LAND USE AND PLANNING

3.9 Land Use and Planning

This section of the Draft EIR presents information pertaining to the land use regulations in Merced, the existing land use conditions and potential environmental impacts that the proposed General Plan would have on these uses. During the Notice of Preparation (NOP) period, comments were received regarding the City's urban expansion and existing County zoning and General Plan designations; the development assumptions from urbanization of the proposed Community Plan areas; potential annexation of the UC Merced campus into the City limits of Merced; the proposed SUDP/SOI and availability of public services and facilities; LAFCo policies regarding future SOI revisions; and the need to prepare a Municipal Service Review.

3.9.1 SETTING

Environmental Setting

The City of Merced is located approximately 104 miles southeast of Sacramento, 53 miles northwest of Fresno, and 112 miles southeast of San Francisco, in the Central Valley of California. Incorporated in 1889, the City of Merced is situated within the eastern section of Merced County and is the largest City in the County. Principal highway access to Merced is via State Highway 99, which runs through the central portion of the City in a general north/south direction. State Highways 140 and 59 also serve the City.

The topography of the community is characterized by flat land approximately 155 - 180 feet in elevation. The local climate is typical of the Central Valley. Average daily temperatures are 48 degrees in January to 95 degrees in July. The summer months are typically dry and hot and the winter months are typically cool with occasional fog. Average annual rainfall is approximately 12 inches, with January being the wettest month of the year with two inches of precipitation.

The City contains a typical mix of residential, commercial, industrial and public land uses. The City is centered around Main Street. Older development transitions into new development as one goes farther north. Significant areas in the extreme north remain undeveloped, though they have been annexed. Less new development has occurred in the south portion of the City. The South Merced Community Plan was approved in 2008, and may spur additional development in the area.

Regulatory Setting

FEDERAL

No federal regulations critical to the assessment of this impact were noted.

STATE

California Government Code Sections 65000-66037, Title 7 Planning and Land Use

These regulations provide the foundation for the organizational and regulatory structures adopted by cities and counties in the State of California. It is through this legislation that cities and counties are required to prepare, adopt and amend General Plans.

In California, a General Plan is the foundation and central feature of the local planning process. Each city and county is required to prepare, adopt, and maintain a General Plan to govern the physical development of all of the land area under its jurisdiction. The purposes that are intended to be served by a General Plan include the following important functions:

- The identification of the community's physical development goals, and goals relating to environmental, economic, and other factors.
- Policies for maintaining or improving the character of existing developed uses and for guiding the location and nature of future development in order to ensure that the community's goals are achieved.
- The consideration of all aspects of local conditions affecting physical development and change, in order to ensure that problems and opportunities are analyzed and addressed adequately within the context of local, regional, statewide, and national goals and policies.

By their nature, general plans possess great potential for environmental impacts by providing for new growth and development.

California Community Redevelopment Law

The California Community Redevelopment Law (California Government Code 33000) outlines the form and required content for a city's redevelopment plan. In accordance with the State redevelopment law, redevelopment plans set the general activities and implementation procedures used by the redevelopment agency. These include the steps the agency may undertake in pursuing the redevelopment process in a community. The plans also include a description of activities that the redevelopment agency is required to undertake. These activities are required in the redevelopment process to conform to Community Redevelopment Law. Many of the circumstances existing in a community that influence the nature and scope of the most appropriate redevelopment activities are prescribed by the redevelopment agency on behalf of the community's members and property owners.

Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act

In 1963, the Knox-Nisbet Act was enacted, and created a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) in every county in the state, with the exception of San Francisco. Each LAFCO is responsible for coordinating logical and timely changes in local governmental boundaries, conducting special studies that review ways to reorganize, simplify, and streamline governmental structure, and prepare a sphere of influence for each city and special district within its county. The Commission's efforts are directed toward seeing that services are provided efficiently and economically while agricultural and open-space lands are protected.

In 2000, the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 was signed into law to reform local government reorganization law. Highlights of these revisions include, but are not limited to, streamlining and clarifying LAFCO policies and procedures; making LAFCOs neutral, independent, and balanced in representation for counties, cities, and special districts; strengthening LAFCO powers to prevent sprawl and ensure the orderly extension of

government services; enhancing communication, coordination, and procedures of LAFCOs and local governments; and enhancing opportunities for public involvement, active participation, and information regarding government decision making.

The act also expanded the LAFCOs mandate to include service reviews. A service review is a comprehensive study designed to better inform LAFCO, local agencies, and communities about the provision of municipal services. Service reviews attempt to capture and analyze information about the governance structures and efficiencies of service providers, and to identify opportunities for greater coordination and cooperation between providers. The service review is a prerequisite to a sphere of influence determination and may also lead a LAFCO to take other actions under its authority.

LOCAL

Merced County Regulations

Unincorporated land located outside the City limits of Merced but within the SUDP/SOI Area is under the jurisdiction of Merced County. Any future development taking place within this area, prior to it being annexed by the City of Merced would be subject to the provisions set forth in the Merced County General Plan and applicable provisions of the Merced County Zoning Ordinance.

