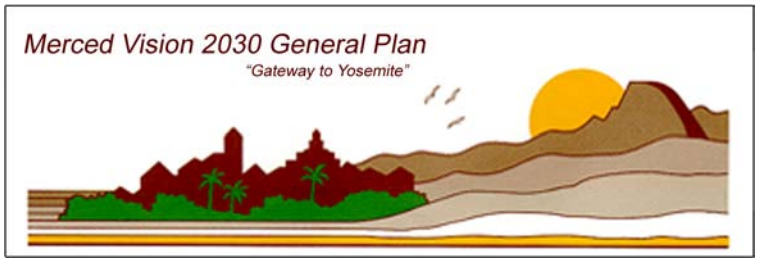
Chapter 6--Urban Design



Chapter 6
Urban Design

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 Background & Scope

Urban design is not merely a set of urban aesthetic guidelines but rather encompasses land use and design elements which enhance the livability of the community. Urban design is a grouping of concepts and guidelines which are used to describe the image or character of the City's environment.

Urban design concepts tend to fall into two distinct categories, relating to:

- The location of different land uses throughout the City and their relationship to one another. (For example, Policies UD-1.1 to UD-1.5 define relationships between commercial, residential, and public land uses and the planned circulation system which links them with one another.)
- The visual character and appearance of individual buildings, sites, and districts. (Policy UD-2.2 and the "Merced Urban Design Guidelines" pages throughout this chapter provide aesthetic guidelines for development.)

In attempting to influence the type, location, and character of both private and public development, urban design policies provide the tools to help create a desirable relationship between new and existing development.

Within the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, the urban design focus for new growth areas is primarily defined by the Urban Village concept (mixed use, pedestrian and transit-friendly neighborhoods). At a city-wide scale, this urban design concept defines the relationship between various parts of the City, linked together by open space and transportation corridors.

At the neighborhood scale, the Urban Village concept results in development of commercial centers surrounded by residential areas, open space, and public facilities. At the project scale, this concept is intended to provide ideas which can be applied to solve a number of design problems and promote long-term, livable community development.

The goal is to build an environmentally and economically "sustainable" city. A "sustainable city" is a city designed, constructed, and operated to efficiently use land and other natural resources, minimize waste, and manage and conserve resources for the use of present and future generations.

A "sustainable" community is one where:

1) Housing, schools, shopping areas, and other things which meet most of the daily needs of residents are located within walking distance of one another;
2) Higher population densities are located around transit stops to provide the critical mass of people and activities needed to make transit economically viable;
3) Housing provides places to live for a variety of people within a single neighborhood; and,
4) Mixed use and transit friendly commercial and employment centers are promoted.

Such a community makes efficient use of land and promotes alternative modes of transportation, thus helping to preserve both our air quality and our quality of life. These same characteristics can also be used to describe many of Merced's older neighborhoods.

6.1.2 Relationship to State Law

Urban design is of critical importance to the decisions that are made regarding general growth and development of a city. Although not a "required element" under state planning law, "good" urban design is the overall purpose of the planning process.

6.1.3 Relationship to Other General Plan Chapters

Within the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, the Urban Design Chapter focuses on the Urban Village concept. Village development will be guided by the principles in this Urban Design Chapter. Other chapters of the General Plan, especially the Land Use Chapter, reflect the community planning principles described in the Urban Design Chapter. Within all of the General Plan chapters, the idea of a "sustainable city" and the design principles for pedestrian- and transit-friendly development have been given specific application in the form of goals, policies and actions relating to the chapter subject area. Overall community appearance has also been addressed, primarily in Policy UD-2.2.

6.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The *Urban Village* and other land use and design concepts have been implemented in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* through the following guiding principles:

- ***Conserve natural resource areas that give form and character to the community.*** The policies contained in the Open Space, Conservation & Recreation Chapter, as well as others, provide for strengthening the visual and physical connection between the City and its natural elements. The Urban Expansion Chapter guides future City growth away from important resource areas to the extent feasible.

- ***Promote an urban form that integrates housing, shops, work places, schools, parks and civic facilities.*** The Urban Village development approach, as set forth in the Land Use Chapter and Land Use Diagram, is the primary means of implementing this principle. Within this land use pattern, development is to be guided by the principles contained in this Urban Design Chapter. Land use planning needs to address long-term as well as short-term needs for a variety of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses.

- ***Reinforce the elements of the community which give Merced its unique identity.*** Through purposeful acts of community building at the City's inception, Merced developed into an attractive community. The Village development concept expands on these successful early planning efforts to assure that future growth and development retains Merced's unique character.

- ***Expand the City's non-vehicular transportation network.*** Through provisions contained in the Transportation and Circulation Chapter and supporting policies in other chapters of this Plan, the City's extensive system of bike and pedestrian paths will expand to serve new growth and development.

- ***Promote convenient pedestrian and vehicular access to transit, commercial, recreation and residential places.*** The success of the City's urban design approach relies on private development which provides convenient vehicular access but is also pedestrian-friendly. This Urban Design Chapter proposes various design approaches which will improve access and encourage walking and bicycling as viable transportation options.

- ***Reinforce the Downtown as a focus point in the City.*** Downtown Merced plays an important role in the social and economic well being of the community. As the seat of government for Merced County, Downtown supports a regional government center. Additionally, the Downtown area is the direct access point to regional highway and railway networks. Policies contained in the various chapters of this plan strengthen the role and function of Merced's Downtown.

- ***Conserve the special qualities of existing neighborhoods and districts.*** The distinctive character of Merced's older residential neighborhoods is one of the most memorable features of the community. The Land Use Chapter of this plan provides policies for maintaining these qualities. The policies and design proposals of this Urban Design Chapter provide a basis for developing these qualities in new and expanding neighborhoods.

- ***Focus residential, commercial and employment center development to encourage public transit use.*** Successful urban centers of the future will be designed to accommodate local and regional public transportation systems. This public transit focus is a central theme of the City's urban design concept. Urban design policies which facilitate transit friendly development as well as convenient vehicular access are contained in the Land Use, Transportation, and Urban Design Chapters of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan.*

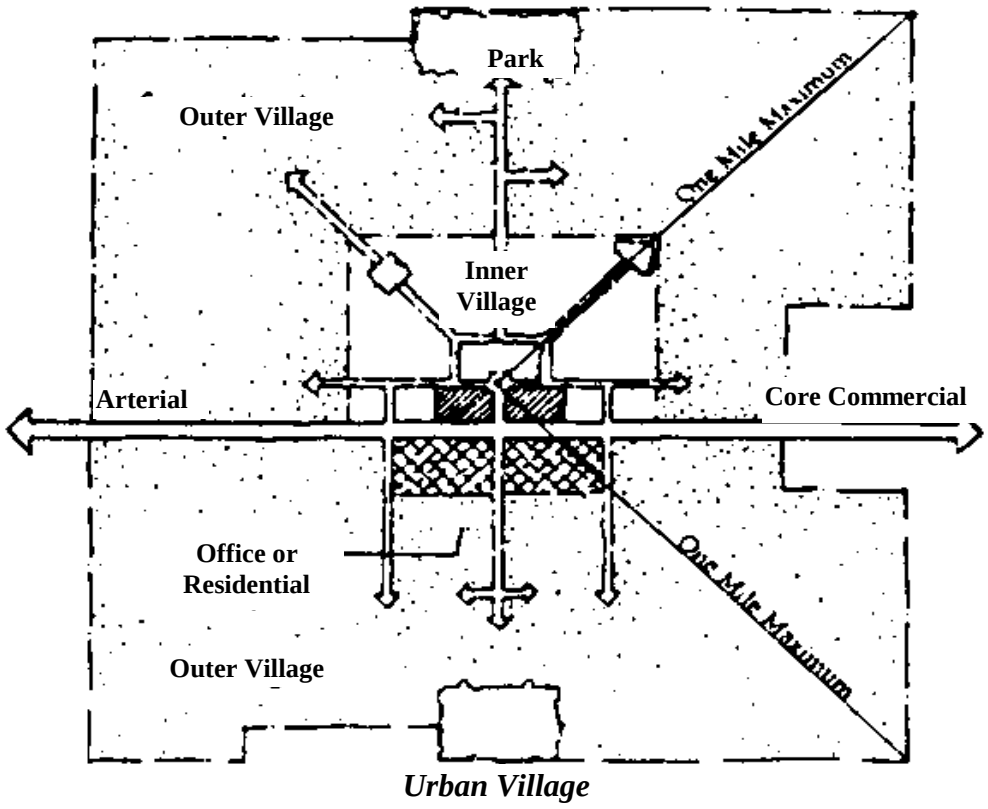
- ***Maximize the use of City streets as public spaces.*** The streets of Merced comprise the major open spaces of the City and are among its liveliest public spaces. Design considerations should focus on providing convenient automobile access to residential, commercial, employment, and public areas while accommodating other forms of transportation as well. Policies contained in the Transportation and Circulation Chapter, along with the design concepts developed in the Urban Design Chapter, are aimed at balancing the need for auto movement and parking with the need for the street system to accommodate other vital community activities.

- ***Assure that development takes place in a balanced manner in order to promote the economic vitality of evolving areas.*** The development of Urban Villages will be a cooperative effort between the City, landowners, and the development community. Villages will likely be developed over a number of years and, thus, will need close coordination between these groups to assure that the desired mixture of land uses is achieved and development costs remain low. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the Villages will be available for traditional single-family development but with a transit and pedestrian focus.

6.3 URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Urban Design Chapter, unlike other chapters of this Plan, also contains design guidelines that are not in the form of goals, policies or actions. These guidelines, contained in the "Urban Design Guidelines" sections of this Chapter, are provided as suggestions for architects and designers and are not mandatory requirements.

Figure 6.1



Urban Village

6.4 MERCED'S URBAN VILLAGES (TRANSIT READY DEVELOPMENT)

In 1990, *Merced 2030-How Should We Grow?* analyzed the various growth and expansion options available to the City. As a result of this study, it was determined that Merced's growth pattern for new growth areas should be based on mixed use, pedestrian- and transit-friendly design principles, simply known as the "Urban Village Concept."

As a follow-up to this planning process, the City commissioned a more refined urban design study for an 8,000-acre portion of the "Northern City" which resulted in the publication of the *North Merced Conceptual Land Use Plan* and *Merced Villages Design Guidelines* in late 1991. This publication established the basic "urban design" policy direction that was used in the preparation of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* in 1997. This *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* continues to utilize the same Urban Village design principles.

Application of "Urban Village" design principles will be encouraged in all new growth areas of the City, including North Merced, Southwest Merced, and South Merced.

The fundamental building block for the Land Use Plan in new growth areas is the *Urban Village*, a compact, mixed-use district that encourage pedestrian and transit travel, which is also referred to "Transit Ready Development" instead of "Transit-Oriented Development." This is because Transit-Oriented Development generally refers to light rail or more extensive public transit systems while "Transit Ready Development" is more descriptive of a City such as Merced where the transit options haven't yet been as fully developed. By utilizing the Urban Village Concept, the City will be designed to accommodate these kinds of transit options in the future, however.

The following sections describe the basic components of a "village."

