

Fresno's BID for downtown revitalization: an analysis of a business improvement district

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## **Abstract**

In the mid-20th century a migration took place taking residents of American downtowns to the newly-developed, master-planned suburbs. In the wake were abandoned urban cores that evolved into poorly-perceived conditions. One of the many responses to correct these deteriorating central districts was the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BID), a public-private partnership that develops complementary services to what a city already provides and is paid for by assessments collected from property and business owners in a defined area. With more than 1,000 BIDs in existence in the United States as of 2010 (Becker, Grossman, Dos Santos, 2011), the concept has caught on as a tool utilized to bring downtowns back to life. However, despite the popularity of BIDs and their nearly 50-year existence as a planning tool, the question of how successful they are in improving the conditions of safety, cleanliness, and business growth in the districts over time needs continued analysis.

This study gauges the impact of BIDs through a case study of Fresno, California and its BID, the Downtown Fresno Partnership. To measure how the Downtown Fresno Partnership has been successful or unsuccessful, interviews with Downtown Fresno stakeholders were conducted to measure the BID's ability to change perceptions and advocate for the property owners in its boundary. Also, to measure further impacts, crime, property values and retail data was investigated.

A perceived injection of new energy seems to exist in Downtown Fresno, as evidenced by the activity taking place and the change in perception of the area since the Downtown Fresno Partnership was formed in 2011. The BID has played a central role in instituting physical change to the space while it has been a strong advocate for its property owners. In its first five years of existence, the Downtown Fresno Partnership has proven to be necessary, but it is not sufficient

on its own. From a planning standpoint, it is important to recognize that in order to revitalize, a community must first organize. In the case of Fresno, the BID provided an opportunity to collect formerly competing interests and put itself at the center of an underperforming downtown to alter the course towards a more vibrant and thriving area. It has established positive momentum down this path, and it is expected to be a strong voice for downtown in the future as others join in on the fully-experienced revitalized state of Downtown Fresno.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have become popular organizations in the United States to revitalize underachieving districts typically in downtown or urban core settings.

Through self-assessments and organization, property and business owners in a defined area are able to provide complementary services to what a city provides and manage the area to restore vibrancy. The trend began as a counteract to the shift of residences and retail to the suburbs in the 1970s. However, BIDs are just as relevant to cities today as they deal with population shifts and preferences that favor urban centers. BIDs are a strategy to remain competitive in attracting users to an urban space.

Through a longitudinal case study analysis of the Downtown Fresno Partnership, a property-based business improvement district in Fresno, California, this study addresses the research question:

*“How are business improvement districts successful or unsuccessful in improving the urban core conditions in and outside its district boundaries?”*

Whereas other studies have focused on major U.S. cities, this is the first on the BID in Fresno, which was established in 2011 but has recently been at the center of major policy shifts in the Downtown Fresno area. Fresno has attempted to revitalize its downtown in a number of ways since installing an outdoor, pedestrian-only mall in 1964 (Table 1-1), but none have seemed to gain the necessary traction to turn around its underperforming trend. The process of creating the Fresno BID was started in the mid-2000s, and with recent declarations of Downtown Fresno “starting to make a comeback” (Hostetter, 2011) and undergoing a “renaissance.” (Sheehan, 2016), a positive trend line has been forming.

**Table 1-1 - Fresno's Plans to Address Downtown Fresno, 1989-2007**

| <b>Plan Name</b>  | <b>Year</b> | <b>Details</b>   |
|---|-------------|--|
| Community Area Plan   | 1989        | Suggests Fulton Mall be served by “a comprehensive management organization (public/private partnership) and be given action-oriented attention toward redevelopment, revitalization, maintenance and modernization efforts.”   |
| Ratkovich Plan  | 1992        | Partial opening of Fulton Mall to vehicular traffic, two-way traffic to surrounding streets, a Farmers Market on Fulton Mall, and the building of a baseball stadium   |
| Downtown Fresno CA (Urban Land Institute Advisory Services Panel) | 1999        | Recommends “restoration of part of the street grid, developing people oriented attractions (such as new and improved Farmer’s Market), updating street furniture and implementing a stricter maintenance program.”   |
| “Vision 2010” Plan  | 2002        | Fresno Redevelopment Agency calls for “revitalization of Fulton Mall with possible limited traffic and refurbished pedestrian and landscape areas” by 2010   |
| Fulton Street Market Potential and Repositioning                  | 2002        | Analyzes a potential mix of dining, entertainment, leisure, retail and lodging along Fulton Mall, concluding that “the Mall would benefit from ‘vehicular traffic’ and that the city should plan for ‘an open access (pedestrian AND vehicles) district oriented to leisure patronage. |
| Fulton Street Revitalization                                      | 2002        | Report on reintroduction of limited car traffic to Fulton Mall   |
| Fulton Mall Report  | 2006        | Does not make a recommendation on restoring traffic to Fulton Mall but does recommend the creation of a Property-Based Improvement District after analyzing other pedestrian malls across the country and gathering public input   |
| Fresno Downtown Traffic and Infrastructure Study                  | 2007        | Does not give strong reasoning to restore traffic to the Fulton Mall but maintains flexibility in making “changes to the use and configuration of the Mall” in the future; also, recommends improvements in lighting, wayfinding, etc.   |

Source: Economic Impact Study Listing of Fulton Mall on National Register of Historic Places, prepared by Market Profiles (2008)

To measure the impact of the Downtown Fresno Partnership on this positive trend line, the study targets the themes of perception, advocacy, crime, property values and retail activity. The Downtown Fresno Partnership has specific goals and objectives targeted towards these themes, but due to its infancy, it has undergone some change in line with its surrounding environment. This study measures the organization's results in revitalizing within its boundary and the possible effects just on the outside of the district lines.

The advent of the Downtown Fresno Partnership acting as a central unit to guide long-term interests of the property owners in Downtown Fresno created a positive effect on downtown revitalization. These positive effects are largely in terms of the groundwork for future returns. The voice to restore vehicular traffic to the Fulton Mall demonstrated some of its strength. Increasing the exposure of the area to infrequent visitors through special events in its early years was another breakthrough. Now, the organization is directing its energy towards economic development, partnering prospective businesses with its property owners so that the field of vibrancy can take place when the Fulton Mall construction is over. Overall, though, its biggest strength is becoming the voice of downtown, aligning competing property owners and using the leverage to become an organization with political will to help get things done that fit its interests.

The outcomes of this study show the Downtown Fresno Partnership has altered its approach in providing leadership and management of its district as the wider Downtown Fresno area aims for a complete revitalized effort. A BID can and should be expected to evolve as priorities and personnel change over the time of creation to implementation. Therefore, this study showcases how those changes in approach can still be guided by the vital factors of perception, advocacy, crime, retail activity and property values.

## **Significance of Case Study Site**

Fresno, the fifth-largest city in California, was originally a small agricultural community and a train depot along the Central Pacific route until the Central Valley Project in the 1930s (Hollander, 2011). The 1933 Central Valley Project provided water to the dry but fertile San Joaquin Valley area and has resulted in “an unprecedented transformation of a sleepy train station town into the agricultural center of the world,” as the region produces 25 percent of the food in the United States (Hollander, 2011). With the rise of the city’s relevance in the national food supply, the city’s population grew rapidly, going from 289,225 in 1970 to 570,163 in 2000 according to the U.S. Census. A need to accommodate this growth in the form of homes was dire. Home construction followed the path of “sprawling, placeless new growth” (Hollander, 2011) and the centrality of downtown began to dissipate.

The downtown’s vitality took on its most dramatic attempt at resurgence in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the installation of the Fulton Mall in 1964. The Fulton Mall was planned and designed by Victor Gruen and Garret Eckbo. Gruen, an Austrian architect who immigrated to the United States in 1938, was well known for his work with enclosed shopping centers in the suburbs before attempting to duplicate that retail experience as part of urban renewal in the latter half of his American career (Hardwick, 2004).

Gruen, however, did not just attempt to recreate a shopping mall experience in Downtown Fresno. He and his firm developed a comprehensive plan for the entire Downtown area in 1958. The three-piece plan involved three parties: the City of Fresno, the Downtown Redevelopment Agency, and the Downtown business owners (Wall, 2005). The plan focused on the entire central business district, using a system of highways to connect it regionally, and then targeted a core “super block” (Wall, 2005). Along the outside of this super block would be a

traffic loop to help keep vehicles on the periphery. The third component of the plan was the “Central Business District Project One,” which featured the creation of a pedestrian-only mall along Fulton Street (Wall, 2005). The Fulton Mall project was funded by the City and Urban Renewal funds, and it received a Housing and Urban Development Award for design excellence in 1968 (Hardwick, 2004).

The Fulton Mall and Downtown Fresno has experienced an up-and-down ride, however. Within one year of its opening, Fulton mall spurred \$800,000 for remodeling of buildings and another \$19 million for new development in Downtown (Wall, 2005). The Fulton Mall, though, soon fell victim to the pull of the suburbs. Two new shopping centers were built in the suburbs in the 1970s and the local government even built federal offices out of the downtown area (Wall, 2005). One shopping mall called Fashion Fair, which followed Gruen’s early concepts, was approved for the northeast part of town two years after the Fulton Mall opened. This project is considered to be the “watershed” moment when the community felt the government shifted its focus away from maintaining its downtown urban core (King, 1988).

The commitment to the Downtown’s success waned in almost the same amount of time it took for the planning process to be completed in the 1960s. By 2008, from a business and city standpoint, the Fulton Mall was only operating at 5.7 percent of its “ultimate potential” in terms of property and sales tax revenue (Market Profiles, 2008). From a retail perspective, when the Fulton Mall was at its peak in the 1960s, it had captured 57 percent of Fresno’s retail market (Market Profiles, 2008). In 2007, that percentage was 1.3 percent (Market Profiles, 2008). In addition to an underperforming center of commercial and residential activity, the Fulton Mall was at one point, as late as 2008, considered to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Market Profiles, 2008). With this designation, Fresno residents who wanted the Fulton

mall to be preserved (referred to some as “Save the Mall folks” in this study’s interviews) could stage resistance to creating change and spurring investment activity in Downtown Fresno’s core.

The Downtown Fresno area was seeking leadership to create actual revitalization like it did when it installed the Fulton Mall in the 1960s. The most recent effort, staged by a mayor whose platform featured downtown revitalization and spurred by a general plan update in 2009, features the Downtown Fresno Partnership as one of the key actors. The BID is at the center of it all, trying to stir activity in the form of retail sales, events, marketing, new businesses, among others. The process to establish the BID was not easy, however. It actually started as early as 2004 and had to survive through the Great Recession, an economic event that had many adverse impacts on all of Fresno. Despite the drawn-out process, the Downtown Fresno Partnership was enacted in 2010 and began as an organization in 2011 – more than 45 years after the pedestrian-only Fulton Mall was created. The Downtown Fresno Partnership may have been primarily created to help implement change on the Fulton Mall, but most importantly, it has changed how Downtown Fresno property and business owners view the timeframe of work required to institute revitalization.

### **Significance of Study**

This case study analysis will help reveal the role that the Downtown Fresno Partnership has played in addressing the conditions of Downtown Fresno, once a place of significant commercial activity but most recently more of a “9-to-5” stop for the majority of people (Market Profiles, 2008). Readers of this report will learn the role BIDs can play in redevelopment of urban cores as well as strengths and weaknesses they have in the process, relative to their

specific districts as well as to the outlying areas. BIDs may be popular, but their role should be targeted in its early stages of existence.



## **Chapter 2 - Background**

### **What are BIDs?**

Numerous definitions have been provided for a Business Improvement District (BID), but the overall theme is the same: a legal mechanism to raise funds and enhance the management of a particular place (Segal, 2002). This mechanism is in the form of a public-private partnership, between property and business owners and the municipality in which they operate, and it uses the funds to provide complementary services to the defined district. While some definitions call BIDs a form of “sub-government” (Grossman, 2010) and others deem it more of a “privately directed and publicly sanctioned” organization (Hoyt, 2007), BIDs are self-interest community groups that gather resources through a self-imposed assessment. They are not a form of government in the sense they can create policy for an entire city – although some have dubbed them private local governments due to their ability to control aspects of the smaller district (Ellen, Schwartz, Voicu, Brooks, & Hoyt, 2007). Their power and influence can be felt in other ways and are sanctioned by state-by-state legislation. From a day-to-day standpoint, though, BIDs are publicly-sanctioned, can provide a wide range of services for additional services and improvement, and mostly rely on self-assessments for the majority of its revenue (Morçöl, Hoyt, Meek, & Zimmermann, 2008).

