



CHAPTER 2: THE PLANNING PROCESS



CHAPTER 2: THE PLANNING PROCESS

OVERVIEW OF “THE PLANNING PROCESS” CHAPTER

The “The Planning Process” Chapter of Merced’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, describes the purpose, process, community involvement and related documents of the planning effort. It contains the following sections:

2.1 PURPOSES AND BENEFITS OF HAZARD MITIGATION PLANNING

2.2 THE PLANNING PROCESS NARRATIVE

2.3 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

2.4 EXISTING PLANS, REPORTS, STUDIES, AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION

2.1 Purposes and Benefits of Hazard Mitigation Planning

Introduction

More often than not, communities are faced with having to deal with the aftermath of an unwanted hazard that can devastate areas of a community. While we cannot prevent disasters from happening, their effects can be reduced or eliminated through hazard mitigation planning, but only if a local government has the foresight to assess likely hazards and craft preventative measures before the next hazard event occurs. This Chapter describes the background of hazard planning and why citizens and governments are becoming better prepared.



2.1.1 Purpose

In the past, federal legislation provided funding for disaster relief, recovery, and for some hazard mitigation planning. The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) reinforces the importance of mitigation planning and emphasizes planning for disasters before they occur. DMA 2000 shifts federal emergency management away from a reactive “response and recovery” emphasis to “preparedness.” The Act also facilitates cooperation between state and local authorities, prompting them to work together. It encourages and promotes sustainability as a strategy for disaster resistance. This enhanced planning network will better enable local and state governments to articulate accurate needs for mitigation, resulting in faster allocation of funding and more effective risk reduction projects.

Under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, States and local communities must have an approved mitigation plan prior to receiving post-disaster funds. Local hazard mitigation plans must demonstrate that their proposed mitigation measures are based on sound planning process that account for the risk to and the capabilities of the individual communities. FEMA-approved LHMP’s meet the requirements of the DMA 2000, which calls for communities to have a multi-hazard mitigation plan in place in order to qualify for future funding under the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). In addition, these plans can assist a community in applying for other hazard mitigation project funding, such as FEMA’s pre-disaster mitigation program, the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program, as well as other federal and state funding. If state and local government meet these criteria and get their plan approved by FEMA, then they are eligible to receive increased funding under the HMGP, which is implemented under Section 404 of the Stafford Act.

In order to continue to be eligible for mitigation project grant funding, a local jurisdiction is required by 44 CFR 201.6(d)(3) to review and revise its plan, and resubmit it for approval within 5 years of FEMA approval of the prior plan.

2.1.2 Benefits

As the costs of damage from natural disasters continue to increase, communities realize the importance of identifying effective ways to reduce vulnerability to disasters. Natural hazard mitigation plans assist communities in reducing risk from natural hazards by identifying resources, information, and strategies for risk reduction, while helping to guide and coordinate mitigation activities throughout the City. Preparing a plan to lessen the impact of a disaster before it happens will provide the following benefits to a community:

- Reduce public and private damage costs;
- Reduce social, emotional, and economic disruption;
- Increase access to funding sources for hazards mitigation projects; and,
- Improve the ability to implement post-disaster recovery projects.

Communities are the first to feel the effects of disasters; therefore, local government should do everything possible to protect their citizens from hazards’ risks and ensure that their community complies with federal and other regulations designed to reduce cost. Business and private organizations also have much to gain by reducing their risk to hazards, in terms of their own well-being, as well as contributing to reducing the risk in the community as a whole. Unfortunately, businesses at times can suffer severe damage from natural disasters and, as a result, they are unable to reopen after the disaster. Even if the business is not physically damaged during the disaster, it cannot operate if its employees cannot get to work, if water and electricity are unavailable, or if customers fear safety

hazards. Thus, to ensure that businesses and private organizations reduce their risk to natural hazards, local communities must set forth an effective and comprehensive plan that addresses hazard threats in addition to identifying and selecting the best solutions to handling such potential risk.

A Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) provides a set of action items, if deployed, will reduce risk from natural hazards through: 1) education and outreach programs that foster the development of partnerships; and 2) implementation of preventative activities, such as a land use program that restricts and controls development in areas subject to damage from natural hazards. The resources and information within the Merced Mitigation Plan:

- Establish a basis for coordination and collaboration among agencies and the public;
- Identify and prioritize future mitigation projects; and,
- Assist in meeting the requirements of federal assistance programs.

Multiple Benefits, Multiple Approaches

After a disaster, repairs and reconstruction are often completed in such a way as to simply restore to pre-disaster conditions. Such efforts expedite a return to normalcy; however, the replication of pre-disaster conditions results in a cycle of damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. Local hazard mitigation ensures that such cycles are broken and that post-disaster repairs and reconstruction result in reduction in hazard vulnerability.

The goal of mitigation is to save lives and reduce property damages. Mitigation can accomplish this, and should be cost-effective and environmentally sound. This, in turn, can reduce the cost of a disaster to property owners and all levels of government. In addition, mitigation can protect critical community facilities, reduce exposure to liability, and minimize community disruption. Examples of mitigation include land use planning, adoption of building codes, and

elevations of homes, or acquisition and relocation of homes away from floodplains.

Partnership, Programs and Funding Opportunities

Communities and states have a range of “local” tools to finance projects. Use of fees, taxes, bonds, and loans to finance projects are options if there is proper state enabling legislation, local authority, and enough political will. Once the plan has been adopted, there is a legitimate basis for initiating the process required to use these financial tools. However, most local hazard mitigation plans cannot be implemented using only local funding sources. Furthermore, it may take some time to work through the legal and administrative process to use proceeds from bond issues and similar finance tools. To supplement local funds, communities can apply for grants from federal and state government, nonprofit organizations, and foundations, as well as seek funding from other private sources. The advantage of applying for grants is that they do not have to be paid back or generate long-term debt; however, most federal grants require state and/or local government to provide some degree of matching funds.