Merced County General Plan

The Merced County General Plan identifies the types and intensities of uses that are permissible in relation to different land use designations. Any future development in the Planning Area that occurs on unincorporated Merced County land would be subject to the provisions of the Merced County General Plan.

Summary of Merced Vision 2015 General Plan

The Merced Vision 2015 General Plan (2015 General Plan) was adopted by the City Council in April 1997. The 2015 General Plan was an update, expansion, and reorganization of the 1981 General Plan. The 2015 General Plan includes the following three separate documents: Merced Vision 2015 General Plan Executive Summary; Merced Vision 2015 General Plan; and Merced Vision 2015 General Plan Program EIR. The 2015 General Plan is comprised of the following mandated elements: Land Use (Chapter 3), Circulation (Chapter 4), Open Space (Chapter 7), Conservation (Chapter 7), Housing (Chapter 9), Noise (Chapter 10), Safety (Chapter 11). Additional elements included in the 2015 General Plan are Urban Expansion (Chapter 2), Public Facilities (Chapter 5), Urban Design (Chapter 6), and Sustainable Development (Chapter 8).

The heart of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* were the goals, policies, and implementing actions. A goal is general, overall, and ultimate purpose, aim, or end toward which the City will direct effort. A policy is a specific statement of principle or guiding action which implies clear commitment. A general direction that the City will follow in order to meet its goals by undertaking specific action programs. It is assumed that each policy statement is preceded by the phrase, "The City shall...". An implementing action is an action, activity, or strategy carried out

in response to adopted Policy to achieve a specific Goal. The major goals of the 2015 General Plan were as follows:

- Expansion of the urban limit line (SUDP area) to accommodate expected growth
- Preservation of prime agricultural land around the City
- Continuation of the predominantly north-south growth pattern
- Expansion of the "Sphere of Influence" (ultimate urban growth boundary) to include rural residential centers east of the City and the UC campus site/Smith Trust property
- A joint City/County planning effort for the area around the future University of California campus
- Economic Development: Planning well in advance for industrial/business park uses and for the infrastructure needed to support such development
- A flexible and efficient circulation system which can accommodate all modes of transportation (private cars, public transit, bicycles, pedestrians, etc.)
- Mixed-use, transit- and pedestrian-friendly "urban villages" with direct access to commercial centers from surrounding neighborhoods
- Location of higher densities along transit corridors
- A diversity of housing types and opportunities
- Housing affordability
- "Sustainable Development" = The efficient use and management of land and other natural resources in order to conserve them for the use of present and future generations

The City's General Plan Land Use Diagram presents the proposed general distribution of the uses of land within the City of Merced and its SUDP. Reference Figure 2-3 in Chapter Two, Project Description, for the existing 2015 General Plan Land Use diagram (Figure 2-4 shows the proposed 2030 General Plan Land Use diagram). Table 3.9-1 shows the 2015 General Plan Land Use acreage of each land use designation within the City limits and SUDP.

Table 3.9-1
Existing General Plan (2015) Land Use (Acreage) within the City & SUDP

Land Use	City Limits	Existing SUDP	City Limits + Existing SUDP	% of Total
RR (Rural Residential)	15	281	296	1.4%
AG Agriculture	92	22	114	0.5%
Total Ag Res	108	302	410	2.0%
LD (Low Density Residential	5,545	3,186	8,731	41.8%

Land Use	City Limits	Existing SUDP	City Limits + Existing SUDP	% of Total
LMD (Low-Med. Density Res.)	853	505	1,358	6.5%
Total Single-Family Res	6,398	3,691	10,089	48.3%
HMD (High-Med. Density Res.	745	28	773	3.7%
HD (High Density Residential	92		92	0.4%
RMD (Residential Mobile Home	79	0	80	0.4%
Total Multi-Family	917	28	945	4.5%
P/G (Public/Government)	533	5	538	2.6%
CO (Commercial Office)	342	189	531	2.5%
Total Office	875	194	1,069	5.1%
IND (Industrial)	1,882	995	2,877	13.8%
IND-R (Industrial Reserve)		150	150	0.7%
Total Industrial	1,882	1,145	3,027	14.5%
BP (Business Park)	125	565	691	3.3%
BP-R (Business Park Reserve)	3	326	329	1.6%
Total Business Park	128	891	1,019	4.9%
CG (Commercial General)	322	258	579	2.8%
CN (Commercial Neighborhood)	190	81	270	1.3%
CT (Thoroughfare Commercial)	213	9	222	1.1%
HC (Highway Commercial)			0	0.0%
CC (Community Commercial)	487	42	529	2.5%
Total Commercial	1,211	390	1,601	7.7%
PK (Open Space-Park/Rec)	746	166	911	4.4%
PKY (Parkway)				0.0%
Total Open Space	746	166	911	4.4%
SCHOOL (School)	663	52	715	3.4%
COM-R (Commercial Reserve)	7	83	90	0.4%
RES-R (Residential Reserve)		360	360	1.7%
PARK-F (Future Park)	6	77	83	0.4%
SCHOOL-F (Future School)	6	49	54	0.3%
VR (Village Residential)	239	286	526	2.5%
SPECIFIC PLAN (Specific Plan, Master Plan)				0.0%
RESERVE (Reserve)				0.0%
Total Other	921	907	1,828	8.7%
Totals	13,186	7,714	20,901	100%

The following Land Use Designation descriptions define the Land Use Areas depicted on the Land Use Diagram of the 2015 General Plan. These General Plan Land Use Designations describe the extent of the uses of land within the Merced Urban Planning Area including standards of population density and building intensity (see Table 3.9-2).

