

CHAPTER TWO

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## CHAPTER TWO PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Section 15124 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines requires that a project description contain specific information that can be used consistently throughout an EIR. This consistency is critical to ensure that various environmental aspects of the project are adequately evaluated.

### **2.1 Statement of Project Intent and Objectives**

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is a long-range plan intended to guide growth and development of the City through the Year 2030. During this period, the population of the City of Merced Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI) area is expected to more than double from its present (2010) level of 80,985 to over 155,000. The U.C. Merced (UCM) campus had an enrollment of approximately 2,700 full time students in 2008 with an expected population impact on the area of approximately 5,000 full time students by the year 2012.

By the year 2035, the UC Merced campus is expected to contribute approximately 37,135 people to the urban growth of the City's urban area; the urban population of Merced is expected to approach 200,000 people by 2035.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* aims to achieve the following guiding principles as well as many others. (A complete summary of the General Plan's goals and policies can be found in Table 2-2 of this Chapter):

- Expansion of the Sphere of Influence and City boundary with phasing of development to avoid premature conversion of agricultural land and to plan for cost-effective extension of municipal services.
- Foster compact and efficient development patterns.
- Connectivity between existing and planned urban areas. Examples include the northeast area toward UCM, the University Community, and South Merced.
- Merced as the single municipal service provider in the expanded sphere of influence.
- New development provides or pays its fair share of public services and facilities to avoid burdening existing city residents (in short, new growth pays for itself).
- Mixed-use, transit and pedestrian friendly urban villages in growth areas with direct access to commercial cores from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Commercial nodes in new growth areas to avoid the aesthetic and circulation issues associated with more common "strip commercial".

- Circulation: Recognition of the cost and importance of the arterial street system and protect capacity with access standards. Designs that encourage all modes of transportation.
- Build community quality. High community standards for Merced’s services, infrastructure, and private development as a strategy for attracting business and industry and to benefit the City’s residents.
- Planning well in advance for industrial/business park uses and for the infrastructure needed to support such development.
- A diversity of housing types and opportunities.
- Encouraging Sustainable and “Green” Development.
- Planning for the provision of infrastructure ahead of development.
- Maintaining Merced’s high quality of life and keeping it a nice place to live.
- Encouraging new research parks and the use of new technologies.
- Protection of the Merced Regional Airport as an important community asset.
- Maintaining a quality educational environment for pre-school, K-12, and higher education.
- Maintaining our quality parks and recreation systems, including the bike path system.
- Encouraging a healthy community through improved medical facilities, air quality, parks & recreation opportunities, etc.

### **2.1.1 INTENT**

In broad terms, the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is a strategy for accommodating population growth in a manner that minimizes adverse “physical” impacts of growth and development. “Physical” adverse impacts are within the purview of CEQA. Social and economic impacts are typically beyond the scope of CEQA, and this Program EIR, unless they will result in a “physical” impact (CEQA Guidelines Section 15131).

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* relies on the concept of “sustainable development” as a means of accommodating expected future growth. In application, the term “sustainable development” in the City of Merced is defined in Chapter 8 of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and means accommodating growth and development without unnecessarily:

- Consuming valuable and limited agricultural soils,
- Contaminating or over-taxing water supplies,
- Destroying or diminishing the value of important wildlife habitat,
- Reducing air quality to a point where our quality of life is threatened,
- Consuming limited non-renewable energy resources, or

- Destroying cultural and historical resources.

### **2.1.2 PLAN OBJECTIVES**

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains a comprehensive set of goals and policies that establish the planning philosophy that will direct future City growth. To achieve its purpose of providing for future population growth, the plan contains land use policies that provide adequate area for housing, employment and commercial activities. The plan also contains policies and standards for the provision of public services and infrastructure necessary to support future population growth.

Beyond the physical needs of future population growth, the plan contains design and open space provisions. These provisions provide an important element to the planning process. Future growth and development are expected to contribute to the overall well being of the community while preserving and enhancing the City's present quality of life.

From the standpoint of "sustainable growth," the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains provisions to ensure that future growth and development:

- Are directed away from concentrations of "prime" agricultural soils,
- Conserve water and do not over-tax or contaminate the region's water resources,
- Preserve and protect important area wildlife habitat,
- Promote development which minimizes adverse growth related impacts on the region's air quality,
- Conserve non-renewable energy resources, and,
- Preserve important area cultural and historic resources.

## **2.2 Project Location**

Located in the Central San Joaquin Valley, the City of Merced is the seat of the Merced County government, as well as a major retail commercial/service center for the surrounding region. The City is located at the intersection of several state highways and is one of the primary access points to Yosemite National Park. Known as the "Gateway to Yosemite," Merced is approximately 80 miles west of the valley floor of the Park, along Highway 140.

Merced is approximately 150 miles southeast of San Francisco and is one of a chain of cities located along State Highway 99. Highway 99 is one of the two major north-south arteries passing through the San Joaquin Valley and connecting Southern California to the Pacific Northwest region. Major cities to the north along Highway 99 include Modesto (40 miles), Stockton (65 miles), and Sacramento (100 miles). To the south are Madera (20 miles), Fresno (55 miles) and

Bakersfield (165 miles). Smaller cities in the vicinity of Merced along the Hwy 99 corridor are Atwater to the immediate northwest and Chowchilla to the southeast.

The City is served by two rail lines, the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe (B.N.S.F.) and the Union Pacific Transportation Company (U.P.), which pass through the City. The Merced Regional Airport provides regional air service. To the north, Castle Air Force Base has been converted to civilian use (Castle Airport).

The City of Merced is located near the geographic center of the County of Merced. To the east of the City is the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The County of Merced is bounded on the north by Tuolumne and Stanislaus Counties, on the east by Mariposa County, on the south by Fresno and Madera Counties, and on the west by Santa Clara and San Benito Counties.

Merced County contains about 1,031 square miles of land area. In 2010, the incorporated City of Merced included 23.1 square miles and the planning area of the City (SUDP) contained approximately 32.4 square miles. [Figure 2-1](#) shows Merced's Regional Location and [Figure 2-2](#) shows Merced's current City limits and Proposed Sphere of Influence (SOI). [Figure 2-3](#) shows Merced's existing 2015 General Plan Land Use diagram.

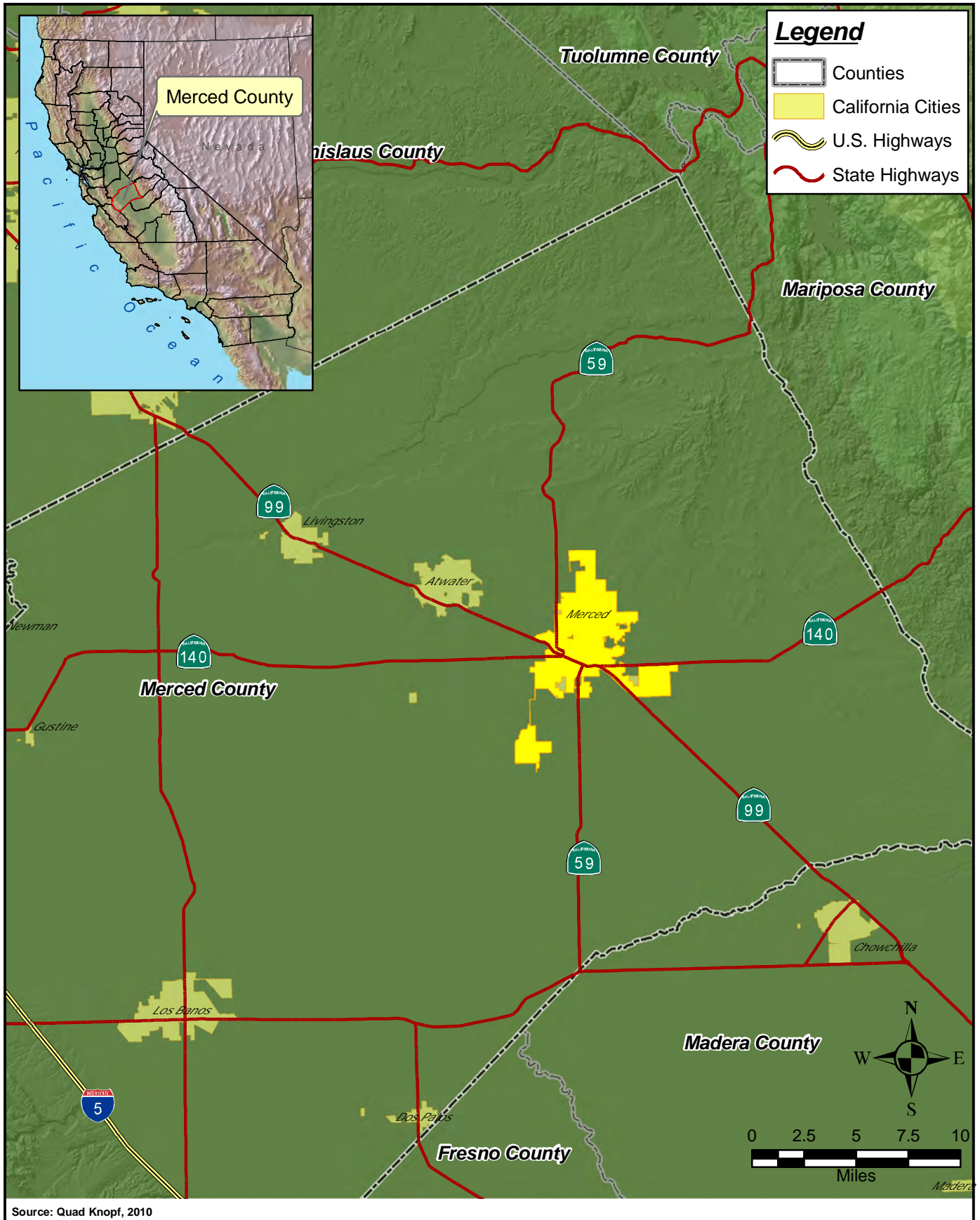
## **2.3 Project Setting**

The City of Merced's 2010 City limits are generally bounded on the west by State Highway 59 and the El Capitan Canal, and on the east by McKee Road. The northerly City limits include Nevada Street and Cardella Road, while the southerly city limits are generally bounded by the Merced Regional Airport, Childs Avenue and by State Highway 99 to the southeast.

