



# 2007 Downtown Strategy

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# 2007 Downtown Strategy

Prepared By:

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Downtown Task Force

Prepared For:

Merced City Council  
Merced Redevelopment Agency Board

Adopted

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## A Vision for Downtown Merced 2014

Downtown Merced is the heart of the City. As the vibrant cultural and historic center for residents and visitors, Downtown is the destination for fine dining, shopping, nightlife and the arts, creating a welcoming place to live, work and visit.





## Previous Strategies

Downtown revitalization has been in progress for more than three decades. It began in the 1970's in response to high vacancy rates that were caused by the new commercial developments that were built in North Merced. It was during this time that Project Area 2 was formed.

In the 1980's redevelopment efforts were focused on revitalizing key areas of Downtown. Major projects included Westgate Shopping Center and Bob Hart Square.

The 1991 Downtown Strategy sought first to maintain Downtown as the governmental and financial center of the City. Second, it sought to expand commercial activity through additional office development, boutique recruitment and construction of an education center. Thirdly, the Strategy laid out a vision of establishing a greater regional draw by creating freeway oriented retail and major discount retail centers along the western side of downtown. Fourth, it envisioned the creation of new community facilities including a youth center, senior center and arts center. Lastly it explained the need to strengthen the transportation system throughout the Downtown.

In 1999 a new Downtown Strategy was developed. This strategy encouraged the development of new smaller retail spaces, the sighting of major anchor tenants throughout Downtown and the creation of a Downtown Cineplex. Several items were continued from 1991 including the construction of a business class hotel and development of a youth center. It included constructing additional pedestrian oriented facilities, open spaces and various public improvements. Several items meant to improve the appearance of Downtown were also included. The plan also mentioned the need to improve neighboring residential areas and to create new housing in the Downtown area. During the same time period, 16th Street Design Guidelines and a Downtown Lighting Strategy were developed.





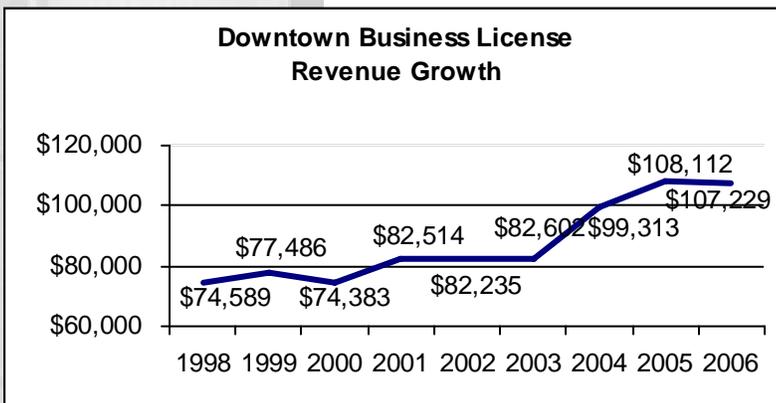
## Downtown Merced's Present Situation 2007



Downtown is experiencing a renaissance. Throughout the early years of Merced's history, Downtown was the center of community life. This began to change during the 1960's and 1970's when Downtown lost its dominance with the development of north Merced. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's efforts towards rebuilding Downtown were focused on creating a niche for Downtown within the community.



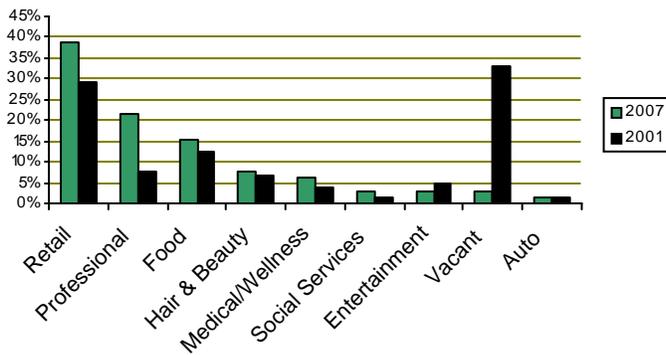
Downtown became the center for the entertainment, arts, and government and strengthened its position as the region's financial district. For the first time in decades, private investment, spurred by governmental investment, returned to Downtown. Despite this progress, Downtown is still confronted with a demographic shift as Merced's affluent population continues to move north. In addition, significant new retail projects are on the horizon, increasing Downtown's competition.



Evidence of the emerging renaissance can be measured in several ways. The graph to the left depicts a strong increase in Downtown Business License revenue. The 44% growth during the previous nine years demonstrates a steady increase for Downtown businesses.

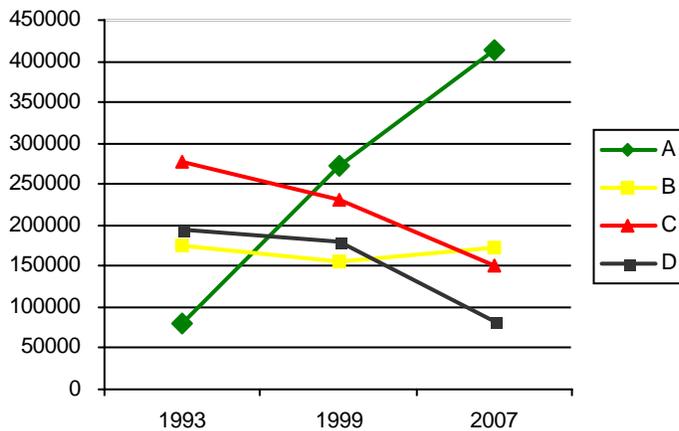


### City Center Commercial Occupancy



Another indication of the growing resurgence can be found in a comparison of the City Center vacancy rates. As displayed, a survey taken in August of 2001 indicated a vacancy rate of 33%. A following survey completed in January of 2007 indicated storefront vacancy rates had fallen to 3%.