RESIDENTIAL

RR (Rural Residential), [1 to 3 dwelling units per acre (du/ac)]

To provide single family homes on large lots in a semi-rural environment and as a buffer between agricultural land and other environmentally sensitive or resource areas and the City's urbanized areas.

LD (Low Density Residential), (2 to 6 du/ac)

To provide single family residential dwellings served by City services throughout the City. Primarily single-family detached housing, but options such as condominiums and zero-lot-line units can be developed.

LMD (Low-Medium Density Residential), (6 to 12 du/ac)

To provide duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes, condominiums, zero-lot-line as well as single-family detached units on appropriately sized lots.

HMD (High-Medium Density Residential), (12 to 24 du/ac)

To provide areas for multi-family development such as apartments, higher density triplex/fourplex units and condominiums.

HD (**High Density Residential**), (24 to 36 du/ac)

To provide for the highest multi-family residential densities typically found only in limited areas of the City.

RMH (Mobile Home Park Residential), (6 to 10 du/ac)

To provide designated areas within the City for the establishment of Mobile Home Park residential environments.

VR (Village Core Residential), (7 to 30 du/ac for a minimum average of 10 du/ac)

To provide for the development of mixed-use, medium-density urban "village" centers in the undeveloped portions of the Merced SUDP/SOI.

COMMERCIAL

CO (Commercial Professional Office)

To provide for a wide range of office commercial uses within the City. The array of relatively small-scale office activities range from professional uses (such as medical, dental, law, engineering, counseling, and architecture) to typical commercial/business office activities like real estate agencies and insurance agencies, financial institutions (banks, and savings and loans), and travel agencies.

CN (Neighborhood Commercial)

To provide sites for retail shopping areas, primarily in shopping centers, containing a wide variety of businesses including retail stores, eating and drinking establishments, commercial recreation, auto services, etc., to serve residential neighborhoods.

CV (Convenience Commercial)

To provide sites for small 1- to 5-acre centers with mini-markets, fast food restaurants, small specialty shops, video rentals, coin laundries, beauty salons, and small professional offices, to serve convenience shopping needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

RC (Regional/Community Commercial)

To provide community and regional commercial centers to serve the full depth and variety of retail goods, general merchandise, apparel, and home furnishings, with one or more major department stores as key tenants.

CT (Thoroughfare Commercial)

To accommodate auto-oriented commerce and the needs of people traveling on highways. Large recreational facilities and some "heavy commercial" uses are also common. Typical uses include motels, gas stations, truck stops, restaurants, automobile sales, auto repair shops, bowling alleys, driving ranges, skating rinks, souvenir shops, carwashes, and plant nurseries.

CG (General Commercial)

To provide areas for general commercial uses which are land-intensive commercial operations, involving some light manufacturing, repair, or wholesaling of goods. Typical activities include lumber-yards, automobile wrecking yards, farm equipment or mobile home sales, and building supplies and machine shops.

INDUSTRIAL

IND (Industrial)

This designation provides for the full range of industrial activities, including but not limited to manufacturing, food processing, trucking, packing, and recycling, as well as related office and production facilities.

BP (Business Park)

To provide areas for a mix of commercial, office, and industrial uses with shared access and parking facilities. Uses could include a wide variety of light manufacturing, warehousing, office and service business activities.

RESERVE

RES-R (Residential Reserve)

To provide areas for future urban density residential expansion within the Merced SUDP/SOI. This classification, along with the other reserve classifications described below, is to be combined with an interim use classification, such as Agriculture, which maintains existing use practices in the area but establishes expected future uses based on need.

COM-R (Commercial Reserve)

To provide areas for future commercial expansion within the Merced SUDP/SOI.

IND-R (Industrial Reserve)

To provide areas for future industrial expansion within the Merced SUDP/SOI.

BP-R (Business Park Reserve)

To provide areas for future business park expansion within the Merced SUDP/SOI.

AI (Area of Interest)

In accordance with the Merced County General Plan, this designation is applied to areas located outside the City's SUDP/SOI proximate to City territory, but not currently planned for annexation or City service, whose development may impact City planning efforts.

OTHER

P/G (Public/Government)

To provide public facilities such as schools, fire stations, police stations, public buildings (libraries, courthouse, public offices, etc.) and similar types of public uses and facilities.

OS-PK (Open Space-Park/Recreation)

To provide public and private open space for outdoor recreation both passive and active. OS-PK areas may be designated in areas containing public parks, golf courses, greens, commons, playgrounds, landscape areas and similar types of public and public open spaces.

