

## **NOTICE OF PREPARATION**

### **Program Environmental Impact Report Ceres General Plan Update**

**Date** May 24, 2017  
**To** Reviewing Agencies, Interested Parties, and Organizations  
**Subject** Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Ceres General Plan Update and Scheduling of a Scoping Meeting on Monday, June 5, 2017

The City of Ceres (City) is preparing an update to its General Plan and has determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be necessary to evaluate environmental impacts of this Project, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In compliance with CEQA, the City will be the Lead Agency and will prepare the EIR. Attached are the project description, location maps, and preliminary identification of the potential environmental issues to be explored.

The City is requesting comments and guidance on the scope and content of the EIR from responsible and trustee agencies, interested public agencies, organizations, and the general public (CEQA Guidelines §15082). If your agency is a responsible agency as defined by Section 15381 of the CEQA Guidelines, your agency may use the environmental documents prepared by the City when considering permits or approvals for action regarding the project.

**Public Review Period:** May 24, 2017 to June 23, 2017

**Responses and Comments:** The City requests your careful review and consideration of this notice, and it invites any and all input and comments from interested agencies, persons, and organizations regarding the preparation of the EIR. Comments and responses to this notice must be in writing and submitted to the Lead Agency Contact through the close of business on June 23, 2017. If applicable, please indicate a contact person for your agency or organization.

Notice of Preparation  
Ceres General Plan Update

**Lead Agency Contact:**

Tom Westbrook, Director of Community Development  
Planning Division  
2220 Magnolia Street  
Ceres, CA 95307  
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A scoping meeting will be conducted as part of the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting at **6:00 PM on Monday, June 5, 2017, at the Ceres Community Center, 2701 Fourth Street, Ceres, CA 95307** to collect oral comments from agencies and the public. If you have questions regarding this NOP or the scoping meeting, please contact Tom Westbrook, at (209) 538-5774 or via email at [tom.westbrook@ci.ceres.ca.us](mailto:tom.westbrook@ci.ceres.ca.us).



Tom Westbrook, Director of Community Development  
City of Ceres



Date

## I Project Contact Information

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<b>Project Title</b>	Ceres General Plan Update
<b>Lead Agency Name</b>	City of Ceres
<b>Contact Person</b>	Tom Westbrook, Director of Community Development
<b>Address</b>	Planning Division 2220 Magnolia Street Ceres, CA 95307
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<b>Project Sponsor Name and Address (same as Lead Agency)</b>	City of Ceres 2220 Magnolia Street Ceres, CA 95307

## 2 Project Location

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### Regional Context

The City of Ceres is located just southeast of Modesto in central Stanislaus County in the San Joaquin Valley. The city is almost 80 miles southeast of San Francisco by car, 60 miles from the nearest Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station in Dublin, 35 miles south of Stockton, and 10 miles north of Turlock. State Route 99 (SR-99) runs through the city. The regional setting is depicted in **Figure 1**.

