



# Fresno Council of Governments

## 2020-2021 Circuit Planning and Engineering Annual Report

*prepared by*

**Rincon Consultants, Inc.**  
7080 N. Whitney Avenue, Suite 101  
Fresno, California 93720

**July 2021**



**RINCON CONSULTANTS, INC.**

Environmental Scientists | Planners | Engineers

[rinconconsultants.com](http://rinconconsultants.com)



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# 1. Introduction

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## Project Title

2020-2021 FCOG Circuit Planning and Engineering Program

## Lead Agency Name and Address

Fresno Council of Governments (FCOG)

2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201

Fresno, CA 93721

## Contact Person and Phone Number

Meg Prince, FCOG Project Manager; [MPrince@fresnocog.org](mailto:MPrince@fresnocog.org) 559-233-4148 x203

## Project Location

Fresno County 13 smaller cities (Coalinga, Firebaugh, Fowler, Huron, Kerman, Kingsburg, Orange Cove, Mendota, Parlier, Reedley, San Joaquin, Sanger, and Selma)

## Description of Project

The primary objectives of this project include assisting FCOG member agencies with integration of Sustainable Communities Strategies (SCS) and Blueprint Smart Growth Principles into local planning processes, as well as coordinating transportation project development between local agencies and FCOG. These objectives required the consultants to meet with staff of all 13 small cities to discuss how to best assist their needs. Another objective of this project is that the member agencies receive the maximum time and individualized assistance to help best achieve their goals.

The role of the Circuit Planner and Engineer is to provide technical assistance to the 13 small cities in Fresno County. This is a joint effort between Rincon Consultants, Inc. (Rincon) and Collins & Schoettler Planning Consultants which provided planning support services, and VSCE, Inc. which provided engineering support services. The type of assistance includes, but is not limited to, planning studies, project deliveries, grant applications, environmental documents, active transportation counts, and other engineering services. This program provides assistance to City planning and engineering staff at the 13 local agencies upon request for services. This contract began on July 1, 2020 and ended June 30, 2021. The same team is continuing these services for the 2021-2022 FCOG fiscal year.

## Project Background

The Circuit Planner and Engineer program originally began with the San Joaquin Valley COGs dedicating a portion of their Prop 84 funds to provide Circuit Planning services to the small cities in the Central Valley to help integrate Blueprint Smart Growth Principles into local planning. Due to the success of that program, Fresno COG (FCOG) initiated a Circuit Planner program to serve its smaller member agencies in 2013 and added a Circuit Engineer program in 2015 to assist with coordinating engineering activities associated with transportation project development. While these services are not intended to provide assistance with items such as a complete rewrite of general plans or development codes, we hope to provide assistance with integrating strategies found within Fresno COG's Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) into local planning practices, continue integration of the "12 Blueprint Smart Growth Principles" into local planning endeavors, and help with other various roadblocks in the delivery of transportation projects.

The FCOG Circuit Planner and Circuit Engineer have historically been separate contracts, each in the amount of \$50,000 per year. However, FCOG has now merged the programs under one contract with the combined contract amount of \$100,000.

## 2. Community Outreach

### Outreach Plan

Rincon initiated contact to set-up meetings with each of the 13 small cities within 90 days of the start of the contract to in order to complete a Preliminary Needs Assessment. Table 1 shows the requested planning or engineering assistance from within the FCOG region.

### Outreach Conducted

Additional outreach occurred over this fiscal year to all the cities on additional projects requests and to help identify potential needs. These outreach efforts were conducted by Eric VonBerg and Karl Schoettler throughout the year. The outreach also included the distribution of the online Zoning Assessment Tool and Model Zoning Book.

