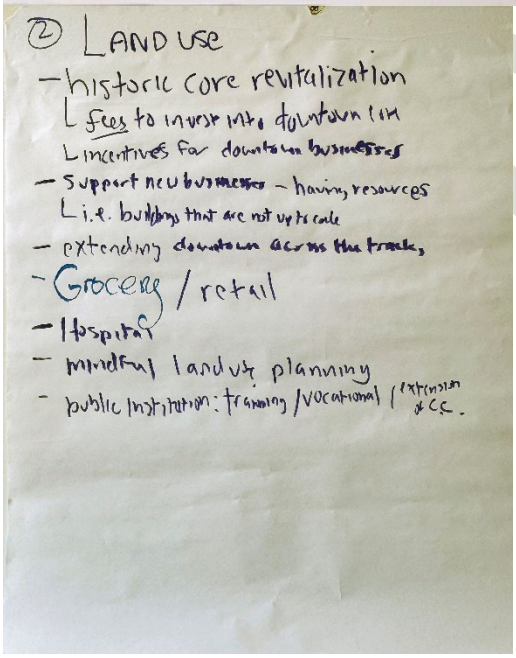


Figure 2. Transportation & Mobility Notes

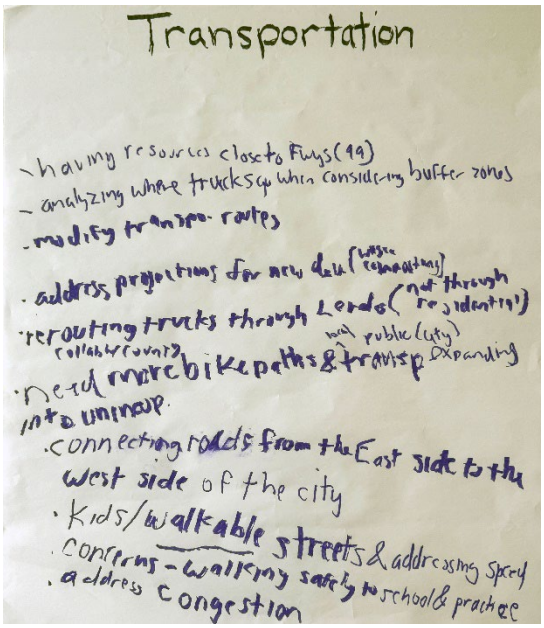


Figure 3. Conservation & Air Quality Notes

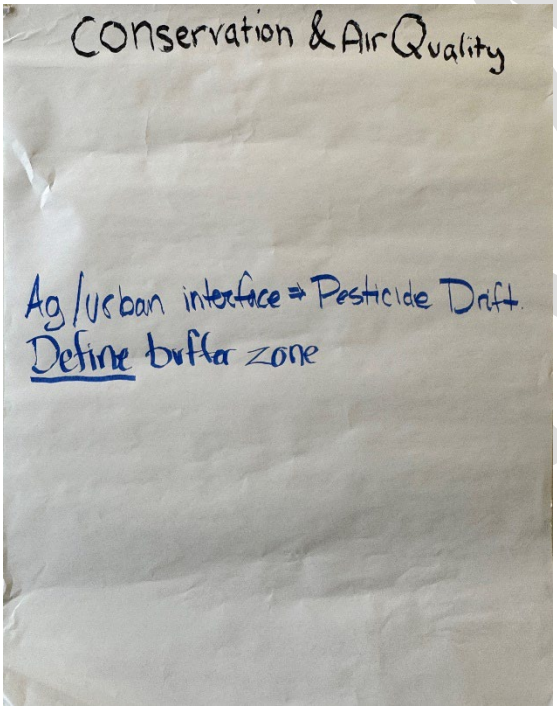


Figure 4. Safety & Noise Notes

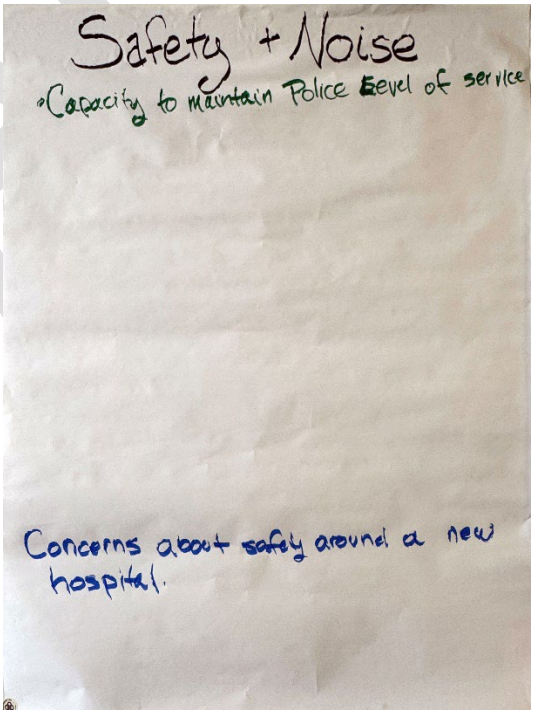
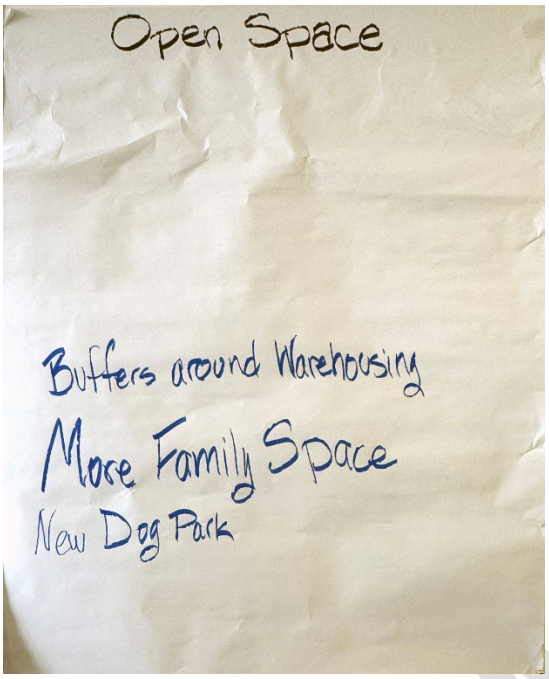
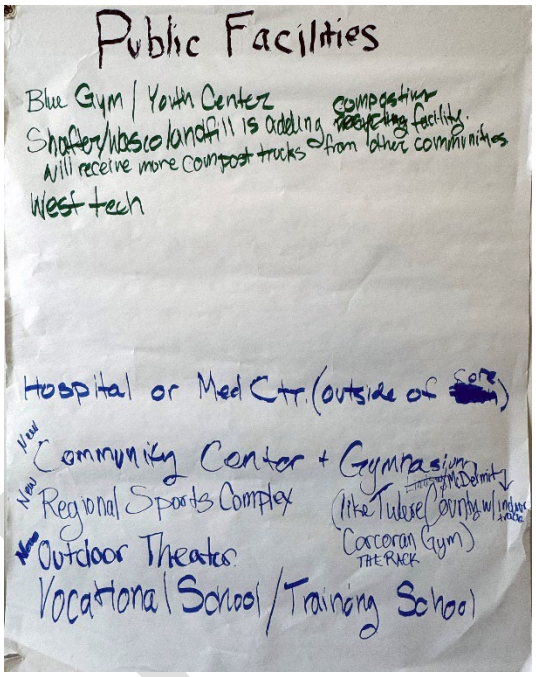


Figure 5. Open Space & Public Facilities Notes





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