



CITY OF MERCED

**Bellevue Community Plan
Public Review Draft**

JULY 2014



SARGENT
TOWN PLANNING





CITY OF MERCED | Bellevue Community Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bellevue Community Plan (BCP) was developed to be consistent with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, and is highly reflective of its policies, illustrative plans and guiding features, such as providing significant employment generating uses that would benefit from being in close proximity to the UC Merced campus. The BCP establishes a high-level planning framework that strikes a balance between certainty and flexibility by anchoring key land uses while allowing their size to adapt to changing market conditions in response to economic growth and the expansion of UC Merced. While the BCP provides a broad range of uses and densities that could occur throughout the plan area, it emphasizes the foundational building blocks of street connectivity, functional mobility choices, active and passive recreation open space corridors and bikeways, gateway street designs, and attractive business park settings to create a great sense of place with investment certainty.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The development of the Bellevue Community Plan (BCP) was designed to be a dynamic process built on:

- Realistic assessments of past and future conditions;
- Consistency with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and other guiding documents;
- Professional planning and engineering guidance;
- Stakeholder participation, outreach to underrepresented groups, and public workshops; and,
- Actions of an ad-hoc advisory committee, with input from an engaged community.

Public Workshop Presentation



Technical Memorandum F (Appendix F) includes a detailed description of plan development process and the community participation program that helped shape the BCP.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Urban development pressure is growing in the northeast section of the City's growth area. The siting of the UC Merced Campus, combined with the forecasted dramatic population increase in California's Central Valley, and the continued northern growth of the City of Merced, all point to the expectation for future growth. This expectation is reflected in several long-range planning efforts including UC Merced's 2020 Plan, the University Community Plan, Yosemite Lake Estates, as well as recent development interests within the City in response to growth at the campus. The presence of sewer and water lines, and need for expanded roads to service growth of the campus, are concrete signs of financial resources being expended in response to growth.

There is a growing demand to provide shovel-ready projects that will respond to the growing market for housing and services. With these projects, however, comes the responsibility to provide adequate public services and facilities in a manner that is sustainable in terms of the capacity of the environment and the fiscal solvency of the community. The Merced City Council recognized these needs, and as part of the adoption of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, identified the need to prepare a

community plan in the area west of UC Merced along the Bellevue Road prior to review of annexation requests. The Bellevue Community Plan can be an important tool for the community to bridge the goal to enable shovel-ready projects with the community values noted above. The need and function of this tool is evident on several levels, including the land use entitlement process, infrastructure services, and quality neighborhoods and jobs; which are summarized below.

THE ENTITLEMENT PROCESS

Shovel-ready projects are issued building permits, but before that type of permit can be issued, the development site needs to be annexed. In order to annex, decisions need to be made about what urban zone to provide properties that are currently zoned for agricultural use in the county. Adoption of a community plan provides guidance to this question. The plan describes a flexible vision for how unincorporated lands with county agricultural zoning can be provided with an urban zone when annexed.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Whereas shovel-ready projects provide jobs, housing and retail opportunities, these projects also demand public facilities and services. In order to assure that adequate levels exist, impact fees are collected, which are based primarily on master plans for water, sewer, emergency services, parks and transportation. Master Plans are formed from the City's General Plan and Community Plans. Thus, the Bellevue Community Plan includes vital information that leads to the ability of the community to understand infrastructure costs that are borne primarily by development projects.

QUALITY NEIGHBORHOODS AND JOBS

The Bellevue Community Plan (BCP) establishes a high-level planning framework that strikes a balance between certainty and flexibility by anchoring key land uses while allowing their size to adapt to changing market conditions in response to economic growth and the expansion of UC Merced. While the BCP provides a broad range of uses and densities that could occur throughout the plan area, it emphasizes the foundational building blocks of street connectivity, functional mobility choices, active and passive recreation open space corridors and bikeways, gateway street designs, and attractive business park settings to create a great sense of place with investment certainty.

For these reasons, the Bellevue Community Plan serves a vital role toward attainment of shovel-ready projects in a sustainable manner while contributing to the development of healthy living environments.

PLAN ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS

The Bellevue Community Plan is comprised of Plan Chapters, Technical Appendices and Environmental Review Documents. The Plan Chapters, described below, include narratives, images and policy language.

PLAN CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 – Introduction identifies the context which the plan was developed, including descriptions of the community and physical setting, the parameters and relevant issues of the plan area established by the City's General Plan, and plan area assumptions, opportunities and constraints.

