



## **City of Merced Annexation Questions & Answers**

### **What does it mean to Annex to the City of Merced?**

Annexation is a term used when an area of land under County of Merced jurisdiction is added to a City such as the City of Merced. The process of annexation typically involves at least three public hearings and all property owners are notified as to the annexation process and the time, date and place of the public hearings.

### **What are the costs of annexation to the City and how long does it take?**

If the property owner does not have plans for development and the City requests that their property be included as part of a formal application already submitted, then the fees are usually waived.

Otherwise, annexation fees vary depending on the size of the annexation. Typically, the City of Merced charges a fee for processing a City application and this fee can vary depending on what is included in the application (i.e. development permits for subdivision, pre-zoning, etc); County LAFCO Fees for annexation and related environmental review is approximately \$3,500. State Board of Equalization filing fees can range between \$300 and \$3,500 depending on the amount of land to be annexed. The total process can take more than one year to complete provided that environmental clearances can be obtained with a "Negative Declaration."

### **Will my taxes increase?**

No change will occur. All properties are taxed at the same rates whether annexed to the City or not (approximately one percent of assessed value). That is, City and County property owners pay the same tax rates. Thus, property tax assessments will not be affected by annexation. However, if the property is resold, or if new improvements to the property are constructed, the assessed value of the property will most likely increase. This increase, however, has nothing to do with your property being in the City or the County.

### **If I have a private septic system, will I be required to connect to City sewer?**

Not under most circumstances. Ordinance No. 2249, adopted in 2006 by the City of Merced waives connection requirements except under limited circumstances, and states:

*"The owner or occupant of lands, building or premises having private sewage disposal systems, hereafter annexed to the City may continue the use of such system within the City, provided that the same is not enlarged, modified, or expanded and is approved by the Chief Building Official; However, in no event shall such system be used or be available for use*

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*upon failure as determined by the appropriate health official or regulatory authority, and the land, building, or premise shall thereafter be connected to the City's municipal sewer disposal system at the owner's sole cost and expense."*

Undeveloped parcels need not hook up to sewer services until development begins unless the property owners wish to have the services and are willing to pay for them.

All homes in the annexed area would be allowed to hook up to City sewers if available at the owner's sole cost and expense. This is now prohibited in County areas except for documented health problems for a failing septic tank or water well. (There may be homes in some proposed annexation areas that already have sewer service via previous agreements with the City). Depending upon your income level, low-interest loans to cover the costs of sewer hook-up may be available to you through the City's Housing Department.

### **What is the Cost of City Sewer Service?**

There are a variety of fees related to connecting to the City of Merced sewer system. These include: "*Sewer Facility Charges*," "*Plant Component*," and "*North Merced Sewer District Fee*." An estimate of total fees is \$6,119 per house in North Merced and approximately \$5,958 in all other areas (YR 2016 Estimate). Additional fees may apply if a property is located in North Merced, but outside the North Merced Sewer Assessment District.

#### Other Costs:

*Right-of-Way Encroachment and Building Permit:* Cost varies depending upon amount of work.

*Construction Costs:* The property owner must hire a licensed plumber to install the sewer lateral in the public right of way. The owner does have the option of installing the sewer lateral on his/her property.

NOTE: It might be advantageous for a special sewer district to be set up to spread these costs over a longer period of time. The City could do this if there were sufficient citizen requests.

*Monthly Service Fees:* After hook up, there is a monthly fee; current fee is \$40.70 (YR 2017) per month for a single-family residence.

### **What If I have a private water well?**

All homes in an annexed area would be allowed to hook up to the City water service (in some cases, water service has already been extended into an area by the former water company which was purchased by the City in the early 1970s). Water rates are metered. The base rate for a 1" connection is \$35.03 which includes 30 hundred cubic feet (HCF) of water per month (YR 2017). An additional charge of \$0.87 per HCF is applied if use exceeds 30 HCF per month. The estimated cost to hook-up to the City water service is \$5,062 for a 1-inch service (YR 2016). This estimate does not include the cost of the work to be done by the City to bring the water line to the property. A deposit of \$5,000 is collected to cover the cost of this work.

**My property is presently served by MID. Will I continue to be able to get water from MID after my property is annexed to the City?**

Yes, MID will continue to provide you with water and you will remain within the MID service district.

**Will my garbage collection service change?**

Pickup of garbage would be done eventually by the City. Rates for this service are comparatively low and would be approximately \$34.61 per month (YR 2017) for residential “curbside” service (three cans). City service would not begin until the private hauler franchise expires, but no later than five years from annexation. There is no garbage charge for undeveloped parcels until the service is being used.

