

1. INTRODUCTION

COMMUNITY PLAN OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

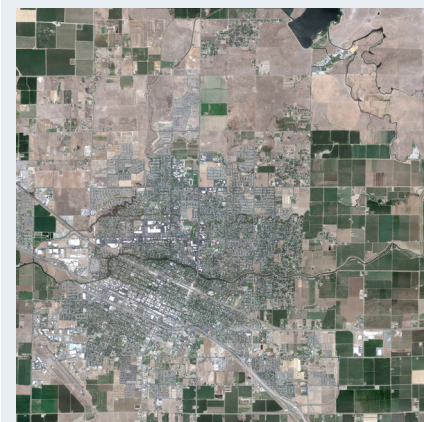
The Bellevue Community Plan (BCP or Plan) provides policy direction to the decision making process for development within a defined geographic portion of the Planning area of the City's *General Plan*. The plan forms a broad framework for mutual understanding among citizens, public agencies, and the development community. Preparing a community plan serves the following purposes:

- To facilitate the Planning Commission and City Council concurrence on long-range development policies;
- To provide a basis for evaluating the level to which private development proposals and public projects are consistent with these policies;
- To better enable the public and government entities to design projects that are consistent with City policies, or to seek changes in these policies through the General Plan Amendment process;
- To record the City's policies and standards for the maintenance and improvement of existing development and the location and characteristics of future development;
- To better inform citizens on land use policy issues and promote opportunities to participate in the local planning and decision-making process;
- To serve as a blueprint for future growth and development within a defined area of the City of Merced's Sphere of Influence (SOI);¹ and,
- Community Plans may, but are not required to, identify components of infrastructure needed to support planned land uses, as well as appropriate financing mechanisms.³

The BCP focuses on providing a vision and framework for coordinating transportation, infrastructure, and open space, with varied land use mixes and intensities.

A "Community Plan" serves as a blueprint for future growth and development within a defined area of the City of Merced's growth boundary.

Aerial View of Merced



THE CITY'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY PLANS

General Plans provide a policy framework upon which community plans are constructed and a foundation to build more detailed implementation tools including community plan diagrams, policies, maps and illustrative plans.

The City's Guiding Principles for local community plans (Section 3.7.2, *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*) are:

- Community Plans which include or are adjacent to established neighborhoods will address the needs of these neighborhoods and potential adverse impacts resulting from plan implementation.
- Public participation by area residents and property owners in the planning process will be emphasized.
- Community Plan areas need connectivity with existing and planned urban areas.
- Community Plans will include all elements determined necessary to ensure consistency with the *General Plan*. These elements may include, but not be limited to, Land Use, Circulation, Open Space, and infrastructure phasing. Community Plans will include a land use and infrastructure phasing plan.
- The "Urban Villages" concept should be incorporated into the planning of these areas as much as feasible.
- The Community Planning process should be focused on the planning issues or concerns which need to be resolved for that planning area and, to this degree, provide data, information, or policy clarification necessary to carry out the goals of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*.

BCP RELATIONSHIP TO FUTURE ANNEXATIONS AND GROWTH

The BCP is not a project that will annex unincorporated properties into the City of Merced. That action occurs through a separate process usually initiated by private property owners with specific development interests, and then only after a formal annexation request is granted by both the City of Merced and the Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). For more information on annexation and implementation of the Plan see Chapter 6 (Urban Expansion).

FRAMEWORK PLAN VS. DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The BCP is not a development project. A development project contains specific land-use entitlements with specific standards. As with the City's General Plan, the BCP is a conceptual framework within which future decisions about development projects would be made when more information is in place. The BCP does not include the specificity or rigidity that comes with a development plan as does, for example, the *Bellevue Ranch Master Development Plan*.

PLANNING VS. ZONING

The Bellevue Community Plan does not rezone property. Upon adoption of the Plan, properties within the planning area will remain in Merced County and will retain their current zoning designations. As there is no City zoning within the plan boundaries, the BCP effort does not affect current property rights. The BCP provides a foundation for future development in a manner that will benefit the property owners and the community.

