



# 2030 MERCED COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

December 10, 2013

Prepared by  
Merced County

In consultation with  
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Planning Partners  
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Economic & Planning Systems  
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Adopted by Merced County Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 2013-147

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- Winton Community Specific Plan

*The community plans are bound separately and are available at the County website at [www.co.merced.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=438](http://www.co.merced.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=438)*

**GENERAL PLAN GLOSSARY ..... G-1**

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# PART I: GENERAL PLAN OVERVIEW

## OVERVIEW AND REGIONAL SETTING

Merced County is located in the heart of California’s San Joaquin Valley, the world’s most productive agricultural region (see **Figure 1-1**). The County, which spans from the coastal ranges to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, is bordered by Stanislaus County to the north, Fresno and Madera Counties to the south, Mariposa County to the east, and Santa Clara and San Benito counties to the west.

The County encompasses approximately 1,980± square miles, of which 1.2 million acres or 98 percent is unincorporated. Approximately 24,128 acres, or 1.9 percent of the total land area, lies within one of the six incorporated cities: Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos, and Merced.

The 2030 Merced County General Plan sets the direction for the future of the county over the next 20 years. This introduction answers the following eight questions about the 2030 General Plan:

- What is a General Plan?
- What are the guiding principles of the General Plan?
- What documents make up a General Plan?
- How is the General Plan organized?
- How is the General Plan implemented?
- How should the General Plan be used?
- How was the General Plan prepared?
- What is the relationship to other planning documents?

## WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

### Purpose of this General Plan

The 2030 Merced County General Plan is a legal document that serves as Merced County’s “blueprint” or “constitution” for all future land use, development,

preservation, and resource conservation decisions. General Plans must be comprehensive and long-term.

- **Comprehensive.** General plans are comprehensive both in their geographic coverage and in the range of subjects they cover. In the case of the 2030 Merced County General Plan, the geographic coverage is the County’s Planning Area, which encompasses both incorporated and unincorporated territory that may directly or indirectly affect the County’s future development. However, the County’s general plan authority does not extend into the incorporated cities. Each city adopts and implements a general plan that covers land within their planning area.
- **Long-Term.** General plans are long-term in perspective. General plan time horizons vary, but typically range from 15 to 25 years into the future. In the case of this General Plan, the County has established the year 2030 as the plan’s time horizon.

## Legal Authority and Requirements

State law requires each county and city to prepare and adopt a general plan for its physical development (Government Code Section 65300). This general plan must address the seven topics (referred to as “elements”) of land use, circulation, housing, open space, conservation, safety, and noise as identified in state law (Government Code Section 65302), to the extent that the topics are locally relevant. *[Note: The Housing Element was adopted in 2010 as required by State law and is not being revised as part of the 2030 General Plan update].* In addition, the cities and counties within the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District must address air quality in their general plans. Merced County has chosen to include air quality goals, policies, and programs as a separate element.

The general plan may address other topics that the community deems relevant to its development, such as economic development, historic preservation, and urban design. The format and structure of the general plan is also left to local discretion, but regardless of the format or issues addressed, all substantive parts of the plan must be consistent with one another (i.e., internally consistent). For instance, the policies in the land use element must be consistent with those of the housing element, and vice versa.

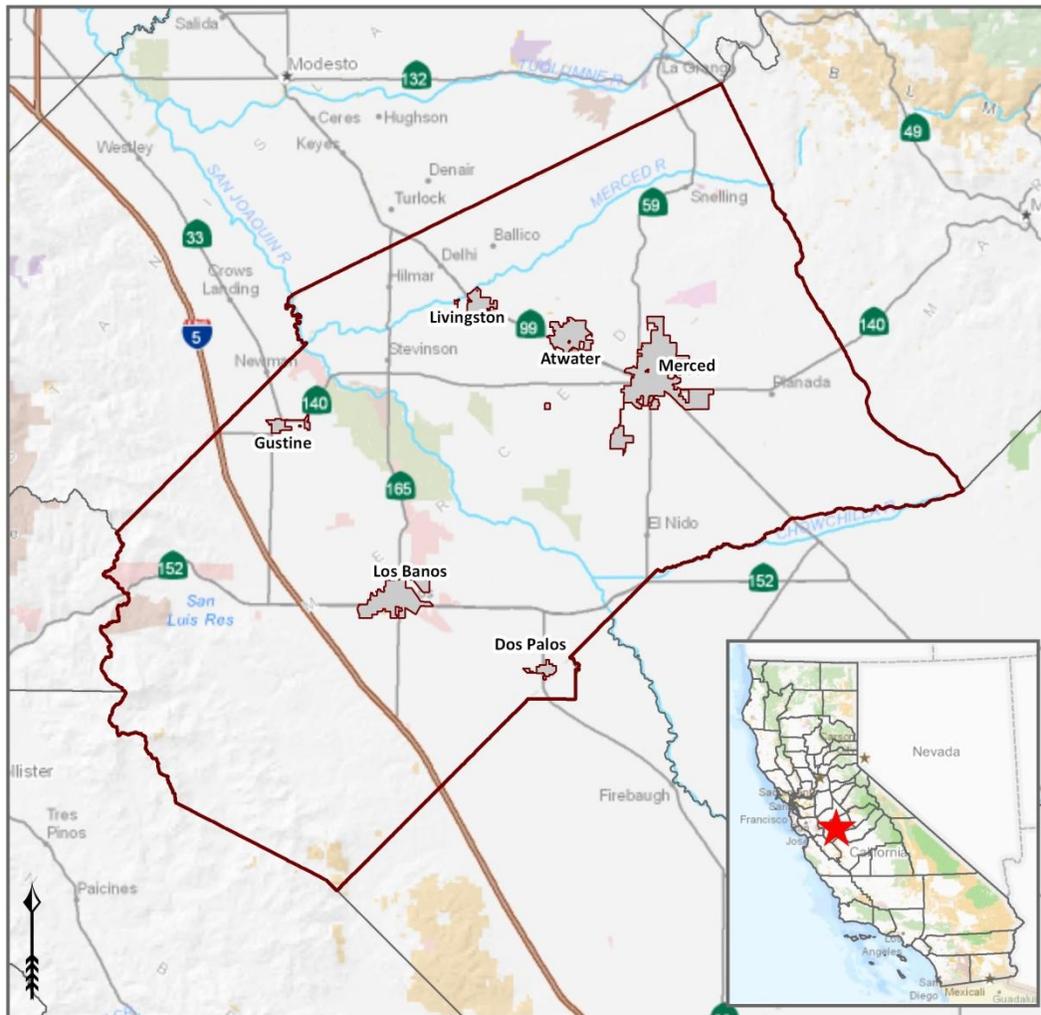
In addition to the mandatory elements described above, the Merced County General Plan addresses five additional topics: economic development, agriculture, public facilities and services, recreation and cultural resources, and water. Under state law, once included in the General Plan, these elements carry the same weight of law as those that are legally mandated. Correspondence between the Merced County 2030 General Plan elements and the legally-required general plan topics are shown in the table on the following page.

		General Plan Elements Required by State Law								
		Land Use	Circulation	Housing	Conservation	Open Space	Noise	Safety	Air Quality*	Optional Elements
Merced County General Plan Elements	Economic Development Element									X
	Land Use Element	X								
	Agriculture Element				X					X
	Circulation Element		X							
	Housing Element			X						
	Public Facilities and Services Element	X								X
	Natural Resources Element				X	X				
	Recreation and Cultural Resources Element	X			X					X
	Health and Safety Element						X	X		
	Air Quality Element								X	
	Water Element				X					X

*\*Air Quality is mandatory for cities and counties within the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.*

## General Plan Area

State law requires counties to adopt a general plan that addresses physical development within the County borders. **Figure 1-1** shows the General Plan Planning Area, which includes all land within the County line and outside of the six incorporated cities. All lands outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the six incorporated cities comprise unincorporated Merced County, and constitute the geography of the 2030 Merced County General Plan.



## WHAT ARE THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE GENERAL PLAN?

Guiding Principles are central ideas that represent the County’s philosophy about growth, development, and sustainability. Guiding Principles represent broad ideas that guide the County throughout its decisions about the adoption and implementation of the General Plan. All General Plan goals, policies, and implementation programs should be consistent with the Guiding Principles. The Guiding Principles provided the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors a foundation for selecting the Preferred Land Use Alternative and the General Plan’s associated goals, policies, and programs.

### How Guiding Principles are Formulated and Used

Guiding Principles are based on the results of the extensive five-year outreach effort conducted as part of the General Plan Update. The effort included stakeholder interviews, technical advisory committee and focus group meetings, community workshops, and study sessions with the Commission and Board. The five principles below represent a general consensus about the basis for General Plan goals and policies.

### Merced County’s Guiding Principles

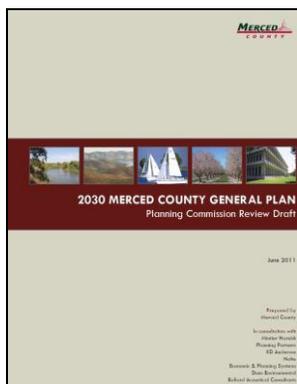
The five guiding principles below reflect a general community consensus about the key considerations for the General Plan. The guiding principles do not constitute fundamental goals or policies of the General Plan and should not be interpreted as such. Many other important considerations could have been included on this list, such as public health, education, and community identity; however, these following five principles highlight the core issues facing the community in the adoption of the General Plan:

- **Agriculture.** Agriculture is the backbone and essential part of Merced County’s economy. It is a way of life that must be supported, and protected to assure the industry’s continued vitality.
- **Economic Development.** Merced County must seek methods to expand and diversify its local economy in order to create and sustain employment and business opportunities that enable existing and future residents to improve their quality of life.
- **Environmental Quality.** The natural resources of Merced County, including air, water, energy, wildlife, and scenery, must be protected to assure a high quality of life for Merced County residents today and in the future.
- **Public Facilities and Services.** New growth and development in Merced County must be responsible for, have access to, and fully fund all essential public facilities and services, including water, sewer, storm water drainage, roadways, schools, government centers, and recreation.

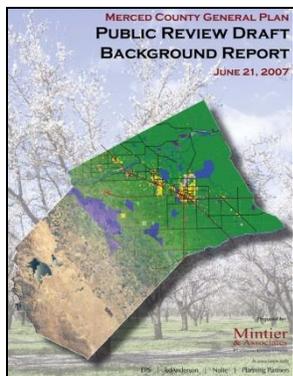
- Transportation.** The Merced County transportation system, including freeways, highways, streets, bike and pedestrian pathways, mass transit, airports, and rail, must be coordinated, networked, adequately constructed, and maintained to meet the needs of residents and businesses.

## WHAT DOCUMENTS MAKE UP THE GENERAL PLAN?

This General Plan formalizes a long-term vision for development and conservation of Merced County and outlines goals, policies, standards, and programs to guide day-to-day decisions concerning growth in the county. Designed to meet local needs while being consistent with State general plan requirements, the General Plan consists of two documents: the 2030 Merced County General Plan (this document) and a 2030 Merced County General Plan Background Report. While both of these documents together officially comprise the General Plan, they are published under separate covers. The following is a brief description of each document.



**2030 Merced County General Plan.** Also called the Policy Document, the 2030 Merced County General Plan contains the goals, policies, and implementation programs that guide the County’s future land use and environmental decisions.



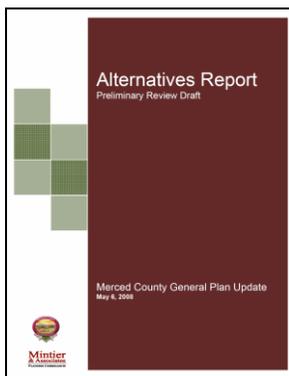
**2030 Merced County General Plan Background Report.** The Background Report took a “snapshot” of Merced County’s trends and conditions as of 2006. The report was subsequently updated several times with more current information prior to General Plan adoption. The report provides a detailed description for a wide range of topics within the Planning Area, such as demographic and economic conditions, land use, public facilities and services, and environmental resources. The report provides decision-makers, the public, and local agencies with context for making policy decisions. Unlike the Policy Document, the Background Report is policy-neutral. Its purpose is to create a foundation or context for making policy decisions. The Background Report also serves as the existing settings description for the Environmental Impact Report prepared on the General Plan.

## General Plan Update Support Documents

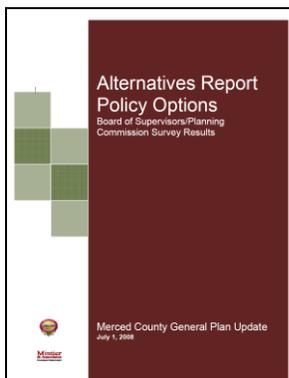
As part of the General Plan update program, the County also prepared several support documents to help guide the update process. These documents served as both the building blocks for the Policy Document and analysis of the impacts associated with implementing the General Plan. These documents, however, are advisory in nature and have not been adopted by the Board of Supervisors as part of the 2030 General Plan.



**Issues and Opportunities Report (June 2007).** This report provides a means of focusing community attention on key issues and opportunities that were identified in the Background Report, Stakeholder Interviews, and Community Workshops. The report summarized major policy implications for Merced County to consider related to accommodating future growth while protecting valuable resources. The report purposely did not reach conclusions or suggest the manner in which the County should proceed in the development of the General Plan. Rather, it provided a forum to facilitate discussion on important issues.



**Preliminary Review Draft Alternatives Report (May 2008).** This report identified three growth alternatives and various policy options for decision-maker and community consideration. The report also identified the various pros and cons of each scenario.



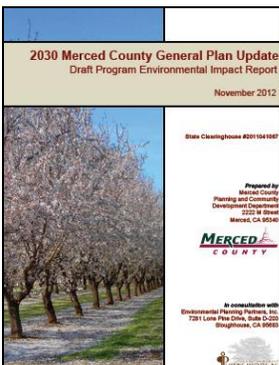
**Alternatives Report Policy Options (July 2008).** This report provided a summary of the results from a survey of the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission on each policy option described in the Preliminary Review Draft Alternatives Report.



**Final Alternatives Report (August 2008).** The County published a revised version of the Preliminary Review Draft Alternatives Report. It includes a detailed outline of policy options and four growth alternatives for the County. The four growth alternatives include: Alternative A: City-centered growth, Alternative B1: Unincorporated-Community growth (existing communities), Alternative B2: Unincorporated Community Growth (existing + new communities), and Alternative C: Resource Protection/ Infrastructure Availability. The Alternatives Report provides an overview of each alternative, population growth assumptions for each alternative, and the strengths and weakness of each alternative.



**Revised Alternatives Report (October 2008).** The County released a Revised Alternatives Report to reflect issues, discussions, and the direction received from the Board of Supervisors. The report compares two new growth alternatives, referred to as Alternatives D and E, which are both refinements of the original four alternatives. Alternative D represents a refinement of Alternative B2 with a focus on new town and city-centered growth intended to increase the protection of productive farmland. Alternative E represents a combination of Alternatives A and C, with a focus on city-centered growth and growth in SUDPs that have adequate infrastructure, but residential densities between Alternatives A and C (e.g., average of four dwelling units per gross acre vs. eight dwelling units per gross acre). The revised report also provided a comparative analysis for the refined alternatives.



**Environmental Impact Report.** This report was prepared to fulfill the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as set forth in Sections 15126, 15175, and 15176 of the CEQA Guidelines Act. The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will use this document during the General Plan Update process in order to understand the potential environmental implications associated with implementing the General Plan.

## HOW IS THE GENERAL PLAN ORGANIZED?

The 2030 Merced County General Plan is divided into the following four parts:

### Part I – General Plan Overview

Part I includes an introduction to Merced County; explains what the General Plan is, how it is organized, and how it is used; and reviews the process that was used to develop the General Plan.

### Part II – Countywide Goals, Policies, and Implementation Programs

Part II includes all of the Countywide goals, policies, and implementation programs that are the heart of the 2030 Merced County General Plan. These goals, policies, and programs address a broad range of topics required by State law and those that address unique local concerns. The Countywide goals, policies, and programs are divided into the following eleven topical chapters, or “elements”, for easy reference:

- Economic Development Element
- Land Use and Community Character Element
- Agricultural Element
- Transportation and Circulation Element
- Housing Element (adopted in 2010)
- Public Facilities and Services Element
- Natural Resources Element
- Recreation and Cultural Resources Element
- Health and Safety Element
- Air Quality Element
- Water Element

#### Sections (Elements)

Each section in Part II contains the goals and policies that the County will use to guide future land use, development, and environmental protection decisions.

#### *Goals*

A goal is a statement that describes in general terms a desired future condition or end state. A goal serves as a general direction-setter.

#### *Policies*

A policy is a statement that guides a specific course of action for decision-makers to achieve a desired goal. A policy must be clear and unambiguous.

### ***Standards***

General Plan land use designations and, in some cases, policies set out standards, even though they are not specifically labeled as such. Standards generally establish a level of quantity or quality that must be complied with or satisfied. For example, the land use designations in the Land Use Element specify a maximum or range for dwelling units per gross acre and a maximum floor area ratio for non-residential uses.

### ***Implementation Programs***

To help ensure that appropriate actions are taken to implement the goals and policies, the General Plan provides a set of implementation measures. An implementation measure is a specific program, procedure, or technique that carries out Plan policies. Following the goals and policies for each topic area are a list of implementation measures that identifies the County department(s) responsible for implementation and provides a timeline for action. Implementation programs should describe actions that are concrete and measurable, so completion can be easily monitored in annual reports.

## **Part III – Community Plans**

Part III of the 2030 Merced County General Plan provides additional geographically-specific policy direction for community plan areas. Each Urban Community is required to have an adopted community plan that will describe goals and policies specific to each community. The goals and policies in this part supplement the Countywide goals and policies contained in Part II of the General Plan.

## **HOW IS THE GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTED?**

If the 2030 Merced County General Plan is to serve its purpose effectively, it must be reviewed, maintained, and implemented in a systematic and consistent manner. This section includes an outline of the process for reviewing and updating the General Plan. This part also outlines requirements for implementing the General Plan consistent with its goals, policies, standards, and programs and provides an overview of the types of actions or tools the County will use to implement the Plan's policies.

### **Implementing the General Plan**

Carrying out the General Plan following its adoption requires a multitude of separate actions and ongoing programs involving virtually every County department and many other public agencies and private organizations. The legal authority for these actions and programs rests on two essential powers of local government: corporate and police powers. Local governments rely on corporate power to collect money through bonds, fees, assessments, and taxes, and spend money to provide services and facilities. Local governments use police power to, among other things, regulate the use of property (e.g., zoning) and building construction (e.g., building codes) in order to promote public health, safety, and welfare. The General Plan provides the formal and legal framework for the exercise of these powers by the County.

Decisions, as well as projects approved by the County, are not required to be consistent with every goal and policy in this General Plan.<sup>1</sup> The plan accommodates a wide range of interests and includes a clear and comprehensive set of principles to help guide land use and development decisions. In doing so, the General Plan sets forth many goals and policies addressing a broad range of topics. The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors rely on the General Plan to determine whether a proposed project is in harmony or agreement with the County's goals and policies. No project or decision is expected to satisfy every General Plan policy, nor does State law impose such a requirement.

## **Revising and Amending the General Plan**

The General Plan is intended to be a living document. As conditions and needs change, the County will need to revise and amend the General Plan to eliminate or modify policies and programs or update diagrams. The General Plan must be flexible to respond to changing conditions and at the same time specific in guiding day-to-day land use and development decisions. To ensure that the policies and proposals of the general plan are systematically implemented, State law since the early 1970s has increasingly insisted that the actions and decisions of each local government concerning both its own projects and the private projects it approves are consistent with its adopted General Plan. The courts have supported and furthered this trend through their interpretations of State law.

Amendments to the General Plan may also be necessary to conform to State and Federal laws passed after adoption of the General Plan. The County will initiate some of these proposals itself; others will be initiated by property owners and developers. State law limits general plan amendments to four times per year, but each amendment can include multiple changes. Similar to the adoption of the general plan, general plan amendments are subject to environmental review, public notice, and hearing requirements, and must not result in inconsistencies with the rest of the plan. Exceptions to this rule include amendments that allow development of affordable housing or comply with a court decision.

## **General Plan Maintenance and Monitoring**

### ***Annual General Plan Implementation Review***

The Community and Economic Development Department will annually review and report to the Planning Commission on the progress in implementing the goals and policies of the General Plan. This annual report will help ensure the County is moving forward to achieve the goals of the Plan. The report will describe the status of each implementation program and take into account the availability of new implementation tools, changes in funding sources, and feedback from plan monitoring activities.

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<sup>1</sup> *The General Plan does not contain fundamental, mandatory, and specific land use policies, standards, objectives of implementation standards similar in character to policies which form the basis of the holding in Families Unafraid to Uphold Rural Etc. County v. Bd. of Supervisors (1988) 62 Cal. App. 4th 1332.*

### ***Five-Year General Plan Review and Update***

Every five years the County will thoroughly review the General Plan and revise and update it as necessary. This review and update process will encompass the entire General Plan including the goals, policies, and implementation programs.

### **Categories of Implementation Actions/Tools**

The County will implement the policies and programs of the General Plan through many actions and tools that can be grouped according to the following eight categories:

- Regulation and Development Review (*RDR*)
- Infrastructure and Service Master Plans, Strategies, and Programs (*MPSP*)
- Financing and Budgeting (*FB*)
- Planning Studies and Reports (*PSR*)
- County Services and Operations (*SO*)
- Inter-Governmental Coordination (*IGC*)
- Joint Partnerships with the Private Sector (*JP*)
- Public Information (*PI*)

#### ***Regulation and Development Review (RDR)***

Many General Plan policies are implemented through regulations based on the County’s “police power” to protect public health, safety, and welfare. County ordinances also create a development review process that provides for County review of individual project proposals and authorizes the County to approve, conditionally approve, or deny projects based on their consistency with the General Plan. The following is a list of plans, ordinances, and procedures commonly used to implement the General Plan:

- Community Plans
- Specific Plans
- Zoning Code
- Subdivision Code
- Building and other codes
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
- Right-to-Farm Ordinance
- Antiquated Subdivision Environmental Review Ordinance
- Development review process

#### ***Infrastructure and Service Master Plans, Strategies, and Programs (MPSP)***

The County has adopted master plans, strategies, and programs for various County services and facilities, types of development, or geographic areas. These are prepared to provide more specific direction for County decision-makers, staff, and the public about how the General Plan will be implemented. They are not elements or components of the

General Plan. The following is a list of master plans, strategies, and programs that the County has adopted or plans to adopt. Specific implementation programs of the General Plan call for the annual or periodic review of many of these master plans, strategies, and programs in addition to adoption of some new master plans and strategies:

- Local Five-Year Strategic Plan
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Wellhead Protection Program

### ***Financing and Budgeting (FB)***

The development, maintenance, and operation of public facilities such as parks and drainage facilities and the provision of County services require financial resources derived from various sources. Programming of County capital projects and their funding over time is outlined in the County’s Capital Improvement Program, which is updated annually. The following is a list of revenue sources used by or available to the County to support development, maintenance, or operation of public facilities and services:

- Property tax revenue
- Sales tax revenue
- User fees
- Development impact fees
- Community facilities and special assessment districts
- Municipal bonds
- Special taxes
- State and Federal grants
- Other State and Federal funding

### ***Planning Studies and Reports (PSR)***

The County conducts studies and produces reports to collect and evaluate information related to specific issues. These studies and reports are undertaken at the direction of the Board of Supervisors as needed or are prepared annually to report on the status and implementation of the General Plan or a master plan.

### ***County Services and Operations (SO)***

The County provides a broad range of services to its residents, businesses, and visitors and manages and operates its facilities to meet community needs. How the County provides services and carries out its operations influences the effectiveness of General Plan implementation.

### ***Inter-governmental Coordination (IGC)***

The County must coordinate with numerous local, regional, State, and Federal agencies to implement the General Plan. These agencies provide services, facilities, or funding

and administer regulations that directly or indirectly affect many issues addressed in the General Plan. The following is a partial list of public agencies that may play a role in implementing the General Plan:

- Local agencies such as the cities of Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos, and Merced;
- Local urban water and wastewater districts, each of which serve urban development and prepare their own water and sewer facility master plans (such as Delhi County Water District);
- Local agricultural or natural resource irrigation districts (such as Merced Irrigation District);
- Regional agencies such as the Merced County Association of Governments, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, and Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County;
- State agencies such as Caltrans, General Services, California Department of Fish and Game, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the California Environmental Protection Agency;
- Federal agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

### ***Joint Partnerships with the Private Sector (JP)***

The County may coordinate its activities with private sector efforts to improve public service delivery, manage public sector assets, or leverage private sector investment. By exploring new partnerships with the private sector, the County can use its technical, management, and financial resources in creative ways to achieve the goals of the General Plan.

### ***Public Information (PI)***

The County can use a wide range of tools to keep residents informed of County services or other issues of current interest. Public information can be distributed through media such as brochures, pamphlets, the County’s website, workshops, seminars, public access television, radio, newspapers, public hearings, neighborhood and community meetings, and customer service hotlines.

## **HOW SHOULD THE GENERAL PLAN BE USED?**

The County General Plan is intended for use by all members of the community including residents, businesses, developers, County staff, and decision-makers. The organization of the General Plan allows users to find topics or sections that interest them and to

quickly review county policies. All of the policies are interrelated and should be considered together when making planning decisions.

## **Residents**

For Merced County residents the General Plan indicates the general types of uses that are permitted around housing, the long-range plans and changes that may affect neighborhoods, and the policies the County will use to evaluate development applications. The General Plan indicates how the County will attract businesses that provide goods and services to meet daily needs and new jobs that are closely matched to educational skills and that lessen the need to commute. The General Plan informs residents how the County plans to improve transportation infrastructure, continue to provide adequate public services, and protect valued open spaces and natural resources.

## **Businesses**

For Merced County businesses the General Plan outlines the measures the County will take to protect investments and encourage future success. Expectations for county business areas are spelled out, while policies ensure that business operations will be compatible with other businesses and nearby residential areas.

## **Developers**

For developers within the county the General Plan introduces the community, provides background information, and outlines development policies. It is important to review all maps and policies throughout the General Plan. In addition, developers should also review the Background Report and the Merced County Code to get a complete perspective on how and where development may take place.

## **County Staff**

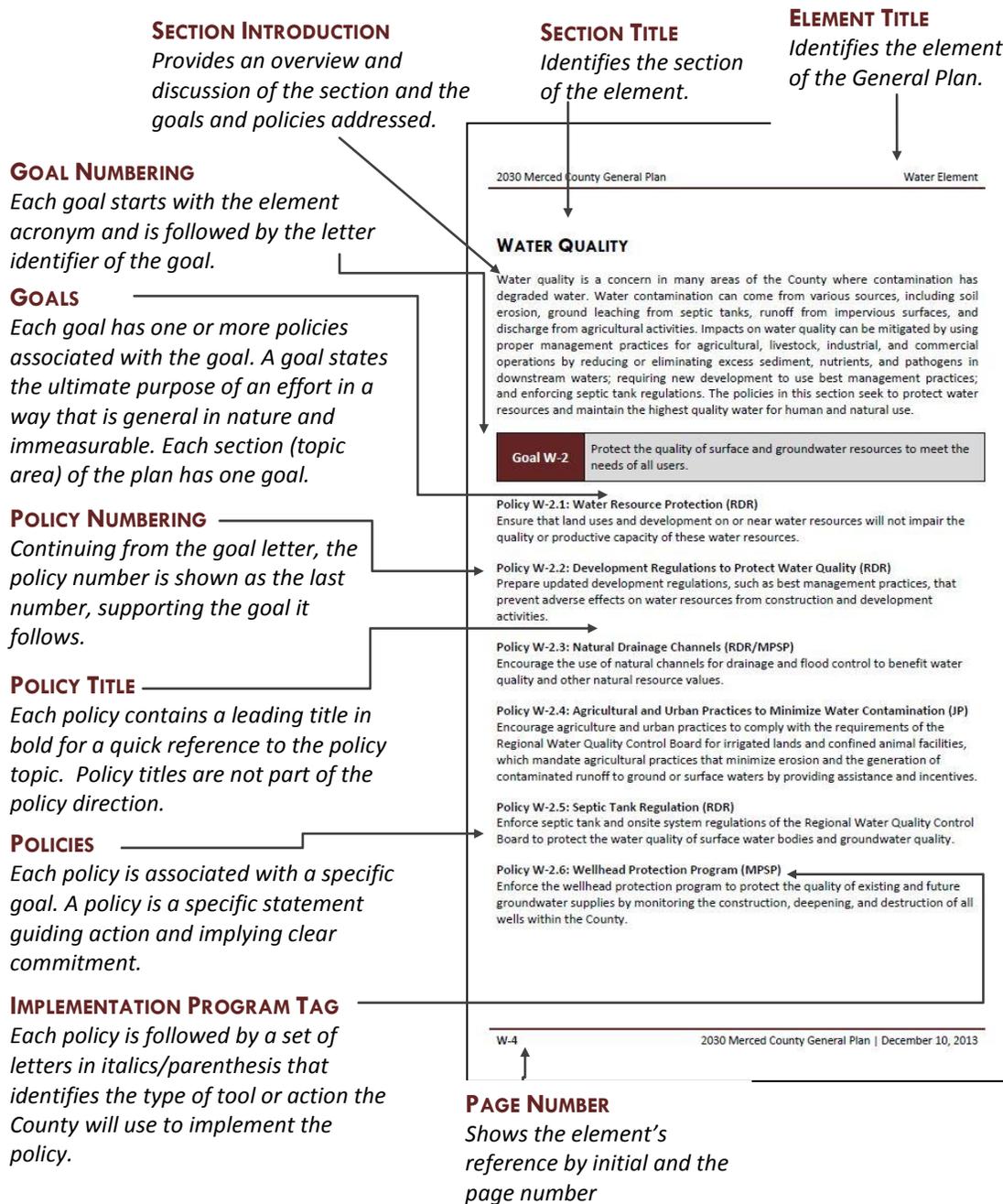
The General Plan is used by County staff to determine if proposed development and public facilities projects are consistent with County policies. The General Plan establishes standards for internal County plans (e.g., infrastructure master plans) and operations. The General Plan is used by County staff as the basis for making recommendations to decision-makers. The General Plan also provides short- and long-term implementation programs for which staff are responsible.

## **Decision-Makers**

The General Plan is a tool to help the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions make land use, environmental, and other decisions. All development decisions must be consistent with the General Plan. The General Plan is also intended to help other public agencies, such as the cities in the County, ALUC, MCAG, Caltrans, and local school districts, as they contemplate future actions in the unincorporated areas of Merced County.

## Goals and Policies Readers' Guide

The General Plan contains goals and policies that will be used by the County to guide future land use, economic development, and environmental protection decisions. A goal is a statement that describes in general terms a desired future condition or “end” state. Goals describe ideal future conditions for a particular topic and tend to be very general and broad. A policy is a clear statement that guides a specific course of action for decision-makers to achieve a desired goal.



## Implementation Programs Readers' Guide

To help ensure that appropriate actions are taken to implement the General Plan, Part II of the General Plan includes a set of implementation programs. Implementation programs identify the specific steps to be taken by the County to implement the goals and policies of the plan. They may include revisions of current codes and ordinances, capital improvements, programs, financing, and other measures that are assigned to different County departments after the General Plan is adopted. The types of tools or actions the County can use to carry out its policies and implementation programs generally fall into eight categories. These are explained in detail in Part IV, Administration and Implementation, along with the specific implementation programs.

**TABLE NAME**  
Each section begins with a new table name.

**IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM TAG**  
Each implementation program is followed by a set of letters in italics/parenthesis that identifies the type of tool or action the County will use to implement the program.

**TIMELINE**  
Identifies an estimated time frame for when the implementation program will be completed. Implementation programs may not be completed as indicated due to budget or resource constraints.

Agricultural Resources Element Implementation Programs		2013-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program AG-A: Right-to-Farm Ordinance (RDR)</b> Periodically review and update the Right-to-Farm Ordinance and provide information to the local real estate industry to help make the public aware of the right-to-farm provisions in their area.						
Implements Which Policies	AG-3.1					✓
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner UC Cooperative Extension					

**RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT(S)/ SUPPORTING DEPARTMENT(S)**  
Identifies which County department(s) are responsible to see the specific implementation is completed and which County department(s), if necessary, will support the responsible department.

**SUPPORTING POLICY(IES)**  
Identifies which policy(ies) the implementation program supports.

**IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM TEXT**  
Specific action(s) the County will take to implement the General Plan.

## HOW WAS THE GENERAL PLAN PREPARED?

Merced County initiated a comprehensive update of its 1990 General Plan in September 2005. The update program focused on developing a revised plan that reflects the County's changing economic and demographic conditions while retaining the community's values and desires.

### Public Outreach

When a general plan is written or amended, State law requires that the planning agency provide opportunities for public involvement through public hearings or other methods. Since public input is vital to the successful implementation of any general plan, Merced County made a considerable effort to involve the public throughout the process. The public provided County staff and the General Plan consultants with direction at key points throughout the General Plan Update effort. Public input, especially in terms of community values, served as the foundation from which County staff and the Consultants developed goals, policies, and programs.

The General Plan outreach program included three series of community workshops, stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings, a General Plan website, and printed and electronic newsletters. The details of these outreach efforts are described below.

### Stakeholder Interviews

On June 8 and 9, 2006, the County conducted 25 interviews with several key stakeholders. These interviews helped the County gain perspectives and insights into the issues to be addressed during the General Plan Update process.

### Community Workshops

Merced County held three series of community workshops during the General Plan Update process. Each series included a set of 15 workshops at different locations throughout the county.

The first workshop series, held between July 2006 and February 2007, helped kick off the General Plan Update process. Over 350 people attended these workshops in Hilmar, McSwain, Delhi, Snelling, Le Grand, Santa Nella, Franklin/Beachwood, Winton, Planada, Dos Palos "Y", South Dos Palos/Midway, Los Banos, UC Merced, South Merced, and Ballico. The workshops provided an opportunity for the public to offer their thoughts on what they like and don't like about their communities and the County, and what important issues should be addressed during the general plan update.



In September 2007 Merced County held the second set of General Plan workshops. Over 240 people attended these workshops. The County presented the contents of the Issues and Opportunities Report and asked participants to provide feedback on the report's findings. Participants also reviewed, discussed, and ranked four growth options: 1) Unincorporated Communities; 2) New Towns; 3) Rural Residential; and 4) Incorporated Cities.

The third and final workshop series was held in November 2008. Approximately 200 people attended these workshops. This series focused on the Alternatives Report, which included four growth alternatives. Participants were asked to rank the four growth alternatives in order of preference and list three reasons for selecting the top ranked alternative. Participants were then asked to list any concerns they had regarding the preferred alternative and list the top three changes they would make to it.

The input gathered at the community workshops was essential to the General Plan Update process. Residents, business owners, and other community members provided invaluable feedback that helped shape the vision and direction of the County General Plan.



### Focus Groups

In May 2007, November 2007, and March 2011 the County hosted a series of Focus Group meetings designed to provide policymakers, County Staff, and the General Plan Consultants with feedback and direction on six key policy areas:

- Open Space/Habitat
- Agriculture
- Water Resources
- Circulation
- Economic Development
- Public Infrastructure

The Focus Groups were made up of members of the community and agency representatives with expertise, background, or interest in the six policy areas. Members were asked to comment on the accuracy of the Administrative Draft Background Report and identify initial policy issues that need to be addressed during the General Plan Update. The last set of Focus Group meetings involved a detailed review of the Public Review Draft General Plan policies.

### **Project Webpage**

The County posted General Plan Update information, meetings schedules, and documents on a webpage located on the County’s main website. This webpage provided a one-stop location to get the latest information on the progress of the process. The webpage provided up-to-date information on upcoming events and allowed residents to download copies of meeting minutes/agendas and documents/reports.

### **Newsletters**

During the General Plan Update, the County published three newsletters that provided an overview of the progress being made and the direction being pursued. The newsletters were posted on the General Plan Update webpage and distributed throughout the community and at the community workshops.

### **Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors Joint Study Sessions**

The County hosted eight joint study sessions with the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors throughout the Update process. These study sessions allowed the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors an opportunity to provide direction to County staff and the General Plan Update consultants at key points in the process. They also provided an opportunity for members of the public to provide direction verbal comments to the County decision-makers in open public sessions.

### **Public Hearings**

The County will hold formal public hearings with the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to consider the General Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

## **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANNING REGULATIONS AND DOCUMENTS?**

There are several other local and regional plans that influence land use and other policy decisions in Merced County.

### **California Assembly Bill 32**

The General Plan has been designed to meet the requirements of AB 32, in particular the requirement for local jurisdictions to address sustainability, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and climate change adaptation. These are addressed by policies and programs throughout the General Plan, rather than in a single section. Each policy and program in the General Plan that promotes sustainability or addresses climate change is indicated with the  icon.

## County Community Plans

The County currently (2011) has 10 adopted community plans and the County is in the process of updating several of them over the next four years. Community plans serve as a bridge between the countywide goals, policies, and implementation programs in the General Plan and the specific needs of each unincorporated community. Community plans supplement the General plan to specifically address a community's needs based on its unique physical, demographic, and economic characteristics. Development within Urban Communities must be consistent with both the General Plan and the Community Plan. The Community plans are incorporated as Part III of the General Plan.

## MCAG Blueprint Process

The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) participated in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process, a joint effort of the Councils of Governments (COGs) representing seven valley counties of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare and the Madera County Transportation Commission (MTC). The Blueprint process started in 2006 as a commitment from the Governor to support efforts to protect and revitalize the San Joaquin Valley with the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. This was followed by regional cooperation by the seven COGs and MTC to participate in an effort to plan for the future of the region through 2050. The goal of the Blueprint process was to develop a preferred future growth vision for each county and the San Joaquin Valley.

MCAG carried out the local Blueprint planning effort, which included workshops and analysis to develop a vision statement, values, and guiding principles and a preferred growth scenario. The Merced County Blueprint is not part of the 2030 Merced County General Plan; rather it is an advisory document that was used to help develop the plan. MCAG does not have authority to develop a regional land use plan that is binding on the actions of Merced County. However, the principles, tools, and implementation strategies from the Blueprint have been used in this update process. Specifically, the County's policy to achieve an average residential density of 7.1 dwelling units per acre was based on the effort to increase densities stressed in the Blueprint planning process.

## MCAG Regional Transportation Impact Fee Study

Prepared in 2008 by MCAG, with assistance from member jurisdictions and stakeholders, the Regional Transportation Impact Fee Study developed a comprehensive plan for countywide improvements to the regional road network through the year 2030. The objective of the study is to ensure that adequate transportation facilities will be available to meet the projected needs of Merced County as it grows, and that the facilities planned are consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan. The study proposed a Regional Transportation Impact Fee (RTIF) that would be assessed on new development throughout the county. The RTIF does not exist in a vacuum; however, a variety of financing mechanisms will be needed to generate the funds to accomplish the required improvements. MCAG projects in 25 years, the RTIF would collect \$206 million of the \$972 million necessary to construct thirteen improvement projects. Merced

County will coordinate road improvements needed to implement the 2030 General Plan with MCAG and the RTIF.

### **City General Plans**

Each city in Merced County has control over the land use and development decisions within its city limits. In turn, each city has its own adopted general plan to guide these decisions. The County is committed to coordinating and cooperating with the Cities in those fringe areas which the Cities proposed for future annexations, but which are located within the unincorporated territory under County jurisdiction.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for future economic development and prosperity. Agriculture is the foundation of Merced County's economy, and the County consistently ranks as one of California's top five producers of milk and cream, chickens, almonds, alfalfa, cattle and calves, silage, and tomatoes. Merced County is home to four agricultural processing facilities that are among the largest of their kind in the world: Ernest and Julio Gallo winery, Hilmar Cheese production facility, Ingomar Packing Company tomato processing plant, and Foster Farms poultry processing facility.

Because of sustained growth in Merced County's food processing and manufacturing over the past 20 years, the County's economy no longer relies exclusively on farm crop production. Despite the County attracting greater concentrations of food manufacturing among fruit and vegetable processors, dairies, and slaughterhouses, few new concentrations in other manufacturing industries or significant new employers outside agriculture have appeared. The major focus of this element identifies ways Merced County can diversify its economy and attract new industries while expanding the agricultural industry. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- General Economic Development
- Economic Base Diversification
- Existing Business Expansion and Retention
- New Business Attraction and Recruitment
- Partnerships
- Workforce Training and Education
- Tourism

## GENERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic sustainability recognizes the need for both local and regional economic prosperity and resilience to maintain the health of the community for current and future generations. It encourages self-reliance, entrepreneurial activity, and the generation of wealth in a manner that does not degrade or burden the ability of future generation to meet social, economic, and environmental needs. In order to encourage economic growth, the County's economic base will need to diversify and increase employment in

sectors outside of agriculture. The policies in this section address the infrastructure, land, and resources needed for general economic development.

**Goal ED-1**

Support and promote growth and diversification of the County's economy.

**Policy ED-1.1: Economic Development Strategy (FB)**

Maintain, monitor, and periodically update an Economic Development Strategy, which shall be used as an operational guide to implement the economic development goals, policies, and programs of the General Plan, as well as fulfilling Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) requirements for a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to receive grant funding.

**Policy ED-1.2: Staff Resources (FB/IGC)**

Continue to allocate appropriate County staff resources to economic development attraction and retention planning activities and coordinate with cities and regional organizations in related economic development and planning efforts.

**Policy ED-1.3: Business Incubator Establishment (IGC)**

Partner with UC Merced and Merced Colleges, to establish business incubators that nurture and expand existing businesses, including small agricultural businesses and food processing enterprises.

**Policy ED-1.4: Developing Enterprise Support (JP)**

Support developing enterprises that directly market agricultural products which have the potential to create new companies and jobs in the distribution system.

**Policy ED-1.5: Infrastructure Investment (MPSP/FB) 🌐**

Direct infrastructure investments to infill areas and other areas with the greatest potential for economic growth in an effort to obtain the greatest pay-off in terms of economic development. This will include taking advantage of existing infrastructure such as Interstate 5, State Route 99, UC Merced, Castle Commerce Center and Airport, as well as planned infrastructure such as the California High-Speed Rail. Encourage the grouping of related and complementary activities and discourage isolated facilities, except when necessary based upon their locational or operational characteristics, in order to minimize vehicle miles traveled (VMT), especially for diesel trucks.

**Policy ED-1.6: Telecommunication Infrastructure Upgrades (JP) 🌐**

Encourage telecommunications providers to upgrade high speed internet and wireless internet capabilities throughout the County to provide state of the art capabilities.

**Policy ED-1.7: Improving Merced County's Quality of Life (SO/PI)**

Economic development efforts shall include consideration of improving air quality, developing an educated workforce, promoting safe/crime-free communities, protecting water quality, and increasing recreational opportunities as a means to improve the quality of life for residents and workers and to attract new industries to the County.

**Policy ED-1.8: Jobs/Housing Balance (RDR) 🌐**

Encourage all communities, and require new or expanded Community Plans, to include sufficient employment-based land uses to maintain a 1:1 jobs/housing balance.

**Policy ED-1.9: Facilities and Services Adequacy (SO/JP)**

Encourage new industries to locate within communities that have or can provide adequate infrastructure capacity to meet the needs of new development.

**Policy ED-1.10: Green Technology Business Promotion (SO/IGC) 🌐**

Promote, in partnership with UC Merced and other organizations, the development of green technology businesses and telecommuting, and shall encourage businesses to use energy efficient and clean technologies.

## ECONOMIC BASE DIVERSIFICATION

Merced County is largely dependent on agriculture and is vulnerable to economic factors specific to this industry. By diversifying the local economy, the County will be able to expand employment opportunities by attracting investment and new businesses. The policies in this section address diversification of the economic base through sustainable development and new industrial opportunities.

**Goal ED-2**

Support the existing agricultural economy while expanding infrastructure and existing/new industries in order to increase employment opportunities and attract new investment.

**Policy ED-2.1: General Economic Base Diversification (SO/JP)**

Encourage the development of a diversified economic base by continuing to promote agriculture, tourism, and commerce, and by expanding efforts to encourage industrial development, including the development of energy resources.

**Policy ED-2.2: Agricultural Base Diversification (IGC/JP)**

Diversify the existing agricultural base by:

- a) Encouraging strong relationships between traditional agricultural industries and emerging agricultural-related industries, particularly with UC Merced, Castle Commerce Center and Airport; and
- b) Emphasizing the expansion of value-added agricultural products.

**Policy ED-2.3: Sustainable Business Development (JP) 🌐**

Encourage the development of environmentally-sustainable businesses that capitalize on industry sector strengths, particularly new emerging green technologies such as solar energy.

**Policy ED-2.4: Agricultural Industry Growth (MPSP)**

Target industry sectors based on the County's growing agricultural economic base, particularly food manufacturing and potential office-based services such as information and professional services.

**Policy ED-2.5: Research and Development Attraction (IGC/JP)**

Attract research and development companies and information/ knowledge-based companies by providing financial incentives and facilitating relationships between local companies and UC Merced.

**Policy ED-2.6: Office Development (RDR)**

Support office development adjacent to key residential growth areas to provide a balance of employment and housing.

**EXISTING BUSINESS EXPANSION AND RETENTION**

The policies in this section address the need to focus on retention and expansion of existing businesses in Merced County. Existing businesses provide the County's job base and constitute the most effective starting point from which to grow the County's economic base. Keeping existing jobs, particularly higher wage jobs, in the County is an important goal, and the policies in this section seek to encourage and support local businesses.

**Goal ED-3**

Support and promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

**Policy ED-3.1: Business Retention (SO)**

Support local and regional business retention and expansion programs to ensure that County services are applicable and accessible to local businesses.

**Policy ED-3.2: Small Business Promotion (JP)**

Promote entrepreneurial development and small business expansion and recognize the job creation potential of locally-owned small businesses.

**Policy ED-3.3: Local Graduate Retention (IGC/JP)**

Actively support efforts to keep local high school and university graduates in the local workforce.

**Policy ED-3.4: Community Center Revitalization (SO/JP)**

Strengthen, through public and private collaboration, the core areas of communities that serve as centers for public, financial, entertainment, and commercial activities.

**Policy ED-3.5: Existing Commercial Center Protection (RDR/MPSP/JP)**

Protect the viability of productive community retail centers by promoting a business mix that responds to changing economic conditions and provides needed services to

surrounding neighborhoods. Also, identify underperforming existing commercial centers and consider reuse alternatives in future Community Plan updates.

**Policy ED-3.6: Small Business Promotion (IGC/JP)**

Promote and expand existing small business development programs by:

- a) Expanding existing programs through a range of public/private partnerships, technical assistance, and economic and financial incentives;
- b) Identifying partnerships between industry and educational organizations, and identifying potential mentoring, job training, networking, and professional development opportunities between these organizations;
- c) Supporting and promoting efforts of the Small Business Administration to provide technical assistance to small business owners and employees through classes and assistance in the areas of business management, marketing, and legal assistance;
- d) Providing low-interest loans for small business development and expansion; and
- e) Strengthening business reinvestment through partnerships and outreach.

**Policy ED-3.7: Local Hiring for Green Technology Businesses (JP) 🌍**

Encourage existing and new green technology businesses to recruit and hire local employees.

## NEW BUSINESS ATTRACTION AND RECRUITMENT

New industry and business attraction to Merced County, including the promotion of agritourism industry, is essential to the future of business in Merced County. The policies in this section address the need to focus on attracting and recruiting new businesses to Merced County.

**Goal ED-4**

Support and promote new business development and employment growth, including local-serving, high-technology, and sustainable businesses.

**Policy ED-4.1: New Industries (IGC/JP)**

Encourage new industries to locate within cities, existing Urban Communities, and other unincorporated County areas where appropriate. The County, in cooperation with cities and local communities, will identify appropriate locations for industrial uses consistent with cities' economic development strategies, taking into account opportunities offered by variations in local environmental conditions.

**Policy ED-4.2: New Job Quality (JP)**

Focus business expansion and industry attraction efforts on companies and institutions that bring quality jobs to the County that provide benefits and self-sufficiency wages for County residents.

**Policy ED-4.3: New and Existing Business Support (SO)**

Develop and identify financial incentives to attract new investment and support existing local businesses, particularly small locally-owned businesses, by:

- a) Continuing to pursue funding for entrepreneurial entities, including private and venture capital funding; and
- b) Encouraging and supporting investment within Enterprise Zones.

**Policy ED-4.4: Physical and Social Infrastructure Development (SO/JP)**

Develop physical and social infrastructure as a means of attracting new businesses by:

- a) Focusing on strengthening quality of life features (e.g., education, improved urban amenities, adequate public safety);
- b) Providing for a diversity of housing choices, ranging from workforce to executive housing; and
- c) Working with providers to expand telecommunication services (i.e., fiber optics, DSL, Cable, wireless service).

**Policy ED-4.5: Childcare Facility Encouragement (RDR) **

Encourage the development of childcare facilities that support working parents by:

- a) Providing incentives to develop childcare facilities in new employment centers;
- b) Ensuring adequate land is available, with appropriate zoning, to encourage childcare centers in residential neighborhoods; and
- c) Establishing relationships with private businesses, schools, and other public and private entities to create more childcare facilities.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Merced County has many opportunities to invest in cooperative efforts between various commercial, public, and private partnerships. UC Merced, Castle Commerce Center and Airport, and various local businesses are all part of the local economy and through partnerships have the ability to encourage development of public facilities and infrastructure that will benefit local communities. The policies in this section address the cooperative efforts needed to develop partnerships that will result in improvement of the economic base and benefit the community.

**Goal ED-5**

Increase the effectiveness of countywide economic development activities through public and private partnerships.

**Policy ED-5.1: Local and Regional Coordination (IGC)**

Work with the cities and regional agencies to develop a resource allocation program that efficiently and equitably distributes the cost and benefits of economic development to local government jurisdictions in the County. The program should include a County-wide capital improvement plan and equitable tax sharing agreement(s) between the County and cities.

**Policy ED-5.2: Regional Cooperation (IGC)**

Cooperate with regional economic development organizations and agencies to expand and improve the economic base of the County.

**Policy ED-5.3: Economic Leadership (SO)**

Provide County-wide and regional economic development leadership by coordinating public and private economic development resources.

**Policy ED-5.4: Partnership Capitalization (IGC)**

Capitalize on partnerships between UC Merced, Merced College, and the private sector by continuing to:

- a) Strengthen relationships between UC Extension programs, Merced College training programs, County organizations and programs, and the local business community to encourage ongoing professional development opportunities for local businesses;
- b) Partner with UC Merced and Castle Commerce Center to develop flexible research and development incubator space, including opportunities for technology transfer; and
- c) Evaluate funding mechanisms that can facilitate infrastructure development and land assembly.

**Policy ED-5.5: Castle Commerce Center (SO/JP)**

Continue to promote economic opportunities at the Castle Commerce Center and Airport by:

- a) Protecting Castle Airport from encroachment by incompatible land uses by limiting development near both ends of the Castle Airport runway and within the Airport Area of Influence boundary established by the Airport Land Use Commission;
- b) Enhancing the role of Castle Commerce Center and Airport as a regional multi-modal transportation hub with passenger air service, freight transportation by air and rail, and aircraft and train maintenance; and

- c) Continuing to encourage related industries to locate and take advantage of Castle Commerce Center and Airport through the use of flexible development standards and streamlined permit processing.

**Policy ED-5.6: Catalyst Project Opportunities (SO)**

Identify and foster unique economic benefits generated from catalyst projects by creating programs to retain UC Merced graduates within Merced County, not only related to employment opportunities, but also related to community amenities such as civic and cultural opportunities, education, and affordable housing.

**Policy ED-5.7: Infrastructure Construction (MPSP)**

Partner with other agencies to identify, coordinate, and facilitate the construction of key infrastructure needs for the County's economic viability.

## WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Many business and professional service providers, such as doctors, attorneys, and investment advisors, continue to grow in terms of payroll and employees in the County's larger cities and unincorporated communities. Unskilled agricultural employment remains largely concentrated in the County's fast-growing immigrant community, but education and training opens new opportunities for subsequent generations of these immigrants. The presence of UC Merced helps enhance the entire education system which will lead to a more educated labor force. The policies in this section focus on improving the current labor force as well as investing in education required by the industries targeted for future County growth.

**Goal ED-6**

Improve the skills of the current workforce in order to attract new investment and ensure economic growth.

**Policy ED-6.1: Workforce Training (SO/IGC)**

Identify workforce training opportunities and needs by expanding vocational job training programs, encouraging private vocational training opportunities, and working with UC Extension and Merced College to identify agricultural technologies, skills, and training needed to support emerging technologies, including value-added food processing and logistics.

**Policy ED-6.2: Workforce Skills Development (IGC)**

Coordinate with other agencies and organizations to develop programs that improve the skills of the County's workforce in order to meet the needs of new and expanding businesses.

**Policy ED-6.3: Workforce Education (SO)**

Encourage school districts to adopt the School-to-Work program as a model for K-12 education and focus on the requirements of those industries targeted for future growth.

**Policy ED-6.4: Local Agricultural Relationship Encouragement (SO/IGC/JP)**

Establish and encourage relationships between existing agricultural-related companies, UC Merced, Merced College, high school agricultural programs, and venture capital organizations.

**TOURISM**

Merced County is renowned for its unique natural resources, including pristine vernal pool grasslands, unique plant and animal species, large managed wetland preserves, and wildlife-based recreational opportunities. Along with its natural resource attractions, the County also has an opportunity to promote heritage tourism and agritourism. Heritage tourism includes experiencing the unique culture, history, or natural resources of a particular destination. Agritourism can include a style of vacation in which hospitality is offered on farms. This may involve the opportunity to assist with farming tasks during the visit. Agritourism is far-reaching and includes any farm open to the public at least part of the year. Tourists can pick fruits and vegetables, ride horses, taste honey, learn about wine, shop in gift shops and farm stands for local and regional produce or hand-crafted gifts, and much more. Each farm generally offers a unique and memorable experience suitable for an entire family. The policies in this section seek to improve and strengthen the agritourism industry in the County.

**Goal ED-7**

Strengthen the tourism industry through the development of natural resource attractions and investment into the agritourism industry.

**Policy ED-7.1: Tourism Promotion (IGC)**

Continue to work with the Merced Visitor Services, chambers of commerce, UC Merced, the Farm Bureau, and interested public and private stakeholders to market Merced County as a premier tourist destination.

**Policy ED-7.2: Heritage Tourism Promotion (JP)**

Work with agencies, organizations, property owners, and business interests to develop and promote Heritage Tourism opportunities.

**Policy ED-7.3: Wildlife-Based Tourism Expansion (IGC/JP)**

Continue to work with and support the efforts of agencies and organizations that promote wildlife-based tourism in the County, such as the Grasslands Education Center, in order to make Merced County a premier destination for recreational, ecological, and educational tourism.

**Policy ED-7.4: Agritourism Promotion (SO)**

Promote existing and new agritourism opportunities, such as the Hilmar Cheese Factory, Grasslands Education Center, Buchanan Hollow Nut store, The Fruit Barn, and Double T Ranch.

**Policy ED-7.5: Public-Private Partnerships (JP)**

Promote and facilitate agriculture-related partnerships between the County and agricultural groups/City Economic Development Departments to expand tourism opportunities throughout the county.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Economic Development Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>ED-A: Economic Development Strategy (MPSP)</b>		✓				✓
Prepare, adopt, and regularly update an Economic Development Strategy, which shall be used as an operational guide to implement the economic development goals and policies of the General Plan, as well as fulfilling Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) requirements for a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to receive grant funding. The strategy should identify industry-specific goals and actions that build on the existing agricultural economy and industries.						
Implements Which Policies	All Economic Development Element Policies, AG-1.3					
Responsible Department	Commerce, Aviation, and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning and Community Development					
<b>ED-B: Capital Resource Allocation Program (MPSP, JP)</b>		✓				✓
Develop a capital resource allocation program, in cooperation with the six cities and applicable regional agencies that efficiently and equitably distributes the cost and benefits of economic development to local government jurisdictions in the County.						
Implements Which Policies	ED-5.1 through ED-5.7					
Responsible Department	Commerce, Aviation, and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>ED-C: Financial Incentives (MPSP, JP)</b>		✓				
Identify financial incentives that can be used to help attract new investments and retain existing businesses. This should include private and venture capital funding and promoting enterprise and redevelopment zones.						
Implements Which Policy	ED-4.3					
Responsible Department	Commerce, Aviation, and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>ED-D: Zoning Code Update (MPSP)</b>		✓				
Update the County Zoning Code with provisions and incentives to help encourage agritourism in the county.						
Implements Which Policy	ED-7.4					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission					

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# LAND USE ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for both rural and urban land use. This element includes a description of the goals, policies, and standards for future land use, development, community design, energy efficiency, and agriculture/resource protection in unincorporated Merced County. This element also includes a detailed description of the Land Use Diagram and the related land use designations and standards. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Countywide Growth and Development
- Agricultural and Foothill Pasture Areas
- Rural Residential Centers
- Rural Centers
- Urban Communities
- Highway Interchange Centers
- Incorporated Cities and Unincorporated Fringe Areas
- Isolated Urban Designations
- Energy Efficient Design
- Development Review and Inter-Agency Coordination
- General Plan Maintenance

## Land Use Diagram

The Land Use Diagram (see **Figure LU-1**) shows the types and locations of existing and future land uses envisioned in the 2030 Merced County General Plan. This includes existing and future agriculture, open space, rural and urban development, and resource protection.

### ***Rural Land Uses and Urban Area Boundaries***

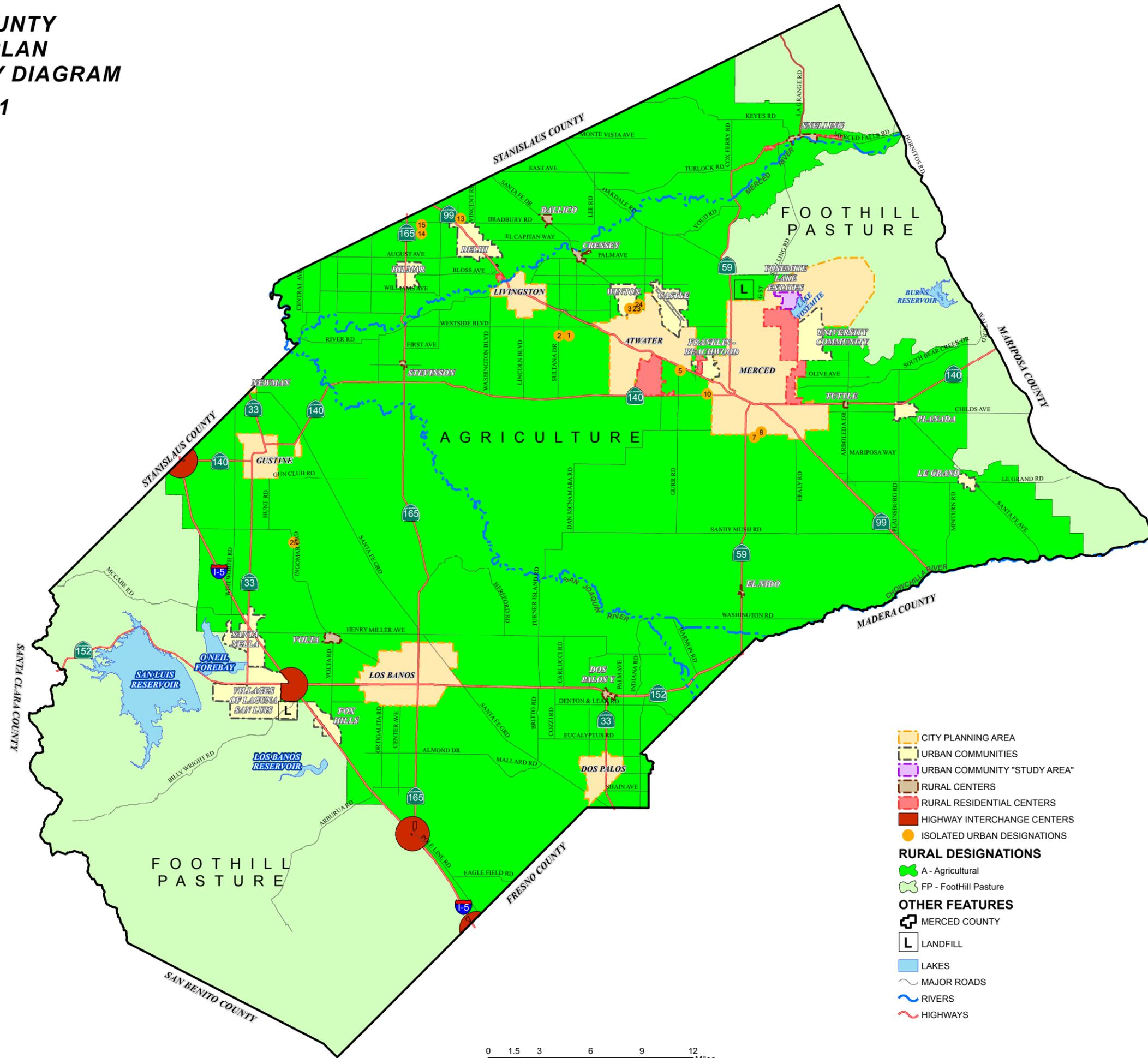
The 2030 Merced County General Plan Land Use Diagram identifies two rural land use designations and six urban land use boundaries, which include: City Planning Areas, Urban Communities, Rural Centers, Rural Residential Centers, Highway Interchange Centers, and Isolated Urban Designations. Due to the scale of the County's Planning

Area, the Land Use Diagram is used to identify the boundaries between the two rural land use areas “Agricultural” and “Foothill Pasture” and those of the defined urban areas containing existing and/or planned growth areas. The Land Use Diagram includes the six different Urban Area Boundaries. Each of these boundaries has a unique purpose and specific policies guiding their future growth and development. These goals and policies are described later in this element. Each of these areas also has a more detailed land use diagram showing the specific land use designations for the area (see Appendix: Land Use Maps for Urban Area Boundaries). The six boundaries include:

- **City Planning Area.** Includes land located within the adopted sphere of influence of the cities of Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos, and Merced (where there is an adopted sphere of influence agreement). The land use and development within the cities is regulated by each City’s general plan and the unincorporated fringe area outside the city limits is governed by the County General Plan and individual sphere of influence or land use agreements with each City.
- **Rural Residential Center.** Includes areas in unincorporated Merced County that contain concentrations of suburban housing, typically on one acre lots that lack full urban services. These areas are typically located adjacent to or near incorporated cities and do not include commercial uses.
- **Rural Center.** Includes areas in unincorporated Merced County that are isolated and have either a stable or declining population. These areas contain some commercial uses that support adjacent rural and agricultural uses, such as feed stores, truck/tractor repair, gas stations, and limited public services. *(Note: these areas were known under the previous general plan as “Specific Urban Development Plans.”)*
- **Urban Community.** Includes areas in unincorporated Merced County that have a range of housing densities, commercial uses, public sewer and/or water infrastructure, public services, and employment-generating land uses. *(Note: these areas were known under the previous general plan as “Specific Urban Development Plans.”)*
- **Highway Interchange Center.** Includes areas in unincorporated Merced County that are intended to accommodate commercial uses oriented to highway travelers. They are typically located at freeway interchanges or intersections of State and Interstate highways.
- **Isolated Urban Areas.** Includes isolated areas in unincorporated Merced County which were designated for urban land uses prior to adoption of the “urban centered concept” in the 1978 General Plan Land Use Element. These areas typically contain a cluster of homes on limited public infrastructure, or an individual commercial or industrial land use. No new isolated urban areas can be established under the 2030 General Plan.

**MERCED COUNTY  
GENERAL PLAN  
LAND USE POLICY DIAGRAM**

Figure LU-1



- CITY PLANNING AREA
  - URBAN COMMUNITIES
  - URBAN COMMUNITY "STUDY AREA"
  - RURAL CENTERS
  - RURAL RESIDENTIAL CENTERS
  - HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE CENTERS
  - ISOLATED URBAN DESIGNATIONS
- RURAL DESIGNATIONS**
- A - Agricultural
  - FP - FootHill Pasture
- OTHER FEATURES**
- MERCED COUNTY
  - LANDFILL
  - LAKES
  - MAJOR ROADS
  - ~ RIVERS
  - ~ HIGHWAYS

0 1.5 3 6 9 12 Miles



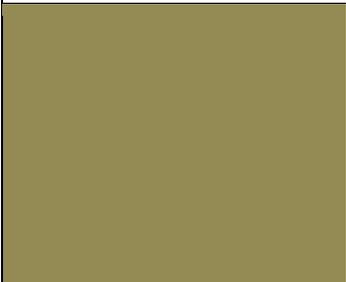


## Land Use Designations

**Table LU-1** provides a description of the 15 land use designations most commonly reflected in the Urban Area Boundary Land Use Diagrams and in individual Community Plans (see Appendix), which are part of the General Plan (see Part III: Community Plans). However, there are additional designations adopted within some of the City Planning Areas which are defined within the respective City General Plans and several unique designations contained within adopted Community Plans which are defined within the Community Plan documents. These additional land use designations fall within the overall description, density, and intensity ranges of the land uses presented in Table LU-1 and **Table LU-2**.

