

Chapter 3 Environmental Setting

According to CEQA Guidelines Section 15125, a DEIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of a project to provide the baseline condition against which project-related impacts are compared. This section provides a general overview of the environmental setting for the proposed Fowler 2040 GP. More detailed descriptions of the environmental setting for each environmental issue area can be found in 3.3.

3.1 Regional Setting

Fowler is in the south-central area of Fresno County in the central San Joaquin Valley. Fowler is bisected by SR 99, Union Pacific Railroad, and Golden State Boulevard, approximately 11 miles south of the City of Fresno, and 5 miles of the City of Selma. Other incorporated cities near Fowler include Selma (5 miles to the southeast), Kingsburg (10 miles to the southeast), Reedley (13 miles to the southeast), Parlier (8 miles to the southeast), and Sanger (8 miles to the northeast) (See [Figure 2-1](#)). Fowler's SOI abuts that of the City of Selma to the southeast. Fowler is located on relatively level land with an elevation of 308 feet. The San Joaquin River and the Kings River are the two principal drainages within the San Joaquin Valley. Fowler is located roughly 16 miles south of the San Joaquin River and 10 miles northwest of the Kings River. Fowler is mostly surrounded by agricultural land except for the south boundary of the city which is surrounded by heavy industrial uses. While the region is not in high-risk zones for most natural hazards, extreme heat and drought are common risks, and ground shaking could occur in the event of an earthquake.

3.2 Physical Setting

3.2.1 Topography and Hydrology

Fowler is located on the Valley floor, which largely consists of flat, nearly level topography lacking substantially or obvious geologic landforms. The Valley is generally defined by the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range and foothills to the east, the Coastal Ranges to the west, and the Tehachapi Mountains to the south.

Fowler is located within the Kennedy Pond watershed; Hydrologic Unit Code: 180300090206. The San Joaquin River and the Kings River are the two principal drainages within the San Joaquin Valley, and Fowler is generally located approximately 18 miles south of the San Joaquin River and 9 miles northwest of the Kings River.

3.2.2 Climate

The San Joaquin Valley Air Basin (SJVAB), in which Fowler is situated, has an inland Mediterranean climate characterized by warm, dry summers and cooler winters. Summer temperatures often exceed 100°F and can vary as much as 30°F. Winters are for the most part mild and humid, with average high in the 50s, while the average daily low temperature is approximately 45°F. The surrounding topographic features restrict air movement through and out of the basin and, as a result, the SJVAB is highly susceptible to pollutant accumulation over time. Inversion layers are formed in the SJVAB throughout the summer and winter; and inversion layer is created when a mass of warm air sits over cooler air near the ground, preventing vertical dispersion of pollutants from the air mass below. During the summer, the San Joaquin Valley experiences daytime temperature inversions at elevations from 2,000 to 2,500 feet above the valley floor. During the winter months, inversions occur from 500 to 1,000 feet above the valley floor.¹ According to the United

¹ (Kings County Council of Governments 2018)

States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the San Joaquin Valley has some of the nation’s worst air quality.²

The SJVAB is generally considered to have a Mediterranean climate, characterized by sparse rainfall and hot, dry summers. With an average of over 260 sunny days per year, the SJVAB provides favorable conditions for ozone formation. While precipitation and fog during the winter block sunlight and reduce ozone concentrations, wintertime fog provides favorable conditions for the formation of particulate matter.

3.2.3 Demographics

Fowler was incorporated June 15, 1908, and in 1910 it recorded a population of 675. In 1920 Fowler had a population of 1,528.³ In 2004, Fowler had approximately 1,445 homes and the population had increased from 2,245 in 1974,⁴ to 4,100 in 2004,⁵ nearly doubling in size over 30 years. Since 2004, Fowler has experienced continued growth in the form of new dwelling unit production at an average annual rate of 2.4 percent, according to building permits issued by Fowler. As of January 1, 2019, Fowler contained 2,061 housing units and 6,605 residents.⁶ According to the State Department of Finance compounded annual growth rate data, Fowler is projected to have a higher growth rate but would add just 4,130 persons between 2015 and 2050.

Fowler has 1,828 households, according to the 2019 United States Census Bureau. A household includes all people living together in a housing unit, which may include one or more families living together, a person living alone, or a group of related or unrelated people. Fowler’s households have an average of 3.37 people. This is slightly higher than the averages for Fresno County and California, which are 3.16 and 2.96 respectively.

Fowler is primarily Hispanic, with Hispanics and Latinos representing 68.7 percent of the total population. White and Asian people comprise the next largest ethnic groups, representing 17.4 percent and 9.7 percent of Fowler’s population, respectively.⁷ A more detailed breakdown is provided in [Table 3-1](#).

