

State of the City 2008: Not bad, but a lot depends on the state

How the state solves its massive \$14 billion budget deficit will help decide how 2008 turns out for the City.

The early cuts proposed by the governor spared cities from any direct impact. But, the state budget is a long and convoluted process, with many changes before it is adopted this summer.

We know that the housing market in Merced is bad, just like the rest of the country. Permits to build homes dropped from 950 in 2006 to 181 in 2007. This year isn't looking much better.

The value of commercial building permits decreased from \$21.3 million in 2006 to \$9.3 million in 2007.

People still are planning their projects for the future. The Planning Department is processing 12 different annexation requests.

With UC Merced expanding by 600-800 students a year, the pressure on the community to expand remains. The City is working on a draft General Plan

Update, designating which land will be used for what purposes. Public hearings are being held on the document at several stages.

Environmental Impact Reports on the Gateway Regional Shopping Center are in progress, and a draft EIR on the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center is due shortly.

Crime is decreasing in the City. The overall drop is small, 0.4 percent, but that doesn't take into account the nearly two dozen new police officers that are in various states of training. By the end of this year, they should all be finished with training and making a bigger impact

on the crime rate.

Every resident knows that fuel prices went through the roof in 2007, and don't show any signs of returning to earth.

It takes more than \$6,800 to fuel a police patrol car each year, and that has affected our budgets. Those higher fuel costs show up in all our different services, from trash collection to operating our wastewater treatment plant. We are still working to upgrade the treatment plant, to meet tougher government standards.

We did a number of road repair projects in 2007 and we've

got more scheduled for this year. In the summer we will be doing an overlay and reconstruction project on Olive Avenue from Highway 59 to G Street. After that, we plan to do the same on Yosemite Avenue from R Street to McKee Road.

Measure C funds, the half-cent sales tax, is paying for many of the new police officers, some firefighters and some roadwork.

This year we expect to have a groundbreaking on the Merced Center Hotel and we will open the parking facility.

We continue to purchase property for extending Parsons Avenue and we are designing a G St. railroad under crossing.

Bottom line, as we peer into the future, 2008 looks like it should be a pretty good year in Merced. But we're keeping an eye on Sacramento.

A PowerPoint presentation on the State of the City is on our Web site at www.CityofMerced.org.



Ask the City: Stop signs aren't the answer to college's traffic

Ask the City is a chance to address questions raised by community members. People can reach us by using 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.

Instead of the flow of traffic being impeded on Yosemite Ave. with a 3-way stop at Stadium Drive in front of Merced College,

why doesn't the City assist Merced College in creating an exit route from the college onto G Street. I'm guesstimating 90 percent or more of the traffic exiting the college is going to G Street or M Street...

Make Stadium and Blue Devil Lane one-way entrances coming from the west, and one-way exits going west (both would be right turn only.)

There are signals set at Cor-morant and G and Lehigh and M

for traffic exiting the college.

J & A, Merced

After two pedestrian fatalities near the intersection there was a strong call for the signals.

As you also noted, traffic does back up at the stop signs during peak hours. The stop signs at Yosemite and Stadium are temporary measures to get drivers used to stopping at the intersection and improve safety. We have a CalTrans grant to install a

signal at the intersection and it's expected to be finished this Fall.

The signal will be synchronized with the lights at G and M streets to smooth the traffic flow.

Our engineers believe traffic flow would be improved with a curbed center median on that block of Yosemite with no left turns allowed from feeder streets.

We worked together with the college on the traffic signal, and we are willing to work with them on other traffic issues.

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.

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

Free movie makes for family fun

The City of Merced Parks and Community Services Department's free Family Movie Night series will show "The Ant Bully" on March 21 and "Surf's Up" on April 18.

The animated films will begin at 7 p.m. at the McCombs Youth Center, 615 W. 15th St. The movie has festival seating, which means bring a blanket or lawn chair to sit on.

Gear up for Spring Cleanup

Time to empty out the garage and spruce up the yard because the annual Spring Cleanup is coming the weekends of April 12-13 and April 19-20.

Residents will receive a flier in the mail with the four locations and extensive details of the Cleanup.

TVs, computer monitors and other electronics are accepted, but not batteries.

Brush and natural wood will be accepted, but no treated lumber such as pres-



sure-treated wood or RR ties.

There are nominal fees for appliances.

Up to nine passenger/light truck tires accepted.

Gang Awareness workshops set

Gang Awareness Workshops give parents and the public information on gangs, the threat gangs pose and how to steer children away from them. Photos of gang apparel, tattoos, colors and graffiti are shown to help parents recognize the signs of gang activity.

The free programs are open to anyone. They are sponsored by the Merced Police Department and the regional Merced Community Violence Prevention & Intervention Task Force — Merced ComVIP.

Workshops are at 7 p.m., except Stowell at 3 p.m.

March 12	Tenaya Middle School, 760 W. 8 th St.
March 13	Stowell School, 251 E. 11 th St. 3-4 p.m.
March 19	Charles Wright, School 900 E. 20 th St.
March 26	Pioneer School, 2950 Gerard Ave.
April 2	Weaver School, 3076 E. Childs Ave.
April 9	Merced High, 205 W. Olive Ave.
April 16	Golden Valley HS, 2121 E. Childs Ave.
April 23	Valley Community School, 1850 Wardrobe

Make some calls before you lose your home

If you are having trouble making your house payment: Call your lender to see if they can adjust payments.

Don't abandon your home. You can lose eligibility for some assistance programs.

Other places to get help: The Hope Hotline any time of the day or night for 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

Merced Theatre fundraising drive

Fundraising efforts are underway to restore the historic Merced Theatre. The City has received a \$1.9 million grant, but full restoration is expected to cost \$6 million.

The end result will give Merced a 1,100 seat venue for concerts, stage performances, community events, and, of course, movies.

To donate, call the Merced Theatre Foundation at 722-3266 or go to www.mercedtheatre.org.

Visitor's Center open 7 days a week

The Merced Visitor's Center/California Welcome Center offers tourism-related services, information and goods from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week.

The center is located at 710 W. 16th St. in Downtown Merced. For information, call the Center at 724-8104.

Free tax help for seniors available

Free tax preparation assistance is available at the Merced Senior Center.

Seniors can get help from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays until April 15.

Returns will be filed electronically. Help is available for Spanish speakers. Homebound seniors can call 385-8803 for aid. The center is located at 755 W. 15th St. between M and O streets.

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/>