<b>Table LU-1 Land Use Designations</b>	
	<p><b>Foothill Pasture (FP)</b>                      This designation provides for non-cultivated agricultural practices which typically require larger areas of land due to poor soil quality, limited water availability, and steeper slopes. This designation is typically applied to areas in the Sierra Nevada foothills and the Diablo Range on the east and west sides of the County.</p>
	<p><b>Agricultural (A)</b>                      This designation provides for cultivated agricultural practices which rely on good soil quality, adequate water availability, and minimal slopes. This is the largest County land use designation by area in the County and is typically applied to areas on the valley floor.</p>
	<p><b>Agricultural Residential (AR)</b>                      This designation provides for single-family dwellings on large lots in a semi-rural environment with limited public services. This designation is typically applied to Rural Centers or at the edge of urban areas. This designation is often used as a buffer between urban and rural land uses.</p>
	<p><b>Very Low-Density Residential (VLDR)</b>                      This urban designation provides for single-family dwellings on larger lots. This designation is typically applied to areas considered appropriate for the construction of single-family dwellings within Rural Centers and Urban Communities.</p>

	<p><b>Low-Density Residential (LDR)</b>                  This designation provides for single-family dwellings on medium to large lots. This designation is typically applied to areas considered appropriate for the construction of single-family dwellings within Urban Communities.</p>
	<p><b>Medium-Density Residential (MDR)</b>                  This designation provides for either single-family dwellings on smaller lots or multi-family housing units. This designation is maybe applied to areas located near commercial centers within Urban Communities.</p>
	<p><b>High-Density Residential (HDR)</b>                  This designation provides for high density multi-family housing units. This designation is typically applied to areas located near the center of Urban Communities.</p>
	<p><b>Mixed-Use (MU)</b>                  This designation provides for higher-density residential development to be located on the same parcel or block as either commercial or office uses in order to provide denser, pedestrian and transit oriented development in urban areas. The mix of uses can be either horizontal or vertical. This designation is typically applied in central areas of Urban Communities.</p>
	<p><b>Neighborhood Commercial (NC)</b>                  This designation provides for commercial uses within Urban Communities that serve the daily needs of the local community. This designation is typically applied within or near residential neighborhoods. Smaller Rural Centers may use this designation as their main commercial area.</p>
	<p><b>General Commercial (GC)</b>                  This designation provides for general retail commercial uses, personal and professional services, and institutional uses in Urban Communities and Highway Interchange Centers. This designation is typically applied to areas near the center of a community to encourage grouping of commercial activities in a central business district or core, possibly with other nonresidential uses.</p>

	<p><b>Business Park (BP)</b>                  This designation provides for clean, low-impact land uses such as professional offices, research and development facilities, warehouse and distribution centers, mini storage, light manufacturing and fabrication (limited to indoor activity), and other similar uses located in Urban Communities.</p>
	<p><b>Public/Quasi-Public (P)</b>                  This designation provides for public and quasi-public facilities and services such as schools, fire stations, hospitals, sanitariums, libraries, museums, government offices and courts, churches, meeting halls, cemeteries and mausoleums, public facilities, and similar and compatible uses. This designation is found throughout the County.</p>
	<p><b>Industrial (I)</b>                  This designation provides for manufacturing, research and development, processing, distribution, storage, or the wholesale trade of various materials and products. This designation is typically applied to areas adjacent to major transportation routes and/or towards the fringe area of Urban Communities and Highway Interchange Centers.</p>
	<p><b>Recreation and Open Space (RE)</b>                  This designation provides for active and passive recreational uses, habitat protection, watershed management, areas that contain public health and safety hazards such as floodways, and areas containing environmentally-sensitive features. This designation may be applied throughout the County.</p>
	<p><b>Urban Reserve (UR)</b>                  This designation is applied to areas within Urban Communities that are considered appropriate for intensive urban land use activities at some future date depending upon community growth needs and availability of urban services, utilities, and facilities. These areas are intended to remain rural until they are redesignated at some future date.</p>

## Land Use Standards

Consistent with State law, the General Plan includes standards of population density and building intensity for each of the land use designations appearing on the Land Use Diagram and as described in Table LU-1. **Table LU-2** identifies these standards and outlines the applicable Urban Area Boundary for each designation shown on the Land Use Diagram.

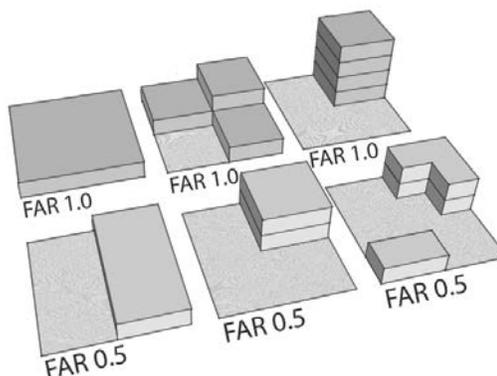
### *Residential Use Standards*

Standards of population density for residential uses are stated as the allowable range of dwelling units per gross acre. The term “gross acre” includes all land (including streets and rights-of-way) designated for a particular residential use, while net acreage excludes streets and rights-of-way. In urban areas net acreage is normally 20 to 25 percent less for a given area than gross acreage. In rural areas the difference between net and gross can be as low as 5 percent. Net acreage is the standard typically used in zoning, while gross acreage is more commonly used in general plan designations.

Standards of population density for residential uses can be derived by multiplying the maximum allowable number of dwelling units per gross acre by the average number of persons per dwelling unit assumed for the applicable residential designation. Standards of building intensity for residential uses are stated as the allowable range of dwelling units per gross acre.

### *Non-Residential Use Standards*

Standards of building intensity for non-residential uses are stated as maximum floor-area ratios. Floor area ratio (FAR) is the ratio of the gross building square footage on a lot to the net square footage of the lot. For example, an FAR of 1.00 will allow 10,000 square feet of gross building floor area to be built, on a lot with 10,000 net square feet of land area, regardless of the number of stories in the building (e.g., a single-story building of 10,000 square feet or a two-story building with 5,000 square feet for each floor). On the same lot a FAR of 0.50 would allow 5,000 square feet of floor area, and a FAR of 0.25 would allow 2,500 square feet. The diagram below conceptually how buildings of one, two, three, and four stories could be developed on a given lot with FARs between 0.5 and 1.0.



**Table LU-2  
Land Use Standards**

Land Use Designations	Minimum Lot or Parcel Size	Dwelling Units Per Gross Acre		Non-Residential Floor Area Ratio	Average Persons Per Household	Average Employee Density <sup>2</sup>	Applicable Urban Area Boundary <sup>3</sup>
		Min.	Max.				
Foothill Pasture (FP) <sup>1</sup>	160 acres	0	0.0125	0.10	3.2	800	-
Agricultural (A)	20 acres	0	0.05	0.10	3.2	800	-
Agricultural Residential <sup>4</sup> (AR)	1/3 acre	0	0.33	-	3.2	-	RRC, RC
Very-Low Density Residential (VLDR)	0.25 acre	1.0	4.0	-	3.2	-	RRC, RC, UC
Low-Density Residential (LDR)	5,000 s.f.	4.0	8.0	-	3.2	-	UC
Medium-Density Residential (MDR)	3,000 s.f.	8.0	15.0	-	3.2	-	UC
High-Density Residential (HDR)	None	15.0	33.0	-	3.2	-	UC
Mixed-Use (MU)	None	4.0	33.0	0.60	3.2	500	UC
Neighborhood Commercial (NC)	None	-	-	0.50	-	500	UC
General Commercial (GC)	None	-	-	0.50	-	600	UC, HIC
Business Park (BP)	None	-	-	0.60	-	300	UC, HIC
Public/Quasi-Public (P)	None	-	-	1.00	-	-	RC, UC, HIC
Industrial (I)	None	-	-	1.00	-	400	UC
Recreation and Open Space (RE)	None	-	-	0.10	-	-	RC, UC
Urban Reserve (UR)	None	-	-	-	-	-	UC

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Foothill Pasture (FP) areas are allowed to have 20 to 40 acre minimum lot size if the existing (pre-2010) Zoning is either A-1 or A-1-40

<sup>2</sup> Equals the amount of square feet of floor area per one employee.

<sup>3</sup> RRC = Rural Residential Center, RC = Rural Center, UC = Urban Community, HIC = Highway Interchange Center

<sup>4</sup> Minimum lot size of one acre and minimum density of one dwelling per net acre unless public sewer and water is available.

## COUNTYWIDE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

This section addresses countywide growth and development patterns in the unincorporated portion of Merced County. The County has a direct role in shaping the character of urban development as it continues to manage growth in the existing unincorporated area. At the same time the County seeks to support and encourage the cities in their land use planning efforts to ensure that a quality living environment is provided for all existing and future residents of the County. The policies in this section direct urban development to vacant and underused land within cities and unincorporated communities (i.e., Urban Communities).

### Goal LU-1

Create a countywide land use pattern that enhances the integrity of both urban and rural areas by focusing urban growth towards existing or suitably located new communities.

#### Policy LU-1.1: Countywide Development (RDR/MPSP)

Direct urban development to areas within adopted urban boundaries of cities, Urban Communities, and Highway Interchange Centers in order to preserve productive agriculture, limit urban sprawl, and protect natural resources.

#### Policy LU-1.2: Rural Centers

Limit the amount of new growth within existing Rural Centers by allowing only agriculture-supporting residential and commercial uses.

#### Policy LU-1.3: Rural Residential Centers (RDR)

Limit the amount of new growth within existing Rural Centers by allowing only residential uses, limiting public services, and prohibiting commercial uses.

#### Policy LU-1.4: Urban Communities (RDR)

Continue to support compact Urban Communities through the efficient use of land to reduce conflicts with agricultural and open space areas, and minimize public service costs.

#### Policy LU-1.5: New Urban Communities (RDR)

Consider the establishment of new Urban Communities in areas off of productive agricultural land (as defined in the General Plan Glossary) which satisfy the policy requirements under Goal LU-5.F, in order to accommodate projected future growth.

#### Policy LU-1.6: Highway Interchange Centers (RDR)

Continue to allow Highway Interchange Centers that meet the specific needs of the traveling public along Interstate 5 and major State highways.

#### Policy LU-1.7: Compact Development (RDR)

Promote compact development in urban communities that supports pedestrian activity and transit ridership.

**Policy LU-1.8: Innovative Development (RDR)**

Promote flexibility and innovation through the use of planned unit developments, development agreements, community plans, specific plans, mixed-use projects, and other innovative development and planning techniques.

**Policy LU-1.9: Regional Housing Needs Allocation Focus (RDR)**

Actively encourage the Merced County Association of Governments to focus future State regional housing needs allocations to the six cities in order to prevent urban sprawl, support compact development and redevelopment, and support the principles of the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint.

**Policy LU-1.10: Orderly Community Growth (RDR) 🌐**

Require the orderly, well planned, and balanced growth of the unincorporated communities consistent with the limits imposed by local infrastructure, services, public facilities, and their ability to assimilate growth.

**Policy LU-1.11: Infrastructure Equity (RDR/MPSP)**

Ensure that new development does not erode current levels of County service and that demands on public facilities and services from new development do not result in an unreasonable and inequitable burden on existing residents and property owners.

**Policy LU-1.12: Hillside Development Standards (RDR)**

Prepare and adopt hillside development standards and illustrated design guidelines addressing viewshed protection for all hillside development.

**Policy LU-1.13: Wetland Habitat Area Separation (RDR)**

Do not allow rural commercial and industrial uses, secondary residences, and ancillary agricultural uses within a half mile of either State or Federal wildlife refuges, or managed wetlands within the Grasslands Ecological Area when it is determined by the County that there could be an unmitigated impact to natural resources or habitat.

**AGRICULTURAL AND Foothill PASTURE**

The vast majority of land in Merced County lies outside of existing cities, Rural Centers, Urban Communities, and Highway Interchange Centers. The Agricultural and Foothill Pasture land use designations are applied to the majority of the land within the County to acknowledge the importance of agriculture and seek ways to protect productive agricultural land, promote agricultural processing and support operations, recognize and preserve valuable open space resources, and allow for the development of energy production facilities in rural parts of the County. *(Note: See the Agricultural Element for additional goals and policies related to agricultural preservation, economy, research, education, tourism; soil resources; Williamson Act, and confined animal facilities).*

**Goal LU-2**

Preserve, promote, and expand the agricultural industry in Merced County.

**Policy LU-2.1: Agricultural Designation (RDR)**

Apply the Agricultural land use designation as the primary designation in the County to support productive agricultural lands and promote the agricultural industry.

**Policy LU-2.2: Foothill Pasture Designation (RDR)**

Apply the Foothill Pasture land use designation on agricultural and open space lands located on the eastern and western edges of the County which are recognized for their value as grazing, cropland, and open space.

**Policy LU-2.3: Land Use Activity Limitations (RDR)**

Limit allowed land use within Agricultural and Foothill Pasture areas to agricultural crop production, farm support operations, and grazing and open space uses.

**Policy LU-2.4: Secondary Uses in Agricultural Areas (RDR)**

Except as otherwise provided by law, limit ancillary uses in Agricultural and Foothill Pasture areas to include secondary single-family residences, farm worker housing, agricultural tourism related uses, and agricultural support services, provided that such uses do not interfere with historic agricultural practices, result in adverse health risks, or conflict with sensitive habitats or other biological resources.

**Policy LU-2.5: Agricultural Support Facilities (RDR/JP)**

Allow consideration of locating characteristically-specific commercial and industrial uses in rural areas in limited cases based on the unique nature of the use and for health and safety reasons, which require location on large parcels or in sparsely populated areas. In addition, consider the following criteria during the Conditional Use Permit review process:

- a) The use requires location in a rural area because of one or more of the following characteristics: unusual site area requirements, natural resource production purposes, the use is directly agricultural related, or because of specific operational characteristics which pose a health or safety problem to urban populations.
- b) The use is located near or readily accessible to a probable work force.
- c) The use is consistent with the intent and policies of the Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Health and Safety Elements.
- d) The use will not significantly impact adjacent agricultural, recreational, natural, cultural, wildlife, or other identified Natural Resources Element.
- e) The use is protected from hazards identified in the Health and Safety Element.
- f) The use is not located on productive agricultural land when nonproductive agricultural land is available in the vicinity of the proposed project.
- g) The use is limited in size, time of operation, or length of permit authority where necessary to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses.

- h) The use shall not have a detrimental effect on surface or groundwater resources.
- i) The use shall provide adequate infrastructure and improvements to reduce impacts on County services.
- j) The use shall have access to adequate transportation facilities without creating abnormally high traffic volumes and shall provide road improvements to mitigate impacts generated by the project.

**Policy LU-2.6: Redesignation for More Intensive Residential Land Use (RDR)**

Prohibit the redesignation of property outside of Rural Centers, Highway Interchange Centers, or Urban Communities for a more intensive residential land use without a General Plan amendment.

**Policy LU-2.7: Rural Energy Production (RDR/SO)**

Allow the development of ethanol production, co-generation, solar, and wind facilities in Agricultural and Foothill Pasture areas that produce renewable energy, support agricultural-related industries, and/or use agricultural waste, provided that such uses do not interfere with agricultural practices or conflict with sensitive habitats or other biological resources.

**Policy LU-2.8: Agricultural Processors (FB/JP)**

Support new agricultural processors in agricultural areas by providing incentives such as industrial revenue bonds for their development.

**Policy LU-2.9: Special Agricultural Uses (RDR)**

Support special agricultural commercial uses in rural areas when they directly relate to and are part of an existing and permitted agricultural enterprise or operation.

**Policy LU-2.10: Industrial Uses (RDR/JP)**

Allow employment-generating industrial uses in Agricultural areas that are not suitable in urban areas due to their size, buffer requirements, or specific use, where the use will not conflict with agricultural and environmental resources.

## RURAL RESIDENTIAL CENTERS

The Rural Residential Center designation includes existing areas with concentrations of suburban residential parcels on a minimum of one acre, which are typically adjacent to cities. These areas lack public sewer and/or water systems, have a stable or slowly increasing population, and have no commercial services.

**Goal LU-3**

Provide limited areas for suburban residential land uses in a manner that minimizes conflicts with surrounding agricultural and open space uses.

**Policy LU-3.1: On-Site Agriculture-Related Uses (RDR)**

Maintain a rural character in Rural Residential Centers by allowing a limited amount of agricultural and animal husbandry activities.

**Policy LU-3.2: Street Circulation Plan (RDR)**

Require, when considering subdivision and parcel map applications in Rural Residential Centers, preparation by the applicant of a street circulation plan for the quarter section within which the proposed division is located.

**Policy LU-3.3: Residential Densities (RDR)**

Maintain a minimum lot size commensurate with sanitation requirements by allowing one-acre minimum lots when Environmental Health Division approved on-site septic systems are installed, or a one-third-acre minimum when the lot has connection to a public sewer and water system.

**Policy LU-3.4: New Rural Residential Center Prohibition (RDR)**

Prohibit the creation of any new, or the expansion of any existing, Rural Residential Centers in the unincorporated county.

## RURAL CENTERS

The Rural Center designation includes areas with small concentration of rural populations in relatively isolated parts of unincorporated Merced County. These areas lack public sewer and/or water systems, have a stable or declining population, and have a limited level of public and commercial services. Rural Centers provide locations for agricultural services, farm support operations, and convenience commercial services for adjacent agricultural operations and rural populations. While new residential uses are discouraged in Rural Centers, these areas do include some existing very low-density, large-lot rural neighborhoods. The County may allow some limited new housing in these areas that supports agricultural-based employment and services; however, the housing will not exceed a density of one dwelling unit per acre.

The policies in this section guide the overall growth and development of Rural Centers in Merced County. The Land Use Diagram includes the following nine Rural Centers (*listed alphabetically*):

- Ballico
- Cressey
- Dos Palos Y
- El Nido
- Snelling
- Stevinson
- Tuttle
- Volta

**Goal LU-4**

Provide for the continuation of areas designated for rural and agricultural support uses in a manner that minimizes agricultural and environmental impacts while benefiting the surrounding agricultural community.

**Policy LU-4.1: Rural Center Development (RDR/MPSP)**

Allow new rural residential development and agricultural support uses in vacant areas within existing Rural Centers, but prohibit the establishment of new Rural Centers.

**Policy LU-4.2: Development Criteria (RDR)**

Require uses within Rural Centers to be limited to:

- a) Commercial uses serve the daily convenience needs of the surrounding agricultural and rural areas;
- b) Agricultural supply and service businesses;
- c) Limited public facilities such as schools, fire stations, post offices, churches, granges, and veterans halls; and/or
- d) Housing for agricultural workers at minimum of one unit per acre.

**Policy LU-4.3: Commercial and Industrial Uses (RDR/JP)**

Consider locating commercial and industrial uses in Rural Centers in limited cases if they support agricultural operations, serve the daily convenience commercial needs of the surrounding rural area, or provide health and safety benefits to the County in sparsely populated areas.

**Policy LU-4.4: Efficient Development (RDR)**

Require efficient and environmentally sound development, which minimizes impacts on sensitive habitat/species, protects water quality and supply, and provides adequate circulation, within Rural Centers.

**Policy LU-4.5: Minimum Lot Size (RDR)**

Require a one-acre minimum lot size for residential lots and subdivisions with on-site septic facilities.

**Policy LU-4.6: Agricultural Support Uses (RDR)**

Require rural agricultural support uses that require a high volume of vehicle traffic to be located near or adjacent to major roadways.

**Policy LU-4.7: Wildlife Refuge Separation (RDR)**

Do not allow rural commercial and industrial uses, secondary residences, and ancillary agricultural uses within a half mile of either State or Federal wildlife refuges, or managed wetlands within the Grasslands Ecological Area when it is determined by the County that there could be an unmitigated impact to natural resources or habitat.

**Policy LU-4.8: Rural Center Expansion (RDR)**

Prohibit the expansion of Rural Centers unless a General Plan Amendment application is processed following the same requirements as for the establishment of a New Urban Community contained in Policy LU-5.F.2.

**URBAN COMMUNITIES**

Urban Communities are unincorporated urban areas that have a range of housing densities, commercial uses, public infrastructure, services, and employment-generating land uses. These include areas known under the previous general plan as “Specific Urban Development Plans.” Urban Communities have five main purposes which are main components of the Urban Centered Concept:

- To ensure future growth occurs in an orderly and logical manner;
- To ensure land is used efficiently;
- To reduce the conversion of productive agricultural land to urban uses;
- To ensure the County's planning efforts are complementary to those of the cities; and
- To ensure future urban development occurs where adequate public infrastructure and services are available.

Urban Communities are intended to accommodate all classifications of urban land use. Each Urban Community has a boundary line (shown on **Figure LU-1**) which is recognized as the ultimate growth boundary for the community over the life of the General Plan or the individual Community Plan. All land within an Urban Community is planned for eventual development in a mixture of urban and urban-related uses. The County has prepared or will prepare a Community Plan for each Urban Community (see Part III of the General Plan). The goals and policies in this section are divided into six subsections to specifically address Urban Communities: growth and development; community character and design; residential development; commercial, office, and mixed-use development; business park and industrial development; and New Urban Communities. These policies are purposely general in nature. Please see Part III of the General Plan for specific goals and policies that apply to each Urban Community. The Land Use Diagram includes the following 11 Urban Communities (*listed alphabetically*):

- |                      |               |                               |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| ▪ Castle             | ▪ Hilmar      | ▪ University Community        |
| ▪ Delhi              | ▪ LeGrand     | ▪ Villages of Laguna San Luis |
| ▪ Franklin/Beachwood | ▪ Planada     | ▪ Winton                      |
| ▪ Fox Hills          | ▪ Santa Nella |                               |

In addition, a “Study Area” for a potential Urban Community called “Yosemite Lake Estates” has also been designated in **Figure LU-1**, and completion of a Community Plan is required before it will become a designated Urban Community.

## Urban Community Growth and Development

The policies in this subsection guide the overall growth and development of Urban Communities in Merced County.

### Goal LU-5.A

Preserve and enhance the character of Merced County by focusing future unincorporated development towards Urban Communities.

#### Policy LU-5.A.1: Urban Community Establishment (RDR)

Allow consideration of new Urban Communities in areas off productive agricultural land (as defined in the General Plan Glossary) that include a balance of land uses for jobs, tax revenues, and housing, and satisfy the policy requirements under Goal LU-5.F.

#### Policy LU-5.A.2: Public Sewer and Water (RDR/MPSP)

Require all development within Urban Communities to be connected to public sewer and water systems where such systems exist.

#### Policy LU-5.A.3: Growth Limitations (RDR)

Limit growth in existing Urban Communities that lack public sewer and water systems to only include land use designations and densities which can be accommodated by individual septic systems and/or wells.

#### Policy LU-5.A.4: Community Plan Requirement (RDR)

Prepare Community Plans for each Urban Community that includes specific local policies and land use designations within the Urban Community boundary. Each Plan shall include a full range of residential, commercial, office, mixed-use, industrial, and other urban land uses in order to accommodate all types and intensities of development commensurate to the availability of public infrastructure and services.

#### Policy LU-5.A.5: Smart Growth (RDR)

Promote the principles of smart growth in Community Plans for each Urban Community, including:

- a) creating safe, walkable neighborhoods;
- b) providing a mix of residential densities;
- c) creating a strong sense of place;
- d) mixing land uses;
- e) directing growth toward existing communities;
- f) building compactly;
- g) discouraging sprawl;
- h) encouraging infill;
- i) preserving open space; and
- j) creating a range of housing opportunities and choices.

#### Policy LU-5.A.6: Jobs/Housing Balance (RDR)

Promote a jobs/housing balance by encouraging residential development near employment centers when preparing new or updating existing Community Plans and providing adequate land for employment generating land use.

**Policy LU-5.A.7: Municipal Advisory Council Role (RDR)**

Use Municipal Advisory Councils to assist the County in identifying local goals and values in preparation and implementation of Community Plans.

**Policy LU-5.A.8: Urban Community Boundaries (RDR)**

Limit the expansion of Urban Community boundaries when not a part of a community planning process, unless an expansion is necessary to accommodate public infrastructure, schools, or parks.

**Urban Community Character and Design**

The policies in this subsection address community character and design within Urban Communities. This includes the effort to preserve the unique character and heritage of these areas as they develop. Through specific urban design guidelines and standards, the County will be able to preserve the spirit and history of each community and enhance the quality of life for its residents.

<b>Goal LU-5.B</b>	Preserve and enhance the design, heritage, historic character, and quality of life of Urban Communities in Merced County.
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**Policy LU-5.B.1: Community Plan Design Guidelines (RDR)**

Develop, maintain, and implement urban design guidelines and uniform policies in new or updated community plans that emphasize the individual character of each community.

**Policy LU-5.B.2: Major Street Corridors and Intersections (RDR)**

Develop illustrated design guidelines and streetscape standards for all development occurring along major street corridors and important intersections within Urban Communities.

**Policy LU-5.B.3: Distinctive Neighborhoods (RDR)**

Encourage the development of diverse and distinctive communities and neighborhoods that build on the patterns of the natural landscape and existing development, and are responsive to their location and context.

**Policy LU-5.B.4: Integrate Natural Features (RDR)**

Emphasize each community's natural features as the visual framework for new development and redevelopment.

**Policy LU-5.B.5: Streetscape Continuity (RDR)**

Ensure that streetscape elements (e.g., street signs, trees, furniture) maintain a visual continuity and follow a common image for each Urban Community.

**Policy LU-5.B.6: Crime Prevention through Design (RDR)**

Encourage open space areas, bicycle and pedestrian systems, and housing projects to incorporate crime prevention site design elements.

**Policy LU-5.B.7: Screening Industrial Uses (RDR)**

Require new industrial uses to be screened, either by landscaping or site design, from existing residential uses and public facilities (e.g., schools, parks) in order to minimize visual impacts within Urban Communities.

**Policy LU-5.B.8: Gateways/Entry-points (RDR)**

Identify key entry points on the edges of the communities, and support programs and projects that enhance gateways and transitional zones between communities, to make each community more distinct and inviting for residents, workers, and visitors.

**Policy LU-5.B.9: Adaptive Reuse (RDR)**

Encourage and promote the presentation and adaptive reuse of locally-, State-, or Federally-listed historic resources and structures in order to preserve Merced County's historic heritage.

**Policy LU-5.B.10: Green Building Development (RDR) **

Maximize use of passive and active solar and/or wind energy resources, and require incorporation of green building design and technology into new development within Urban Communities.

**Urban Community Residential Development**

New residential development in unincorporated Merced County will be concentrated in Urban Communities with adequate public services and infrastructure in order to achieve efficient development patterns at higher average densities. These higher densities will help limit the conversion of productive agricultural lands for residential land uses. The policies in this section address future residential development within Urban Communities.

**Goal LU-5.C**

Provide adequate, efficient, and high quality residential development that accommodates the housing needs of all income groups expected to reside in Merced County.

**Policy LU-5.C.1: Residential Development (RDR)**

Apply a range of residential densities to Urban Communities in order to promote walkable neighborhoods, facilitate affordable housing, and provide transition between urban and rural edges.

**Policy LU-5.C.2: Vacant Land Redesignation (RDR)**

Selectively re-designate vacant land for higher-density residential uses within Urban Communities to facilitate infill development when adequate infrastructure and services are, or can become, available.

**Policy LU-5.C.3: High-Density Development (RDR)**

Promote the development of higher-density housing within Urban Communities located along major transportation corridors and transit routes and served by the full range of urban services, including neighborhood commercial uses, community centers, and public services.

**Policy LU-5.C.4: Residential Uses in Mixed-Use Development (RDR)**

Designate limited areas within Urban Communities for mixed-use development that provides for higher-density residential uses combined with compatible uses such as commercial, retail, and office.

**Urban Community Commercial, Office, and Mixed-Use Development**

The policies in this subsection describe ways to revitalize and consolidate existing uses as well as promote new commercial, office, and mixed-use opportunities within Urban Communities. These policies are closely aligned with policies in the Economic Development Element supporting a comprehensive effort to increase commercial development and sales tax revenue.

**Goal LU-5.D**

Maintain economic vitality and promote the development of commercial uses within Urban Communities that are compatible with surrounding land uses and meet the present and future needs of County residents, workers, and visitors.

**Policy LU-5.D.1: Commercial Development (RDR)**

Require new commercial development be designed to minimize the visual impact of parking areas on public roadways and maintain compatibility with surrounding land uses.

**Policy LU-5.D.2: Office Development (RDR)**

Require new office development be located near major transportation corridors and concentrations of existing or planned residential uses. New office development may serve as buffers between residential uses and higher-intensity commercial uses.

**Policy LU-5.D.3: Neighborhood Commercial Development (RDR)**

Plan adequate pedestrian-oriented neighborhood commercial shopping areas to serve residential development.

**Policy LU-5.D.4: Pedestrian-Oriented Development (RDR)**

Require new commercial development be designed to encourage and facilitate pedestrian circulation within and between commercial and nearby residential areas.

**Policy LU-5.D.5: Mixed-Use Development (RDR)**

Support the development of mixed-use projects within existing Urban Communities that reduces travel distances and locates residences near compatible jobs and services.

**Policy LU-5.D.6: Sewer and Water Services Requirement (RDR)**

Require sewer and water services for new commercial development in accordance with the local urban service district standards and the Building Code.

**Policy LU-5.D.7: Castle Air Force Base Reuse Plan (RDR/MPSP)**

Use the Castle Air Force Base Reuse Plan as the Community Plan and the Special Planning Zone development standards to guide redevelopment of the former Air Force Base.

**Urban Community Business Park and Industrial Development**

Business Park and industrial development is important for future job and economic growth in the County. The policies in this subsection address industrial development in Urban Communities.

**Goal LU-5.E**

Designate adequate land for, and promote development of, industrial uses to meet the present and future needs of County residents for jobs and to maintain economic vitality.

**Policy LU-5.E.1: Biotechnology and Biofuels (JP)**

Encourage industrial and research-oriented businesses in Urban Communities which specialize in biotechnologies and biofuels that enhance agricultural productivity, enhance food processing, provide new agriculturally-related products and markets, or otherwise enhance the agricultural sector in the County.

**Policy LU-5.E.2: Location Consideration (RDR)**

Apply the Business Park and Industrial land use designations as appropriate along major roads and on the edges of Urban Communities to help buffer agricultural land from urban areas and to separate residential areas from highway and railroad noise.

**Policy LU-5.E.3: Industrial Development Design (RDR)**

Require that all industrial uses located adjacent to planned non-industrial areas or roads carrying significant non-industrial traffic be designed with landscaping and setbacks.

**Policy LU-5.E.4: Industrial and Business Park Development (RDR)**

Ensure future industrial and business park development is compatible with surrounding land uses through the use of landscaping, screening, and other buffers.

**New Urban Communities**

New Urban Communities, or “New Towns,” provide an opportunity for Merced County to accommodate future growth in new, balanced communities that provide full urban infrastructure and services, employment generating land uses, and institutional facilities. The establishment of new Urban Communities in Merced County is dependent upon meeting the dual goals of locating growth in areas away from productive agricultural land and providing urban areas in geographic locations which will help accommodate future growth that has historically occurred in the unincorporated parts of Merced County. Since the County is committed to commercial agricultural production as our core economic activity, the policies in this section require that new Urban Communities only be allowed if they are located off of the valley floor, or clearly do not convert productive agricultural land to urban uses.

The policies in this section require new Urban Communities to be established through the adoption of a Community Plan. The Community Plan will identify the purpose and function of the new Urban Community and detail the land use mix, including any proposed affordable housing and employment generating land uses. The County also requires new Urban Communities to include adequate commercial, employment, and institutional uses for all of their residents. These requirements address expectations that new Urban Communities growth will occur in a logical and orderly manner so that urban services are committed to viable developments rather than purely speculative projects.

**Goal LU-5.F**

Provide for the establishment of new Urban Communities in order to accommodate future growth in the unincorporated parts of Merced County that are located off productive agricultural land or the valley floor.

**Policy LU-5.F.1: New Urban Community Size and Location Requirements (RDR)**

Only accept applications for the establishment of additional new Urban Communities if they encompass a minimum area of 320 acres in order to achieve efficiencies in urban service delivery and provide for long-range growth needs. In addition, require that proposed new Urban Communities be located only in areas that:

- a) Are off the valley floor unless the project area is clearly located on non-productive soil;
- b) Contain few wetlands or significant natural resources;
- c) For proposals off the valley floor, do not contain more than 50 percent productive farmland (as defined in the General Plan Glossary) or 10 percent Prime Farmland (as classified on the Statewide Important Farmland Map), and for projects on the valley floor, do not contain more than 10 percent productive farmland;
- d) Are not located within two miles of an existing city or Urban Community;
- e) Are not delineated as a 200-year floodplain or are able to clearly demonstrate that they have adequate protection from a 200-year event;
- f) Are near major transportation routes; and
- g) Are not located within areas that recharge to already compromised source water aquifers (i.e., in overdraft condition) or areas highly susceptible to groundwater contamination.

**Policy LU-5.F.2: New Urban Community Application Requirements (RDR/MPSP/FB)**

Require all applicants for new Urban Community to provide:

- a) A complete Guidance Package submitted for review by the Board of Supervisors. The Guidance Package shall include the following components: project description and history; statement of understanding of the basic facts including a summary of compliance with items a through e listed under Policy LU-5.F.1; the roles of the applicant and County in preparation of the Community Plan and Environmental Impact Report; identification of the anticipated planning issues that will need to be addressed through the application process; and a project schedule. The Guidance Package will be valid two years upon submittal to the

County. If two years pass before action is taken on the project, the project applicant shall submit a new/updated Guidance Package for Board consideration;

- b) A General Plan Amendment and Zone Change Application;
- c) A Community Plan consistent with State specific plan requirements, including the location and intensity of planned land uses and circulation system. The plan shall provide a mix of land uses and densities, including residential, commercial, mixed-use, employment-generating, and public facilities;
- d) An infrastructure Master Plan that identifies public and private infrastructure needs; service district or assessment area formation details; a development phasing plan; and a strategy for the installation, operations, and ongoing maintenance of infrastructure required to support growth. This plan shall be consistent with all applicable private, local, regional, State, and Federal infrastructure, regulations, and programs related to transportation, sewage and wastewater treatment, water quality and quantity, drainage, parks and open space, and any other public facilities, infrastructure, and services;
- e) A Fiscal Impact Analysis that includes an assessment of projected tax revenues compared to projected County service costs in order to demonstrate that the project will have a fiscally neutral or positive impact on the County and any special districts that provide services to the project;
- f) A Market Demand Study that demonstrates how the proposed Urban Community will affect existing unincorporated communities in the County. This shall include an analysis of how and where new residents will shop/work and how that their economic characteristics/trends will affect the overall economic characteristics of the County. The analysis shall additionally include a demonstration of the need for the expansion of the community taking into consideration the land available for urban uses within other Urban Communities in unincorporated areas of the county;
- g) A program to ensure that the project will provide a full range of needed public services, including fire protection, law enforcement, parks, library, community center, and other necessary public services;
- h) A public outreach program to adjacent property owners and applicable community groups/organizations;
- i) A plan for coordination with other local, regional, State, and Federal agencies that have regulation authority over the project;
- j) Funding for the preparation of a project-specific Environmental Impact Report;
- k) Commitment to enter into a Reimbursement Agreement requiring deposits into a Planning Trust Fund with Merced County for all, or an agreed upon portion, of the estimated cost of the General Plan Amendment, Environmental Impact Report preparation, Infrastructure Master Plan, and peer review.

**Policy LU-5.F.3: Infrastructure Guarantees (MPSP)**

Require project applicants for new Urban Communities to study and guarantee, through a development agreement, that water, wastewater, and other infrastructure needs can be provided as part of the approval of any new Urban Community.

**Policy LU-5.F.4: Water Impacts (RDR)**

Prohibit new Urban Communities, or the expansion of existing urban communities, if they will negatively impact the water supply of existing users.

**Policy LU-5.F.5: Jobs/Housing Balance (RDR)**

Require new Urban Community proposals to include land uses and development intensities that result at buildout a minimum of 1:1 jobs to housing ratio.

**Policy LU-5.F.6: New Urban Community Composition (RDR)**

Require new Urban Communities to include a mix of commercial, employment, and public uses that support planned residential development. This includes having enough commercial land available to support the basic retail needs of the community's residents and enough public uses (fire, sheriff, schools) to support the community.

## HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE CENTERS

Highway Interchange Centers are intended to accommodate motels, restaurants, truck stops, gas stations, and other commercial uses oriented to serve highway travelers. Highway Interchange Centers may be considered at interchanges or intersections of State and Interstate highways. These centers are not appropriate locations for permanent residential housing. The policies in this section guide the creation, location, and use of existing and planned Highway Interchange Centers in the County.

<b>Goal LU-6</b>	Provide dedicated commercial areas that serve the needs of the traveling public while balancing countywide circulation and other County needs.
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**Policy LU-6.1: Highway Interchange Center Locations (RDR)**

Consider establishing Highway Interchange Centers at existing and programmed interchanges (i.e., funded by the State Transportation Improvement Program) along State highways, which are not adjacent to Urban Community areas, in order to serve the traveling public.

**Policy LU-6.2: Highway Commercial Area Protection (RDR)**

Protect planned Highway Interchange Centers from speculative and premature development activities.

**Policy LU-6.3: Non-Highway Oriented Uses (RDR)**

Prohibit non-highway oriented commercial, industrial, and residential uses to be located in Highway Interchange Centers.

**Policy LU-6.4: Highway Access (RDR/PSR)**

Review the adequacy of highway access and the suitability of planned uses for all existing, expanded, and proposed Highway Interchange Centers.

**Policy LU-6.5: Public Service Availability (RDR)**

Do not designate any new Highway Interchange Centers unless it can be demonstrated that sufficient public services are available.

**Policy LU-6.6: Design Guidelines (RDR)**

Prepare and adopt design guidelines for all Highway Interchange Centers which will include landscaping, signage, height, and bulk requirements.

**Policy LU-6.7: Agricultural Land Use Designations (RDR)**

Designate land within and adjacent to planned Highway Interchange Centers as agricultural until such time that viable development projects are submitted and approved.

**Policy LU-6.8: Land Use Redesignation (RDR)**

Reserve the right to redesignate land uses and zoning to the original designation if approved projects are not developed within three years or as defined in the project's conditions of approval and/or development agreement within Highway Interchange Centers.

## INCORPORATED CITIES AND URBAN FRINGE AREAS

The majority of future growth in Merced County will occur in either the existing cities (Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos, Merced) or within their spheres of influence. While the cities have land use authority within their city limits, the County coordinates planning efforts with the cities in the unincorporated portions of their spheres of influence. Consultation, coordination, and cooperation between the cities and the County are a necessary and essential aspect of future planning. Orderly expansion, land use controls, and zoning consistency are among the many efforts employed by both the cities and the County to better plan for the future of the local population. The policies in this section address County and city coordination for future development in cities and their fringe areas. *(Note: This 2030 General Plan replaces the previous Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) designation for cities with the "City Planning Area" designation. This designation is intended to follow the sphere of influence boundary adopted by LAFCO, and as reflected in any City/County sphere of influence agreements. For clarification, the former "Celeste" SUDP is now located within the Merced City Planning Area since urban services and water services for this area are provided by the City of Merced.)*

**Goal LU-7**

Ensure that development in county/city fringe areas is well planned and adequately serviced by necessary public facilities and infrastructure.

**Policy LU-7.1: Infill Development Focus (RDR) 🌍**

Encourage infill development to occur in cities in order to maximize the use of land within existing urbanized areas, minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land, and minimize environmental impacts associated with new development.

**Policy LU-7.2: Orderly Expansion (RDR/IGC)**

Promote orderly expansion of urban uses within city spheres of influence recognizing the city has primary responsibility to determine the type and timing of development.

**Policy LU-7.3: City Sphere of Influence Expansions (RDR/IGC)**

Support city sphere of influence expansion proposals when the city has demonstrated there is an actual need for additional land to accommodate planned growth and documented a good faith effort to implement an infill development program(s) to minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land.

**Policy LU-7.4: Increased Residential Densities within Cities (RDR/IGC)**

Encourage cities to increase average residential densities in their adopted General Plans in order to provide adequate housing for future populations while limiting urban sprawl.

**Policy LU-7.5: Land Use Conflict Reduction (RDR/IGC)**

Encourage cities to incorporate in their general plans land use policies that minimize potential conflicts with agriculturally-related industrial operations and other agricultural activities at the urban interface through the provision of appropriate buffers or other measures.

**Policy LU-7.6: Policy Consultation (RDR/IGC)**

Promote, within city spheres of influence, consultation between the cities and the County at the staff level in the early stages of preparing general plan amendments and other policy changes that may impact growth or the provision of urban services. Staff consultations, particularly concerning Community Plans or Specific Plans, shall provide for meaningful participation in the policy formulation process and shall seek resolution of issues prior to presentation to the decision-making bodies.

**Policy LU-7.7: Existing Neighborhood Policy Consistency (RDR/IGC)**

Encourage cities to incorporate in their general plans County land use policies for communities/neighborhoods that were established previously under County jurisdiction.

**Policy LU-7.8: Rural-Residential Urban Buffers (RDR/IGC)**

Minimize potential land use conflicts at the interface between city urban development and existing rural-residential areas by encouraging cities to require buffering measures when urban development is proposed adjacent to existing developed rural-residential areas within their spheres of influence.

**Policy LU-7.9: Annexation Proposals (RDR/IGC)**

Encourage cities to include in their annexation proposals only properties that are proposed for immediate development or when a phased development is adopted through a specific plan or development agreement.

**Policy LU-7.10: Annexation Boundaries (RDR)**

Discourage any annexation proposal that creates unincorporated islands, peninsulas, corridors, or irregular boundaries.

**Policy LU-7.11: City Consultation (RDR/IGC)**

Do not approve any discretionary permit for new urban development within a city sphere of influence unless the development proposal has first been referred to the city for consideration of possible annexation pursuant to the policies of this section and provisions of any applicable city/county memorandum of understanding.

**Policy LU-7.12: Urban Reserve (RDR)**

Apply, as appropriate, the Urban Reserve designation to unincorporated properties within city spheres of influence that are planned for future development by the city in their general plan.

**Policy LU-7.13: Land Use Controls (RDR/IGC)**

Maintain, in coordination with the cities, land use controls on all unincorporated lands within Urban Communities adjacent to city boundaries which reflect agricultural and open space uses until the land becomes qualified for urban use.

**ISOLATED URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

Many parts of unincorporated Merced County contain urban uses that were approved prior to the requirement that all urban development had to be located within a designated urban boundary or urban center. The policies in this section address preexisting residential, commercial, and industrial uses located outside designated urban boundaries that were approved prior to the 1989 General Plan revision.

**Goal LU-8**

Recognize pre-existing isolated areas designated for urban land uses as limited exceptions to the "Urban Centered Concept" of the General Plan.

**Policy LU-8.1: Existing Isolated Urban Designations (RDR)**

Continue to recognize existing properties that were designated "Residential," "Commercial," or "Industrial" prior to the 1989 General Plan revision as legitimate urban designations.

**Policy LU-8.2: Land Use Controls (RDR)**

Prohibit the expansion or redesignation to a more intensive use of an existing urban land use located outside of an Urban Area Boundary. Require the Board of Supervisors, during the review of a General Plan Amendment and Zone Change application, to make a determination that the land use intensity will not increase as a result of a redesignation.

**ENERGY EFFICIENT DESIGN**

Merced County is committed to promoting future development that is energy efficient. The policies in this section provide direction on the use of innovative building technologies, energy efficiency, and ways to achieve sustainable development practices.

**Goal LU-9**

Support and promote energy efficiency through innovative building design and land use patterns.

**Policy LU-9.1: Solar Access (RDR)** 

Require new residential subdivision lots and new commercial, office, industrial, and public buildings to be oriented and landscaped to enhance natural lighting and solar access in order to maximize energy efficiency.

**Policy LU-9.2: Sustainable Building Practices (RDR)** 

Promote sustainable building practices, including the requirements of Title 24 of the California Administrative Code.

**Policy LU-9.3: Energy Retrofits (RDR)** 

Promote the retrofitting of existing buildings with new and innovative energy and water efficiency technologies.

**Policy LU-9.4: Green Building Standard (RDR)** 

Require all new County buildings be constructed to green building standards and all existing County buildings to be retrofitted with energy efficient technologies.

**Policy LU-9.5: Energy Conservation Standards for New Construction (RDR)** 

Cooperate with the local building industry, utilities, and air district to promote enhanced energy conservation standards for new construction.

## DEVELOPMENT REVIEW AND INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

There are many local, regional, State, and Federal agencies that have planning, permitting, or development review responsibilities in Merced County. Coordination between agencies is critical to the successful implementation of the 2030 Merced County General Plan. The policies in this section promote inter-agency coordination with planning decisions, increase permitting processing efficiency, and eliminate multi-agency redundancies.

**Goal LU-10**

Cooperate with other local, regional, State, and Federal jurisdictions and agencies in the San Joaquin Valley to achieve mutually-beneficial development, environmental, and economic goals.

**Policy LU-10.1: Permitting Streamlining (RDR)**

Continue to implement a streamlined permit application process that minimizes development review timeliness and ensures permitting procedures and regulations are consistent and efficient.

**Policy LU-10.2: County and City Cooperation (RDR/IGC)**

Work cooperatively with all cities in the county to encourage each city to adopt and maintain its general plan consistent with the Merced County General Plan. Adopt

complementary planning policies through a cooperative planning process to be determined by the respective legislative bodies.

**Policy LU-10.3: Countywide Vision (RDR/IGC)**

Work cooperatively with the six cities, through MCAG and LAFCO, and other governmental organizations to agree on a countywide vision for urban growth and open space preservation using the Merced County Association of Governments Blueprint as a guide.

**Policy LU-10.4: Revenue Sharing Agreements (RDR/IGC)**

Follow any adopted Revenue Sharing Agreement entered into between the County and each respective city for all land use proposals within unincorporated city sphere of influence areas.

**Policy LU-10.5: Sphere of Influence Land Use Responsibility (RDR/IGC)**

Acknowledge that the cities have primary responsibility for planning within their LAFCO-adopted spheres of influence, however, in the interim the County has responsibility for coordinating planning efforts and in some instances providing urban services within city spheres of influence.

**Policy LU-10.6: Community Plan Consistency (RDR/IGC)**

Update the General Plan for consistency following city adoption of a general or community plan. Any unresolved conflicts between the County and city plans shall be identified for the decision-making bodies. Establish and maintain land use controls on unincorporated lands within the spheres of influence consistent with the policies of the County General Plan.

**Policy LU-10.7: Community Plan Evaluation (RDR)**

Evaluate, during the update of the county's community plans, the alternative of re-designating undeveloped rural-residential areas to the Urban Reserve designation to support the efforts of the affected city to achieve more efficient use of land within its existing sphere of influence.

**Policy LU-10.8: City and County Consultation (RDR/IGC)**

Promote consultation between the cities and County staff when cities are preparing proposed annexation boundaries or sphere of influence expansions.

**Policy LU-10.9: Air Quality Management Coordination (IGC) **

Coordinate with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and affected agencies and neighboring jurisdictions in the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin to ensure regional cooperation on cross-jurisdictional and regional transportation and air quality issues, and to establish parallel air quality programs and implementation measures, such as trip reduction ordinances and indirect source programs.

**Policy LU-10.10: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Consultation (IGC) **

Consult with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District during CEQA review for discretionary projects that have the potential for causing adverse air quality impacts. Ensure that development projects are submitted to the District for CEQA comments and review of air quality analysis.

**Policy LU-10.11: Coordination with University of California, Merced (IGC)**

Explore opportunities to coordinate conservation planning efforts with the University of California, Merced. This can include the consolidation of conservation planning data, the development of habitat restoration plans, or the joint undertaking of habitat restoration projects.

**Policy LU-10.12: Consultation with State and Federal Agencies (IGC)**

Continue to consult with applicable State and Federal regulatory agencies during project review and permitting activities.

**Policy LU-10.13: Coordination with Regional Blueprint Planning Efforts (IGC) **

Continue to participate in regional planning efforts with the Merced County Association of Governments and other State partnerships.

**Policy LU-10.14: Consultation with Grassland Resources Regional Working Group (IGC)**

Consult with the Grasslands Resources Regional Working Group during project review and conservation planning efforts for projects within the boundaries of the Grasslands Focus Area.

## GENERAL PLAN MAINTENANCE

The effectiveness of the General Plan ultimately depends on how it is implemented and maintained over time. State law requires that most actions of local government affecting the physical environment be consistent with the general plan, and sets out guidelines for the plan's monitoring, updating, and amendment. The goal and policies in this section ensure that Merced County maintains a high level of attention to the General Plan by providing for regular review and updating to ensure that County regulations and ordinances are consistent with the General Plan.

<b>Goal LU-11</b>	Provide a clear framework for the ongoing administration, maintenance, and implementation of the 2030 Merced County General Plan.
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**Policy LU-11.1: Annual Review (PSR)**

Review and report to the Planning Commission on the implementation status of the General Plan annually, as required by State law.

**Policy LU-11.2: Implementation Program Monitoring (PSR)**

Maintain and annually review the Implementation Programs of the General Plan before the preparation of the County's Annual Budget. Prioritize the programs based on applicability and relevance, the timing of initiation, and the availability of funding to execute and sustain the various General Plan programs.

**Policy LU-11.3: Amendments (PSR)**

Do not amend the General Plan more than four times per calendar year. Each amendment may include multiple changes.

**Policy LU-11.4: Amendments Review/Approval (PSR)**

Require the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to hold public hearings and grant approvals for all General Plan amendments.

**Policy LU-11.5: Five-Year General Plan Review (PSR)**

Conduct a major review of the General Plan every five years from the date of final approval of the General Plan and revise it as deemed necessary. The County's Housing Element will be updated on a periodic basis as mandated by the State.

**Policy LU-11.6: Ordinance Consistency (RDR/PSR)**

Review and amend, as necessary, applicable ordinances and regulations to ensure consistency with the General Plan.

**Policy LU-11.7: Community Plan Updating (RDR/PSR)**

Periodically update adopted community plans to reflect changing environments within Urban Communities.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Land Use Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program LU-A: Zoning Code and Zoning Map Consistency (RDR)</b> Update the Zoning Code and Zoning District Maps to ensure consistency with the General Plan.						
Implements Which Policies	LU-11.6	✓				✓
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department						
<b>Program LU-B: Hillside Development Standards (RDR)</b> Adopt and implement hillside development standards and illustrated design guidelines addressing viewshed protection for all hillside development.						
Implements Which Policy	LU-1.11		✓			
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works					
<b>Program LU-C: City-County Sphere of Influence Agreements (IGC)</b> Adopt and implement City-County Resolutions of Agreement to guide decision-making for all discretionary applications and building permits on unincorporated property located within city sphere of influence areas. The City-County Agreements shall be periodically reviewed and renegotiated as necessary.						
Implements Which Policies	LU-7.2, LU-7.3, LU-7.4, LU-7.5, LU-7.6, LU-7.8	✓				
Responsible Department	County Counsel					
Supporting Departments	County Executive Officer Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program LU-D: Energy Efficiency Incentives (JP) 🌱</b> Prepare, in coordination with the local energy providers and developers, a voluntary incentive-based program(s) to encourage the use of energy-efficient design and equipment.						
Implements Which Policies	LU-9.1, LU-9.2, LU-9.3, LU-9.4, LU-9.5, LU-9.6, LU-9.7		✓			
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Departments	Public Works Environmental Health					
<b>Program LU-E: Community Plan Updates (RDR)</b> Review and periodically update Community Plans for each Urban Community in order to ensure they reflect community needs and expectations. This will include, as necessary, updates to the design guidelines sections of each Community Plan.						✓

Land Use Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Implements Which Policies	LU-5.A.4, LU-5.B.1, LU-5.B.2					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					
Implements Which Policies	LU-4.A.4, LU-4.B.1					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					
<b>Program LU-F: Highway Interchange Center Design Guidelines (RDR)</b> Prepare and adopt design guidelines for all Highway Interchange Centers which will include landscaping, signage, height, and bulk requirements.						
Implements Which Policies	LU-6.6		✓			
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Departments	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					
<b>Program LU-G: General Plan Consistency</b> Review and amend, as necessary, applicable ordinances and regulations referenced herein to ensure consistency with the General Plan. These shall include the following: Zoning Code, Subdivision Code, Building Code, and Development Standards.						
Implements Which Policies	LU-11.6	✓				✓
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Departments	Public Works Environmental Health County Counsel					
<b>Program LU-H: Annual General Plan Reviews (RDR)</b> Review the General Plan annually, focusing principally on actions undertaken in the previous year to carry out the implementation programs of the plan. A report to the Board of Supervisors shall include, as the Commission deems appropriate, recommendations for amendments to the General Plan. This review shall also be used to satisfy the requirements of Public Resources Code §21081.6 for a mitigation monitoring program.						
Implements Which Policy	LU-11.1				✓	
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Departments	Public Works Environmental Health County Executive Officer					

Land Use Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program LU-I: Major Five-Year General Plan Reviews (RDR)</b> Conduct a major review of the General Plan, including the Policy Document and Existing Conditions Report, beginning every five years from the date of final approval of this General Plan.						
Implements Which Policy	LU-11.5		✓	✓		
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Departments	Public Works Environmental Health Department County Administrative Office					
<b>Program LU-J: Major Five-Year General Plan Review Funding (PSR)</b> Continue to implement, as appropriate, an impact fee on new development applications that will be used to fund five-year updates to the General Plan.						
Implements Which Policies	LU-11.5		✓	✓		
Responsible Department	County Executive Officer					
Supporting Departments	Community and Economic Development Public Works					

## **APPENDIX: LAND USE MAPS FOR URBAN AREA BOUNDARIES**

The maps in this section show the land use designations within each of the Urban Area Boundaries described on page LU-2. While most of the designations shown on the maps reflect the designations described in Tables LU-1 and LU-2, there are additional designations adopted within some of the City Planning Areas which are defined within the respective City General Plans. Table LU-4 on the following page describes the development standards for each of the city-based designations in the City Fringe Areas. There are also several unique designations contained within adopted Community Plans which are defined within the Community Plan documents.

Table LU-3 Land Use Standards for City Fringe Areas						
Land Use Designations	Description	Minimum Lot or Parcel Size	Dwelling Units Per Gross Acre		Non-Residential Floor Area Ratio	Based on City or County General Plan?
			Min.	Max.		
<b>Atwater City Planning Area</b>						
Low Density Residential (LD)	Single-family residential	6,000 s.f.	1	6	-	City
Medium Density Residential (MD)	Single-family residential	6,000 s.f.	1	8	-	City
Highway Interchange Center (HIC)	Similar to General Commercial	-	-	-	0.50	City
Recreational (REC)	Golf course (same as RE)	-	-	-	0.10	County
<b>Dos Palos City Planning Area</b>						
Low Density Residential (LD)	Single-family residential	10,000 s.f.	1	3	-	City
Commercial (C)	Same as General Commercial	-	-	-	0.40	City
Public Use (P)	Government owned and quasi-public use	-	-	-	0.10	City
Recreational (REC)	Park	-	-	-	0.10	City
Residential Reserve (RR)	Agricultural holding zone	-	-	-	0.10	City
Industrial Reserve (IND-R)	Agricultural holding zone	-	-	-	0.10	City
<b>Gustine City Planning Area</b>						
Commercial (C)	Same as General Commercial	-	-	-	0.50	City
<b>Livingston City Planning Area</b>						
Low Density Residential (LD)	Single-family residential	6,000 s.f.	0	7.5	-	City
High Density Residential (HD)	Multiple-family residential	-	12	29	-	City
Commercial Reserve (CR)	Same as Agricultural	-	-	-	0.10	City
<b>Merced City Planning Area</b>						
Low Density Residential (LD)	Single-family residential	6,000 s.f.	2	6	-	City
Medium Density Residential (MD)	Multiple-family residential	6,000 s.f.	6.1	12	-	City
Commercial General (GC)	Same as General Commercial	-	-	-	0.35	City
Commercial Neighborhood (CN)	Same as Neighborhood Commercial	-	-	-	0.35	City
Heavy Commercial (HC)	Same as Industrial	-	-	-	0.35-0.5	City
Regional Community Commercial (RC)	Regional shopping center	-	-	-	0.35-6.0	City

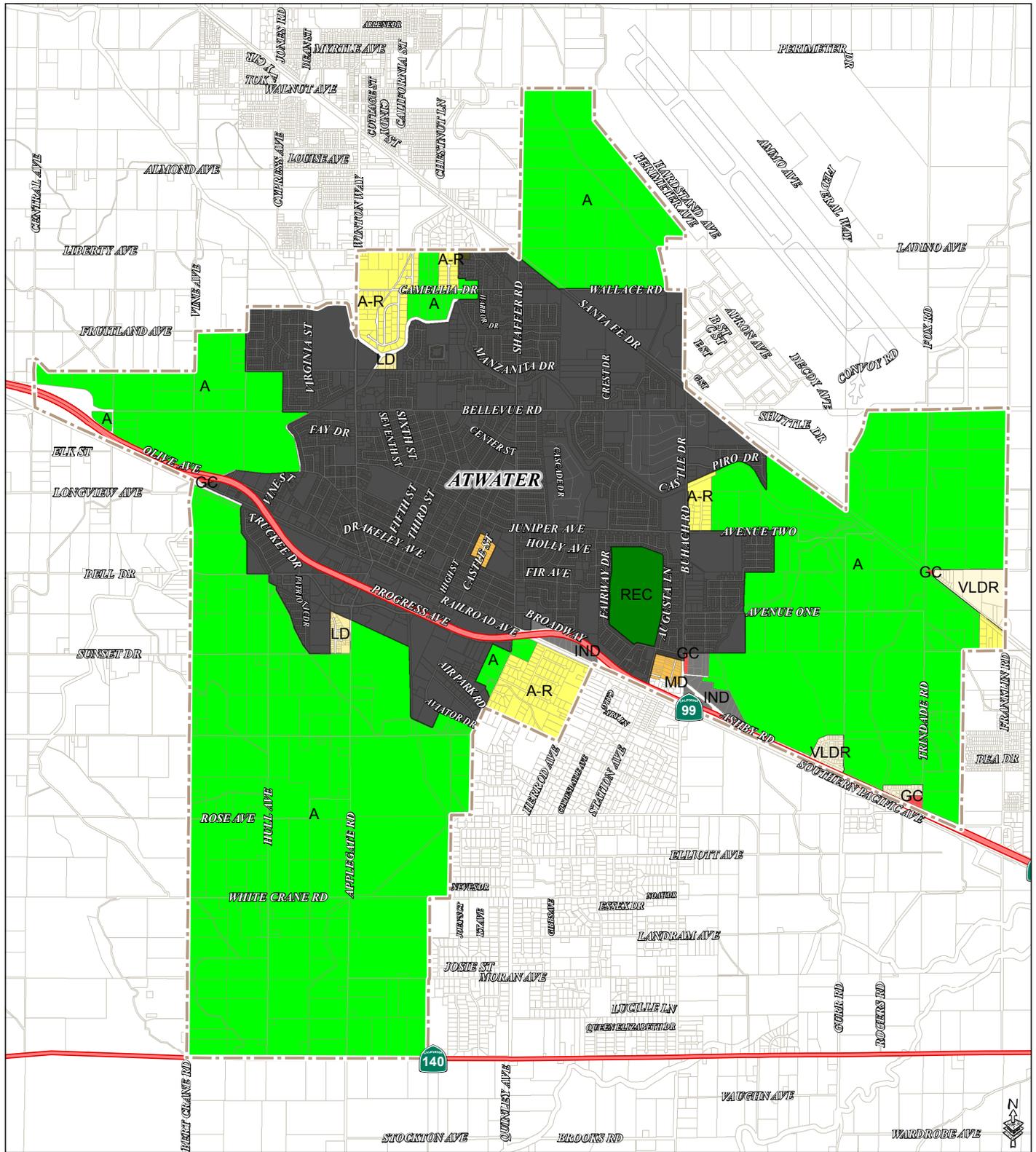
Table LU-3 Land Use Standards for City Fringe Areas						
Land Use Designations	Description	Minimum Lot or Parcel	Dwelling Units Per Gross Acre		Non-Residential Floor Area Ratio	Based on City or County General
Public/Government (P/G)	Government owned and quasi-public use	-	-	-	0.10	City
Quasi Public Facilities (QP)	Same as Public/Quasi Public	-	-	-		
Open Space (OS)	Parks	-	-	-	0.10	City
Residential-Reserve (RR)	Agricultural holding zone	-	2	6		City
Industrial Reserve (IND-R)	Agricultural holding zone	-	-	-	0.3-0.5	City
Urban Expansion Area (UE)	Agricultural holding zone	-	-	-	0.10	City
University (UNIVERSITY)	University of California at Merced	-	-	-	0.35-6.0	City

Notes:

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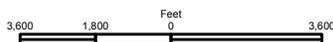
# CITY PLANNING AREA MAPS

***Please see next page***

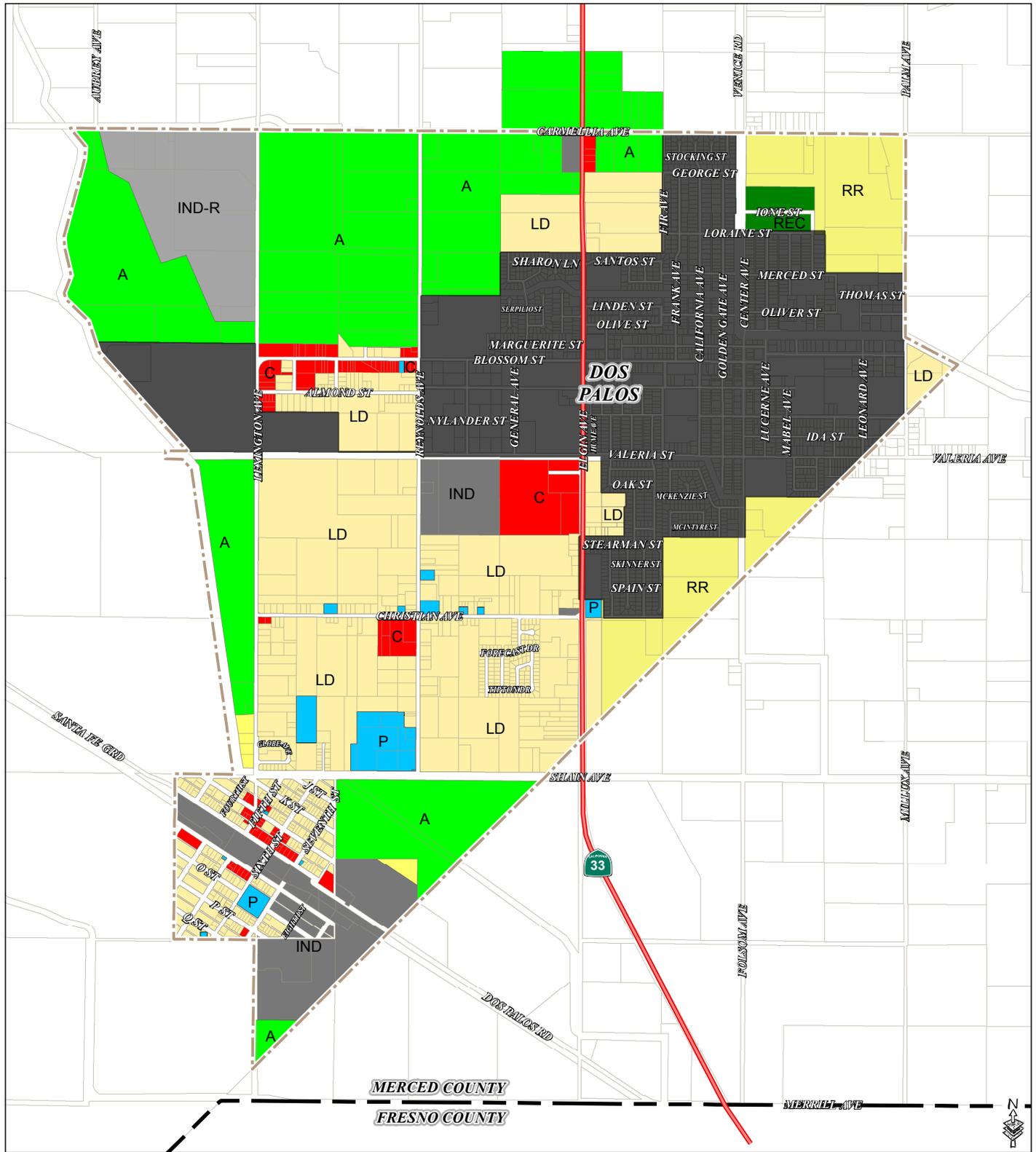


- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
- City Planning Area
  - City Limit
- GENERAL PLAN**
- A - Agricultural
  - A-R - Agricultural-Residential
  - GC - General Commercial
  - IND - Industrial
  - LD - Low Density Residential
  - MD - Medium Density Residential
  - REC - Recreational
  - VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# City Planning Area Atwater



