



2. VISION & URBAN DESIGN

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* provides valuable direction for the Bellevue Community Plan (BCP) and is the starting point for this plan. The General Plan identifies regional features that will shape the community plan area, for example, the Merced Loop Road and interest to identify sites for future job-generating uses near UC Merced. From the City's *General Plan*, five core principles establish the urban design framework upon which the remainder of the structure (urban expansion, land use, transportation, public facilities and services and urban design) of the plan is based.

REGIONAL FEATURES

This section describes how the BCP implements the goals of the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan and integrates with other planning efforts in the community, specifically:

- Linkages with the Atwater-Merced Expressway / Loop Road
- Research and Development Sites
- Preservation of Downtown Cultural Center
- City of Merced Transit Corridor
- Expanded Community Arterial Network
- High Speed Rail Connection

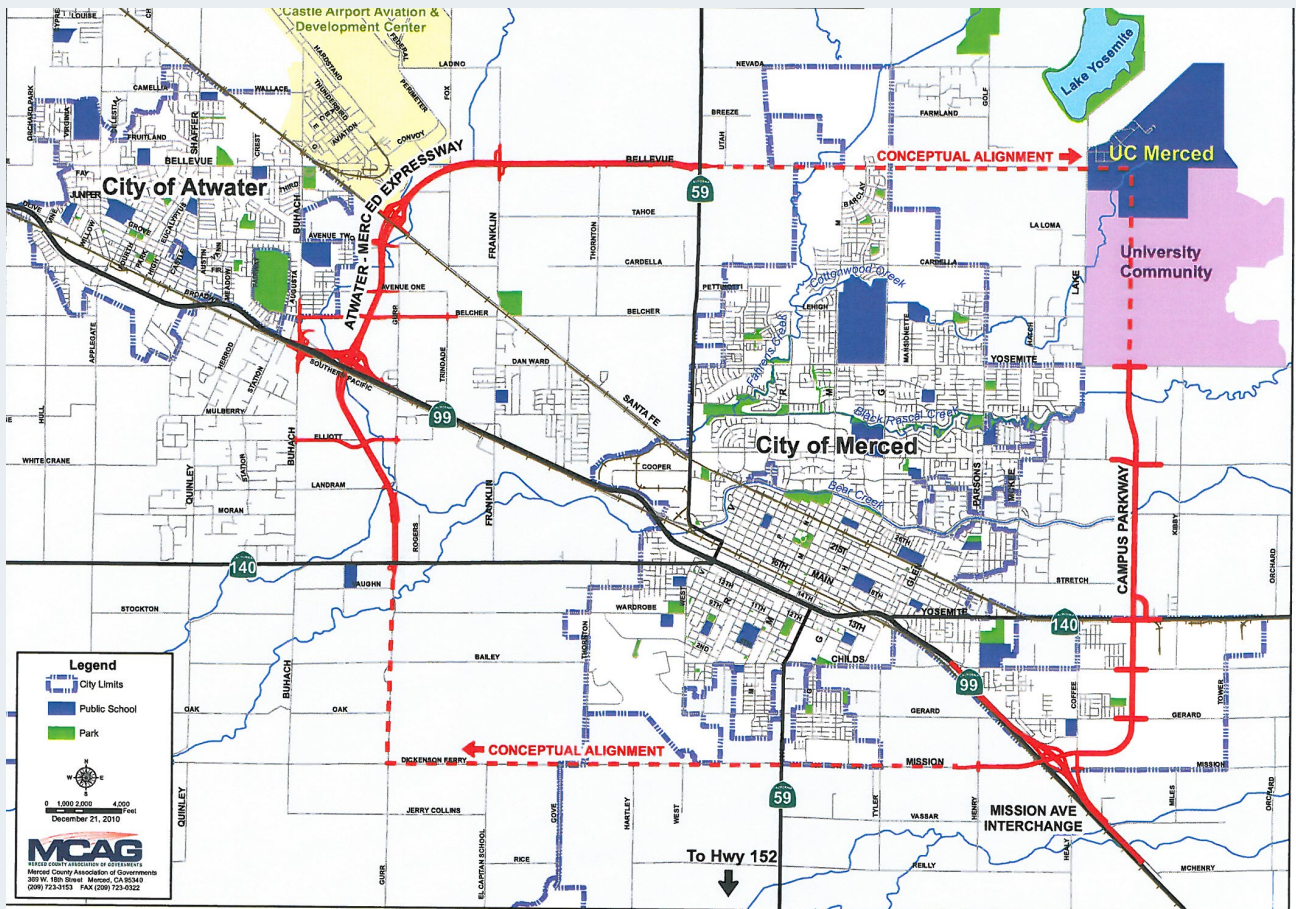
ATWATER-MERCED EXPRESSWAY / LOOP ROAD

The loop concept came from the Highway 99 Major Investment Study which began in 1993 and was adopted by the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) in 1997. It was derived from the idea that State Highway 99 through Merced/Atwater could only fit 6 lanes on the existing footprint, although 8 lanes would be needed in the future. However, with a full loop-road, 6 lanes would suffice. The Campus Parkway segment of the loop idea came from the City of Merced’s “Eastern Beltway” study. The Atwater-Merced Expressway segment originated from plans for a functional north-south state highway to replace the existing Highway 59 alignment. The components of the loop were drawn where they seemed most reasonable.

As part of the loop road network, Bellevue Road has the potential to be a much more significant regional route in the foreseeable future than other east-west arterials shown on the City’s Circulation Plan. As part of the loop road network (see Figure 4 below), Bellevue Road has the potential to be a much more significant regional route in the foreseeable future than other east-west arterials shown on the City’s Circulation Plan. This makes it imperative that necessary rights-of-way (ROW’s) be obtained throughout its corridor, in order to ensure its future viability. Bellevue Road will also connect to the Merced-Atwater Expressway project west of Highway 59, which will ultimately connect Bellevue Road to Highway 99.

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Figure 4. Merced Loop System



Merced County Association of Governments, 2013

The Bellevue Community Plan forms a critical link in the provision of Merced's transit service, including a link to the potential high-speed rail station in downtown.

