

K.I.3.
P

City of Merced

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN



Adopted 2004



MOORE IACOFANO GOLTSMAN, INC.

412 NW 13th Avenue
Portland, OR 97209

503.297.1005

www.migcom.com

Preface

This report is a long-range guide for park and recreation services in Merced. Once adopted, it will give the City direction and policies for acquiring and developing parks, open space, trails, and other recreational facilities.

As the largest city in Merced County, Merced is a regional provider of park and recreation services. However, the current service level is lower than that of most California communities of similar size. One of the main questions addressed in this master planning effort was whether the City should attempt to improve the quality of life in Merced by providing a larger and more comprehensive park and recreation program. The City has been fortunate in that its inventory of parks is good, and most existing neighborhoods are served by parks. The City also wisely pursued the development of an off-street bicycle trail system that is now widely viewed as a local treasure. However, in the absence of a plan for park acquisition and development, many of the newer parks are poorly designed, poorly located, or underdeveloped. The result is a park system that is underutilized in many cases. In addition, with the increase in new development, more parks are coming on-line, increasing the maintenance needs of the park system. In addition, the level of recreation programming in Merced is very low, and there are limited options available for residents.

As with the rest of California and the United States in general, Merced has experienced general budget constraints within recent years. In addition, the average income in Merced is lower than in Merced County and much lower than in the State of California, which means that the population has a need for affordable recreation and less disposable income to pay for it. Compounding the budgetary challenge is several years of instability in the organization of park and recreation services in Merced. The result is a disconnect between parks and recreation, a lack of recreation programming, and a park system that is underdeveloped. With the exception of several that are highly used, many of the parks require renovation and or substantial upgrades to improve their quality and usability.

This plan addresses community needs and charts a new direction for the City to take in the future. The City has the basis for an excellent park system, and the potential to develop comprehensive recreation programming. However, to provide a higher level of service to residents, the existing system needs improvement, as well as expansion to meet the expected population growth. In addition, an increased level of programming is needed to meet community recreation needs. With the current level of development in Merced, it is now time to expand the basics and go to the next level of park and recreation services.

Planning Team

City Council

Hubert "Hub" Walsh, Mayor
Joe Cortez
Michele Gabriault-Acosta (Elected, 11/2003)
Rick Osorio
David Riordan (Outgoing 11/2003)
Jim Sanders
Bill Spriggs
Stanley Thurston (Outgoing 11/2003)
Ellie Wooten (Elected 11/2003)

Recreation and Parks Commission

Darrell Cherf, Chair
John Carlos, Vice Chair
Dwight Amey
Mario Butticci
Jerry Crews
James Newhoff
Kathy Wager

Planning Commission

Walter Burr, Chair
Michele Gabriault-Acosta, Vice Chair
Wayne Eisenhart
Henry Fisher
Linda Lopez
Carl Pollard
Larry Shankland

City of Merced Staff

James Marshall, City Manager
Bill Cahill, Assistant City Manager

Alexander Hall, Parks and Community Services Director
Norene Borba, Recreation Supervisor
Eugene Drummond, Recreation Supervisor
Jake Meneley, Recreation Supervisor
Jessica Cortright, Parks and Community Services Secretary
Gordon Gray, Public Works Manager

Jack Lesch, Director of Development Services
Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager
John Franck, Senior Engineer

Consultant Team

MIG Inc.

Jerry Draggoo
Lauren Schmitt, ASLA, AICP
Sharon McNamee

Users Advisory Group

Michael Belluomini, Merced Union High School District
Lou Bertain, Apartment Owners Association
Doug Bondi, Merced Girls Softball League
Michael Carter, Merced City School District
Rob Cooper, Merced Youth Football
Claudia Corchado, Boys & Girls Club of Merced
Dr. Larry Johnson, Merced College
Joel Knox, Golden Valley Homeowners Association
Jeff Leis, Yosemite Church
Paul Lundberg, Merced Localink, Inc.
Dave Nannini, Merced Youth Sports Complex
Pete Padilla, Merced Youth Baseball
Tom Siverly, Merced Youth Soccer Association
Loretta Spence, Merced Resident
Chris Tafoya, The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Marjie Treanor, Neighborhood Watch
Peggy Vejar, Merced County Park & Recreation Department

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

SECTION 1 - Introduction

1.1	Introduction to the Project	1-1
1.2	Public Involvement	1-3
1.3	Planning Process	1-4

SECTION 2 – Community Profile

2.1	Regional Context	2-1
2.2	Planning Area	2-2
2.3	Natural Resources	2-3
2.4	Climate	2-5
2.5	Demographic Characteristics	2-5
2.6	Land Use	2-7
2.7	Population Projections	2-7
2.8	U.C. Merced	2-8

SECTION 3 – Existing Recreation Resources

3.1	Introduction	3-1
3.2	Park Land Definitions	3-7
3.3	City of Merced Park and Recreation Areas	3-8
3.4	Merced County Resources	3-10
3.5	School and College Facilities	3-11
3.6	Private Facilities	3-12
3.7	Facility Definitions	3-12
3.8	Summary of Facilities	3-13

SECTION 4 – Community Input Summary

4.1	Introduction	4-1
4.2	Public Workshop Summary	4-1
4.3	Youth Workshop Summary	4-2
4.4	Stakeholder Interviews	4-2

SECTION 5 – Recreation Needs Assessment Summary

5.1	Introduction	5-1
5.2	Parkland Needs	5-1
5.3	Recreational Facility Needs	5-8
5.4	Specialized Facilities Needs	5-11
5.5	Recreation Program Needs	5-12

SECTION 6 – Park and Facility Recommendations

6.1	Introduction	6-1
6.2	Facility Plan	6-1
6.3	Trail Recommendations	6-48
6.4	Indoor Recreation Facilities	6-51
6.5	Outdoor Sports Facilities	6-55
6.6	Specialized Recreation Facilities	6-60
6.7	Applegate Zoo	6-63

SECTION 7 – Management, Maintenance, and Program Recommendations

7.1	Introduction	7-1
7.2	Management	7-1
7.3	Recreation Programs	7-6
7.4	Fees and Charges	7-8
7.5	Maintenance	7-11
7.6	Street Beautification	7-14
7.7	Park Design	7-15
7.8	Public Restrooms	7-16

SECTION 8 - Implementation

8.1	Introduction	8-1
8.2	Potential Funding Sources	8-1
8.3	Project Costs	8-3
8.4	Financing Strategy	8-5
8.5	Partnerships	8-9
8.6	Financing Parks Maintenance	8-10

MAPS

Existing Park Resources	3-5
Neighborhood Park Service Areas	5-3
Community Park Service Areas	5-5
Park Layout Plan	6-5

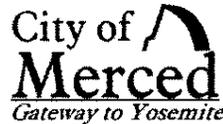
APPENDICES

Appendix A – Community Profile (under separate cover)

Appendix B – Existing Resources (under separate cover)

Appendix C – Community Input Summary (under separate cover)

Appendix D – Needs Assessment (under separate cover)



PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

As the largest city in Merced County, Merced is a regional provider of park and recreation services. However, the current service level is lower than that of most California communities of similar size. One of the main questions addressed in this master planning effort was whether the City should attempt to improve the quality of life in Merced by providing a larger and more comprehensive park and recreation program.

The City has been fortunate in that its inventory of parks is good, and most existing neighborhoods are served by parks. The City also wisely pursued the development of an off-street bicycle trail system that is now widely viewed as a local treasure. However, in the absence of a plan for park acquisition and development, many of the newer parks are poorly designed, poorly located, or underdeveloped. The result is a park system that is underutilized in many cases. In addition, with the increase in new development, more parks are coming on-line, increasing the maintenance needs of the park system. In addition, the level of recreation programming (both public and private) in Merced is very low, and there are limited options available for residents.

This plan addresses community needs and charts a new direction for the City to take in the future. The City has the basis for an excellent park system, and the potential to develop comprehensive recreation programming. However, to provide a higher level of service to residents, the existing system needs improvement, as well as expansion to meet the expected population growth. In addition, an increased level of programming is needed to meet community recreation needs. With the current level of development in Merced, it is now time to expand the basics and go to the next level of park and recreation services.

EXISTING RESOURCES

The Merced park system consists of both active and passive recreational areas, including a variety of park types, as well as an extensive off-street bicycle path system. The City of Merced has approximately 187 acres of active parkland, more than 120 acres of linear parkland encompassing the stream corridors where the bike paths are located, and more than 29 acres of undeveloped parkland.

The bike trail system is contained in 4 creek corridors, and currently total 13.11 miles. Expansions to this system are planned, and funding is in place for some of them.

In Merced, the inventory of recreation facilities such as sports fields used by the public is relatively low, and the City itself provides only a few facilities. There are no gymnasiums owned by the City, except the McCombs Youth Center which is operated by the Boys and Girls Club. The City relies heavily on the local school districts for athletic fields and gymnasiums. The following facilities are available for public use in Merced:

- 23 youth softball/baseball fields (3 lighted);
- 5 adult softball fields (all lighted);
- 13 soccer fields (does not include open turf areas);
- 6 tennis courts; and
- 5,450 s.f. of pool space.

Other recreational sites in the planning area owned by public agencies include the Merced County Fairgrounds (owned by the State of California), Courthouse Park, and Flanagan Park, (both owned by Merced County). Lake Yosemite, also owned by Merced County, is located to the northeast of the planning area and is adjacent to the U.C. Merced campus.

COMMUNITY INPUT

The Park and Open Space Master Planning process incorporated community input in several ways.

These include:

- A public workshop
- A youth workshop
- Stakeholder interviews

A public workshop was held on the evening of June 10, 2003 in the Sam Pipes Room at the Merced Civic Center. Key findings are summarized below.

- The top three priorities identified by participants were:
 - City-wide trail system expansions
 - Outdoor sport field complex
 - More aquatic facilities (Pools and water playgrounds)
- Participants seemed to value the parks in the City and see them as an important component of quality of life. The trail system was cited as a major success by many.
- Generally, there appeared to be interest in the City's providing additional recreation programs and developing more partnerships, especially with the school districts.
- There was support for a mix of park facilities, with neighborhood parks within walking distance of most citizens.

On June 10, 2003, a noontime workshop for youth was held at McCombs Youth Center. Approximately twenty youth ranging from ages 7 to 18 were in attendance, with the majority of the group ages 10 and 11.

Participants identified swimming and waterslides; very active amusements such as skate parks; and concessions in parks their top activities and facilities to include in parks. Other input received through the youth workshop included a need to provide park facilities that accommodate people with disabilities.

In May, 2003, telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders identified by the City of Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan project team. Key findings were:

- There is a perception of crime in the parks, and on the bike paths. The City needs to address

this, such as through increased policing or volunteer foot patrols.

- There is a lack of indoor recreation space. There is a need for gyms, classrooms, indoor meeting places, community rooms, and similar indoor spaces.
- The bike trail system is wonderful and should be expanded, especially toward U.C. Merced and Lake Yosemite.
- There should be parks within walking distance of most neighborhoods.
- There is a need for more programming, especially for youth.

PARK LAND AND FACILITY NEEDS

- It is recommended the City consider reducing its inventory of mini-parks because of the low use of these parks and the overlapping service areas.
- Based on the recommended service level, 8 additional neighborhood park sites are needed to serve the current city limits, and an additional 13 are needed to serve the planning area at build-out. However, 9 sites are already available or dedicated to park use.
- The majority of the current Merced city limits are served by the existing community and large urban parks. To provide community park service to the entire planning area, 4 additional community or large urban parks will be needed.
- In addition to other park land needs, land is needed for the following special use facilities: 2 youth centers, 2 recreation centers, and additional athletic complexes.
- There are opportunities to develop trails along linear corridors such as the Cottonwood Creek corridor and the northern portion of the Fahrens Creek corridor. In order to build out the City of Merced's off-street bikeway network as planned, approximately 65 acres of linear park land containing approximately 10.8 miles of trail are needed.
- Based on the recommended demand standard, 1 additional adult softball field is needed to serve current demand and a total of 6 additional fields would be required at build-out.
- It is recommended the city maintain about the current level of service for youth baseball and

softball fields. The supply and demand analysis showed that current needs can be served by the existing field inventory. A total of 17 additional fields will be needed to serve the City at build-out.

- Based on the recommended demand standard, there is a shortage of 3 soccer fields at this time. This will be reduced to a shortage of 2 fields once the new field at Joe Herb Park is complete. At build-out, a total of 17 additional soccer fields will be needed.
- Based on the supply and demand analysis, there is a need for additional gymnasium space. The recommended demand standard indicates a current need for 2 courts, with a need for the equivalent of a total of 11 courts at build-out.
- There is a need for additional pool space. Despite the need, this plan does not identify a pool improvement due to the cost.

FACILITY PLAN

The Master Plan includes a facility plan that sets forth recommendations for existing parks, proposed new parks, and new facilities. Key points of the facility plan are summarized below:

- Due to their size, maintenance costs, and limited recreational value, additional mini-parks are not recommended. In addition, the City should consider reducing its current inventory of this park type by either selling some sites or acquiring additional land to make them into neighborhood parks.
- Improvements are proposed to most of the City's neighborhood parks, with major improvements proposed for Burbank Park.
- Land is available for eight new neighborhood parks, but the parks need to be designed and developed.
- Thirteen new neighborhood parks will require land acquisition, as well as planning and park development.
- Upgrades are proposed to the City's existing community and large urban parks, including McNamara, Joe Herb, and Applegate. Development of Fahrens Park as per the master plan is proposed.
- Four new community parks are proposed, including a 40 acre site in south Merced and three 20 acre sites in north Merced. These sites are intended to serve new growth in the community.

- Two new indoor recreation centers and two new youth centers are proposed.
- A second adult softball complex is proposed, preferably to be located in north Merced.
- A soccer complex is proposed for inclusion in the new community park in south Merced, site CP-42. This site should be about 20 acres in size, and should include lights on at least a portion of the fields.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- The City should work with local leagues and any new leagues that may form to establish a Sports Council that will develop policies for field scheduling and other field sports-related topics. This group should include representatives from all field sports, and should meet regularly (at least quarterly).
- The City should consider moving the Zoo from Applegate Park to another site in the long term.
- Improve park security. In addition to park design improvements, this can be accomplished by regular patrol of bike paths and parks by police bike patrols, volunteer Explorers, or paid park rangers.
- Increase recreation programs and classes. Target areas include more programs for adults, fitness programs, youth at-risk programs, arts and crafts, special one day events, cultural events, day camps, sports instructional programs, indoor instruction and special interest classes. Another potential program area is additional recreational sports, especially for youth.
- Implement a computerized program registration program, preferably one that allows registration via the internet, to increase the level of customer service.
- Establish cost recovery goals for each program area. Track revenues and expenditures for each program area so that cost recovery can be evaluated routinely.
- Improve the level of park design.
- Adopt specific restroom policies about when and where restrooms will be provided, and what type they will be. The policies will help reduce vandalism and improve safety in park restrooms.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The total cost to develop the parks and facilities identified in the plan is about \$74 million, a number that seems daunting. However, it is important to remember that the City is planning to almost double in size in the next twenty-five years. About \$13 million of that figure is for land acquisition, some of which will be required by new development. Also, more than \$30 million is for new park development, most of which is needed to accommodate new development. Impact fees and land dedications should provide for the development of parks required to serve new development.

This plan is intended to be a twenty to twenty-five year document. A short-term six year capital improvement plan is proposed for initial implementation of the plan. It is anticipated that work on the park system would continue beyond the initial 6 year strategy, and that successive CIPs would continue to be prepared and updated.

With the degree of new development planned for Merced, there are a number of uncertainties about timing of new park development (which will occur with housing development) and the level of funding from park impact fees. A six year time frame is a reasonably foreseeable future for capital project planning, and is the basis for the financing strategy.

While there are many combinations of specific financing sources to implement the plan, there are two general approaches to funding park improvements: a pay-as-you-go approach based on availability of grants and local funding and a more aggressive approach based on a voter-supported tax measure paying for selected improvements.

It is recommended that Merced pursue the “pay as you go” approach. If the budget situation and the economic climate stabilizes in the next few years, the City should evaluate whether there is community interest in more park and recreation improvements and facilities, and consider whether to pursue tax-supported financing.

Pay As You Go Financing Approach:

Under this option, capital projects will be funded through existing funding mechanisms such as the General Fund, Park Reserve Fund, CDBG funds, Proposition 40 Fund Allocations, private

donations, and grants. New parks will mainly be provided in areas undergoing development, and will be funded based on the availability of impact fees and land dedications.

Note that this option does not include the possibility of developers building parks, an option that the City has pursued with some success in the past. The City will pursue the developers building the proposed new parks, reducing projected development costs approximately 20% for each park.

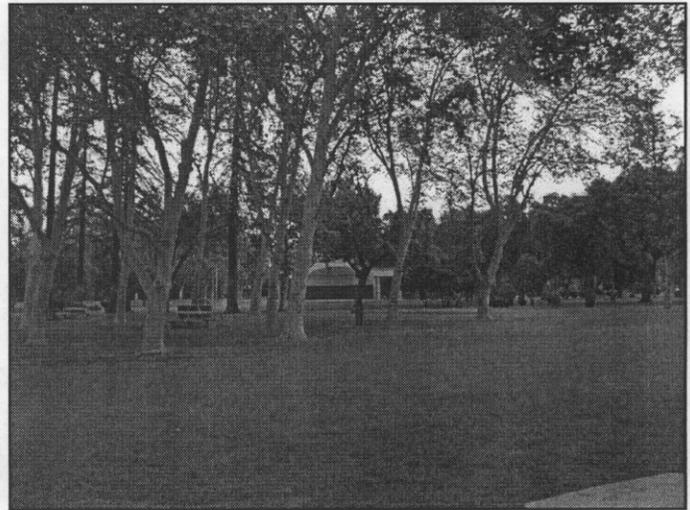
Based on the current funding levels, about \$1,873,000 is generated annually from the Park & Recreation Fund and about \$1,018,563 is generated annually from the Park Reserve Fund/PFFP. These funds can be used for park capital expenditures. The “pay as you go” option assumes revenue from impact fees at the current level of development as well as continued use of CDBG funds for some park improvements. Over a six year period, about \$21,036,734 could be used for capital projects, including the funds currently contained in the Park Reserve Fund.

**Proposed 6 Year CIP
Pay As You Go Financing Approach**

Project Name	Opinion of Probable Cost	Comment
Charles Richard Drew Park	\$147,000	Upgrade
William Lloyd Garrison Park	\$132,087	Partial Upgrade
Santa Fe Strip N'hood Park	\$581,500	Development
Flanagan Park	\$300,000	Upgrade
Alfarata Ranch	\$990,000	Development
Yosemite Gateway	\$1,190,625	Development
New Neighborhood Park	\$1,345,000	Acquisition/Dev.
New Neighborhood Park	\$1,345,000	Acquisition/Dev.
New Neighborhood Park	\$1,345,000	Acquisition/Dev.
Ada Givens Park	\$270,000	Upgrade
McNamara Park	\$340,000	Upgrade
Fahrens Park	\$940,000	Development
New Community Park	\$5,000,000	Acquisition/Phase I Dev.
New Community Park	\$5,290,000	Acquisition/Dev.
New Community Park	\$1,400,000	Acquisition
Applegate Park	\$20,000	Volleyball, Top Spin Courts
Bikeway Development/Improvements	\$400,000	Development

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California



*Photo: Merced Open Air Theater, Applegate Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 1: Introduction

- *Introductory Statement*
- *Report Organization*
- *Public Involvement*
- *Planning Process*

1.1 Introduction to the Project

Report Organization

This report summarizes the findings and conclusions for providing park and recreation services in the City of Merced. The Plan will provide policies for improving and maintaining the existing park system; acquiring land for proposed park, recreation and open space areas; and an approach for financing future improvements. The proposed short-term strategy (six years) for funding these improvements is identified in Section 8, Implementation.

The Plan also includes sections that identifies and evaluates the existing system; assesses the need for additional park land, open space and specialized facilities; establishes criteria and standards for site selection, design, and management of the various areas; and recommends an approach to funding acquisition, development and maintenance of facilities.

Due to the large amount of information in the Plan, much of the technical data is located in appendices found at the back of the document. The main report is divided into the following sections:

Section 1 - Introduction: Provides an overview of the document organization, opportunities for public involvement and the planning process.

Section 2 – Community Profile: Discusses the community profile that provides the framework for the Plan. This includes a discussion of the natural resources, political boundaries and the population profile.

Section 3 – Existing Resources: Inventories and analyzes the park system. This section categorizes the parks by type.

Section 4 – Community Input Summary: Provides a summary of the community workshop meeting, youth meeting, and stakeholder interviews.

Section 5 – Needs Assessment Summary: Provides an overview of the methodology and results of the park, open space and facility needs assessment process.

Section 6 – Park and Facility Recommendations: Provides recommendations and policies for the acquisition and development of future park sites as well as improvements to existing parks and facilities. It also addresses recommendations for the development of major specialized facilities.

Section 7– Management, Maintenance, and Program Recommendations: Provides recommendations on organization, operations, and maintenance and suggests operational procedures to better manage the park and recreation program in Merced.

Section 8 - Implementation: Provides a list of projects and actions necessary to implement the plan, identifies project priorities and potential funding sources.

Appendix A - Community Profile: Discusses community profile information that influences the demand and need for park and recreation services. This includes demographic and land use information.

Appendix B - Existing Resources: Includes an inventory of existing park, open space and recreational areas in the Merced area. This includes lands and facilities owned by the City of Merced as well as Merced County, Merced College, and the local school districts.

Appendix C – Community Input Summary: Provides a summary of the public workshop, the youth workshop, and the stakeholder interviews.

Appendix D – Needs Assessment: Provides an analysis of the park, open space and facility needs in Merced.

Background Reports

In addition to the information found in this report, a series of background reports were prepared during the study process. These documents included:

- Discussion Paper #1 Community Profile
- Discussion Paper #2 Existing Resources
- Discussion Paper #3 Public Input Results
- Discussion Paper #4 Needs Assessment

The purpose of providing these “interim-planning reports” was to provide background information during the study and provide a foundation for future decision-making.

1.2 Public Involvement

In order to reflect the views of the community and build consensus support for the plan, public participation was an integral part of the planning process. Public involvement was achieved through the following methods:

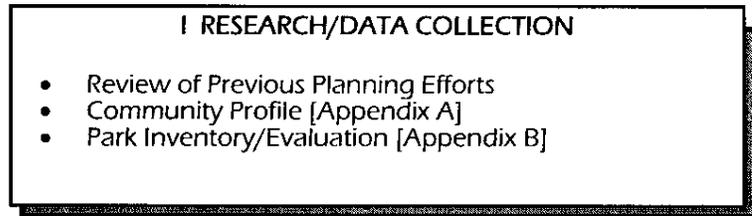
- **Community Workshop Meeting** – This was an advertised meeting open to the general public. The meeting was structured to allow participants an opportunity to voice their personal opinions about park and recreation needs in Merced.
- **Stakeholder Interviews** – A list of stakeholders representing a variety of interests was contacted, and phone interviews were conducted with willing participants
- **Youth Workshop Meeting** – A workshop was held with youth at the Boys and Girls Club, with the intent of providing an opportunity for youth to express their thoughts about park and recreation needs.
- **Contacts with User Groups** – Organized sports group representatives were contacted to obtain information about organized sports activities in Merced.
- **Users Advisory Group** – City Council identified a list of citizens and agency representatives to participate in the planning process. This group was convened to provide input during the planning process.

