2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Yosemite Avenue-Gardner Avenue to Hatch Road Annexation project (proposed project) proposes to annex approximately 68.6 acres currently within Merced County (County) into the City of Merced (City) and construction and operation of "The Crossings," a mixed-use development component on an approximately 28.4-acre portion of the project site. The Crossings would consist of a 540-unit apartment village including a 13,700 square foot clubhouse and associated outdoor recreation space. The Crossings also includes five mixed-use buildings consisting of 66,000 square feet of retail space on the ground level and 45,000 square feet of residential space on the second level, totaling 30 additional units (12 apartments and 18 extended stay units) (Hochhauser Blatter 2020). The other approximately 40.2 acres of the project site are referred to as the Remainder Area. No development or change in the underlying land use designation of Rural Residential is proposed in the Remainder Area; this area is proposed to be zoned Urban Transition.

The project location, project setting and surrounding land uses, project objectives, and specific project elements are described in detail in this chapter.

2.2 PROJECT LOCATION

The approximately 68.6-acre project site is located in unincorporated Merced County but adjoins the City (see Figure 2-1, Regional Location). The site extends north of East Yosemite Avenue between Gardner Avenue on the west and Hatch Road on the east (see Figure 2-2, Project Location). The City limits are immediately adjacent to the project site on the west and south and the project applicant is requesting the site be annexed into the City.

Additionally, Figure 2-2 identifies the approximately 28.4-acre portion of the site proposed for development under The Crossings project component, and the approximately 40.2-acre portion of the site that comprises the Remainder Area, which is not currently proposed for development. As shown in Figure 2-2, The Crossings is proposed to be developed within an L-shaped portion of the site that includes the majority of the western half of the site but excludes an approximately 9.4-acre area in the northwest corner. This 9.4-acre area is included in the Remainder Area, along with the approximately 30.8 acres in the eastern portion of the project site.

The project site includes the following Assessor Parcel numbers (APNs): 060-570-009, 060-570-010, 060-570-011, 060-570-012, 060-570-013, 060-570-014, 060-570-056, 060-570-058, 060-570-059, 060-570-097, and 060-570-098. The total area of the project site reflected in the Assessor's Parcel data is approximately 70 acres. The acreages relied upon in this EIR were

developed using GIS analysis and therefore differ slightly from the Assessor's data. The total area of the project site identified throughout this EIR is approximately 68.6 acres.

2.3 PROJECT SETTING AND SURROUNDING LAND USES

The project site is located adjacent to developed areas of the City to the south and west. Land under active agricultural use is located to the north and a mix of rural residential uses are located to the east, across Hatch Road. The project site is located approximately 0.5 miles west of the County's University Community Plan area.

The project site is located within the unincorporated County and is designated as a Rural Residential Center on the Merced County City Planning Area-Merced land use map (Merced County 2011). The project site is located within the City's Sphere of Influence and designated Rural Residential in the City's Merced Vision 2030 General Plan (City of Merced 2012). The land use designations within and surrounding the project site are shown on Figure 2-3, City of Merced Land Use Designations, and Figure 2-4, County of Merced Land Use Designations.

The Crossings component is located adjacent to the northeast corner of East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue. This area currently supports primarily agricultural land with four buildings, trailers, shipping containers, and various pieces of equipment located on 3 acres of this portion of the project site. All of the buildings on the site would be demolished as part of the project and the equipment removed. The Remainder Area includes a mix of rural residences, a church (Yosemite Church), a private school (Stoneridge Christian School), and undeveloped agricultural lands.

The current County land use designation for the project site is Agricultural-Residential (A-R) and the zoning for the project site is Rural Residential (R-R), which provides areas for rural residential development, hobby farming and limited animal raising operations with less than a full range of urban services. The County's zoning ordinance states that this zone is intended to serve as a transitional area between more dense urban communities and agricultural uses with the option of allowing between one and three dwelling units per acre (Merced County 2020).

