

City of Merced | Bellevue Corridor Community Plan



# FOUNDATION REPORT

AUGUST 2012



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This Report provides an overview of the Bellevue Corridor Community Plan (BCCP) preparation process, reviews existing concepts and materials that will serve as a foundation for Plan development, and sets direction for the BCCP background studies and chapters.

The Merced community has participated in important planning initiatives over the past several years including the City's 2030 General Plan, UC Merced's Long Range Development Plan, and Merced County's University Community Plan. The outcomes of these planning initiatives will serve as an important basis upon which the BCCP will be developed. This report includes a brief overview of these plans and describes key concepts from each plan that will be incorporated into the BCCP (see Section 2).

The Report is organized into the following Sections:

- Section 1. Introduction
- Section 2. Objectives, Opportunities, and Constraints
- Section 3. Plan Preparation Process Overview
- Section 4. Overview of Existing Plans
- Section 5. Next Steps
- Appendix A. Background Study Outlines
- Appendix B. Relevant General Plan Goals and Policies
- Appendix C. BCCP Area Map

## 2. OBJECTIVES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONSTRAINTS

### Plan Objectives

The BCCP will guide the physical development of approximately 1,920 acres of unincorporated land. The aim of the BCCP is to facilitate development that results in:

- A range of new neighborhoods, commercial centers and transition areas;
- Animated street activity;
- Coherent and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes;
- A rich and articulated public realm;
- Varied mobility options including vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles and transit
- A dynamic mix of uses; and
- A harmonious relationship between architecture, economy and the public realm.

To accomplish these objectives, the BCCP will establish specific standards for circulation and complete streets, transit priority projects, and land uses, site plans, and building design through a development code.

Circulation and complete streets strategies will aim to develop the corridor as a commercial focal point, connecting walkable neighborhoods through a network of well-designed streets that accommodate a range of transportation modes. The BCCP will incorporate a multi-modal approach that addresses roadway needs on a layered basis and will identify relevant examples of street types, streetscapes, and public space types that are complementary to land uses and appropriate for application in the Plan area.

The BCCP will identify and prioritize Transit Priority Projects (TPPs) and coordinate TPP locations with the pattern of new neighborhoods and activity nodes, as well as the anticipated pace of realizing development in these areas.

TPPs will be focused near existing or anticipated bus routes or stops including bus rapid transit and campus shuttles. The BCCP will include standards and land use policies specifically tailored to maximize TPP sites.

The vision for development site and building design in the BCCP area will be implemented through a development code. The code will utilize best practices and integrate concepts from the City's urban design guidelines and outcomes from the community outreach process. Code standards will be tailored for the BCCP's urban villages, corridor development and future research, and development park areas.

### Opportunities

The BCCP area presents important opportunities for the City of Merced. The continued growth of UC Merced will provide an influx of people, ideas, and energy. The BCCP should aim to capitalize on this growth and ensure new development meets the needs and desires of new and existing residents. Potential opportunities include the following:

- **Growing University-oriented population.** UC Merced is expected to grow to approximately 25,000 students and over 6,500 faculty and staff members by 2035. As the population grows, there will be an expanding market for housing, goods, and services.
- **Future Research and Development Park Sites.** Anticipating and preparing for market demands caused by a growing university, sites for future job generating research, and development parks can be set aside today for development in the future.
- **Limited existing development.** There is little existing development located within the Plan area. Large, undeveloped tracts of land present a wide variety of opportunities for well-designed development tailored specifically to the needs of the growing University-oriented population.
- **Home for Entrepreneurs.** The BCCP can help foster a living and working environment to attract a new generation of entrepreneurs, leading to innovations, technologies, and expansion of local job-generators.
- **Alternative transportation.** The BCCP should identify and implement circulation and land use standards that encourage multi-modal transportation including walking, biking, riding transit, and driving.
- **Leverage new investment.** The expanding University community has and will continue to spark associated investment in Merced. The BCCP should identify opportunities to leverage new investment in the University-area to improve citywide economic vitality.
- **Low-impact development.** Well-planned growth in the BCCP area can ensure that development minimizes impacts to natural resources, air quality, and water quality. The BCCP should identify and incorporate concepts for development patterns and solutions that conserve and enhance resources from which a community prospers.
- **Community character.** As noted, there is little existing development within the BCCP area, thus the BCCP presents an important opportunity to elaborate on General Plan vision concepts for developing a unique community character. The BCCP should encourage memorable public spaces and distinctive community nodes that facilitate positive interaction and idea sharing and build upon the concepts developed through the UC Merced Long Range Development Plan.
- **Existing Rural Residential Communities.** Though primarily located outside the Plan Area, existing "ranchette neighborhoods" provide a semi-rural lifestyle defined by open space and agricultural uses. The BCCP provides an opportunity to maintain and strengthen the character of these neighborhoods; these neighborhoods can provide development themes for some areas of the BCCP.

