

AREA PLAN

Development of the University of California Merced and associated University Community introduces an urban function and uses into an area historically committed by the County of Merced for agriculture, open space, and low density rural uses that serve as a transition between the urbanized City of Merced and surrounding agricultural production. This area also serves as a primary recreational amenity for the region, centered on Lake Yosemite Park. Inherently, these important characteristics and functions will be significantly affected by the development of the campus and community.

The economic, social, and cultural benefits accruing from the development of UC Merced and the Community are of considerable significance and, as such, are fully supported by the County of Merced. The policies for the development of the University Community, as presented in earlier sections of this Plan, and the adopted Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) for the campus provide for development that, while urbanized, considers the region's agriculture, open spaces, and historic patterns of development.

While supporting the campus and community, the County of Merced recognizes the long-standing imperative to preserve its agricultural lands, assure an appropriate transition between urbanized lands and agriculture, and protect Lake Yosemite Regional Park as an asset for its residents. To this end, the University Community Plan expands upon its core policies for the development of lands within the defined limits of the planning area by the establishment of goals and policies in this section of the Plan to address these critical values in relationship to how they affect surrounding lands. In general, these pertain to lands within two miles of the University Community.

AGRICULTURE—SUSTAINING THE REGION'S PARAMOUNT RESOURCE

OVERVIEW

One of the central themes of the Merced County General Plan is the conservation of important agricultural lands and the protection and enhancement of the County's important agricultural industry. A reflection of this commitment is the presence of an Agricultural Element as a distinct element in the County General Plan. This section of the University Community Plan responds to (1) the presence of designated prime agricultural lands and productive agricultural activities in areas south and southeast of the University Community planning area, and (2) concerns that development of the University Community or related infrastructure could adversely affect the long-term viability of this area as a key component of the County's agricultural industry. The following goals, objectives, and policies provide guidance to ensure that the future development of the University Community reflects the County's commitment to farmland conservation and enhancement of agricultural productivity through strengthening the linkages between the County's urban areas and its agricultural industry, targeted voluntary preservation strategies, and limitations on infrastructure capacity.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal

Strengthen economic and social linkages between the University Community's urban consumers and regional small-scale farms.

Objective

AA 1.0

Support agriculture by encouraging farmers to deliver agricultural products directly to consumers.

Policies

AA 1.1

Encourage the development of agricultural retail businesses by promoting local agricultural events and other direct marketing programs by advertising for them through regional media. *(Imp 1.4, 3.5)*

AA 1.2

Facilitate a farmers' market in the University Community, in coordination with the Merced County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, by providing a suitable low-cost site in a central location and other resources to develop and promote it. *(Imp 1.4, 3.5)*

AA 1.3

Encourage the use of local agricultural goods for use in local restaurants, schools, and grocery stores, when possible. *(Imp 3.5, 5.10)*

Goal

Preservation of important farmlands south and east of the University Community.

Objective

AA 2.0

Protect land located south of the University Community boundary and immediately east of the City of Merced.

Policies

AA 2.1

Establish the University Community boundary as an urban limit line, outside of which no urban uses will be permitted in agricultural areas (refer to Policies LU 2.4 to LU 2.6). *(Imp 2.1)*

AA 2.2

Design and develop infrastructure to serve development within the University Community boundary, except where necessary for joint use by the Community and UC Merced and to provide connections to regional systems. *(Imp 2.4, 4.13)*

LAKE YOSEMITE REGIONAL PARK—SUSTAINING MERCED’S MOST IMPORTANT RECREATIONAL ASSET

OVERVIEW

The general underlying themes in the University Community Area Plan relative to recreation include the importance of Lake Yosemite Regional Park to Merced County, the nature and amount of increased demand for recreational facilities caused by the new population generated by the University Community and the UC Merced campus, and the roles of Merced County, UC Merced and the University Community in providing recreational facilities sufficient to meet potential demand.

The goals and policies presented below assume, and seek to address, future demands on regional recreational facilities, especially Lake Yosemite Regional Park. These policies also establish a framework for future individual and collective action by Merced County, the University Community and UC Merced to respond effectively over time to the recreational needs of a growing population in eastern Merced County.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal

Joint use of the University of California, Merced recreation facilities, and Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

Objective

ALY 1.0

To meet the recreational needs of UC Merced students, staff and faculty, as well as University Community residents.