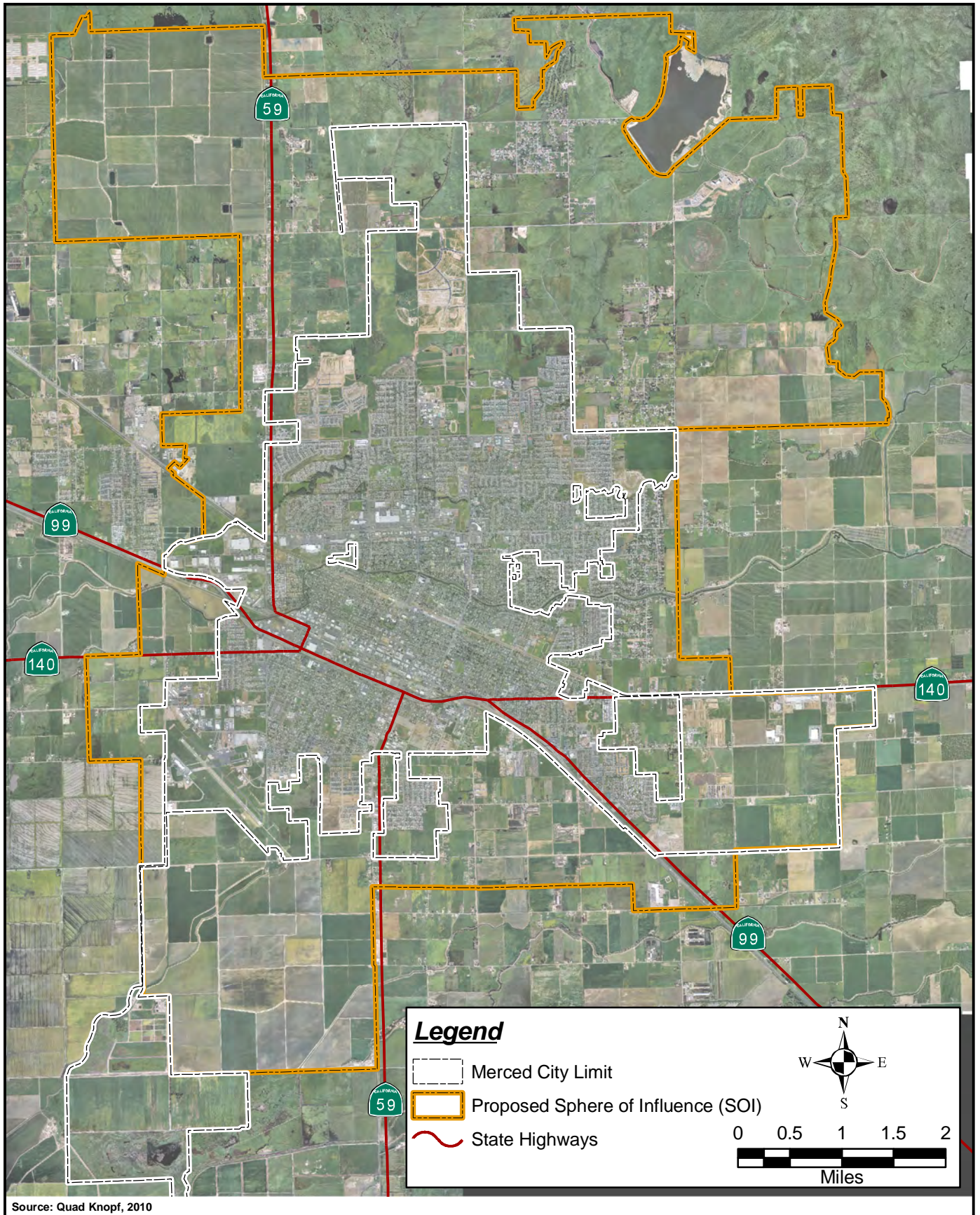
The northern portion of the City is characterized by gently rolling terrain, while the southern portion is relatively flat. The area surrounding the City is largely used for agricultural production. The northern, western, and eastern portions of the City contain a number of creeks and canals including Bear Creek, Black Rascal Creek, Fahrens Creek, and Cottonwood Creek. Lake Yosemite is located approximately three miles north and east of the City center. The City of Atwater and Castle Airport is located approximately four miles northwest of the City.

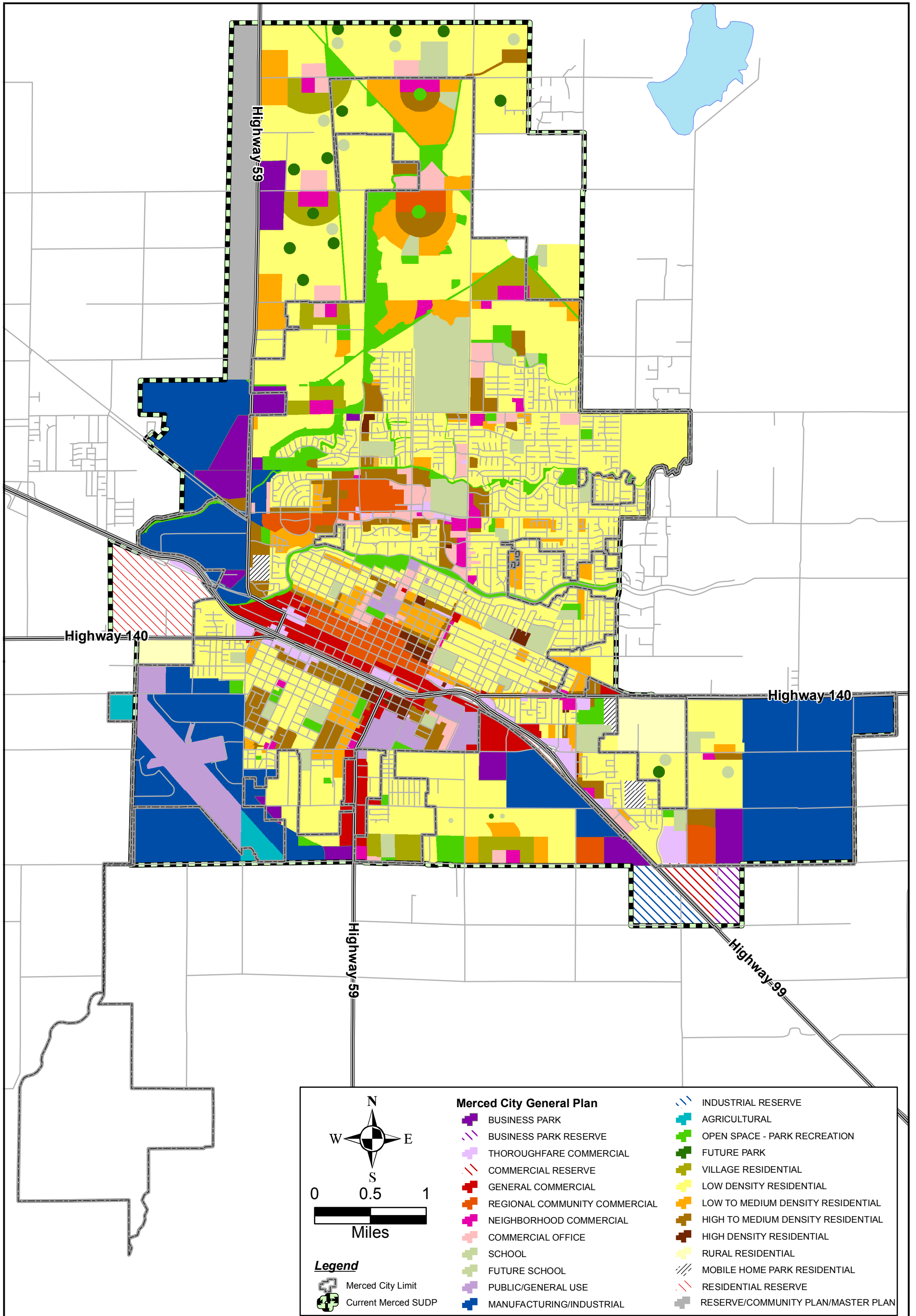
## **2.4 Project Description**

The proposed project includes an update of the City of Merced's General Plan. California state law requires each city and county to adopt a general plan "for all the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its planning" (§65300). The General Plan will include Urban Expansion, Land Use, Transportation & Circulation, Public Facilities & Services, Urban Design, Open Space, Conservation & Recreation, Sustainable Development, Housing, Noise and Safety Elements. The Housing Element has been previously adopted and certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development and is available under separate cover. The Housing Element (last updated in 2003 with minor revision in 2004) has a set schedule for review, generally every five years, based on State law. The Housing Element is currently being updated by the City and will




**MERCED VISION 2030 GENERAL PLAN EIR**  
**REGIONAL LOCATION MAP**
Figure 2-1







be incorporated into the General Plan after its adoption. Figure 2-4 shows the proposed 2030 Land Use and Circulation Map for the proposed General Plan. The expansion of the urban land use designations define the limits for extending City services and infrastructure so as to accommodate new development anticipated within the 2010-2030 time-frame of the General Plan. Policies in the proposed General Plan limit leap-frog development and provide for an orderly transition from rural to urban land uses.

