

CITY OF MERCED | BELLEVUE ROAD COMMUNITY PLAN



BACKGROUND STUDY

**Zoning, Development and Land Use  
Standards to Implement the Bellevue  
Corridor Community Plan**

January 22, 2013



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# 1. PURPOSE OF MEMORANDUM

This memorandum addresses how the relevant direction in Chapter 3 of the City of Merced (City) 2030 General Plan (Land Use) will be implemented in the BCCP. The BCCP will need to result in a comprehensive approach that achieves the goals for the Bellevue area as well as those of the City as a whole.

The land within the BCCP area is located within the City's Sphere of Influence, not yet within the incorporated City boundaries. As a result, there is no City zoning on the properties. The BCCP will serve as a tool for describing the vision and establishing zoning, development and land use standards for the 2.5-square mile area. Zoning will be the primary tool for implementing the vision described in the BCCP.

In order to generate and apply the appropriate zoning, development and land use standards to the BCCP area, the following are necessary:

- Recommendations for how to implement the Urban Village concept balanced with the key features of the planning area;
- A vision supported by the community that can be articulated in enough detail in the BCCP to be implemented through zoning;
- Evaluation of the vision to determine which of the City's current zoning districts and standards are appropriate to implement the vision and direction in the BCCP; and
- Identification of zoning standards necessary to implement the vision and direction in the BCCP.

The analysis in this Memorandum addresses the first item above. The analysis is in narrative format to expose and discuss issues that need to be clarified in order to move forward confidently. Based on community input through the public process, the consultant team will then work with the community to prepare the second item, the vision for the BCCP area. The vision will then be turned into a complete plan that will be accompanied by zoning, development and land use standards for implementation.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2.1 Implementing the Urban Village Concept with the Key Features of the Bellevue Corridor Planning Area

The BCCP process should ensure that the General Plan is implemented at the appropriate level (e.g., policy or regulation). This memo directs implementation of the General Plan Urban Village concept (Section 3.6.2) and the Bellevue Corridor planning area (Section 3.7.4). Key features and direction from these sections of the General Plan are summarized below.

#### **Key Features and Issues to be Addressed in the BCCP:**

- **Economics/Market:** Long-term sustainability and demand to determine size and location of research and development (R & D), medical/professional offices, retail/commercial, and housing;
- **Land Use:** Implementation of the Urban Village concept; compatible and complementary land uses, influence and effects from the UC on nearby land; interface with existing rural areas; a variety of housing types and densities in addition to job-generating land uses;
- **Transportation/Circulation:** Establish Bellevue Road as a multi-modal access corridor that unifies rather than separates the opposite sides of the road; Establish a system of collector streets and arterials to encourage internal circulation within the BCCP area;
- **Public Facilities:** Location and financing of public facilities; off-street bike and pedestrian paths; parks and open space;
- **Environment:** Lake Yosemite Inundation Area; Sensitive species and habitat conservation;
- **Character/Design:** Establish design guidelines for development along Bellevue Road; Consider the natural hill on the south side of Bellevue between G and Gardner as a focal point.

The following analysis will refer back to these key features, with recommendations on approaches or adjustments as necessary to best support these key features. For example, 1) how to incorporate employment land uses such as R & D parks; 2) compatibility issues of buildings and land uses with adjacent regional transit and roads; and 3) accommodation for transit priority projects.

## 2.2 Implementing Merced's Urban Village Concept through the BCCP

The Urban Village concept (about 1 square mile, or 64 acres) establishes options for new growth at a scale larger than that of individual projects: new pieces of Merced. The Urban Village concept is essentially a pattern of approximately four neighborhoods (about 160 acres each) with high connectivity and internal variety that are served by some type of commercial area as well as areas for industrial uses or business parks. Each neighborhood has its own shape, role and intensity based on its location and the BCCP vision, as established in the General Plan. Each group of four neighborhoods is expected to have an "Inner Village" which contains the most intense housing in the neighborhood along with any civic, commercial or retail businesses, as well an "Outer Village" that contains the least intense housing in the neighborhood and any parkland and schools.

The traditional city, one that matures while easily adapting to changing conditions, is based on an observable structure of Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts and Corridors. Merced is such a city, especially its downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Each quadrant in the BCCP will be a mix of at least two of the traditional city environments mentioned above. The range of mixing depends upon the vision and policy direction of the BCCP.

In the analysis presented in this memo, we implement the Urban Village concept using our experience with the traditional city approach of Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts and Corridors. To summarize how our recommended approach implements the Urban Village concept, Tables 1 and 2 compare the General Plan's direction for the structure of new growth areas with our recommendations for the new structural pieces of Merced's growth. Each of the traditional city environments (Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts, and Corridors) is described following Tables 1 and 2.

| <b>Table 1: Urban Village Concept</b>   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Innver Village</b>   | <b>Outer Village</b>   |
| <b>Approximate amount in 1 Square Mile = 1/3</b>  | <b>Approximate amount in 1 Square Mile = 2/3</b>                       |
| <b>Core Commercial Area</b>   | <b>Low Density Residential Area</b>                                    |
| <b>Either of 3 types of Core Commercial Areas:</b><br><b>Community = 20 to 60 acres</b><br><b>Neighborhood = 10 to 20 acres</b><br><b>Convenience = 3 to 10 acres</b> | <b>Min Dwellings per Acre = 2</b><br><b>Max Dwellings per Acre = 6</b> |
| <b>Village Core Residential</b>   | <b>Open Space and Schools</b>  |
| <b>Min Dwellings per Acre = 7</b><br><b>Min Average Dwellings per Acre = 10</b><br><b>Max Dwellings per Acre = 30</b>   |  |
|   |  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Range of Land Uses:</b> The Inner Village may contain a wide variety of commercial, retail and business-park type uses as well as the most intense housing within the area.</p>   | <p><b>Range of Land Uses:</b> The Outer Village may contain a wide variety of lower density housing choices.</p> |
| <p>The Urban Village Concept and its direction identified above has been translated on the next page into a system of physical components that can be established, adjusted and applied to each of the square mile sections or 'quadrants' in the BCCP. Moving forward, the system of Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts and Corridors will implement the Urban Village Concept.</p> |  |