### City Center Building Conditions



The overall building conditions in the City Center have also significantly improved. In the 14 years surveyed, the “Class A” square footage has increased 500% while the “Class D” square footage has declined by 58%. Class A space has been defined as new or substantially rehabilitated space, Class B as well maintained space, Class C is space in need of significant restoration, while Class D is space that is likely beyond repair and needing tremendous intervention.

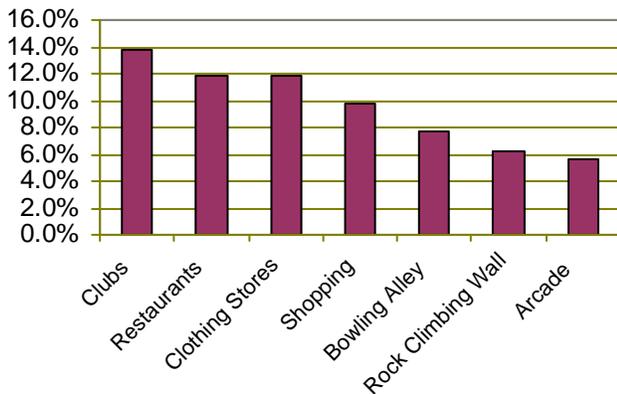
This marks a significant change in the marketability of the City Center square footage. Much of this progress resulted from the Redevelopment Agency’s projects, including Mainplace Merced, the Mondo Building, the Multi Cultural Arts Center, the Merced Theatre and the Merced Lofts.



## Public Engagement

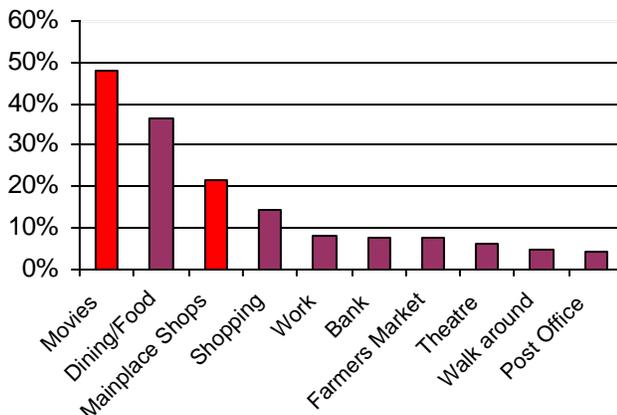
The committee sought to engage the public throughout the development of the 2007 Downtown Strategy. On June 7, the Committee received commentary from approximately 100 people at the Downtown Thursday Night Festival. During the Merced County Fair, the Committee received 214 survey responses. The Committee has also received several survey responses from an online web survey.

**What Businesses are needed Downtown?**



All three of the surveys asked respondents to provide guidance as to what businesses were needed in Downtown. The three most popular categories were shopping, entertainment uses and restaurants. Notably, the survey responses did not produce a large call for a specific brand of store or restaurant. Instead, there was a desire for additional entertainment destinations coupled with a greater number and variety of stores and restaurants.

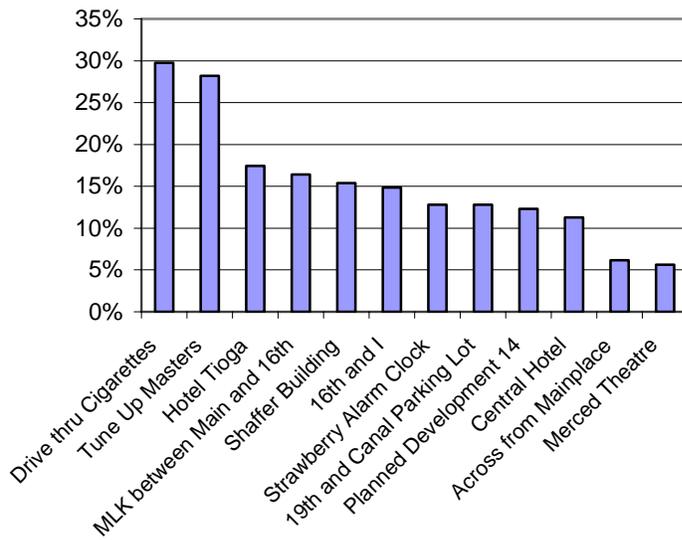
**Why do you come to Downtown?**



When respondents were asked why they presently visit Downtown, more than half specifically called out attending movies or visiting the retail venues at the Mainplace Cineplex (of which Starbucks was the most mentioned). This confirms the notion that Mainplace is the center of retailing in Downtown. The next closest category was dining/food (this does not include Mainplace restaurants). This result displays the current strength of downtown dining.