The various methods focused on activities that solicited input and public involvement from a variety of interest groups.

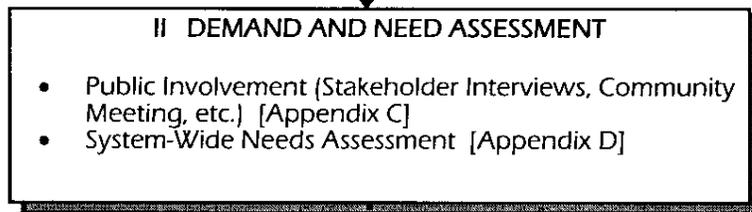
1.3 Planning Process

The planning process was divided into four basic phases. These are outlined below.

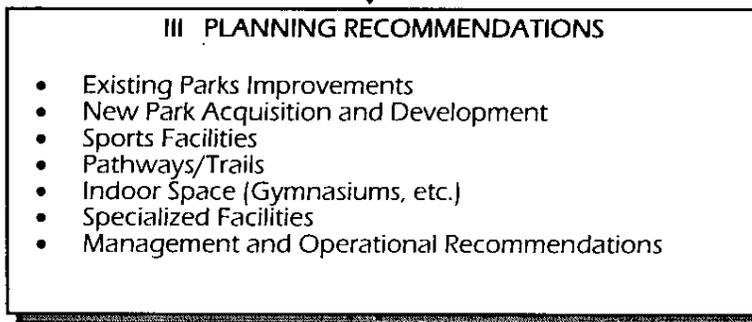
Phase 1
Research



Phase 2
Assessment



Phase 3
Recommendations



Phase 4
Implementation

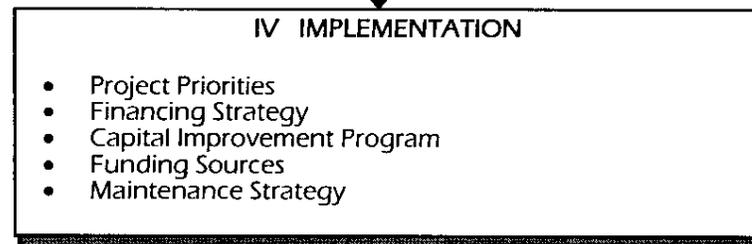
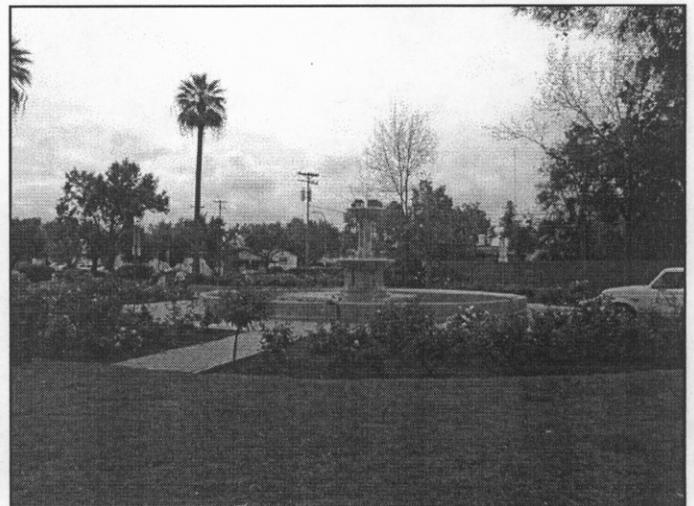


FIGURE 1.1
Planning Process

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California



*Photo: Laura Fountain at Applegate Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 2: Community Profile

- *Regional Context*
- *Planning Area*
- *Natural Resources*
- *Climate*
- *Demographic Characteristics*
- *Land Use*
- *Population Projections*
- *U.C. Merced*

2.1 Regional Context

The City of Merced is located in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. It is the county seat of Merced County, and is a major commercial and retail center for the surrounding area. Merced County is one of the most significant agricultural producers in the State.

Highway 140 provides access to Yosemite National Park from Merced, and Merced serves as a gateway to Yosemite. Highway 99 passes through the City, splitting it just south of downtown. Highway 99 was formerly the major north-south state highway, until it was replaced by Interstate 5, which is located to further to west. Highway 59 is another major route, located on the west side of town. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (B.N.S.F.) and Southern Pacific (S.P.) railways pass through town. Both carry freight, and Amtrak service is provided on the B.N. S.F. line. There is fairly frequent freight traffic on these rail lines, which pass through downtown. The Merced Municipal Airport is a small airport with commercial and freight air service. Airlines serving the Merced airport provide access to other hubs, but few direct flights to other destinations. A greater variety of commercial flights are available at the Fresno and Sacramento Airports. The former Castle Air Force Base is located to the north and is being converted to civilian use.

Listed below are travel distances from Merced to various destinations.

Fresno	45 Miles
San Jose	115 Miles
Sacramento	118 Miles
San Francisco	131 Miles
Reno	285 Miles
Los Angeles	461 Miles



FIGURE 2.1
Regional Location

2.2 Planning Area

The planning area for this study is the area referred to as Merced's SUDP (Specific Urban Development Plan) boundary. This is the area anticipated for future urban growth. The SUDP boundary includes all of the incorporated areas of Merced, as well as planned urban development areas that will likely be annexed in the future. Figure 1.2 on the next page shows the planning area boundary.

In general, the planning area extends to Thornton Road to the west, a few miles north of Bellevue Road, Lake Road to the east, and Mission Avenue to the south. The planning area measures approximately 33.1 square miles in size and includes roughly 21,159 acres.

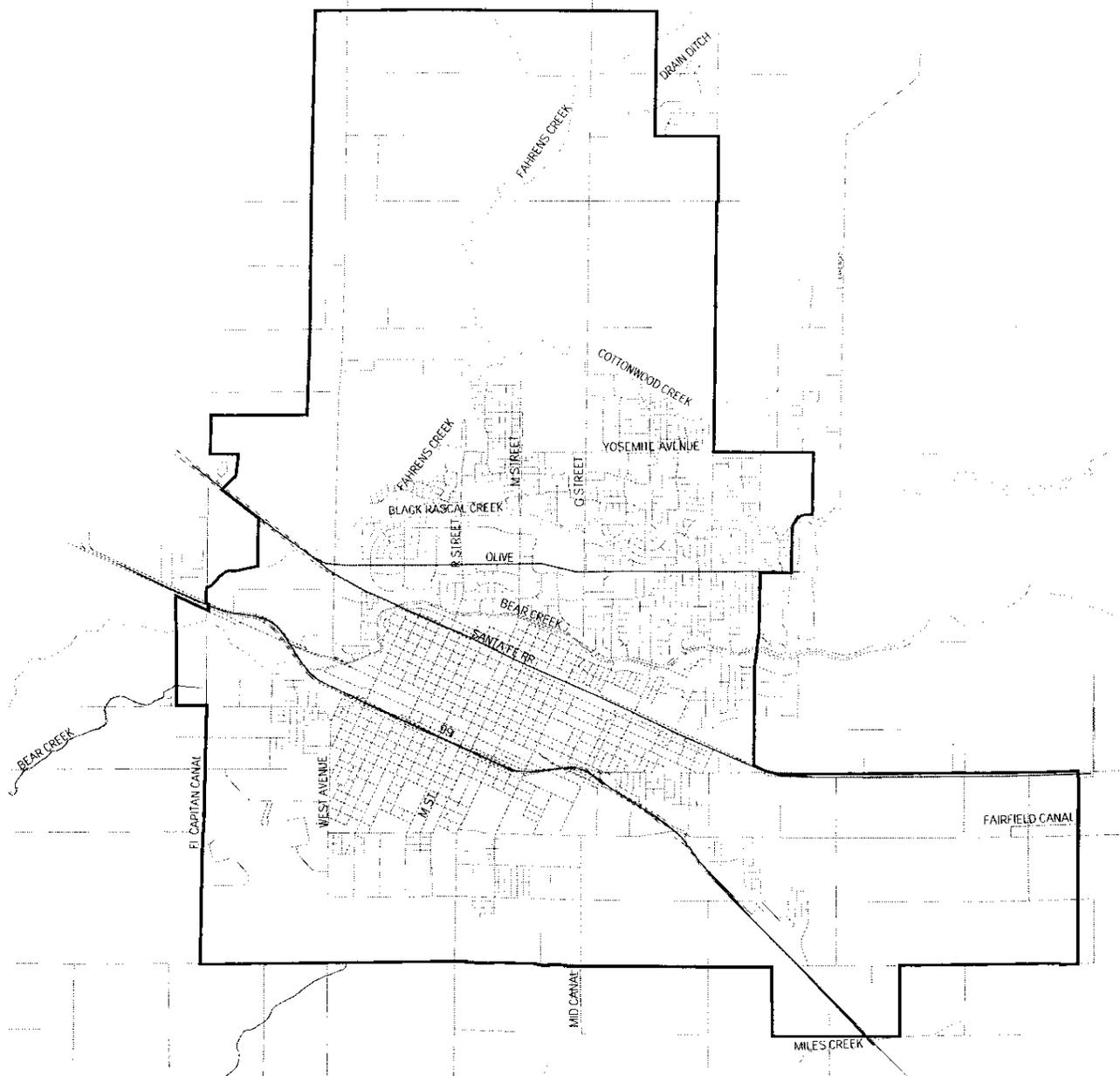


FIGURE 2.2
Planning Area Map

2.3 Natural Resources

The natural resources in the Merced area are important for a variety of reasons. The topography/terrain, the existence of water features and drainage corridors, location of floodplain/floodway and the presence of wetlands all impact the potential for development. While these lands are considered environmentally sensitive and have limited development potential, they can be conducive to park, open space, and recreation uses. Aside from providing potential recreation functions, the protection of these areas has a number of other benefits such as protecting unique landforms, maintaining aquifer recharge areas and preserving the riparian and vegetative cover. The natural features that influence the provision of park, recreation and open space areas are listed below:

Topography/Terrain

The terrain in the Central Valley is generally level. For the most part, the terrain in Merced is also relatively level and reflects the nature of the floodplains found throughout the City. The northern portion of the City has gently rolling terrain, while the southern portion, most of which is floodplain, is generally flat. As a result, recreational facilities are easily adapted to the existing topography and terrain and provide easy accessibility for both active and passive recreational activities. Outside of the City, the landscape is dominated by agricultural uses.

Rivers, Streams and Drainage ways

Rivers, streams and drainage way areas are important because of their ability to provide habitat corridors for fish and wildlife, preserve riparian vegetation and carry storm water runoff. In addition to their functional and aesthetic characteristics, the drainage ways can also serve as conduits for trails.

The City of Merced is located within the San Joaquin/Merced River drainage basin. The four most significant creeks in Merced are Bear Creek, Black Rascal Creek, Fahrens Creek, and Cottonwood Creek. All of these water features are located in the northern portion of the City. Bear Creek crosses through Merced just north of downtown. Black Rascal Creek is located further to the north, and Fahrens Creek drains into Black Rascal Creek. Cottonwood Creek also passes through the City, near the current northern city limits. In addition, irrigation laterals under the jurisdiction of Merced Irrigation District crisscross the city. The laterals are mostly aboveground canals. In the future, these may be piped and placed underground.

Merced's extensive bike trail system is located along the creek corridors, and many of the parks in the northern portion of the City are located adjacent to the creeks. There are several opportunities to expand these areas and provide linear open space and trail opportunities along the creeks, irrigation laterals, and beyond.

Lake Yosemite is located about 3 miles to the northeast of the City, and is adjacent to the new U.C. Merced campus currently under construction.

Floodway/Floodplains

Floodplain areas are seasonally inundated by rivers, streams, creeks, canals, and other areas prone to this. These areas are delineated in terms of their frequency of flooding, such as 100-year and 500-year floodplains. The floodway is an area within the floodplain that includes that channel and any area below the ordinary high water level. These areas have been identified and mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Floodways and floodplains are important because of their hazard potential and their ability to store floodwater. Because lands within floodways are subject to flooding, development is usually prohibited and/or heavily regulated. However, these areas can be used as a resource for recreation, in the form of open space, sport fields and scenic areas. These types of facilities do not typically interfere with the flow of water and are not significantly impacted by seasonal flooding. Floodplains also are subject to restrictions, depending on the type of development proposed.

Merced is subject to flooding. About 80% of the current city limits is located within the 100-year floodplain. As a result, flood control basins are required for new development and are located throughout the City. Most of these are smaller basins built as part of residential development projects. Several of the City's parks are located in the basins, and Bob Carpenter Park is an example of a typical basin park. The largest flood control basin in Merced is a newly constructed facility near Fahrens Park.

Wetlands

Wetland areas have surface or ground water that supports vegetation typically for life in saturated (hydric) soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. These types of areas are an important feature because of their ability to detain and absorb storm water, recharge groundwater, improve water quality and provide habitat.

For the purposes of parks and recreation, wetlands are important for a number of reasons. The identification of wet areas creates a constraint to development; meaning lands are not conducive to construction of housing, commercial, or industrial. This means the areas can be used as a resource for recreation, in the form of open space, interpretive areas, or scenic areas.

The northern portions of the planning area contain seasonal wetlands and vernal pools that provide potential habitat for species of wildlife listed as threatened or endangered.

2.4 Climate

Winters in the Merced area are mild and humid, and summers are hot and dry. Weather in the San Joaquin Valley is strongly influenced by the surrounding mountain ranges. The Coast Range to the west prevents air circulation, and traps air in the Valley during the winter months. The Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east prevent cold air from circulating into the valley, protecting it from cold winters. The presence of the mountains contributes to the Tule fogs which can blanket the valley in the winter months.

Merced averages about 12 inches of precipitation per year, with the majority occurring in the winter months. There is very little precipitation in the summer, and summers tend to be quite hot. Average January temperature is 45 degrees, and average July temperature is 78.4 degrees. Average high temperature in July is 96.8 degrees, and in August is 95.2 degrees.

From the perspective of providing park and recreation services, the fog and precipitation make outdoor recreation unpleasant in Merced during certain times of the year, even though Merced's winters are fairly mild. During the winter months, indoor facilities such as gymnasiums may be desirable to provide a place for active recreation activities and programs such as basketball and volleyball. Indoor meeting rooms and classrooms can provide space for instructional classes and arts/crafts. During the warmer and dryer months, outdoor facilities provide space for organized sports, swimming, playground activities and picnicking during the hot summer weather. Due to the hot weather, shade will be an important consideration in Merced's parks.

2.5 Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics are important attributes because they can influence recreational interests and participation. Factors such as age and income significantly affect the level and individual ability to pursue recreational activities. To a lesser extent, employment, education and ethnicity also play a role. The demographic information for the City of Merced has been derived from the 2000 US Census and from Merced Council of Governments (MCOG) projections.

Population Trends

Merced is the largest city in Merced County, with an estimated 2003 population of 67,610. According to the US Census, the city's 2000 population was placed at 63,893. This is a 13.6% increase from the 1990 population of 56,216. During the same time period, Merced County grew 18.0% and the State of California grew 25.0%.

Table 2.1
Population Growth 1990-2003
City of Merced, Merced County and California

Year	City of Merced	Percent Increase	Merced County	Percent Increase	State of California	Percent Increase
1990	56,216	--	178,403	--	23,792,000	--
2000	63,893	13.6%	210,554	18.0%	29,760,021	25.0%
2003	67,610	5.8%	225,100	6.9%	35,591,000	19.6%

Source: US Census Bureau

As Table 2.1 indicates, population in the City of Merced has been increasing at a steady rate, but more slowly than the County or the State of California.

A review of age data revealed that the City of Merced has a higher percentage of residents under the age of 18 than statewide in California, and the median age is lower. In general, based on the age distribution, Merced can be characterized as a community with a high number of young adults with children.

Data on income levels also provide indicators for recreation trends. In general, the higher income groups tend to be more active and participate in the more expensive types of activities. Income levels within Merced are slightly lower than countywide in Merced County, and much lower than statewide in California.

An analysis of race and ethnic background data revealed that the ethnic composition of Merced has some similarities to that of the State of California, with several differences. Ethnicity can be important from a recreation participation standpoint, because some ethnic groups have a higher participation level in specific types of recreational activities, which could increase the demand for certain types of facilities. Merced has a lower percentage of White residents than the State of California. In addition, compared to California overall, Merced maintains a higher proportion of residents in the "Other" category of ethnic groups, and a slightly higher percentage of residents who described themselves as "Two or more races". The percentage of the population in the Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander groups is similar to the percentages for California. In Merced, 41.4% of the population is Hispanic or Latino, compared to 32.4% statewide. Generally, Merced has a more diverse population than typical in the State of California.

Education level can be important from a recreation participation standpoint for several reasons. Lower education levels are generally associated with lower income levels, which means families may have less income available for non-essentials, especially higher cost recreation activities such as golf or skiing. In addition, marketing and outreach materials will need to be geared toward the audience to ensure that they are accessible to everyone in the community. In Merced, 31.5% of the population has not completed high school, a much higher percentage than statewide in California. Just over 18% has less than a 9th grade education level. Merced's percentage of the population with Bachelor's degrees and Graduate or professional degrees is about half of the percentages statewide in California. The lower education levels in Merced are consistent with the lower income levels.

2.6 Land Use

Land use plays an important role in the location, distribution and availability of park and recreational facilities. The diversity of land uses in the Merced planning area makes it necessary to evaluate the most effective means of meeting the park and open space needs for each major category. Residential areas will need parks to fulfill recreation needs of area residents. Industrial areas may require parks that focus on use during the day, or where people will travel to at night. Commercial areas are more likely to require plazas and smaller sized places for passive recreation. In addition, land use helps to identify areas where development is at a high density.

Table 2.2
Breakdown of Lands By Land Use Type,
2015 General Plan SUDP
City of Merced

Land Use Type	Total Acres
Residential, combined designations	11,670
Commercial, combined designations	1,660
Office/Public, combined	1,100
Industrial, includes Reserve	2,920
Business Park, includes Reserve	900
Open Space / Parks	1,490 ¹
Schools	800

¹ In the General Plan, active park space, creeks, and open space are combined into a single land use category. As of 2003, the City had 337 acres of parkland, linear parks, and undeveloped parkland in its inventory.

According to the Merced 2015 General Plan, the total land area within the SUDP is 20,540 acres. More than half the land (56.8%) is designated for residential uses.

Since the preparation of the General Plan, the SUDP has been expanded slightly on the southeast corner of town, and now includes approximately 21,159 acres.

There are about 14,312 acres within the current Merced city limits. It is anticipated that the SUDP will accommodate the City's future growth, and the all of the SUDP will someday be annexed in the city. Based on the land available within the Merced SUDP, buildout of the City's General Plan is not expected until after 2025.

2.7 Population Projections

Population growth primarily occurs through two means: 1) annexation and 2) in-migration and infill. Both sources are particularly critical in identifying new demand for park and recreation services. Shown in Table 2.3 are the population projections for the Merced SUDP through the year 2025. These were adopted in July 2000 by the Merced County Association of Governments.

Table 2.3
Population Projections
City of Merced

Year	Population, Merced SUDP
1990	60,900
2000	70,544
2005	81,263
2010	92,014
2015	100,706
2020	108,505
2025	115,346

A number of residential developments have been approved in the City of Merced and its SUDP. These developments will provide between 12,300 and 14,384 new units of housing in Merced, a mix of single family, attached, and multi-family developments. Most of these developments have plans that include provisions for park lands to serve the residential neighborhoods.

Table 2.4
Major Planned Developments, March 2003
City of Merced

Development	Units
Bellevue Ranch	4,843 – 6,648
Weaver	807
Fahrens Park Specific Plan	895
Northeast Yosemite Specific Plan	2,739
Fahrens Creek II	920
Fahrens Creek North	1,282
Hunt Family Annexation	814-1,093
Total	12,300 – 14,384

2.8 U. C. Merced

The opening of the University of California Merced campus could have major land use impacts on Merced. The Merced site was selected in 1995, after an extensive site selection process that began with consideration of 80 different sites throughout the San Joaquin Valley. The land for the campus was a former ranch and was donated to the University of California system by the Virginia Smith Trust.

The campus will be located on Lake Road, near Lake Yosemite, and includes the former Merced Hills Golf Club. The campus was originally planned to be located on a different portion of the Trust

property, but was moved to the Lake Road location due to the presence of environmentally sensitive vernal pools on the original location. The campus will include a total of approximately 2,000 acres: 910 acres will be used for college facilities (academics, athletics, housing, and parking); 340 acres will be reserved for future growth; and the remaining 750 acres will become a natural preserve of vernal pool habitat. In partnership with the Nature Conservancy, a conservation easement was established on an additional 5,030 acres to protect vernal pool / grasslands habitat.

Construction of the campus is underway, and U.C. Merced is expected to open with 1,000 students in Autumn 2005. At the opening of campus, 500 faculty and staff are anticipated. At build out in 2030, the campus population is expected to grow to 25,000 students and 6,248 faculty and staff.

Generally, college students tend not to use off-campus recreation facilities and instead rely on the campus gymnasiums, fields, and other athletic facilities for recreation activities. However, according to U.C. Merced's own Environmental Impact Report, the establishment of a large institution such as a major research university campus is known to result in substantial growth in a region's population and employment. Because of population growth, there could be a need for increased recreation facilities and services in Merced.

When U.C. Merced opens in 2005, it will have recreation and athletic facilities to support the initial years of campus growth. By 2007/08, additional sports fields will be constructed. The University will establish a NCAA Division I sports program and the facilities to support it. These facilities could offer new recreation opportunities for Merced citizens, if it is possible to develop a use agreement.

This page left intentionally blank.

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California

This page is left intentionally blank.



*Photo: Playground at Fahrens Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 3: Existing Recreation Resources

- *Introduction*
- *Park Land Definitions*
- *City of Merced Park and Recreation Areas*
- *Merced County Resources*
- *School and College Facilities*
- *Private Facilities*
- *Facility Definitions*
- *Summary of Facilities*

3.1 Introduction

Overview of Merced's Park System

Currently, the City of Merced is the primary provider of parks and recreational facilities in the Merced area. Other agencies such as Merced County provide some recreational opportunities but to a much lesser extent. In addition to the City, the Merced City School District (MCSD) is a major provider of sport facilities in the area. MCSD and the City of Merced have an excellent collaborative relationship and a history of working together. There is a formal compact between MCSD and the City that pledges cooperation into the future. The City also collaborates with the Merced Union High School District (MUHSD), but uses these fields to a lesser degree due to the more extensive athletic programs offered at the high school level. Merced's Parks and Community Services Department is responsible for scheduling many school athletic fields after school hours.

The Merced park system consists of both active and passive recreational areas, including a variety of park types, as well as an extensive off-street bicycle path system. The City of Merced has approximately 187 acres of active parkland, more than 120 acres of linear parkland encompassing the stream corridors where the bike paths are located, and more than 29 acres of undeveloped parkland.

Other recreational sites in the planning area owned by public agencies include the Merced County Fairgrounds (owned by the State of California), Courthouse Park, and Flanagan Park, (both owned by Merced County). Lake Yosemite, also owned by Merced County, is located to the northeast of the planning area and is adjacent to the U.C. Merced campus.

As part of the Master Plan process, MIG reviewed the parks comprising Merced's park system and have identified positive features of the park system as well as shortcomings. The findings are summarized below.