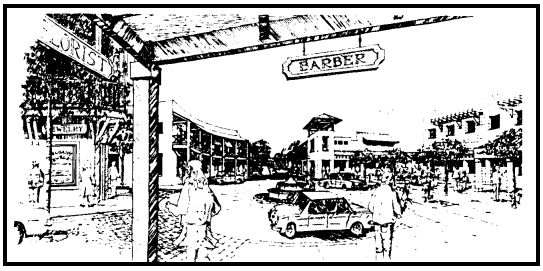
6.4.1 Inner Villages

The *Inner Village* is a mixed-use community within an average 1/4 mile walking distance of a transit stop and *Core Commercial* area. All Inner-Villages include a mixture of parks, shops, medium-density residences, and civic uses. Inner Villages combine these uses within a comfortable walking distance, making it convenient for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle or foot as well as by car.

A Merced example of an "Inner Village" would be the area surrounding the College Green Shopping Center at Olive and G. Higher-density apartments surround the commercial center and are directly connected to the center through a pedestrian walkway and College Green Drive.

6.4.2 Core Commercial Areas

Each village must have a mixed-use *Core Commercial* area located immediately adjacent to the medium-density neighborhoods (*Village Core Residential areas*--see below*).* At a minimum, the Core area should provide convenience retail and civic sites. Larger cores may also include major supermarkets, professional offices, day care, restaurants, service commercial, entertainment uses, comparison retail and other retail stores. A transit stop and village green should be located in the Inner Village near the commercial and residential areas.



6.4.3 Village Core Residential Areas

"Village Core Residential" is the land use category applied to the residential areas that are within a convenient walking distance (about 1/4 mile) from the Core Commercial area and transit stop. (On the Land Use Diagram, this category is simply labeled "Village Residential.") These areas are built at densities high enough to support the commercial area and transit use. Together, the *Core Commercial* and *Village Core Residential* areas make up the *Inner Village.* An average minimum gross density of 10 dwelling units per acre (du/ac) will allow a mix of small lot single-family, townhouses and apartments in Village Core Residential areas.

All Village Core Residential areas should be pedestrian in scale, ranging from slightly under to slightly over one-quarter mile in radius and should provide direct and easy access to Core Commercial areas and transit stops. Village Core Residential areas may contain a variety of housing types and ownerships, ranging from small lot single-

family homes to apartment buildings, as long as the overall average gross density of the Inner Village is at least 10 du/ac. While housing diversity is desirable, this density requirement could be achieved using only a single-family product--small lots with ancillary units.

6.4.4 Outer Village Areas

Less compact areas surrounding the Inner Villages contain lower density housing, offices, schools, and open space. These areas are known as the *Outer Village.* The Outer Villages are tied to the Inner Villages by a local network of connector streets so that perimeter arterials and thoroughfares are not relied upon for local travel, thereby reducing demand on these roads and providing safe paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. This circulation system is a key component of Village developments.

The Outer Village Area is intended to provide lower-density uses that are not appropriate in the Inner Village because they are not sufficiently compact and are more reliant on the automobile. Outer Village areas are designated for single-family and office uses (only along arterials across from Core Commercial areas) that will help support the Core Commercial businesses and transit service. "Low Density Residential," which allows single-family residences (see Chapter 3), is the land use category that will be applied to most of the Outer Village areas.

These Outer Village areas make up the majority of the land available in the Village areas. (Of each one- square-mile Village, approximately two-thirds of that area will be the Outer Village.) These areas will be much like traditional single-family neighborhoods, except they will have more of a pedestrian- and transit-friendly atmosphere.

Public schools and parks that provide services to both the Outer Village and Inner Village should be located in the Outer Village near the boundary of the Inner Village.

6.4.5 Open Space, Parks & Plazas

The location of parks, plazas and trails should be coordinated to distribute a variety of recreation opportunities throughout the growth area. Growth areas should contain a network of open space including community parks, neighborhood parks, village parks, village greens, plazas and an inter-connected 'greenway' trail system. (Refer to Section 7.2.2 for more details.)

6.5 URBAN DESIGN GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

Goal Area UD-1: Transit Ready Development or Urban Villages

GOALS

- **An Integrated Urban Form**
- **Transit-Ready Community Design**
- **Pedestrian- and Bicycle-Compatible Neighborhoods**

POLICIES

UD-1.1 Apply Transit-Ready Development or Urban Village design principles to new development in the City's new growth areas.

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 Village commercial 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 Transit-Ready Development or Urban Village principles.

Policy UD-1.1
Apply Transit-Ready Development or Urban Village Design Principles to New Development in the City's New Growth Areas.

The fundamental building block of the Plan is the Village, a compact, mixed-use district that will accommodate projected growth, maintain Merced's present quality of life and help ensure its continued economic vitality. Villages achieve these goals by encouraging pedestrian and transit travel, and by minimizing single-use, low density developments that generate traffic congestion, air pollution, a scarcity of affordable housing, monotonous landscapes and poor utilization of environmental and land resources. The City of Merced has established the "Urban Village" model (also known as "Transit Ready Development") as the basic design concept governing urban form in new growth areas. Its principles should be applied as much as feasible in new growth areas throughout the Merced urban area.

Implementing Actions:

1.1.a The focus of new development will be the "Urban Village," which are mixed-use, pedestrian- and transit-friendly communities within a one-square mile area.

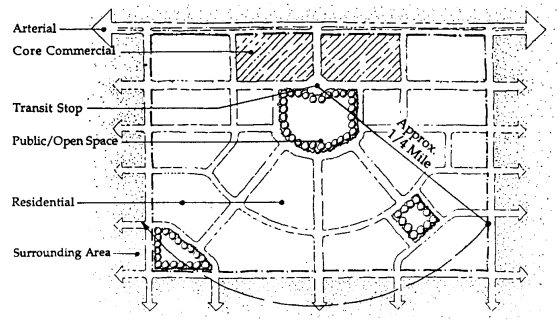


Figure 6.2
"Inner Village"

Villages should include a mixture of parks, shops, a variety of housing types, and civic uses. Villages combine these uses within a convenient distance, making it easier for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle or foot as well as by car. Village sites should be located on or near planned transit segments and provide a physical environment that encourages pedestrian and transit travel.

1.1.b Each village shall have a mixed-use "Core Commercial" area located immediately adjacent to Village Core Residential neighborhoods.

At a minimum, plans for designated Core areas should provide convenience retail and civic sites. Larger cores may also include major supermarkets, professional offices, day care, restaurants, service commercial, comparison retail and other retail stores located adjacent to the transit stop. Optional upper floor office and residential uses in the Core Commercial area increases the mixed-use, round-the-clock nature of the Core area. A transit stop and village green should be located between commercial uses and Village Core Residential areas.

Three kinds of Core Commercial areas may occur:

a) Convenience Centers — providing a convenience "mini-market" with some ancillary retail (typically 3-10 acres);

b) Neighborhood Centers — providing a supermarket with an additional anchor store, major ancillary retail and professional offices (typically 10-20 acres); or,

c) Community Center — providing a supermarket and drugstore, ancillary retail, professional offices and additional anchors such as junior department stores and health clubs (ranging from 20-60 acres).

1.1.c "Village Core Residential Areas" (part of the "Inner Villages") shall include residences that are within a convenient walking distance from Core Commercial areas and transit stops, and are built at densities high enough to help support them.

Village designs should incorporate an average minimum gross density of 10 dwelling units per acre (du/ac) which will allow a mix of small lot single-family, townhomes and apartments in Village Core Residential areas. All Village Core Residential areas should be pedestrian in scale, ranging from slightly under to slightly over one-quarter mile in radius and should provide direct and easy access to Core Commercial areas and transit stops.

Village Core Residential areas may contain a variety of housing types and ownership options, ranging from small lot single-family homes to apartment buildings, as long as the overall average gross density of the Village is at least 10 du/ac. (Gross densities calculations should include the area in lots as well as in streets and alleys immediately in front and behind the lots). While housing diversity is desirable, this density requirement could be achieved using only a single-family product — small lots with carriage (ancillary) units. Small village parks should be provided as an urban amenity within these denser Village Core Residential areas.

1.1.d Each Village will have an "Outer Village" adjacent to it which includes lands no further than one mile from the Core Commercial area.

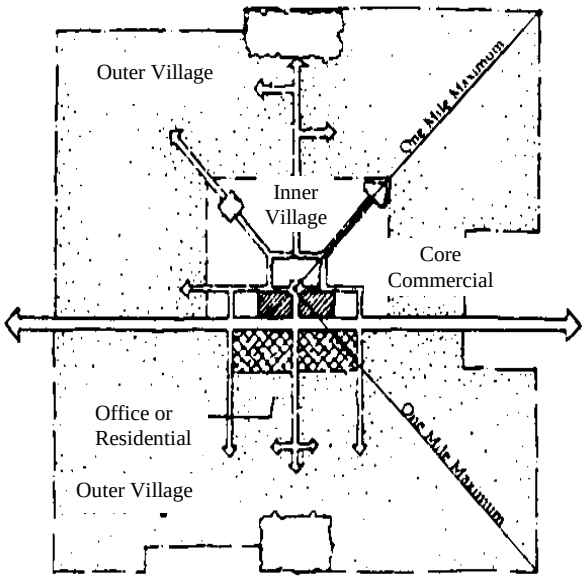


Figure 6.3
Urban Village

Site plans for the "Outer Village" street network must provide multiple direct street and bicycle connections to the center without use of an arterial street. Outer Villages may have lower density housing, public schools, community parks, limited areas of office uses, and park-and-ride lots.

The Outer Village is intended to provide uses that are not appropriate in the Inner Villages, because they are not sufficiently compact and are more reliant on the automobile. Public schools and parks that provide services to both the Inner and Outer Village should be located in Outer Villages near the boundary of the Inner Village.

Commercial uses that are very similar in nature and market appeal to those located in the Village's Core Commercial area are generally not allowed in Outer Villages because they diminish the viability of the Village's retail center, although professional office uses may be located on the opposite side of the arterial across from the Village Core Commercial Area.

1.1.e The location of parks, plazas, and trails should be coordinated to distribute a variety of recreation opportunities throughout the area.

The Urban Village area should contain a network of open space including community parks, neighborhood parks, village parks, village greens, plazas and an interconnected "greenway" trail system. Bicycle and pedestrian trails should be created along major creeks, high-voltage power lines, transitways, and along the abandoned Yosemite Valley Railroad (YVRR) railroad bed in North Merced to provide easy access to parks and schools that should be located along them.

1.1.f Uses which rely extensively upon autos or trucks are encouraged to locate in Business Park or other commercial areas along major transportation corridors.

An important concept of Urban Village development is to create areas which are less dependent upon auto and truck transportation than other areas of the City. Many uses typically allowed in commercial areas rely predominantly upon auto travel to generate business patrons. These uses, such as auto dealers and repair shops, mini-storage facilities, travel commercial complexes, and motels, should not be permitted in Villages in most cases. These uses should be accommodated in nearby areas where the street and highway system can support the traffic loads that they generate. For example, such uses are appropriate in business park areas adjacent to Highway 59 in North Merced.

Similarly, light industrial uses should not generally be permitted in Villages except that business park/research & development type uses may be appropriate in those Villages in the northeastern portion of the City near UC Merced. Industrial uses are appropriate, however, where existing industrial activities occur and along major transportation corridors.