VISION VS. CONSTRUCTION

The BCP planning process allowed the community to take a comprehensive approach to examining land use, circulation, and other issues. As the City's urban fabric expands with market demand, the BCP offers guidance for growth that is grounded in the community's vision, takes advantage of existing resources, and avoids potential constraints. However, for future urbanization to occur in the Plan Area, additional input will be needed from the community as the scope and scale of development becomes influenced by market conditions, decisions from local landowners, and the availability of public services.

Tour of Bellevue Corridor Project Area and Presentation



The Bellevue Community Plan study area is located outside but adjacent to the Merced City limits, and within the City’s planned growth area, otherwise known as the Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) and Sphere of Influence (SOI).

SETTING

COMMUNITY SETTING

The City of Merced is approximately seven miles long from north to south and six miles at its widest point from east to west. In January 2012, the City of Merced covered approximately 23 square miles and had an estimated population of 79,328. The Bellevue Community Plan area is located to the northeast of the City of Merced, and covers an area of approximately 2.4 square-miles. The planning area is generally bounded by G Street on the west; Farmland Avenue on the north; Lake Road on the east and Cardella Road on the South (between Lake Road and Gardner Road), and generally ½ mile south of Bellevue Road (between Gardner Road and G Street). Lake Yosemite, UC Merced and the northern part of the UC Community Plan area abuts the eastern edge of the BCP study area. From the project boundary, Downtown Merced is 3.5 miles to the southwest, and Castle Airport and the City of Atwater are 6 miles to the west.

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PHYSICAL SETTING

The northeastern portion of the City’s planned growth area is characterized by gently rolling terrain while the remainder of the City is relatively flat. The northern, western, and eastern portions of the City contain a number of creeks and canals including Bear Creek, Black Rascal Creek, Fahrens Creek, and Cottonwood Creek. These creeks all traverse the City from east to west. With the exception of a few pockets of rural residential homes, the BCP planning area is predominately grasslands.