Table 3.9-2
Standards of Population Density and Building Intensity (2015 and 2030 General Plan)

				<u>Residential</u>	<u>Population</u>
Land Use Designation	Zoning	Residential Density (Units/Gross Acre)	Average Permitted Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	Average Persons/ Housing Unit	Person/ Acre (Range)
Residential					
Rural (RR)	P-D	1.0 to 3.0		3.02	3.0-9.1
Low Density (LD)	R-1-5,	2.0 to 6.0		3.02	6.0-18.1
	R-1-6,				
	R-1-10,				
	R-1-20				
Low-Medium Density	R-2	6.1 to 12.0		3.02	18.4 to 36.2
(LMD)					
High-Medium Density	R-3-1.5,	12.1 to 24.0		3.02	36.5 to 72.5
(HMD)	R-3-2				
High Density (HD)	R-4	24.1 to 36.0		3.02	72.8 to 108.7
Mobile Home Park (RMH)	R-MH	6.0 to 10.0		3.02	18.1 to 30.2
Village Residential (VR)	RP-D	7.0 to 30.0		3.02	21.1 to 90.6
		(Average			
		10.0)			

				Residential	<u>Population</u>
Land Use Designation	Zoning	Residential Density (Units/Gross Acre)	Average Permitted Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	Average Persons/ Housing Unit	Person/ Acre (Range)
Commercial					
Commercial/Professional Office (CO)	C-O		0.50		
Neighborhood (CN)	C-N		0.35		
Convenience (CV)	P-D		0.35		
Regional/Community (RC)	C-C		0.35 to 6.0		
Thoroughfare (CT)	C-T		0.35		
General (CG)	C-G		0.35		
Urban Village Core (UVC)	P-D		0.35		
Business Park	P-D**		0.40		
Industrial	I-L, I-H		0.30 to 0.50		
Reserve*					
Residential	A-1-20	2.0 to 6.0*		3.02*	6.0-18.1*
Commercial	A-1-20		0.35*		
Industrial	A-1-20		0.30 to 0.50*		
Business Park	A-1-20		0.40*		
Area of Interest	A-1-20		0.10*		
Other					
Public/Government (P/G)	All				
Open Space-	All		0.10		
Park/Recreation Facility					
(OS-PK)					
*Does not apply until area is redesignated from "Reserve ** New Zoning District(s) may be created for these land uses.					

Specific Plans/Master Development Plans

In 1996, the City of Merced had three adopted "Specific Plans" (Fahrens Park, Campus North, and Northeast Yosemite) and one "Master Development Plan," (Bellevue Ranch) all located in the North Merced planning area. These plans were developed as a way of master-planning large areas under consideration for development.

The Fahrens Park Specific Plan was originally adopted in 1984, includes approximately 300 acres and calls for single-family residential development, open space (including Fahrens Community Park and a flood control channel), along with a small amount of medium-density residential development. The Campus North Specific Plan was originally adopted in 1985, includes 78 acres, and, as amended, calls for single-family homes on standard and small lots, and professional office uses. The Northeast Yosemite Specific Plan was adopted in 1989, includes approximately 640 acres, and calls for mostly single-family residential development with some

duplex and multi-family development. Other uses include the new Mercy Medical Center Merced and Mercy Cancer Center, three church sites, Cruickshank Middle School, a 10-acre park site, and a small neighborhood commercial center ("The Promenade").

The Bellevue Ranch Master Development Plan was adopted in June 1995 and covers 1,365 acres. The plan calls for a great deal of single-family residential and multifamily residential development as well as a substantial amount of retail commercial and professional office development adjacent to the east-west arterials running through the site. Other uses include more elementary school sites, one high school site, nearly 200 acres of park land and open space, and two fire station sites.

Existing Zoning Summary

Zoning regulations clearly indicate the extent and type of development that can occur in the incorporated areas (hence holding capacity and buildout potential). An important distinction between the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance is that the General Plan provides guidance on the location, type, density, and timing of new growth and development over the long-term, while the Zoning Ordinance regulates uses, building height, setbacks, provisions of open space, lot sizes, and other factors related to development on individual property. The discussion of future growth must first examine the current growth potential and capacity for new growth. The General Plan and Zoning Ordinance are the two most important factors used to calculate potential growth. The General Plan and Zoning Ordinance provide guidance and requirements for an area's ultimate population and size and to what extent development is possible. The purpose of this section is to summarize existing information regarding the City of Merced Zoning Ordinance.

The Zoning Ordinance establishes 11 residential classifications, seven commercial zones, two industrial zones, four reserve zones, one public/government zone, and one open space/park zone (reference Table 3.9-2). The purpose of all zones is to translate the broad General Plan land use categories into detailed land use classifications that are applied to properties with much greater precision than the General Plan.

The Zoning Ordinance has a number of Special Districts established to provide areas for special uses which are of a transitory nature, which require special consideration by the Planning Commission and the City Council.

Redevelopment Plans

The Goal of the Redevelopment Program is to stimulate economic investment by participating in real estate-based development projects and public improvements that increase economic vitality and improve physical conditions in target redevelopment project areas for the benefit of the entire City and its residents in order to eliminate physical and economic blight as defined by the California Community Redevelopment Law (CRL), which provides the framework for carrying out redevelopment activities.