**Properties most in need of revitalization**



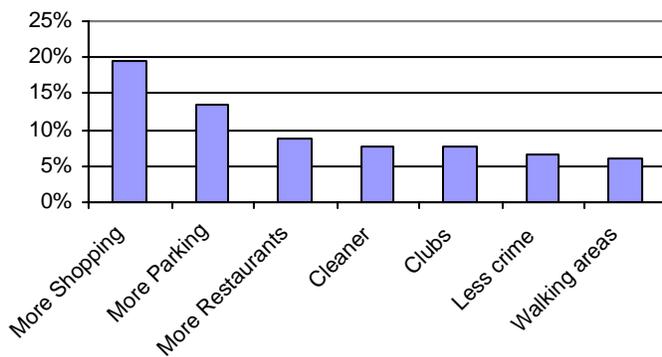
The surveys also asked respondents to list the three properties that are in the most need of revitalization. To a large degree, respondents chose properties in clusters centered along 18th Street and Martin Luther King Way. Also, respondents noted the need to revitalize the buildings on the south side of the 400 block of Main Street. Several other prominent structures were named, including the Hotel Tioga and the Shafer Building

**Properties Needing Revitalization the Most**





### What would make you come to Downtown more often?



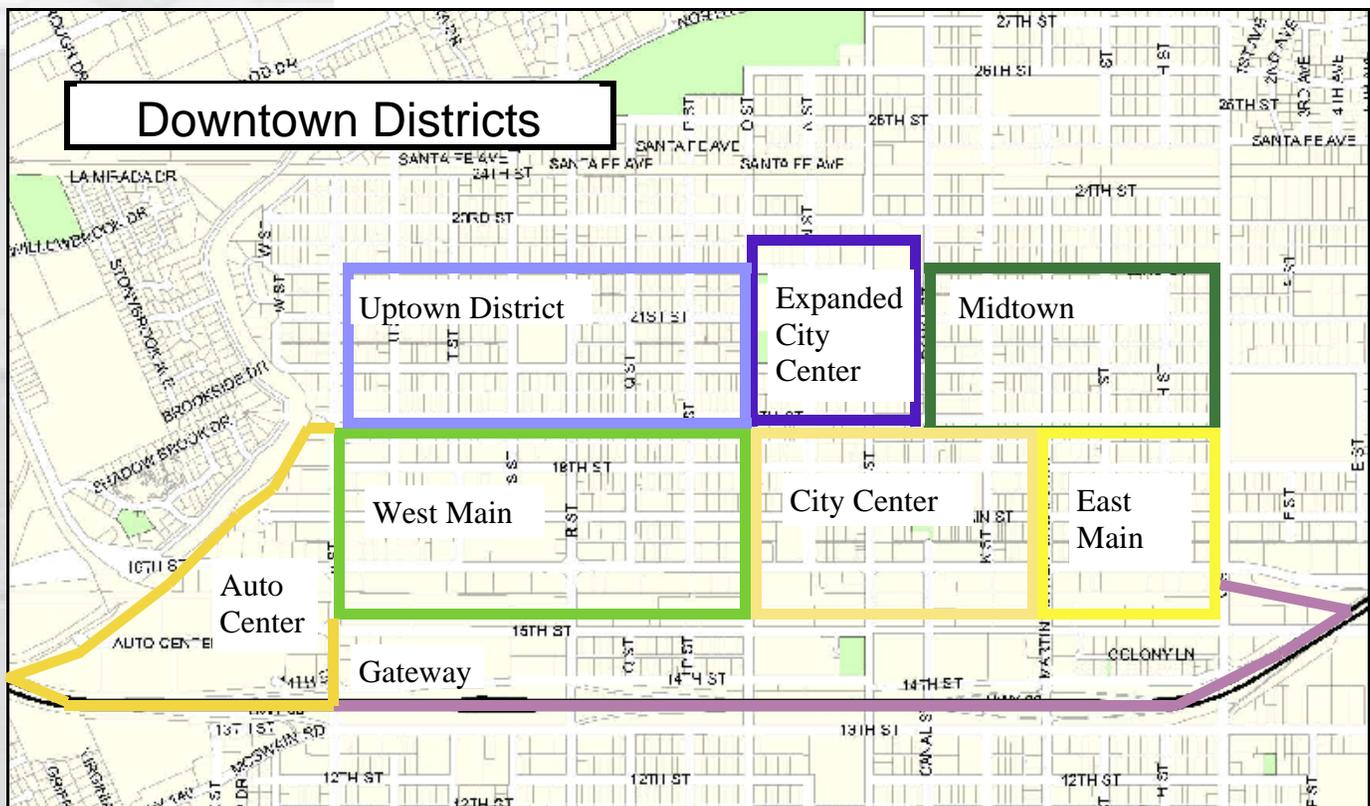
Responses to the question asking what would draw the respondent to Downtown more frequently were divided into two categories. First, respondents desired additional destinations. These included additional shopping areas, more restaurants, and other activities. The second category focused on the quality of the Downtown experience. Items including expanding parking, cleanliness and crime reduction were top responses.



## Downtown Merced

Downtown Merced is generally bounded by Highway 99 to the south, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line to the north, “G” Street to the east and “V” Street to the west.

Downtown contains eight distinct districts. These districts are unique in their design and economic function.



### City Center

The City Center is the urban core of Downtown. Typical of a dense center, it has few building setbacks, shared parking facilities and taller buildings. It is a financial, governmental and service center, capable of providing mixed use residential development.