Figure 1. Bellevue Community Plan Area in Relation to Downtown Merced

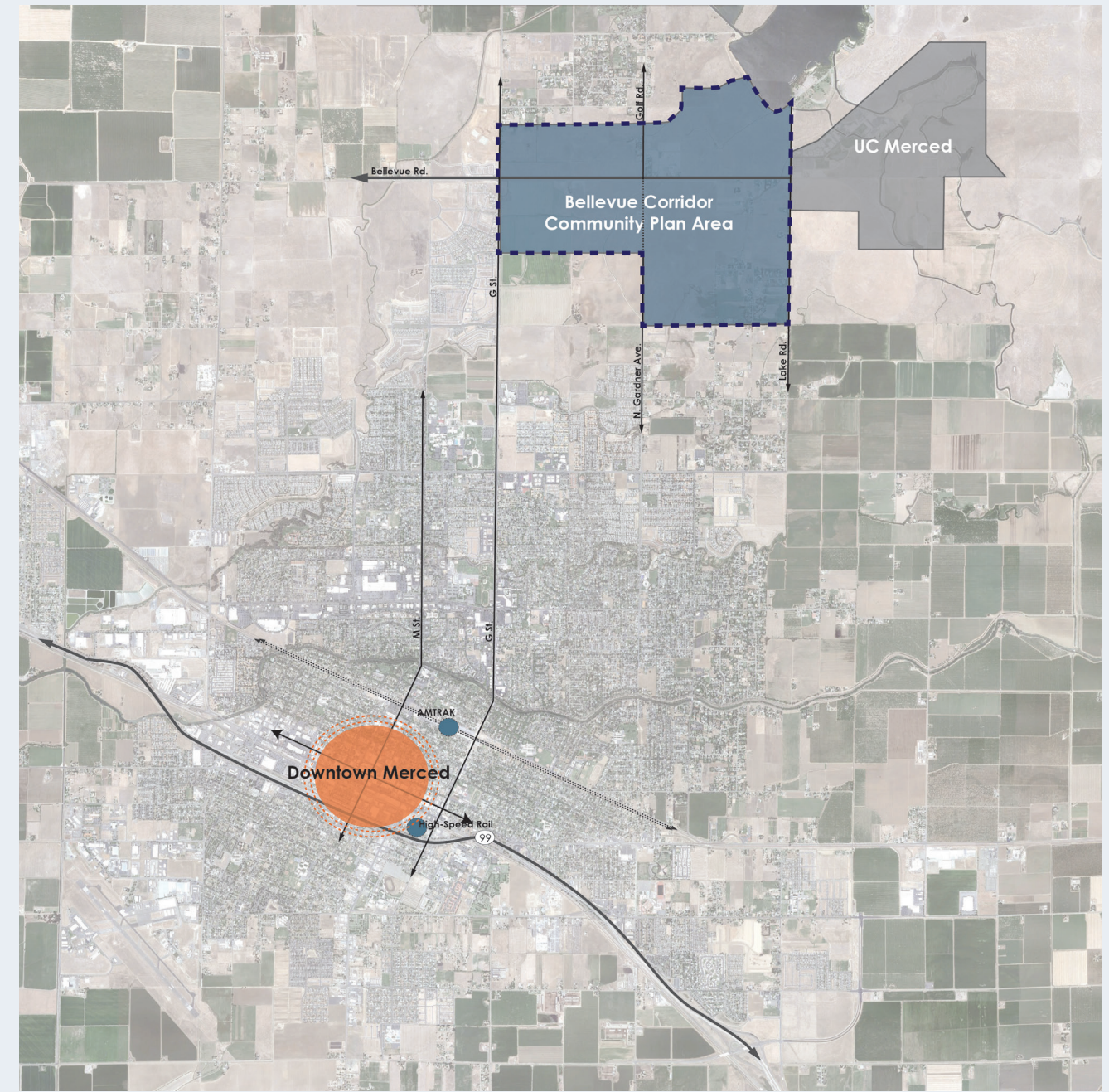
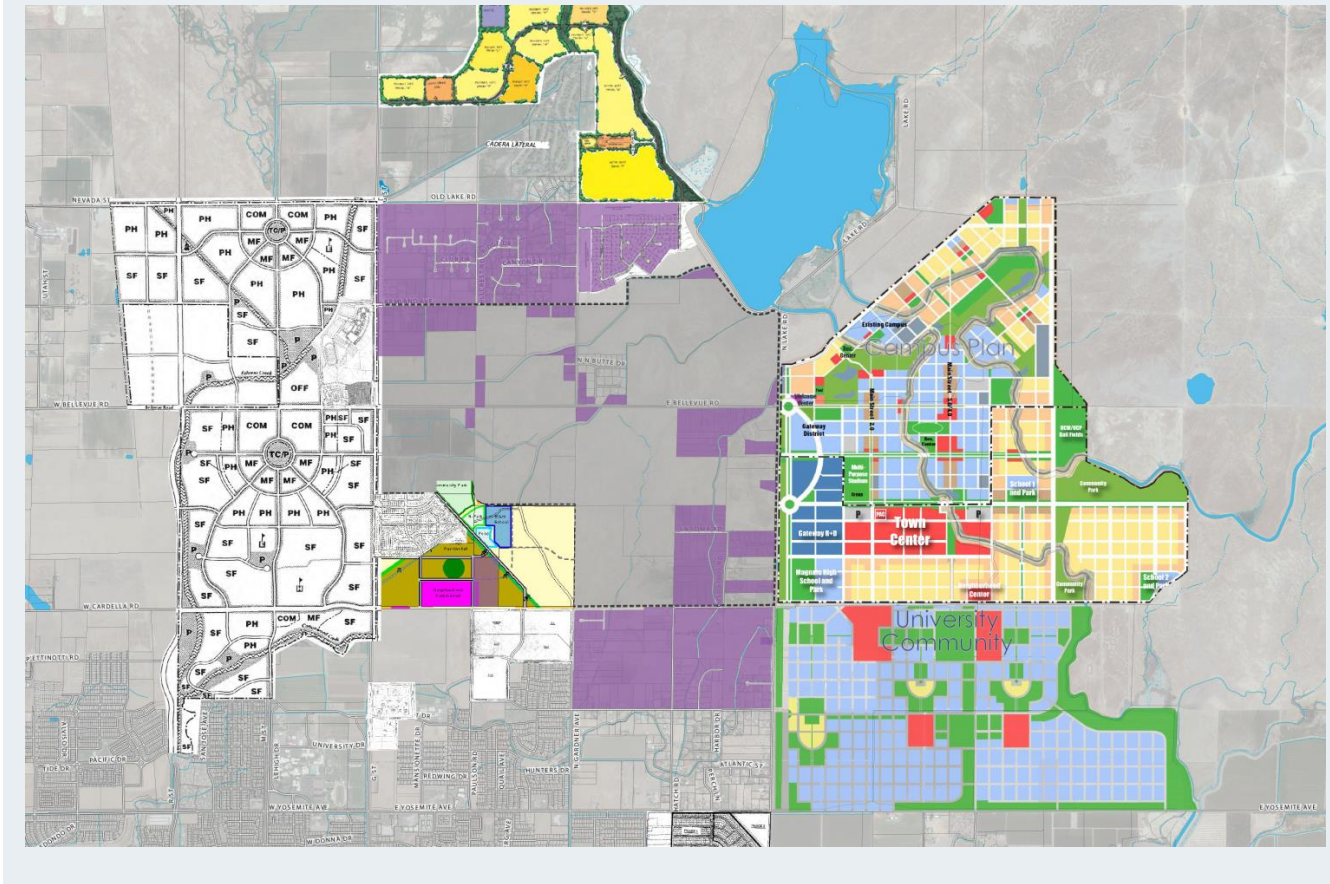


