

## Valley's cities can see rebirth, says report

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- **Revitalizing city centers is key to managing growth**
- **“The San Joaquin Valley is California’s fastest-growing region”**

The once-vibrant city centers of San Joaquin Valley communities can see a rebirth and in turn help manage growth, according to a new report from the Council of Infill Builders.

It shows how communities can overcome challenges to compact development and cultivate walkable neighborhoods while preserving local history.

The report emerged from a brain trust of Valley builders, public officials, financial leaders and land use experts that convened in Fresno to identify the challenges cities face in efforts to meet the emerging demand for walkable, convenient neighborhoods.

“The San Joaquin Valley is California’s fastest-growing region,” says Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin. “In order to accommodate growth and fulfill consumer preference, cities need to offer a mix of housing where residents can live within walking or biking distance from jobs, stores, schools, and services.”

The report identifies four key barriers that limit opportunities for investment in historic downtown areas, including insufficient amenities; inadequate infrastructure; lack of financing; and too few constraints on the horizontal growth that consumes open space and valuable agricultural land.

“These challenges can be met through thoughtful planning, zoning and design,” says Curt Johansen, president of the Council of Infill Builders. “With the right combination of private investment and supportive public policy, communities can build homes in existing neighborhoods that will increase economic activity and tax revenue while reducing the burden on municipal budgets.”

Recommendations developed by the group include:

- Improving urban design and expanding amenities, such as through “pop-up culture” of food trucks and art shows and by allowing more experimentation and temporary permits for activities that bring residents into downtown neighborhoods.
- Flexible zoning that allows for new product types and catalytic interim uses for existing buildings or public spaces to encourage revitalization in key infill areas.

- Regional and local prioritization of infrastructure in infill areas, such as parks, utility upgrades, and sidewalks, as well as upgrading and performing deferred maintenance on public infrastructure, based on municipal assessments and master planning for infrastructure needs.
- Air district funding to finance catalytic infill projects that will reduce driving and air pollution by reviving downtown neighborhoods.
- Tiered or differential development impact fees that account for the true fiscal and environmental burdens of outlying projects and encourage new projects in infill neighborhoods.

"Residents of the San Joaquin Valley increasingly want exciting mixed-use places," says Michael Michaud of Wigh Properties, a family real estate business in Kingsburg. "Revitalizing city centers satisfies that demand and turns downtowns back into economic and social hubs and centerpieces of the regional economy."

The Council of Infill Builders is a nonprofit corporation of real estate professionals committed to improving California through infill development.

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