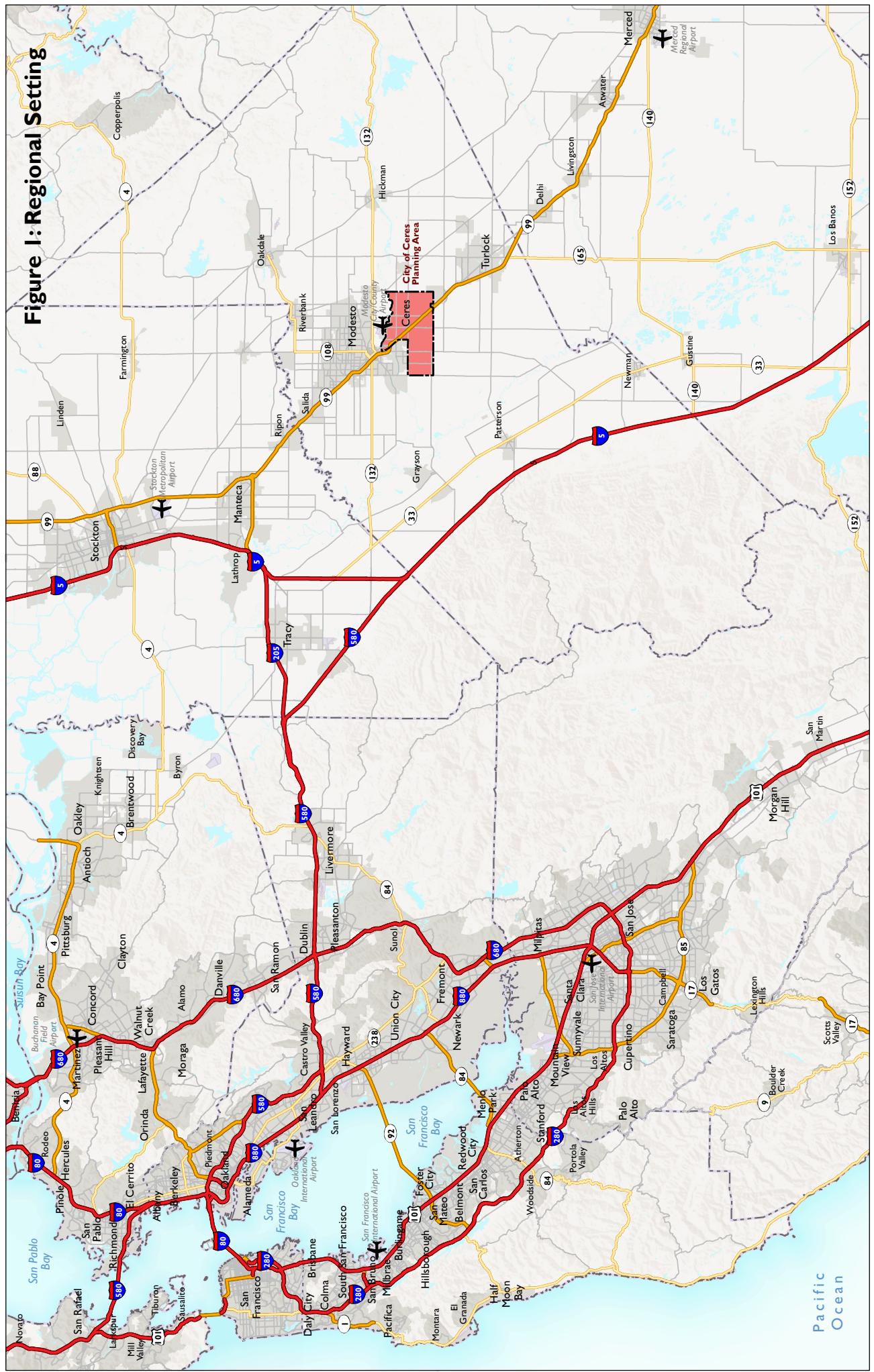
### Planning Area

The General Plan Planning Area (Planning Area), shown in **Figure 2**, is defined as the land area addressed by the General Plan. The Planning Area for the General Plan Update is the same as that used for the 1997 General Plan. It encompasses 14,700 acres including the City of Ceres, its Sphere of Influence (SOI), adjacent unincorporated areas, and Mancini Park in the City of Modesto. It is roughly bounded by the Tuolumne River on the north, Carpenter Road on the west, Grayson Road on the south, and Washington Road on the east. Although Ceres does not have jurisdiction in areas outside of its city limits, what happens in those areas bears a relation to the city's planning and must be considered in the General Plan, per California Government Code Section 65300.

# GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

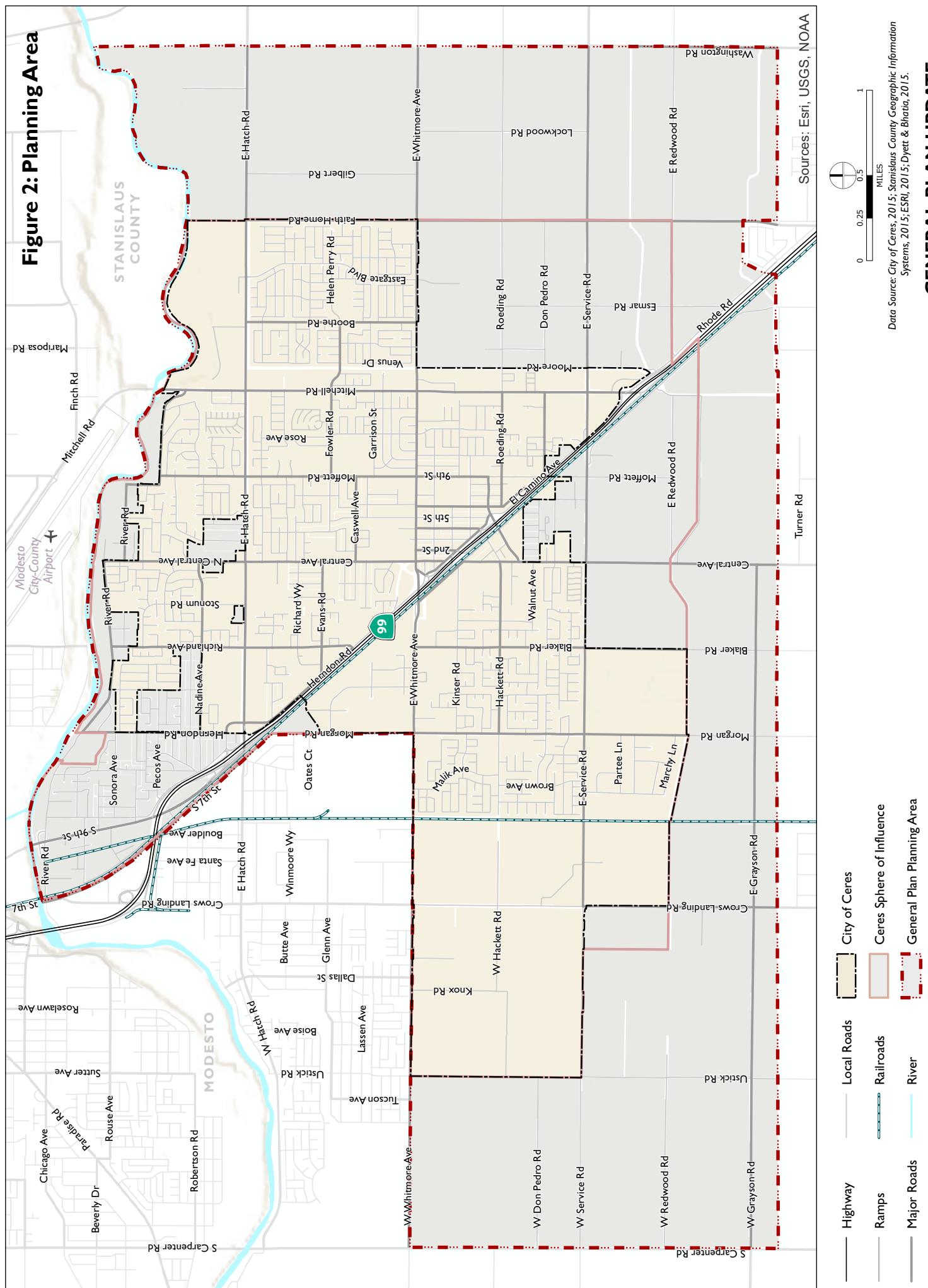
## City of Ceres

**Figure I: Regional Setting**



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MILES  
Data Source: City of Ceres, 2015; Stanislaus County Geographic Information Systems, 2015; Esri, 2015; Dyett & Bhatia, 2015.

**Figure 2: Planning Area**



# GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

## City of Ceres

Data Source: City of Ceres, 2015; Stanislaus County Geographic Information Systems 2015; ESRI 2015; Dwyer & Bhatia 2015

## **3 Project Description**

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The proposed Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will cover the Ceres General Plan Update, referred to as the Proposed Project. The following section provides background information on the Proposed Project and what the EIR will be analyzing.

### **CERES GENERAL PLAN UPDATE**

#### **Background**

The General Plan is a long-term document with text and diagrams that express the goals, objectives, and policies necessary to guide the community toward achieving its vision over a 20- to 30-year period. City decision-makers (e.g., City Council and Planning Commission), rely on the General Plan as a basis for making decisions on matters such as land use and the provision of public facilities (e.g., roads, parks, fire stations, etc.). It is also a policy document that guides decisions related to protecting, enhancing, and providing those things that the community values most, such as farmland, and protecting and enhancing the character of the community.