Policies

ALY 1.1

Work with UC Merced for the shared use of its on-campus recreational, parking and sports facilities with the Merced community, especially with regards to campus parking in areas bordering Lake Yosemite Regional Park. Such cooperative programming may diminish impacts on the existing Park by providing additional recreational opportunities and shared parking for Park users. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 1.2

Encourage UC Merced to provide students, staff, and faculty with active recreational and sports facilities and programs on campus that meet or exceed any recommended standards for the anticipated campus population, concurrent with increases in campus population. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 1.3

Cooperate with UC Merced, to the maximum extent possible, to initiate and maintain a cooperative campus-run, water-related program on Lake Yosemite that combines academic programs with student and public recreational water sports activities year round. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

Goal

Expansion and Improvement of Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

Objective

ALY 2.0

To assure the continued capacity of Lake Yosemite Regional Park to serve the recreational needs of County residents.

Policies

ALY 2.1

Require that, prior to the transfer of title for any land that is currently or planned to be a part of Lake Yosemite Regional Park, UC Merced develop mechanisms for the acquisition of additional property to replace any parkland lost or impacted by the conversion for campus uses consistent with state and federal grant requirements. Eligible lands include, but are not limited to, lands contiguous with the existing developed Park and property on the Lake itself, subject to approval of the Board of Supervisors. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 2.2

Developers of the University Community and UC Merced shall participate in the development of additional parkland adjacent to Lake Yosemite to be included within the Lake Yosemite Regional Park in cooperation with UC Merced in order to meet the needs of the University Community and campus populations at a standard of 0.88 acres for each 1,000 residents, which may be satisfied by the payment of in-lieu fees. *(Imp 4.8, 5.6)*

ALY 2.3

Work with the City of Merced and UC Merced to expand Lake Yosemite Regional Park in response to impacts associated with buildout of the University Community and UC Merced. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 2.4

Encourage UC Merced to designate the County-owned property currently designated for Park expansion as an appropriate buffer for Lake Yosemite Regional Park, including, but not limited to, such lower intensity on-campus uses as athletic fields. *(Imp 3.3)*

ALY 2.5

Monitor the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park associated with increased population and assess those impacts related to the build out of the University Community and UC Merced. The County, UC Merced, and developers shall work cooperatively with the University to assure that development adjacent to Lake Yosemite does not result in a net increase in costs to the County or decrease in service level. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 2.6

Initiate, in coordination with UC Merced, the development and implementation of a Lake Yosemite Regional Park Master Plan to determine the potential uses, necessary facilities, design standards, and funding strategies for public parkland surrounding Lake Yosemite. The Master Plan shall address active and passive recreation including playing fields, recreational equipment design and placement, a pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian recreational trail system around the Lake and connecting to existing or planned trails, parking and landscape planning and design. *(Imp 4.8, 5.6)*

Goal

Meeting the Recreational Needs of Eastern Merced County.

Objective

ALY 3.0

To establish a planning framework and identify resources to support recreation planning for Eastern Merced County

Policies

ALY 3.1

Work with UC Merced to create a joint task force to meet regularly in a public setting to achieve cooperative goals for recreation and open space planning, parkland and resource acquisition, and the provision of adequate active and passive recreation, parks and open spaces to meet the needs of the population of eastern Merced County and UC Merced. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 3.2

Work with the City of Merced to establish recreation fees to apply to all new development, including the University Community, to support the expansion of Lake Yosemite Regional Park. *(Imp 3.3, 5.6)*

ALY 3.3

Encourage development of a public golf course in the vicinity of the University Community, UC Merced, and Lake Yosemite, as warranted by demand for such a facility. *(Imp 1.4, 5.6, 5.11)*

RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY OF MERCED

CONTEXT

In 1997, the County and City entered into an agreement for the sharing of revenue for newly annexed areas to the City of Merced. Such a Revenue Sharing Agreement is required prior to the processing and approval of an annexation application to the City of Merced by the Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The Revenue Sharing Agreement contains provisions governing County land use within the City’s Growth Area (SUDP) Sphere of Influence, and the Rural Residential Centers that exist in the vicinity of the City of Merced. Under the current terms of the agreement, the County is limited within this RRC to residential land uses at a density no greater than one unit per net acre, even though County zoning provisions allow a greater density and certain institutional uses.

The proposed site of the University Community SUDP Plan Area is located adjacent to the City’s SUDP. In addition, Bellevue Road is designated by the City of Merced as a future transit corridor that would connect the University Community and campus with downtown Merced (via “M” Street). Cumulatively, these factors suggest that the intervening lands between the City and Community SUDP’s Plan Area, currently designated for rural uses, be reconsidered for higher density development comparable to those uses permitted on adjoining lands. This could create a continuous pattern of urban uses of comparable density between the City and University Community. While this may be viewed as a benefit, it may also be perceived as a detriment. Arguably, one-acre lot development is urban in character and, in many communities, is the density of upscale housing neighborhoods. The lack of a clearly defined transitional area could negatively impact the ability to establish the identity of a distinct community that may be necessary to attract the involvement of a high quality master developer.

