COVER PAGE

CHAPTER 2: Urban Expansion

Chapter 2—Urban Expansion

How is the planning area governed? What population growth factors are influencing the plan? Where will growth occur? What are the possible growth scenarios of the Bellevue Community Plan? What are the community plan policies that will guide future growth-related decisions? This chapter addresses these and related questions.

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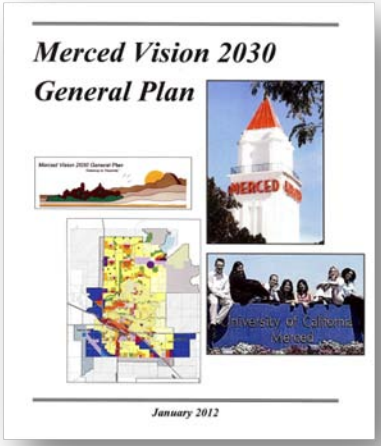
INTRODUCTION



To assure that the Bellevue Community Plan was crafted in a manner consistent with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, this section describes how General Plan policies and implementing actions were utilized to develop and implement the "Urban Expansion" Chapter of the BCP.

For ease of reference, BCP applicable Urban Expansion-related General Plan polices and implementing actions are listed in this section of the BCP. These may be applicable for various reasons:

- guided the crafting of the Bellevue Community Plan (BCP);
- guide design of future development projects; and
- formed the foundation upon which new policies were written to apply specifically to the BCP. Where used to develop policies for the BCP, a brief discussion is added to explain the relevance of the BCP planning area to the policy.

Use of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* goals and policies in this manner assures that the Community Plan is consistent with the City's General Plan.

Subject areas include:

- Preservation of Agriculturally Significant Areas
- A Compact Urban Form / Efficient Urban Expansion
- Joint Planning Efforts
- Annexation

2.6.1 Preservation of Agriculturally Significant Areas

Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.1

Develop Non-Prime Agricultural Lands First

Implementing Action 1.1.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Direct development away from significant concentrations of "Prime" agricultural soils and give priority to the conversion of non-prime agricultural land if reasonable alternatives exist."*** Lands within the BCP do not contain significant concentrations of prime agricultural soils. Except for a ____ acre site on the southeast corner of "G" Street and Bellevue Road (approximately __% of the BCP area), most of the area is either developed with rural residential properties or vacant grasslands.

Develop Key Employment and Circulation Corridors

Implementing Action 1.1.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* also states, ***"The UC Merced Campus and University Community are located on prime farmland to avoid sensitive wetlands habitat. Some areas that contain prime soils are adjacent to important circulation and employment corridors and will need to be developed for urban use in order to achieve critical City economic development and circulation goals."***

2.6.2 A Compact Urban Form / Efficient Urban Expansion

Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.2

Through the promotion of compact urban form, the City of Merced can achieve several important environmental and community planning goals. Through the concentration of urban development within the City's SUDP/SOI, impacts on surrounding agricultural resource lands can be reduced and important prime soils preserved. Additionally, through compact urban development, efficient public transit systems can operate to protect the region's air quality and pedestrian and bicycle use is encouraged. Compact urban development also reduces public infrastructure development and maintenance costs to the City and its residents. For this reason, M*erced Vision 2030 General Plan* Urban Expansion Policy 1.2, states, ***"Foster Compact and Efficient Development Patterns to Maintain a Compact Urban Form."***

Limit Establishment and Growth of Rural Residential Centers

Implementing Action UE-1.2.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Work with Merced County to ensure that existing unincorporated Rural Residential Centers in the Merced area are not expanded and no new Rural Residential Centers are established."*** RRC's are not efficient uses of land and have not proven to be ideal buffers between urban and agricultural uses. Existing RRC's can remain but should not be enlarged and no new RRC's should be established, in accordance with County (and City) General Plan policy and provisions of the existing City/County Property Tax Sharing Agreement adopted in 1997 (Section 2.3.4).

Limit Expansion of City Utilities to Unincorporated Lands

Implementing Action UE-1.2.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Continue to limit the expansion of City utilities to only those areas within the established urban boundary."*** Proposals for urban development within the City's SUDP/SOI shall be considered only after annexation has taken place. City utilities should not be extended outside of the City limits except in cases where public health and safety are threatened or a significant public interest (such as the UC campus) is served.