The Plan includes Guiding Principles, developed during Community Workshops, described above in Section 2.1. Table 2-1 shows the acreage of General Plan land use designations for both the current and proposed General Plans (City limits and SUDP/SOI).

**Table 2-1  
Existing & Proposed General Plan Land Use Comparison Within the City Limits and SUDP/SOI (Acres)**

Land Use	City Limits	Existing SUDP	Total	Proposed SUDP/SOI	All Land in new SUDP/SOI
RR (Rural Residential)	15.25	280.84	296.09	2004.91	2301.00
AG (Agriculture)	92.33	21.51	113.84	0	113.84
<b>Total Ag Res</b>	<b>107.58</b>	<b>302.35</b>	<b>409.93</b>	<b>2004.91</b>	<b>2414.84</b>
LD (Low-Density Residential)	5516.28	2981.05	8497.33	274.08	8771.41
LMD (Low-Medium Density)	824.05	305.48	1129.53	46.96	1176.49
<b>Total Single-Family Res</b>	<b>6340.33</b>	<b>3286.53</b>	<b>9626.86</b>	<b>321.04</b>	<b>9947.90</b>
HMD (High-Medium Density)	745.08	61.84	806.92	25.35	832.27
HD (High Density Residential)	92.44	0	92.44	23.56	116.00
RMH (Residential Mobile Home)	79.34	0.18	79.52	0	79.52
<b>Total Multi-Family</b>	<b>916.86</b>	<b>62.02</b>	<b>978.88</b>	<b>48.91</b>	<b>1027.79</b>
P/G (Public/Government)	533.16	5.30	538.46	39.82	578.28
CO (Commercial Office)	341.74	132.32	474.06	0	474.06
<b>Total Office</b>	<b>874.90</b>	<b>137.62</b>	<b>1012.52</b>	<b>39.82</b>	<b>1052.34</b>
IND (Industrial)	1882.22	994.73	2876.95	0	2876.95
IND-R (Industrial Reserve)	0	150.40	150.40	1072.34	1222.74
<b>Total Industrial</b>	<b>1882.22</b>	<b>1145.13</b>	<b>3027.35</b>	<b>1072.34</b>	<b>4099.69</b>
BP (Business Park)	128.59	453.35	581.94	77.43	659.37
BP-R (Business Park Reserve)	2.94	85.27	88.21	0	88.21
<b>Total Business Park</b>	<b>131.53</b>	<b>538.62</b>	<b>670.15</b>	<b>77.43</b>	<b>747.58</b>
CG (General Commercial)	321.55	172.04	493.59	0	493.59
CN (Neighborhood Commercial)	200.75	51.71	252.46	22.84	275.30
CT (Thoroughfare Commercial)	212.89	292.01	504.90	173.92	678.82

Land Use	City Limits	Existing SUDP	Total	Proposed SUDP/SOI	All Land in new SUDP/SOI
RC (Regional/Community)	475.46	42.37	517.83	0	517.83
<b>Total Commercial</b>	<b>1210.65</b>	<b>558.13</b>	<b>1768.78</b>	<b>196.76</b>	<b>1965.54</b>
OS-PK (Open Space/Park)	786.85	167.24	954.09	152.91	1107.00
<b>Total Open Space</b>	<b>786.85</b>	<b>167.24</b>	<b>954.09</b>	<b>152.91</b>	<b>1107.00</b>
<b>Total School</b>	<b>677.91</b>	<b>68.32</b>	<b>746.23</b>	<b>994.18</b>	<b>1740.41</b>
Other Lands					
COM-R (Commercial Reserve)	7.15	83.18	90.33	0	90.33
RES-R (Residential Reserve)		360.34	360.34	0	360.34
PARK-F (Park-Future)	5.83	65.18	71.01	0	71.01
SCHOOL-F (School-Future)	5.83	42.78	48.61	0	48.61
VR (Village Residential)	238.67	205.11	443.78	0	443.78
<b>Total Other Lands</b>	<b>257.48</b>	<b>756.59</b>	<b>1014.07</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1014.07</b>
<b>Total Community Plan Areas*</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>389.14</b>	<b>389.14</b>	<b>7956.00</b>	<b>8345.14</b>
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>13186.31</b>	<b>7411.69</b>	<b>20598.00</b>	<b>12864.30</b>	<b>33462.30</b>

\* Shown as "Reserve" in Merced Vision 2015 General Plan.

Source: Quad Knopf, City of Merced, 2010

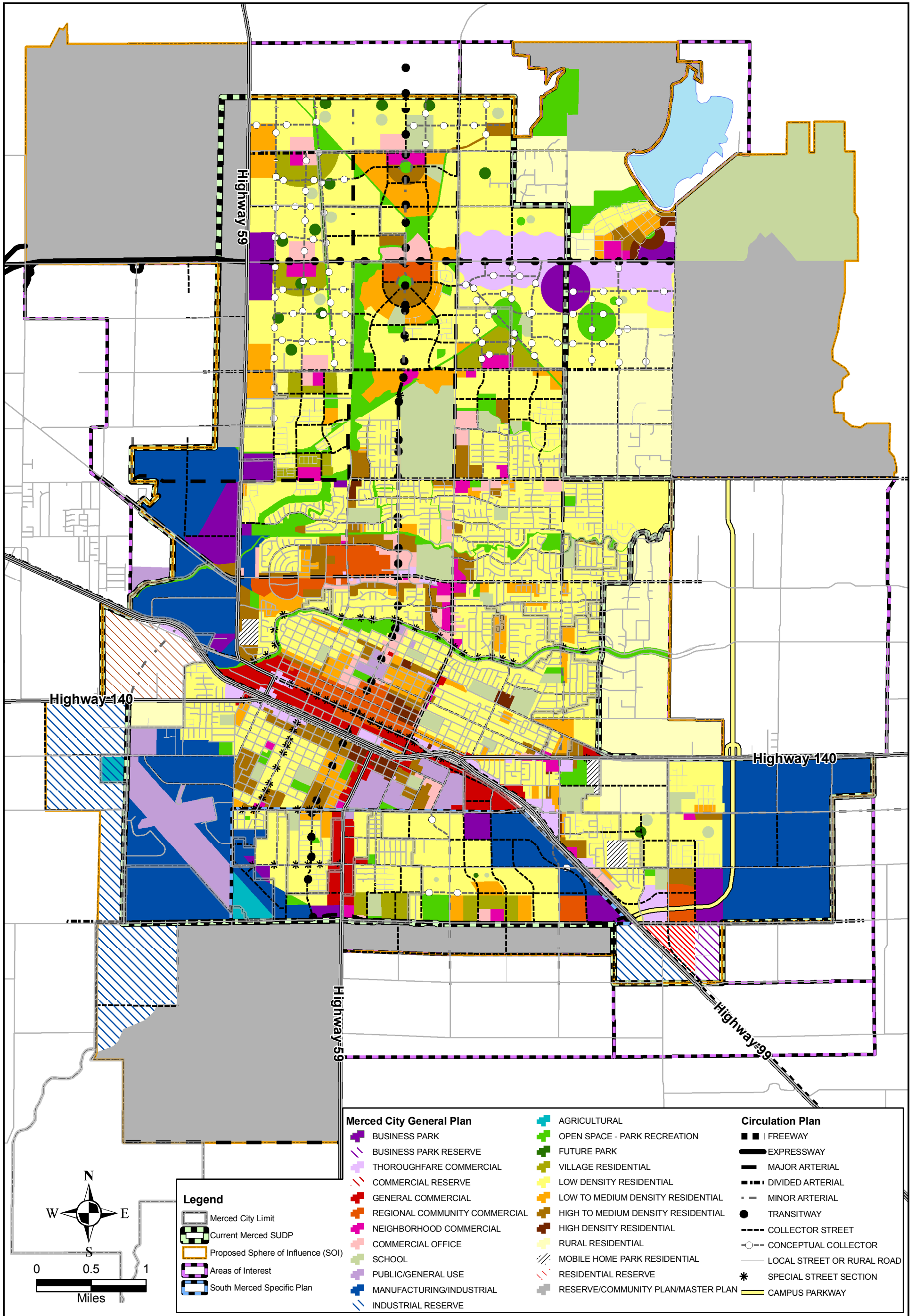
## CURRENT MERCED SPECIFIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (SUDP) AREA

Merced's current SUDP (adopted in 1997 with the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*) is based on policies contained in the *Merced County Year 2000 General Plan*. The Plan utilizes an "urban centered" concept to focus population growth in defined urban areas. The goal of the plan is "to provide for intensive urban development and to protect agricultural and open space land from uncontrolled sprawling urban development." The current SUDP is approximately 20,000 acres.