### **Expanded City Center**

Extends north of the City Center proper. It is a continuation of the financial and governmental center. Though more vehicular oriented, it represents a large service center and employment base for Downtown.

### **Mid Town**

Midtown is a mixed density historic residential district located north of the City Center. It contains several of the City's finest turn of the century residences and its renaissance is seen as a key to the economic vitality of Downtown.

### **Uptown**

Uptown is a largely lower density area east of the Expanded City Center district. Its architectural style is a mix between turn of the century and war year styles. It is a transitional zone with numerous professional offices and services mingled within the residences.

### **East Main**

East Main is one of the most economically distressed areas of Downtown. It contains the highest vacancy rates and the largest concentrations of structures. The Task Force has pictured this area as fitting a possible high density row-house development. It is thought this will reduce the total number of deteriorated commercial spaces, condense the Downtown commercial areas and provide additional residential customers for Downtown businesses.

### **West Main**

West Main is a transitional area, including more pedestrian oriented buildings close to the City Center and traditional vehicular oriented shopping centers like Westgate closer to "R" Street.



### **Auto Center**

This is the automotive center of the city. It contains the majority of the car dealerships and services of the city.

### **Gateway District**

The Gateway District is the area immediately adjacent to the freeway. Its uses are generally designed to be regionally oriented to serve the city resident as well as the highway traveler. Currently the district is a mix between these commercial uses and residential uses.





## Action Items

To foster Downtown's renaissance and to guide it into its next stage, the City Council appointed a task force of twenty-two citizens, business owners, property owners and Downtown residents to establish guidelines and goals for the next five to seven years. The Task Force developed six strategies:

1. Create a superior ambiance.
2. Create exceptional Downtown residential neighborhoods.
3. Build a distinguished Downtown.
4. Solidify Downtown's role as the arts, entertainment and dining destination.
5. Adopt and enforce policies to protect and enhance Downtown.
6. Connecting Downtown.





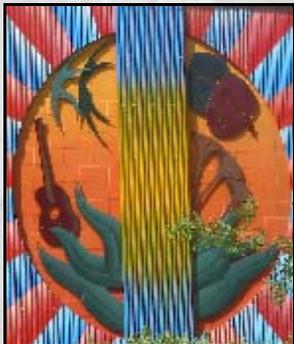
## 1.0 Create a superior ambiance.

### 1.1 Create a unique pedestrian environment through public art, signage, landscaping and sensory experiences.

Downtown's differentiation in large part will lie in its pedestrian orientation. The majority of commercial centers in Merced and the greater Central Valley are vehicular oriented. If Downtown were to enhance its pedestrian orientation, it would emphasize its uniqueness.

Additional public art (including murals, fountains and sculptures) will add interest and increase the unique experience of walking through the Downtown. Small-scale signage directed towards the sidewalk will be more inviting to pedestrians and help draw shoppers into the establishment. This would require signs of a smaller yet more intricate scale. The Agency will promote the use of blade signs and other more pedestrian oriented signs.

It is in the Downtown's interest to care for and promote the tree canopy in Downtown. The canopy helps to moderate temperatures and extend the outdoor commercial season. It provides visual interest to walkers and it differentiates the Downtown. Closer attention should be made to low-lying landscaping including shrubs and flowers. The Agency should establish a program to promote the inclusion of flowers throughout the Downtown area. The merchants would partner in this activity by providing for the maintenance of the flowers in front of their establishment. Uniqueness will be gained





through the colorful display and pleasant aroma. The Agency will also promote the inclusion of commercial uses and design that will project pleasant auditory and olfactory experiences to those who pass by.

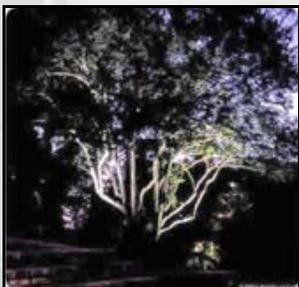
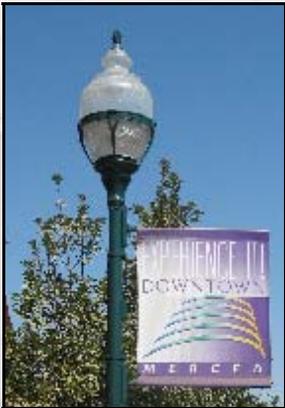
**Schedule: Ongoing**

### 1.2 **Enhance lighting throughout Downtown.**

Numerous public responses have commented on the darkness of the Downtown in contrast to other commercial areas. The relative darkness has led to a safety concern for visitors. There are four components of lighting that address this comment. Each component should be coordinated with the adopted Downtown Lighting Strategy.

First, the Agency will need to complete the downtown public improvements that include additional streetlights. These improvements will enhance the overall lighting in Downtown. Particular attention should be paid to areas of the City Center that have not had the new Sternberg lights, and to areas outside the core which need additional streetlights.

Second, the trees throughout the downtown present an opportunity to create a dramatic and effective lighting element. The Agency should invest in the permanent uplighting of the trees. Different possibilities, including ground level lights and tree wrapping, should be investigated. The ultimate choice based on durability and effectiveness will be chosen and installed throughout the City Center.