Land surrounding the project site to the south and west within the City is designated low density residential in the City's Merced Vision 2030 General Plan and zoned low density residential (R-1-6) with a small area at the southwest corner of East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue designated commercial/office and zoned Residential Planned Development (RP-D 20). Land to the north in the unincorporated County is designated A-Rand zoned R-R. The City and County zoning designations for the project site and surroundings are shown on Figure 2-5, Zoning Designations.

2.4 BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

The City's Merced Vision 2030 General Plan recognizes that the presence of the University of California (UC) Merced campus and its anticipated growth will result in an increased need in housing in a range of housing formats for students, faculty and staff as well as growth from the City itself. Chapter 9 of the 2030 General Plan discusses the need to work with UC Merced staff to "address housing needs and impacts caused by existing student housing on neighborhoods and the community" in accordance with Action 1.1.g as a means to implement Policy H-1.1, which requires support for increased densities in residential areas (City of Merced 2012). UC Merced has adopted plans that anticipated enrollment of 10,000 students by 2020 and approximately 25,000 full-time students and 9,200 employees at full buildout of the campus. The UC Merced Long Range Development Plan expects to be able to house approximately 50% of students on campus and the remaining would be required to find housing elsewhere. UC Merced requires most of its first-year students to live on campus, however there is not sufficient on-campus housing to meet this need and "there are often 200 to 300 students on the waiting list for housing" (Fresno Bee 2021). While enrollment increased steadily at the University, development of residential units stalled between 2006 and 2014, though several projects have been approved in the years since.

In the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan, the City discusses overcrowding in approximately 9.1% of households, suggesting a need for additional housing. Furthermore, the Land Use element of the General Plan states "The University projects at least 50% of its students need to be housed off-campus. The community does not have a well-developed supply of housing specific to students" (City of Merced 2012). Additionally, in 2021, with students returning to campus after engaging in distance learning in 2020, UC Merced has found that students are facing a limited availability of rental spaces, leading to increased rental rates and insufficient affordable options (Fresno Bee 2021). The existing overcrowding issues along with the anticipated growth expected in UC Merced's Long Range Development Plan demonstrate a need for housing, for students, staff and faculty, within the vicinity of the University.

2.5 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

In general, the project seeks to develop a mixed-use village and to annex the adjacent properties to create a logical city boundary. While the project is not designated as student housing, the proximity of the project to the University of California Merced campus would help provide nearby housing opportunities for students. The specific project objectives include:

• Develop an attractive and high-quality mixed-use project comprising housing, retail and general commercial.

- Provide quality and affordable living space for the local housing market in close proximity to commercial uses.
- Create a low-carbon footprint living environment desirable to eco-conscious residents through the use of select building materials, low-energy appliances, and native landscaping.
- Operate a professionally managed secure living space for residents that includes dedicated village-style retail, restaurant, and mixed-use.
- Produce economic benefits by creating hundreds of construction jobs, twelve to fifteen jobs operating the housing project when completed, and dozens of retail and restaurant job opportunities for the village retail and mixed-use center.
- Provide residents a variety of transit options.

2.6 PROJECT COMPONENTS

The Crossings is a proposed mixed-use development located on a 28.4-acre site that fronts East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue. A breakdown of The Crossings land uses is provided in Table 2-1. The site plan is shown on Figure 2-6, The Crossings Proposed Site Plan. As shown in Table 2-1 and Figure 2-6, The Crossings consists of two primary areas – a residential village and a commercial/mixed-use area. The residential village would consist of 20 three-story buildings with a total of 540 residential units, a 13,700 square foot clubhouse, associated outdoor recreation space. The residential buildings would have 27 units per building. Of the 540 units, 300 units would be one bedroom with one bathroom and 240 units would be two bedrooms with two bathrooms. The commercial/mixed-use portion would include five mixed-use buildings consisting of 66,000 square feet of retail space on the ground level and 45,000 square feet of residential space on the second level, totaling 30 additional units (12 apartments and 18 extended stay units) (Hochhauser Blatter 2020).