CITY OF MERCED TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Numerous policies of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* identify the need to plan for a transit corridor to connect downtown Merced with UC Merced, specifically mentioning the Bellevue Road corridor (see Figure 5). Future transit stations are proposed within UC Merced and the Bellevue Ranch Development. As such, the Bellevue Community Plan forms a critical link in the provision of Merced's transit service, including a link to the potential high-speed rail station in downtown. Building upon this foundation of a transit corridor the BCP planning process set out to examine Transit Priority Project (TPP) needs, potential locations, and design solutions, notably, to define TPPs in keeping with SB 375 and to describe anticipated transit needs for use as a key driver in establishing the land use and design elements of the Plan. Transit Priority Projects are eligible for various levels of CEQA-based permit streamlining, encouraging development that is consistent with the goals of the BCP. (See Mobility and Land Use chapters for additional information on TPPs).

EXPANDED COMMUNITY ARTERIAL NETWORK

The BCP planning area includes two arterial streets that are essential parts of regional and community-wide infrastructure needs. First, the roles and values that Bellevue Road brings to the community are numerous and essential. Already a major conduit for UC Merced related-traffic, this role will dramatically increase in the near and long-terms as improvements link the Atwater-Merced Expressway to Bellevue Road. In addition, a major entryway to UC Merced, Bellevue Road provides the community with the opportunity to create an inviting gateway to UC Merced and the City of Merced. The extension of Gardner Road to Bellevue Road in the BCP planning area will complete the City's easternmost arterial road, which when complete, will extend from Highway 99 through Southeast Merced, the eastern edge of Central Merced and all of North Merced. The completion of Cardella Road will provide important east-west traffic flow for the community. Together, these roads will serve as important linkages between UC Merced and the rest of the City of Merced. Development of these roads will also minimize traffic impacts on Lake Road.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SITES

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* describes seven “Commercial and Industrial Employment Corridors” with heavy concentrations of commercial and industrial development; the BCP is one of these areas, and is described as likely containing significant amounts of job generating uses that wish to be located in close proximity to the UC Merced campus. In numerous locations, the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* describes a vision for future jobs-based land uses in the BCP planning area:

- Provide for increased opportunities for job-based land uses attracted by a university climate while still maintaining the basic concept of mixed-use, pedestrian, and transit oriented communities. (pages 3-71 to 3-73)
- Each of the “Urban Villages” between Lake Road and “G” Street should contain in addition to “Neighborhood Commercial,” “Village Residential,” and “Professional Commercial -Office,” the opportunity for an expanded urban core comprised of a jobs-based office, business park or research and development type land use supported or spun-off from UC Merced. page 3-56.
- The plan should assess the viability of expanding office, commercial, and research and development land use capacities in the plan area (pages 3-71 to 3-73)
- Some of the land uses could connect to research and development activities associated with the campus research programs or professional services associated with the campus’s professional schools. (pages 3-71 to 3-73)

The City of Merced Vision 2030 General Plan encourages the expansion of office, commercial, and research and development land use capacities in the Bellevue Corridor Plan Area.

Example of R&D Site





The construction of the proposed High Speed Rail system would provide new jobs for Merced residents and help connect Merced to large population and job centers throughout the State.

To balance the need for regional vehicular access to UCM and the BCP area with the imperatives of pedestrian-oriented, transit-ready mixed-use neighborhood development, a conceptual network of “complete streets” forms the framework of the BCP.

HIGH SPEED RAIL

The proposed High Speed Rail system will connect San Francisco to Los Angeles, with a large portion of the system running through the Central Valley with a station in Merced, see Figure 6.

Figure 6. California High Speed Rail Proposed Alignment



Since UC Merced would be a significant attraction for potential riders of the HSR, demand for transportation linkages between the HSR station and UC Merced will develop. Thus, the BCP will need to include designs and infrastructure that accommodate transit and supporting modes of transportation linked to the proposed High Speed Rail station in Merced.