PARTNERSHIPS

Private Partnership agreements between local governments and business or organizations can be advantageous for all parties involved. Private organizations and businesses routinely offer discounted or free goods and services to local governments in exchange for publicity or other benefits. In the end, the governments, organizations, businesses, and the public can all benefit from working together. For example, in Houston, Texas, FEMA and two prominent home improvement stores teamed up to provide information and advice on cleaning up and rebuilding after flooding caused by Tropical Storm Allison. FEMA Hazard Mitigation Teams staffed booths at both stores for three days, providing information on mitigation methods and techniques and the

importance of flood insurance. By providing space, the stores played an important role in promoting community awareness of flooding hazards and helped foster public involvement in recovery.

STATE PROGRAMS

State Partnerships are excellent sources of funding, support, and technical assistance. State geological surveys, water resource agencies, and departments of planning or natural resources often have useful data related to hazard identification and risk assessments. States can further help publicize awareness and generate interest by declaring a Hazard Awareness Week and promoting related local events on their website.

The State of California has numerous agencies that are involved in hazard identification and hazard mitigation, including:

- **California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA)** is an entity that is responsible for disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and the administration of federal funds after a major disaster declaration.
- **The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)** is in charge of all aspects of wildland fire protection on private and state properties, and administers forest practice regulation.
- **The California Division of Water Resource (DWR)** plans, designs, constructs, operates, and maintains the State's Water Projects; regulates dams, provides flood protection, and assists in emergency management. It also educates the public and serves local water needs by providing technical assistance.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has developed several programs that provide funding to state and local governments to assist and support state, regional, and local communities in an effort to reduce, respond, and recover from a natural disaster. Under 44 CFR Sec 201.6, local governments must have a FEMA-approved Local Mitigation Plan in order to apply for and/or receive **project** grants under the following hazard mitigation assistance programs:

- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP);
- Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM);
- Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA); and,
- Severe Repetitive Loss (SRL).

Pre-Disaster Programs

- The **Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program (PDM)**, authorized under DMA 2000, provides pre-disaster funding on a competitive basis to states, communities, and tribes for cost-effective hazard mitigation planning activities that complement a comprehensive mitigation program and reduces injuries, loss of life, and damage and destruction of property before it strikes. However, an approved mitigation plan is required to receive funding since it is graded and awarded on a competitive basis.
- The **Flood Mitigation Assistance Program (FMA)** provides funding to assist states and communities in implementing measures to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to buildings, manufactured homes, and other insurable structures. Three types of grants available through the FMA program include “Planning,” “Project,” and “Technical Assistance.” Only communities that participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), and have a FEMA-approved LHMP that addresses flood hazards can apply for FMA “Project” grant. “Planning” and “Technical Assistance” grants only require participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Planning grants are to be used by states and communities to prepare flood mitigation plans, with a focus on repetitive loss properties. The NFIP is a governmental entity that helps local communities by offering government insurance to property owners for structures that otherwise would be uninsurable because of their susceptibility to flooding.
- The **Severe Repetitive Loss Program (SRL)** provides funding to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to severe repetitive loss (SRL) residential structures in order to reduce or eliminate claims under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Active-Disaster Programs

- The **Fire Management Assistance Grant Program (FMAG)**, made available by FEMA through the President’s Disaster Relief Fund, assists in fighting fires that threaten to cause a major disaster. Eligible costs covered by the aid can include expenses for field camps, equipment use, repair and replacement; tools, materials, and supplies; and mobilization and demobilization activities. Such funds can be used for both wildland and urban fires.

Post-Disaster Programs / Federal Disaster Aid and Relief Funds

- The **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**, authorized by Section 404 of the Stafford Act, provides grants to state and local government to implement long-term hazard mitigation actions after a major disaster declaration. An approved mitigation plan is required to receive project funding. Additionally, the Stafford Act also authorizes up to 7 percent of available HMGP funds for mitigation planning purposes.
- The **Public Assistance Program (PA)** is authorized under section 406 of the Stafford Act. The program provides funding to state and local governments, Indian Tribes, and certain private non-profits (such as rural electric cooperatives -RECs), following a disaster declaration, for the repair, restoration, or replacement of damaged facilities, and for other associated expenses, including emergency protective measures and debris removal. Under the program, FEMA reimburses successful applicants for 75 percent of their total eligible expenses. In California, Cal EMA pays 18.75 percent of the eligible costs incurred by city and county agencies and special districts, with local agencies picking up the remaining 6.25 percent. This program does not require an approved mitigation plan from FEMA.
- The **Assistance to Individuals and Households Grant Program** is authorized by Section 411 of the Stafford Act and authorizes grants to be used for mitigation measures to cover serious unmet, disaster-related real property losses.

Federal Disaster Assistance

A United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) declaration will result in the implementation of the Emergency Loan Program through the Farm Services Agency. This program enables eligible farmers and ranchers in the affected county as well as contiguous counties to apply for low interest loans. A USDA declaration will automatically follow a major disaster declaration for counties designated major disaster areas and those that are contiguous to declared counties, including those that are across state lines. As part of an agreement with the USDA, the SBA offers low interest loans for eligible businesses that suffer economic losses in declared and contiguous counties that have been declared by the USDA. These loans are referred to as Economic Injury Disaster Loans.

2.2 The Planning Process Narrative

Introduction

This section provides a systematic account of how Merced's hazard mitigation plan was developed - from the moment the planning team was created and the public participated, to how each section of the plan was developed. This description serves as a permanent record that explains how decisions were reached on a strategy to reduce losses, and demonstrates that it was developed with stakeholder input in a methodical and reasonable way.