**Table 2: Implementation**

| <b>Centers</b>   | <b>Neighborhoods</b>  | <b>Districts</b>  | <b>Corridors</b>  |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Approximate amount in Quadrant =</b> Distributed along Corridors at least 1/2 mile apart</p>   | <p><b>Approximate amount in Quadrant =</b> at least 50% or more depending upon location</p>   | <p><b>Approximate amount in Quadrant =</b> Distributed along Corridors between Centers, buffering Neighborhoods from large roads</p>  | <p><b>Approximate amount in Quadrant =</b> Square mile defined by Corridors ; may be applied to 1/2 mile areas</p>  |
| <p><b>Description and Types</b></p>  | <p><b>Description and Types</b></p>   | <p><b>Description and Types</b></p>   | <p><b>Description and Types</b></p>   |
| <p>Centers are located to serve adjacent neighborhoods and districts and are typically located along a Corridor. One of three types of Centers is applied to a location along a Corridor or along the edges of a District or Neighborhood.</p> | <p>Neighborhoods are located between Corridors and accommodate a wide range of housing choices with the most intense housing nearer Corridors, Centers, and Districts. Depending upon location, Neighborhoods are</p> | <p>Districts are areas that because of their size or function are neither neighborhoods or centers such as business and research parks. Districts are typically located along or near Corridors and may contain non-residential activity as well as</p> | <p>Corridors are areas typically 1 block deep along the square-mile and half-mile grid. Corridors buffer neighborhoods from larger roads and are punctuated by Centers with Districts occurring as well and may contain a wide variety of non-residential and</p> |



|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Streets and streetscapes are the most urban of all in the BCCP. Three types of centers provide for the expected range of land use activity:   | composed of at least two and up to three Neighborhood Residential environments. Streets and streetscapes respond to and support the three general environments. Three types of Neighborhood-Residential provide for the expected range of land use activity: | Urban Residential. Streets range from urban for office areas to industrial for manufacturing areas. Two types of Districts provide for the expected range of land use activity: | residential land use activity. Streets and streetscapes respond to and support the three general environments. Three types of Corridors provide for the expected range of land use activity:       |
| <b>Regional:</b> Contains retail and service businesses that attract customers from the region.   | <b>Urban Residential:</b> Consists of the most intense housing in the neighborhood and typically up to 25% of the total housing area depending upon location.  | <b>Workplace:</b> Consists primarily of large office or light industrial buildings with jobs that attract employees from Merced and the region.                                 | <b>Urban:</b> Segments that primarily consist of Urban Residential housing and District development. The street section along these segments is the most robust to accommodate mixed-use activity. |
| <b>Community:</b> Contains retail and service businesses and services aimed at the greater Bellevue area  | <b>Neighborhood Residential:</b> Consists primarily of single-family housing and typically up to 75% of the total housing area depending upon location.  | <b>Recreation:</b> Consists of unique recreationally-oriented activities and buildings.   | <b>Neighborhood:</b> Segments that primarily consist of Neighborhood Residential housing. The street section along these segments is neighborhood-oriented.  |
| <b>Neighborhood:</b> Contains retail and service businesses and services aimed at the nearby neighborhoods  | <b>Rural Residential:</b> Consists primarily of single-family housing and typically up to 25% of the total housing area depending upon location.   |   | <b>Rural:</b> Segments that primarily consist of Rural Residential housing. The street section along these segments is the least intense of all with natural landscaping and detailing.            |
| <b>Combining and Applying the Above Components:</b> The actual combinations and amounts of each of the four components depends upon the vision and policy direction for each square mile or 'quadrant' in the BCCP. |  |   |  |

**Component A: Centers**

**Terminology:** The term “Center” refers to concentrations of non-residential and residential activity such as retail, office and service commercial with housing that is more intense than the housing in neighborhoods or along corridors.

**Purpose:** The main purpose of Centers is to provide the focal points of business, housing and civic activity that serve a variety of needs. Centers are sometimes located in geographically central locations but typically are located between neighborhoods along key streets or at the edges of Districts and along Corridors.

**Application to the BCCP:** We recommend three types of centers as shown in Table 2. The appropriate type of center depends upon many factors such as location, role and intensity within the BCCP area.

As individual neighborhoods, districts and corridors will vary from one another across the 2.5 square-mile area, centers in the area will also vary in size, intensity, layout, physical character, range of land uses.

Based on our interpretation of the direction from the General Plan, the size of Centers appears to be at the larger end of the spectrum. Because Centers will vary in response to their context and economic role, we have provided an expanded discussion about the size of Centers below to clarify expectations.

The General Plan identifies a quarter-mile walking distance for how Centers are to be sized and integrated with adjacent areas. This distance translates into about three walkable blocks in any direction. For the purposes of the BCCP we recommend that the term ‘walkable block’ refer to blocks that are not large and that do not favor vehicles to the

exclusion of pedestrians. In our experience, a walkable block is typically up to 600 feet long in any direction and has pedestrian-oriented streetscapes with vehicular speeds that are typically less than 35 miles per hour. If speeds need to be higher such as along a boulevard, the street is then designed to be in balance with the pedestrian activity expected along its edges. As discussed in other parts of this memorandum, while there are exceptions, these factors tend to make a street conducive to people walking or wanting to be on the street: all important factors for the viability of Centers. When these factors increase numerically, the tendency is for the resulting environment to be one where people do not feel as comfortable walking or cycling. Over time, such streets present a less than appealing address for the buildings and activities along these streets.