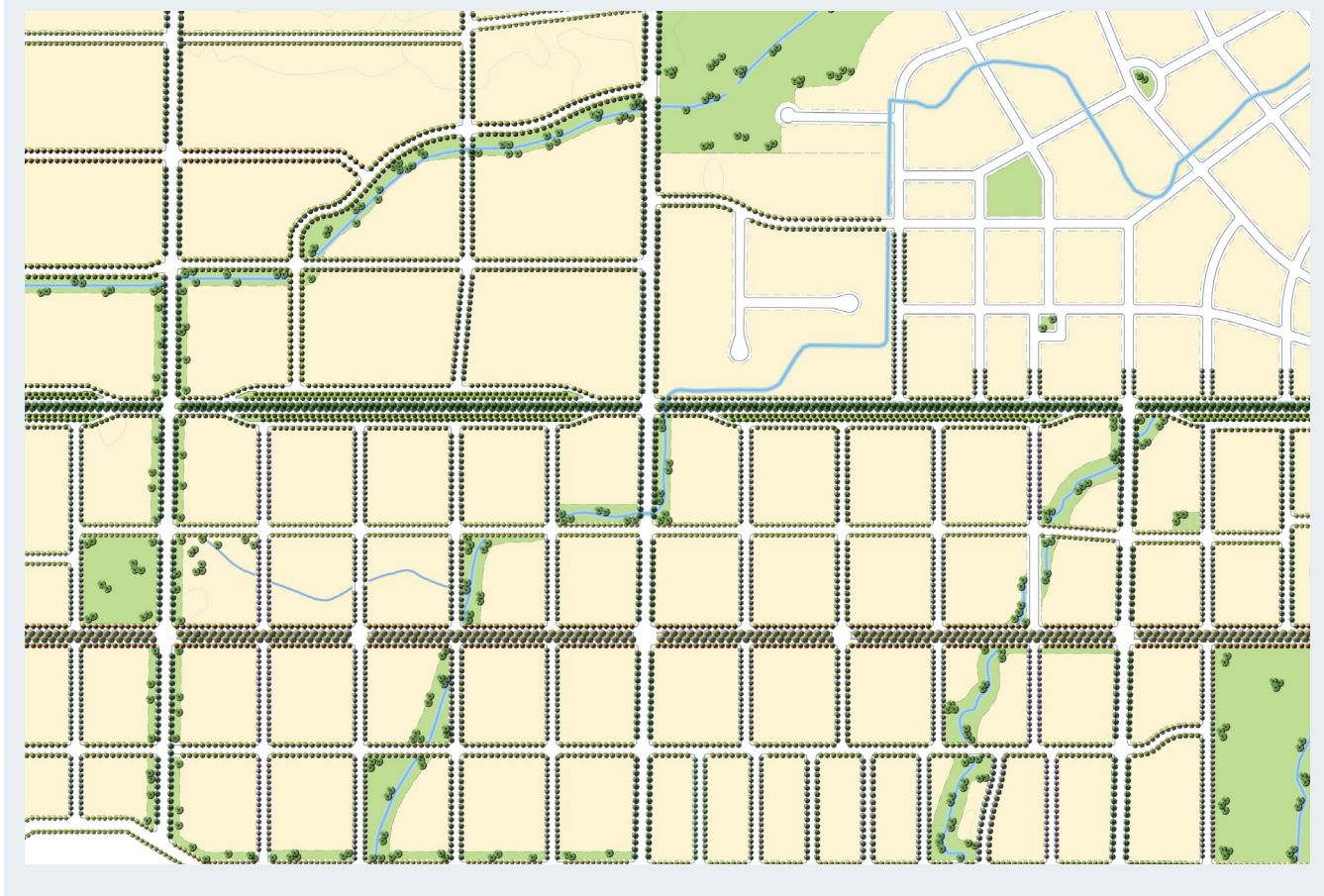
CORE PRINCIPLES

INTERCONNECTED NETWORK/COMPLETE STREETS

To balance the need for regional vehicular access to UCM and the BCP area with the imperatives of pedestrian-oriented, transit-ready mixed-use neighborhood development, a conceptual network of “complete streets” forms the framework of the BCP. Complete local and collector streets –

designed to provide a relatively quiet, low-speed driving environment that is safe and comfortable for pedestrians and bicyclists – organize the area into walkable blocks, which are variable in size and shape to accommodate a very wide range of land uses and development types. This network of local and collector streets is carefully connected to the major cross-town arterial corridors at widely spaced intersections to ensure that the vehicular capacity of those corridors is maintained. Frontage roads (also known as side access lanes) may be appropriate along Bellevue Road to allow abutting development to face the corridors to create an attractive urban “gateway”, rather than turning their backs to face local streets.

Figure 7. Illustration of an Interconnected Block Structure



NATURAL LANDFORMS

The conceptual street network is shown to generally follow the natural contours of the site to preserve the natural landforms of the BCP. These subtle but distinctive landforms include a number of natural drainages and a low hill at the center of the BCP area, just south of Bellevue Road and straddling Gardner Road. Because Gardner Road is a major north-south circulation corridor - and because the grades along its trajectory are not severe - it is not diverted to follow topographic contours, but streets to the east should bend to conform to the natural contours and adjacent seasonal creek. The pattern of curving streets is truncated to the west of Gardner, because the southwest

Innovation Hub to Promote STEM Employment and Attract R&D Development

Excerpt from the Brookings Institute Report *The Hidden STEM Economy*:

"Today, there are two STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) economies. The professional STEM economy of today is closely linked to graduate school education, maintains close links with research universities, but functions mostly in the corporate sector. It plays a vital function in keeping American businesses on the cutting edge of technological development and deployment. Its workers are generally compensated extremely well. The second STEM economy draws from high schools, workshops, vocational schools, and community colleges. These workers today are less likely to be directly involved in invention, but they are critical to the implementation of new ideas, and advise researchers on feasibility of design options, cost estimates, and other practical aspects of technological development. Skilled technicians produce, install, and repair the products and production machines patented by professional researchers, allowing firms to reach their markets, reduce product defects, create process innovations, and enhance productivity. These technicians also develop and maintain the nation's energy supply, electrical grid, and infrastructure."