This issue, along with the potential growth inducement associated with development of the University Community SUDP Plan Area and Campus Parkway, begs

fundamental questions about the long-term urban growth boundaries for the City and protection of agricultural lands. Such issues cannot be resolved independently and require collaborative efforts that build upon the history of collaborative planning fostered by the Revenue Sharing Agreement. A number of ancillary issues emerging from the development of the campus and Community, such as their impacts on the use of Lake Yosemite Regional Park, would also benefit from a collaborative approach.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal

Development on lands between the University Community and City of Merced that is complementary and compatible reflects the area’s characteristics and natural resources.

Objective

ARM 1.0

To establish a process and policy, standards, and regulations for the development of lands between the University Community and City of Merced to ensure their compatibility with the University Community, UC Merced campus, and City of Merced.

Policies

ARM 1.1

Confer with the City of Merced in the joint planning of lands located between the University Community and City SUDP (location to be mutually determined by the County and City) that may designate land uses to be accommodated, development and design standards, transportation and infrastructure improvements, public services (schools, parklands, etc.), open spaces, resource management strategies, and governance. This would be accomplished through a Memorandum of Understanding, which builds upon the spirit of cooperation in the existing Revenue Sharing Agreement. *(Imp 3.3)*

ARM 1.2

Assure that development in the area between the City and University Community SUDPs urban limit boundaries complements (in type, density/intensity, and design) and does not adversely impact uses in these areas. In particular, control uses located at key entries and edges to ensure that their quality is reflective of the campus and Community. *(Imp 2.1, 3.3)*

ARM 1.3

Plan for the development of cohesive transportation (roadways, transit, bikeway, and pedestrian) and infrastructure (water, wastewater, storm drainage, telecommunications, and energy) systems that link the University Community, campus, unincorporated Rural Residential Center, and City, where needed and appropriate. *(Imp 2.1, 2.4, 3.3)*

ARM 1.4

As part of the joint planning of lands located between the University Community and the City of Merced SUDP, the County and the City should evaluate the long-term viability of rural water and wastewater infrastructure, and should consider the potential for provision of urban water and wastewater infrastructure to this area. *(Imp 2.1, 2.4, 3.3)*

Goal

A long-term growth and development strategy for the greater Merced urban area, including the University Community, which recognizes the importance of preserving opportunities for agricultural uses.

Objective

ARM 2.0

To establish a process and policy, standards, and regulations for the management of agricultural lands.

Policies

ARM 2.1

Collaborate with the City of Merced in establishing a strategy for the long-term growth and management/protection of agricultural lands on properties east of the City, extending to and beyond the proposed Campus Parkway. *(Imp 2.1, 3.3)*

ARM 2.2

Collaborate with the City of Merced in implementing agricultural protection policies defined in the Area Plan—Agriculture (preceding section). *(Imp 3.3)*

Goal

Maintenance and enhancement of Lake Yosemite Regional Park as a recreational amenity serving residents of the County, City of Merced, and greater region.

Objective

ARM 3.0

To establish a process and policy, standards, and procedures for the long term use, management, improvement, and funding of Lake Yosemite Regional Park.

Policy

ARM 3.1

Identify community recreational needs and potential funding sources for the Lake Yosemite Regional Park in cooperation with the City of Merced and other jurisdictions that benefit from the Park's use. While the Park is under the authority of the County, the City and all jurisdictions whose constituencies use that Park should seek to identify how they can contribute to the Park's maintenance, enhancement, and programs (refer to policy ALY 3.2). *(Imp 3.3, 4.8, 5.6)*

Goal

Provision of adequate public services to the University Community throughout its development life.

Objective

ARM 4.0

To engage the City of Merced as a partner in providing adequate urban services to the University Community in the early years of development.

Policy

ARM 4.1

Enter into agreements with the City of Merced to provide interim police, fire, library, and other services to the University Community during the initial stages of development and sufficient resource capacities are created to support local services. *(Imp 3.3)*

Goal

Clearly understood linkages to City and County destinations.

Objective

ARM 5.0

To develop a system of information, visual elements, and transportation that integrate the County, City, and University Community into a cohesive community fabric.