**Local Example of a Walkable Center:** As a local example of a walkable Center, Downtown Merced and the adjacent neighborhoods illustrate the above points very well. A summary of Downtown Merced and the adjacent neighborhoods is provided below:

**Downtown Merced:**

**Role:** The Main Street for Merced.

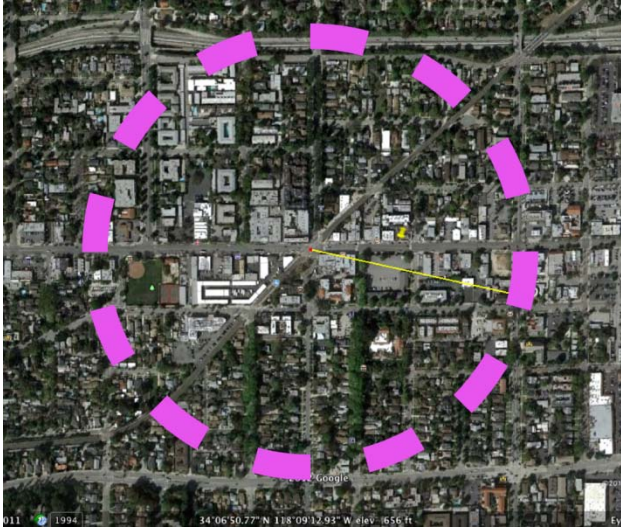
**Size:** Approximately 100 acres; This regional center consists of eight blocks from R to G Street on each side of Main Street extending north for two blocks into the adjacent neighborhoods and south for one block toward Highway 99. The blocks range in size from 400 to 425 x 325 feet.

**Physical Character:** Most buildings are single- and two-stories with some taller buildings in the core. The ambience feels that of a small city as distinct from a town.

**Example of a Range of Centers.** In order to provide additional perspective on the size of Centers, the following examples are provided. The examples are listed from most intense and urban to least intense and rural for successful Centers in a variety of physical and economic contexts ranging from small cities to small towns: South Pasadena, Healdsburg, Rancho Santa Fe, and Los Olivos.

Each of the following examples could serve entirely or partially as models for adaptation to the BCCP. The actual models to be adapted depend upon a range of factors, namely location and role in the overall mix and structure of the BCCP area.

## Table3: Centers Comparison



**Most Urban**

**South Pasadena, CA**

**Non-Residential Portion of Center:** 20 acres

**Physical Character:** A small city at the upper end of the intensity spectrum.

**Characteristics:** A Local 'main street' at Mission and Meridian Streets. This 'center' consists of 4 blocks on both sides of Mission Street and is essentially 1 block deep as it connects with adjacent neighborhoods of single- and multi-family houses.

The blocks range in size with some at 220 x 280 feet, some at 275 x 280 feet and some at 280 x 345 feet.

Most buildings are single-story with some two-story buildings.



**Healdsburg, CA**

**Non-Residential Portion of Center:** 23 acres

**Physical Character:** A small town.

**Characteristics:** A community-oriented Main street and town square. This 'center' consists of 3 blocks on each side, surrounding a central town square and then connecting with adjacent neighborhoods of single- and multi-family houses. There is some corridor 'main street' development north and south of these 9 blocks. These blocks are perceived as the 'center'.

The blocks range in size but are generally between 235 to 260 feet x 260 to 275 feet.

Most buildings are two-stories with a few 3-story buildings.

**Note:** The area within the purple circle is the land within a 1/4 mile of each example's physical center.



# Table 3: Centers Comparison



## Rancho Santa Fe, CA

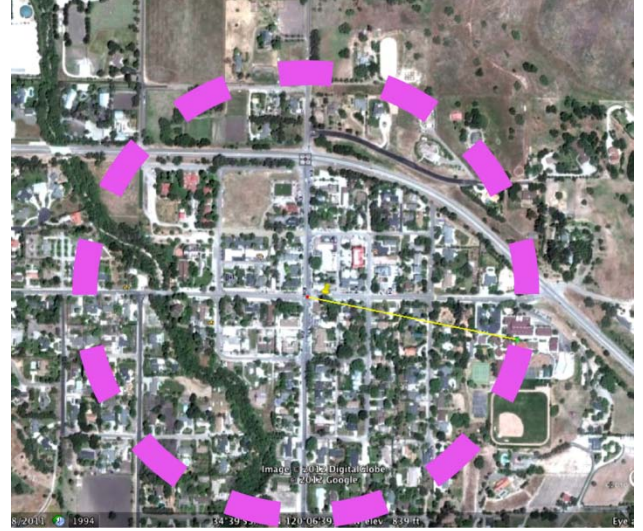
**Non-Residential Portion of Center:** 39 acres

**Physical Character:** A very small town with some rural character.

**Characteristics:** A local Main street. This 'center' consists of 3 blocks on each side, with one block at the south end that contains a hotel resort. These 7 blocks then connect with adjacent neighborhoods of estate-type houses in all directions.

The blocks range in size with some at 160 x 235 feet and some at 235 x 550 feet.

Most buildings are single-story with a few two-story buildings.



**Most Rural**

## Los Olivos, CA

**Non-Residential Portion of Center:** 16 acres

**Physical Character:** A very small town with entirely rural character.

**Characteristics:** A local Main street at Grand and Alamo Pintado Avenues. This 'center' consists of 3 blocks on both sides of Grand Avenue and is one block deep as it connects with single- and small multi-family buildings in the adjacent neighborhoods.

The blocks range in size with half at 300 x 315 feet and the other half at 300 x 460 feet.

Most buildings are single-story with some two-story buildings.

**Note: The area within the purple circle is the land within a 1/4 mile of each example’s physical center.**

The above examples show that whether or not the individual tenants are aimed at the region, the entire community, or at the neighborhood level, less rather than more acreage is needed to generate a viable Center. This is important when considering that *Implementing Action 1.2.b* (page 6-12) identifies that commercial areas should typically be of the following size depending upon the type.

| Type of Center  | Required Size of Center (Acres)  | Required Size of Urban Residential  | Total Required Size of Center (acres)  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Regional:</b> We recommend adding the Regional Center type. Typically includes anchor stores that have the widest trade area of stores in Merced. Only 1 is realistic in the BCCP. | We recommend Min 20  | We recommend Min 20   | We recommend Min 40  |
| <b>Community:</b> Typically includes a supermarket, pharmacy, ancillary retail, professional office, junior anchor stores, health club  | GP Reqmt: 20-60<br>We recommend Min 20   | GP Reqmt: 40-80<br>We recommend Min 10  | GP Reqmt: 100<br>Min 30  |
| <b>Neighborhood:</b> Typically includes a supermarket, additional anchor, major ancillary retail, provisional office  | GP Reqmt: 10-20<br>We recommend Min 5  | GP Reqmt: 50-60<br>We recommend Min 10  | GP Reqmt: 70<br>Min 15   |
| <b>Convenience:</b> Typically includes a convenience mini-market with some ancillary retail. We recommend incorporating this type into the Neighborhood Center type.                  | GP Reqmt: 3-10<br>We recommend incorporating this type into Neighborhood Center type | GP Reqmt: 40-47<br>We recommend incorporating this type into Neighborhood Center type | GP Reqmt: 50<br>We recommend incorporating this type into Neighborhood Center type |