Third, and most important, Downtown businesses will need to enhance their lighting. The Agency should seek to encourage store owners to add decorative and effective lighting to the storefronts and sides of their businesses. In addition, the Agency will work to encourage owners to leave their lights on into the later evening.

Fourth, additional lighting should be installed in the alleys and parking lots throughout the Downtown. The increased illumination will help increase the public's comfort in visiting and parking in Downtown. The perception of inadequate lighting in Downtown's parking lots and alleyways was a common complaint on the Downtown Survey.

**Schedule: December 2009**

**1.3 Encourage appropriate events in the City Center.**

The Downtown Thursday Night events should be restructured to promote visitor spending in the Downtown retail shops. Currently, many store owners and visitors feel that the festival detracts from the established retail stores. It is recommended that the Thursday Night event be restructured to be a farmers' market solely, and then possibly mature to include additional craft and homemade or locally made items. The primary mission of the new festival should be to increase commercial activity in the Downtown businesses. In order to achieve this restructure, it may be necessary to halt the festival for one year to "rebrand" the event and change expectations.





The Agency should encourage the current Saturday morning Farmers’ Market to relocate closer to the City Center. This will provide the Market with added exposure and provide local cafés additional breakfast customers. Potential locations could include Bob Hart Square or Canal Street.

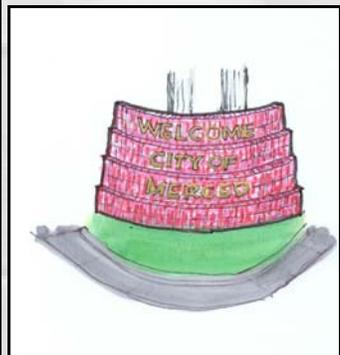
Additional festivals should be considered. These should draw attention to the retail stores that are currently open. Small events such as “Stay Open Late” nights as well as “Taste of Merced” events and festivals should be developed. Events such as the “MERCOCO Classic”, “Big Valley Arts Festival” and the “Christmas Parade” should be supported and encouraged. Similar events should be promoted when appropriate.

**Schedule: Ongoing**

**1.4 Increase open spaces throughout Downtown and enhance current spaces.**

Recognizing that the pedestrian experience is vital for Downtown’s marketability, the inclusion of additional open spaces is necessary. These spaces should provide respites for visitors and unique sensory experiences such as fountains, public art and landscaping. In addition, they can provide the opportunity for the Downtown to provide distinctive services. These could include Wi-Fi hotspots, music and other modern conveniences. Potential spaces could be Canal Street between Main and 18th, K Street between 16th and Main, and K Street between Main and 18th Street.





The current open spaces (Bob Hart Square, the Main Place Plaza, mid-block crossings) should be studied, and where possible and appropriate, additional features should be added. Preference should be given to features that add exclusivity and quality to Downtown.

**Schedule: June 2012**

**1.5 Encourage additional outdoor dining.**

Additional venues should be developed and policies adopted to encourage additional outdoor dining. This adds street vitality and helps to create a unique urban experience necessary for Downtown's success. As sidewalk dining becomes more successful, flexible on-street parking/dining should be investigated.

**Schedule: December 2008**

**1.6 Create entry gateway monuments.**

To help establish a distinct City Center district, a series of gateway monuments should be installed. The features should be located at the significant entry points into the City Center. The ultimate design of these monuments should be investigated by staff and coordinated with the Design Review Committee.

**Schedule: June 2011**

**1.7 Update Downtown marketing materials.**

Downtown's future success is largely dependent on differentiating itself from other commercial districts in Merced. Downtown is already distinguished as the historical, urban district. A logo reflecting this advantage would help distinguish it from present and future strip centers and malls.



In addition to differentiating Downtown, the logo should reflect a unique sense of place. By promoting a place, it provides the smaller businesses of Downtown the ability to buy into an established image. If the Downtown Marketing were reinforced by local merchant advertisement spending, the recognition of Downtown's identity will increase.

**Schedule: June 2008**



## **2.0 Create exceptional Downtown residential neighborhoods.**

### **2.1 Develop policies to encourage Downtown housing development.**

Certain policies hamper denser urban housing. For example, condominium development requires a higher number of parking spaces per unit than apartment units. Policies such as these should be investigated to see if changes should be made to help make urban housing more economically feasible. Policies regarding building height, parking and density should be investigated.

**Schedule: December 2008**

### **2.2 Develop the Mid-Town neighborhood as a premiere residential district with historic character.**

The renaissance of the Mid-Town neighborhood would provide a significant economic stimulus to Downtown. It would help draw new customers closer to Downtown and improve the image of the greater central Merced area. Mid-Town's niche arises from its ability to differentiate itself from the newer developments in Merced. Recognizing this, the City should adopt policies to enhance its uniqueness. This may necessitate the rezoning of some of the area. The Agency should actively seek to acquire and retrofit, and demolish if necessary, structures that are dilapidated and that do not add to the historical identity of the district. The Agency will develop policies and programs to stimulate façade and landscape improvements within the district.





The Agency should seek to improve the public infrastructure within the district, including streetlights, sidewalks, roads and park strips. The City should seek to enhance code enforcement and blight control in the area.