The County applies the "urban centered" concept through the designation of Specific Urban Development Plans (SUDP), Rural Residential Centers (RRC), Highway Interchange Centers (HIC), and Agricultural Services Centers (ASC). Of these, only SUDP's and RRC's relate to Merced's planning efforts. Specific Urban Development Plans are intended to accommodate all classifications of urban land use (residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional).

An SUDP has a boundary line which is recognized as the ultimate growth boundary of the community over the life of the Plan, and all land within the SUDP is planned for eventual development in a mixture of urban and urban-related uses. (*Merced County Year 2030 General Plan*)

Each of Merced County's six incorporated cities, as well as eighteen unincorporated communities, are presently designated as SUDP's. The City of Merced General Plan proposes to expand its SUDP to provide sufficient developable area to accommodate future growth through the Year 2030 and beyond.



## **PROPOSED MERCED SPECIFIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLAN BOUNDARY (SUDP)/SPHERE OF INFLUENCE (SOI)**

The proposed Merced SUDP would result in a coterminous Sphere of Influence (SOI) and SUDP boundary. The proposed SUDP/SOI boundary would also reduce the current SOI boundary in the northeast to reflect the revised location of the U.C. Merced campus. The proposed SUDP/SOI contains approximately 33,463 acres (52.4 square miles of land area); almost the same area as the 1997 Sphere of Influence.

- 1) Approximately 3,995 acres will be added in Northwest Merced. The new SUDP/SOI boundary would generally move to Franklin Road on the west, north of Old Lake Road, and south to Santa Fe Drive. This area is proposed for industrial and business park uses along Highway 59 and a large mixed-use community north of Bellevue Road.

This area will be able to accommodate a significant amount of the residential growth in the City for the next 20 years.

The business park and industrial areas along Highway 59 are included in order to provide a better “jobs-housing” balance in North Merced, as well as alleviate circulation and air quality concerns. Most existing employment opportunities in Merced are located Downtown and south of Highway 99.

- 2) The second area of expansion consists of approximately 3,824 acres. It would move the SUDP/SOI south of Highway 99 to the vicinity of McNamara Road and west to a line 1/4 mile west of Thornton Road. South of the Merced Regional Airport, a large community plan has been proposed. Although impacted by airport land use restrictions, the proposal has some significant residential and recreational potential.
- 3) The third area to be included encompasses 6,748 acres and moves the SUDP/SOI boundary to take in the property between the current city limit/SUDP, and the U.C. Merced campus and community. These will be brought within the SOI as well.

Inclusion of this area within the SUDP will form a more logical urban boundary, which will ultimately facilitate the provision of City services to the university.

These areas referenced above represent logical expansion areas for the City, primarily because they are adjacent to major road improvements (Merced-Atwater Expressway, Mission / Highway 99 Interchange, etc.). They also encompass areas needed for long-term commercial and industrial development. The residential areas included in this expansion were for the most part large tracts with significant planning efforts currently underway. Given the environmental and physical limitations elsewhere around the City, these are the most logical areas for the next phase of expansion. These areas will give the City enough land to accommodate expected growth over the next 20 to 40 years.

## ***Area of Interest***

Some of the original General Plan study areas were found to have constraints which limited their development potential within the current plan timeline. In the interest of flexibility, and to provide interested property owners with some options, certain study areas have been designated as being within the Area of Interest (AOI). This area is a concern to the City, as it is likely going to be the location of City expansion in the next general plan update, 20-40 years hence. Should it be found that some property within the AOI can be developed sooner, criteria have been developed which would allow land to be incorporated within the SUDP/SOI when appropriate, and ultimately annexed.

In addition, including these areas in the AOI would allow the City to comment on any development proposals which might occur in these areas and impact current and future City development patterns, public service provision, and circulation routes. These areas are not considered for urban development within the 20-year planning horizon.

## **MERCED COUNTY URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

Within the vicinity of the City of Merced SUDP/SOI, several unincorporated urban areas have been developed under the jurisdiction of Merced County. These areas, while outside of the City's SUDP/SOI area, have a considerable impact on the City.

### ***Franklin/Beachwood SUDP***

This is an unincorporated urban area of a little under 3,000 people located on the western boundary of the City's SUDP/SOI. The area is north of Highway 99 between the City SUDP/SOI and Franklin Road and is served Santa Fe Drive.

### ***East Merced RRC***

Located generally east of the City's 1997 SUDP and west of Lake Road, this area has been developing for many years with one-acre and larger home sites. Development in this area is not served by public sewer or water which accounts for the large lot sizes. This area has served as a buffer between the City's urban growth and the agricultural areas east of Lake Road.

### ***Weaver Area RRC***

This area contains a mixture of incorporated and unincorporated urban developments. The area east of Doane-Hartley is incorporated up to Kibby Road, and includes the City's Eastern Industrial Park. This area was included in the City's SUDP since the 1980's.

### ***Celeste RRC***

Located northwest of the intersection of Kibby Rd. and Highway 140, this area is a small residential community surrounded by agricultural land to the east, north and west.

## **2.4.1 PURPOSE**

The purpose of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is to address various issues that have arisen since the adoption of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* in 1997. Most of the changes have arisen due to the new location of the UC Merced campus and its adjacent University Community. Rapid growth and increasing land costs in Merced have also led to the need to consider additional areas for expansion, thus, one major component of the General Plan Update was to expand the City's existing growth boundary known as the Specific Urban Development Plan boundary (SUDP boundary). Modifications were made to the City's SUDP/Sphere of Influence to add the University Community area and to remove areas north and east of Lake Yosemite that have been identified as significant wetlands preservation areas. The SUDP and the SOI were also combined into one boundary.

## **2.4.2 GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS/CHAPTERS**

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains 14 chapters, including the major chapters outlined below. In addition to the mandated and optional elements, the General Plan contains an Executive Summary, an Introduction (Chapter 1), a Glossary of Terms (Chapter 12), a Bibliography (Chapter 13), and a Subject and Policy Index (Chapter 14). It is anticipated that the Executive Summary, the Introduction, and Chapters 12, 13 and 14 required very minor updates to reflect the revised General Plan chapters below. The extent of the updates on the other 10 chapters is outlined in detail below. Each of the seven State-Mandated Elements needed to be updated to reflect the latest edition of the State of California's General Plan Guidelines and changes to State General Plan law since 1997.

### ***Urban Expansion Chapter***

The Urban Expansion Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 as part of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. The Urban Expansion Chapter needed substantial updating to reflect current issues and an expanded Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) boundary and a modified Sphere of Influence, which have been combined into one boundary. Issues that were addressed include, but are not limited to:

- 1) One of the primary purposes of this General Plan Update is to expand the City's SUDP/SOI to include the UC Merced Campus, University Community, and other areas. The existing Urban Expansion Chapter justified the expansion of the SUDP to its 1997 configuration. The modified Chapter addresses the proposed SUDP Expansion, justifying the expansion based on specific criteria and discussing issues associated with that expansion.
- 2) The City's Sphere of Influence needs to be modified to remove wetlands preservation areas north and east of Lake Yosemite from the Sphere and to include the University Community Plan area. Criteria used by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to evaluate Sphere modifications were addressed as well.

- 3) The current Urban Expansion Chapter addresses UC Merced and the University Community at its 1997 location. The Updated Chapter was modified to reflect the new location and discusses issues associated with including these areas in the City's SUDP/SOI.
- 4) With the new location of UC Merced and the University Community, the future of the existing Rural Residential Centers between the City's SUDP and the Campus and Community needed to be addressed in cooperation with Merced County. Much of the area is already subdivided into one-acre estate lots on individual wells and septic systems, but there is also a significant amount of vacant land with potential for development. The residents in this area have traditionally not been interested in annexation to the City and City infrastructure master plans have not been designed to serve these areas. However, with the new location of the University Community, interest in annexation and higher density/intensity development has been expressed by some property owners in the area. Issues that were addressed include the types of land uses that should be allowed, how the area would be serviced with City infrastructure and services, interface issues between new developing areas and existing estate lots, and others.
- 5) In 2004, the County of Merced approved the Yosemite Lakes SUDP within the City's Sphere of Influence. This approval was authorized by the City (as required in the City/County Tax Sharing Agreement) only if the developer and County entered into an agreement to consider this area in the City's SUDP expansion and for future City annexation. The Yosemite Lakes Project area encompasses approximately 655 acres located north of Old Lake Road and north and east of the Merced Golf & Country Club. No land use plan for the area has yet to be established, but the developer is required by the County to move forward with a Community Specific Plan. The City has proposed for this area to be included in the City's proposed SUDP/SOI. Appropriate land use, circulation, and biological constraints were among the issues that needed to be addressed for this area by the applicant and the County in consultation with the City.
- 6) The *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* identified the City's desire to establish a greenbelt between the City of Merced and the City of Atwater, approximately five miles to the west. Recent development proposals in Atwater, the expansion of the Franklin-Beachwood SUDP, the proposed alternative alignments of the Merced-Atwater Expressway, and other recent developments have served to help determine that such a greenbelt should not be included in the General Plan.

