

## Project Highlight



# Merced Programmatic Climate Action Plan

Located in the northern San Joaquin Valley, the City of Merced is home to approximately 45% of Merced County's population. The City of approximately 80,000 residents is the location of the newest University of California campus as well as being an important planned stop on California's High Speed Rail system. The City's economic base has traditionally been agricultural and light industrial. With the recent investments in higher education and transportation, however, the city may see significant change in the coming century. The City has the opportunity to shape future growth in a way that protects its natural resources and stimulates the local economy.

### The Project

In 2012, the City of Merced developed its first generation *Climate Action Plan*. This plan was developed with funding from the Federal Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants funds. It established a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and outlined implementation actions. The Plan was developed in collaboration with an 18-member Climate Action Plan Advisory Ad-Hoc Committee.

In 2013, the City of Merced embarked on creation of a suite of tools to implement the *Climate Action Plan*, which included an urban design manual that graphically demonstrates the City's development policies and codes in a user-friendly format. These tools became

known as the *Programmatic Climate Action Plan* and the development of these were funded by the Grant Program.

Key outputs included:

1. An update to the *2008 GHG Emission Inventory*.
2. A monitoring protocol and tool.
3. A selection of feasible and effective projects and programs to achieve the City's adopted greenhouse gas reduction target. Projects were selected based on cost effectiveness, anticipated greenhouse gas emissions, and ability to be monitored.
4. A list of potential development-related code amendments that could help implement *Climate Action Plan* strategies and mitigation measures.
5. A user-friendly *Unified Design Manual* (UDM) to make regulations easier to understand and ensure their effectiveness in achieving greenhouse gas emissions.
6. Qualification for Permit Streamlining through California Environmental Quality Act.



At the City's Resource Efficiency Fair, residents give feedback on what kinds of energy efficiency actions they participate in or would consider participating in. Source: Bill King, City of Merced

In pursuing a Programmatic Plan, the City will achieve two objectives: first, it improved the likelihood of the achieving the goals set out in the initial *Climate Action Plan*. Second, it front-loaded the assessment of greenhouse gas emissions from various projects, thereby providing more predictability to investors interested in developing in Merced. By qualifying for Permit Streamlining under the Environmental Quality Act, the City's identified projects can be expedited for development. City planners have completed all work on the Programmatic Plan and hope to take it to the City Council for review and potential adoption before the end of 2017.

### Local/Regional Connection

As the seat of Merced County, the City of Merced is already a regional hub for government, business and industry. With the 2005 opening of University of California Merced adjacent to the City, Merced became an educational center for the San Joaquin Valley and California. Future plans to locate a California High Speed Rail station in downtown Merced are poised to strengthen the city's ties to the State's larger metropolitan regions, in turn preparing the City for future economic and population growth. Against this backdrop, the need for a comprehensive sustainability plan for the City becomes clear.

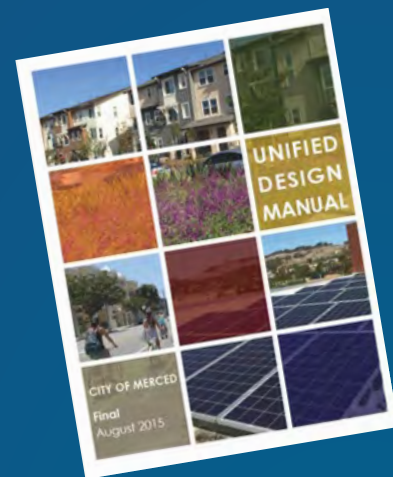
### Agency Collaboration for Action

The work to complete the City's *Programmatic Climate Action Plan* relied on the participation of a number of different organizations and divisions within the City of Merced. The Plan's components were varied—from the internal assessment of municipal operations' impacts on greenhouse gas emissions to the urban design direction of the *Unified Design Manual*—and thus required a diversity of expertise to develop.

### Effective Community Engagement

The City of Merced recognized the importance of engaging a representative cross-section of community members in the development of the *Programmatic Climate Action Plan*. Building off recent civic engagement in the City's Zoning Code update, City Staff knew that engaged residents would be willing to attend regular meetings over the course of the project. As such, the City of Merced convened an ad-hoc advisory group of local residents and business leaders to identify opportunities for *Climate Action Plan* implementation and to review and provide input on project deliverables. This committee met seven times over the course of Plan development.

Through an innovative partnership with the Local Government Commission, the City and its technical consultant also hosted a series



Source: City of Merced

### Locally-Driven Solutions

- Providing certainty and predictability to those investing in Merced while also achieving greenhouse gas targets by introducing a permit streamlining process for new development projects that meet *Climate Action Plan* targets.

Community-based organizations and public agencies presented information about their programs and services at Merced's Resource Efficiency Fair. Source: Bill King, City of Merced.



of public workshops, including a City-Wide Resource Efficiency Fair. There, 34 local community-based organizations and neighboring or regional public agencies shared programs and services around water conservation, recycling, energy-efficiency, reduced utility bills, and alternative transit. Approximately 70 community members and exhibitors attended to learn what conservation-related actions local government agencies, non-profit groups, schools, and businesses are engaged in locally. A summary of conservation-related actions by the City to date was presented. In addition to games, activities, and booths, the fair was a great place to connect with local leaders/organizations, share ideas, and learn how to stay involved in the project. Community input was gathered and results summarized. Following this kick off to the Plan's public process, the City collaborated with the Local Government Commission to host more focused workshops for deeper discussions about economic prosperity and healthy communities.

Two stakeholder meetings with the local development community, consisting of engineers, surveyors, architects, planners, and builders were held. These meetings gave stakeholders dedicated time to review

and comment on the draft *Unified Design Manual* and associated information about potential code revisions.

### Sustainable Benefits for California

Implementation of Merced's *Programmatic Climate Action Plan* will help to advance many of California's sustainability objectives, particularly in the areas of:

- Economic Prosperity
- Improved infrastructure systems
- Infill and compact development
- Natural resources and agricultural lands protection and preservation
- Public health
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions

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The *Design Manual* graphically demonstrates the City's development policies and codes in a user-friendly format. Source: City of Merced.