**Table 1 2020-2021 FCOG Preliminary Needs Assessment Project Ranking**

	City	Proposed Project	Status
1	Coalinga	Active Transportation Counts	Completed
2	Fowler	Bike/Pedestrian Counts	Postponed - COVID
3	Kingsburg	Alley Design Guidelines	Completed
4	Fowler	ADA Compliance Assessment	Not Selected
5	Fowler	Review Policies for Blueprint Compatibility	Not Selected
6	Fowler	ADA Transition Plan (Caltrans Grant Application)	Not Selected
7	Kerman	Downtown Design Guidelines	Completed
8	Kingsburg	Kingsburg Mobility Plan	Not Selected
9	Mendota	Cycle 5 ATP Before Counts	Postponed - COVID
10	Sanger	Audit Current Zoning	Completed
11	San Joaquin	Zoning Code Amendments	Completed
12	Selma	Downtown Multi-Use Overlay Zone	Completed
13	Coalinga	Audit Current Zoning to preserve its Small Valley City Character	Incorporated into Online Zone Code Review; On-going
14	Firebaugh	Identify Infrastructure Funding	Not Selected
15	Kerman	AG Mitigation Program	Not Selected
16	Reedley	Assist with United Health Project	On-going
17	Selma	Selma Gateway Improvements	Not Selected

18	San Joaquin	Traffic Counts in June 2020	Postponed - COVID
19	Sanger	Update Construction Standards	Not Selected
20	Selma	Business Improvement District Advertising & Signage	Not Selected
21	Fowler	Adams Avenue/SR 99 IC Improvements	Not Selected
22	Huron	N/A	N/A
23	Orange Cove	N/A	N/A
24	Parlier	N/A	N/A
25	City of San Joaquin Firebaugh Sanger	LEAP Grant Application Assistance	Completed

## 3. 2020-2021 Projects

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### Coalinga

Coalinga requested Circuit Planner and Engineering assistance for two projects, Active Transportation (ATP) Counts and an Audit of Current Zoning to better fit a small Valley city. Later they requested assistance in preparing a Request for Proposal (RFP).

The traffic counts were postponed in the prior year, however, VSCE conducted ATP counts from October 8-12, 2019 and provided these results to the City and FCOG. This project is completed as of 2020-2021.

Rincon prepared a RFP for the City's proposed Trails Master Plan in Segments 3, 4, and 9 and provided technical assistance to City Staff prior and during the RFP process.

Rincon developed a Demo of a Zoning Ordinance Assessment Tool as described below. The first city this demo tool will be prototyped is for the City of Coalinga. Development of this project is complete as of 2020-2021.

### Kingsburg

Kingsburg requested Circuit Planner and Engineering assistance for the City's Alley Design Guideline.

Collins and Schoettler prepared a "white paper" offering guidance to the City of Kingsburg to implement design strategies for two alleys in downtown Kingsburg. The Kingsburg Alley Study analyzes converting several alleys for pedestrian use in downtown Kingsburg. The study profiles existing conditions and provides a number of strategies to convert these alleys into pedestrian paseos, complete with outdoor dining (for adjacent restaurants) landscaping, street furniture, fountains and wall murals, among other features. The City is now using the study as a guide to improve the alleys and also as a resource to seek funding to make the vision become a reality. This project is complete as of 2020-2021.

### Kerman

Kerman requested Circuit Planner and Engineering assistance to update the City's Downtown Design Guidelines. The Guidelines would establish flexible strategies for three focus areas – general commercial projects, projects in the downtown area, and special uses and situations that many cities struggle with (such as gas stations, franchise businesses and others). Collins and Schoettler provided support for the City and prepared the Guidelines. This project is ongoing.

### Sanger

Sanger requested Circuit Planner and Engineering services for a Current Zoning Audit.

Collins and Schoettler provided support for the zoning ordinance audit. The Sanger Zoning Audit is an analysis of the existing Sanger Zoning Ordinance to identify ways that the ordinance can be made to be more compliant with the twelve Blueprint Principles. The existing ordinance is a very dated document, with significant portions originally adopted in 1982. Characteristic of many zoning codes

of that time, the ordinance only provides basic development standards and (with some recently enacted exceptions) generally does not promote walkable neighborhoods, or commercial districts with strong visual character and mixed uses. The audit analyzes each chapter and provides recommendations for improvements or replacement. The City will be using the audit to guide an expected comprehensive update of the ordinance to ensure it meets the community's expectations for quality, livable development. This project is completed as of 2020-2021.