In late 2015, the City of Ceres initiated a multi-year collaborative process to comprehensively update its General Plan, which dates back to 1997, and does not necessarily reflect current conditions or community priorities. The update process has allowed the community to establish priorities regarding Downtown Ceres, parks and recreation, economic development, housing types, farmland preservation, and other issues. The General Plan update is comprehensive and includes all State-required elements other than the Housing Element, which was last updated in January of 2016 (per California Department of Housing and Community Development requirements) and is not part of the Proposed Project.

Steps in the planning process leading up to preparation of the General Plan that have been completed include community visioning, compiling background reports and analyzing land use and transportation alternatives, engaging the community in deliberating choices about the future, and preparation of a "Preferred Plan" land use map. The full Public Review Draft General Plan is anticipated to be released in late summer/early fall of 2017. More information about the Ceres General Plan Update can be found on the Ceres General Plan Update website at <http://www.ceresgeneralplanupdate.com/>.

#### **Vision and Objectives**

An ongoing public participation process has provided opportunities for public input to the Ceres General Plan Update. Early in the planning process, the community was engaged through a citywide survey, community workshops, stakeholder interviews, presentations to service clubs and Planning Commission and City Council study sessions to establish priorities for future planning, resulting in the following vision statement and guiding principles for the General Plan Update that have been adopted by the City Council.

## **Vision Statement**

*In 2035, Ceres has a continued connection to its agricultural heritage, a balance of housing and retail choices, ample job opportunities, an attractive Downtown, rich cultural and community events and an abundance of recreational opportunities. Ceres is a place where families want to raise their children and businesses want to locate and flourish. In Ceres, people enjoy a safe and healthy city with first-rate community amenities and a clean and sustainable environment.*

## **General Plan Guiding Principles**

- **Neighborly Character.** Knowing that “Together We Achieve,” continue to cultivate a friendly, small town feel, inclusive, and civically engaged community as the population grows and changes.
- **Safe, Family-Friendly Hometown.** Promote Ceres strong and high performing school system, and support the City’s safe neighborhoods and youth activities so that Ceres continues to be a desirable place for families.
- **Agricultural Identity.** Celebrate Ceres agricultural history, support the continued success of the agricultural industry, and consider how to balance the protection of prime agricultural lands with growth and economic development objectives.
- **Health and Sustainability.** Provide well-maintained and accessible parks, street trees and landscaping, and healthy food options; and prioritize clean air, clean water, and resource conservation to help keep the community—both the people and the environment—healthy.
- **Complete Community.** Support the development of a complete and balanced community where needs can be met locally, with new commercial options, industrial growth, and a diversity of housing options that attracts new business, industry and associated professionals.
- **Strong Downtown.** Encourage and direct public and private investment in Downtown Ceres to restore it as the physical and cultural center of the city. Enhance Downtown so it becomes vibrant, active and a place for people to assemble, dine, and socialize in a mixed-use environment.
- **Attractive Destination.** Cultivate Ceres as a unique destination in the Central Valley and for travelers on Highway 99. To the extent possible, ensure that new development visible from Highway 99 offers attractive and unique views from that travel way.
- **Economic Development.** Strengthen job opportunities with industrial and commercial growth and promote education and job training. Continue to balance provision of streamlined services and entitlements with fiscal responsibility to support the future needs of the City.
- **Revitalization.** Encourage infill development and investment within existing neighborhoods and commercial corridors in order to revitalize areas within the city limits.
- **Balanced Circulation Network.** Make it safe and convenient for residents and workers to get where they need to go and for businesses to transport goods by providing well-

maintained sidewalks, connected bicycle networks, efficient connections to major transportation corridors, and regional transit connections.

## **General Plan Update Contents**

The General Plan Update comprises the following chapters, meeting the requirements for general plans under California Government Code §65302 for elements that a general plan must contain.