### ***Land Use Chapter***

The Land Use Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 as part of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. The Land Use Chapter and Diagram depict a series of "Urban Villages" throughout the City's new growth areas. These Urban Villages are mixed use, transit and pedestrian friendly communities with commercial nodes, surrounding higher density residential uses within walking distance, and outlying lower density areas. The Land Use Chapter required updating to reflect current issues and expansion of the "Urban Village" land use concept to areas within the proposed SUDP/SOI. Issues that were addressed but not limited to, include:

- 1) In order to determine if the land supply within the City's proposed SUDP/SOI will be adequate to accommodate at least 20 years of growth, the General Plan needed to provide the following analysis: a) Inventory existing residential, commercial, and industrial land uses in the planning area; b) assess population and employment projections; c) analyze the existing land supply; and d) determine and assign land use designations to areas within the proposed SUDP/SOI.
- 2) "Urban Village" land use concept was applied to the proposed SUDP/SOI areas where other plans did not exist. This land use concept from the City's General Plan has also been used in the University Community Plan adopted by the County and should be incorporated with all new growth areas.
- 3) The *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* identified two South Merced Specific Plan areas which needed further study. Until such time as Specific Plans were adopted, a "Residential Reserve" land use designation was applied to all areas that were not annexed to the City in 1997. As an interim measure prior to adoption of the Specific Plans, in 2004, the City adopted the South Merced Strategic Plan, which outlines a draft land use and circulation concept for South and Southeast Merced and a series of strategies to address development issues in the area. The City launched the Community Plan process in mid-2005 as a separate process from the General Plan Update. The South Merced Community Plan was adopted in 2008. Various concepts from the South Merced Strategic Plan and Community Plans were incorporated into the General Plan.
- 4) The *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* refers to a number of adopted and future Specific Plans, which will now be known as Community Plans. Various modifications to the four adopted specific plans (Fahrens Park, Campus North, Northeast Yosemite, and Bellevue Ranch) have taken place since that time that needed to be reflected in the General Plan text and diagrams. A fifth Specific Plan, Fahrens Creek, has since been adopted and needed to be reflected in the text of the General Plan.

### ***Transportation & Circulation Chapter***

The Transportation and Circulation Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 as part of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. The General Plan contains a circulation system concept for the undeveloped areas of North Merced. The system is based on one-mile square grids, formed by two sets of intersecting major roadways (arterials or higher order streets), featuring shorter east-west distributor arterials and longer north-south cross-town arterials. The cross-town (north-south) arterials have signalized access to them only at one-half mile intervals, by alternating collectors and distributor (east-west) arterials. The distributor arterials are intended to have signalized access to them by cross-town arterials (one mile apart) and intervening collectors one-quarter mile apart. This circulation system needed to be expanded into the new SUDP and Sphere of Influence areas.

The Transportation and Circulation Chapter also required updating to reflect current issues and an expanded circulation system to serve the proposed SUDP/SOI. Issues that have been addressed include, but are not limited to:



- 1) An amended Circulation Map has been provided which addresses the expansion of City roadway designations into the proposed SUDP/SOI and other issues outlined below.
- 2) The City's 2015 General Plan outlines a concept for an "Eastern Beltway" to serve the UC Merced Campus and growth within the City's northern growth areas as part of a planned "loop system" of roadways along the City's perimeter, but no alignment is designated on the Circulation Map. This project, now known as the Campus Parkway, would generally run from the new Mission Avenue/Highway 99 Interchange north through the City's Southeast Merced area, over Highway 140, and continue north to Yosemite Avenue and eventually into the University Community and UC Merced Campus. The alignment of this roadway has been determined. The County of Merced was the lead agency on the project and prepared an EIR for the Project. The City's General Plan has been amended to reflect the most current information regarding this roadway.
- 3) The City's 2015 General Plan identifies the need for a "Highway 59 (Western) Beltway" as part of the loop system around the City's perimeter. The alignment for this roadway was generally to correspond to North Highway 59 north of Yosemite Avenue and then curving south and west toward a future interchange with Highway 99 in the vicinity of Thornton Road extended. As part of the Regional Transportation Planning process, it has been determined that the City's Western Beltway may need to be combined with a prospective beltway ("Atwater-Merced Expressway") to the east of the City of Atwater. To that end, the Merced County Association of Governments has launched a planning process for a "Merced-Atwater Expressway" with three possible corridors between the Cities of Merced and Atwater. The City's General Plan has been amended to reflect the most current information regarding this project.
- 4) The City's General Plan has been amended to reflect the most current regional transportation information as outlined in the 2004 Merced County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), prepared by the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG). This includes planned improvements to State Highways and regionally significant roadways.
- 5) The City of Merced maintains an extensive series of on and off-street bikeways. A Bikeway Circulation Plan exists for the current SUDP. This plan has been expanded to serve areas within the proposed SUDP/SOI and provides bikeway connections to the UC Campus and University Community.

### ***Public Facilities and Services Chapter***

The Public Facilities and Services Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 as part of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. The Public Facilities and Services Chapter required updating to reflect current issues, the expanded SOI/SUDP, and the 2003/2004 updates to the City's Public Facilities Financing Plan. Issues that were addressed, but not limited to, include:

- 1) With an expanded SOI/SUDP, additional sites for public facilities (parks, fire stations, etc.) needed to be identified in the expansion areas in order to serve these areas and meet current City standards.

- 2) The City adopted its Public Facilities Impact Fees schedule and associated Public Facilities Financing Plan in 1998. The Financing Plan and the Impact Fees program were then substantially amended in 2003 (with minor revisions in 2004), May 2006, and August 2009 (with another amendment proposed for consideration in August 2010). The General Plan needed to be updated to reflect the current list of public facility projects anticipated in the Financing Plan.
- 3) An analysis of the ability of the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) and associated lines to serve the expanded areas needs were included. From an environmental perspective, growth inducement analysis was needed for placement of the line outside the SUDP/SOI on the eastern and western edges of the City.

### ***Urban Design Chapter***

The Urban Design Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 along with the rest of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. The Urban Design chapter outlines policies and guidelines for implementing the City's "Urban Village" concept. No major updates to the Urban Design Chapter were anticipated in this General Plan Update process. However, minor reformatting and minor text changes were made.

### ***Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Chapter***

The Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 as part of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. This Chapter combines two State-mandated Elements-Open Space and Conservation. The Open Space Chapter needed substantial updating to reflect current issues and the recently adopted Parks and Open Space Master Plan (October 2004). Issues that were addressed are:

- 1) Much of the current General Plan language regarding park facilities is based on the 1984 City of Merced Parks and Open Space Master Plan. In 2003-04, the City of Merced was involved in a substantial update of that 1984 Plan, including significant public and stakeholder input. The result was the City of Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan, prepared by Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc. of Portland, Oregon, adopted in October 2004. The General Plan needs to be updated to reflect the contents of the 2004 Parks and Open Space Master Plan.
- 2) When the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* was adopted in 1997, information about the extent of wetlands and habitat for endangered species in the Merced SUDP and Sphere of Influence was limited. Since that time, extensive information has been obtained through the UC Merced Long Range Development Plan, Merced County University Community Plan, and the Merced County Habitat Conservation Plan (now suspended) processes regarding wetlands and habitat resources. The City's General Plan needed to be updated to reflect that new information for areas within its proposed SUDP/SOI and additional policies need to be developed to address these resources. Some overlap is possible with the Sustainable Development Chapter (see below). If the consultants findings conclude that future development in the expanded SOI/SUDP would likely result in a "take" of protected species, then the General Plan needs to include a plan or at a minimum create new General Plan

policies and action items that explain how the City will protect species and permit development.

- 3) The General Plan identified "issues for future study" in Section 7.6 of the General Plan (beginning on page 7-34). These issues included Lake Yosemite Regional Park, Greenbelts and Urban Limit Lines, Future Park Sites and Parks and Open Space Resources (addressed in the 2004 Park and Open Space Master Plan), Highway 59 Landfill Site, and Groundwater Recharge. These issues will need to be evaluated and discussed.
- 4) The General Plan contains strong policies regarding the preservation of agricultural land to the east of the City's SUDP/SOI. Some of these lands are now planned for the UC Merced campus and the adjacent University Community. These policies have been revisited and modified as necessary. Impacts caused by changes to these Policies will also need to be addressed in this EIR.

### ***Sustainable Development Chapter***

The Sustainable Development Chapter was originally adopted in April 1997 as part of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan*. The Sustainable Development Chapter addresses the environmental, natural, and cultural resources of the City, including soil resources, water resources, wildlife resources, air resources, energy resources, and historic resources. The Sustainable Development Chapter needed updates to reflect current issues, such as climate change, healthy communities, and wetlands preservation. Issues that were addressed, but not limited to, include:

- 1) The air quality section needed to be updated to reflect the most current information regarding the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin and the most recent air quality attainment plans of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD).
- 2) The wildlife and water resources sections needed to be updated to reflect the most up-to-date information about wetlands and endangered species habitat within the City's SUDP/SOI.
- 3) In 2003 and 2004, Scenic California undertook a project in the City of Merced to identify scenic resources in Merced. Information from that photo database and scenic resources map and report were incorporated into the General Plan.

### ***Housing Chapter***

The Housing Element was adopted in December 2003, with slight modifications adopted in July 2004. The adopted Housing Element was certified by the State to be in compliance with State Housing Element law. No updates to the Housing Element were done in this General Plan Update process. The Housing Element is currently being updated by the City and in accordance with State housing law and will be incorporated into the General Plan document after its adoption.