The services, which are meant to complement and not replace those provided by the public sector, were originally focused on cleanliness and safety in the first BIDs (Houstoun, 2003) but have since expanded over the last 50 years into a wider variety. This new range of services includes economic development, public space regulation, and transportation and parking (Houstoun, 2003). The most common services, however, tend to be marketing, maintenance, capital improvements, and policy advocacy (Mitchell, 1999). Of note, and despite the similarities

in services across BIDs in the United States and world, the specific services a BID provides is unique to its own district. The mix of services is left to be determined by the needs of the property and business owners as well as any other management perspectives in the defined area (Houstoun, 2003).

Services are not only the differences among BIDs. BIDs go by different names based on the state: special improvement districts (New Jersey), public improvement districts (Texas), neighborhood improvement districts (Pennsylvania), and property-based business improvement districts, or PBIDs (California) (Hoyt, 2007). In California, BIDs were legally enacted based on two laws: The Parking and Business Improvement Area Law of 1989 and Property Business Improvement District Law of 1994. Although similar BID laws were on the books since the 1950s (Brooks, 2007), these two laws expanded previous legislation that only allowed businesses to tax themselves and pay for parking lots. This is the reason why the 1989 and 1994 laws exist in Parking Division of the California's Streets and Highway Code for legislation but pertain to more than just parking. The second of these laws, the 1994 version, gives BIDs – or as they are known through the legislation, PBIDs – the authority to provide activities such as promotion of public events, marketing and economic development, retail retention and recruiting, providing security, sanitation, street and sidewalk cleaning, to name a few. The law also provides the ability for the districts to create improvements on any tangible property with a useful life of five years or more. Examples of such improvements include parking facilities, lighting and heating facilities, and rehabilitation or removal of existing structures. The addition of financing of streets as well as addressing existing structures, security facilities and equipment were the key differences between the 1989 and 1994 laws. However, neither law enables PBIDs to issue bonds.

In addition to legislation outlining what BIDs are constituted to do, the laws also outline the process of establishing a BID and the management structure. Before outlining the process of creating a BID, it is important to note BID adoption is a choice and not mandated at a government level (Brooks, 2007). However, once a BID is adopted based on a vote of the district's property and business owners, all those included in the boundary must pay the assessment. This can create issues for smaller businesses, which will be addressed in the critiques of BIDs later in this review.

The process of forming a BID can vary by state but does have similar characteristics. First, to adopt a BID, there are one of three different approaches: support by business and property owners through an affirmative vote; an objection or protest period by affected business owners; or requiring the municipality's government to show a need for a BID (Houstoun, 2003). Once the first step is passed, a BID is typically organized as a non-profit, public-private or public-nonprofit organization (Briffault, 1999; Mitchell, 1999; Hoyt, 2007) and assessments can be determined through a fee based on property size, a building's frontage, its location within the defined district, or on an equal basis (Houstoun, 2003). Sometimes the assessment is handled through the city. Although BIDs may not get a consensus support from its entire district, the assessment acts as a thread of cohesion and collectivity among its variety of constituents. The constituents thus establish a board of directors and may hire administrative staff based on the size of the BID.

Hoyt (2001) uncovered BIDs not only form due to collective efforts of business owners, but also due to community partnerships. Non-profit organizations, universities, and existing community development corporations can help provide resources during the formation process as well as during the BID's existence. In addition, government officials can play a role in

forming BIDs, based on the expectation BID participants will “offer goods as well as job opportunities, thus improving the economic conditions in nearby residential areas” (Hoyt, 2001). Hoyt’s study even shows existing BIDs help influence the creation of other BIDs in the same city. Therefore, BIDs may only manage its own district, but there are several actors that help steer the creation process as well as the sphere of influence in subsequent years, beyond the areas in dire need of commercial revitalization.

BIDs are more likely to form in an area that has more commercial space, where the district benefits can be capitalized, and in an established neighborhood in the midst, or with the potential of, experiencing some sort of appreciation (Meltzer, 2012). In other words, declining neighborhoods with no potential for growth are not likely to benefit from BID formation (Meltzer, 2012). BIDs also tend to form in older cities, based on the year of incorporation (Brooks, 2007), which would make sense as this public-private partnership is an answer to urban decline in older areas of a city. One of the reasons BIDs are attractive tools to revitalize and redevelop underperforming, older areas is the fact that they narrow their approach to make a specific district better economically and socially while not stripping the area of its boundaries (Mitchell, 2008). According to Mitchell, a BID’s approach to improving an area has four elements: small-scale planning is more sensitive to a community’s needs than large-scale city planning; they act as the anti-suburban planning tool; breaking up administrative roles is not detrimental to a city but rather effective; and BIDs aim to address the public interest with entrepreneurial public-private partnerships.

The process of establishing a BID can be long and feature many types of actors. However, the key role in seeing a BID through the formation process to a long-standing existence is leadership (Bradley, 2006). This leadership is an ongoing process, making sure goals

are met and being evaluated moving forward so that the vibrancy of a downtown is maintained. It has also helped BIDs generally maintain their existence once established as relatively few have not been renewed after the end of five- or 10-year terms (Becker, Grossman, Dos Santos, 2011). Leadership for a special district has changed since the 1950s, going from advocacy in the 1950s and 1960s to a more cooperative and collaborative approach since the 1970s (Bradley, 2006). However, this paradigm shift in leadership mirrors the rise and continued existence of BIDs.

### **Why were BIDs originally formed?**

BIDs were created to establish a sustainable funding base, react to declining public resources, and respond to stronger competition (Houstoun, 2003). While BIDs were first created in declining post-industrial cities left to compete with suburban shopping after the middle of the 20th century (Schragger, 2010), BIDs are not uncommon approaches in American history in revitalization or competition with other areas of a city. BIDs are related to special districts or benefit districts, an idea in the United States that goes as far back to New York City in the 1700s to finance water supply projects (Houstoun, 2003). The newer BID approach is different, though, based on the fact they use a self-assessment from all of its members to deliver services and not physical redevelopment (Mallett, 1994). The services help create an environment for the business owners to act in their self-interests for the better of a community, an ideal that is ingrained in American cities.

As Morçöl and Zimmerman (2008) and Monti (1999) address, business owners acting in their own interests to improve the surrounding areas of their environment is nothing new. American cities have mostly been centers of commercial activity over the course of history, and their shape and form have been forged by private interests (Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2008;

Warner, 1987). The idea of *privatism* (Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2008; Warner, 1987) and its role in urban development means that the territory of a city features individuals acting to better their profits and lives while working together as a community. In other words, *privatism* means “communities should be unions of wealth-seeking individuals.” (Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2008). A community may be challenged by external factors, but the sources of power, influence and money – business and property owners – will find a way to better their environment.

Those business and property owners looking for answers in the time of suburban growth were situated in once-thriving downtowns. Thus, BIDs were formed in a way to counteract this movement, bringing back customers and users of the urban space from shopping malls located in the periphery. The first BID in the world was created in Toronto in 1970 while New Orleans was the first home of the first assessment-financed district in the United States in 1975 (Houstoun, 2003). The Bloor-Jane-Runnymede Improvement Area in Toronto began to form in 1963 when Neil McLellan, a local business owner and business association parking committee chairman, worked with the city officials and other stakeholders to create a business district (Hoyt, 2008). The reasoning for developing the business district was because the once-thriving commercial area now known as the West Bloor Village needed to compete with suburban shopping centers that were attracting former customers and thus affecting parking revenues. Also, the group wanted all property and business owners to contribute to the district’s improvement, thus eliminating the voluntary assessment and any “free riders.” (Hoyt, 2007). By 1969, legislation was created that allowed for the creation of the first BID and the organization first focused on “streetscape improvements and special events.” (Hoyt, 2008). In the United States, a 1975 state law in Louisiana, the 1975 Act 498, in 1974 gave way to the first American BID in New Orleans, known as the Downtown Development District (Houstoun, 2003). These first movements

towards a competitive downtown enforce that “BIDs seek to entice those disenchanted with suburbia ... BIDs do not have to be concerned with growth management because the growth boundaries of most downtowns are already well-defined.” (Mitchell, 2008) The fact that BIDs do not necessarily provide resources to create their growth in a more efficient and dense pattern, but rather on growing within its already existing features and infrastructures can make it more effective with its assessments. Being complementary to the municipality and focusing on services enables businesses to rise together and be competitive at a larger scale.

There are several contributing factors to the downtown revival movement, all of which are aimed at remaining competitive to the suburban shift. The suburban shift, following World War II, involved the mass production of automobiles and houses. The increase in cars and trucks on the road allowed industry to be less reliant on trains and rivers for transportation. Meanwhile, people took flight to the new homes being built in the suburbs. These homes were built in unprecedented numbers, going from 114,000 housing starts in 1944 to 1.7 million in 1950 (Levy, 2006). With the movement of people and homes, retail followed. Shopping centers moved out of the downtown environment as the demand for space and parking was easier to meet in the expansive environment. Over a 30-year span from 1945-1975, central business districts, which had 30 percent of regional retail sales in 1945, featured just 11 percent of the retail market share (Levy, 2006).

In addition to the suburban population and retail shift, other factors that played a role in the BID movement were due to policy changes that focused on the privatization of some public services in the 1980s, spurred at the federal level by Reagan administration policies, and the movement of companies and their office workers to the edges of the city that left retail centers abandoned (Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2008). By 1990, 40 percent of all office space in the

United States was constructed in the 1980s (Birch, 1991; Mallet, 1994). A number of factors contributing to this construction boom included deregulation of U.S. savings and loans associations, absence of another bank investment alternatives and foreign investors (Mallet, 1994). As office space grew in central cities as well as on the urban edges, the increase of low-paying jobs, urban poverty, and unemployment began to form in the 1990s (Mallet, 1994). For BIDs, the over-construction of real estate in the 1980s began a shift away from property building to property management (Birch, 1991; Mallet, 1994). The void in revenues from users of the retail, residential and office space as well as the cut in federal subsidies to city governments left business and property owners looking for answers. The rise of *privatism* began to take rise once again as cities returned to their “self-interests for the communal good” roots.

The most recent growth of BIDs in the United States is an answer to the focus on redevelopment in the 1980s by introducing the management of these post-industrial spaces in the 1990s (Mallet, 1994). While tracking BIDs across the United States is difficult because a comprehensive registry does not exist at the state or federal level, there have been several attempts in determining the number of BIDs. A survey by Jerry Mitchell in 1999 showed 60 percent of BIDs in the United States were created in the 1990s (Houstoun, 2003). Mitchell’s study determined there were 404 BIDs before the turn of the century, a total that swelled to more than 1,000 when the International Downtown Association conducted its own census in 2010. In line with the growth in number of BIDs, the districts and their managing organizations have become more like “general-purpose governments” and “less like special-purpose entities” (Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2008). They have also become more autonomous from local governments (Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2008). With a general, autonomous approach, BIDs have evolved but remain focused on remaining competitive to re-attract users of the downtown space.



## **What do BIDs do?**

BIDs, which were originally established as management entities to create clean and safe environments, have expanded their services over the last 50 years and shown a return on the assessments paid for by business owners. BIDs have increased property values (Ellen et al., 2007), reduced crime (Hoyt, 2005; Canalog, 2006; Brooks, 2008; Cook & MacDonald, 2011), and taken a role in advocacy or collaboration with a municipality's government (Wolf, 2008). Most studies have been based in large, coastal cities, but BIDs have also been proven to work in revitalizing Rust Belt cities (Fox, 2013).

BIDs can have a dramatic effect on the resale value of commercial property values within the district (Ellen et al., 2007). The Ellen et al. study showed that commercial properties saw a 30.2 percent increase in value per square foot in the first five years after a BID was designated when compared to the time period before designation. However, the study also revealed that the increase in property values does not extend to residential properties. Also, smaller BIDs, with a higher concentration of retail and industrial space, do not share in this increase in property values. Residential properties tend to experience the highest growth in value immediately prior to a BID designation, showing an anticipatory rise in value. That value declines, though, as the BID ages (Ellen et al., 2007).

One of the two primary components in the first BIDs, safety - and subsequently reducing crime - is an essential piece of what BIDs do. With that, they have undergone several studies centered on crime. Through previous literature, BIDs have shown to decrease crime in their defined areas (Brooks, 2008), specifically related to property crime when compared to other commercial areas (Hoyt, 2001; Hoyt, 2005). This can be due to the presence of security or BID

ambassadors on the streets wearing welcoming, brightly-colored shirts (Hoyt, 2001, Hoyt, 2005). Despite the decrease in crime in the district, a possible spillover effect still may exist. A study in Philadelphia showed BIDs feature lower crime rates in commercial areas compared to non-BID areas while also not pushing crime to nearby blocks (Hoyt, 2005). However, some spillover effects were noted in other studies of the same city (Canalog, 2006).