1.1.g The City will work with individual property owners within the Village areas to assure that development occurs in a balanced manner to assure economic viability of individual projects.

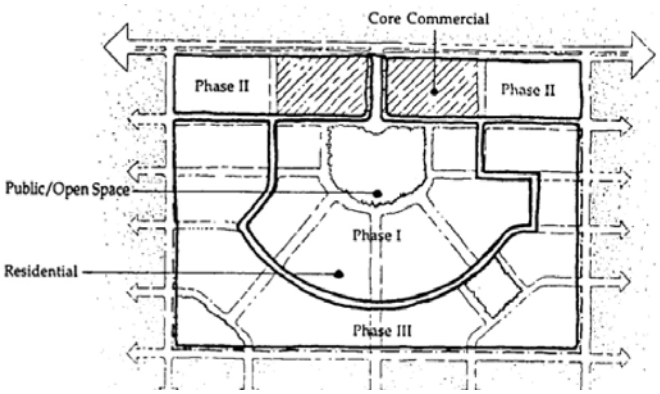


Figure 6.4
Conceptual Phasing of a Village

The growth area must be developed in a balanced phasing pattern. Schools and parks must be dedicated concurrent with commercial and residential uses. Furthermore, areas must be set aside for land uses that will be needed in later phases, but where market demand needs to mature, such as Core Commercial and higher density housing areas. For this reason, development of Villages is seen as a cooperative effort between the City, landowners and the development community.

Villages represent relatively large projects which may be executed over several years. The phasing of the project is critical to its success, both as a financial undertaking and as a mechanism to encourage transit use. In order to encourage the public service agencies to provide public facilities in a timely manner to serve the needs of residents, developers are asked to dedicate sites designated for public uses concurrent with development of commercial and residential uses. Developers should also work with the City to ensure that the recommended mixture of land uses is achieved in a timely manner and development costs remain low.

1.1.h Develop special "Urban Village" design principles to encourage more job-generating uses within the Urban Villages.

Special "Urban Village" designs should be developed to provide for increased opportunities for job-based land uses attracted by a university climate in some Urban Villages, especially in the northwestern area of the City, while still maintaining the basic concept of mixed-use, pedestrian and transit oriented communities. These "Urban Villages" may differ from others in the Community in the mixture of business park, research and development, office, public/cultural uses, and retail uses within the Village Core areas instead of the retail/office/public facilities focus of other Villages which are more residential in nature.

Policy UD-1.2
Distribute and Design Urban Villages to Promote Convenient Vehicular, Pedestrian, and Transit Access.

Villages should be distributed throughout the City's growth area in a pattern that allows the greatest number of residents access to a variety of shopping opportunities. Villages should be distributed to permit residents to walk to retail and public facilities without having to cross an arterial street. Villages should also be located to take advantage of main transit lines and existing retail market demand.

The Urban Village circulation system encourages all modes of travel, while providing adequate access for automobile traffic. This street pattern is achieved by providing multiple routes to destinations without relying on arterials. This pattern of multiple routes keeps traffic volumes lower on individual connector streets and allows pedestrians and bicyclists to avoid unfriendly arterials. This pattern also favors pedestrians by slowing traffic, reducing pavement, and improving the sense of shelter afforded by houses and trees. Within the Urban Village development concept, local and connector streets should be designed to discourage through traffic, while still providing an interconnected and a legible circulation network.

Implementing Actions:

1.2.a Villages should be located to maximize access to their Core Commercial areas from their adjacent neighborhoods without relying on arterials.

Villages with major retail centers should be spaced at least one mile apart and should be distributed to serve various growth sub-areas. Generally, there should be one Village for each full square mile bound by arterials, except in rural residential areas.

1.2.b The boundary of each village varies with the size of the Core Commercial area and does not extend across arterials.

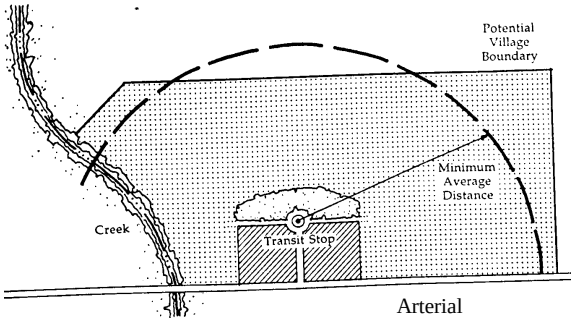


Figure 6.5
Village Boundaries

While the shape of the Village may vary, the size of the Inner Village should not be less than the area described by the quarter-mile walking distance radius (ranging from 1200 to 1600 feet) from the transit stop and core commercial area.

The minimum size of an Inner Village should vary according to the kind of Core Commercial area within the Village; larger Villages are associated with larger Core Commercial areas. The minimum distance requirement does not apply to areas with major intervening features such as major creeks and high-voltage power lines, where the boundary should follow the major feature.

Inner Villages should typically be at least 100 acres when associated with a Community Center, 70 acres when associated with a Neighborhood Center, and 50 acres when associated with a Convenience Center.

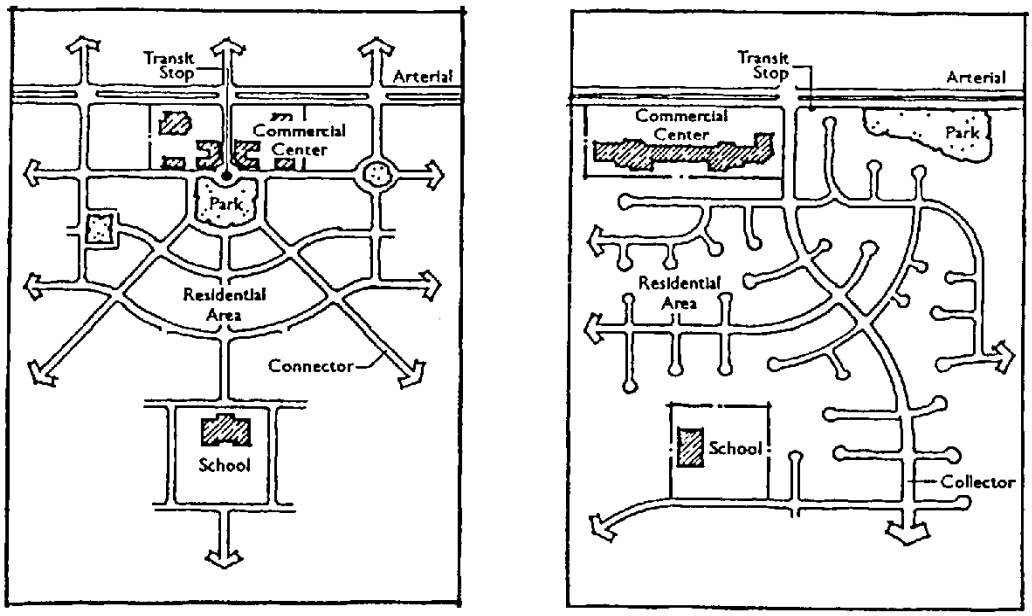
1.2.c Building intensities and densities should meet the minimum requirements set forth for a Village to promote more active centers, support transit, and encourage pedestrian-oriented development that fronts onto the street.

Compared with other Village areas, the Inner Villages should have the highest commercial intensities (the amount of building relative to the size of the site) and the highest residential densities (the number of dwelling units in a given area). Core Commercial areas should be intensive enough to provide a "main street" shopping spine. Multi-storied buildings and structured parking are strongly encouraged near transit stops to better utilize the lands adjacent to the transit line and to provide additional transit ridership. A development pattern is encouraged where densities are highest at the center of the Village and become lower as the distance from the center increases. Thus higher density housing types such as apartments and townhouses are most appropriate adjacent to the Core, with lower density single family housing placed further out.

1.2.d The Village street system should provide multiple and parallel routes between the Core Commercial area and the rest of the Village. In no case shall trips which could be internal to a square mile bound by arterials be forced onto an arterial.

The collector street pattern should be simple and memorable. Winding roads, dead end streets and cul-de-sacs that cut off direct access to Village Centers should be discouraged in Village Core Residential Areas, but may be appropriate in some Outer Village areas. Streets should converge near common destinations that contribute to an area's unique identity, such as transit stops, Core Commercial areas, schools and parks

The street system should allow autos, bikes, and pedestrians to travel on small local streets to any location in the Village. At no time should an arterial street be the only preferable route to and from the Inner Village and its Outer Village.



Preferred ***Discouraged***

Figure 6.6
Village Street Systems

1.2.e Arterial streets should allow efficient conveyance of through traffic and must not pass through Villages.

The paved width of arterials should provide for safety, efficiency and long term needs. The regional traffic circulation system is dependent upon an efficient and smooth-flowing network of arterials. The required right-of-way for arterials varies with anticipated need. (Refer to Chapter 4, Circulation Map.)

1.2.f Collector and local streets should connect the Inner and Outer Village to Core Commercial areas, schools, and community parks without the use of arterials.

In general, Collectors should be designed to carry moderate levels of local traffic smoothly, in a way that is compatible with bicycle and foot traffic. A network of collectors should provide alternative paths to destinations within the Village for neighborhood residents. The collector network should not provide a speedy through-route alternative to arterials. "T" intersections and "dog leg" alignments could be used to reduce through traffic and reduce speeds. The precise alignment of collectors will be determined as individual projects are designed.

Collectors should contain bikeways. Driveway cuts should be minimized and alley access to rear garages is encouraged to minimize potential conflicts among autos and bicyclists, and for the convenience of residents along collectors. Collectors and some local streets should be aligned along the edge of parks and open space to enhance the aesthetic character of the streets and sidewalks.

1.2.g The pedestrian and bicycle system must provide clear and direct access to the Core Commercial area and the transit stop.

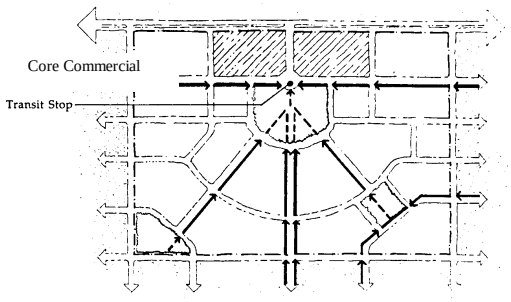


Figure 6.7
Pedestrian & Bicycle System

Although the street and sidewalk system will accommodate many destinations within Villages, the primary destination will be the Commercial Core and transit stop. Direct paths to the transit stop should be lined with activities and be shaded. The configuration of parking, shopping and pedestrian routes should reinforce access to transit. A feeling of safety for pedestrians and bicyclists can be provided through the use of park strips between the curb and the sidewalk or bike path which provide separation from auto traffic.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

STREET DESIGN

Commercial Streets

Commercial streets located in Core Commercial areas should be designed to accommodate pedestrians, slow traffic, provide on-street parking and create a pleasant shopping environment.

Explanation: Commercial streets should create an intimate shopping environment that maintains drive-by visibility to stores. Shops should front onto commercial streets with minimal setbacks. Wider sidewalks, street trees, awnings and arcades should be used to accommodate this active, pedestrian environment. Curbs and landscaping should be configured to allow street cleaning equipment.