**Schedule: December 2011**

**2.3 Build at least 300 housing units throughout the Downtown.**



The Agency should seek to create an urban residential neighborhood. This action will draw new customers to Downtown, provide a new housing type to Merced and help create a distinct urban core. The goal of 300 units represents a desire to locate approximately 1 out of every 10 new housing units in Merced within Downtown.



It is vital for this to be an incremental process seeking to develop a market for this housing. Housing should be a mix of upscale, urban lofts, owner occupied row houses and dense mixed-use commercial residential development. It would be appropriate to locate the mixed use development in the City Center, while the other housing units would be built in the East Main, Mid Town and Uptown Districts. The desire would be for the majority of the housing units to be owner occupied, with some of the mixed-use developments providing a leasing opportunity for people desiring to live close to the entertainment hub of the City. Housing should be developed within close proximity to mass transit and other residential amenities. Ideally, at least half of the units will be built in the City Center. This may also include significant rehabilitation of the present residential units.

**Schedule: December 2012**



### 3.0 Build a distinguished Downtown.

#### 3.1 Focus investment in redeveloping key Downtown properties.

As opportunities are available, redevelopment efforts should focus on the following properties. Priority should be given to the properties that would yield the largest transformation, provide the largest revitalization per square foot and provide the most significant benefits to the image of Downtown.



- |                                       |                                |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| El Capitan Hotel                      | Hotel Tioga                    |
| Central Hotel                         | Shaffer Building               |
| Main between Canal and K              | 16 <sup>th</sup> and K Street  |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> and MLK              | 16 <sup>th</sup> Street hotels |
| Planned Development #14               | 18 <sup>th</sup> and I         |
| Main Street East of MLK               | Tune Up Masters                |
| MLK between Main and 16 <sup>th</sup> | 16 <sup>th</sup> and I         |
| Strawberry Alarm Clock                | Former Hyundai site            |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> and Canal            | Maria's Mexican                |
| Parking Lot                           | Kitchen                        |
| K Street between 16 <sup>th</sup> and |                                |
| Main                                  |                                |

**Schedule: Ongoing**

#### 3.2 Establish a commercial recruitment program that supports the Downtown vision.

Recognizing that Downtown has several competitors and numerous others will soon emerge, it is necessary for Downtown to create a draw for retailers. The Office of Economic Development should investigate and establish a program to attract boutique, restaurant and other retailers to Downtown.

**Schedule: December 2008**





### 3.3 Investigate adjusting development fees.

Currently, the City of Merced calculates the various impact fees based upon land uses. It does not account for the location of the uses. The fees are largely used for two purposes: extending services to newly developed areas and expanding services in previously developed areas. By rebuilding within developed areas some costs may be avoided. In the City's next significant revision of its impact fees, the idea of impact fee zones or the addition of an infill zone should be reviewed.



Agency staff should also investigate other incentives that are justifiable and used in other cities. The incentives should assist in reducing the financial impact of increasing design standards within Downtown.

**Schedule: June 2009**

### 3.4 Investigate and address Downtown parking needs.

Survey respondents repeatedly cited issues regarding Downtown parking. Noting that Downtown has changed dramatically since the completion of the last parking study, a new study should be completed. Upon completion of the study, various items will need to be addressed. Investments in aesthetics, lighting and paving are likely outcomes of a study. Additional parking will also likely be needed, within the City Center and other areas of Downtown including West and East Main. The study should also investigate the economic feasibility of developing a larger revenue stream to care for and expand Downtown parking.

**Schedule: June 2009**





**3.5 Create a significant City Center anchor to complement the Mainplace Theaters.**

More than half of the respondents to the Downtown survey listed the Mainplace development as a significant reason for visiting Downtown. This asset should be reinforced through the construction of another significant commercial development in the City Center. The development could be a mixed-use development, providing residential units as well as a significant amount of commercial square footage. Tenants could include major national retailers, restaurants and other entertainment activities.

**Schedule: June 2011**



#### **4.0 Solidify Downtown's role as the arts, entertainment and dining destination.**

##### **4.1 Encourage the creation of a strong and capable Arts and Entertainment Committee.**

The Committee would likely be composed of organizations such as Playhouse Merced, Merced College Drama Department, Merced County Arts Council, UC Merced, The Merced Theatre Foundation, The Conference and Visitors Bureau, and the City of Merced. This committee would seek to coordinate events and activities. The Committee should also seek to bolster the representative organizations through joint fundraising, marketing and other activities.