May 14, 2013 Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

- City Planning Area
- City Limit

**GENERAL PLAN**

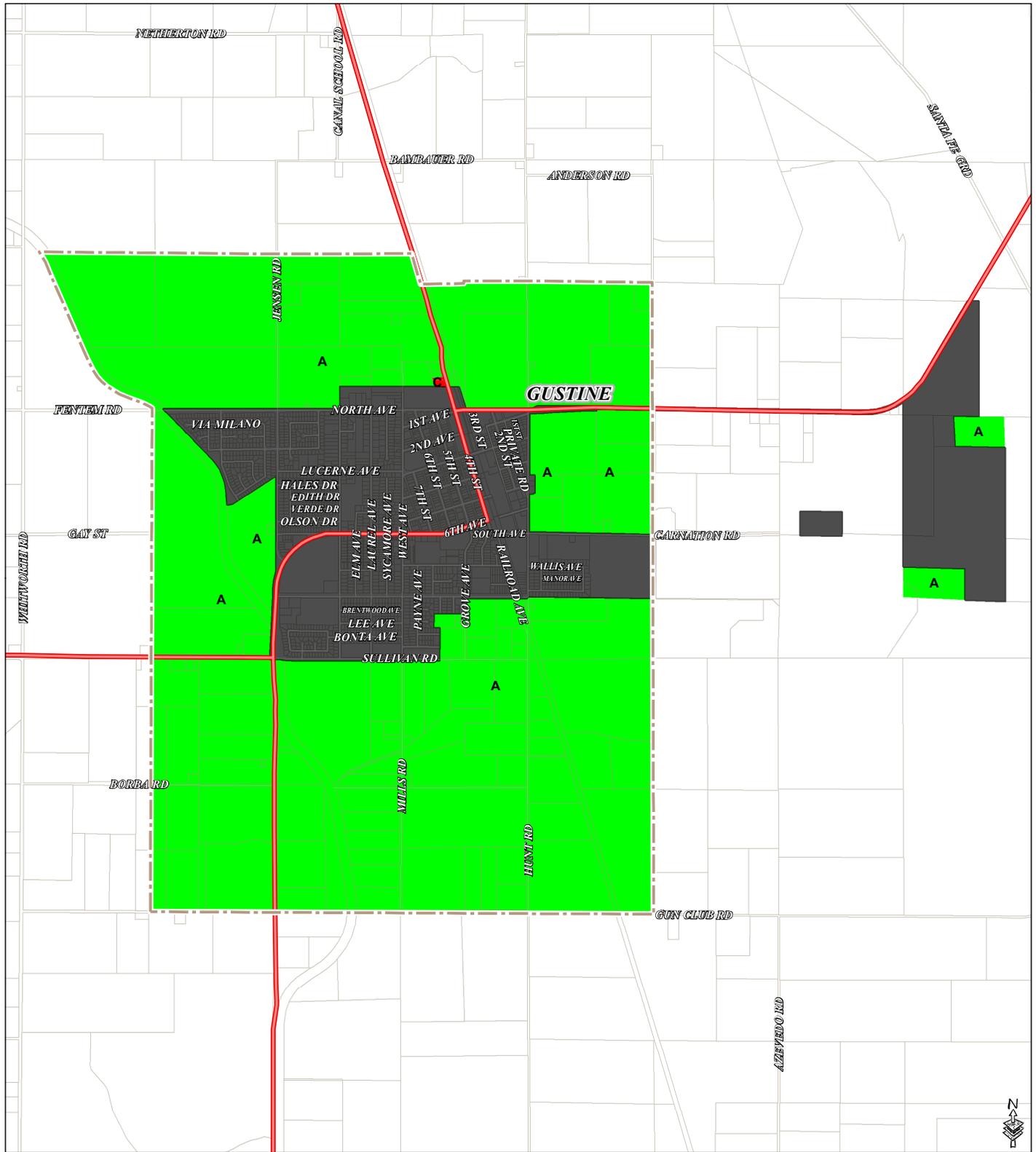
- A - Agricultural
- A-R - Agricultural-Residential
- C - Commercial
- GC - General Commercial
- IND - Industrial
- IND-R - Industrial Reserve
- LD - Low Density Residential
- P - Public Use
- REC - Recreational
- RR - Residential-Reserve

# City Planning Area Dos Palos

2,000 1,000 0 2,000  
Feet

Merced County  
20 30  
General Plan Update

May 14, 2013 Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

City Planning Area

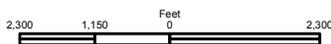
City Limit

**GENERAL PLAN**

A - Agricultural

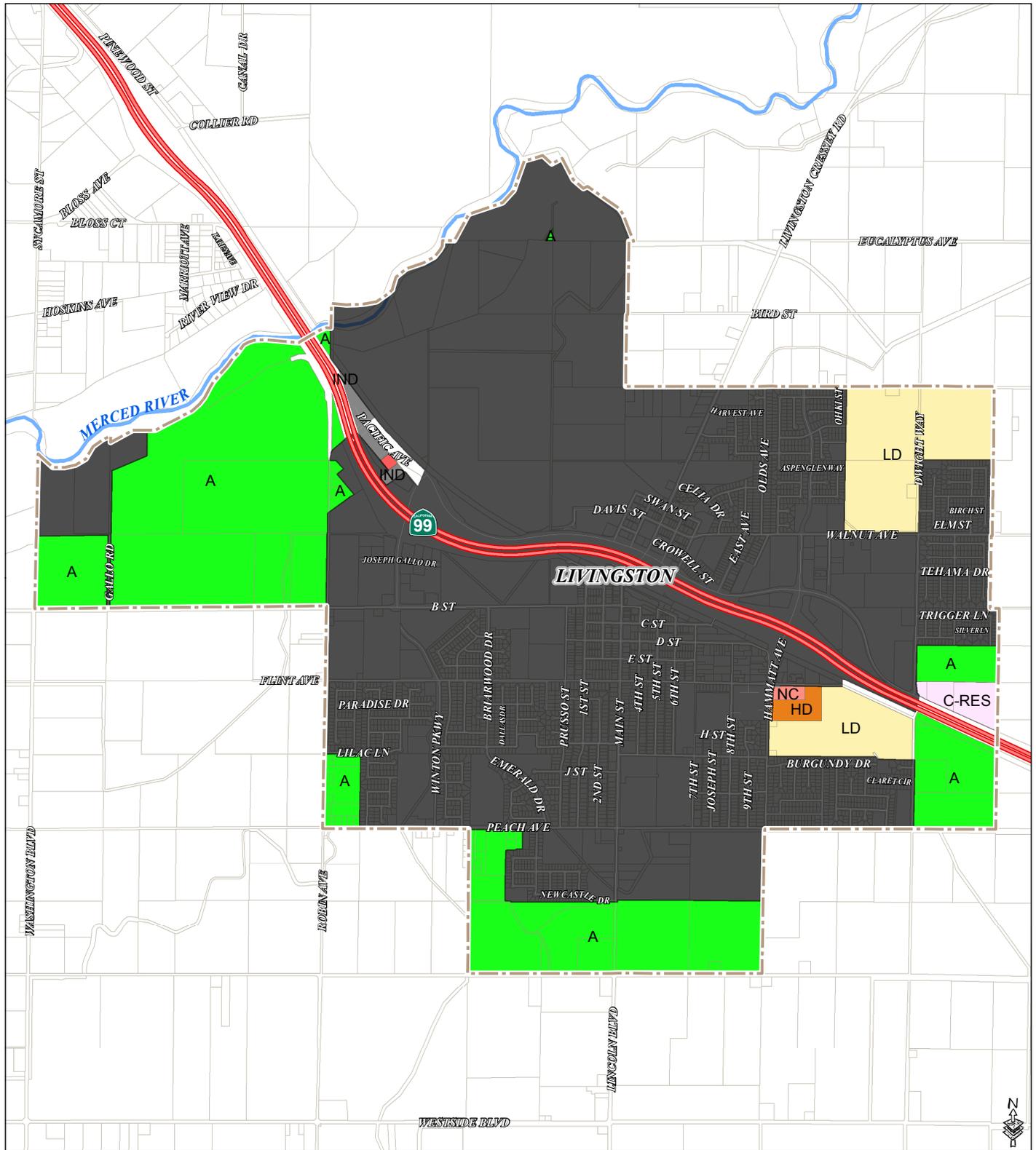
C - Commercial

# City Planning Area Gustine



May 14, 2013

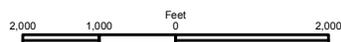
Merced County GIS - MA



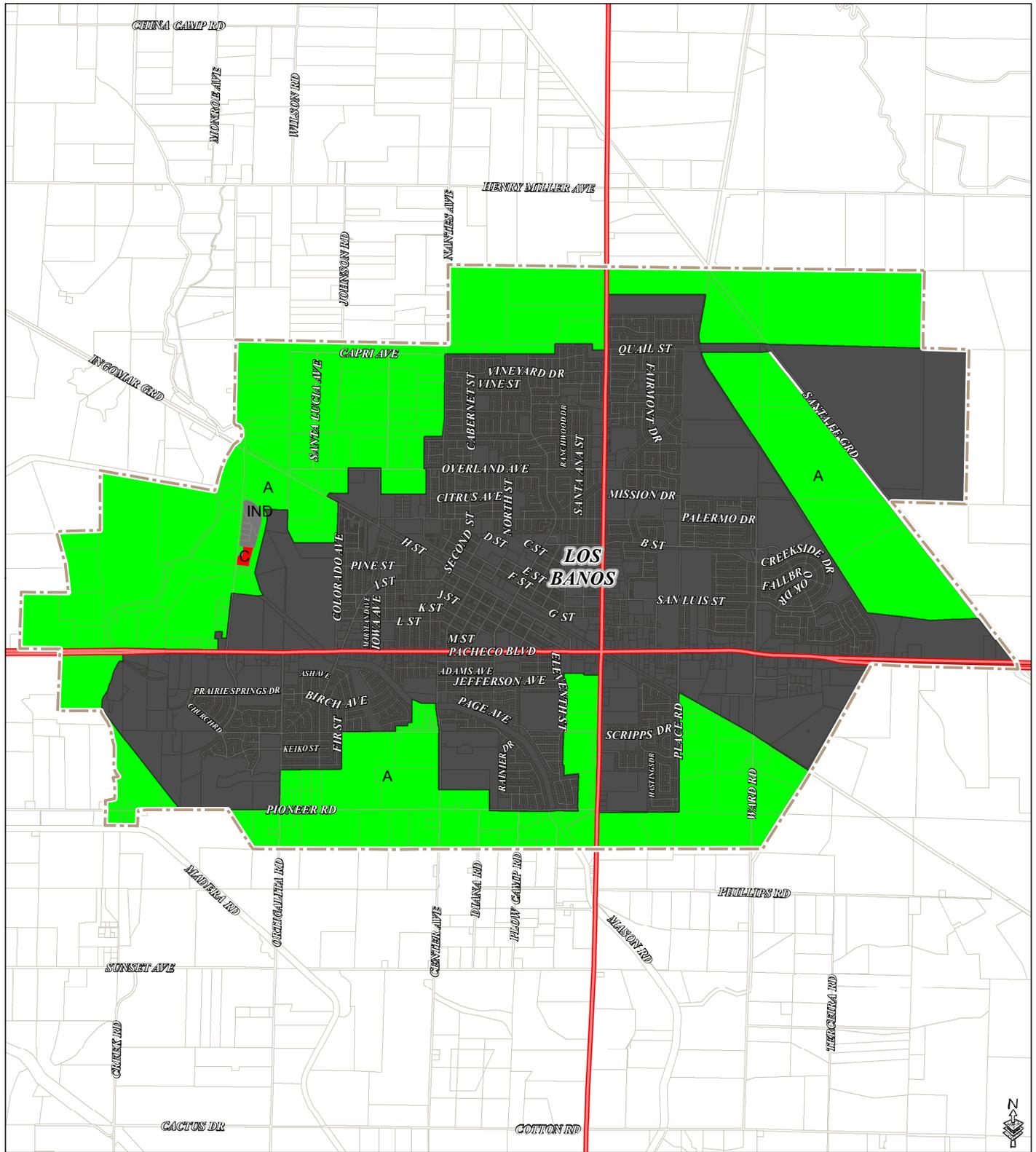
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

- City Planning Area
- City Limit
- GENERAL PLAN**
- A - Agricultural
- CR - Commercial Reserve
- CG - Commercial General
- HD - High Density Residential
- IND - Industrial
- LD - Low Density Residential
- NC - Neighborhood Commercial

# City Planning Area Livingston



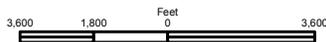
May 14, 2013 Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

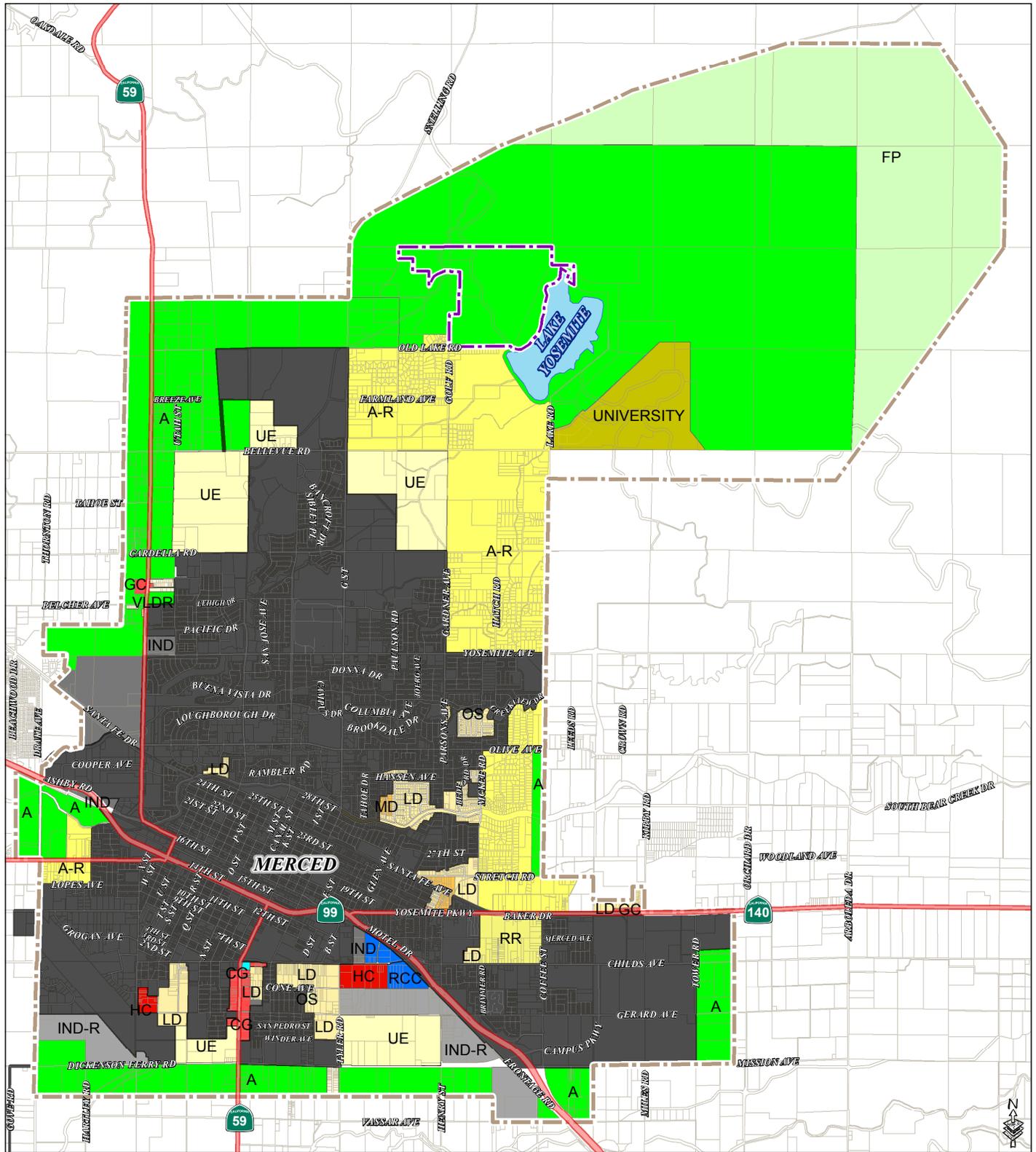
-  City Planning Area
-  City Limit
-  A - Agricultural
-  C - Commercial
-  IND - Industrial

# City Planning Area Los Banos



November 15, 2013

Merced County GIS - MA



# City Planning Area - Merced

## URBAN DESIGNATIONS

<b>GENERAL PLAN</b>			

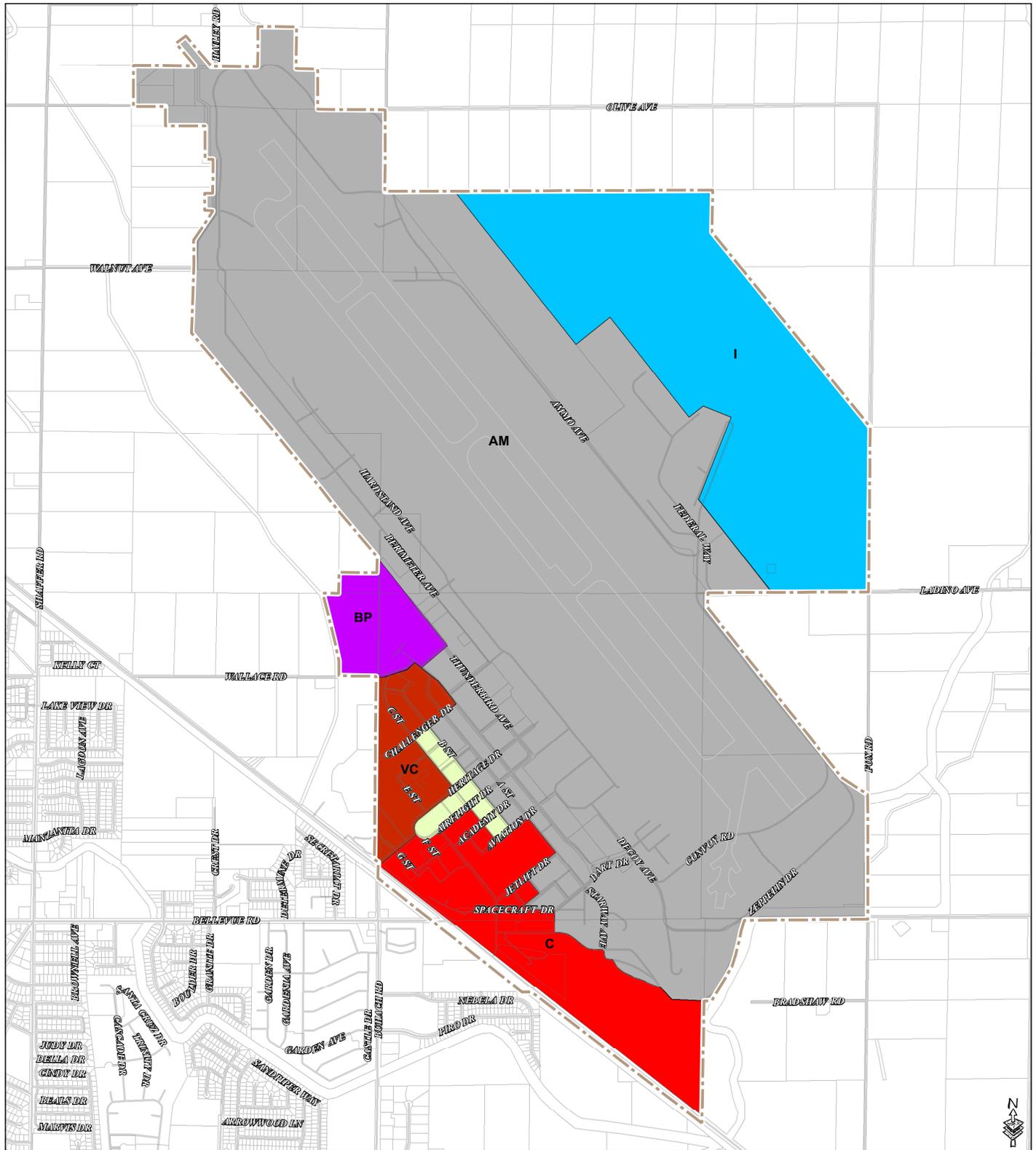


May 14, 2013

Merced County GIS - MA

# URBAN COMMUNITY MAPS

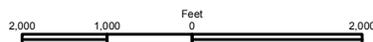
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**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

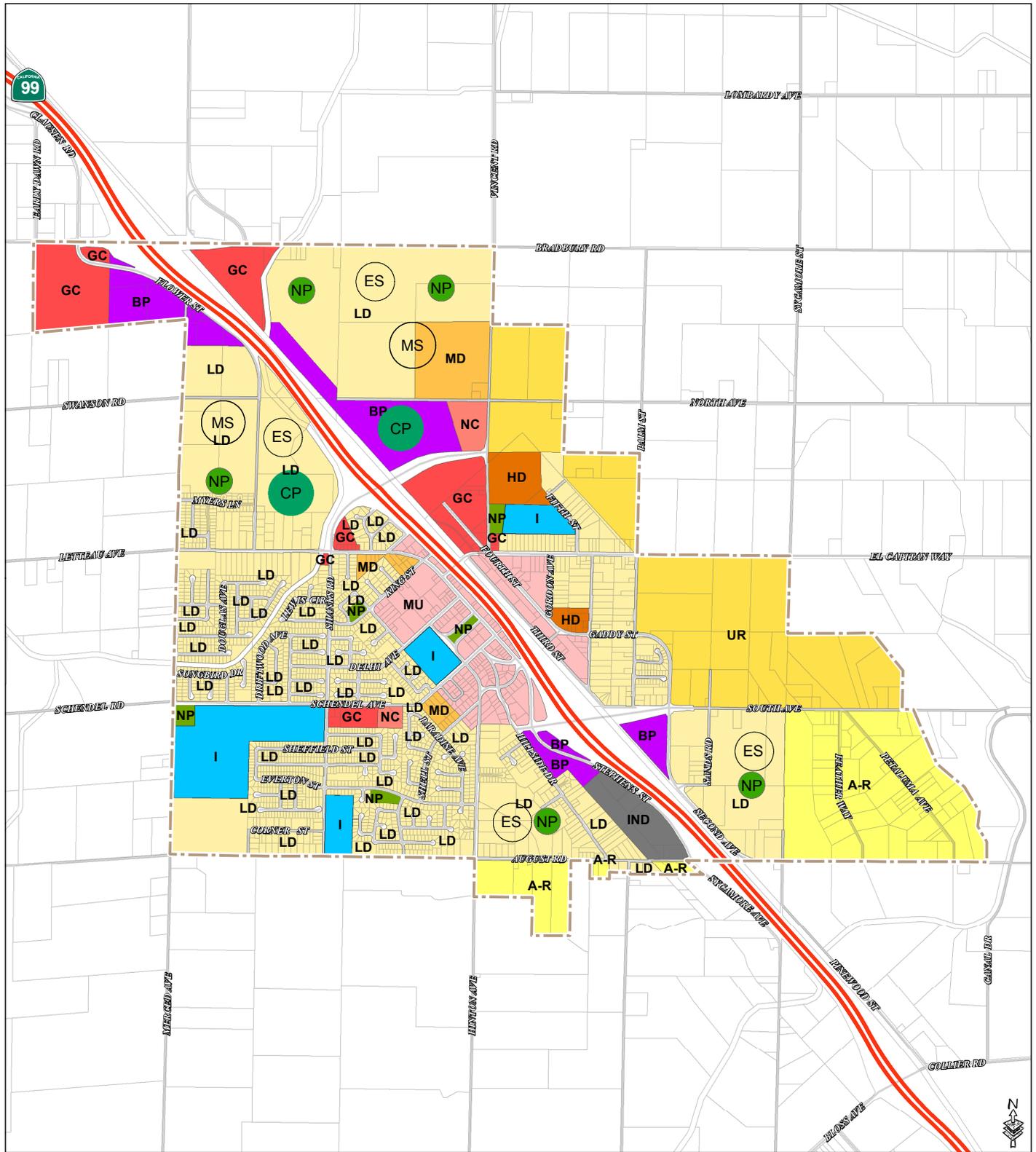
-  URBAN COMMUNITIES
- GENERAL PLAN**
-  A/M - Aviation/Manufacturing
-  BP - Business Park
-  C - Commercial
-  I - Institutional
-  OS - Open Space
-  VC - Visitor Commercial

# Urban Communities Castle (CAED)



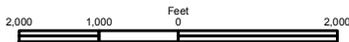
October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA

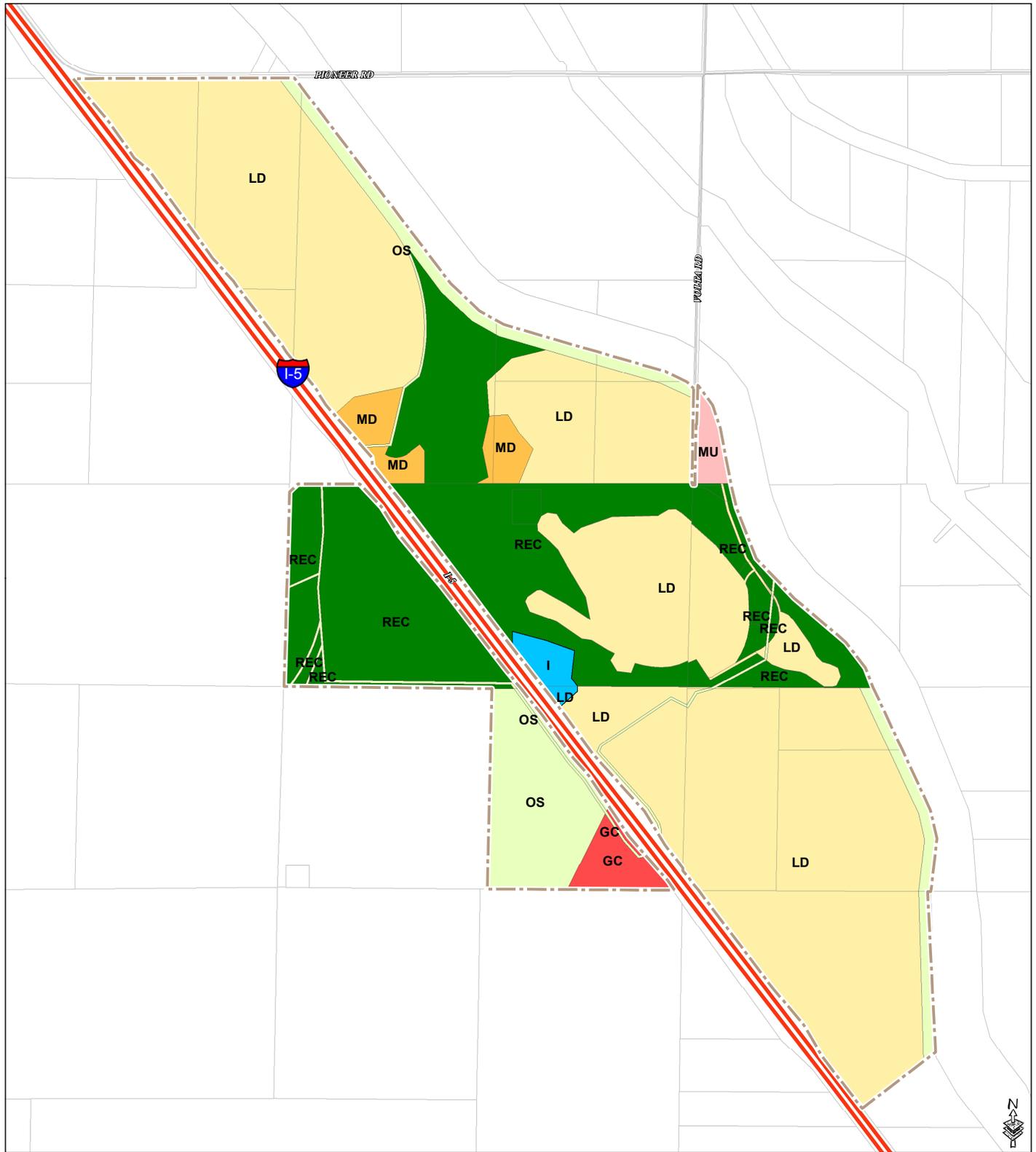


# Urban Communities - Delhi

<b>URBAN DESIGNATIONS</b>	IND - Industrial	<b>Parks</b>
URBAN COMMUNITIES	LD - Low Density Residential	CP - Community Park
<b>GENERAL PLAN</b>	MD - Medium Density Residential	ES - Elementary School
A-R - Agricultural-Residential	MU - Mixed Use	MS - Middle School
BP - Business Park	NC - Neighborhood Commercial	NP - Neighborhood Park
GC - General Commercial	NP - Neighborhood Park	
HD - High Density Residential	UR - Urban Reserve	
I - Institutional		



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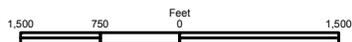
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

URBAN COMMUNITIES

**GENERAL PLAN**

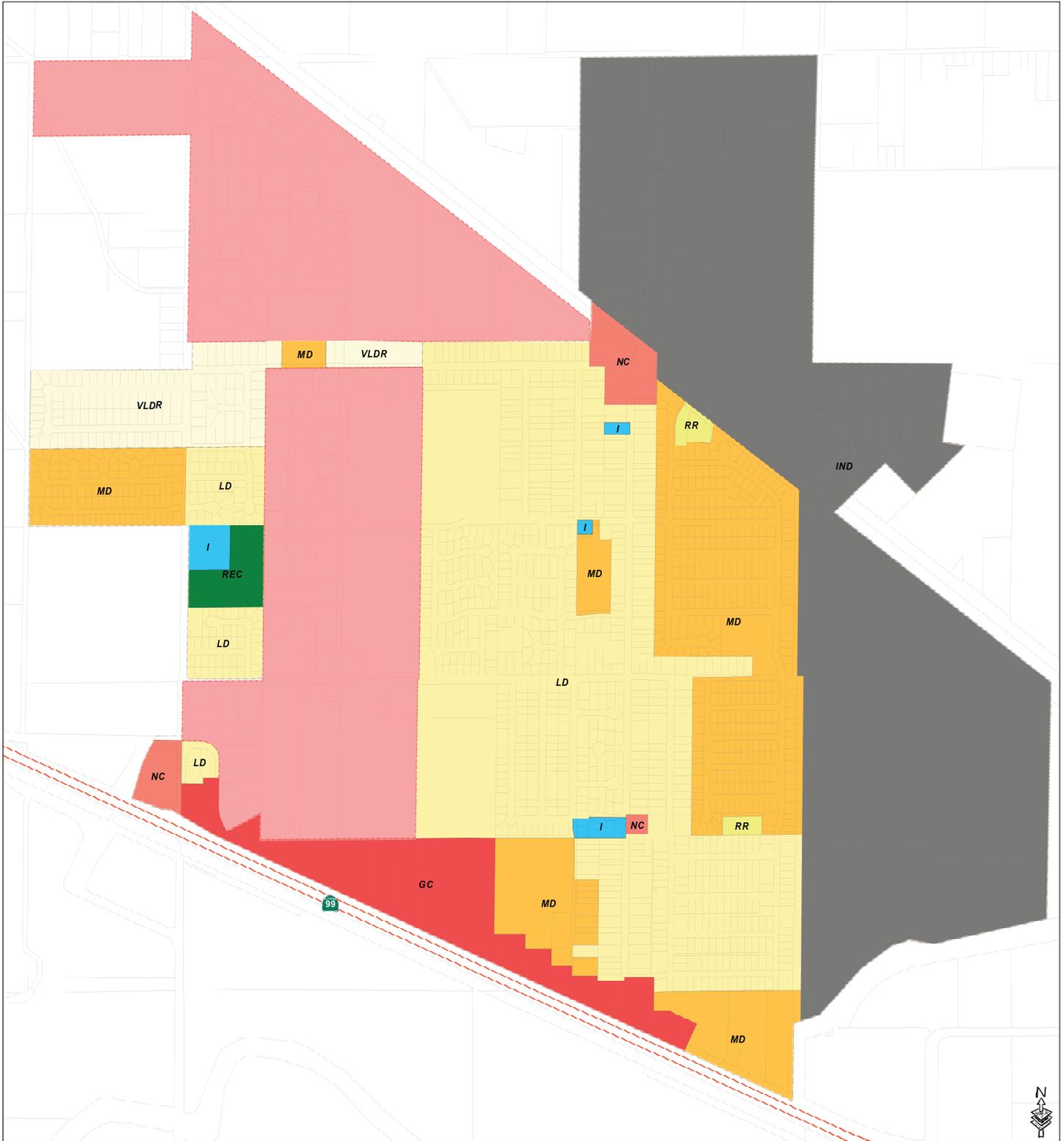
- GC - General Commercial
- I - Institutional
- LD - Low Density Residential
- MD - Medium Density Residential
- MU - Mixed Use
- OS - Open Space
- REC - Recreational

# Urban Communities Fox Hills



October 24, 2011

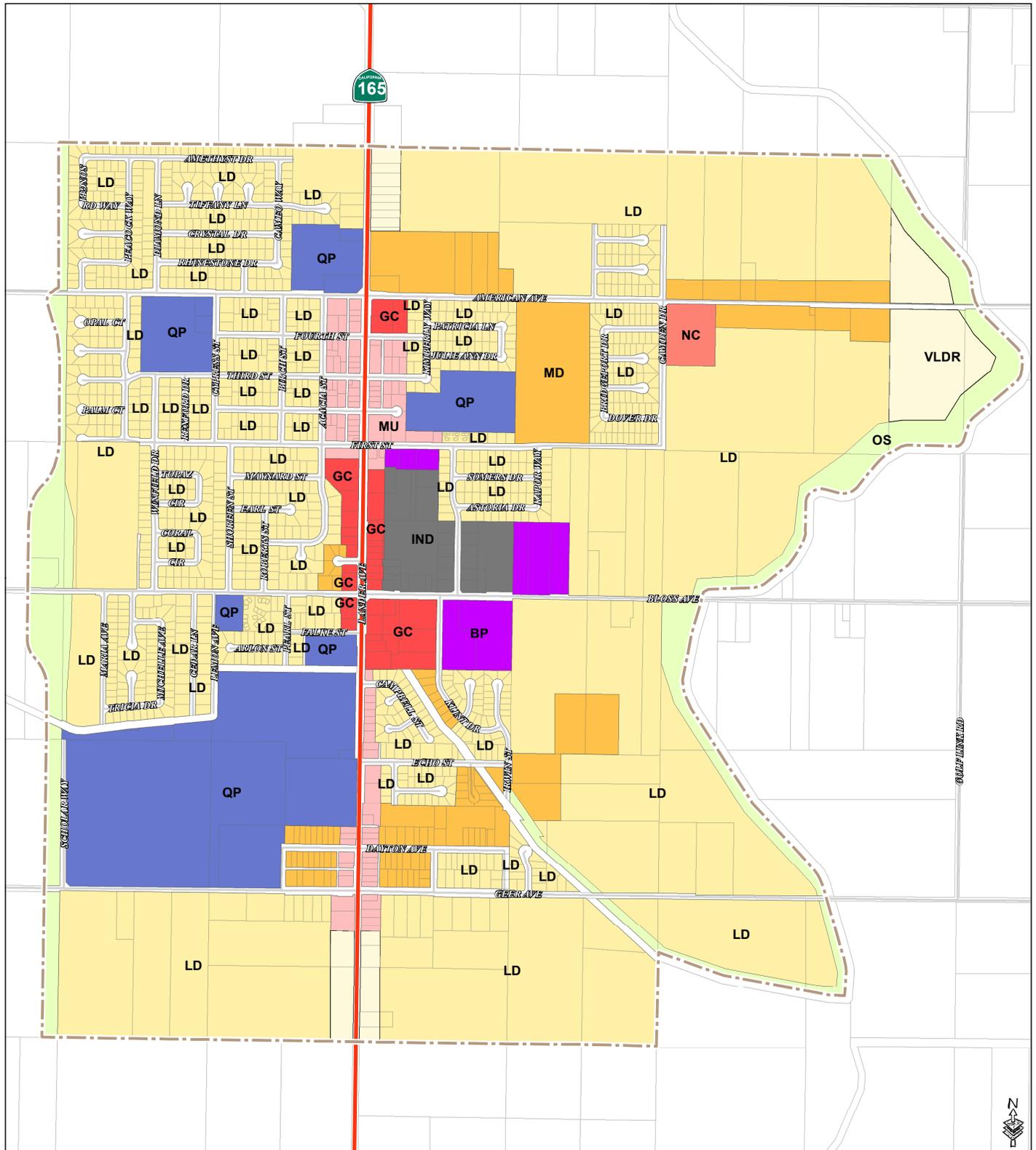
Merced County GIS - MA



- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
- URBAN COMMUNITIES
  - RURAL RESIDENTIAL CENTERS
- GENERAL PLAN**
- GC - General Commercial
  - I - Institutional
  - IND - Industrial
  - LD - Low Density Residential
  - MD - Medium Density Residential
  - NC - Neighborhood Commercial
  - REC - Recreational
  - RR - Residential-Reserve
  - VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

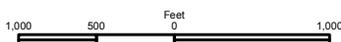
# Franklin - Beachwood Community Plan Map

March 27, 2013 Merced County GIS - MA



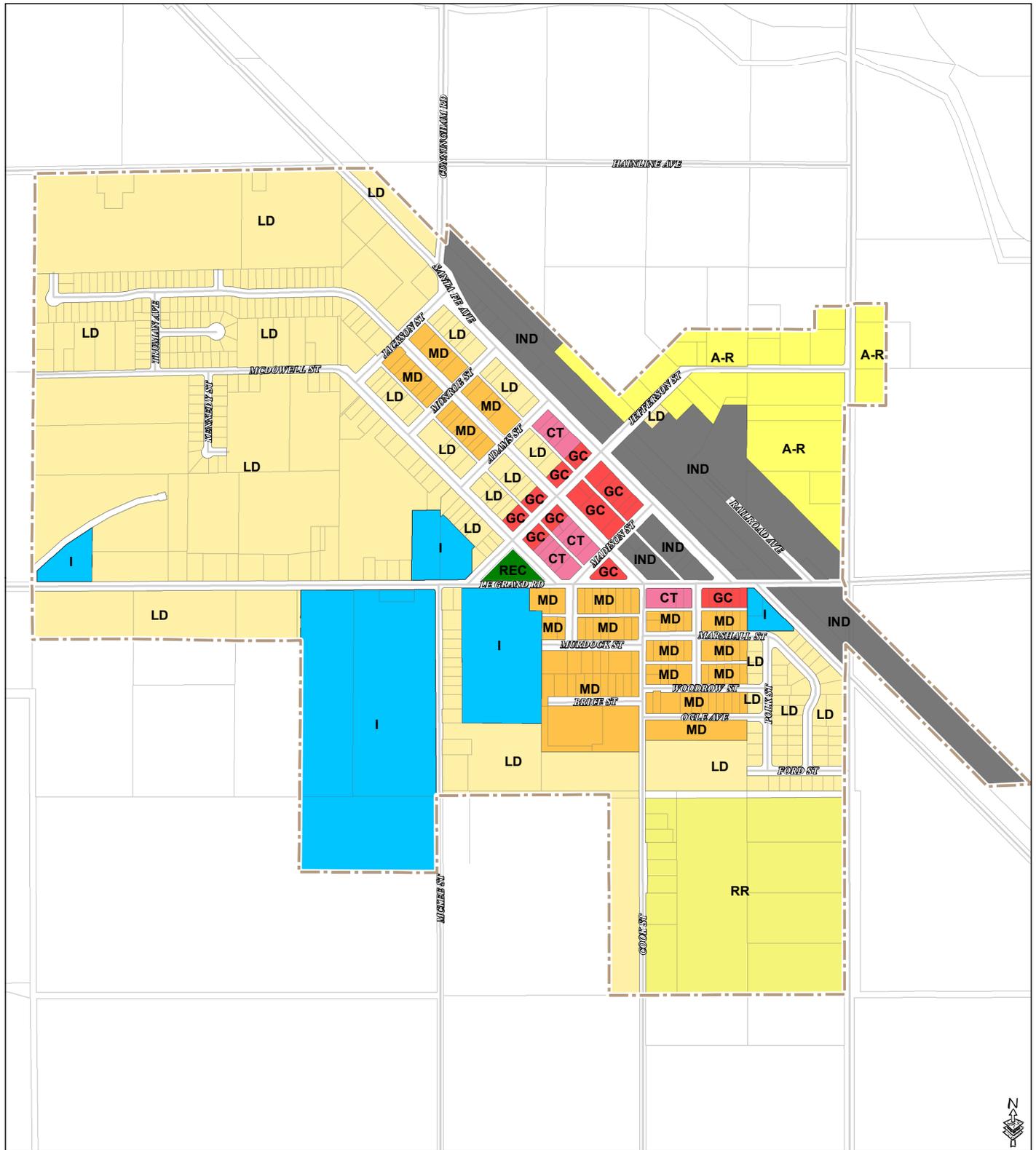
URBAN DESIGNATIONS	
	URBAN COMMUNITIES
GENERAL PLAN	
	BP - Business Park
	GC - General Commercial
	IND - Industrial
	LD - Low Density Residential
	MD - Medium Density Residential
	MU - Mixed Use
	NC - Neighborhood Commercial
	OS - Open Space
	QP - Quasi Public Facilities
	VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Urban Communities Hilmar



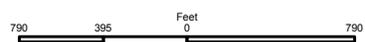
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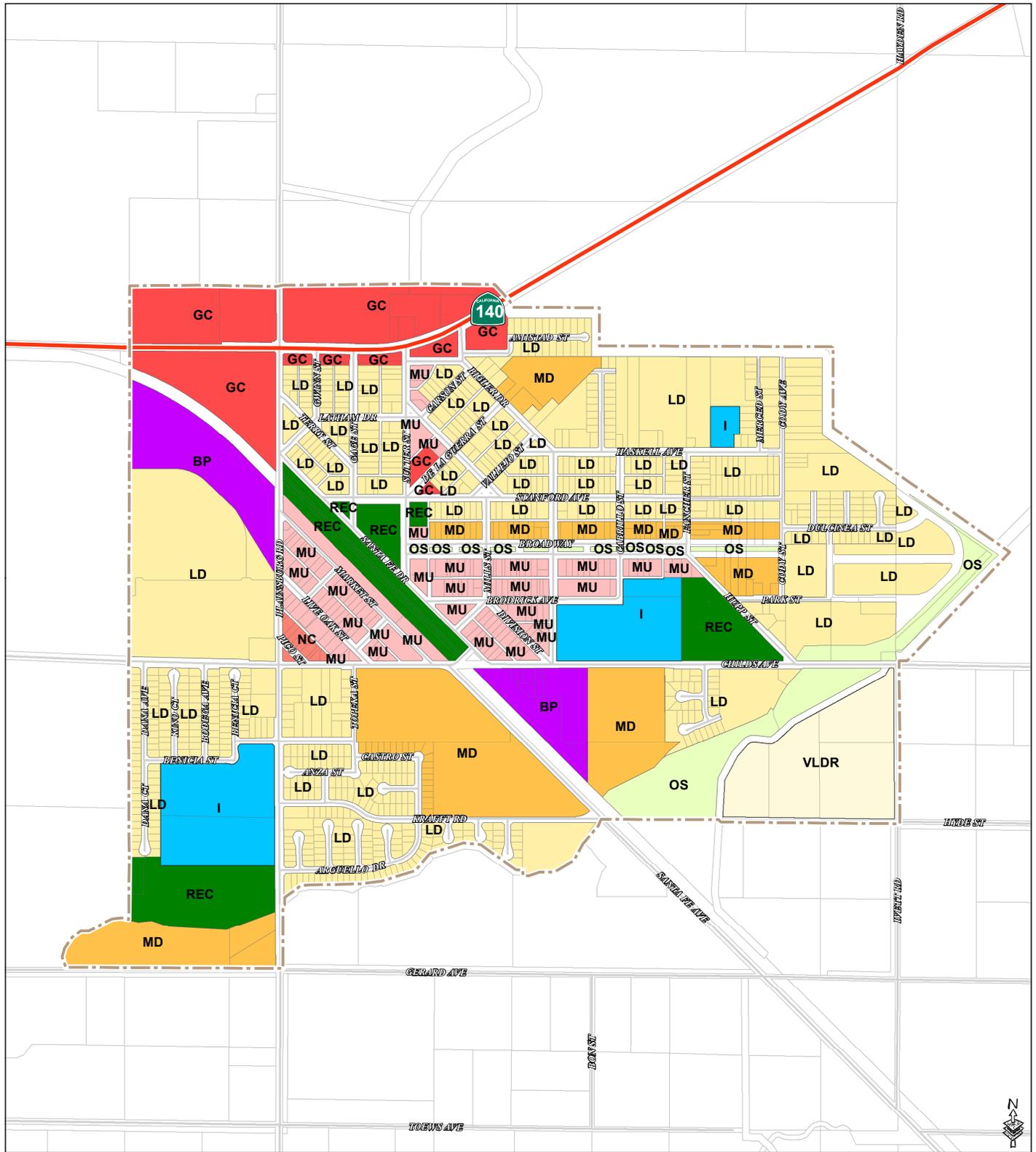
Merced County GIS - MA



URBAN DESIGNATIONS	
	URBAN COMMUNITIES
GENERAL PLAN	
	A-R - Agricultural-Residential
	C-T - Commercial-Transition
	GC - General Commercial
	I - Institutional
	IND - Industrial
	LD - Low Density Residential
	MD - Medium Density Residential
	REC - Recreational
	RR - Residential-Reserve

# Urban Communities Le Grand





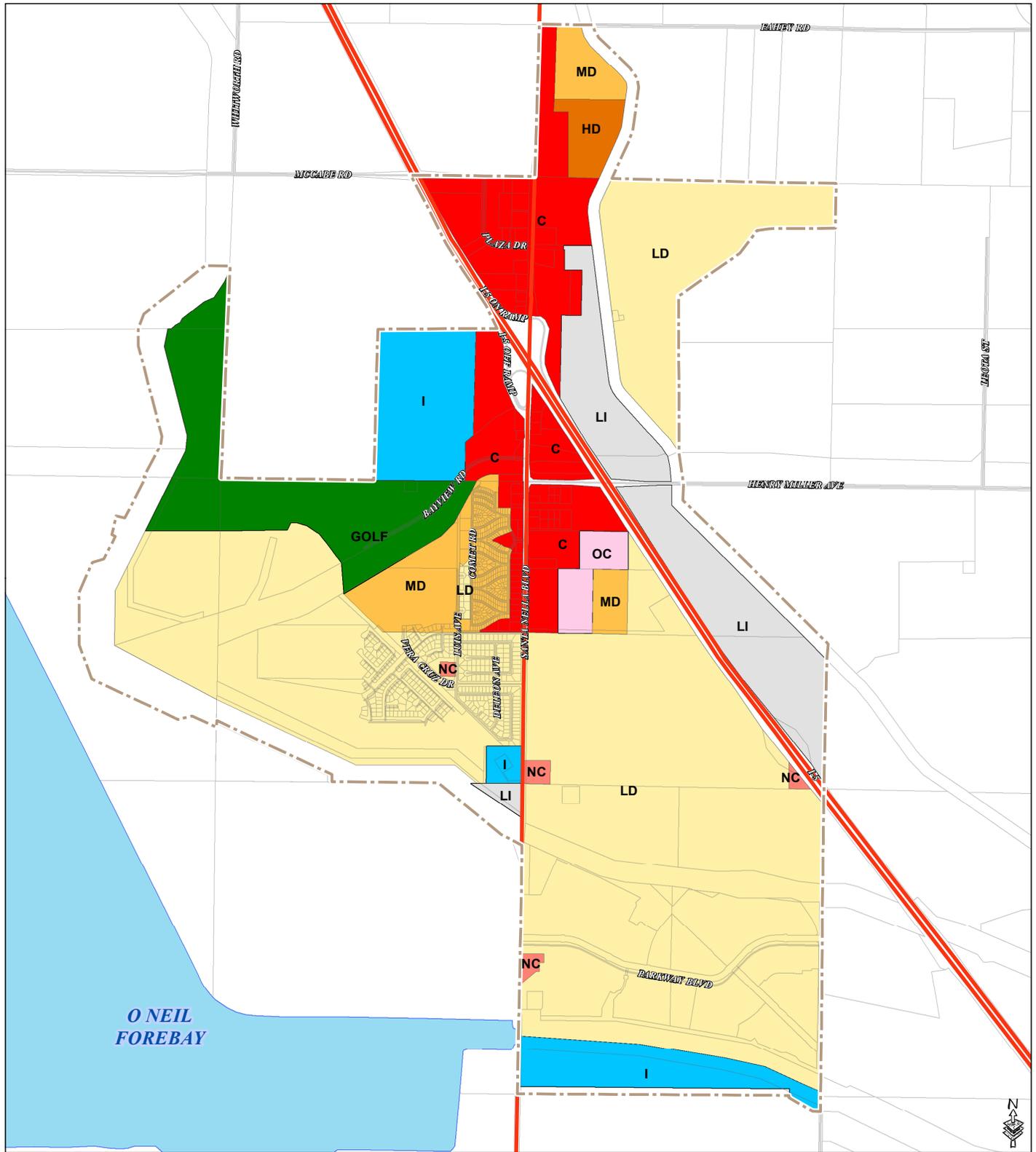
URBAN DESIGNATIONS	
	URBAN COMMUNITIES
GENERAL PLAN	
	BP - Business Park
	GC - General Commercial
	I - Institutional
	LD - Low Density Residential
	MD - Medium Density Residential
	MU - Mixed Use
	NC - Neighborhood Commercial
	OS - Open Space
	REC - Recreational
	VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Urban Communities Planada

1,000    500    0    1,000  
Feet

Merced County  
20    30  
General Plan Update

October 24, 2011      Merced County GIS - MA



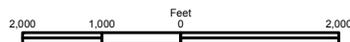
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

URBAN COMMUNITIES

**GENERAL PLAN**

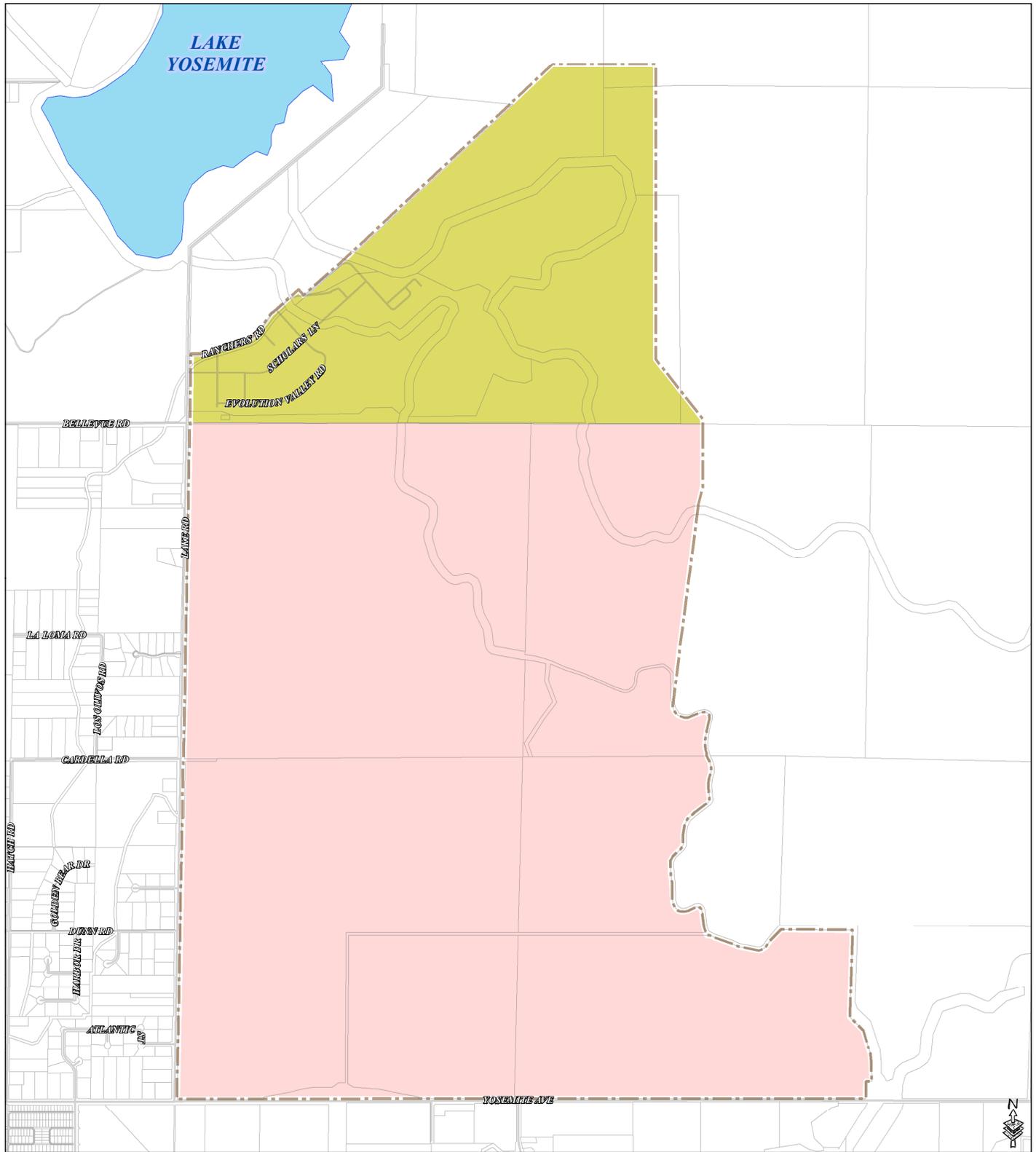
- C - Commercial
- Golf
- HD - High Density Residential
- I - Institutional
- LD - Low Density Residential
- LI - Light Industrial
- MD - Medium Density Residential
- NC - Neighborhood Commercial
- OC - Office Commercial

# Urban Communities Santa Nella



October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

URBAN COMMUNITIES

**GENERAL PLAN**

MU - Multiple Use Urban Development

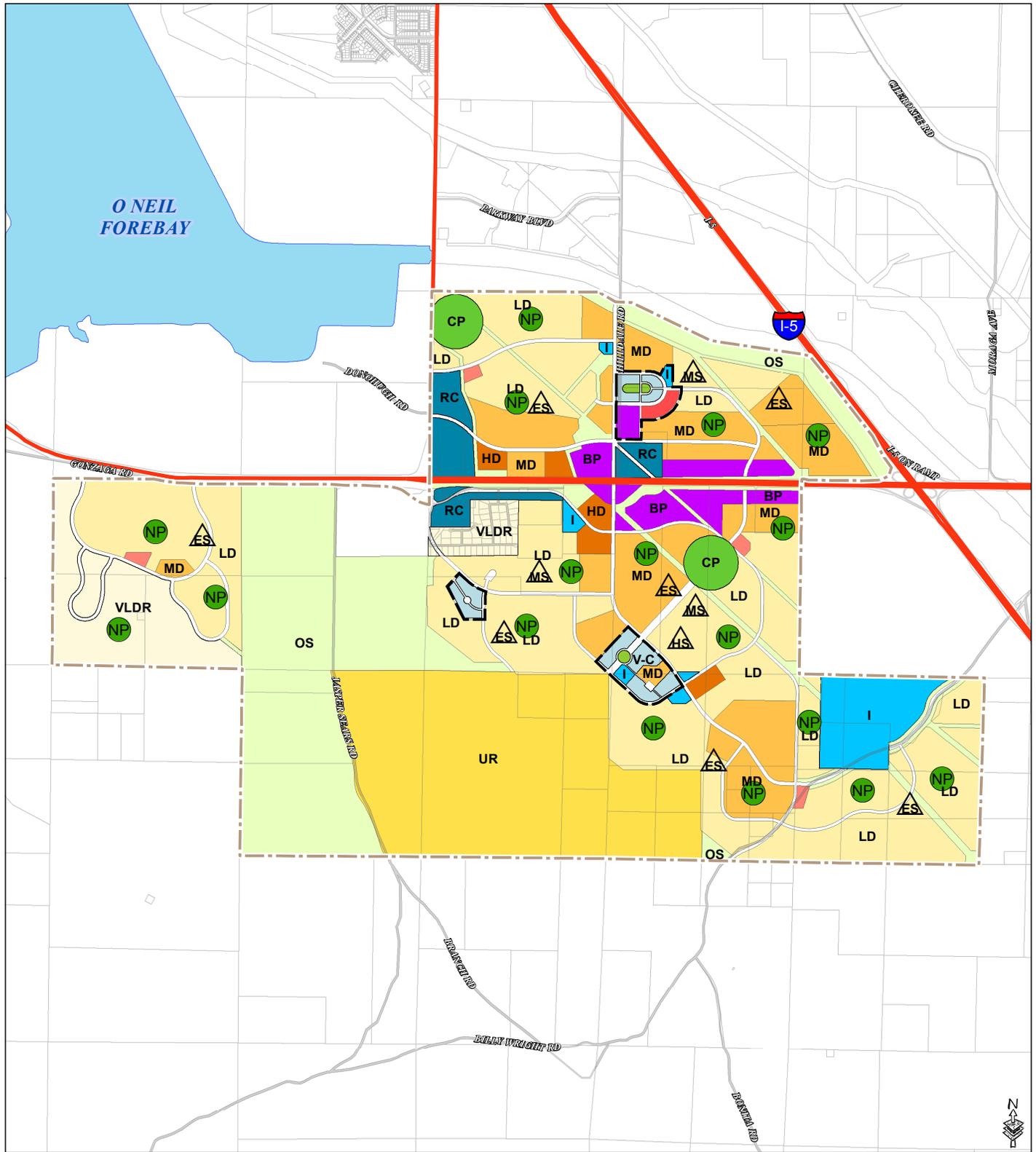
UNIVERSITY - University

# Urban Communities University Community

1,800    900    0    900    1,800  
Feet

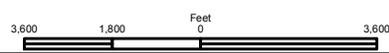
Merced County  
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General Plan Update

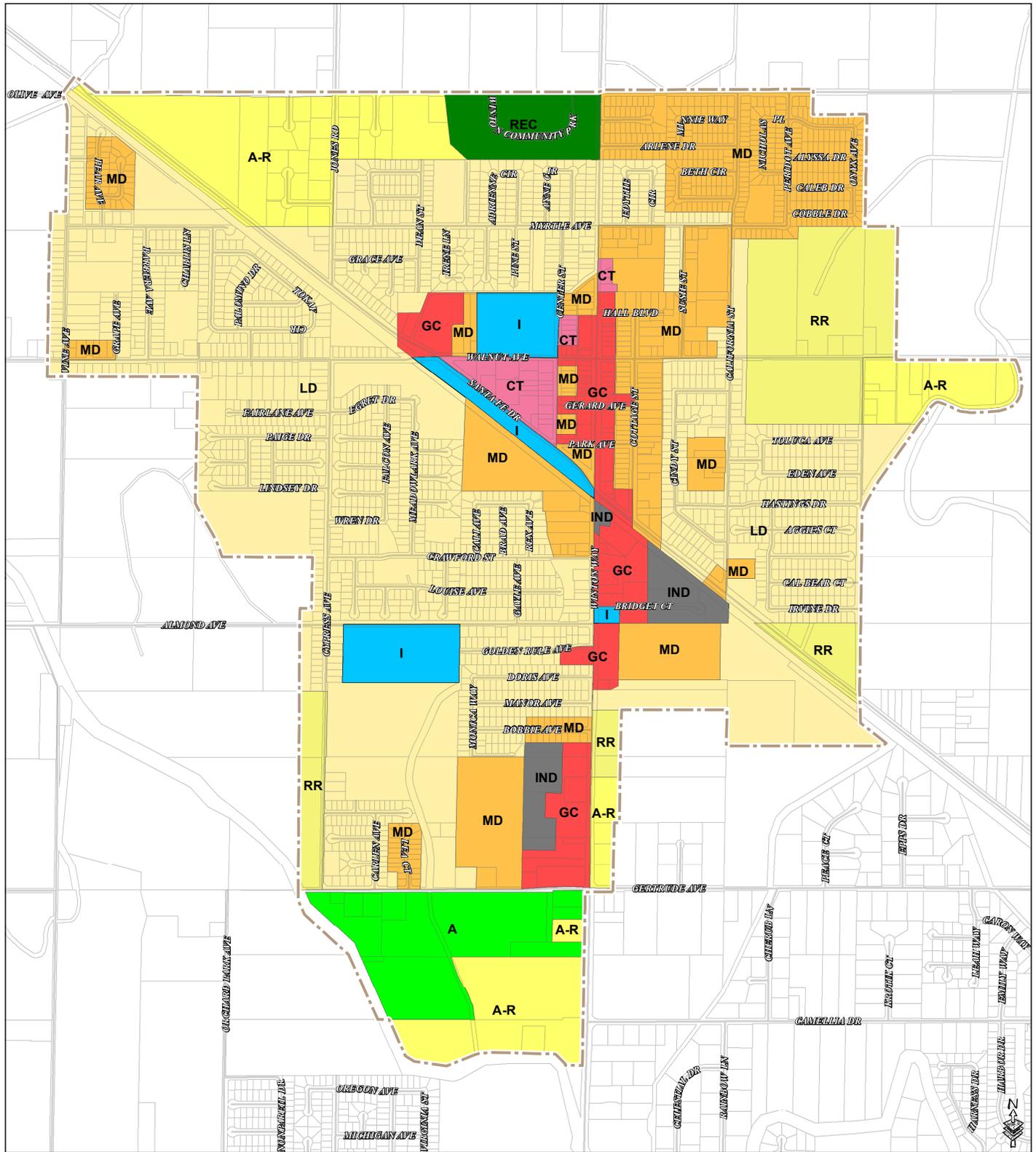
October 15, 2013    Merced County GIS - MA



# Urban Communities - Villages of Laguna San Luis

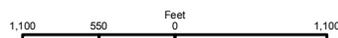
- village parks
- OTHER FEATURES**
  - Village Center Boundary
  - Schools
- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
  - URBAN COMMUNITIES
  - LD - Low Density Residential
  - MD - Medium Density Residential
  - HD - High Density Residential
  - BP - Business Park
  - GC - General Commercial
  - RC - Regional Commercial
  - I - Institutional
  - V-C - Village-Center
  - V-C-P - Village-Center Parks
  - VLDR - Very Low Density Residential
  - OS - Open Space
  - NC - Neighborhood Commercial
  - UR - Urban Reserve
- GENERAL PLAN**





- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
- URBAN COMMUNITIES
- GENERAL PLAN**
- A - Agricultural
  - A-R - Agricultural-Residential
  - C-T - Commercial-Transition
  - GC - General Commercial
  - I - Institutional
  - IND - Industrial
  - LD - Low Density Residential
  - MD - Medium Density Residential
  - REC - Recreational
  - RR - Residential-Reserve

# Urban Communities Winton



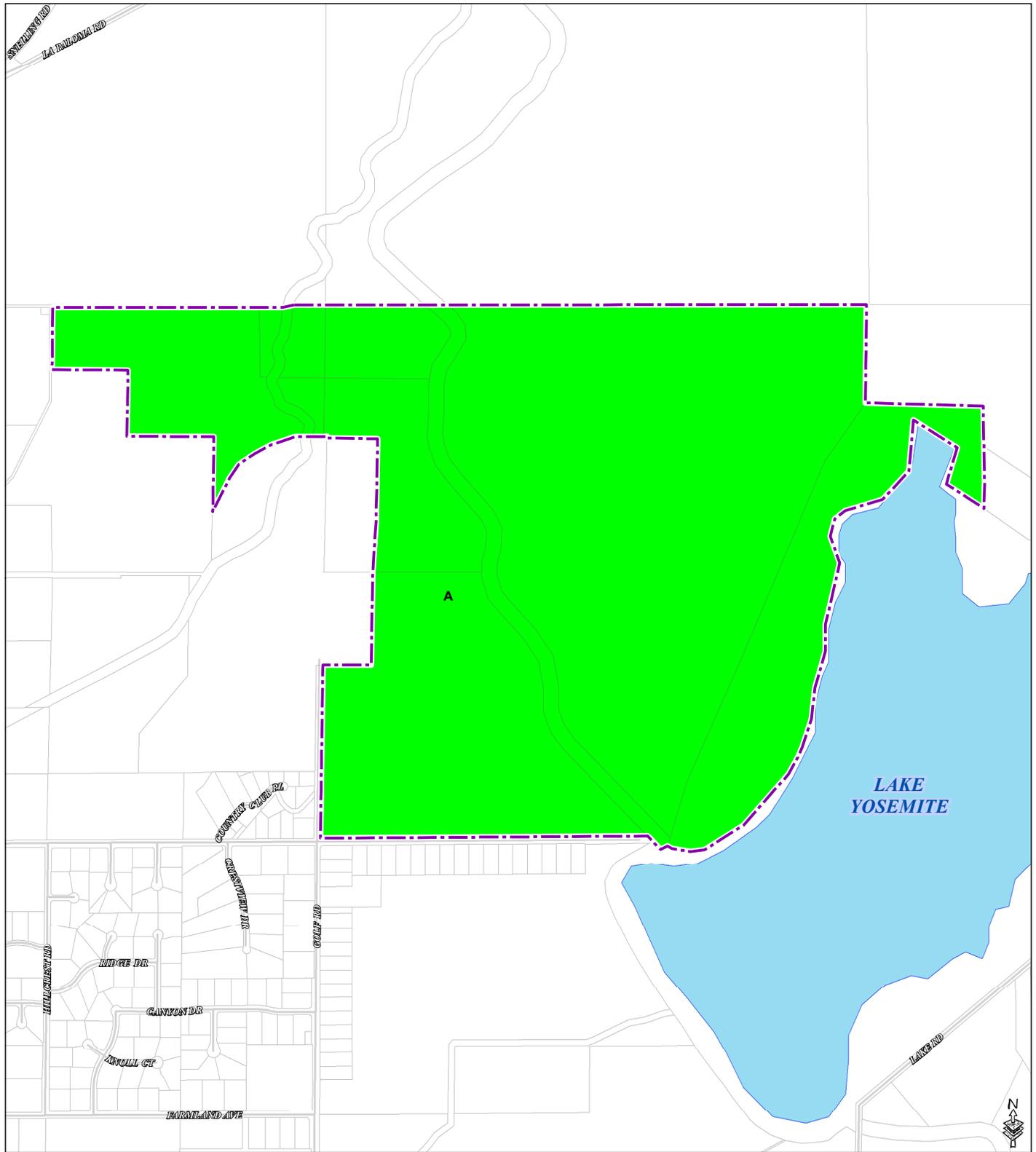
October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA

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# **URBAN COMMUNITIES “STUDY AREA” MAPS**

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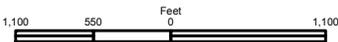
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

 URBAN COMMUNITY STUDY AREA

**GENERAL PLAN**

 A - Agricultural

# Urban Communities "Study Area" Yosemite Lake Estates



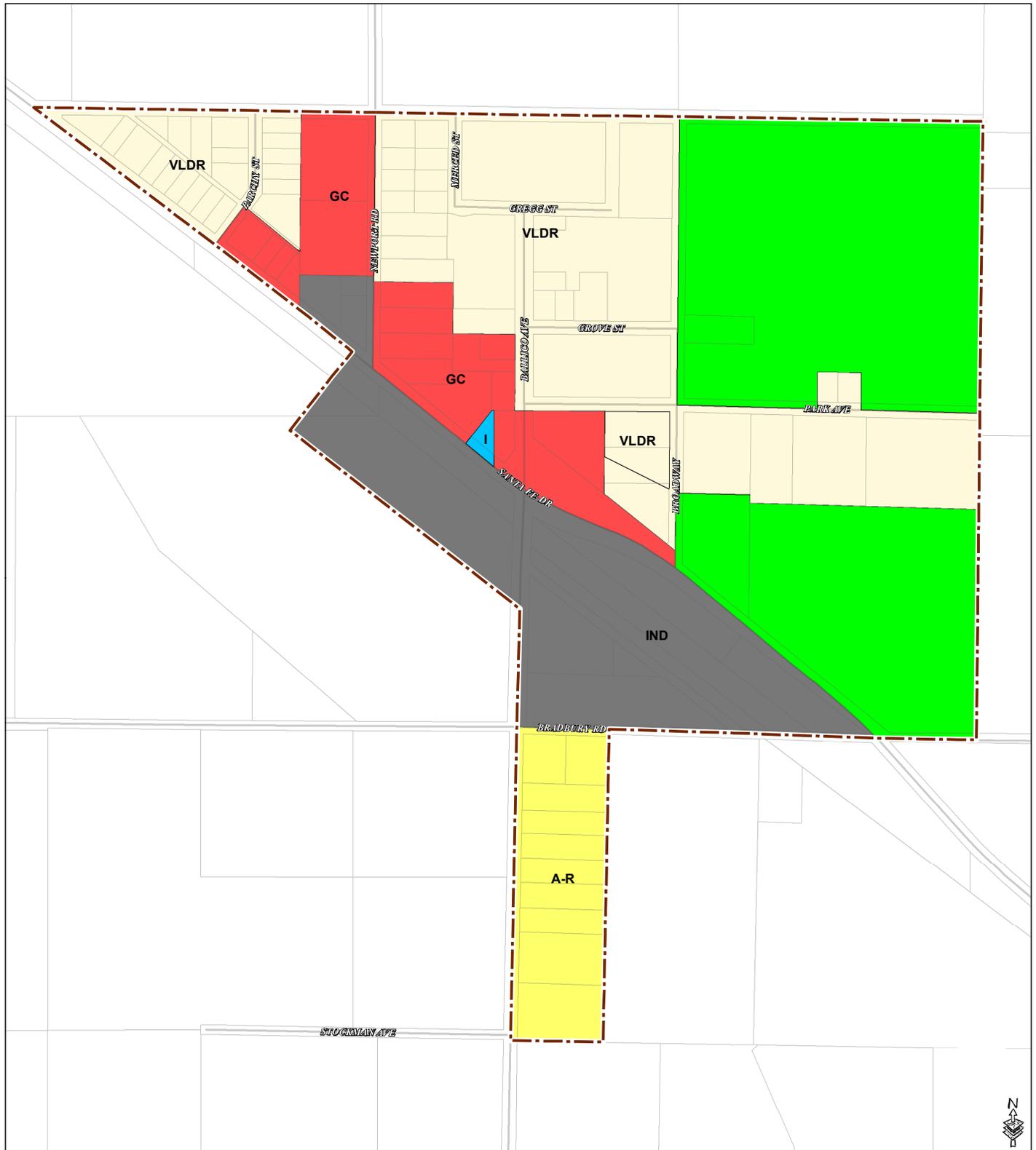


October 24, 2011      Merced County GIS - MA

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# **RURAL CENTER MAPS**

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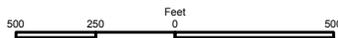
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

RURAL CENTERS

**GENERAL PLAN**

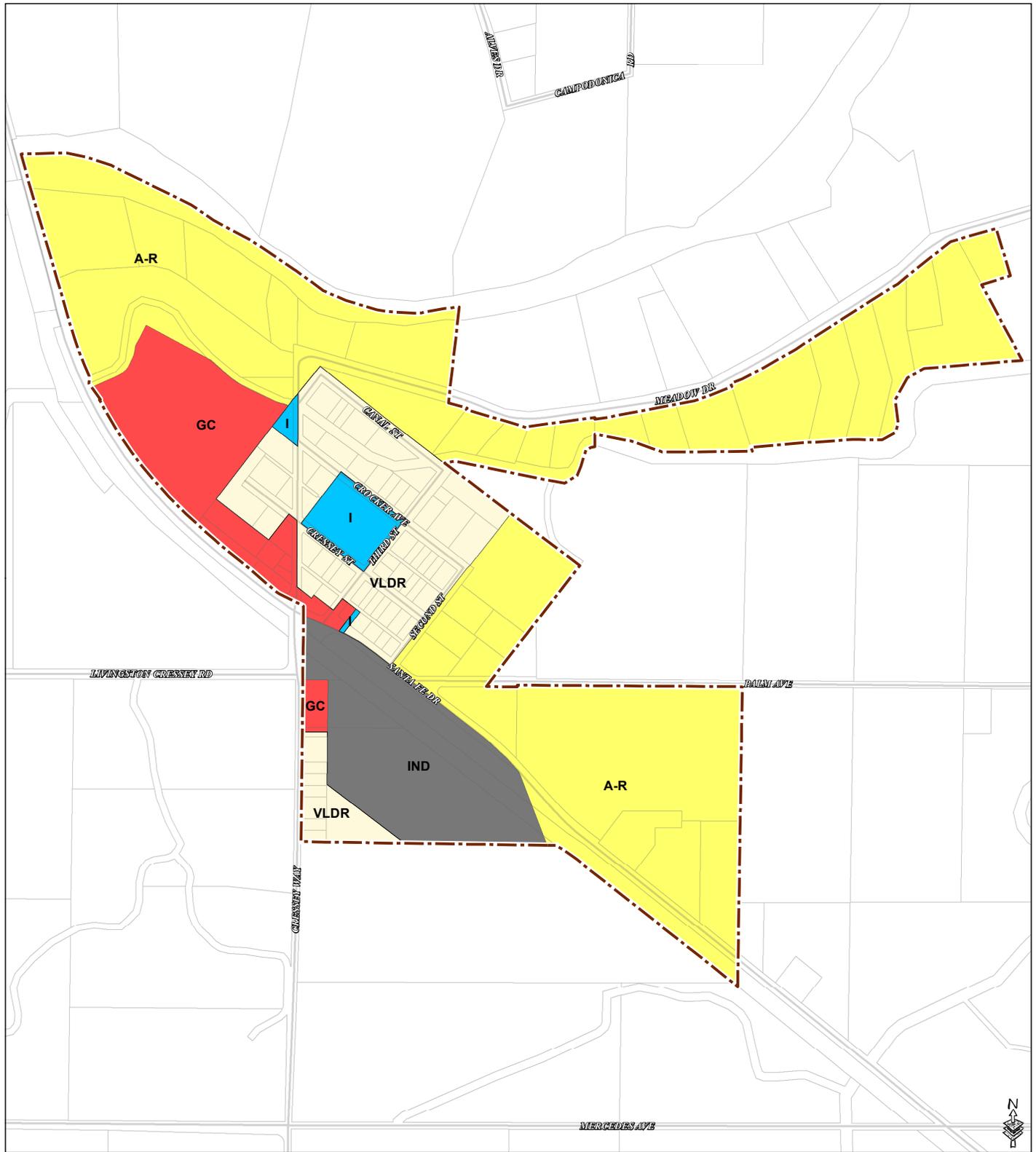
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- A-R - Agricultural-Residential
- GC - General Commercial
- I - Institutional
- IND - Industrial
- VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

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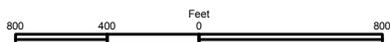
October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA



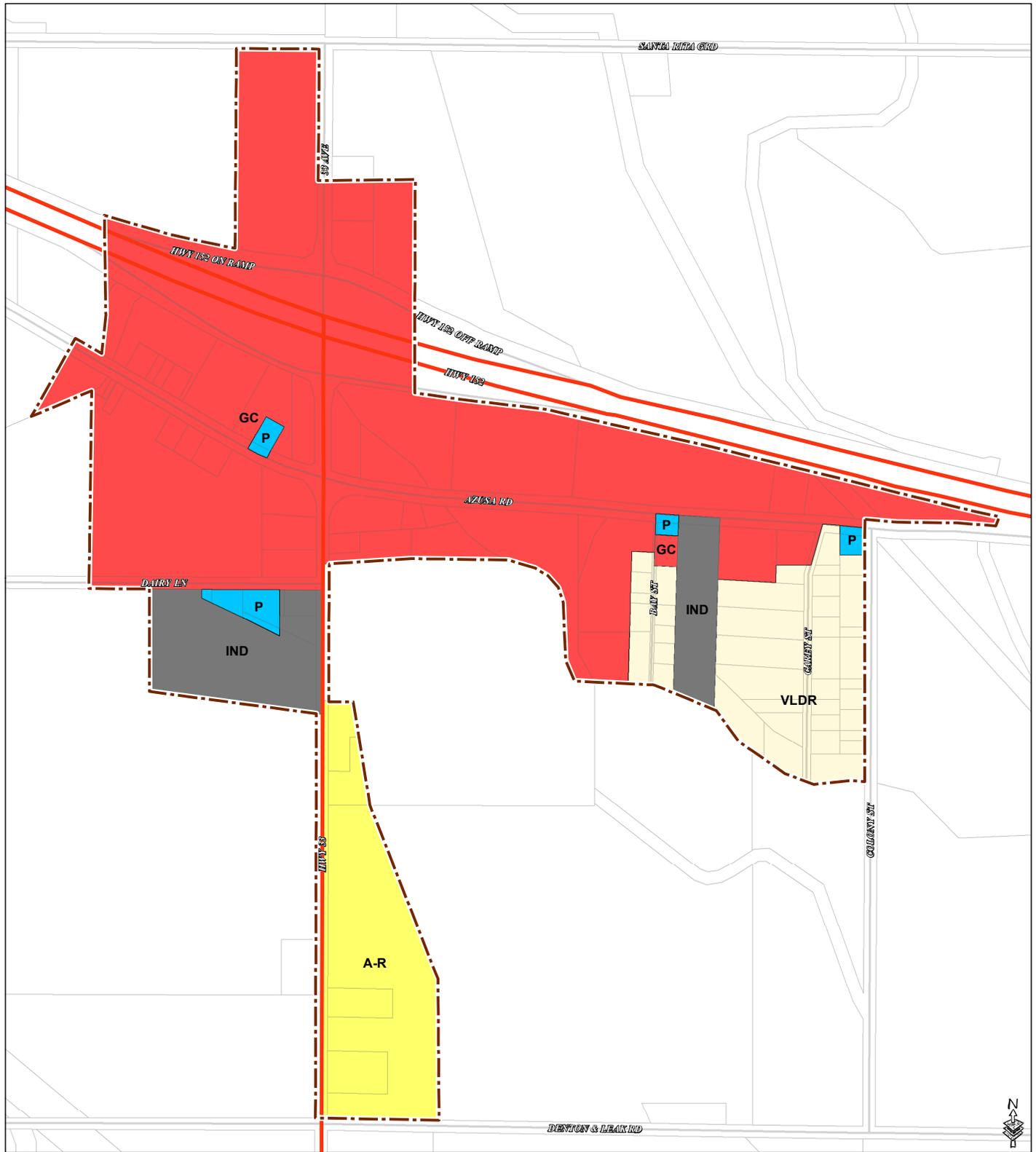
- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
-  RURAL CENTERS
  - GENERAL PLAN**
  -  A-R - Agricultural-Residential
  -  GC - General Commercial
  -  I - Institutional
  -  IND - Industrial
  -  VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Rural Centers Cressey



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**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

RURAL CENTERS

**GENERAL PLAN**

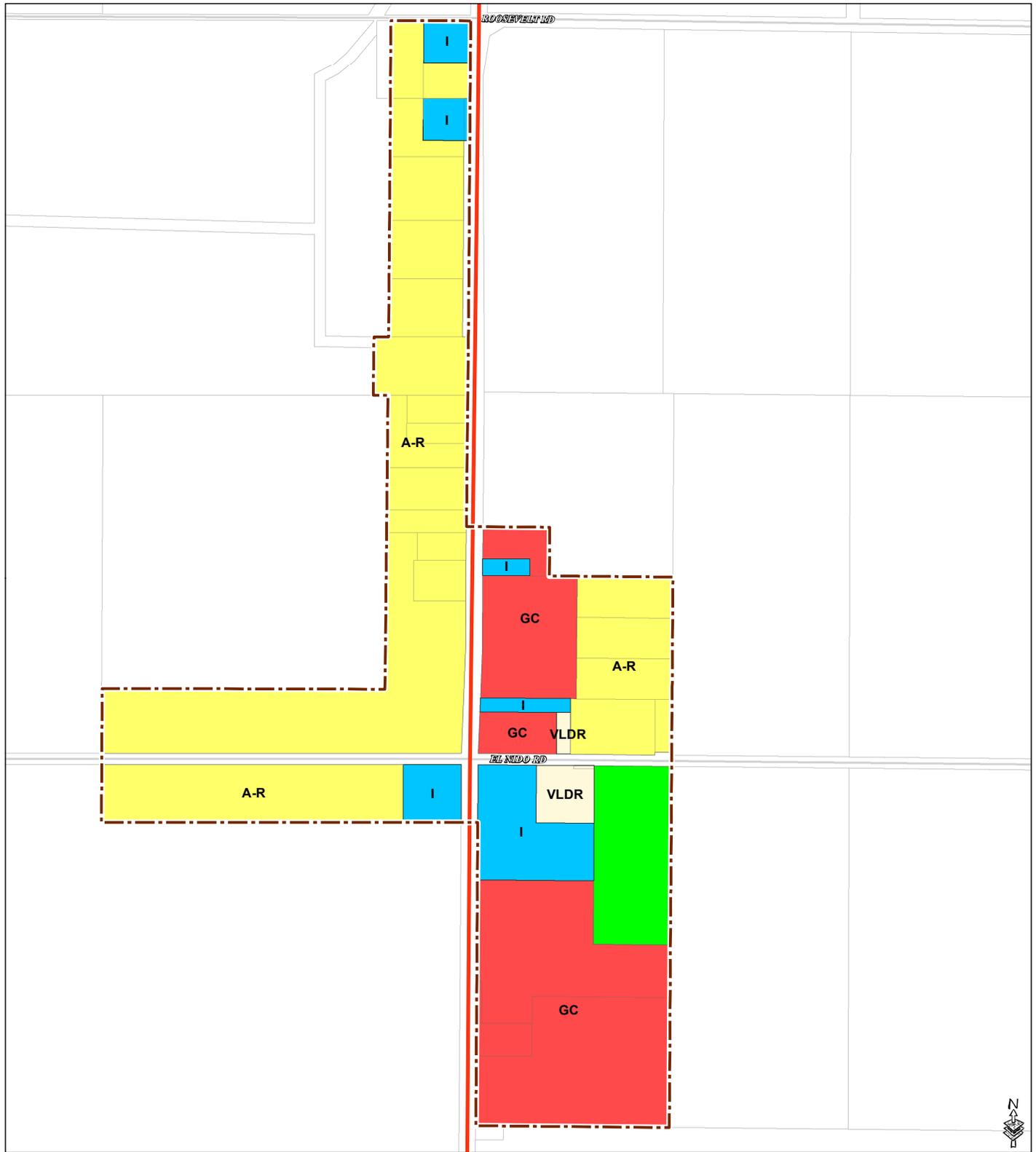
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- GC - General Commercial
- IND - Industrial
- P - Public Use
- VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Rural Centers Dos Palos Y

640      320      Feet      0      640

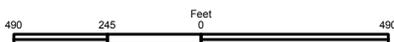
Merced County  
20      30  
General Plan Update

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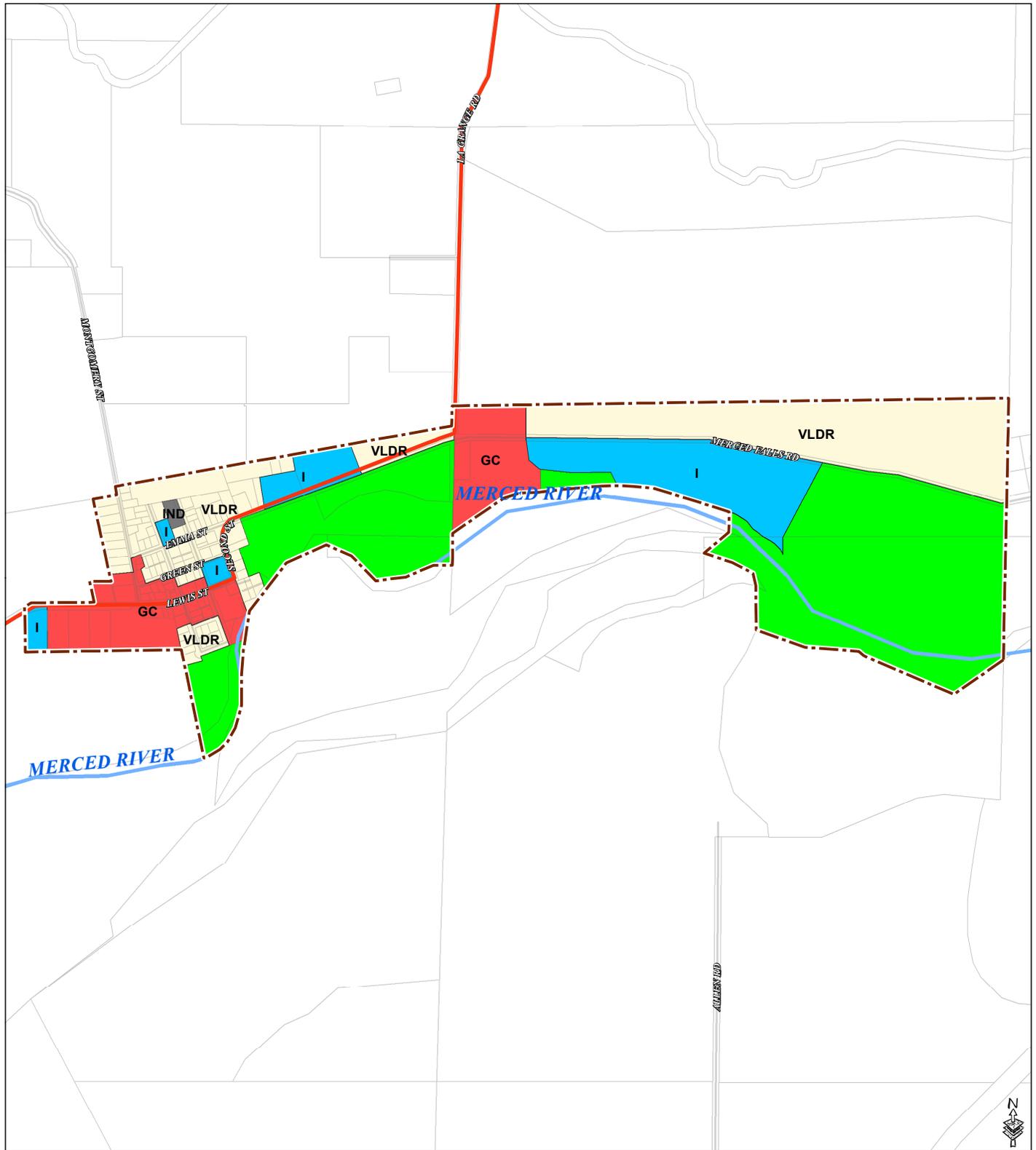
- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
- RURAL CENTERS
  - GENERAL PLAN**
  - A - Agricultural
  - A-R - Agricultural-Residential
  - GC - General Commercial
  - I - Institutional
  - VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Rural Centers El Nido



October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

RURAL CENTERS

**GENERAL PLAN**

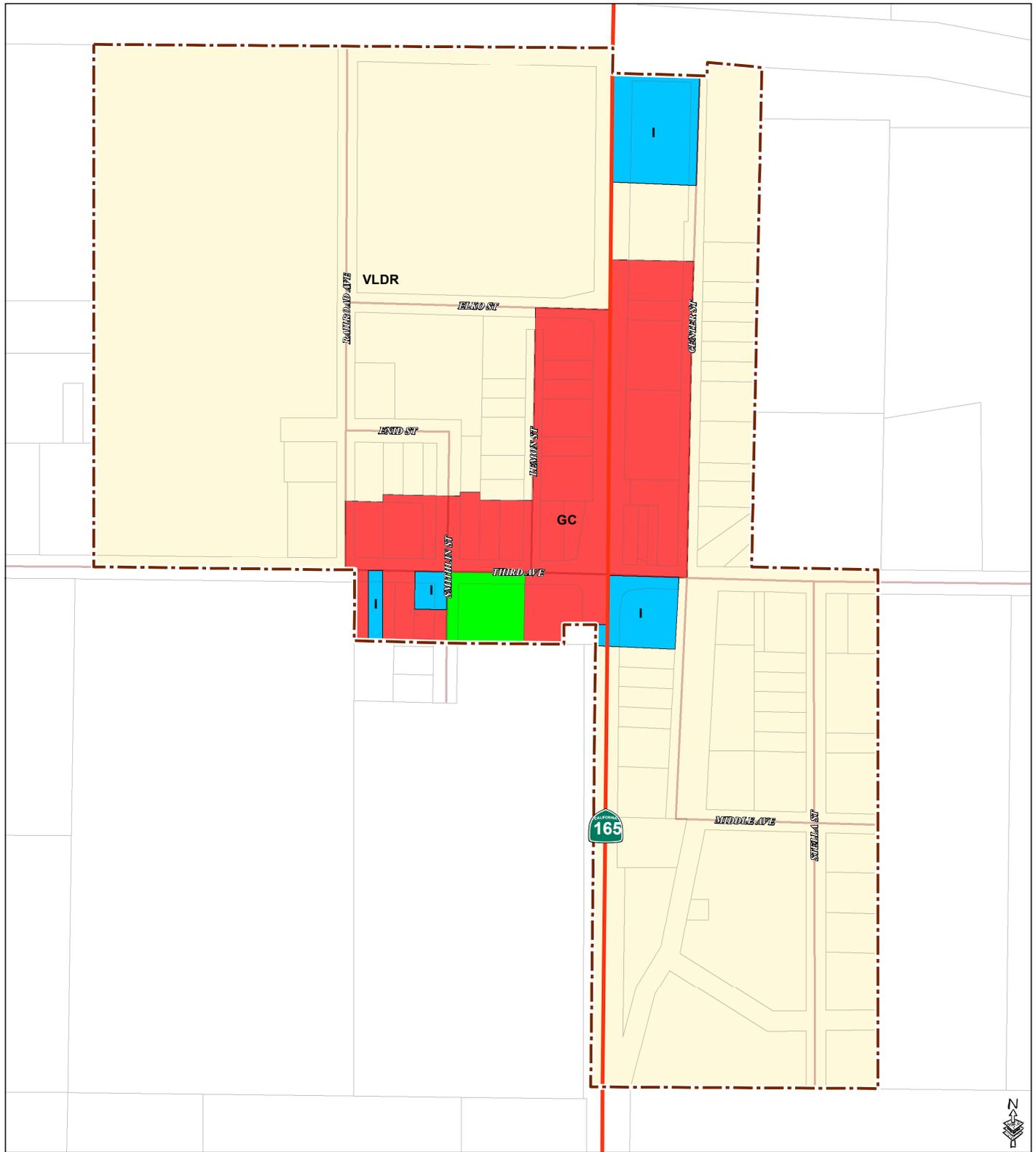
- A - Agricultural
- GC - General Commercial
- I - Institutional
- IND - Industrial
- VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Rural Centers Snelling

1,200    600    Feet    0    600    1,200

Merced County  
20    30  
General Plan Update

October 24, 2011    Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

RURAL CENTERS

**GENERAL PLAN**

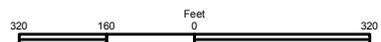
A - Agricultural

GC - General Commercial

I - Institutional

VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Rural Centers Stevinson



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**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

RURAL CENTERS

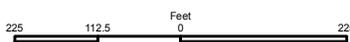
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A - Agricultural

GC - General Commercial

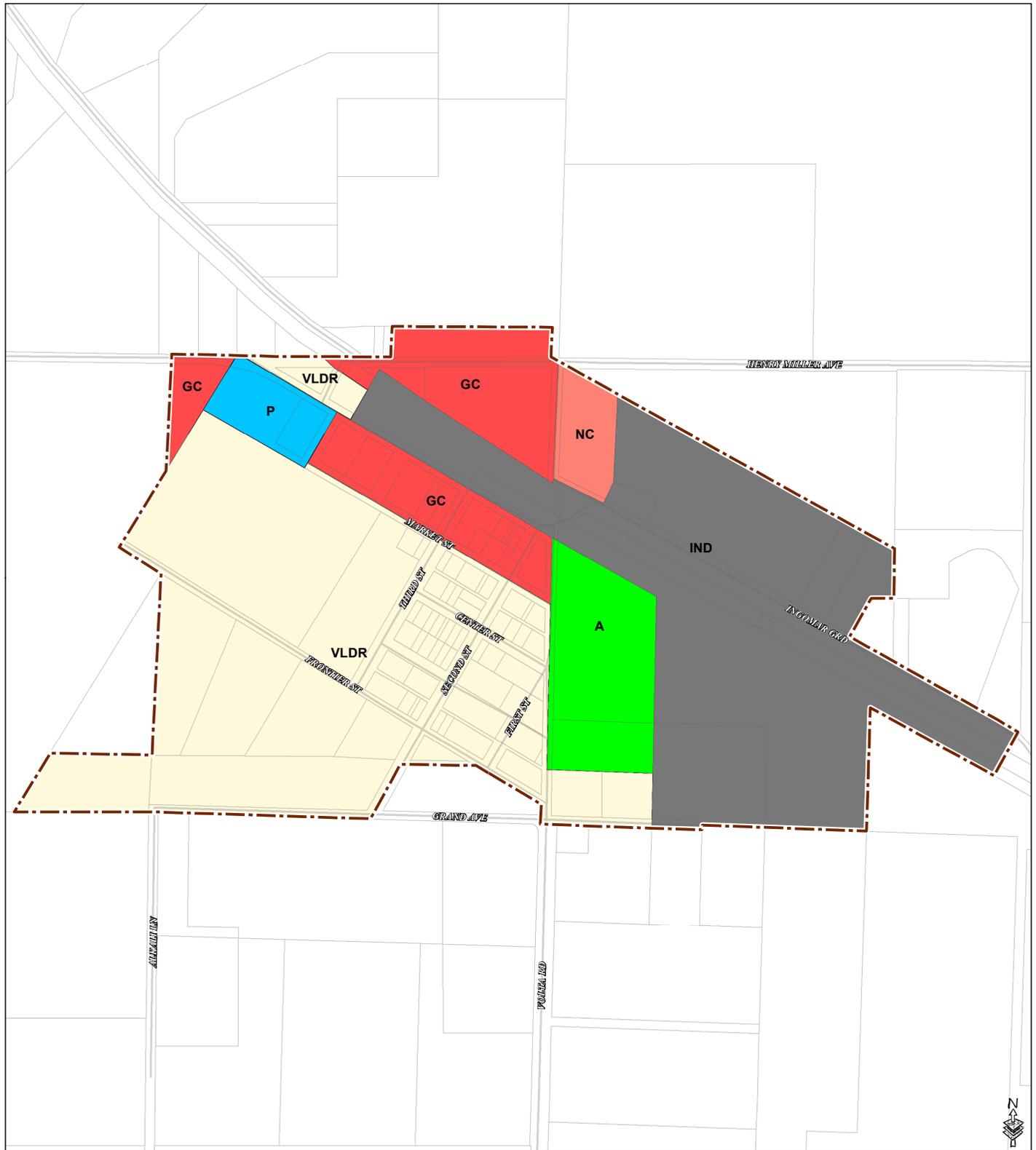
IND - Industrial

# Rural Centers Tuttle



October 24, 2011

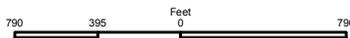
Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

-  RURAL CENTERS
- GENERAL PLAN**
-  A - Agricultural
-  GC - General Commercial
-  IND - Industrial
-  NC - Neighborhood Commercial
-  P - Public Use
-  VLDR - Very Low Density Residential

# Rural Centers Volta

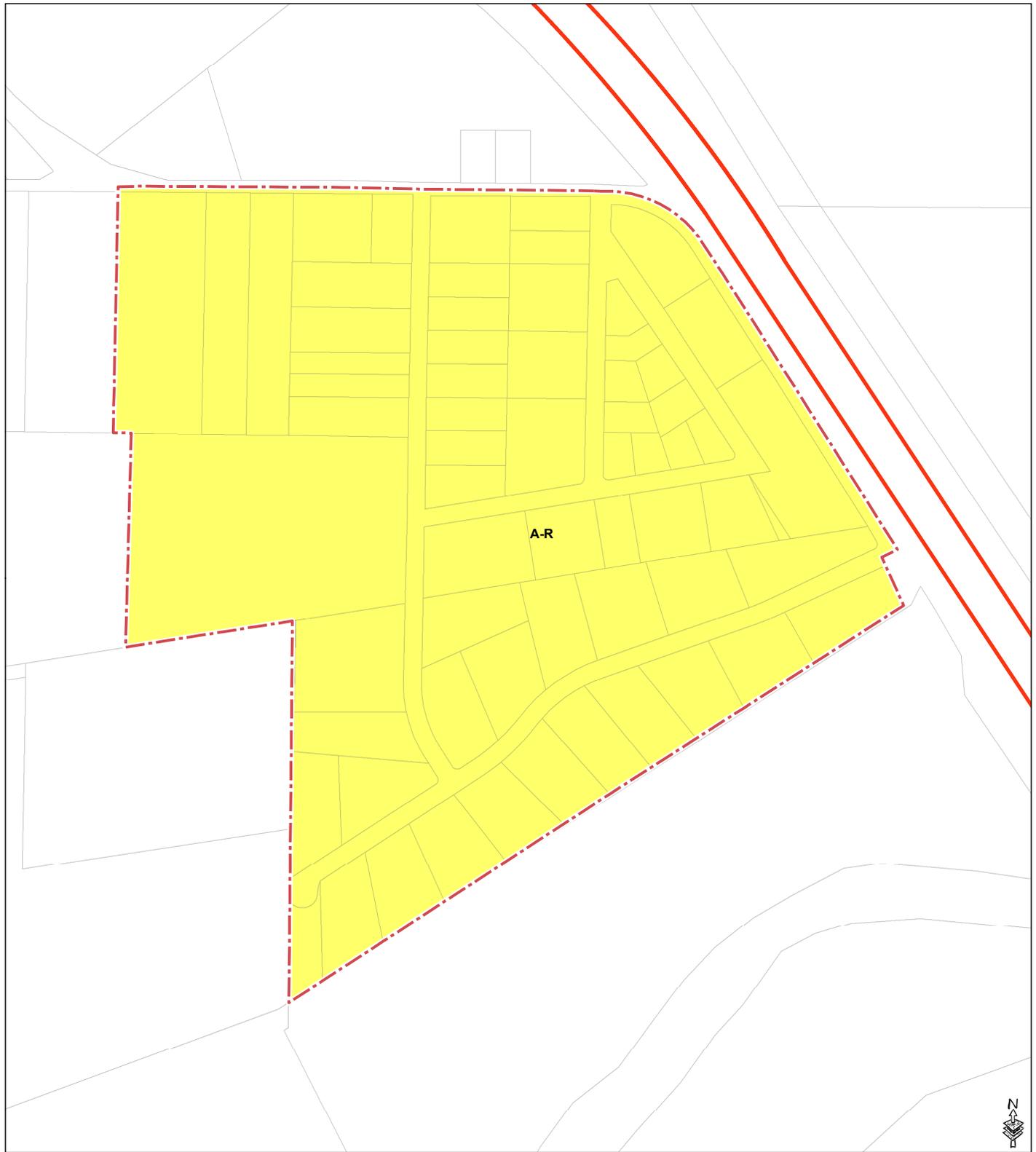


October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA

# **RURAL RESIDENTIAL CENTER MAPS**

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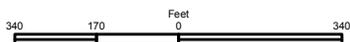
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

 Rural Residential Centers

**GENERAL PLAN**

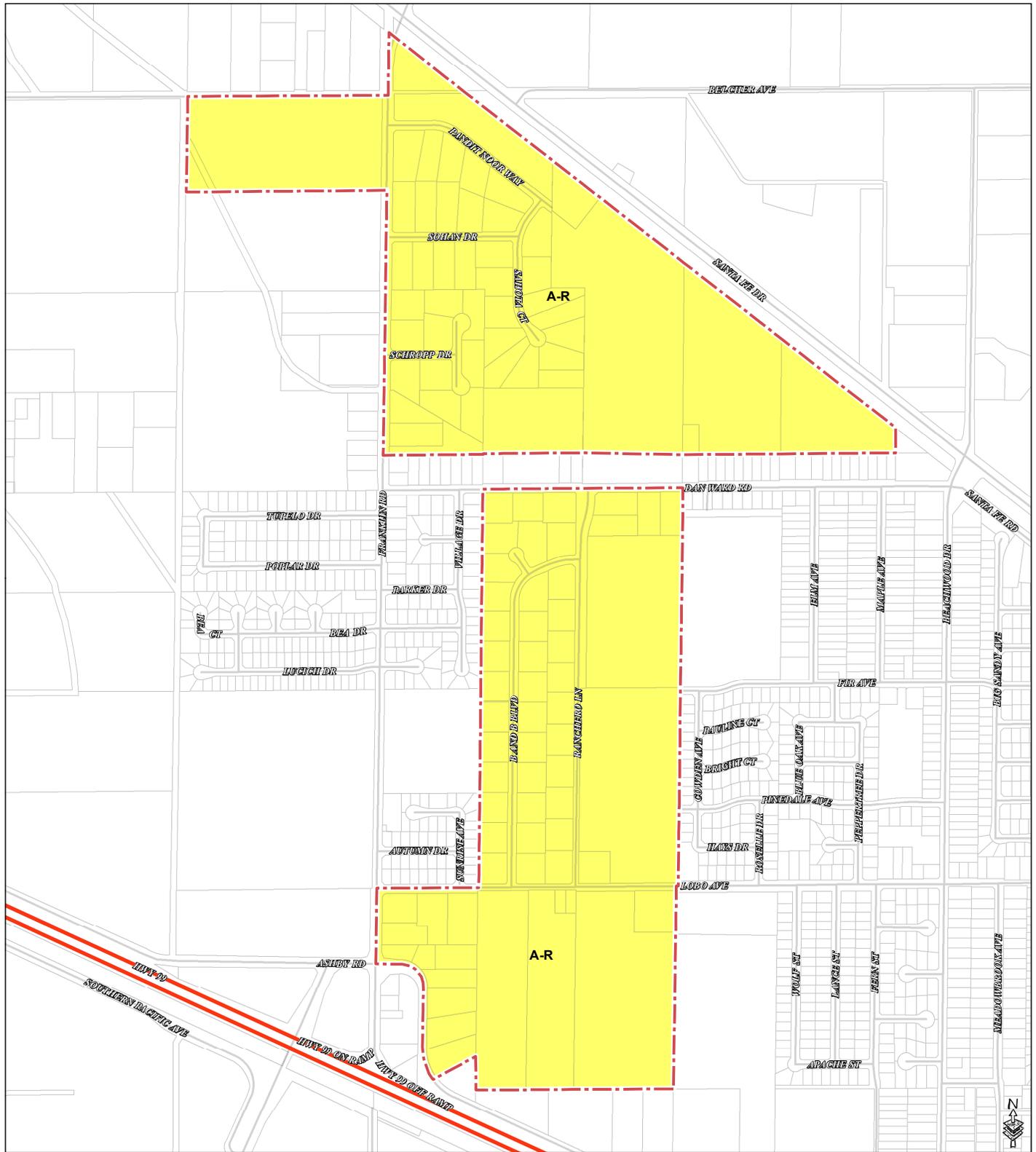
 A-R - Agricultural-Residential

# Rural Residential Centers Delhi



October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA



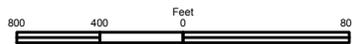
**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

-  Rural Residential Centers
-  roads

**GENERAL PLAN**

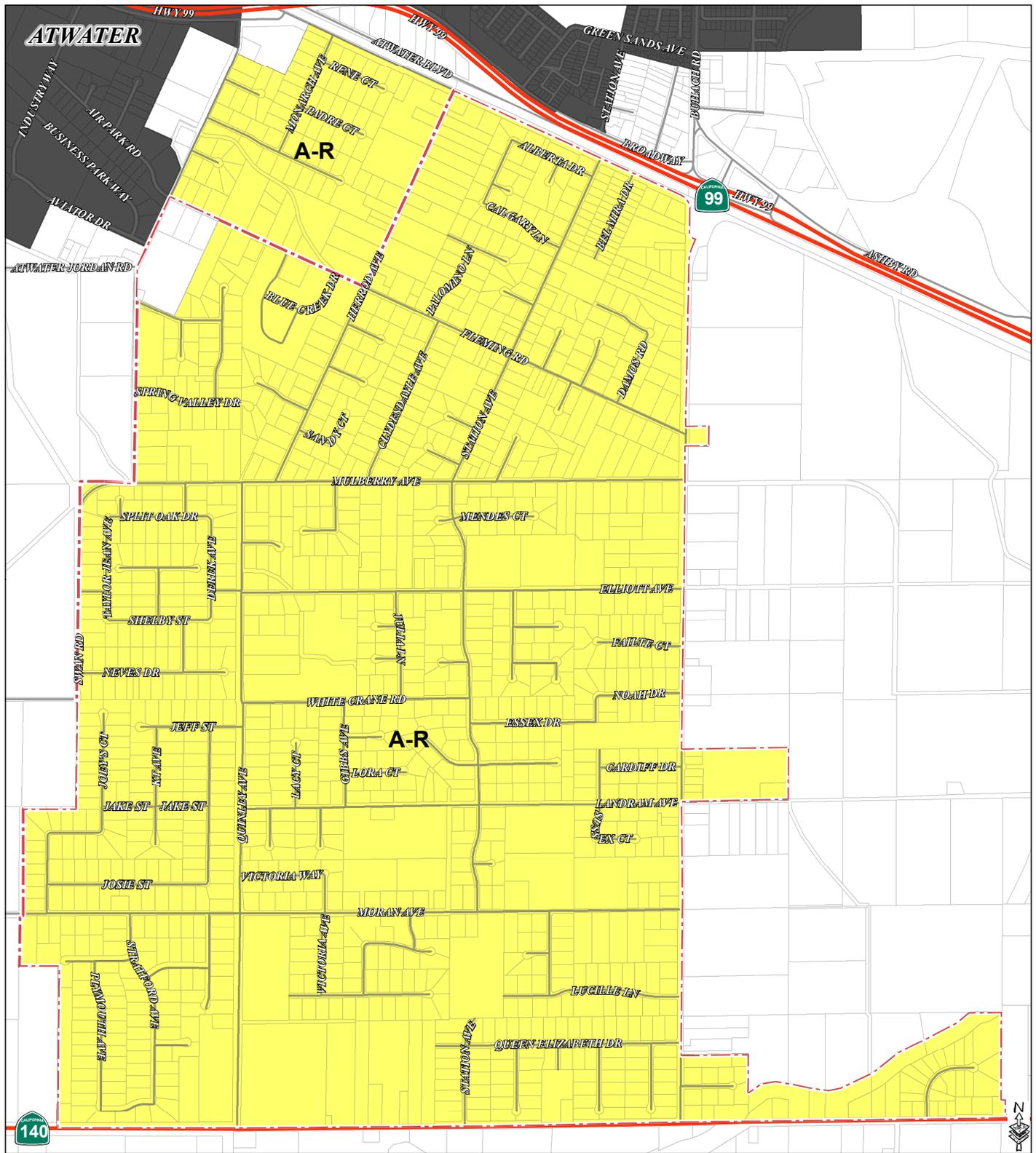
-  A-R - Agricultural-Residential

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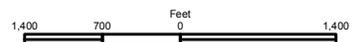
October 24, 2011

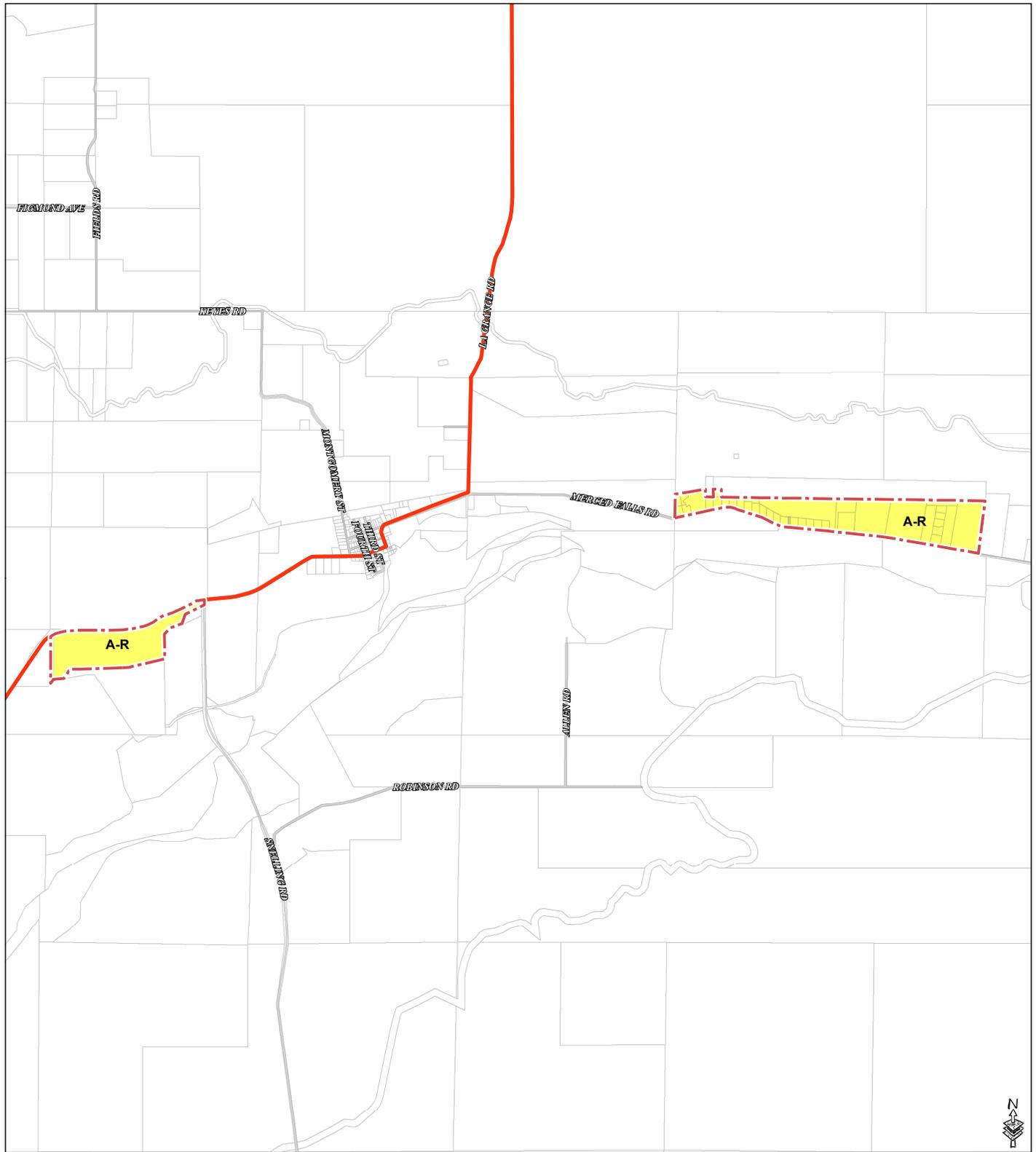
Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATION**  
 Rural Residential Centers  
**GENERAL PLAN**  
 A-R - Agricultural-Residential

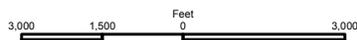
# Rural Residential Centers McSwain





- URBAN DESIGNATIONS**
-  Rural Residential Centers
- GENERAL PLAN**
-  A-R - Agricultural-Residential

## Rural Residential Centers Snelling

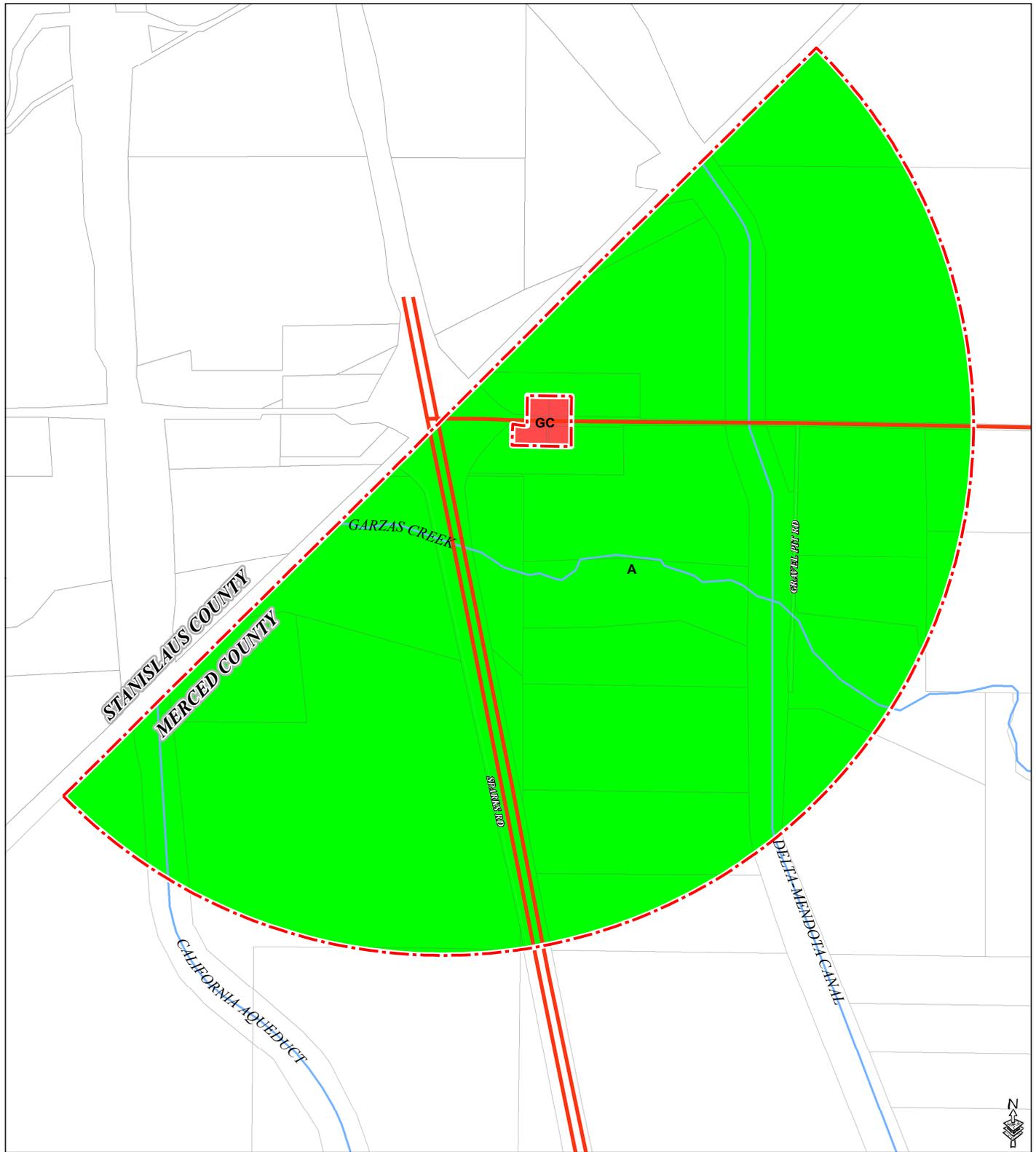


October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA

# **HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE AREA MAPS**

*Please see next page*



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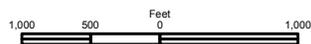
 Highway Interchange Centers

**GENERAL PLAN**

 A - Agricultural

 GC - General Commercial

**Highway Interchange Centers  
I-5 Sullivan Rd.**



October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA



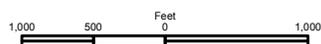
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 Highway Interchange Centers

**GENERAL PLAN**

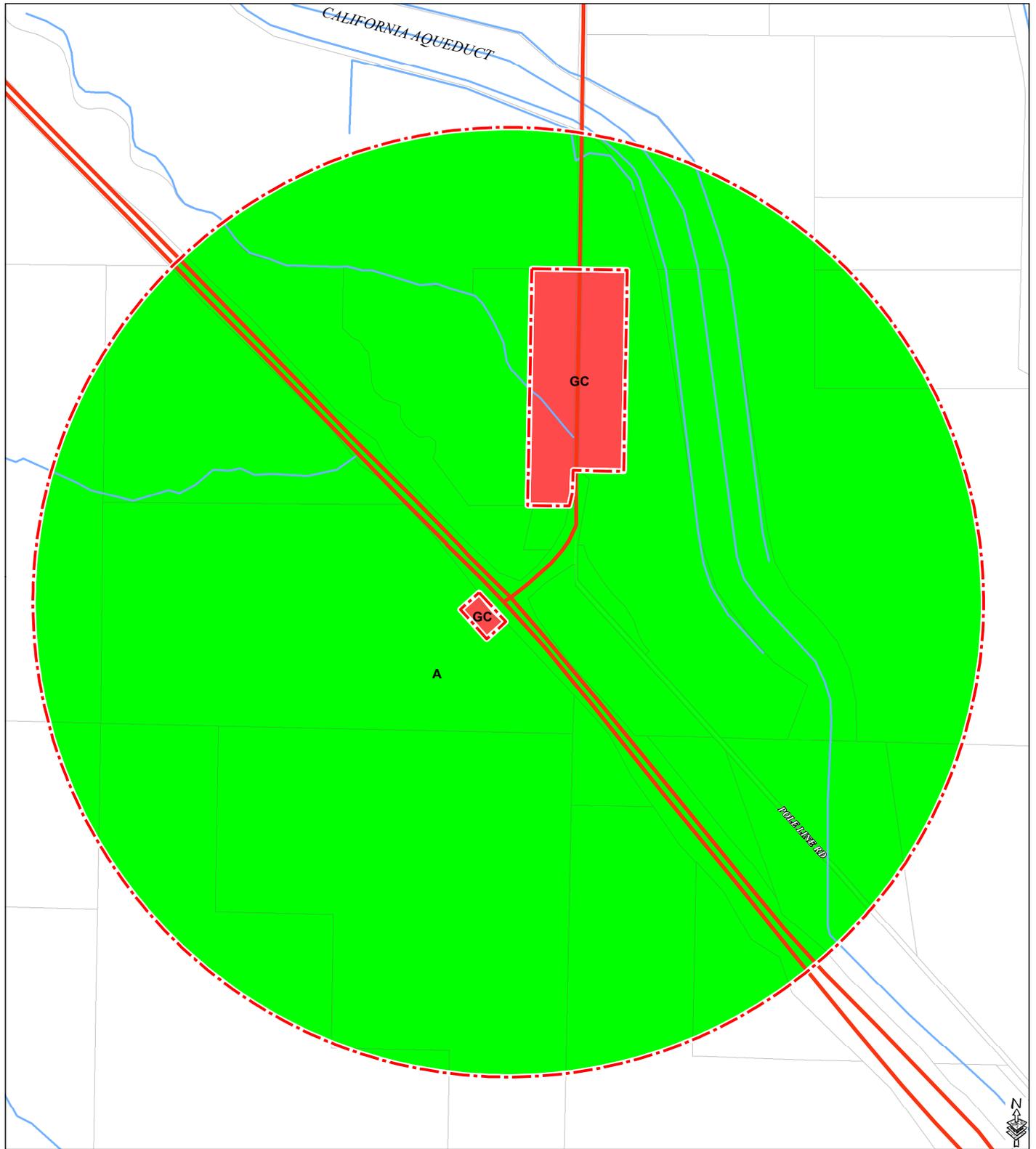
 A - Agricultural

**Highway Interchange Centers  
I-5 HWY 152**



October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

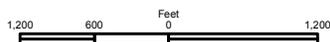
 Highway Interchange Centers

**GENERAL PLAN**

 A - Agricultural

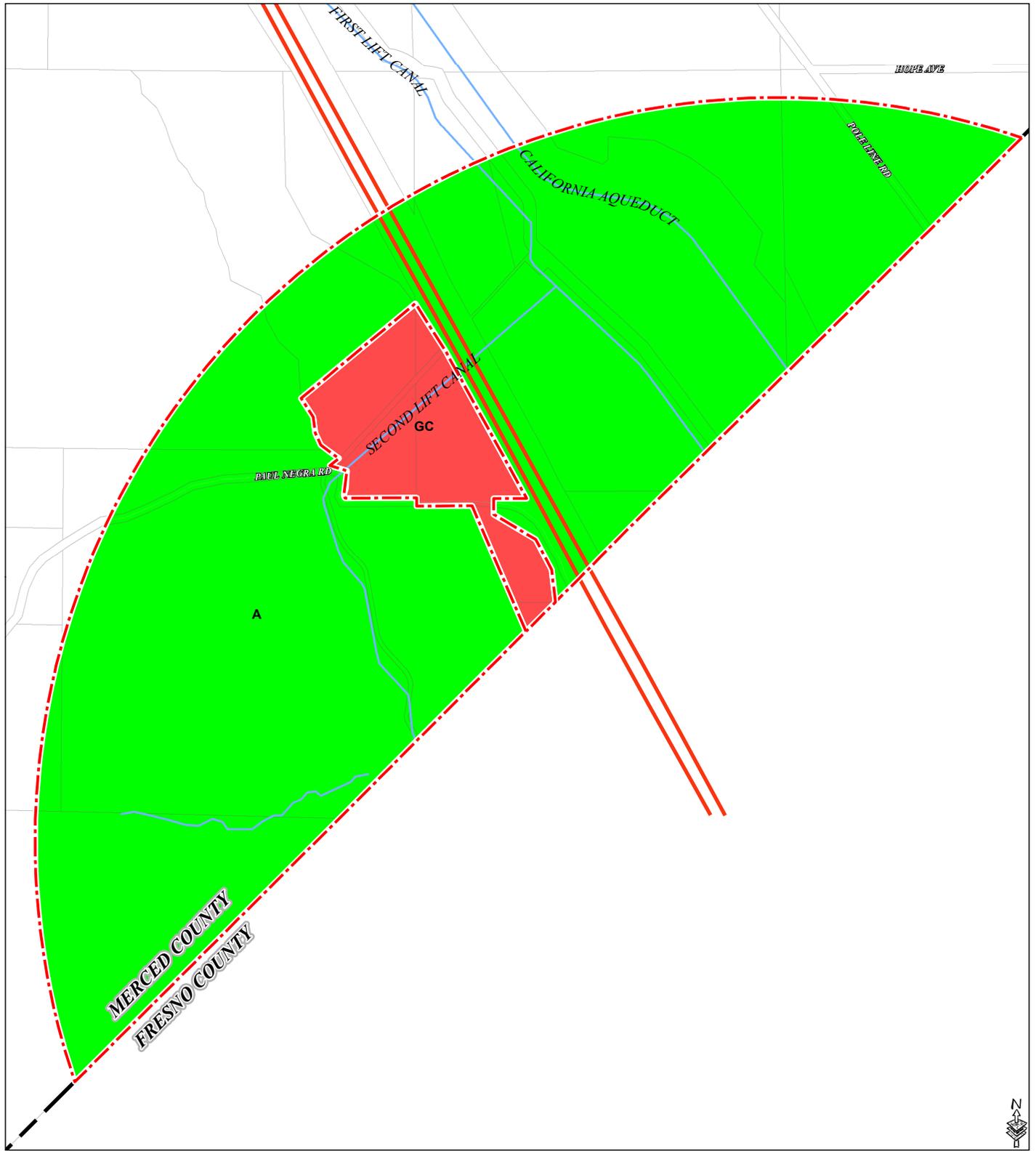
 GC - General Commercial

**Highway Interchange Centers  
I-5 Mercey Springs Rd.**



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Merced County GIS - MA



**URBAN DESIGNATIONS**

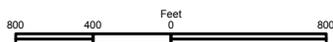
Highway Interchange Centers

**GENERAL PLAN**

A - Agricultural

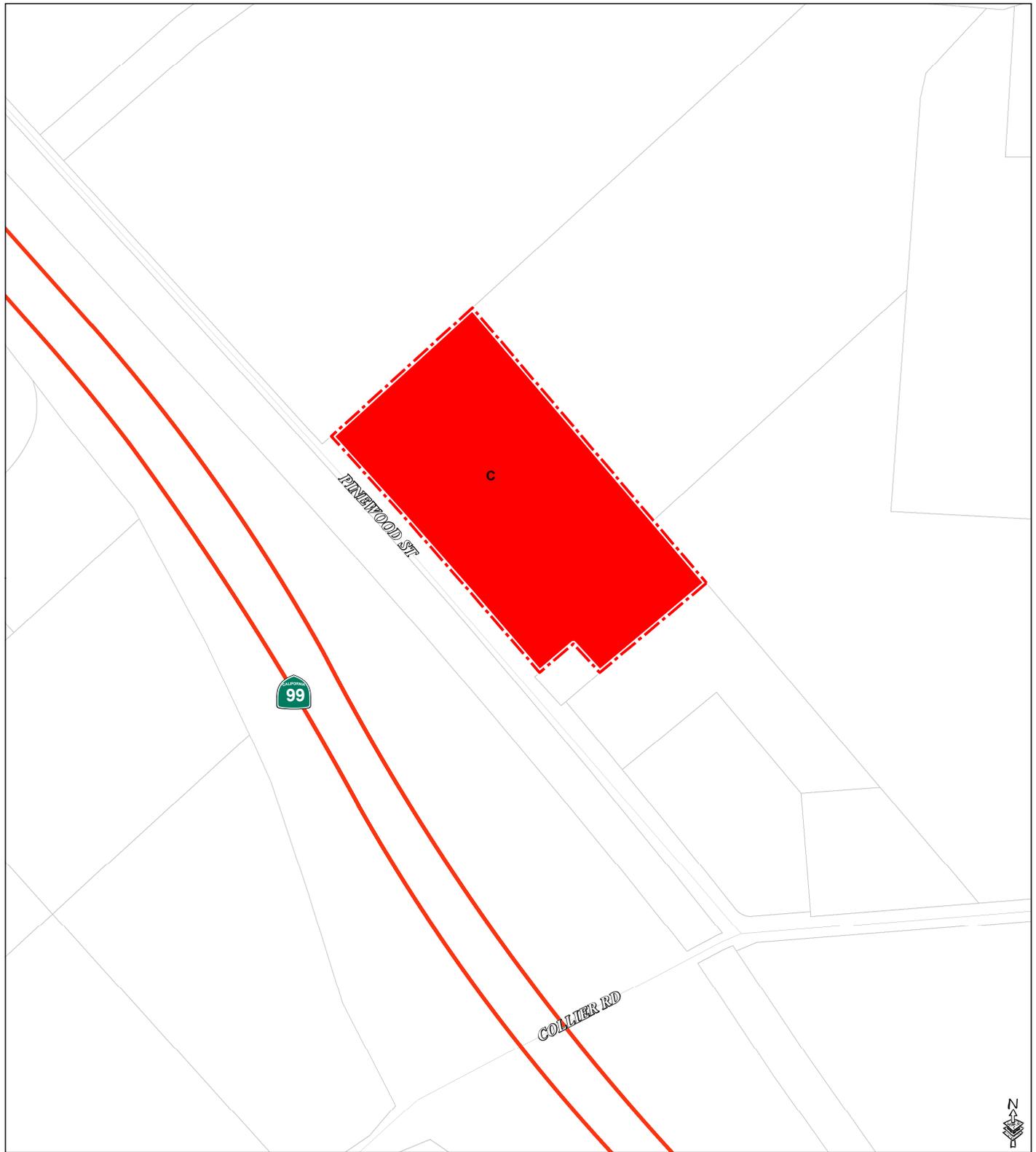
GC - General Commercial

**Highway Interchange Centers  
I-5 Nees Rd.**



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Merced County GIS - MA



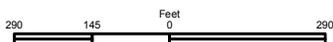
**URBAN DESIGNATION**

 Highway Interchange Centers

**GENERAL PLAN**

 Commercial

**Highway Interchange Centers  
HWY 99 Collier Rd.**



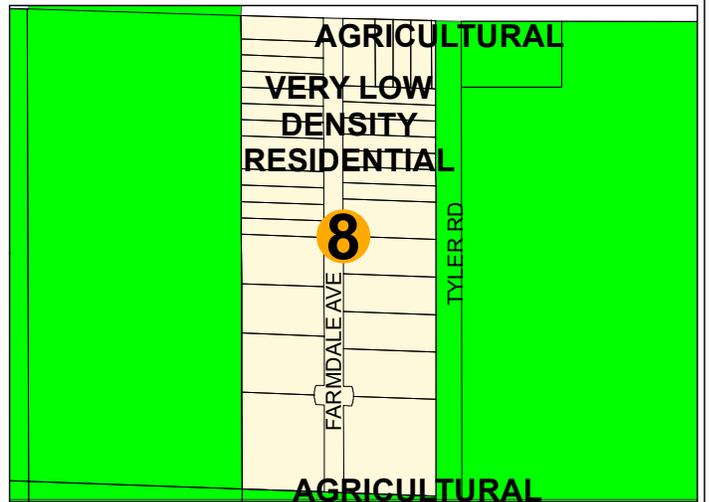
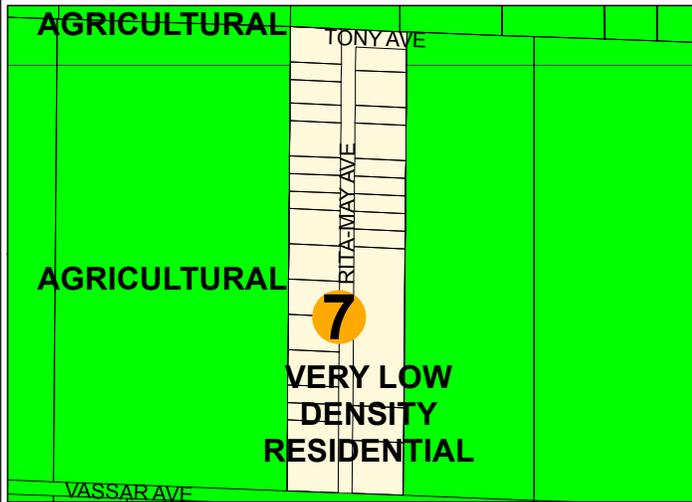
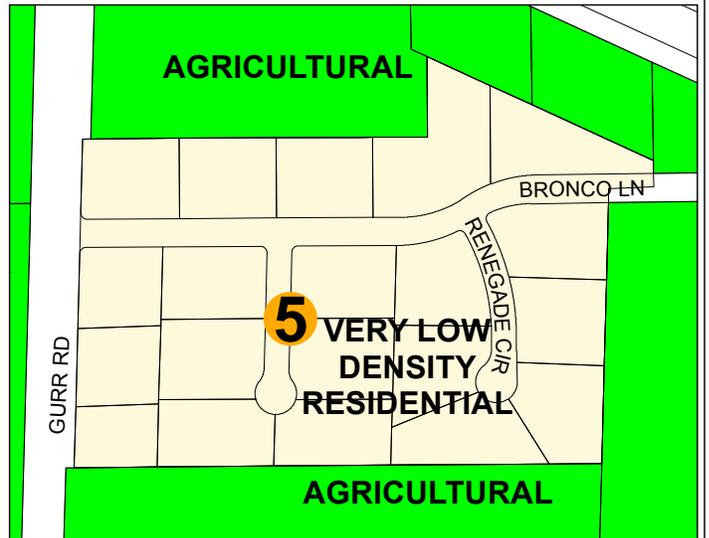
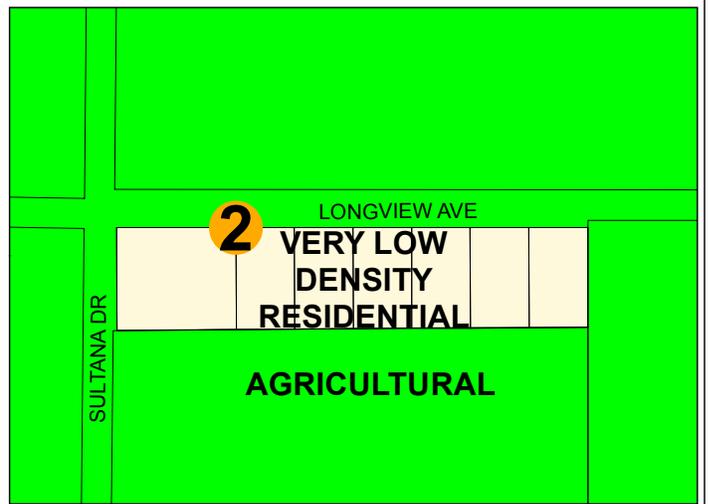
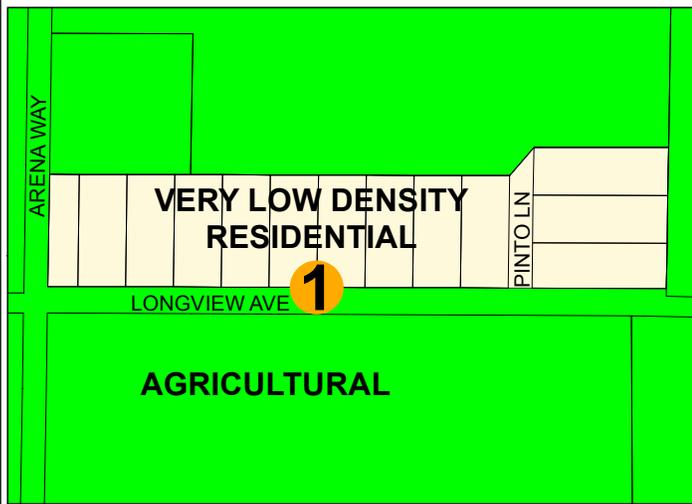
October 24, 2011