Figure 2. Proximate Development Plans and Projects surrounding the Bellevue Community Plan Area



PROXIMATE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND PROJECTS

The community of Merced has participated in important planning initiatives over the past several years including the *City’s Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, *UC Merced’s Long Range Development Plan*, and *Merced County’s University Community Plan*.

The community of Merced has participated in important planning initiatives over the past several years including the *City’s Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, *UC Merced’s Long Range Development Plan*, and *Merced County’s University Community Plan*. The outcomes of these and other planning initiatives serve as an important basis for the BCP. A detailed description of development plans and projects occurring within and near the Bellevue Community Plan area is provided in Technical Memorandum B (Appendix B) of the BCP. The “Projects and Plans” document identifies and describes recent and anticipated growth patterns.

GENERAL PLAN GUIDANCE

CONSISTENCY WITH THE MERCED VISION 2030 GENERAL PLAN

The Bellevue Community Plan was developed to be consistent with the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, and reflects key criteria detailed in the *General Plan*. The following sections from the *General Plan* created the foundation of the BCP and established the Core Principles discussed in Chapter 2 (Vision and Urban Design chapter):

- Key Goals, Policies and Implementation Actions
- Key Features and Issues of the Bellevue Community Plan
- The Bellevue Community Plan “Illustrative Plan”

KEY GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

A complete and full listing of *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* goals, objectives, policies, and implementing actions that have notable relevance to the BCP project area and/or plan objectives are listed in Technical Memorandum C (Appendix C) of the BCP. This appendix also includes policies crafted as a part of the BCP, which offer greater detail and refinement of the broader *General Plan* language. The policies in Technical Memorandum C are a key part of the BCP and are intended to guide and inform development-related activities in the project area.

KEY FEATURES AND ISSUES OF THE BELLEVUE COMMUNITY PLAN

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* (Section 3.7.4) identified several key features and related direction for the BCP, including: economic development, land use, transportation, public facilities, environment and urban design.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

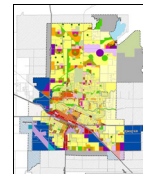
The City’s *General Plan* describes Bellevue Road as a gateway to UC Merced connecting the campus to Castle Airport Aviation and Development Center, other employment centers, and to Downtown Merced via the G, M and R Street corridors, and that (1) their economic development strategies should be compatible and complementary; and (2) they should connect to one another via a network of transportation and communications systems that optimize access between and among them.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* also describes the Bellevue Corridor as likely to contain significant employment generating uses that would benefit from being in close proximity to the UC Merced campus (Section 3.5.5), and is identified as a Commercial and Industrial Employment Corridor to contain heavy concentrations of commercial and industrial development.