Table 3-1: Fowler Ethnic Population as of 2019

	Number	Percent
White	1,079	17.4%
Black or African American	11	0.2%
Asian ¹	605	9.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	14	0.2%
Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Some other race	0	0.0%
Two or more races	234	3.8%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	4,257	68.7%
Total	6,200	100.0%
¹ Including South Asian Populations		

3.3 Land Use Setting

² (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2018)

³ (Woeste 1998)

⁴Ibid.

⁵ (United States Census Bureau 2019)

⁶ (State of California Department of Finance 2021)

⁷ (United States Census Bureau 2019)

3.3.1 Existing Land Uses

An existing land use represents the use that currently occupies a property. Existing uses are distinguishable from the planned land use or applicable zone district of a property, as it is often the case that the existing use on a property differs from what would be allowed as new development. The distribution of the existing land uses is shown in [Figure 3-1](#).

The breakdown of the existing land uses within the City limits, SOI, Expansion Area, and total planning area can be found in [Table 3-2](#). Residential uses make up the largest category within the city limits at nearly 31 percent, followed by vacant land at 22 percent. Agricultural uses make up a significant portion of both the SOI and expansion area, at 84.2 percent and 89.7 percent, respectively. Within the overall planning area, agriculture occupies 63.9 percent of the land, residential uses occupy approximately 10 percent, industrial uses make up 9.4 percent, while commercial and office uses occupy just 2.7 percent. Public uses, such as churches, government facilities, schools, and other utilities, occupy an additional 5 percent. The remaining 9 percent comprises vacant land and right-of-way. Most existing development lies on the east side of SR 99, although substantial residential development exists to the west. Retail and industrial uses are generally clustered along the eastern side of SR 99.

Table 3-2: Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Use	City Limits Acres (%)	Sphere of Influence ^a Acres (%)	Expansion Area ^b Acres (%)	Planning Area ^c Acres (%)
Residential Uses	378.1 (30.8%)	46.1 (1.8%)	17.7 (2.8%)	441.9 (9.9%)
1 Unit	334.9	41.6	17.8	394.35
2-4 Units	14.2	4.0	5.0	23.2
5+ Units	24.0	0.5	-	24.5
Manufactured Home Park	5.0	-	-	5.0
Commercial and Office Uses	69.1 (5.6%)	29.6 (1.1%)	23.9 (3.8%)	122.6 (2.7%)
Commercial	3.5	-	-	3.5
Day Care	8.0	5.2	-	13.2
Food Store	0.3	-	-	0.3
Fraternal Lodge	18.8	-	-	18.8
Funeral Home	1.0	-	-	1.0
Garage	0.4	1.4	-	1.9
General Office	8.7	3.2	5.1	17.0
Medical-Dental Office	4.9	5.7	-	10.7
Motel	5.1	-	-	5.1
Parking Lot	5.3	-	-	5.3
Plant Nursery	1.6	1.1	-	2.7
Restaurant	-	13.0	18.8	31.8
Service Station	8.5	-	-	8.5
Used Car Lot	1.9	-	-	1.9
Industrial Uses	223.7 (18.2%)	197.1 (7.6%)	0.0 (0%)	420.8 (9.4%)
Cold Storage	8.5	-	-	8.5
Factory	12.2	-	-	12.2
Freight Truck Terminal	4.2	-	-	4.2
Light Industrial Facility	32.7	44.2	-	76.9
Packing House	45.3	9.5	-	54.8
Warehouse	120.8	143.4	-	264.2
Public/Quasi-Public and Institutional Uses	191.3 (15.6%)	29.9 (1.2%)	0.0 (0%)	221.2 (5%)
Church	18.4	-	-	18.4
Government	1.7	-	-	1.7
Health Facility	2.4	-	-	2.4
Library	0.7	-	-	0.7
Oil, Gas	4.6	-	-	4.6