Positive Features:

- There are a variety of park types in Merced's park system, and the system provides a range of park experiences for Merced's citizens.
- Parks are distributed geographically throughout Merced, serving most of the community.
- The facilities in the City's parks are generally in good condition.
- Overall, the parks are well-maintained.
- The trail system provides links to parks.

Shortcomings:

- Many of the parks are very basic, and lack amenities typically found in city parks such as bike racks and water fountains.
- There is a lack of internal pathways in many of the parks.
- A comprehensive signage program is needed.
- There is a lack of imagination and innovation in the design of many of the parks. Facilities in some parks were developed without the benefit of master planning, which has led to piecemeal design.
- Newer parks lack adequate trees and shade, even when taking into account the fact that the trees are not yet mature.

Park, Recreation, and Open Space Areas

- The parks were not designed with maintenance in mind. For example, most of the parks lack maintenance saving devices such as mowing strips along fence lines, playground curbing, and dugout/backstop paving.
- Many existing restrooms are older and in poor condition.

Listed below is a summary of the park, recreation and open space areas in the Merced planning area, including areas owned by other agencies. The Merced County Fairgrounds is not included in Table 3.1 because of its current limited recreation value.

Table 3.1
Summary of Park, Recreation and Open Space Areas
Merced Planning Area

Park, Recreation and Open Space Areas	Total Park Land (Acres)	Number of Sites
City of Merced		
Mini-Parks	4.20	10
Urban Plazas	.42	1
Neighborhood Parks	45.79	5
School Parks	10.00	1
Community Parks	83.06	3
Large Urban Parks	32.37	1
Athletic Parks	12.34	1
Special Use Areas	1.47	1
Linear Parks	120.45	4
Undeveloped Parkland	29.50	6
Total, City	339.60	33
Other Agencies		
Neighborhood Parks	3.96	1
Special Use Areas	11.30	1
Total, Other Agencies	15.26	2

Based on the inventory in Table 3.1, the current ratio of park land to population can be derived. The current ratio is the existing amount of park land divided by the existing population. It is expressed in terms of acres per 1,000 population. The 2003 estimated population for the City of Merced (67,610) was used to determine the current ratios.

By identifying the current ratios, one can quickly compare current inventories with other communities and determine whether Merced is above or below average. Listed below is the current ratio for each of the park land categories in Merced. Table 3.2 reflects only those acreages owned by the City of Merced.

Table 3.2
Summary of Current Ratios
City of Merced

Park Land Type	Current Ratio (Acres per 1,000 Population)
Mini-Parks	0.06 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Urban Plazas	0.01 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Neighborhood Parks	0.68 Acres/1,000 Pop.
School Parks	0.15 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Community Parks	1.23 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Large Urban Parks	0.49 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Athletic Parks	0.18 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Special Use Areas	0.02 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Linear Parks	1.78 Acres/1,000 Pop.
Undeveloped Parkland	0.44 Acres/1,000 Pop.

Facilities

Table 3.3 includes an inventory of facilities owned by the City of Merced, Merced City School District, Merced Union High School District, and Weaver School District.

Table 3.3
Summary of Facilities
Merced Planning Area

Area	Total Number of Facilities
City of Merced	
Youth Ball Fields ¹	2, 1 lighted
Adult Softball Fields	5, all lighted
Soccer Fields ²	4
Tennis Courts	2
Pool Space	5,450 s.f.
Pathways/Trails	13.11 Miles
Merced City School District	
Youth Ball Fields ¹	16
Soccer Fields ²	4 ³
Tennis Courts	4
Merced Union High School District	
Youth Ball Fields	4, 1 lighted
Soccer Fields	4
Weaver School District	
Youth Ball Fields ¹	1, lighted
Soccer Fields	1

¹ Does not include multi-use backstops or practice fields

² Does not include open turf areas used for soccer

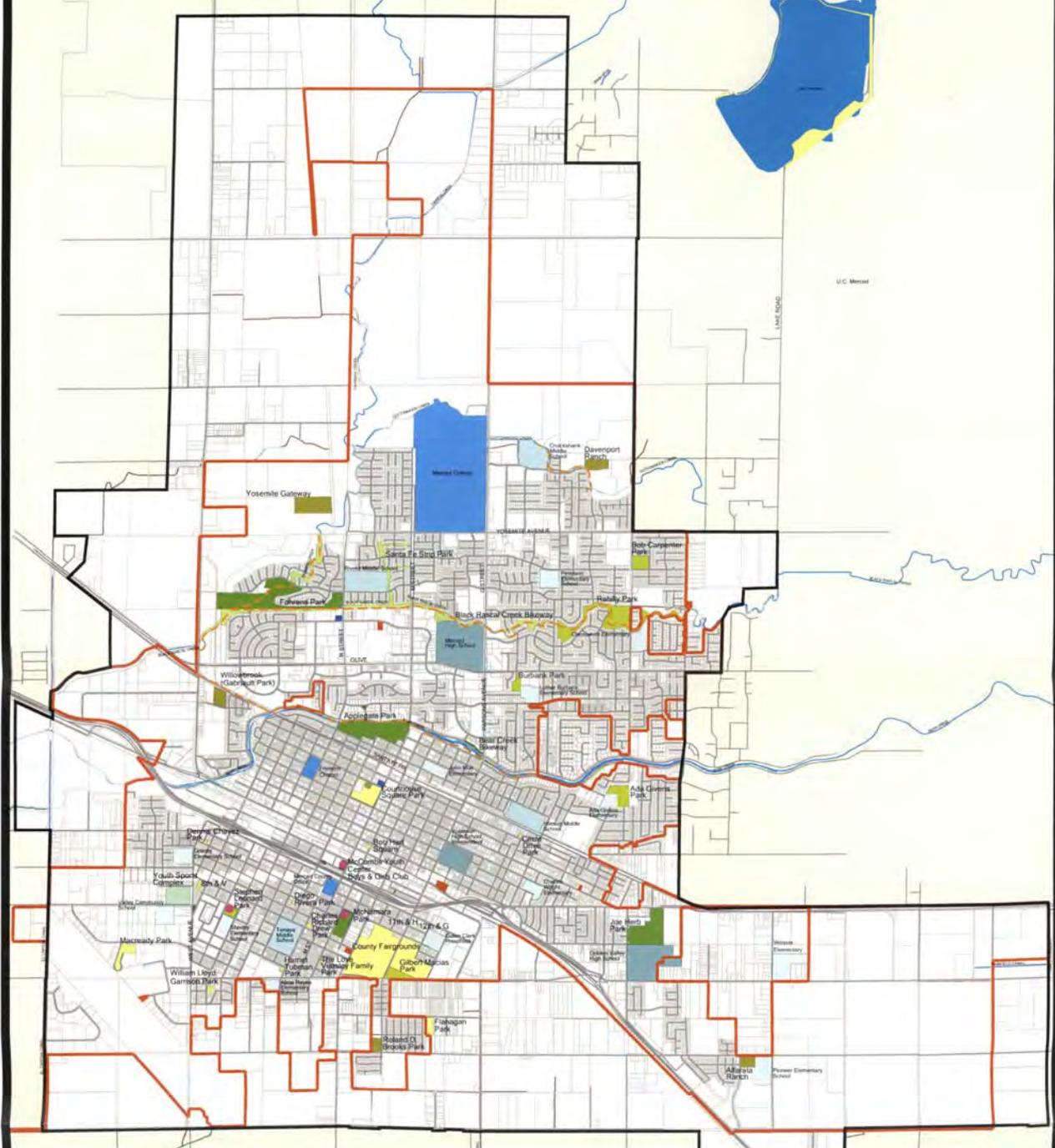
Table 3.3 includes only those facilities used either by the City or by youth sports leagues. There may be additional facilities at school sites, but these are not currently available for public use. Based on the inventory, the current ratio of facilities to population can be derived. The current ratio is the existing amount of facilities divided by the existing population. The 2003 estimated population for the City of Merced (67,610) was used to determine the current ratios.

Table 3.4
 Summary of Current Ratios (City and MCSD)
 Merced Planning Area

Park Land Type	Current Ratio
Adult Softball Fields	1 Field/13,522 Pop.
Youth Ball Fields	1 Field/2,936 Pop.
Soccer Fields	1 Field/11,268 Pop.
Pool Space	134.61 s.f./1,000 Pop
Pathways/Trails	0.19 mi./1,000 Pop.

On the following page is a map of the existing parks and open space areas in the Merced area.

EXISTING PARK & RECREATION RESOURCES



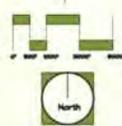
LEGEND

— SUDP/ Planning Area	■ Special Use Parks
- - - City Limits	■ Athletic Parks
□ Elementary Schools	■ Undeveloped Parkland
□ Middle Schools	■ Other Recreational Resources (Non-City)
□ High Schools	— Off Street Bike Trails
□ Mini Parks	● Community Recreation Facility
■ Neighborhood Parks/ School Parks	
■ Community Parks	
■ Linear Parks	

Existing Park & Recreation Resources

**Parks & Recreation
Open Space Master Plan**

Merced, California



Base data provided by the City of Merced

3.2 Park Land Definitions

The most effective and efficient park system to manage is one made up of different types of parks, each designed to provide a specific type of recreation experience or opportunity. When classified and used properly, they are easier to maintain, create less conflicts between user groups and have less impact on adjoining neighbors. In order to assess the park system in Merced and to address specific park land needs, the parks have been classified as follows.

Mini-Parks

Mini-parks, tot lots and children's playgrounds are all small, single purpose play lots designed primarily for small children usage. Due to their size, the facilities are usually limited to a small open grass area, a children's playground and a small picnic area.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are a combination playground and park, designed primarily for non-supervised, non-organized recreation activities. They are generally small in size (about 5 acres) and serve an area of approximately one-half mile radius. Typically, facilities found in a neighborhood park include a children's playground, picnic areas, trails, open grass areas for passive use, outdoor basketball courts and multi-use sport fields for soccer, softball, and baseball. Optimum size is between 3 and 7 acres.

School Parks

School parks are park facilities, usually neighborhood park facilities, that are developed adjacent to or on school grounds.

Community Parks

A community park is planned primarily to provide active and structured recreation opportunities. In general, community park facilities are designed for organized activities and sports, although individual and family activities are also encouraged. Community parks serve a much larger area and offer more facilities. As a result, they require more in terms of support facilities such as parking, restrooms, and covered play areas. Community parks usually have sport fields or similar facilities as the central focus of the park. Their service area is roughly a 1-2 mile radius. Optimum size is between 15 and 20 acres.

Large Urban Parks

Large urban parks are parks designed to serve the entire community. Generally, they provide a wide variety of specialized facilities such as sports fields, indoor recreation areas, and large picnic areas. Due to their size and facilities offered, they require more in terms of support facilities such as parking, restrooms, and play areas. They often exceed 50 acres in size and should be designed to accommodate large numbers of people.

Special Use Areas

Special use areas are miscellaneous public recreation areas or land occupied by a specialized facility. Some of the uses falling into this classification include community centers, skate parks, community gardens, or sites occupied by buildings.

Urban Plazas

Urban plazas are small parks, usually passive, that provide an opportunity for the public to gather in urban locations. Size varies, but urban plazas are typically small and primarily hard surfaces.

Athletic Parks

Athletic parks are sites where sports fields are the central focus. Facilities may consist of baseball, softball and soccer fields. Supplemental activities may include tennis, volleyball, playgrounds, and picnic areas.

Linear Parks

Linear parks are open spaces or developed landscaped areas that follow linear corridors such as creek corridors, canals, trail corridors, abandoned railroad right-of-ways, canals, and other elongated features. This type of park usually contains trails, landscaped areas, viewpoints and seating areas. Neighborhood park facilities may be incorporated when space is available.

Undeveloped Parkland

This is undeveloped parkland owned by the City and planned for park use in the future.

3.3 City of Merced Park and Recreation Areas

Table 3.5 summarizes the park, recreation and open space areas owned and maintained by the City of Merced.

Table 3.5
Summary of City Parks By Type
Merced Planning Area

Park Areas	Total Acres	Development Level	Condition
Mini Parks			
8 th and V Mini-Park	0.89	Low	Fair
11 th and H Mini-Park	0.17	Low	Fair
12 th and G Mini-Park	0.19	Low	Fair
Dennis Chavez Park	0.28	Low	Fair
William Lloyd Garrison Park	1.02	Low	Fair
Diego Rivera Park	0.25	Low	Fair
Love Veasley Family Park	0.17	Low	Fair
Harriet Tubman Park	0.45	Low	Fair
Charles Richard Drew Park	0.52	Low	Fair
Circle Drive Park	0.26	Low	Fair
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>4.20</i>		
Urban Plazas			
Bob Hart Square	0.42	High	Good
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>0.42</i>		
Neighborhood Parks			
Stephen Leonard Park	2.70	Medium	Fair
Gilbert Macias Park	4.91	High	Good
Bob Carpenter Park	5.99	Medium	Good
Rahilly Park ¹	28.91	Medium	Good
Burbank Park	3.28	Low	Fair
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>45.79</i>		
School Parks			
Ada Givens Park ²	10.00	Medium	Good
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>10.00</i>		
Community Parks			
McNamara Park	8.70	High	Fair
Joe Herb Park	26.74	Medium	Fair
Fahrens Park ³	47.62	Low/Medium	Good
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>83.06</i>		

Table 3.5 (cont.)

Park Areas	Total Acres	Development Level	Condition
Large Urban Parks			
Applegate Park ¹	32.37	Medium	Good to Fair
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>32.37</i>		
Athletic Parks			
Youth Sports Complex	12.34	Medium	Good
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>12.34</i>		
Special Use Areas			
McCombs Youth Center	1.47	High	Good
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>1.47</i>		
Linear Parks⁵			
Santa Fe Strip Park	6.94	Low	Fair
Bear Creek Bikeway	59.96	Medium	Good
Black Rascal Creek Bikeway	44.47	Medium	Good
Fahrens Creek Bikeway	9.08	Medium	Good
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>120.45</i>		
Undeveloped Lands⁶			
Willowbrook (Gabriault Park)	5.00	N/A	NA
Roland D. Brooks Park	4.00	N/A	NA
Hansen Park	7	N/A	NA
Davenport Ranch	7.50	N/A	NA
Yosemite Gateway	8.00	N/A	NA
Alfarata Ranch	5.00	N/A	NA
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>29.50</i>		
	<i>(N/A)</i>	<i>397.05</i>	

¹ Includes Black Rascal Creek Bikeway between Parsons and Cherokee.

² City owns 5 acres. Additional 5 acres is on school grounds.

³ Does not include Black Rascal Creek Bikeway acreage.

⁴ Includes Bear Creek Bikeway between R and M Streets. Includes Purchasing Dept. and City yard located at 25th and P.

⁵ Acreage for linear parks includes entire creek corridor. Pathway mileage is indicated in another location.

⁶ Acreage of future parks identified by city staff.

The acreage figure for each park was determined using parcel data from Merced's GIS system. Development level of the parks was rated high, medium, or low based on the facilities in each park:

- Low: Turf, minimal trees and landscaping, minimal amenities and facilities.
- Medium: Some facilities and amenities, but there is space for additional ones.
- High: Park appears fully developed without space for additional facilities.

Condition of the parks was assessed during site visits on April 21 and 22, 2003. Good condition describes a park with a generally good level of maintenance, with all amenities and facilities in working order. Fair condition describes a park with generally adequate

maintenance, but that has some areas in need of attention. Poor condition denotes a park with broken equipment and facilities.

Merced has an extensive bikeway trail system, with the bikeways running through the City's linear park corridors. Table 3.6 contains a summary of the existing mileage. In addition, Merced County maintains a paved, off-street bikeway along Lake Road that connects to the U.C. Merced site and Lake Yosemite. An extension of the Fahrens Creek bikeway is planned, and the establishment of a bikeway in the Cottonwood Creek corridor is also planned.

Table 3.6
Summary of Existing Pathways/Trails
Merced Planning Area

Area	Miles	Surface
Bicycle Trails		
Bear Creek Bikeway	5.04	Concrete, asphalt
Black Rascal Creek Bikeway	4.60	Concrete, asphalt
Fahrens Creek Bikeway	2.70	Concrete
Santa Fe Strip Park	0.77	Concrete

The City of Merced constructed an Arts Center next to City Hall using Redevelopment Agency funding. The non-profit Merced County Arts Council operates the Arts Center and offers a range of arts and cultural programming opportunities. There are likely opportunities for expansion of the partnership with the Arts Council to increase cultural and arts programming either at the Center or at other locations, and for identifying creative ways to use the Center to help meet Merced's need for indoor recreation space.

3.4 Merced County Resources

Merced County has two park sites within the Merced planning area, and one nearby:

Table 3.7
Summary of Merced County Lands
Merced Planning Area

Site	Acres	Activity/Facility
Lake Yosemite	532.46	Regional park – Lake with picnic grounds, Scout camping, boating facilities
Flanagan Park	3.96	Neighborhood park
Courthouse Park	11.30	Urban square surrounding historic courthouse

3.5 School and College Facilities

Lake Yosemite is a regional park located near the U.C. Merced campus, and may be reconfigured as a result of the campus plan. The park itself contains about 100 acres of land, outside the lake. The lake is a water retention facility developed by the Merced Irrigation District (MID). MID leases the lake and its shoreline to Merced County for recreational use under a 50 year lease that ends in 2026. The County owns an additional 200 acres of undeveloped land to the southeast, which was purchased for the purpose of expanding Lake Yosemite Regional Park. Lake Yosemite is open year round and is visited by more than 300,000 people annually.

Flanagan Park is a neighborhood park near the southeast boundary of Merced. Currently, this park is in extremely poor condition and would require major upgrades before it can serve the community. The County is interested in turning Flanagan Park over to the City.

As mentioned previously, Merced County owns Courthouse Square and Flanagan Park within the Merced planning area, and Lake Yosemite Regional Park nearby. Courthouse Square is located in downtown Merced, adjacent to the historic Merced County Courthouse building. Courthouse Square serves as a community gathering space, and is the main public park near the downtown business district.

Schools are an important resource for recreation facilities such as sports fields, playgrounds and gymnasiums. Merced's Parks and Community Services Department, as well as private organizations, extensively use local school facilities for recreation programs. This includes fields for outdoor sports and gymnasiums for volleyball and basketball.

The Merced City School District (MCSD) provides elementary and middle schools in Merced. The Merced Union High School District (MUHSD) provides high schools in Merced. In addition, the Weaver Union School District (WUSD) has two elementary schools within the southeastern portion of the Merced planning area.

MCSD and the City have a long history of collaboration, including establishment of a formal compact pledging coordination and cooperation into the future. In addition, MCSD and the City have a formal agreement for Ada Givens Park and will establish additional agreements for any school parks established in the future. In addition, MCSD has established a policy of providing neighborhood elementary schools, and seeks to locate schools adjacent to parks. Ada Givens Park is an example of a school park established through cooperation between MCSD and the City. Parks and Community Services is responsible for scheduling MCSD fields after school hours. City maintenance crews also provide additional maintenance of school athletic fields used by the community.

MUHSD has facilities, but they are not currently available to the public due to use by the more extensive high school athletic programs.

Merced College is a junior college located in the northern part of Merced. It has extensive athletic facilities as well as a large pool.

According to College officials, Merced College athletic facilities, especially the pool, are at capacity. Because of the heavy use of these facilities, there is very limited time available for the Parks and Community Services Department.

The University of California at Merced will have recreation and athletic facilities to support the initial years of campus growth when it opens in 2004. By 2007/08, additional sports fields will be constructed. The University will establish a NCAA Division I sports program and the facilities to support it. The facilities at U.C. Merced will be excellent, and could offer expanded recreation opportunities for Merced citizens. Without a joint use agreement, it may be difficult for the City Parks and Community Services Department to gain access to U.C. Merced facilities because there is likely to be high demand for their use.

3.6 Private Facilities

There are limited private facilities in the Merced planning area. There are a few fitness centers and gymnastics studios, as well as a full-service athletic club. Other facilities available are a skating rink, a golf course, a driving range, and a shooting range. Most communities of Merced's size have a greater range of private recreation options. For example, the YMCA is often a significant recreation provider in a city of Merced's size. YMCA facilities are non-profit, and often have programs affordable to lower income populations. Yet, no YMCA facilities have ever been established in Merced.

3.7 Facility Definitions

The most functional types of facilities are adequately developed ones designed to serve specific functions. However, for various reasons (e.g., facility shortages, poor condition), sport facilities are often used for activities or sports they were not designed for. In order to assess the condition of existing facilities and to address additional needs, the facilities have been divided into the following categories.

Youth Ball Fields

*Regulation Baseball: 90' bases, 320+ foul line;
Youth Baseball: 60' bases, approximately 200' foul line with either skinned or grass infield
Youth Softball: 60' bases, 180' foul line*

Unlike many other communities, most of the youth fields in Merced have skinned infields. By tradition, certain fields are used by the softball leagues, and certain fields are used by the baseball leagues. However, the fields are similar and could be used interchangeably. For this reason, and also due the wide array of field sizes, youth baseball and youth softball fields have been combined into the single category of "ball fields" for planning purposes.

Adult Softball Fields

Adult Softball: 275-300' outfield for slow pitch; 225' for fast pitch and 250' outfield for women's slow pitch

Soccer Fields

Regulation field dimensions: 195' x 225' by 330' x 360', grass or all weather surfacing; permanent or portable goals

Youth field dimensions: Varies according to age U14 (60 yds. x 110 yds.) - U6 (20 yds. x 30 yds.); permanent or portable goals

In addition to permanent soccer fields, there are a number of open turf areas in Merced that aren't officially fields, but that have been traditionally used for young children's soccer.

Football Fields

Field dimensions: 160' x 360'; permanent goals

Tennis Courts

Appropriate dimensions, fenced and surfaced with a color coat

Gymnasium Space

Appropriate dimension for the sport and have adequate dimensions outside the court for safe play. Playing surface should be of resilient flooring.

Swimming Pools

Appropriate dimension for intended use (recreation or competitive)

Basketball Court (Outdoor)

42'-50' x 74'-94' plus appropriate perimeter distance

Volleyball Court (Outdoor)

30' x 60' plus appropriate perimeter distance

3.8 Summary of Facilities

Below is a list of recreational facilities categorized by type. This includes adult softball fields, youth baseball/softball fields, soccer fields, football fields, tennis courts, gymnasium space and swimming pools. It should also be noted that the quality and condition of the facilities can vary significantly. In some instances, the playing fields are uneven or lack adequate upkeep and maintenance.

Table 3.8
Summary of Recreation Facilities by Type
Merced Planning Area

Adult Softball Fields

Number	Location	Comments	Condition
3	Joe Herb Park	Lighted fields. Also 3 youth practice fields	Good
2	McNamara Park	Lighted fields	Fair
5	TOTAL (Adult Softball Fields)		

Table 3.8 (Cont.)