Although there is a possibility of crime spillover, a BID is created to provide safety in its specific district and the expenditures on ensuring safety for its users can be substantial. BIDs can at times outspend local governments on security and crime reduction (Brooks, 2008). For example, Brooks (2008) shows one of the BIDs in Los Angeles – the Hollywood Entertainment District BID – spent \$1.4 million per square kilometer on security measures. It was slightly higher than the Los Angeles Police Department’s \$1.3 million per square kilometer in the same area.

In another crime analysis in BIDs, Cook and McDonald (2011) were able to put a dollar value to the effect of crime reduction in Los Angeles BIDs. They determined for every \$10,000 spent on crime control by a BID in the city would result in \$200,000 of societal benefits. This shows the private intervention or cooperation with a municipality’s police force helps reduce crime, a public good felt by all. The exact dollar figures may not be specific to all BIDs in the United States, but it does show there is a greater societal return on investment in crime reduction when undertaken by a BID. This is an important fact to keep in mind when critiques are raised in the next section because it shows the security in a district may seem like social control, but it does have a greater benefit.

With “clean and safe” priorities established and central to BIDs, as the districts age and gain more political clout in a municipality, the evolution to being a part of governmental matters

begins to surface. BIDs play an active role in urban governance due to their centrality and widening range of political influence (Morçöl et al, 2010). That central role, in downtowns or in important commercial districts, was given rise due to the lack of management in those areas and their subsequent downfall. Therefore, BIDs serve as a management arm for such an area (Grossman, 2010). BIDs clean up their areas, gain credibility, and then begin advocating for more policies that can help in the revitalization process. The process becomes more complicated, though, as a BID moves beyond beautification programs to improve its district. These moves, by leaders and managers of BIDs, include contributing a great deal of effort on planning and economic development (Wolf, 2008). While some studies show a weak causal connection between a BID and economic development (Schragger, 2010), BIDs are still players in this area due to their proximity to public, private and nonprofit organizations that provide services that affect the overall development of a city (Mitchell, 2008). The economic interests of a BID meet the standards of a select few (Schragger, 2010), but the organization evolves into a role of bettering its own community – as is the case with any community organization. BIDs are a part of the bigger city picture.

### **What are the critiques of BIDs?**

With the growth of BIDs, the critiques of the revitalization tool have taken shape. BIDs can have uneven benefits across paying members, as “anchor participants” can have the most to gain (Brooks & Strange, 2011). Meanwhile, the ability to shape a public space can be limited to resources raised and the relationship with local authority (De Magalhães, 2012). Despite those internal issues within a BID, the major themes of discontent for BIDs from a larger standpoint are accountability, evaluation, and social control or privatizing public space.

As BIDs become more and more popular, their role as a private actor in a public setting is becoming more common, which raises the question of accountability. BIDs are actors in the urban governance network (Morçöl et al., 2010), but this can be limited to playing a central role in the district's boundaries and not creating policy or demonstrating power throughout the rest of the city. While some may believe this issue of accountability is limited by the organization's inability to create policy (Hochleutner, 2008), meaning their downfalls are sequestered to a defined area, others may see the accountability of these organizations needing to meet a higher standard as their legal authorities grow (Barr, 1997; Briffault, 1999). Barr feels the lack of accountability for BIDs to the public for their actions is a "serious problem." (Barr, 1997) Los Angeles is one municipality that has tried to address the issue of accountability (Cook and McDonald, 2011). Such measures include annual audits of the BID's financial reports, with the city holding the ability to shut down a BID if it is out of compliance with its service agreements or has financial management issues (MacDonald, 2009).

The concern with accountability in BIDs also stems from an inconsistent approach to evaluation. Although BIDs are prevalent across the United States and throughout North America, the organizations are not measured through a proven evaluation method, thus creating a performance measurement gap for delivering on their promises (Grossman, 2010). Assessing the performance requires an integrated qualitative and quantitative approach (Grossman, 2010), something that does not exist across the board. Specific factors include quality, accountability and accessibility, which could be strong barometers of success as compared to business measurements (Grossman, 2010). The benchmarking system put in place by the Downtown Phoenix Partnership can be seen as a good practice as it focuses on a quantitative method for measuring change and establishing its objectives (Houstoun, 2003).

In addition to accountability and evaluation, the biggest critique of BIDs is their ability to privatize public space and enact social control (Grossman, 2010). Kelley (2014), through an analysis of Seattle Business Improvement Areas – another name for BIDs – showed these districts control public space in a detrimental way towards people such as the homeless or demonstrators who are limited in their use of a public space. Kelley even goes on to call these spaces “pseudo-private” due to the regulatory nature of BIDs. Marquardt and Fuller (2012) show, through a case study of Los Angeles BIDs, that the organizations may attempt to stir downtown revitalization by managing public space, but a side effect is a BID focuses on “surface beautification” that steers away actual political answers to social tensions. BIDs can be superficial in making sure their space looks neat and tidy, but the control of the defined boundary does not address the root of a safety or cleanliness issue. The privatization practice of BIDs can be seen as a bucket of paint on a crumbling wall.

Despite the privatization critique, as Grossman (2010) notes, BIDs are different than other public-private partnerships in that there might be a better way to view their role. Instead of viewing BIDs as only focused on business-related goals, with the private weighing heavier in such partnerships, a BID is actually designed to blend private endeavors with public capabilities (Grossman, 2010). This underscores the *privatism* background raised earlier in this literature review. Nonetheless, the social control of a public space can be destructive to some users, and BIDs, through their industry partnership, the International Downtown Association, have begun to research how it can play a better role in social issues such as homelessness. As BIDs age in their own cities and as an overall planning tool, they could become a bigger actor in a city by increasing its societal benefits.

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

This study measures how BIDs impact downtown revitalization through two perspectives: people and business. Considering BIDs are public-private partnerships, evaluating them through the lenses of people (public) and business (private) will help showcase results, successful and unsuccessful, through their cooperative structure. As Marquardt and Fuller (2012) point out, BIDs must be studied by evaluating how they target specific urban populations through the organization's work, how they govern users of the space, what kinds of alliances do they form with other actors to shape their space, and how they take part in that transformation process. The people and business framework used by this study will use those guidelines in collecting results oriented to crime, perception, retail activity, property values and advocacy.

Working within the two-pronged framework, the research question is answered through a longitudinal single-case study analysis (Yin, 2014) of Fresno, California. The case study measures the impact of the Downtown Fresno Partnership over the course of time (during its first five years of existence). The BID may be relatively young, but with several plans having already been created since the 1970s addressing the state of Downtown Fresno and the City as a whole, the first few years of the BID's existence can show a change in the state of the district since previous actions were passive in nature. Also, according to Brooks in 2007, Fresno was the largest city in California without a BID. In fact, of the 20 largest cities in the nation's most populous state, 13 had at least one BID. Coupled with a multi-decade decline in performance in its downtown commercial sector, Fresno's creation of a BID has shown how it is trying to catch up with other California downtowns that had already adopted a BID approach in revitalization.

As is the case with all BIDs, this study discusses the services provided by the Downtown Fresno Partnership and how they have changed from the time of creation to implementation.

These services currently include marketing, special events, security, trash pick-up, landscaping, maintenance, recruiting new businesses and professional development events (Downtown Fresno Partnership, 2016). A BID provides its own unique assortment of services, but this study analyzes Fresno specifically to measure its success. The process in which I analyzed “success,” the two-pronged framework of business and people, could be applied to other BIDs to help determine their effectiveness as a planning tool across the country.

**Figure 1 - Analysis Framework**



### **People (Public)**

#### **Task 1: Crime**

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, BIDs have possibly played a role in decreasing crime inside the district boundaries. This study dives into the issue of crime being decreased inside a BID specifically to Fresno. However, this one will be different due to the fact that Fresno has only one BID and the district has a tiered system. In other words, the Downtown Fresno Partnership may apply for more security and safety patrols in its core area of the Fulton

Mall in Zone 3 as opposed to the edges in Zone 1. Using the Crime Watch Map published by the Fresno Police Department on the City of Fresno website and using a company called Socrata, the study collected crimes relating to disorder, breaking and entering, and property on an annual basis for 2012-16. Based on the Fresno Police Department's definitions, disorder is "any behavior that tends to disturb the public peace or decorum, scandalize the community, or shock the public sense of morality," and property crimes are "general crimes committed on a residential or commercial property." (Fresno Police Department, 2016) Once crime was collected following this criteria for the entire city, the target area was filtered by using the intersections within the PBID boundary (Appendix A), which was then used to create a composite list of all Disorder and Property crimes in the PBID area. This summary totals of these crimes can be found in the Safety section of Chapter 4.

## **Task 2: Perception**

Downtowns, as with any commercial district inside a city, attempt to draw users to its space by harnessing positive perceptions of its space. The perception of a struggling downtown can linger across generations and force BIDs to work hard in its branding and marketing efforts to make the district an attractive place to visit. This study measured how the BID plays a role in improving this perception through interviews, with questions covering the BID, Downtown Fresno and the leadership showcased by the BID (Appendix B). The interviews, ranging from 20-40 minutes, targeted identified key stakeholders defined by their role in the Downtown Fresno Partnership and Downtown Fresno. In total, 19 interviews were conducted between November 2016 and February 2017.



## **Business (Private)**

### **Task 3: Property Values**

Since BIDs are created primarily to serve the interest of the property owners acting in the district's space, this study dove into how those property owners see a return on their self-assessment through a gain in property values. However, due to how Fresno County property records are maintained and shared with the public, only values for 2011 and 2012 were able to be collected. Despite this shortfall, and due to recent events that have taken place in the Downtown Fresno area such as the reopening of Fulton Mall to vehicular traffic, this set of data will provide a good baseline for future studies. The property values shared in this study reflect those in the Downtown Fresno Partnership's three tiers as well as in the same outlying area defined in the crime analysis. The latter part will help provide context for the growth in the property values within the BID boundary while also attempting to measure any spillover property value increase or decrease outside the boundary.

### **Task 4: Retail Activity**

In addition to property owners, business owners and the change in their sales activity before and during the BID's existence will be measured. The Downtown Fresno Partnership is primarily focused on the Fulton Mall portion of the district. The study gathered annual sales tax figures collected by Fresno County to reflect retail figures for the entire city and county; however, sales tax, and subsequent retail data, was unable to be gathered specific to Downtown Fresno. Therefore, this study does draw any conclusions on growth or decline in retail activity within the BID boundaries, but it does leave an opportunity for the Downtown Fresno Partnership to measure retail sales number and assess its impact to improve business activity.

Historical studies conducted by professional firms provided on the City of Fresno website are addressed in this section, which show the performance of the Fulton Mall before the BID was established. Showing these two approaches can help the BID measure how far retail activity has progressed or regressed once the current Fulton Mall construction is complete and storefronts have no physical barriers to attracting customers.

### **Task 5: Advocacy**

While it may be difficult to quantify, the role of advocacy by BIDs could lead to results that serve the self-interest of business and property owners in the district. BIDs have become important actors in the urban governance network (Morçöl, Vasavada, & Kim, 2014), meaning they can influence the way in which policies are created in relation to the downtown. For the Downtown Fresno Partnership, the study measured its ability to advocate for downtown matters through the interview process described earlier in the perception section as well as search through historical publication archives. The publication archives, such as from the city's main newspaper *The Fresno Bee*, also provided a journalistic view into downtown policy-making. The search through the archives was focused on stories only relating to the downtown from a business and policy perspective, such as previous city planning efforts before the formation process that started in 2007 and actions that have taken place during the BID's existence since 2011.

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

The Downtown Fresno Partnership is a necessary piece to the overall revitalization effort. While it may not be sufficient for solving the entire effort on its own, the organization is an important component, representing the private sector and its political support. Other actors, such as housing developers or government entities, play their own role that coincides with the Downtown Fresno Partnership's purpose, which has evolved from a marketing based organization to one that is focused on economic development. With its major role in advocacy and altering the perception of Downtown Fresno, the Downtown Fresno Partnership is now left to maintain the momentum towards revitalization and deliver value and results to its assessment-paying property owners.

### **Perception**

#### **Perception of Downtown Fresno**

The purpose of a BID is to improve the perception of an area, moving from a less-than-ideal image to one that draws and evokes vibrancy. In the case of Downtown Fresno, the perception of the area in late 2016 to early 2017 was one that involved a sense of moving on a positive trajectory. Each of the 19 interviews demonstrated this movement. Some felt it had sufficient momentum to reach a revitalized state while others expressed uncertainty of what the future holds following this trajectory. Overall, though, the perception of Downtown Fresno is a positive one relative to where it was, and the Downtown Fresno Partnership played a role in creating a sense of hope for the downtown area.