2.2.1 Project Initiation

The planning effort began on July 1, 2010, after award of a planning grant from Cal EMA in spring 2010. The planning effort was led by the City's Planning Division. Considerable effort was made training and researching to assure that the planning approach was comprehensive and consistent with state and federal guidelines and requirements. To achieve this goal, the Project Leadership Team created three key guidance documents that would set the foundation for the project's Planning Process, these being: (1) a detailed *scope-of-work* checklist describing the phases, steps and tasks necessary to craft an acceptable plan; (2) a *public outreach strategy* ensuring that the public would be engaged in the planning process; and, (3) an *agenda outline of committee activities* to occur throughout the planning period. The plan development process was set forth in "The Planning Process Narrative" and "Community Involvement" sections and edited throughout the planning process, as necessary, to account for adjustments. These sections laid the foundation upon which the remainder of the plan was constructed.

2.2.2 Planning Process Narrative

Hazard Mitigation Planning (HMP) is a dynamic process built on realistic assessments of past and present information used by the City to anticipate future hazards and provides meaningful strategies to address possible impacts and identified needs.



RC#A1a

The City of Merced utilized the HMP process described in FEMA's "State and Local Mitigation Planning How-to-Guides." There are four general planning phases. The first phase, **Organize Resources**,

consists of mobilizing the community and getting started with the Planning Process. The second phase, **Assess Risks**, identifies hazards and estimates the losses associated with these hazards. The third phase, **Develop the Mitigation Plan**, consists of identifying mitigation actions and implementation strategies. The fourth phase, **Implement the Plan and Monitor Progress**, discusses how to implement, monitor, and evaluate mitigation actions, and to keep the mitigation plan current.

Into this four-phase process, the City of Merced integrated a more detailed 10-step planning process used for FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) and Flood Mitigation Assistance programs. Thus, the combined 4-phase HMP and 10-step CRS process used for this plan meets the requirements of six major funding programs:

- FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
- Pre-Disaster Mitigation program
- Community Rating System
- Flood Mitigation Assistance Program
- Severe Repetitive Loss program
- New Flood Control Projects Authorized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

FEMA's 4-Phase Process and the 10-Step CRS Process used to Develop the City of Merced Local Hazard Mitigation Plan:

Phase 1: Organize Resources

- Step 1: Organize the Planning Effort
- Step 2: Involve the Public
- Step 3: Coordinate with Other Departments and Agencies

Phase 2: Assess Risks

- Step 4: Identify the Hazards
- Step 5: Assess the Risks

Phase 3: Develop the Mitigation Plan

- Step 6: Set Goals
- Step 7: Review Possible Activities
- Step 8: Draft an Action Plan

Phase 4: Implement the Plan and Monitor Progress

Step 9: Adopt the Plan

Step 10: Implement, Evaluate, and Revise the Plan

The following “Phase” and “Step” descriptions provide a detailed narrative of the overall project progression. Supplementing this Planning Process Narrative are agendas and minutes (see Appendix A). Meetings are also listed in the “Opportunities for Public Comments,” Table 2-1.

Phase 1: Organize Resources

The first phase of the mitigation planning process includes assessing readiness to plan, establishing a planning team, securing political support, and engaging the community. As a single-jurisdiction plan, the City of Merced is the sole jurisdiction seeking approval of the Merced Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP).

**Step 1.1: Organize the Planning Effort**

The initial step in organizing resources was the establishment of the Plan Leadership Team (PLT), consisting of key City Staff responsible for preparing the MHMP (maps, tables, text, images, and formatting), and for providing the overall guidance of the project. Using FEMA’s program guidance documents and how-to-guides, the PLT gained an understanding of HMP and the phases, steps, and tasks necessary to craft an acceptable plan. This work resulted in the creation of a detailed *scope-of-work*.

Next, a *Skills and Knowledge Team* was formed and consisted of representatives from the City’s Engineering, Building, and Fire Departments, who brought specialized knowledge of flooding, earthquakes, and fire hazards, respectively. This team conducted initial assessment of hazards and began to draft profiles for Merced’s most prevalent hazards. After conclusion of Steps 1.2 and 1.3 below, a citizens advisory committee was formed. (See Section 2.3,

“Community Participation,” for a full description of the membership and roles of the PLT and the Disaster Council).

Step 1.2: Involve the Public

The PLT crafted a project “Public Outreach Strategy” (please refer to Section 2.3, “Community Involvement,” for details). The strategy was crafted to assure that the public and private sectors were engaged in the development process of the plan. The strategy also ensured that the activities of the PLT, the Disaster Council, and stakeholders were coordinated throughout the planning process. Public meetings were held during development of the draft plan and prior to finalizing the plan. These meetings are outlined in Table 2-1 and detailed in the “Community Involvement” section of this Plan. All notices to the public, including press releases, website postings, and newsletters, are on file with the City of Merced Planning Division.

**Step 1.3: Coordinate with Other Departments and Agencies**

Section 201.6.b.2 of 44 CFR requires that opportunities for involvement in the planning process be provided to neighboring communities, local and regional agencies involved in hazard mitigation activities, agencies that have the authority to regulate development, businesses, academia, and other private and nonprofit interests. This task was accomplished by the MHMP planning team as summarized below.

- *Agency Notification*—A diligent effort was made to keep key agencies apprised of the planning process. These key agencies are denoted in the list of stakeholders provided in the “Community Participation” section. These key agencies were invited to participate in the HMP process from the beginning and were kept apprised of plan development milestones. All of these



agencies received meeting announcements, meeting agendas, and given access to meeting minutes throughout the plan development process. This approach proved to be beneficial when these agencies supported the effort by attending meetings or providing feedback on issues. All of these agencies were also informed about the MHMP web page to see up-to-date information.