Youth Ball Fields

Number	Location	Comments
0	Joe Herb Park	3 youth practice fields – no permanent youth fields
2	Merced High School	2 lighted
2	Golden Valley High School	
2	Youth Sports Complex	1 lighted. Open area used for practice
5	Rivera Middle School	2 lighted. Used for girls softball.
3	Cruikshank Middle School	Unlighted. Used for girls softball.
5	Hoover Middle School	3 lighted. Used for youth baseball.
3	Tenaya Middle School	Unlighted. Also 1 practice field.
1	Weaver Elementary School	Lighted

Soccer Fields

Number	Location	Comments	Condition
1	Joe Herb Park	1 more under construction	Fair
1	Ada Givens Park	Open area used for youth soccer	Fair
1	Youth Sports Complex	Open area used for youth soccer	Fair
1	Weaver Elementary School		Fair
1	Gracey Elementary	In detention basin	Fair
1	Tenaya Middle School	Overlay on ball fields	Fair
2	Rivera Middle School		Fair
2	Golden Valley High School	Used by league	Good
2	Merced High School	Used by league	Good
3	Merced College	Used by league	Good

Football Fields

Number	Location	Comments	Condition
0	None		

There are fields at Merced College and at the high schools, but these are not used by the City, nor was league use reported at these sites.

Tennis Courts

Number	Location	Comments	Condition
2	Applegate Park		Fair
4	Tenaya Middle School	2 are unusable due to disrepair	Poor

Volleyball Courts

Number	Location	Comments	Condition
0	None		

Table 3.8 (Cont.)

There are no constructed outdoor volleyball courts in any of Merced's parks. However, there is heavy use of many of the parks for volleyball and for a Southeast Asian game known as ka da (which uses a court similar to a volleyball court

Gymnasiums

Number	Location	Comments	Condition
1	McCombs Youth Center	Limited availability	Good
1	Tenaya Middle School	Limited availability	Good
1	Cruickshank Middle School	Limited availability	Good
1	Hoover Middle School	Limited availability	Good
1	Rivera Middle School	Limited availability	Good
1	Golden Valley High School	Limited availability	Good
1	Merced High School	Limited availability	Good
1	Pioneer Elementary School	No use agreement	Fair
1	Merced College	Limited availability	Good
TOTAL (Gymnasiums)			

The City only owns 1 gymnasium. Merced schedules games at a number of school sites, including those listed above (except Pioneer). However, gym time is very limited at the schools and the City is at risk of being bumped for school activities. There is more availability at elementary schools and middle schools than there is at high schools. Merced College has a gymnasium, but handles its own scheduling. Currently, Merced College is completely booked and the City is only able to obtain gym time once a week for the volleyball league.

Pools

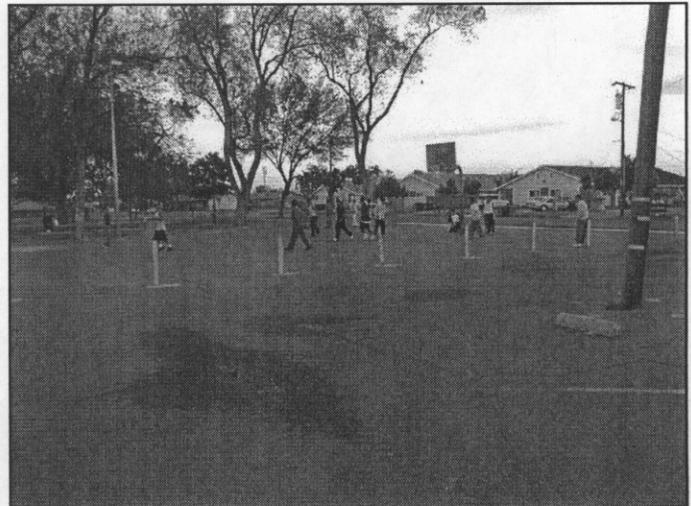
Square Feet	Location	Comments	Condition
1,500	McNamara Park	Small (30 x 50)	Good
3,150	Stephen Leonard Park	6 lane, 25 yard pool	Good
800	Ada Givens Park	Small (20' x 40') and 3.5' depth	Good
TOTAL (Pools)			

This page left intentionally blank.

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California

This page is not intentionally blank.



*Photo: Basketball at McNamara Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 4: Community Input Summary

- *Introduction*
- *Public Workshop Summary*
- *Youth Workshop Summary*
- *Stakeholder Interviews*

4.1 Introduction

The Park and Open Space Master Planning process incorporated community input in several ways. These include:

- A public workshop
- A youth workshop
- Stakeholder interviews

The results of these public outreach efforts are summarized in this section.

4.2 Public Workshop Summary

A public workshop was held on the evening of June 10, 2003 in the Sam Pipes room at the Merced Civic Center. The purpose of this workshop was to provide an opportunity for Merced residents to share their ideas, comments, and visions for the future of Merced's park system.

The workshop was participatory and interactive. Upon arrival, people were asked to show where they live on a map of Merced and then to indicate their top 3 priorities from a list of nine. The priorities exercise also provided space to write down other priorities not included on the original list.

After brief introductions and an overview of the park master plan project, Sharon McNamee of MIG led the group in a vision exercise. Participants were asked to describe what they envisioned for Merced's park system in 20 years.

For the second half of the meeting, participants were divided into 6 small groups. Each group was given 6 questions to discuss.

At the end of the meeting, the workshop participants reconvened. A representative from each small group reported key findings to the reassembled participants.

Key workshop findings are summarized below.

- The top three priorities identified by participants were:
 - City-wide trail system expansions
 - Outdoor sport field complex
 - More aquatic facilities (Pools and water playgrounds)
- Participants seemed to value the parks in the City and see them as an important component of quality of life. The trail system was cited as a major success by many.
- Generally, there appeared to be interest in the City's providing additional recreation programs and developing more partnerships, especially with the school districts.
- There was support for a mix of park facilities, with neighborhood parks within walking distance of most citizens.
- Most workshop participants were not in favor of locating a school in Fahrens Park. Participants generally favored a more

4.3 Youth Workshop Summary

passive park for this location that takes advantage of the natural environment.

- There was a range of opinions on how to address the mini-parks. A number of evening workshop participants seemed to favor working with the surrounding residents to determine the future of the parks

On June 10, 2003, a noontime workshop for youth was held at McCombs Youth Center. Approximately twenty youth ranging from ages 7 to 18 were in attendance, with the majority of the group ages 10 and 11.

After a brief introduction, Sharon McNamee of MIG, Inc. led the group in a discussion about parks, focusing on six topic areas. In addition to opportunities for group discussion, this workshop included a drawing exercise and written comment cards.

Applegate Park and Rahilly Park were the parks most frequently mentioned by the youth participants when they were asked about their favorite parks.

Participants also identified their top activities and facilities to include in parks. These were swimming and waterslides; very active amusements such as go-kart tracks, roller coasters, and skate parks; and concessions in parks, including Kentucky Fried Chicken and candy/sweets.

Other input received through the youth workshop included a need to provide park facilities that accommodate people with disabilities, and a desire for more skate park facilities.

4.4 Stakeholder Interviews

In May, 2003, telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders identified by the City of Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan project team. Key findings from the interviews are identified below.

- There is a perception of crime in the parks, and the bike paths. The City needs to address this, such as through increased policing or volunteer foot patrols.
- There is a lack of indoor recreation space. There is a need for gyms, classrooms, indoor meeting places, community rooms, and similar indoor spaces.
- The bike trail system is wonderful and should be expanded, especially toward U.C. Merced and Lake Yosemite.
- Stakeholders believed there were many opportunities for improving parks and recreation opportunities, but that there has not been a commitment from the City of Merced to parks.
- Parks & Rec isn't visible/accessible to the community especially in terms of programs.

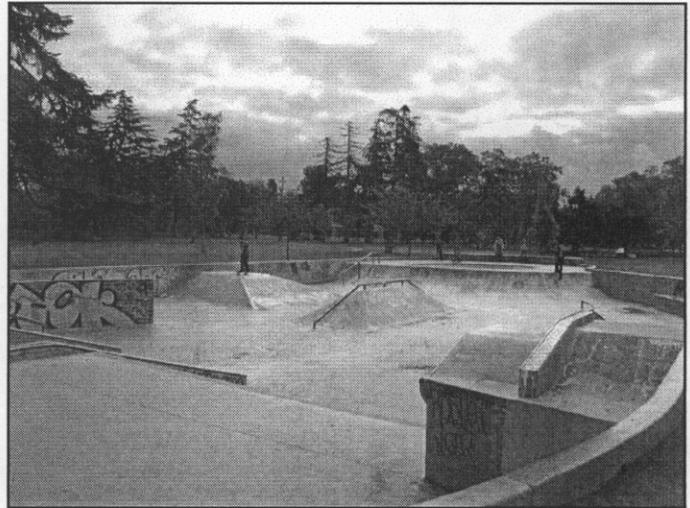
- There should be parks within walking distance of most neighborhoods.
- There is a need for more programming, especially for youth.
- The budget and finances will be a major challenge for the department.

This page left intentionally blank.

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California

This page is intentionally blank.



*Photo: Skate Park, Applegate Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 5: Recreation Needs Assessment Summary

- *Introduction*
- *Parkland Needs*
- *Recreational Facility Needs*
- *Specialized Facility Needs*
- *Recreation Program Needs*

5.1 Introduction

Quantifying park and recreation facility needs is difficult because many different variables influence recreation needs. Community values, participation patterns, and willingness to pay for services vary widely from one community to another. Consequently, what seems appropriate for one community may not be suitable for another. One of the problems associated with determining needs is that overstating the demand can result in the development of underutilized facilities. Conversely, under-estimating the needs can result in overused facilities and a lack of usable park land and open space.

This report discusses the park and facility needs for the City of Merced. The process for identifying needs was:

1. Inventorying and analyzing the existing supply of park and recreation facilities.
2. Public input on park and recreation needs
 - a. Public meeting
 - b. Stakeholders interviews
 - c. Youth workshop
 - d. Contact with user groups
3. Forecasting park and facility needs using a variety of methods.

5.2 Parkland Needs

Developing a statement of land needs for park areas and open space is a difficult type of needs analysis because it depends on localized values, availability of land, financial resources and desired service levels.

To determine specific land needs for the City of Merced, several analytical methods were used. These included a comparison to other communities, results of public input, national trends, land availability and geographical deficiencies for parks and open space areas. It should be noted that even with all the statistical information available, a certain amount of subjective analysis and professional experience must be used to quantify the standards.

In the following discussion, recommended standards for specific types of park areas are given. In many cases, comparisons to other communities are given. These comparisons are given in terms of the "existing ratio" or the "recommended standard". The existing ratio is the existing amount of park land divided by the existing population. It is expressed in terms of acres per 1,000 population. The recommended standard is the desired amount of parkland and is also expressed in terms of acres per 1,000 population.

The ratio of park land or recreation facilities is based on a comparison with the existing population base. By developing a desired level of service (recommended standard) and applying it to a future population forecast, one can determine future needs. To determine the existing ratio, the 2003 population of 67,610 within the existing Merced city limits was used. To determine the recommended standard, the projected 2025 population of 115,346 within the Merced SUDP was used.

Table 5.1 provides a comparison of the current ratio of parkland and the recommended demand standard for Merced.

Table 5.1
Comparison of Current Ratio and
Recommended Demand Standard
Park and Recreation Areas
City of Merced

Recreation Area	Current Ratio ¹	Recommended Standard
Mini-Parks	0.06 Acres/1,000 Pop.	0.02Acres/1,000 Population
School Parks / Neighborhood Parks ²	0.40 Acres/1,000 Pop.	1.09 Acres/ 1,000 Population
Large Urban / Community Parks	1.71 Acres/1,000 Pop.	1.69 Acres/ 1,000 Population
Special Use Areas ³	0.21 Acres/1,000 Pop.	0.38 Acres / 1,000 Population
Linear Parks ²	2.13 Acres/1,000 Pop.	1.82 Acres / 1,000 Population
Undeveloped	0.44 Acres/1,000 Pop.	None

¹ Based on 2003 population of 67,610 within Merced city limits.

² See discussion in Neighborhood Park and Linear Park sections of Appendix D for a description of how the ratio was calculated.

³ Includes Urban Plazas and Athletic Parks.

Listed below are the current specific needs for parkland based on the recommended standards listed above.

Table 5.2
Summary of Current Park Needs (Year 2003)¹
Park and Recreation Areas (in Acres)
City of Merced

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Year 2003 Demand	Additional Need Or (Excess Capacity)
Mini-Parks	4.20	1.35	(2.85)
School Parks / Neighborhood Parks ²	26.88	60.34	33.46
Large Urban /Community Parks	115.43	114.26	(1.17)
Special Use Areas ³	14.23	25.69	11.46
Linear Parks ²	144.36	109.53	(34.83)
Undeveloped	29.50	-	-

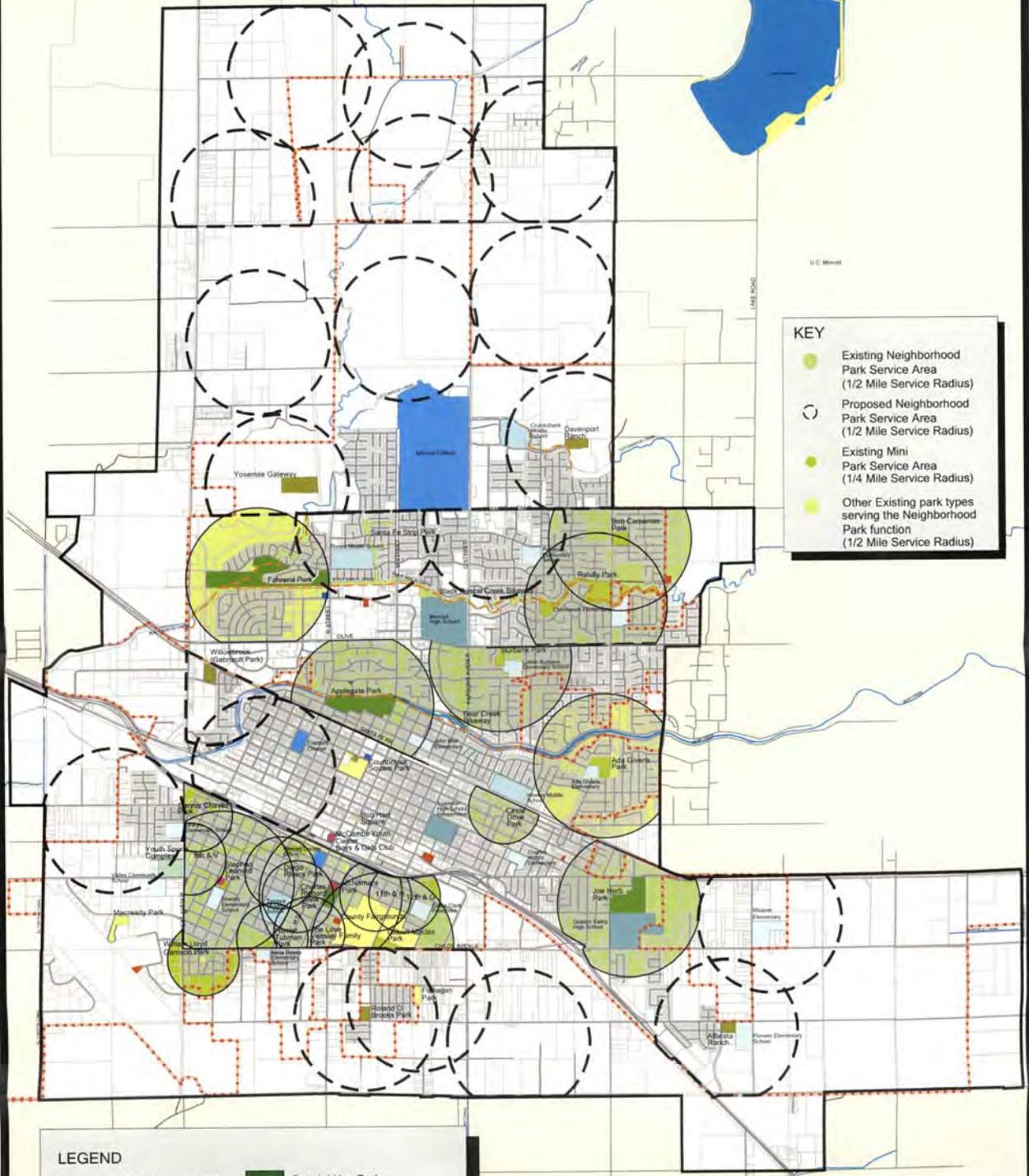
¹ Based on 2003 population within Merced city limits of 67,610.

² See discussion of Neighborhood Park and Linear Park sections of Appendix D for description of acreage figures.

³ Includes Urban Plazas and Athletic Parks.

The Neighborhood and Community Park Service Area maps on the next two pages show the existing served and unserved areas in Merced.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK SERVICE AREA MAP

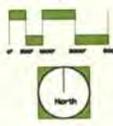


KEY

- Existing Neighborhood Park Service Area (1/2 Mile Service Radius)
- Proposed Neighborhood Park Service Area (1/2 Mile Service Radius)
- Existing Mini Park Service Area (1/4 Mile Service Radius)
- Other Existing park types serving the Neighborhood Park function (1/2 Mile Service Radius)

LEGEND

 SUDP/ Planning Area	 Special Use Parks
 City Limits	 Athletic Parks
 Elementary Schools	 Undeveloped Parkland
 Middle Schools	 Other Recreational Resources (Non-City)
 High Schools	 Community Recreation Facility
 Mini Parks	 Off Street Bike Trails
 Neighborhood Parks	
 Community Parks	
 Linear Parks	



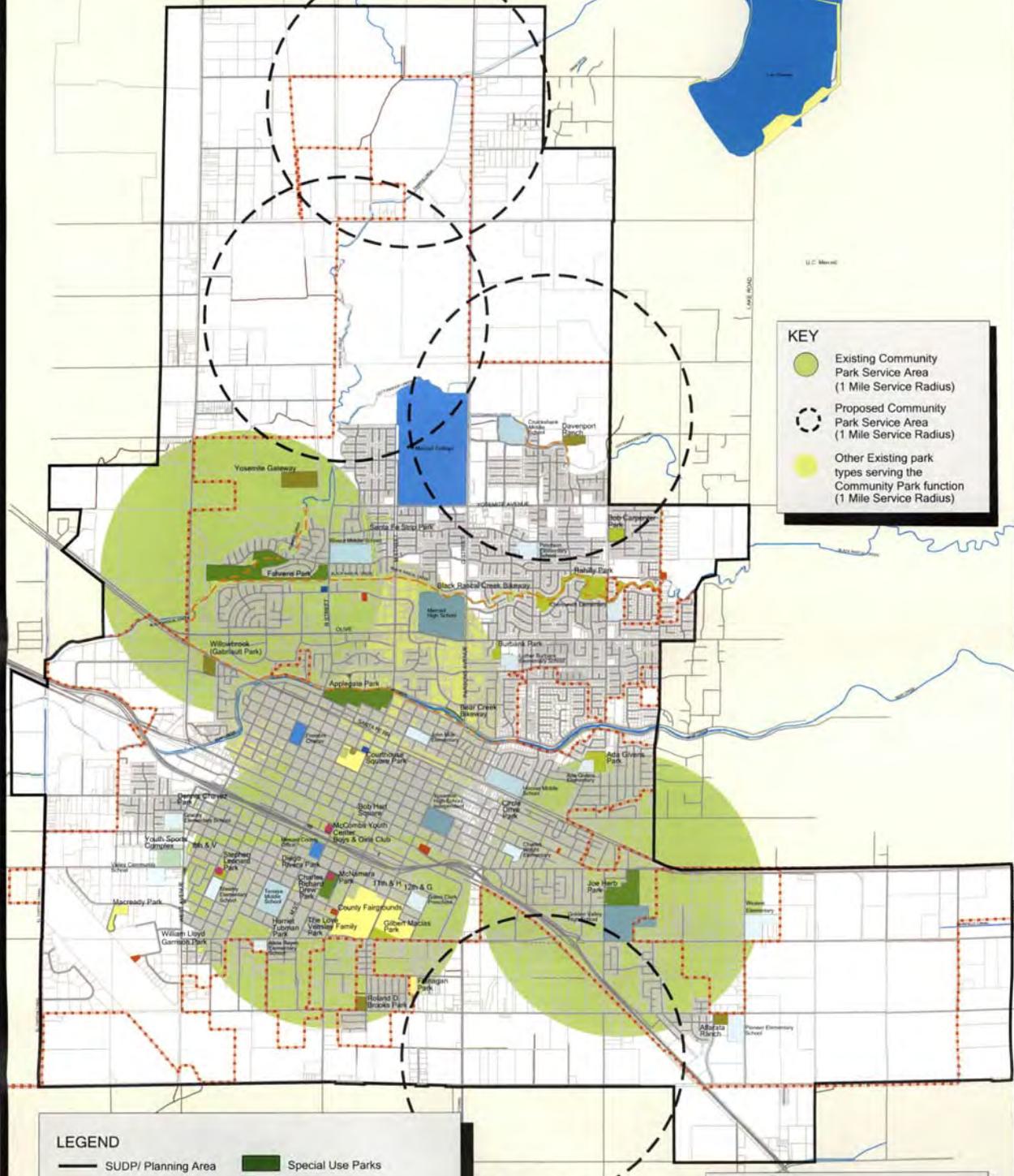
Neighborhood Park Service Area Map

**Parks & Recreation
Open Space Master Plan**

Merced, California

Base data provided by the City of Merced

COMMUNITY PARK SERVICE AREA MAP

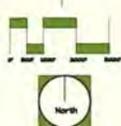


KEY

- Existing Community Park Service Area (1 Mile Service Radius)
- Proposed Community Park Service Area (1 Mile Service Radius)
- Other Existing park types serving the Community Park function (1 Mile Service Radius)

LEGEND

 SUDP/ Planning Area	 Special Use Parks
 City Limits	 Athletic Parks
 Elementary Schools	 Undeveloped Parkland
 Middle Schools	 Other Recreational Resources (Non-City)
 High Schools	 Community Recreation Facility
 Mini Parks	 Off Street Bike Trails
 Neighborhood Parks	
 Community Parks	
 Linear Parks	



Community Park Service Area Map
 Parks & Recreation
 Open Space Master Plan
 Merced, California

Base data provided by the City of Merced

Table 5.3 contains the projected acreage needs for the City of Merced at build-out, based upon the recommended standard.

Table 5.3
 Summary of Park Needs (Build-out)¹
 Park and Recreation Areas (in Acres)
 City of Merced

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Build-out Demand ¹	Additional Need Or (Excess Capacity)
Mini-Parks	4.20	2.31	(1.89)
School Parks / Neighborhood Parks ²	26.88	125.34	98.46
Large Urban /Community Parks	115.43	195.43	80.00
Special Use Areas ³	14.23	44.23	30.00
Linear Parks ²	144.36	209.55	65.19
Undeveloped	29.50	--	--

¹ Based on a 2020 build-out population of 108,505 within the Merced SUDP (the project planning area).

² See discussion in Neighborhood Park and Linear Park sections of Appendix D for description of acreage figures.

³ Includes Urban Plazas.

Listed below is a summary of the impacts based on the total land needs.

