



MEMO

To: Bill King, Principal Planner
CITY OF MERCED

From: Jennifer Venema

Cc: Pam Johns, Tammy Seale, Jeanine Cavalli, Nora De Cuir

Date: June 26, 2015

Re: Merced Programmatic CAP Focus Group Meeting, June 11, 2015

The purpose of this memo is to summarize the sixth Focus Group meeting, held on March 12, 2015. The PMC team facilitated the meeting for the City's Programmatic Climate Action Plan project.

The City of Merced Programmatic Climate Action Plan (PCAP) project implements the City's Climate Action Plan (CAP), adopted by the City Council in 2012. The project's goal is to provide tools to support and implement the CAP. Key objectives include achieving the City's adopted greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets while streamlining and simplifying the review of new development. The project will result in: 1) an action plan; 2) tools to track and analyze urban growth, the cost benefit of strategies, and emission reductions; and, 3) design guidance. The primary purpose of the sixth Focus Group meeting was to review the approach and project tools that will support CAP implementation.

FOCUS GROUP

The Focus Group for the PCAP project is an ad hoc committee of key stakeholders representing different organizations and interests in the community. Members of the Focus Group include representatives from businesses, the local green industry, the Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce, and community groups, along with representatives from the Planning Commission, City Council, and City departments. The Focus Group convenes on a regular basis to offer recommendations and feedback to City staff and decision-makers during the development of project materials. Prior to the sixth Focus Group meeting, Focus Group committee members reviewed Technical Memo #4, which included a summary of project tools and implementation processes.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING #6

The sixth Focus Group meeting was held from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. in the Sam Pipes Room in the Merced Civic Center on June 11. In attendance were six members of the Focus Group, two members of the public, and City staff. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss tools that will implement CAP measures and monitor progress to the target.

MEETING APPROACH

City and PMC staff presented information to the Focus Group and facilitated a discussion with Focus Group members. The following issues were addressed:

- **Project Overview**
PMC staff summarized the PCAP project status and timeline. This presentation identified the anticipated timeline of subsequent Focus Group meetings for review and recommendation of project materials in September and late fall of this year, with project completion planned for early 2016.
- **Implementation Tools**
PMC presented an overview of the benefits and purposes of tools completed through the project: the PCAP, the Project Options Checklist, the UDM, and the monitoring tool. The presentation then focused on the draft Project Options Checklist and monitoring tool. PMC and City staff discussed the function and approach of the Project Options Checklist, fielding questions and responding to issues raised by the Focus Group. Discussion reviewed the eight options in the checklist for projects to demonstrate consistency with the CAP. Focus Group member suggested additional options to consider. PMC briefly reviewed the connection between the Project Options Checklist and UDM. Following this discussion, PMC demonstrated the functionality of the monitoring tool. The Focus Group and PMC discussed the tools ability to credit future GHG reductions to the City based on lower actual rates of growth than those assumed in the General Plan and CAP.
- **Questions and Wrap-Up**
Staff presented the next steps for the PCAP project and anticipated timeline of releasing draft tools and materials for the Focus Group by July 31 (Programmatic Climate Action Plan, Unified Design Manual, Project Options Checklist, and monitoring tool). Two subsequent Focus Group meetings in August and late fall of this year will allow for Focus Group consideration of the tools and recommendation to the City Council.

DISCUSSION

During the presentation at the Focus Group meeting, committee members, PMC, and City staff discussed numerous issues regarding CAP tools and approach for developing the PCAP. A summary of key topics discussed is provided below.

1. **Expectations for PCAP:** Focus Group members questioned the completion of a cost-benefit analysis and provision of additional technical information. Staff and other Focus Group members noted that the cost-benefit analysis was reviewed at a previous meeting. Staff explained that this information, in addition to other technical details, will be included in the PCAP document.
2. **Measures in the Project Options Checklist:** Focus Group members prioritized flexibility for the checklist. Members recommended that prescriptive measures should be changed to provide flexibility (e.g., allow requirements for renewable energy to be met by multiple technologies and not just solar PV). Focus Group members provided varying opinions on the ease of readability and clarity of the Project Options Checklist. Members also requested provision of at least one additional option for residential and nonresidential development. Staff responded that one more option could be provided for both residential and nonresidential

projects, and noted that adjustments could be made to focus on the performance objectives for each measure.

- 3. Diversity of measures in the Project Options Checklist:** Focus Group members asked for inclusion of water, xeriscaping, shading, and other supportive actions as options for projects to achieve necessary GHG reductions. Several members asked for less emphasis on renewable energy, with provision of other options. Staff responded that actions such as water conservation generally provide lower smaller reductions than those in the checklist. Staff noted that they can explore creation of an additional option for consistency that packages several lower-credit actions into one overall option.
- 4. Presentation of the Project Options Checklist:** Focus Group members discussed potential benefits to provide scoring for each measure identified in the checklist, rather than a pre-determined set of options. Others asked for a different way of summarizing each item such as providing the prescriptive technical details associated with each option. Several questions and responses focused on questions regarding usability for developers. Feedback from staff explained the relationship between the Project Options Checklist and the UDM. Discussion from staff sought to clarify that the project is using a streamlining approach, drawing on plan-level guidance from the CEQA Guidelines, to provide plan-level streamlining as directed by City Council. Staff also discussed challenges and opportunities with scoring and weighting each measure in the Project Options Checklist. Instead, staff noted that the Project Options Checklist provides recommendations for the most feasible and effective measures to achieve CAP consistency. Staff also explained that projects could still opt to complete a separate environmental review of GHG emissions, rather than rely on the Project Options Checklist.
- 5. Public outreach:** Discussion from Focus Group members also emphasized the importance of an ongoing community outreach program to support and achieve CAP targets. Members shared suggestions for publicizing CAP accomplishments opportunities through bill inserts or other methods. Staff discussed efforts to support outreach, and shared an update regarding the City's partnership with the Institute for Local Governments (ILG). With ILG, City staff noted that they are exploring potential leadership models to support CAP implementation. City staff explained that staff anticipates providing at least two updates to Council each year on CAP implementation, following completion of the PCAP effort.
- 6. Challenge of new growth:** Members vocalized concern that ambitious growth projections in the General Plan results in greater expenses to new development by resulting in greater levels of GHG reductions to achieve CAP consistency. Staff clarified that the Project Options Checklist shows ways that each project could be consistent with overall guidance from the SJVAPCD that projects each achieve a 29% reduction in GHG emissions from BAU levels and reduce project-level contribution to overall, community-wide GHG emissions. This individual project-level reduction would not change. Staff also demonstrated the functionality of the monitoring tool to estimate reductions in the 2020 GHG emissions forecast based on lower levels of growth. Staff summarized the benefit of the monitoring tool to show overall, community-wide progress to the GHG reduction target, accounting both for current activity data and annual changes in demographics (residents, households, and employment).