More than half of the interviewees recognized Downtown Fresno as having positive momentum towards revitalization. While this also shows that the revitalization has yet to come

to fruition, it does demonstrate the stakeholders express a feeling of optimism that Downtown Fresno could be a place to live, work and play in the near future. One interviewee put it delicately, saying it is “recognized as having positive momentum. Still not a place that people are thinking about going to automatically, after hours for shopping and eating ... but more than a few years ago.” Another interviewee said Downtown Fresno is in a “healthy position” and is “actively moving in the right direction.” The biggest contributor to this direction was that the “building blocks are in place, dots all over the place, and it’s time to connect.”

Not all perceptions of Downtown Fresno were positive, however. For example, one interviewee expressed the opinion that the area is for some people, but not for all. The interviewee said, “To me, that’s one of the biggest problems. The lack of diversity in downtown.” This lack of diversity stems from the fact that an “enlarged section of the Fresno population” has “no desire to come down.” For an area attempting revitalization, this feeling can be expected. As the work is put into place to create more attractions for a wider range of the people, there will be moments where it does not feel diverse enough to attract that bigger group. In its current state, the users of Downtown Fresno may feel their needs are met. However, the larger group, who do not live or shop on a regular basis in the downtown area, do not feel welcomed or demonstrate a need to visit this space. It is important to note the role of this segment of the population during the revitalization process. The Downtown Fresno Partnership shall also consider this segment.

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has put forth the effort to draw this segment, which will be detailed later in this paper. Before working to that point, it is important to understand what Downtown Fresno is today. One interviewee perceived it as a “place where a lot of people work, people are now starting to live, and our missing component is a place where people will

play.” To diversify and add to the “play” element, the work of the Downtown Fresno Partnership and the overall revitalization effort has put Downtown Fresno “on the verge of taking several steps up the ladder of having a vibrant downtown that is appealing to more people generally within this suburban community,” one interviewee said.

### **Where the Perception of Downtown Fresno Stands Today**

As with any struggling area, whether it be an urban core, blighted neighborhood or abandoned industrial center, the absence of people and activity creates a perception of unsafe, unwelcoming or undesirable to visit. For Downtown Fresno, since the major department stores along Fulton Mall were left vacant and more of the growing population sought to move elsewhere and visit the retail centers closer to their new homes, the negative perception persisted since the late 1980s.

Through each of the 19 interviews, there were several similarities to what the perception of Downtown Fresno is today. One those similarities was Downtown Fresno was on the cusp of dramatic change. One interviewee used the phrase “pre-revitalized,” meaning it’s not revitalized yet due to “decades of neglect.” However, the movement towards becoming revitalized is visible down the road.

How close is Downtown Fresno to becoming a revitalized area? The timeline ranged from interviewee to interviewee, with one saying four to 10 years. Another was more vague, saying it is “on the verge of exploding in a very positive direction.” Others felt something was imminent, saying, “Downtown Fresno is at the point where the dominos hit and it’s starting to slowly fall...all of that upward momentum has now clicked and it’s starting to move and move

quickly.” Another interviewee said Downtown Fresno has “accurately arrived at emerging, which means you can see actual elements of revitalized downtown that are at a mass, provides a foundation for completing a downtown revitalization...we are probably 36 months away from a downtown that is very nearly revitalized.”

Although the process of revitalization is on the horizon, the dramatic change could be swayed into another direction, too. This is a sentiment expressed by some interviewees. One stated the area could go in one of two directions: stay the same, much like the previous decades, or embrace the vision for a different tomorrow. Another mentioned maintaining the momentum for an improved downtown was unclear, saying, “I think it is changing, generally for the better. I don’t know how sustainable that’s going to be.” Another interviewee said Downtown Fresno is still being hurt by the “wait-and-see attitudes” by many parties, including Fresno residents, business owners and investors. The slow approach by some may stall any momentum gained in the area for revitalization, leading to a much-of-the-same look that Downtown Fresno has experienced for decades.

Despite some uncertainty in the perception, there was still a positive feeling due to the presence of the Downtown Fresno Partnership. One interviewee said, “(Downtown Fresno is) now (experiencing) a lot of things that were being talked about are starting to happen.” The Downtown Fresno Partnership has spent the first six years of the organization’s existence acting as a marketing and economic development vehicle to the Fresno community. The organization is a collective effort, aligning interests of its property owners who pay an assessment to receive the benefit of its services. The way in which the Downtown Fresno Partnership was able to stir that momentum was through several actions, such as marketing, events, branding, and advocacy.

## **How Has the Perception Changed Since 2011**

To arrive at the current perception of Downtown Fresno being on the cusp or verge of revitalization, the area had to go through a formation process that started in 2011 – the same year when the Downtown Fresno Partnership was officially established. Prior to the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the feeling towards Downtown Fresno was one of indifference. Each of the interviewees expressed some form of this, and could show the change in how they perceive Downtown Fresno today as using the perception of 2010 as a baseline. The revitalization of Downtown Fresno has had the benefit of a supportive Mayor, but overcoming words such as “dismal,” “it wasn’t even a downtown,” “deteriorating” on a daily basis since the 1970s, or a “mess” requires more than just the political actors to alter perceptions. The Downtown Fresno Partnership has helped play a role in creating a “stronger vibrancy, better energy level - there tends to be more activity,” as one interviewee stated.

When asked where the perception of Downtown Fresno was around 2010, one interviewee said it was a challenge to make that perception a positive one because revitalization seemed to indicate people were in the wrong for leaving downtown. By revitalizing an area that some people left years before, the government and its planning efforts were showing that it knew better than them. The interviewee said:

*I would hear from family members, generations of family members that wouldn't go downtown, that (Downtown Fresno) was scary. I think the resentment was that they had made investments and made decisions based on (Downtown Fresno being scary or unwelcoming). And to say we needed to go back to the place where we were trying to escape was sort of like saying “they were wrong.” (Mayor Ashley Swearingin) has been careful trying to say, with all of the*

*planning work, we're not trying to change the past, but we are trying to chart a new course for the future. But I think that has subsided a little bit. And for that to continue to not be an issue it just needs to be the case that people see themselves in Downtown in some way.*

The reason this quote is important is because it shows the careful consideration needed in planning for revitalization through communication. The political actors will attempt to ensure the focus is on the forward-thinking, making sure no one feels as if they were wrong in leaving a downtown. Meanwhile, the private sector must align its thinking to encourage types of businesses that meet the wants and needs of all people. From a BID's standpoint, it needs to market its area to outsiders as being a place that they see themselves visiting and taking part in. The BID is one way in which a consolidated voice that can showcase vibrancy in a downtown area and not a feeling of making a mistake for leaving in the first place.

To create that feeling of belonging by residents and visitors, the change in perception of Downtown Fresno has grown due to cohesiveness by the private sector, a direct result of the Downtown Fresno Partnership. One interviewee said, "We are now gaining traction over the last 5-6 years where downtown is an accepted place for business. It wasn't for 20 years (from about 1990-2010)." This is due in part to the strategic thinking by the property owners, as one interviewee credited, as well as the presence of "strong voices, passionate voices...that are talking about making downtown a better place" as another interviewee stated. These passionate voices with a unified strategic mindset have been able to use the Downtown Fresno Partnership as a momentum-creating device to change the outlook on Downtown Fresno. How the organization has attempted to change that perception has been through comprehensive methods. The organization's approach, though, has undergone a shift in strategy during its infancy.



## **Role of the Downtown Fresno Partnership in that Change**

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has played a significant role in the changing of the perception of Downtown Fresno. This change is primarily produced through “clean and safe” services as well as marketing and events. However, demonstrated through the stakeholder interviews, it is evident the change is also being produced at a behind-the-scenes level – more along the lines of economic development. Although the role of setting up the framework for a vibrant area may not produce the immediate and visible results desired by the larger population, establishing the foundation may produce the greatest return over the long-run – an important outlook from a planning perspective. There have been plenty of immediate actions produced by the Downtown Fresno Partnership, though, and without them, the positive momentum aimed for the long-term would be tough to duplicate.

One role that the Downtown Fresno Partnership has taken to override the negative perception of Downtown Fresno is being the center for stakeholders. The history of business in Downtown Fresno was dilapidated, fed in part by a fractured property and business owner community. The formation of the Downtown Fresno Partnership immediately produced a network of property owners who were able to strengthen their interests through a “consolidated voice,” as one interviewee put it. The interviewee went on to say, “(the Downtown Fresno Partnership) brought everyone together. It made a consolidated voice, and that voice got strong. Because, I mean, if everyone is just yelling in their different pockets, it means nothing.” Another interviewee declared the Downtown Fresno Partnership-created community “made Downtown feel smaller in a sense where they’re really good at connecting people with different resources.” The division of thinking within the property and business sector of Downtown Fresno was cured

within the boundary following the establishment of the BID. This provided a long-term outlook on the area's success that seemed to be missing for the previous 20, or most likely more, years. Fresno has a history of studying the problem of its stagnant downtown and coming up with recommendations of how to fix it, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Unfortunately, for the sake of the revitalization, these studies yielded little results, especially as it relates to perception or advocacy. The formation of the Downtown Fresno Partnership, though, was a result of an effort to alter the course of the downtown area. One interviewee said this process showed, "property owners taking a discreet and measurable step towards investing more in downtown. That increased the perception of what's possible downtown." The property owners, by collecting and working alongside one another, demonstrated there was a serious effort in place to make Downtown Fresno more of an attraction than what it was in 2008-10.

Despite its overarching role of being a place for synergy and collaboration for property owners, the Downtown Fresno Partnership has evolved in its public outreach approach from its opening days to the end of 2016. For the first three years, under the direction of its first full-time Executive Director Kate Borders, the organization served as a marketing and promotions vehicle for downtown. An interviewee said, "If you look at a lot of what (the Downtown Fresno Partnership) did, Kate wasn't really out wooing business. She was trying to sustain business. Get this (Fulton Mall construction) vote passed and then get people coming downtown." During this tenure, the role of the Downtown Fresno Partnership was to raise the profile and increase the visibility of a place that many in Fresno did not think was a place to seek out. To do this, the Downtown Fresno Partnership staged events such as an outdoor ice rink, music festivals and other events to draw people to the area.

Following the Fresno City Council agreeing to restore vehicular traffic to the Fulton Mall, the Downtown Fresno Partnership went through an organic change in its role that was accelerated by a change in leadership. The current Executive Director, Aaron Blair, took his job in 2014 and shifted the Downtown Fresno Partnership's role to become the economic development and urban design engine for the downtown area. One interviewee described the organization's biggest strength and role today being Blair, saying he "just spends his time bouncing around Downtown Fresno. I think he has a really good understanding of what's happening on the ground. Who the personalities are. And what everyone is looking for, and he's trying to get everybody what they're in it for as fast as possible. He spends much less time on the high-flying speech...and much more time on the very difficult work of moving projects forward." The change in the organization's role is important, and the timing is central to maintaining the momentum of events and promotions. As more people could see themselves in the downtown area for a variety of activities, the organization shifted to putting businesses and property owners in place that will keep people coming back outside of special events.

From a planning perspective, both roles, from marketing and promotions to economic development, demonstrate the strategic approach required by the Downtown Fresno Partnership to create real change in the private sector. First, the organization and its stakeholders prescribed the problem of a lack of pedestrian activity. This shortcoming hurt the perception of the downtown area for a majority of the Fresno population. Therefore, the organization became the voice of public outreach to promote what is happening in downtown. Once the marketing and events demonstrated results in terms of number of people taking part in downtown events, the Downtown Fresno Partnership shifted its focus on how to consistently attract those people to visit downtown even more. The passing of the Fulton Mall vote created a tipping point for the

wider public, but it also allowed the Downtown Fresno Partnership to approach investors and business owners with several indicators the place was a good one to do business. The pedestrian-only area was opened back up to vehicular traffic, which some investors expressed to City government and the Downtown Fresno Partnership as being an indicator they could do business in Downtown Fresno. One interviewee stated, “Everyone that contacts Fresno gets referred to the (Downtown Fresno Partnership), and (Blair) reaches out to not just the board members, all of the property owners. (The Downtown Fresno Partnership) is very active in dealing.” The planning for a better commercial environment was set to be put into place.

However, the Downtown Fresno Partnership also had to take on the role of creating the rules in which the business can play in Fresno much easier to understand. This required the organization to take a seat at the table of development codes and community plans generated by the City of Fresno. In 2016, this process, which started in 2010, resulted in the adoption by the City Council of three new planning documents for downtown: Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan, Fulton Corridor Specific Plan, and a new Downtown Development Code (Sheehan, 2016). The result of the process was a change in a perception of Downtown Fresno that it was not business friendly. Through interactions with its stakeholders and City officials in developing new codes and downtown-specific plans, the Downtown Fresno Partnership was a strengthened voice for property owners who wanted potential business owners to feel as if Downtown Fresno was the place to be in terms of setting up a business.