- It is recommended the City consider reducing its inventory of mini-parks because of the low use of these parks and the overlapping service areas as depicted on the Neighborhood Park Service Area map.
- Based on the recommended service level, 8 additional neighborhood park sites are needed to serve the current city limits, and an additional 13 are needed to serve the planning area at build-out. However, 9 sites are already available or dedicated to park use. The Neighborhood Park Service Area map on the next page depicts the service analysis.
- The majority of the current Merced city limits are served by the existing community and large urban parks. To provide community park service to the entire planning area, 4 additional community or large urban parks will be needed. The Community Park Service Area map depicts the service analysis.
- In addition to other park land needs, land is needed for the following special use facilities: 2 youth centers, 2 recreation centers, and additional athletic complexes.
- There are opportunities to develop trails along linear corridors such as the Cottonwood Creek corridor and the northern portion of the Fahrens Creek corridor. In order to build out the City of Merced's off-street bikeway network as planned, approximately 65 acres of linear park land are needed.

5.3 Recreation Facility Needs

The determination of need for recreation facilities such as sport fields, swimming pools, and trails was derived from several analytical approaches. These included analysis of play and practice time requirements of local sport teams, comparison to other communities, and mathematical models developed over the years from other studies.

On the following pages, the needs for specific types of facilities are discussed. Similar to the discussion of park land needs, the "existing ratio" and "recommended demand standard" are expressed in terms of number of facilities per 1,000 population. The existing ratio is the existing population divided by the number of facilities (e.g., fields, square feet, and miles). Likewise, the recommended demand standard is the desired ratio of population to facilities. This is based on the desired level of service. By establishing a desired level of service and applying it to the existing and future population forecast, one can determine the appropriate recommended demand standard and ultimately the future needs. To determine the existing ratio for facilities, the population within current Merced city limits was used. The recommended demand standard was determined specifically for Merced through the needs assessment. Appendix D contains the detailed needs assessment in its entirety.

To determine the need for sport fields, a demand model was created that compared the supply of fields against the demand created by the number of teams. Within this demand model there are many variables (or service levels) that will affect the eventual need statement. These variables include:

- Demand Variables
 - * Number of teams
 - * Number of games and practices permitted per team per week
- Supply Variables
 - * Number of fields
 - * Number of games/practices permitted per field per week
 - * Existence of lighted or unlighted fields

As part of the master planning process, specific need for six specific types of facilities was analyzed. The facility categories include:

1. Adult Softball Fields
2. Youth Ball Fields
3. Soccer Fields
4. Indoor Courts
5. Pool Space
6. Pathways/Trails

Table 5.4 provides a comparison of the current ratio of facilities and the recommended demand standard for Merced.

Table 5.4
Comparison of Current Ratio and
Recommended Demand Standard
Recreation Facilities
City of Merced

Recreation Area	Current Ratio	Recommended Standard
Adult Softball Fields	1 Field/13,522 Pop.	1 Field/11,300 Population
Youth Ball Fields ¹	1 Field/2,936 Pop.	1 Field/ 2,900 Population
Soccer Fields ¹	1 Field/11,268 Pop.	1 Field/ 3,500 Population
Indoor Gym Space (Courts)	1 Court/16,903 Pop. ²	1 Court/ 13,500 Population
Pool Space	134.61 s.f./1,000 Pop	151 S.F./ 1,000 Population
Pathways and Trails	0.19 mi./1,000 Pop.	.20 Miles/ 1,000 Population

¹ Includes school facilities as well as City of Merced facilities., even if no use agreement exists.

² The City currently uses a variety of time slots at school gyms throughout the community. Because of the nature of the court use, it is difficult to calculate how this court use converts to total courts available to the community. See discussion of indoor gym space for description of how recommended standard was derived.

Table 5.5 summarizes the current facility needs, based on the recommended demand standard.

Table 5.5
Summary of Current Recreation Facility Needs
City of Merced

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Year 2003 Demand	Additional Need
Adult Softball Fields	5	6	1
Youth Ball Fields ¹	23	23	0
Soccer Fields ¹	16	19	3
Indoor Gym Space (Courts) ²	4	Equivalent of 5	1
Pool Space	9,083 s.f.	10,194 s.f.	1,111 s.f.
Pathways and Trails	13.11 miles	13.56 miles	0.45 miles

¹ Includes school facilities used by youth leagues as well as City of Merced facilities, even if no use agreement exists.

² The City currently uses a variety of time slots at school gyms throughout the community. Because of the nature of the court use, it is difficult to calculate how this court use converts to total courts available to the community. See discussion of indoor gym space in Appendix D for description of how recommended standard was derived.

Table 5.6 summarizes the facility needs at build-out, based upon the recommended demand standard.

Table 5.6
Summary of Recreation Facility Needs at Build-out
City of Merced

Area or Facility	Existing Inventory	Build-out Demand	Additional Need
Adult Softball Fields	5	11	6
Youth Ball Fields ¹	23	40	17
Soccer Fields ¹	16	33	17
Indoor Gym Space (Courts)	4	Equivalent of 9	5
Pool Space	9,083 s.f.	17,418 s.f.	8,335 s.f.
Pathways and Trails	13.11 miles	23.07 miles	9.96 miles

¹ Includes school facilities used by youth leagues as well as City of Merced facilities, even if no use agreement exists.

² The City currently uses a variety of time slots at school gyms throughout the community. Because of the nature of the court use, it is difficult to calculate how this court use converts to total courts available to the community. See discussion of indoor gym space in Appendix D for description of how recommended standard was derived.

Listed below are the specific needs for facilities based on the standards listed above.

- Based on the recommended demand standard, 1 additional adult softball field is needed to serve current demand and a total of 6 additional fields would be required at build-out.
- It is recommended the city maintain about the current level of service for youth baseball and softball fields. The supply and demand analysis showed that current needs can be served by the existing field inventory. A total of 17 additional fields will be needed to serve the City at build-out.
- Based on the recommended demand standard, there is a shortage of 3 soccer fields at this time. This will be reduced to a shortage of 2 fields once the new field at Joe Herb Park is complete. At build-out, a total of 17 additional soccer fields will be needed.
- Based on the supply and demand analysis, there is a need for additional gymnasium space. The recommended demand standard indicates a current need for 2 courts, with a need for the equivalent of a total of 11 courts at build-out.
- There is a need for additional pool space.
- The recommended standard of 0.20 miles per 1,000 population means that a total of .45 additional miles of paved pathways/trails are needed at the present time. By City's build-out, a total of 23.07 miles will be needed.

5.4 Specialized Facilities Needs

In addition to the more traditional types of park land and recreation facilities discussed earlier in this report, there were other needs identified during the planning process. These will be discussed more fully in Section 6, and are briefly outlined below.

Indoor Recreation Space:

Many communities have built indoor recreation centers that contain a variety of indoor spaces, such as gymnasiums, racquetball courts, exercise/aerobics areas, weight training rooms, places for active recreation classes, dance studios and other specialized activity areas. In some instances, even ice rinks, tennis courts, childcare facilities and places for large group gatherings have been incorporated into these types of spaces. These facilities are extremely popular where the climate is not conducive to year round outdoor recreation activities or where nighttime recreation activities are required.

In Merced, an indoor recreation center would considerably expand the number of recreation activities that could be offered as well as provide needed gymnasium space for basketball, volleyball, and other sports. This type of facility would need to be designed to avoid competing with existing private providers. However, in most communities, private providers cannot meet all of the community need for indoor recreation space, and typically do not serve people with lower incomes.

Community Center

Community centers can be combined with indoor recreation center. Community centers typically include meeting rooms and classrooms that can be used for recreational classes as well for rental by community groups. Frequently, a large hall or event room is included. Sometimes performing arts space or facilities such as a youth center or a library are included. For example, the Arts Center that was built by the City of Merced is an example of a small community center.

Merced currently does not have a community center, although the Arts Center does provide some space for arts programming. Based on public input, there is a need for additional indoor community space, especially space for events. Rental space for parties (family gatherings, celebrations, etc.) and events would meet a currently unmet need in the community and allow the City a source of income to help offset operating costs.

Merced could provide a combined indoor recreation center and community center to meet the community's needs for indoor space. Because of the fairly significant north/south geographic spread of the community at build-out, it is recommended that two such facilities be provided even though operating costs are higher for two centers than for one. Prior to making the decision to go forward with major new facilities, the City should develop a detailed cost/revenue analysis to determine the annual operating costs of the facilities.

5.5 Recreation Program Needs

Group Picnic Areas

Picnic areas that can be reserved for large groups are located at Applegate, Joe Herb, and Rahilly Parks. Both the Applegate and Rahilly facilities receive very heavy use. Stephen Leonard and Applegate Parks both attract a high volume of fairly large groups despite the lack of facilities. In addition to meeting a community need, this type of recreation area can generate revenue from reservations.

Golf Course

A need for another golf course in the Merced area was discussed by some members of the public. The area recently lost a golf course to the construction of the new University of California at Merced. However, there are public courses in Madera and Modesto. Publicly owned golf courses are typically designed to be fully supported by user fees, or sometimes are intended to be revenue generators. Additional study beyond the scope of this project is needed if the community wishes to assess the feasibility of a golf course. Merced should only consider a public golf course if a detailed and sound feasibility analysis determines that the course will be at minimum self-supporting.

Large Water Playground

Merced's hot climate would make a large water playground very attractive to families. There are no facilities of this type within the City or nearby, and the operating costs are much lower than for a pool. The City could charge admission to this type of facility, if a fairly elaborate playground were provided. Smaller neighborhood-scale water playgrounds typically cannot support admission fees.

The City of Merced offers a limited recreation program. There is a range of athletics options, with the City operating a number of programs itself and co-sponsoring other programs with local leagues. In terms of aquatics, Merced offers swimming classes for younger youth. In addition, the City offers some after-school programming for younger youth, as well as some limited general recreation classes. The general recreation classes are typically taught through contract relationships with recreation providers. This is an area where programming could be significantly expanded.

Two of the major factors that limit the City's ability to provide additional programming are a lack of facilities and a lack of staff. The lack of indoor facilities was previously discussed. The level of recreation staffing in Merced is low compared to other cities of a similar size. The City has 5 full-time recreation staff, including the Director (who is also responsible for code enforcement) and the Department Secretary. The remaining 3 full-time staff are responsible for the City's existing programming. One person is devoted to youth

programming, but has also managed to develop some special events programming for the City. A second person is devoted to aquatics and athletics, including operation of the adult softball leagues. The third person is responsible for the Zoo, the Seniors programs, and developing the program guide. The City's hand-written registration procedure also places a large demand on staff time for the Department Secretary, as well as for the three program staff. In addition, the three full-time recreation program staff are also responsible for supervising the City's part-time recreation employees, such as pool staff.

Two full-time zookeeper positions are funded through the Department, but these positions do not provide recreation programming. There are also some part-time program staff, particularly for youth programs, but these positions are barely sufficient to cover the staffing needs of the programs. With the existing workload and the current staffing level of 3 full-time recreation staff, there is limited time available for development of additional programming.

Recreation programming will be discussed in detail in Section 7. However, it is important to keep in mind that City staff do not have to teach the programs – contract teachers and recreation providers can do that. City staff can develop program ideas, recruit the teachers, provide the space, and take care of registration, leaving the actual teaching to others. While this is the current practice for general recreation classes, the range of programming offered in Merced is limited for a city of its size. It is important to remember that an expansion in programming does not necessarily mean an expansion in staffing. Some of the recreation programs the City should consider include the following:

- After school programs
- Summer youth programs and camps
- Recreational sports for youth (less competitive than the youth leagues)
- Evening activities for youth and teens
- Special events
- Cultural and performing arts (potential partnership opportunity with the Arts Council)
- Arts (drawing, photography, etc.) (potential partnership opportunity with the Arts Council)
- Outdoor education / nature programs
- Fitness classes (aerobics, water exercise, yoga, etc.)

This page left intentionally blank.

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California



*Photo: Pool at Stephen Leonard Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 6: Park and Facility Recommendations

- *Introduction*
- *Facility Plan*
- *Trail Recommendations*
- *Indoor Recreation Facilities*
- *Outdoor Sports Facilities*
- *Specialized Recreation Facilities*
- *Applegate Zoo*

6.1 Introduction

This section of the Park and Open Space Master Plan discusses the recommendations for parks and facilities.

Park Layout Plan	
Mini-Parks	6-7
Neighborhood Parks	6-14
Community/Large Urban Parks	6-29
Special Use Areas	6-39
Linear Parks	6-43
Trail Recommendations	6-48
Indoor Recreation Facilities	6-51
Outdoor Sports Facilities	6-55
Specialized Recreation Facilities	6-60
Applegate Zoo	6-63

6.2 Facility Plan

The Park Layout Plan, shown on page 6-5, is a graphic representation of existing and future parks and other proposed recreation facilities. Some important notes about the Layout Plan are:

1. A letter of the alphabet and number (such as NP-15) defines each site on the Layout Plan. The number is for site identification only and corresponds to text in this section. The letters represent the type of existing or proposed park and are keyed as follows:

MP	Mini-Park
NP	Neighborhood Park
SP	School Park
CP	Community Park
LU	Large Urban Park
SU	Special Use Park
LP	Linear Park
UP	Urban Plaza
AP	Athletic Park

2. On the Layout Plan, an asterisk illustrates proposed park sites. The intent is not to identify specific sites, but rather to show a general location of where a park site should be located to provide needed park service. The actual location will be determined based on land availability, acquisition cost and the property owner's willingness to sell.
3. The location and arrangement of the parks is designed to serve the entire Planning Area at build-out.
4. Names for proposed parks, where used, are for reference purposes only and are not yet approved by City staff or the City Council.

Overall Concept:

Park Layout Plan Objectives:

1. *Provide a multi-use neighborhood park type facility within walking distance of most residents of Merced.*
2. *Provide community parks within a reasonable bicycling or driving distance of most residents.*
3. *Provide land for specialized facilities such as sports fields and indoor recreation areas.*

The ideal park system for a community is one made up of a hierarchy of various park types, each offering certain types of recreation and/or open space opportunities. Separately, each park type may serve only one basic function, but collectively they will serve the entire needs of the community. By recognizing this concept, Merced can develop a more efficient, cost effective and usable park system

The proposed park system for Merced centers on the premise that a multi-use neighborhood or community park will be located within a half-mile radius of most residents. Currently, the park system is developed so that parks are generally available within walking distance, but many of the parks are underdeveloped and are not serving residents' recreation needs.

The core system of parks (neighborhood and community parks) will provide the basic open space and recreational opportunities within the City. It is important to note that these core parks should be developed to meet the overall recreation needs of the community. Supplementing these parks will be large urban parks, regional parks, specialized recreation areas, and linear parks for trail systems.

It should be noted that certain park and recreation areas and facilities could be developed in partnership with other departments, agencies or private groups. For instance, the Merced City School District has demonstrated an interest in joint school and park sites.

Park Index:

The purpose of the table below is to provide a quick reference locating the discussion on specific park sites.

Table 6.1
Index of Individual Park Recommendations – Existing Parks
Merced Planning Area

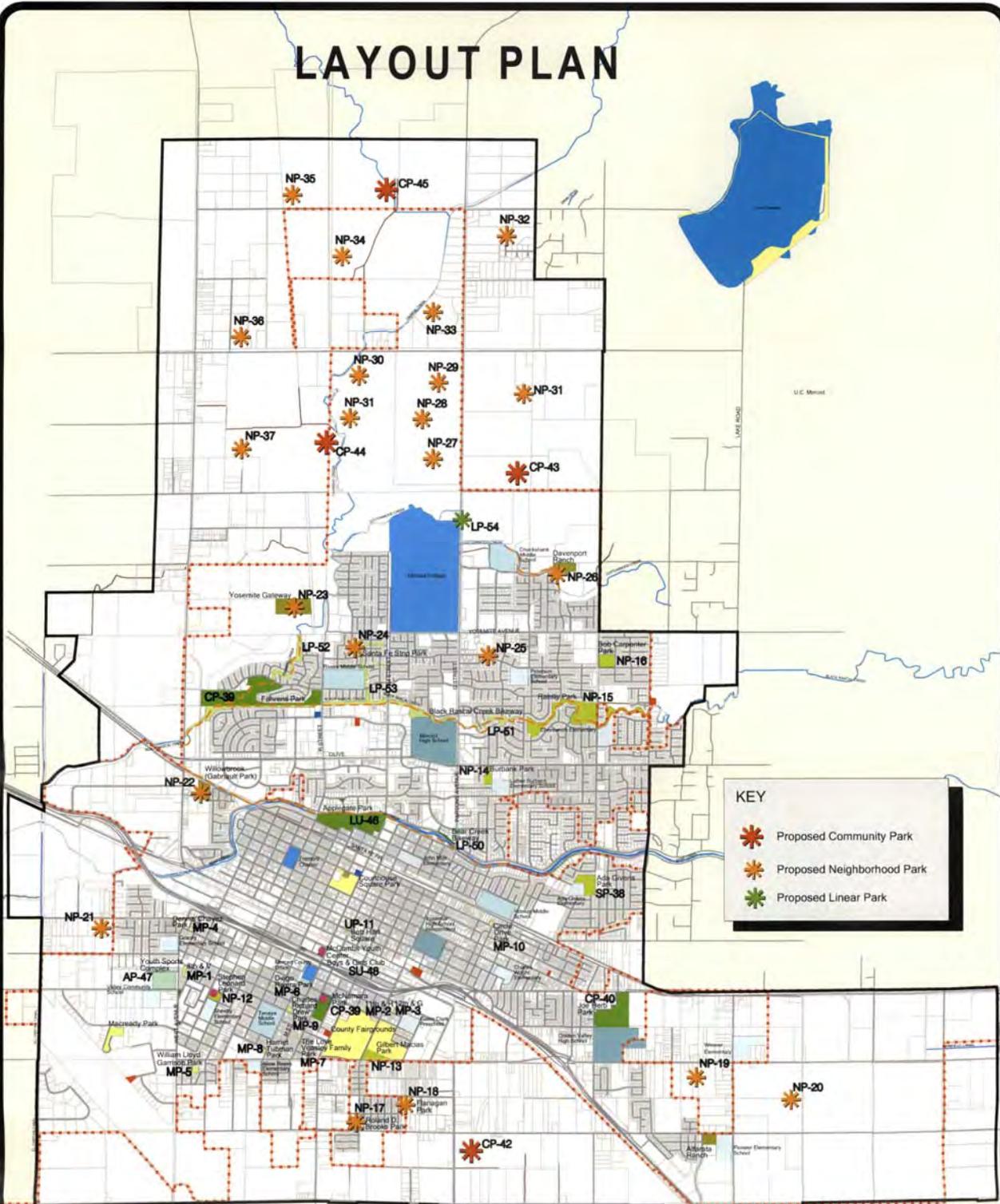
Site Number	Park Name	Page Number
MP-1	8 th and V Mini-Park	6-9
MP-2	11 th and H Mini-Park	6-9
MP-3	12 th and G Mini-Park	6-10
MP-4	Dennis Chavez Park	6-10
MP-5	William Lloyd Garrison Park	6-11
MP-6	Diego Rivera Park	6-11
MP-7	Love Veasley Family Park	6-12
MP-8	Harriet Tubman Park	6-12
MP-9	Charles Richard Drew Park	6-13
MP-10	Circle Drive Park	6-13
NP-12	Stephen Leonard Park	6-18
NP-13	Gilbert Macias Park	6-18
NP-14	Burbank Park	6-19
NP-15	Rahilly Park	6-20
NP-16	Bob Carpenter Park	6-20
SP-38	Ada Givens Park	6-27
CP-39	McNamara Park	6-32
CP-40	Joe Herb Park	6-33
CP-41	Fahrens Park	6-34
LU-46	Applegate Park	6-36
UP-11	Bob Hart Square	6-40
AP-47	Youth Sports Complex	6-40
SU-48	McCombs Youth Center (Boys & Girls Club)	6-41
LP-50	Bear Creek Bikeway	6-45
LP-51	Black Rascal Creek Bikeway	6-45
LP-52	Fahrens Creek Bikeway	6-46
LP-53	Santa Fe Strip Park	6-46
LP-54	Cottonwood Creek Bikeway	6-47

Table 6.2
 Index of Individual Park Recommendations – Proposed Parks
 Merced Planning Area

Site Number	Park Name	Page Number
NP-17	Roland D. Brooks Park (P)	6-21
NP-18	Flanagan Park (P)	6-21
NP-19	Alfarata Ranch Park (P)	6-22
NP-20	Weaver Park (P)	6-23
NP-21	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-23
NP-22	Willowbrook (Gabriault) Park (P)	6-23
NP-23	Yosemite Gateway Park (P)	6-24
NP-24	Santa Fe Strip Neighborhood Park (P)	6-24
NP-25	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-25
NP-26	Davenport Ranch (P)	6-25
NP-27	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-28	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-29	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-30	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-31	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-32	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-33	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-34	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-35	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-36	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
NP-37	New Neighborhood Park (P)	6-26
CP-42	New Community Park (P)	6-34
CP-43	New Community Park (P)	6-35
CP-44	New Community Park (P)	6-35
CP-45	New Community Park (P)	6-35
SU-49	North Recreation Center (P)	6-41

Note: In some cases, the names identified above are for reference purposes only. These names are subject to change and will be finalized by City Council during the park planning and development process.

LAYOUT PLAN

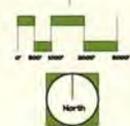


KEY

-  Proposed Community Park
-  Proposed Neighborhood Park
-  Proposed Linear Park

LEGEND

 SUDP/ Planning Area	 Special Use Parks
 City Limits	 Athletic Parks
 Elementary Schools	 Undeveloped Parkland
 Middle Schools	 Other Recreational Resources (Non-City)
 High Schools	 Mini Parks
 Neighborhood Parks/ School Parks	 Off Street Bike Trails
 Community Parks	 Community Recreation Facility
 Linear Parks	



Layout Plan
**Parks & Recreation
 Open Space Master Plan**
 Merced, California

Base data provided by the City of Merced

Mini Parks

Mini-parks, tot lots and children's playgrounds are all small, single purpose play lots designed primarily for small children usage. Due to their size, the facilities are usually limited to a small open grass area, a children's playground and a small picnic area.

Assessment:

1. **Existing Conditions:** Currently, there are 10 mini-parks in the Merced planning area. These are located in South Merced and most offer limited recreation opportunities.
2. **Service Areas:** The service area for a typical mini-park is considered to be a 1/4-mile radius.
3. **Needs Assessment:** Due to their size, maintenance costs, and limited recreational value, additional parks of this type are not recommended. In addition, the City should consider reducing its current inventory of this park type by donating or selling some sites.

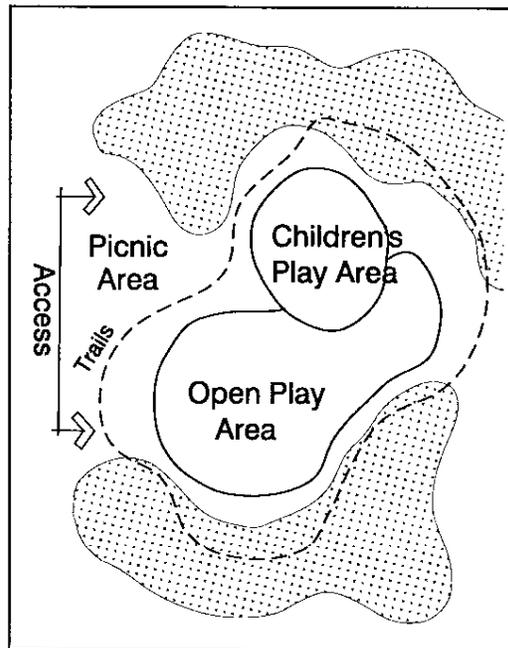
Design and Development Policies:

1. **General Land Use Guidelines:**
 - a. Due to their size and limited recreational value, **public parks** of this type should be **discouraged**. Mini-parks should only be considered when there is not a sufficient population base to support a neighborhood park or no other option is available to provide park service.
 - b. The development of this park type should be encouraged as part of large private multi-family developments under private ownership. Within single-family subdivisions, if these parks are provided, they should be owned and maintained by a homeowners association.
2. **Site Selection Criteria:**
 - a. While there is no size requirement for mini-parks, the minimum size should be at least 20,000 square feet in size.
 - b. The site should be central to the area it serves.
 - c. The site should be flat and usable and have the ability to support active uses.
 - d. If possible, walking distance should not exceed one-quarter mile, and not require crossing of busy streets or other barriers.
3. **Design and Development Standards:**
 - a. Appropriate facilities include:
 - Children's playground facilities
 - Open grass play area
 - Picnic areas

- Pathways, preferably looping
- Site amenities (picnic tables, benches, bike racks, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, etc.)

b. The site should be visible from adjoining streets and have at least 100-150 feet of street frontage.