Promote High Density Residential Sites to Maintain a Compact Urban Form

Implementing Action UE-1.2.d of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Promote higher residential densities within the Merced urban area."*** To maintain a compact form, the highest densities should, in general, be directed toward central areas of the City. Higher densities along the urban fringes may occur in Community Plan areas, if justified, however.

2.6.3 Joint Planning Efforts

Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.4

The University Community Plan area is planned as an urban area requiring urban services. Consideration has been given to making this area part of the incorporated City of Merced. Cooperative planning efforts will be necessary to ensure the effective development of this area for all interested and affected parties. For these reasons, the ***Land Use Policy L-1.2*** *of the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan spotlights the need to* ***"Continue Joint Planning Efforts on the UC Merced Campus and University Community Plans."***

Plan for Annexation of UC Merced

Implementing Action UE-1.4.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, **"Incorporate the UC Merced campus area as part of the City's SUDP/Sphere of Influence and begin planning for the eventual annexation of the Campus."** The City should begin the process of planning for the eventual annexation of the Campus to the City, including evaluating various corridors for possible annexation in order to bridge the gap between the current City limits and the Campus boundary. Planning of the land uses along those corridors should also begin as well, including possible locations for research and development parks.

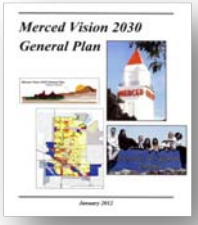
Implement City's Position Regarding Development of the University Community Plan (UCP)

- The UCP should be incorporated into the City, and not served by a County Service District, either as an interim or permanent measure;
- Under specific conditions, the City may provide interim sewer and water from Bellevue Road to the UCP;
- In the near-term, the City encourages annexation along the Bellevue Corridor;
- Phasing of the University Community's development should provide for logical extension of urban services; and
- The City accepts the University Community Plan as a general conceptual framework for future planning of the University Community by the City.

Implementing Action UE-1.4.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, "**Working in cooperation with the County, implement the following (3-part) policy statement from City Council Resolution #2006-89 regarding the University Community Plan Area.**

1. Long-term Land Use and Governance

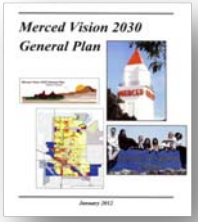
The University Community should be incorporated into the City of Merced, and should not be part of the unincorporated County, or a separate City.



- It is in the public interest that the University Community's development not result in the creation of a new city or other jurisdiction.
- Multiplication of jurisdictions can lead to conflicts, which should be avoided. A separate City on Merced's border is inherently undesirable.
- The University Community is expected to develop at an urban density. Merced County does not currently provide urban services. The City is already serving the University of California campus, and it is logical for the City to serve the adjacent area as well.
- No separate wastewater treatment plant should be allowed or constructed in the area, given the risks to the City's groundwater supply that could result, and competition for qualified licensed operators. This statement does not, however, preclude consideration of innovative methods of wastewater treatment for the area which are reasonably viable from an economic perspective.

The University Community should be developed with the use of annexation agreements and phased annexations, not through the creation of a County services district, either as an interim or permanent measure.

2. Phasing of Development and Services



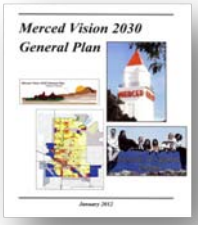
The City of Merced is willing to provide interim sewer and water services from existing sewer and water lines along Bellevue Road that serve the University campus, provided that certain conditions are met:

- Interim services to the University Community require compliance with environmental law and permitting, including the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and approval by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo).
- Prior to providing interim services, the City must receive an acceptable plan for long term service provision, enforceable commitment for annexation, and financial planning and commitments necessary to fund long term services.

The City should encourage annexation along the Bellevue Corridor to provide contiguity between the University Community and the City of Merced.