Regional

Regional

Community

Neighborhood

Based on the above information in implementing action 1.2.b, discussion is needed to understand the role and effect of the identified parameters. With the variety of changes occurring in the retail industry, the above assumptions about acreage and associated business activity are at the large end of the scale. Increasingly, retail stores are shrinking in size and are beginning to include small versions of other stores within their footprint. With this in mind, and recognizing the intent and work that went into the above information, we recommend providing alternative ways of implementing the above policy direction for acreage. For example, adding a Regional Center type and allowing the Community Center to be developed and function within the acreage for a Neighborhood Center is one way to provide flexibility that responds to the rapidly changing retail industry. In addition we recommend eliminating the Convenience Center type and incorporating it into the Neighborhood Center because it most often occurs

within a Neighborhood Center. Accordingly, we recommend lowering the acreage requirements as shown above in the table along with parameters to be developed for the range of Centers identified earlier in 'Implementation' that will be based on the BCCP vision. Last, we recommend using a variety of flexible buildings instead of conventional zoning requirements to address the wide range of uses (including civic) and as the way to realize commercial space. Over time, this approach is more realistic than applying a strict zoning requirement for a land use when there is no market to support its existence.

**Main Components of Centers:** Each Center consists of interconnected, walkable blocks of commercial or mixed uses in three types of environments focused on one of three types of business/service-oriented activity, as described in the table on the preceding page: Regional Center, Community Center, Neighborhood Center. The second component of each Center is the immediately adjacent area that typically focuses on more intense residential or mixed-use residential. This second component is typically the Urban Residential Neighborhood type and is described on page 12.

In general, the Center is adjacent to the intersection of a collector or side street and a major arterial while the Urban Residential Neighborhood areas are located further into the site, away from the major arterial but with high interconnectivity to the Center. The location of the Center adjacent to a key intersection along a major arterial is critical to the success of the commercial and retail space. It is essential that commercial and retail space be visible to and accessible by community-wide traffic. This highlights the importance of connectivity to draw customers from both the highly visible arterial and from side streets that intersect with the arterial. Instead of the commercial stores being located at the back of a large parking lot, the interconnected models place a few buildings along the arterial to shape the streetscape while providing strong views of the parking for larger tenants farther from the arterial. To further create connectivity, side streets should be inserted into the larger shopping center pattern to break up the mass of the buildings, promote walking from adjacent neighborhoods, and generate an appealing physical character for the shopping center. We recommend that the implementation standards generate blocks and streets that are conducive to retail and business environments which may also need large parking areas while connecting with adjacent neighborhoods.

**Buildings and Adjacencies in Centers:** Another key factor to address in the implementation standards is how to locate buildings that are meant to attract motorists from arterials and ensure that they are also good neighbors to adjacent residences. This concern is threefold: 1) massing and scale, 2) adjacent outdoor activity such as truck deliveries and 3) connectivity that is inviting, not circuitous and running through the backs of buildings or through large amounts of parking. We recommend that the standards address these issues by providing a variety of compatible building sizes that can be adjacent to each other and still generate an appealing physical character. Some buildings are more appropriate near or facing a large road and some buildings are more appropriate near or facing adjacent residential. Each group of buildings has needs and physical characteristics that can be identified and anticipated. This is in contrast to the typical approach of a setback between buildings based on land use. The setback approach has little effect on buildings that are long, simply making a longer building a bit further away but not really lessening the effects. The key issue to focus on is building size not building use. In response, the requirements need to vary depending upon building height and length for small and large buildings. We recommend that the standards require connectivity along the streetscapes adjacent to facades instead of cutting up a development site with unnecessary and poorly visible pedestrian-only pathways that are not used much.

The land for each Center should be as efficient as possible so as not to result in physical separations that waste land, and to create positive adjacencies with neighboring residences. As a result, the opportunity to mix ingredients will be high. Mixing these ingredients is achievable in a variety of ways: within the same building, adjacent to one another, or across and down the street from each other. For the mixing to be effective, how and to what degree the mixing occurs needs to be in response to the particular Center and its location, role and intensity.



## Component B: Neighborhoods

**Terminology:** The term “Neighborhood” refers to the primarily residential areas consisting of a variety of housing choices.

**Purpose:** The main purpose of Neighborhoods is to serve as the primary source of places to live in the area. Neighborhoods comprise most of a traditional city and are shaped by Centers, Districts and Corridors. According to the General Plan, Neighborhoods are to comprise the majority of each quadrant and are to consist mainly of regular neighborhoods of single-family houses.

**Application to the BCCP:** We recommend that Neighborhoods be made of three types as shown in Table 2: Urban Residential, Neighborhood Residential, and Rural Residential. The appropriate type of neighborhood depends upon many factors such as location, role and intensity. It is important to keep in mind that different neighborhood types can and should be located next to each other for variety, flexibility and adaptation to changing conditions.

**Main Components of Neighborhoods:** Each Neighborhood consists of interconnected, walkable blocks of housing in three types of environments – Urban Residential, Neighborhood Residential, Rural Residential.

**Urban Residential.** These areas are the most intense of the three neighborhood types and housing types typically range from rowhouses to courtyard apartments to dense apartment buildings in a variety of sizes. Mixed-use activity typically occurs in the transitions between this neighborhood type and adjacent Districts, Corridors or Centers. Streetscapes are typically shaped by narrow, tree-lined streets with on-street parking and short front yards and entries to buildings directly from the front yard.

**Neighborhood Residential.** These areas are the typical neighborhood type with housing types ranging from single-family houses to a variety of house-form multi-family buildings such as duplexes and quadplexes in some locations. Streetscapes are typically shaped by tree-lined streets with on-street parking and a variety of moderate to large front yards and entries to buildings directly from the front yard.

**Rural Residential.** These areas are the least intense of the three neighborhood types and housing types typically range from single-family houses in an agricultural setting to single-family houses in rural settings. Streetscapes are typically shaped by natural features with a rural character along both sides of streets and a variety of large yards around all sides of buildings.