Merced County GIS - MA

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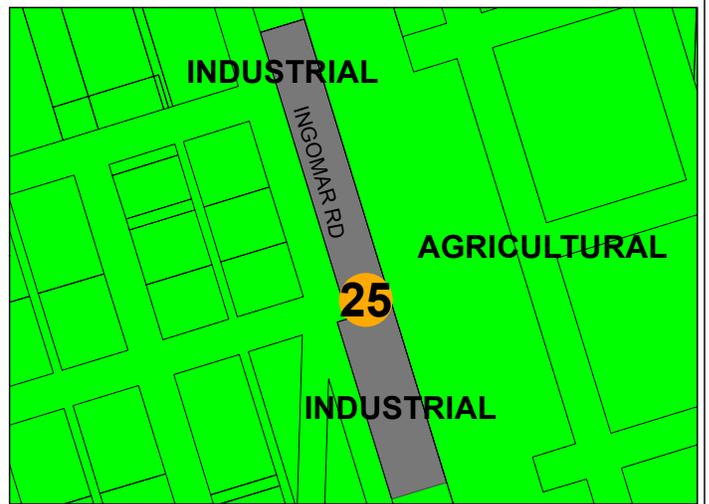
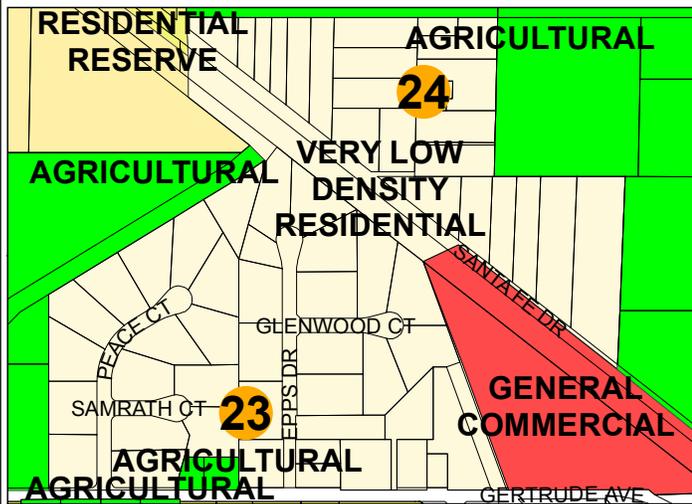
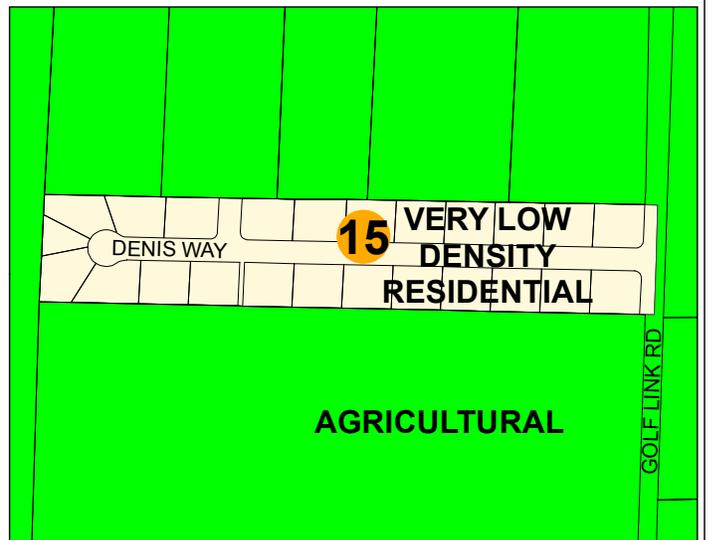
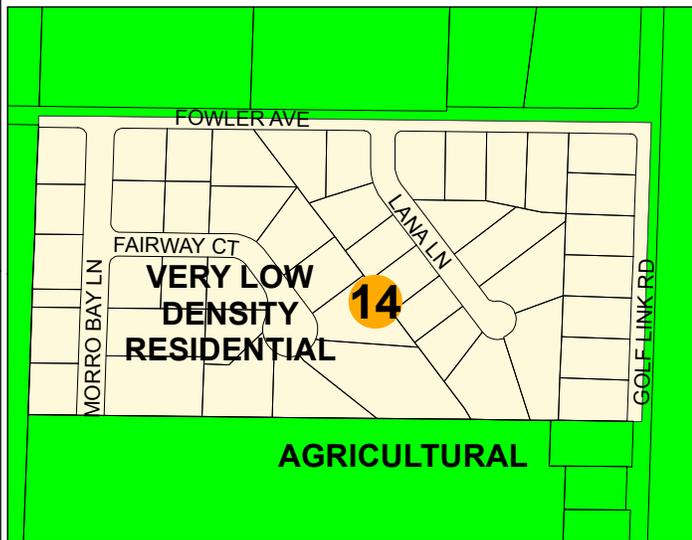
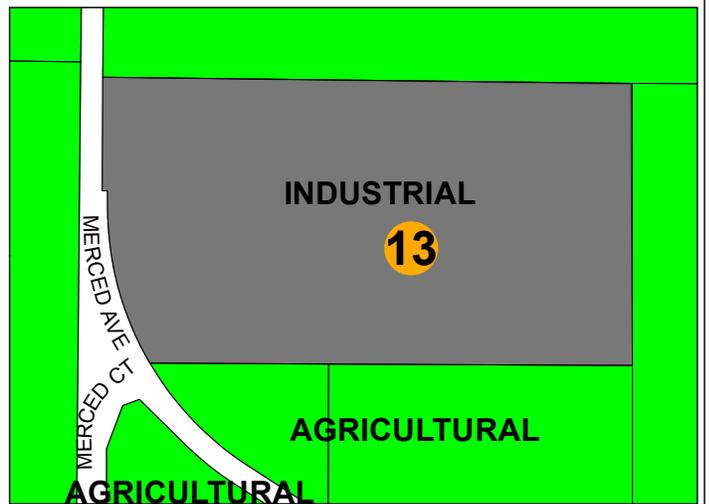
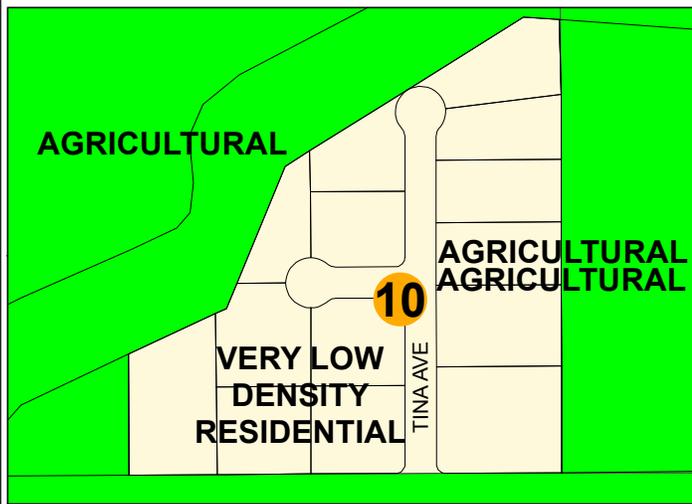
# **ISOLATED URBAN DESIGNATION MAPS**

*Please see next page*



## Merced County Isolated Urban Designations





## Merced County Isolated Urban Designations





# AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for the protection, preservation, and expansion of productive agriculture. Agriculture is the prominent economic segment in the County and accounts for more than 90 percent of all land area. Merced County is ranked fifth among all counties in California and sixth in the nation in the annual market value of farm products. Rich soils, accessible irrigation water, favorable climate, a large labor force, and reliable access to local, national, and global markets make Merced County a thriving agricultural community. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Agricultural Economy
- Agricultural Land Preservation
- Agricultural and Urban Area Compatibility
- Confined Animal Facilities
- Agricultural Research and Education
- Agricultural Recreation

## AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

Agriculture plays a key role in shaping the economy and unique character of Merced County. A top priority for the County is to protect the existing agricultural economy, and to also find ways to expand the agricultural economy in the future. The policies in this section address the protection, expansion, and diversification of the local agricultural economy and its support industries. *(Note: Please see the Economic Development Element for additional goals and policies related to overall countywide economic growth).*

### Goal AG-1

Maintain the financial viability of the agricultural sector by encouraging expansion of commercial agriculture, attracting new agricultural support and value added industries, and promoting locally-grown commodity

sales.

**Policy AG-1.1: Merced County Farmers Competitive Edge (JP)**

Promote local agricultural operations and businesses that provide a competitive edge to Merced County farmers and ranchers.

**Policy AG-1.2: Agricultural Industry Expansion (IGC)**

Establish programs and coordinate with local, regional, and State agencies to encourage new economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable agricultural industries in Merced County.

**Policy AG-1.3: Promoting Local Agriculture (SO) **

Establish, as part of the County's economic development strategy, programs that promote and maintain local commercial agriculture.

**Policy AG-1.4: High Value Agricultural Industries (SO/JP)**

Support the development of high-value food processing industries and the production of emerging crops and animal products that can lead to new markets for local products.

**Policy AG-1.5: On-Site Product Sales (SO/JP)**

Identify locations where on-site farm product sales have good economic potential, such as on major roadways and support creation of agricultural tours and trails which promote agricultural tourism.

**Policy AG-1.6: Certified Farmers Markets (JP)**

Support certified farmers markets by working with local communities, local farm groups, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Certified Farmers Market Program.

**Policy AG-1.7: Produce Stands (JP)**

Encourage farmer owned and operated produce markets and stands with local farm produce within the agricultural areas of the County that sell locally-grown farm products by working with local Chambers of Commerce and agricultural groups.

**Policy AG-1.8: Local Farmer-Consumer Connections (JP)**

Promote the connection between local farmers and consumers by enhancing access by local farmers to local markets, including restaurants, institutions, and schools.

**Policy AG-1.9: Legislative Advocacy (IGC)**

Actively monitor, review, comment, and advocate on pending major State and Federal legislation and executive orders which could have an impact on agriculture in Merced County. Coordinate position statements with the Farm Bureau and other agricultural interest groups in the County.

**Policy AG-1.10: Regulatory Compliance Assistance (IGC/FB)**

Continue to assist the operators of confined animal facilities to meet local, State, and Federal operational regulations by identifying sources of funding for necessary modifications of facilities, establishing revolving loan programs, and assisting operators in meeting regulatory requirements.

**AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION**

Merced County is committed to protecting productive agricultural land and the agricultural industry. The Land Use Element includes numerous goals and policies for focusing future urban growth into either Urban Communities or New Towns off the valley floor, and increasing the average densities of residential development to minimize the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses. This section includes policies that address various agricultural land preservation and conservation strategies, including agricultural mitigation requirements, Williamson Act contracts, and farmland conservation programs managed by non-county agencies that acquire and hold conservation easements. *(Note: As used throughout the Agricultural Element, the term “productive agriculture” is defined as: “farmland that has received water supplies in three of the prior 10 years and is classified as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland on the Statewide Important Farmland map.”)*

**Goal AG-2**

Ensure the long-term preservation and conservation of land used for productive agriculture, potentially-productive agricultural land, and agricultural-support facilities.

**Policy AG-2.1: Agricultural Land Preservation (RDR)**

Protect agriculturally-designated areas and direct urban growth away from productive agricultural lands into cities, Urban Communities, and New Towns.

**Policy AG-2.2: Agricultural Land Mitigation (RDR)**

Protect productive agricultural areas from conversion to non-agricultural residential uses by establishing and implementing an agricultural mitigation program that matches acres converted with farmland acres of similar quality to those converted preserved at a 1:1 ratio. Coordinate with the six cities in Merced County and the Merced Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), consistent with LAFCo’s statutory mission to preserve agricultural land and open space, to establish consistent standards and mitigation for the loss of farmland. In addition, the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (LESA model) may be used to determine whether the conservation land is of equal or greater value than the land being converted.

**Policy AG-2.3: New Development (RDR/IGC)**

Formalize County-City agreements emphasizing concentration of new development in cities that include agricultural mitigation and avoidance of productive agricultural land conversion.

**Policy AG-2.4: Preservation Programs (RDR/JP)**

Encourage property owner participation in programs that preserve farmland, including the Williamson Act, conservation easements, and USDA-funded conservation practices.

**Policy AG-2.5: Williamson Act Minimum Parcel Size (RDR/MPSP)**

Modify the Agricultural Preserve Rules and Procedures to reduce the Williamson Act minimum required parcel size to 10 acres, consistent with State law. For parcels not operated as part of a larger farming operation, encourage larger parcel size minimums (40 or more acres) and/or evidence of commercial agricultural use for entering new Williamson Act contracts.

**Policy AG-2.6: Williamson Act Contracts Non-Renewal on Small Parcels (RDR)**

Remove (non-renew) current Williamson Act contracts on small parcels not devoted to commercial agriculture and not operated as part of a larger farming operation.

**Policy AG-2.7: Modify Merced County Agricultural Preserve Rules (RDR/MPSP)**

Modify the Agricultural Preserve Rules and Procedures to allow parcels smaller than 10 acres for a limited number of circumstances authorized as exceptions in the County Zoning Code and consistent with State law.

**Policy AG-2.8: Conservation Easements (RDR/MPSP)**

Support the efforts of public, private, and non-profit organizations to preserve agricultural areas in the County through dedicated conservation easements, and range land held as environmental mitigation.

**Policy AG-2.9: Infrastructure Extension (RDR/MPSP)**

Oppose the extension of urban services, such as sewer lines, water lines, or other urban infrastructure, into areas designated for agricultural use, unless necessary to protect public health, safety, and welfare.

**Policy AG-2.10: Fiscal Impact Minimization (FB)**

Minimize the fiscal impact to the County from State and Federal programs which result in the purchase of property in fee title through the use of mutual aid agreements, required subvention payments, and any other available means.

**Policy AG-2.11: Preservation Collaboration (IGC/JP)**

Collaborate with landowners, cities, State and Federal agencies, colleges, universities, stakeholders, and community-based organizations to continue and expand agricultural preservation in the County.

**Policy AG-2.12: Antiquated Subdivisions (RDR)**

Encourage the voluntary merger of antiquated subdivision lots that conflict with adjacent agricultural uses, and continue to require environmental review of permits that could result in adverse environmental impacts in agricultural and rural areas, including traffic generation, groundwater contamination, stormwater drainage disposal, and air quality deterioration.

**Policy AG-2.13: Minimum Agricultural Parcel Size Requirement (RDR)**

Require a 20 acre minimum permitted parcel size in areas designated Agricultural to discourage land divisions for rural residential purposes and maintain parcels large enough for efficient commercial agriculture production. Require 160 acre minimum permitted parcel size in areas designated Foothill Pasture and in grassland areas.

**Policy AG-2.14: Viability of Smaller Parcels (RDR)**

Require applicants seeking to divide agriculturally-zoned parcels to demonstrate the continued viability of lots less than 40 acres for commercial agriculture, using specific standards (i.e., access to agricultural water, joint farm management, access for aerial spraying, size viability for specific commodities) and farm management plans.

**Policy AG-2.15: Merced County Agriculture Preserve Consolidation (RDR/MPSP)**

Modify the Merced County Agricultural Preserve to be consistent with State Subdivision Map Act and Williamson act rules for allowing parcels less than 10 acres for a limited number of circumstances authorized as exceptions in the County Zoning Code and consistent with State law.

**Policy AG-2.16: High Speed Rail Line Location (IGC)**

Coordinate with the California High Speed Rail Authority to locate the high speed rail lines along existing major transportation corridors, such as State Routes 99 or 152, to minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land to non-agricultural uses.

**AG-2.17: Continued Access to Surface Water for Subdivided Parcels (RDR/IGC)**

Where requested by the water purveyor, when agricultural parcels are subdivided and the original parcel (prior to subdivision) has access to surface water (such as from an irrigation or water district facility), require that an easement be provided over the parcel(s) that has/have access to the surface water source to the remaining parcel(s) that will not be adjacent to or near the surface water source. The easement should specify the purpose of the easement and whose responsibility it is to maintain private water conveyance facilities within said easement.

## **AGRICULTURAL AND URBAN AREA COMPATIBILITY**

Reducing urban and agricultural land use conflict plays a critical role in maintaining productive agriculture in Merced County. Historically, a major issue in the County has been the expansion of urban uses onto adjacent farmland. This often creates nuisances for urban residents which in turn threatens the viability of agriculture. To combat this problem, the County adopted a Right-to-Farm Ordinance which requires prospective residents of new development near agricultural areas to be notified that there may be inconveniences and discomfort associated with normal farming activities and that any established agricultural operations will not be considered a nuisance.

In addition to nuisance issues, residential development in rural areas and the parcelization of agricultural lands into small unincorporated rural holdings reduces the efficiency and viability of commercial farming. The policies in this section seek to minimize land use conflicts between urban and agricultural uses, reduce farmland

conversion, limit further parcelization of farmland, and establish adequate buffers between agricultural and urban uses.

### Goal AG-3

Minimize conflicts between productive agricultural areas and urban land uses, and discourage the parcelization and conversion of large agricultural holdings into rural residential parcels or urban uses.

#### **Policy AG-3.1: Right-to-Farm Ordinance (RDR)**

Continue to implement the Right-to-Farm Ordinance to define and limit instances where agricultural operations may be considered a nuisance to surrounding rural residential, residential or urban development.

#### **Policy AG-3.2: Agricultural Buffer (RDR)**

In consultation with the MCAC, require buffers between proposed non-agricultural uses and adjacent productive agricultural operations to protect farms, dairies, and agricultural-related production facilities from conflicts with non-agricultural uses, specifically rural residences and urban area residential development.

#### **Policy AG-3.3: Agricultural Buffer Standards (RDR)**

In consultation with the MCAC, establish agricultural buffer standards based on the type of agricultural operation, and historic cropping and pesticide application patterns, to be applied to rural residences and urban area residential development proposals adjacent to productive agricultural land and agricultural-related facilities.

#### **Policy AG-3.4: Residential Buffers from Agriculture (RDR)**

Require a minimum 200-foot buffer between new residential development within designated urban areas and existing agricultural operations, and establish design/maintenance guidelines for developers and property owners.

#### **Policy AG-3.5: Home Site Clustering (RDR)**

Require clustering of homes on agricultural parcels to minimize interference with agricultural operations.

#### **Policy AG-3.6: Illegal Dumping (RDR/PI)**

Work with property owners and local law enforcement to find solutions to illegal dumping on agricultural properties such as offering free trash drop-off days and increased penalties for illegal dumping.

#### **Policy AG-3.7: Public Facility Locations (IGC)**

Discourage public agencies from locating facilities, especially schools, in existing agricultural areas.

#### **Policy AG-3.8: Zoning Ordinance Update (RDR)**

Update the County Code to rename the Agricultural Residential (AR) zone to Rural Residential to remove the implication that agriculture is the primary and desired use.

**Policy AG-3.9: New Confined Animal Facility Location Requirements (RDR)**

Require new or expanded confined animal facilities to be located, at a minimum:

- a) One-half mile from any Rural Center or Urban Community boundary; residentially-designated or zoned property; sensitive uses such as schools, hospitals, jails, Federal wildlife areas, State wildlife areas, and public parks; or concentrations of five or more off-site residences. This does not include areas for municipal uses such as wastewater treatment facilities, airports, or solid waste recycling or disposal facilities located outside urban areas; and
- b) One thousand feet from any off-site residence, unless there is written permission from the off-site property owner.

**Policy AG-3.10: New Adjacent Residences (RDR)**

Prohibit new single- or multi-family residences within one thousand feet of an existing confined animal facility.

**Policy AG-3.11: Solar and Wind Energy Production Facilities (RDR)**

Encourage the installation of solar and wind energy production facilities in agricultural areas so long as they do not result in a tax burden to the County, do not result in permanent water transfers off of productive agricultural land, do not require cancellation of Williamson Act contracts, and do not conflict with sensitive habitats or other biological resources. In addition, approval of such facilities shall require dedications of agricultural land and habitat mitigation when impacts to these resources have been determined to be significant pursuant to CEQA, measures to control erosion, and assurances for financing decommissioning activities.

**Policy AG-3.12: Subdivision and Residential Uses in Agricultural Areas (RDR/MPSP)**

Revise the Merced County Zoning Code, Section 18.02.02, Table 4, to allow for two classes of minor subdivisions within the A-1, A-1-40, and A-2 zones: one that would conditionally waive the right to construct residences on resulting parcels by placement of a note on the face of the recorded-map; and one that would permit the construction of residences on the resulting parcels subject to a conditional use permit.

**AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**

Research and education are vital to the economic health and expansion of the agricultural industry in Merced County. Agricultural research can improve soil and crop productivity; while market understanding can help local farmers adjust to national and international product demand. The policies in this section address opportunities to research market conditions and technology trends, and promote agricultural education and workforce training.

**Goal AG-4**

Anticipate the future needs of the agricultural sector in order to improve agricultural competitiveness, efficiency, and employment.

**Policy AG-4.1: Technical Assistance Support (IGC/SO)**

Support efforts of UC Merced, UC Cooperative Extension, the Agricultural Commissioner, and other entities to provide technical assistance to farmers attempting to shift to higher-value or more efficient crops.

**Policy AG-4.2: School Programs (SO/PI)**

Coordinate with local school districts to develop or enhance local agricultural awareness and educational programs.

**Policy AG-4.3: Workforce Training Programs (SO/PI)**

Encourage and support regional workforce training programs at local high schools, colleges, universities, and non-profit organizations.

**Policy AG-4.4: Farmland Protection Educational Outreach (SO/PI)**

Encourage educational programs to inform children and adults of the importance of protecting farmland.

**Policy AG-4.5: GIS Mapping (RDR)**

Expand the County's Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and related data capabilities to include information on the spatial distribution and value of different agricultural commodities, land values, conservation easement locations, agricultural production processing links, natural resource attributes, urban-agricultural edge patterns, residential fragmentation of farmland, and other policy-related items.

**Policy AG-4.6: Agricultural Education Outreach (IGC/PI)**

Coordinate with organizations such as the UC Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau and California Women for Agriculture to provide more public information about the local contributions and practices of agriculture through brochures, the County website, and other media targeted to urban audiences.

**Policy AG-4.7: Methane Sequestration (RDR/IGC) **

Support efforts of local dairies and the San Joaquin Valley Pollution Control District to develop standards and programs for the sequestration of methane gas in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and odors, and to provide a source of clean, efficient, and cheap electricity and natural gas.

## **AGRICULTURAL TOURISM**

Merced County has the benefit of being located along major highway routes between northern and southern California. The County is also near the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta, and Yosemite National Park. The County's rich agricultural resources and heritage can be used to help expand tourism opportunities.

Agricultural tourism includes commercial enterprises which provide access to visitors at a working farm, ranch, or production facility which is available for the enjoyment or education of visitors. This includes farm stands or shops, U-pick, farm stays, tours, on-farm classes, fairs, festivals, holiday events (i.e., pumpkin patches, Christmas tree

farms), winery tours and events, orchard dinners, youth camps, barn dances, hunting or fishing, and guest ranches. The policies in this section address opportunities for expanding the agricultural recreation and tourism industry in Merced County. *(Note: Please see the Recreation and Cultural Resources Element for additional goals and policies related to parks, recreation, and tourism.)*

**Goal AG-5**

Further develop and expand the agricultural tourism and recreation industry in Merced County.

**Policy AG-5.1: Agricultural Tourism and Ecotourism Development (SO)**

Support the development of agricultural tourism activities that promote the agricultural, open space, and natural resources of the County.

**Policy AG-5.2: Agricultural Tourism Expansion (RDR/SO)**

Support the expansion of agricultural tourism that helps maintain sites in agricultural production and provide supplemental income to property owners, provided these activities do not negatively impact on-going agricultural operations on adjacent lands.

**Policy AG-5.3: Agricultural Tourist Centers (RDR)**

Promote the development of agricultural tourism centers and visitor tourist centers along Interstate 5, State Route 99, State Route 152, and other State highways within the County.

**Policy AG-5.4: Agricultural Niches (JP)**

Encourage the development of agricultural niches, such as smaller local farms that produce specialty crops to help promote agricultural tourism.

**Policy AG-5.5: Fertilizer Application (SO/IGC)**

Work with agricultural organizations to provide an outreach program to inform Merced County farmers about ways to reduce nitrogen fertilizer while minimizing effects on crop yield.

**Policy AG-5.6: Agricultural Pump Energy Use (SO/IGC)**

Work with Merced County agricultural organizations to develop an outreach program to encourage farmers to improve the efficiency of their irrigation pumps.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Agricultural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program AG-A: Right-to-Farm Ordinance (RDR)</b> Periodically review and update the Right-to-Farm Ordinance and provide information to the local real estate industry to help make the public aware of the right-to-farm provisions in their area.						
Implements Which Policies	AG-3.1					✓
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner UC Cooperative Extension					
<b>Program AG-B: Agricultural Land Mitigation Program (MPSP)</b> Develop an agricultural land mitigation program in cooperation with the six incorporated cities.						
Implements Which Policy	AG-2.2	✓				
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner UC Cooperative Extension					
<b>Program AG-C: Public Outreach Program (MPSP, IGC)</b> Develop and implement a public outreach program to inform farmers, ranchers, and the public of the advantages of participation in land trust agreements, conservation easements, dedication incentives, Williamson Act contracts, and the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program Fund, in cooperation with the University of California Cooperative Extension, resource conservation districts, and other industry agencies.						
Implements Which Policies	AG-4.1, AG-4.2, AG-4.3, AG-4.6	✓				
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner County Assessor UC Cooperative Extension					
<b>Program AG-D: Conservation Easements Funding (MPSP)</b> Develop a program establishing criteria to prioritize the location for establishment of agricultural conservation easements.						
Implements Which Policy	AG-2.9	✓				
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner UC Cooperative Extension					

Agricultural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program AG-E: Agricultural Buffer Guidelines (MPSP)</b>                      Develop and implement guidelines for design and maintenance of buffers to be required when new non-agricultural uses are approved in agricultural areas. Buffer design and maintenance guidelines shall include, but are not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Buffers shall be located on the parcel for which a permit is sought and shall protect the maximum amount of farmable land.</li> <li>b. Buffers shall be physically and biologically designed to avoid conflicts between agriculture and non-agricultural uses.</li> <li>c. Buffers generally should consist of a physical separation between agricultural and non-agricultural uses. The appropriate width shall be determined on a site-by-site basis taking into account the type of existing agricultural uses, the nature of the proposed development, the natural features of the site, and any other factors that affect the specific situation.</li> <li>d. Appropriate types of land uses for buffers include compatible agriculture, open space and recreational uses such as parks and golf courses, industrial uses, and cemeteries.</li> <li>e. The County may condition the approval of a project on the ongoing maintenance of buffers.</li> <li>f. A homeowners association, agricultural land trusts, or other appropriate entity shall be required to maintain buffers to control litter, fire hazards, pests, and other maintenance problems.</li> <li>g. Buffer restrictions may be removed if agricultural uses on all adjacent parcels have permanently ceased.</li> </ul>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	AG-3.2, AG-3.3, AG-3.4					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner UC Cooperative Extension					
<p><b>Program AG-F: Legislative Advocacy (JP, PI)</b>                      Actively monitor, review, comment, and advocate on pending major State and Federal legislation and executive orders which could have an impact on agriculture in Merced County. The County will also coordinate position statements with the Farm Bureau and other agricultural interest groups in the County.</p>						✓
Implements Which Policy	AG-1.8					
Responsible Department	Agricultural Commissioner					
Supporting Departments	Community and Economic Development County Counsel UC Cooperative Extension					

Agricultural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program AG-G: Agricultural Information Database (PSR)</b> Maintain a database that includes information on the spatial distribution and value of different agricultural commodities, Williamson Act parcels, land values, conservation easement locations, agricultural production processing links, natural resource attributes, urban-agricultural edge patterns, residential fragmentation of farmland, and other policy-related items.		✓				✓
Implements Which Policies	AG-2.6, AG-2.7, AG-2.8, AG-2.9, AG-4.5					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner County Assessor UC Cooperative Extension					
<b>Program AG-H: Zoning Ordinance Update (RDR)</b> Update the County Code to rename the Agricultural Residential (AR) zone to Rural Residential.		✓				✓
Implements Which Policy	AG-4.5					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Board of Supervisors UC Cooperative Extension					
<b>Program AG-I: Agricultural Tourist Center Identification and Standards (RDR, SP)</b> Establish and adopt criteria for the creation of new agricultural tourism centers and visitor tourist centers located along Interstate 5, State Route 99, State Route 152, and other State highways within the County. Criteria should address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Require legitimate agriculture commercial activities only, and encourage local grown or produced commodities;</li> <li>b. Ensure new centers are compatible with adjacent land uses, using buffers where necessary to avoid conflicts;</li> <li>c. Require adequate and safe vehicle access to site;</li> <li>d. Require adequate water and wastewater facilities and other sanitation;</li> <li>e. Allow, in very limited situations, ancillary uses, such as gas stations, mini markets, motels, or restaurants;</li> <li>f. Include farm-stays, farm tours, and trails in order to promote tourism;</li> <li>g. Include incentives and promote broad based agritourism;</li> <li>h. Establish appropriate functions, such as fundraises, barn dances, weddings parties; and</li> <li>i. Establish location criteria such as minimum parcel size, existing uses, proximity to cities, and capability with surrounding agricultural, residential, and animal confinement uses.</li> </ul>		✓				

Agricultural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Implements Which Policy	AG-5.2, AG-5.3					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors UC Cooperative Extension					
<p><b>Program AG-J: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (MPSP)</b>                      In conjunction with the Policies AG-2.2, AG 2.4, and AG 2.8 and Program AG-B, the County shall develop and adopt and Agricultural Land Mitigation Program ordinance. The ordinance shall ensure that agricultural mitigation is required for the conversion or change from an agricultural use to a predominantly non-agricultural use prior to, or concurrently with, approval of a zone change from agricultural to non-agricultural zoning designation, or other discretionary action by the County. Additionally, the ordinance shall require that for each acre of agricultural land changed or converted, one acre of equivalent agricultural land shall be preserved (1:1 ratio). The ordinance shall define the term “equivalent agricultural land.” The ordinance shall provide for mitigation via a conservation easement. The ordinance shall outline that where a conservation easement is funded or dedicated, an endowment for the on-going monitoring and maintenance of the agricultural conservation easement must also be required. Finally, the ordinance shall require that prior to the approval of a final subdivision map, or issuance of the first building permit, whichever comes first, a project proponent shall provide written evidence to the County that a conservation easement and endowment has been secured (by the County or other qualifying entity) to mitigate for the permanent loss of agricultural land.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policy	AG-2.2, AG 2.4, AG 2.8					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					
<p><b>Program AG-K: MCAC Consultation to Establish Residential Setbacks (MPSP)</b>                      Establish a process to consult with the Merced County Agricultural Commissioner during the discretionary review of minor subdivisions or other urban development where the right to construct residences has not been waived within or adjacent to agriculturally zoned areas to determine the historic cropping and pesticide application patterns on the affected parcel and adjacent parcels. Establish residential setbacks from onsite and adjacent farming operations sufficient to minimize health risks and maintain historic farming practices and cropping patterns, including the application of pesticides.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policy	AG-3.2, AG-3.3, AG-3.4					

Agricultural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					
<b>Program AG-L: Program to Permit the Construction of Residences on Non-Residential Minor Subdivisions (MPSP)</b> Establish a process to consider permitting the construction of residences consistent with the requirements of Section 18.02.020 A of the Merced County Code for parcels within subdivisions where the right to construct residences has previously been waived. The process shall include provisions to consult with the MCAC and establish any required residential setbacks as set forth in Program AG-K.		✓				
Implements Which Policy	AG-2.12, AG-2.14, AG-3.12					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					



# TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for the safe and efficient circulation of people, vehicles, and goods throughout the County. Roadways, rail, and air are the three primary travel conduits in Merced County. This element has been written to establish goals and policies for the circulation system in order to balance the varying needs of motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians as well as the unique needs for the movement of farm equipment and agricultural commodities. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Roadway System
- Parking
- Transit and Ridesharing
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation
- Rail Transportation
- Air Transportation

## CIRCULATION DIAGRAM AND STANDARDS

The County maintains a variety of roadways which have differing characteristics. These roadways include everything from low-volume rural local roadways serving agricultural areas to high-volume urban expressways serving large urban areas. All of these roadways play a vital role in how people and goods are transported throughout the County. A key element in managing the County's roadway system is the establishment of a functional roadway classification hierarchy. The hierarchy is created primarily to distinguish between two major roadway functions and characteristics: (1) providing access to adjacent property; and, (2) providing efficient mobility.

Since the circulation needs of urban areas are significantly different than the needs of rural areas, the County's functional roadway classification system includes distinct categories for urban and rural areas.

## Urban Roadway Classifications

- **Freeway.** Freeways are generally under the jurisdiction of the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Freeways generally have the highest traffic volumes and serve traffic with regional and statewide destinations.
- **Principal Arterial.** Roadways that serve the major centers of activity in cities and urban communities. These roadways generally accommodate high traffic volumes with longer trip lengths. A high proportion of motorists in an urban area travel on Principal Arterials as part of their routine trip to a destination.
- **Expressway.** An expressway is a special form of Principal Arterial characterized by a very high level of mobility. No access to abutting private property is permitted along an Expressway. To reduce the overall delay experienced by motorists, the number of intersecting roadways is restricted to a maximum of one per every half mile.
- **Minor Arterial.** Roadways that interconnect with and augment the urban principal arterial system and provide service to trips of moderate length and a somewhat lower level of travel mobility than Principal Arterials.
- **Collector.** Roadways that provide land-access and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial, and industrial areas. A Collector differs from an Arterial in that roadways on the collector system may penetrate residential neighborhoods, distributing trips from the arterial system to the ultimate destination. In a complimentary manner, a Collector also collects traffic from the Local streets in residential neighborhoods and channels it into the arterial system.
- **Local.** Roadways that comprise all facilities not on one of the higher systems. Local roadways serve primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and access to the higher systems. Service to through traffic is not desirable and generally discouraged on Local roadways.

## Rural Roadway Classifications

- **Freeway.** Freeways are generally under the jurisdiction of the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Freeways generally have the highest traffic volumes and serve traffic with regional, statewide, and interstate destinations.
- **Principal Arterial.** Roadways that consist of a network of continuous routes that serve corridor movements with trip length and travel density characteristics indicative of regional or statewide travel. Principal Arterials in rural areas provide an integrated network without stub connections, except where unusual geographic or traffic flow conditions occur.

- **Minor Arterial.** Roadways that form the network linking cities, urban communities, and other large traffic generators. All larger urban areas should be served by at least one Minor or Principal Arterial. Smaller urban areas should be within a reasonable distance of an arterial roadway.
- **Major Collector.** Roadways that serve urban communities not directly served by an arterial roadway. Major Collectors should be spaced at intervals consistent with travel demand throughout rural areas to adequately serve the agricultural community.
- **Minors Collector.** Roadways with characteristics similar to a Major Collector but serving smaller segments of the rural areas. Minor Collectors collect traffic from rural Local roadways and channels it into the Major Collector and arterial roadway system.
- **Local.** Roadways that primarily provide access to adjacent land and provide service to travel over relatively short distances compared to collectors or other higher system roadways. In a rural setting, a Local roadway may provide service to through traffic. Generally, Local roadways are not designed to accommodate large volumes of truck traffic.

**Table CIR-1** describes the desired characteristics for each roadway classification type occurring in Merced County. **Figure CIR-1** shows the roadways in Merced County designated with functional classifications higher than “Local.” Many of the roadways maintained by Merced County have not yet been developed to include all of the characteristics described in Table CIR-1. The Improvement Standards and Specifications for Merced County (which are intended to reflect the characteristics in this table) include specific guidance for the design of roadways included as part of or impacted by development projects. The Improvement Standards do not cover all of the roadway classification types or all potential roadway features that may be necessary to support a development project. Because of this, roadways shall be designed to conform to the characteristics in this table as well as design guidance contained in the most recent version of “A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets” published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).

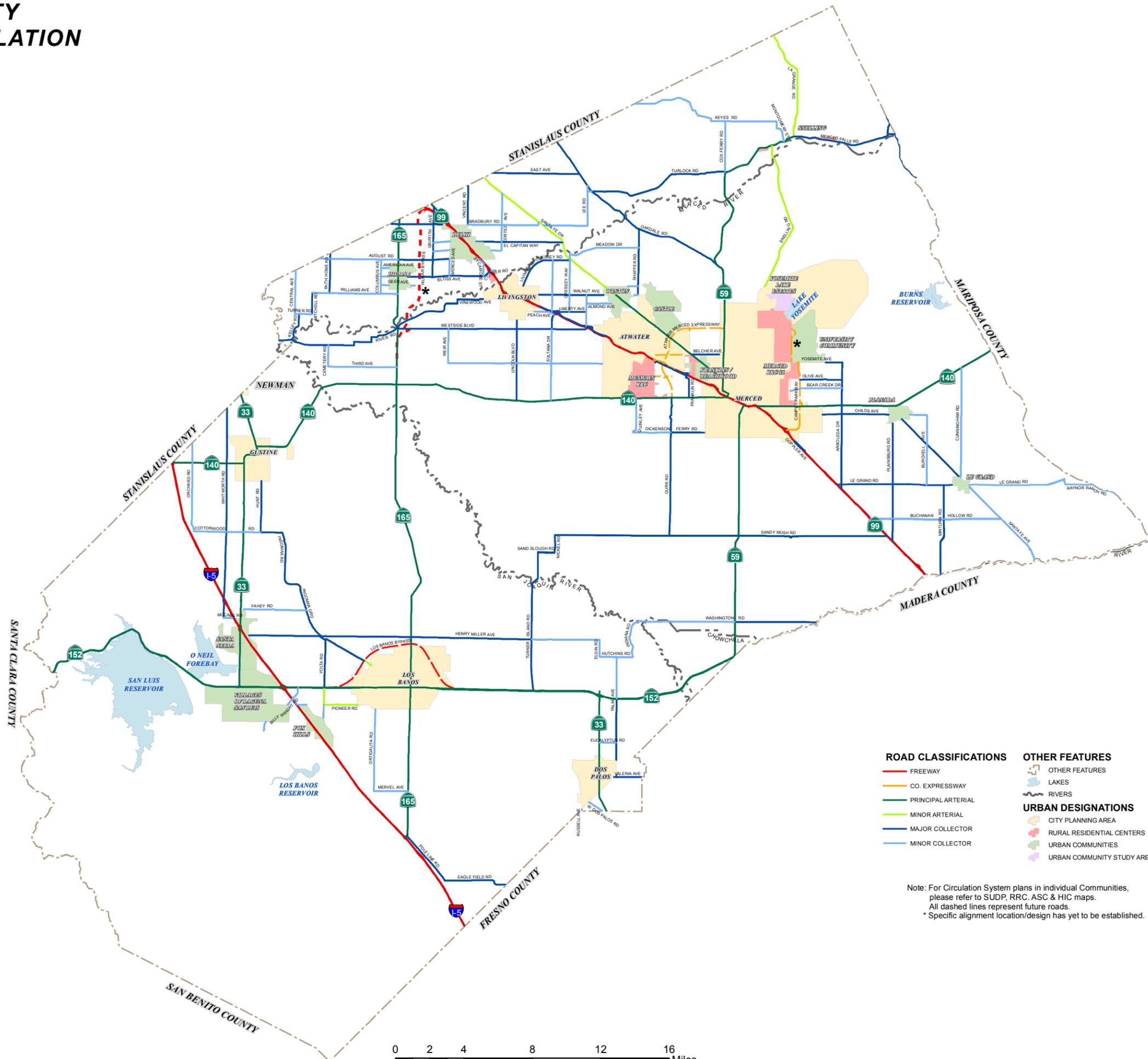
**TABLE CIR-1  
Functional Classifications – Desired Roadway Characteristics**

Location	Functional Classification	Right of Way	Lanes	LOS Analysis Threshold	Intersecting Roadways	Private Property Access	Mobility/ Operating Speed
Urban	Freeway	Varies	4 – 8	D	Interchange at 1 mile spacing	None	High
	Expressway	150' – 180'	4 – 6	D	1 per 1/2 mile	None	High
	Principal Arterial	100' – 180'	2 – 6	D	1 per 1/4 mile	Very Limited	Medium-High
	Minor Arterial	60' – 100'	2 – 4	D	1 per 1/4 mile	Limited	Medium
	Collector	60' – 90'	2	D	1 per 1/8 mile	Limited	Low-Medium
	Local	46' – 60'	2	D	No Limit (100' offset Min.)	Controlled	Low
Rural	Freeway	Varies	4 - 8	D	Interchange at 2 mile spacing	None	High
	Principal Arterial	Varies	2 - 4	C	1 per 1/2 mile	Very Limited	High
	Minor Arterial	80' – 120'	2 - 4	C	1 per 1/2 mile	Limited	Medium-High
	Major Collector	60' – 90'	2 - 3	C	1 per 1/4 mile	Limited	Medium-High
	Minor Collector	60'	2	C	1 per 1/4 mile	Limited	Medium-High
		Local	60'	2	C	1 per 1/4 mile	Controlled

Table Notes:

1. Right-of-Way. The right-of-way widths shown represent typical right-of-way widths needed to accommodate the number of travel lanes necessary to support anticipated traffic volumes, shoulders, roadside ditches (rural roadways), curb, gutter, sidewalk, and bicycle lanes (where appropriate). Additional right-of-way width may be necessary at approaches to intersections to accommodate turn pockets.
2. Lanes. The number of lanes shown represents the typical number of lanes likely to be necessary for the various types of roadways. In unusual cases, additional lanes may be necessary to accommodate higher traffic volumes.
3. LOS Analysis Threshold. The LOS thresholds indicated in this table represents the maximum acceptable weekday AM or PM Peak Hour LOS. Whenever a traffic analysis is prepared as part of a project approval, improvements need to be identified to ensure the resulting operating LOS does not exceed these threshold values.
4. Intersecting Roadways. The values in this column represent the typical maximum number of intersections along the various types of roadways. In some cases, the number of intersections may be greater; however, a traffic analysis will be required indicating that the safety and function of the roadway will not be significantly compromised.
5. Private Property Access. Private property access to roadways maintained by Merced County is granted through the issuance of an encroachment permit by the Department of Public Works. No access to private property will be permitted on Freeways or Expressways. Access to local roads will generally be approved; however, guidelines for driveways on local roadways in urban areas have been established in the Merced County Improvement Standards and Specifications. Generally, driveways on other roadway types will be permitted; however the number of driveways will be limited to preserve the safety and function of the roadway. In some cases joint driveways serving more than one parcel may be required.
6. Mobility/Operating Speed. The descriptions in this column represent the perceived level of mobility (usually represented by operating speed) a motorist may anticipate to experience on the various roadway types during non-peak hours.

# MERCED COUNTY COUNTYWIDE CIRCULATION DIAGRAM Figure CIR-1



- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| <b>ROAD CLASSIFICATIONS</b>                              | <b>OTHER FEATURES</b>      |
| <span style="color: red;">—</span> FREEWAY               | OTHER FEATURES             |
| <span style="color: orange;">—</span> CO. EXPRESSWAY     | LAKES                      |
| <span style="color: green;">—</span> PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL  | RIVERS                     |
| <span style="color: lightgreen;">—</span> MINOR ARTERIAL | <b>URBAN DESIGNATIONS</b>  |
| <span style="color: blue;">—</span> MAJOR COLLECTOR      | CITY PLANNING AREA         |
| <span style="color: lightblue;">—</span> MINOR COLLECTOR | RURAL RESIDENTIAL CENTERS  |
|  | URBAN COMMUNITIES          |
|  | URBAN COMMUNITY STUDY AREA |

Note: For Circulation System plans in individual Communities, please refer to SUDP, RRC, ASC & HIC maps.  
All dashed lines represent future roads.  
\* Specific alignment location/design has yet to be established.





## ROADWAY SYSTEM

County roadways are a key transportation link that allows movement of both people and goods throughout the region. The County's dedication to promoting multi-modal transportation, compact development, and the commitment to creating a jobs/housing balance while serving the needs of agriculture are all linked to future roadway improvements. In addition, the County is dedicated to creating complete streets that are designed for all roadway users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, farm equipment, and motorists, to the extent appropriate to the function and context of the roadway. The policies in this section address the overall movement of people and goods on the highways and streets in Merced County.

### Goal CIR-1

Maintain an efficient roadway system for the movement of people and goods that enhances the physical, economic, and social environment while being safe, efficient, and cost-effective.

#### Policy CIR-1.1: Functional Roadway Classification System (RDR)

Require a Countywide roadway system, consisting of interstate/principal arterial, minor arterial, major collector, minor collector, collector, and local roadways, and specific to urban and rural areas, that adequately serves existing and planned land uses based on the County's Functional Classifications and Level of Service Standards.

#### Policy CIR-1.2: Efficient Transportation Network (RDR)

Encourage land use patterns that promote shorter travel distances between residences and employment centers within Merced County, allow for non-auto travel, plan for multi-modal access for communities near I-5 and other major roadways, provide traffic-calming on local roadways, and promote the efficient expansion and maintenance of transportation-related infrastructure to avoid constructing new roadways that would cause the physical division of existing communities.

#### Policy CIR-1.3: Transportation Efficiency (RDR)

Encourage transportation programs that result in more efficient energy use, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and noise levels, and improve air quality.

#### Policy CIR-1.4: Traffic Studies (RDR/PSR)

Require a traffic study to be prepared for all specific and community plans that includes, at a minimum:

- a) Assessment of internal circulation system needs and design of a primary traffic circulation network for the plan area;
- b) Demonstrate consistency with the circulation policies of the General Plan;
- c) Identify regional transportation infrastructure connectivity requirements; and

- d) Identify specific traffic impacts related to the plan area and improvement measures to mitigate those impacts including the identification of proportionate impact levels for regional governments.

**Policy CIR-1.5: County Level of Service Standards (RDR)**

Implement a Countywide roadway system that achieves the following level-of-service (LOS) standards during peak traffic periods:

- a) For roadways located within rural areas: LOS "C" or better.
- b) For roadways located outside Urban Communities that serve as connectors between Urban Communities: LOS of "D" or better.
- c) For roadways located within Urban Communities: LOS of "D" or better.

**Policy CIR-1.6: Level of Service "E" Exception (RDR)**

Allow a level of service "E" or worse only on a minor component of the circulation system (such as a left turn movement from a local roadway) if the major component of the circulation system (such as a through movement on a collector or arterial roadway) would be significantly compromised in the process of improving the level of service of the minor component.

**Policy CIR-1.7: Alternative Transportation Modes (RDR) **

Require development projects that have the potential to reduce existing level of service to plan for and accommodate alternative modes of transportation (i.e., bicycle, pedestrian, transit).

**Policy CIR-1.8: Private Roadway Improvements (RDR)**

Require private roads and related improvements to be designed and installed to County standards as contained in the Improvement Standards and Specifications Manual (Title 16 of County Code) and Subdivision Code (Title 17), unless it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the approval authority that alternative improvements will be provided sufficient to fulfill the goals and objectives of this Chapter and the respective Codes.

**Policy CIR-1.9: Roadway Maintenance and Improvement (RDR)**

Require that roadways are maintained and improved consistent with established peak period level of service.

**Policy CIR-1.10: Road System Coordination (IGC)**

Cooperate with the cities within the County, adjacent counties, and State and Federal transportation agencies to coordinate the countywide roadway system, including right-of-way dedication and roadway improvements.

**Policy CIR-1.11: Public Road Frontage (RDR)**

Require newly created lots or parcels in Urban Communities and Rural Residential Centers to front on an approved public road that meets County standards. Exceptions to this policy may be permitted for Planned Developments (PD), or lots fronting on

privately maintained gated roads provided adequate regional circulation and emergency access is maintained, or for access to four or fewer parcels in Rural Residential Centers so long as the roads have an all-weather surface.

**Policy CIR-1.12: STAA Route Designations (SO/IGC)**

Encourage the designation of Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) routes by Caltrans to accommodate large trucks serving commercial, industrial, and agricultural land uses.

**Policy CIR-1.13: Cost-Effective Roadway Maintenance and Improvement (RDR)**

Support all methods to achieve cost-effective design, construction, and maintenance of existing and future roadways.

**Policy CIR-1.14: Required Structural Improvements (RDR/MPSP)**

Require developers of mining, large commercial, agricultural commercial, and industrial projects to either make appropriate roadway improvements and/or provide a funding mechanism for maintenance of the structural sections of County roadways when such projects could result in appreciable increases to commercial truck traffic and/or compromise the integrity of existing road sections.

**Policy CIR-1.15: Right-of-Way and Roadway Improvement Requirements (RDR)**

Require right-of-way dedication and roadway improvements to offset project-related traffic and roadway impacts on all discretionary land use entitlement approvals.

**Policy CIR-1.16: Inter-Agency Right-of-Way Coordination (IGC)**

Require road right-of-way and improvements to be consistent with cities and adjacent counties transportation planning to ensure compatibility.

**Policy CIR-1.17: Encroachment Permits (RDR)**

Require encroachment permits to control access points on public roads.

**Policy CIR-1.18: Right-of-Way Work (RDR)**

Require encroachment permits for work within a right-of-way.

**Policy CIR-1.19: Future Right-of-Way (PSR)**

Prepare a study to identify the location of future roadway right-of-way needed to better connect new development and alleviate congestion.

**Policy CIR-1.20: Right-of-Way Protection (RDR)**

Require existing and future right-of-way to be protected from encroachment of incompatible structures.

**Policy CIR-1.21: Agricultural Operations (RDR)**

Require adequate right-of-way to accommodate increases in vehicular traffic on rural roads that serve agricultural tourism, value-added agriculture, and/or other unique agriculture-related land uses and pursue improvements as funding and resources allow.

**Policy CIR-1.22: Complete Streets (RDR) 🌐**

Require new urban streets within Urban Communities to be designed and constructed to not only accommodate automobile, truck, and bus traffic, but to also serve all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit passengers of all ages and abilities. This includes:

- Creating multi-modal street connections in order to establish a comprehensive, integrated, and connected transportation network;
- Minimizing curb cuts along non-local streets;
- Consider planting street trees adjacent to curbs and between the street and sidewalk to provide a buffer between the pedestrian and the automobile, where appropriate;
- Constructing sidewalks on both sides of streets, where feasible; and
- Coordinating with other agencies and cities to ensure connections are made between jurisdictions;
- Incorporating traffic calming devices such as roundabouts, bulb-outs at intersections, and traffic tables.

**Policy CIR-1.23: At-Grade Railroad Crossing Guidelines (RDR/IGC/JP)**

Work with California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the affected railroads to monitor the effects of development, and implement necessary and applicable design improvements at railroad crossings.

**PARKING**

Parking is a key element in shaping travel habits and patterns. The policies in this section address adequate and appropriately-located parking facilities. Parking management tools will be used to ensure sufficient parking for businesses while protecting adjacent neighborhoods and the environment.

**Goal CIR-2**

Provide and manage parking to accommodate auto usage while minimizing the impacts of excessive parking supply.

**Policy CIR-2.1: Off-Street Parking (RDR)**

Require off-street parking in all new development within Urban Communities to reduce reliance on on-street parking, except for infill and re-use development projects.

**Policy CIR-2.2: Shared Parking Facilities (RDR)**

Seek to reduce the amount of land devoted to parking at new non-residential developments and encourage the use of shared parking facilities in Urban Communities.

**Policy CIR-2.3: Comprehensive Parking Program (RDR)**

Develop and adopt a comprehensive parking program that prioritizes shared parking, walking, biking, and public transportation use during the drafting of Community Plans in Urban Communities.

**Policy CIR-2.4: Priority Parking (RDR)**

Require the identification of priority parking areas for vanpools, carpools, and energy-efficient and low-pollution vehicles, including consideration of recharge stations for electric vehicles in all Commercial and Business Park-designated development projects.

**Policy CIR-2.5: Residential Permit Parking Areas (RDR)**

Designate residential permit parking areas as needed to protect neighborhoods from parking intrusion from adjacent land uses.

## TRANSIT AND RIDESHARING

Public transit is an increasingly important component of the Merced County transportation network. It provides an alternative to automobile travel and more travel options for youth, elderly, low-income individuals, and mobility-impaired citizens. The level of transit services available to County residents has increased substantially since transit was introduced to the area in 1974. Historically, public transit has developed in response to basic transportation needs of the transit-dependent population. However, in response to rising congestion and the need to reduce the use of fossil fuels in order to clean the air, it has become a priority to expand transit options throughout the County. This includes creating multi-modal transportation centers that link auto, transit, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian modes of travel and encourage ridesharing (i.e., carpooling). The policies in this section address preserving and expanding transit services to County residents, workers, and visitors.

**Goal CIR-3**

Maintain a public transit system that provides an alternative to automobile travel, supports ridesharing, and meets the needs of the entire community.

**Policy CIR-3.1: Multi-Modal Transportation (RDR) **

Encourage multi-modal transportation opportunities within Urban Communities.

**Policy CIR-3.2: Transit Improvements (RDR) **

Continue to support transit efforts by the Merced County Association of Governments, Dial-A-Ride, UC Merced Transit, other public entities, private social service providers, and other various private charter services to improve and expand public transit throughout the County.

**Policy CIR-3.3: Alternative Transit Fuels (RDR) **

Encourage transit providers to reduce pollution from transit fleet vehicles, such as purchasing vehicles that use alternative fuels or providing fueling/charging stations.

**Policy CIR-3.4: Public Transit Funding (FB)** 

Pursue efforts to obtain grants and other funding to offset costs of maintaining and expanding public transit systems.

**Policy CIR-3.5: Ridesharing Promotion (RDR)** 

Encourage programs that promote the use of ridesharing, carpooling, and vanpooling.

**Policy CIR-3.6: Park-and-Ride Facilities (RDR)** 

Establish park-and-ride facilities in Urban Communities with a high commuter population.

**Policy CIR-3.7: Commute Trip Reduction (RDR)** 

Support efforts to reduce auto commute trips, such as mixed-use developments or private shuttle vans at large employment centers.

**Policy CIR-3.8: New Transit Hubs (RDR)** 

Identify and develop new regional transit hubs at major commercial centers, employers, or institutions.

**Policy CIR-3.9: Telecommute and Flexible Work Incentives (SO/JP)** 

Encourage non-residential developments to offer telecommute and flexible work-hour opportunities, and provide employee incentives for using transit, ridesharing, bicycling, and walking.

**Policy CIR-3.10: Ridesharing (PI)** 

Promote ridesharing through public information and outreach.

## BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

A comprehensive network of bikeways and pedestrian trails that are safe, convenient, and accessible is an integral component of Merced County's transportation infrastructure. Similar to roadways, the bicycle and pedestrian system includes a functional hierarchy. Through the General Plan, the County will manage the bicycle and pedestrian systems under the following functional classifications:

- **Class I - Bicycle Path.** A dedicated bikeway that does not share a road or street right-of-way with motor vehicles. Bicycle paths are typically designed to minimize automobile cross-flows and are intended for the exclusive use of bicyclists and/or pedestrians.
- **Class II - Bicycle Lane.** A bikeway located within the paved area of a roadway that shares the roadway with motor vehicles. Bicycle lanes are identified on a roadway with specific striping, signs, and pavement markings in order to promote the orderly flow of traffic.
- **Class III – Bicycle Route.** A bikeway that shares a roadway with motor vehicles. Bicycle routes are typically identified only with signs (no road markings).

- **Pedestrian Path.** A path that is physically separated by distance or barrier from a roadway. Pedestrian paths are different than sidewalks, and are typically constructed in conjunction with Class I Bicycle Paths.
- **Sidewalk.** A pedestrian-dedicated paved walkway located adjacent to roadways.

Bicycles provide low-cost mobility to the non-driving public, are an excellent form of recreation, and offer potential health benefits to the entire community. The policies in this section address issues and improvements for the system of bicycle and pedestrian transportation routes.

#### Goal CIR-4

Maintain and expand a safe, continuous, and easily accessible bicycle and pedestrian circulation system.

#### Policy CIR-4.1: Bicycle and Pedestrian System (RDR/PSR)

Encourage a complete, safe, and interconnected bicycle and pedestrian circulation system that serves both commuter and recreational travel, and provides access to major destinations within and between Urban Communities and cities. Prioritize Class I bicycle paths and separate trails between communities as part of the MCAG Regional Bikeway Plan. To the extent possible, use railroad and canal as right-of-way instead of streets to promote safety.

#### Policy CIR-4.2: Bicycle Lanes and Pedestrian Paths (RDR)

Require all new or major reconstructed streets within Urban Communities to accommodate travel by pedestrians and bicyclists, except where pedestrians and bicyclists are prohibited by law from using a given facility or where the costs of including bikeways and walkways would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use.

#### Policy CIR-4.3: City and County Coordination (RDR)

Coordinate on the location and construction of new bikeways with cities and adjacent counties.

#### Policy CIR-4.4: Bicycle Lane Standards (RDR)

Ensure that the design and construction of bicycle lanes is consistent with Caltrans criteria and standards.

#### Policy CIR-4.5: Bicycle Storage Facilities (RDR/IGC/JP)

Require the installation of bicycle storage facilities at major transportation terminals and commercial and employment centers.

#### Policy CIR-4.6: Multi-Use Trails (RDR)

Encourage the development of multi-use corridors (such as hiking, equestrian, and mountain biking) in open space areas, along power line transmission corridors, utility easements, rivers, creeks, abandoned railways, and irrigation canals.

**Policy CIR-4.7: Bicycle Facilities Funding (FB)** 

Pursue all available local, regional, State, and Federal funding sources for the construction and maintenance of bicycle facilities.

**Policy CIR-4.8: Bicycle and Pedestrian Amenities (RDR)** 

Encourage the installation of amenities that serve bicyclists and pedestrians, such as secure and convenient bicycle parking, water fountains, and shaded seating areas at public facilities.

**Policy CIR-4.9: Bus Bicycle Racks (JP)** 

Work with transit providers to encourage transit bicycle transfers by installing bicycle racks on buses.

**Policy CIR-4.10: Bicyclist Amenities (RDR)** 

Require non-residential developments to provide amenities for bicyclists, including bicycle racks, showers, and changing facilities.

**Policy CIR-4.11: Rails-to-Trails (RDR)** 

Pursue rails-to-trails opportunities where former railroad right-of-ways are improved for pedestrian and non-motorized transportation.

**Policy CIR-4.12: Class I Bike Path Funding (RDR, IGC)** 

Require new Class I Bike Paths to be jointly-funded between the County and the cities so no single agency is disproportionately burdened by the costs of new bike paths.

## RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Many agricultural, industrial, and commercial operations rely on rail transportation to move products efficiently throughout the County. In addition to freight rail, the County is also served by an extensive network of Amtrak trains connecting Merced County to the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento region, and the southern San Joaquin Valley. In addition, the California High-Speed Rail Authority has identified Downtown Merced as a planned station location and Castle Commercial Center as a potential maintenance center for the proposed high speed train system. The high speed rail system will be a great transportation resource for County residents and could also contribute to the growing tourism industry. The policies in this section focus on the maintenance, safety, and future improvement/expansion of freight and passenger rail transportation systems in Merced County.

**Goal CIR-5**

Maintain and expand a rail transportation system that provides safe, efficient, and reliable movement of freight and passengers within and through Merced County.

**Policy CIR-5.1: Freight and Passenger Rail Services (RDR)** 

Support the continued operation and improvements to existing freight and passenger rail lines and terminals.

**Policy CIR-5.2: Freight-Focused Industry (RDR)**

Encourage agricultural, industrial, and commercial businesses that transport large quantities of goods or materials to locate in areas served by rail or air transportation facilities.

**Policy CIR-5.3: Rail Service Coordination (RDR/IGC/JP)**

Encourage coordination of passenger rail services with other public transportation.

**Policy CIR-5.4: At-Grade Rail Crossing (RDR)**

Encourage alternatives to at-grade rail crossings at existing and future roads.

**Policy CIR-5.5: Railroad Corridor Preservation (RDR/IGC)**

Work with other agencies to plan railroad corridors that facilitate the preservation of important rail line right-of-way for future rail expansion or other appropriate transportation facilities.

**Policy CIR-5.6: Rail Line Abandonment (IGC)**

Coordinate with the Public Utilities Commission and MCAG to evaluate possible impacts of rail line abandonment proposals and consider alternative uses for abandoned facilities, such as light rail, bicycle trails, utility corridors, or transit facilities.

**Policy CIR-5.7: High Speed Rail (RDR/IGC) 🌐**

Coordinate with the California High Speed Rail Authority, the cities, and other local agencies in efforts to properly locate the High Speed Rail corridors throughout Merced County, including at least one station and a heavy maintenance facility.

**Policy CIR-5.8: ACE Train Expansion (IGC) 🌐**

Encourage the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission to expand Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) train service along the State Route 99 corridor to the City of Merced and other links into Merced County.

**Policy CIR-5.9: Spur Lines (RDR)**

Seek to reduce railroad spur line conflicts with existing and proposed roads.

## AIR TRANSPORTATION

Merced County contains five publicly-owned, public-use airports: Castle Aviation Center, Gustine Airport, Los Banos Municipal Airport, Merced Municipal Airport, and Turlock Municipal Airport (located in Merced County, but owned/operated by the City of Turlock). In addition to the public use airports, there are eight privately-owned airfields located within Merced County, some of which allow public use.

A key component of aviation safety is the compatibility of land uses adjacent to airports. While promoting airport land use compatibility is necessary to address safety concerns, it has the added advantage of maintaining or expanding airport capabilities, improving delivery of products and services, and preserving facility investments. Encroachment due to incompatible land use is one of the greatest threats to increasing the capability and capacity of the County's aviation system. The aviation system of Merced County is a

vital economic resource to be preserved, maintained, and developed for future generations. The policies in this section address the safety, efficiency, and reliability implications of air transportation in Merced County.

**Goal CIR-6**

Ensure that air transportation systems provide safe, efficient, and reliable movement of passengers and freight.

**Policy CIR-6.1: Airport Protection and Support (SO)**

Support and protect the operations of all publicly-owned and publicly-used airports.

**Policy CIR-6.2: Air Passenger Service Coordination (JP)**

Encourage coordination of air passenger services with other public transportation.

**Policy CIR-6.3: Air Freight Service (SO/JP)**

Encourage industrial and commercial activities that involve freight movement to locate near airports that have air freight service.

**Policy CIR-6.4: Multi-modal Development (RDR)**

Support the development of multimodal terminal facilities at County airports.

**Policy CIR-6.5: Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (RDR)**

Review building permits and discretionary applications in areas subject to potential safety or noise impacts from public airports to assure compatibility with the Merced County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan or other adopted ALUC plans.

**Policy CIR-6.6: Private Air Strip Locations (RDR)**

Prohibit private airstrips that conflict with municipal airports and discourage airstrips which do not support agricultural commercial operations such as crop dusting activities.