## **Noise Chapter**

The Noise Element was originally adopted in March 1993. Minor formatting changes were made in 1997 to match the rest of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* document. The Noise Chapter needed to be updated to reflect current information and updated noise contours. Issues that were addressed, but not limited to, include:

- 1) Updated noise contours based on the latest available traffic modeling and circulation system, updated railway traffic projections, and current and future Merced Regional Airport and Castle Airport flight patterns.
- 2) An evaluation of the acceptable noise level standards to determine if they are realistic in the current and future environment. Incorporate new noise reduction techniques and provide flexibility in the noise standards for certain areas.
- 3) In April 1999, Merced County adopted the Merced County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. This Plan identified land use impacts associated with airports throughout Merced County. Of interest to the City of Merced are the parts of the Plan dealing with the Merced Regional Airport and the Castle Airport. The Plan recommends several amendments to the City's General Plan to address impacts associated with those airports. Revisions to the Land Use, Noise, and Safety Chapters were required to address these issues.

## **Safety Chapter**

The Safety Element was originally adopted in January 1995. Minor formatting changes were made in 1997 to match the rest of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* document. The Safety Chapter needed to be updated to reflect current information and to maintain internal consistency. Issues that were addressed, but not limited to, include:

- 1) Updated information on hazards, including flooding (including the current status of the long-planned Army Corps of Engineers flood channel project in Merced) and dam failure.

### **2.4.3 ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and Program EIR analysis rely on several assumptions regarding existing and future conditions in the Merced SUDP/SOI area. Specifically, these assumptions are:

1. Continued development of the 10th University of California (UC) campus will take place southeast of Lake Yosemite on the northeastern edge of the Merced SUDP/SOI.
2. Future population growth in the Merced SUDP/SOI area will approach 155,000 by the year 2030.
3. Regional urban development (residential, commercial and industrial) will be focused within the Merced City's SUDP/SOI and not in the unincorporated areas surrounding the City in order to accommodate efficient levels of service delivery.

4. The average household size in the SUDP will remain at approximately 3.02 people per dwelling unit.
5. The City's SUDP/SOI will need to accommodate 50,000 housing units.
6. The City's SUDP/SOI will accommodate approximately 35,000 employment opportunities.
7. Projected growth estimates will occur within the planning time-frames.

It should be noted that there are several events that could occur and result in these assumptions being invalidated. In order to make the plan's vision of the future as reasonably accurate as possible, some policies and analysis contemplate these "special events" occurring. Unless otherwise stated, however, the above assumptions are the primary basis of analysis.

#### **2.4.4 PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS**

As a General Plan under California law, the "project" is a policy document used by the City to guide future growth and development. State Law requires that the City's development regulations be "consistent" with the General Plan. Additionally, zoning and subdivision proposals are required to be consistent with the General Plan.

General plan goals and policies tend to be broad and far reaching. As a result, environmental analysis is conducted in a "broad" manner that reflects the nature of the General Plan. (See CEQA Guidelines Section 15146 for a more detailed discussion of this topic.)

#### **Goals**

Each Chapter of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* contains goals, policies and a list of potential implementing actions. A goal is the broad vision of what the community wants to achieve or provide to residents, landowners, business-owners, and visitors. It is a statement of a desired condition. The goal is general in nature and usually timeless.

Policies and Actions are short to intermediate range. Policies state the City's clear commitment on how Goals will be achieved. Actions are specific and describe the means by which the City may carry out a policy.

[Table 2-2](#) contains a list of the goals and policies contained in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* organized by the Chapter within which they appear.

**Table 2-2  
Merced Vision 2030 General Plan Goals and Policies**

<b><i>Chapter 2 -- Urban Expansion</i></b> <b><i>Goal Area UE-1: Urban Expansion</i></b>	
<b>GOALS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>A Compact Urban Form</b></li> <li>■ <b>Preservation of Agriculturally Significant Areas</b></li> <li>■ <b>Efficient Urban Expansion</b></li> </ul>	
<b>POLICIES</b>	
<b>UE-1.1</b>	Designate areas for new urban development that recognize the physical characteristics and environmental constraints of the planning area.
<b>UE-1.2</b>	Foster compact and efficient development patterns to maintain a compact urban form.
<b>UE-1.3</b>	Control the annexation, timing, density, and location of new land uses within the City's urban expansion boundaries.
<b>UE-1.4</b>	Continue joint planning efforts on the UC Merced and University Community plans.
<b>UE-1.5</b>	Promote annexation of developed areas within the City's Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP)/Sphere of Influence (SOI) during the planning period.
<b>UE-1.6</b>	Consider expansion of the City's SUDP/SOI boundary for areas within the Area of Interest when certain conditions are met.

<b><i>Chapter 3 -- Land Use</i></b> <b><i>Goal Area L-1: Residential &amp; Neighborhood Development</i></b>	
<b>GOALS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Housing Opportunities in Balance with Jobs Created in the Merced Urban Area</b></li> <li>■ <b>A Wide Range of Residential Densities and Housing Types in the City</b></li> <li>■ <b>Preservation and Enhancement of Existing Neighborhoods</b></li> <li>■ <b>Quality Residential Environments</b></li> <li>■ <b>Mixed-use, Transit and Pedestrian-Friendly Residential Environments</b></li> <li>■ <b>Ensure Adequate Housing is Available to All Segments of the Population</b></li> </ul>	
<b>POLICIES</b>	
<b>L-1.1</b>	Promote balanced development which provides jobs, services and housing.
<b>L-1.2</b>	Encourage a diversity of building types, ownership, prices, designs, and site plans for residential areas throughout the City.
<b>L-1.3</b>	Encourage a diversity of lot sizes in residential subdivisions.
<b>L-1.4</b>	Conserve residential areas that are threatened by blighting influences.
<b>L-1.5</b>	Protect existing neighborhoods from incompatible developments.

- L-1.6** Continue to pursue quality single-family and higher density residential development.
- L-1.7** Encourage the location of multi-family developments on sites with good access to transportation, shopping, employment centers, and services.
- L-1.8** Create livable and identifiable residential neighborhoods.
- L-1.9** Ensure connectivity between existing and planned urban areas.

## ***Goal Area L-2: Economic & Business Development***

### **GOALS**

- **Increased Employment Opportunities for the Citizens of Merced**
- **A Diverse and Balanced Merced Economy**
- **Preservation and Expansion of the City's Economic Base [Quintero]**
- **High Quality Industrial Areas, Including Technology Parks**
- **More High-Quality Research & Development Parks**
- **Ready Access to Commercial Centers and Services Throughout the City**
- **A Distinguished Downtown**

### **POLICIES**

- L-2.1** Encourage further development of appropriate commercial and industrial uses throughout the City.
- L-2.2** Locate new or expanded industrial, research & development, technology, and business parks in appropriate areas.
- L-2.3** Promote the retention and expansion of existing industrial and commercial businesses.
- L-2.4** Provide a range of services adjacent to and within industrial areas to reduce auto trips.
- L-2.5** Maintain attractive industrial areas and business parks.
- L-2.6** Provide neighborhood commercial centers in proportion to residential development in the City.
- L-2.7** Locate and design new commercial development to provide good access from adjacent neighborhoods and reduce congestion on major streets.
- L-2.8** Encourage a mixture of uses and activities and reinvestment that will maintain the vitality of the downtown area.
- L-2.9** Identify locations and develop standards for campus-type research and development parks.
- L-2.10** Encourage well-planned freeway-oriented developments

## ***Goal Area L-3: Urban Growth and Design***

### **GOALS**

- **Living Environments which Encourage People to Use a Variety of Transportation Alternatives**

- **A Compact Urban Village Design for New Growth Areas**
- **Self-sustaining, Mixed-Use, Pedestrian-Friendly Neighborhoods**
- **Transit-Oriented Development Adjacent to the High Speed Rail Station**

**POLICIES**

- L-3.1** Create land use patterns that will encourage people to walk, bicycle, or use public transit for an increased number of their daily trips.
- L-3.2** Encourage infill development and a compact urban form.
- L-3.3** Promote site designs that encourage walking, cycling, and transit use.
- L-3.4** Build identity, character, and enhanced community design in the South Merced Community Plan area.
- L-3.5** Develop a Transit-Oriented Development Overlay Zone Adjacent to the Planned High Speed Rail Station in Downtown Merced
- L-3.6** Require community plans for large new development areas within the City’s SUDP/SOI prior to development.
- L-3.7** Implement policies and principles to conform to the intent of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint.

***Chapter 4.0 -- Transportation and Circulation***  
***Goal Area T-1: Streets and Roads***

**GOALS**

- **An Integrated Road System that is Safe and Efficient for Motorized and Non-motorized Uses**
- **A Circulation System that is Accessible, Convenient and Flexible**
- **A Circulation System that Minimizes Adverse Impacts upon the Community**
- **A Comprehensive System of “Complete Streets” Which Address All Modes of Transportation**

**POLICIES**

- T-1.1** Design streets consistent with circulation function, affected land uses, and all modes of transportation.
- T-1.2** Coordinate circulation and transportation planning with pertinent regional, State and Federal agencies.
- T-1.3** Design major roads to maximize efficiency and accessibility.
- T-1.4** Promote traffic safety for all modes of transportation.
- T-1.5** Minimize unnecessary travel demand on major streets and promote energy conservation.
- T-1.6** Minimize adverse impacts on the environment from existing and proposed road systems.
- T-1.7** Minimize street system impacts on residential neighborhoods and other sensitive land uses.
- T-1.8** Use a minimum peak hour Level of Service (LOS) “D” as a design objective for all new streets in new growth areas and for most existing City streets except under special circumstances.