### Challenges / Constraints

The area presents a number of challenges and constraints:

- **Distance between UC Merced and Downtown.** Because the UC campus is located approximately five miles outside of the downtown core, new development in the Plan area must serve to connect the two activity areas through appropriate uses, a thoughtful street grid, and transit.
- **Development phasing.** The scale of the Plan area and timing of the UC campus buildout will make phasing an important consideration in Plan implementation. The pattern and timeframe in which the area develops will impact transit opportunities, development feasibility, and interim community character.
- **Natural resource and habitat disruption.** Portions of the Plan area are home to sensitive natural resources such as vernal pools that must be considered in land use plans.
- **Affordable housing.** Housing within the Plan area should include a range of housing types offered at prices affordable to households at a variety of income levels to ensure that appropriate housing options are available to new and existing residents including students, working professionals, families, and seniors. BCCP policies should reflect housing goals and policies established in the General Plan Land Use and Housing Elements.
- **Multiple interests.** BCCP standards and policies must address the needs and concerns of individual property owners while ensuring each unique development contributes to a unified whole.
- **Multiple City focus points.** The City has important existing resources including the charming downtown area and several historic neighborhoods. The BCCP must ensure that development within the BCCP complements, rather than competes with these existing community focal points.
- **Campus Parkway Regional Traffic (Loop Road):** Bellevue Road is part of Merced's loop road that carries regional Highway 99 traffic to and from north Merced and UC Merced. The BCCP street design must address how to minimize the impact of regional traffic on efforts to: 1) provide pedestrian, bicycle and transit mobility options in the Bellevue Corridor Urban Villages., and 2) develop high-quality living environments on both sides and fronting Bellevue Road.

### 3. PLAN PREPARATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

#### Community Outreach

Community outreach will play a key role in the formation of the BCCP. The outreach program consists of an open house community kick-off workshop, interviews with community stakeholders, a multi-day design workshops, meetings with citizen and technical advisory groups, and meetings with the Planning Commission.

**Stakeholder Interviews.** City Staff and members of the Consultant Team met with 10 stakeholders representing a variety of interests in the BCCP area on May 2, 2012. The interviews allowed the Consultant Team to gather background information regarding land ownership patterns, development interests, and the desires and concerns of these stakeholders.

**Community Kick-off Meeting and Stakeholder Interviews.** The City hosted a community-based information and orientation open house on May 4, 2012, attended by approximately 100 individuals, to inform the public about the project's intent and purpose, as well as future opportunities for providing input.

**Design Workshops.** Public workshops will be a key milestone in the community engagement process. The community will be able to participate in the planning and design process in various formats, including formal opening and closing presentations, informal process presentations (pin-ups) held most evenings, topic-specific brown bag lunches, and casual one-on-one chats with City Staff and Consultant Team members during the open studio hours.

The design workshops are not only about engaging and communicating with the public, but also about creating detailed design solutions for the Plan area with specific direction for future planning and coding efforts. The Consultant Team will render numerous boards of three-dimensional drawings to clearly illustrate the Plan's intent. In addition to tying the public into the process, it will be critical to engage City Staff, other agencies and organizations, the Planning Commission, and the City Council as much as possible throughout the workshop events. At the conclusion of the workshops, a formal presentation will be made to the community describing a clear planning direction for the Plan area.