Local Streets

Local Streets should have travel and parking lanes sufficiently narrow to slow traffic and allow trees to form a pleasing canopy over the street, while still providing for adequate access for automobiles, and emergency and service vehicles.

Explanation: Local streets should be designed to serve low volumes of traffic through a pedestrian-oriented environment. Street trees should be provided to enhance the quality of the neighborhood and provide relief from summer heat.

Alleys

Alleys can be used to serve residential and commercial developments within Villages, and for lots facing onto parks and collector streets.

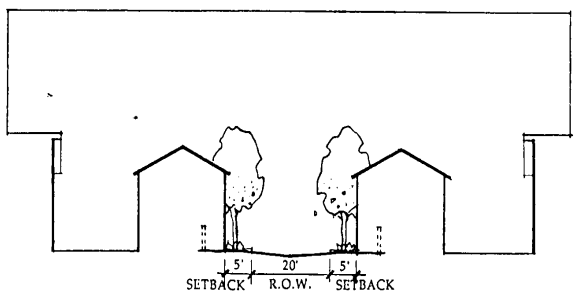


Figure 6.8

Explanation: Alleys provide visual relief for the streetscape and a secondary means of access to individual parcels. Alleys serving residential development should be at least 20 feet wide with a 5 foot setback to each garage. No parking would be allowed within the 20 foot right-of-way, but parking should be provided within garages or on-site parking areas. Visitor parking should occur on the street in front of units. Street trees and landscaping are encouraged within the 5' setback where access to garages and on-site parking is not needed.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

STREET DESIGN

Street Vistas

Where possible, streets should frame vistas of the Core Commercial areas, public buildings, parks, or natural features.

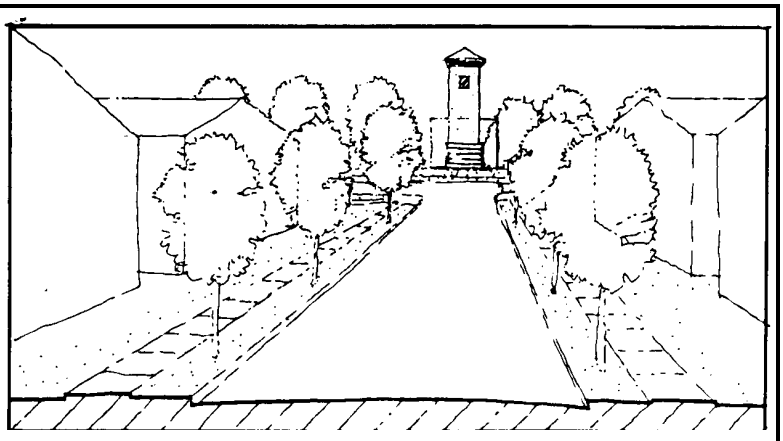


Figure 6.9

Explanation: Streets and buildings should be designed so views down streets terminate at important buildings and places. This will establish a series of pedestrian "landmarks" and allow pedestrians to see the context of their community. Straight streets, in particular, can allow clear views to landmarks and are encouraged.

Street Trees

Shade trees are required along all streets. Street trees should be spaced a maximum of 40 feet on center and should be located in planter strips between curbs and sidewalks where appropriate. Tree species should be selected to create a unified image for the street and provide an effective canopy.

Explanation: Many streets are identified and remembered by their street trees. Village streets should be lined with similar trees to give them a unified and distinct image. Within Villages, trees should be placed in a planter strip between the street and sidewalk. In areas that do not have planter strips, the trees should be kept close to the sidewalk to provide shade and should be aligned to visually frame the street.

Arterial Crossings

Crosswalks across arterials should be provided at all signalized intersections. Undercrossings designed for pedestrians and bicyclists should be provided at specified locations, where greenways cross arterials.

Explanation: Crosswalks and underpasses should be provided for easy and safe pedestrian and bicycle movement across arterials. As part of the City-wide trail network, undercrossings should be provided where "greenways" and bikepaths cross arterials and in some cases, collectors, where feasible. Additional crossings should be provided at Core Commercial areas and signalized intersections.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

STREET DESIGN

Pedestrian Routes

Primary pedestrian routes should be located along or visible from streets. Routes through parking lots or at the rear of residential developments should be avoided. Bordering primary pedestrian routes and bikeways with rear yards and fences should be avoided. Where primary pedestrian routes cross arterials, undercrossings or signalized intersections should be provided.

Explanation: Too often pedestrian paths have been separated from streets, giving a confusing message to pedestrians and creating safety concerns due to reduced visibility. Where possible, the primary pedestrian path system should coincide with the street system. Diagonal short cuts through parks, plazas and greens are an exception and should be encouraged. Paths through parking lots and away from streets should be used only where large setbacks from the street are permitted. Alternate routes around parks should be provided for night use.

Safe pedestrian crossings across arterials, and in some cases collectors, should be provided where major pedestrian movement is anticipated, such as along greenways and across from Core Commercial areas. Undercrossings or signalized intersections should be provided in these locations.

Bikeways

Bike paths should also be provided along greenways, along transitways, the approximate alignment of the Yosemite Valley Railroad (YVRR), and along major creeks and powerline easements. Bicycle routes are also encouraged on small residential streets, but marked bike lanes may not be required. Connections to Merced's existing bikeway network should also be provided.

Explanation: Selected routes to the transit stop should provide marked or separated bikeways connecting Village areas. The greenway network provides additional bicycle-oriented connections to parks and schools. On smaller residential streets within the Village, slower auto speeds will allow bikes to share the travel lanes. The YVRR bike path in North Merced need not follow the existing alignment of the railroad but should run near it and provide a direct route.

Bike Parking

Bicycle parking facilities should be provided throughout Core Commercial areas, in office developments, and at transit stops, schools, parks, and other special destinations.

Explanation: Bike racks or other bike storage facilities should be provided at various shopping, employment, transit and recreational destinations in Villages. Bike parking may be shared between uses, but should be centrally located, easily accessible to building entries, protected from weather extremes, and visible from streets or parking lots.

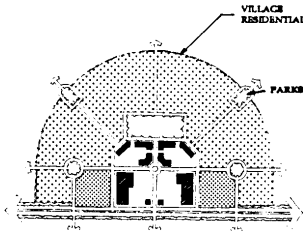
Policy UD-1.3
Promote and Facilitate Core Commercial Design Principles in Village Commercial Areas.

The Commercial Core of the Village plan provides the focus for service, employment, recreation and entertainment within each Village area. It is vital that these core areas contain ample space to accommodate all necessary uses and activities and at the same time be highly accessible to surrounding residential areas by non-vehicular means. Core Commercial areas must be adjacent to a future transit stop. Street-level retail space should form a pedestrian-oriented "main street" that is accessible from the surrounding Village without using an arterial road. Shopping malls and centers should face shops onto streets that connect to the surrounding neighborhood without large intervening parking lots. The design of Core Commercial areas should encourage shopping enroute to the transit stop or by office workers during the day.

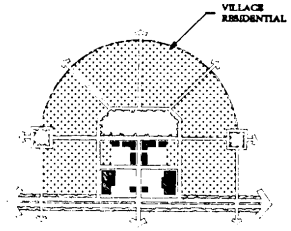
Implementing Actions:

1.3.a Each Village must have a mixed-use Core Commercial area containing ground floor retail and commercial space, including: Convenience Centers, Neighborhood Centers, and Community Centers.

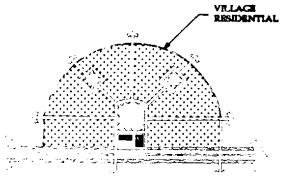
CORE COMMERCIAL AREAS



Community Center



Neighborhood Center



Convenience Center

Figure 6.10

The size and uses in each Core area can vary, depending on the size, location, and village's function in the region. At a minimum, it should serve as a transit destination and convenience shopping area for Village residents, and can contain professional offices as well as retail uses.

Community Retail Centers should concentrate a diverse set of major commercial and civic uses such as junior department stores, discount stores, restaurants, health clubs, grocery stores, drug stores, hardware stores, public offices, and day care. Large-scale office areas should be located across an arterial road from Community Retail Centers.

Neighborhood Retail Centers should serve the growth area with major grocery stores, drug stores, ancillary shops, and offices. Professional office uses may also be located across arterial roads from Neighborhood Retail Centers.

Convenience Retail Centers should provide convenience "mini-markets" and some ancillary commercial uses. Convenience Retail Centers must not contain major anchor stores.

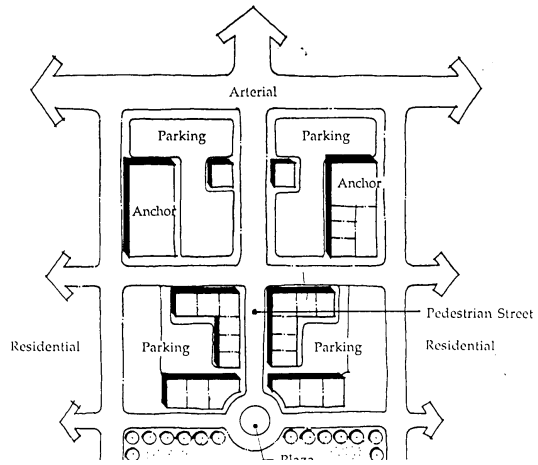


Figure 6.11
Core Commercial Area

1.3.b Core Commercial areas must be developed at sufficient intensity (typically a F.A.R. of at least 0.25) to create a focus of activity at the center of Villages.

The F.A.R. can be achieved with a mix of traditional retail, offices, and entertainment uses. F.A.R.'s (Floor Area Ratios) are the ratio of the total floor area to the lot area, excluding public streets. Office and residential uses over ground floor retail are encouraged. Joint use parking should be provided wherever possible, making higher intensities feasible. Structured parking is also encouraged and should be considered in the design of Core Commercial areas, even if implemented in later phases.

1.3.c Office areas should be built at an intensity that concentrates activity near transit stops and Core Commercial areas.

A F.A.R. of 0.35 to 0.60 is encouraged without structured parking, and may be as high as 1.00 F.A.R. with structured parking. Larger office areas should be located across from the Community Retail Centers. Smaller office areas should be located across from Neighborhood Retail Centers. Professional and commercial office uses are also permitted in Core Commercial areas. In most cases offices will be developed with surface parking. As land values rise in Merced, structured parking will become more economically feasible. This guideline encourages development of multi-story buildings with structured parking, thereby allowing more efficient use of land near transit stops.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

COMMERCIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Building design principles, while not critical to the function of Village development, contribute to the overall attractiveness of a Village and its marketability. It is the City's desire to promote Village development which accomplishes the basic goals of reducing traffic congestion and urban pollution; at the same time, the Village development concept must achieve market acceptance for its potential residents. Therefore, Village building design principles are provided in this section to promote building designs which will enhance the market image of Village areas.

Parking Lots

Parking lots should not dominate the frontage of pedestrian-oriented streets or street segments, or interrupt major pedestrian routes.