Urban Residential

Neighborhood Residential

Rural Residential

**Buildings and Adjacencies in Neighborhoods:** The primary building in Neighborhoods is the house and its various multi-family versions. Some of the Urban Residential Neighborhoods will tend to have house-form buildings and larger, more dense residential or mixed-use buildings. In response, we recommend applying the House-Form range of building types that fits each Neighborhood area based on location, role and overall intensity expectations. For example, some neighborhoods might be adjacent to Centers and will likely use the more intense (Urban Residential) end of the House Form range. Other neighborhoods might be adjacent to single-family neighborhoods and will tend to use the middle (Neighborhood Residential) portion of the House-Form range. Other neighborhood residential areas might be adjacent to more rural-oriented character and will tend to use the lower (Rural Residential) end of the House-Form range. The ability of the House-Form range to adapt to these three basic neighborhood environments inherently provides for a realistic variety of housing choices in each Neighborhood and allows each Neighborhood to adjust to its setting and expectations with flexibility and predictability.

## Component C: Districts

**Terminology:** The term ‘District’ refers to an area that cannot and should not be expected to appear or function as a Center, Neighborhood or Corridor because of its unique size or function typically as Research & Development or Light Industrial.

**Purpose:** The main purpose of Districts is to enable development that uses land differently than Centers, Neighborhoods, and Corridors to function effectively while integrating into the whole. Districts can range from airports to hospitals to business parks. Some may incorporate residential, retail and commercial but not in the same way as Centers or Corridors.

**Application to the BCCP:** We recommend two types of Districts as shown in Table 2: Research & Development, and Light Industrial. The appropriate type of District for each quadrant and its locations depends upon many factors such as location, role and intensity.

**Research & Development District.** These areas are typically high in proportion of employees to building area and have outdoor areas for activities such as light assembly and testing. Streetscapes are typically shaped by tree-lined streets with on-street parking and short front yards or commercial shopfronts along the sidewalk with entries to buildings directly from the sidewalk.

**Light Industrial District.** These areas are typically low in proportion of employees to building area and have large outdoor areas for activities such as assembly and testing. Streetscapes are typically shaped by tree-lined streets with on-street parking and short front yards or commercial shopfronts along the sidewalk with entries to buildings directly from the sidewalk.



Research & Development District

Light Industrial District

Light Industrial District

**Main Components of Districts:** Each District consists of interconnected, walkable blocks that are large enough to accommodate the large sizes of buildings associated with the unique activities of Districts. Blocks are not as interconnected as in other areas of quadrants but are connected to adjacent blocks and their environments.

**Buildings and Adjacencies in Districts:** The primary buildings in Districts are the largest of buildings in the BCCP. These block-form buildings are sometimes located within the middle of a site but often are toward the street behind a front yard or commercial shopfront to emphasize room in the rear of sites for maneuvering of vehicles and equipment.

Adjacent Neighborhoods are buffered by streetscapes that serve as a physical transition between large office and light industrial buildings on one side of a street to larger residential buildings such as those in the Urban Residential Neighborhood type. Alternatively, transitions can be made at the rear of a District and the rear of a Neighborhood type but this puts more focus on the need for compatibility between outdoor activity on both sides of the boundary.

Where Districts are immediately adjacent to a major thoroughfare, buildings are oriented to front the thoroughfare or at least orient a side of the building along the thoroughfare. In this way, the District does its part to shape and provide identity to the streetscape along major thoroughfares.



## Component D: Corridors

**Terminology:** The term ‘Corridor’ refers to the land on both sides of a major thoroughfare but only for the half-block or lots fronting the thoroughfare. (Note: If the Plan continues using ‘Corridor’ as an implementation term, the Plan name should be changed from Bellevue *Corridor* Community Plan to Bellevue Road Community Plan (or another acceptable name).)

**Purpose:** The main purpose of a corridor is to function as the segment of development and activity between major components such as Centers and Districts and to buffer Neighborhoods from major thoroughfares.

**Application to the BCCP:** We recommend three types of Corridors as shown in Table 2: Urban Corridors, Neighborhood Corridors, and Rural Corridors. The appropriate type of Corridor depends upon many factors such as location, role and intensity. As the thoroughfare passes through each quadrant in the BCCP, appropriate Corridors will be identified in response to the vision and physical character expected for each area.

**Urban Corridors.** These areas are typically the Urban Neighborhood Residential environment adjusted for office and housing along major thoroughfares. Streetscapes are typically shaped by tree-lined streets with on-street parking and a variety of modest front yards. Where office activity is described, ground floor commercial shopfronts along the sidewalk provide entries to buildings directly from the sidewalk. Side streets from adjacent areas intersect with the major thoroughfare while maintaining the streetscape and character of the adjacent area.

**Neighborhood Corridors.** These areas are typically the Neighborhood Residential environment adjusted for the type of housing appropriate along major thoroughfares. Streetscapes are typically shaped by tree-lined streets with on-street parking and large front yards with entries to buildings directly from the front yards. Side streets from adjacent areas intersect with the major thoroughfare while maintaining the streetscape and character of the adjacent area.

**Rural Corridors.** These areas are typically the Rural Residential Neighborhood environment adjusted for its interface along major thoroughfares. Streetscapes are typically shaped by the nature or rural character along both sides of streets and a variety of the largest front yards in the area. Side streets from adjacent areas intersect with the major thoroughfare while maintaining the streetscape and character of the adjacent area.



Urban Corridors

Neighborhood

Corridors Rural Corridors

**Main Components of Corridors:** Each Corridor consists of lots that face each side of the major thoroughfare connecting directly to the adjacent blocks in Centers, Neighborhoods, or Districts.

**Buildings and Adjacencies in Districts:** The primary buildings in Corridors are a variety of house-form and block-form buildings in response to the intended physical character of the particular segment. Adjacent areas and buildings are typically buffered by physical transitions in building scale and massing along the side and rear boundaries of Corridor lots.

## General Topics

In support of the Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts, and Corridors that will organize and shape the variety of environments in the BCCP area, we have identified ten key general topics that need to be discussed for direction on their implementation.