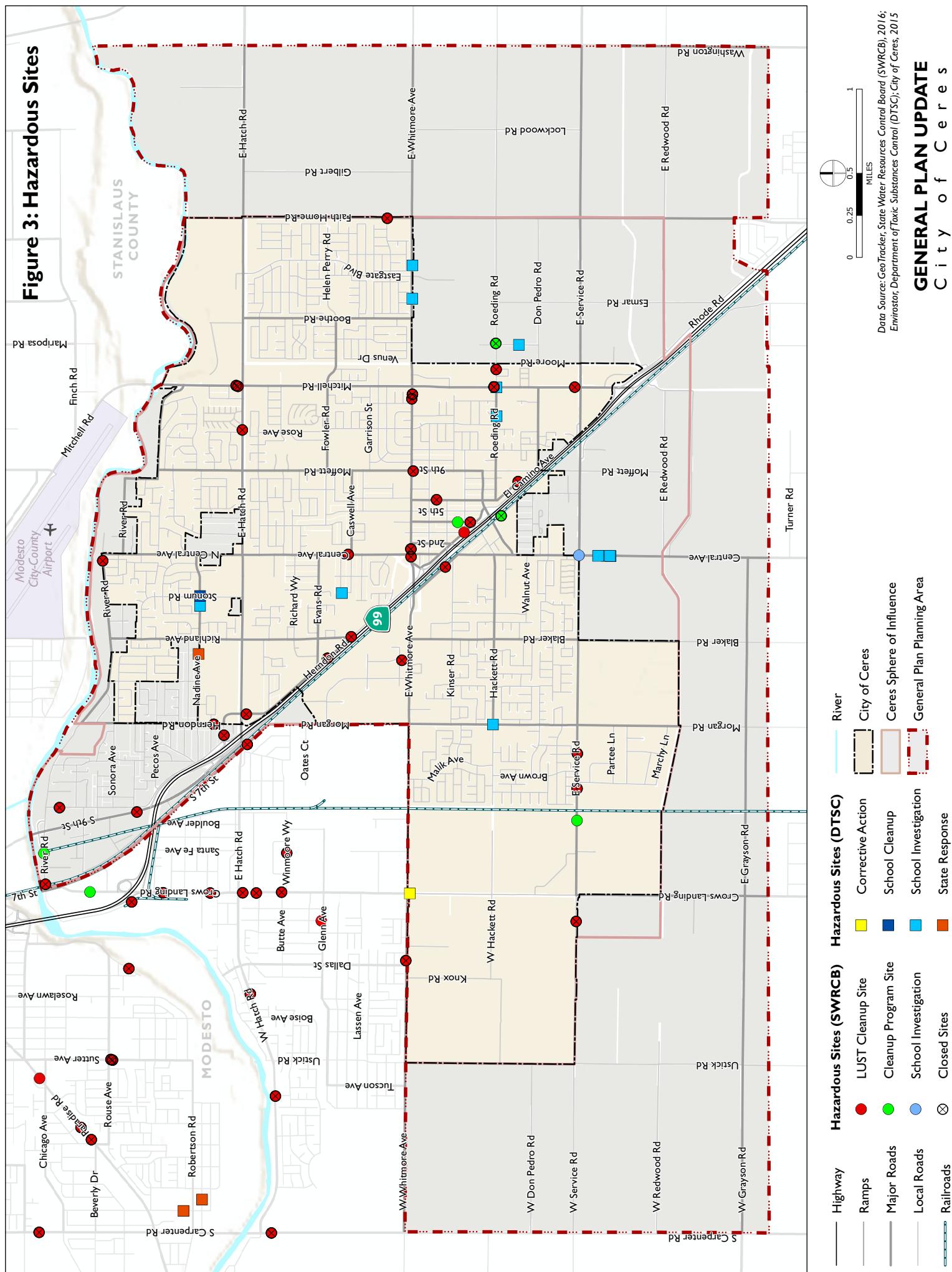
Each element of the Plan includes goals, policies, and actions, which together articulate a vision for Ceres. Goals define an ideal future related to the public health, safety, or general welfare of the community; they set directions for policies. Policies are specified ends or conditions that are an intermediate step towards attaining a goal; they are specific statements to guide decision-making. Actions are implementation measures that the City will undertake to accomplish the objective of the policy.