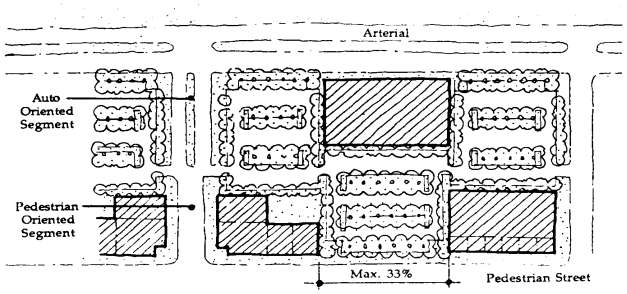


Diagram illustrating a preferred parking lot configuration.

Figure 6.12

Explanation: Parking lots should be located behind buildings or in the interior of a block whenever possible. Parking lots that serve buildings facing pedestrian-oriented streets or street segments should be located to the rear of the building. Major anchor retail stores may have deeper parking lots.

Parking Lot Landscaping

All parking lots must have at least one tree per 6 parking spaces so that within ten years approximately 50 percent of the surface area of the lot is shaded. Additionally, parking lots should be screened from streets by landscape treatments. Views of retail facades should not be blocked by tree canopies.

Explanation*:* This parking lot landscaping standard is intended to achieve a quality of environment that is comfortable to pedestrians, rather than planting a specified number of trees that may or may or not achieve the desired results. Additional trees should be located along walkways; perimeter landscaping should screen views of cars, but not block views of retail facades. Tree canopies should be trimmed to retain shade, while allowing building visibility.

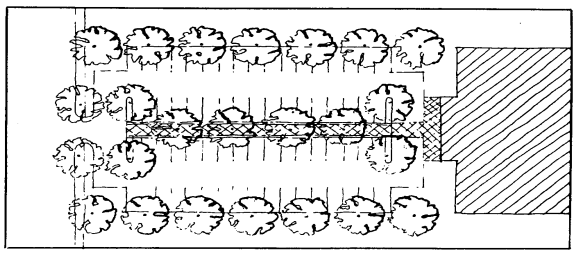


Figure 6.13

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

COMMERCIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Architectural Character

Buildings should create visually pleasing human-scaled environments that reinforce the identity of the various uses and express the importance of the Village centers and civic buildings

Explanation: No project should appear to dominate an entire street or block. Variety in floor level, facades, roof forms and architectural details that create the appearance of several smaller projects are strongly encouraged, but should not detract from an overall sense of continuity created through massing roof types and materials.

Building materials should convey durability and permanence, and should be suited to Merced's climate. Building materials such as concrete, stucco, masonry, tile, stone and wood should be used to the greatest extent possible. Glass curtain walls and all reflective glass should not be used. Shading devices and techniques should be used to reduce interior glare, conserve energy and contribute to visual interest. The use of "green buildings" should be encouraged.

Building heights that transition gradually from perimeter areas to the Core Commercial and Office areas are encouraged. Special buildings, such as community centers, schools and theaters, should have ornamental and vertical elements to communicate their civic importance.

Landscaping

Landscape elements such as trees, trellises, arbors, water features, amphitheaters, plazas, and courtyards should be used to enhance public spaces, pedestrian paths and building entrances. Drought tolerant plants are encouraged for landscaped areas. Areas that require irrigation should use water conserving features and systems, when practical.

Explanation*:* Landscape elements should be used to provide relief from summer heat, create a visual interest and to reinforce patterns of use. Trees, trellises, and arbors should be used along sidewalks and across parking lots to provide protection from the sun and create a pleasant canopy. Plazas and courtyards should be located near office entrances and within Core areas. Water features (with recirculated water) and amphitheaters may be used to mark places of civic importance. Street trees should be planted along streets.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

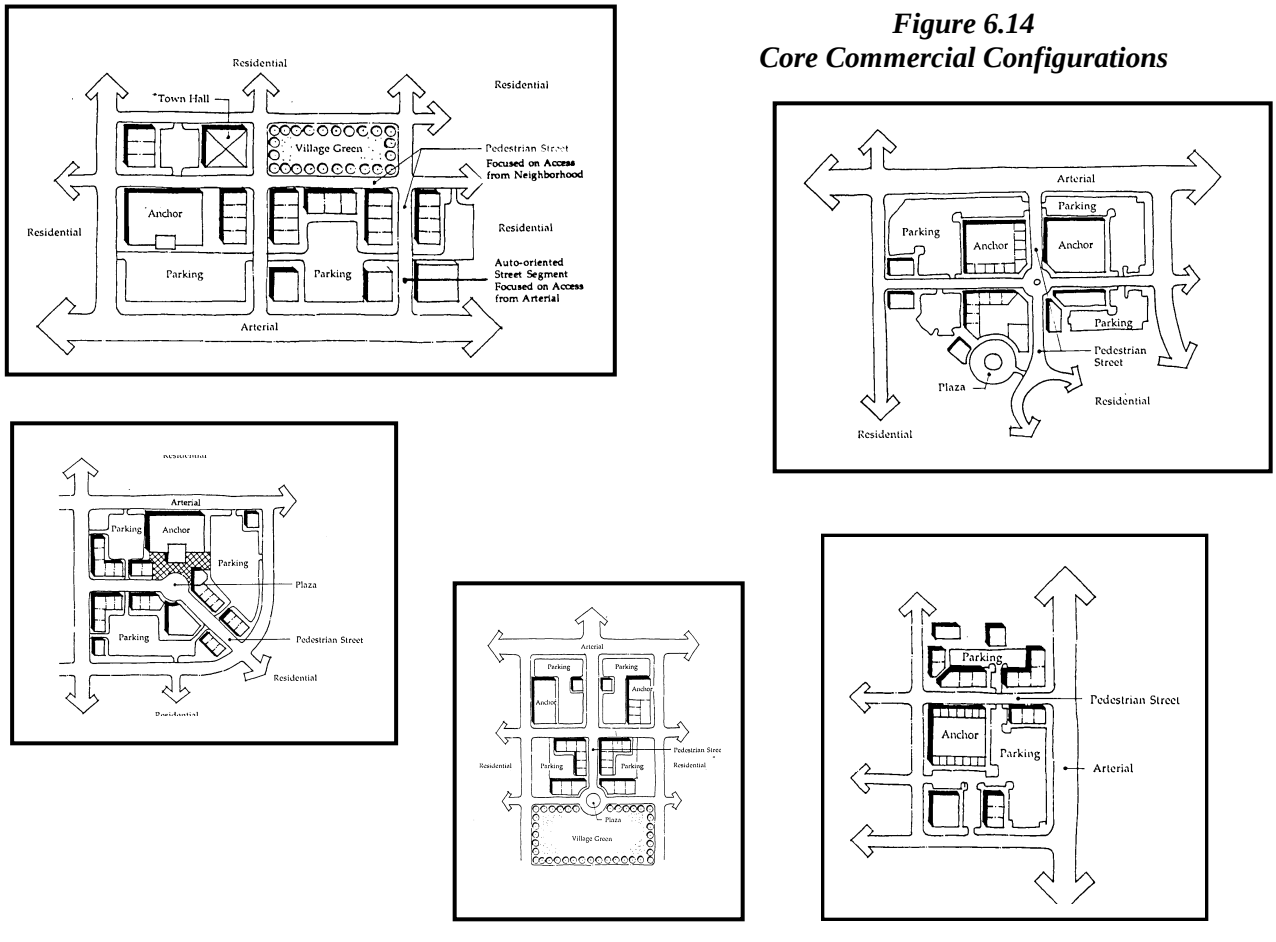
COMMERCIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Core Commercial Configuration

The configuration of shops in the Core area should seek a balance between pedestrian and auto comfort, visibility, and accessibility.

Explanation: While anchor stores may orient to arterial streets and parking lots, smaller shops must orient to pedestrian "main streets" and plazas. Core Commercial areas should be configured to allow standard parking quantities, access and visibility for the car, as well as providing convenient paths for local pedestrians. The Core Commercial area's configurations should allow local residents to walk and drive to shopping and transit stops without using arterials. Often, the smaller shops can turn to form a "main street" with street-side parking and parking lots behind the shops to form a pleasant place to walk. Simultaneously, the edge of the Core fronting the arterial may house larger parking areas and anchor stores in a location visible from arterials. Anchor stores are encouraged to provide entries to their parking lot and to the pedestrian-oriented shopping street. (See ***Figure 6.14*** below.)

Figure 6.14
Core Commercial Configurations



MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

COMMERCIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Commercial Building Setbacks

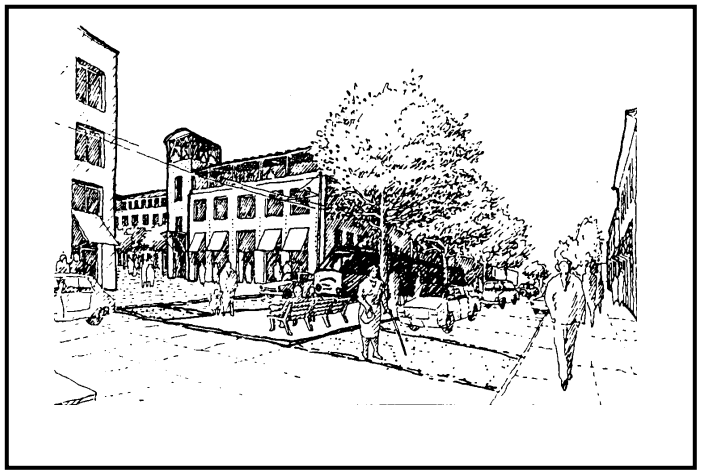
Building setbacks from non-arterial streets should be minimized. Setbacks should reflect the desired character of the area and bring buildings close to the sidewalk.

Explanation: Buildings in Core Commercial areas should build to non-arterial streets and the sidewalk edge whenever possible, except for anchor tenants that may require larger setbacks. Parking areas or garages should be recessed or placed to the rear of buildings, in clustered parking areas and along alleys. Larger setbacks should be permitted in appropriate areas.

Commercial Building Facades

Commercial building facades should be visually accentuated with various architectural elements such as arcades, porches, bays, and balconies to enhance the pedestrians' environment. Street level windows and numerous building entries are encouraged in the Core Commercial area. In almost no case should the facade of a building consist of an unarticulated blank wall.

Explanation: Buildings should incorporate design elements that draw in pedestrians and reinforce street activity, especially along main streets. Anchor retail tenants should be encouraged to add small-scale retail uses on building frontages. Commercial facades should vary from one building to the next, rather than create an overly unified frontage. Monotonous and undifferentiated commercial facades should be avoided; variations in floor level, facades, roof forms and architectural details that create the appearance of several smaller projects are strongly encouraged.



MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

COMMERCIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Commercial Building Entries

Primary ground floor commercial building entrances should orient to plazas, parks, or pedestrian-oriented streets, not to interior blocks or parking lots, except for anchor retail buildings, which may have their entries from off-street parking lots. On-street anchor street entries are strongly encouraged, however.

Explanation: Entries into small shops and offices should orient directly onto a pedestrian-oriented street. Buildings with multiple retail tenants should have numerous entries to the street. Off-street parking should also be located at the rear of buildings with short, pleasant passageways leading to the pedestrian-oriented street and primary entrances.

Some retail anchor stores, such as neighborhood grocery stores, need parking lot access to the primary entry. This is acceptable if pedestrian access to the entry is provided from the street, and pedestrians are not required to walk from street sidewalks through the parking lot to enter the store. Along walls without entries, building elevations should include windows, display areas, and/or be lined with small retail shops.