**1. Transit Priority Project Compliance:** The requirements for 'transit priority projects' are discussed in detail in the transportation analysis being prepared by other members of the consultant team. Key among those requirements are the following: a) minimum 50 percent of the transit priority project needs to be residential, b) the residential portion of the project needs to be at least 20 units per acre, and c) the project must be within a half mile of a major transit stop or transit corridor. We recommend that the above requirements be implemented through standards for the blocks within a half-mile of a major transit stop once those areas are identified in the vision for the BCCP.

**2. Open Space, Parks & Plazas.** The approach of Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts, and Corridors integrates open space in each of these environments depending upon the intended physical character and land use intensity to be established by the vision: all Centers Neighborhoods, Districts, and Corridors have some form of open space, depending upon location and role in the BCCP. This approach then takes the direction from the General Plan and applies it according to the vision for each environment.

There is a difference between the larger open spaces of Neighborhood areas and the more urban and compact open spaces of Centers, Districts and Corridors. Within Centers, Districts and Corridors, the amount of open space is less important as compared to how that open space, for example an urban plaza, is shaped by non-residential ground floors.

The General Plan establishes an integrated framework of open spaces. Chapter 7 'Open Space, Recreation and Conservation' (page 7-4) identifies eight types of park space ranging from Mini-Parks and Neighborhood Parks to Athletic Parks and Linear Parks. We recommend that upon establishing the intent and role of each quadrant in the BCCP, the corresponding range of appropriate Park Types be identified for adjustment to each environment within Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts and Corridors. This will allow each of these environments to internally distribute its open spaces as needed in the following general manner:

**Centers.** Open spaces in these environments are the most physically intense and urban of all open spaces in the BCCP. These open spaces are smaller and typically gathering places such as plazas that are often lined by ground floor retail or service businesses.

**Neighborhoods.** Open spaces in these environments are the least physically intense and suburban of all open spaces in the BCCP. These open spaces are larger and typically range from parks and community gardens to playgrounds and sportsfields. Which of these open space types are appropriate depends upon the vision for the area and which of the three neighborhood environments is being applied.

**Districts.** Open spaces in Districts are less frequent than in the other environments and can range from a plaza that serves as an outdoor employee area to more suburban-oriented small parks that can serve as buffers for adjacent blocks.

**Corridors.** Open spaces in these environments tend to be similar to the intensity and size of those in Neighborhoods. These open spaces are typically parks in response to the intended physical character of the adjacent thoroughfare.

Compatibility with nearby and adjacent businesses and houses is key when arranging blocks and placing buildings near open space. As the planning process moves forward, more information will be developed about which open spaces are most compatible with each of the above environments.

**3. Scale, Interconnectivity and Compatible Adjacencies.** Housing in the Urban Residential Neighborhoods will be the bridge between the typical Neighborhood Residential areas at one end of an area and Centers at the other end. While the Neighborhood Residential areas and Centers only share a boundary with one of these three environments, the Urban Residential Neighborhoods share boundaries with two: the more intense Centers and the less intense Neighborhood Residential areas. The interface between these different environments is critical to effective connections while generating a cohesive whole.

In many successful communities, Urban Residential Neighborhoods seamlessly serve the Centers while being a positive neighbor to the less intense Neighborhood Residential areas. In order to do so, residential development in the Urban Residential Neighborhoods needs to include a range of options for developers and the public that responds to the BCCP vision. In our experience, the most effective way to deal with this issue of adjacencies and transitions is through a combination of flexible blocks and a range of appropriate building types that best fit and function on each type of block. For every physical environment, there are certain buildings and sizes that result in positive adjacencies that can be identified and translated into standards. Similarly, there are buildings and sizes that do not make for appealing adjacencies that can be identified. We recommend that the issues of scale, interconnectivity and compatible adjacencies be addressed in the standards.

In addition to each building needing to be a positive neighbor, each building needs to contribute to the walkable environment of blocks to generate identity while adding to the whole. For example, it is possible to achieve the General Plan's minimum densities and direction for interconnectivity and yet generate an environment that does not result in positive adjacencies. Typically, this occurs by not appropriately connecting the scale (the types and sizes of individual buildings) with frontage (how the facades of buildings shape streetscapes) and streets (the variety of street types that support and generate certain environments).

Aside from knowing how many units a building can generate (its density), it is equally important to know what façade lengths and building heights result from certain building intensities. This information helps us to know the sizes of buildings and their site-needs, which in turn helps to identify the appropriate variety of streets and streetscapes to support these environments. If a building is too large or not large enough, or not located appropriately to the adjacent sidewalk and streetscape, the result can easily become a numerically compliant yet incongruous combination of buildings and environments. These subjects are all interrelated and need to be considered as a part of the whole. The 'whole' being each of the various environments ultimately identified by the vision for each quadrant. We recommend using an approach that identifies the range of building types and sizes for the various types of Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts and Corridors. This information can be adjusted for each location and translated into clear development standards for each implementing zone.

**4. Block-Size.** Block-size is essential in establishing the degree to which a place is walkable and connected. Block-size is also critical to land use flexibility (see '5. Block-Size and Land Use Flexibility' below). Generally, as block-length increases, it becomes less conducive for people to walk. Longer distances between intersections can encourage 'j-walking' and higher vehicle speeds, making the walking experience less appealing. We recommended a block size range of 200 to 600 feet. The blocks in Downtown Merced including the Downtown Neighborhoods are an example of walkable blocks. Most Downtown Merced blocks are 325 by 400 feet with most including alleys. These blocks provide for high interconnectivity of vehicles and pedestrians while yielding very useable sites for the types and sizes of buildings that could be expected in these environments. The range of land uses appropriate for the intended environment will determine how individual blocks should be developed. For example, block-sizes need to be larger in Districts than in the other three environments. The appropriate range of block sizes for each environment will be based on the vision for each quadrant and its expected environments.