4. Schematic Diagram



Recommendations

1. Summary of Recommendations:

Table 6.3
Summary of Mini-Park Recommendations
Merced Planning Area

Park Number	Site	Existing Acres/ Proposed Acres	Action
MP-1	8 th and V Mini-Park	0.89	Consider disposal
MP-2	11 th and H Mini-Park	0.17	Consider disposal
MP-3	12 th and G Mini-Park	0.19	Consider disposal
MP-4	Dennis Chavez Park	0.28	Consider disposal
MP-5	William Lloyd Garrison Park	1.02	Upgrade
MP-6	Diego Rivera Park	0.25	Consider disposal
MP-7	Love Veasley Family Park	0.17	Consider disposal
MP-8	Harriet Tubman Park	0.45	Consider disposal
MP-9	Charles Richard Drew Park	0.52	Upgrade
MP-10	Circle Drive Park	0.26	Upgrade
Total		4.20	

2. Specific Improvements:

8th and V Mini-Park

MP-1

The 8th & V mini-park is fairly large compared to the other mini-parks in Merced, but it is located very near Stephen Leonard Park. The service area for this park overlaps the service area for Stephen Leonard Park. It has very few facilities, and does not appear to get much use.

Since it has limited recreation value and overlapping service area, the City should consider disposing of this mini-park. Prior to making a final decision, the City should consult the immediate neighbors. At this meeting, City representatives should share a cost-benefit analysis, including the maintenance cost of this park; the projected cost for upgrades; the availability of funding for upgrades; options for disposal (donation of park or donation/sale of the land); the estimated proceeds if the park were sold; and the service areas of nearby parks. The four options that should be explored with neighbors are: 1. Disposing of the park by selling it or donating the land (such as to Habitat for Humanity) and dedicating any funds generated to park improvements at nearby parks; 2. Keeping the park as is and continuing to maintain it at its current level (not recommended); 3. Upgrading it and continuing to maintain it as a City park; or 4. Forming a local maintenance district to pay for upgrades and maintenance. Turning the park over to neighborhood volunteers is not usually a workable solution, because the City remains ultimately responsible for the park and often has to resume maintenance once the initial volunteers have phased out. Due to the limited City funds currently available for upgrades, it will be important to discuss the realistic potential of various funding sources (City, neighbors, other groups). Option 2 is not recommended because of the current limited recreation value of the park. Option 3 is also not recommended, unless neighbors can provide a strong argument in favor, a private group steps in to take over ownership, or neighbors propose a realistic financing plan for upgrades.

11th and H Mini-Park

MP-2

This is one of the smaller sites (about 7,500 s.f.), and does not appear to get much use. It does contain some trees and a small play area. Since it is across the street from the flea market grounds, there are very few eyes on this site, which make it less welcoming for users. Gilbert Macias Park, which has much nicer play equipment, is located on the south side of the flea market grounds.

Due to its limited recreation value and overlapping service area, the City should consider disposing of this mini-park. It is the size of a residential lot, and is located among single family residences. Prior to making a final decision about the park's future, the City

should consult the immediate neighbors. See the discussion under 8th and V mini-park, site MP-2, for additional details.

12th and G Mini-Park

MP-3

This park is the size of a single family lot. The play structure is very small, and there are no trees or landscaping on the site. The site does not appear to get much use, although it is in the midst of a residential neighborhood with many multi-family developments.

Although this park is fairly close to both McNamara Park and Gilbert Macias Park and is quite small, it has some potential to provide recreation value to surrounding neighbors, who are mainly residing in apartments with limited outdoor space. However, in its current state, this park is providing very limited recreation value and requires significant upgrades.

Prior to making a final decision about the future of this park, the City should hold a meeting with surrounding neighbors (those within a quarter mile of the park) to determine the recreational value of this site to neighbors and gain input on its future. There are four general options for this site:

- If the site is providing recreational value to surrounding neighbors, the City could upgrade and maintain it.
- If the site is providing recreational value to surrounding neighbors, the City could upgrade it and a neighboring property owner or a private group could pay for maintenance.
- If there is marginal recreational value, neighbors or other groups could pay for upgrades and maintenance. If there isn't interest, the City should sell or donate the site.
- The site could be sold or donated and any proceeds used to upgrade a nearby park.

This site may be a good candidate to turn over to a neighboring property owner (if they are willing), who would then be responsible for maintenance and possibly for upgrades. If it is determined that the City should retain this park and upgrade it, the park should be designed using a process that involves the surrounding neighbors. This will ensure that the resulting park reflects the needs and desires of neighbors, and that there is a sense of "ownership" of the park among neighbors which can increase use of the park and help reduce vandalism.

Dennis Chavez Park

MP-4

This is one of the larger of the mini-park sites and has good visibility because it is located on a corner. It has a nicer character than many of the other mini-parks because of the path system and shade trees. Other than the play area and the pathway, there is very little in terms of amenities. It does not appear to get much use by the surrounding neighborhood. However, this

park does offer potential service to a small area outside the 1/2 mile service area of Stephen Leonard Park.

Because of its limited recreation value and overlapping service area, the City should consider disposing of this mini-park. It is about the size of a residential lot, and is located among single family residences. Prior to making a final decision about the future of this park, the City should consult the immediate neighbors. See the discussion under 8th and V mini-park, site MP-2, for additional details.

William Lloyd Garrison Park MP-5

William Lloyd Garrison Park is the largest of the mini-parks, and has some potential for expansion. Currently, it barely qualifies as a developed park because it is essentially an uneven grass area, with the exception of a small play area and a bench located in one corner. If upgraded, this park would provide service to an area not served by other neighborhood parks.

It is recommended that this mini-park be upgraded so that it meets local recreation needs. Recommended upgrades include:

- Prepare a master plan for the site, taking into account in the design any potential land acquisitions to expand the park.
- Provide a larger play area with more interesting equipment; including installation of safety surfacing and curbing.
- Provide a path system within the park.
- Install paved court for basketball, etc.
- Upgrade irrigation system.
- Provide additional trees.
- Provide site amenities: signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables.
- If the park size is increased to at least 2 acres, reclassify as a neighborhood park.

Diego Rivera Park MP-6

This is one of the smaller sites (about 10,800 s.f.), and does not appear to get much use. It contains very few amenities, and the play equipment is quite small. There does appear to be undeveloped land at the rear of the park. The site is located midway between McNamara and Stephen Leonard Parks, and a few blocks from Charles Richard Drew Park (MP-9).

Because of its limited recreation value and overlapping service area, the City should consider disposing of this mini-park. It is the size of a residential lot, and is located among single family residences. Prior to making a final decision about the future of this park, the City should consult the immediate neighbors. See the discussion under 8th and V mini-park, site MP-2, for additional details.

Love Veasley Family Park**MP-7**

This park is the size of a single family home site (about 7,500 s.f.). The play structure is very small, and there are no other facilities or landscaping at the park. This site is within walking distance of Gilbert Macias Park, McNamara Park, and Harriet Tubman Park, all of which have nicer and more interesting play equipment.

Because of its limited recreation value and overlapping service area, the City should consider disposing of this mini-park. It is the size of a residential lot, and is located among single family residences. Prior to making a final decision about the future of this park, the City should consult the immediate neighbors. See the discussion under 8th and V mini-park, site MP-2, for additional details.

Harriet Tubman Park**MP-8**

This park is located adjacent to the Golden Valley Health Center and appears to get some use, unlike many of the other mini-parks. The main users are children who are visiting the Health Center. Tenaya Middle School and Charles Richard Drew Park are a few blocks away. The park is almost a half acre in size, and has a basketball backboard in addition to play equipment. Although it isn't a full half-court, the backboard seems to attract use.

Prior to making a final decision about the future of this park, the City should hold a meeting with surrounding neighbors (those within a ¼ mile of the park), and specifically with Golden Valley Health Center, to determine the recreational value of this site to neighbors and gain input on its future. There are four general options for this site:

- If the site is providing recreational value to surrounding neighbors, the City could upgrade and maintain it.
- If the site is providing recreational value to surrounding neighbors, the City could upgrade it and a neighboring property owner (such as the Health Center) or a private group could take over or pay for maintenance.
- If there is marginal recreational value, neighbors or other groups could pay for upgrades and maintenance. If there isn't interest, the City should sell the site.
- The site could be donated or sold and any proceeds used to upgrade a nearby park.

As an additional alternative, this site may be a good candidate to turn over to Golden Valley Health Center, if they are willing, since the park is essentially part of the Health Center site and appears to be mostly used by Health Center clients. The Health Center would then be responsible for maintenance and possibly for upgrades.

Charles Richard Drew Park**MP-9**

Charles Richard Drew Park is one of the larger mini-parks, and contains just over a half acre. The park contains few amenities, but the play structure is larger than in most other mini-parks. This park is located diagonally across the street from Tenaya Middle School, which does not have a play area, and has good visibility because of its corner location.

It is recommended that this mini-park be upgraded so that it meets local recreation needs. Recommended upgrades include:

- Prepare a master plan for the site.
- Upgrade the play equipment, including installation of safety surfacing and curbing. If possible, provide two play areas for different age groups, including tots.
- Provide a path system within the park.
- Upgrade irrigation system.
- Provide additional trees and landscaping.
- Provide site amenities: signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables.

Circle Drive Park**MP-10**

Circle Drive Park is one of the most attractive and welcoming mini-parks. It is very visible from E. 23rd Street, and is surrounded by Circle Drive. Shade trees provide a canopy over the park. There are no other parks nearby.

It is recommended that this mini-park be upgraded so that it better meets local recreation needs. Recommended upgrades include:

- Prepare a master plan for the site.
- Upgrade the play equipment, including installation of safety surfacing and curbing. If possible, provide two play areas for different age groups, including tots.
- Provide a path system within the park.
- If space permits, provide a paved court area for basketball
- Upgrade irrigation system.
- Provide additional trees and landscaping.
- Provide site amenities: signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables.

Neighborhood Parks/ School Parks

Neighborhood parks are a combination playground and park, designed primarily for non-supervised, non-organized recreation activities. They are generally small in size (about 5 acres) and serve an area of approximately one-half mile radius. Typically, facilities found in a neighborhood park include a children's playground, picnic areas, trails, open grass areas for passive use, outdoor basketball courts and multi-use sport fields for soccer, and Little League baseball. Optimum size is between 3 and 7 acres.

School parks are parks provided adjacent to school sites. These parks provide the same function as neighborhood parks. In Merced, the school park model is one that the City and the Merced City School District intend to pursue in the future.

Assessment:

1. **Existing Conditions:** Currently, there are five neighborhood parks and one school park consisting of 26.88 acres in the Merced city limits. Merced owns all five neighborhood parks, and 5 acres of the school park site. The remainder of the school park site is owned by MCSD, and a portion of MCSD's acreage contains the school buildings.
2. **Service Areas:** The service radius for a neighborhood park is considered to be a 1/2-mile radius. Please refer to the Neighborhood Park Service Area Map in Appendix E to see the underserved areas.
3. **Needs Assessment:** Based on the service area analysis, 8 additional neighborhood park sites are needed to serve the current city limits, and an additional 13 are needed to serve the planning area at build-out. However, 9 sites are already available or dedicated to park use.

Design and Development Policies:

1. **General Land Use Guidelines:**
 - a. The acquisition of neighborhood parkland should occur far in advance of its need.
 - b. The construction of a neighborhood park should occur when the area it will serve reaches about 75% developed (measured by either acreage developed, or population accommodated).
 - c. Wherever feasible, neighborhood park acquisition should occur adjacent to elementary schools sites.
2. **Site Selection Criteria:**
 - a. Under most conditions, neighborhood parks should be no smaller than about three acres in size, with optimum size being 5 acres. If located next to a school site, optimum park size may be reduced to 2 - 3 acres, depending upon the school facilities provided. If flood control basin facilities are included in a neighborhood park site, at least 2 contiguous

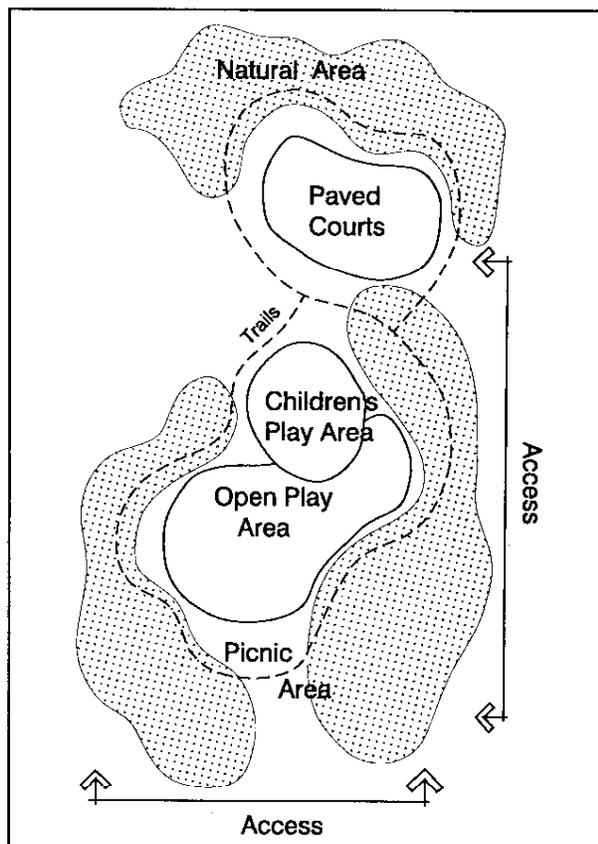
usable acres should be provided in addition to the acreage contained in the basin.

- b. At least 50% of the site should be flat and usable, and provide space for both active and passive uses.
- c. The site should be reasonably central to the neighborhood it is intended to serve.
- d. If possible, walking or bicycling distance should not exceed one-half mile for the area it serves. Access routes should minimize physical barriers and the crossing of major arterials.
- e. The site should be visible from adjoining streets.
- f. Access to the site should be via a local residential street. The park should be open to a public street on at least three sides, and have at least 200 feet of frontage along each street. If located on a busy street, incorporate buffers and/or barriers necessary to reduce vehicular hazards.
- g. Additional access points from the adjoining neighborhood should be provided. These should be at least 25 feet wide.

3. Design and Development Standards:

- a. Appropriate facilities include:
 - Unstructured open play areas and practice sports fields. Fields should not be scheduled for league play.
 - Children's playground (tot and youth)
 - Basketball court
 - Tennis courts (single or pair)
 - Picnic areas
 - Shelter building (small)
 - Trails and/or pathways
 - Natural open space
 - Site amenities (picnic tables, benches, bike racks, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, etc.)
- b. Parking Requirements: Minimum of three spaces per acre of usable active park area. If on-street parking is available, this standard can be reduced by one car for every 25 feet of available street frontage. Design should encourage access by foot or bicycle.
- c. Active and noise producing facilities, such as tennis and basketball courts, should be located away from adjoining homes.
- d. Portable restrooms are appropriate for this type of site. Restroom policies are discussed in Section 7.8.

4. Schematic Diagram



Recommendations:

The following are recommendations for existing and future neighborhood and school parks in the Merced planning area. The table below summarizes the recommendations.

1. Summary of Recommendations:

Table 6.4
Summary of Neighborhood Park Recommendations
Merced Planning Area

Park Number	Site	Existing Acres/ (Proposed Acres)	Action
NP-12	Stephen Leonard Park	2.70	Minor upgrades
NP-13	Gilbert Macias Park	4.91	No change
NP-14	Burbank Park	3.28	Prepare master plan; major upgrade
NP-15	Rahilly Park	5.00 ¹	Minor upgrades
NP-16	Bob Carpenter Park	5.99	Minor upgrades
NP-17	Roland D. Brooks Park (P)		Planning and development
NP-18	Flanagan Park (P)	3.96	Prepare master plan, complete redevelopment
NP-19	Alfarata Ranch Park (P)	(5.00)	Planning and development
NP-20	Weaver Park (P)	(5.00)	Planning and development
NP-21	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Planning and development
NP-22	Willowbrook Park (P)	(5.00)	Planning and development
NP-23	Yosemite Gateway Park (P)	(8.00)	Planning and development
NP-24	Santa Fe Strip Neighborhood Park (P)	(0.00)	Provide neighborhood park facilities within existing linear park.
NP-25	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-26	Davenport Ranch (P)	(7.50)	Planning and development
NP-27	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-28	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-29	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-30	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-31	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-32	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-33	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-34	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-35	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-36	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
NP-37	New Neighborhood Park (P)	(5.00)	Acquisition, planning and development
SP-38	Ada Givens Park	5.00	Prepare master plan; further development
Total		125.34	

¹ Some City records show Rahilly Park as containing a total of 28.91 acres. However, this figure includes Black Rascal Creek Bikeway between Parsons

and Cherokee. For the purpose of the master plan, 5 acres (the approximate size of the neighborhood park facilities) are inventoried as part of Rahilly Park, and the remaining acreage is included in the Black Rascal Creek Bikeway acreage.

Existing Acres = 26.88 Acres
 Proposed Acres = 98.46 Acres

Note that all proposed parks are identified in this plan as neighborhood parks. Some of these parks may be built in conjunction with school sites, and as such would be considered school parks.

2. Specific Improvements:

Stephen Leonard Park NP-12

Stephen Leonard Park is a very popular neighborhood park located in South Merced across from Sheehy Elementary School. The picnic tables and barbecues receive a lot of use. Mature trees provide shade and a pleasant character at this park, which encompasses an entire block. While only on-street parking is available, there is on-street park all around the park's perimeter. The park contains a small children's play area, a paved basketball court, picnic tables with barbecues, and a very small swimming pool (approximately 30'x50') with a shelter and bathhouse. A youth center is located at the northwest corner of the park.

Specific recommendations for this park include:

- Install sidewalks and/or internal pathways.
- Replace playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories; install safety surfacing and curbing.
- Eventually eliminate pool. Replace with a small water playground located to take advantage of the restroom and shelter. Either this pool or the Ada Givens pool should be maintained until a replacement teaching pool is developed.
- When a new recreation center is opened in South Merced with more extensive youth facilities, close the youth center. See discussion within Section 6.4. At that point, there would be two options for this building. The first is to demolish it and reintegrate the building site into the park. The second option is to refurbish the building and use it for recreation programs, community rentals, and other public use.

Gilbert Macias Park NP-13

Gilbert Macias Park is an attractive and newer facility located on Childs Avenue amidst the fairgrounds complex. It has fairly large trees (15 to 25 years in age) that provide shade and an inviting canopy. The flea market grounds to the north are unsightly, and are surrounded by chain link fence. No changes are proposed for this park.

Burbank Park

NP-14

Burbank Park has the potential to serve an area of Merced that is not currently being served by neighborhood park facilities. This park has a number of challenges, including fragmented street patterns, a narrow frontage on Olive Avenue, a lack of facilities, and poor access. The surrounding neighborhood contains a variety of uses, from single family homes to rural residential development to commercial development. There may be opportunities for future expansion of the site because the property to the east contains a single family residence and horse paddocks. It is possible that this owner will sell at some point in the future, and the land would offer an opportunity to expand the park, provide better access, and create greater visibility from Olive Avenue.

Currently, there is a lack of usable amenities in the park and a lack of parking (no off-street parking and no on-street parking due to lack of street frontages). There is poor visibility of the park from Olive Avenue due to the narrow entrance and minimal street frontage. Most of the park is surrounded by the fenced back yards of residential development, offering little visibility into the site. Although the park is adjacent to Luther Burbank Elementary School, there is no connection between the school and the park. In its current state, Burbank Park is not fulfilling the neighborhood park function.

Because the area to the south of Olive and east of Burbank Park is not being adequately served by neighborhood parks, it is recommended that this park be upgraded to meet neighborhood park recreation needs. However, additional street frontage and substantial upgrades would be required in this park for it to fulfill the neighborhood park function. Although this area is underserved by neighborhood parks, the City may decide that the upgrades needed at this site are not worth the cost.

If upgrades are desired in the long-term, recommended improvements include:

- Prepare a master plan for the site, taking into account in the design any potential land acquisitions to expand the park and creating a more clear relationship with the school site.
- Acquire the neighboring parcel currently occupied by a private residence (it also has a horse paddock) if it becomes available. This property has frontage on Olive, and would provide additional usable acreage. The purpose of the acquisition is to increase access to the park and create a more usable configuration.
- Provide a larger play area with more interesting equipment; including installation of safety surfacing and curbing.
- Provide parking, either on-street or in a small off-street parking lot.
- Provide a path system within the park.
- Install paved court for basketball, etc.

- Upgrade irrigation system.
- Provide additional trees.
- Provide site amenities: signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables.

Rahilly Park

NP-15

This park is one of the most attractive in Merced. It needs half-street improvements on Parsons Avenue. An island of unincorporated Merced County land is located across Parsons Avenue from the park. Parsons was extended to the north of the park in 2003, increasing access.

The picnic shelter is available for rental and is heavily used by residents from throughout Merced. It contains a pit barbecue and rotisserie. One of the two play areas is a fairly large wooden structure. The other play area has a newer play structure, a small wooden climbing structure, swings, and concrete pipe segments. There is a small pond near the picnic shelter, and Black Rascal Creek Bikeway passes through the southern side of the park. The topography at the park is rolling, which contrasts with the mostly flat landscape of the Central Valley and provides a sense of privacy and enclosure inside the park. Although restrooms are not typically recommended in neighborhood parks, it is recommended that the restrooms at Rahilly Park remain and be upgraded because of the heavy rental use of this facility.

Only minor upgrades are proposed for this park, including:

- Install sidewalks and/or internal pathways.
- Renovate restroom building and shelter.
- Remove permanent goals and leave the undersized soccer field as an open turf area.
- Provide a paved court for basketball, etc. if this can be accomplished without impacting the character of the park.
- Provide street improvements at the time the neighboring streets are improved.

Bob Carpenter Park

NP-16

Bob Carpenter Park is a shallow detention basin located within a newly developed single family residential area. The park contains a children's play area, some picnic tables and barbecues, a water fountain, and a turf area with two small backstops. The detention basin was designed from a utilitarian standpoint, and is a rectangular depression that takes up most of the site. The park is not inviting for several reasons: it doesn't have many amenities; it offers very little shade because it's new; and the barbecues and picnic tables have not been placed in a manner to invite use. There have been conflicts at this site between the surrounding neighborhood and the baseball and soccer teams that have been flocking to the park to practice (although it is not intended for this).