- The Bellevue corridor is expected to become a major regional transportation arterial. Bellevue Road also contains sewer and water lines which have been extended from the City to the University of California campus. The western half of the Corridor, from G Street to Golf Road, is already within Merced's SUDP, and annexation proposals are pending. East of Golf Road, the area along Bellevue Road is held in large tracts by a few land owners, and is mostly undeveloped. It is realistic to expect development proposals in this area in the near term.
- Phasing of the University Community's development should provide for logical extension of urban services.
- The Merced County "Rural Residential Center" bounded by Lake Road, Cardella Road, Yosemite Avenue, and Golf Road (extended) should be annexed into the City of Merced as well. However, this area, which is already developed to a large extent, should be allowed to retain its rural character, with a special plan Designation to be worked out through the General Plan update process.

3. Planning Processes



The City accepts the University Community Plan adopted by Merced County on December 21, 2004 as a general conceptual framework for the planning of the University Community.

- That existing plan can be used as foundational work for further planning for the area, with the City as lead agency in the planning process.
- If a special planning process or framework is used for the development of the University Community, then the costs of that planning process shall be borne by applicants and developers, not by Merced residents.

The City should revise all of its various planning documents to accommodate the incorporation of the University Community into the City of Merced. These include not only the General Plan, but also plans for wastewater treatment, water, storm drainage, parks, fire protection, and other services

2.6.4 Annexation

GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.3

"Leap-frog development" tends to be cost-prohibitive in these times due to the high up-front costs of extending utility lines, streets, etc., across undeveloped properties to outlying areas. Such development should be discouraged in most cases because of the service inefficiencies it creates. Developments of large singular land uses bar opportunities for citizens to live, shop or work in a setting conducive to sustainable environmental, social and economic communities. Large distances between land uses create unwanted economic and social costs. For example, road infrastructure costs to connect jobs and housing are higher the further these uses are from each other. Likewise, cost to the citizen, in terms money spent and loss of time for other activities, is similarly affected. Greater impact to air quality results the further uses are to one another. For these reasons, the Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.3.of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* spotlights the need to **"control the annexation, timing, density, and location of new land uses within the City's Urban Expansion Boundaries."**

New Development Should be next to Existing Urban Areas

Implementing Action UE-1.3.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"The City should continue to require that all new urban development and annexations be contiguous to existing urban areas and have reasonable access to public services and facilities."*** Exceptions can be made for industrial areas which for business recruitment reasons often need to provide infrastructure and services prior to development. Other exceptions may be made, with strong justification on a case-by-case basis, for other areas which may serve the public interest through early development.

New Development should be Phased

Implementing Action UE-1.3.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"The City shall encourage phasing of new development."*** Phasing of new development can prevent the premature conversion of agricultural land, and permit the efficient and cost effective extension of services. When approving General Plan Amendments and Specific/Community Plans for large areas, the City should consider applying phasing to the development tied to the ability of the City to provide infrastructure and municipal services to new development and/or consider designating certain areas for development within 10-year time frames. These policies can be implemented through the Pre-Annexation Development Agreement process with property owners who seek these land use entitlements.

Plan for a Mixture of Land Uses

Implementing Action UE-1.3.e of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"The planning for land uses in newly developing areas should reflect a mix of land uses which will support a neighborhood, including a variety of residential densities and price ranges, neighborhood and convenience shopping facilities, job creation, and public facilities such as schools and parks."*** The City will continue to promote the use of the mixed-use, pedestrian- and transit-friendly neighborhoods ("Urban Villages") in all new growth areas of the City as much as feasible.

Evaluate Annexation Proposals to Meet Specific Criteria

Implementing Action UE-1.3.g of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Evaluate future annexation requests against the following conditions:***

