

Foreclosures can be a problem for everyone

The “mortgage meltdown” sweeping across the country is having a big impact in Merced.

It’s estimated one in 82 Merced homeowners are having some kind of problem with their mortgage.

There is a financial impact on the homeowner that spreads throughout the community. There also can be issues in the neighborhood created when people abandon their homes.

Lawns and landscaping can die, creating eyesores, windows get broken, graffiti sprouts up and houses may be occupied by vagrants and criminals.

The City Council recently directed the City Attorney’s Office to develop a program that deals with abandoned properties.

The City will be contacting lending institutions to get permission to clean up the properties that have been vacated. The City will seek payment for its costs.

If properties are maintained, it preserves the quality of neighborhoods and protects home values. It also will keep the homes from becoming havens for blight and crime.

Can’t make the payment?

If you are having trouble making your house payment, don’t ignore the problem. Don’t lose your home and wreck your credit rating.

Call your lender and ask for the “Work Out” desk or the “Loss Mitigation Department,” where they may be able to help you with your payments. Be honest with them about your finances.

Don’t ignore the letters from your lender.

Don’t abandon your home. Stay in it while you work with the lender. You can lose eligibility for some assistance programs if you move out of your home.

There are other places to get help:

- ♦The Hope Hotline any time of the day or night to get free help at 1-888-995-HOPE or go to 995hope.org.
- ♦The State of California has information at <http://www.yourhome.ca.gov/> or for help in Spanish go to <http://www.sucasa.ca.gov/>.
- ♦FHASecure, a refinancing option for homeowners who were able to make their payments until the loans were reset, is at <http://www.fha.gov/>.

Call Code Enforcement about blight

There are other situations that can lead to trashed neighborhoods besides property in foreclosures. City code enforcement specialists can help

residents maintain their neighborhoods. For neighborhood blight, call Code Enforcement at 385-6855. If you see criminal activity, please call 911.

Ask the City: *What about that G St. stoplight?*

Odds are if one person is posing a question to the City, it’s on the minds of many people. “Ask the City” is an attempt to publicize some of the questions we receive. People can use the “I Want to ... Send Feedback” link on the City homepage, email us at Newsletter@CityofMerced.org or write to the Newsletter using the address on the next page. We also will answer directly if you include contact information.

The stoplights located at G St. and 26th St. in Merced needs some kind of attention. Currently the wait to cross G St. can take up to 5 minutes and I don’t know why. The other night, I sat for 6

minutes before I finally made a right turn to go up the street a block to cross G St. There was no other traffic on G St. to trigger this delay and it was quite frustrating. Thank you.

(Sent anonymously from our Web site.)

Sorry for the hassle. That traffic signal is one of the oldest in the City, according to our Engineering Department. And, as you know, it is showing its age with those kinds of timing problems.

The good news is the signal has a name, Project No. 108029. Public Works says the replacement work should begin in June and it should be completed by October.



The City’s new parking structure at 18th and M streets is expected to be open this month. Classes are scheduled for the Merced College building next door.

Merced City Council

Mayor Ellie Wooten
 Mayor Pro Tem John Carlisle
 Council members:
 Joe Cortez
 Michele Gabriault-Acosta
 Noah Lor
 Jim Sanders
 Bill Spriggs

Council meetings

The Council usually meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers in the Civic Center. The agenda is posted online at www.CityofMerced.org.

Holiday

City offices will be closed on Monday, Jan. 21, in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. The City Council will meet on Tuesday at 7 p.m. Refuse collection will not be affected by the holiday.

Contacting us

The City of Merced Web site, www.CityofMerced.org, contains City Council information, the Municipal Code and General Plan and other information. To contact the Newsletter, e-mail newsletter@cityofmerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write:
 Merced Civic Center
 678 W. 18th St.
 Merced CA 95340

The Civic Center is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., except holidays.

Call us

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
City Clerk	385-6866
Airport	385-6873
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
After hours	385-6905
Recreation/Parks	385-6855

**IN AN EMERGENCY
 DIAL 911**

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

City sewer, water rates go up in January

The bills for City of Merced water and sewer customers will increase in January. Residential sewer rates are \$34.77 a month as of Jan. 1 and flat residential water rates start at \$27.66.

The City Council approved the rate schedule in December 2006 to pay for the rising costs of 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 laws requiring the City to provide tertiary treatment of the wastewater.

The complete list of water and sewer rates is available on the City's web site at www.CityofMerced.org. on the Home Page, click on Municipal Code and go to Title 15: Public Service.



A postcard of the Merced Theatre from 1931.

Fundraising goal to restore Theatre

The Merced Theatre Foundation has a campaign to raise \$4 million to restore the historic theater. The funds will be used to augment the \$1.9 million grant the City received from the California Cultural and Historic Endowment.

The finished product will be a 1,100 seat auditorium that will be the largest performance venue in the City, suitable for everything from live music to dance programs to community events and, of course, movies.

The Foundation's Web site, www.mercedtheatre.org, contains information on the theater, restoration details and ways to get involved in the project.

Tax-deductible donations can be made payable to the Merced Theatre Foundation, P.O. Box 716, Merced, CA, 95341. Or call the Theatre for more information at (209) 722-3266.

Gang Awareness workshops set

The Gang Awareness Workshop programs resume this month. The programs are sponsored by the Merced Police Department and the Merced Community Violence Prevention & Intervention Task Force — Merced ComVIP.

The program is designed to give parents and the public

information on gangs, the threat they pose to the community and how to steer children away from gangs. Photos of gang apparel, tattoos, colors and graffiti will be shown to help parents recognize the signs of gang activity.

Workshops are scheduled for 7 p.m. except at Fremont.

- Jan. 9 Ada Givens Elementary School, 2900 Green St.
- Jan. 14 Cruickshank Middle School, 601 Cormorant Dr.
- Jan. 16 Gracey Elementary School, 945 West Ave.
- Jan. 17 Fremont Charter 1120 W. 22nd St. 6:30-7:30 p.m.
- Jan. 23 Hoover Middle School, 800 E. 26th St.
- Jan. 30 John Muir Elementary School, 300 W. 26th St.
- Feb. 6 Peterson Elementary School, 848 E. Donna Dr.
- Feb. 13 Reyes Elementary School, 123 S. N St.



A 19-seat Beechcraft 1900D flown by Great Lakes.

Great Lakes landing in Merced

Great Lakes Airlines plans to begin flying into the Merced Airport by the end of this month.

Based in Cheyenne, Wyo., Great Lakes will offer non-stop flights to McCarran Las Vegas International Airport. The airline code-shares with United and Frontier, which allows easier connections to other flights.

Reservations can be made by calling 1-800-554-5111 or going to www.greatlakesav.com.