By providing ample space in the BCP for innovative businesses to thrive, the City of Merced can better position itself to support both levels of STEM economies. Through connecting with both UC Merced and Merced College, businesses will be able to access a range of STEM workers to support direct flows of information between the universities and surrounding enterprises.

quadrant of the hill lies outside the BCP. However a similar pattern in that area would help to implement the *General Plan* intentions that development be designed in harmony with the natural land.

Natural Hill Landform near UC Merced within the BCP



Single-loaded "drives" are recommended for selected creekfront stretches of these streets, affording motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists views of natural greenways containing preserved and enhanced creeks, rather than relegating the creeks to "drainage alleys" running along the back sides of private properties.

Example of a Single-loaded Drive



The land uses prioritized for the hilltop area include research and development and potentially multi-family housing as well, either or both of which could benefit from such a central and attractive location.

INNOVATION HUB

The BCP provides an opportunity for UC Merced and the community to fuse and become a hub for innovation in the Central Valley. An innovation hub is a place that supports the flow of information. Innovation can be any groundbreaking approach, idea, or advancement that changes the way we live, work, and play. Through this direct flow of information among the University and surrounding enterprises original ideas can manifest from an educational thought to a service or product on the market.

Figure 8. Illustration of Possible Gateway Design Overlay Along Bellevue



By planning the BCP as an innovation hub it is possible to increase the potential for businesses to take innovative ideas from mind to market using this type of environment. Innovation starts with the under-story of the economic food chain, the entrepreneurs, which would be located in this type of setting.

The creation of collaborative work environments interlaced with walkable, transit-oriented places to meet, network, and provide housing for employees is essential to supporting entrepreneurial businesses who value face-to-face interaction. This type of physical environment encourages groups of diverse, future-oriented thinkers who have the potential to advance the economy despite downturns to locate in Merced. Innovation is about people, and it is important to foster an environment that facilitates interaction among individuals. Thus, it is important to create public spaces of interest to attract a variety of people with varying ideas and perspectives. Tech firms value public realms that foster a melting pot of ideas.

GATEWAYS TO UC MERCED

Both Lake Road and Bellevue Road are identified as scenic corridors in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*. The position of UC Merced at their intersection further emphasizes the need to enhance the visual character of these roads and to create attractive entryways. In the long-term, Bellevue Road will accommodate regional vehicular traffic, whereas Lake Road will be a local road emphasized by low vehicle speeds and continuous pedestrian and bicycle pathways. Collaboration between the City of Merced and Merced County is needed to craft detailed design standards for these roadways and adjacent properties.

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BELLEVUE BOULEVARD

The BCP envisions Bellevue Road as a landscaped boulevard to UC Merced, and sufficient room for 4-lanes or 6-lanes (if needed). Bellevue Road would also be defined by a cohesive design for buildings that address the street to create an awe-inspiring and eye-pleasing gateway to the Central Valley’s only UC campus. As an important gateway, a boulevard to UC Merced, the character of the Bellevue corridor should be attractive and not a default solution. Land uses at the G Street and Gardner Road intersections should exhibit a proud welcoming gateway to the Bellevue Corridor and “driveway” towards UC Merced.

LAKE ROAD

In the long-term, regional and community north-south oriented traffic will occur on the Campus Parkway Expressway to the east of Lake Road. Consistent with the traffic study for UC Merced and the northern portion of the University Community, the function of Lake Road will serve local traffic, creating an opportunity to emphasize a linear open space corridor with strong pedestrian and bicycle facilities, along with a landscaped buffer between the rural residential properties to the west of the more intensely developed University Community.