## ***Goal Area T-2: Bicycles, Pedestrians, and Public Transit***

### **GOALS**

- **An Efficient and Comprehensive Public Transit System**
- **A Comprehensive System of Safe and Convenient Bicycle Routes (Within the Community and Throughout the Urban Area)**
- **A Comprehensive System of Safe and Convenient Pedestrianways**
- **A Comprehensive System of “Complete Streets” Addressing All Modes of Transportation**

### **POLICIES**

- T-2.1** Provide for and maintain a major transitway along "M" Street and possibly along the Bellevue Road/Merced-Atwater Expressway and Campus Parkway corridors.
- T-2.2** Support and enhance the use of public transit.
- T-2.3** Support a safe and effective public transit system.
- T-2.4** Encourage the use of bicycles.
- T-2.5** Provide convenient bicycle support facilities to encourage bicycle use.
- T-2.6** Maintain and expand the community’s existing bicycle circulation system.
- T-2.7** Maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- T-2.8** Improve planning for pedestrians.
- T-2.9** Ensure that new development provides the facilities and programs that improve the effectiveness of Transportation Control Measures and Congestion Management Programs.

## ***Goal Area T-3: Air and Rail Services***

### **GOALS**

- **Air and Rail Systems that Provide Safe and Convenient Service to the Community**

### **POLICIES**

#### ***AIR***

- T-3.1** Preserve the Merced Regional Airport and its protective zones from incompatible encroachment and incompatible development within the Airport Industrial Park.
- T-3.2** Promote and encourage the orderly and timely development of commercial and general aviation facilities.
- T-3.3** Provide adequate ground transportation systems that complement air transportation facilities.

#### ***RAIL***

- T-3.4** Reduce rail system impacts on circulation within the urban area.
- T-3.5** Support enhanced railroad passenger service and high speed rail service for Merced.
- T-3.6** Retain and expand as needed rail facilities serving industrial development.

**Chapter 5 -- Public Services & Facilities**

**Goal Area P-1: Public Facilities and Services**

**GOALS**

- **Maintenance and Improvement of Merced's Existing Infrastructure**
- **New Development Which Includes a Full Complement of Infrastructure and Municipal Public Facilities**
- **Efficient and Cost-Effective Public Service Delivery**

**POLICIES**

- P-1.1** Provide adequate public infrastructure and municipal services to meet the needs of future development.
- P-1.2** Utilize existing infrastructure and public service capacities to the maximum extent possible and provide for the logical, timely and economically efficient extension of municipal infrastructure and services where necessary.
- P-1.3** Require new development to provide or pay for its fair share of public facility and infrastructure improvements.

**Goal Area P-2: Police and Fire Protection Services**

**GOAL**

- **Maximum Crime and Fire Protection Services**

**POLICY**

- P-2.1** Maintain and enhance public protection facilities, equipment, and personnel to the maximum extent feasible within the resource constraints of the City to serve the City's needs.

**Goal Area P-3: Water**

**GOAL**

- **An Adequate Water Source, Distribution and Treatment Infrastructure System in Merced**

**POLICIES**

- P-3.1** Ensure that adequate water supply can be provided within the City's service area, concurrent with service expansion and population growth.
- P-3.2.** In cooperation with the County and the Merced Irrigation District, work to stabilize the region's aquifer.

**Goal Area P-4: Wastewater**

**GOAL**

- **An Adequate Wastewater Collection, Treatment and Disposal System in Merced**

**POLICIES**

- P-4.1** Provide adequate wastewater collection, treatment and disposal capacity for existing and projected future needs.
- P-4.2** Consider the use of reclaimed water to reduce non-potable water demands whenever practical.

***Goal Area P-5: Storm Drainage and Flood Control***

**GOAL**

- **An Adequate Storm Drainage Collection and Disposal System in Merced.**

**POLICIES**

- P-5.1** Provide effective storm drainage facilities for future development.
- P-5.2** Integrate drainage facilities with bike paths, sidewalks, recreation facilities, agricultural activities, groundwater recharge, and landscaping.

***Goal Area P-6: Solid Waste***

**GOAL**

- **Solid Waste Management Services That Accommodate the Local Population Without Causing Significant Damage to Environmental Resources**

**POLICIES**

- P-6.1** Establish programs to recover recyclable materials and energy from solid wastes generated within the City.
- P-6.2** Minimize the potential impacts of waste collection, transportation and disposal facilities upon the residents of Merced.

***Goal Area P-7: Schools***

**GOAL**

- **Adequate School Facilities for All Students in the Merced Urban Area**
- **Excellent Cooperative Relationships between the City, the School Districts, and the Development Community**

**POLICIES**

- P-7.1** Cooperate with Merced area school districts to provide elementary, intermediate and high school sites that are centrally located to the populations they serve and adequate to serve community growth.
- P-7.2** Support higher educational opportunities.

## ***Goal Area P-8: Cultural and Community Services***

### **GOAL**

- **Support for Cultural and Community Services that Improve and Maintain the Quality of Life for the Residents of Merced**

### **POLICIES**

- P-8.1** The City will support the cultural and health related needs of the community by incorporating such facilities and services in development and redevelopment proposals.
- P-8.2** The City will promote consolidation of complementary or support services to avoid duplication of programs.
- P-8.3** Work with others to study innovative ways of delivering library services at the neighborhood level to promote community education and provide a focus for community activity and cultural development.

## ***Goal Area P-9: Telecommunications***

### **GOAL**

- **Development of Infrastructure and Service to Allow All Merced Residents to Utilize New Technologies to Communicate with the Region, the Nation, and the World**

### **POLICIES**

- P-9.1** Develop City standards for telecommunications infrastructure and encourage its installation in all new development.
- P-9.2** Make information regarding City government and decision-making, local services, and opportunities to participate in City governance available to Merced citizens in electronic form.
- P-9.3** Make use of telecommunications services to increase public safety.

## ***Chapter 6 -- Urban Design***

### ***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.

***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.

***Chapter 7-- Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation***

***Goal Area OS-1: Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources***

**GOALS**

- Maintenance of Merced's Biological Resources
- A High-Quality, Expanding Urban Forest
- Preservation of Scenic Corridors and Resources
- Improvement and Enhancement of Water Quality

**POLICIES**

**OS-1.1** Identify and mitigate impacts to wildlife habitats which support rare, endangered, or threatened species.

**OS-1.2** Preserve and enhance creeks in their natural state throughout the planning area.

**OS-1.3** Promote the protection and enhancement of designated scenic routes.

**OS-1.4** Improve and expand the City's urban forest.

**OS-1.5** Preserve and enhance water quality.

*(Notes: The preservation and protection of important soil resources is addressed under Conservation [erosion], Open Space for the Managed Production of Resources [agricultural preservation policies], and the Urban Expansion Chapter of this General Plan, where the issue of growth impacts on prime soils is addressed.)*

***Goal Area OS-2: Open Space for the Managed Production of Resources***

**GOAL**

- Protection of Regional Agricultural Resources

**POLICIES**

**OS-2.1** Protect agricultural areas outside the City's SUDP/SOI from urban impacts.

**OS-2.2** Relieve pressures on converting areas containing large concentrations of “prime” agricultural soils to urban uses by providing adequate urban development land within the Merced City SUDP/SOL.

### ***Goal Area OS-3: Open Space for Outdoor Recreation***

#### **GOALS**

- **High-Quality Recreational Open Space**
- **Adequate Public Recreation Facilities**
- **Comprehensive Urban Trail and Bike Path System**

#### **POLICIES**

- OS-3.1** Provide high-quality park and open space facilities to serve the needs of a growing population.
- OS-3.2** Maintain and expand the City's Bikeway and Trail System.
- OS-3.3** Maintain the City's existing high-quality open space facilities.
- OS-3.4** Develop a diverse and integrated system of park facilities throughout Merced.

### ***Goal Area OS-4: Open Space for Public Health and Safety***

#### **GOAL**

- **A Safe Environment For Merced's Citizens**

#### **POLICY**

- OS-4.1** Preserve open space areas which are necessary to maintaining public health and safety.

### ***Goal Area OS-5: Conservation of Resources***

#### **GOALS**

- **Conservation of Water Resources**
- **Preservation and Protection of Soil Resources**

#### **POLICIES**

- OS-5.1** Promote water conservation throughout the planning area.
- OS-5.2** Protect soil resources from the erosive forces of wind and water.

## ***Chapter 8 -- Sustainable Development***

### ***Goal Area SD-1: Air Quality and Climate Change***

#### **GOALS**

- **Clean Air with Minimal Toxic Substances and Odor**
- **Clean Air with Minimal Particulate Content**

- **Effective and Efficient Transportation Infrastructure**
- **Coordinated and Cooperative Inter-Governmental Air Quality Programs**
- **Reduction in the Generation of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) from New Development**

**POLICIES:**

- SD-1.1** Accurately determine and fairly mitigate the local and regional air quality impacts of projects proposed in the City of Merced.
- SD-1.2** Coordinate local air quality programs with regional programs and those of neighboring jurisdictions.
- SD-1.3** Integrate land use planning, transportation planning, and air quality planning for the most efficient use of public resources and for a healthier environment.
- SD-1.4** Educate the public on the impact of individual transportation, lifestyle, and land use decisions on air quality.
- SD-1.5** Provide public facilities and operations which can serve as a model for the private sector in implementation of air quality programs.
- SD-1.6** Reduce emissions of PM10, PM2.5 and other particulates with local control potential.
- SD-1.7** Develop and implement a Climate Action Plan for the City.
- SD-1.8** Implement Policies in Other General Plan Chapters to Address Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Goals

***Goal Area SD-2: Cultural Resources***

**GOALS:**

- **A Diverse And Rich Historic and Cultural Resource Environment**
- **A Long-Term Community Historic Preservation/Improvement Program**

**POLICIES:**

- SD-2.1** Identify and preserve the City's archaeological resources.
- SD-2.2** Identify and preserve the City's historic and cultural resources.
- SD-2.3** Develop and promote financial incentive programs for historic preservation efforts.