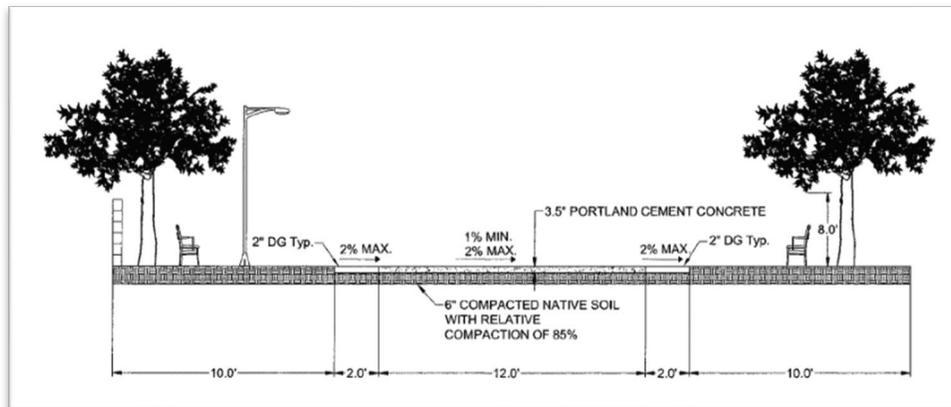
## San Joaquin

San Joaquin requested Circuit Planner and Engineering services for two projects, including Zoning Code Amendments and Traffic Counts. Traffic counts were suspended due to COVID-19.

Rincon performed an audit of the existing zoning code ordinance and provided recommendations to update the existing zoning code to be consistent with current State law and streamline the current community development processes. This project is on-going under the City's SB2 Planning Grant to fully update the City's zoning code. This project is completed as of 2020-2021.

## Reedley

Reedley requested Circuit Planner and Engineering assistance for one project: assistance with preparing a site plan for the remaining land surrounding a recently constructed United Health clinic at the northeast corner of Buttonwillow and Manning Avenue and integration of City multi-use trail and joint-use flood basin/park. This project was completed.



## Selma

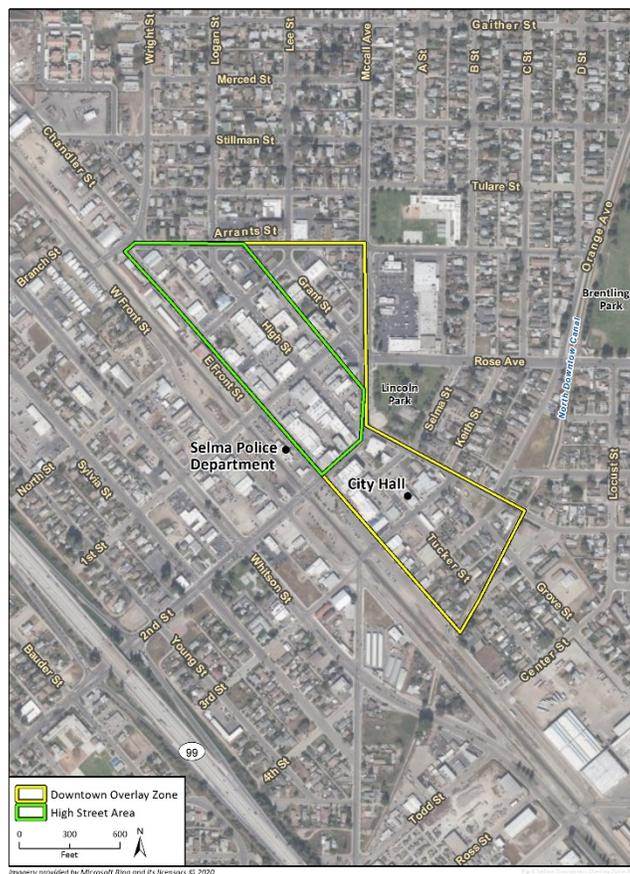
Selma requested Circuit Planner and Engineering services for three projects, including a Downtown Multi-use Overlay Zone, Gateway Improvements, and Business Improvement District Advertising and Signage.