Chapter 2 – Vision and Urban Design provides the long-term vision of the Plan and policy direction about core design principles which broadly influence mobility, open space, land use and public services and facilities in the plan area.

Chapter 3 – Mobility emphasizes the development of a municipal circulation and transportation system, integrated with open spaces and land uses, and accommodates all modes of transit (automobiles, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians), including provision for Transit Priority Projects (TPP). Chapter 3 includes rights-of-way templates and graphics depicting future streets, pathways and transit corridors within the Plan Area.

Chapter 4 – Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation elements are designed in a comprehensive multiuse approach addressing recreation, storm-drainage, joint use school facilities, connectivity of uses, and natural resource needs of the planning area and surrounding lands.

Chapter 5 – Community Character anticipates and identifies locations for future land uses, and arranges them in a pattern that is both complementary and compatible with nearby uses including the UC Merced, Rural Residential Neighborhoods, and planned communities.

Chapter 6 – Urban Expansion describes governance challenges, growth factors and several growth scenarios for the plan area. The Urban Expansion Chapter emphasizes a comprehensive and collaborative approach, identifying infrastructure planning and fiscal responsibility as key drivers in future decisions concerning urban expansion.

Chapter 7 – Public Services and Facilities addresses the public service and facility needs of an expanding City population.

Chapter 8 – Plan Maintenance describes how the Bellevue Community Plan may be implemented, monitored, and updated, as needed.

On the topics of sustainable development, housing, noise and safety, the Bellevue Community Plan defers to the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*.

TECHNICAL APPENDICES

Plan Appendices contain detailed background information that is foundational to the discussion and policies of the Bellevue Community Plan, and includes the following topics:

- A. Bellevue Community Plan Consistency with the City’s General Plan.
- B. Development Projects and Plans.
- C. Applicable Merced Vision 2030 General Plan Goals, Policies and Actions.
- D. Technical Circulation Memorandum.
- E. Foundation Report.
- F. Plan Development and Community Participation.
- G. Merced Loop Road.
- H. Innovation Hub Elements, Relevance and Suggested Policies.
- I. Findings Report with Supporting Background Reports.
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CORE FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

DEFINED YET FLEXIBLE

The Bellevue Community Plan is a long-term document with a tremendous amount of uncertainty. To counter this, the plan has a policy framework for future master planning that is comprehensive and is supported by the community. The policy and development framework will deliver an interconnected transit-oriented development pattern, clarity of urban character and flexibility of use to respond to changing markets.

INVESTMENT CERTAINTY

While the Bellevue Community Plan provides a broad range of uses and densities that could occur, it also emphasizes the development of a great sense of place with investment certainty. 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 pattern where the next development is framed by the preceding development site that implements the overall vision, rather than a smattering of projects.

A STRONG DOWNTOWN

Downtowns are sensitive to market forces, particularly to urban growth in other areas. Initially, an identity distinct from Downtown Merced will need to be fostered by the City to develop a separate and non-competing center in the BCP plan area. Over time, as the market expands, greater flexibility in land uses may be achieved.

ATTRACTING JOBS-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* includes numerous policies and narratives concerning the anticipation for significant jobs-based land uses within the BCP. Following the lead of the General Plan, the BCP includes a “Research and Development Park Character Area” that could accommodate up to 2.9 million square-feet of Research and Development floor space. The Plan is flexible, supporting the size of this land use to adjust depending upon market conditions. The Research and Development employment corridor is infused with innovation hub design elements to attract new firms and industry wishing to locate near the campus.

HOUSING

The Bellevue Community Plan relies on the housing-related narrative, images, diagrams and policies of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* to guide planning, provision and development of future housing units in anticipation of Merced’s increased population. The BCP includes a wide variety of housing types ranging from rural residential estate homes to high-density multifamily dwellings.

A TAILOR-SUITED LAND USE MODEL

Certain features of the planning area have strongly influenced the land use structure of the BCP; these include: 1) proximity to UC Merced and associated compatibility needs; 2) anticipated job-based land uses attracted by a university climate; 3) the regional attributes of Bellevue Road as part of the Merced Loop Road; and 4) the community-wide transit corridor linking UC Merced to downtown and beyond. Their influence is revealed in the amounts and location of land uses. For example, 1) the amount of low-density residential has dropped while the amount of land set aside for research and development parks have increased, resulting in a more balanced jobs-to-housing ratio; 2) as specified in the BCP, the placement of retail uses may locate at a corner of two arterial roads, expanding sites beyond just the corner of a collector and arterial road; 3) dense housing and retail may locate within one-quarter mile

of the Mandeville Transit Corridor between G Street and Lake Road, and not be confined to a single node surrounded by low-density housing; and 4) a vertical and horizontal mix of land uses may occur throughout most of the plan area. Thus, a land use design unique to the planning area and distinct from the City’s Urban Village Concept is recommended by the BCP (described in greater detail in the land use section of Technical Appendix A).