***Goal Area SD-3: Energy Resources***

**GOAL**

- **Sustainable Energy Resource Use in the City of Merced**

**POLICIES**

- SD-3.1** Promote the use of Solar Energy technology and other Alternative Energy Resources.
- SD-3.2** Encourage the use of energy conservation features, low-emission equipment, and alternative energy sources for all new residential and commercial development.

## ***Goal Area SD-4: Healthy Communities***

### **GOALS**

- **Healthy Lives for Community Residents**
- **A Healthy Environment for All Residents**

### **POLICIES**

**SD-4.1** Create a healthy built environment.

**SD-4.2** Encourage increased physical activity of residents and healthier food choices.

## ***Chapter 9 -- Housing***

*Note: The Housing Element is due to be updated per the schedule in State Law and is NOT included in the comprehensive General Plan Update.*

## ***Chapter 10 -- Noise***

### ***Goal Area N-1: Noise***

#### **GOALS**

- **To Protect City residents from the Harmful and Annoying Effects of Exposure to Excessive Noise.**
- **To Protect the Economic Base of the City by Preventing Incompatible Land Uses from Encroaching upon Existing or Planned Noise-Producing Uses.**
- **To Encourage the Application of State of the Art Land Use Planning Methodologies in Areas of Potential Noise Conflicts.**

#### **POLICIES**

**N-1.1** Minimize the impacts of aircraft noise.

**N-1.2** Reduce surface vehicle noise.

**N-1.3** Reduce equipment noise levels.

**N-1.4** Reduce noise levels at the receiver where noise reduction at the source is not possible.

**N-1.5** Coordinate planning efforts so that noise-sensitive land uses are not located near major noise sources.

**N-1.6** Mitigate all significant noise impacts as a condition of project approval for sensitive land uses.

## ***Chapter 11 -- Safety***

### ***Goal Area S-1: Disaster Preparedness***

#### **GOAL**

- **General Disaster Preparedness**

#### **POLICY**

**S-1.1** Develop and maintain emergency preparedness procedures for the City.



### ***Goal Area S-2: Seismic Safety***

#### **GOAL**

- **Reasonable Safety for City Residents from the Hazards of Earthquake and Other Geologic Activity**

#### **POLICIES**

- S-2.1** Reduce the potential danger from earthquake and seismic-related activity from existing buildings where necessary.
- S-2.2** Encourage the improvement of all public facilities and infrastructure such as natural gas, fuel, sewer, water, electricity, and railroad lines and equipment with up-to-date seismic safety features.
- S-2.3** Restrict urban development in all areas with potential ground failure characteristics.

### ***Goal Area S-3: Flooding***

#### **GOAL**

- **A City Free From Other Than Street Flooding**

#### **POLICIES**

- S-3.1** Implement Protective Measures for Areas in the City and the SUDP/SOI, Within the 100-Year and the 200-Year Floodplains.
- S-3.2** Maintain essential City services in the event of flooding or dam failure.

### ***Goal Area S-4: Fire Protection***

#### **GOAL**

- **Fire and Hazardous Material Safety for the Residents of the City and For Those Working in Fire Suppression**

#### **POLICIES**

- S-4.1** Promote the concept of fire protection master planning with fire safety goals, missions, and supporting objectives for the community.
- S-4.2** Maintain a reasonable level of accessibility and infrastructure support for fire suppression, disaster, and other emergency services.

### ***Goal Area S-5: Airport Safety***

#### **GOAL**

- **A Safe Airport Environment Both Above and On the Ground**

#### **POLICIES**

- S-5.1** Continue to protect approach areas and control zones for both existing and future runway systems through land use regulations and property acquisition where necessary.

**S-5.2** Prevent the encroachment of potential hazards to flight within the Airport's airspace.

### ***Goal Area S-6: Crime***

#### **GOAL**

- **Reduced Criminal Activity and An Increased Feeling of Safety and Security in the Community**

#### **POLICIES**

**S-6.1** Provide superior community-based police services within the resource constraints of the City.

**S-6.2** Provide services and personnel necessary to maintain community order and public safety.

### ***Goal Area S-7: Hazardous Materials***

#### **GOAL**

- **Hazardous Materials Safety for City Residents**

#### **POLICIES**

**S-7.1** Prevent injuries and environmental contamination due to the uncontrolled release of hazardous materials.

**S-7.2** Ensure that hazardous materials are cleaned up before a property is developed or redeveloped.

### ***Land Use Concept***

The fundamental land use concept of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is the “Village.” The “Village” concept applies principally to the City’s designated growth areas. Within developed areas of the City, “Village” development policies attempt to promote in-fill development with mixed use and other types of development/redevelopment that promotes transit use.

Within the City’s *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, a “Village” is a compact, mixed-use district. The “Village” concept is expected to efficiently accommodate projected growth, maintain Merced’s present quality of life and ensure the continued economic vitality of the City.

The “Villages” land use concept encourages pedestrian and transit travel. The concept minimizes 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 “Villages” land use concept takes the typical elements of urban growth (retail centers, single family and multifamily housing, roads, and public services) and reorganizes them to form a more efficient and pedestrian-oriented development pattern.

In the “Villages” land use concept, medium density housing, core commercial uses, and public facilities are concentrated within easy walking distance of transit service. Additionally, office uses are located immediately across from the larger core commercial areas. Consequently, the

“Villages” are more human-scaled and community-oriented than typical commercial strips and residential subdivisions.

As a result, residents can walk to shop, to work, or to ride transit. Workers in or near the village core can walk for local errands, to have lunch or to use parks and recreation facilities. By locating transit stops near core commercial areas, shopping can occur to and from work. By providing a compact mixture of land uses, many of a person’s daily trips can be accommodated on foot. Nevertheless, the street system is designed to accommodate those who wish to drive or need to drive for major purchases such as weekly grocery shopping.

Centrally-located public uses, such as post offices, libraries, civic centers, day care, and neighborhood parks, are also an important component of the “Village” land use concept. They provide convenient community services and meeting places, as well as support local stores.

Less compact Outer Village Areas surround the Villages and contain lower density housing, schools, and open space. Outer Village Areas are tied to the “Village Core” by a local network of connector streets so that arterials and thoroughfares are not relied upon for local travel. This reduces demand on these roads and provides safe paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. Overall, the “Villages” concept provides a formula for more sustainable development patterns in the City of Merced.

### ***Land Use Diagram***

The City’s Land Use Diagram for the General Plan is shown in Figure 2-4. It presents the general distribution of the uses of land within the City of Merced and its SUDP/SOI (or growth boundary).

The Land Use Diagram combined with General Plan Policy text set forth the number of people and dwelling units per net acre of land for each property planned for residences and the building intensity for all other proposed development. This building intensity is expressed in terms of a floor area ratio, which is the gross floor area permitted on a site divided by the total net land area of the lot. Other pertinent features of the Land Use Diagram include the locations of existing and proposed parks, public schools, and other public facilities such as fire stations.

General plans also must contain a circulation element. This element shows the location and extent of existing and proposed thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities, and correlates them with the land use element. Maps are needed to show location. Merced’s Circulation Plan shows current and proposed arterials, collector streets, and local streets as well as bikeways and rail lines (on separate maps). This roadway system has been tested against the planned level proposed in this plan and has been found to be adequate.

Together, the Land Use Diagram and Circulation Plan graphically show the managed growth of the City for the next 20 years. The General Plan also contains other maps and diagrams that show various features of Merced and help illustrate various goals and policies of the General Plan.

## **2.5 Proposed Action**

The purpose of the General Plan Update is to address various issues that have arisen since the adoption of the *Merced Vision 2015 General Plan* in 1997. Most of the changes have arisen due to the new location of the University of California Merced campus and its adjacent University Community. Rapidly fluctuating growth and increasing costs in Merced have also led to the need to consider additional areas for expansion, thus, one major component of the General Plan Update was to expand the City's existing growth boundary known as the Specific Urban Development Plan boundary (SUDP boundary). Modifications were made to the City's Sphere of Influence to add the University Community area and to remove areas that have been identified as significant wetlands preservation areas. The SUDP and SOI boundaries were combined into one single boundary. In addition, the land-use designation for certain areas within the City limits has been amended to allow a broader mix of uses than currently allowed. With the implementation of the proposed General Plan, buildout would result in a variety of potential uses including: increased residential development, commercial development, and open space.

## **2.6 Uses of the EIR and Required Agency Actions and Permits**

With the exception of the Merced County LAFCO, which reviews changes to Spheres of Influence, annexations to cities and special districts in Merced County; no other agencies must approve the City's actions as described above, as no permits will be issued from resource, regulatory, or planning agencies as part of project approval. In the interest of disclosure, this Program EIR has been sent to the following agencies for review and comment:

- County of Merced
- California Department of Fish & Game
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- National Office of Historic Preservation
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District
- Merced County Airport Land Use Commission
- Merced Police Department
- University of California, Merced
- Merced Union High School District
- Merced City School District
- Merced Community College District
- McSwain Union Elementary School District
- Weaver Union Elementary School District