Rincon drafted a memo with recommendations and presented to the Planning Commission and City Council on strategies to implement all three project requests as part of the Downtown Overlay Zone, which would enhance and encourage mixed-use development in Downtown Selma. In the 2019-2020, Rincon created an Outreach Plan Memo for the City to review on best practices to reach stakeholders in Downtown Selma. Rincon also provided recommendations for Downtown parking

issues at the request of the City. The Downtown Overlay Zone was an on-going project from 2019-2020. Rincon conducted additional outreach to several small business owners within the Downtown Overlay Zone boundaries. Rincon drafted a Community Feedback Memo for the City of Selma. The information from local stakeholders via the Community Feedback Memo provided information for development for the future uses and design guidelines for the Downtown Overlay Zone District. The purpose of this new overlay zone is to foster the appropriate downtown businesses, shopping, dining, and other related uses through the continued use of existing structures and enable compatible enhancement and redevelopment where reuse is not feasible in order to achieve the following goals:

- A. Encourage harmonious architecture that reflects the essential character of Downtown Selma through use of height, setback, design, and façade materials;
- B. Compact development is encouraged to promote walking, bicycling, recreation, transit use, and community reinvestment, to reduce energy consumption, and to offer opportunities for employment and consumer activities in proximity to residences;
- C. Promote pedestrian friendly streetscape along the main corridors of Downtown;
- D. Encourage residential development as part of mixed-use development throughout the downtown area.
- E. Preserve and enhance downtown businesses, shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities that encourage foot traffic in the downtown and evening use.

Below is the map boundaries of the proposed Downtown Selma Overlay Zone.



## Zoning Evaluation Tool and Model Zoning Ordinance (Multiple Jurisdictions)

Several jurisdictions requested for updates to their zoning code in order to comply to most recent State laws as these small cities do not have the staff time or funds or expertise available to do so. There have been numerous new State zoning requirements in the last few years, cities may have adopted new General Plan or amendments creating inconsistencies with their zoning ordinance, or their code is just out of date, not user friendly, or is not accomplishing city goals for encouraging and shaping development for a small rural city.

Rincon developed a prototype online tool that enables the cities within this program to systematically assess their current zoning ordinance and be provided a list of sections needing updated. This tool requires participation from the city's in order to identify issues within the existing zoning code and then use that information to verify whether the zoning code complies to existing State laws and regulations. Rincon created a basic prototype and presented the idea to FCOG Policy Board. The prototype was implemented to several cities and assisted in Model Zoning Ordinance update in the City of San Joaquin and Coalinga.

Rincon and Collins & Schoettler developed model zoning code sections for cities to utilize to update their zoning code based on the results of the evaluation. These two tools are to work together to first identify needed areas for update, and then templates for updating those sections that can be customized to fit the individual cities. Development of this tool is complete as of 2020-2021. However, implementation and use of the Zoning Evaluation Tool is on-going. An example of how to use-the Zoning Model Book is below.

### Using the Model Book

Cut sheet title identifies topic

Explanation and applicability sections provide context

Colored box outlines model policy, code, or considerations

FRESNO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
SUBREGIONAL CAP IMPLEMENTATION MODEL BOOK

## 2.1 MINISTERIAL REVIEW

Ministerial review processes do not require any discretionary decisions by staff or decision-makers; rather, they simply verify that predetermined requirements have been met for the granting of the permit. Ministerial permits may be approved “over the counter” by the City Planner or other designated staff and do not need to be reviewed by the Planning Commission or City Council. All jurisdictions have some form of administrative review and permitting, and some uses are now required by California State law to have administrative approval. Ministerial review is best for minor land use actions that have little impacts on surrounding properties or service systems and have no environmental effects under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**Explanation**  
This section contains two types of common ministerial review performed by jurisdictions: zoning clearance and site plan review. A zoning clearance is a written record that can be requested by the applicant to verify that the proposed project meets the zoning district requirements for the subject property.  
A site plan review is commonly performed in conjunction with another discretionary permit application process to ensure the proposed project meets all standards and requirements of the jurisdiction.

**Applicability**  
All jurisdictions have some form of ministerial review process. The exact permits and uses allowed administrative approval may vary, however.

**Model Ordinance Language**  
The following model language provides an example of an ordinance section describing a jurisdiction’s ministerial review process, including preparation of Zoning Clearance Letters and completion of Site Plan Review. The language should be modified to be consistent with the jurisdiction’s specific requirements and terminology.

