



Potential Locations for a Homeless Encampment in Chico, Ca.

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Introduction

Homelessness in Chico, California has been at the forefront of public discourse in recent months. Steps have been taken by the city and other associations to alleviate the number of loitering individuals in public and private areas of Downtown. Homeless advocate groups, including the Chico Housing Action Team (CHAT), have been campaigning for a designated homeless encampment area. By utilizing the power of GIS, we set out to find an appropriate tax parcel for a homeless camp within the Chico sphere of influence. To guide our search, we collaborated with CHAT member Dan Everhart to define specific criteria within which the tax parcel must fit.

Considerations were made in regards to minimum lot size, access to public utilities, and proximity to services and transportation, among others. We also wanted to create a plan for the possibility that citizens would not tolerate a permanent camp within their neighborhood. Other cities have successfully maintained rotating homeless camps, housed in churches, that could also be used as a model for Chico. By utilizing the tools and methods available to us in ArcGIS, we hope to make a meaningful contribution to our community.

Analysis & Results

- Analysis conducted within the city of Chico sphere of influence
- Pared down the number of tax parcels from over 28,000 to just 42
- Visually refined the search by removing currently developed plots
- Left with 9 that would be suitable for the camp
- All are located in the southeast quadrant of town near the intersection of Park Ave and E Park Ave
- Parcels all zoned for commercial or manufacturing/industrial businesses; most of the 9 lots feature structures on site (which could be torn down or converted)
- Almost all also have a large amount of open space
- One lot believed to be completely vacant (based on satellite imagery) was later revealed to be under construction
- A prime vacant lot close-by had been eliminated from our analysis due to its proximity to a daycare center; said center was later found to be defunct

Conclusions

Our analysis found many suitable places for a homeless encampment, however...

Major issues exist that must be overcome for the project to succeed:

- Of the appropriate parcels, only one is a completely vacant lot
- The rest are developed and in various stages of use
- Residents and business owners of the Park Ave corridor and South Barber neighborhood to the west would likely fight the installation of such a camp in the area

But there are other solutions...

In Seattle, Washington participating churches open their doors to campers for a few months at a time, with this in mind:

- Another analysis conducted to find all of the churches within the Chico sphere of influence within 1/4 mile of a bus route (see below)

Perhaps through cooperation with CHAT, these facilities could be instrumental in helping to alleviate a problem that should be a concern for the whole community.

Data & Methods

Parcel Selection Criteria

- Larger than 1 acre in size
- Within 1/4 mile of B-Line bus routes
- Within 1 mile of the Jesus Center
- Within 250 feet of existing sewer/water lines
- Farther than 1/4 mile from schools and daycares
*using this parameter eliminates the legal need to conduct background checks on potential inhabitants



Data Acquisition

From Geographical Information Center:

- City of Chico sphere of influence
- Butte County tax parcels
- Butte County B-Line bus routes
- Chico landmarks
- Chico sewerlines
- Chico schools/daycares
- Chico churches

From California State University, Chico:

- Chico tax parcels



ArcMap 10.2 Tools

Extract Tools:

- Clip
- Select

Proximity Tools:

- Buffer

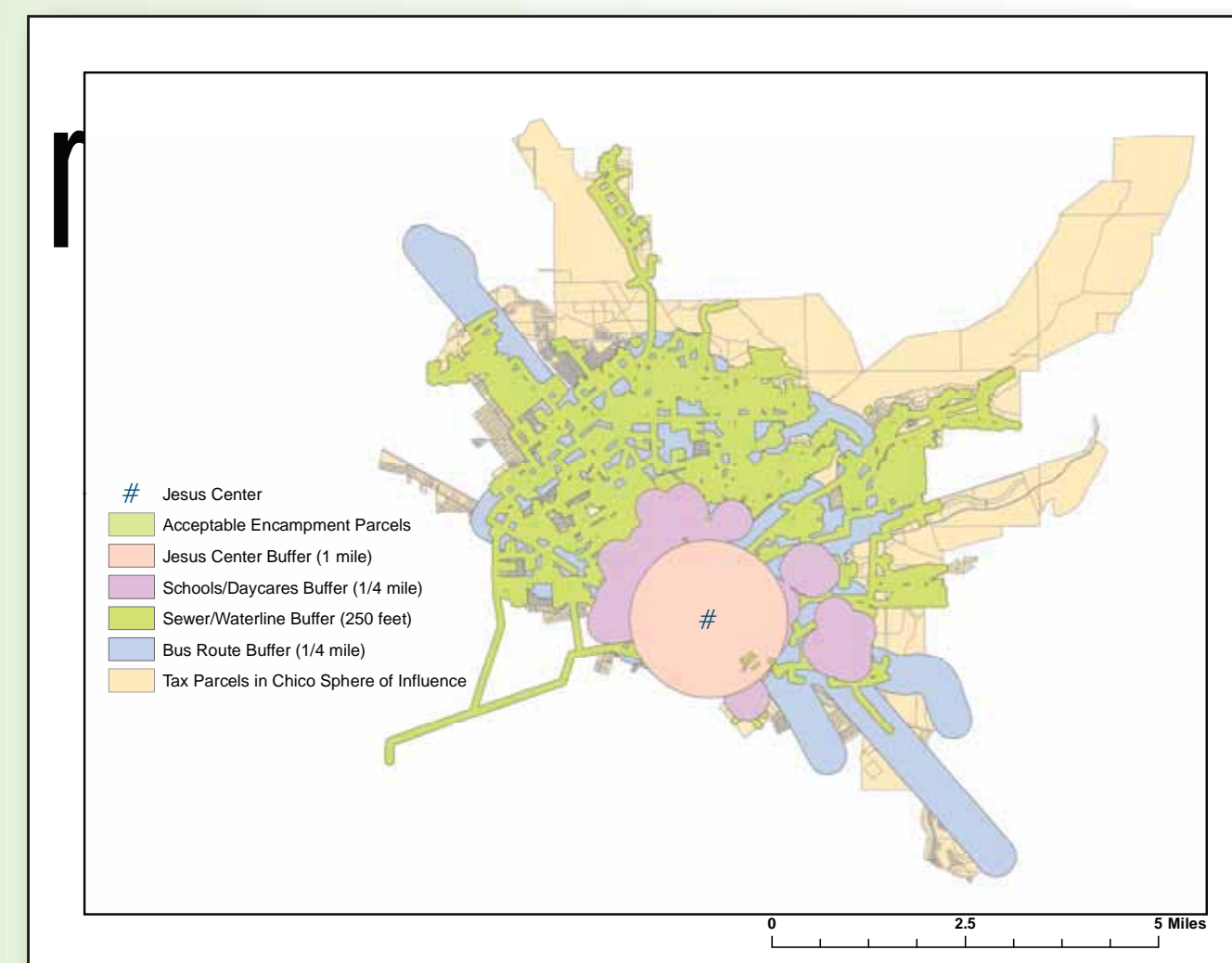
By attribute and location

Overlay Tools:

- Intersect

Join Tools:

- Join Field



A: Partially occupied by part-time antique store



B: Metal work/costume business in front half



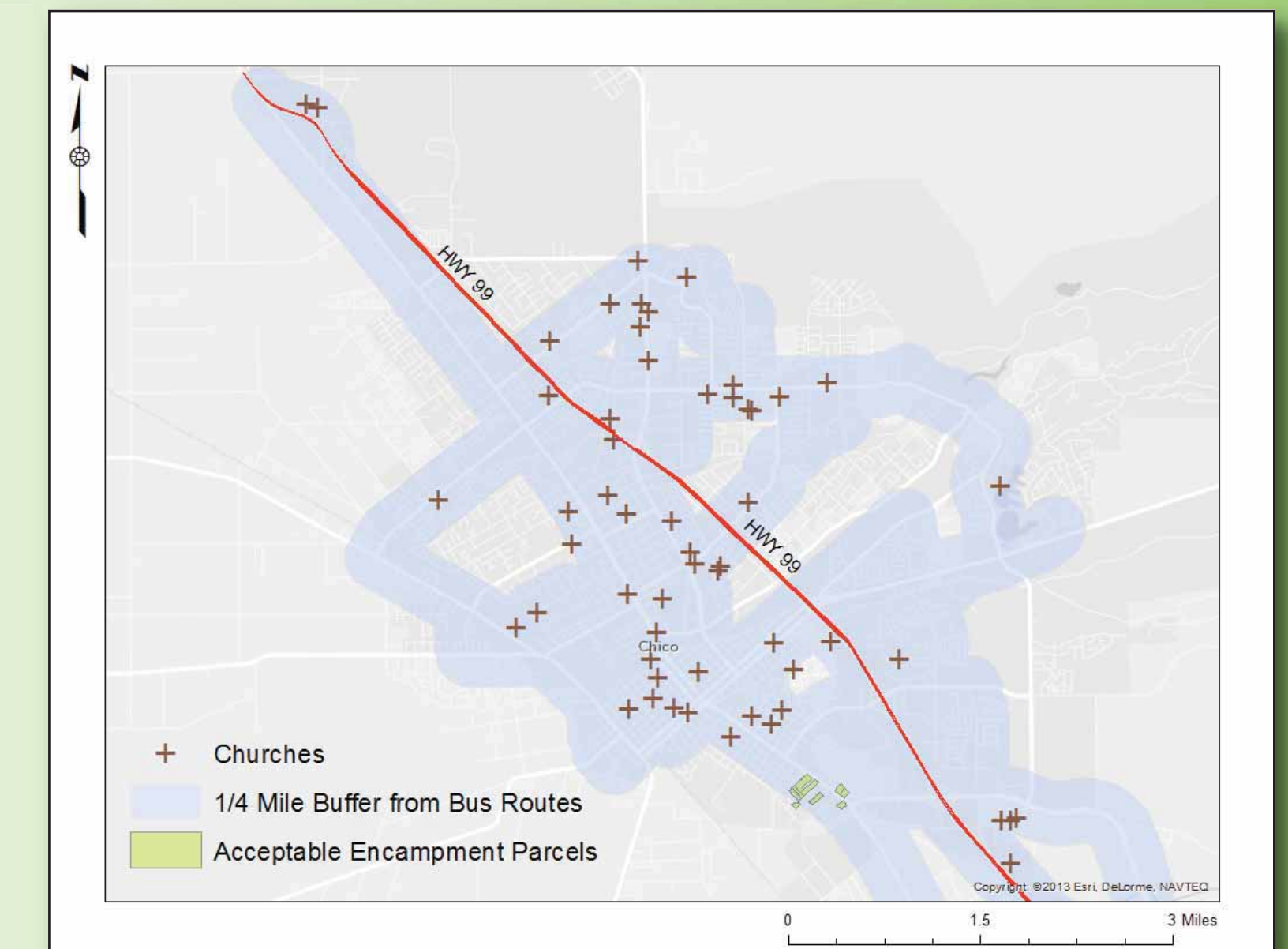
C: Thought to be vacant, now under development



D: Optimal vacant lot, eliminated from analysis by old data



Green polygons show the 9 qualifying parcels; pictures to right are ground images of a few lots



1/4 mile buffer on bus lines found ideal churches to enlist in a rotating homeless shelter program

References

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- Loftus-Farren, Zoe. 2011. Tent Cities: An Interim Solution to Homelessness and Affordable Housing Shortages in the United States. *California Law Review* 99, 4: 1037-1081.