Upper Story Uses in Core Commercial Areas

Two- and three-story buildings are encouraged in the Core Commercial areas. Upper floors may contain residential or office uses.

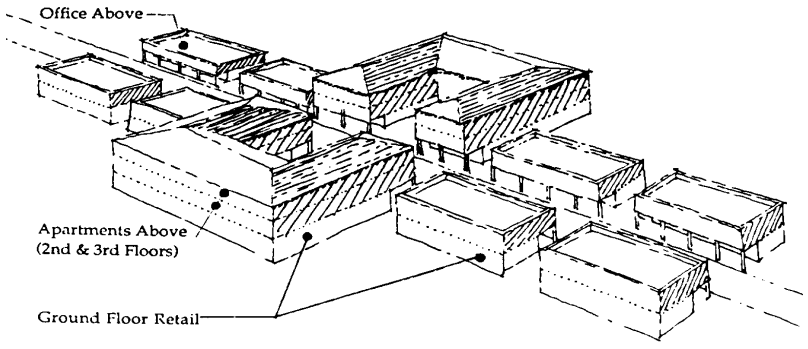


Figure 6.15

Explanation: Retail developments in the Core Commercial area may add up to two additional floors of residential and/or office uses. Additional office and residential uses in the Core Commercial areas are encouraged as long as retail uses and activities are maintained. Special care must be given to the design of residential units to ensure privacy and security.

Policy UD-1.4
Promote and Facilitate Urban Village Residential Area Design Principles.

Within a Village development, a wide range of housing types and sufficient density needs to be developed to meet the varied housing needs of residents and to promote the economic stability necessary to support a healthy Commercial Core area.

Implementing Actions:

1.4.a A mix of residential densities, ownership patterns, cost, and building types is desirable in Villages.

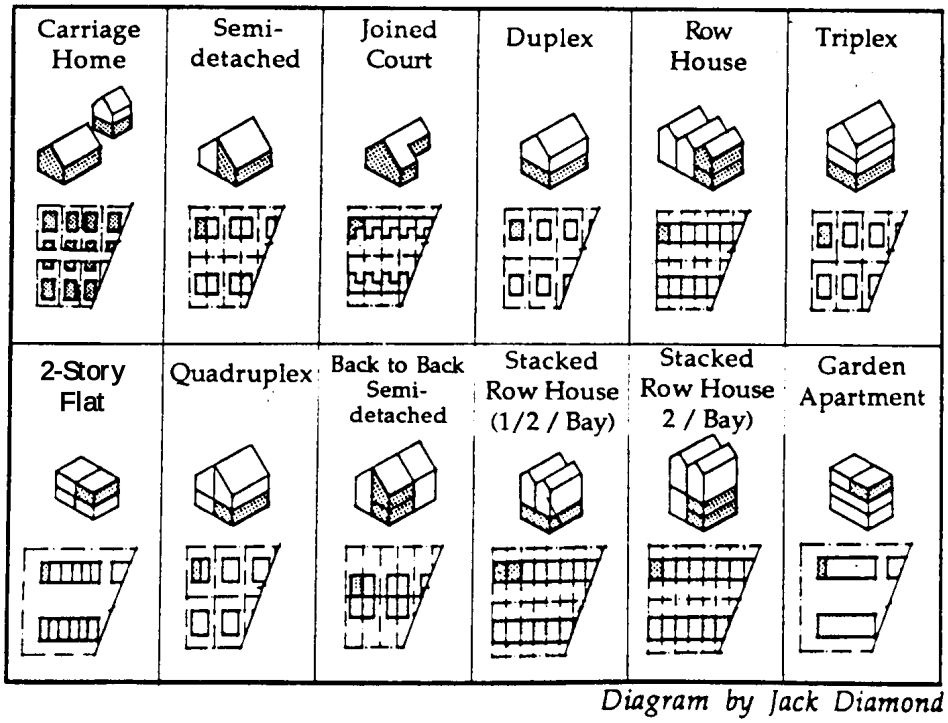


Figure 6.16
Housing Types

While each Village will take on a different character and will have a different proportion of single-family and multi-family densities, care should be taken to provide a variety of housing types, costs, and ownership opportunities within each Village. The Village Core Residential portion of the Village can be a combination of small-lot single-family units, duplexes, townhouses, and up to three-story apartment buildings. Outer Village areas provide opportunities to develop other lower density housing types.

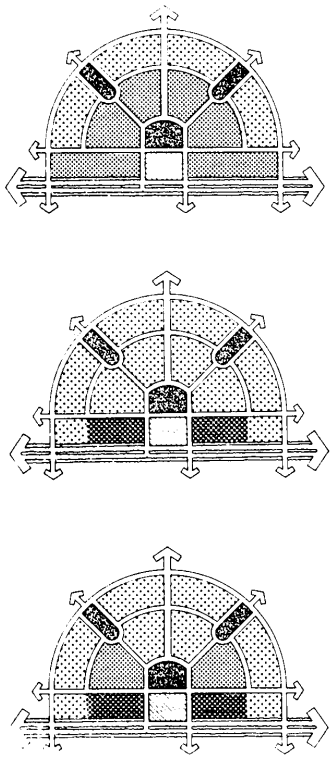
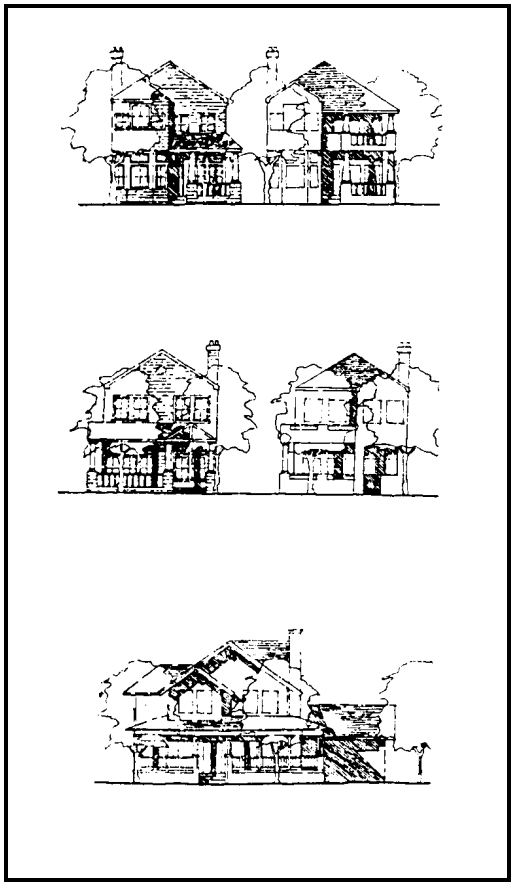


Figure 6.17
Range of Densities

1.4.b A range of densities and dwelling types are permitted in Villages.

Gross residential densities within Village Core Residential areas should be a minimum of 7 units per acre, an average of at least 10 units per acre, and a maximum of 30 units per acre. Gross residential densities within Outer Village areas should have a minimum average density of 4.5 units per acre (or higher) with a minimum of 2 units per acre. These gross density requirements must be met to ensure the viability of transit and retail centers, as well as providing housing opportunities for a range of households. (Gross density calculations should include the area in lots as well as in streets and alleys immediately in front and behind the lots, except where existing property configurations and site constraints reduce effective densities.)

Many single-family residential types will meet these requirements, especially if ancillary units are used. Many multi-family housing types are permitted in Inner Villages; duplex and triplex units are also permitted in Outer Village Areas. The range of permissible housing types are illustrated in the following guidelines.



MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

RESIDENTIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Single-Family Housing Types

Single-family residential types cover a wide range of densities. They should enhance the pedestrian-oriented character of Villages. Single-family types illustrated here include: zero-lot line homes, small-lot single family, standard-lot single family and estate residences. Ancillary units may be used in single-family areas.

Explanation: Single-family housing types should create a high-quality, pedestrian-oriented environment, as illustrated by the following housing types.

Zero-Lot Line Homes

Zero-lot line homes are detached single-family dwellings with only one private side yard. Zero-lot line homes have three sides with windows and one blank wall set to a side property line. (The blank wall provides privacy for the neighbor's side yard.) Zero-lot line homes may be built at gross densities ranging from about 7 to 10 dwelling units per acre (du/ac). Ancillary units can increase this density by 75% to a maximum of 17.5 du/ac.

Small-Lot Single-Family Homes

Small-Lot single-family homes have side setbacks on both sides, thereby allowing windows to occur on all sides. Efficient lotting of small-lot single-family homes can result in gross densities of about 6 to 8 du/ac. Ancillary units can increase this density by 75% to a maximum of 14 du/ac.

Standard Lot Single-Family Homes

Standard lot single-family homes are similar to small-lot single-family homes except for larger lot sizes. Standard lot single-family homes may be built at gross densities of between 2 to 6 du/ac. Ancillary units in the rear can increase this density by 75% to a maximum of 10.5 du/ac.

Estate Residences

Estate residences have very large lot sizes and may be built at gross densities of up to 2 du/ac. Ancillary units can increase this density by 75% to a maximum of 3.5 du/ac.

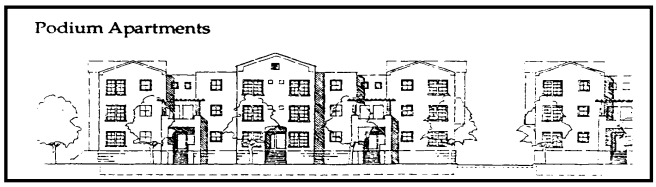
MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

RESIDENTIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Multi-Family Housing Types

Multi-family housing types should be varied in character and enhance the pedestrian-oriented character of Villages. Multi-family housing types cover a range of densities and include: podium apartments, garden apartments, small multiplexes and townhouses. Duplexes and triplexes (two and three unit multiplexes) are the only multi-family housing types permitted in Outer Village areas.

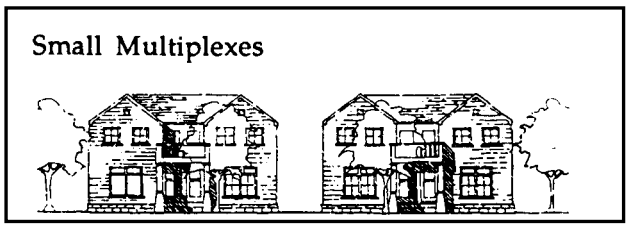
Explanation: Multi-family types include housing with stacked and/or attached units, as illustrated by the following housing types. Several multi-family types can be consistent with the preceding guidelines and used to create a high-quality, pedestrian-oriented environment. These types may be rented or owned.



Podium Apartments:
Podium apartments contain attached and stacked units above a structural platform or podium with a parking garage provided below. Shared stairs lead from the garage to the street or to the podium, where paths lead to units and shared stairs to upper units. Podiums should be not more than 5 feet above finished grade to allow direct access to first floor units and to permit visual access to the street, unless flooding conditions preclude this arrangement. Because of their compact arrangement, podium apartments can generally be built at densities ranging from 20 to 30 units per acre.