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has also been so involved in improving the perception of the downtown area that some stakeholders had a hard time imagining the space without the organization being there. One example of the Downtown Fresno Partnership ingraining itself in the downtown arena was through marketing and promotions. An interviewee said, “I would say

if I envision all the steps and all the promotions and advancement that downtown image has accomplished so far, I can't envision (the Downtown Fresno Partnership) not being there." In addition to promotions and marketing, the Partnership's role in encouraging businesses to locate to downtown showed its prominent influence. As one interviewee said, "(Those businesses) would definitely not be there but for the (Downtown Fresno Partnership) and its role." The Downtown Fresno Partnership was able to attract these businesses through competitions such as "Create Here" or "Restaurant Makeover." To implement these contests, the Downtown Fresno Partnership set up a non-profit foundation, called the Downtown Fresno Foundation. This vehicle is able to apply for grants and donations from private foundations and then use these funds to spur business creation or improvement in the downtown space. While the Downtown Fresno Foundation is an arm of the Downtown Fresno Partnership, it is still a driver for economic development that would not have happened without the presence of the BID.

Moving forward, the importance of the Downtown Fresno Partnership is expected to move to the next level as more development takes place. One interviewee believed the Downtown Fresno Partnership is "definitely going to be needed here in the near future when there's a lot more development, businesses that kind of maybe are new here. There are going to be some businesses that are moving from other parts of town that aren't going to understand downtown." So, while the Downtown Fresno Partnership is currently working with prospective tenants and matching them with property owners, in the future the role could be one that is even more important as outside groups start entering the Downtown Fresno market. The Downtown Fresno Partnership could be one of the first organizations an investor or prospective interacts with as they scout the market. The Downtown Fresno Partnership will need to be a good representative to these groups, creating a positive perception from the outset.

The Downtown Fresno Partnership is not only altering the perception of Downtown Fresno through economic development; it is also doing it through activating the street with the presence of ambassadors or security. This programming, the second element to the BID mantra of “clean and safe,” put Downtown Fresno Partnership ambassadors, employed by the organization, around the boundary area to help provide visitors with information and directions to places. One interviewee said the ambassador program creates a “feeling of safety,” which is a direct attempt at changing the perception of Downtown Fresno being unsafe. Another interviewee believed the fact the ambassadors were a consistent presence on the streets of Downtown Fresno was significant because it allowed them to go around “talking to folks...keeping things clean and fresh.” Starting in 2016, the ambassador program was converted into more of a security function. It still provided the “eyes on the streets” needed in a vibrant area, but it also helped address minor security concerns of people. However, some of these safety concerns were related to loitering, which fits into the critique of social control of private parties in a public space. However, the aim of the program, to create a perception of safety, was believed to have a positive effect.

Although the Downtown Fresno Partnership has played a significant role in the perception change of downtown, it is important to remember the role of the BID is a piece of the larger planning puzzle. As one interviewee put it, the Downtown Fresno Partnership is “necessary but not sufficient.” While on one hand, the Downtown Fresno Partnership creates a network of connections for a long-term vision that did not exist in the private sector before 2011. It has raised the profile of the downtown space through events and marketing. It even became the center of information for prospective people using the space, from investors to visitors. However, on the other hand, it was only able to create a platform for a segment of stakeholders. This

segment was limited to property owners within the boundary. The group does not include the residents of the new housing in the downtown area as well as other companies outside the boundary. Therefore, more needs to be accomplished to satisfy the vision of a vibrant downtown. The presence of the Downtown Fresno Partnership is necessary to stir others into action, but the bigger puzzle requires more pieces to be put into place. The puzzle does not stop within the BID boundaries.

### **Measure of the Impact across All Interviews**

When asked to assess the level of impact the Downtown Fresno Partnership has had on the revitalization efforts in Downtown Fresno, 16 of the 19 gave it a “4” or “5” on a 1-5 scale, with five being the greatest impact and one being no impact all. Meanwhile, the other three interviewees deemed its impact at a “3,” showing there was uncertainty on the level of impact it has offered so far.

Of the 84 percent of interviewees that gave it a favorable assessment, the biggest contributor to the reasoning was the Fulton Mall reconstruction. Responses ranged from “it would not have happened without them,” “I’m looking out my window and I see construction that wouldn’t have happened without (the Downtown Fresno Partnership) pushing for it,” and “It added a tremendous amount of push that the mayor needed to add to the political will, to get it done.” The other responses followed along these lines, showing the direct result of a drastic change to the downtown landscape proved vital in showing others the organization was necessary.

One of the most important impacts the Downtown Fresno Partnership offers entering 2017 surfaced in one interviewee’s response to the impact scale question. Talking about the

transition from Mayor Swearingin to Mayor Lee Brand, her successor who took office in January 2017, the interviewee believed the presence of the Downtown Fresno Partnership offers a bridge of momentum into new political leadership. The interviewee said, “We just had a change in administration (the mayor). The (Downtown Fresno Partnership) creates the continuity between the two administrations to make sure the focus stays on downtown because the PBID interacts with the City so much. That’s extremely valuable.” This potential, of exercising leadership not just for the Downtown Fresno Partnership but also the entire downtown area, shows the PBID can demonstrate influence as a change in mayoral leadership creates some uncertainty. The presence of the organization, that was not there in previous political transitions, maintains momentum for a continued pursuit of downtown revitalization.

Despite the more than three-quarters positive responses, the presence of some answers that were slotted at the “3” level on the 1-5 scale show some uncertainty by downtown stakeholders on how much impact the Downtown Fresno Partnership has created. Some of it was due to maybe the organization has done a good enough job to this point that the foundation for revitalization is set in place. Specifically, the interviewee said, “Keep (the property owners) up, keep them focused. But I’m no longer in the ‘DFP is the alpha and the omega.’ My sense is still critical, still important.” In one way, this impact is a positive one for the Downtown Fresno Partnership. It has created a network in the downtown area that helps itself. The Downtown Fresno Partnership can worry about things within its boundary, but the impact on the outside is one that shows optimism to get things done in other corners of downtown.

The remaining two responses showcasing uncertainty followed the theme of wanting and waiting to see more. As one interviewee put it, “It’s in a building process. I wouldn’t describe it as a mature organization. It is right where I would expect it to be but I’m not rating it where I



would expect it to be at this point in its maturity but the maximum impact a Downtown Fresno Partnership could and very likely will have.” This shows the Downtown Fresno Partnership has not showcased its full potential due to the downtown area still improving overall. The PBID can play a certain role, but as the entire area realizes its full potential, so to can the organization. With time, the Downtown Fresno Partnership will mature as the area, the one it controls and the one outside its boundary, becomes more vibrant and thriving. The PBID can lift others, but it also requires an environment that lifts it as well.

### **Perception of Downtown Fresno Partnership**

While the Downtown Fresno Partnership has played an active role in changing the perception of Downtown Fresno, the PBID itself is perceived in a positive light by nearly all of the interviewees. One simple way of measuring this is through the growth in approval percentage to renew the PBID for its second term. In 2010, as part of the initiation process, the district’s property owners voted “2-to-1 in support” of forming the PBID (Hostetter, 2010). In 2015, the renewal vote swelled to 3-to-1 in favor or remaining neutral. The favorability of the organization is also evident in other measures. One interviewee felt just within the first five years of its existence, the presence of the Downtown Fresno Partnership has inspired more investment activity. This plays into its role as the ability to connect people with all interests to the downtown space, a necessary part of revitalizing a derelict area. This role improves the perception of its work.

A central point of positivity regarding the perception of the Downtown Fresno Partnership is its ability to connect property owners and be a single voice. One interviewee described the organization as the middle of a roundabout in a street. As everyone works their

way through the cycle of doing business in downtown, the Downtown Fresno Partnership is the stable center, relaying information to the various actors as they pass through. These actors are the property owners who make up the district, but also visitors looking for something to do in downtown. This can be measured as a success for the organization helping change the perception of the Downtown Fresno area to residents outside its boundary. Whereas before, those residents did not feel connected to the downtown area or know what was taking place, the Downtown Fresno Partnership is that one-stop shop to disperse information to potential consumers in the space. As one interviewee put it, it is an engine for connecting. The only thing is that connectivity works for both private parties and residents or visitors to Fresno.

Another aspect of the strong voice role was it was believed by one interviewee as being a less-talked-about benefit to the Downtown Fresno Partnership. While most BIDs hold true to the “clean and safe” mantra, an interviewee felt the ability of the Downtown Fresno Partnership to be the voice of revitalization of Downtown Fresno was important. That voice was one not of the government but one of private interests looking to restore the vibrant commercial center. This seemed to give the revitalization effort and the Downtown Fresno Partnership more weight to the entire process. This interviewee felt this was especially important to Fresno as the city can feel disconnected or misaligned. While the government’s direction may change with new political leaders stepping into office, the revitalization effort in Downtown Fresno would hold constant as the strong voice of the Downtown Fresno Partnership continues to exist and be heard.

The importance of the Downtown Fresno Partnership as expected should be measured on the return of the assessments paid. However, most of the interviewees did not feel the financial return was as important at this juncture due to the organization’s infancy. One interviewee said the organization’s ability to gather property and business owners who are competing in the same

market outweighed any financial return. This interviewee said, “Once they elect a board to oversee the funds, those competitors are in the same room. Then they start working on stuff together and it really changes the community dynamic within downtown when you have people like that who know each other, laugh with each other, have a sense of accomplishment together.” Therefore, a qualitative return on the assessments is more about organizing and creating a cultural shift in Downtown Fresno property owners. Typically, this would make sense as a business improvement district, in its role to help spur revitalization, needs to erase a disconnect between actors in the same space. While it may be tough for some to see the benefit of such a cost, as some would pay more due to their higher number of square footage, the long-term result would be a better environment to conduct business or own property. The demand for the area could yield a different type of financial return down the road.

While its relationship with the municipal government will be discussed later in the advocacy section, the Downtown Fresno Partnership was perceived as important because of its ability to fill the gap between the City can and cannot do. While a City must allocate resources and personnel to its entire area, the Downtown Fresno Partnership fills that void for the downtown space as the allocation takes place. As one interviewee said, “I see it as a very necessary tool to assist in managing the downtown because it is a special needs area.” Special needs areas can receive higher priority from a municipality, but with private parties provided their own financial and other resources to the effort, the potential of a greater return is increased.

Despite the majority positive perception of the Downtown Fresno Partnership after its first six years of existence, there was a view of the years ahead. Some expressed the view the organization needed to be better at organizing and being a stronger voice to the people outside its boundary. Others alluded to transition or pivots that it will need to make in the future, which can

be true for any BID – especially one that is on the path of revitalization. Specifically, the event that triggers this thought of future pivots is the Fulton Mall become a street for vehicular traffic. The same event that formed the positive light on the Downtown Fresno Partnership’s work has also created some uncertainty of what it could mean for the organization’s future efforts. The “big win” raised expectations in even more uncertain times. The Fulton Mall has not experienced vehicular traffic since the early 1960s. Nobody is quite sure of what it means moving forward – or if the expectations portrayed and relayed by the Downtown Fresno Partnership will come to fruition.

Another perception of the Downtown Fresno Partnership that was neither positive nor negative was the view of uncertainty if it delivered any type of return yet. Despite after six years of existence, the benefit of services provided by the Downtown Fresno Partnership was still unclear. The interviewee did embrace the idea of being an organized approach, but the vagueness of that benefit left a feeling of wanting more. While this stakeholder had his business located within the Downtown Fresno Partnership boundary, it does represent an opportunity for the organization to express its results in a more clear, correlative way.

The results will be important moving forward in not only maintaining a good image of its organization and downtown, but as more of the expected activity, from investors and pedestrians, occurs. The perception of being needed will only increase for the Downtown Fresno Partnership. Especially as its role of being an advocate for businesses and property owners grows as well.

## **Advocacy**

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has been a visible advocate which has also worked behind the scenes to create a business climate sought by newcomers and current property

owners. One way in which the organization has been a visible advocate is the reconstruction of Fulton Mall. One interviewee said the Downtown Fresno Partnership has been a “huge benefit for Downtown Fresno. It created a vehicle for getting the Fulton Mall open.” From a behind-the-scenes standpoint, another interviewee said, “The best thing they did was get, all of that work to get the (Fulton) Mall opened (to vehicular traffic) and to get the City to ease up restrictions on where people can go, how they can go, doing all of that work was critical.” The advocate role allows the Downtown Fresno Partnership to help businesses that are trying “to make a downtown thriving and make it more attractive for more customers, and feel like they are going to go experience a downtown lifestyle.” That same interviewee said if the Downtown Fresno Partnership was not around to play the advocacy role, “it would be much, much harder to get the attention we need in (downtown).”