The City of Merced contains two redevelopment areas. Project Area 2 was created in 1974 and encompasses the entire downtown and the Western Industrial Park. In 1996, the Redevelopment Agency approved the Gateways Project Area, which included areas along Merced's highways. This project area was amended in 2000 to encompass a portion of the Airport Industrial Park and again in 2005 to include the majority of South Merced and areas outside of the City limits. Redevelopment activities in Merced are governed by the Agency's Board which consists of the six City Council Members and the Mayor.

Sphere of Influence

A "sphere of influence" is a boundary surrounding cities and special service districts intended to represent the ultimate area into which the city or district may expand and extend public services. The Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) must approve the adoption of a sphere of influence boundary and changes to existing sphere boundaries.

The policies of LAFCO require a development plan and a plan for the extension of services to be submitted with every application for a boundary change, and that be submitted with any application for annexation. Other policies discourage the annexation of prime agricultural land when significant areas of non-prime agricultural land is already available, and encourage the development of vacant/infill areas within cities before the annexation and development of fringe areas. Additional policies encourage city annexations that reflect a planned, logical, and orderly progression of urban expansion and promote efficient delivery of urban services.

General Plan Consistency

The intent of the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan Update is to identify areas for new growth that is anticipated over the next 20 years. The Plan also establishes goals, policies and implementing actions to regulate that development. A set of guiding principles was formulated in order to direct the development of the Plan and its' implementing regulations. These guiding principles are:

- Expansion of the Sphere of Influence and City boundary with phasing of development to avoid premature conversion of agricultural land and to plan for cost-effective extension of municipal services.
- Foster compact and efficient development patterns.
- Connectivity between existing and planned urban areas. Examples include the northeast area toward UCM, the University Community, and South Merced.
- Merced as the single municipal service provider in the expanded sphere of influence.
- New development provides or pays its fair share of public services and facilities to avoid burdening existing city residents (in short, new growth pays for itself).
- Mixed-use, transit and pedestrian friendly urban villages in growth areas with direct access to commercial cores from surrounding neighborhoods.

- Commercial nodes in new growth areas to avoid the aesthetic and circulation issues associated with more common "strip commercial".
- Circulation: Recognition of the cost and importance of the arterial street system and protect capacity with access standards. Designs that encourage all modes of transportation.
- Build community quality. High community standards for Merced's services, infrastructure, and private development as a strategy for attracting business and industry and to benefit the City's residents.
- Planning well in advance for industrial/business park uses and for the infrastructure needed to support such development.
- A diversity of housing types and opportunities.
- Encouraging Sustainable and "Green" Development.
- Planning for the provision of infrastructure ahead of development.
- Maintaining Merced's high quality of life and keeping it a nice place to live.
- Encouraging new research parks and the use of new technologies.
- Protection of the Merced Regional Airport as an important community asset.
- Maintaining a quality educational environment for pre-school, K-12, and higher education.
- Maintaining our quality parks and recreation systems, including the bike path system.
- Encouraging a healthy community through improved medical facilities, air quality, parks & recreation opportunities, etc.

The intent of the 2030 General Plan update was not to replace the 2015 plan, but to update selected elements to reflect changes in state law, and new issues (such as the UC Merced campus) that arose since the 2015 plan was adopted. A significant amount of the 2015 plan was retained, including land use designations and development standards.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains a number of policies that apply to Land Use and Planning impacts in conjunction with ultimate build-out of the City in accordance with the General Plan. The specific policies listed below contained in the Urban Expansion, Land Use, Transportation and Circulation, Public Services and Facilities, Urban Design, Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation, Housing, and Safety Elements of the General Plan are designed to ensure that environmental impacts are minimized as development occurs.

Urban Expansion Policies:

- **UE-1.1** Designate areas for new urban development that recognize the physical characteristics and environmental constraints of the planning area.
- **UE-1.2** Foster compact and efficient development patterns to maintain a compact urban form.
- **UE-1.3** Control the annexation, timing, density, and location of new land uses within the City's urban expansion boundaries.
- **UE-1.4** Continue joint planning efforts on the UC Merced and University Community plans.
- **UE-1.5** Promote annexation of developed areas within the City's Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP/SOI)/Sphere of Influence (SOI) during the planning period.
- **UE-1.6** Consider expansion of the City's SUDP/SOI boundary for areas within the Area of Interest when certain conditions are met.

Land Use Policies:

- **L-1.1** Promote balanced development which provides jobs, services and housing.
- **L-1.2** Encourage a diversity of building types, ownership, prices, designs, and site plans for residential areas throughout the City.
- **L-1.3** Encourage a diversity of lot sizes in residential subdivisions.
- **L-1.4** Conserve residential areas that are threatened by blighting influences.
- **L-1.5** Protect existing neighborhoods from incompatible developments.
- **L-1.6** Continue to pursue quality single-family and higher density residential development.
- **L-1.7** Encourage the location of multi-family developments on sites with good access to transportation, shopping, employment centers, and services.
- **L-1.8** Create livable and identifiable residential neighborhoods.
- **L-1.9** Ensure connectivity between existing and planned urban areas.
- **L-2.1** Encourage further development of appropriate commercial and industrial uses throughout the City.
- **L-2.2** Locate new or expanded industrial, research & development, technology, and business parks in appropriate areas.