- ***a) Is the area contiguous to the current City limits and within the City's Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI)? Do the annexed lands form a logical and efficient City limit and include older areas where appropriate to minimize the formation of unincorporated peninsulas?***
- ***b) Is the proposed development consistent with the land use classifications on the General Plan Land Use Diagram (Figure 3.1)?***
- ***c) Can the proposed development be served by the City water, sewer, storm drainage, fire and police protection, parks, and street systems to meet acceptable standards and service levels without requiring improvements and additional costs to the City beyond which the developer will consent to provide or mitigate?***
- ***d) Will this annexation result in the premature conversion of prime agricultural land as defined on the Important Farmland Map of the State Mapping and Monitoring Program? If so, are there alternative locations where this development could take place without converting prime soils?***
- ***e) Will a non-agricultural use create conflict with adjacent or nearby agricultural uses? If so, how can these conflicts be mitigated?***
- ***f) Does annexation of the area help the City reach one of the following goals?***
  - ***1) Does annexation of the area bring the City closer to annexation of the UC Merced campus and University Community?***
  - ***2) Does the area contain significant amounts of job-generating land uses, such as industrial, commercial, office, and business/research & development parks?***
  - ***3) Does the project provide key infrastructure facilities or other desirable amenities, such as the extension of major roads, utility trunk lines, parks and recreational facilities, etc.?"***

RURAL RESIDENTIAL CENTERS

Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.5

Unincorporated suburban development within the City's SUDP/SOI has resulted in problems of public protection (police and fire) service delivery to residents in addition to posing potential long term problems to residents with respect to maintenance of on-site water systems and wastewater disposal (septic) systems. Such problems could also threaten the City's future water quality. Also, residents of these areas, while directly impacted by the City's planning decision making process, have no direct voice in municipal affairs. In the long-term interest of both the City and the residents, these unincorporated suburban areas should be annexed to the City of Merced. For these reasons, the Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.5.of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* **"promotes annexation of developed areas within the City's Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI)."**

Annex Suitable Rural Residential Areas

Implementing Action UE-1.5.a of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"The City should continue to promote the annexation of unincorporated urban areas within the urban expansion boundaries, which cause a duplication of public services and hinder extension of City services to new development, if they are financially feasible."*** The RRC area within the BCP has the potential to hinder extension of City services to future development lands located east of Lake Road. Continued growth in the County will create developments that do not include municipal utilities and bar future development of land that could help contribute to the cost of such infrastructure. Annexation of these lands prior to further development would resolve these issues.

Remove Unnecessary Obstacles to Annexation

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* includes other implementing actions of Urban Expansion Policy UE-1.5 to examine methods to ease annexation of the RRC in and adjacent to the BCP plan area, and include:

Implementing Action UE-1.5.b of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Review relevant City improvement and development policies to remove unnecessary obstacles to annexation."***

Implementing Action UE-1.5.c of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Provide assistance to residents of unincorporated areas to address public health and safety concerns of on-site water and sewer systems."***

Implementing Action UE-1.5.d of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Establish annexation policies and outreach program regarding the annexation of the existing Rural Residential Centers (existing development on one-acre lots)."***

Implementing Action UE-1.5.e of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* states, ***"Provide information to interested unincorporated area residents on the benefits of annexation."***

2.7 Bellevue Community Plan Goals, Policies and Actions

INTRODUCTION

Consistent with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, the goals of this BCP chapter are grouped into four areas as follows. This approach fosters consistency and builds on the City's broader General Plan guidance; these subjects include:

- ***Goal Area UE 1:*** Preservation of Agriculturally Significant Areas
- ***Goal Area UE-2:*** A Compact Urban Form/Efficient Urban Expansion
- ***Goal Area UE-3:*** Joint Planning Efforts
- ***Goal Area UE-4:*** Annexation

Policies and Implementing Actions specific to the BCP planning area are set forth in the Tables below:

Goal Area UE-1: Preservation of Agriculturally Significant Areas

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a P-----

1.1.b T------

1.1.c A--------

1.1.d W-------

Goal Area UE-2: A Compact Urban Form/Efficient Urban Expansion

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a P-----

1.1.b T------

1.1.c A--------

1.1.d W-------

Goal Area UE-3: Joint Planning Efforts

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a P-----

1.1.b T------

1.1.c A--------

1.1.d W-------

Goal Area UE-4: Annexation

GOAL

- C_____

POLICIES

UE-1.1 E_____

UE-1.2 P_____

Policy UE-1.1
E_____

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a P-----

1.1.b T------

1.1.c A--------

1.1.d W-------

2.8 Bibliography

1. *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*.
2.
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