**5. Block-Size and Land Use Flexibility.** Organizing land into a system of blocks is as old as the practice of making cities and towns. The current practice of carving up land on demand is efficient from the perspective of need but not

always efficient from the perspective of future options. Typically, land is carved out in response to a specific project. If that project becomes infeasible or isn't what the current developer wants to do on that site, the carved out land also might become infeasible or unrealistic. As an alternative, using a pattern of flexible blocks allows an owner to map out a preferred pattern that can be adjusted as needs or priorities change while still adding up to a coherent pattern of land uses. Mapping out the potential blocks on a property enables an owner to move forward with different areas of the property while knowing generally how each portion will connect and make sense with the rest. The mapping of blocks only becomes official when a subdivision is approved. Through the recommended approach, there is less need to map blocks and lots prematurely. In addition, using this approach will also help when the market is changing for other types of development that were not anticipated when drafting this plan and standards. Having a system of flexible blocks, the owner can adjust entire blocks or portions of blocks in response. Without a system of flexible blocks, mapping often is at the scale of projects. Projects do not always want to or need to concern themselves with the remainder of a property. Understanding property from the perspective of potential blocks provides a higher degree of understanding about options and flexibility than the current practice of developing superblocks or individual projects.

**Implementing Action 1.2.d** (page 6-13) states that *"The village street system should provide multiple and parallel routes between the Core Commercial Area and the rest of the village. In no case shall trips which could be internal to a square mile bound by arterials be forced onto an arterial."*

This action requires a network of interconnected streets. We recommend implementing this direction through standards for block-size and streets that make a range of blocks for Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts, and Corridors. An important component of this subject is the frequency of intersections in order for connectivity to disperse rather than concentrate traffic. For example, some plans have addressed 'connectivity' by having a network. But when that network is based on a pattern of fewer connections that force most traffic on to a few rather than more streets, the results are not positive. Over time, these less connected environments tend to dilute and not support the physical character of the adjacent areas. We recommend that the BCCP provide a range of street types for developers to choose from that both work from a circulation perspective to generate effective connectivity and the sense of place and value expected in the wide range of environments throughout the BCCP area.

## 6. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

**Implementing Action 1.3b** (page 6-19) The General Plan states that *"...Commercial areas must be developed at sufficient intensity (typically a Floor Area Ratio [FAR] of at least 0.25) to create a focus of activity at the center of villages."*

**Implementing Action 1.3c** states that *'Office areas should be built at an intensity that concentrates activity near transit stops and Commercial Areas.'* Further, this implementing action identifies a FAR of 0.35 to 0.60 as *'encouraged without structured parking and may be as high as 1.0 with structured parking'*.

The FAR requirement is quantitative and does not provide any indication of how the resulting building might be located on its site or how large it may be. Aside from the FAR and overall building height, neighbors or neighboring property owners may have little information about the building(s) that may occur next door. For example, a FAR of 0.25 could mean a single-story building covering  $\frac{1}{4}$  of its site. Or, it could mean a two-story building covering  $\frac{1}{8}$  of the site and so forth. The implementing action identifies this FAR as a minimum with the next implementing action encouraging a higher FAR for office development. Effectively, the identified FAR range is 0.25 to 0.60 with the higher end of the range expecting office development.

This raises three key questions: 1) How much office is enough to comply with the intent of the General Plan? 2) How is the FAR calculated and is it the best tool for informing standards? 3) What happens when the uses in the building change over time?



**All or Some Office?** The General Plan language is clear about encouraging office development at a higher FAR than other land uses. As an employment generator, office development is certainly important. However, as stated, does the General Plan prevent a mixed-use building where residential is the majority of the building with an entire ground floor of office? Even if that ground floor is large? The drawing in Figure 6.15 (page 6-24) indicates that the building is not entirely office but the above policy direction could be interpreted a few ways. As currently stated, Implementing Action 1.3c could unintentionally result in smaller buildings than are necessary in the mid-term, possibly resulting in tenants choosing other sites or in demolition and reconstruction of relatively new buildings to suit new tenants. We recommend not connecting land use to the amount of allowable square feet (FAR). Knowing that land use demand will change over time, we recommend identifying the sizes of buildings that are expected and then *accommodating not requiring* the variety of land uses that may be in demand over the long term. We also recommend standards that identify the maximum sizes of buildings (in stories and length, not FAR) depending upon their location and adjacencies along with a set of allowable land uses so that the owner may choose how to occupy the building over time.

**FAR Range:** Depending upon the particular quadrant, the stated FAR range could be seen as very low. Although the Bellevue Corridor planning area is at Merced's northern end, individual Centers will range in intensity with some at the low end of the allowable FAR and others possibly needing more intensity than a 1.0 FAR. We recommend interpreting this upper limit based on the following discussion.

A key distinction is whether the far is FAR expected in the aggregate for an area prior to making blocks or for the individual blocks once they are identified? If for the entire area, the FAR is high but if for individual blocks and lots, it is low as explained below. It is important to keep in mind that a 'site' being prepared and sold by an owner might be small, ¼-acre for example. Or, a 'site' might be a five-acre parcel or even larger. While the formula is the same, the meaning of the outcome (maximum FAR) is very different. In both cases, the FAR number is a lump sum. But, the FAR for a ¼-acre site speaks directly to the types and sizes of buildings that can work on the site while the FAR for a five-acre site stays a lump sum that could mean one or many buildings with no indication about size. The lump sum FAR information is useful for quickly identifying the total allowed FAR for an entire area but because it still has to be interpreted as to how many buildings and of what size, the tendency is to decrease these numbers. The reasoning is usually that such an amount is substantial and perhaps too much to deal with for an area, leaving the questions to the application-review process.

If the FAR is intended to simply forecast how much commercial or mixed-use square footage is expected in areas, this needs to be understood. It is critical to avoid confusing the role of FAR with regulation. As discussed, FAR is excellent at measuring how much development is expected. But, it is far less effective at informing the actual development of individual blocks and sites. We recommend keeping the FAR information at the aggregate level, as a maximum to inform infrastructure capacity, for example. Then, along with the vision, we recommend identifying the appropriate types of buildings and their associated outcomes to generate standards that deliver the range of expected outcomes. In this way, the FAR is applied at the policy level and does not have to continue as a layer of regulation. Often, this process is reversed: FAR limits are established and the vision is to conform to that abstract numerical direction.