**Schedule: December 2009**

##### **4.2 Assist in developing an Arts Season combining musical, theatrical and visual arts in Downtown.**

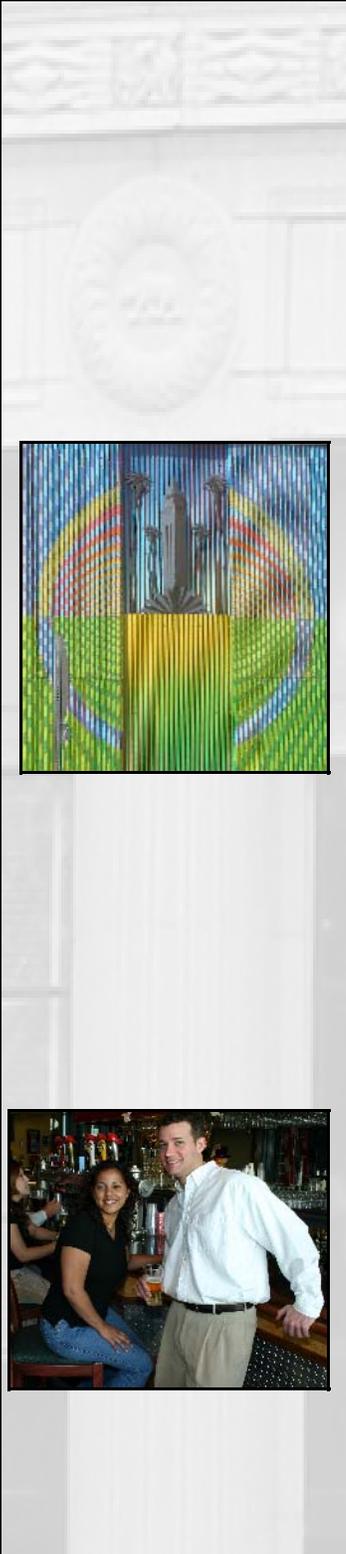
Downtown has an abundance of cultural venues within a three block radius. Merced has a significant number of organizations dedicated to providing cultural events to the citizens. Development of a coordinated Arts Season should be pursued. This event would provide exposure to the organizations and increase economic activity in Downtown. The hope is for the season to create a regional draw for people to visit Downtown.

**Schedule: June 2010**

##### **4.3 Develop a program to utilize available commercial spaces for artistic endeavors.**

The Redevelopment Agency should seek to enhance the Downtown Core by seeking to place various





artistic endeavors in retail spaces that are otherwise unoccupied. These endeavors may include exhibits, window displays, or galleries. The program would seek to place artists in commercial spaces that are currently vacant at a free or reduced rate.

**Schedule: December 2010**

**4.4 Develop a program to increase public art throughout Downtown.**

Increasing public art would help to achieve a more vibrant and appealing Downtown. To achieve this goal, the Agency would be encouraged to sponsor additional public art throughout the core. Locations should be determined based on visibility, blight reduction and pedestrian and vehicular traffic counts.

Staff should also investigate the possibility of adopting policies which would provide continued investment in art. Policies could include an artistic set-a-side requirements for developments. Staff should investigate measures used by other cities to increase and enhance public art.

**Schedule: December 2010**

**4.5 Recruit fine dining, clubs, and outdoor dining.**

In order to solidify Downtown's role as a dining destination, the Office of Economic Development should establish a program to attract restaurants to the Downtown. Targets should include bakeries, coffee shops, delis, fine dining, night clubs and dessert eateries. The recruiting should include a limited number of chains. The retailer mix between local, regional and national stores should be balanced.

**Schedule: Ongoing**



## **5.0 Adopt and enforce policies to protect and enhance Downtown.**

### **5.1 Assure redevelopment progress continues.**



Significant progress towards the complete revitalization of Downtown has been made. However, currently it is not capable to compete with newer commercial districts on its own. This reality will not likely change in the next nine years. Therefore, it is imperative for redevelopment activities to continue in some form.

Staff should investigate extending the life of Redevelopment Project Area II past its current sunset date of 2016. In addition, staff should research and promote the development of other legacy institutions to continue redevelopment without a redevelopment agency.

**Schedule: December 2008**

### **5.2 Protect entertainment uses in Downtown.**



More than half the respondents to the recent Downtown survey commented that a primary reason for visiting Downtown was the Mainplace Cineplex. Recognizing the vital role this anchor plays in continually attracting customers, the City should maintain and abide by the existing Cineplex ordinance limiting multiplex developments to the Central Commercial district.

Additional entertainment uses should be included in this reservation. Uses such as regional restaurants and large live music venues and clubs should be considered amongst others for inclusion.

**Schedule: June 2009**



### 5.3 **Enforce existing codes and ordinances.**

Numerous businesses do not abide by existing sign ordinances. This has presented a blighting influence and a safety concern. In addition, several businesses have not followed current blight control ordinances regarding outdoor merchandise storage and building conditions. There are also some uses that are in contradiction to current zoning ordinances. The City should increase staff effort to address these issues.

**Schedule: Ongoing**

### 5.4 **Complete Downtown design standards.**

Staff should complete the Downtown standards that reflect a broader range of colors, enhanced material selection and encourage greater building height. The standards should be specific enough to provide guidance to new developments in terms of architectural style, public improvements, density and set-back. The standards should include specific recommendations to assure quality developments. These standards should include a minimum for façade coverage with higher quality building materials. The guidelines should also encourage sustainability in development. The Design Review Commission should make sure that these standards are abided by in both the commercial and residential districts of Downtown.

Staff should investigate ways to promote sustainability within the guidelines developed. The guidelines should reflect the needs of the different districts.

**Schedule: December 2008**





**5.5 Restrict uses that hamper further City Center development.**

While some uses are needed, they are not necessarily helpful in creating a superior ambiance in the City Center. In particular, social services should be restricted from the City Center. In addition, the City and Agency should actively seek to assist in the relocation of the social services that are currently in the City Center.

**Schedule: December 2008**

**5.6 Increase funding for marketing, cleaning and securing Downtown.**

In order for the smaller Downtown merchants to successfully compete in the greater marketplace, their presence needs to be amplified. Currently, their individual marketing is complemented by the Downtown Business Improvement District. The District provides the funding for the current Downtown marketing. Staff should investigate ways to augment this fund through additional revenues. In addition, attention should be paid to ensure the largest presence possible is purchased with the resources available. Staff should seek joint media buys with other agencies and with the Downtown merchants to lower advertising costs. To assist in the development of Downtown's identity, Downtown merchants should be encouraged to incorporate Downtown's logo and tag lines in their advertisements.