The emphasis on economic development also appears in a *General Plan* discussion to adjust the City’s Urban Village concept near UC Merced. The *General Plan* states, “The composition and pattern of land uses in the Urban Villages near UC Merced along Bellevue Road will have unique

Merced Vision 2030 General Plan

Merced Vision 2030 General Plan



January 2012

designs and functions due to the economic opportunities and connectivity to the university. 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. This additional land use potential is represented in Figure 37, Community Character Place Type Plan.

LAND USE

The City’s *General Plan* describes the Bellevue Corridor as one that should be designed as a place where services, shops, schools, businesses, public uses, and residences mix in a vibrant setting. The BCP should assess the viability of expanding office, commercial, and research and development land use capacities in the plan area. The City’s Urban Village will be the backbone concept model for creating core commercial nodes along Bellevue Road and a connection to neighborhoods to the south and north. 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. The City’s *General Plan* specifically identifies that the following features should be included in or influence the creation of the BCP:

Urban Village Design

Urban Villages are described in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* as mixed-use, mixed-density neighborhood developments incorporated into and planned in conjunction with a network of interconnected, walkable streets. This design allows for a variety of land uses including jobs-based land uses attracted to a university climate to be intermixed within the BCP framework.

- Special “Urban Village” designs suited to the “Bellevue Corridor Planning Principles” and potential expansion thereof to 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. These “Urban Villages” may differ from others in the Community in the mixture of business park, research and development, office, public/cultural uses, and retail uses within the Village Core areas instead of the retail/office/public facilities focus of other Villages which are more residential in nature; and,
- Land Uses should be compatible and complimentary with one another and planned as integrated, coordinated mixed-use neighborhoods and communities; and,
- The influence and effects of the UC Merced and University Community land use and circulation plans on adjacent (western) properties; and,
- Interface issues and infill land use patterns adjacent to and within pre-existing “Rural Residential” properties; and,
- A variety of housing types and densities should be encouraged within the Community Plan area in addition to job-generating uses consistent with the City’s overall economic strategy and the Bellevue Corridor Economic Analysis (see Appendix I).

TRANSPORTATION

Per the City's *General Plan*, it will be essential that adequate rights-of-ways be reserved along all major corridors. The design cross-section of these corridors may vary depending upon the adjacent land uses, but they should have two characteristics in common. They should be designed as multi-modal access corridors that accommodate both automobiles and a public transit system (rubber tire or light rail), as well as bicycles and pedestrians. Further, they should be designed to unify, rather than separate, the elements of the community located on opposite sides of the road. These roads should be designed as landscaped, multimodal boulevards.

Establish "Bellevue Parkway Planning Principles" describing the design [including appropriate right-of-way, function and land use pattern along Bellevue Road] recognizing two key traits: (1) multi-modal access corridor that accommodates both automobiles and public transit systems, as well as bikes and pedestrians; and (2) designed to unify rather than separate the community located on opposite sides of the road.

Establish a system of collector streets and arterials with appropriate rights-of-ways to encourage internal circulation within the Community Plan area. This would include determining the proper alignment and right-of-way for Gardner Road.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The City's *General Plan* states the BCP should establish adequate public facilities to accommodate growth within the area. The *General Plan* states the BCP provide the, "Location and financing of public facilities including a fire station, schools, roadways, off-street bike and pedestrian paths, and parks/open space."

ENVIRONMENT

The BCP addresses specific environmental issues and vulnerable areas relevant to the plan area which necessitate protection or preservation. The City's *General Plan* states that the BCP should address the following: "Lake Yosemite Inundation Area and Sensitive species and habitat conservation."

CHARACTER/DESIGN

The *General Plan* states the BCP should include design parameters to guide the future development of the plan area. The *General Plan* identifies the following characteristics be included in the BCP:

- Establish, through the Community Plan process, design guidelines for development along the Bellevue Corridor in accordance with the City's Urban Design principles outlined in Chapter 6 of the *General Plan*.
- The natural hill, which occurs on the south side of Bellevue Road between G Street and Gardner Road, should be considered as a focal point for the Corridor.

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THE BELLEVUE COMMUNITY PLAN “ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN”

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* includes “illustrative plans” as an appendix to its Land Use Chapter. Illustrative plans are not adopted plans and are only included in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* to inform the public of preliminary land use concepts under consideration in each of the Plan areas. No land use entitlements are granted by including illustrative plans in that appendix. The land uses shown in the northwest corner of Lake Road and Bellevue Road are a part of the formally adopted Land Use Diagram of the City of Merced, and not considered “illustrative.” The “Illustrative Plan” (Figure 3) below from the *General Plan* shows a conceptual land use plan for the BCP area.