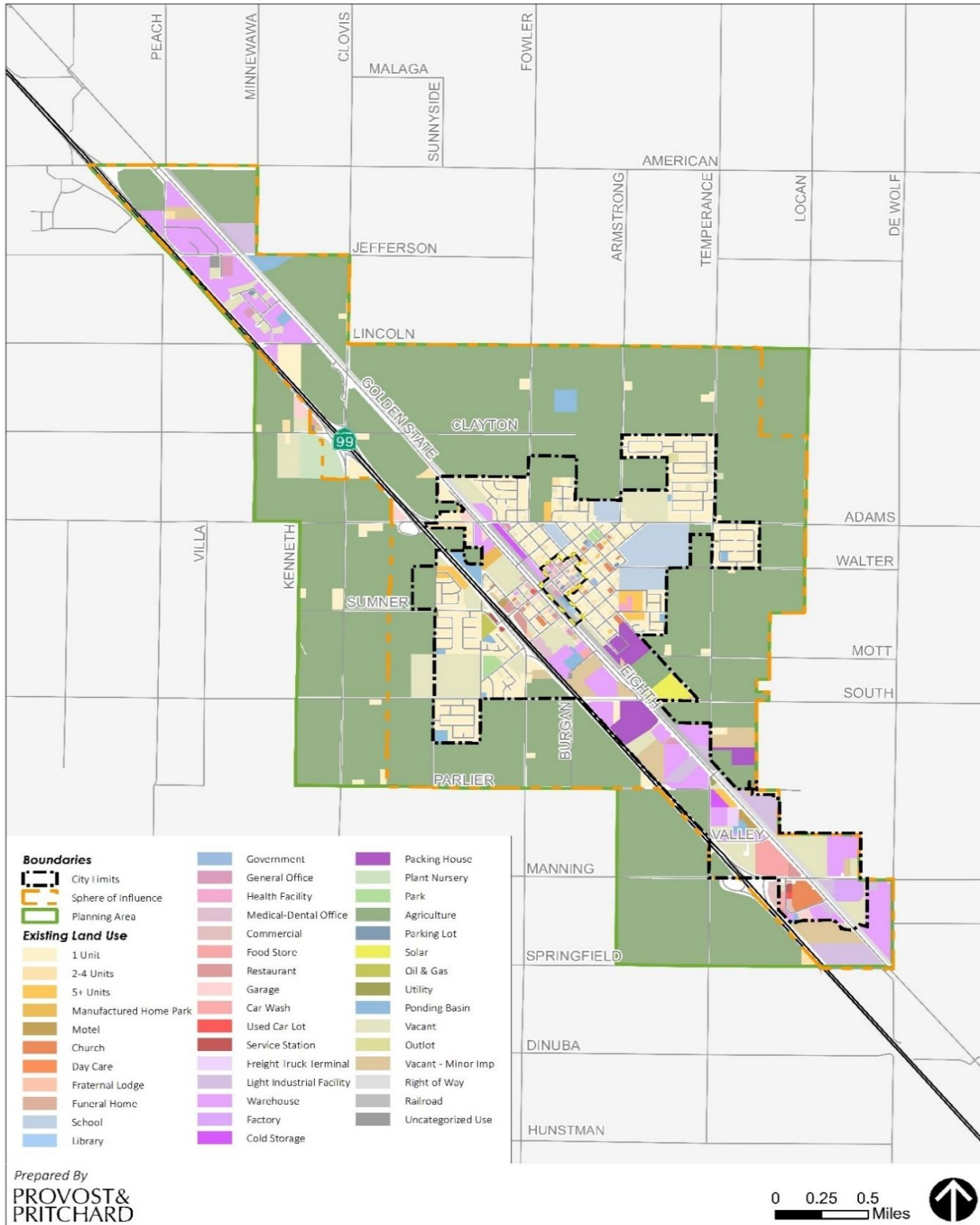
Existing Land Use	City Limits Acres (%)	Sphere of Influence ^a Acres (%)	Expansion Area ^b Acres (%)	Planning Area ^c Acres (%)
Park	8.0	-	-	8.0
Ponding Basin	24.1	22.1	-	46.2
Railroad	27.8	7.8	-	35.6
School	85.7	-	-	85.7
Solar	15.8	-	-	15.8
Utility	2.2	-	-	2.2
Agriculture	96.7 (7.9%)	2185.4 (84.2%)	567.2 (89.7%)	2849.4 (63.9%)
Agricultural crops	96.7	2185.4	1,075.2	3,357.0
Vacant and Right-of-Way	270.2 (22%)	108.1 (4.2%)	23.8 (3.8%)	402.1 (9%)
Vacant	208.8	36.2	23.8	268.8
Vacant – Minor Improvements	42.6	49.0	-	91.6
Right-of-Way	18.7	22.9	-	41.6
TOTAL	1229.0	2596.3	632.6	4457.8
^a Includes acreage in the SOI boundary, exclusive of acreage in Fowler limits.				
^b Includes acreage in the Expansion Area, exclusive of acreage in Fowler limits and SOI.				
^c Includes acreage in City limits, SOI, and Expansion Area				

3.3.2 Existing Access and Transportation Network

The roadway system within the planning area includes SR 99 as well as numerous city streets and county routes. Fowler’s current street hierarchy, also known as a functional classification system, groups streets into categories. There are five existing road classifications within the planning area: freeways, expressways, arterials, collectors, and local streets. SR 99 is the major regional transportation route into and out of Fowler.

There are three exits from SR 99 that provide access directly into Fowler: Adams Avenue, Merced Street, and Manning Avenue. Other commonly used entrances into Fowler include North Fowler Avenue, South Fowler Avenue, South Temperance Avenue, Golden State Boulevard, and East South Avenue. While SR 99 provides easy access to northern and southern California from Fowler, it also acts as a dominant physical barrier, separating the city into eastern and western areas. Only Adams Avenue, Merced Street, and Manning Avenue provide access across the highway, limiting the flow of both automobile and pedestrian traffic between the east and west sides of Fowler.

Figure 3-1: Existing Land Uses⁸



⁸ (Fresno County 2019)