**Policy CIR-6.7: New Structures (RDR/IGC)**

Require projects that could impact air travel to be compatible with Merced County Airport Land Use Commission plans, policies, and standards.

**Policy CIR-6.8: Transmission Tower and Lines (RDR/IGC)**

Review all proposed radio, television, power, or related transmission towers and lines for appropriate location and possible air travel conflicts during the discretionary application process. All projects located in Airport Areas of Influence or in approach/departure areas will be referred to the Merced County Airport Land Use Commission for comment.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Transportation and Circulation Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program CIR-A: Traffic Impact Study (MPSP/PSR)</b> Prepare a Traffic Impact Study that includes an estimate of the required funding necessary to develop circulation improvements necessary to support the general plan, including environmental studies, permit acquisition, environmental mitigation, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction, and construction management. Develop and adopt Traffic Impact Study Guidelines that identify the significance of traffic impacts when background traffic conditions, existing or in the future, exceed the County's minimum Level of Service goals.		✓				
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.1, CIR-1.5					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development Board of Supervisors					
<b>Program CIR-B: Bridge and Thoroughfare Fees (FB)</b> Continue to collect Bridge and Major Thoroughfare Fees, and other fees adopted pursuant to law, to assist in financing improvements necessary to maintain an adequate level-of-service on roadways within the County.						✓
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.5, CIR-1.6					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program CIR-C: Improvement Requirements (RDR, SO)</b> Use the Improvement Requirements specified in Title 16 of the County Code to determine appropriate right-of-way dedication and improvement requirements necessary for various entitlements.						✓
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.16, CIR-1.17, CIR-1.18, CIR-1.19, CIR-1.20, CIR-1.21					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program CIR-D: LAFCO Right-of-Way Approvals (IGC)</b> Continue to request the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to require entire right-of-way to be included or excluded in proposed annexation boundaries.						✓
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.16, CIR-1.17, CIR-1.18, CIR-1.19, CIR-1.20, CIR-1.21					
Responsible Department	Public Works					

Transportation and Circulation Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Supporting Department						
<b>Program CIR-E: Complete Streets Program (MPSP)</b> 🌐 Prepare best design criteria and guidelines for creating complete streets within Urban Communities, while recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs, during the community plan preparation/update process. This includes developing performance standards with measurable outcomes.						
Implements Which Policy	CIR-1.23					✓
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development Planning Commission Board of Supervisors					
<b>Program CIR-F: Regional Transportation Plan Development (RDR, IGC)</b> Provide input into the development of the Regional Transportation Plan by the Merced County Association of Governments to ensure County roads and facilities are adequately addressed.						
Implements Which Policy	CIR-1.1, CIR-1.2, CIR-1.3, CIR-1.16					✓
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program CIR-G: Parking and Bicycle Standards (MPSP)</b> 🌐 Prepare and adopt comprehensive parking and bicycle programs for each Community Plan area that encourages shared parking, walking, biking, and public transportation use in Urban Communities during the community plan preparation/update process. The programs shall also include standards for bicycling parking and related facilities.			✓			
Implements Which Policies	CIR-2.1, CIR-2.2, CIR-2.3, CIR-2.4, CIR-2.5					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works					
<b>Program CIR-H: Bicycle Facility Funding Study (MPSP)</b> 🌐 Prepare a Bicycle Facility Funding Study that identifies available local, regional, State, and Federal funding sources for the construction and maintenance of bicycle facilities within Urban Communities during the community plan preparation/update process.		✓		✓		
Implements Which Policies	CIR-4.7					
Responsible Department	Public Works					

Transportation and Circulation Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program CIR-I: Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (MPSP)</b> Encourage the Merced County Airport Land Use Commission to periodically update the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan for all public airports in Merced County.						
Implements Which Policies	CIR-6.1, CIR-6.2, CIR-6.3, CIR-6.4, CIR-6.5, CIR-6.6, CIR-6.7, CIR-6.8, CIR-6.9	✓		✓		
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works Commerce, Aviation, and Economic Development					
<b>Program CIR-J: Modify Regional Transportation Improvement Fees (MPSP/FB/SO/IGC)</b> Work with MCAG, cities within the county and Caltrans to create a regional approach to addressing the costs of improvements needed to roads and highways as described in Tables 19-6, 19-8, 19-13, and 19-18 of the Draft Program EIR through implementation of an expanded regional fee program.						
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.5, CIR-1.9, CIR-1.10, CIR-1.16, CIR-1.19	✓				✓
Responsible Department	Public Works/MCAG/Cities/Caltrans					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program CIR-K: Buildout Right of Way Reservation and Fee Program (MPSP/FB/SO/IGC)</b> Work with MCAG, cities within the county and Caltrans to create a regional approach to address the preservation of right of way, and the funding for such rights of way, needed to improve roads and highways under buildout conditions as described in Tables 19-9, 19-14, and 19-19 of the Draft PEIR through implementation of an expanded regional fee program.						
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.5, CIR-1.9, CIR-1.10, CIR-1.16, CIR-1.19	✓				✓
Responsible Department	Public Works/MCAG/Cities/Caltrans					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					

Transportation and Circulation Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program CIR-L: Rail Crossing Safety Program (RDR/MPSP/SO/IGC)</b>                      Develop a rail crossing safety program consisting of monitoring, safety standards, CPUC consultation, and facility funding as set forth below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For development projects adding substantial traffic to existing at-grade crossings (defined as 2,000 or more daily trips), the development shall submit a traffic analysis to the County for review. The analysis and report shall estimate daily and peak hour traffic at the crossing and adjoining intersections, as well as collision history data and estimates of train, vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian travel on the crossing and will describe existing, planned and funded equipment at at-grade crossings.</li> <li>The County will review traffic data in consultation with the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to identify improvements needed to ensure public safety.</li> <li>The County shall condition approval of development projects and community plans that add substantial traffic across at-grade crossings to participate in the funding for improvements needed to ensure the public safety as determined by the County. Such improvements may include coordinated highway / rail traffic signals, enhanced signing, warning equipment, markings and/or grade separations.</li> <li>Depending on the outcome of these studies, the County may include crossing improvements in future updates to its Capital Improvement Program or to Bridge &amp; Major Thoroughfare fee programs.</li> </ol>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	CIR-1.23					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<p><b>Program CIR-M: County Regional Bicycle Transportation Plan (MPSP/IGC)</b>                      Prepare a Regional Bicycle Transportation Plan for the unincorporated area of the county for both existing and planned improvements and facilities, that compliments, links to wherever feasible, and integrates with bike routes and policies contained in bike plans for adjacent urban areas.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	CIR-4.1, CIR-4.3, CIR-4.4, CIR-4.6, CIR-4.7, CIR-4.11					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					



# HOUSING ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

Under California law, the housing element must include the community's goals, policies, quantified objectives and housing programs for the maintenance, improvement, and development of housing. This Housing Element includes eight goal statements. Under each goal statement, the element sets out policies that amplify each goal statement. Implementation programs are listed at the end of the corresponding group of policies and describe briefly the proposed action, the County agencies or departments with primary responsibility for carrying out the program, the funding source, and the time frame for accomplishing the program. Several of the implementation programs also identify quantified objectives.

The following definitions describe the nature of the statements of goals, policies, and implementation programs and quantified objectives as they are used in the Housing Element Policy Document:

**Goal:** Ultimate purpose of an effort stated in a way that is general in nature and immeasurable.

**Policy:** Specific statement guiding action and implying clear commitment.

**Implementation Program:** An action, procedure, program, or technique that carries out policy. Implementation programs also specify primary responsibility for carrying out the action and an estimated time frame for its accomplishment. The time frame indicates the fiscal year in which the activity is scheduled to be completed. These time frames are general guidelines and may be adjusted based on county staffing and budgetary considerations.

**Quantified Objective:** The number of housing units that the County expects to be constructed, conserved, or rehabilitated; or the number of households the County expects will be assisted through Housing Element programs based on general market conditions during the time frame of the Housing Element.

Housing element law recognizes that in developing housing policy and programs, identified housing needs may exceed available resources and the community's ability to satisfy these needs. The quantified objectives of the housing element, therefore, need not be identical to the identified housing need, but should establish the maximum

number of housing units that can be constructed, rehabilitated, and conserved, or households assisted over a five-year time frame.

## NEW CONSTRUCTION

Over the last several decades unincorporated Merced County's housing stock has consisted mostly of moderately priced, single-family homes built in traditional suburban and rural subdivisions. Based on the county's changing demographic profile, the County may need to provide a variety of housing types to meet the needs of its diversifying population. As a result, the County approved several new large-scale master planned communities (i.e., Villages of Laguna San Luis, Fox Hills, and University Community) to guide the development of a diverse mix of land uses, including a variety of housing types (e.g., single-family, multifamily, and mixed-use dwelling units). These "new communities" approved since the adoption of the 2003 Housing Element provide excellent opportunities to meet the County's regional housing need, while at the same time provide more diverse growth patterns that respond to the county's changing population. These new communities also provide opportunities for the creation of affordable housing since these areas include the majority of the unincorporated county's available sites zoned for higher residential densities.

### Goal HE-1

To provide for a broad range of housing types and densities to meet the needs of all residents of the unincorporated area.

#### Policy 1.1

The County shall continue to adopt programs, ordinances, incentives, land use plans and other regulatory mechanisms that provide opportunities for the private sector to address the housing needs of citizens in all economic levels.

#### Policy 1.2

The County shall ensure that there are adequate sites available to meet its regional fair share housing allocation of 7,364 units (824 extremely low, 824 very low, 1,241 low, 1,430 moderate, and 3,045 above moderate).

#### Policy 1.3

The County shall continue to maintain an up-to-date site inventory of available sites for residential development.

#### Policy 1.4

The County shall direct housing to less valuable farmland when agricultural land conversion is justified.

**Policy 1.5**

The County shall allow the conversion of agricultural and other rural land, including antiquated subdivisions, into housing uses only where a clear and immediate need is demonstrated based on anticipated growth, availability of public services and facilities, and taking into account available vacant land within the community.

**Policy 1.6**

The County shall support infill residential development and other mid- to large-sized residential projects in unincorporated urban communities that have the infrastructure necessary to support such development.

**Policy 1.7**

The County shall encourage and support residential projects that include sustainable development principles which incorporate environmental protection measures balanced with serving the needs of residents.

**Policy 1.8**

The County shall promote the use of cluster housing, mixed-use, and planned development concepts where existing community services are available.

**Policy 1.9**

The County shall encourage a variety of housing types to meet the special needs of our diversified population.

**Policy 1.10**

The County shall encourage the consolidation of parcels to facilitate more efficient multi-family residential development.

**Policy 1.11**

The County shall strongly encourage residential development projects to develop at the maximum allowable density.

**Policy 1.12**

The County shall minimize governmental constraints to the development, improvement, and maintenance of its housing stock.

**Policy 1.13**

The County shall encourage key services and facilities (e.g., public transit, child care facilities, schools, parks, and neighborhood shopping centers) to be located within walking distance of higher density residential development.

**Policy 1.14**

The County shall promote mixed-income housing in new development.

**Policy 1.15**

Wherever feasible, the County shall encourage affordable housing to be located in transit-oriented development projects.

**Policy 1.16**

The County shall encourage the usage of mixed-use residential/office/retail developments in each community's downtown core.

**Policy 1.17**

When updating Community Plans, the County shall work closely with the Municipal Advisory Councils to ensure a range of housing types, including multi-family housing developments, are provided that meets the needs of all economic segments of the community.

**Policy 1.18**

When feasible, the County should seek to expand the Redevelopment Agency's project area boundaries to enhance opportunities for the provision of affordable housing.

**Policy 1.19**

The County shall advocate and support Federal and State actions that create a stable climate for housing production.

**Policy 1.20**

The County shall ensure that updated and new Community/Specific Urban Development Plans maximize housing choice and encourage socio-economic integration by providing a range of housing types that accommodate all economic segments of the community.

**Policy 1.21**

The County shall encourage and support the development of innovative housing types and building materials that may emerge during the buildout of the University Community Plan, contingent on their compatibility with adjacent uses.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Merced County, along with the State and Nation, is facing numerous economic challenges that will impact the ability to provide adequate amounts of affordable housing for all our citizens. In 2005 the County's per capita personal income was roughly \$14,000 lower than that of California. Additionally, Merced County's unemployment rate was 17.3 percent as of May 2009. Merced County has some of the largest concentrations of poverty in the country and many of these residents have difficulty affording even the most modest homes. Between 2006 and 2009, Merced County housing prices have dropped to half of their 2006 property value which has made housing affordable to specific segments of the population (e.g., first-time homebuyers with a household income near the county median). Although Merced County's housing stock is considered relatively affordable by California standards, there still exists a sizable demand for quality, affordable housing for a significant portion of Merced County's population. Despite the plummeting home prices, there have been a number of economic factors that have been barriers to obtaining affordable housing. The tightening of loan underwriting practices and larger required down payments have limited the ability of many homebuyers to take advantage of lower house prices. Since the early 1980s, the personal income gap between the Merced County and California

has been growing wider. In addition, if Merced County sees another wave of Bay Area residents moving into the county in search of affordable housing like it did prior to 2006, this may drive up housing costs and further exacerbate existing affordability issues and further drive lower income residents into concentrated pockets of poverty.

There is no best strategy for providing affordable housing in Merced County. Most affordable housing projects require multiple subsidies to bridge the affordability gap. In the past, the County has addressed the need for affordable housing through successfully obtaining state grant funding, regulatory incentives for developers, and the forming of partnerships with both the public and private sectors. Since 2003, the County has been successful in obtaining \$2 million in CDGB funds and \$2 million in HOME funds to fund a variety of local housing programs, including providing low income loans through the First-Time Homebuyer Program. In 2008, Merced County was awarded \$2.18 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds. In the last several years, Merced County representatives have been involved in supporting the San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust (SJVHT), a non-profit organization, which was formed to address regional housing needs by providing a dedicated source of revenue to build new affordable housing.

### Goal HE-2

To encourage the construction and maintenance of affordable housing in Merced County, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of extremely low-, very low-, and low-income households.

#### Policy 2.1

The County shall provide opportunities for the development of a variety of affordable housing types.

#### Policy 2.2

The County shall enable opportunities for deed-restricted affordable housing to ensure long-term affordability.

#### Policy 2.3

The County shall encourage deed-restricted affordable housing to be built using attractive, long-lasting, low-maintenance materials.

#### Policy 2.4

The County shall continue to provide incentives to developers to construct housing that is affordable to those making under 80 percent of the area median income.

#### Policy 2.5

The County shall continue to support the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley and San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust's efforts to create and seek funding sources to increase, preserve, and improve the supply of affordable and workforce housing in the San Joaquin Valley.

**Policy 2.6**

The County shall facilitate the use of Federal and State programs to assist in development that meets Merced County's housing needs and is consistent with local plans and programs.

**Policy 2.7**

The County shall promote homeownership opportunities by continuing allocation of available grant funds to assist eligible lower income households.

**Policy 2.8**

The County shall continue to provide rental assistance to very low- and low-income households through programs offered by the Housing Authority and other agencies.

**Policy 2.9**

The County shall continue to allow second and manufactured dwelling units on residential sites subject to adopted development standards and requirements.

**Policy 2.10**

The County shall encourage and facilitate the development of second units in appropriate locations to increase the availability of affordable housing.

**Policy 2.11**

The County shall encourage low- and moderate-income housing to be distributed evenly throughout unincorporated urban communities to avoid concentrations of low- and very low-income groups.

**Policy 2.12**

The County shall continue to work with other agencies and non-profit organizations to prevent the conversion of subsidized, affordable housing to market-rate housing.

**Policy 2.13**

The County shall preserve existing mobile home parks and encourage mobile home park development as a means of providing affordable housing opportunities.

**Policy 2.14**

The County shall support the development of housing plans and programs, including new government subsidized housing, that maximize housing choice for minorities and lower-income households.

**Policy 2.15**

The County shall inform and educate the public regarding the benefits of multi-family housing and affordable housing and address compatibility issues with surrounding land uses.

**Policy 2.16**

The County shall seek partnerships with the University of California, Merced, other public agencies, and non-profit housing developers to secure land and construct affordable housing in the University Community.

**Policy 2.17**

The County shall require that community plans for new communities and specific plans within new communities include a housing strategy that commits to accommodating a proportionate share of the county's regional affordable housing need.

**Policy 2.18**

The County shall encourage and provide incentives for mixed-income housing opportunities through local commitment and planning, partnerships with affordable housing developers, and funding sources, such as a regional affordable housing trust.

**Policy 2.19**

The County shall encourage affordable housing to be located close to key services (e.g., child care, transit).

## **FORECLOSURE**

Following a decade of exponential growth in the housing market, housing growth began to crash nationwide in the Fall of 2006 after one of the biggest financial crises of the past half century. Declining home values and sharp interest rate resets have combined to drive foreclosures to record levels, and the losses to homeowners, communities, and investors have thrown the economy into one of the worst recessions in decades. Merced County has been devastated by the foreclosure crisis. Merced County is one of the hardest hit counties in both California and the United States.

Merced County's foreclosure rate is nearly double that of California's rate and close to triple the nation's rate. Between June 2007 and May 2009, there were approximately 24,000 foreclosure filings in the county. Housing prices have fallen so dramatically that the housing market collapsed back to price levels comparable to those in the 1990s. Fueled by an oversupply of new homes, high unemployment, and the national recession, Merced County's median housing price had dropped to \$105,000 in May 2009, down from approximately \$380,000 in 2005. These foreclosures have led to several problems in the county including neighborhood blight, abandoned homes, increased crime activity, declining property values, loss in property tax revenue for the County, overcrowding, and numerous economic impacts.

In the wake of the national mortgage crisis, preventing or mitigating foreclosures and facilitating recovery from the damage they cause have become tremendous challenges for local governments. The root causes of the foreclosure crisis, including lending and regulatory practices, lie at a much broader scale than a particular city or county. Local government, community groups, and the local private sector are limited in what they can do to address foreclosures like regulate lending or change foreclosure processes. In addition, the Federal government has made stimulus money available through the

Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), including \$3.1 million for Merced County. With this available funding, there are a number of foreclosure mitigation strategies available to local governments, such as:

- Reaching out to distressed borrowers and those facing mortgage rate resets to prevent additional foreclosures;
- Expanding access to services to households who are in the foreclosure process to ensure that they receive help in finding rental housing, credit repair services; and
- Mitigating the negative impact of foreclosures and Real Estate Owned (REO) properties on neighborhoods.

### Goal HE-3

To prevent foreclosures, protect affected families, and stabilize neighborhoods impacted by foreclosures.

#### Policy 3.1

The County shall assist local residents in finding Federal, State, and local programs to prevent or assist with a foreclosure sale.

#### Policy 3.2

To preserve homeownership and promote neighborhood stability, the County shall attempt to alleviate individual and community issues associated with foreclosures.

#### Policy 3-3

The County shall strive to preserve and restore the appearance of its neighborhoods most impacted by foreclosures through basic upkeep for vacant properties and abandoned homes by supporting neighbors and community groups in performing regular lawn maintenance and clean-ups.

#### Policy 3.4

The County shall allocate State and Federal funding to acquire foreclosed properties and preserve them as affordable housing for lower- and moderate-income first-time homebuyers.

## SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING

Within the general population there are several groups of people who have special housing needs. These special needs can make it difficult for members of these groups to locate suitable housing. Merced County's special needs groups include the following:

***Farmworkers.*** Farmworkers are an essential component of Merced County's agricultural sector of the local economy. Farmworkers tend to be relatively young, predominantly male and members of a minority group, primarily Hispanic. While a number of farmworkers are single men, many have family members accompanying them, especially after the recent changes in

immigration laws. Most farmworkers have high rates of poverty, live in overcrowded housing units, and have a low homeownership rate.

**Seniors.** With the overall aging of society, the senior population (persons over 65 years of age) will increase in most communities. Consequently, the need for affordable and specialized housing for older residents will grow. Typical housing types used to meet the needs of seniors include smaller attached or detached housing for independent living (both market-rate and affordable), second units, shared housing, age-restricted below-market-rate rental developments, congregate care facilities, life-care facilities, residential care homes licensed by the State, and skilled nursing homes.

**Homeless Persons.** Homeless individuals and families have perhaps the most immediate housing need of any group. They also have one of the most difficult set of housing needs to meet, due to both the diversity and complexity of the factors that lead to homelessness, and to community opposition to the siting of facilities that serve homeless clients.

**Single-Parent Households.** Single-parent households need affordable housing with childcare and recreation programs on-site or nearby, in proximity to schools and with access to services. Households with single-parent heads, like large households, may have difficulty in finding appropriate-sized housing. And despite fair housing laws and programs, discrimination against children may make it more difficult for this group to find adequate housing.

**People with Disabilities.** People with disabilities represent a wide range of different housing needs, depending on the type and severity of their disability as well as personal preference and lifestyle. “Barrier-free design” housing, accessibility modifications, proximity to services and transit, and group living opportunities represent some of the types of considerations and accommodations that are important in serving this need group.

**Large Households.** Large households, defined by the US Census as households with five or more persons, have special housing needs. Large households tend to have difficulties purchasing housing because large housing units are rarely affordable and rental units with three or more bedrooms may not be common in many communities.

**Extremely Low-Income Households.** Extremely low-income households are defined as those households with incomes under 30 percent of the area median income. Extremely low-income households typically consist of minimum wage workers, seniors on fixed incomes, the disabled, and farmworkers. This income group is likely to live in overcrowded and substandard housing conditions. This group of households has specific housing needs that require greater government subsidies and assistance, housing with supportive services, single room occupancy (SRO) and or shared housing, and/or rental subsidies or vouchers.

**Goal HE-4**

To provide a range of housing types and services for special needs groups.

**Policy 4.1**

The County shall strive to address the unique housing needs of seniors, large families, single-parent households, and the homeless, persons with disabilities, extremely low-income households, farmworkers, and students.

**Policy 4.2**

The County shall work with non-profit agencies, cities, and developers on regional approaches to providing housing for special needs populations.

**Policy 4.3**

The County shall assist in local and regional efforts to secure funding for development and maintenance of housing designed for special needs populations.

**Policy 4.4**

The County shall continue to support the Housing Authority in developing and maintaining farmworker housing in agricultural zones.

**Policy 4.5**

The County shall encourage agricultural employers to provide on-site housing opportunities for their employees.

**Policy 4.6**

The County shall strive to alleviate overcrowded housing conditions for farmworkers.

**Policy 4.7**

The County shall continue to support the Merced County Community Action Agency, Merced Rescue Mission, and all other homeless service provider organizations in their efforts to provide services for homeless persons and persons in need of supportive housing.

**Policy 4.8**

The County shall continue to provide assistance to the Community Action Agency, Merced Rescue Mission, and all other homeless service provider organizations in providing transitional housing for the homeless.

**Policy 4.9**

The County shall encourage the incorporation of supportive services and design features that respond to the needs of seniors and other with limited mobility, such as single-story floor plans, wheelchair ramps, bathrooms with grab-bars, and buildings with elevators.

**Policy 4.10**

The County shall ensure equal access to housing by providing reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities. The County shall provide a process for individuals with disabilities to make requests for reasonable accommodation in regard to relief from the County's various land use; zoning; or building laws, rules, policies, practices, and/or procedures.

**Policy 4.11**

The County shall continue to ensure new multi-family housing includes units that are accessible and adaptable for use by disabled persons in accordance with Chapter 11 of the California Building Code.

**Policy 4.12**

The County shall ensure that all new multi-family construction meets the accessibility requirements of the Federal and State laws through the local permitting process.

**Policy 4.13**

The County shall provide opportunities for the development of housing types (e.g., co-housing, higher density units, sustainable building materials, group quarters, etc.) that meet the special needs of students.

**Policy 4.14**

The County shall encourage to co-location of childcare, disabled, mentally-disabled, and elderly facilities compatible with the needs of residents and land use patterns; and encourage such facilities to be located near homes, schools, community centers, recreation facilities, and transit hubs.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION/REHABILITATION**

There is often public anxiety based on the misperception that affordable and multi-family housing will devalue the neighborhoods in which they are established. Careful design and enforcement of health and safety standards can ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods and reduce opposition.

While it is important to encourage the development of new affordable housing, reinvestment in the existing supply of housing is equally important. Based on a 1999 housing conditions survey of 11,636 units in Merced County, the County found that 2,089 or 18 percent were dilapidated or in need of some rehabilitation. For the nine communities (i.e., Delhi, Hilmar, Le Grand, Planada, South Dos Palos/ Midway, Winton, Ballico, Stevinson, Volta) surveyed, South Dos Palos, Winton, Ballico, Stevinson, and Volta showed the largest percentage of units in need of rehabilitation.

**Goal HE-5**

To preserve the existing character and integrity of residential neighborhoods and conserve and improve the existing housing stock.

**Policy 5.1**

To ensure that housing throughout the unincorporated county is decent, safe, and sanitary for its occupants, the County shall continue to maintain adequate health, safety, fire, and applicable development standards

**Policy 5.2**

The County shall require quality design and appearance of all new multi-family and affordable housing projects so that they blend in with the existing community fabric, add value to the community's built environment, and strengthen acceptance by the local community.

**Policy 5.3**

The County shall require compatibility of physical design, building structure, and lot layout relationships between existing and new construction to help the new developments complement the surrounding neighborhoods.

**Policy 5.4**

To create balanced communities, the County shall promote mixed-income neighborhoods by encouraging innovative design (e.g., second units, co-housing, duplexes, zipper lots, zero-lot lines, alley-loaded parking, six pack subdivisions, three-story units, live work units).

**Policy 5.5**

The County shall continue to provide for code enforcement in the unincorporated areas.

**Policy 5.6**

The County shall strive to raise and enforce current design standards for all rental properties in the community through General Plan and Community Plan design guidelines.

**Policy 5.7**

The County shall continue to provide housing rehabilitation assistance to low-income homeowners in target unincorporated communities.

**Policy 5.8**

The County shall improve infrastructure to foster private investment and rehabilitation of older neighborhoods.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY HOUSING & DISCRIMINATION PREVENTION**

According to California State Law, all households have the right to rent or purchase housing without discrimination. The County has continued to ensure equal housing opportunity through the enforcement of fair housing practices and the dissemination of fair housing information throughout the community. The County's support for the Merced County Housing Authority and other housing organizations in the operation of

its fair housing counseling services has proven to be an effective means for addressing housing issues and ensuring fair housing in the county.

<b>Goal HE-6</b>	To provide decent housing and quality living environment for all Merced County residents regardless of age, religion, race, ethnicity, creed, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, ancestry, national origin, disability, economic level, and other arbitrary factors.
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**Policy 6.1**

The County shall further the cause of fair housing and encourage compliance with fair housing laws.

**Policy 6.2**

The County shall promote housing opportunities for all persons regardless of age, religion, race, ethnicity, creed, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, ancestry, national origin, disability, economic level, and other arbitrary factors that prevent choice in housing.

**Policy 6.3**

The County shall advocate fair housing practices in all sectors of housing and provide for the investigation of housing discrimination complaints.

**Policy 6.4**

The County shall cooperate with community-based organizations that provide services or information to victims of housing discrimination.

## ENERGY CONSERVATION

Energy efficiency has direct application to affordable housing. The more money spent on energy, the less there is available for rent or mortgage payments. High energy costs have particularly detrimental effects on low-income households that do not have enough income or cash reserves to absorb higher energy cost increases and must choose between basic survival needs of food, clothing, and shelter.

<b>Goal HE-7</b>	To ensure energy efficiency and appropriate weatherization for all new and existing housing units.
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**Policy 7.1**

The County shall promote public awareness regarding the need for energy conservation.

**Policy 7.2**

The County shall ensure that new construction meets Title 24 energy conservation requirements.

**Policy 7.3**

The County shall work with local energy providers to promote energy conservation programs and incentives to existing residential developments, especially low-income households.

**Policy 7.4**

The County shall encourage housing developers to utilize energy efficient, green building techniques and promote “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design” (LEED) certified housing units in both single and multi-family residential projects.

**Policy 7.5**

During the review of tentative maps, the County shall encourage new subdivision lots to be oriented to allow for both passive and active solar design to minimize energy losses.

**Policy 7.6**

The County shall encourage the use of solar, wind, other renewable energy resources, and use of water recycling water systems for residential and other building applications.

**IMPLEMENTATION MONITORING**

The County is committed to addressing the various housing needs of its citizens. Communication between County departments, the Housing Authority, and local non-profit housing developers, along with close monitoring of progress is needed to ensure that the policies and programs contained in this Housing Element are implemented to the greatest extent feasible.

<b>Goal HE-8</b>	To ensure that Housing Element programs are implemented on a timely basis and progress of each program is monitored and evaluated annually.
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**Policy 8.1**

The County shall continually work to carry out the day-to-day implementation of Housing Element programs.

**QUANTIFIED OBJECTIVES**

One of the requirements of State law (California Government Code Section 65583[b]) is that the Housing Element contain quantified objectives for the maintenance, preservation, improvement, and development of housing. State law recognizes that the total housing needs identified by a community may exceed available resources and the community’s ability to satisfy this need. Under these circumstances, the quantified objectives need not be identical to the total housing needs. The quantified objectives shall, however, establish the maximum number of housing units by income category that can be constructed, rehabilitated, and conserved over a five-year time period. Table 5-1 summarizes the quantified objectives for the construction, rehabilitation, or

conservation of units during the remaining time frame of the Housing Element (2009-2014).

<b>Table HE-1 Summary of Quantified Objectives</b>						
<b>Objective Category/Program</b>	<b>Extremely Low</b>	<b>Very Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Mod.</b>	<b>Above Mod.</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>New Construction/Homeownership</b>						
<b>Program 2-1:</b> San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust	30	70	70	58	-	<b>228</b>
<b>Program 2-2:</b> First Time Homebuyer Program	--		40	-	-	<b>40</b>
<b>Program 2-13:</b> Pursue State And Federal Funding for Affordable Housing	50	25	25	-	-	<b>100</b>
<b>Program 4-10:</b> Farmworker Housing Permitting Process	50	50	-	-	-	<b>100</b>
<b>Program 4-11:</b> Assist in Obtaining Funding for Farmworker Housing	50	-	-	-	-	<b>50</b>
<b>Rehabilitation</b>						
<b>Program 3-5:</b> Foreclosure Acquisition	-	17	17	16	-	<b>50</b>
<b>Program 5-1:</b> Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Program	-	150	200	150	-	<b>500</b>
<b>Conservation</b>						
None*	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,068</b>

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<b>New Construction</b>						
<b>Program 1-1: Vacant and Underutilized Land Inventory</b>						
The County shall maintain an updated inventory of vacant and underutilized, residentially designated land. The County shall make this information available to the public by providing the inventory at the Planning and Community Development Department and on the County's website.		✓				✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, County Assessor, County Tax Collector					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010, ongoing					
Quantified Objective	N/A					
<b>Program 1-2: Community Plan Updates</b>						
The County shall continue to review and update its Community Plans to ensure adequate land is available for various housing types at all income levels. The County shall continue to zone and designate adequate sites during the Community Plan updates to meet the various housing needs of each community.						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund, Development Fees					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 1-3: Innovative Housing Types</b>						
To encourage development of innovative housing designs and building materials that may emerge during the buildout of all new communities, the County shall consider modifications of building and subdivision codes, where appropriate, that would facilitate the development of new types of affordable units, while maintaining the public's health, safety, and quality of life. The County shall also work closely with local builders and potential developers to create new experimental housing prototypes.				✓		
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2011-2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program 1-4: Infrastructure Financing Assistance in New Communities</b>                      To reduce the “up-front” infrastructure improvement and development costs in new communities, the County shall investigate the feasibility of providing assistance in developing long-term infrastructure financing. Such financing might include formation of a Mello-Roos or special assessment district to support a long-term, low-interest revenue bond to fund infrastructure improvements.</p>			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<p><b>Program 1-5: Water Study</b>                      The County shall conduct a county-wide water study that examines future demand compared with existing and planned supply and identifies ways to meet unmet projected demand. The study will consist of the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A summary of existing water resources in the county;</li> <li>▪ Water demand and capacity projections for a 20-year time horizon for the eastern, western, and northern regions of the county;</li> <li>▪ An estimation of groundwater and surface water available to support future urban development, including new towns;</li> <li>▪ A description of water supply systems to satisfy the urban demands for each region;</li> <li>▪ An analysis of groundwater and surface water source availability during drought years;</li> <li>▪ A list of strategies for augmenting groundwater and surface water supplies through non-potable water sources, recycled water practices, water conservation programs, and new storage facility construction opportunities.</li> </ul>		✓				
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<p><b>Program 1-6: Child Care</b>                      The County shall encourage the development of childcare facilities within all housing developments, with specific the specific emphasis on affordable housing, through the use of incentives determined to be appropriate. The County shall review incentive options to develop a plan or policy relating to this issue in cooperation with childcare providers and intermediaries.</p>			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 1-7: Rezone Sites to Meet RHNA</b>						
The County shall rezone adequate sites for higher-density development within the University Community Plan to accommodate at least the remaining need of 974 lower-income units (48.7 acres, assuming 20 units per acre). The County shall ensure that at least 50 percent of the unmet lower-income RHNA need be accommodated on housing sites designated exclusively for residential use, permit owner-occupied and rental multi-family uses by-right, allow at least 16 units per site, and allow at least 20 units per acre.				✓		
Responsibility	Planning Department					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 1-8: Planning for Large Sites</b>						
The County shall provide opportunities for further subdivision or specific plan development of large sites identified in the Housing Element to encourage a variety of housing types, including affordable housing, and site plan concepts that achieve the maximum housing potential of large sites. The County shall employ a range of tools and techniques, potentially including outreach to property owners and stakeholders, to encourage development of these sites.						✓
Responsibility	Planning Department					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	As necessary					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 1-9: Sufficient Capacity for Vacant Sites</b>						
The County shall work with water and sewer service providers to ensure that sufficient capacity exists for sites identified in the Housing Element vacant sites inventory to facilitate development of these sites within the planning period.						✓
Responsibility	Planning Department					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 1-10: Modifying the Permitting Process for Multi-family Housing</b>						
The County shall amend the Zoning Code to allow multi-family developments with 21 units or more with an Administrative Permit (AP) instead of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), consistent with the current requirements for multi-family developments with 5-20 units.			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Affordable Housing</b>						
<b>Program 2-1: San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust</b> The County shall continue to work with the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley and San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust in developing a housing trust fund to provide a dedicated source of revenue to build new affordable housing units. The County shall investigate the formation of a county-level housing trust to provide a variety of assistance for low-income housing projects, including, but not limited to, land acquisition, deferred loans for homebuyers, rental loan funds, low-interest financing for the construction, incentives to private developers (e.g., density bonuses), leveraging government programs and private loans, front-end master planning, and other assistance.		✓				✓
Responsibility	Board of Supervisors, Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Federal, State (Proposition 1C), and local (Real Estate Transfer Tax, General Fund, Sales Tax, RDA Set Aside) Funds					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010, ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	288 units (30 extremely low-, 70 very low-, 70, low-, and 58 moderate-income units)					
<b>Program 2-2: First Time Homebuyer Program</b> The County shall continue to partner with other public agencies and non-profit organizations in providing loans to qualified low-income, first-time homebuyers.						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	HOME and CDBG Funds					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	40 low-income households					
<b>Program 2-3: Density Bonus Ordinance Amendment</b> The County shall amend the Zoning Ordinance so that the density bonus requirements are consistent with changes to State law (i.e., SB 1818 and SB 435).			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 2-4: "Fast Track" Processing</b> The County shall continue to provide "fast track" processing for extremely-low, very low-, low-, and moderate-income housing project applications.						✓
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 2-5: Expedited Plan Checks and Building Inspections</b> The County shall continue to expedite plan checks and building inspections to meet construction deadlines associated with the award of Federal tax credits.						
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 2-6: Impact Fees Reduction</b> The County shall waive or reduce some or all processing and impact fees for affordable multi-family developments.						
Responsibility	All County Departments, Board of Supervisors					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Determined at time of project application					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 2-7: Housing Choice Voucher Program</b> The County shall provide assistance to the County Housing Authority for the continuation of Section 8 (Housing Choice Voucher Program) rental housing program. The County shall assist the Housing Authority in providing translation services (e.g., Spanish, Hmong) to residents that speak English as a second language.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Housing Authority					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 2-8: Housing Choice Voucher Program Outreach</b> The County shall continue to work with the Housing Authority in providing outreach to landlords about the benefits of Housing Choice Vouchers and other available rental programs.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Housing Authority					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program 2-9: Assistance to At-Risk Units</b>                      The County shall continue to work with other local agencies and non-profit organizations (e.g., California Housing Partnership) in identifying and assisting existing subsidized, affordable housing developments that are at risk of converting to market-rate housing. The County shall maintain and update, as needed, the inventory of housing units or projects at risk of converting to market rate (See Table 5-51 in the Background Report).</p>						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Housing Authority					
Funding	Federal and State Funds					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<p><b>Program 2-10: Inclusionary Housing Program Study</b>                      The County shall consider applying for a CDBG technical assistance grant to develop workshops with the Cities, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors in order to discuss the need for a countywide inclusionary ordinance. The workshops shall consider various topics including integration of inclusionary requirements with employment/housing balance requirements to discourage impaction of areas, and methods to ensure firm commitment from the Cities for its implementation (e.g., City/County revenue sharing agreements).</p>				✓ (2013-2014)		
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, County Counsel, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, Participation with Cities					
Funding	CDBG Technical Assistance Funds					
Timeframe	FY 2013-2014					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<p><b>Program 2-11: Housing Program Information</b>                      The County shall continue to disseminate information to the public about its available housing programs. The County shall continue to use its website as an information/referral source.</p>						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Governmental Affairs					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program 2-12: Legislative Relief</b>						
The County shall, through its State and Federal representatives, advocate for higher State and Federal financial commitments to low and moderate income housing programs to allow provide local governments with greater financial resources to meet Federal and State housing mandates. The County shall pursue housing legislation that establishes a permanent statewide fund to address the county’s housing need. The County shall write letters of support or opposition as warranted.				✓		
Responsibility	All County Departments					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2011-2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 2-13: Pursue State and Federal Funding for Affordable Housing</b>						
The County shall pursue appropriate State and Federal funding sources, including HOME, CDBG, and Proposition 1-C funds, to support the efforts of non-profit and for-profit developers to meet new construction and rehabilitation needs of lower-income households, especially extremely low-income households. The County shall periodically update and review available housing programs to identify additional funding sources.			✓		✓	
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011, at least annually thereafter					
Quantified Objectives	50 extremely low-, 25 very low-, 25 low-income units					
<b>Forclosure</b>						
<b>Program 3-1: Foreclosure Prevention Resources</b>						
The County shall continue to promote foreclosure prevention resources by posting information on the County website about foreclosure prevention hotlines and services offered by non-profit organizations.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Government Affairs					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program 3-2: Homebuyer Education Promotion</b>                      The County shall continue to coordinate meetings in appropriate communities between relevant participants (Building Industry Association, mortgage lenders, Association of Realtors, Housing Authority, etc.) to educate the public on options that exist for potential homebuyers. The program shall include workshops and/or the distribution of information regarding readiness to purchase a home, money management, understanding credit, obtaining a loan, shopping for a home, home maintenance, financial management, and foreclosure prevention. The County shall promote the program on the County website, through brochures available at the County offices, and/or in local newspaper advertisements, as well as through partnerships with local realtors. To assist residents where English is their second language, the County shall provide translations of written materials and translation services at public meetings.</p>						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Governmental Affairs					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<p><b>Program 3-3: Nuisance Abatement in Impacted Neighborhoods</b>                      To help secure and maintain vacant, foreclosed properties, the County shall expand code enforcement in the areas most impacted by foreclosures. The County shall strive to effectively follow up on zoning code violations to ensure that problems are addressed. The County shall investigate creation of a nuisance abatement fund through measures, such as the annual licensing of properties of two or more units to fund the maintenance of abandoned properties and consider recouping costs by charging property owners and/or placing liens on the properties.</p>		✓				
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works, Environmental Health Division, District Attorney					
Funding	General Fund, Neighborhood Stabilization Program Funds					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<p><b>Program 3-4: Foreclosure Registration Ordinance</b>                      To ensure that foreclosed homes are not a source of blight, the County shall investigate adoption of an ordinance that require property owners of foreclosed homes, including banks, mortgage lenders, or any other holder of a deed of trust, to register their properties with the Public Works Building Division and pay a fine if the properties fall into disrepair. The County shall expand the electronic complaint system through the County's website that would allow neighboring homeowners to report problem homes in the community.</p>			✓			✓

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, County Counsel					
Funding	General Fund, Neighborhood Stabilization Program Funds					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011, ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 3-5: Foreclosure Acquisition</b>						
The County shall continue its work with qualified non-profit partners using Federal and State Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds to acquire foreclosed properties for private ownership, rehabilitate properties if necessary, and redevelop properties as affordable housing for renters or first time homebuyers. The County may use other housing programs, such as the first time homebuyer down-payment assistance program, in conjunction with this program.						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Neighborhood Stabilization Program Funds, CDGB Funds, other State and Federal Funds					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	50 very low-, low-, and moderate-income units					
<b>Program 3-6: Foreclosure Eviction Ordinance</b>						
The County shall investigate the need for a Foreclosure Eviction Ordinance, which would ensure that banks or lenders who foreclose on a single-family or multi-family residence cannot evict tenants merely because property owners have been foreclosed on the property.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works, County Counsel, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors	✓				
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Special Needs Housing</b>						
<b>Program 4-1: Zoning Code Amendments</b>						
The County shall amend to the Zoning Code to reflect changes to State law since the previous Housing Element was adopted in 2003: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Permit "by right" farm labor camp housing for up to 36 employees through the "plot plan" review process</li> <li>▪ Permit "by right" family day care homes for eight or fewer children consistent with the Merced County Health and Safety Code.</li> <li>▪ Allow transitional and supportive housing as a permitted use in residential zoning districts subject only to those restrictions that apply to other residential uses of the same type in the same zone; and</li> <li>▪ Ensure that various special needs housing types, such as single room occupancy housing, are defined and listed as permitted uses in appropriate zoning districts and specify the conditions and process required to develop such housing.</li> </ul>			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, County Counsel, Public Works, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-2: Farmworker Housing Plan</b>						
The County shall establish a committee or task force to oversee development of a Farmworker Housing Plan that identifies and addresses farmworker housing needs. Initial committee members should include a representative from the County Planning and Community Development Department, Public Works Department, Environmental Health Division, Agricultural Commissioner, Housing Authority, Farm Bureau, University of California Cooperative Extension, and a member of a group representing farmworkers.				✓		
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works, Environmental Health Division, County Counsel, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors					
Funding	General Funds					
Timeframe	FY 2011-2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-3: Reasonable Accommodation</b>						
The County shall amend the County Code to provide individuals, family members, caregivers, and/or anyone acting on behalf of the person with disabilities reasonable accommodation in rules, policies, practices, and procedures that may be necessary to ensure equal access to housing.			✓			
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development, County Counsel, Board of Supervisors					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-4: Publicizing Reasonable Accommodation</b>						
The County shall create a public information brochure on reasonable accommodation for disabled persons and provide that information on the County's website.						
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development, Governmental Affairs			✓		
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2011-2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-5: Universal Design</b>						
The County shall investigate the feasibility of adopting specific universal design standards for all new construction to encourage accessibility to the greatest extent possible.						
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development			✓		
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2011-2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-6: Funding for Senior Citizen Projects</b>						
The County shall continue to work with the County Housing Authority and private entities in acquiring grants for senior citizen projects in the unincorporated communities where they are needed.						
Responsibility	Public Works, Community and Economic Development					✓
Funding	Federal and State Grants					
Timeframe	Ongoing, as funds are available					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-7: Senior Housing Incentives</b>						
The County shall allow a 50 percent density bonus for senior housing and explore revisions to the parking standards for senior housing to allow a reduced standard from that of typical single and multi-family housing.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program 4-8: Priority Permit Processing</b> The County shall provide priority permit processing for projects that are targeted toward special needs groups and key facilities (including childcare) that service groups such as seniors, the disabled, and the homeless, including priority for building plan check, subdivision map review, improvement plans for roadways and utilities, and environmental impact analysis.		✓				✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works Building Division, Public Works Roads Division, Environmental Health Division					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010, ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-9: Zoning for Emergency Shelters</b> The County shall amend to the Zoning Code to allow emergency shelters in at least one of the following zones by right (i.e., without a conditional use permit or other discretionary approval): Light Industrial (M-1) and General Commercial (C-2). The County shall establish development and management standards for emergency shelters that are consistent with State law and encourage and facilitate the development of emergency shelters.			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, County Counsel, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	Within on year of adoption of the Housing Element					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 4-10: Farmworker Housing Permitting Process</b> The County shall continue the additional dwelling occupancy monitoring permit (ADOMP) program to facilitate the provision of private farmworker housing in agricultural zones.						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Building Department					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	100 farmworker housing units (extremely low- and very low-income units)					
<b>Program 4-11: Assist in Obtaining Funding for Farmworker Housing</b> The County shall apply for or support applications for funding for farmworker housing, including the Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker Housing Grant Program. The County shall periodically review available funding programs to identify additional funding sources for farmworker housing.			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011, annually thereafter					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Quantified Objectives	50 farmworker housing units (extremely low-income)					
<b>Neighborhood Preservation/Rehabilitation</b>						
<b>Program 5-1: Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation</b> The County shall continue to work with other public agencies and non-profit organizations in implementing the Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Program, which provides assistance to eligible low-income homeowners for correction of health, safety, and/or sanitation issues and code violations..						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	500 units (100 units per year)					
<b>Program 5-2: Funding for Housing Rehabilitation</b> The County shall continue to apply for Community Development Block Grant and HOME Program funding for housing rehabilitation in Merced County unincorporated communities with the greatest need.						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund, CDBG and HOME Grants					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 5-3: CDBG Funding for Code Enforcement</b> The County shall continue to utilize "set-aside" funds from CDBG grants for code enforcement to aid in property clean-up and substandard housing enforcement, and community/neighborhood preservation.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Environmental Health Division				✓	
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Annually					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 5-4: Housing Conditions Survey</b> To get an accurate assessment of Merced County's existing housing stock, the County shall pursue State and Federal grants to assist in funding a housing conditions survey.			✓			
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	State and Federal Funds					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 5-5: State Housing Code Enforcement</b> The County shall continue to enforce the State Housing Code by either the repair or demolition of substandard housing units that are health and safety hazards.						✓

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Environmental Health Division					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 5-6: Outreach to Landlords</b>						
The County shall continue work with the Housing Authority and other housing agencies and organizations in providing outreach to landlords about the benefits of improving rental units.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Housing Authority, Environmental Health Division					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Equal Opportunity Housing &amp; Discrimination Prevention</b>						
<b>Program 6-1: Fair Housing Information</b>						
The County shall distribute to public locations throughout the county and continue to display in County offices brochures and pamphlets from the Fair Employment & Housing Practices Commission that explain the requirement of employers to provide adequate housing for employees. The County shall also post information on the County’s website about fair housing practices with links to appropriate investigative or enforcement agencies that can resolve housing complaints.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Governmental Affairs					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Energy Conservation</b>						
<b>Program 7-1: Renewable Energy Resources Information</b>						
The County shall continue to display brochures illustrating the use of solar, wind, and other renewable energy resources in housing maintenance and repair and information on “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design” (LEED) certification programs.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program 7-2: Energy Conservation for Affordable Housing</b>						
The County shall target local funds and community development block grant resources to assist affordable housing developers in providing the use of solar, wind, other renewable energy resources, and use of water recycling water systems for residential and other building applications.				✓		
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2011-2012					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 7-3: Green Building Code Regulations</b>						
The County shall enforce State regulations related to green building as the State enacts laws in accordance with the Building Energy Efficiency Standards, Part 11 of Title 24 of California’s new Green Building Standards Code to establish mandatory green building standards for all new construction by 2010.		✓	✓			
Responsibility	Building					
Funding	General Fund					
Timeframe	2010					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 7-4: Energy Efficiency Retrofit</b>						
The County shall continue to promote energy efficiency retrofit and preventative maintenance programs such as the Merced County Community Action Agency Weatherization Program and PG&E Residential Energy Efficiency Rebate Programs. The County shall display brochures advertising these programs, as well as flyers and brochures illustrating the beneficial use of solar and other renewable energy resources in housing maintenance and repair.				✓		
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2010-2011					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Implementation Monitoring</b>						
<b>Program 8-1: Implementation Tracking Matrix</b>						
The County shall use the Implementation Tracking Matrix to continually track the progress of Housing Element programs.						
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Public Works	✓				✓
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	FY 2009-2010, ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					

Housing Element Implementation Programs						
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program 8-2: Housing Element Implementation Reporting</b>						
The County shall annually review and report on the implementation of Housing Element programs and the County's effectiveness in meeting the programs' objectives.					✓	
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Annually					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					
<b>Program 8-3: Annual Real Estate Market Housing</b>						
The County shall establish and implement a comprehensive annual monitoring program to document the sales prices or rental rates for all new units constructed or rehabilitated in the previous year and to determine housing affordability levels. The County shall also regularly monitor housing sales price trends of existing units along with a report on the amount of vacant designated land for residential development.						✓
Responsibility	Community and Economic Development, Assessor's Office, County Tax Collector					
Funding	Staff Time, General Fund					
Timeframe	Ongoing					
Quantified Objectives	N/A					





# PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This Element provides guidance for the logical and efficient expansion and/or upgrading of services and facilities in Merced County. Development in the County is dependent on a complicated network of public facilities and services. Each type of service has a unique set of challenges and must adapt to growth and change differently. Several types of County-provided public facilities and services are experiencing limitations including libraries, jail facilities, road maintenance, and Sheriff and Fire Department staffing. Although there is generally an adequate distribution of libraries and fire stations, County fiscal problems have kept staffing and equipment at minimum levels. While the County has historically experienced high rates of population growth in some areas, it has not been able to increase staffing of libraries, fire stations, or Sheriff "beats" to maintain a constant per capita service level.

Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Public Facility and Service Funding
- Wastewater
- Storm Drainage and Flood Control
- Solid and Hazardous Waste
- Utilities
- Law Enforcement
- Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services
- Schools and Libraries
- Childcare

*Note: Policies related to the supply and delivery of water are contained in the Water Element.*

## PUBLIC FACILITY AND SERVICE FUNDING

Upgrading or replacing public facilities is typically funded by service fees, surcharge fees, assessments, grants, loans, bonds, or other financial instruments. However, in general,

expansion or development of facilities is the responsibility of private developers. While public entities are responsible for the operation and maintenance of facilities, property owners within the service area are responsible for the costs of operation and maintenance of facilities and services, which is funded through assessments, charges, and fees for service.

Policies in this section seek to ensure that new development pays its share of the cost of providing new facilities and services. Policies also address the location and capacity of existing and future public facilities, as well as the funding necessary to provide these services.

### Goal PFS-1

Ensure adequate funding for new, expanded, and upgraded public facilities and services.

#### **Policy PFS-1.1: Funding Essential Services (FB)**

Determine the acceptable minimum level for the efficient delivery and funding of essential County services.

#### **Policy PFS-1.2: Facilities Funding Mechanisms (FB)**

Use a wide range of funding mechanisms to adequately fund capital improvements, maintenance, and on-going operations of publicly-owned and/or operated facilities, including:

- a. Establishing appropriate development impact fees;
- b. Establishing assessment districts; and
- c. Pursuing grant funding.

#### **Policy PFS-1.3: Funding for Required Infrastructure Facilities (MPSP/FB)**

Require new infrastructure facilities to be fully funded and that development contributes its proportionate share of costs by:

- a. Increasing public-private partnership opportunities for capital improvements as well as ongoing operations and service delivery costs;
- b. Requiring developers to fully fund their proportionate share of public infrastructure through a combination of impact fees, community facility districts, or through private funding sources; and
- c. Identifying and using existing financing mechanisms to fund capital facility expansion and ongoing maintenance costs.

#### **Policy PFS-1.4: Regional Coordination (IGC)**

Support efforts to coordinate with regional and local agencies to

- a. Identify potential funding mechanisms;
- b. Pursue regional grant opportunities;

- c. Encourage consolidation of services;
- d. Create efficiencies between service districts; and
- e. Promote joint use facilities.

**Policy PFS-1.5: Public Facility Master Plans (MPSP)**

Require regular updates of County Facility Master Plans to:

- a. Ensure that future public facilities are designed to meet projected long-term capacity needs in order to avoid unplanned expansion costs;
- b. Support and pioneer infrastructure master plans and facilities that further sustainable practices, including the following: pursue water reuse (i.e., greywater), encourage joint drainage and park facilities, and change drainage standards to allow for joint use;
- c. Coordinate with local service districts to ensure that sufficient water/wastewater treatment is available for unincorporated communities prior to directing additional growth to them;
- d. Evaluate levels of service on roadway maintenance;
- e. Consider establishment of a County water and wastewater system to serve unincorporated community development projects; and
- f. Encourage joint use facilities between the County and the cities, special districts, and other public agencies.

**Policy PFS-1.6: Maintenance and Operation Funding (FB)**

Investigate additional funding mechanisms for future maintenance and operations including sheriff and fire facilities and storm drainage systems. These funding mechanisms could include the following:

- a. Sales tax increases for construction and facility replacement;
- b. Homeowners associations with enforceable covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs);
- c. Community Facilities Districts (CFDs);
- d. Landscape and lighting districts through the County Service Areas (CSAs); and/or
- e. Other assessment districts.

**Policy PFS-1.7: Infrastructure Investment Prioritization (FB)**

Require infrastructure investments to be prioritized based on the following characteristics:

- a. Communities with the greatest need based on future growth or deficiencies in existing services; and/or
- b. Communities with the greatest economic potential.

**Policy PFS-1.8: New Development Financing (FB)**

Require new development to provide adequate financing, where a nexus can be shown, that meets all identified public facility costs.

**Policy PFS-1.9: Public Safety Services (MPSP/FB)**

Coordinate with cities and special districts to ensure adequate public safety services are provided countywide, and develop mechanisms to ensure financial resources are allocated for fire protection and sheriff patrol.

**WASTEWATER**

Several special districts, including community service districts, water districts, and sanitary districts provide sanitary sewer service within the unincorporated communities in the County. Unincorporated communities that lack sanitary sewer infrastructure are serviced by septic systems.

Merced County is facing several issues related to wastewater. The primary issue is that many communities have wastewater facilities that are near capacity and cannot provide additional sewage treatment services without being expanded/upgraded. Additionally, the improper location and/or operation of septic tanks and other individual wastewater systems in the County can affect the quality of groundwater and impair the use of water for domestic, recreation, and wildlife habitat purposes. The policies in this section support adequate wastewater capacity for development in unincorporated urban areas, promote the phasing of wastewater facilities in areas designated for growth, and encourage public education and monitoring for areas using septic systems.

**Goal W-2**

Ensure the adequate wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal within the County.

**Policy PFS-2.1: Water and Sewer Expansion (MPSP/SO)**

Encourage public sewer system operators to maintain and expand their systems to meet the development needs of the County.

**Policy PFS-2.2: Wastewater Treatment and Disposal Capacity (RDR/MPSP)**

Require applicants for discretionary projects located within special district boundaries to provide a "Can and Will Serve" letter or other documentation from the appropriate sewer and/or water district demonstrating the commitment of capacity prior to acceptance of the discretionary application as complete. Discretionary applications generally include: general plan amendments, zone changes, conditional use, location and development, tentative subdivision and administrative permit applications.

**Policy PFS-2.3: Sewer and Water District Requirement (RDR)**

Require at the final map or building permit stage for permitted developments proof of approved service from a local sewer and/or water district or approval from the County Health Department for on-site systems outside districts outside urban special districts service boundaries. For discretionary applications, a "Can and Will Serve" letter from the

local sewer and/or water district shall be required as part of the application materials. For discretionary applications outside a district, initial clearance for processing must be obtained from the County Health Department for projects utilizing on-site systems.

**Policy PFS-2.4: Intensive Processing Activities (RDR)**

Discourage the development of intensive processing activities that have heavy wastewater discharge characteristics in areas identified as having high groundwater or drainage problems unless effective mitigation measures are available.

**Policy PFS-2.5: Ground or Surface Water Contamination (RDR)**

Prohibit wastewater disposal facilities, including private residential facilities, that are determined to have the potential to contaminate the groundwater or surface water, on either a site-specific or cumulative basis.

**Policy PFS-2.6: Septic System Standards (RDR/MPSP)**

Require adequate standards for private septic systems to protect water quality and public health.

**Policy PFS-2.7: Septic System Care Education (SO/JP)**

Encourage and support programs to educate homeowners on the care and maintenance of private sewage disposal systems.

**Policy PFS-2.8: Grant Application Assistance (FB)**

Support communities and special districts in applying for State and Federal grants for major wastewater related expansions or upgrades when such plans promote the efficient solution to wastewater treatment needs for the area and County, and are consistent with adopted County General Plan and Community Plans.

**Policy PFS-2.9: Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrading (MPSP)**

Encourage, where appropriate, upgrades to existing centralized or regional wastewater treatment plants to produce reclaimed water suitable for unrestricted reuse.

**Policy PFS-2.10: Consistency with SWRCB OWTS Requirements (RDR/MPSP/SO)**

Revise the County's on-site sewage disposal standards to conform to the SWRCB's Water Quality Control Policy for Siting, Design, Operation, and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems, and submit the revised standards for approval as a Local Agency Management Program to maintain local oversight and approval of OWTS.

## **STORM DRAINAGE AND FLOOD CONTROL**

Some areas of Merced County are exposed to flooding due to periodic heavy rainfall, snowmelt, dam failures, and inadequate storm drainage systems. To prevent flooding in Merced County, the County enforces stormwater and floodplain management practices. Developers are required to provide their own storm drainage systems within subdivisions in most unincorporated communities of the County unless there is a community system in place. With the exception of Hilmar, the County maintains these storm drainage systems. The policies in this section address storm drainage facility design and flood control for Merced County.

**Goal PFS-3**

Ensure the management of stormwater in a safe and environmentally sensitive manner through the provision of adequate storm drainage facilities that protect people, property, and the environment.

**Policy PFS-3.1: Stormwater Management Plans (MPSP)**

Require stormwater management plans for all Urban Communities to reduce flood risk, protect soils from erosion, control stormwater runoff, and minimize impacts on existing drainage facilities.

**Policy PFS-3.2: Stormwater Facilities in New Development (RDR/MPSP)**

Require that new development in unincorporated communities includes adequate stormwater drainage systems. This includes adequate capture, transport, and detention/retention of stormwater.

**Policy PFS-3.3: Community Drainage Systems (MPSP/SO)**

Encourage development of community drainage systems rather than individual project-level systems, in order to use land more efficiently and protect people, property and the environment in a more comprehensive manner.

**Policy PFS-3.4: Agency Coordination (IGC)**

Coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other appropriate agencies to develop stormwater detention/retention facilities and recharge facilities that enhance flood protection and improve groundwater recharge.

**Policy PFS-3.5: Pre-Development Storm Flows (MPSP)**

Require on-site detention/retention facilities and velocity reducers when necessary to maintain pre-development storm flows and velocities in natural drainage systems.

**Policy PFS-3.6: Retention/Detention Facility (RDR/MPSP)**

Encourage stormwater detention/retention project designs that minimize drainage concentrations and impervious coverage, avoid floodplain areas, are visually unobtrusive and, where feasible, provide a natural watercourse appearance and a secondary use, such as recreation.

**SOLID AND HAZARDOUS WASTE**

Merced County does not operate solid or hazardous waste hauling operations. No transfer stations exist in the County, so most waste is collected through drop boxes and curbside collection. Within the County there are two active solid waste disposal/landfill facilities owned and operated by the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority (MCRWMA): the SR 59 Landfill and the Billy Wright Landfill (BWL). The Department of Public Works operates a Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facility at the SR 59 Landfill that collects waste oil, batteries, household pesticides, antifreeze, e-wastes, and other household hazardous waste. The policies in this section focus on the collection and safe disposal of solid and hazardous waste generated in Merced County, as well as the recycling, composting, and overall reduction of waste.

**Goal PFS-4**

Ensure the safe and efficient disposal and recycling of solid and hazardous waste generated in the County.

**Policy PFS-4.1: Landfill Buffers (RDR/MPSP)**

Locate appropriate land uses and encourage larger parcel sizes around existing and abandoned (i.e., un-reclaimed) solid waste landfill sites.

**Policy PFS-4.2: Landfill Location (RDR)**

Require landfills to be located in areas that avoid health and safety risks and ensure that future adjacent land uses do not restrict landfill operations.

**Policy PFS-4.3: Spill Site Development (RDR)**

Prohibit development on sites identified by Federal, State, or local agencies as spill sites or hazardous waste areas unless approved cleanup occurs prior to development.

**Policy PFS-4.4: Land Use Compatibility with Solid Waste Facilities (RDR)**

Require solid waste facility sites and landfills are protected from encroachment by incompatible land uses, such as schools and homes.

**Policy PFS-4.5: Solid Waste Service Availability (RDR)**

Require all new development to adequately provide solid waste storage, handling, and collection through the development review and permitting process.

**Policy PFS-4.6: Solid Waste Reduction (SO)**

Support and promote feasible waste reduction, recycling, and composting efforts.

**Policy PFS-4.7: Composting and Green Waste Facilities (SO)**

Encourage the proper siting and operation of composting and green waste facilities in rural areas of the County.

**UTILITIES**

Utilities are important service providers that support the expansion of the region's economic base, serve available developable land, and maintain and increase infrastructure capacity. Electric services in the County are provided by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), Merced Irrigation District (MID), and Turlock Irrigation District (TID). PG&E provides all the natural gas services within Merced County. Telecommunication services are primarily provided by SBC/AT&T, with a wide range of other service providers in the market for wireless and long distance services. The policies in this section address the provision of utilities in Merced County, including natural gas, electric services, and communication systems.

**Goal PFS-5**

Ensure the provision of adequate utilities to the residents of Merced County.

**Policy PFS-5.1: Adequate Utility Facilities and Services (SO)**

Encourage the provision of adequate gas and electric, communications, and telecommunications service and facilities to serve the needs of existing and future residents and businesses.

**Policy PFS-5.2: Utility Easements (RDR)**

Require utility easements to be obtained on individual parcels at the subdivision map approval stage to provide adequate area for installation of improvements, including sewer, water, cable-television, and telephone lines.

**Policy PFS-5.3: New Transmission and Distribution Lines (RDR/MPSP)**

Encourage new transmission and distribution lines to be sited within existing utility easements and right-of-ways or utilize joint-use of easements among different utilities to avoid impacting existing communities.

**Policy PFS-5.4: Electrical Interference (MPSP/SO)**

Require mitigation of electrical interference to adjacent land uses in the placement of electrical and other transmission facilities.

**Policy PFS-5.5: Contingency Plans (JP)**

Require utility and pipeline companies and districts maintain contingency plans for responding to potentially hazardous situations such as pipeline breaks and fallen power lines.

**Policy PFS-5.6: Underground Power Transmission (RDR)**

Require power transmission and distribution facilities to be located underground within urban communities and residential centers.

**Policy PFS-5.7: Utility System Expansion (RDR/JP)**

Coordinate with local gas and electric utility companies in the design and location, and appropriate expansion of gas and electric systems, while minimizing impacts to agriculture and minimizing noise, electromagnetic, visual, and other impacts on residents.

**Policy PFS-5.8: Communication Towers (RDR/SO)**

Require compliance with the Wireless Communications Guidelines for siting of communication towers in unincorporated areas of the County.

**Policy PFS-5.9: Communication Tower Design (RDR/SO)**

Require new telecommunication infrastructure to be screened, camouflaged, or designed in such a way as to be nearly invisible from public areas.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Sheriff's Department has the primary responsibility for protecting the life and property of the residents living in the unincorporated areas of Merced County. The Sheriff's Department is also responsible for investigation of all criminal activities

occurring in unincorporated areas and apprehension of individuals who have violated the law. The policies in this section address the general characteristics of law enforcement facilities and services provided within Merced County by the Sheriff's Office and the divisions for which it is responsible.

### Goal PFS-6

Ensure the provision of timely and adequate law enforcement through proper management and staffing of the Sheriff Department in Merced County.

#### Policy PFS-6.1: Staffing Levels (SO)

Encourage optimum staffing levels for both sworn Sheriff Deputies and civilian support staff in order to provide quality law enforcement services in Merced County.

#### Policy PFS-6.2: Sheriff Department Response Time Standards (SO)

Strive to achieve and maintain appropriate Sheriff Department response times for all call priority levels to provide adequate law enforcement services for all County residents.

#### Policy PFS-6.3: Pursue Grant Funding (FB)

Continue to pursue grants to fund additional staff positions, new law enforcement equipment and technology, educational programs for children and the public on the dangers of drugs, and for other law enforcement activities that enhance the safety and welfare of Merced County residents.

#### Policy PFS-6.4: Fair Share (RDR)

Require new development to pay its fair share of the costs for providing law enforcement service facilities and equipment to new residents.

#### Policy PFS-6.5: Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (RDR)

Include the Sheriff Department in the review of development projects, specifically for residential subdivision and commercial development, to adequately address crime and safety, and promote implementation of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles.

## FIRE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The Merced County Fire Department provides a range of services and programs aimed at protecting the lives and property of the people of Merced County from the adverse effects of fire, medical emergencies, exposure to hazardous materials, or other dangerous conditions. The Policies in this section address the standards, equipment, and funding for providing coordinated fire protection and emergency services for Merced County. The policies ensure safety for existing and future County residents through the expansion of fire facilities commensurate with population growth.