- **L-2.3** Promote the retention and expansion of existing industrial and commercial businesses.
- **L-2.4** Provide a range of services adjacent to and within industrial areas to reduce auto trips.
- L-2.5 Maintain attractive industrial areas and business parks.
- **L-2.6** Provide neighborhood commercial centers in proportion to residential development in the City.
- **L-2.7** Locate and design new commercial development to provide good access from adjacent neighborhoods and reduce congestion on major streets.
- **L-2.8** Encourage a mixture of uses and activities and reinvestment that will maintain the vitality of the downtown area.
- **L-2.9** Identify locations and develop standards for campus-type research and development parks.
- **L-2.10** Encourage well-planned freeway-oriented developments
- **L-3.1** Create land use patterns that will encourage people to walk, bicycle, or use public transit for an increased number of their daily trips.
- **L-3.2** Encourage infill development and a compact urban form.
- **L-3.3** Promote site designs that encourage walking, cycling, and transit use.
- **L-3.4** Build identity, character, and enhanced community design in the South Merced Community Plan area.
- **L-3.5** Develop a Transit-Oriented Development Overlay Zone adjacent to the planned High Speed Rail Transit Station in Downtown Merced.
- **L-3.6** Require Community Plans for large new development areas within the City's SUDP/SOI prior to development.
- **L-3.7** Implement policies and principles to conform to the intent of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint.

Transportation and Circulation Policies:

- **T-1.1** Design streets consistent with circulation function, affected land uses, and all modes of transportation.
- **T-1.3** Design major roads to maximize efficiency and accessibility.

- **T-1.7** Minimize street system impacts on residential neighborhoods and other sensitive land uses.
- **T-2.1** Provide for and maintain a major transitway along "M" Street and possibly along the Bellevue Road/Merced-Atwater Expressway and Campus Parkway corridors.
- **T-2.6** Maintain and expand the community's existing bicycle circulation system.
- **T-2.8** Improve planning for pedestrians.
- **T-2.9** Ensure that new development provides the facilities and programs that improve the effectiveness of Transportation Control Measures and Congestion Management Programs.
- **T-3.1** Preserve the Merced Regional Airport and its protective zones from incompatible encroachment and incompatible development within the Airport Industrial Park.
- **T-3.2** Promote and encourage the orderly and timely development of commercial and general aviation facilities.
- **T-3.4** Reduce rail system impacts on circulation within the urban area.
- **T-3.6** Retain and expand as needed rail facilities serving industrial development.

Public Services and Facilities Policies:

- P-1.1 Provide adequate public infrastructure and services to meet the needs of future development.
- **P-1.2** Utilize existing infrastructure and public service capacities to the maximum extent possible and provide for the logical, timely and economically efficient extension of infrastructure and services where necessary.
- **P-3.1** Ensure that adequate water supply can be provided within the City's service area, concurrent with service expansion and population growth.
- **P-4.1** Provide adequate wastewater collection, treatment and disposal capacity for existing and projected future needs.
- **P-5.1** Provide effective storm drainage facilities for future development.
- **P-5.2** Integrate drainage facilities with bike paths, sidewalks, recreation facilities, agricultural activities, groundwater recharge, and landscaping.
- **P-7.1** Cooperate with Merced Area School Districts to provide elementary, intermediate and high school sites that are centrally located to the populations they serve and adequate to serve community growth.

Urban Design Policies:

- **UD-1.2** Distribute and design Urban Villages to promote convenient vehicular, pedestrian, and transit access.
- **UD-1.3** Promote and facilitate Core Commercial design principles in
- **UD-1.1** Apply Urban Village design principles to new development in the City's new growth areas.
- **UD-1.4** Promote and facilitate Urban Village residential area design principles.
- **UD-1.5** Design and develop public and quasi-public buildings and uses utilizing Urban Village principles.

Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Policies:

- **OS-1.2** Preserve and enhance creeks in their natural state throughout the planning area.
- **OS-1.4** Improve and expand the City's urban forest.
- **OS-2.1** Protect agricultural areas outside the City's SUDP/SOI from urban impacts.
- **OS-3.1** Provide high-quality park and open space facilities to serve the needs of a growing population.
- **OS-3.4** Develop a diverse and integrated system of park facilities throughout Merced.
- **OS-4.1** Preserve open space areas which are necessary to maintaining public health and safety.

Housing Policies:

H-1.1 Support increased densities in residential areas.

Noise Policies:

- **N-1.1** Minimize the impacts of aircraft noise.
- **N-1.5** Coordinate planning efforts so that noise-sensitive land uses are not located near major noise sources.

Safety Policies:

S-2.3 Restrict urban development in all areas with potential ground failure characteristics.

S-5.1 Continue to protect approach areas and control zones for both existing and future runway systems through land use regulations and property acquisition where necessary.

