

VISION FOR THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

The advent of UC Merced offers a rare opportunity to define a new community in Merced County. This opportunity is supported by a legacy of tried-and-true principles of urban planning and lessons learned from thirty years of an unprecedented pattern of growth. The successes and mistakes of past development populate the land, manifesting a variety of views, rules, economic conditions, and natural constraints. Upon this legacy is overlain a refined knowledge of the present relationship between humans, the natural environment, and economic realities. The choices, opportunities, and quality of life for future residents hinge upon the current ability to synthesize this vast knowledge and the clarity to define policies that balance the needs of society, the environment, and the economy. This Community Plan rises to that challenge with the explicit purpose of creating a vibrant community where multiple generations are supported by an urban setting whose fundamental characteristics are capable of sustaining a fine quality of life. One might ask, “What is this University Community?”

■ CONTEXT

The University Community is a new community that results from, supports, and nurtures the development of the tenth campus of the University of California. While it represents a new group of users and cultures, it builds upon and sustains the rich history, qualities, and environments that distinguish Merced and the San Joaquin Valley. The Community promotes the vitality of the region’s economy, supports the social well-being of its residents, and is environmentally sustainable. The University Community and UC Merced are inextricably linked, breaking down the barriers that often separate town and gown. A common and connected framework of streets and blocks establishes a uniform urban form in which uses that serve both campus and Community are interspersed. The activity cores of the Community and campus adjoin and reinforce one another, enhancing and sustaining livability and vitality for Community residents and the campus population.

■ COMMUNITY

The University Community is a residential community that contains the full range of uses and services that cumulatively create “neighborhood.” It supports and contributes to the well-being of populations who decide to live in proximity

to the campus—students, faculty, staff, and others attracted by the intellectual, social, and cultural qualities of a university environment. It is a place where one can live, shop, work, socialize, be entertained, educated, and culturally enriched, recreate, enjoy and respect nature, engage in philosophical and religious pursuits, and experience a high quality of life. It is a community of choices, in recognition the resident population will be diverse in demographics, culture, education, income, needs, and life experiences.

The University Community complements the City of Merced and region. Its uses are additive to and enhance the mix and quality of existing business centers in downtown Merced, at Castle Airport, and other communities throughout the County.

The Community accommodates an increment of population and employment growth and provides new opportunities that would not have existed without UC Merced.

■ LIVABILITY

The University Community promotes the value of livability. It offers the opportunity for people to engage with others in their neighborhoods, where they shop, play, and are entertained. Its built environment contains places that promote activity, where public plazas, sidewalks, and the street are the “public living room” for the community. These are interconnected through a network of pedestrian paths and bikeways to promote accessibility. The Town Center and Residential Village Centers are places where people can walk, dine, shop, participate in events, and observe the casual comings and goings of other. The neighborhoods contain housing that faces the public space, the front yard and the street, and, at the same time, offer opportunities for privacy. Each neighborhood centers on a school, park, multi-purpose facility, local services, and similar facilities that serve as the common center of identity and activity.

■ ECONOMY

The presence of UC Merced provides a unique opportunity to stimulate new industries that capitalize upon its intellectual capital and research and expand Merced’s economy. The University Community is the incubator for these new ventures and economic activity that diversify and improve the fiscal vitality of the region. These businesses produce new jobs for Merced’s residents, which coupled with training to advance their skills, enhance the incomes and well-being of residents. A diverse population also broadens the mix of retail and offices that can be supported in the marketplace (food stores, restaurants, book stores, clothing, sporting goods, etc.), contributing new revenue to Merced.

■ SOCIAL WELL-BEING

The University Community provides a diverse range of education, cultural, recreation, health, safety, and other services that, coupled with the job opportunities and livable neighborhoods, contribute to a high level of social well-being for its residents. Schools are located next to parks, which, together, serve as centers for each Residential Village. Libraries, performing arts venues, art galleries, and other cultural facilities are located in the Town Center. A continuous network of parks and open spaces gives form to the Community and provides a diversity of recreational opportunities for all ages. Health, social, youth, seniors, and other programs are developed in response to Community resident needs. The provision and maintenance of housing that is affordable for all residents in the long term heightens the quality of life for Community residents.

■ INNOVATION

The University Community nurtures the innovation and experimentation that are intrinsic to a university-related population. Opportunities are provided for the research, testing, and use of new building forms and construction techniques that make housing and other development more affordable and conserve energy, water, building materials, and other natural resources. The area's wetlands, vernal pools, and other natural habitats provide opportunities for education and research for methods to protect and restore scarce plant and animal species and habitat. Academic and private sector research stimulate the incubation of new industries and technologies, as well as the region's productive agricultural economy. New arts and cultural activities are available in the Community.

■ MOBILITY

The University Community fosters mobility and accessibility for its residents, businesses, and visitors. A diversity of transportation alternatives is provided, reducing the need for automobile use. The concentration of housing in proximity to the Town Center and Village Center (schools and parks), mixed use development that integrates housing with commercial uses, extensive streetscape improvements, shared parking facilities, and network of trails and paths promote pedestrian activity and make it enjoyable. Transportation corridors are used for multiple transportation modes, integrating bicycle and public transit use with automobiles. The multi-modal transportation center in the Town Center provides convenient access to the campus and Community from surrounding areas and enables the Community and campus populations to access downtown Merced and other regional centers.

■ INFRASTRUCTURE

The University Community is supported by an innovative and environmentally sustainable infrastructure system. All water-related elements are integrated into

a single system—potable water, wastewater, and storm drainage. It extracts water from groundwater sources and rainwater collected on-site, collects and treats wastewater, and disperses the recycled treated water for landscape irrigation, building cooling, and other purposes. The use of solar and wind generated energy are used to augment traditional sources. The Community is interconnected by wiring, fiber optics, and other new technologies that facilitate telecommunications and access to government, library, educational, health, entertainment, and other information, as well one another.

■ **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The University Community recognizes the importance of its environmental resources. It participates in regional programs to conserve wetlands, habitats, and agricultural uses. Natural resources on-site are preserved in a continuous open space network that is linked to surrounding open spaces. The site's agricultural uses are preserved as interim uses as development is phased from the north to the south. Buildings are constructed using recycled materials and energy conserving fixtures and techniques. They are located to minimize heat gain and loss and provide shelter from prevailing winds.

■ **NATURAL HAZARDS**

Development in the University Community is located and designed to mitigate the potential impacts of noise, brush fire, earthquakes, flood, landslides, and other natural hazards. These are coupled with the implementation of police and fire emergency response programs to ensure the public safety.

■ **ADJACENT COMMUNITIES AND USES**

The University Community recognizes the values and qualities of adjacent land uses and places. It supports continued agricultural uses on properties to the east and south, expanded use and improvement of Lake Yosemite Regional Park, and a working collaboration with the City of Merced in assuring a linked transportation and infrastructure network and determining the long-term development opportunities for lands between the Community and City.