The key objectives of the public workshop process are to:

- Illustrate the potential development of the Plan area and Urban Villages including appropriate densities, mix of uses, right-of-way designs, and cohesiveness of the public and private realms;
- Ensure that development reinforces the General Plan goals and objectives;
- Develop BCCP area land uses and start to shape the expectations for zoning;
- Confirm the community vision for the “complete street” components of the street design effort;
- Interact with transit agency representatives to refine the “Transit Priority Project”; and

**Citizen and Technical Advisory Group Meetings.** The City will host regular meetings with the Citizen and Technical Advisory Committees. The meetings will be organized by City Staff, but the Consultant Team will be responsible for summarizing comments and incorporating feedback into the BCCP.

#### Background Study Preparation

The Consultant Team will prepare background studies analyzing existing conditions and Plan potential in the areas of market and economic conditions, complete streets, development code, rights-of-way and semi-public spaces, and transit priority projects. The background studies will be compiled in a Findings Report, which will serve as the foundation for the BCCP. Refer to Appendix A for tentative outlines of each background study.

**Economic Analysis.** This study will evaluate the long-term trends and market potential affecting the viability of commercial and residential real estate product types in the Plan area; provide professional guidance to aid planning team in developing a land use program, including consideration of a) research and development park; b) office; c) retail; and d) housing types; link core UCM competencies with potential market; and assess lands along Bellevue Road and Lake Road for market potential of future research and development parks.

**Complete Streets.** City Staff will prepare a memo describing research and examples of “complete streets” concepts. The memo will include preliminary recommendations for internal circulation within the BCCP areas.

**Development Code.** This study will identify and examine relevant examples of approaches and details for coding vacant land and existing development. The study will focus on three key needs: 1) gleaning tips and helpful advice from staff about expectations, issues to address, details and procedures to include or avoid in the BCCP development code 2) identifying how the code will implement Chapter 6 of the 2030 General Plan (Urban Village Concept and Design Guidelines) for the Bellevue Corridor and 3) identifying a preliminary code structure that provides a kit of parts that can respond to the emerging Bellevue Corridor Plan.

**Right-of-Way/Semi-Public Spaces.** This study will provide initial direction for street design options and strategies, describe existing conditions, and document assumptions and projections for future travel volume. The study will outline appropriate circulation planning principals that build on the General Plan and are intended to accommodate anticipated land uses and provide efficient multi-modal access.

**Transit Priority Project.** This study will examine Transit Priority Project (TPP) needs, potential locations, and design solutions. The primary focus will be to define TPPs in keeping with SB 375 and to describe anticipated transit needs for use as a key driver in establishing the land use and design elements of the Plan.

These background studies will be consolidated and refined as part of a **Findings Report**.

#### Plan Preparation

The Consultant Team will build upon findings from the background studies and public outreach activities to prepare a development code framework, transit priority project implementation actions, right-of-way design templates and graphics, and quantified indicator outcomes. City Staff will prepare a BCCP land use map and greenhouse gas emission reduction policies, programs and actions, and will consolidate work from City Staff and the Consultant Team into a complete BCCP draft. Following adoption of the BCCP from the Planning Commission and City Council, the Consultant Team will prepare a development code to implement the BCCP.

#### Expected Outcomes

Background research, analysis of existing conditions, and feedback from the public outreach process will result in a Final BCCP that meets the following expected outcomes:

- A thorough background analysis and documentation of existing conditions;
- A Plan that creates compatible land uses and infrastructure with existing semi-rural neighborhoods
- A Plan that capitalizes on the opportunities provided by UC Merced including: designation of future research and development parks, and establishment of an “innovation hub.”
- Policies and strategies directing development in keeping with the General Plan;
- Land use and circulation plans that accommodate an appropriate mix of uses, and establish a foundation for walkable, enjoyable community nodes;
- A development code that provides clear, predictable standards for development in keeping with the type, style, and character identified in the vision and General Plan, to help create a vibrant and attractive community; and
- An infrastructure and phasing plan that describes how growth may occur within the Plan area.

