

Merced Sun-Star

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Merced hires firm to streamline climate plan, officials say

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With the city's climate action plan in place for a year, Merced has hired a firm to develop a streamlined plan for reducing greenhouse gases that is easy for developers to use.

Merced City Council hired Rancho Cordova-based PMC Inc. at \$190,550 to develop the "programmatic climate action plan," or PCAP. It must be completed in no longer than three years.

Merced's general plan has a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels, and the PCAP is supposed to serve as a tool for new developers in town. Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere, a process tied to global warming.

Councilwoman Mary-Michal Rawling said greenhouse gas regulation is relatively new, so some developers could be left scratching their heads. The PCAP, when complete, should answer any questions.

"There's a lot of unanswered questions," she said. "So this just provides some certainty."

The state has approved a \$250,000 grant that will pay for PMC Inc.'s work. Two other companies submitted bids for the project but promised as much as 300 fewer hours than PMC, which estimated 1,436 hours for the project.

No Merced or neighboring area consultants submitted proposals, according to city documents.

Mayor Stan Thurston said the PCAP will prioritize the 150 projects in the city's climate action plan. It will also do much of the California Environmental Quality Act work that can sometimes tie up new development.

"It's part of streamlining the CEQA process for the developer," he said. "If the city has developed this plan, then (developers) can use the city plan and just check off that part of their CEQA process."

The PCAP could help Merced get more state funding and, as the process becomes easier to use, the city could see health benefits. That's a big plus in the Central Valley, known for its poor air quality and high asthma rates, said Councilman Noah Lor.

Merced County is also making moves to reduce greenhouse gases, according to Lori Flanders, Merced County Association of Governments spokeswoman. The county is working with eight others across the San Joaquin Valley to try to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5 percent by 2020 and 10 percent by 2035.

"It has to be a multicounty effort for it to bring the emissions down," Flanders said. "One jurisdiction alone isn't going to have the impact that a whole region could."

The city of Merced's PCAP could be complete in about two years, said Bill King, principal planner for the city of Merced and project manager for the climate action plan. In the meantime, city staff is forming an advisory committee and needs local input and volunteers, he said.

For more on the committee, call King at (209) 385-4768.

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