Survey respondents often commented on the need to enhance the cleanliness and security in Downtown. Of particular note was the need to stop aggressive panhandling. Staff should investigate ways in which





funding for cleaning and safety services could be expanded. Merchants will be asked to participate in an overall cleanliness campaign.

**Schedule: June 2009**

**5.7 Encourage the creation of a strong and capable Downtown Business Group.**

Currently Downtown lacks a business group to coordinate events and community needs. A durable organization with a Charter, Board of Directors and mission statement is needed. The organization should be focused on increasing the profitability of the member entities and on increasing the marketability of Downtown. The group would help address safety, cleanliness and other areas necessary for Downtown's success.

**Schedule: December 2009**





## 6.0 Connecting Downtown.

### 6.1 Improve Bicycle/Pedestrian connections.



Merced is well served by a network of pedestrian and bicycling paths. The paths serve as a link between many of the community's parks and serves as an alternate transit way. As Merced continues to grow these paths will continue to multiply. To assist in making Downtown more welcoming to these travelers, additional investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure should be made. These may include bicycle centers, racks, benches, water fountains and other amenities. A connection to this network would enhance Downtown's viability. In addition, an effort should be made to connect the Amtrak station to this network. This action will provide another route in which potential customers would enter Downtown.



Applegate Park serves as a community gathering point and as one of the primary trailheads. Staff should investigate the feasibility and funding availability to connect Downtown to Applegate Park via a landscaped trail. This trail could potentially follow a less heavily trafficked roadway, potentially Canal Street or Martin Luther King Way.



Currently, Downtown does not have a large open space often found in urban areas. The closest present open space is Courthouse Park. Staff should seek ways in which the connection between the park and Downtown could improve. This could include inclusion of Downtown public improvements along N Street to visually and functionally tie the park to Downtown.



As the City continues to grow and the City Center densifies, thought should be made to alternative transportation in the Downtown and especially in the City Center.

**Schedule: June 2012**

**6.2 Encourage improved bus service.**

Downtown currently serves as the transportation hub of the County. “The Bus”, YARTS and Greyhound provide daily service at the Merced Transportation Center. Downtown should seek to enhance this position by expanding service in the City Center. In addition, investments in additional facilities should be made.

**Schedule: June 2010**

**6.3 Expand and enhance connections between the Downtown and Merced College and the University of California.**

Both institutions can provide Downtown with thousands of customers and potential new residents. Staff should make a concerted effort to reach out to these communities and encourage merchants to do the same. Student discount programs such as UC Merced Cat Spots should be encouraged. Recruitment efforts should focus on businesses that would take advantage of this population. Events welcoming the students should be held. Housing that would be appropriate for students should be constructed.

To assist in this goal, infrastructure linking the two campuses to Downtown should be established. This should include enhanced bus service, information, marketing and other amenities.

**Schedule: Ongoing**





## Task Force Process

The City Council set the completion of a new Downtown Strategy as a priority in 2006-07. During its January 16, 2007 meeting, the Redevelopment Agency Board appointed 22 people to serve on the Downtown Strategy Task Force. The committee included members of several City Commissions and Committees as well as members of the general public.

The committee met a total of eight times. During the meetings, the committee studied the history of downtowns throughout America, the history of Merced's Downtown and the current economic and physical state of Downtown Merced. To help broaden their perspective, the committee visited five different downtowns (San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles, Stockton, Lodi and Livermore). The committee discussed Downtown's current state and the opportunities and challenges Downtown will face in the coming years. A significant amount of public input was received through surveys and commentary gathered during the Thursday Night Festival and the Merced County Fair. The committee also received several surveys from the public through the City's website.



## Downtown Strategy Task Force

Nicola Adams	Toni's Courtyard Café manager Representing the Parks and Recreation Commission
Mary Camper	Owner, Whimsy Representing the Redevelopment Advisory Committee
John Hofmann	Retired Urban Planner Representing the Design Review Commission
Mary Ward	District Representative, Assemblymember Galgianni Representing the Planning Commission
Todd Bender	Managing Member, Summerton Homes
Kathleen Crookham	County Supervisor District 2
Michael Fagalde	Attorney, Allen, Proietti & Fagalde, LLP
Doug Fluetsch	Broker, Fleutsch & Busby Insurance
Michael Greenberg	Owner, Cold Stone Creamery
Forrest Hansen	Attorney, Berliner Cohen
Kristine Keennon	District Representative, Senator Denham
Melyssa Laughlin	Executive Director, Convention & Visitors Bureau
Pope Lawrence	Wood Turner
John Lemen	Designer, J. Lemen Kitchen Design
David Love	Broker, Century 21 M&M and Associates
Joe Ramirez	Banker, County Bank
Grey Roberts	C.P.A., Roberts and Allan, CPA's
Craig Scott	Architect, DCA Architects
Joan Sortini	Former Director Merced County Arts Council
Lars Tatom	Artistic Director, Playhouse Merced
John White	Capital Planning Director, UC Merced