Image of UC Merced's Central Plant received a LEED Gold rating



NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY UTILIZATION

The University of California, Merced has set standards in sustainable planning and environmentally forward design. In order to build upon the framework established by UCM, the BCP carries forward many of the UCM Long Range Development Plan goals and strategies for sustainability while adapting them to address the constraints of the plan area. The UCM Long Range Development Plan principles were created using a triple net zero commitment:

Figure 9. UCM Triple Zero Commitments



Using the model set by UCM, the BCP should also encourage and utilize renewable sources of energy including solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal power. UCM plans to achieve all three triple net zero commitments shown above by 2020. The City of Merced and the BCP are committed to adhering to principles of sustainable environmental stewardship, conservation and habitat protection in the planning, design, and construction phases of the BCP area. While protecting the natural environment and conserving resources is of the utmost importance, newly constructed buildings should maximize energy efficiency and include passive environmental systems such as shading, orientation, and roof configuration. Buildings should also strive to achieve U.S. Green Building Council LEED certification. Landscaping should also be designed to conserve water and recharge groundwater supplies. Likewise, roadways, parking lots, and circulation pathways should minimize, detain, and filter stormwater run off.

PLAN STRUCTURE

URBAN DESIGN

The focus of new development will be mixed-use, pedestrian and transit-ready communities, with standards that make the BCP area a gateway to UC Merced and encourage employment-generating uses. Lower-density residential land uses to the north and south of the focus area will form a compatible transition to the existing residential neighborhoods.

MOBILITY

The circulation network for the BCP should balance the need for efficient regional access for motorists with the need for safe and efficient local circulation by pedestrians, bicyclists, transit and automobiles. Innovative designs for the major roadways – including Bellevue Road – and for an interconnected network of local streets and collectors are encouraged to achieve this balance.

OPEN SPACE, CONSERVATION, AND RECREATION

The BCP takes an innovative approach to ensuring an interconnected network of parks, trails, and multi-use open space areas. This approach understands that connectivity between open space and recreational areas is as important as the quantity of space.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

New development should take the form of complete, mixed-use, mixed-density, walkable, bikable and transit-oriented neighborhood patterns. These patterns, based on the City’s urban design principles, should integrate single-family, multi-family and commercial development, along with significant employment centers for new research and development businesses related to the growing success of UC Merced. To ensure well-connected and integrated development patterns, require that each sub-area be master planned prior to development of individual projects. (See Chapter 6 for more information on implementation.)

URBAN EXPANSION

Urban expansion should be contiguous with existing developed areas to avoid fiscally unsustainable “leap frog” development. New development should employ compact, efficient and mixed-use urban forms that do not unnecessarily or prematurely consume or fragment agricultural land, rural land, or other non-renewable resources. Expansion in the BCP area should be coordinated with the UCM campus and other community plans, and should be oriented in relation to the existing and planned corridors connecting the City with UCM.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Plan for the orderly, phased expansion of urban services – including but not limited to utility systems and public safety facilities – in coordination with new development. The capital cost and operating expenses of such systems should be fiscally sustainable and equitably borne by the benefiting parties.

PLAN FRAMEWORK AND FLEXIBILITY

The BCP is a framework and a set of principles/strategies to help the City expand in a more fiscally sustainable manner and to manage a number of “critical uncertainties” to increase the chances of building an interconnected set of valuable pedestrian and transit-oriented places over a long time. These uncertainties point to the need for the BCP to be flexible, but to establish a vision so that when the area develops, the BCP guides new growth toward the community vision for the area. The BCP faced many critical uncertainties during the creation of the plan including the following:

- The timeline for build out of the plan area is not known. Any improvement or condition that is conceived of as “interim” may last a year or 25 years.
- The timeline for buildout of the adjacent University Community Plan area is unknown.
- The growth rate for UC Merced may vary and could grow at a rate as planned, faster, or even slower than predicted.
- The development of the California High-Speed Rail is unpredictable and could impact the demand for space in the city.
- Location, timing, and funding of sewer and water line improvements could prevent buildout of the plan area if not adequately identified or established.

A FRAMEWORK OF CERTAINTY

The BCP is a long-term document with a tremendous amount of uncertainty as described above. As such, the plan has a policy framework so when future master planning occurs there is a comprehensive approach in place that is supported by the community. However, since development in the BCP will occur over the long-term, it is important to build flexibility into the plan document. The intent of plan is to be flexible and to adapt to market changes. The BCP contains minimum and maximum development standards that are crafted with flexibility to enable the plan to respond to future markets.