Proposed Buildings	Square Footage
Residential	
20 Buildings (540 dwelling units)	626,280 sf (31,314 sf/building)
Clubhouse	13,700 sf
Total	639,980 sf
Mixed-Use	
First Floor Total (Commercial/Retail)	66,000 sf
Second Floor Total (Residential – 30 dwelling units)	45,000 sf

Table 2-1 The Crossings - Land Uses

Proposed Parking	Spaces
Residential	901
Commercial/Retail	323
Total	1,223

Table 2-1The Crossings - Land Uses

Source: Hochhauser Blatter 2020

Building Design and Signage

The proposed residential building architecture is designed with a contemporary style, as shown in Figure 2-7. The color palette of the buildings are primarily muted, warm colors in shades of brown, beige and grey. The building exteriors would be finished with a combination of stucco, cementitious horizontal lap siding and panel cladding. The building roof is a combination of pitched standing seam metal roof and flat roof. Each residential unit is provided with covered balconies/ patios, protected by a metal and glass guardrail system. The tall window apertures allow natural light to the interiors, while the solar shades minimize glare and heat gain. Building heights would be generally approximately 36 feet with some features extending to approximately 40-feet 6-inches (Hochhauser Blatter 2020).

The proposed commercial building architecture is also designed with a contemporary style and finished with siding and stucco, as shown in Figure 2-8. The buildings would also be finished in varying shades of beige and the roof would consist of pitched standing seam metal roofs. The second floor of each end of the retail strip includes a balcony with a metal railing. Like the residential buildings, the commercial buildings would have tall window apertures allow natural light to the interiors, while solar shades would minimize glare and heat gain; however, these tall windows would be largely restricted to the first floor (Hochhauser Blatter 2020).

Sections 20.20.010 and 20.20.020 of the City's zoning ordinance discusses the purpose, requirements, and restrictions in Urban Transition (U-T) Zoning District and Planned Development (P-D) Zoning Districts respectively. Under the U-T zone, building heights may reach maximum of 40 feet for principal buildings and 25 feet for accessory buildings whereas the P-D zone does not have an explicit height maximum but buildings require approval from the Planning Commission and City Council (City of Merced 2020).

Monument signs are proposed to be placed at the corner of East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue, adjacent to the driveway along East Yosemite Avenue that provides access to the residential area, and in the central plaza within the retail area. Monument signs would be a combination of vinyl/metal letters mounted on a concrete cast-in-place wall. The signs would be back-lit, up-lit, or a combination. The City's standards regarding signs are included in Chapters

17.36 and 20.62 of the Municipal Code. The apartment complex within The Crossings component of the project would have more than 200 feet of frontage on East Yosemite Avenue, thus under Municipal Code Section 17.36.572, the monument sign for the complex may have a maximum height of 6 feet and a maximum size of 24 square feet per side. The Municipal Code also addresses materials, color, arrangement within the site, and lighting (specifically that the individual lettering and logo may include internal lamination but may not include direct or reflected lighting).

Security Features

Secure gate access would be a part of the design of the residential buildings. The clubhouse would be accessible only through the use of key card readers. Additionally, closed circuit television (CCTV) network monitoring would be installed throughout the residential component to ensure the security and safety of residents.

Retail/Residential Employees

It is anticipated there would be eight to ten full time and six to eight part time employees managing the apartment component. Their duties would include management, leasing, marketing, property maintenance, technology maintenance, accounting, and resident services. In the retail component of the project, there would be a minimum of four full time property managers and retail housing personnel plus two maintenance and janitorial workers, in addition to employees of the individual retail businesses that locate onsite. Overall, it is estimated that approximately 147 employees would be employed within The Crossings component.

Vehicle Access, Circulation, and Parking

Vehicle access to the residential portion would be provided by a driveway off of East Yosemite Avenue that would provide both ingress and egress to the site. Access to the retail portion would be provided by a driveway off of East Yosemite Avenue and two driveways off of Gardner Avenue. Internal drive lanes would connect the retail and residential portions of the project site.