**Goal PFS-7**

Provide adequate fire and emergency medical facilities and services to protect County residents from injury and loss of life, and to protect property from fire.

**Policy PFS-7.1: Fire Staffing and Response Time Standards (SO)**

Strive to maintain fire department staffing levels and response times consistent with National Fire Protection Association standards.

**Policy PFS-7.2: Fire Protection Service Expansion (SO)**

Strive to expand fire protection service in areas that are currently underserved or areas that experience growth in order to maintain adequate levels of service.

**Policy PFS-7.3: Water Service Standards (RDR)**

Require all development within unincorporated communities to be served by water supplies, storage, and conveyance facilities supplying adequate volume, pressure, and capacity for fire protection.

**Policy PFS-7.4: Visible Signage (SO)**

Ensure that all roads and buildings are properly identified by name or number with clearly visible signs in order to promote faster response times.

**Policy PFS-7.5: Cooperative Service Agreements (SO/IGC)**

Promote cooperative fire protection agreements with municipal and State and Federal forest agencies, and adjacent County fire departments to provide added fire protection on a year-round basis.

**Policy PFS-7.6: Emergency Medical Service Staffing and Response Time Standards (SO)**

Strive to achieve and maintain optimum staffing levels and appropriate response times to provide adequate emergency medical services for all County residents.

**Policy PFS-7.7: Fire Facility Fees (RDR/JP/FB)**

Require new development to pay its fair share of public facility fees for new fire station facilities, equipment, and staffing necessary to maintain the County's service standards in that area. New development may also be required to create or join a special assessment district or other funding mechanism, to pay the costs associated with the operation of a fire station.

**Policy PFS-7.8: Fire Station Locations (SO)**

Strive to locate new fire stations in areas that ensure the minimum response times to service calls.

**Policy PFS-7.9: Fire Safety Standard Compliance (RDR)**

Ensure that all proposed developments are reviewed for compliance with fire safety standards by responsible local fire agencies per the Uniform Fire Code and other State and local ordinances.

**Policy PFS-7.10: Adequate Fire Flows for Agricultural Facilities (RDR)**

Require all agricultural commercial facilities to have adequate water supply and fire flows to meet the Uniform Fire Code and other State and local ordinances.

**SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES**

There are a total of 20 school districts with 90 schools, one community college district with two campuses, and one public university in Merced County. Public primary education is overseen by the Merced County Office of Education, a regional agency whose mission is to provide educational leadership, resources, and service to assist school districts to be effective facilitators of learning for all pupils. In addition to the core programs offered, these districts provide many other social, health, and education-related programs and services for children, parents, and educators. New growth will also bring demand for new or expanded library facilities in the County. The policies in this section seek to maintain acceptable levels of service and ensure adequate funding for school and library facilities in Merced County.

**Goal PFS-8**

Coordinate with school districts, colleges, and universities to provide for the educational and literary needs of Merced County residents.

**Policy PFS-8.1: Coordination with School Districts (IGC/SO)**

Collaborate with school districts related to school facility planning issues by:

- a. Identifying trends in school enrollment and development to identify future changes in enrollment and ensure that school locations and attendance boundaries enhance communities;
- b. Encouraging policies to promote logical school district boundaries within a community; and
- c. Working with school districts during local planning processes and review of development proposals in regards to alternative funding needed for school facilities.

**Policy PFS-8.2: New School Location (RDR/SO)**

Encourage school districts to site new schools in locations that are consistent with current and future land uses, safe for students to walk or bicycle to from their homes, and incorporated into larger neighborhoods that can serve multiple purposes.

**Policy PFS-8.3: Adequate Transportation to School (IGC/SO)**

Coordinate with school districts to ensure that circulation and transportation systems in unincorporated communities provide for the safe movement of students from home to schools, including considerations for pedestrian, bicycle, and overall safe routes to school.

**Policy PFS-8.4: School Overcrowding Solutions (SO)**

Work with local school districts to develop solutions for overcrowded schools and financial constraints of constructing new facilities.

**Policy PFS-8.5: Multiple-Use School Facilities (SO)**

Encourage multiple-use school facilities, including opportunities for civic and cultural uses, recreation facilities, and service programs to efficiently provide for education, recreation, and community meeting space.

**Policy PFS-8.6: School Impact Fees (FB)**

Support the efforts of school districts to obtain appropriate funding methods, including school impact fees.

**Policy PFS-8.7: Incompatible Land Uses near Schools (RDR/IGC)**

Coordinate with school districts to reduce the effects of incompatible land uses and noise adjacent to school facilities.

**Policy PFS-8.8: Library Facilities and Services (SO)**

Encourage expansion of library facilities and services as necessary to meet the needs of future growth.

**Policy PFS-8.9: University and College Expansions (SO)**

Work cooperatively with the University of California, Merced Community College, and Merced Community College Westside Campus to support the expansion of curriculum, enrollment, and facilities at the University of California, Merced.

**Policy PFS-8.10: School District Consultants (IGC)**

Encourage early consultation between school districts and the County when proposing new, or modifying existing, school site locations.

## CHILDCARE

Childcare facilities are an essential part of any community. Through supporting the provision of affordable childcare, the County can support working families, ensuring a more viable local economy and labor market. The policies in this section address the need for childcare facilities.

<b>Goal PFS-9</b>	Encourage the development of quality childcare services and facilities throughout the County.
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**Policy PFS-9.1: Zoning (RDR/SO)**

Support childcare centers in business parks and other appropriate locations in the County with adequate safeguards in order to provide a needed service for working parents and a benefit to the community.

**Policy PFS-9.2: Permit Streamlining (RDR)**

Streamline the permit process to the extent practical to promote and support the development of family childcare homes and childcare centers.

**Policy PFS-9.3: Childcare Facilities at Major Job Centers and Facilities (RDR)**

Encourage the inclusion of childcare centers at major job centers and facilities to serve the employees of those centers, as well as those to whom the location provides convenient access.

**Policy PFS-9.4: Childcare Facility (SO)**

Provide incentives or requirements for childcare facilities to be included in new employment centers.

**Policy PFS-9.5: Public Facilities Use (SO)**

Encourage and support the use of public and faith-based facilities for childcare, in particular at those facilities where the connection with childcare is significant, such as schools and community and recreation centers.

**Policy PFS-9.6: Location near Park and Recreational Facilities (SO)**

Maximize the use and productivity of parks and recreation facilities by encouraging childcare facilities to be located adjacent to or nearby to allow children who are under care and supervision to use the public space.

**Policy PFS-9.7: Childcare Facility Compatibility (RDR)**

Ensure that proposed childcare facilities will be compatible with surrounding land uses and review proposed land uses adjacent to these facilities for their compatibility with childcare operations.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Public Facilities and Services Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program PFS-A: Infrastructure Improvements and Funding Mechanisms (MPSP, FB, IGC)</b>                      Prepare and adopt capital improvement programs for all County-owned and operated facilities and services to ensure consistency with the General Plan in order to maintain an adequate level-of-service. Coordinate with cities and special districts to identify and find solutions to key infrastructure deficiencies in existing communities. Require new development to fund infrastructure improvements necessary to mitigate the impacts of the development.</p>		✓				✓
Implements Which Policies	PFS-1.1 through PFS-1.10					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development, Sheriff, Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Library					
<p><b>Program PFS-B: Alternative Rural Wastewater Systems (PSR)</b>                      Prepare a study to evaluate alternatives for rural wastewater systems. Alternatives that could be evaluated include elevated leach fields, sand filtration systems, evapotranspiration beds, osmosis units, and holding tanks. For larger generators or group of users, alternative systems include communal septic tank/leach field systems, package treatment plants, lagoon systems, and land treatment.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	PFS-1.5, PFS-2.1 through PFS-2.10					
Responsible Department	Environmental Health					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<p><b>Program PFS-C: Wastewater System Standards (MPSP)</b>                      Update onsite wastewater system standards consistent with guidelines proposed by the State Water Resources Control Board under Assembly Bill 885.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	PFS-2.1 through PFS-2.9					
Responsible Department	Environmental Health					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					

Public Facilities and Services Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program PFS-D: Private Sewage Disposal Standards (PI)</b> Prepare and distribute information on the care and maintenance of private sewage disposal systems.						
Implements Which Policies	PFS-1.5, PFS-2.1 through PFS-2.10		✓			
Responsible Department	Environmental Health					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program PFS-E: Integrated Waste Management Plan (MPSP, IGC)</b> Coordinate with local agencies to prepare an update to the County’s Integrated Waste Management Plan to determine existing and projected waste disposal needs, methods of disposable land characteristics suited for disposable sites, and anticipated locations.						
Implements Which Policies	PFS-4.1 through PFS-4.6					✓
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Environmental Health					
<b>Program PFS-F: Capital Improvement Plan (MPSP)</b> Regularly update and implement a Capital Improvement Plan that identifies impacts to County services and facilities from new development at both cumulative and project levels. The plan shall include, at a minimum, maintaining current (2010) fee structure for fire and Sheriff stations and equipment, road improvements, parks, libraries, and court facilities. Other possible funding sources for ongoing staffing and maintenance costs of these facilities will be investigated, including special benefit assessment districts, Mello-Roos or Marks-Roos community facility districts, and development agreements.						
Implements Which Policies	PFS-1.1 through PFS-1.10		✓			
Responsible Department	County Administration					
Supporting Department	Public Works					
<b>Program PFS-G: Childcare Facility Incentives (MPSP)</b> Develop a formula for granting a bonus in density or intensity of use for commercial, industrial, and residential projects that provide child care facilities.						
Implements Which Policies	PFS-9.3, PFS-9.4, PFS-9.5, PFS-9.6		✓			
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Child Support Services					

Public Facilities and Services Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program PFS-H: Regional OWTS Suitability Evaluation (MPSP/PSR/RDR/SO)</b>                      Conduct an evaluation of the general suitability of OWTS within areas known or suspected to contain contaminated groundwater or surface water from such systems based on groundwater and surface water sampling, soil capabilities, depth to groundwater, and the intensity of existing and future development. Develop standards for such areas to avoid continued or future contamination, which could include a prohibition on new OWTS, a requirement that new development install an alternative system that would reduce the potential for contamination over that provided by a standard OWTS, or mandatory connection to a community wastewater treatment plant.</p>			✓			
Implements Which Policies	PFS-2.5, PFS-2.6, PFS-2.10					
Responsible Department	Environmental Health					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development/County Counsel					



# NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for the management and preservation of natural resources. The County’s rich natural resources are essential to the local economy and quality of life. These resources are also a source of natural beauty and scenic vistas in the County. The preservation and protection of these resources is vital to the continued benefit and enjoyment of current and future residents. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Biological Resources
- Energy Resources and Efficiency
- Soil and Mineral Resources
- Scenic Resources

## BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Merced County is renowned for its unique natural resources, including pristine vernal pools, grasslands, unique plant and animal species, large managed wetland preserves, and wildlife-based recreational opportunities. More than 170,000 acres in Merced County are currently (2010) protected in either Federal and State wildlife areas or private conservancies. The County is also home to the Merced Grasslands, one of the largest and most intact grassland wetland habitats in the world. While the County’s biological resources are abundant, they face challenges from urbanization. The policies in this section address protection, preservation, and enhancement of biological resources in Merced County.

### Goal NR-1

Preserve and protect, through coordination with the public and private sectors, the biological resources of the County.

#### Policy NR-1.1: Habitat Protection (RDR/PSR)

Identify areas that have significant long-term habitat and wetland values including riparian corridors, wetlands, grasslands, rivers and waterways, oak woodlands, vernal pools, and wildlife movement and migration corridors, and provide information to landowners.

**Policy NR-1.2: Protected Natural Lands (RDR/PSR)**

Identify and support methods to increase the acreage of protected natural lands and special habitats, including but not limited to, wetlands, grasslands, vernal pools, and wildlife movement and migration corridors, potentially through the use of conservation easements.

**Policy NR-1.3: Forest Protection (SO)**

Preserve forests, particularly oak woodlands, to protect them from degradation, encroachment, or loss.

**Policy NR-1.4: Important Vegetative Resource Protection (SO)**

Minimize the removal of vegetative resources which stabilize slopes, reduce surface water runoff, erosion, and sedimentation.

**Policy NR-1.5: Wetland and Riparian Habitat Buffer (PSR/RDR)**

Identify wetlands and riparian habitat areas and designate a buffer zone around each area sufficient to protect them from degradation, encroachment, or loss.

**Policy NR-1.6: Terrestrial Wildlife Mobility (SO)**

Encourage property owners within or adjacent to designated habitat connectivity corridors that have been mapped or otherwise identified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage their lands in accordance with such mapping programs. In the planning and development of public works projects that could physically interfere with wildlife mobility, the County shall consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the potential for such effects and implement any feasible mitigation measures.

**Policy NR-1.7: Agricultural Practices (SO)**

Encourage agricultural, commercial, and industrial uses and other related activities to consult with environmental groups in order to minimize adverse effects to important or sensitive biological resources.

**Policy NR-1.8: Use of Native Plant Species for Landscaping (SO)**

Encourage the use of native plant species in landscaping, and, where the County has discretion, require the use of native plant species for landscaping.

**Policy NR-1.9: Rural to Urban Redesignations (MPSP)**

Carefully consider the potential impacts on significant habitats from new development when redesignating land from a rural to an urban use.

**Policy NR-1.10: Aquatic and Waterfowl Habitat Protection (MPSP)**

Cooperate with local, State, and Federal water agencies in their efforts to protect significant aquatic and waterfowl habitats against excessive water withdrawals or other activities that would endanger or interrupt normal migratory patterns or aquatic habitats.

**Policy NR-1.11: On-Going Habitat Protection and Monitoring (PSR)**

Cooperate with local, State, and Federal agencies to ensure that adequate on-going protection and monitoring occurs adjacent to rare and endangered species habitats or within identified significant wetlands.

**Policy NR-1.12: Wetland Avoidance (RDR/PSR/MPSP)**

Avoid or minimize loss of existing wetland resources by careful placement and construction of any necessary new public utilities and facilities, including roads, railroads, high speed rail, sewage disposal ponds, gas lines, electrical lines, and water/wastewater systems.

**Policy NR-1.13: Wetland Setbacks (RDR)**

Require an appropriate setback, to be determined during the development review process, for developed and agricultural uses from the delineated edges of wetlands.

**Policy NR-1.14: Temporary Residential Uses (RDR)**

Ensure that buildings and structures approved for temporary residential use in significant wetland areas are not converted to permanent residential uses.

**Policy NR-1.15: Urban Forest Protection and Expansion (SO/MPSP)**

Protect existing trees and encourage the planting of new trees in existing communities. Adopt an Oak Woodland Ordinance that requires trees larger than a specified diameter that are removed to accommodate development be replaced at a set ratio.

**Policy NR-1.16: Hazardous Waste Residual Repository Location (RDR)**

Require new hazardous waste residual repositories (e.g., contaminated soil facilities) to be located at least a mile from significant wetlands, designated sensitive species habitat, and State and Federal wildlife refuges and management areas.

**Policy NR-1.17: Agency Coordination (MPSP/IGC/JP)**

Consult with private, local, State, and Federal agencies to assist in the protection of biological resources and prevention of degradation, encroachment, or loss of resources managed by these agencies.

**Policy NR-1.18: San Joaquin River Restoration Program Support (MPSP/SO)**

Monitor the San Joaquin River Restoration Program efforts to ensure protection of landowners, local water agencies, and other third parties.

**Policy NR-1.19: Merced River Restoration Program Support (MPSP/SO)**

Support the restoration efforts for the Merced River consistent with the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan.

**Policy NR-1.20: Conservation Easements (SO/IGC/JP)**

Encourage property owners to work with land trusts and State and Federal agencies to pursue voluntary conservation easements.

**Policy NR-1.21: Special Status Species Surveys and Mitigation (RDR/SO/IGC)**

Incorporate the survey standards and mitigation requirements of state and federal resource management agencies for use in the County's review processes for both private and public projects.

**ENERGY RESOURCES AND EFFICIENCY**

Energy resources are important natural resources that support the expansion of the region's economic base, agricultural sector, available developable land, and infrastructure capacity. Most County energy needs are supplied by resources imported from out of the area. Electricity and natural gas are received via electrical transmission and gas pipelines, while gasoline and diesel fuel are imported from outside the County by various oil companies by truck and pipeline. As traditional sources of energy become depleted, the need to develop alternate options and methods of power generation becomes more important. There is potential to decrease the County's reliance on fossil-fuel-based energy sources through increased use of biomass, wind, solar, and energy conservation programs. The policies in this section promote energy conservation practices and focus on renewable energy production within Merced County.

**Goal NR-2**

Provide adequate and efficient energy supplies by increasing renewable energy production and energy conservation.

**Policy NR-2.1: Renewable Energy Use (RDR) **

Promote the development and use of renewable energy resources to reduce dependency on petroleum-based energy sources.

**Policy NR-2.2: Clean Alternative Energy Requirement (RDR) **

Encourage new electricity providers to use only clean alternative energy sources (e.g., solar, thermal, wind).

**Policy NR-2.3: Biomass-to-Energy Production (RDR) **

Encourage the use of biomass facilities to capture untapped local energy sources from dairies, farmland, and other industrial sources, provided that such uses do not interfere with agricultural practices, or conflict with sensitive habitats or other biological resources consistent with Policies AG-3.11 and LU-2.7.

**Policy NR-2.4: Solar Power (RDR) **

Encourage on-site solar power use in residential, commercial, and industrial buildings, and utility-scale solar power projects in rural locations that do not harm agricultural productivity and habitat values consistent with Policies AG-3.11 and LU-2.7.

**Policy NR-2.5: Legislative Advocacy (RDR) **

Actively monitor, review, comment, and advocate for the purposes of furthering alternative energy resources on pending major State and Federal legislation, executive orders, and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District rulemaking that may have an impact on the development of alternative energy resources in Merced County.

**Policy NR-2.6: Open Space Impacts (MPSP/IGC/JP) 🌐**

Work with public agencies and private energy providers to ensure that energy projects avoid or minimize impacts to open space, natural resources, and productive agricultural land.

**Policy NR-2.7: Residential Rehabilitation and Improvement (RDR) 🌐**

Encourage the rehabilitation and improvement of existing single-family and multi-family units to achieve greater energy efficiency.

**Policy NR-2.8: Energy Efficient County Facilities (RDR) 🌐**

Replace existing traffic lights, street lights, and other electrical uses with energy efficient bulbs and appliances in the course of ongoing maintenance/replacement as funding permits.

**Policy NR-2.9: Energy Conservation (RDR) 🌐**

Encourage and maximize energy conservation and identification of alternative energy sources (e.g., wind or solar).

**Policy NR-2.10: Efficiency Education (RDR) 🌐**

Work with energy providers to educate the public about energy efficiency, water conservation, and other greenhouse gas reduction measures.

**Policy NR-2.11: Energy-Efficiency Focused Design (RDR) 🌐**

Encourage the use of energy-efficiency design features such as site orientation, light colored building materials, and tree canopies.

**Policy NR-2.12: Green Practices Education (RDR) 🌐**

Encourage recycling, composting, source reduction, and education efforts throughout the County for residents, businesses, industries, institutions, and construction.

**SOIL AND MINERAL RESOURCES**

Merced County is rich in nonfuel mineral and soil resources; however, there are very few traditional hard rock mines in operation today. The County's mineral resources are primarily sand and gravel, which are ample in the County. The policies in this section address the extraction of known mineral resources, prevent the encroachment of incompatible uses adjacent to mineral resources and ensure that resource extraction is compatible with the health and safety of County residents.

**Goal NR-3**

Facilitate orderly development and extraction of mineral resources while preserving open space, natural resources, and soil resources and avoiding or mitigating significant adverse impacts.

**Policy NR-3.1: Soil Protection (RDR/SO)**

Protect soil resources from erosion, contamination, and other effects that substantially reduce their value or lead to the creation of hazards.

**Policy NR-3.2: Soil Erosion and Contamination (RDR)**

Require minimal disturbance of vegetation during construction to improve soil stability, reduce erosion, and improve stormwater quality.

**Policy NR-3.3: Soil Improvement (RDR)**

Encourage landowners to participate in programs that reduce soil erosion and increase soil productivity. This shall include promoting and coordinating the efforts of University of California Cooperative Extension, various Resource Conservation Districts, and other similar agencies and organizations.

**Policy NR-3.4: New Development Compatibility (RDR)**

Ensure that new development is compatible with existing and potential surface mining areas and operations as identified on the Mineral Resource Zone Maps prepared by the State Division of Mines and Geology and other mineral resource areas identified by the County. The County shall:

- a. Require development applicants near identified mineral resources to prepare a statement that specifies why the County should permit the proposed land use and describe how the benefits of the proposed use would clearly outweigh the impacts that may limit the potential to extract mineral resources in that area.
- b. Require new incompatible land uses adjacent to existing mining operations to provide a buffer between the development and adjacent mining operations adequate to mitigate significant impacts to mineral land uses. The buffer distance shall be based on an evaluation of noise, aesthetics, drainage, operating conditions, biological resources, topography, lighting, traffic, operating hours, and air quality.
- c. Require written notification to be sent to mining operators and subject landowners of land use entitlement applications for potentially incompatible land uses in areas where mining operations are currently taking place.

**Policy NR-3.5: Mineral Resource Protection (RDR)**

Require areas identified with mineral deposits on either the State Mine Land Classification Maps provided by the State Mining and Geology Board's Classification Report, or site-specific information, remain protected for possible future mineral extraction. Impose conditions upon new incompatible land uses in areas surrounding identified mineral deposits for the purpose of mitigating significant land use conflicts prior to approving a use that would otherwise be incompatible with mineral extraction. The identified mineral deposit may be determined by the classification maps, Classification Report, separate County maps, or on a site-specific basis.

**Policy NR-3.6: Buffers between Mining Operations and Adjacent Uses (RDR)**

Require operators of new mines to provide buffers or physical barriers between the mining operation and any existing nearby incompatible land uses when a significant impact is identified during the development review process.

**Policy NR-3.7: Merced River Corridor Buffers (RDR)**

Require surface mining operations in dredge tailing areas along the Merced River corridor to design riparian vegetation buffers consistent with the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan.

**Policy NR-3.8: Habitat Restoration and Buffer Incentives (RDR)**

Support and encourage property owners and surface mining operators to pursue one or more of the following incentives:

- a. State and Federal habitat restoration funding for restoring wildlife habitat;
- b. Conservation easements following reclamation for restoring wildlife habitat; and
- c. Other local, State, and Federal incentives.

**Policy NR-3.9: Riparian and Critical Habitat Protection (RDR)**

Protect or mitigate, in compliance with local, State, and Federal requirements, areas of riparian vegetation along rivers, streams, and other habitats that support threatened, endangered, or other sensitive species. This shall include:

- a. Requiring mining operators that propose mining operations that will have a significant adverse impact on these resources to mitigate to the fullest extent that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires for such impacts and obtain the necessary State and Federal permits prior to operation.
- b. Encouraging mining operators that impact natural resources to propose an end use that will result in minimal loss of resources.
- c. Referring all surface mining applications to the appropriate local, State, and Federal agencies to consult with the agencies regarding project design, mitigation, and reclamation efforts.

**Policy NR-3.10: Disturbance to Productive Agricultural Farmland (RDR)**

Encourage property reclamation to productive agricultural farmland, rather than habitat or an alternative non-agricultural land use, when a surface mining application involves disturbance of productive agricultural farmland.

**Policy NR-3.11: Concurrent Reclamation (RDR)**

Require reclamation of mining sites concurrent with extraction activities rather than after extraction has been completed.

**Policy NR-3.12: Sand and Gravel Extraction Control (RDR)**

Ensure that strict control is maintained on sand and gravel extractions in streambed channels and within areas designated as having sensitive habitat and open space resources.

**Policy NR-3.13: Agricultural Land Disturbance (RDR)**

Require mining projects to obtain agricultural conservation easements of similar quality to the farmland converted consistent with Implementation Program AG-J at a minimum of 1:1 ratio for each acre of productive agricultural land converted as a result of mining and not returned to agricultural production.

**Policy NR-3.14: Residual Mercury Survey and Mitigation Requirement (RDR/SO)**

Require the evaluation of existing mercury deposits within dredge tailings for mining, urban development, and infrastructure projects located in the historic dredger tailings along the Merced River or elsewhere in the county, and identify adequate mitigation necessary to prevent the migration of mercury-containing sediments or fines to the Merced River or its tributary waterways, or result in the contamination of adjacent properties as a result of the construction process by severing all exposure pathways that could result in the release of mercury into the aquatic environment.

**Policy NR-3.15: Drainage Course Setbacks (RDR/SO/IGC)**

Within all areas designated for urban land uses by the 2030 General Plan, all structures, paving, or grading shall be set back from rivers, creeks, channels or other major waterways at least twenty feet from the top of bank or twenty feet plus twice the channel depth measured from the toe of the near embankment, whichever is greater, unless a greater setback is required by state or federal regulation.

## SCENIC RESOURCES

The rural and agricultural landscapes provide the primary scenic resources in Merced County. The County also has many scenic vistas, such as the Coastal and Sierra Nevada mountain ranges, and the Los Banos Creek, Merced, San Joaquin, and Bear Creek river corridors. State Route 152 and Interstate 5 are designated scenic routes in parts of the county. Preservation of the County’s scenic features, both natural and working landscapes, enhances the amenity value and economic development potential of the County as it adds to the quality of life for existing and future residents. The policies in this section address the management, protection, and preservation of the County’s scenic resources. *(Note: See the Land Use Element for additional goals and policies related to urban design).*

<b>Goal NR-4</b>	Protect scenic resources and vistas.
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**Policy NR-4.1: Scenic Resource Preservation (RDR)**

Promote the preservation of agricultural land, ranch land, and other open space areas as a means of protecting the County’s scenic resources.

**Policy NR-4.2: Special Review Process for Structures Adjacent to Scenic Highways (IGC, RDR)**

Coordinate with Caltrans, during the review of proposed structures and activities located adjacent to State-designated scenic highways, to ensure that scenic vistas and local scenic values are not significantly degraded.

**Policy NR-4.3: Building Design (RDR)**

Require that siting and design of buildings protect, improve, and enhance the scenic quality of the built and natural environments and take full advantage of scenic resources through site orientation, building setbacks, preservation of viewsheds, height limits, and the use of appropriate construction materials and exterior modulation.

**Policy NR-4.4: New Roads (RDR)**

Consider the surrounding landscape, topography, and existing scenic values when determining the location and construction of new roads.

**Policy NR-4.5: Light Pollution Reduction (RDR)**

The County shall develop and implement a lighting ordinance to require good lighting practices, such as the use of specific light fixtures that reduce light pollution, minimize light impacts, and preserve views of the night sky. The ordinance shall contain standards to avoid light trespass, particularly from developed uses, to sensitive wildlife corridors and refuges.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Natural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program NR-A: Habitat Conservation Plan (MPSP)</b>                      In consultation with an established formal State or Federal program involving the cities within the County, the County will participate in a countywide Habitat Conservation Plan or regional plans that identify areas for natural resource conservation (including greenbelts) and describes standards for habitat blocks, fees, and compensation. This shall include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Conducting a countywide comprehensive habitat identification and mapping program for use in future policy determinations.</li> <li>b. Developing a conservation strategy to preserve, restore, and enhance the unique vernal pool habitats and associated special-status species in Merced County.</li> </ul>			✓			
Implements Which Policies	NR-1.1 and NR-1.2					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Board of Supervisors, County Counsel					
<p><b>Program NR-B: Oak Woodland Ordinance (RDR)</b>                      Prepare an Oak Woodland Ordinance that establishes standards and mitigation for the protection of valuable oak resources in the County.</p>						
Implements Which Policies	NR-1.1, NR-1.3, NR-1.15	✓				
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Board of Supervisors, County Counsel					
<p><b>Program NR-C: GIS Mapping (PSR, PI)</b>                      Update the existing Geographical Information System to include current protected or designated habitat spatial information, including wildlife refuges, Grasslands Focus Area (GFA) and Grasslands Ecological Area (GEA) boundaries, mitigation banks, Williamson Act parcels, Habitat Connectivity Corridors, priority riparian corridors, and habitat preserves.</p>						
Implements Which Policies	NR-1.1, NR-1.2, NR-1.5	✓				✓
Responsible Department	Information Technology Department					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					

Natural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program NR-D: Sensitive Habitat Guidelines (MPSP)</b>                      Prepare and adopt guidelines and thresholds of significance pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.7 for evaluating project impacts to identified sensitive habitat, including a significance criterion for potential effects on habitat values within Grasslands Focus Area (GFA) boundaries. The guidelines shall be made available for public comment prior to final adoption. For discretionary projects within the boundaries of the GFA, the guidelines shall require the preparation of an appropriate project-level CEQA document with a review and evaluation of biological resources impacts at a level of detail commensurate with the proposed project’s effects to such resources in addition to implementation of the Open Space Development Review System. For non-discretionary or ministerial projects within the GFA boundaries, the Guidelines shall require the County to implement the Open Space Development Review System, including referral to GRRWG (Grasslands Resources Regional Working Group) as appropriate. The guidelines shall recommend measures such as buffers, clustered development, project design alterations, and transferable development rights, sufficient to protect sensitive habitats from encroachment.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	NR-1.1, NR-1.2, NR-1.3, NR-1.4, NR-1.5, NR-1.7, NR-1.10, NR-1.12, NR-1.13, NR-1.14, NR-1.17, NR-1.21					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Board of Supervisors/County Counsel					
<p><b>Program NR-E: Biological Resources Review Requirements (RDR/MPSP/IGC)</b>                      County biological resources review requirements should identify state and federal biological significance thresholds and species-specific survey guidelines, and should include types of survey reports, surveyor qualifications, countywide habitat classifications, foraging crop habitat values, approved mitigation banks, and procedures to facilitate pre-consultation with state and federal agencies. State and federal mitigation standards should be considered as minimum County standards. Submit results of biological resources assessments, surveys and proposed mitigation measures to the appropriate state and federal agency as early in the review process as practicable, to expedite and ensure regulatory consistency among local, regional, state, and federal agencies with jurisdiction over such resources.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	NR-1.1, NR-1.2, NR-1.3, NR-1.4, NR-1.5, NR-1.7, NR-1.10, NR-1.12, NR-1.13, NR-1.14, NR-1.17, NR-1.21					

Natural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	County Counsel					
<b>Program NR-F: Ongoing Inventory of Open Space Resources (MPSP/PSR/SO)</b> The County shall maintain an open space and conservation inventory to delineate those areas that have significant open space or conservation value. Those areas include agricultural lands, native pasture lands, parks and recreation areas, historic resources, scenic highways, wetland, wildlife and vegetation habitat resources, mineral and energy resource areas, fire hazard areas, geologic and flood hazard areas, noise impacted areas and other resource and hazard areas.		✓				✓
Implements Which Policies	AG-2.1, AG-2.8, AG-2.9, AG-4.5, NR-1.1, NR-1.2, NR-1.7, NR-1.11, NR-3.4, NR-4.1, NR-4.2, HS-1.1, HS-1.3, HS-1.6, HS-1.7, HS-2.6, HS-2.7, HS-2.9, HS-2.10, HS-2.13, HS-3.8, HS-7.1, HS-7.3					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Information Technology Department					

Natural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program NR-G: Open Space Development Review System (RDR/IGC)</b>                      The Open Space Development Review System (OSDRS) is one of the primary implementing tools of the County’s Open Space Action Plan. Through such a review system, daily planning and permit approval decisions should reflect and implement the adopted policies and development standards of the 2030 General Plan.                      Other federal, state and local agencies also have responsibility for the protection, maintenance and development of Open Space resources. The referral of projects and consultation with appropriate responsible and trustee agencies is part of the program.                      The system is intended for utilization both by developers in the design and building of projects, and by planners and decision makers in review of projects for conformance with County policy. The system is basically a process for assessing the appropriateness of proposed developments, including their compatibility with surrounding environmental constraints and resources. The general review system will be organized in a five step process. This process will be implemented in conformance with the Sensitive Habitat Guidelines developed under Implementation Program NR-D of this Element.                      This system of review will be required of all projects for which a building permit or other entitlement is necessary such as a land division or use permit, as well as during policy and ordinance amendment. The Community and Economic Development Department has developed a five-step process consisting of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic Land Use Category, Zone Code Consistency, and Community Service Availability Determination</li> <li>2. Open Space Inventory Map and Data Base Review</li> <li>3. Demonstration by the permit applicant of consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, the State Water Resources Control Board, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and/or the Army Corps of Engineers, and any water purveyor serving the project area, as appropriate, to evaluate resources that could be affected by the proposed action; and proof of issuance of permits by these agencies, as required</li> <li>4. Environmental Determination</li> <li>5. Land Use and Sensitive Resource Compatibility Determination</li> </ol>		✓				✓
Implements Which Policies	NR-1.1, NR-1.2, NR-1.3, NR-1.4, NR-1.5, NR-1.7, NR-1.10, NR-1.12, NR-1.13, NR-1.14, NR-1.17, NR-1.21					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Information Technology Department					

Natural Resources Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<p><b>Program NR-H: Open Space Acquisition Consideration as Part of the County Annual Capital Improvement Program (MPSP/FB/SO)</b>                      The County annually prepares a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as part of the budgetary process. Under the Government Code, the Planning Commission is required to determine if the CIP is consistent with the County General Plan, including the Open Space related policies. As a component of this process, acquisition of open space lands and resources will be considered.                      The final approval of the CIP is by the Board of Supervisors.</p>		✓				✓
Implements Which Policies	NR-4.2, NR-4.4					
Responsible Department	Department of Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<p><b>Program NR-I: Agricultural Education Program (SO/IGC/PI)</b>                      In a coordinated effort between the Department of Community and Economic Development and the County Agricultural Commissioner, the County shall produce a brochure or publication outlining the responsibilities of landowners in managing and preserving sensitive environmental resources on their properties. The brochure shall set forth state and federal regulatory requirements and permitting procedures, state and federal agency contact information, and statutory penalties for noncompliance, including the loss of commodity support and other assistance offered through the USDA. The brochures will be made available at the offices of the County departments cited above, the County Building Division counter, posted on the County’s website, and provided to the various Resource Conservation Districts throughout the county for additional distribution.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	AG-1.10, AG-4.6, NR-1.1, NR-1.2, NR-1.3, NR-1.4, NR-1.5, NR-1.7, NR-1.10, NR-1.12, NR-1.13, NR-1.14, NR-1.17, NR-1.21					
Responsible Department	Agricultural Commissioner					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					



# RECREATION AND CULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for recreation opportunities and cultural resource protection. Recreation resources and facilities provide economic, health, and open space benefits to County residents while archeological and historical resources help preserve the unique character of Merced County. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Parks and Recreation
- Cultural, Archeological, and Historical Resources

## PARKS AND RECREATION

Merced County contains several County, State, and Federal parks and recreation areas and public open space areas. There are approximately 114,000 acres of park and recreation facilities in the County that offer a variety of amenities such as picnicking, swimming, boating, hunting, bird watching, playgrounds, sports fields, and hiking. The policies in this section address park and recreation opportunities in Merced County.

### Goal RCR-1

Preserve, enhance, expand, and manage Merced County's diverse system of regional parks, trails, recreation areas, and natural resources for the enjoyment of present and future residents and park visitors.

#### Policy RCR-1.1: Public Recreation Land Use (RDR/MPSP)

Encourage the continuation and expansion of existing public recreation land uses, including, but not limited to, public beaches, parks, recreation areas, wild areas, and trails.

**Policy RCR-1.2: County Park Financing (FB)**

Require new County park locations and improvements to existing parks to be financed through the implementation of the Local Recreational Park Land Space and Fee Obligation Ordinance.

**Policy RCR-1.3: Neighborhood, Community, and Regional Parkland Standards (RDR)**

Encourage a minimum of three acres of neighborhood, community, or regional parkland per each 1,000 persons in the County by:

- a) Working with other agencies and private interests to provide for adequate neighborhood, community, and regional parkland and facilities;
- b) Actively participating in the planning of projects that have regional recreation benefits;
- c) Encouraging and supporting local agency efforts to achieve their objectives for providing local parkland. All local providers should seek to provide at least three acres of parkland for each 1,000 persons.
- d) Actively seeking available regional, State, and Federal grant funds for acquiring, developing, and maintaining regional parks; and
- e) Encouraging and supporting other public agencies and private groups in the development of recreation facilities that are consistent with the 2030 Merced County General Plan.

**Policy RCR-1.4: Regional Recreation Facilities Master Plan (RDR/MPSP)**

Prepare and regularly update a Regional Park and Recreation Facilities Master Plan that:

- a) Identifies opportunities for a wide variety of recreation activities, including public trails;
- b) Ensures that adequate local and regional park facilities are available to serve existing and future population;
- c) Prioritizes improvements to recreation sites based on their ability to accommodate multiple activities that best address the identified recreation needs of the community and take advantage of significant natural features that enhance the recreation experience;
- d) Requires recreation sites to be designed and developed in a manner that enhances natural features and recreational use, and minimizes environmental impacts to the site and adjacent lands;
- e) Considers the special needs of the elderly and the physically-impaired in the design and development of recreation facilities;
- f) Ensures adequate parking and non-vehicular access to recreation facilities;

- g) Encourages the development of transit services between recreation facilities and population centers;
- h) Expands existing park revenue, seeks new funding sources, and explores innovative funding arrangements for developing and maintaining County recreation facilities; and
- i) Supports facilities and activities that meet the needs of a culturally diverse population.

**Policy RCR-1.5: Local Park System (RDR)**

Require a system of local and neighborhood parks, and other recreation areas throughout the County that balance the importance of direct site access with management of sensitive wildlife resources. Require the master planning of new local and neighborhood parks to occur during the Community Plan preparation process.

**Policy RCR-1.6: Non-Recreational Land Use Buffers (RDR)**

Require buffering between non-recreational land uses and sensitive public recreation lands through site design and other techniques when the non-recreational land use may significantly impact recreational lands.

**Policy RCR-1.7: Agricultural Land Use Compatibility (RDR)**

Consider agriculture as a compatible land use and appropriate buffer for public and private recreation areas.

**Policy RCR-1.8: Trails within Transmission Lines (RDR)**

Encourage the use of equestrian, bicycle, and pedestrian/hiking trails within existing energy, communication, transmission, and distribution easements.

**Policy RCR-1.9: California Recreational Trail System Integration (RDR)**

Require that areas proposed for the California Recreational Trails System be reviewed during project proposals for consideration of easements and integration into County recreation facilities.

**Policy RCR-1.10: Trail Development (RDR)**

Develop pedestrian, bike, and/or equestrian trails along the Merced River.

**Policy RCR-1.11: Scenic Resource and Public Land Protection (RDR)**

Encourage the use of regional parks and open space areas as a mechanism to preserve the County's natural scenic beauty and protect land for public purposes.

**Policy RCR-1.12: Recreation Services (RDR/SO)**

Support recreation services to promote the full use of recreation facilities within their design capacity, and improve connections and access to a wide range of recreation opportunities in order to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors.

**Policy RCR-1.13: Joint-Use Facilities in Parks (RDR/IGC)**

Require, where feasible, parks to be developed as joint-use facilities (e.g., stormwater facilities with ball fields) in order to provide more cost-efficient active parks.

**Policy RCR-1.14: Community Oriented Neighborhood Parks (RDR)**

During the preparation of Community Plans and during the review of subdivision applications review process, ensure neighborhood parks are sited near activity centers such as schools, libraries, and community centers.

## CULTURAL, ARCHEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Merced County occupies an archeologically and historically rich part of the San Joaquin Valley. Archeological, historical, architectural, paleontological, and Native American cultural resources and values must be considered in all phases of planning and subsequent development projects, including design, permitting, construction, and long-term maintenance. It is essential that the public and project proponents be aware of cultural resources, as well as all the County, State, and Federal environmental laws and regulations that protect them. The policies in this section address the preservation of archeological and historic resources in Merced County.

<b>Goal RCR-2</b>	Protect and preserve the cultural, archeological, and historic resources of the County in order to maintain its unique character.
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**Policy RCR-2.1: Archeological Site and Artifact Protection (RDR)**

Require development projects that affect archeological sites and artifacts to avoid disturbance or damage to these sites.

**Policy RCR-2.2: Historical Area Preservation (RDR)**

Support the preservation of historical structures and areas, particularly those listed on the National Registrar of Historic Places and California Registrar of Historic Places.

**Policy RCR-2.3: Architectural Character Preservation (RDR/IGC)**

Require that the original architectural character of significant State- and Federally-listed historic structures be maintained in compliance with preservation standards and regulations.

**Policy RCR-2.4: Park and Open Space Historic Resource Preservation (RDR)**

Require the preservation of historic resources located in parks and publicly-owned open space areas.

**Policy RCR-2.5: Human Remains Discovery (RDR)**

Require that, in the event of the discovery of human remains on any project construction site, all work in the vicinity of the find will cease and the County Coroner and Native American Heritage Commission will be notified.

**Policy RCR-2.6: Historic Buildings and Areas (RDR)**

Identify buildings and areas with special and recognized historic, architectural, or aesthetic value to be preserved and rehabilitated during the Community Plan update process. New development should respect architecturally and historically significant buildings and areas, and conform to the current Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings, and incorporate adaptive reuse practices, where feasible, to preserve the County's historical heritage and rural character.

**Policy RCR-2.7: Historic Preservation (RDR)**

Support the efforts of local preservation groups and community property owners to preserve or improve building facades and exteriors consistent with the historic and visual character of the specific building or area.

**Policy RCR-2.8: Historical Preservation Area/Site Designations (RDR)**

Allow sites of historical and archeological significance to be designated as historical preservation areas or sites during the Community Planning process or on individual sites in rural areas.

**Policy RCR-2.9: Historical and Cultural Resources Investigation, Assessment, and Mitigation Guidelines (RDR/MPSP)**

Establish and adopt mandatory guidelines for use during the environmental review processes for private and public projects to identify and protect historical, cultural, archaeological, and paleontological resources, and unique geological features.

**Policy RCR-2.10: Tribal Consultation (RDR/MPSP/IGC)**

Consult with Native American tribes regarding proposed development projects and land use policy changes consistent with Planning and Zoning Law at Government Code Section 65351, and the OPR Tribal Consultation Guidelines (2005).

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Recreation and Cultural Resources Element Implementation Program						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program RCR-A: Regional Recreation Facilities Master Plan</b> Prepare, adopt, and regularly update a Regional Park and Recreation Facilities Master Plan.						
Implements Which Policy	RCR-1.4		✓			
Responsible Department	Public Works, Parks and Recreation Division					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program RCR-B: Historic and Cultural Resources Investigation, Assessment and Mitigation Guidelines (MPSP/SO)</b> Prepare and formally adopt guidelines and standards for the preparation of assessments of historical, cultural, archaeological, and paleontological resources, and unique geological features prepared pursuant to Policy RCR-2.9. At a minimum, the guidelines shall include resource survey guidelines covering personnel qualifications, research and field techniques, investigation and documentation, data collection and recordation, and resource preservation, avoidance, minimization, and mitigation strategies. The guidelines shall specify broad categories of acceptable mitigation consistent with Public Resources Code Section 21083.2 and State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4(b), as they may be amended for any identified adverse effects to historic and cultural resources, paleontological resources, or unique geological features.						
Implements Which Policy	RCR-2.9		✓			
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Board of Supervisors/County Counsel					



# HEALTH AND SAFETY ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for protecting County residents and properties from unreasonable risks associated with hazards. People and communities are subject to potential harm from natural forces, such as flooding and earthquakes, as well as from human-caused hazards such as noise and aviation. Balancing human safety with environmental protection poses an urgent challenge for decision-makers. For example, by directing human activities to areas that are less susceptible to flooding and wildfire, the County can reduce risks to human safety. Similarly, by controlling the extent and intensity of certain land uses and activities in sensitive natural areas, the County can dramatically reduce negative impacts on unique natural resources. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Geologic and Seismic Hazards
- Flood Hazards
- Fire Hazards
- Airport Safety
- Hazardous Materials
- Adaptation to Climate Change
- Noise
- Environmental Justice

## GEOLOGIC AND SEISMIC HAZARDS

The County has a responsibility to guide the location and type of new development in the County to minimize risks posed by geologic and seismic hazards. As the County moves forward with plans for economic growth and urbanization, concerns for human safety will ensure that the location of new development and improvement of existing facilities minimizes the risk or geologic and seismic hazards. The policies in this section address the geologic and seismic hazards of Merced County.

<b>Goal HS-1</b>	Minimize the loss of life, injury, and property damage of County residents due to seismic and geologic hazards.
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**Policy HS-1.1: Structure Location and Compliance (RDR)**

Require that all new habitable structures be located and designed in compliance with the Alquist-Priolo Special Studies Zone Act and related State earthquake legislation.

**Policy HS-1.2: Financial Assistance for Seismic Upgrades (RDR/FB)**

Support efforts to obtain financial assistance from Federal and State agencies in order to implement corrective seismic safety measures required for existing County buildings and structures.

**Policy HS-1.3: Dam Inundation Areas (RDR)**

Require all new structures located within dam inundation areas to conform to standards of dam safety as required by the State Division of Safety of Dams.

**Policy HS-1.4: Ensure Earthquake Resistant Design (RDR)**

Require earthquake resistant design for proposed critical structures such as hospitals, fire stations, emergency communication centers, private schools, high occupancy buildings, bridges and freeway overpasses, and dams that are subject to County permitting requirements.

**Policy HS-1.5: Public Education (RDR)**

Encourage educational programs to inform the public of earthquake dangers in Merced County.

**Policy HS-1.6: Landslide Areas (RDR)**

Prohibit habitable structures on areas of unconsolidated landslide debris or in areas vulnerable to landslides.

**Policy HS-1.7: Hillside Development (RDR)**

Discourage construction and grading on slopes in excess of 30 percent.

**Policy HS-1.8: Grading Standards (RDR)**

Require that the provisions of the International Building Code be used to regulate projects subject to hazards from slope instability.

**Policy HS-1.9: Unstable Soils (RDR)**

Require and enforce all standards contained in the International Building Code related to construction on unstable soils.

## FLOOD HAZARDS

Economic growth and prosperity in Merced County is partially dependent upon Federal, State, and local agency cooperation on regional and local flood management systems. Large areas of Merced County continue to be subject to inundation during floods, with approximately 380,010 acres in the FEMA floodplain. The physical risks associated with potential flooding and regulatory requirements for floodplain management are important aspects of future land use decisions throughout the County, and guide the local and community-level emergency response needs.

Recent legislation has strengthened flood protection regulations in California. This legislation requires the California Department of Water Resources and Central Valley Flood Protection Board to prepare and adopt a Central Valley Flood Protection Plan (CVFPP) by 2012. The legislation also establishes certain flood protection requirements for local land use decision-making based on the CVFPP. This law sets a higher standard for flood protection for the San Joaquin Valley area. It sets an urban level of flood protection necessary to withstand a 1 in 200 chance of a flood event occurring in any given year (200-year flood) for areas developed or planned to have a population of at least 10,000. It also requires the County to collaborate with cities to develop a flood emergency response plan. The policies in this section address flooding hazards in Merced County.

**Goal HS-2**

Minimize the possibility of loss of life, injury, or damage to property as a result of flood hazards.

**Policy HS-2.1: Floodplain Management Priorities (RDR/MPSP)**

Prepare and adopt a floodplain management program in flood hazard areas that gives priority to regulation of land uses over development of structural controls as a method of reducing flood damage.

**Policy HS-2.2: Countywide Flood Emergency Plan (RDR/MPSP)**

Coordinate with the cities in Merced County to develop a Countywide flood emergency plan that is consistent with city general plans.

**Policy HS-2.3: Countywide Flood Control Authority (MPSP/IGC)**

Work with the cities in Merced County to establish a Countywide flood control authority to coordinate efforts and develop opportunities for expanded Federal funding.

**Policy HS-2.4: Coordination to Improve Flood Control (FB/IGC)**

Coordinate with State and local flood management agencies to develop funding mechanisms to finance the design and construction of flood facilities.

**Policy HS-2.5: Flood Control Project Funding (FB)**

Support the efforts of local districts and communities in obtaining funding for local flood control projects.

**Policy HS-2.6: Flood Risk Consideration (RDR)**

Prohibit new development in existing undeveloped areas (i.e., area devoted to agriculture or open space that is not designated for development) protected by a State flood control project without appropriately considering significant known flooding risks and taking reasonable and feasible action to mitigate the potential property damage to the new development resulting from a flood.

**Policy HS-2.7: Finding of Flood Protection for New Development (RDR)**

The County shall not enter into a development agreement, approve any building permit or entitlement, or approve a tentative or parcel map unless it finds one of the following:

- a) The flood control facilities provides 200-year level of protection in urban and non-urban areas consistent with the current Central Valley Flood Protection Plan;
- b) Conditions imposed on the development will protect the property at a 200-year level of protection in urban and non-urban areas consistent with the current Central Valley Flood Protection Plan; or
- c) The local flood management agency has made “adequate progress” on the construction of a flood protection system which will result in protection equal or greater than the 200-year flood event in urban and non-urban areas consistent with the current Central Valley Flood Protection Plan.

**Policy HS-2.8: Floodwater Diversion (RDR)**

Require new flood control projects or developments within areas subject to 100- and 200-year frequency floods are done in a manner that will not cause floodwaters to be diverted onto adjacent property or increase flood hazards to property located elsewhere.

**Policy HS-2.9: Minimize Public Facility Impacts (RDR/MPSP)**

Encourage all agencies that operate public facilities, such as roads, structures, wastewater treatment plants, gas, electrical, and water systems within areas subject to 100- and 200-year frequency floods to locate and construct facilities to minimize or eliminate potential flood damage.

**Policy HS-2.10: Essential Facility Location (RDR)**

Prohibit the construction of essential facilities (including hospitals, healthcare facilities, emergency shelters, fire stations, emergency command centers, and emergency communications facilities) in the 100- and 200-year floodplain, unless it can be demonstrated that the structural and operational integrity of the facility can be maintained during flood events.

**Policy HS-2.11: National Flood Insurance Program (SO)**

Continue to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

**Policy HS-2.12: Relocation Assistance (IGC)**

Support State and local flood management agencies to provide relocation assistance or other cost-effective strategies for reducing flood risk to existing economically disadvantaged communities located in non-urbanized areas.

**Policy HS-2.13: Open Space Use (RDR)**

Encourage open space uses in flood hazard areas.

**Policy HS-2.14: Multi-Purpose Flood Control Projects (RDR)**

Encourage multi-purpose flood control projects that incorporate recreation, resource conservation, preservation of natural riparian habitat, and scenic values of the County's streams, creeks, and lakes.

**Policy HS-2.15: Flood Control Design (RDR)**

Encourage flood control designs that respect the natural topography and vegetation of waterways while retaining dynamic flow and functional integrity.

**Policy HS-2.16: Adapting Infrastructure to Climate Change (RDR/MPSP)**

Encourage increased stormwater and flood protection infrastructure capacity in order to accommodate changes in precipitation and extreme weather events.

**Policy HS-2.17: Flood Control Facility Construction (RDR)**

Permit the construction of County flood control facilities in existing developments located within flood hazard areas to proceed only after a complete review of the environmental effects and project costs and benefits.

**Policy HS-2.18: Public Awareness Programs (PI)**

Prepare public awareness programs to inform the general public and potentially affected property owners of flood hazards, potential dam failure inundation, and evacuation plans.

**Policy HS-2.19: Mutual Aid Resource (RDR)**

Coordinate and use mutual aid resources to augment local resources in order to perform rescue operations, secure utilities and inundated areas, and control traffic in event of dam failure.

**Policy HS-2.20: Multi-Hazard Functional Plan Update (RDR)**

Prepare and include provisions for mutual aid efforts within the County Multi-Hazard Functional Plan.

**FIRE HAZARDS**

Both urban and wildland fire hazards exist in Merced County, creating the potential for injury, loss of life, and property damage. Urban fires primarily involve the uncontrolled burning of residential, commercial, or industrial structures due to human activities. As the County continues to experience increased urbanization through new development and expanded road systems, the need for improved safety planning will intensify. While new development will bring new challenges for fire safety, it will also bring new opportunities to enhance and expand existing services and facilities to serve the County’s growing demand for fire protection services. The policies in this section address fire hazards in Merced County.

<b>Goal HS-3</b>	Minimize the exposure of County residents and public and private property to the effects of urban and wildland fires.
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**Policy HS-3.1: Adequate Water Supplies for Fire Suppression (RDR)**

Require adequate water supplies be available for fire suppression prior to occupancy of any structure in urban areas where a public water system does not exist prior to occupancy of any structures located in the County.

**Policy HS-3.2: Minimum Peak-load Water Supply Standards (RDR)**

Establish minimum peak-load water supply standards for developments with public water systems.

**Policy HS-3.3: Sprinkler Systems (RDR)**

Require sprinkler systems in areas where a fire department determines alternate fire protection measures are not adequate or to comply with State law.

**Policy HS-3.4: Smoke Detectors (RDR)**

Encourage installation and maintenance of smoke detectors in existing residences and commercial facilities that were constructed prior to the requirement for their installation.

**Policy HS-3.5: Vegetation Clear Zones (RDR)**

Encourage and maintain vegetation "clear zones" around new and existing residential structures in areas designated as having a high or extreme fire hazard severity and assist property owners in identifying how the clear zones should be maintained.

**Policy HS-3.6: Weed Abatement (RDR)**

Encourage weed abatement programs throughout the County in order to promote fire safety.

**Policy HS-3.7: Road Fire Buffers (RDR)**

Encourage fire buffers along heavily traveled roads within high and extreme hazard zones by thinning, disking, or controlled burning. Plan parks, golf courses, utility corridors, roads, and open space areas so they can serve a secondary function as a fuel break.

**Policy HS-3.8: Cluster Development (RDR)**

Encourage cluster developments in areas identified as subject to high or extreme fire hazard in order to provide for more localized and effective fire protection measures, such as consolidations of fuel build-up abatement, firebreak maintenance, firefighting equipment access, and water service provision.

**Policy HS-3.9: Building Permit Review (RDR)**

Require all buildings and structures to be constructed to fire safety standards prescribed in the Building Code and the County Fire Prevention Ordinance. Where minimum fire flow water pressure is not available to satisfy Fire Department standards, alternate fire protection measures shall be identified and incorporated into the development.

**Policy HS-3.10: Emergency Equipment Access – New Development (RDR)**

Require safe all-weather access for fire and other emergency equipment as part of the subdivisions and building permit application review process.

**Policy HS-3.11: Emergency Equipment Access – Existing Development (RDR)**

Encourage the construction of safe all-weather access for fire and emergency equipment to serve existing residential uses in areas designated as having a very high fire hazard severity.

**Policy HS-3.12: Fire-Resistant Vegetation (RDR)**

Require that development in high fire hazard areas have fire-resistant vegetation, cleared fire breaks separating communities or clusters of structures from native vegetation, or a long-term comprehensive vegetation and fuel management program.

**Policy HS-3.13: Uniform Fire Code (RDR)**

Require the Uniform Fire Code to be used as a guide for project-level fire prevention and suppression activities, including site access, water supply, fire protection systems, and the use of fire resistant building materials.

**AIRPORT SAFETY**

The aviation system of Merced County, consisting of four municipal airports and one County-administered airport, is a vital economic resource to be preserved, maintained, and enhanced for future generations. While the promotion of compatible land uses around airports is necessary to address safety concerns, it has the added advantage of maintaining or expanding airport capabilities, improving delivery of products and services, and preserving previous investments. Encroachment due to incompatible land use is one of the greatest threats to increasing the capability and capacity of the County’s aviation system. The policies in this section address airport safety in Merced County.

<b>Goal HS-4</b>	Promote the safe operation of airports and the safety of Merced County residents by requiring that any new development within the airport area of influence be consistent with the requirements of the Merced County Airport Land Use Commission’s compatibility plan and compliant with Federal Aviation Administration regulations.
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**Policy HS-4.1: Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (RDR)**

Require that development around public use airports be consistent with the safety policies and land use compatibility guidelines contained in the Merced County Airport Land Use Commission’s adopted Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan, and ensure that development near private airstrips addresses land use compatibility issues and complies with Federal Aviation Administration regulations.

**Policy HS-4.2: Compliance with FAA Regulations (RDR)**

Require that development within the airport approach and departure zones is in compliance with Part 77 of the Federal Aviation Administration Regulations (FAA regulations that address objects affecting navigable airspace).

## HAZARDOUS MATERIALS AND WASTE

Merced County has an aggressive program of tracking and inspecting hazardous materials and waste. The information about hazardous materials and wastes is important to future land use and growth management decisions. The County tracking system includes the collection of data related to underground storage tanks, hazardous material spill sites, and landfills. The policies in this section address the problem of hazardous materials and wastes, as well as the location, storage, transportation, and safety of such hazardous materials.

### Goal HS-5

Protect Merced County residents, visitors, and property through providing for the safe use, storage, transport, and disposal of hazardous materials and wastes.

#### **Policy HS-5.1: Compliance with Safety Standards (RDR)**

Require that hazardous materials are used, stored, transported, and disposed of in a safe manner, in compliance with local, State, and Federal safety standards.

#### **Policy HS-5.2: Hazardous Material and Waste Transport (IGC)**

Coordinate with the California Highway Patrol to establish procedures for the movement of hazardous wastes and explosives within the County.

#### **Policy HS-5.3: Incompatible Land Uses (RDR)**

Prohibit incompatible land uses near properties that produce or store hazardous waste.

#### **Policy HS-5.4: Contamination Prevention (RDR)**

Require new development and redevelopment proposals that have suspected or historic contamination to address hazards concerns and protect soils, surface water, and groundwater from hazardous materials contamination by conducting Phase I Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) according to the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards and applicable Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) remediation guidelines. Also, complete additional Phase II Environmental Site Assessments and soil investigations, and any identified or needed remediation when preliminary studies determine such studies are recommended.

#### **Policy HS-5.5: Household Hazardous Waste (PI)**

Continue to administer educational programs to inform the public about household hazardous waste and the proper methods of disposal.

#### **Policy HS-5.6: Hazardous Waste Residual Repositories (RDR/MPSP)**

Prohibit hazardous waste residual repositories (as defined by the Merced County Hazardous Waste Management Plan) to be located in significant wetland and threatened species habitats or adjacent to State and Federal wildlife refuges or management areas.

## ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, predominantly as a result of the burning of fossil fuels, is increasing the potency of the greenhouse effect and leading to global climate change. The potential effects of climate change include sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, diminished water supply, increased wildfire risk, increased frequency and magnitude of flooding, habitat loss, and possible impacts to public health and the local economy, including agriculture. The policies in this section seek to protect the County from and facilitate adaptation to the potential effects of climate change.

<b>Goal HS-6</b>	Plan for the eventual impacts of climate change through adaptive management strategies and responses in order to mitigate climate change impacts while protecting the quality of life for current and future County residents.
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**Policy HS-6.1: Development Restrictions in High Risk Areas (RDR) 🌐**

Prohibit development in areas that may be more severely impacted by climate change, including areas at high risk of wildfire or flooding, unless proper design mitigation is included in the project.

**Policy HS-6.2: Climate Change Monitoring and Adaptation (RDR) 🌐**

Prepare an analysis that monitors the impacts of climate change and use adaptive management to develop new strategies and modify existing strategies to respond to the impacts of climate change.

**Policy HS-6.3: New Agricultural Crops (RDR/PSR) 🌐**

Coordinate with University of California Cooperative Extension in efforts to identify new agricultural crop choices/varieties that accommodate a longer growing season and are resistant to heat, insects, and disease. Also identify agricultural production methods such as planting dates and irrigation methods to adapt to changes in the climate.

**Policy HS-6.4: Public Health Facilities and Program (RDR) 🌐**

Support the expansion of public health facilities and programs that address increases in extreme weather events (e.g., heat waves) and reduced air quality.

**Policy HS-6.5: Early Warning System (RDR) 🌐**

Prepare and maintain an early warning system for disease outbreaks and extreme heat events.

**Policy HS-6.6: Emergency Planning (RDR) 🌐**

Support emergency planning for disease outbreaks and extreme weather events.

**Policy HS-6.7: Public Awareness (PI) 🌐**

Support public awareness of water conservation measures, agricultural changes, storm and flood preparedness, forest/range fire protection, air quality issues, extreme weather events, and disease prevention.

## NOISE

While most noise is common and frequently an integral part of daily living, exposure to excessive noise is often cited as a health problem in terms of general well-being and contribution to undue stress and annoyance. There are many sources of noise in the County including traffic on Interstate 5; State Routes 33, 59, 99, 140, and 152; local roads; railroad operations; aircraft operations; commercial uses; active recreation areas; and outdoor play areas.

The following noise level standards have been developed in order to quantify noise impacts in the County. Table HS-1 shows the noise level standards for noise-sensitive areas affected by traffic, railroad, or airport noise sources in the County. Table HS-2 shows the interior and exterior noise level standards for noise-sensitive areas affected by existing non-transportation noise sources in the County. In addition to these standards, the policies in this section address ways to reduce or eliminate existing and future conflicts between land uses and noise.

TABLE HS-1 Noise Standards for New Uses Affected by Traffic, Railroad, and Airport Noise			
New Land Use	Sensitive <sup>1</sup> Outdoor Area - Ldn	Sensitive Interior <sup>2</sup> Area - Ldn	Notes
All Residential	65	45	3
Transient Lodging	65	45	3,4
Hospitals & Nursing Homes	65	45	3, 4, 5
Theaters & Auditoriums	---	35	4
Churches, Meeting Halls, Schools, Libraries, etc.	65 65	40 40	4 4
Office Buildings	65	45	4
Commercial Buildings	---	50	4
Playgrounds, Parks, etc.	70	---	
Industry	65	50	4

*Notes:*

1. Sensitive Outdoor Areas include primary outdoor activity areas associated with any given land use at which noise-sensitivity exists and the location at which the County’s exterior noise level standards are applied.
2. Sensitive Interior Areas includes any interior area associated with any given land use at which noise-sensitivity exists and the location at which the County’s interior noise level standards are applied. Examples of sensitive interior spaces include, but are not limited to, all habitable rooms of residential and transient lodging facilities, hospital rooms, classrooms, library interiors, offices, worship spaces, theaters. Interior noise level standards are applied within noise-sensitive areas of the various land uses with windows and doors in the closed positions.
3. Railroad warning horn usage shall not be included in the computation of Ldn.
4. Only the interior noise level standard shall apply if there are no sensitive exterior spaces proposed for these uses.
5. Since hospitals are often noise-generating uses, the exterior noise level standards are applicable only to clearly identified areas designated for outdoor relaxation by either hospital staff or patients.

<b>TABLE HS-2                      Non-Transportation Noise Standards                      Median (L50) / Maximum (Lmax)<sup>1</sup></b>				
<b>Outdoor Area<sup>2</sup></b>			<b>Interior<sup>3</sup></b>	
<b>Receiving Land Use</b>	<b>Daytime</b>	<b>Nighttime</b>	<b>Day or Night</b>	<b>Notes</b>
All Residential	55 / 75	50 / 70	35 / 55	
Transient Lodging	55 / 75	---	35 / 55	4
Hospitals & Nursing Homes	55 / 75	---	35 / 55	5, 6
Theaters & Auditoriums	---	---	30 / 50	6
Churches, Meeting Halls, Schools, Libraries, etc.	55 / 75	---	35 / 60	6
Office Buildings	60 / 75	---	45 / 65	6
Commercial Buildings	55 / 75	---	45 / 65	6
Playgrounds, Parks, etc.	65 / 75	---	---	6
Industry	60 / 80	---	50 / 70	6

*Notes:*

1. These standards shall be reduced by 5 dB for sounds consisting primarily of speech or music, and for recurring impulsive sounds. If the existing ambient noise level exceeds the standards in this table, then the noise level standards shall be increased at 5 dB increments to encompass the ambient.
2. Sensitive Outdoor Areas include primary outdoor activity areas associated with any given land use at which noise-sensitivity exists and the location at which the County’s exterior noise level standards are applied.
3. Sensitive Interior Areas includes any interior area associated with any given land use at which noise-sensitivity exists and the location at which the County’s interior noise level standards are applied. Examples of sensitive interior spaces include, but are not limited to, all habitable rooms of residential and transient lodging facilities, hospital rooms, classrooms, library interiors, offices, worship spaces, theaters. Interior noise level standards are applied within noise-sensitive areas of the various land uses with windows and doors in the closed positions.
4. Outdoor activity areas of transient lodging facilities are not commonly used during nighttime hours.
5. Since hospitals are often noise-generating uses, the exterior noise level standards are applicable only to clearly identified areas designated for outdoor relaxation by either hospital staff or patients.
6. The outdoor activity areas of these uses (if any) are not typically used during nighttime hours.
7. Where median (L50) noise level data is not available for a particular noise source, average (Leq) values may be substituted for the standards of this table provided the noise source operates for at least 30 minutes. If the source operates less than 30 minutes the maximum noise level standards shown shall apply.

<b>Goal HS-7</b>	Protect residents, employees, and visitors from the harmful and annoying effects of exposure to excessive noise.
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**Policy HS-7.1: Noise Standards for New Land Uses (RDR)**

Require new development projects to meet the standards shown in Tables HS-1 and HS-2, at the property line of the proposed use, through either project design or other noise mitigation techniques.