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL LANDS

In that the Bellevue Community Plan contains sensitive species and habitat areas, the Plan considered and recommends several methods to conserve these natural resources. Consistent with adopted mitigation measures of City’s General Plan EIR, property owners are required to prepare delineations of Waters of the U.S. and Wetlands prior to annexation, and to obtain permits from relevant state and federal agencies. Property owners also need to comply with the adopted Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Merced and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Additionally, the Open Space Master Plan of the BCP establishes several open space corridors that include identified sensitive habitats. For example, the Plan proposes a large open space corridor extending from Cardella Road to Lake Road at a point north of Bellevue Road. These may shrink or expand depending upon the findings and actions of the permitting process described above.

OPEN SPACE FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

The Bellevue Community Plan includes several active parks including three neighborhood parks, a community park and several urban plazas. Neighborhood parks are recommended to be combined with future school sites to serve the anticipated population, and urban plazas will add open space opportunities to high-density populations along Mandeville Lane. Open space corridors featuring pedestrian and bicycle pathways connect to parks and other destinations.

SUPPORT CIRCULATION MODES THROUGH LAND USE DESIGN

Along Bellevue Road the goal is to emphasize smooth traffic flow and provide access to adjacent uses at appropriate intervals and through innovative means, while also creating a distinct gateway appearance through attractive building designs and associated landscaping. Within the Mandeville transit route, which links the planned transit stations in Bellevue Ranch and UC Merced, new development should be organized in the form of complete neighborhoods and districts and be oriented to pedestrians and transit. Higher-intensity development and activities should be concentrated near planned transit stops. This arrangement supports regional automobile trips on Bellevue Road, while creating a pedestrian-oriented corridor along Mandeville Lane, and enhances the value of the research and development area that is to be located between these roads.

NEIGHBORHOOD MASTER PLANNING

The Bellevue Community Plan recommends that the City create a dynamic “neighborhood master plan” process to ensure that each new increment of development is well-connected to existing and future adjacent development, while responding to market. The framework for new development would be a clear and interconnected – yet flexible – network of complete streets and community open spaces. This process acts as the fundamental tool to ensure that the overall physical community structure is developed as envisioned in the BCP.

NEXT STEPS

PLAN INTEGRATION

Upon adoption of the Bellevue Community Plan, the City should begin the process to integrate it with existing master plan documents and processes, including but not limited to the following:

- Merced Vision 2030 General Plan.
- City of Merced 2013 Bicycle Transportation Plan.
- 2003 Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- Capital Improvement Planning.
- Public Utility Master Plans.
- Transit Planning Documents.
- Regional Transportation Plans (as appropriate).

COORDINATED DEVELOPMENT

A common vision and approach to urban expansion creates certainty, and certainty attracts investments, and investments create jobs. Yet, as evidenced in the growth scenarios of the BCP (Chapter 6, Urban Expansion), along with concerns raised by the BCP Ad-hoc Advisory Committee, there are numerous unanswered questions and challenges concerning infrastructure, financing and phasing of growth in and adjacent to the BCP planning area. The BCP supports a collaborative effort to create a multi-jurisdictional infrastructure and service plan to support growth in a manner that serves the interest of the community as a whole, in a fiscally sound manner. Partners with the City in this effort would include Merced County, the University of California, as well as the Merced Irrigation District, local schools and the Merced County Association of Governments. The UC Merced Long Range Development Plan (LRDP), the University Community Plan (UCP), and the Bellevue Community Plan, among other plans, provide the necessary information and options from which a unified development phasing plan could be crafted. Future outcomes of this collaborative effort could include:

- Select a growth scenario, or combination thereof.
- Develop a strategic phasing plan and plan for services that coordinate expenditure of resources, provides certainty in the marketplace, and leads to an efficient use of public infrastructure and services.
- Update financing and master plans and programs to align with the broad decisions concerning financing, infrastructure, and phasing in the northeast Merced SOI.

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