

City is in good shape as we head into 2007

State of the City address looks at past and future

The State of the City is good, City Manager Jim Marshall told the group gathered at the Merced Senior Center in January.

Crime is down, sales tax revenues are up and the state is prevented from taking money from City coffers as it has done in the past.

Looking back on 2006, Measure C was implemented for public safety improvements and it resulted in the hiring of more than 30 police officers and firefighters.

A prominent piece of Merced's history is also being preserved, as the Merced Theatre reconstruction is under way.

Local government revenues were stabilized and future funding was assured due to the passage of Proposition 1A. In the past the state had been able to raid the City's treasury at will, now it has to pay back anything it takes.

The entire State of the City presentation that was given at the Wake Up Merced breakfast in January is online at www.CityofMerced.org.

Unfunded mandates are still a problem facing the City. These come about when the state or federal government requires the City to implement a program, but doesn't provide the money to pay for it.

Current examples of hidden unfunded mandates are the new rules regarding the treatment of sewage and drinking water. Residents will pay the costs of those mandates through higher utility bills.

Building permits were down in the past year, a trend that could continue in 2007. There were a total of 2,838 permits taken out, down by 613 from 2005. Permits for single family dwellings were down 465, for a total of 950.

However, there were 50 commercial

building permits, an increase of nine over the previous year. The City added 68 new commercial buildings last year.

New businesses that came to town include PetsMart, Aarons Furniture, Carniceria Vallarta, Cool Hand Luke's, Big Bubbas BBQ, Perkos, Country Waffle, Fernando's Bistro, Stockman's Bank and the Educational Employees Credit Union.

Scholle, Centurion Boats, Malibu Boats and Quebecor all expanded their manufacturing capacity. There also were groundbreakings for the Hampton Inn, Arvin Sango's expansion and The Playa Merced.

The Police Department saw major changes in the past year starting with the hiring of Police Chief Russ Thomas in April. There have been 27 new officers or trainees hired, and five police staff members.

The department has been restructured, with four lieutenant positions created, and there have been seven promotions to sergeant.

The number of major crimes committed citywide dropped 3.36 percent in 2006. The number of motor vehicle accidents increased by 3 percent, although there was a slight decrease in injury accidents.

The department responded to 66,962 calls for service, which averages out to 183 calls a day or 7.6 calls per hour.

The past year saw the opening of Fire Station 55 on Parsons Avenue, giving better coverage to North Merced residents. The department retained its ISO rating of 2, which is used to determine fire insurance rates.

Twelve new employees were added to the department, which responded to 4,495 calls for service, a 1.6 percent increase over the previous year.

Although construction is lagging, preparations are under way to accommodate future expansion of the City.

The General Plan Update is in progress, with a proposed urban area of approximately 40,000 acres, roughly double the current size. A draft of the General Plan is due for review in the middle of this year.



The City of Merced Redevelopment Agency received statewide recognition for its restoration of the Mondo Building.

Two annexations were completed in 2006 for 384 acres, while 13 annexations totaling 2,600 acres are pending. A draft of the South Merced Specific Plan has been completed.

A priority for 2007 and beyond is maintaining existing neighborhoods to make sure they retain the quality of life residents expect.

A major issue in the future is working out the funding and phasing of transportation projects including a railroad separation, Parsons Avenue, Campus Parkway and Yosemite Avenue.

Other issues facing the City include the Charter review, implementing the changes at the wastewater treatment plant, determining the rate of development of the City, increasing the number of fire stations, maintaining an on-going positive relationship with UC Merced, financing major projects and developing a Citizen's Academy.

Holiday schedules

The City of Merced offices will be closed for Presidents Day, Monday, Feb. 19.

City residential refuse collection will not be affected by the holiday. However, the City Council meeting normally scheduled for that Monday will be held on Feb. 20. Council meetings begin at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers on the second floor of the Civic Center.

The City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten
 Mayor Pro Tem Joe Cortez
 Councilmember Michele Gabriault-Acosta
 Councilmember Rick Osorio
 Councilmember Carl Pollard
 Councilmember Jim Sanders
 Councilmember Bill Spriggs

Contacting us

The City of Merced wants the site www.CityofMerced.org to be a one-stop source for information on the City. It contains City Council agendas and minutes, the Municipal Code, the General Plan, news releases, department listings, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, information on officials and an online survey.

To contact the Newsletter, e-mail newsletter@cityofmerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write to Newsletter at the address below.

Merced Civic Center
 678 W. 18th St.
 Merced CA 95340
 Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.,
 except holidays

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney.....	385-6868
Code Enforcement	385-6855
Finance	385-4718
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel.....	385-6839
Planning Department	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30)...	385-6800
Recreation/Parks.....	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department 385-6891
 Police Department..... 385-6912

Dog licenses now available at Central Police Station

As of Feb. 1, Postage Plus will no longer process dog licenses. Dog licenses in the City of Merced will be issued at the Central Police Station, 611 W. 22nd St. Licenses will be issued Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. They also can be obtained at some veterinary offices.

Merced City license fees are:
 1 year unaltered \$14 altered \$6
 2 year unaltered \$28 altered \$12

3 year unaltered \$42 altered \$16
 1 year senior unaltered \$7 altered \$3
 2 year senior unaltered \$14 altered \$6
 3 year senior unaltered \$21 altered \$8
 A duplicate license tag is \$3.

The delinquent penalty is \$28 and license fee. A delinquent is a dog over 5 months of age or the owner has had the dog over 30 days. All dogs in the City must be licensed, even indoor dogs. For more information, call Animal Control at 385-4720.

E-mail bulletins can pass the word on jobs

Among the many services available through the City's web site are subscriptions. These e-mail bulletins allow people to automatically be notified about things like City job openings, bids and RFPs, news releases and other information.

To sign up go to the City's home page at www.CityofMerced.org and click on the "subscriptions" button and fill in the information for a new subscription.

Other services available online include paying utility bills, downloading forms, filing police reports for minor crimes, anonymously leaving crime tips and filling out a satisfaction survey.

Recycle e-waste properly

Old TVs, computers and monitors, radios, cell phones, printers, and fax machines are some of the materials that make up e-waste. It does not include household appliances, batteries or smoke detectors.

E-waste cannot be tossed in the garbage because of a new state law banning the disposal of e-waste in landfills. E-waste also cannot be disposed of in the City's blue curbside recycling containers.

E-waste collections are held regularly at various locations in Merced. To find out about the next collection, call 381-1100.

Mistletoe removal



A City worker removes the last of the mistletoe from a tree in Central Merced as part of an abatement program to prune the parasite out of street trees. If left unchecked, mistletoe can kill the tree. Residents are encouraged to use a private contractor to remove the mistletoe from trees on their property.

Utility rates increased to recover higher operating costs

The bills for City of Merced water and sewer customers are higher this month, reflecting a recent rate increase.

Residential sewer rates are now \$26.95 a month and the flat residential water rates are starting at \$24.92.

The City Council approved the rate increase in December to cover the rising costs of regulations and operations.

In the case of sewer rates, much of the

increase will be used to upgrade the wastewater treatment plant to meet new federal and state regulatory mandates.

The upgrades will provide tertiary treatment of the wastewater and also eliminate the drying beds for sludge.

There also is an expansion project at the wastewater treatment plant that is not being funded by rates. It is being funded by future new users through higher connection fees.