While the Downtown Fresno Partnership was created to be an advocate for downtown property owners, it is also an advocate in another form: for some political actors. In 2008, Ashley Swearingin was elected to the first of her two terms as mayor of Fresno. A central component of her platform was to revitalize downtown, and she expressed the importance of such a strategy in a “State of Downtown” breakfast in 2011 by saying “a downtown is a city's calling card to the larger world...a vibrant downtown will improve the entire city's economy...(a) downtown is uniquely positioned to be an entertainment hub for the central San Joaquin Valley.” (Hostetter, 2011) One way in which she, and plenty of others, believed a path to revitalize the area was doing something with the Fulton Mall. The pedestrian-only outdoor mall was not working and yet the corridor represented layers of history central to Fresno’s story. Mayor Swearingin and other City officials developed options for how to address the Fulton Mall, ranging from

completely restoring the corridor to vehicular traffic to simply cleaning up the Fulton Mall and preserving its history.

Once these options were considered by stakeholders and presented to the public, the efforts to alter the look and function of the Fulton Mall were put into place. The city government used the experience of people with previous revitalization experience, including Craig Scharton, a former City Council member and City staff member who also had experience with the Main Street America program, and Dan Doyle, who helped craft the legislation to enable property-based business improvement districts in California in the early 1990s as well as assisted with the formation of the first ever PBID in Sacramento shortly after. Other important actors in the formation process included Jan Minami, a former director of the downtown BID in Visalia, which is about 40 miles from Fresno; Brad Segal, a Colorado-based consultant hired by Minami to help with legal matters; and Elliott Balch, the City's downtown revitalization manager and former director of the Downtown Association. These and other relevant actors helped bridge the gap between revitalization efforts from the early 21st century to the new approach of the property-based business improvement district.

Part of the formation process, and to help build its ability to advocate as one voice for Downtown Fresno, was combining the Downtown Association with the new Downtown Fresno Partnership. This conversation started taking place in 2008. The Downtown Association, which was considered weak in terms of power and influence, had only half of its board occupied. With that, the board chairman at the time, Balch, filled the vacant spots with pro-Downtown people. Ones who would favor a new type of organization, a property-based group as opposed to a merchant-based. These new board members were also looking out for ways to improve

downtown and saw the current organization, the Downtown Association, as not being the right group to lead the charge.

Once Mayor Swearingin took office, the push to form a PBID in Fresno was able to move past its stalemate. One interviewee said, “I think the key was to finally get us to push over the edge was when Ashley Swearingin became the mayor because Ashley knew what was going on...She was a believer in revitalization, so that was kind of the final push we needed to finally get the approval process at the government level to support it and finally make it work.” While Mayor Swearingin supported the measure to form the Downtown Fresno Partnership, it still required City Council approval to have financial resources supporting the launch, before any votes were cast by potential property owners in the boundary. One selling point to the City Council was the Fulton Mall and addressing it in a way that would alter its current course of being dilapidated and underperforming in terms of market potential.

The Fulton Mall vote was the strongest public evidence of advocacy by the Downtown Fresno Partnership. Each of the 19 interviewees made a point to discuss the topic, which is not surprising considering the construction is currently underway and expected to wrap up in May or June 2017. However, the idea of opening the Fulton Mall to vehicular traffic was not a new idea. It just never had the political will, by elected officials and property or business owners, to make it happen. The Downtown Fresno Partnership changed that by providing a voice to open up the Fulton Mall. It gathered private property owners to work with elected officials. It organized more than 400 people to attend the City Council vote in February 2014. As one interviewee said, but was repeated in some form by many others, “I don’t believe (the opening of the Fulton Mall) would have happened without the (Downtown Fresno Partnership).”

In a February 2014 letter as part of the Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project's Environmental Assessment, the Executive Director, Kate Borders, identified the Downtown Fresno Partnership as the "leading advocate for Downtown Fresno stakeholders such as property and business owners." (Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project, 2014) The letter also stated the importance of addressing the Fulton Mall, saying the landscape has been the "very top of the tier of challenges confronted by these stakeholders." (Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project, 2014) The Partnership's stance on the importance of Fulton Mall centers on the historic character, access from streets to businesses and buildings along Fulton, and the artwork throughout the space. It supported Alternative 1 of the 10 different alternatives because it provided double the on-street parking, buffers sidewalks from vehicle traffic, 50 percent more tree coverage, and a consistent promenade on the east side of the street that encourages pedestrian activity (Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project, 2014).

The Downtown Fresno Partnership also acted as a voice in the Fulton Mall reconstruction project because it was able to produce other examples of successful pedestrian-only malls opened back up to vehicular traffic. For example, in a letter in the Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project Environmental Review in 2014, the Executive Director Kate Borders cited examples of Burlington, Vermont and Raleigh, North Carolina that also featured pedestrian malls. One, Burlington, was cited as not encouraging the building of pedestrian-only malls because the success was dependent on foot traffic generated by proximity to such locations as a university or tourist location. In Raleigh, the letter says the President and CEO of the Raleigh Downtown Alliance believes the reopening of its pedestrian mall was the biggest factor in generating \$3 billion in investment in Downtown Raleigh. This ability to state these previous examples, using a voice strengthened by its constituents but also a network of similar downtowns, demonstrated the



Downtown Fresno Partnership's strong advocacy powers. Simply connecting other precedents to its own case was able to be a strong mover in the conversation shift of what to do with the Fulton Mall.

Another aspect of the Downtown Fresno Partnership's advocacy for the Fulton Mall Reconstruction was related to parking. In the Purpose and Need outlined in the Environmental Assessment, the need was based on 1) Increase Mobility in the Fulton Mall Study Area; 2) Improve Visibility of Businesses, Offices and other Amenities; and 3) Increase Consistency with Land Use Plans. The lack of on-street, short-term parking was a direct concern as it related to the first goal. In fact, the Environmental Assessment cited research by Norman Garrick of the University of Connecticut from 2007 that stated, "on-street parking plays a crucial role in benefitting activity centers on numerous levels...users of downtowns consistently valued on-street parking spaces over and above off-street surface lots and garages." (Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project, 2014) This study revealed prior to Fulton Mall being opened to vehicular traffic, it had 14 metered on-street parking stalls, one stall per 460 square feet of commercial space, and 75 percent of Fulton Mall's 2,788 parking spaces were in structures. Therefore, the Downtown Fresno Partnership was able to take this information and use it to advocate for a different type of Fulton Corridor: one open to vehicle traffic to help increase pedestrian activity.

A lesser talked about form of advocacy undertaken by the Downtown Fresno Partnership was its administering of the Downtown Academy. The Downtown Academy connects members of the Fresno Leading Young Professionals (FLYP) with government, business and community leaders through immersive educational experiences. Members of the annual 10-month classes learn about Downtown Fresno's features by visiting areas such as housing, adjacent neighborhoods, businesses, and the Fulton Mall. The class members also complete a project

specific to that year's class and take a field trip to a city that has experienced its own downtown revitalization. The ultimate result aimed for by the Downtown Fresno Partnership is to have the Downtown Academy graduates become a "downtown champion, and member of a tight-knit group that supports vibrancy, innovation, advocacy, and partnerships in our downtown."

(Downtown Fresno Partnership, 2016)

The Downtown Academy program was mentioned by three interviewees as an effective tool to engage and educate members of the Fresno community about the area. Each class represented a new opportunity for the Downtown Fresno Partnership to grow its base of knowledgeable people who then can in turn help spread the word of improving downtown. This advocacy role spread the reach of the organization outside its boundary, but used its area to showcase the potential and what needs to be done in the meantime. The Downtown Academy has been a strong opportunity for the Downtown Fresno Partnership to engage and educate more advocates for its space.

One way in which the Downtown Academy helped expand its reach through advocacy was class projects. Some were a part of promoting events, such as the ice skating rink, while others were grassroots efforts to mobilize a positive perception on the outlook of downtown. One of these campaigns that a Downtown Academy class embraced for its class project was the "I Believe" campaign. In 2013 and through its Downtown Academy outreach, the campaign reached 869 people through 47 separate meetings (2014 State of Downtown Fresno Program). The Downtown Academy was able to communicate the campaign's message through meetings held at their individual homes or other social gatherings. Each class member was given a "meeting in a box," which had all he or she needed to help facilitate the meeting and increase the awareness of downtown's potential. The small-scale advocacy allowed the Downtown Fresno

Partnership to alter the perception of downtown without having to hold every single meeting in its office. It took the advocacy directly to the people.

### **Role of Leadership by the DFP**

Advocacy is one way in which the Downtown Fresno Partnership has exhibited its leadership in Downtown Fresno and the entire city. By working with property owners and City government, the organization has carved out its own sphere of influence, a key component to leadership.

In the political realm, the Downtown Fresno Partnership has exercised leadership by combining characteristics and results to show it can be taken seriously. One interviewee described the combination of factors including being “able to demonstrate you know what you’re talking about...having an ability of expertise. Perseverance - the fact that (the organization) kept hanging in there...(it also has) a pretty good sense of not being (at City Hall) all the time so they know, when (it is there), it’s important.” These three components – expertise, perseverance, and balance – offset it from the Downtown Association, a merchant-based organization that existed before the PBID.

Comparatively, the Downtown Association had little political leadership to exhibit. The Downtown Association was described in interviews as “Half of the board didn’t even have a business downtown, the ones that did were just crabby and negative, drove good people away.” As one interviewee said, “If (the Downtown Association) would have shown up to a council meeting, the council wouldn’t have (cared) about what they were asking them for or fighting against or whatever. So you do have to have some standing in the community as an organization.”

Therefore, the Downtown Fresno Partnership may be viewed as an organization with strong leadership because the downtown group before it was weak. It can also be it has demonstrated enough results and political balance so far to influence views and decisions in its favor. It is probably a combination of both, but nonetheless, the leadership in the political realm has given the Downtown Fresno Partnership a stage to stand on going forward. This is a change from previous efforts, as discussed in Chapter 1. One interviewee said, “(Downtown Fresno) didn’t have that political capital, political will, so that’s a huge change...having the political will to fix the Fulton Mall is a big change. Having the property owners work together on big projects like getting the PBID formed or getting the Fulton Mall approved (the Fulton Mall reconstruction) or staving off the “Save the Mall” folks who tried putting it on the National Register and all that...there’s more cohesion there, there’s more investment there, there’s political will, there’s actual construction.” Simply, the leadership created this change.

The reason for political leaders to respect the leadership of the Downtown Fresno Partnership lies in the makeup of the Partnership’s assessed property owners. One interviewee said the PBID acronym – which stands for Property-Based Business Improvement District – could have also stood for “Power Base in Downtown.” The reasoning was the Downtown Fresno Partnership was a concerted effort to use financial resources and “really use this as a table of the most influential people downtown and get them thinking about their mutual interest and lobbying for it. And what’s happening.” While this can lead to the critique that BIDs attempt to control public space for private gain, the leadership enacted by previous organizations in the area was not resulting in revitalization. The presence of influential people operating with one voice allowed the Downtown Fresno Partnership to distance itself from previous efforts and work with other leaders to deliver results.

While the leadership of the Downtown Fresno Partnership has been needed and well-represented, one interviewee stated there was still room to grow. This is not unexpected as the entire downtown environment is settling into a revitalized state, but the interviewee did offer what this new type of leadership could look like, saying, “Leadership is key. Communication is key in being successful. I think our PBID does a good job and we can be a lot better. Engage the small businesses.” The interviewee credited the work of the two PBID executive directors so far, but the organization still has “room to grow.” It can move beyond what another interviewee described the preferred model used in Fresno: “sort of industrial model of, ‘We hire you. You’re in charge of revitalizing. Good luck. Go get ‘em.’” The Downtown Fresno Partnership can exercise more leadership and communication to bring together even more interests and represent a wider range of the actors in downtown.

## **Safety**

Hand in hand with the overall perception of Downtown Fresno being on a positive trend line, all 19 of the interviewees expressed they feel safe in downtown. While this was expected considering each of the interviewees was a downtown stakeholder, the lack of a discussion by some indicated there was an assertive confidence in being safe in the area. Others, meanwhile, demonstrated how the perception of being unsafe in downtown could exist. One interviewee said, “I think it still has a perception...and the word homelessness creating an impression that it’s not safe. I do believe it’s safe.”