Vehicle circulation throughout the site would be provided via striped on-site drive lanes that would permit vehicle access and parking. A total of 1,223 surface parking spaces would be provided, with 901 being provided for the residential component and 322 for the commercial/retail component (Hochhauser Blatter 2020). Chapter 20.38 of the City's Municipal Code lists the parking and bike requirements for both retail and residential land uses. The parking spaces included in the project design would satisfy the City's requirements of 1 space per 300 square feet of restaurant or retail uses, and 1.75 spaces for the first 30 units and 1.5 spaces for the requirements are based on a percentage of the required automobile parking requirements and includes separate requirements for short and long term parking. For multi-family residential land

uses, the standards require 10% of required automobile parking spaces for short term bicycle parking and 1 space per 10 units for long term bicycle parking. For non-residential uses (retail), standards require 8% of required automobile spaces for short term bicycle parking and an additional 8% of required automobile spaces for uses 10,000 square feet for long term bicycle parking. Based on these requirements, the project would be required to provide 220 bicycle parking spaces.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Access

Bike storage for residents would be provided at each building. Bike access would be combined with walkways linking the right-of-way and would connect to Class II bike lanes located on both sides of East Yosemite Avenue west of Gardner Avenue and located on the north side of East Yosemite Avenue east of Gardner Avenue. There are no Class II bike lanes on Gardner Avenue or Parsons Avenue.

Outdoor Spaces and other Amenities

All buildings in The Crossings component would be connected with a network of meandering walkways. These walkways would pass through landscaped areas located between the residential buildings. An outdoor plaza is proposed central to the retail portion to be used for evening events and outdoor activities, such as music events, craft fairs, and farmers' markets.

Lighting

On-site lighting would be a combination of post-mounted fixtures at parking areas, building wall mounted exterior fixtures, and light bollards along the meandering walkways. All lighting fixtures would be energy-efficient in compliance with California Building Code Title 24 requirements. Chapter 20.38 of the City's Municipal Code include lighting standards, including that the on-site light fixtures and locations would meet the City's screening requirements, including required hooding and allowable levels of illumination at the property line.

Landscaping

Project site landscaping would be required to conform to the City's Landscape Standards including Municipal Code Chapter 17.60 (Water Efficient Landscape and Irrigation) and the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (WELO) (City of Merced 2020). The requirements listed in the City's Landscape Standards aim to ensure that a project's landscape design to provide an attractive and visually appealing environment that would be well-suited to the outdoor living needs of the residents. These requirements outline standards regarding low-water use and ease of maintenance. The standards include requirements for a variety of low-water using species (including California natives) of trees, shrubs, groundcovers and grasses. Other requirements include that turf grass areas be

limited to areas suitable for active recreation, deciduous trees be located to provide solar shading and minimal heat gain on south and west facing building facades, and spreading canopy trees be located in parking lots.

In accordance with the requirements listed in the code, the landscape design in the commercial area would include a variety of special use areas with site furnishings, enhanced paving types, recirculating water features, kiosks, planters and an array of flowering low-water trees, shrubs and groundcovers.

Infrastructure and Energy Features

Water

There is an existing 16" water main located within both East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue. The 16" water main within Yosemite Avenue is located approximately 20 feet south of the roadway centerline and is looped with a 12" water line heading south on Parsons Avenue, a 16" line heading south on McKee Road, and a 12" line heading north on Paulson Road. The 16" main on Gardner Avenue is approximately 8 feet east of the roadway centerline and is looped with a 12" water line heading water line heading

The two 16" water mains would be utilized to supply the anticipated flow requirements for fire, domestic, and landscape irrigation systems. It is contemplated that a 12" onsite water "main" would be looped through the project site with a 12" backflow device at each end where it connects to the 16" main. Smaller water mains and individual service lines to the various buildings would be fed from the 12" onsite loop. The number and location/spacing of onsite fire hydrants would be determined during the design phase of the project in accordance with the fire department and City and Code requirements.