1. **Introduction.** The introduction to the General Plan provides an overview of the document and its purpose, use, and policy structure. It highlights the vision statements and key principles; gives the reader a background to the planning process and the requirements for the Plan; describes how the Plan is organized; and explains how it will be administered after it is adopted.
2. **Land Use and Community Design Element.** The Land Use and Community Design Element directs the location and form of future development, shaping where people will live, work, play, and shop in Ceres. It presents the desirable pattern for the ultimate development of the city for the General Plan horizon year of 2035 and seeks to ensure that land use planning reflects the community's evolution and changing demographics, while promoting sustainability and considering the needs of disadvantaged unincorporated communities. Goals and policies related to urban form and design will inform development decisions by providing a common understanding of the characteristics the community wishes to achieve and preserve.
3. **Transportation and Circulation Element.** The Transportation and Circulation Element provides for the development and maintenance of a multimodal circulation network, promoting increased transportation choices to serve existing and new development. It responds to the California Complete Streets Act of 2008 by planning for a balanced, multimodal transportation system that meets the needs of all users of roadways, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, children, seniors, persons with disabilities, public transportation users, and movers of commercial goods. A system of street typologies and mode priorities for each roadway type are established.
4. **Agricultural and Natural Resources Element.** The Agricultural and Natural Resources Element establishes goals and policies for the conservation of natural resources in Ceres. This element addresses agricultural and soil resources; open space resources; biological resources; hydrology and water quality; and cultural and archaeological resources. The General Plan promotes thoughtful planning and resource management that can help inform community discussion about weighing environmental conservation with other General Plan goals. The General Plan seeks to balance carefully planned growth with conservation and enhancement of the area's natural resources.

5. **Health and Safety Element.** The purpose of the Health and Safety Element is to identify the natural and man-made public health and safety hazards that exist within the city, and to establish preventative and responsive policies and programs to mitigate their potential impacts. Ensuring the safety of community members, through protection from hazards, is an essential service of public agencies and a critical priority for maintaining community health and welfare. Specifically, the Health and Safety Element addresses physical and nutritional health, health risks of disadvantaged communities, air quality hazards, climate change mitigation and adaptation, seismic and geologic hazards, flooding, hazardous materials, airport hazards, and fire hazards. The Element also identifies the major noise sources that exist in the Planning Area and establishes policies and programs that the City can enact to mitigate potential impacts through both preventative and responsive measures, consistent with requirements for the Noise Element. Hazardous sites designated by both the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) are shown on **Figure 3**.
6. **Public Facilities and Services Element.** The purpose of the Public Facilities and Services Element is to provide a policy framework for the City to manage infrastructure and services, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that public utilities and services meet the needs of the community as the city grows. More specifically, the Element addresses the planning, provision, and maintenance of police and fire services; parks and recreational facilities and programs; schools; and water, wastewater, stormwater, and solid waste systems.
7. **Economic and Community Development Element.** The Economic and Community Development Element of the General Plan contains goals and policies that will enable the City to direct local resources to retain, relocate, expand and assist local businesses and attract new industries that will increase the City's tax base and economic diversity. This Element provides policy direction for fostering development and revitalization to support a vibrant downtown; providing jobs for the growing population; creating opportunities for supply of retail goods and services that will be needed by the community and patronized by regional travelers as well as business to business opportunities, and enhancing the City's ability to engage and prioritize improvements to disadvantaged communities.

While a required element of a city's General Plan, the Housing Element is not included in the Proposed Project being considered in this EIR. Per the requirements of the California Department of Housing and Community Development, Ceres' Housing Element was last updated and adopted in January 2016 (covering the period from 2014-2023) and underwent environmental review at that time. However, other elements in the Ceres General Plan Update are consistent with the Housing Element.

**Figure 3: Hazardous Sites**



### **Land Use Change and Projected Growth Under the Proposed General Plan**

The land use diagram of the Proposed Project is shown in Figure 4. The land use diagram is similar to Ceres' current land use diagram from the 1997 General Plan, with some changes. Changes to land use designations in the Proposed Project include the following: a new Medium High Density land use designation (allowing residential development from 12 to 20 dwelling units per acre); greater allowable density in the High Density land use designation (new allowable range of 20 to 30 dwelling units per acre); and a wider variety of allowable uses in the Regional Commercial designation (such as large-scale shopping centers, office centers, low-intensity warehousing, and recreational uses). Changes to the current land use diagram in the Proposed Project include the following: designating the area around the interchange of Service Road and Mitchell Road as Regional Commercial, and changing the designation of two parcels near the intersection of Roeding Road and Moore Road from Low Density Residential to Light Industrial. Additional refinements to the Proposed Project land use diagram are possible as the new General Plan is drafted.