While statistically Downtown Fresno is no more unsafe than other parts of Fresno, it has carried the perception of being unsafe to a wider portion of the Fresno population. The question becomes, where did this perception of unsafe come from? It is due in large part to the inactivity

making people feel uneasy. As one interviewee put it, “When Downtown Fresno is considered unsafe, people are mistaking it for lonely.” Another interviewee said the “lack of people out and about” contributes to issues. The scarcity of pedestrian activity, or activity during non-working hours, has created a stigma in the Downtown Fresno area that is an unwelcome place that breeds crime. However, that stigma is furthered by people visiting the area and not seeing very many people, or at least people that are similar to them, moving about the space as well. The effect could be, and has proven to be for many decades, people are not seeking out downtown as a place to eat, drink or shop. To sum it up in one interviewee’s words, there is not much crime downtown “but everybody left downtown so everybody figures it’s a bad place to be.”

With the formation of the Downtown Fresno Partnership, there was a concerted effort by the organizers and staff to put people on the street and aim to create a place of activity. One example of the Downtown Fresno Partnership purposefully people on the street was through employees of its organization. When the Downtown Fresno Partnership started in 2011, it implemented an ambassador program. Putting “eyes on the street,” the ambassadors would walk around the boundary, offering wayfinding and information to people moving about downtown. They could also report any areas of concern, such as graffiti or alley clean-up, to the City of Fresno. In 2013, the ambassador program interacted with visitors through deliveries (2,260), direct patrols (4,378) and escorts (285) in 2013 (2014 State of Downtown Fresno Program). This concept of ambassadors is nothing new to other BIDs; it follows the mantra of “clean and safe.” However, with the Downtown Fresno area never having the resources or far-reaching organization to put welcoming people on the streets, it had not occurred in Fresno through a BID in previous years.

Following the renewal for a second term of the Downtown Fresno Partnership in 2016, the ambassador program had some of its funding directed towards nighttime patrols. As more and more people are potentially using the Downtown Fresno at night – a form of reaching revitalization – the Downtown Fresno Partnership wanted to create the feeling of safety at more hours throughout the day. The ambassador program was more of a daytime function. One interviewee called the new aspect of the program as “more of a security function.” The same interviewee stated there was some skepticism of the new initiative, but it had a “huge impact on Fulton after dark. People not sleeping the doorways anymore. These would be large numbers of people, to the point where it would feel kind of dangerous walking through. So that has been a positive.” As with the critiques of other BIDs, though, where does the line of private control of a public space stop?

Similar to other downtowns, Downtown Fresno has homeless people who choose to live around the area. Several interviews addressed the homeless population as a contributing factor to the perception of being unsafe. Answers from the interviews that identified the homeless range from, “There’s homeless people, but not that many. It’s never been a problem for me. The average person would see that as a problem” to “We have our homeless. I can tell you who they are. I watch them out my window every day. They’re pretty much harmless. We have security who will escort them if they are bothering people.”

From a statistical standpoint, Downtown Fresno saw a decrease in reported property and quality of life crime from 2015 to 2016. According to the Fresno Police Department, there were at least 3,867 reported incidents in the Downtown Fresno Partnership’s boundaries in 2015. In 2016, that number dropped to at least 3,402. While not all of that decrease can be attributed to the Downtown Fresno Partnership, considering these are reported numbers by the Fresno Police

Department and not the organization, it does show a decrease in a specific type of criminal activity in the area. Once the Downtown Fresno Partnership is able to share its own numbers of nighttime patrol incidents, then it could tell a wider story of how the organization is playing a role in promoting safety in Downtown Fresno. There is also a significant increase in reported incidents from 2014 to 2015 (Table 2). The Downtown Fresno Partnership would want to use this information shared by the Fresno Police Department to show it is or able to address specific safety concerns for visitors and property owners.

**Table 4-1 – Reported Property and Quality of Life Crime in PBID’s Boundary**

| Year | Total Reported Incidents | Suspicious Activity Incidents | Reported Incidents, Less Suspicious Activity Incidents | Reported Incidents on Fulton Street/Fulton Mall |
|------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| 2012 | 3,637                    | 1,844                         | 1,793  | 1,031   |
| 2013 | -                        | -                             | -  | -   |
| 2014 | 3,374                    | 1,964                         | 1,410  | 857   |
| 2015 | 3,867                    | 2,178                         | 1,689  | 760   |
| 2016 | 3,402                    | 1,975                         | 1,427  | 535   |

Source: Crime Watch Map, Fresno Police Department and City of Fresno website

Note: The publicly data was not available in full until 2012. Also, the 2013 data was unable to be filtered.

Another aspect of the reported incidents by the Fresno Police Department is the decrease along the Fulton Mall. As seen in Table 4-1, there were 1,031 reported property or quality of life incidents on Fulton Street or Fulton Mall in the Downtown Fresno Partnership boundary. By 2015, the number of incidents decreased to 760 and in 2016, it was down to 535. Part of the decrease in 2016 could be attributed to the construction along the Fulton Mall. However, it does follow the decreasing trend line of crime on Fulton. This is important because this is where the



Downtown Fresno Partnership concentrates most of its ambassador and nighttime patrol activities. In one way, it appears those efforts are paying off in decreasing crime. However, further analysis would be required to draw a direct correlation.

Safety in Downtown Fresno is misunderstood. The perceived problem is overstated or does not exist, based on property crime statistics and answers given by interviewees for this research project. The Downtown Fresno Partnership has made a direct effort to make people feel welcome, through ambassadors and nighttime patrol, as well as programs and events to increase pedestrian activity. The goal of the Downtown Fresno Partnership is to establish a foundation of safety felt by all of Fresno; one that can help alter this unwarranted perception of being unsafe, at least relative to other parts of town. In the end, the organization is attempting to have more people think like one stakeholder interviewed for this research: “I’ve never heard it be unsafe. I think these are false perceptions that are being perpetuated because we keep telling each other to think that way. And I’ve never seen any data that supports that. I think Fresno is down on itself because they think other people think poorly of them. The people I hang around aren’t feeling unsafe being downtown.”

### **Value – Retail and Property Values**

BIDs, like any special district, require a self-assessment to be paid and in turn, additional services are provided. In the case of the Downtown Fresno Partnership, the parties that pay the assessment include property owners and government bodies (City of Fresno, Fresno County). With total assessments being paid around the \$600,000 mark for more than 300 parcels of land in the Downtown Fresno Partnership boundary, the question of how effective is this money being spent can easily be raised. For this study, one interviewee alluded to this thought process by

saying, “I don’t know what the benefit is. It is an organized approach by the property owners but I don’t know what the return is yet; meaning what benefit of the services is still a little vague to me.”

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has shifted in its approach of communicating its benefits and value during its short tenure. From day one, the organization produced annual reports and shared this information through an annual public meeting and presentation. The meeting, which was more of a dinner or breakfast event, featured recaps of what took place during the previous year and had programs with detailed statistics for its impact. Following the leadership change, the Downtown Fresno Partnership has since shifted its form of communicating by focusing more on investment dollars generated in Downtown Fresno. While it does not claim to have a direct causation for additional money being invested, the Downtown Fresno Partnership does use this information to showcase activity taking place. It also produces quarterly development reports, a practice it started in 2016, to help increase its reach of communicating what is taking place in Downtown Fresno. It also continues its “State of Downtown” meetings, use the event to promote new and exciting opportunities while also recapping what took place in the previous year.

Flagship events and quarterly development reports can be effective in communicating the value of the Downtown Fresno Partnership, but there are other ways it can strengthen its reasoning or showing a return on assessments paid. One way is through retail sales growth in the area. For the Downtown Fresno Partnership, the focus is on Fulton Mall, the core of the PBID’s boundary. However, that core is undergoing a dramatic change at the time of the writing of this report. Therefore, it could provide an opportunity once the construction is complete to measure the growth of retail sales along the Fulton Mall as well as in the different zones of the PBID.

This can be done over a longitudinal basis, which can then be used to further communicate the value of being within the PBID. These numbers could be compared historically, but also at the city and county scale. City- and county-wide retail sales numbers are provided on a quarterly basis by the California State Board of Equalization. As shown in Table 4-2, retail sales are growing across the city and county since 2010, after the Great Recession. It could be beneficial for the Downtown Fresno Partnership to tell its members they are either in line with the rest of the area in terms of growth – or even outpacing it. Context could be vital for maintaining momentum.

For this report, the California State Board of Equalization had issued a quarterly report on retail sales activity in the state from 2000-2014. This data is measured by transactions subject to sales and use tax and can be retrieved from the Fresno County office. If comparing numbers at a larger scale to help tell the story of value delivered, it would be important for the Downtown Fresno Partnership to follow the state’s same standards for information tabulated, such as basing types of business based on North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes to compare permit holders as well as use inflation rates – called the California Taxable Sales Deflator by the state – produced in the annual reports.

**Table 4-2 - Sales Activity in Fresno, based on Sales Tax Collected**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Annual (Retail Only Outlets)</b> | <b>Annual (All Outlets)</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2000        | \$3,665,810                         | \$4,857,211                 |
| 2001        | \$3,863,836                         | \$5,028,903                 |
| 2002        | \$4,158,346                         | \$5,307,350                 |
| 2003        | \$4,502,934                         | \$5,714,921                 |
| 2004        | \$4,920,482                         | \$6,276,756                 |
| 2005        | \$5,411,282                         | \$6,916,252                 |

|      |             |             |
|------|-------------|-------------|
| 2006 | \$5,643,638 | \$7,254,468 |
| 2007 | \$5,495,981 | \$7,122,176 |
| 2008 | \$4,950,427 | \$6,591,134 |
| 2009 | \$4,343,089 | \$5,667,810 |
| 2010 | \$4,478,073 | \$5,738,383 |
| 2011 | \$4,845,455 | \$6,225,732 |
| 2012 | \$5,199,262 | \$6,695,044 |
| 2013 | \$5,352,055 | \$6,947,118 |
| 2014 | \$5,562,108 | \$7,265,940 |

Source: California State Board of Equalization, <http://www.boe.ca.gov/news/tsalescont.htm>

When also considering the retail sales activity in Downtown Fresno in the future, it is also important to consider what was predicted for the area, specifically along the Fulton Mall once vehicular traffic was restored. In the Environmental Assessment prepared for the Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project in 2014, it compared the three alternatives to reopening Fulton Mall, with two of them featuring vehicular traffic while the other was a no-build option. From an economic impact standpoint, the report showed returning vehicles to the Fulton Mall corridor could generate between \$55 and \$79 million in annual gross retail sales, an increase of 73-146 percent from the no-build or similar current status (Fulton Mall Reconstruction Project, 2014). The report also showed major retail vacancy rate along the Fulton Mall was 34.9 percent and about 11 percent in both the downtown area and entire city. From a property owners' standpoint, this type of information shared over time will be impactful in showing the successes of the Downtown Fresno Partnership and the value it has brought and can continue to bring. This type of information could also show the wider community the benefits of having a BID put in place to assist with the downtown revitalization efforts.

Another avenue to demonstrate benefits to investors and property owners in the Downtown Fresno Partnership is to measure the property values for the area. In California, due to Proposition 13 passed in 1978, properties are only assessed at the time when the property is sold or changed owners. Despite this, the Downtown Fresno Partnership could work closely with the Fresno County Assessor's Office to keep track of property values on the parcels inside the Downtown Fresno Partnership boundary. The organization started a "detailed vacancy database" in 2013, which was used to recruit new businesses to 130 stores. Today, it actively promotes the number of new businesses opened within its boundary. A similar database for property values can be started, if not already, to track property values over time and use this information at the appropriate moment.

However, assessed value can be different than market value. This is evident by the fact some property owners hold onto their properties during this time of "pre-revitalization" in Downtown Fresno as they wait for the price offered by investors matches their perceived value. Therefore, only relying on assessed value can cause challenges. It is a starting point, though, considering this information is publicly available through the Fresno County Assessor's Office. It is also imperative the Downtown Fresno Partnership demonstrate causality for the growth in property values through its programs and services. Conversely, consistently and transparently tracking property value data can help guide future programs or initiatives by the organization. The information can be used as a complete feedback loop. In the end, the benefits could be demonstrated to the potential investors as well as to its own organization.

## **Downtown Fresno Partnership – Looking Ahead**

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has demonstrated an impact in the revitalization efforts. These include staging strong support for the reopening of the Fulton Mall to vehicular traffic as well as influencing others, such as business owners or real estate developers, to move into the downtown space that is within the PBID boundaries and just outside. While it can count some of its successes and work towards addressing its weaknesses, part of the interviews for this study asked stakeholders to look ahead and imagine what the Downtown Fresno Partnership can do to support a truly revitalized Downtown Fresno. Would its better role be addressing perception or becoming a strong advocate for the area?