**ZONING CLEARANCE LETTER**

- A. A zoning clearance letter may be requested for all buildings and structures hereinafter erected, constructed, altered, or moved within or into any district established by this title, or for any use or activity which requires a building permit, to verify that each new or expanded use or structure complies with all applicable requirements of this Ordinance and with any applicable City policies or standards. No building permit shall be issued until zoning confirmation has been obtained from the planning department, and any other necessary permits required by this title have been issued and have become effective.
- B. Applications for a zoning clearance letter shall be submitted to the planning department and shall be accompanied by a processing fee pursuant to the amount listed in Section \_\_\_\_\_.
- C. The [PLANNING MANAGER] may request that the zoning clearance application be accompanied by a written narrative, operational statement, or other related materials necessary to show that the proposed development complies with all applicable provisions of this Ordinance.

**SITE PLAN REVIEW**

- A. Site plan review may be required at the discretion of staff or the Planning Commission as part of any discretionary permit to ensure the proposed development is in conformance with the standards and

4 | PLANNING PERMITS

## Local Early Action Planning (LEAP) Grants Program Application Assistance (Multiple Jurisdictions)

Several jurisdictions requested assistance to apply for the California Department of Housing and Community Development’s Local Early Action Planning Grants Program (LEAP or Program). LEAP is made available as a portion of the Local Government Planning Support Grants Program pursuant to Chapter 3.1 of Health and Safety Code (Sections 50515 to 50515.05) (Chapter 159, Statutes of 2019). LEAP provides funding to jurisdictions for the preparation and adoption of planning documents, process improvements that accelerate housing production, and facilitate compliance in implementing the sixth cycle of the regional housing need assessment (RHNA). The region was awarded \$119,040,000 as part of this program. Rincon conducted outreach to the 13 cities and provided information and offered support services as part of the Circuit Planner and Engineering contract to inform cities of this grant funding. Three cities sought assistance including City’s of San Joaquin, Firebaugh, and Sanger in applying for this grant funding. This project is completed as of 2020-2021.

## 4. COVID-19 Impacts

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Due to the nature of the COVID-19 virus, several projects will be delayed until further notice and will be considered on-going until conditions are deemed safe to proceed or appropriate to conduct. We are hopeful that the delayed projects will be conducted in the 2021-22 project year.

The projects affected are primarily related to Transportation and Traffic and this includes but not limited to the following proposed projects:

- City of Fowler Bike and Pedestrian Counts
- City of Mendota Cycle 5 ATP Before Counts
- City of San Joaquin Traffic Counts

Traffic counts rely on several factors including measuring traffic patterns at peak times which accounts primarily for work and school schedules. However, due to COVID-19, the sheltering-in-place orders have altered business as usual traffic patterns for both work and school schedules. Therefore, traffic counts conducted at this time would not be considered an accurate depiction to measure the existing and future needs and were suspended. We anticipate being able to conduct these counts once schools return in the Fall of 2021 and employees return to work at their offices.

## 5. Conclusion

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Rincon, VSCE, and Collins and Schoettler are continuously working to provide planning and engineering assistance to the smaller FCOG cities. Several projects mentioned above are considered on-going as the team is working virtually at this time as precautions due to COVID-19. In total, 25 projects were submitted for assistance from nine (9) FCOG cities, six (6) projects were completed as of 2020-2021, and currently three (3) projects are active and on-going. There are three (3) transportation-based projects put on hold due to COVID-19 related traffic count issues. The Zoning Evaluation Tool and Model Zoning Ordinance are being developed for use by any of the 13 smaller cities.

A summary of the work prepared was provided to the FCOG TTC, PAC, and Policy Board in July of 2021. Projects and reports completed are available by contacting Meg Prince, FCOG at [MPrince@fresnocog.org](mailto:MPrince@fresnocog.org).

## 6. References

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### List of Rincon Consultant, Inc. Staff

#### **RINCON CONSULTANTS, INC.**

Eric VonBerg, Senior Project Manager

Jerry Hittleman, Senior Planner

Della Acosta, Senior Planner

April Durham, Environmental and Urban Planner

Victoria Chung, Environmental Planner

### List of Collins and Schoettler, Planning Consultants Staff

#### **COLLINS AND SCHOETTLER, PLANNING CONSULTANTS**

Karl Schoettler, Principal

Greg Collins, Partner

Andrew Chamberlain, Associate

### List of VSCE Staff

#### **VSCE**

Jesus Vargas, Senior Project Manager

Deo Calabio, Senior Project Manager

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