The Ceres General Plan Update uses a horizon year of 2035. State law specifies that general plans take a long-term perspective; therefore, in order to effectively set goals and policies that can guide strategic decision-making, most general plans look ahead approximately 20 years. The horizon year of 2035 does not signify an “end point.” Rather, it represents a reasonable range in which to plan comprehensively for the city’s next phase of growth, change, and investment.

In the EIR, the horizon year of 2035 is referred to as “buildout” for analysis purposes. The potential population, number of jobs, and amount of development at buildout is based on existing development and an estimated amount of potential new development in the Planning Area. For the Proposed Project, potential new development is expected to occur on underutilized, vacant, and rural parcels as well as sites of current development projects as of 2017; however, not all of these identified parcels are assumed to fully develop. To estimate potential new development, assumptions were made about the percentage of parcels that would develop by buildout, as well as the density of new development. However, land use development, population growth, and job growth are subject to numerous forces, such as macroeconomic cycles and the decisions of individual property owners. Neither the Proposed Project nor the EIR guarantees, assumes, or requires that the General Plan Planning Area will develop to its fullest “buildout” extent by 2035.

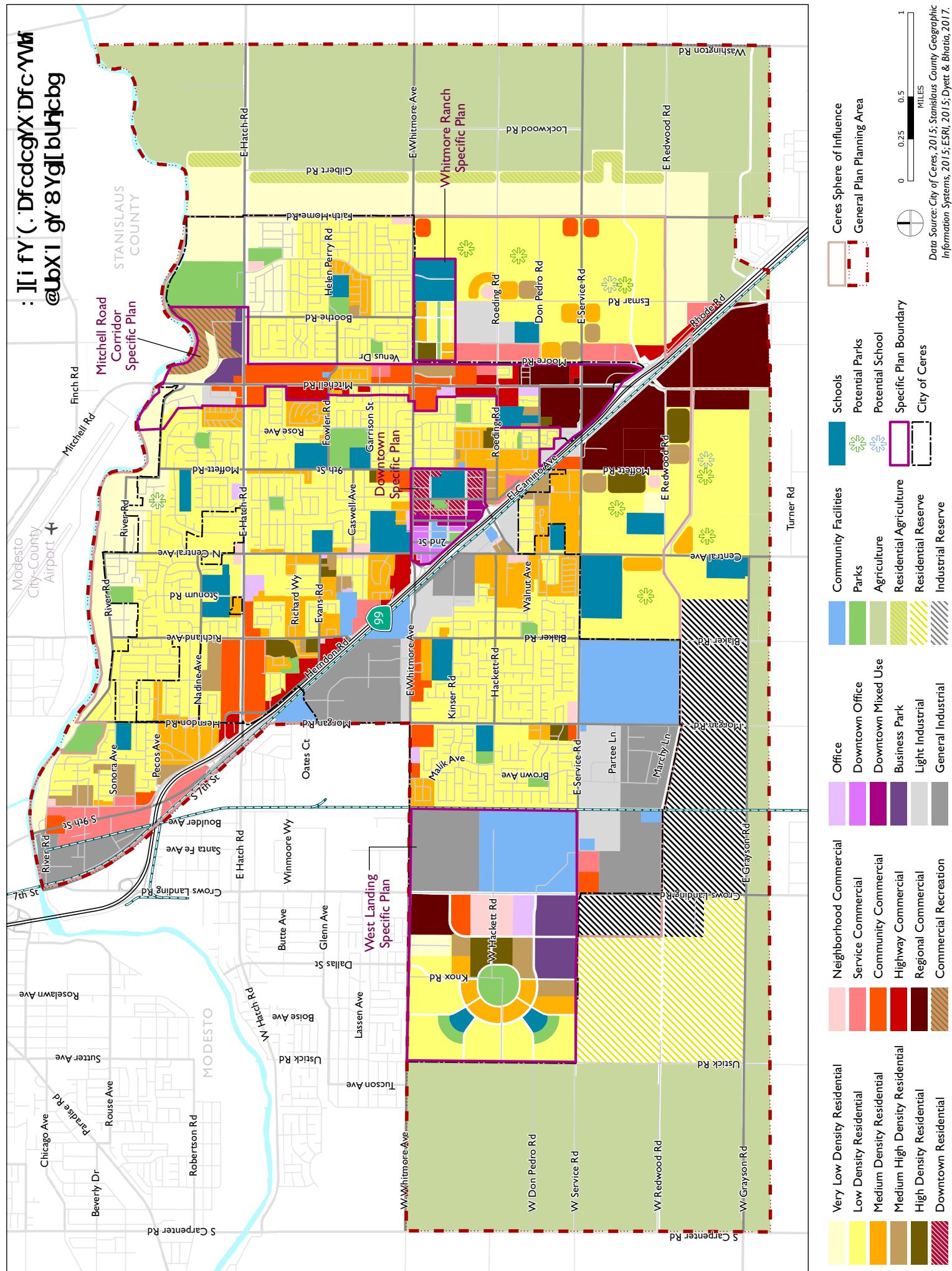
Table 1 shows the estimated buildout of the Planning Area to be analyzed in the EIR. In 2015, the Planning Area’s population was approximately 47,000. The Proposed Project could result in approximately 22,300 new residents by 2035 based on expected development at buildout. This would constitute an increase of 47 percent from the population in 2015 and an average annual growth rate of 2.0 percent. These new residents would be in approximately 6,800 new housing units, an increase of 49 percent and an average annual growth rate of 2.0 percent from the number of housing units in 2015. New development in the Planning Area could support about 19,200 new jobs in 2035, a 225 percent increase from the total number of jobs in 2015, with an average annual growth rate of 6.1 percent. While ultimately market forces will determine the amount of housing and employment growth that occurs by 2035, the EIR will take a conservative approach of assuming this level of potential job and housing growth—which the developable land in the Planning Area could support—in order to fully account for potential impacts.