The overwhelming theme was the role of advocacy. Stakeholders envision the Downtown Fresno Partnership continuing to strengthen its voice for downtown. To strengthen that voice, one interviewee believes “great things will happen if (the Downtown Fresno Partnership gets) more extroverted, more natural organizers, more vocal people on the board. People with strong opinions.” This voice can be used in the political sphere, shaping policies that benefit its constituents, as well as the voice to everyday people, ones who are looking for something to do but do not where to start. Overall, stakeholders would like to see the Downtown Fresno Partnership mold the image of downtown as a place to be. It is already putting forth that effort, but with the Fulton Mall construction on track to be finished in the late spring of 2017, the environment for improving this image will be more concrete.

The role of being an advocate plays into other aspects of planning, such as economic development. One interviewee believed advocacy could lead to other things, such as being “some sort of (expert) for developers and potential business owners, potential investors, to get more development happening.” This was a key concern for several interviewees. They stated the

desire for more development, either in the form of changes to the built environment or in filling storefronts with vibrant businesses to feed into the larger downtown context. Some of these changes are already evident, such as the case with the Fulton Mall being opened to vehicular traffic for the first time since 1964 as well as on the outside of the PBID boundaries in the form of higher-density residential developments. Once the development starts to take place, diversity in businesses that occupy the space was another desire expressed through the interviews. To help attract this diversity, the Downtown Fresno Partnership could be the center for bringing new businesses into downtown by working directly with the City of Fresno on their behalf. Or another path could be providing incentives for small business owners to open and be a part of the discussion being had by bigger developers. Each of these ideas may be happening, but the interviewees stressed the role of being an advocate for property and business owners, big and small, with the City and the public can help in the revitalization effort.

Other roles the Downtown Fresno Partnership could take over time are creating a sense of place in downtown, supporting the new residents moving into the downtown area, and most importantly, being a guardian for the entire downtown area. To create a sense of place or support new residents, the Downtown Fresno Partnership could use its resources to attract “creative youth,” as one interviewee called the segment of the population. This segment could also help brand different parts of the downtown area, a practice that one interviewee believed should be up to the residents of the area – not the City of Fresno or even the Downtown Fresno Partnership. The branding should be organic, the interviewee said. While it’s not a direct concern, supporting the housing element of downtown’s revitalization can help bring the nighttime activity a vibrant downtown. The Downtown Fresno Partnership can continue to facilitate attracting amenities that

create a thriving evening time economy to help it move beyond a “9 to 5” workday area of the city.

Each role will help planning efforts for a thriving urban core, but the role of guardian is the most important due to turnover in the political sphere. Going back to the fact that Mayor Swearingin, one of the strongest supporters of the Downtown Fresno Partnership and Downtown Fresno, the change in administrative leadership over time will bring uncertainty. However, the stable presence of the Downtown Fresno Partnership can keep the interests of downtown at the forefront. As one interviewee said, “(The Downtown Fresno Partnership is) honestly the guardian of everything that we have built so far and to protect it from going backwards.” Downtown Fresno experienced a time with a weak organization in its downtown. The stakeholders did not want to see the area go back to its lowly influential ways again. Once the guardian role is stabilized, and efforts to be the economic development and advocacy engine for downtown, the Downtown Fresno Partnership could take on the role of coordinating the area. The organization aims at making Downtown Fresno a “clean and safe” place to be. It is doing the foundational work today to attract businesses and investors by working with the City and current property owners. Once the revitalization fully takes place, the efforts to maintain vibrancy will be practiced by actors outside its organization. When this occurs, the Downtown Fresno Partnership will make a subtle shift to being “in charge of coordinating the revitalization,” as one interviewee said. The same interviewee added the organization can make room for “people to come in and be on the design committee or be on the finance committee or marketing or whatever. And just having an office where people are coming and going all the time.”



## **Chapter 5 - Conclusion**

The Downtown Fresno Partnership has created momentum and influenced others in the revitalization effort of Downtown Fresno. It has moved from a marketing and events-driven organization that applies the “clean and safe” model employed by many BIDs to an economic development-focused union looking to grow the base of businesses that support a thriving, 24-7 city. The organization has earned major advocacy wins, such as reopening a pedestrian-only mall in its core to vehicular traffic that has stirred attention and investment interest in the downtown area. It has also helped the City of Fresno pass more “business friendly” codes and plans, encouraging property owners to attract businesses that fit this new vision enabled by rules of the area. In its first six years, the Downtown Fresno Partnership has help put revitalization on a positive trend line, in and outside its boundary lines.

However, similar to many revitalization efforts, the work needed to fully realize the potential takes longer than six years of a BID in existence. As raised by eight of the 19 interviewees, the Downtown Fresno Partnership and entire Downtown Fresno revitalization effort falls under the header, “There’s still a lot of work needing to be done.” Downtown Fresno is “still not a place that people are thinking about going to automatically, after hours for shopping and eating,” as one interviewee said. Meanwhile, the perception some property and business owners feel is that “there is still a lot of ‘wait-and-see’ attitudes, though...from business owners waiting to see what the Mall looks like when it’s done,” another interviewee said. When it relates to the Fulton Mall construction being completed in late spring-early summer of 2017, one interviewee believed the Downtown Fresno Partnership should move now to make sure the relaunch of downtown is up to the expectations of outsiders looking in. The interviewee said, “I think we should be operating like the house is on fire.”

Despite this uncertainty of how long it will take to become a revitalized downtown, as opposed to a “pre-revitalized” downtown as assessed earlier by interviewees, the small victories and foundation laid by the Downtown Fresno Partnership and others, such as housing developers, have at least given the revitalization effort a path. By increasing its stakeholders who share the common vision of what a vibrant Downtown Fresno will look like, the Downtown Fresno Partnership can leverage the thinking of “there’s still a lot of work needing to be done but it’s definitely moving forward.”

One limitation of this study is its attempt to measure some of the qualitative features. The study relies on interviews to measure the impact of the Downtown Fresno Partnership. The Downtown Fresno Partnership, and possibly other BIDs, could provide more transparent information on direct impacts of its work to showcase its value. These impacts could be tied to retail activity, property values or pedestrian counts. The Downtown Fresno Partnership has communicated these numbers to support qualitative claims, but it must consistently provide this information to its constituents and the public. This study also fell short in showcasing these quantitative measures to further support the qualitative data.

Another limitation is the pool of interviewees. The greatest impact on the study were the interviews, and the author made a concerted effort to speak with people who are stakeholders either within the Downtown Fresno Partnership organization or in the Downtown Fresno area. The author wanted to tell this story from the outside-in. However, for a revitalization effort to be fully successful, it will need to attract actors who are not already taking part in the area. The perspective of Fresno residents who are still not taking part in the downtown space may share a different side of the impact created by the Downtown Fresno Partnership. However, the author believes this is a study or story to tell after the BID matures and puts the necessary pieces in

place to attract those late-adopters. As the Downtown Fresno Partnership progresses over time, another study less focused on qualitative measures could be a stronger indicator its revitalization successes.

For future studies, there should be a continued discussion of the role of BIDs in the political realm. Almost acting like a lobbyist, the moral questions of whether advancing the interests of private parties over the overall public interest is best for a municipality. In the case, the Downtown Fresno Partnership has been a political and planning tool to help improve the downtown area. Who is advocating for who has changed, but it does showcase a possible source of power and influence that acts from private interests in a political arena.

Another point of study as it pertains to BIDs is their ability to measure their impact. This is similar to the quantitative data supporting qualitative claims mentioned earlier. Property and business owners are paying a dollar amount in annual assessments. Most business owners are looking for a return on any money spent, and not every business person will be satisfied by qualitative results. Drawing the direct link between assessments paid and any qualitative or quantitative results will be an important story for a BID to tell.

To conclude, the Downtown Fresno Partnership, while necessary but not sufficient, is playing an important role in revitalizing downtown. However, it is one of the players in the area. One interviewee described it as a piece of art, saying, “Right now, I view (Downtown Fresno) as a blank canvas and people are painting this canvas. In five or 10 years, we will ultimately see what the canvas will look like.” The Downtown Fresno Partnership, as a tool to build consensus in planning for a vibrant future, is hopefully contributing its own color and brush strokes in large parts of the canvas. The picture of progress will require more work to be done, but at least the current work is being fitted in a positive frame.

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## Appendix A - Street Intersections within Downtown Fresno Partnership Boundary; Used in Crime Data Collection

|                        |                         |                          |
|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Q and Fresno           | Q and Tulare            | Santa Fe and Tulare      |
| Santa Fe and Kern      | Santa Fe and Inyo       | P and Fresno             |
| P and Mariposa         | P and Tulare            | P and Kern               |
| P and Capitol          | P and Inyo              | P and Mono               |
| P and Ventura          | O and Merced            | O and Fresno*            |
| O and Mariposa         | O and Tulare            | O and Kern               |
| O and Capitol          | O and Inyo*             | O and Ventura            |
| N and Merced           | N and Fresno            | N and Mariposa           |
| N and Tulare           | N and Kern*             | N and Inyo               |
| M and Merced           | M and Fresno            | M and Mariposa           |
| M and Tulare           | M and Kern              | M and Inyo               |
| M and Ventura          | L and Stanislaus        | L and Tuolumne           |
| L and Merced           | L and Fresno            | L and Tulare             |
| L and Kern             | L and Inyo              | L and Mono               |
| L and Ventura          | Van Ness and Amador     | Van Ness and San Joaquin |
| Van Ness and Calaveras | Van Ness and Stanislaus | Van Ness and Tuolumne    |
| Van Ness and Merced    | Van Ness and Fresno     | Van Ness and Tulare      |
| Van Ness and Kern      | Van Ness and Inyo       | Van Ness and Mono        |
| Van Ness and Ventura   | Fulton St and Calaveras | Fulton and Stanislaus    |
| Fulton and Tuolumne    | Fulton and Merced       | Fulton and Fresno        |
| Fulton and Mariposa    | Fulton and Tulare       | Fulton and Kern          |
| Fulton and Inyo        | Fulton and Mono         | Fulton and Ventura       |
| Broadway and Merced    | Broadway and Fresno     | Broadway and Mariposa    |
| Broadway and Inyo      | Broadway and Mono       | Broadway and Ventura     |
| H and Stanislaus       | H and Tuolumne          | H and Merced             |
| H and Fresno           | H and Mariposa          | H and Tulare             |
| H and Kern             | H and Inyo              | H and Mono               |
| H and Ventura          |                         |                          |

\* Intersections featured complications with the filter method. Therefore, they were not used in the total reported incidents found in this study's crime data.

## **Appendix B - Case Study Interview Questions**

### **Background (These will be kept confidential; only necessary to help group stakeholders)**

1. What is your current role in the community of Fresno?
2. What is your background with the city of Fresno?
3. What is your current role specific to Downtown Fresno (if different than question one)?
4. Define your role or relationship with the Downtown Fresno Partnership?

### **Overall**

1. In your opinion, what makes a great city (not specific to Fresno)?

### **Downtown Fresno**

1. How do you perceive downtowns as a whole (not specific to Fresno)? What makes a great downtown (once again, not specifically to Fresno)?
2. What is your perception of Downtown Fresno?
3. How has your perception of downtown changed over the last 5-6 years?
4. What are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of Downtown Fresno?
5. How often do you visit Downtown Fresno for 1) work or 2) after work/social settings?
6. Do you consider Downtown Fresno safe?
7. Would you recommend visitors to stop by and experience Downtown Fresno?
8. What other parts of Fresno would you encourage visitors to experience while in town?

### **Downtown Fresno Partnership**

1. What is your perception of the Downtown Fresno Partnership?

2. How would you gauge the growth of the organization since it was officially enacted in 2011?
3. What impact do you think the DFP has had on the revitalization efforts of Downtown Fresno?
4. What are the strengths of DFP? Weaknesses?
5. What has the DFP done well in its first six years? What do you think it could do better over the course of its current five-year term and beyond?
6. On a scale of 1-5, with “5” meaning the greatest impact and “1” meaning no impact at all, where would you rate the DFP and its role in Downtown Fresno?

### **Leadership of the Downtown Fresno Partnership**

1. Would you consider the DFP effective with its leadership role in the urban governance network of Fresno? This can be the leadership expressed by the organization as a whole, at the executive level, board of director level, etc.

### **Fresno**

1. If you could reshape or redefine Fresno and Downtown Fresno by the year 2030, what would you do to make it thrive for the entire city?
2. What role does the Downtown Fresno Partnership play in achieving that vision?

## Appendix C - IRB Exemption Letter

**KANSAS STATE** | University Research Compliance Office  
**UNIVERSITY**

TO: John Keller  
IARCP  
301 D Seaton

Proposal Number: 8493

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 10/17/2016

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Fresno's BID for Downtown Success/PLAN 897: Proposal Writing"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 2, subsection: ii.

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.