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Opportunity Zones, created by Trump's tax law, are meant to help the heartland thrive and make the country more equal—but can they pull it off?

FRESNO, Calif.—Census tract 06019000100 has a lot going for it. Locals cheer the melting-pot atmosphere, the arts scene, the nearby nature, and the affordable housing—affordable in national terms, which feels all the more amazing given that it is a quick drive both to the grandeur of Yosemite and to the tech hub of the Bay Area. Start your car up and grab a coffee here at 9 a.m., and you could be standing in downtown San Francisco or in front of Apple's headquarters by noon.

For all that, though, this tract has its problems. There is the stifling summer heat, the poverty, and the pollution. Technology companies have not flooded into the area like they have in the Bay and in Reno, and the city faces underinvestment and blight. Roughly two-thirds of the families in 06019000100 live below the poverty line. The surrounding county is economically depressed too, with an unemployment rate above 8 percent, one of just a handful of places nationally where that is still true. Moreover, the income gap between households in Fresno County and Santa Clara County, where Apple is headquartered, has widened in the past 10 years.

Still, Fresno is a place that feels on the cusp, as if just a little more investment, a little more infrastructure, and a little more spit and elbow grease might help it thrive. It has what a real-estate broker might call “good bones,” with plenty of lower-cost real estate and highway saturation. It has a steady supply of educated workers, by virtue of being home to Fresno State, among other schools. And it has a powerful industrial base, in terms of agriculture as well as in other industries. “If you are a company that is looking at having a West Coast presence, especially a distribution or an e-commerce center, there's no better place than Fresno County right now,” said Lee Ann Eager, the president of the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation (motto: “Living the California dream”).

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