As is typical for most 3-story buildings in Merced, there would be a fire booster pump for the fire sprinkler systems for all 3-story buildings constructed within the project site.

Wastewater

There is an existing 18" gravity sewer line in East Yosemite Avenue (20 feet north of centerline) that flows west from Gardner Avenue to G Street. Based on the estimated rate of 140,000 gallons per minute (gpd), this line has adequate capacity for the proposed development. The point of

connection would be at the terminal manhole at the intersection of East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue. The onsite sewer lines would consist of 6" and 8" lines.

Stormwater and Drainage

Since the project site generally slopes from the northeast to the southwest, it drains to the southwest corner of the parcel at East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue. This drainage is conveyed to the city's storm drain system via a 24" storm pipe that crosses under East Yosemite Avenue and continues south through a detention basin and pump station which ultimately discharges into Black Rascal Creek. This system is designed to allow the project site to discharge storm water runoff that would be generated by a 2 year-24 hour storm. In accordance with city standards, The Crossings component of the project would continue to discharge to the same 24" pipe at the same rate but would provide the necessary on-site detention to contain a 50 year-24 hour storm event. The amount of impervious surfaces to be created would be approximately 64% of the 28.4-acre portion of the site that would support The Crossings development. This equates to a detention volume of about six acre-feet. The basin would have a total surface area of approximately 1.1 acre, with sides sloped at a 2:1 ratio, and a maximum water depth for the 50-year storm event of approximately 10 feet (Appendix H). This basin would be fenced for safety. A storm pump station is proposed to be installed at the west end of the proposed detention basin to empty the basin while controlling the discharge rate to the allowable amount.

The project applicant would be required to comply with the City's Storm Drainage Design Standards and the more recently adopted Post Construction Standards Plan (PCSD) (City of Merced 2015). The PCSD describes various low impact design (LID) and hydromodification concepts to reduce the amount of run off generated by the project and improve the quality of the storm water being discharged from the site. Specific LID features for the project have not been identified but typically include bio swales, modular wetlands biofiltration units, storm water planters, and possibly underground mechanical systems such as a nutrient separating baffle box.

Energy Efficiency Features

The project must meet the mandatory requirements of the California Green Building Standards Code. Examples of green principles of design include:

- Use of drought tolerant, indigenous plantings to minimize water use.
- Incorporating open and naturally ventilated circulation spaces in buildings to minimize energy use.
- Cut-off luminaires (no upward light emitted).

- Installation of Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment and designated parking for low-emitting and fuel-efficient vehicles.
- Short-term and long-term bicycle parking.
- Energy efficient mechanical and plumbing systems.
- Energy efficient building envelope with water resistance and moisture management.
- Solar shading devise to minimize heat gain on south and west facing facades.
- Construction waste reduction, disposal and management.
- Energy efficient HVAC systems and building commissioning.
- Indoor air quality using non-toxic, non-volatile-organic-content paints and adhesives, moisture control, acoustical control, natural daylight and natural ventilation.

Project Schedule

The proposed project would develop 540 residential units in twenty 3 story buildings with a 13,700 square foot supporting clubhouse building, a mixed use building with 66,000 square feet of ground floor retail and 30 additional residential units on the 2nd floor. The project would also include 1,223 parking spaces. It is expected that construction of the proposed project would last approximately 27 months.

Site Clearing, Grading, and Construction

The Crossings component of the project site contains limited vegetation, other than agricultural crops, which would be removed from the site. The row of olive trees immediately east of this portion of the site would be retained under this development. The project site is relatively flat. Site grading is expected to require movement of approximately 45,000 cubic yards of dirt and fill, with cuts and fills generally balancing onsite. Project construction would be staged, with construction of the apartment complex occurring first, and materials stockpiles and equipment storage occurring on the commercial portion of the site. It is currently estimated that up to approximately 50 construction trips per day between workers as well as deliveries would be required. All construction activities would utilize existing roadways surrounding the project site. Primary routes would likely include use of East Yosemite Avenue with access to Highway 99.