**7. Retail and Civic Land Use Activity:** The General Plan description of commercial areas (Section 6.4.2) identifies retail and civic uses as key components of commercial areas. The ability to realize shops and civic uses is dependent upon when shops and civic uses are supportable by customers. As any land use activity responds to the needs of the area and the population, it is especially true for shops and civic uses: Shops won't appear until a sufficient customer base is established. We recommend that the approach for involving these uses be to *enable rather than require* shops and civic uses. The possibility for shops, office space and civic uses needs to be in place so that when the timing is correct, those uses can be realized and located effectively. We recommend allowing buildings that in the short term utilize ground floors and upper floors for other uses but in the long term can easily be converted to shops, office space and civic uses. This gives property owners the option of moving forward while avoiding a scenario that may result in vacant land for years while waiting for the shops, office space and civic uses to be built from scratch. This approach requires a change to how

parking standards are currently calculated. We recommend that except for residential buildings which should have their parking on the same site as the dwellings, non-residential parking be handled in a grouped manner as is practical for the location. This allows the sharing of parking spaces as in shopping centers and reduces unnecessary parking spaces while letting that land be used in other ways.

**8. Residential Density**

**Implementing Action 1.4a** (page 6-25) states *‘A mix of residential densities, ownership patterns, cost, and building types is desirable in Villages.’*

Figure 6.16 ‘Housing Types’ of the General Plan identifies 12 housing types ranging from a ‘Carriage House’ to ‘Garden Apartments’. This range of choices is very broad and the information and graphics are abstract, and are intended to be developed further for implementation. The chart has minimal information about each housing type, however, it provides specifics such as *‘maximum 3 stories’*. The following numerical direction is provided in the descriptions of housing types on pages 6-27 through 6-29:

|                                  | Single-Family Housing Types  |                                | Multi-Family Housing Types |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
|                                  | Gross Density Range per Acre | Density Range w/ancillary unit | Density Range              |
| Zero-Lot Line Homes              | 7 - 10                       | 17.5                           |                            |
| Small-Lot Single Family Homes    | 6 - 8                        | 14                             |                            |
| Standard Lot Single-Family Homes | 2 - 6                        | 10.5                           |                            |
| Estate Residences                | Up to 2                      | 3.5                            |                            |
| Podium Apartments                |                              | n.a.                           | 20 - 30                    |
| Garden Apartments                |                              | n.a.                           | 16 - 22                    |
| Small Multiplexes                |                              | n.a.                           | 10-18                      |
| Townhouses                       |                              |                                | 10 - 20                    |

The above information raises a few questions: What if there are emerging or recent housing types that would fit well in Merced but are not implicit in the above list? In addition, such numbers, while accurate about certain outcomes, reflect a certain set of assumptions that may or may no longer apply. For example, by adjusting the size of a lot by a small amount for very good reasons, the above assumptions can change substantially and a proposal may technically be out of compliance despite being a good idea and within the vision. Last, the term ‘housing type’ is accurate as long as all of the building is used for residential purposes. But what if a building contains mostly housing but has some non-residential activity? That possibility appears to only exist by viewing a commercial building as having some housing in it. But then what direction is there about the density of housing in those cases?

We recommend the Block-Form and House-Form approach as a way to transition the housing type information in the General Plan to a robust and flexible system that will translate the policy direction into standards for the BCCP.

**9. Block-Form and House-Form Buildings.** Another way to describe and understand density-related terms is to consider them within the context of what is physically intended in the each Center, Neighborhood, District, and

Corridor. Centers are intended for the highest of density while at the other end of the spectrum are Neighborhood areas: Urban Residential, Neighborhood Residential, and Rural Residential. In between these two ends of the spectrum are Districts and Corridors. Using a scale of size and intensity that sorts buildings into two categories (Block-Form and House-Form), the appropriate buildings and sizes can be identified for each environment. Buildings in Centers, Districts and Corridors fall into mostly the Block-Form category with some House-Form buildings. Buildings in Neighborhood areas fall entirely into the House-Form category. Most regulations and policies are not equipped to make this distinction and as a result, rely on vague or complicated mathematical approaches.

**House-Form buildings.** These are buildings that regardless of land-use, are the size of what most people would expect for houses, including large houses. While there are certain repeating characteristics from one community to another, the parameters for 'House-Form' buildings in Merced need to be identified through the process of preparing the standards.

**Block-Form buildings.** These are buildings that are either individually small but abut to form a block or large buildings that occupy portions of blocks or entire blocks. Centers, Districts and Corridors may include some House-Form buildings but consist primarily of Block-Form buildings.

The House and Block building forms each have a variety of *building types* not *housing types* to choose from according to need and intended physical character. Each building type has inherent density and size outcomes that can be expressed, discussed and adjusted. The House-Form and Block-Form approach replaces the FAR and density approach, which typically imposes arbitrary numerical limits not connected to physical realities. The House-Form and Block-Form approach begins with identifying the range of buildings and sizes that could be expected in the BCCP, then identifying the numerical resultants of those buildings. Within these two categories of buildings, owners will have several choices to apply to their property in a variety of ways.

Through the recommended approach above, the issue of density is moot as it is controlled directly by parking. This approach requires some additional thought when initially proposing the building in order to provide flexibility on the site for less or more parking over the life of a building. However, this approach lets the building be pursued as a reusable container regardless of density.

Policy direction can be articulated throughout the BCCP in a way that is based on the physical realities and needs of buildings. For example, instead of requiring minimum densities in a particular area, which may be impractical or may leave out good ideas because of numerical limits, this approach enables the selection of appropriate building types based on relevant factors that are connected to the intended physical environment. This approach also enables policy direction for 'mixture' of certain densities to be more realistically implemented by identifying the appropriate building types and then establishing percentage ranges for mixing by location.

**10. Implementation through Zoning and Standards.** The above information will guide how the BCCP vision is expressed at the policy level and ultimately in implementing standards. The proposed structure of Centers, Neighborhoods, Districts and Corridors is easily translated into zoning and standards that deliver the vision one project at a time while adding up to a desirable whole. Such standards range in level of detail according to the desired level of regulation for the expected results across the 2.5 square-mile area. Some areas might need or warrant more detailed standards while other areas or topics might benefit from less detail. The system we can apply is in direct response to the proposed structure described in this memo and adjustable across a number of topics. First, however, upon the vision being established, we will test the City's zoning and standards that could be used in the BCCP to determine if the vision is implementable through those standards.