While the BCP provides a broad range of use and densities that could occur, it emphasizes the foundational building blocks (of street connectivity, transit use, etc.) to create a sense of great place with investment certainty.

While the BCP provides a broad range of uses and densities that could occur, it emphasizes the foundational building blocks (of street connectivity, transit use, etc.) to create a great sense of place with investment certainty through the neighborhood master planning process as described in Chapter 5. The BCP is geared to make projects that are connected to their neighbors and to the transit spine with complete, walkable streets, so the City creates a systematic development where the next development is framed by the preceding development site, and the City is not left with a smattering of projects, but rather the development of a vision.

PLAN VISION AND STRATEGIES

Throughout development of the Plan, members of the BCP Ad-hoc Citizen Advisory Committee and the community expressed their desired outcomes of the Plan, which can be summarized as a Plan that will create a community that is a beacon of pride for the San Joaquin Valley and the people of the State of California as a whole. Specifically, the community vision including achieving the following outcomes:

Table 2 Citizen Advisory Committee Desired Outcomes of the Bellevue Corridor Community Plan
Community Support
A plan developed out of public outreach and input
A plan reviewed by the development community
Neighborhood Compatibility
Plan elements that provide compatibility with existing 1-acre lots.
A plan that is not offensive to existing residents
A plan that maintains the quality of life for existing residents
Mobility/Circulation
A plan that includes an off-street pedestrian/bike path that parallels Bellevue Road.
A plan that provides a greater awareness of cyclists, pedestrians and users of alternative forms of transportation as a legitimate part of the community, and for their safety as it relates to other vehicles.
A plan that includes a light rail easement to Castle Airport and Atwater.
A plan that results in traffic flow, not congestion, in the area near the campus.
A plan that respects existing property owners along Bellevue Road, and other plan elements that provide compatibility with existing 1-acre lots.
A Plan that connects with downtown at all transportation scales.
A Plan that motivates people to live and work in the Plan area and not migrate to other communities or into farmland areas.
Land Use
A plan that includes economically feasible variety of land uses that are compatible with UCM.
A 21st Century Plan looking to the future and with adequate flexibility to accommodate future technological developments.
An appropriate range of new neighborhoods, commercial centers and transition areas that are anticipated to occur due to UC Merced.
A Plan that is responsive to how the younger population wishes to live; not everyone wants to live in single family homes. How we live today is going to be different from how they choose to live in the future.
A Plan that looks at the long-term, and is not reactive to the immediacy of the current market.

Business Growth
A plan that supports business growth.
A plan that maintains the quality of life for Merced, while providing economic development of the area.
A plan that emphasizes the establishment of sustainable jobs and creative uses.
A Plan that exhibits environmentally and technologically forward thinking, as demonstrated in the development of the UCM campus itself.
Design/Aesthetics
Create an attractive gateway for UC Merced.
A Comprehensive Long-Term Infrastructure Plan
A plan that dovetails with University Community Plan area, and includes an infrastructure plan that is compatible with the larger planning area.
A comprehensive plan, integrated with other planning efforts, for example, the Atwater-Merced Expressway effort.
An infrastructure plan that provides for long-term future growth.
A plan that addresses the interface with the community of Merced, including small-scale connectivity between the City and Campus, not simply by regional improvements.
Coordinated Growth
A plan that coordinates rather than competes with other planning efforts.
A plan that addresses the interface between the Plan area and UCM, making sure there is proper synergy between the plan areas.
Well thought out and careful planning approach for future growth that serves the City of Merced, County, and property owners.
Governance
Plan elements that describe the regulatory "interface" (responsibility and obligations) between property owners and local governments.

BELLEVUE COMMUNITY PLAN GOALS AND POLICIES

The goal headings of this BCP chapter are grouped into the same policy topics as the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*. This approach fosters consistency and builds on the City’s broader *General Plan* guidance. In furtherance of consistency with the City’s *General Plan*, Appendix C, policies specific to the BCP planning area are described in greater detail and grouped with the goals and policies it shares in common with the City’s *General Plan*. In additions to the goals and policies below, Master Plans/projects/permit applications need to take into account the BCP in its entirety and be consistent with the language herein.