Garden Apartments:

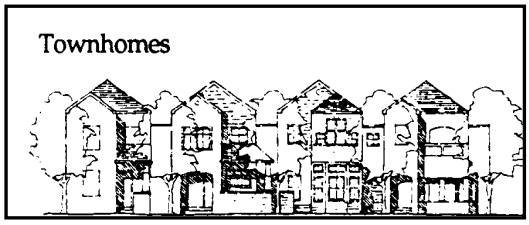
Garden apartments contain attached and stacked units with surface parking lots. Shared stairs, accessible from public streets, provide access to the upper-floor units of Garden apartments, while ground-level units often have entrances directly off of public streets. Garden apartments may be built at gross densities ranging from 16 to 22 du/ac.



Small Multiplexes
Small multiplexes have 2-6 units contained in a building that has many of the aesthetic and functional qualities of single-family houses. Units may be rented or owned. While units are attached and may be stacked, the overall form of the building can bear a strong resemblance to large traditional homes. Small multiplexes may have mirror-image plans or asymmetrical arrangements, where some entries face a sideyard. Every dwelling unit should have access to the street and private open space. A main entrance should always face and be visible from a public street and be articulated with a porch. Upper floor units should have entry stairs extending to grade. Side entrances should be visible from the street. Multiplexes may be built at gross densities ranging from 10 to 18 du/ac.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

RESIDENTIAL AREA APPEARANCE



Townhouses

Townhouses are a traditional housing type found in many older towns and villages. Townhouses are attached at their sides in groups of three or more. Each unit has its own front yard and entrance, as well as a private back yard. Because there is only one unit per lot, townhouses tend to be owner-occupied. Townhouses may be built at gross densities ranging from 10 to 20 du/ac.

Residential Building Entries

In most cases, primary ground floor residential building entrances should face and be visible from the street, instead of parking lots and driveways in the interior of blocks.

Explanation: In residential areas, the front door and guest entry should orient to the street. Private back door entries can provide access from alleys, garages, and parking lots. Ancillary units and upper floor units in multi-family or apartment complexes may be accessed by rear or side entries.

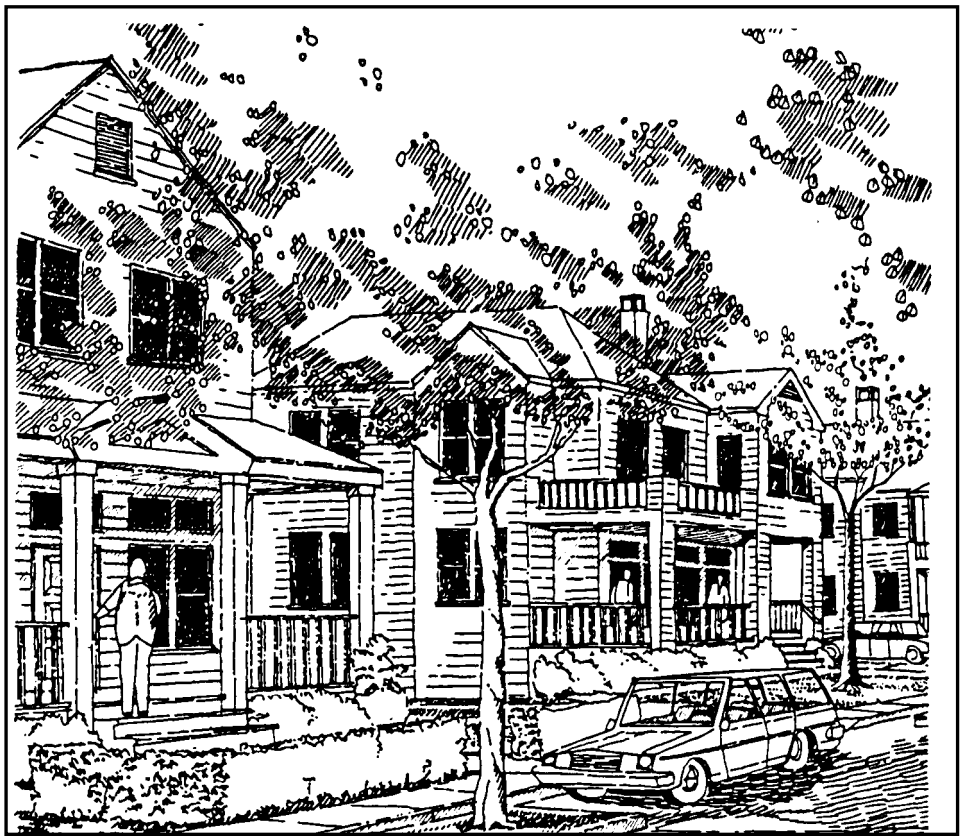
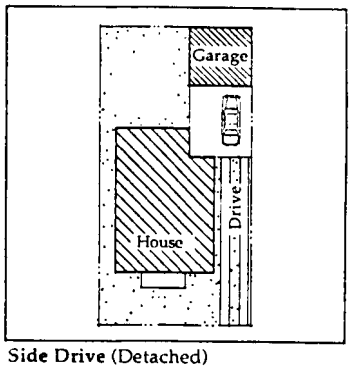
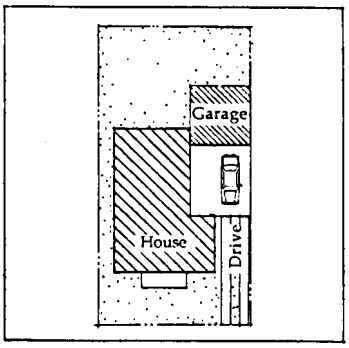


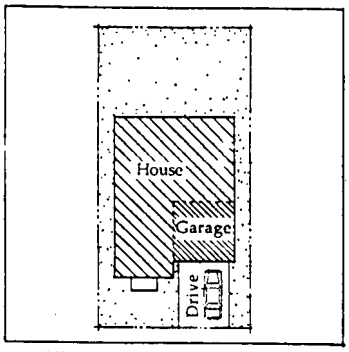
Figure 6.18



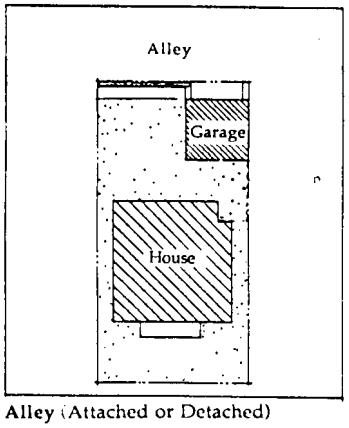
Side Drive (Detached)



Side Drive (Attached)



Modified Front Garage



Alley (Attached or Detached)

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

RESIDENTIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Residential Garages

Residential garages should be designed to reduce the visual impact of the auto and to line the street with active, visually interesting features.

Explanation: The garage should be set back behind the front facade of the residential building if possible. Garages may be sited in several acceptable ways: in the rear and accessed from an alley, or in the rear and accessed from a side drive. Garages may be sited to the side, but should be recessed behind architectural features and the front facade. Garages for most housing types should be sited away from the street behind or below residential buildings. Garages may be located in front of the house if a carriage house is provided above and/or if garage doors do not face the street. Where flooding is not an overriding concern and garages can be located below residences, they should be depressed so that the first floor of residences is not more than 5 feet above finish grade.

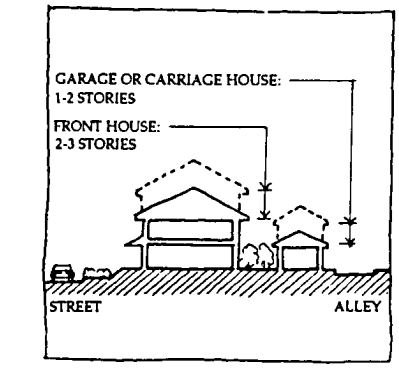


Figure 6.19

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

RESIDENTIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Ancillary Units

Ancillary units or 'second units' are encouraged in association with single-family residences. They may be counted as 3/4 of a unit to meet density requirements. Carriage houses, ancillary units situated above garages, are encouraged.

Explanation: Ancillary or second units create affordable rental units without changing the quality of single-family areas. They can also serve to offset housing costs for the primary unit, or provide needed space for a teenager, college student, or elderly family member. Ancillary units can be provided in Village Core Residential areas, either as part of the primary home or above a garage.

Carriage Houses are ancillary units built over detached garages at the rear lots and accessed by alleys or side drives. Carriage Houses may occur in combination with any of the following housing types: Zero-Lot Line, Small-Lot Single-Family, Standard Lot Single-Family and Estate Residential.

Residential Building Facades

The exterior of residential buildings or facades should be varied and articulated to provide visual interest to the streetscape.

Explanation: Building entries and windows should face the street. Front porches, bays, and balconies are encouraged. In no case shall a facade of a building consist of an unarticulated blank wall or an unbroken series of garage doors. Varied and human-scaled building facades are key to making a place "pedestrian-oriented." Building designs should provide a high level of visual interest, without creating a chaotic image. Residences should include design elements that enhance the streetscape and address or front the street. Facades should vary from one building to the next to avoid a monotonous streetscape. Trellises and overhangs are encouraged as ways of combating Merced's summer heat.

MERCED URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

RESIDENTIAL AREA APPEARANCE

Residential Building Setbacks

Residential building setbacks from public streets should be minimized, while maintaining privacy. Minimum and maximum front setbacks should be established that reflect the desired character of an area and ensure that residences face streets and sidewalks.

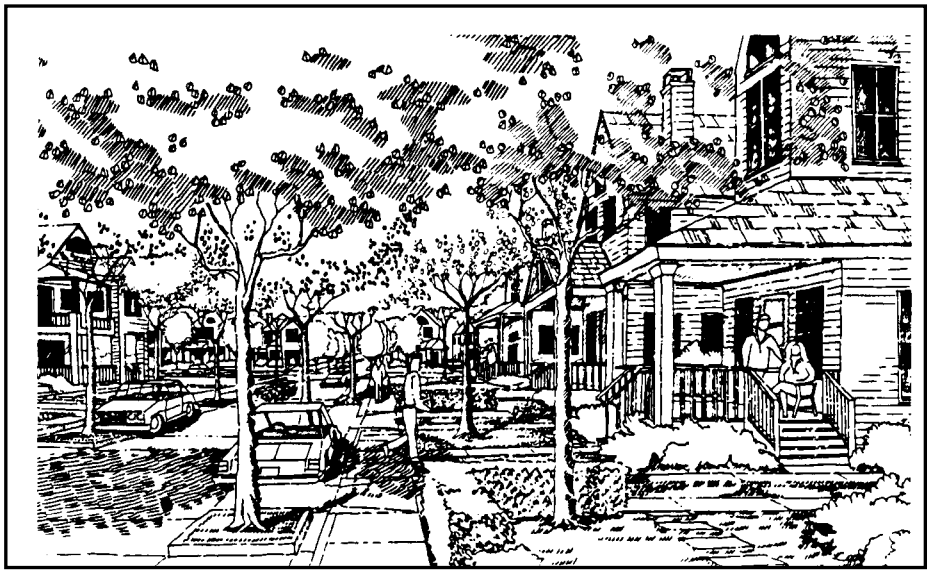
Explanation: In most residential areas, building setbacks should be between 10 and 20 feet to the back of sidewalk. If apartments occur over first floor commercial space, no setback is required. Estate Residences (less than 2 du/ac) may be set back as much as 30 feet.