Specific Urban Development Plan

The SUDP/SOI boundary is recognized as the City's ultimate growth boundary over the life of the General Plan. Merced County policy states that all land within the SUDP/SOI is planned for eventual development through a mixture of urban and urban-related uses. The City of Merced's General Plan builds on the County SUDP policies to provide a long term growth strategy for Merced's future expansion. Merced's revised SUDP/SOI boundary is proposed to be coterminus with the Sphere of Influence.

Additional local regulations are described under the Environmental Setting portion of this section.

3.9.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a project is normally considered to have a significant impact on the environment if it will:

- Physically divide an established community
- Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the project (including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, local coastal program, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect
- Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan

3.9.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact #3.9-1: Physically divide an established community

Discussion/Conclusion: As shown in Table 3.9-3, the 2030 General Plan establishes 21 land use designations that encompass 33,463 acres, which is 62 percent larger (12,865 acres) than the SUDP in the existing 2015 General Plan, but almost the same size as the 1997 Sphere of Influence (33,700 acres). The SUDP and SOI boundaries have been combined into one boundary in the proposed General Plan. The largest land use is Low Density Residential (8,771 acres or 26 percent of the SUDP/SOI).

Table 3.9-3
Merced Planned Land Use Summary
(2015 General Plan SUDP vs. 2030 General Plan SUDP/SOI)

	2015 G	P SUDP	2030 GP		
Land Use Classification	Acres	Percent of Total	Acres	Percent of Total	Percent Change
RR (Rural Residential)	296	1.44	2,301	6.88	677
AG (Agriculture)	114	0.55	114	0.34	0
Total Agricultural Residential	410	1.99	2,415	7.22	489
LD (Low-Density Residential)	8,497	41.25	8,771	26.21	3
LMD (Low-Medium Density)	1130	5.49	1,177	3.52	4
Total Single-Family Residential	9,627	46.74	9,948	29.73	3
HMD (High-Medium Density)	807	3.92	833	2.49	3
HD (High Density Residential)	92	0.45	116	0.35	26
RMH (Residential Mobile Home)	80	0.39	80	0.24	0
Total Multi-Family	979	4.75	1,029	3.08	5
P/G (Public/Government)	538	2.61	578	1.73	7
CO (Commercial Office)	474	2.30	474	1.42	0
Total Office	1,012	4.91	1,052	3.14	4
IND (Industrial)	2,877	13.97	2,877	8.60	0
IND-R (Industrial Reserve)	150	0.73	1,223	3.65	715
Total Industrial	3,027	14.70	4,100	12.25	35
BP (Business Park)	582	2.83	659	1.97	13
BP-R (Business Park Reserve)	88	0.43	88	0.26	0
Total Business Park	670	3.25	747	2.23	11
CG (General Commercial)	494	2.40	494	1.48	0
CN (Neighborhood Commercial)	252	1.22	275	0.82	9
CT (Thoroughfare Commercial)	505	2.45	679	2.03	34
RC (Regional/Community)	518	2.51	518	1.55	0
Total Commercial	1,769	8.59	1,966	5.88	11
OS-PK (Open Space/Park)	954	4.63	1,107	3.31	16
Total Open Space	954	4.63	1,107	3.31	16
Total School	746	3.62	1,740	5.20	133
Total Other Lands	1,404	6.82	1,244	3.72	-11
Community Plan Areas	0	0.00	8,115	24.25	N/A
TOTAL SOI/SUDP AREA	20,598	100.00	33,463	100.00	62
Note: Open Space Inventory for the 2030 SOI/SUDP includes arterial street rights-of-way					

Source: Figures 2-3 & 2- -Land Use Diagram as calculated by Quad Knopf, Inc.

A number of plans and policies are related to the 2030 General Plan Update. These include, but are not limited to, the City's Zoning Ordinance, the Merced County General Plan, the Merced County Zoning Ordinance, Specific Plans/Master Development Plans, redevelopment project

areas, the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (LAFCO), the Merced County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), Merced Public Facilities Financing Plan, the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the Merced County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan, the Merced Regional Airport Master Plan, the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Attainment Plan (AQAP), and the Air Quality Guidelines for General Plans.

The 2030 General Plan includes planning for infrastructure elements (utilities and roadways) to improve the quality of life for City residents and to support an additional 74,000 residents by 2030. These elements will widen some roadways, improve existing infrastructure, and improve flood control facilities. However, no major new roads or infrastructure corridors are proposed in the developed portions of the community that would create a physical barrier or division between existing neighborhoods.

The 2030 General Plan Draft Urban Expansion Element includes the following goals: a compact urban form; preservation of agriculturally significant areas; and efficient and phased urban expansion. These goals will help prevent urban sprawl and land use conflicts, and will ensure compatibility and community continuity throughout the City. Policies and implementing actions are included as part of the proposed project to encourage development of cohesive neighborhood patterns and consequently, would minimize this impact. The 2030 General Plan provides a number of policies and implementing actions designed to protect the desired elements of the community (i.e., history, character, etc.) while also providing for future growth.