Table 3 Vision and Urban Design Goals and Policies Specific to the Bellevue Corridor Community Plan consistent with the City’s General Plan
<p>Goal Area UD-1: Transit-Ready Development or Urban Villages</p>
<p>Policy UD-1.1: Orient buildings to address the street.</p> <p>Creating a physical environment that encourages pedestrian and transit travel is more than simply providing a sidewalk. Actual use is based on the design of adjacent uses and proximity to a variety of uses. Positioning buildings next to the street and sidewalk (addressing) creates a pleasing environment for the pedestrian where they can enjoy proximity to building entrances, window displays, architectural interest, and other people. This context attracts pedestrians and provides a worthwhile return of the City’s investment to construct and occupy space within a public right-of-way.</p>
<p>Policy UD-1.2: Seek to provide incubator-spaces for small businesses.</p> <p>Through zoning, site design planning and economic development tools , seek to provide spaces throughout the planning area, but notably within the Mandeville Corridor, that offer office, retail and small-scale manufacturing incubator-sites for entrepreneurs who are attracted to a university setting.</p>
<p>Policy UD-1.3: Strive to meet the commercial services of not only students, but the local community as well.</p> <p>Serving a diversified market guarantees services and related activities year-round, not just during the academic schedule. A variety of retail outlets should be present in the BCP to reflect the interests of a diverse population.</p>
<p>Policy UD-1.4: Seek to attract and retain entrepreneurs and UCM graduates.</p> <p>Some of the most important meetings are spontaneous. Spontaneous meetings occur when paths intersect while traveling from one place to another or standing in line for coffee or lunch. Chance interactions have the qualities of being informative, creative, and social in an important way that reinforces relationships. The Bellevue Corridor should be a place that enables such interactions, such as:</p> <p>Housing: To encourage the flow of ideas, the BCP should not only have places to meet, but a population to fill such space. The population in the BCP will include: 1) researchers expanding on current and new research and development; 2) students and graduates; 3) young families seeking new business or research opportunities; 4) those wanting to embrace a lifestyle of creativity with the incorporation of thoughts inspired by surrounding people; 5) entrepreneurs who wish to be part of an innovative community; and, 6) small business owners in an innovative community (restaurants, coffee shops, boutiques, apparel stores).</p> <p>Events and Activities: Support and encourage farmers-markets for local farmers and shoppers, live music to showcase local talent, or other events available to community residents, hosted by local businesses throughout the BCP.</p> <p>Pedestrian-Related Street Components: Develop streetscapes with ample amenities such as landscaping, shade trees, generous sidewalks, street furniture, signage, lighting, and art to promote pedestrian movement, community attractiveness, and informal meeting spaces. Done right, pedestrian-related street components can spark street-level interaction and maximize the potential for informal contact of the average person in a given public space at any given time.</p> <p>Scale: To assure frequent interactions, ensure that pedestrian-scale design exists throughout the plan area, but particularly in highly populated areas. At the individual space level, indoor and outdoor spaces will be intimate and active enough to encourage people to meet or stop to engage when they encounter one another.</p>

Goal Area UD-2: Overall Community Appearance**Policy UD-2.1: Development of private and public lands will seek to maintain existing topographical features.**

The hilly terrain in the planning area is unique to the City of Merced and should be maintained. The vista and swale topography provide opportunities for open space corridors, curving roadways, and distinct place-making opportunities whether on public or private lands. Removal of large amounts of soil should be avoided; rather the development should fit the character of the land.

Policy UD-2.2: Working in cooperation with the County, the City shall propose development standards for Bellevue Road and Lake Road.

Both Lake Road and Bellevue Road and adjacent environs should be constructed as important gateway roads. Development standards should include a unique roadway cross-section, appropriate siting and aesthetic architecture of adjacent buildings and required yard areas, a complementary street furniture zone (where appropriate), and landscaping both within and along the rights-of-way. The character of these streets should be unique and attractive, and be as much a gateway to UC Merced as a gateway to the City of Merced. Landscaping shall be included within these rights-of-way to create a Boulevard appearance.