# APPENDIX A. BACKGROUND STUDY OUTLINES

## Economic Analysis

- A. Existing conditions
  - 1. Demographics
  - 2. Real estate market supply and demand
- B. Market potential
  - 1. UC Merced
    - 1. Impacts
    - 2. Opportunities
  - 2. Citywide trends (market potential)
  - 3. Catalytic sites (e.g. Bellevue Road & Gardner Road)
  - 4. UC Merced Spin-Off Development catalysts/incentives/features of Innovation Hub
    - a. Activities
    - b. Programs
    - c. Partners
    - d. Infrastructure
- C. Professional guidance to aid planning team in developing a land use program, including consideration of a) research and development park; b) office; c) retail; and d) housing types.
- D. Link core UCM competencies with potential market

## Development Code

- A. Understanding Merced's Expectations and Preferences for Development Standards on the Bellevue Corridor
  - 1. General expectations and preferences for development standards
  - 2. Ideas about how the code should function on a daily basis: an understanding of staff's needs from a daily functional perspective
- B. Translating Merced's Urban Design Guidelines (Chapter 6) into development code standards for the Bellevue Corridor
  - 1. Urban Village and its essential components and policy direction
    - a. 'Inner Villages'; 'Core Commercial Areas'; 'Village Core Residential Areas'
    - b. 'Outer Village Areas'; 'Open Space, Parks and Plazas'
  - 2. 'Urban Design Goals, Policies and Actions'
  - 3. 'Street Design'
  - 4. 'Commercial Area Appearance'; 'Residential Area Appearance'
  - 5. 'Overall Community Appearance'
- C. Development Code for the Bellevue Corridor
  - 1. Minimum Components
    - a. Vision
    - b. Administration and Procedures
    - c. Zoning Map and Zoning Districts
    - d. Standards for all Zoning Districts
    - e. Standards Specific to Zoning Districts (Intent of Zone, Standards for Building Placement, Height, Parking Placement, Encroachments and Adjacencies - including Land Use Standards)

- f. Performance Standards for Specific Land Uses
    - i. Agriculturally-related activity
    - ii. Lodging: B&B's, Hotels, Motels
    - iii. Civic Buildings
    - iv. Eating Establishments
    - v. Sidewalk Dining
  - g. Block and Street Standards (including Streetscape Standards)
  - h. Building and Massing Standards
  - i. Frontage Standards
  - j. Signage Standards
  - k. Definitions (using existing municipal code definitions and replacing/adding as appropriate)
- D. Optional Components (not in current scope of work). These items will be discussed in the Background Study for informational purposes and consideration in future work efforts)
- 1. Solar and Wind Access and Energy Production Standards
  - 2. Architectural Style Standards
  - 3. Public Art Standards

### Right-of-Way / Semi-Public Spaces

- A. Circulation overview
  - 1. Opportunities
  - 2. Constraints
- B. Street network design principles
  - 1. Current and anticipated needs
  - 2. Transportation modes
    - a. Automobile
    - b. Pedestrian
    - c. Bicycle
    - d. Transit
      - i. Bus
      - ii. Shuttle
      - iii. Other
      - iv. Automobile
- C. Conceptual designs (Cross-sections & plan views of street and zone between curb and face of building)
  - 1. Overview
  - 2. Bellevue Parkway planning principles
    - a. Three alternative designs for Bellevue Corridor
  - 3. Arterial, collector, and local street typologies
    - a. Proposed right-of-way widths
    - b. Preferred cross-sectional dimensions
    - c. Other layout features
  - 4. Considerations
- D. Anticipated arterial street level of service
  - 1. Volume for each travel mode and road design
  - 2. Volume adjustments based on anticipated land uses and designs
  - 3. Forecasted Daily LOS (based on volume-to-capacity ratios) data sheets for the three alternative street designs

### Transit Priority Project

- A. Overview of SB 375 and definition of Transit Priority Project (TPP)
- B. Potential transit service options
  - 1. Short term
  - 2. Long term
- C. Potential TPP locations
  - 1. Future site criteria
  - 2. Potential locations within the plan area
- D. Potential TPP service type analysis (order of magnitude)
  - 1. Types
    - a. Bus rapid transit
    - b. Conventional bus
    - c. Light-rail
  - 2. Potential ridership
  - 3. Transit agency capacity/needs
- E. TPP design concepts/plan view and cross-sections, consistent with SB 375 definition
- F. General Cost analysis
  - 1. Construction and operating cost estimates/comparison
  - 2. Phasing
- G. TPP recommendation
  - 1. Service type
  - 2. Relationship to land use/transportation goals