Policies

ARM 5.1

Work with the City of Merced to develop a well-designed street signage and monuments/ landmarks program that will be commonly used throughout the University Community, City of Merced, and adjoining areas that provides clear information regarding major destinations and travel routes (“wayfinding”). (*Imp 3.3*)

ARM 5.2

Work with the City of Merced in establishing a unified transit system that connects the University Community with key destinations in the City. (*Imp 3.3, 4.1*)

RELATIONSHIP TO ADJACENT USES

CONTEXT

The University Community planning area divides both the Flying “M” property being acquired by the Virginia Smith Trust/UC Merced LLC and Hunt Farms. The lands west of the Fairfield and Le Grand Canals within the UCP are designated for urban uses. Lands east of these canals have a rural designation of “Agriculture” in the County General Plan. As lands within the University Community and UC Merced campus are developed over time, it may be appropriate to consider how the use of these adjoining properties inter-relate and fit. The area north of the Le Grand Canal is highly constrained, as it is near some of the most valuable and sensitive wetlands and endangered species habitat in the region. The lands south of the Le Grand Canal are currently irrigated pastureland, crop land, and non-irrigated pasture. The use of such lands would have to be carefully evaluated for its impacts on the region’s agricultural productivity, natural resource enhancement opportunities, and continuity with the University Community and UC Merced campus.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal

Long-term use of the land east of the University Community that reflects the site’s natural resources, contribution to agricultural productivity, continuity with the University Community, and role as a definable urban limit.

Objective

AV 1.0

To provide a process for the consideration of the appropriate long-term use of lands east of the University Community Boundary.

Policies

AV 1.1

Evaluate the appropriate long-term use of the lands east of the University Community including consideration of, but not limited to, development, agriculture, habitat preservation, or habitat restoration. (*Imp 2.1, 5.1*)

AV 1.2

Evaluations of the lands east of the University Community shall consider the site’s soils, agricultural uses, and productivity; the existing presence of wetlands and significant plant and animal species, as well as habitat enhancement or restoration opportunities; relationship and ability to fit with the University Community’s land uses and infrastructure and UC Merced; and relationships to adjoining agriculture and open spaces. (*Imp 2.1, 2.3, 5.1*)

AREA PLAN—RELATIONSHIP TO UC MERCED CAMPUS LONG RANGE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LRDP)

CONTEXT

The design and development of the UC Merced campus is guided by the campus Long Range Development Plan (LRDP.) The LRDP describes the development of a Main Campus of 910 acres, a Campus Land Reserve of 340 acres, and a Campus Natural Reserve of 750 acres. Development within the main campus is proposed to consist of an Academic Core (157 acres); Student Services (23 acres); Student Housing (250 acres); Faculty Housing (90 acres); Campus Support (56 acres); Athletic and Recreation (148 acres); Parking (147 acres) and On-campus Research (39 acres). The LRDP was approved by the Regents in January 2002.

The University Community Plan has been prepared to address the growth that will occur as a result of the development of UC Merced. The County and University planning teams have closely coordinated throughout the preparation of the UCP and LRDP. This coordination has resulted in the Plans being compatible and mutually supportive. As these plans are administered and future amendments considered, this coordination between the County and UC will become even more critical, to ensure the continued compatibility of these plans. The integrity of these plans must also be retained to respect the representations in each plan that each one achieves its goals with minimum environmental impact. In recognition that the development of UC Merced as prescribed by the LRDP will change over time in consideration of evolving academic and research programs and financial resources, it will be essential to periodically review and amend where necessary the UCP to ensure the consistency of development within the University Community.

Because the University and University Community are being developed on vacant lands, the unique coordination of the University and County in developing and implementing their plans will avoid the historical experience of land use conflicts in other campus host communities.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal

Maintain the compatibility of the University Community Plan and Campus Long Range Development Plan, and the integrity of each plan, as these plans are administered and implemented by the County and the University.

Ensure through development agreements and other measures that if presently unanticipated University campus uses outside the boundaries of the LRDP adopted in January 2002 are proposed within the UCP area, such uses will conform to and not frustrate the provisions of the Merced County General Plan and the University Community Plan.

Objective

ARUC I.0

To provide a process during the administrative and public review of Specific Plans for the University Community that ensures coordination between the County and University in the implementation and administration of the UCP and LRDP, and maintains the integrity of each plan.

Policies

ARUC I.1

The County shall, consistent with state statutes, make available drafts of specific plans for public review and comment, which shall include the opportunity for UC Merced to comment regarding their compatibility with the campus LRDP.

ARUC I.2

Amendments to the UCP shall not frustrate the goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the campus LRDP.

ARUC I.3

The County shall review proposed amendments to the LRDP, prior to consideration by the Board of Regents, to ensure their compatibility with the University Community Plan goals, objectives, policies, and programs.

ARUC I.4

The County shall secure the cooperation of UC Merced to assure that any amendments to the UC Merced LRDP not frustrate the goals, objectives, policies, and programs of the University Community Plan.

ARUC I.5

In recognition of possible significant changes in UC Merced's academic and research programs, the County shall periodically review the UCP in response to changes to the UC Merced LRDP.