Off-Site Improvements

No off-site improvements are needed other than construction of curb, gutter and sidewalks along the property frontages on East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue. These would be constructed in accordance with adopted City standards. All onsite water, sewer and storm drain infrastructure would tie into existing infrastructure located adjacent to the site within the East Yosemite Avenue and Gardner Avenue right-of-way.

2.7 REQUIRED DISCRETIONARY ACTIONS AND APPROVALS

Project approval from the City would require the following discretionary actions:

- Certification of the EIR and adoption of the Mitigation Monitoring Plan. Before the City can approve the proposed project, it must certify that the EIR was completed in compliance with the requirements of CEQA, that the decision-making body has reviewed and considered the information in the EIR, and that the EIR reflects the independent judgment of the City. Approval of the EIR also requires adoption of a Mitigation Monitoring Program (MMP), which specifies the methods for monitoring mitigation measures required to eliminate or reduce the project's significant effects on the environment. The City would also be required to adopt Findings of Facts and a Statement of Overriding Conditions as part of project approval.
- **Pre-zoning.** The project requires pre-zoning to Planned Development (P-D) for the ±28.4 acres within The Crossings component. Within the P-D area, a Site Utilization Plan that includes land use designations must be established. The P-D for The Crossings component would include a Site Utilization Plan land use designation consistent with Multi-Family Residential (R-4) zone district for the residential portion of the site and a land use designation consistent with the Neighborhood Commercial (C-N) zone district for the mixed use portion of the site. The project also proposes pre-zoning to Low Density Residential (R-1-10) and Urban Transition (U-T) for the ±40.2 acres in the Remainder Area.
- **General Plan Amendment.** The project requires amending the land use designations for the site from Rural Residential (RR) to Neighborhood Commercial (CN) and High-Medium Density Residential (HMD).
- **Site Utilization Plan.** The project requires a Site Utilization Plan that establishes the planned development concepts.
- **Minor Subdivision Map**. The project requires a minor subdivision map to allow for phasing of the project site.
- **Development Agreement**. Approval of a Pre-Annexation Development Agreement between the City and the project applicant.
- **Site Plan Review**. Subsequent to the annexation of the project site, Site Plan Review approval is required for all development within the established Planned Development zone.

Responsible and Permitting Agencies

Responsible and permitting agencies are state and local public agencies, other than the lead agency, that have some authority to carry out or approve a project or that are required to approve a portion of the project for which a lead agency is preparing or has prepared an EIR or Initial Study/Negative Declaration. A list of trustee, responsible and/or permitting agencies is included below. However, this list is not exhaustive and approvals from other agencies may be needed. This Draft EIR has been designed to provide information to these agencies to assist them in the permitting processes for the proposed project. While CEQA is not binding on federal agencies, and no federal agencies have been identified that would be required to take action on the project, any such agency may use the analysis in this document in order to assist with the preparation of their own analyses required by federal law.

Merced County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). Will review the project and the EIR to approve annexation of the Project site to the City of Merced.

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB). Ensures compliance with the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit for any stormwater discharge associated with construction activity. Also responsible for issuing Waste Discharge Requirements for any activities that would result in impacts to waters of the State.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD). Oversees air quality and has the authority to require mitigation fees.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Responsible for protecting natural resources including protected plant and wildlife species and for issuing a Streambed Alteration Agreement under Section 1600 of the California Fish and Game Code for any activities that would substantially alter the flow, bed, channel, or bank of streams and lakes.

2.8 REFERENCES CITED

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- City of Merced. 2015 Post Construction Standards Plan (PCSD). Effected July 1, 2015. <u>https://www.cityofmerced.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=7362</u>
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Yosemite Avenue - Gardner Avenue to Hatch Road Annexation Project









