
1. INTRODUCTION

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On August 13, 2001, the County of Merced published the Merced University Community Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The DEIR was available for public review and comment for 52 days, until October 4, 2001. During the review period the County accepted oral testimony at public hearings on the DEIR. In July 2004 the County published the Supplement to the Merced University Community Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (SDEIR). The SDEIR was available for public review for 45 days, until September 12, 2004.

This Final EIR includes all comments received during the public review period on the DEIR (written comments and oral testimony), responses to comments on the DEIR, written comments on the SDEIR, and the responses to comments on the SDEIR. This document, the Draft EIR, and the Draft SEIR together constitute the Final EIR (FEIR) for the Merced County University Community Plan. This document has been prepared by the County of Merced in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Background

This EIR is an informational document intended to disclose to the Merced County Board of Supervisors, other public agencies, and the public the environmental consequences of approving and implementing the University Community Plan.

All oral comments made at the Draft EIR public hearings held by the Merced County Board of Supervisors on September 12, 2001, September 13, 2001, and September 19, 2001, all written comments received during the 45-day Draft EIR public review period from August 13, 2001 through October 4, 2001, and the 45-day Supplement to the Draft EIR public review period from July 30, 2004 through September 13, 2004 that pertain to environmental issues are addressed in this FEIR.

These comments and responses, in conjunction with the Draft EIR, the Supplement to the Draft EIR, and the noted text changes, constitute the FEIR, which will be considered for certification by the Merced County Board of Supervisors. Copies of the public notices associated with the distribution of the Draft EIR, and Supplemental EIR are included in the FEIR as Appendix A. Chapter 2 includes a summary of the revisions and text changes made to the Draft EIR based on changes made to the University Community Plan (UCP), responses to comments, and staff initiated changes.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Proposed Project is the Merced County University Community Plan (UCP), a new chapter of the Merced County General Plan, which provides for the development of an integrated community of housing, business, commercial, cultural, civic, and open space uses and infrastructures systems to support the successful development and growth of the adjacent UC Merced campus. The University Community would include four residential villages with a mix of residential housing densities. Each village would integrate a mix of uses that constitute a complete neighborhood, including a mix of housing types at varying densities and a village center that includes a school, park, local retail, and/or other services or civic uses. The UCP calls for a mixed-use Town Center at the northernmost portion of the University Community area to serve as a transition into the campus. A variety of land uses would be included in the Town Center, including retail, office, research and development, entertainment, civic, cultural, and residential. The University Community would also include a system of open space amenities, including a centralized “village green,” parks, trails, and natural drainage corridors. An open space greenbelt would link the Town Center and residential villages within the UCP area. The UCP contains a land use diagram, development capacity table, and policies that guide development and direct growth within the UCP area.

Since release of the Draft EIR and Draft UCP, changes have been made to the UCP in response to comments received on the Draft EIR, the Supplement to the Draft EIR, and changes initiated by staff. Please see Chapter 2 for a complete summary of changes made to the UCP

This EIR will also serve as the basis for the environmental review for subsequent approvals by public agencies. As stated on page 1-2 of the DEIR, it is intended that this EIR would serve as the environmental review to support the following approvals from Merced County Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) would be based on this EIR:

- Expansion of the City’s service district boundaries (e.g., City of Merced for water or wastewater, Merced Irrigation District for drainage) to include the project site, or creation of a new service district.

The proposed UCP, which would be adopted by resolution as a component of the County of Merced General Plan, would encompass goals, objectives, policies, and implementation programs that address each of the elements required by State of California Planning Law, Government Code Section 65300 et. Seq., as well as a number of non-mandatory elements. The UCP is organized according to six principal chapters: Community Development, Community Infrastructure and Services, Environmental Resources, Public Safety, Area Plan, and Implementation Programs. The UCP is supplemented by a Technical Background Report, which provides information about the existing conditions and factors influencing development of the UCP planning area.

The UCP applies relevant County of Merced General Plan goals, objectives, and policies and supplements these to reflect the unique issues, planning visions and objectives associated with development of the site.