Porches, bays and balconies should be allowed to project into these setbacks to contribute to a street's human scale and activity.

Residential Building Heights

Multi-family residential types should not exceed 3 1/2 stories. Single-family residences should not exceed 2 1/2 stories.

Explanation: Building heights should gradually transition from perimeter areas to the Core area, with the Core area serving as the visual focal point of the Village. Heights should be greatest adjacent to Core Commercial areas and across from parks. Construction of residential buildings over underground or partially underground parking structures is encouraged. Vertical projections above the main building volume such as chimneys, roof peaks and cupolas are also encouraged.



Policy UD-1.5
Design and Develop Public and Quasi-Public Buildings and Uses Utilizing Transit-Ready Development or Urban Village Principles.

Public facilities and services are a central part of the design and development of a successful Village. The application of public facilities planning principles in designating space for public and quasi-public services at the neighborhood or "Village" level will help assure that future community service needs can be met in a cost effective manner.

Implementing Actions:

1.5.a Civic services should be placed in central locations in Villages.

Public buildings should be placed in central locations, in highly visible focal points, or adjacent to public parks and plazas. Civic uses such as an urban plaza, community center, post office, and library, are best located in the Core area in conjunction with retail businesses and offices and adjacent to village greens. Recreation-oriented uses, such as parks, recreation facilities, and community buildings, should be centrally located with easy access from both residential and Village Core areas. In most cases, parks and plazas should also be provided.

Developers should work with City agencies to determine needed locations for future public parks, plazas and buildings, and conditions for their provision. Public service providers are encouraged to make every effort to place new facilities in Villages to provide a transit travel option for patrons.

Major entries should face public streets and be articulated architecturally. The building and architectural features should be sited to take advantage of vistas along streets, to visually connect these civic buildings with their surrounding neighborhood. Major public buildings should have a civic presence enhanced by their height, mass and materials. Construction and materials should convey a sense of permanence and importance.

1.5.b School sites should be selected by their respective districts in a way that provides opportunities to use pedestrian trails and bicycle routes to and from school and minimizes the need for students to cross arterial streets.

Schools should also be designed to communicate their civic importance and located on or near a "greenway" bicycle and pedestrian trail to provide safe and convenient access to school. Elementary schools should be distributed so few students have to cross arterials. Junior high school and senior high schools should be distributed to minimize the need for busing. High school sites should be selected by their respective Districts so they can be served by transit.

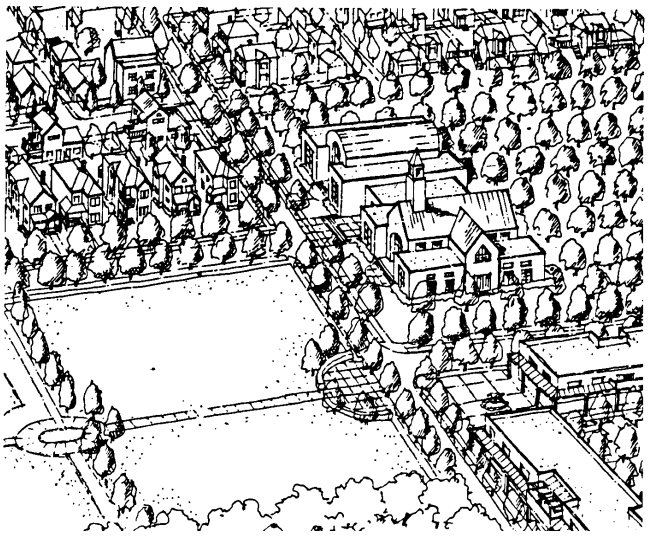


Figure 6.20
Village Green

1.5.c Quasi-Public buildings such as religious buildings, fraternal halls, daycare facilities and private schools are encouraged to be situated and designed to face neighborhood parks or village greens.

Religious buildings, fraternal halls and other quasi-public buildings are encouraged to be sited adjacent to neighborhood parks, with entrances in front and parking to the rear or side, or below the building. The civic importance of these buildings should be enhanced through their height, mass and architectural features and materials.

1.5.d Utility facilities such as wells, pump stations, and electrical substations should be located in sites poorly suited for other forms of development, such as small sites bounded by high voltage power lines and arterials.

Utility facilities should be screened by dense vegetation or architectural features. Areas that are poorly suited to residential and other uses could be used efficiently as locations for utility facilities. Locations adjacent to arterials may be desirable but should be accessible by local streets if possible and should be designed to accommodate needed equipment.

1.5.e Public parks and plazas should be designed for both active and passive uses. They should reflect and reinforce the character of the surrounding area.

Various types of parks and plazas can be designed for Villages to establish an identity or character for each neighborhood. For example, plazas in Commercial Core areas may be most appropriately designed with finished pavement materials such as stone or brick, and include fountains and seating areas; parks in residential areas could be developed with grassy fields, play equipment, and sports facilities. Parks should be located and designed to take advantage of view corridors along streets to create a legible and memorable street pattern.

1.5.f Encourage subdivision designs that provide neighborhood parks in proximity to activity centers, such as schools, libraries, and community centers.

Neighborhood parks are an important aspect of the Urban Village and should be provided in proximity to areas where citizens gather.

Goal Area UD-2: Overall Community Appearance

GOALS

- **A Unique Community Image**
- **Attractive Neighborhoods and Districts**
- **Attractive and Memorable Public Streets**

POLICIES

UD-2.1 Use Urban Village design concepts in neighborhood revitalization programs.

UD-2.2 Maintain and enhance the unique community appearance of Merced.

Policy UD-2.1
Use Urban Village Design Concepts in Neighborhood Revitalization Programs.

Urban Village development policies and principles can result in improved neighborhood environments, reduced traffic congestion, and better and more cost effective service delivery systems. Although some existing neighborhoods throughout Merced contain certain elements of the Urban Village, some service and infrastructure improvements could enhance these "Villages." Through the use of the Specific Plan and Redevelopment Plan process, existing neighborhoods could be revitalized utilizing modified Urban Village policies, programs and standards.

Implementing Actions:

2.1.a Identify existing or potential neighborhood core areas that could serve as a Core Commercial area.

Specific planning areas have been identified in Downtown, South, and Southeast Merced where Village design principles may be applied. City staff should inventory the existing commercial service centers in these designated planning areas and evaluate their potential for application of Core Commercial planning principles.

2.1.b Evaluate public transit alternatives and service levels within existing neighborhoods.

Based on existing population and service centers and in cooperation with Merced County Transit, locate optimum public transportation service routes, park and ride facilities, transit stops, etc. Through the Community Plan or other appropriate planning technique, prepare a program for developing necessary public transit support facilities within existing neighborhoods throughout Merced.

2.1.c Identify needed neighborhood level public and quasi-public service facilities within existing neighborhoods.

Prepare a plan and program for the development of public and quasi-public facilities which should be located in the vicinity of existing or planned Core Commercial service centers.

Policy UD-2.2
Maintain and Enhance the Unique Community Appearance of Merced.

Over the years, the City of Merced has developed a unique physical character and civic flavor. The City's compact form, tree shaded streets, well kept neighborhoods and extensive open space areas have contributed to its charm and attractiveness. The Courthouse Square and re-energized downtown commercial center have maintained their human scale which enhances the small town flavor of Merced even though the city has grown significantly in recent years. To preserve and enhance this positive community appearance, the City has traditionally committed to a policy of civic improvement and beautification.

Implementing Actions:

2.2.a Encourage joint City and County cooperation in establishing land use and development standards along all major gateways to the City.

Highways 99, 59 and 140 are important entry points into the Merced urban area. Scattered and unsightly development along these entry points detracts from the overall positive appearance of the city. To a large extent, these entry corridors are subject to development rules and regulations administered by Merced County. Working in cooperation with the County, the City shall propose development standards for these city entrances and outline a strategy for implementation.

2.2.b Encourage the design of buildings that are in scale with adjacent development and harmonize with the character of the area or neighborhood.

Through the site plan and design review process, encourage the preparation of architectural renderings of new buildings in scale and context with existing improvements in the area to permit a broader range of review options.

2.2.c Discourage the visual monotony along major streets created by designs which use uninterrupted walls or fences with little or no landscaping.

Where it is necessary to develop fences or walls as visual screens or sound barriers, encourage the use of earth berms and other landscape techniques to minimize visual monotony. Fences and walls shall have landscaped areas with varied setbacks where they are visible from public streets. Adequate measures, such as the annexation to the City's Services Community Facilities District (CFD), shall be imposed on development permits to assure that long-term maintenance of these areas can be assured. Openings for pedestrian access in such walls will also be encouraged at intervals along arterial streets. Modified open-end cul-de-sacs will be encouraged in place of continuous walls along collector and lower-order streets.

2.2.d Encourage the development of methods to require acceptable levels of landscaping for new development and for effective maintenance in highly visible areas of the community.

Landscape designs should incorporate water conservation and low maintenance features.

2.2.e Expand the City's programs for undergrounding utility lines and require all new utility lines to be placed underground.

Working closely with PG&E and other utility companies, the City shall continue its efforts to place existing overhead electrical and communication lines underground. All new utility lines shall be placed underground. Utility boxes, which cannot be placed underground, shall be screened from view in residential and commercial areas.

2.2.f Expand the City's policies which require architecturally suitable means of screening utility equipment and garbage containers.

Site plan review procedures shall consider screening of utility equipment, garbage collection/recycling stations and other necessary appurtenant features of urban development.

2.2.g Require, where possible, the landscaping of railroad corridors through the City with low maintenance yet highly effective plant materials as commonly used in the community by various Caltrans facilities.

Through the development review process, developments proposed along a railroad corridor may be required to contribute to a landscape improvement fund or establish a landscape improvement and maintenance district along a rail corridor adjacent to the development site. The City may investigate other programs and actions which would assist in the financing of landscape efforts along these railroad corridors.

2.2.h Support merchant groups that initiate improvement programs that make commercial centers more attractive and more efficient.

The City shall work closely with various merchants and merchant groups to facilitate improvements to existing commercial centers. Particular attention should be given to improving pedestrian and transit support facilities to assure that these older centers are competitive with newer more transit/pedestrian oriented centers.

2.2.i Continue to support the long-term beautification and preservation of downtown commercial areas.

The City's Redevelopment program efforts shall be maintained in this area.

2.2.j Maintain and update as necessary the City's sign ordinances in order to maintain attractive and uncluttered commercial landscapes throughout the City.

The City's current sign ordinance has different standards for different areas of the City, but all with the same goal of maintaining attractive and uncluttered commercial areas. There is a North Merced Sign section, which covers areas north of Bear Creek; the Redevelopment Sign section, which covers the Downtown Redevelopment Area; and the General Regulations and individual zoning districts, which cover the rest of the City. The regulations for North Merced and Downtown are, by the policy direction of the City Council when they were adopted, more restrictive on the amount and type of signs allowed than the general regulations. The City's sign ordinance has not been comprehensively updated since the 1970's. After the adoption of the General Plan, City staff would like to begin the process of preparing a comprehensive update of the City's sign ordinance along with the Zoning Ordinance in order to reflect changing practices within the sign industry and to make the ordinance more user-friendly and understandable for the public.