- **Disaster Council Involvement**—Members of the public and stakeholder agencies sit on the City’s Disaster Council, which is assisting the Planning Leadership Team (PLT) to craft the MHMP (See Section 2.3 for details).
- **Coordination with Merced County**—Although the MHMP is a single-jurisdiction multi-hazard mitigation plan, the City engaged Merced County in the City’s effort in order to gain insight on shared concerns and goals of responding and preparing for hazards that affect both jurisdictions.
- **Pre-adoption Review**—Community Stakeholders were provided an opportunity to review and comment on the draft MHMP throughout its development. The predominant means for this review was through the MHMP webpage on the City website. When updates were posted, agencies and interested members of the public were sent an e-mail message informing them that draft portions of the MHMP were available for review. In addition to Disaster Council meetings, which were open to the public, a public meeting with the Planning Commission was held on July 18, 2012, to receive public input on the draft plan.

Capitalizing on the resources available from other City departments and agencies, the PLT identified and integrated existing planning documents into MHMP during this phase. A listing of all such documents is provided in Section 2.4, and their use in developing the MHMP is marked in the plan.



Phase 2: Assess Risks

The second phase of the HMP process involved the identification and evaluation of natural and man-made hazards, and the preparation of damage loss estimates. Knowing where hazards can affect Merced’s built environment and the likely outcome of damages and losses resulting from a hazard event helps to focus protection efforts on the City’s most important assets first. The Risk Assessment also builds the scientific and technical foundations for the mitigation strategy. The Geographic Information System (GIS)-based HAZUS program was used to display, analyze, and quantify hazards and vulnerabilities.



Step 2.1: Identify the Hazards

In this task, all natural and man-made hazards that *might* affect the City of Merced were listed, as well as those that are most likely to occur. The hazards included natural, technical, and human-caused events. The PLT, Disaster Council, and the public all contributed to the identification of hazards in the planning area. The PLT met early in the planning process and identified the most apparent hazards which allowed for the preparation of preliminary Risk Assessments to be drafted by the *Skills and Knowledge Team*. After formation of the Disaster Council and with public input, a final review of the hazard list was prepared. The Disaster Council ranked the list of hazards at their March 9, 2012, public meeting.

Step 2.2: Assess the Risk

This step has three components: (a) preparation of “Risk Assessments,” (b) review of community assets, with an emphasis on the effect of natural disasters on the City’s critical facilities, including the Civic Center, Police Stations, Fire Stations, and Utility Systems; and, (c) prepare an estimate of losses. Conclusions about the nature of risk and vulnerability formed the foundation for selection and prioritization of mitigation actions.

Risk Assessments: The Disaster Council reviewed the “Risk Assessments” for the identified hazards; both the hazard profile and vulnerability assessment were put together in a combined report. The flood-related hazard profile also includes a description of the role of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The Profiles include a description of the location, extent, and prior events. Upon completion of describing these factors, the Disaster Council helped to determine the probability of recurrence.

Asset Inventory: An inventory of community assets was performed in order to determine the quantity of buildings, people, and asset values that lie in the different hazard areas and what proportion of the City this represents. The baseline data contained in HAZUS was supplemented with recently constructed assets, (for example, the new Merced Medical Center on “G” Street). This inventory enabled the City to estimate losses resulting from flood and earthquake hazard events and to determine where resources should be allocated to address mitigation issues.

Loss Estimate: The City of Merced utilized HAZUS, a PC-based software, which implements the FEMA-developed “loss estimate methodology” to map and display hazard data, as well as the results of earthquake damage and economic loss estimates for buildings and infrastructure within the City. This task helped the City determine which assets would be subject to the greatest potential damages and which hazard event is likely to produce the greatest potential losses.

Phase 3: Develop the Mitigation Plan

The third phase of the HMP process combined the “Risk Assessment” and loss estimates to develop the mitigation goals, and identified mitigation actions to achieve these goals to reduce future disaster-related losses.



Step 3.1: Mitigation Goals

The first step of this phase was for the Disaster Council to establish a set of goals for hazard mitigation. Goals of the MHMP were selected to be consistent with community and state goals, and applicable to the hazards and vulnerability thereof experienced in the City of Merced.

Step 3.2: Select Mitigation Activities

This step included three activities: (a) draft a capabilities assessment; (b) analyze mitigation actions; and, (c) prioritize selected mitigation measures.

- *Capabilities Assessment:* This assessment provides a comprehensive examination of the City’s capacity to implement meaningful mitigation initiatives, and identifies existing opportunities for program enhancement. Capabilities include staff and organizational capability, technical capability, policy and program capability, infrastructure capability, and fiscal capability. The purpose of this assessment is to identify any existing gaps, weaknesses, or conflicts in local programs/activities that may hinder mitigation efforts, or to identify those local activities that can be built upon in establishing a successful community hazard mitigation program.
- *Analyze Mitigation Actions:* Mitigation strategies are intended to reduce the vulnerability to the identified hazards. It was imperative to have engineers and vital City employees involved in this phase of the plan in order to develop strategies and projects that will mitigate the hazard and solve the problem cost-effectively, as well as ensure consistency with the City’s long-term mitigation goals and capital improvements. A team-based approach was utilized to brainstorm mitigation projects based on risk assessments, capabilities assessment, and loss estimates.

- *Prioritize Mitigation Initiatives:* The Disaster Council prioritized the mitigation measures, using the “STAPLEE Prioritization” tool, emphasizing benefits vs. costs, where appropriate.

Step 3.3: Draft an Action Plan

The PLT developed a draft action plan to detail how the mitigation recommendations will be implemented and administered by the City, including: responsible departments, funding resources, and estimated timeframe. At their public meeting of January 25, 2013, the Disaster Council reviewed and commented on the draft Action Plan.

The PLT produced a complete first draft of the MHMP, including the *Plan Maintenance* Chapter. This complete draft was posted on the project website for community stakeholders and the Disaster Council’s review and comment, and was presented at Community Meeting #2 on April 19, 2013 to provide an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the Plan.