**Table I: Potential Growth in the Ceres General Plan Planning Area, 2015-2035**

	2015	2035
Population	47,000	69,300
Housing Units	13,800	20,500
Jobs	8,500	27,700

Note: Numbers rounded to the nearest hundred.

Sources: 2015 figures: California Department of Finance, 2015; EPS, 2016; Dyett & Bhatia, 2017. 2035 figures: Dyett & Bhatia, 2017.



## 4 Environmental Impact Report

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The EIR will analyze the potential environmental consequences of adopting the proposed Ceres General Plan Update (the Proposed Project). It will discuss how goals, policies, and implementing actions of the Proposed Project may affect the environment, identify significant impacts, and recommend measures to mitigate those impacts. It will also evaluate the cumulative impacts and potential growth-inducing impacts of the Proposed Project. The EIR will consider the environmental impacts of various alternatives developed during the planning process, including the “No Project Alternative” (projected outcomes based on continued implementation of the existing General Plan [1997]), and identify an environmentally superior alternative.

The environmental assessment will utilize the most current guidelines for CEQA and for each issue area. The EIR will be prepared to take full advantage of CEQA streamlining and tiering opportunities for future projects, whether in accordance with provisions of SB 375, or other tiering and exemption provisions in CEQA. Community members can provide input at two different phases in the EIR process: in response to this Notice of Preparation (where comments are solicited on the scope of the EIR), and to the Draft EIR itself when that document is released (when comments are solicited on the analysis and conclusions of the EIR).

## 5 Potential Environmental Impacts to Be Considered

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Preliminary issues for the EIR analysis of the Proposed Project and project alternatives include:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Energy, Greenhouse Gases, and Climate Change
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Historic and Cultural Resources (includes Tribal Cultural Resources)
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use, Population, and Housing
- Noise
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation
- Utilities

Resource topics that will not be addressed in the EIR include forestry resources and mineral resources, due to a lack of these resources in the Planning Area.