Applicable policies of the Draft Urban Expansion Element with regard to this impact include Policy UE-1.1 which states that the City is to designate areas for new urban development that recognize the physical characteristics and environmental constraints of the planning area. Policy UE-1.2 calls for the City to foster compact and efficient development patterns to maintain a compact urban form, and Policy UE-1.3 states that the City will control the annexation, timing, density, and location of new land uses within the City's urban expansion boundaries. Policy UE-1.4 calls for the City to continue joint planning efforts on the UC Merced and University Community plans. Policy L-1.9 of the Land Use Element calls for the City to ensure connectivity between existing and planned urban areas and Policy LU-3.2 calls for the City to encourage infill development and a compact urban form.

Applicable implementing actions of the policies above include encouraging development on infill sites by amending the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances to better accommodate such requests (1.2.a). Implementing Action 1.2.c states that the City will continue to limit the expansion of City utilities to only those within an established urban expansion boundary. Implementing Action 1.2.d states that the City will promote higher residential densities within the Merced urban area. The City will 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 (1.3.a). The City should adequately plan for public improvements/services to support designated land uses for all areas as they become suitable for development and/or proposed for annexation (Implementing Action 1.3.b). With Implementing Action 1.3.c, the City shall encourage phasing of new development.

Generally, new development as a result of the 2030 General Plan would represent a continuation of the existing urban area of the City and would not result in the physical division of the existing community. New guiding principles have been added to the 2030 plan for preparation of Community Plans which require connectivity with existing and planned urban uses. With the implementation of the policies and implementing actions noted above, this impact is considered *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact #3.9-2: Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation

Discussion/Conclusion: Per State law, the General Plan is the primary planning document of the community and the blueprint for future growth. The 2030 General Plan would supersede the 1997 General Plan once adopted. Upon approval and implementation of the 2030 General Plan, other City documents, like the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, or infrastructure master plans may need to be updated to ensure consistency.

To address this, Implementing Action 1.2.a of Policy P-1.2 of the proposed Public Services and Facilities Element calls for the City to develop plans which establish priorities to address existing inadequacies in the City's infrastructure system and to periodically review and update them. Implementing Action 1.2.a of Policy UE-1.2 states that the City will encourage development on infill sites by amending the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances to better accommodate such requests. Implementing Action 1.3.a of Policy P-1.3 states that the City should require new development to provide or pay for its fair share of public facility and infrastructure improvements to assure that maintenance of City service levels is adequate. Implementing Action 3.1.b of Policy P-3.1 call for the City to update the Water Master Plan and Urban Water Management Plan for the SOI and expanded SUDP/SOI area.

Implementing Action 3.2.a of Policy T-3.2 states that the City will implement the Merced Regional Airport Master Plan and update it as necessary. This will ensure that new development is consistent with the Airport Master Plan. Also, see discussion in Impact #3.7-5 regarding the Merced County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan.

The proposed General Plan land use designations beyond the existing SOI are not consistent with the existing Merced County General Plan land use designations; however, this inconsistency already exists since the adopted General Plan has urban uses for areas which the County has designated for non-urban uses. This inconsistency is typical, since more intensive urban uses are generally encouraged within cities. As a result, the proposed General Plan would not create a new significant impact that does not already exist. Please see Section 3.2, Agricultural and Forest Resources, of this EIR for a discussion of the potential impacts related to conflicts between existing County agricultural designations and the proposed General Plan.

Much of the area designated Rural Residential (RR) in the County General Plan on the east side of Merced is proposed as RR in the expanded SUDP/SOI. The exception is the Bellevue

Corridor which is a major route to UC Merced. See General Plan Section 3.7.1 for a discussion of the planning process for the Bellevue Corridor Community Plan. The RR designation in the 2030 Plan allows for 1 to 3 units with annexation and urban services. This is consistent with the County General Plan which permits up to 3 units when sewer and water are available.

Development of the General Plan will ultimately involve expansion to the City's SUDP/SOI and annexations. The City must comply with LAFCO policies and procedures for final approval of the SOI. A part of LAFCO policy is the General Plan's attention to phasing. This is an important part of Chapter 2, Urban Expansion. The Land Use Element includes policies designed to reduce the demand of annexations, such as encouraging in-fill development and a compact urban form (Policy L-3.2), and controlling the annexation, timing, density, and location of new land uses within the City's urban expansion boundaries (Policy UE-1.3). The City will promote the annexation of developed areas within the City's SUDP/SOI during the planning period (Policy UE-1.5). Policy UE-1.4 calls for the City to continue joint planning efforts on the UC Merced and University Community plans.

Implementation of the policies and implementing actions in the 2030 General Plan and the LAFCO process would result in *less than significant* land use impacts related to conflicts with other plans, policies and regulations applicable in the Merced area.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact #3.9-3: Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan.

Discussion/Conclusion: No Habitat Conservation Plans or Natural Community Conservation Plans have been adopted encompassing the Merced Planning Area, and *no impact* would therefore occur as a result of implementing the proposed 2030 General Plan.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

As the primary planning document for the City of Merced, the proposed General Plan would have a less than significant impact in relation to potential conflicts with other applicable plans, policies and regulations, including the County's General Plan and LAFCO's SOI. Since the proposed General Plan would not have a significant impact on these regional land use plans and policies, the proposed General Plan would *not result in a significant cumulative impact*.