Phase 4: Implement the Plan and Monitor Progress

The fourth phase of the mitigation planning process included: (a) approval and adoption process of the MHMP; and (b) establishing a *Plan Maintenance Program*, to ensure that the MHMP will remain an active and relevant document. The Disaster Council reviewed and approved the Plan Maintenance Chapter of the plan in April 2013. A Section Periodic review of the plan helps keep the plan current, reflecting the changing needs of the community or state.



Step 4.1: Adopt the Plan

After the Disaster Council formally voted to approve the draft MHMP at Community Meeting #2, the following actions occurred:

- *State and Federal Plan Approval*—In May 2013, the draft plan was submitted to the State Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA), who forwarded their comments and MHMP to FEMA, who in turn reviewed, commented and provided one combined review and letter to the City. The MHMP was revised to address these comments, and then sent directly to FEMA for review and approval. On August 6, 2014, FEMA determined the plan is eligible for final approval pending its adoption by the City of Merced.
- *Local Adoption*—Within one calendar year of receipt of an “approval, pending adoption” from FEMA, upon recommendation by the Disaster Council, the Merced City Council adopted the MHMP through Resolution 2015-09 at their hearing of March 16, 2015. The City forwarded this resolution to FEMA, who “officially approved” it on March 19, 2015, the plan’s effective date (see inside cover of this plan).
- *General Plan Consistency*— Under AB 2140, adopting the FEMA “Approved” LHMP into the Safety Element of the General Plan is optional. However, doing so entitles compliant communities to additional available recovery reimbursements after a major disaster declaration. It also entitles compliant communities to receive priority consideration for hazard mitigation grant funding. The Local Adoption noted above included the action to include the MHMP as part of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*.



RC#E1



Step 4.2: Implement, Evaluate, and Revise the Plan

The true worth of any mitigation plan is in the effectiveness of its implementation. In the Action Plan, each recommended mitigation strategy includes key implementation factors, such as a lead manager, possible funding sources, and schedule. Implementation of the MHMP will be accomplished through existing planning mechanisms such as the general plan related activities, the capital improvement plan, building code, and development design guidelines. The MHMP *Action Plan* is presented in Chapter 4 (Mitigation Strategy) of the MHMP. A plan update and maintenance schedule and a strategy for evaluation and continued public involvement are included in Chapter 5 (Plan Maintenance) of the MHMP.

2.2.3 Environmental Review

In general, in accordance with CEQA Guideline 15061(b)(3), a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA.



In addition to this general exemption, the MHMP is also considered exempt through Statutory Exemption 15262 and Categorical Exemption 15306.

Statutory Exemption

Statutory Exemption 15262, *Feasibility and Planning Studies*, applies to a project involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the agency, board, or commission has not approved, adopted, or funded does not require the preparation of an

EIR or negative declaration, but does require consideration of environmental factors. This section does not apply to the adoption of a plan that will have a legally binding effect on later activities. The MHMP is consistent with these criteria and is a type of Feasibility and Planning Study.

Categorical Exemptions

Categorical Exemption 15306, *Information Collection*, otherwise known as “Class 6,” consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. These may be strictly for information gathering purposes, or as part of a study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. The MHMP is consistent with these criteria and is a “Class 6” Categorical Exemption.

CEQA Review for the MHMP

The PLT and Disaster Council crafted the MHMP to be consistent with the definitions of Statutory Exemption 15262, *Feasibility and Planning Studies*, and Categorical Exemption 15306, *Information Collection*. No mitigation action is recommended that triggered the need for environmental analysis. A Notice of Exemption citing the aforementioned exemptions was prepared for the MHMP, and is included with plan Adoption Resolution 2015-09 at the inside cover of this plan.

Future CEQA Review

The implementation of mitigation actions of future projects of the MHMP may trigger the need for assessment of environmental impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and would occur after adoption of the MHMP.

(Page left intentionally blank.)

2.3 Community Participation

Introduction

The City of Merced utilized a detailed public outreach strategy to successfully capture agency and community input. Agency participation allows impacted organizations to provide expertise and insight into the planning process. Integrating citizen participation during the process results in increased public awareness and a reflection of community issues, concerns, and new perspectives on mitigation opportunities.



Public Outreach Strategy

This Public Outreach Strategy was developed to provide opportunities for the public to be involved in the development of Merced’s LHMP. The objectives of the Public Outreach Strategy are:



- Identify the *participants* in the planning process, who include: the Planning Leadership Team, the Disaster Council, the Skills and Knowledge Team, and the general public, including stakeholders;
- Satisfy the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 “public outreach” requirements during the drafting of the plan and prior to its adoption;
- Utilize a variety of *public outreach methods*, for example, a questionnaire to gauge the public’s perception of risk and support of hazard mitigation;
- Provide multiple *public outreach events* to collect meaningful input into each aspect of the plan; and,
- Attempt to reach a diverse mix of the public and as many citizens in the planning area as possible.

This chapter is structured to describe three key elements of the public outreach strategy, including: (1) Plan Participants; (2) Public Outreach Methods; and, (3) Public Outreach Events and Activities. The section concludes with Table 2-1, “Opportunities for Public Comments,” which provides a summary of the Project’s community participation in the development of the plan.

2.3.1 Plan Leadership

The City of Merced Local Hazard Mitigation Plan was crafted by the Plan Leadership Team, guided by technical support staff and actions of the Disaster Council, with input from the comments of an engaged community.



RC#A1c&d

THE PLAN LEADERSHIP TEAM

In 2009, the City Manager’s Office directed the Development Services Department to spearhead the effort to secure planning funds to prepare a LHMP. The Planning Division of the Development Services Department led this effort, and upon award of a planning grant from FEMA in 2010, formed a Plan Leadership Team (PLT).