Despite the shortcomings of this park, the play equipment is new and the turf is in fairly good condition. Therefore, only minor changes are proposed, including:

- Provide sidewalks and/or a paved internal pathway.
- Provide additional trees
- Provide benches, especially near the play area.
- Provide access control, such as removable bollards, across the curb cut.
- Provide additional site amenities, such as a bike rack and trash receptacles.
- Reposition some of the picnic tables to make them more inviting.
- If possible, provide a paved court area for basketball. The court location should be carefully considered to be sure that it fits into an overall plan for the park.

Roland D. Brooks Park

NP-17

This site has been dedicated for park use as part of an adjacent subdivision. Like Bob Carpenter Park, this park is a shallow detention basin. This park was designed prior to the park master plan project and is planned to be constructed in 2003. It is likely that this park will be similar to Bob Carpenter Park, because there are many similarities between the two sites.

Therefore, the following improvements should be considered at Roland D. Brooks Park:

- If not provided, install sidewalks and/or a paved internal pathway.
- Provide additional trees.
- Provide benches, especially near the play area.
- Provide additional site amenities, such as a bike rack and trash receptacles.
- If possible, provide a paved court area for basketball. The court location should be carefully considered to be sure that it fits into an overall plan for the park.
- Reposition some of the picnic tables to make them more inviting.

Flanagan Park

NP-18

Flanagan Park is owned by Merced County, and is just outside the current Merced city limits. Although this park is currently in very poor condition, it has potential to be rehabilitated to serve as a pleasant neighborhood park. Despite the poor condition, there is a pleasant character at this park and it is shaded by mature trees.

Previously, Merced County has sought to turn ownership and responsibility for this park over to the City of Merced. It is recommended that the City of Merced accept ownership of this park with the condition that Merced County first remove all hazardous conditions on the site. City and County staff should review the site together and agree on which equipment and

facilities should be removed. Once any hazardous conditions are removed, the City of Merced will take ownership of an essentially undeveloped park site. There may be an opportunity to expand this park to the east. Flanagan Park is long and narrow. If an additional acre or two were acquired on the east side, it would make the site more usable.

After assuming ownership of Flanagan Park, the City should prepare a master plan for the site. The design program for the park should include the following:

- Playground areas with separate equipment for respective age categories
- Paved court for basketball, etc.
- Multi-use field area (suitable for recreational (unorganized) sports play or practice)
- Open play area
- Picnic shelter
- Picnic area
- Paved pathways
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables)

Alfarata Ranch Park

NP-19

This site has been owned by the City for a number of years and was acquired for park use. Although the site is to the west of Pioneer Elementary School, it is adjacent to the buildings and not an extension of the school play area. The park is currently undeveloped, but it does contain a municipal water well. An interchange proposed for Highway 99 at Mission Avenue could have a major effect on this area. Because of the planned interchange, the City should consider whether another site closer to residential development would be more appropriate for a neighborhood park in this area. If a more suitable site is identified, the existing Alfarata Ranch park site should be designated for other uses.

Whether the current Alfarata Ranch Park site or a different nearby park site, it is recommended that a neighborhood park be developed in this vicinity. A master plan should be prepared to guide the future development of the park. In order to ensure that the site will fulfill the neighborhood park function, it is recommended that the design program include the following:

- Playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories
- Paved court for basketball, etc.
- Multi-use area (suitable for practice for organized sports)
- Open play area
- Picnic shelter (small building)
- Picnic area
- Paved pathway
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables)

Weaver Park NP-20

It is proposed that a neighborhood park be provided in the vicinity of Weaver School, preferably adjacent to the school if possible. A master plan should be prepared to guide the future development of this site. In order to ensure that the site will fulfill the neighborhood park function, it is recommended that the design program include the following:

- Playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories
- Paved court for basketball, etc.
- Multi-use area (suitable for practice for organized sports)
- Open play area
- Picnic shelter (small building)
- Picnic area
- Paved pathway
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables)

New Neighborhood Park NP-21

It is proposed that a neighborhood park be provided in the in the residential area to the west of Gracey Elementary School. This residential area is currently lacking park service, and needs a neighborhood park facility. A site between 2 and 5 acres in size should be acquired for park use. A master plan should be prepared to guide the future development of the site. In order to ensure that the site will fulfill the neighborhood park function, it is recommended that the design program include the following:

- Playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories
- Paved court for basketball, etc.
- Multi-use area (suitable for practice for organized sports)
- Open play area
- Picnic shelter (small building)
- Picnic area
- Paved pathway
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables)

Willowbrook Park NP-22

This park was dedicated for park use and designed prior to the park master plan project. It is planned to be constructed in 2003. It is likely that this park could have similar shortcomings to some of the other newer parks in Merced.

Therefore, the following improvements should be considered at Willowbrook Park:

- If not provided, install sidewalks and/or a paved internal pathway.

- Provide additional trees.
- Provide benches, especially near the play area.
- Provide additional site amenities, such as a bike rack and trash receptacles.
- If possible, provide a paved court area for basketball. The court location should be carefully considered to be sure that it fits into an overall plan for the park.
- Reposition some of the picnic tables to make them more inviting.

Yosemite Gateway Park

NP-23

This park was dedicated for park use prior to the park master plan project. It is planned to be constructed in 2004. It is likely that this park could have similarities to some of the other newer parks in Merced.

Therefore, the following improvements should be considered at Yosemite Gateway Park:

- If not provided, install sidewalks and/or a paved internal pathway.
- Provide additional trees.
- Provide benches, especially near the play area.
- Provide additional site amenities, such as a bike rack and trash receptacles.
- Site picnic tables and shelters so that they are inviting.
- If possible, provide a paved court area for basketball. The court location should be carefully considered to be sure that it fits into an overall plan for the park.

If these recommendations can be incorporated into the park design before construction begins, it will be more cost effective than retrofitting the park.

Santa Fe Strip Neighborhood Park

NP-24

Santa Fe Strip Park is an existing linear park containing a path that connects to the Black Rascal Creek Bikeway. Although the park contains a few additional elements, such as a play area, it receives very limited use. The park is not very visible: it has narrow street frontages, and residential homes (almost all with 6' fences) back onto the park. Neighborhood park facilities are needed to serve the surrounding neighborhood. It is recommended that neighborhood park facilities be developed on a portion of Santa Fe Strip Park to meet local park needs.

The recommended location for neighborhood park facilities is immediately north of Donna Drive. This site has good visibility from the street, and the park widens in this area. A master plan should be prepared to guide the future development of this site. In order to ensure that the site will fulfill the neighborhood park function, it is recommended that the design program include the following:

- Playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories
- Multi-use area (suitable for practice for organized sports)
- Open play area
- Trees to provide shade
- Picnic shelter (small building)
- Picnic area
- Paved pathway (connecting site elements to the existing linear pathway through the park)
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables)
- Possibly a paved court for basketball, etc. Whether a paved court is appropriate should be considered carefully at this site. The site is fairly small, and it may be difficult to locate a court so that it doesn't disturb the park's immediate neighbors. If a court is included, it should be located near the street and as far from residences as possible.

New Neighborhood Park

NP-25

It is proposed that a neighborhood park be provided in the residential area to the south of Yosemite Avenue and to the west of Peterson Elementary School. This residential area is currently lacking park service, and needs a neighborhood park facility if a suitable site can be acquired. A site between 2 and 5 acres in size should be acquired for park use. Because most of this area has been developed, it may be difficult to find an appropriate site.

A master plan should be prepared to guide the future development of the site. To ensure that the site will fulfill the neighborhood park function, it is recommended that the design program include the following:

- Playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories
- Paved court for basketball, etc.
- Multi-use area (suitable for practice for organized sports)
- Open play area
- Picnic shelter (small building)
- Picnic area
- Paved pathway
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables)

Davenport Ranch Park

NP-26

This site has been dedicated for park use as part of an adjacent subdivision. Like Bob Carpenter Park, this park is a shallow detention basin. This park was designed prior to the park master plan project and is planned to be constructed in 2003.

It is likely that this park will have similar shortcomings to Bob Carpenter Park, because there are many similarities between the two sites.

Therefore, the following improvements should be considered at Davenport Ranch Park:

- If not provided, install sidewalks and/or a paved internal pathway.
- Provide additional trees.
- Provide benches, especially near the play area.
- Provide additional site amenities, such as a bike rack and trash receptacles.
- If possible, provide a paved court area for basketball. The court location should be carefully considered to be sure that it fits into an overall plan for the park.
- Reposition some of the picnic tables to make them more inviting.

New Neighborhood Parks Sites NP-27 through NP37

Ten neighborhood parks are recommended to serve the mostly undeveloped northern portion of the planning area. Specific area plans have been developed for some of this section of Merced, and some subdivisions are being platted.

Based on the review of some of the development plans for this area of Merced, it is anticipated that many of the neighborhood parks will incorporate storm detention basins. For neighborhood parks, at least 2 usable acres should be provided outside the storm detention basin.

Basins that are located in parks should be contoured to provide a more pleasing shape and a larger usable area than the rectangular or square configuration that is currently typical. In order to maintain the same amount of storm water detention, a deeper basin may be required.

For each of these parks, a site needs to be acquired. General locations for each of the parks are indicated on the layout plan. Access to each of the sites should be via a local residential street. Each park should have at least 200 feet of frontage along the street. If located on a busy street, buffers and/or barriers should be incorporated as necessary to reduce vehicular hazards, but without reducing overall park safety and security. Each park should be central to the neighborhood it is meant to serve.

A master plan should be prepared to guide the future development of each site. To ensure that the sites will fulfill the neighborhood park function, it is recommended that the design program for each of the parks include the following:

- Playground area with separate equipment for respective age categories.
- Multi-use area (suitable for practice for organized sports). This is suitable for location within a detention basin.

- Open play area. This is suitable for location within a detention basin.
- Trees to provide shade.
- Picnic shelter (small building).
- Picnic area.
- Paved pathways.
- Support facilities (e.g., signage, bike racks, waste receptacles, benches and picnic tables).
- Paved court for basketball, etc.
- At least one of the north neighborhood parks should include a small water playground, similar to what is proposed at Stephen Leonard Park. A restroom should be provided at this site.

Ada Givens Park

SP-38

Ada Givens Park was developed in conjunction with Ada Givens Elementary School. The entire park is fenced and access to the park is prohibited when school is in session. The park is heavily used by the local youth soccer league because of its large, level open grass field. This park is difficult to reach, except from the south via Hawthorne Avenue. When the parcel to the east is developed and Parsons Avenue is constructed, there may be an opportunity to acquire additional land. At the very least, the new street will provide additional access and visibility for the park.

This park contains a very small 3.5' depth swimming pool (app. 20'x40') with small shelter and bathhouse, a children's play area, an octagonal picnic shelter with barbecue, an open turf area, and soccer fields.

The lack of access to this facility during school hours is problematic, because that is a prime use time for park users with small children. The fencing should be altered so that a portion of the park facilities are available to the public during the day, with at minimum, a play area, benches, and a picnic table.

While the facilities are newer and in good condition, Ada Givens Park appears to have been constructed without benefit of an overall master plan. The gazebo structure is awkwardly located, and the park seems underdeveloped, as if it weren't finished yet. There are very few trees, and the park looks as if it gets very hot during the summer.

Despite the shortcomings of this park, the equipment is new and the turf is in fairly good condition. Therefore, minor changes and are proposed, including:

- Prepare a master plan to guide the future development of this park before any additional facilities are added.
- Eliminate the pool. Replace with a small water playground located to take advantage of the restroom and shelter. The water playground should be accessible to the public during the day. As mentioned in the Stephen Leonard Park recommendations, either the Ada

Givens pool or the Stephen Leonard pool should be kept open until a replacement teaching pool is provided.

- Relocate some of the fencing to provide an area that is accessible to the public during school hours. This area should include play equipment, benches, a picnic table, and adequate shade, as well as the water playground.
- Provide sidewalks and/or a paved internal pathway.
- Provide additional trees.
- Provide benches, especially near the play areas.
- Provide additional site amenities, such as more picnic tables, a bike rack, and trash receptacles.
- Provide a paved court area for basketball. The court location should be carefully considered to be sure that it fits into an overall plan for the park and does not conflict with surrounding residences. If possible, the court should be accessible to the public during the day.
- Continue to work with MCSD regarding the use policies for this site.

**Community Parks/
Large Urban Parks**

A community park is planned primarily to provide active and structured recreation opportunities. In general, community park facilities are designed for organized activities and sports, although individual and family activities are also encouraged. Community parks serve a much larger area and offer more facilities. As a result, they require more in terms of support facilities such as parking, restrooms, and covered play areas. Community parks usually have sport fields or similar facilities as the central focus of the park. Their service area is roughly a 1-2 mile radius. Optimum size is between 15 and 20 acres.

Large urban parks generally serve the same function as community parks, and designed to serve the entire community. Generally, they provide specialized facilities such as sports fields, indoor recreation areas, or large picnic areas. Due to their size and facilities offered, they often require more in terms of support facilities such as parking, restrooms, and play areas. Applegate Park is an excellent example of a large urban park, because it contains the MOAT, the skate park, and the historic fountain and rose garden, as well as the zoo and Kiwanis Kiddieland.

Assessment:

1. **Existing Conditions:** Merced currently has 1 large urban park and 3 community parks totaling 115.43 acres.
2. **Service Area:** The service radius for a community park is about a 1.0-1.5 mile radius. In the absence of a community park, a large urban park can fulfill this function. Please refer to the Community Park Service Area Map in Appendix E for an analysis of underserved areas.
3. **Needs Assessment:** Based on the service area analysis, the majority of the current Merced city limits are served by the existing community and large urban parks. To provide community park service to the entire planning area, 4 additional community or large urban parks will be needed.

*Design and Development
Policies:*

1. **General Land Use Guidelines:**
 - a. Because of their size, the acquisition of community parkland should occur far in advance of its need.
 - b. Construct a community park when the area it will serve reaches about 50% developed (measured by either acreage developed, or population accommodated).
2. **Site Selection Criteria:**
 - a. Minimum size should be 15-20 acres with the optimum being about 30 acres.
 - b. At least two-thirds of the site should be available for active recreation use and adequate buffers of open space should separate active use areas from nearby homes.
 - c. If possible, walking or bicycling distance should not exceed

one to one and a half miles for the area it serves.

- d. The site should be highly visible from adjoining streets.
- e. Access to the site should be via a collector or arterial street.
- f. Provide an adequate clear zone for Life Flight helicopters to make emergency landings, if deemed necessary by the Chiefs of the Police or Fire Departments.

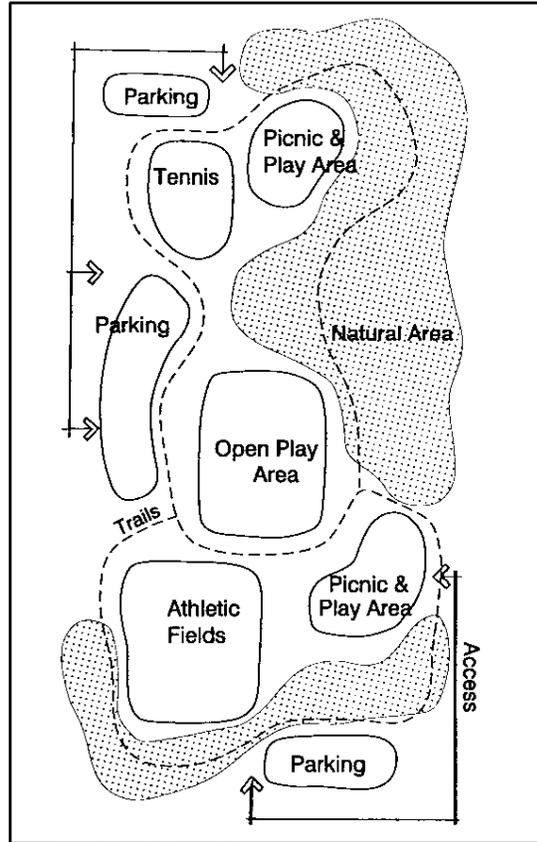
3. Design and Development Standards:

- a. Appropriate facilities include:
 - Designated sport fields - softball, baseball, soccer, etc.
 - Outdoor basketball courts
 - Sand or grass volleyball courts (pair)
 - Open multi-use grass area
 - Children's playground (tot and youth)
 - Restrooms
 - Picnic area
 - Picnic shelters (various sizes)
 - Group picnic facilities
 - Trails/pathway systems
 - Site amenities (picnic tables, benches, bike racks, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, etc.)
 - For large urban parks, single-purpose specialized facilities (e.g. viewpoints, special features, etc.)
 - For large urban parks, interpretive facilities
- b. Parking requirements: dependent upon facilities provided. Provide 50 spaces per ball field plus 5 spaces per acre of active use area.
- c. Permanent restrooms are appropriate for this type of park but should be located in highly visible areas and near public streets.

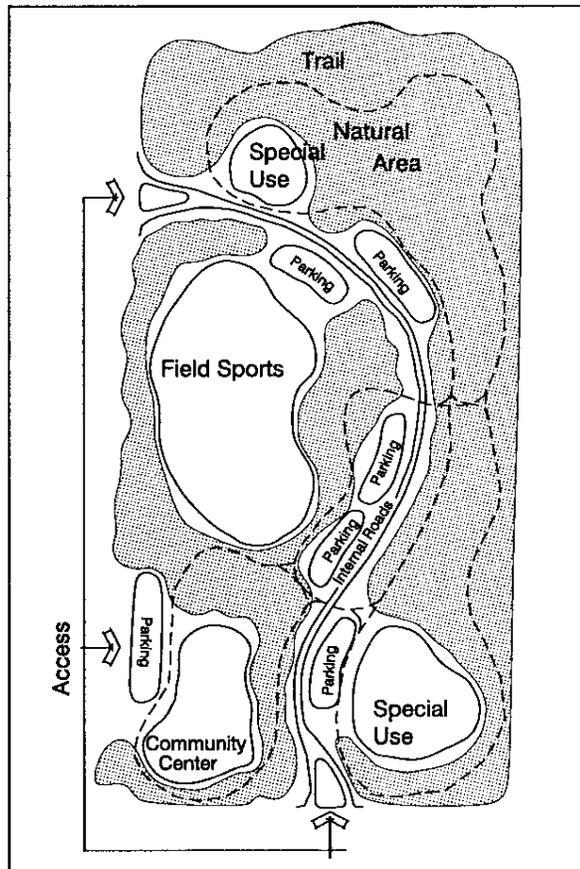
4. Schematic Diagrams:

Two schematic diagrams are provided on the following page.

Community Park Diagram



Large Urban Park Diagram



Recommendations:

1. Summary of Recommendations:

Table 6.5
Summary of Community Park Recommendations
Merced Planning Area

Park Number	Site	Existing Acres/ (Proposed Acres)	Action
CP-39	McNamara Park	8.70	Upgrades
CP-40	Joe Herb Park	26.74	Minor upgrades
CP-41	Fahrens Park	47.62	Development
CP-42	New Community Park (P)	(20.00) (minimum)	Acquisition, planning, and development
CP-43	New Community Park (P)	(20.00)	Acquisition, planning, and development
CP-44	New Community Park (P)	(20.00)	Acquisition, planning, and development
CP-45	New Community Park (P)	(20.00)	Acquisition, planning, and development
LU-46	Applegate Park	32.37	Minor upgrades
Total		31.26	

(P) – Proposed Site

Existing Acres = 115.43 Acres
Proposed Acres = 80.00 Acres

2. Specific Improvements:

McNamara Park CP-39

McNamara Park is a very heavily used park, and contains the largest City-owned swimming pool. Although this park is small, it serves the community park function. There is a fairly large children’s play area with a sand surface, a play structure, and spring toys. A basketball court is located adjacent to the parking lot. There are also two lighted softball fields. The park was developed in a piecemeal fashion, and none of the architecture or materials are consistent. The youth drop-in center is a former fire station and could use significant renovations. The police station is new and fairly attractive, but was not designed to fit into an overall architectural program for the park.

Recommended improvements include:

- Prepare a new master plan for this park to guide development. The master plan should also address how to unify the diversity of architectural forms and materials on this site.
- Upgrade the parking lot with landscaping and new paving.
- Resurface the basketball court and create a better separation between the court and the parking lot.

- Provide shaded seating areas near the basketball court.
- Evaluate the play area for compliance with ADA regulations and provide improvements if needed.
- Eliminate the softball fields (after replacements are constructed at a different site) and replace with a soccer field. A soccer field provides a green open area when not in use for games, whereas the softball fields do not offer flexibility for use. In addition, the two softball field configuration does not work well for league and tournament play.
- Provide a year round restroom at the park. If the restroom facility associated with the softball field is to serve as the main park restroom, it should be replaced and/or upgraded.
- When a new recreation center is opened in South Merced with more extensive youth facilities, the youth center should be closed. At that point, two options are possible for this building. The first would be to demolish it and reintegrate the building site into the park. The second option would be to refurbish the building and use it for recreation programs, community rentals, and other public use.

Joe Herb Park

CP-40

Joe Herb Park is one of the major locations for organized sports activity in Merced. The park contains a lighted softball complex with 3 fields and a concession stand. There are 3 practice youth ballfields, and an open turf area that is used for soccer. In addition, there is a picnic shelter with a play area, horseshoe pits, and restrooms.

CalTrans has plans to reconfigure the existing Yosemite Parkway viaduct, which would require redesign of the entrance to the park. In addition, CalTrans has indicated a desire to relocate a secondary entrance drive through the north end of Joe Herb Park to a mobile home park located to the east. The proposed location for this driveway would negatively impact the current configuration of the play area, restrooms, and picnic shelter in this area of the park.

Two residential in-holdings at the northwest and southwest corners of the park are planned for acquisition, and full-sized soccer field is planned to be constructed. A new driveway connecting to Parsons has also been discussed as an option.

In general, this park is fairly well maintained, particularly the softball complex. The northern picnic area is in fair condition, but the restrooms are in poor condition. Minor improvements are proposed. These include:

- Provide a paved, internal pathway system.
- Acquire the residential inholdings as they become available.

- Upgrade the picnic area and the play area. An overall plan for this portion of the park should be developed that takes into account the proposed CalTrans transportation revisions. The restroom should be replaced. Buffering of the picnic area from Yosemite Avenue should be increased, and additional trees should be provided throughout this section of the park.
- Provide a access drive if needed. This depends in part on the outcome of the Yosemite Avenue revisions and how they affect the park entrance.

Fahrens Park

CP-41

A master plan is being completed for Fahrens Park concurrent with the Parks and Open Space Master Plan effort. Fahrens Park is currently minimally developed, with the bulk of the acreage an open field. The site is wooded, with stands of eucalyptus trees. This park site is irregularly shaped and contains two creeks and a storm water detention basin. Although it is the largest community park in Merced in terms of acreage, it cannot support as many facilities as some of the other sites due to its irregular shape and the environmental constraints.

At the time this master plan was being prepared, a proposal was being discussed that could have a major impact on Fahrens Park. MCSD identified Fahrens Park as the most favored site for a new elementary school. A school would be located in the largest contiguous area of the park, and would reduce the open space character of the park in addition to limiting public access to portions of the park. If the school is constructed at Fahrens Park, the park can still serve the community park function, but in a much more passive and smaller scale way. The school issue was unresolved at the writing of this report.