Figure 3. Bellevue Community Plan “Illustrative Plan”

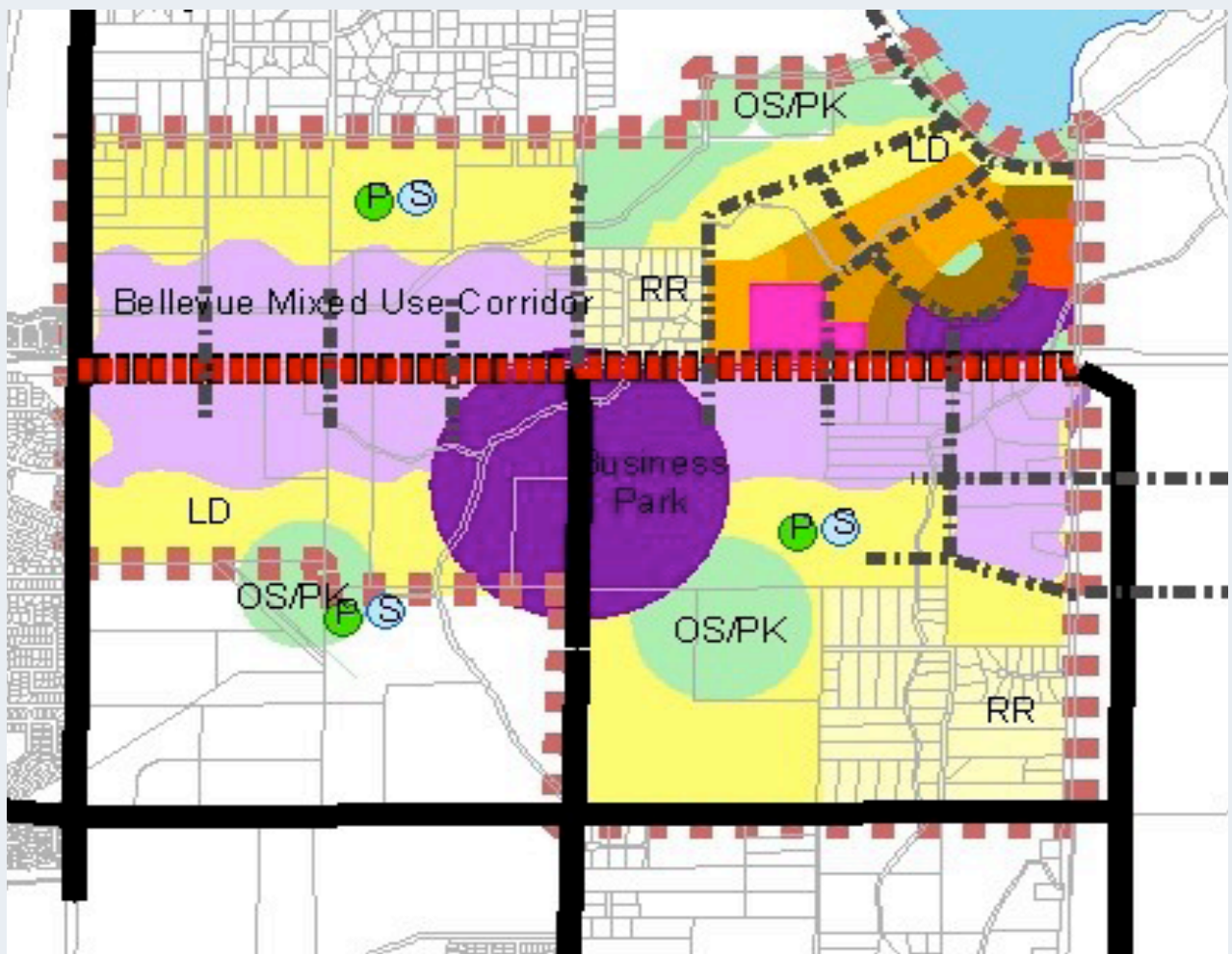


Table 1 Land Use Designations from the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan

Land Use Designations	Key	Intended Uses	Density
Rural Residential (RR)	Light Yellow	Residential: single-family	1 – 3 units per acre
Low Density Residential (LD)	Yellow	Residential: single-family detached, condominium, and zero-lot line	2 – 6 units per acre
Low-Medium Density Residential (LMD)	Tan	Residential: single-family detached, duplex, triplex, fourplex, condominium, zero-lot-line	6.1 – 12 units per acre
High-Medium Density Residential (HMD)	Light Brown	Residential: multifamily, apartment, condominium, triplex, fourplex	12.1 – 24 units per acre
High Density Residential (HD)	Dark Brown	Residential: multifamily	24.1 – 36 units per acre
Neighborhood Commercial (CN)	Pink	Commercial: retail, eating and drinking, commercial recreation, auto services, etc.	Average 0.35 FAR
Bellevue Corridor Mixed Use	Light Purple	A mixture of LMD, HMD, HD, CO and CN.	Varies
Thoroughfare Commercial (CT)	Red	Commercial: auto-oriented commerce, large recreational facilities, some heavy commercial, lodging and hospitality, automobile sales and services	0.35 Floor Area Ratio
Business Park (BP)	Purple	Commercial and industrial: heavy commercial, office, research and development, light manufacturing, warehousing, information-based and service-based activities	0.40 Floor Area Ratio
Open Space – Park/Recreation Facility (OS-PK)	Green	Recreation: public parks, golf courses, greens, commons, playgrounds, and other public and private open spaces	0.10 Floor Area Ratio
School	Blue Circles	Public Elementary Schools	N/A

BELLEVUE COMMUNITY PLAN (BCP)

The *General Plan* conceptual land use plan (for illustrative purposes only) for the BCP is shown on the previous page. This illustrative plan also appears on the City’s Official Land Use Diagram. Through the development of the BCP, the *General Plan* “Illustrative Plan” and land use designations (Table 1), described above, were refined in order to develop the community’s vision for the BCP area in the following chapters of this community plan.

ASSUMPTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONSTRAINTS

The Bellevue Community Plan was guided by the following assumptions and the assessment of opportunities and constraints regarding anticipated future conditions to the year 2030 listed in the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and developed through the community engagement process.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Although essentially vacant today, the BCP is surrounded by existing and proposed urban and suburban land uses. All lands within the City's adopted Sphere of Influence within and near the BCP will be developed.
- Development within the BCP area will be guided by "Urban Expansion" policies in the City's *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* as well as Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission's (LAFCO) procedures, codes, and actions.
- Significant amounts of job-generating land uses will be located in close proximity to the UC Merced Campus.
- The University of California Merced (UCM) campus will continue to expand in the vicinity of Lake Yosemite on the northeastern edge of the Merced growth boundary or SUDP/SOI along with a future University Community.
- Urban development (residential, commercial, and industrial) will continue to be focused within the City of Merced's growth area (SUDP/SOI) and not in the unincorporated areas surrounding the City.

From City Council Resolution #2006-89 regarding the University Community:

- The University Community will be incorporated into the City of Merced and will not be a separate city or part of the unincorporated County.
- Annexation along the Bellevue Corridor is encouraged to provide contiguity between UC Merced and the City of Merced. It is realistic to expect development proposals in the BCP planning area in the near-term.
- Though no separate wastewater treatment plant should service the University Community, consideration of innovative methods of wastewater treatment for that area may occur.
- The City will encourage annexation along the Bellevue Corridor to provide contiguity between the University Community and the City of Merced.

OPPORTUNITIES

The BCP presents important opportunities for the City of Merced. The continued growth of UC Merced will provide an influx of people, ideas, and energy. The plan should capitalize on this growth and ensure that new development meets the needs and desires of new and existing residents. Potential opportunities include the following:

Growing University-Oriented Population

At full buildout, UC Merced is expected to grow to approximately 25,000 students and over 6,500 faculty and staff members. As the population grows, there will be an expanding market for housing, goods, and services.