Plan Leadership Team

Bill King, Merced Planning Division

Mike McLaughlin, City of Merced Fire Chief

Ken Elwin, Merced Engineering Division

The PLT duties included:

- Establish a Disaster Council;
- Ensure plan compliance with Disaster Mitigation Act (DMA) requirements;
- Facilitate the Planning Process including Public Participation;
- Produce the draft and final plan documents; and,
- Coordinate the Cal EMA and FEMA Region IX plan reviews.

The PLT engaged other City Staff members having specialized skills and or knowledge to craft specific components of the plan.

Skills and Knowledge Staff Team

Ruthanne Harbison, GIS Specialist / Mapping and HAZUS

Mark Hamilton, Planner / Asset Inventory and Loss Estimates

John Franck, retired Senior Engineer / Risk Assessment

Shawn Henry, City of Merced Fire Battalion Chief / Capability Assessment

Julie Sterling, Associate Planner / Public Outreach Coordinator

Don Wolcott, Building Plans Examiner / Risk Assessment

Stuart England / NFIP Coordinator

Nancy Lee, Secretary II / Plan Format and Design

DISASTER COUNCIL

A hazard mitigation plan is one of the best ways to enhance collaboration and gain support among the parties whose interests might be affected by hazard losses. By working together, a broad range of stakeholders can identify and create partnerships that pool resources to achieve a common vision for the community. The scope of work established for this process was built around this concept by the formation of a *Disaster Council* (DC). The members of this committee included key City personnel, citizens, knowledgeable individuals representative of the community, and stakeholders from within the planning area. After a thorough review, assessment and understanding of Hazard Mitigation Planning, the PLT began the process to establish the membership of the *Disaster Council*.

The City Manager appointed the members and on December 5, 2011, the Merced City Council was presented with its roster and overview of the jurisdiction and purpose of the Disaster Council. The powers and duties of the Disaster Council are codified in Title 8 Chapter 20 of the Merced Municipal Code, and are empowered to develop and recommend for adoption by the City Council, emergency and mutual-aid plans.

Disaster Council

1. Chair: **John Bramble**, City Manager
(Director of Emergency Services)
2. Vice-Chair: **Mike McLaughlin**, Fire Chief
(Deputy Director of Emergency Services)
3. Police: **Norm Andrade**, Police Chief
4. Public Works: **Mike Wegley**, Director
5. Public Works: **Stan Murdock**, Director
6. Development Services: **David Gonzalves**, Director
7. Finance: **Brad Grant**, Director
8. Civic Representative: **Dr. Laurie Dickinson**
9. The Appraisal Group: **John Sundgren**
10. American Red Cross: **Sherry Pitchford**
11. Merced Irrigation District: **Dan Aguilar**
12. Pacific Gas & Electric: **Richard Dye**
13. Merced City School District: **RoseMary Parga Duran**
14. Merced Union High School District: **Kelly Bentz**



The *Disaster Council* was responsible for providing essential insight into several facets of the plan, including:



- Identified past natural hazard events and ranking thereof;
- Commented on current natural hazard vulnerability (including specific locations);
- Assisted in developing plan goals;
- Identified critical City assets;
- Identified current mitigation efforts and potential mitigation actions;
- Reviewed chapters of the plan throughout the development process; and,
- Provided a final recommendation to the City Council.

The *Disaster Council* met 8 times during the planning period. The purposes of those meetings are outlined in Table 2-1 and agendas and minutes of the meetings are contained in Appendix A.



RC#A1a



2.3.2 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Stakeholders are individuals or groups that could be affected by the MHMP and/or who can provide specialized knowledge or be individuals working with populations or areas at risk from natural hazards. Key stakeholders were invited to attend *Disaster Council* meetings and provided comment on the draft chapters of the MHMP. Interested stakeholders were granted one-on-one interviews to learn more about their ideas and concerns about hazard mitigation planning for consideration in drafting the draft plan. Stakeholders were notified when draft Chapters of the MHMP were posted on the Project website for review and comment.

Stakeholders represented the following groups. Key stakeholders, denoted by (**) were represented on the Disaster Council.

Neighboring Communities

City of Atwater
 Chief of Police
 Fire Battalion Chief
 Public Works

RC#A2.a, b,
& c

Local and Regional Agencies

** Merced Irrigation District
 ** City Public Works Department
 Merced County Fire Department
 Merced County Public Works - Roads Division
 Merced County Sheriff's Office
 Merced County Operations of Emergency Services (OES)
 ** Pacific Gas and Electric
 ** Merced Union High School District
 ** Merced City School District

Weaver Union Elementary School District
 Merced College
 UC Merced
 City of Merced Economic Development
 ** City of Merced Police Department
 ** City of Merced Fire Department
 City of Merced Information Technology Department
 ** City of Merced Finance Department
 US Army Corp of Engineers
 Caltrans District 10

Agencies having Authority to Regulate Development

Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission
 **City of Merced Development Services Department
 Merced County Planning Department
 Merced County Environmental Health Department
 Merced County Public Health Department
 Merced County Farm Bureau

Businesses, Academia, and Other Private and Non-Profits

Merced Ahead
 The Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce
 The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
 Local Developers and Builders (BIACC)
 Mercy Medical Center
 Golden Valley Health Center
 Riggs Ambulance
 Merced County Fair
 League of Women Voters
 Merced Lao Family Community
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 Neighborhood Watch Representatives
 Environmental and Conservation Groups
 Railroad Contacts
 ** Local Chapter of the American Red Cross

Merced Sun Star
 Merced County Times
 Merced County Historical Society
 United Way of Merced
 Building Healthy Communities
 ** The Appraisal Group

GENERAL PUBLIC

Golden Valley Neighborhood Association
 Sierra Club
 San Joaquin Raptor Wildlife Rescue Center



CONSIDERATION AND INCORPORATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

The *Disaster Council* considered input received from the public through the various outreach methods, and where appropriate, comments were incorporated into various sections of the plan.