**Policy HS-7.2: Acoustical and Groundborne Vibration Analysis Requirements (RDR)**

Require development project applicants to prepare an acoustical analysis as part of the environmental review process when noise-sensitive land uses are proposed in areas exposed to existing or projected exterior noise levels exceeding the levels shown in Tables HS-1 and HS-2. Require an analysis of groundborne vibration for proposed residential and other sensitive projects (including but not limited to hospitals and schools) located within 1,000 feet of a rail line with at least 30 operations per day or an existing industrial groundborne vibration source. The acoustical and groundborne vibration analyses shall:

- a) Be the responsibility of the applicant;
- b) Be prepared by qualified persons experienced in the fields of environmental noise and groundborne vibration assessment and architectural acoustics;
- c) Include representative noise level measurements with sufficient sampling periods and locations to adequately describe local conditions;
- d) Estimate projected future (20 year) noise levels relative to the standards shown in Tables HS-1 and HS-2 at the property line of the proposed use, and, as applicable, estimate project future groundborne vibration levels using a maximum vibration standard of 70 VdB;
- e) Recommend appropriate mitigation to achieve compliance with the adopted policies and standards in this element, including setbacks from groundborne vibration sources causing adverse levels of vibration; and
- f) Estimate interior and exterior noise, and groundborne vibration exposure after the prescribed mitigation measures have been implemented at the property line.

**Policy HS-7.3: Existing Rural Sources (RDR)**

Discourage new noise sensitive land uses in rural areas with authorized existing noise generating land uses.

**Policy HS-7.4: New Noise or Groundborne Vibration Generating Uses (RDR)**

Require new commercial and industrial uses to minimize encroachment on incompatible noise or groundborne vibration sensitive land uses. Also consider the potential for encroachment by residential and other noise or groundborne vibration sensitive land uses on adjacent lands that could significantly impact the viability of the commercial or industrial areas.

**Policy HS-7.5: Noise Generating Activities (RDR)**

Limit noise generating activities, such as construction, to hours of normal business operation.

**Policy HS-7.6: Multi-Family Residential Noise Analysis (RDR)**

Require noise analyses be prepared for proposed multi-family, town homes, mixed-use, condominiums, or other residential projects where floor ceiling assemblies or party-walls shall be common to different owners/occupants to assure compliance with the State of California Noise Insulation Standards.

**Policy HS-7.7: Noise or Vibration Impacted Residential Area Monitoring (RDR)**

Consider any existing residential area “noise or vibration impacted” if the exposure to exterior noise exceeds the standards shown in Table HS-2 or if groundborne vibration levels exceed 70VdB. Identify and evaluate potential noise or groundborne vibration impacted areas and identify possible means to correct the identified noise/land use incompatibilities.

**Policy HS-7.8: Project Design (RDR)**

Require land use projects to comply with adopted noise and vibration standards through proper site and building design, such as building orientation, setbacks, natural barriers (e.g., earthen berms, vegetation), and building construction practices. Only consider the use of soundwalls after all design-related noise mitigation measures have been evaluated or integrated into the project or found infeasible.

**Policy HS-7.9: Transportation Project Construction/Improvements (RDR)**

Require transportation project proponents to prepare all acoustical analysis for all roadway and railway construction projects in accordance with Policy HS-7.2; additionally, rail projects shall require the preparation of a groundborne vibration analysis in accordance with Policy HS-7.2. Consider noise mitigation measures to reduce traffic and/or rail noise levels to comply with Table HS-1 standards if pre-project noise levels already exceed the noise standards of Table HS-1 and the increase is significant. The County defines a significant increase as follows:

<u>Pre-Project Noise Environment (Ldn)</u>	<u>Significant Increase</u>
Less than 60 dB	5+ dB
60 - 65 dB	3+ dB
Greater than 65 dB	1.5+ dB

**Policy HS-7.10: Aircraft Noise (RDR)**

Prohibit new noise-sensitive development within the projected future 60 dB Ldn noise contours of any public or private airports.

**Policy HS-7.11: Train Whistle Noise (IGC)**

Support improvements to at-grade crossings in urban areas in order to eliminate the need for train whistle blasts near or within communities.

**Policy HS-7.12: New Project Noise Mitigation Requirements (RDR)**

Require new projects to include appropriate noise mitigation measures to reduce noise levels in compliance with the Table HS-2 standards within sensitive areas. If a project

includes the creation of new non-transportation noise sources, require the noise generation of those sources to be mitigated so they do not exceed the interior and exterior noise level standards of Table HS-2 at existing noise-sensitive areas in the project vicinity. However, if a noise-generating use is proposed adjacent to lands zoned for residential uses, then the noise generating use shall be responsible for mitigating its noise generation to a state of compliance with the standards shown in Table HS-2 at the property line of the generating use in anticipation of the future residential development.

**Policy HS-7.13: Noise Exemptions (RDR)**

Support the exemption of the following noise sources from the standards in this element:

- a) Emergency warning devices and equipment operated in conjunction with emergency situations, such as sirens and generators which are activated during power outages. The routine testing of such warning devices and equipment shall also be exempt provided such testing occurs during daytime hours.
- b) Activities at schools, parks, or playgrounds, provided such activities occur during daytime hours.
- c) Activities associated with County-permitted temporary events and festivals.

**Policy HS-7.14: Transportation Noise Mitigation Program (MPSP/SO)**

Adopt a countywide transportation noise mitigation program to reduce transportation noise levels at existing sensitive land uses.

**Policy HS-7.15: New Project Groundborne Vibration Mitigation Requirements (RDR)**

For residential projects within 1,000 feet of a rail line with at least 30 operations per day, or an existing industrial or commercial groundborne vibration source, require new residential projects to include appropriate groundborne vibration mitigation measures to reduce groundborne vibration levels to less than 70 VdB within structures. However, if a groundborne vibration-generating use is proposed adjacent to lands zoned for residential uses, then the groundborne vibration-generating use shall be responsible for mitigating its groundborne vibration generation to a state of compliance with the 70 VdB standard at the property line of the generating use in anticipation of the future residential development.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Merced County is committed to making land use, environmental, and resource protection decisions that are predictable and fair. The policies in this section ensure that Merced County will make decisions that are fair and equitable for every resident, regardless of age, race, culture, or income.

**Goal HS-8**

Ensure the fair treatment of all visitors, residents, employees, and property owners, regardless of age, race, culture, and income with respect to land use and environmental decisions.

**Policy HS-8.1: Environmental Justice (SO)**

Require the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of land use and environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Ensure that no part of the community suffers disproportionately from adverse human health or environmental effects, and strive to provide all residents to live in a clean and healthy community.

**Policy HS-8.2: Equal Public Participation (SP)**

Ensure that all community residents have meaningful opportunities to participate in all public decision-making processes, including Planning Commission and Board of Supervisor actions.

**Policy HS-8.3: Equitable Distribution of New Public Facilities and Services (RDR)**

Promote the equitable distribution of new public facilities and services that increase and enhance the entire community's quality of life.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Health and Safety Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program HS-A: Floodplain Mapping (RDR, IGC, PSR)</b> Continue to participate in the Federal Flood Insurance Program and maintain flood hazard maps and other relevant floodplain data and revise/update this information as new State and Federal information becomes available.		✓				✓
Implements Which Policy	HS-2.11					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program HS-B: Floodplain Management Ordinance (RDR)</b> Update and periodically review the Special Flood Hazard Areas provisions contained in the County Code to ensure adequate protection for structures located within identified flood zones.		✓				
Implements Which Policies	HS-2.1 through HS-2.19					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works					
<b>Program HS-C: Countywide Flood Emergency Plan (RDR, MPSP)</b> Prepare, maintain, and implement a Countywide Flood Emergency Plan that is consistent with city adopted general plans. The plan should be prepared in coordination with cities in Merced County and address the requirements of Senate Bill 5.			✓			
Implements Which Policies	HS-2.2					
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program HS-D: Countywide Flood Control Authority (MPSP/IGC)</b> Establish, in coordination with cities in Merced County, a Countywide Flood Control Authority that will be responsible for coordinating local flood control efforts and identifying opportunities for additional Federal funding.			✓			
Implements Which Policies	HS-2.3					
Responsible Department	Board of Supervisors					
Supporting Department	County Administration					

Health and Safety Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program HS-E: Dam Failure Evacuation Plan (MSPS)</b> Prepare and implement Dam Failure Evacuation Plan(s) and provide public information on dam failure preparedness.						
Implements Which Policies	HS-2.18, HS-2.19		✓			
Responsible Department	Fire Departments					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development Public Works					
<b>Program HS-F: Critical Area Flooding and Drainage Plan (MSPS)</b> Continue to implement the Critical Area Flooding and Drainage Plan.						
Implements Which Policies	HS-2.1 through HS-2.19					✓
Responsible Department	Public Works					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program HS-G: Noise Sensitive Land Uses Near Airports (PS, MPSP)</b> The County shall review all noise sensitive land uses, including but not limited to hospitals, schools and residential dwellings, at the building permit or discretionary review stage for compatibility with noise exposure from any public use airport as identified in the current Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan.						✓
Implements Which Policies	HS-4.1, HS-4.2, HS-7.1 through HS-7.12					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works					
<b>Program HS-H: Household Hazardous Waste (PI)</b> Prepare, maintain, and implement a program to educate the public about household hazardous waste and the proper method of disposal. This can include updates to the County website, newsletters, and other informational materials.						
Implements Which Policies	HS-5.5		✓			
Responsible Department	Environmental Health Division					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program HS-I: Climate Change Adaptation Analysis (RDR)</b> Prepare an analysis that monitors the impacts of climate change and use adaptive management to develop new strategies and modify existing strategies to respond to the impacts of climate change.						
Implements Which Policies	HS-6.2	✓				
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					

Health and Safety Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
Supporting Department						
<b>Program HS-J: Agricultural Crop Identification Study (RDR/PSR)</b> Prepare an analysis that identifies new agricultural crop choices and varieties that accommodate a longer growing season and are resistant to heat, insects, and disease. Also identify agricultural production methods such as planting dates and irrigation methods to adapt to changes in the climate and protect the local economy.		✓				
Implements Which Policies	HS-6.3					
Responsible Department	University of California Cooperative Extension (through a contract with Merced County)					
Supporting Department	Agricultural Commissioner					
<b>Program HS-K: Noise Control Standards (RDR)</b> Update and enforce the Noise Control standards contained in the County Zoning Code as necessary to be consistent with the policies and standards within this element.						✓
Implements Which Policies	HS-7.1 through HS-7.12					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Environmental Health, Building Division					
<b>Program HS-L: Noise Sensitive Land Uses Near Major Transportation Noise Sources (RDR/MPSP/SO)</b> For roadways, railways, and other sources of transportation noise estimated to produce noise levels in excess of General Plan standards, document the locations of all existing noise sensitive land uses, including but not limited to hospitals, schools, and residential dwellings. Predict noise levels at the noise sensitive land uses. If noise levels exceed General Plan standards, identify feasible mitigation measures, including a funding source for implementation of the measures. The mitigation program could include, but should not be limited to, the following specific elements for noise abatement consideration where reasonable and feasible: noise barrier retrofits; truck usage restrictions; reduction of speed limits; use of quieter paving materials; building façade sound insulation; traffic calming; additional enforcement of speed limits and exhaust noise laws; and signal timing.						✓
Implements Which Policies	HS-7.1 through HS-7.12					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Environmental Health, Building Division					



# AIR QUALITY ELEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This element provides the policy context for Merced County to achieve its vision for air quality and greenhouse gas reduction. Air pollution can adversely affect human health, degrade the natural and built environments, adversely impact the production and quality of agricultural crops, and change the earth's climate. It is a major factor in defining the quality of life for County residents, and the San Joaquin Valley air basin has air pollution levels among the worst in the nation. Cities and counties in the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin are required to amend their general plans to include goals, policies, and feasible implementation strategies to improve air quality and address climate change.

Besides regulating point-source pollution, such as industrial sources of pollution, the primary means for local government to improve air quality is by changing land use patterns and reducing automobile travel. For a rural area like Merced County, the primary role in this strategy is to direct development to existing urban areas and to minimize parcelization and residential development on agricultural and open space land. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation
- Environmental Assessment and Mitigation
- Public Facilities and Operations
- Congestion Management and Transportation Control Measures
- Toxic and Hazardous Emissions
- Fugitive Dust and PM10

## GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere by human activities, predominantly the burning of fossil fuels, is increasing the potency of the greenhouse effect and leading to global climate change. Local efforts to reduce energy consumption and use alternative energy sources can save consumers money and improve air quality. Not only is there a concern for worldwide impacts, but there are new and emerging legal and regulatory issues that local governments in California must address. The most important

of these is Assembly Bill 32 which requires local governments to inventory greenhouse gases. In order to implement AB 32, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has adopted emission reduction targets and best management practices that are required to be met by each jurisdiction, including Merced County. The policies in this section require energy conservation, greenhouse gas emission reduction, and global and local climate change adaptation.

<b>Goal AQ-1</b>	Reduce air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions and anticipate adaptation due to future consequences of global and local climate change.
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**Policy AQ-1.1: Energy Consumption Reduction (RDR) 🌍**

Encourage new residential, commercial, and industrial development to reduce air quality impacts from energy consumption.

**Policy AQ-1.2: Business Energy Reduction Strategies (RDR) 🌍**

Encourage all businesses to: replace high mileage fleet vehicles with more efficient and/or alternative fuel vehicles; increase the energy efficiency of facilities; transition toward the use of renewable energy instead of non-renewable energy sources; adopt purchasing practices that promote emissions reductions and reusable materials; and increase recycling.

**Policy AQ-1.3: Agricultural Operations Emission Reduction Strategies (RDR) 🌍**

Promote greenhouse gas emission reductions by encouraging agricultural operators to use carbon efficient farming methods (e.g., no-till farming, crop rotation, cover cropping); install renewable energy technologies; protect grasslands, open space, oak woodlands, riparian forest and farmlands from conversion to other uses; and develop energy-efficient structures.

**Policy AQ-1.4: Methane Digesters (RDR, JP) 🌍**

Encourage large dairies to capture methane through use of manure digester systems to generate an alternative source of energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and serve as a source of profit for agricultural operations.

**Policy AQ-1.5: Climate Action Plan (RDR, PSR) 🌍**

Prepare a Climate Action Plan that includes an inventory of 1990 and 2010 greenhouse gas emissions, determines project air quality impacts using analysis methods and significance thresholds recommended by the SJVAPC, and identify strategies to achieve State emission reduction targets.

**Policy AQ-1.6: Air Quality Improvement (SO) 🌍**

Support and implement programs to improve air quality throughout the County by reducing emissions related to vehicular travel and agricultural practices.

**Policy AQ-1.7: Heat Island Effect Reduction (RDR) 🌐**

Require increased tree canopy and reflective surface materials in order to reduce the heat island effect (i.e., increased temperatures due to heat radiation off paved surfaces and rooftops). This includes:

- a) Preserving agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and corridors, wetlands, watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, and other open space that provide carbon sequestration benefits;
- b) Establishing a mitigation program for development of those types of open space that provide carbon sequestration benefits;
- c) Requiring like-kind replacement for, or impose mitigation fees on, land development that results in the loss of carbon sequestering open space; and
- d) Using mitigation funds generated to protect existing open space.

**Policy AQ-1.8: Climate Change Adaptation (RDR) 🌐**

Prepare appropriate strategies to adapt to climate change based on peer-reviewed scientific findings of the potential impacts.

**Policy AQ-1.9: Interagency Coordination (IGC) 🌐**

Coordinate with cities, regional, State, and Federal agencies and organizations to collaborate on a comprehensive approach to planning for climate change.

**Policy AQ-1.10: Public Awareness (IS) 🌐**

Increase public awareness about climate change and encourage county residents and businesses to become involved in activities and lifestyle changes that will aid in reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

**Policy AQ-1.11: Truck-Related Development (RDR)**

Discourage development that causes significant increases in truck traffic on roads that are not capable of accommodating truck traffic due to pavement section deficiency or other capacity limitations, unless adequate mitigation through fees or improvements in required as part of the permit approval.

**Policy AQ-1.12: Dairy Digester Permit Streamlining (RDR/MPSP/IGC)**

For existing dairy operations that are consistent with all permit requirements, including those issued by Merced County, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, amend the Zoning Ordinance and Animal Confinement Ordinance to permit digesters using on-farm feedstocks via Plot Plan Review. Proponents of digester projects using this process shall demonstrate that the digester is consistent with the RWQCB General Order for On-Farm Digesters (or any successor regulation) process, and that all needed SJVAPCD approvals necessary to construct and operate the digester have been obtained. No feature of this policy shall permit the expansion of any dairy herd or construction of other dairy facilities without compliance with all Zoning Code and Animal Confinement Ordinance requirements governing such uses.

**Policy AQ-1.13: Methane Digester Policy (IGC)**

Cooperate with federal, state, and regional agencies to establish programs to encourage and provide incentives for the installation and operation of methane digesters.

**Policy AQ-1.14: Methane Digester Funding (MPSP/FB/JP)**

Use a wide range of funding mechanisms to establish a revolving low-interest loan program to provide funding for the construction of methane digesters, including obtaining available state and federal energy efficiency grants.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION

The environmental assessment process required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is the most important tool for the County to communicate with other agencies and the public on the air quality impacts of development. The County can make a significant difference in reducing project-level air quality impacts through the careful identification of potentially significant impacts and adoption of corresponding feasible mitigation measures in compliance with CEQA. The policies in this section guide the County in establishing fair and consistent project review procedures for assessing project impacts on air quality.

<b>Goal AQ-2</b>	Mitigate significant local and regional air quality impacts of projects through the CEQA process.
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**Policy AQ-2.1: Air Quality Plan Compliance (RDR) 🌐**

Require all development projects to comply with applicable regional air quality plans and policies.

**Policy AQ-2.2: Development Review Process (RDR) 🌐**

Use the development review process to achieve measurable reductions in criteria pollutant, toxic air contaminants, and greenhouse gas emissions.

**Policy AQ-2.3: Cumulative Impacts (RDR) 🌐**

Encourage the reduction of cumulative air quality impacts produced by projects that are not significant by themselves, but result in cumulatively significant impacts in combination with other development.

**Policy AQ-2.4: Mitigation (RDR) 🌐**

Require that local and regional air quality impacts identified during CEQA review for projects reviewed and approved by the County are consistently and fairly mitigated.

**Policy AQ-2.5: Innovative Mitigation Measures (RDR, IGC, JP) 🌐**

Encourage innovative mitigation measures and project redesign to reduce air quality impacts by coordinating with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, project applicants, and other interested parties.

**Policy AQ-2.6: County Decision-Making Process (RDR)** 

Require climate change planning and program implementation in the County decision-making process.

**Policy AQ-2.7: Air District Best Performance Standards (RDR)** 

Require the County to use the Best Performance Standards adopted by SJVAPCD during the development review and decision-making process to ensure new projects meet the targets set by the district.

## PUBLIC FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

Merced County is a large employer and operates a large vehicle fleet. The County takes a leadership role in implementing employer-based trip reduction and fleet operator programs to reduce the County's emissions and provide a model for the private sector. The policies in this section focus on improving air quality by improving County facilities and operations.

**Goal AQ-3**

Improve air quality through improved public facilities and operations and to serve as a model for the private sector.

**Policy AQ-3.1: Automotive Trip Reduction Program (RDR, PSR)** 

Prepare and implement an automotive trip reduction program for County employees, which may include:

- a) Department-sponsored carpooling efforts and rideshare programs;
- b) Preferred parking locations for carpool/rideshare users;
- c) Transit-cost reimbursement or subsidy for employees; and
- d) Incentives for employees who use alternative means of transportation (e.g., train, biking, walking, carpooling).

**Policy AQ-3.2: Clean Fleet Vehicles (RDR)** 

Require vehicle replacement practices that prioritize the replacement of older higher-emission vehicles and the purchasing of the lowest emission technology vehicles, consistent with cost-effective management of the program.

**Policy AQ-3.3: Teleconferencing (RDR)** 

Use teleconferencing in lieu of employee travel to conferences and meetings when feasible.

**Policy AQ-3.4: Infrastructure for Telecommuting (RDR)** 

Develop state-of-the-art communication infrastructure to support telecommuting and secure software programs to allow telecommuting by County employees.

**Policy AQ-3.5: Purchasing Preferences (RDR)** 

Institute environmentally-responsible purchasing, including giving preference to products that reduce or eliminate indirect greenhouse gas emissions and promote recycling.

## CONGESTION MANAGEMENT AND TRANSPORTATION CONTROL MEASURES

Transportation control measures are strategies to lower emissions by reducing vehicle trips, vehicle miles traveled, and idling. Central to this strategy are policies that encourage people to drive less. Congestion management programs improve the efficiency of the transportation system through measures that increase system capacity with minimal capital improvements. State and Federal law requires local governments to include transportation control and congestion management measures in their transportation plans.

Merced County has the opportunity to create performance-based development patterns and codes that by design reduce trip generation, trip length and, as a result, air pollutant emissions related to future commercial and residential development projects. The policies in this section support the reduction of transportation-based emissions.

### Goal AQ-4

Reduce traffic congestion and vehicle trips through more efficient infrastructure and support for trip reduction programs.

#### Policy AQ-4.1: Decrease Vehicle Miles Traveled (RDR)

Require diverse, higher-density land uses (e.g., mixed-use and infill development) to decrease vehicle miles traveled.

#### Policy AQ-4.2: Increasing Road Capacity (RDR)

Increase the efficiency of the existing road network prior to constructing additional capacity. These measures could include: modifying intersections using turn restrictions or channelization, where feasible; and redirecting truck traffic during peak hours.

#### Policy AQ-4.3: Public Transport Use Incentives (RDR, PSR)

Prepare incentives and programs to encourage use of public transit and decrease vehicle miles traveled.

#### Policy AQ-4.4: Transportation Alternatives (JP)

Require employers and developers to provide employees and residents with attractive, affordable transportation alternatives, such as transit stops, van pool pick-up and drop-off locations, and biking paths/storage.

#### Policy AQ-4.5: Public Education and Awareness (PI, PSR)

Support programs that educate the public regarding the impact of individual transportation, lifestyle, and land use decisions on air quality.

#### Policy AQ-4.6: Non-Motorized Transportation (RDR)

Encourage non-motorized transportation corridors within and between communities.

**Policy AQ-4.7: Planning Integration (RDR)** 

Require land use, transportation, and air quality planning to be integrated for the most efficient use of resources and a healthier environment.

**TOXIC AND HAZARDOUS EMISSIONS**

Siting of industrial, agricultural, and heavy commercial projects that generate toxic or hazardous emissions must take into consideration protection of residential and other sensitive land uses. The policies in this section address appropriate areas for development in order to minimize conflicts and promote economic growth.

<b>Goal AQ-5</b>	County residents are protected from toxic air pollutants and noxious odors from industrial, manufacturing, and processing facilities, and agricultural operations.
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**Policy AQ-5.1: Residential Buffers (RDR)** 

Require effective buffers between residential and other sensitive land uses, and non-residential land uses that generate hazardous air emissions such as highways (e.g., I-5 and SR-99), trucking centers, gasoline dispensing facilities, and dry cleaners. Effective buffers shall be determined by requiring consultation with the SJVAPCD for any project that may have a health risk impact, including those projects that would otherwise appear to be exempt from CEQA requirements.

**Policy AQ-5.2: New Point Sources (RDR)** 

Require new air pollution point sources such as, but not limited to, industrial, manufacturing, and processing facilities to be located an adequate distance from residential areas and other sensitive receptors.

**CRITERIA POLLUTANTS**

Particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter (PM10) and less than 2.5 microns (PM 2.5) are major components of air pollution that threaten the health of humans and the environment. These particles are of great concern to public health because they are small enough to be inhaled into the deepest part of the lungs and cause respiratory-related illness. The San Joaquin Valley is classified as a serious nonattainment area for PM10 under Federal criteria. Because of this classification, jurisdictions in the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin are subject to a series of Federal mandates aimed at achieving the Federal ambient air quality standards. These include adoption of contingency measures and implementation of Best Available Control Measures (BACM). The major sources of these emissions in Merced County are agriculture and dust from construction, industrial activities, and on- and off-road vehicles. The policies in this section support the reduction of PM10 and PM2.5 emissions and other particulates from sources within Merced County.

**Goal AQ-6**

Improve air quality in Merced County by reducing emissions of PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, and other particulates from mobile and non-mobile sources.

**Policy AQ-6.1: Particulate Emissions from Construction (IGC) 🌐**

Support the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's efforts to reduce particulate emissions from construction, grading, excavation, and demolition to the maximum extent feasible and consistent with State and Federal regulations.

**Policy AQ-6.2: Emissions from County Roads (RDR) 🌐**

Require PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> emission reductions on County-maintained roads to the maximum extent feasible and consistent with State and Federal regulations.

**Policy AQ-6.3: Paving Materials (RDR) 🌐**

Require all access roads, driveways, and parking areas serving new commercial and industrial development to be constructed with materials that minimize particulate emissions and are appropriate to the scale and intensity of use.

**Policy AQ-6.4: Agricultural Best Management Practices (RDR, JP) 🌐**

Encourage agricultural operations to incorporate Best Management Practices, such as paving roads, screening cropland with windbreaks, limiting tilling and grading on high-wind days, and changing harvesting equipment, to reduce particulate emissions consistent with State and Federal regulations.

**Policy AQ-6.5: Industrial Best Management Practices (RDR, JP) 🌐**

Require industrial facilities to incorporate economically feasible Best Management Practices and control technology to reduce PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions consistent with State and Federal regulations.

**Policy AQ-6.6: Prohibition on Wood Stoves (RDR/MPSP)**

Prohibit wood stoves and wood burning heaters in all newly constructed residences in unincorporated Merced County that have access to natural gas. Natural gas stoves have substantially lower PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions as compared to wood stoves.

**Policy AQ-6.7: Stove Replacement (RDR/MPSP/SO)**

Require owners of residences with existing wood stoves, or wood burning heaters or fireplaces to remove such wood appliances, upgrade existing stoves to meet EPA certified Phase II emission standards, or replace existing wood stoves with natural gas fired stoves upon sale or major reconstruction of the residence as defined for non-conforming structures in the Merced County Zoning Code if the residence has access to natural gas. Merced County shall establish a program to collect and destroy any existing wood stoves that have been removed by residents.

**AQ-6.8: Voluntary Emissions Reduction Agreement (RDR/IGC)**

Require all project applicants, where project emissions for any criteria pollutant have been evaluated to exceed SJVAPCD significance thresholds, to consult with the SJVAPCD regarding the establishment of a Voluntary Emissions Reduction Agreement between

the applicant and the SJVAPCD. Support the SJVAPCD in its efforts to fund the Emission Reduction Incentive Program.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Air Quality Element Implementation Programs						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program AQ-A: Climate Action Plan (MPSP)</b>  <p>Prepare, maintain, and implement a Climate Action Plan (CAP) for the County that identifies strategies the County can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through land use and transportation planning. The plan shall also address economic and social adaptation to the effects of global and local climate change. The plan shall include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a baseline analysis to determine 1990 and 2010 (or most appropriate base year) greenhouse gas emission levels in the County;</li> <li>actions necessary to reduce Countywide greenhouse gas emissions consistent with State requirements.</li> <li>implementation strategies to help the County adapt to the effects of global and local climate change; and</li> <li>a program to regularly monitor emissions and verify results a minimum of every five years starting in 2010.</li> <li>A provision to amend the General Plan to include the policies and programs of the Climate Action Plan.</li> <li>A requirement that County operations and actions, as well as land use approvals, are consistent with the Climate Action Plan.</li> </ol>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	All AQ policies, specifically AQ-1.5 and AQ-1.8					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works, Environmental Health, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors Health Department					
<b>Program AQ-B: County Telecommuting Upgrades (RDR)</b>  <p>Purchase and regularly update state-of-the-art communication infrastructure and software programs to allow telecommuting by County employees.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	AQ-3.3					
Responsible Department	Information Technology					
Supporting Department						
<b>Program AQ-C: Transit Incentives (PSR)</b>  <p>Establish incentives and programs to encourage the use of public transit in order to decrease automotive vehicle miles traveled.</p>		✓				
Implements Which Policies	AQ-3.1, AQ-4.3, AQ-4.4					
Responsible Department	Community and Economic Development					
Supporting Department	Public Works					



# **WATER ELEMENT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Water is one of the most critical resources for the Merced County economy and for the quality of life of its residents. Both surface water and groundwater supplies are an important determinant of future growth and agricultural production in the County, yet, like much of California, areas of the County have experienced problems with water supply and quality. Declining groundwater levels have been a long-term, recurring problem in certain regions of the County. Groundwater recharge, conjunctive use programs, and recycled water practices are keys to meeting increased agricultural and urban water demands. Water conservation will also be critical to sustaining an adequate water supply for future use.

Water quality is also a concern in many areas of the County where contamination sources have degraded water use. Areas with degraded water quality may require extensive and expensive treatment/remediation.

This element includes goals and policies that address the multiple uses of water, including urban, agricultural, and environmental. The element also addresses water resource issues, such as water supply, water quality, and watershed management. Goals and policies in this element are organized under the following headings:

- Water Supply
- Water Quality
- Water Reuse and Conservation
- Watershed Management
- Interagency Coordination

## **WATER SUPPLY**

Merced County depends heavily on groundwater for its water needs. Historical water data shows the use of surface water supplied by the irrigation districts is decreasing during droughts, while the pumping of groundwater for irrigation has been increasing. Several consequences can occur if aquifer levels continue to decline, including land subsidence, reduction of drought protection, increased regulatory control, higher

energy costs, and reduction in agricultural production. The policies in this section seek to protect Merced County's long-term water supply.

**Goal W-1**

Ensure a reliable water supply sufficient to meet the existing and future needs of the County.

**Policy W-1.1: Countywide Water Supply (MPSP/IGC)**

Ensure that continued supplies of surface and groundwater are available to serve existing and future uses by supporting water districts and agencies in groundwater management and water supply planning; requiring that new development have demonstrated long-term water supply; and assisting both urban and agricultural water districts in efforts to use water efficiently.

**Policy W-1.2: Demonstrating Sufficient Water Supply for New Development (RDR/MPSP/IGC)**

Require all new development within the adopted service area of a water purveyor to demonstrate adequate quantity and quality of water will be available prior to issuing building permits.

**Policy W-1.3: Agricultural Water Study (MPSP/IGC)**

In cooperation with local water agencies and districts, maintain the detailed General Plan study of countywide water use and needs for agriculture with periodic updates and with information that can be widely shared and publicized.

**Policy W-1.4: Groundwater Recharge Projects (RDR)**

Support implementation of groundwater recharge projects consistent with adopted Integrated Regional Water Management Plans to minimize overdraft of groundwater and ensure the long-term availability of groundwater.

**Policy W-1.5: New Well Guidelines (RDR/IGC)**

Coordinate with the cities and special districts in developing County-wide guidelines regarding the location and construction of new water wells.

**Policy W-1.6: Surface Water Storage (SO)**

Support water agencies in the exploration of additional surface water storage opportunities.

**Policy W-1.7: Water Sufficiency Requirement (RDR)**

Require new developments to prepare a detailed source water sufficiency study and water supply assessment per Title 22 and SB 610, consistent with any Integrated Regional Water Management Plan or similar water management plan. This shall include studying the effect of new development on the water supply of existing users, with public input.

**Policy W-1.8: Single User Well Consolidation (IGC)**

Encourage consolidation of single user wells into local water districts (with management plans) where feasible.

**Policy W-1.9: Water Supply Research and Protection (PSR/SO)**

Encourage investment into water quality improvement techniques such as desalinization plants and desalinization plants and the treatment of urban runoff. Encourage improvements to the drainage systems in the County, including the efforts of the San Joaquin River Flood Control Association, and completion of the San Luis Drain Project or, if it is determined that the San Luis Drain cannot be completed as designed, the removal and elimination of the drain in Merced County.

**Policy W-1.10: Groundwater Overdraft Protection (RDR/MPSP)**

Where a water supply source is nearby and accessible, encourage large water consumers to use available surface irrigation water (secondary water) for school athletic fields, sports complexes, and large landscape areas.

**WATER QUALITY**

Water quality is a concern in many areas of the County where contamination has degraded water. Water contamination can come from various sources, including soil erosion, ground leaching from septic tanks, runoff from impervious surfaces, and discharge from agricultural activities. Impacts on water quality can be mitigated by using proper management practices for agricultural, livestock, industrial, and commercial operations by reducing or eliminating excess sediment, nutrients, and pathogens in downstream waters; requiring new development to use best management practices; and enforcing septic tank regulations. The policies in this section seek to protect water resources and maintain the highest quality water for human and natural use.

<b>Goal W-2</b>	Protect the quality of surface and groundwater resources to meet the needs of all users.
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**Policy W-2.1: Water Resource Protection (RDR)**

Ensure that land uses and development on or near water resources will not impair the quality or productive capacity of these water resources.

**Policy W-2.2: Development Regulations to Protect Water Quality (RDR)**

Prepare updated development regulations, such as best management practices, that prevent adverse effects on water resources from construction and development activities.

**Policy W-2.3: Natural Drainage Channels (RDR/MPSP)**

Encourage the use of natural channels for drainage and flood control to benefit water quality and other natural resource values.

**Policy W-2.4: Agricultural and Urban Practices to Minimize Water Contamination (JP)**

Encourage agriculture and urban practices to comply with the requirements of the Regional Water Quality Control Board for irrigated lands and confined animal facilities, which mandate agricultural practices that minimize erosion and the generation of contaminated runoff to ground or surface waters by providing assistance and incentives.

**Policy W-2.5: Septic Tank Regulation (RDR)**

Enforce septic tank and onsite system regulations of the Regional Water Quality Control Board to protect the water quality of surface water bodies and groundwater quality.

**Policy W-2.6: Wellhead Protection Program (MPSP)**

Enforce the wellhead protection program to protect the quality of existing and future groundwater supplies by monitoring the construction, deepening, and destruction of all wells within the County.

**Policy W-2.7: NPDES Enforcement (RDR)**

Monitor and enforce provisions of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program to control non-point source water pollution.

**Policy W-2.8: Water Contamination Protection (RDR/MPSP)**

Coordinate with the State Water Resources Control Board, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and other responsible agencies to ensure that sources of water contamination (including boron, salt, selenium and other trace element concentrations) do not enter agricultural or domestic water supplies, and will be reduced where water quality is already affected.

## WATER REUSE AND CONSERVATION

Water conservation is an easy, cost-effective way to reduce demand for water. Water-efficient technologies benefit the environment, economy, and community as a whole. Water can also be conserved through the reuse of agricultural wastewater and domestic greywater. Through a series of wastewater treatments and filtration techniques, recycled water can be safely used for agriculture and domestic non-potable purposes. The policies in this section address water conservation in Merced County through increased efficiency and reuse.

<b>Goal W-3</b>	Maximize the efficient use and reuse of water supplies through water conservation, water recycling, and public education
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**Policy W-3.1: Water Availability and Conservation (SO/PI)**

Support efforts of water agencies and districts to prevent the depletion of groundwater resources and promote the conservation and reuse of water.

**Policy W-3.2: Landscape Water Efficiency (SO/PI)**

Ensure the conservation of water in urban areas through the implementation of the State Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance as implemented in Section 18.38 (Landscaping Standards) of the County Zoning Ordinance.

**Policy W-3.3: Water System Rehabilitation (RDR/MPSP)**

Encourage the rehabilitation of irrigation systems and other water delivery systems to reduce lost water and increase the efficient use and availability of water.

**Policy W-3.4: High Water Use Processing Activities (RDR)**

Prohibit any processing activities with high water use practices near areas where groundwater overdraft problems exist, unless the facility uses water recycling and conservation techniques that minimize affects of water use to the groundwater table.

**Policy W-3.5: Educational Programs (IGC/PI)**

Support the development of educational programs by water districts and public agencies, including the Model Water Efficient Landscape Standards adopted by the State Department of Water Resources, to increase public awareness of efficiently conserving, using, reusing, and managing water resources.

**Policy W-3.6: New Construction (RDR/SO)**

Promote efficient water conveyance systems in new construction, including systems for the recycling of greywater.

**Policy W-3.7: Existing Development Retrofits (RDR/SO)**

Enforce the retrofitting of existing development with water-conserving devices as required by state law.

**Policy W-3.8: Water Reuse Programs (RDR/SO)**

Encourage water reuse programs to conserve raw or potable water supplies (such as the capture of rainwater) consistent with State Department of Public Health guidelines.

**Policy W-3.9: Water Reuse Treatment (RDR/SO)**

Encourage water reuse/recycling through the treatment and distribution of tertiary treated wastewater.

**Policy W-3.10: Domestic Greywater Use (SO)**

Encourage the use of domestic greywater for landscape irrigation purposes.

**Policy W-3.11: Composting Toilets (PSR)**

Explore the feasibility of reducing wastewater through the use of dry/composting toilets in new construction.

**Policy W-3.12: Water Conservation Information (IGC/PI)**

Provide information on water conservation measures to the general public and coordinate with conservation efforts of the University of California, Cooperative Extension, local Resource Conservation Districts, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and irrigation districts.

**Policy W-3.13: Agricultural Water Reuse (RDR)**

Promote and facilitate using reclaimed wastewater for agricultural irrigation, in accordance with Title 22 and guidelines published by the State Department of Public Health.

**Policy W-3.14: Agricultural Water Conservation (JP)**

Encourage farmers to use irrigation methods which conserve water in areas where flood irrigation is used for groundwater recharge.

**Policy W-3.15: Agricultural Water Efficiency (IGC)**

Coordinate with the Farm Bureau and agricultural irrigation districts to promote protection of water resources in agricultural areas by encouraging programs that assist producers to use water efficiently in agricultural operations and by promoting technology for efficient water use in agriculture.

## WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Watershed management is a comprehensive approach for the oversight of supply, water quality, drainage, stormwater runoff, and water rights. The objective of watershed management is to assure the diverse needs of the watershed users and beneficiaries are met. The policies in this section address the County's role in watershed protection and enhancement.

<b>Goal W-4</b>	Enhance and protect County watersheds through responsible water and land use management practices that address water bodies, open spaces, soils, recreation, habitat, vegetation, groundwater recharge, and development.
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**Policy W-4.1: Water Resource Protection and Replenishment (RDR/MPSP/IGC)**

Protect watersheds, aquifer recharge areas, and areas susceptible to ground and surface water contamination by identifying such areas, and implementing requirements for their protection such as:

- a) Implement zoning and development regulations to protect water resources, including aquifer recharge areas and areas susceptible to ground and surface water contamination;
- b) For new development, and when adopting new Community Plans, require community drainage systems that incorporate on-site infiltration and contaminant control measures that are compatible with the County SWMP and NPDES regulations for post-construction runoff conditions; and
- c) Cooperate with other agencies and entities with responsibilities for water quality and watershed protection.

**Policy W-4.2: Watershed Program Funding (FB)**

Support efforts to obtain grant funding for locally-sponsored watershed programs, planning efforts, and projects that enhance and protect the watersheds of the County.

**IRRIGATION DISTRICT AND WATER AGENCY COORDINATION**

The County of Merced does not own or control water rights within the County, however, land use decisions made by the County do affect water demand. There are five major irrigation districts, nine medium-sized irrigation districts or water agencies, and 15 smaller irrigation districts or water agencies that control and manage this resource within the County. The policies in this section promote coordination and information sharing between local governments and the water agencies in the County.

<b>Goal W-5</b>	Promote interagency communication and cooperation between local governments, irrigation districts, and water districts in order to optimize use of resources and provide the highest level of dependable and affordable service, while respecting individual entities water rights and interests.
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**Policy W-5.1: Countywide Water Supply Study (RDR/MPSP/PSR)**

Prepare and regularly update a comprehensive water supply study that includes all four groundwater basins and three hydrologic zones, and takes into consideration activities in neighboring counties and the region. The plan shall consider reductions in Federal and State water deliveries in the western part of the County and anticipated reductions in water supplies due to climate change.

**Policy W-5.2: Master Plan Development (IGC)**

Coordinate with all agricultural and urban water districts to develop water supply master plans to guide future groundwater basin water supplies through regional solutions.

**Policy W-5.3: Water Forum (IGC/FB)**

Support a county-wide water forum to coordinate long-term water demand and supply programs that emphasize sustainability in the County consistent with approved IRWMPs.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

Water Element Implementation Program						
		2014-2015	2016-2020	2021-2030	Annual	Ongoing
<b>Program W-A: Water Conservation Plan (MPSP, IGC)</b> Prepare a countywide Water Conservation Plan, in coordination with the six incorporated cities and special districts, which identifies water sources and outlines ways of conserving water resources.		✓				
Implements Which Policies	W-1.1 through W-1.11					
Responsible Department	Public Works, Cities, Special Districts					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program W-B: Agricultural Water Study (MPSP, IGC)</b> Prepare, adopt, and regularly update, in cooperation with local water agencies, a detailed study of Countywide water use and needs for agriculture with periodic updates and with information that can be widely shared and publicized.			✓			
Implements Which Policies	W-1.3					
Responsible Department	Public Works, Cities, Special Districts					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					
<b>Program W-C: Countywide Water Supply Study (RDR, MPSP, PSR)</b> Prepare, adopt, and regularly update a comprehensive water supply study that includes all four groundwater basins and three hydrologic zones, and takes into consideration activities in neighboring counties and the region. The plan shall consider reductions in Federal and State water deliveries in the western part of the County and anticipated reductions in water supplies due to climate change.		✓				
Implements Which Policies	W-5.1					
Responsible Department	Public Works, Cities, Special Districts					
Supporting Department	Community and Economic Development					

# PART IV

## GENERAL PLAN GLOSSARY

The following is a glossary of abbreviations, acronyms, and terms used throughout the 2030 Merced County General Plan.

### ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AB	California Assembly Bill
ALUC	Airport Land Use Commission
ARC	Agricultural Residential Center
CARB	California Air Resources Board
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CLUP	Comprehensive Land Use Plan
CWA	Clean Water Act
dB	Decibel
DU	Dwelling Unit
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
FAR	Floor Area Ratio
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GBA	Gross Building Area
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
JPA	Joint Powers Authority
LAFCo	Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission
LOS	Level of Service
MCAG	Merced County Association of Governments
NLA	Net Lot Area
SB	California Senate Bill
SOI	Sphere of Influence
TAZ	Traffic Analysis Zone
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Services
WWTP	Wastewater Treatment Plant

### A

**A-Weighting.** A frequency-response adjustment of a sound level meter that conditions the output signal to approximate human response. All noise level measurements and noise standards associated with this General Plan are provided in terms of A-weighted sound levels.

**Achieve.** To carry out successfully or accomplish.

**Acknowledge.** To recognize the rights, authority, or status of.

**Acoustics.** The science of sound.

**Acres, Gross.** The total area of a site including portions that cannot be developed (e.g., right-of-way, open space).

**Acres, Net Developable.** The total area of a site excluding portions that cannot be developed (e.g., right-of-way, open space). Sometimes referred to as the “buildable” area of the project.

**Affordable Housing.** Housing which costs no more than 30 percent of gross household income. Housing costs include rent or mortgage payments, utilities, taxes, insurance, homeowner association fees, and other related costs.

**Airport Land Use Commission.** Responsible for developing and maintaining comprehensive land use plans to protect public health and safety, ensure compatible land uses in the areas around each airport, and ensure consistency between local land use plans and comprehensive land use plans for airport areas.

**Allocate.** To apportion for a specific purpose or to particular persons or things.

**Allow.** To make a possibility or admit.

**Ambient Noise.** The distinctive acoustical characteristics of a given space consisting of all noise sources audible at that location. In many cases the term ambient is used to describe an existing or pre-project condition such as the setting in an environmental noise study.

**Annex, v.** To incorporate a land area into an existing district or municipality, with a resulting change in the boundaries of the annexing jurisdiction.

**Anticipate.** To give advance thought, discussion, or treatment to.

**Apply.** To put to use especially for some practical purpose.

**Approve.** To accept as satisfactory.

**Aquifer.** An underground, water-bearing layer of earth, porous rock, sand, or gravel, through which water can seep or be held in natural storage. Aquifers generally hold sufficient water to be used as a water supply.

**Arterial.** A roadway designed to favor mobility over local access. While some access to adjacent properties may be provided, arterials are designed and controlled to allow through movement at relatively high travel speeds.

**Assist.** To give usually supplementary support or aid to.

**Attract.** To pull to or draw toward oneself or itself.

## B

**Building Codes.** State regulation enforced by the most recently updated codes in Title 15 of the Municipal Code, Title 24 of the California Building Code, California Mechanical, Plumbing, Electrical, Fire, and California Energy Code.

## C

**City.** An incorporated municipality with local administrative and regulatory authority, usually governed by a mayor and council. When spelled with a capital "C," refers to a government agency or administration body. When spelled with a lower case "c," refers to the geographical area or a generic city.

**Class I (Bike Path).** A bicycle path intended for the exclusive use of bicycles or shared with pedestrians and physically separated by distance or a barrier from the roadway. Class I paths provide the safest opportunities for bicycle travel.

**Class II (Bike Lane).** A bicycle lane that shares the right-of-way with the roadway defined by the creation of a separate lane with pavement markings.

**Class III (Bike Route).** A bicycle route that shares the right-of-way with the roadway, but is not separated by markings or barriers. Instead, Class III bike routes are designated by signage along the roadway. Class III facilities are typically provided along low-volume streets to minimize the potential for conflicts between bicyclists and motorists.

**Climate Change.** The change in the statistical distribution of weather over periods of time that range from decades to millions of years. It can be a change in the average weather or a change in the distribution of weather events around an average (for example, greater or fewer extreme weather events). Climate change may be limited to a specific region, or may occur across the whole Earth. In recent usage, especially in the context of environmental policy, climate change refers to changes in the modern climate and may be qualified as anthropogenic climate change, more generally known as "global warming" or "anthropogenic global warming."

**Collaborate.** To work jointly with other agencies or organizations on planning, land use, and environmental topics. This can include meeting and discussing options, but is less formal than coordinate.

**Collector.** A roadway that provides a balance between mobility and access. These roadways serve to "collect" traffic from the local streets and deliver it to the arterial network at a moderate rate of speed.

**Community Plan.** A policy plan that focuses on a particular region or community of the County within the overall general plan area. They refine policies of the general plan as they apply to a smaller geographic area. All principles, goals, objectives, policies, and plan proposals set forth in a community plan must be consistent with the overall general plan.

**Condominium.** A building or group of buildings in which units are owned individually, but the structure, common areas and facilities are jointly owned by all owners on a proportional, undivided basis.

**Conduct.** To direct or take part in the operation or management of.

**Consider.** To think of especially with regard to taking some action.

**Consistent.** Free from variation or contradiction. State law requires consistency between a general plan and implementation measures such as the County Code and infrastructure projects.

**Cooperate.** To act or work together in compliance with another agency, organization, or group.

**Coordinate.** To solicit, consider, and respond to comments from other agencies, organizations, or groups in order to bring common actions, movements, or conditions. Coordinate is used in the context of the general plan to direct an organized approach to addressing inter-jurisdictional issues that are not solely under the purview of Merced County. This does not imply that the County is superior or subordinate to other agencies, organizations, or groups. Rather, it indicates that the County will confer with other agencies, organizations, or groups to find mutually-agreeable solutions. (*Note: "to coordinate" or "coordination" does not have the same meaning as found in the appellate court decision of California Native Plant Society v. City of Rancho Cordova (2009) 2009 Cal. App. Lexis 430.*)

**Cultural Resource.** A broad definition for a variety of resources, including archaeological sites, isolated artifacts, Native American cultural properties, and historic buildings, structures, landscapes, sites, and features.

**Culvert.** A short, closed (covered) conduit or pipe that passes storm water runoff under an embankment, usually a roadway.

## D

**Decibel.** Fundamental unit of sound that is defined as ten times the logarithm of the ratio of the sound pressure squared over the reference pressure squared.

**Detention Pond.** A water system that delays the downstream progress of storm water runoff in a controlled manner. This is typically accomplished using temporary storage areas and a metered outlet device, as opposed to retention ponds, which retain all storm water and rely on evaporation and/or percolation for its removal.

**Develop.** As applied to general plan policies, is a directing term for the drafting or preparation of rules, guidelines, policies, or illustrations.

**Development.** A human-made change to property, such as buildings or other structures, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation, or drilling operations.

**Designate.** To indicate and set apart for a specific purpose, office, or duty.

**Determine.** To settle or decide by choice of alternatives or possibilities.

**Direct.** To carry out the organizing, energizing, and supervising of.

**Discharge.** Flow of surface water in a stream or canal or the outflow of ground water from a flowing artesian well, ditch, or spring. Can also apply to discharge of liquid effluent from a facility.

**Discourage.** A less rigid directive to be honored in the absence of compelling or contravening considerations. Discourage communicates a clear commitment against a particular topic, but permits flexibility if circumstances so dictate.

**Drainage.** The control and removal of excess rainfall runoff or groundwater by the use of surface or subsurface features or drains.

**Dwelling Unit.** A room or group of rooms (including sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation facilities), which constitutes an independent housekeeping unit, occupied or intended for occupancy by one household on a long term basis.

**Dwelling, Multi-family.** A building containing two or more dwelling units for the use of individual households; an apartment or condominium building is an example of this dwelling unit type.

**Dwelling, Single-family Attached.** A one-family dwelling attached to one or more other one-family dwellings by a common vertical wall. Row houses and town homes are examples of this dwelling unit type.

**Dwelling, Single-family Detached.** A dwelling, not attached to any other dwelling, which is designed for and occupied by not more than one family and surrounded by open space or yards.

## **E**

**Element.** A division or chapter of the General Plan.

**Encourage.** A less rigid directive to be honored in the absence of compelling or contravening considerations. Encourage communicates a clear commitment in favor of a particular topic, but permits flexibility if circumstances so dictate.

**Enforce.** To carry out effectively.

**Enhance.** To improve existing conditions by increasing the quantity or quality of beneficial uses or features.

**Ensure.** A directive policy term referring to the monitoring of another agencies, organizations, or groups activity, or monitoring the compliance of a regulation or policy.

**Environmental Impact Report.** A detailed statement prepared under CEQA describing and analyzing the significant environmental effects of a project and discussing ways to mitigate or avoid the effects.

**Establish.** To bring into existence.

**Evaluate.** To determine the significance, worth, or condition by careful appraisal and study.

**Expand.** To increase the extent, number, volume, or scope of.

**Explore.** To investigate, study, or analyze.

## **F**

**Facilitate.** To make easier or help bring about.

**Family.** (a) Two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption (United States Bureau of the Census). (b) An individual or a group of persons living together who constitute a bona fide single-family housekeeping unit in a dwelling unit, not including a fraternity, sorority, club, or other group of persons occupying a hotel, lodging house or institution of any kind (State of California).

**Federal Emergency Management Agency.** A Federal agency established to respond to major emergencies. FEMA seeks to reduce the loss of life and protect property against all types of hazards through a comprehensive, risk-based emergency management program. In March 2003, FEMA became part of the Department of Homeland Security.

**Flood.** A temporary rise in flow or stage of any watercourse or storm water conveyance system that results in water runoff exceeding its normal flow boundaries and inundating adjacent, normally dry areas.

**Flood, 100-year.** The magnitude of a flood expected to occur on the average every 100 years, based on historical data. The 100-year flood has a 1/100, or one percent, chance of occurring in any given year.

**Flood Control.** The specific regulations and practices that reduce or prevent damage caused by either storm water runoff or dam failure.

**Floodplain.** The relatively level land area outside of river, stream, or creek channel that is regularly subject to flooding. That part of the floodplain subject to a one percent chance of flooding in any given year is designated as an “area of special flood hazard” by the Federal Insurance Administration.

**Floodway.** The area between the banks of a river, stream, or creek.

**Floor Area Ratio.** The gross floor area permitted on a site divided by the total net area of the site, expressed in decimals to one or two places. For example, on a site with 10,000 net square feet of land area, a floor area ratio of 1.0 will allow a maximum of 10,000 gross square feet of building floor area to be built. On the same site, an FAR of 1.5 would allow 15,000 square feet of floor area; an FAR of 2.0 would allow 20,000 square feet; and an FAR of 0.5 would allow only 5,000 square feet.

**Focus.** To concentrate attention or effort.

**Follow.** To be or act in accordance with.

**Formalize.** To give a certain or definite form to.

**Foster.** To promote the growth or development of.

**Frequency.** The measure of the rapidity of alterations of a periodic acoustic signal, expressed in cycles per second or Hertz.

## G

**General Plan.** A compendium of goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs regarding its long-term development, in the form of maps and accompanying text. The General Plan is a legal document required of each local agency by the State of California Government Code Section 65301 et seq. and adopted by either a City Council or a Board of Supervisors.

**Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (Assembly Bill 32).** A California law, adopted in 2006, that focuses on reducing statewide greenhouse gas emissions. AB 32 requires the California Air Resources Board, the State agency charged with regulating statewide air quality, to adopt rules and regulations that would achieve GHG emissions equivalent to statewide levels in 1990 by 2020.

**Goal.** A general, overall, and ultimate purpose to which an endeavor is directed.

**Green Building.** Any building that is sited, designed, constructed, operated, and maintained for the health and well-being of the occupants, while minimizing impact on the environment.

**Greenhouse Gases.** Gases in an atmosphere that absorb and emit radiation within the thermal infrared range. The primary greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere are water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone.

**Groundwater.** Water beneath the surface of the earth, often confined to aquifers capable of supplying wells and springs.

**Groundwater Recharge.** The natural process of infiltration and percolation of rainwater from land areas, lakes, or streams through permeable soils into water-holding rocks that provide underground storage.

## H

**Hazardous Material.** Any item or agent (biological, chemical, physical) which has the potential to cause harm to humans, animals, or the environment, either by itself or through interaction with other factors. Hazardous materials include, but are not limited to, hazardous substances, hazardous waste, and any material which a handler or the administering agency has a reasonable basis for believing that it would be injurious to the health and safety of persons or harmful to the environment if released into the workplace or the environment.

**Historic Preservation.** The preservation of historically-significant structures and neighborhoods in order to facilitate restoration and rehabilitation of the building(s) to a former condition.

**Household.** All those persons—related or unrelated—who occupy a single housing unit.

## I

**Identify.** To establish the identity of.

**Impact Fee.** A fee, also called a development fee, levied on the developer of a project by a city, county, or other public agency as compensation for otherwise unmitigated impacts the project will produce. Government Code §66000, et seq., specifies that development fees shall not exceed the estimated reasonable cost of providing the service for which the fee is charged. To lawfully impose a development fee, the public agency must verify its method of calculation and document proper restrictions on use of the fund. Impact/development fees may be used to pay for preparing and updating general and specific plans.

**Implement.** Carry out or accomplish. To give practical effect to and ensure of actual fulfillment by concrete measures.

**Implementation.** An action, procedure, program, or technique that carries out general plan policy.

**Improve.** To advance or make progress in what is desirable.

**Increase.** To make greater.

**Infill Development.** Development of vacant land, usually individual lots or left-over properties, within areas that are already largely developed.

**Infrastructure.** Public services and facilities such as sewage-disposal systems; water-supply systems; electricity, gas, or other utility systems; and roads.

**Institute.** To originate and get established.

**Investigate.** To observe or study by close examination and systematic inquiry.

## J

**Jobs/Housing Ratio.** The availability of housing near employment areas. A jobs/housing ratio divides the number of jobs in an area by the number of employed residents. A ratio of 1.0 indicates a balance. A ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a net in-commute; less than 1.0 indicates a net out-commute.

**Joint Powers Authority.** A legal arrangement that enables two or more units of government to share authority in order to plan and carry out a specific program or set of programs that serves both units.

## K

There are no terms to be included.

## L

**L50.** The median noise level, or level exceeded 50 percent of time.

**Ldn.** The average day/night sound level. Similar to CNEL but with no evening weighting.

**Leq.** The energy equivalent level, defined as the average sound level on the basis of sound energy (or sound pressure squared). The Leq is a “dosage” type measure and is the basis for the descriptors used in current standards, such as the 24-hour CNEL used by the State of California.

**Level of Service.** A standard used by government agencies to measure the quality or effectiveness of a municipal service such as police, fire, or library, or the performance of a facility, such as a street or highway.

**Level of Service (Traffic).** A standard scale used by government agencies to measure the amount of traffic that a roadway or intersection can accommodate, based on such factors as maneuverability, driver dissatisfaction, and delay.

**Limit.** To curtail or reduce in quantity or extent.

**Lmax.** The highest root-mean-square sound level measured over a given period of time.

**Local Agency Formation Commission.** A five- or seven-member commission within each county that reviews and evaluates all proposals for formation of special districts,

incorporation of cities, annexation to special districts or cities, consolidation of districts, and merger of districts with cities. Each county LAFCo is empowered to approve, disapprove, or conditionally approve such proposals. LAFCo members generally include two county supervisors, two city council members, and one member representing the general public. Some also include two representatives of special districts.

**Local Street.** A street whose primary function is to provide direct access to adjacent properties and to connect to the collector network. Local streets can serve residential, commercial, or institutional uses.

**Locate.** To determine or indicate the place, site, or limits of.

**Loudness.** A subjective term for the sensation of the magnitude of sound.

## M

**Maintain.** To keep in an existing state (as of repair, efficiency, or validity). To preserve from failure or decline.

**Maximize.** To make the most of.

**Minimize.** To reduce or keep to a minimum.

**Mitigate, v.** To ameliorate, alleviate, or avoid.

**Monitor.** To watch, keep track of, or check for a special purpose.

## N

**Noise.** Any sound that is undesirable because it interferes with speech and hearing, or is intense enough to damage hearing, or is otherwise annoying. Noise, simply, is “unwanted sound.”

**Noise Attenuation.** Reduction of the level of a noise source using a substance, material, or surface, such as earth berms and/or solid concrete walls.

**Non-potable.** Water that does not meet drinking quality standards.

## O

**Oppose.** To place over against something so as to provide resistance, counterbalance, or contrast.

**Ordinance.** A law or regulation adopted by a governmental authority, usually a city or county.

**Overcrowding.** Households or occupied housing units with 1.01 or more persons per room.

## **P**

**Participate.** To have a part or share in something.

**Partner.** To join or associate with another agency, organization, or group.

**Pedestrian Path.** A path that is physically separated by distance or barrier from the roadway. Most pedestrian paths will be built in conjunction with a Class I Bike Path.

**Paratransit.** Paratransit is an alternative mode of flexible passenger transportation that does not follow fixed routes or schedules. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, public transit operators are required to provide complementary paratransit along most public transit services which receive funding from the Federal Transit Administration for those unable to ride fixed-route transit due to disabling conditions.

**Parcel.** A lot in single ownership or under single control, usually considered a unit for purposes of development.

**Peak Hour.** The time period during which the greatest demand occurs on the transportation system in the morning and early afternoon, also known as “rush hour.”

**Plan.** To devise or project the realization or achievement of.

**Policy.** A specific statement of principle or action that guides the management of public affairs. Policies are adopted by a legislative body (such as a city council or county board of supervisors) in order to meet specified goals and objectives before undertaking an action program.

**Prepare.** To work out the details of something in advance.

**Preserve.** To keep alive, intact, or free from decay.

**Productive Agriculture/Productive Farmland.** Farmland that has received water supplies in three of the prior 10 years and is classified as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland on the Statewide Important Farmland map.

**Prohibit.** A directive to not allow a particular use, activity, or action.

**Promote.** To contribute to the growth or prosperity of.

**Protect.** To maintain the status or integrity of.

**Provide.** To supply or make available.

**Pursue.** To find or employ measures to obtain or accomplish.

## Q

There are no terms to be included.

## R

**Recognize.** To acknowledge or take notice of in some definite way.

**Recycled Water.** Wastewater that becomes suitable for a specific beneficial use as a result of treatment.

**Reduce.** To diminish in size, amount, extent, or number.

**Rehabilitation.** The repair, preservation, and/or improvement of substandard housing.

**Remove.** To get rid of or eliminate.

**Renewable Energy.** Energy that is produced by effectively using naturally-replenished resources such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides and geothermal heat.

**Require.** An unequivocal directive that communicates a mandatory requirement.

**Residential, Multiple Family.** Usually three or more dwelling units on a single site, which may be in the same or separate buildings.

**Residential, Single-family.** A single dwelling unit on a building site.

**Review.** To go over or examine critically or deliberately.

**Ridership.** The number of passengers on a given transportation system measured in number of one-way passenger trips.

**Right-of-way.** A linear strip of land occupied or intended to be occupied for transportation (streets, bike lanes, sidewalks, on-street parking, transit lanes, railroad tracks) or public facilities (utility lines).

**Runoff.** Drainage water or flood discharge that leaves an area as surface flow or as pipeline flow.

## S

**Seismic.** Terrestrial movement that is caused by or subject to earthquakes or earth vibrations.

**Seniors.** Persons age 65 and older.

**Sensitive Interior Areas.** Any interior area associated with any given land use at which noise-sensitivity exists and the location at which the County’s interior noise level standards are applied. Examples of sensitive interior spaces include, but are not limited to, all habitable rooms of residential and transient lodging facilities, hospital rooms, classrooms, library interiors, offices, worship spaces, theaters, etc.

**Sensitive Outdoor Areas.** The primary outdoor activity area associated with any given land use at which noise-sensitivity exists and the location at which the County’s exterior noise level standards are applied.

**Sidewalk.** A dedicated paved pedestrian walkway located adjacent to streets and roadways.

**Significant Wetlands.** An area with high wetland habitat value based on the Adams methodology and United States Army Corps of Engineers delineation methods (also referred to as “jurisdictional wetlands”).

**Solid Waste.** A waste type that includes predominantly household waste (domestic waste) with sometimes the addition of commercial wastes collected by a municipality within a given area.

**Specific Plan.** A legal tool authorized by Article 8 of the Government Code (Section 65450 et seq.) for the systematic implementation of the general plan for a defined portion of a community’s planning area. A specific plan must specify in detail the land uses, public and private facilities needed to support the land uses, phasing of development, standards for the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, and a program of implementation measures, including financing measures.

**Sphere of Influence.** The probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency, as determined by the Local Agency Formation Commission of the county.

**Storm Drainage System.** A system for collecting surface runoff of stormwater and removing it to appropriate outlets. The system may include inlets, catch basins, storm sewer pipes, channels, detention basins, and pump stations.

**Streamline.** To make simpler or more efficient.

**Strengthen.** To make stronger.

**Subdivision.** The division of a tract of land into defined lots, either improved or unimproved, which can be separately conveyed by sale or lease, and which can be altered or developed. “Subdivision” includes a condominium project as defined in §1350 of the California Civil Code and a community apartment project as defined in §11004 of the Business and Professions Code.

**Subdivision Map Act.** Section 66410 et seq. of the California Government Code, this act vests in local legislative bodies the regulation and control of the design and improvement of subdivisions, including the requirement for tentative and final maps.

**Subsidence.** The sinking of land, usually occurring over broad areas, which typically results from extraction of groundwater, gas, oil, and geothermal energy, or hydro-compaction, peat oxidation, earthquake, and fault rupture.

**Support.** A commitment to agree with, maintain, uphold, or advocate the actions, activities, or programs of another agency or organization.

## T

**Target.** To set a defined goal.

**Terrestrial Species.** An animal that lives predominantly or entirely on land (e.g., cattle, deer, fox), as compared with aquatic animals which live predominantly or entirely in the water, or amphibians which rely on a combination of aquatic and terrestrial habitats.

**Traffic Model.** A mathematical representation of traffic movement within an area or region based on observed relationships between the kind and intensity of development in specific areas.

## U

**United States Army Corps of Engineers.** A Federal agency of civilian and military engineers, scientists, and other specialists working in engineering and environmental matters to provide quality, responsive engineering services to the United States including planning, designing, building, and operating water resources and other civil works projects (e.g., navigation, flood control, environmental protection, disaster response); designing and managing the construction of military facilities for the Army and Air Force; and providing design and construction management support for other Defense and Federal agencies (i.e., interagency and international services).

**United States Fish and Wildlife Service.** A Federal bureau within the Department of the Interior whose mission is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

**Update.** To bring up to date.

**Use.** To put into action or service.

## V

**Vacant.** Lands or buildings that are not actively used.

## W

**Waste Water Treatment Plant.** A municipal or public service district which provides treatment of collected waste water.

**Watershed.** A regional land area, defined by topography, soil, and drainage characteristics, within which raw waters collect and replenish supplies.

**Wetland.** Lands where saturation with water is the dominant factor determining the nature of soil development and the types of plant and animal communities living in the soil and on its surface.

**Wildlife Corridors.** A strip of habitat connecting wildlife populations separated by human activities (e.g., roads, development, or logging); allows an exchange of individual wildlife populations; and facilitates reestablishment of wildlife populations in isolated areas.

**Work.** To bring to pass.

**Workforce Housing.** Housing that is affordable to working households that do not qualify for publicly subsidized housing, and cannot afford market-rate housing in their own community. Ideally, workforce housing will satisfy the housing needs of family households earning between 60 and 180 percent of the median-household income.

## X

There are no terms to be included.

## Y

There are no terms to be included.

## Z

**Zoning.** The division of a city or county by legislative regulations into areas, or zones, that specify allowable uses for real property and size restrictions for buildings within these areas; a program that implements policies of the general plan.

**Zoning Code.** The regulatory ordinance that contains all applicable use and size restrictions by zones, used to implement the general plan.