Future Research and Development Park Sites

The plan should anticipate and prepare for the market demands caused by a growing University, including identifying sites for future job generating research and development parks and encouraging multiple interests to collaborate for long-term economic and fiscal benefits.

Home for Entrepreneurs

The plan should help foster a living and working environment to attract a new generation of entrepreneurs, leading to innovations, technologies, and expansion of local investment and job-generators.

Alternative Transportation

The plan should identify and implement circulation and land use standards that encourage multi-modal transportation including walking, biking, transit, and driving. By implementing the complete transportation network and shifting away from auto-centric mobility patterns, it is possible to compliment and build upon the UC Merced investment while moderating the environmental impacts of increased development within the BCP area. It is essential to offer multi-modal access to the student population of UC Merced and to future BCP residents.

Leverage New Investment

The expanding University community has and will continue to spark associated investment in Merced. The plan should identify opportunities to leverage new investments in the University to improve citywide economic vitality.

Low-Impact Development

Well-planned growth in the BCP area can ensure that development minimizes impacts to natural resources, air quality, and water quality. The plan should identify and incorporate concepts for development patterns and solutions that conserve and enhance resources from which a community prospers.

Community Character

There is little existing development within the BCP area, thus the BCP presents an important opportunity to elaborate on *General Plan* vision concepts for developing a unique community character. The plan should encourage memorable livable, human-scale public spaces and distinctive community centers that facilitate positive interaction and idea sharing.

The scale of the Plan area and timing of the UC campus build-out will make phasing an important consideration in Plan implementation. The pattern and timeframe in which the area develops will impact transit opportunities, development feasibility, and interim community character.

Existing Rural Residential Communities

Though primarily located outside the Plan Area, existing “ranchette neighborhoods” provide a semi-rural lifestyle defined by open space and agricultural uses. The BCP provides an opportunity to maintain and strengthen the character of these neighborhoods with appropriate soft transitions to new higher intensity development; these neighborhoods can also provide development themes for some areas of the BCP, such as equestrian-oriented facilities and trails.

Regional Attributes

Bellevue Road will serve as part of the Merced Loop Road connecting Northern California from Highway 99 and leading to UC Merced. UC Merced services roughly a third of its students coming from Northern California, another third from the San Joaquin Valley and a third from Southern California. UC Merced already has an international reputation in various fields of study and is likely to spawn business opportunity, start-up companies and research labs adjacent to the campus within the City of Merced. Given that that Bellevue Road will likely serve as one of the first impressions of the Merced community for commuters, the land uses and design aspects of the North and South corners of Bellevue Road and G Street could take on a more regional nature as juxtaposed to the community serving and local transit character established for much of the planning area.

Ownership Blocks

A large portion of the plan area is owned by a handful of owners, enabling planned growth and coordinated design elements with the BCP.

CONSTRAINTS

While there are many opportunities for the City to capitalize on, the following constraints and challenges have been taken into account during the development of the Plan.

Development Phasing

The scale of the Plan area and timing of the UC campus build-out will make phasing an important consideration in Plan implementation. The pattern and timeframe in which the area develops will impact transit opportunities, development feasibility, and interim community character.

Natural Resource and Habitat Disruption

Portions of the Plan area are home to sensitive natural resources such as vernal pools that must be considered and which have the potential to enhance unique public open spaces.

View of Bellevue Road



Multiple Interests

The project area is within the City's SOI and SUDP, but is currently under County jurisdiction. Additionally, the BCP area will be developed by many property owners and developers over the course of several decades. BCP standards and policies must address the needs and concerns of the individual property owners and local jurisdictions, while ensuring each unique development contributes to a unified whole.

Multiple City Focus Points

The City has important existing resources including the charming downtown and several historic neighborhoods. The BCP must ensure that development within the BCP complements, rather than competes with these and other existing or future community focal points.

An Uncertain Economy

The current economy is still uncertain and growth forecasts for Merced and the BCP vary widely.

Competition to Serve the UCM Market

The BCP area and the University Community will potentially be competing for valuable economic development and expensive infrastructure capacity for many decades to come.

Affect on Downtown

Downtowns are sensitive to market forces, particularly to urban growth in other areas, including the development of the BCP.

A focused and consistent effort will be needed on the part of decision makers so ensure successful, long-term implementation.