Public Outreach Methods

Multiple public outreach and noticing methods were utilized to inform the community of the preparation of the LHMP, including:

- Information about meeting dates, draft versions of the report, and links to provide public comments were provided via the City's website.
- Meeting notices were posted to the Civic Center Notice Cabinet.
- Notices of community meetings were posted in the City's Employee Newsletter "*City Scene*."
- Newsprint Press Releases on the Project were provided to the Merced Sun Star and *Merced County Times* for various public outreach events.
- Public Service Announcements (PSA), for example a local radio program "*Community Conversations*," was utilized to advertise public outreach events.
- South Merced Community Newsletter: A monthly newsletter from the *Golden Valley Health Centers*.

- Notices of community meetings were posted in the City's newsletter "*Your City Connection*" that is delivered with monthly utility bills.
- Flyers in English and Spanish
- Community Cable TV covered all project-related meetings with the Merced City Council.



Public Outreach Events and Activities

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

A key objective in the public outreach strategy was to give the public as many opportunities to participate during the drafting of the plan and prior to its adoption. This objective was achieved and the events and activities utilized are detailed here. The full listing of public outreach events are summarized in Table 2-1.



RC#A3a & b

Public Survey



A *Natural Hazard Community Awareness Survey* was developed for Merced and asked 30 questions to gauge household hazard preparedness and the level of knowledge of methods available to reduce the impacts of hazards. The survey also asked several demographic questions to help analyze trends. Survey results were used by the *Disaster Council* as a guide when establishing goals and mitigation strategies for the MHMP. The PLT widely advertised this survey, including but not limited to project stakeholders, City employees, members of City committees and commissions, and community groups. The survey was completed and returned by 138 recipients. The data collected was then analyzed and converted into a readable format. Appendix C provides a complete summary of the survey and survey findings.

Informational Webpage

An informational website was created to keep the public posted on plan development milestones and to solicit information pertinent to the development of the plan. The webpage address www.cityofmerced.org was publicized in all press releases, mailings, questionnaires, and public meetings. Information on the Disaster

Council, public meetings, key elements of the plan, and drafts of the MHMP were available throughout this process. The City intends to keep the MHMP website active after the plan's completion to keep the public informed about successful mitigation projects and future plan updates.

Disaster Council Meetings

All Disaster Council (DC) meetings were advertised as public meetings on the City website, emails, and through press releases prior to scheduled meeting dates.

Public Community Meetings

In addition to the public Disaster Council meetings, several public community meetings occurred throughout the development of the MHMP to identify common concerns and ideas regarding hazard mitigation and to discuss specific goals and actions of the mitigation plan. On July 18, 2012, the PLT held a public meeting concerning the draft MHMP at a Planning Commission meeting to receive input from the public. The following outreach for this meeting occurred: 1) a June 28, 2012, legal notice in the Merced County Times; 2) a July 5, 2012 article in the Merced County Times; 3) notices to 93 local Neighborhood Watch block captains; 4) notices to all 50 stakeholders representing public agencies and community interest groups; 5) article in the City of Merced Employee Newsletter, "City Scene;" and, 6) a radio interview/advertisement on Capital Public Radio.

Market on Main Street Event

Planning Staff provided opportunities for community input at the *Market on Main Street* event in August 2012. Input was sought through the use of: 1) *Natural Hazard Community Awareness Surveys*; and 2) participants ranked the potential mitigation actions, and were encouraged to provide ideas for mitigation strategies for the MHMP.

There were a total of 22 people who completed the Community Awareness Surveys and 18 people who participated in ranking the potential mitigation strategies.





The public input gathered from these events was shared with the *Disaster Council* at their December 2012 meeting to help them prioritize the final set of potential mitigation actions. The 9 recommended Mitigation Strategies were subsequently ranked and tallied by the PLT.

The Planning Leadership Team, guided by FEMA plan development requirements determined which of the six Plan Goals were met for each strategy; when implementation is to occur within the 5-year Plan timeline; which organization/department would be responsible for overseeing the strategy; provide potential funding sources; and estimate the project costs. At their January 25, 2013 Meeting, the Disaster Council reviewed and discussed the Mitigation Action Plan for the MHMP.

Community Stakeholder Interviews

The PLT offered interviews to all Community Stakeholders. The meetings were held at the Merced Civic Center or at the Merced City Fire Department Station #51 throughout the development process of the MHMP.

On April 19, 2013, prior to plan approval, the complete draft plan was presented to the Disaster Council, Stakeholders, and the general public at Community Meeting #2.