**What is the City’s Mistletoe Abatement program?**

The City’s Mistletoe Program affects City Street Trees only. There is no requirement to remove mistletoe on private property upon annexation, nor will the City initiate or contract with the property owner to remove mistletoe from a non-City Street Tree. If the property owner determines that mistletoe is a problem, then they would have to hire a private contractor to eliminate it. The City does not provide this service unless it is for a City Street Tree.

**What about curbs, gutters, sidewalks, street trees or streetlights?**

There is no requirement that curbs, gutters, sidewalks, street trees or streetlights be installed as part of the annexation. The City may require a developer to make off-site improvements, which may include the frontage of your property. If substantial remodeling or building was to take place after annexation on an individual lot basis, then construction of curbs, gutters, sidewalks, street trees and street lights would be required along the frontage of property. If desired by a neighborhood, a special district could be established to install these items at the cost of the property owners. The City may also establish a special district to install public improvement for larger public improvements such as streets, sidewalks, etc.

**City Zoning Regulations compared to County Zoning Regulations.**

Perhaps the most significant change to the circumstances of your property will be the application of the City’s zoning and development laws. Zoning for an annexed area would be established at the time of annexation, consistent with the City’s General Plan for the area. Under City development standards and most zoning districts, with the availability of City sewer and water, your property may qualify to be used and developed more intensely than would normally be possible under County regulations. For example, a site designated for low-density residential uses in the City’s General Plan, could be zoned R-1-6 or R-1-5 when it was annexed allowing construction of single-family homes on 5,000 or 6,000 square foot residential lots.

Typically, the potential uses and the type of development that can be considered under County standards is much more restrictive than under City zoning, as a result of the availability of City services. However, if a property is annexed with Urban Transition (U-T) zoning, then uses that were legally established in the County may continue and not be expanded in the City without a rezone.

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While City codes tend to be more restrictive with respect to some types of appearance codes, keeping of animals and property maintenance regulation, the City has routinely amended its ordinance to permit the keeping of agricultural animals. If you have an interest in annexation and a desire to maintain and keep agricultural related animals, then please inform the City Planner so that he/she may prepare the necessary ordinances.

### **If my property is used for farming now, will I be permitted to continue to farm?**

Yes. First of all, all uses and activities that are presently conducted on the property will become “legal non-conforming uses” if they do not comply with the City’s zoning regulations. While farming is not a normal use in the City code, existing farming operation will be permitted to continue in their present form. That does not mean that if your farm is presently a row-crop operation, you would be allowed to establish a dairy or poultry operation; nor would your existing poultry or dairy operation be permitted to expand beyond its present use boundaries in a manner that is inconsistent with the City’s zoning standards. Additionally, the City has adopted a code provision (Title 6, Section 6.04.081-Exception to Livestock and Poultry Regulations) which, if applied to a specific area (zone) permits the continuation of existing livestock and poultry keeping that would otherwise be limited under most current City zoning regulations. For those properties that do not have legal non-conforming use status, a maximum of two chickens are permitted on a City residential lot Merced Municipal Code 6.04.080-I).

### **Fire Protection**

Fire protection service would be provided by the City Fire Department. The City has an excellent fire protection rating and fire insurance rates are generally lower in the City than under County jurisdiction. If there are an insufficient number of fire hydrants in a newly annexed area, the City would likely require installation of fire hydrants, probably by special assessment.

### **Police Protection**

Police protection service would be provided by the City Police Department. The department has a highly trained staff of police officers. Response time to any call for emergencies is usually five to eight minutes.

### **Can we park our vehicle in front of our home on the street?**

Operative vehicles can be parked on the street; Unlicensed or inoperable vehicles may be subject to removal immediately depending on the circumstances. Licensed/operational and legally parked vehicles should not be parked on the street for more than 72 hours without being driven; this is to prevent "storage" of vehicles (including motor-homes) on public streets. There is no restriction against parking on the street at night. The spot in front of a residence is NOT reserved for that residence (courtesy would say otherwise, but it isn't a law). Other residents in the area may park on the street in front of other properties.

### **Election**

After annexation, residents of the area would become citizens of the City and be entitled to vote in City elections, and be eligible to hold elective and appointive positions.

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**Other**

Property owners are encouraged to visit or call the Merced City Planning and Development Services Department at 678 W. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Merced, CA 95340, (209) 385-6858 to discuss these or other questions, future plans, or options resulting from annexation. **The costs noted above are subject to change.**