Table 2-1: Opportunities for Public Comments

Date	Event Title	Plan Participants	Outreach Methods
2/10/11	Plan Leadership Orientation Meeting with Skills and Knowledge Team	PLT, SKT	Internal
Ongoing	Skills and Knowledge Team Meetings	PLT, SKT	Internal
9/2011 - 11/2012	Community Survey using Survey Monkey	All	W, F, CN, PR, SMN
11/14 -11/18/11	Geographic Information System (GIS) Day and Map Gallery	All	W, CN, PR, F
1/13/2012	Disaster Council Meeting #1: Project Orientation	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W
2/10/2012	Disaster Council Meeting #2: Hazard Identification	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W
3/6/2012	Public Outreach at Golden Valley Heath Center Roundtable Discussion	PLT,DC,SKT	F,CM
3/7/2012	Article in the Merced Sun Star	GP	PR
3/9/2012	Disaster Council Meeting #3: Risk Assessment and Hazard Ranking	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W,PR
4/2012	Article in City of Merced Utility Billing - "Your City Connection"	GP	UB
4/2012	Golden Valley Health Center Newsletter sent to 250 residents (English/Spanish)	GP	SMN
7/2/12	Article in City Scene – City Employees & City Council	PLT,DC,SKT	CN
7/3/12	South Merced Roundtable Discussion – Public Outreach (Update on grant)	GP/CS	F,CM
7/5/12	Article in Merced County Times	GP/CS	PR
7/9/12	Radio Interview w/ Robert Hensley, Capital Public Radio, Sacramento	GP	RI
7/9/12	Outreach e-mail blast to Neighborhood Watch Captains	GP/CS	CN
7/13/12	Disaster Council Meeting #4: Capability Assessment, Mitigation Goals, and Actions	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W
7/18/12	Community Meeting #1 "Planning Commission Orientation and Public Input"	PLT,CS,GP	PHN,W,PR, CN, RI,
8/9/12	Public Outreach Booth at "Market on Main Street" event	PLT, GP	W, RI , F
10/6/12	Fire Safety Week	PLT, GP	CN, F
11/13-11/27/12	Geographic Information System (GIS) Day and Map Gallery	PLT,DC,CS,GP	W, CN, PR, F
12/4/12	South Merced Roundtable Discussion – Public Outreach (Update on grant)	GP/CS	F,CM
12/7/12	Disaster Council Meeting #5: Prioritize and Project Implementation Action Plan	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W
1/25/13	Disaster Council Meeting #6: LHMP Action Strategy Matrix	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W
4/19/13	Community Meeting #2 and Disaster Council Meeting #7 - "Public Review of Draft Plan" and Formal Recommendation of Draft Plan	PLT,DC,CS,GP	PHN,W,PR
2/18/2015	Planning Commission Public Hearing	PLT,CS,GP	PHN,W
3/16/2015	City Council Public Hearing	PLT,CS,GP	PHN,W

Community Participation Table Key

Code Outreach Method Description

W	Website
PHN	Civic Center Notice Cabinet
TV	Community Cable TV
CN	City Employee Newsletter
F	Flyers
UB	Utility Bill Notice
PR	Press Release
RI	Radio Interviews
SMN	Community Newsletter
CM	Community Meeting

<u>Code</u>	<u>Participants</u>
PLT	Plan Leadership Team
DC	Disaster Council
SKT	Skills and Knowledge Team
CS	Community Stakeholders
GP	General Public

2.4 Existing Plans, Reports, Studies, and Technical Information

Introduction

Hazard mitigation planning involves identifying existing policies, tools, and actions that will reduce a community's risk and vulnerability from natural hazards. Integrating plans, studies, programs, and ordinances that guide growth and development into the MHMP establishes a credible and comprehensive plan that links with and supports other community programs.



2.4.1 Plan Coordination with Existing Documents

While developing the City of Merced Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP), the Project Leadership Team reviewed existing planning resources, such as plans, reports, studies, technical information, programs and policies, and codes. As appropriate, relevant information from these resources were incorporated into the hazard mitigation planning effort.



RC#A4.a & b

INFLUENCE OF MHMP ON OTHER PLANNING RESOURCES

Following completion and approval of the Hazard Mitigation Plan, these existing planning resources will be reviewed to ensure their information is consistent with the MHMP and updated as appropriate. For example, the City of Merced's General Plan Safety Element will be amended to include the FEMA "Approved" Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. Additionally, the next update to the City of Merced Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) will incorporate the hazard risk assessment from the MHMP. These are a few examples of how the MHMP will be integrated into existing planning resources.



SUMMARY TABLE OF EXISTING PLANNING RESOURCES

Listed in Tables 2-1.a and 2-1.b are existing studies, reports, technical information, programs, codes, and policies that have either been incorporated into the Merced Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP), or have been or may be amended with information found in the MHMP.

Table 2-1.a: Existing Plans, Reports, Studies and Technical Information

Existing Plans, Reports, Studies and Technical Information	Information From:	Potential Information To:
Merced Vision 2030 General Plan	×	×
City of Merced Capital Improvement Plan	×	×
City of Merced Emergency Operations Plan (2011 Revision)	×	×
State of California Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan	×	
Merced Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (under preparation)	×	×
2010 Urban Water Management Plan	×	×
City of Merced Stormwater Management Plan	×	×
Merced County - Feasibility Study Black Rascal Creek Flood Control Project June 2008/Addendum 1 February 2009	×	
Yosemite Lake Dam Failure Analysis for Bellevue High School – NAVD 88 (subsequent name change to El Capitan High School)	×	
Possibilities versus Probabilities: Analysis of Community Risk within the City of Merced	×	
Final Environmental Impact Report, Merced Union High School District Bellevue Road Area High School	×	
Merced County Courthouse Museum Archives	×	×
ACS Firehouse Software (number of occurrences of the hazard as recorded by the Merced Fire Department)	×	
GIS Data: Assessor parcel data including use codes, assessed categories and values, geographic placement of critical facilities, base theme data including parcels, water features, roads, topography, city limits	×	

Additionally, during the development of the MHMP, many data sources were utilized to gather historical hazard frequencies and probabilities, and detailed hazard descriptions. These are listed in the “References and Works Cited” – Appendix E.

Table 2-1.b: Existing Plans, Reports, Studies and Technical Information

Existing, Programs, and Policies and Codes	Information From:	Potential Information To:
Programs		
Functional Access and Needs Plan	x	x
Continuity of Operations Plan	x	x
Merced County Hazardous Waste Management Plan (The Merced County Environmental Health Division, which oversees the enforcement of the <i>Merced County Hazardous Waste Management Plan</i> maintains an up-to-date list of known hazardous waste sites within the County)	x	x
The City of Merced Hazardous Materials Area Plan has been developed and is utilized as the response guidelines to hazardous materials incidents. ²	x	x
2011 Area Plan for Emergency Response to Hazardous Material Incidents	x	x
CalSIEC Central Planning Area / Merced Operational Area Governance Charter	x	
Fire Department Master Plan and Strategic Plan	x	x
National Flood Improvement Program	x	x
Policies and Codes		
Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances	x	x
Floodplain Ordinance	x	x
Building Code		x