It is recommended that the Fahrens Park Master Plan be implemented. The Fahrens Park Master Plan contains additional detail about the proposed development of this park site.

New Community Park

CP-42

A new community park is proposed for South Merced. Identified in the South Merced Strategic Plan, this park is intended to be a major community focal point. The strategic plan identified a potential site that includes about 40 acres.

This park is proposed to be the site of a new community park with group picnic areas, sports fields for soccer and youth baseball/softball, very high quality and interesting children’s play areas, basketball courts, and pathways. It is also recommended that a new indoor recreation center be sited in this park to accommodate the indoor recreation needs of the area. A larger youth center is also recommended to replace and upgrade the very small youth centers at Stephen Leonard Park and

McNamara Park. In addition, a soccer complex is proposed for inclusion in this park.

This community park is also a potential site for the relocated zoo. This is discussed in greater detail in Section 6.7. The site for this park needs to be acquired, and should be a minimum of 40 acres in size. On a 40 acre site, approximately 15 acres could be devoted to community park uses and relocated zoo, 5 acres to the Recreation Center and Youth Center, and 20 acres to a soccer complex.

After acquisition, a master plan is recommended to guide development of the site. The master plan can be designed to accommodate phased development of the park, to allow improvements to be provided over time.

New Community Parks CP-43, CP-44, CP-45

Three community park sites are recommended in north Merced. Much of this area is located within the Bellevue Ranch Specific Plan area. General locations for each of these parks are indicated on the layout plan. As development plans for this area of the City are refined, the park sites will likely also be refined.

The park sites should be located on arterial or collector streets, and should be a minimum of 20 acres in size. If storm detention basins are included in a community park site, at least 8 to 10 acres should be provided outside the basin.

The following recommendations are applicable to each of the three sites:

- Acquire a park site that meets the planning guidelines.
- Prepare a master plan to guide development of the site. Recommended program elements include:
 - * Designated sport fields - softball, baseball, soccer, etc.
 - * Outdoor basketball courts
 - * Tennis courts
 - * Open multi-use grass areas
 - * Children's playgrounds (tot and youth)
 - * Restroom
 - * Picnic area
 - * Picnic shelters (various sizes)
 - * Group picnic facilities
 - * Trails/pathway systems
 - * Site amenities (picnic tables, benches, bike racks, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, etc.)
- Implement the plan.

Due to the warm climate in Merced in the summer, these park sites should be planted with ample large and fast-growing trees.

Applegate Park**LU-46**

This park is Merced's centerpiece, and is probably the most used park in the City. The setting of Applegate Park is beautiful, and the park is filled with mature trees. The formal rose garden, historic Laura fountain, and gazebo are very attractive. The newer amphitheater (MOAT) is formal in design with columns surrounding the stage. The children's play area is well-sited and fairly large. A skate park is a recent addition, and appears to be well-designed and frequently used. The park also contains Kiwanis Kiddieland and a small zoo.

Although Applegate is overall one of the most pleasant parks in the City, there are a number of items that could use attention to ensure that Applegate remains Merced's jewel into the future. While the park is generally well laid out, some of the additions to the park over the years appear to have been located without the benefit of an overall development plan for the park. The park has no path system providing circulation throughout the park, and there are numerous bare dirt patches indicating the most heavily used paths of travel, and the turf is generally in poor condition. The restrooms are also in poor condition. The Bureau of Purchasing is located in a 1950's/1960's era building in the center of the park, and is surrounded by an asphalt yard with chain link fencing topped by razor wire. Although the park's setting is attractive, the intrusion of the City yard and the unattractive barbed wire-topped chain link fencing that surrounds both the Kiwanis Kiddieland and the Applegate Zoo take away from the atmosphere. Although the tennis courts are in good condition, they are oddly sited and do not appear to get much use for tennis or for basketball.

Recommended improvements include:

- Prior to any upgrades or additional development at this park, prepare a master plan.
- Provide paved internal pathways throughout the park.
- Replace asphalt pathways.
- Repave driveways and parking areas, and provide curbing.
- Rehabilitate the turf. This should not be completed until the master plan has been developed and the path system is constructed.
- Cut an edge and mulch the shrub beds. Consider the long term future of these: If shrub beds are to be a permanent element at Applegate Park, a replacement plan needs to be developed because many of the shrubs are mature or over-mature.
- Repave Bear Creek Bikeway through Applegate Park. Regrade some of the areas near the bikeway to improve access between the park and the bikeway. There should be several ADA-compliant access points.
- Improve the picnic areas, and provide concrete pads under the tables.

- Monitor turf wear and tear as a result of the popular volleyball and ka da games that frequently occur at the park. As parks are redesigned and more picnic facilities are added, the demand at Applegate may be reduced. If there continues to be high wear and tear at Applegate, City staff should organize a summit with regular players. The purpose of this meeting would be to identify a design solution to develop facilities to accommodate the game that will reduce the maintenance level.
- Reconfigure the loading dock at the MOAT.
- Refurbish the historic bell tower or redesign this area with the purpose of developing a more formal entrance to the park at this location.
- Provide signs at all major entry points to the park.
- Relocate the par course equipment so that it is located along a pathway.
- Eliminate the tennis courts either once additional courts are available or if the park is redesigned.
- If a basketball court is provided, it needs to be located closer to a street or to an activity hub.
- Add site amenities, including bike racks and benches.
- Add a trail sign/map at the bikeway.
- Replace the restrooms.
- Consider upgrading the chain link fencing within the park, particularly around Kiddieland. Examples of other options include vinyl-coated chain link fencing or "wrought iron" type fencing. Upgrading of the fencing could include reconfiguring the fencing somewhat to open up more of the park.
- Consider locating a medium to large sized water playground at Applegate Park. A water playground could be sited nearby the other play equipment, on the site of the current tennis courts, at the Purchasing office site (see below), or near the zoo site (see below)

Long range recommendations for Applegate Park include:

- *Relocation of the Purchasing office: When the Purchasing office requires significant renovations or an expansion, the City should consider removing it from Applegate Park. Because the City invested in upgrades to the Purchasing office and anticipates years of useful life of the building, it is recommended that moving the office not be evaluated until such a time in the future that the building again requires significant investment. The reason for considering relocation in the long term is that Applegate Park is Merced's signature park, and it is very heavily used. The Purchasing office and yard is located at a highly visible corner of the park, and offers an opportunity to expand park uses either by removing the building to provide additional park land or reusing the building as a recreation center. In addition, the Purchasing office detracts from the Applegate Park experience due to its large parking lot and razor wire-topped fence.*

- Relocation of the zoo. Specific recommendations for the zoo are addressed in Section 6.7. Relocation of the zoo, which is very constrained at the Applegate location, would also free up a large section of the park for other park development, such as a relocated basketball court, more picnic areas, additional open turf areas or possibly even some sports fields.

Special Use Areas, including Athletic Parks and Urban Plazas

Special use areas are miscellaneous public recreation areas or land occupied by a specialized facility. Some of the uses falling into this classification include special purpose areas, waterfront parks, community gardens, single purpose sites used for field sports or sites occupied by buildings.

Athletic parks are special use sites where sports fields are the central focus. Facilities may consist of baseball, softball and soccer fields. Supplemental activities may include tennis, volleyball, playgrounds, and picnic areas.

Urban plazas are small parks, usually passive, that provide an opportunity for the public to gather in urban locations. Size varies, but urban plazas are typically small and primarily hard surfaces.

Assessment:

1. **Existing Conditions:** Currently, there is one special use area, one athletic park, and one urban plaza in the Merced planning area. Although the City paid for construction of the Arts Center, it is operated by a non-profit Arts Council and does not offer space for classes or events offered by the City or other groups. Therefore, it is not discussed in this section. However, any additional recreation use that would benefit the community should be encouraged at the Arts Center and opportunities for additional community use should be explored.
2. **Service Area:** Depending on the function it serves, the service area for a special use area varies widely. However, special use areas are generally considered to have a community-wide service area.
3. **Needs Assessment:** In order to accommodate the spaces identified below, approximately 30.00 acres of additional land are needed. The breakdown of additional acreage is as follows:

* Sports complex	20.00 Acres
* Indoor recreation center	8.00 Acres
* Northside youth center	2.00 Acres

Design and Development Policies:

1. **General Land Use Guidelines:**
 - a. Depends on the type of facilities proposed.
 - b. Prior to the addition of any special use area, the City should prepare a detailed feasibility and cost/benefit analysis for each proposed site being considered.
2. **Site Selection Criteria:**
 - a. Size and location of facility will depend on the facility's function that is being considered.
3. **Design and Development Standards:**
 - a. Design criteria will depend on the facilities and activities

proposed.

b. Parking requirements: Depends on the activities offered.

Recommendations:

1. Summary of Recommendations:

Table 6.6
Summary of Special Use Area Recommendations
Merced Planning Area

Park Number	Site	Existing Acres/ Proposed Acres	Action
AP-47	Youth Sports Complex	12.34	Continue implementation
SU-48	McCombs Youth Center	1.47	No change. Consider ways to expand use.
UP-11	Bob Hart Square	0.42	No change
SU-49	Indoor Recreation Center (P)	(8.00)	Planning, Acquisition and Development
	Sports Complex	(20.00)	Planning, Acquisition and Development
	Second Youth Center	(2.00)	Planning, Acquisition and Development
Total			

(P) – Proposed Site

Existing Acres = 14.23 Acres
Proposed Acres = 30.00 Acres

Merced Arts Center: The Merced Arts Center was built by the City and is operated by the Merced County Arts Council. It was not included in Table 6.6 above because the City does not currently use it for programming, and staff recommended against inclusion during the facility inventory phase of the project. However, the Arts Center is a community resource and the City's partnership with the Arts Council could be expanded to provide additional programming for community use of the Center. Section 7 includes additional discussion about the Arts Center.

2. Specific Improvements:

Bob Hart Square UP-11

Bob Hart Square is a well-maintained downtown plaza. It contains a kiosk, a clock, benches surrounding a paved plaza area and small lawn area, and a planting bed with flagpole.

No changes are proposed, other than that the City could consider allowing a few food vendors in the park

Youth Sports Complex**AP-47**

The youth sports complex is a lighted facility containing two youth ballfields and an open area used for soccer and baseball warm-ups/practice. The facility is owned by the City of Merced and operated by a private youth sports organization. Merced provides the maintenance, and provided about 60% of the funding to construct the complex.

The following recommendations are proposed:

- It is recommended that the Youth Sports Complex eventually become a youth baseball complex. Because of the current need for more soccer fields, the open turf area should be maintained until additional soccer fields are built elsewhere.
- It is recommended that responsibilities be clarified regarding the maintenance and operation of the youth sports complex. See Section 6.5 for further discussion of sports leagues and recommendations on field upgrade policies.
- The youth league should be responsible for any additional capital improvements at the complex, including restrooms and additional fields.

McCombs Youth Center (Boys and Girls Club)**SU-48**

The McCombs Youth Center is a distinctive new structure with an indoor gymnasium, a game room/lobby area, classrooms, and an outdoor basketball court. The facility is operated by the Boys and Girls Club through a lease with the City of Merced. Membership costs \$10 per year, and the center is open daily until 7 p.m. The Center is located on the same block as the Senior Center with a shared parking lot between the two.

McCombs Youth Center is new and in good condition. No changes to the facility area proposed. However, the City should work with the Boys and Girls Club to find ways to maximize use of this facility. Input into the Park and Open Space Master Plan indicated that youth delinquency is an ongoing problem in some areas of Merced, as are graffiti and gang activity. Programming for youth is a major need to provide alternatives to negative behavior. Expanding use of the Boys and Girls Club could help meet some of these youth program needs. For example, weekend nighttime hours could be established for teens, or perhaps the club could open all day on weekdays when the schools are closed.

Proposed Indoor Recreation Center**SU-49**

The Bellevue Ranch Specific Plan includes a circular park site near a centrally located town center. This site would be an excellent location for an indoor recreation center. Further discussion of this facility is included in Section 6.4 on Indoor Facilities.

Proposed Sports Complex

A 6-8 field softball complex is recommended. At the current time, one additional field is needed. Five additional fields will be needed to serve future needs. In addition, the 2 fields at McNamara Park are recommended to be replaced with soccer. At least 6 fields will be needed to serve projected future demand, and the two replacement fields would eventually warrant a total of 8 fields within a complex. The recommended location is north of Black Rascal Creek and should contain about 20 acres of land.

A northside youth complex will also be needed in the future. This complex could be located at the proposed sports complex site, which would increase the acreage needs. Further discussion of the second youth complex is contained in Section 6.4.

Recommendations for the sports complex include:

- Acquire site(s).
- Refine program and develop master plan.
- Implement master plan.

Soccer Complex

A soccer complex is proposed for inclusion in the new community park in south Merced, site CP-42. This site should be about 20 acres in size, and should include lights on at least a portion of the fields.

Youth Center

A larger youth center is proposed to replace the existing south Merced youth centers, as well as expand youth programming capabilities in south Merced. This center is proposed for inclusion in the new community park in South Merced, site CP-42.

Second Youth Center

A second youth center is needed in north Merced. All of the current city-run youth programs are concentrated south of downtown, as is the city-funded Boys and Girls Club. A northside youth center could either be run by a youth organization such as the Boys and Girls Club, or it could be home to a City-sponsored youth program.

No site has been identified for the second youth center. Approximately 2 acres would be required, and the center should be sited so that it is convenient for youth to access. The youth center could be a stand-alone facility, or it could be incorporated into another park site or into another recreation facility. Further discussion of this facility is included in Section 6.4 on Indoor Facilities.

Linear Parks

Linear Parks are open spaces or developed landscaped areas that follow linear corridors such as creek corridors, canals, trail corridors, abandoned railroad right-of-ways, canals, and other elongated features. This type of park usually contains trails, landscaped areas, viewpoints and seating areas. Neighborhood park facilities may be incorporated when space is available.

Assessment:

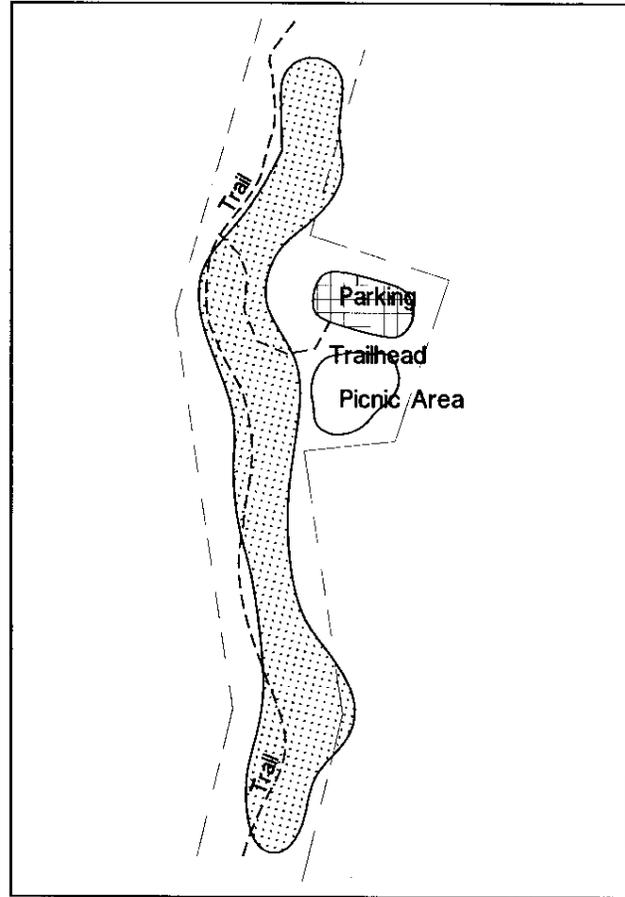
1. **Existing Conditions:** Currently, there are four linear parks in Merced totaling 144.36 acres.
2. **Service Area:** Depending on the function it serves, the service area for a linear park varies widely. Most of Merced's existing linear parks have a community-wide service area.
3. **Needs Assessment:** The City has been providing input to the County on the Countywide bikeway master plan. It is recommended the city expand on its linear park system, and that the bicycle trail system be expanded concurrently to reflect those Class I trails depicted on the County master plan. In order to build out the City of Merced's off-street bikeway network as planned, approximately 65 acres of linear park land containing approximately 10.8 miles of trail are needed.

Design and Development Policies:

1. **General Land Use Guidelines:**
 - a. Because of the shape, configuration, and potential for high use, noise and use impacts on adjacent property must be taken into consideration.
2. **Site Selection Criteria:**
 - a. Linear parks should generally follow creeks, utility rights-of-way, canals, railways or other linear corridors.
 - b. Linear parks should be at least 50-55 feet wide. These parks may need to be wider to meet City environmental goals, while still allowing for trail use.
3. **Design and Development Standards:**
 - a. Activities are generally passive in nature.
 - b. Paved pathways should be designed to accommodate maintenance and patrol vehicles
 - c. Where general public use is promoted, adjoining uses should be protected by fences or other features to control access.
 - d. Natural areas in linear parks should be maintained for fire and weed abatement, and potentially for habitat. Developed areas of linear parks should be landscaped and maintained.
 - e. Developers should be encouraged to provide pathways

within their proposed developments to link with the city's overall linear park system.

4. Schematic Diagram:



Recommendations:

1. Summary of Recommendations:

Table 6.7
Summary of Linear Park Recommendations
Merced Planning Area

Park Number	Site	Action
LP-50	Bear Creek Bikeway	Minor upgrades
LP-51	Black Rascal Creek Bikeway	Minor upgrades
LP-52	Fahrens Creek Bikeway	Minor upgrades, complete development
LP-53	Santa Fe Strip Park	Minor upgrades
LP-54	Cottonwood Creek Bikeway	Complete development
Total		

2. Specific Improvements:

Bear Creek Bikeway

LP-50

This linear park encompasses the Bear Creek corridor, a publicly owned greenway containing a paved bicycle path. The Bear Creek corridor is wooded, and the bikeway extends along the creek from the west to the east boundary of Merced. Bear Creek Bikeway was constructed in three phases in the 1970's, with paths along both sides of the creek bank for a three-mile section of the bikeway.

Only minor upgrades are proposed for the Bear Creek Bikeway:

- Continue with trail upgrades, including the segment passing through Applegate Park. Consider widening the trail to at least 12' in high use areas, such as in Applegate Park.
- Provide trail amenities, including signage. Amenities include bike racks, benches, picnic tables, water fountains, and even shelters. These should be located periodically along the trail to provide trail users with opportunities to rest. Signs should be located at entrance points to the trail, and trail system maps should be located at major intersections.

Black Rascal Creek Bikeway

LP-51

This linear park is a 50' wide corridor that runs along Black Rascal Creek and includes the Black Rascal Creek Bikeway. The Black Rascal Creek corridor is wooded, and the bikeway extends along the creek from the west to the east boundary of Merced. Black Rascal Creek Bikeway was built in the two phases in the late 1970's. This park intersects the Fahrens Creek Bikeway in Fahrens Park, and connects to Santa Fe Strip Park. A planned future expansion of Merced's bikeway system would connect the east end of Black Rascal Creek Bikeway to County's Lake Road bike path, providing access to the new U.C. Merced campus.

Only minor upgrades are proposed for Black Rascal Creek Bikeway:

- Complete the proposed extension connecting the Lake Road bike path. This should be a priority for the City even though a portion of the proposed trail linkage lies outside the Merced SUDP. The City should contribute to this linkage because it would provide safer access and more route options for Merced residents. This trail connection could simply be a trail easement containing a paved trail, rather than a linear park.
- Continue with ongoing trail upgrades. Consider widening the trail to at least a 12' width in high traffic areas, such as through Fahrens Park.

- Provide trail amenities, including signage. Amenities include bike racks, benches, picnic tables, water fountains, and even shelters. These should be located periodically along the trail to provide trail users with opportunities to rest. Signs should be located at entrance points to the trail, and trail system maps should be located at major intersections.

Fahrens Creek Bikeway

LP-52

This linear park extends north from Fahrens Park along Fahrens Creek. It is generally a 50' wide corridor centered on the creek. Expansion of the Fahrens Creek Bikeway is planned, first to construct a missing segment of the trail and then to extend the trail further to the north.

Several minor upgrades are proposed for Fahrens Creek Bikeway:

- Complete the missing link as soon as possible.
- Continue with the planned extension of the Fahrens Creek bikeway as development occurs.
- Provide trail amenities, including signage. Amenities include bike racks, benches, picnic tables, water fountains, and even shelters. These should be located periodically along the trail to provide trail users with opportunities to rest. Signs should be located at entrance points to the trail, and trail system maps should be located at major intersections.

Santa Fe Strip Park

LP-53

This linear park is a strip located behind single family houses. Fingers of the park extend outward and eventually connect to the Black Rascal Creek Bikeway. This linear park varies in width, from about 40' to about 170' at the widest point. However, all the homes backing on the park are fenced and very few provide gates to the park. There are a few play areas, but the park is mostly turf and seems barren. This park has a very different character from the other linear parks, partly because it is not centered on a creek and partly because it seems like leftover space due to its orientation behind the homes.

It is recommended that the City avoid developing parks of this design in the future. While the concept of providing access to the trail system is good, Santa Fe Strip Park contains a lot of acreage that requires maintenance, yet doesn't provide the recreation opportunities that some of the other parks do. It is wider than needed to serve as a neighborhood trail connection, but not wide enough to provide much recreation value as a neighborhood park. If neighborhood connections to the bikeway system are proposed in the future, these dedications should be no wider than 25'.

Some minor upgrades are proposed for Santa Fe Strip Park:

- Provide neighborhood park facilities as recommended for site NP-24.
- Reduce the turf area and provide more visual interest at this park through landscaping and site amenities. Provide landscaping beds from the fence lines into the park, leaving turf on either side of the paved path no wider than one or two passes with the mower. Landscaping beds should contain trees and low-growing shrubs (under 3' in height) and plant material. Taller shrubs can be planted as a buffer along the fence lines, but should not be located so that they block views into the park. Benches should be provided periodically along the paved pathways.
- Provide signage at each major street intersection, including a map of the overall Merced trail system.

Cottonwood Creek Bikeway

LP-54

Only a small segment of the Cottonwood Creek Bikeway has been constructed. This linear park will extend along the Cottonwood Creek corridor, and generally be 50' wide corridor centered on the creek. As planned, this bikeway will connect to the Fahrens Creek bikeway.

There are several minor recommendations for the Cottonwood Creek Bikeway:

- Continue with the planned extension of the Cottonwood Creek bikeway as development occurs. Provide trail amenities, including signage. Amenities include bike racks, benches, picnic tables, water fountains, and even shelters. These should be located periodically along the trail to provide trail users with opportunities to rest. Signs should be located at entrance points to the trail, and trail system maps should be located at major intersections.
- Seek a connection between the Cottonwood Creek Bikeway and the County's Lake Road bikeway. This should be a priority for the City even though a portion of the proposed trail linkage lies outside the Merced SUDP. The City should contribute to this linkage because it would provide safer access and more route options for Merced residents. This trail connection could simply be a trail easement containing a paved trail, rather than a linear park.

6.3 Trail Recommendations

Trails and pathways are designed to provide walking, bicycling, and other non-motorized recreational opportunities. By providing linkages to other areas and facilities, they can provide non-vehicular options for travel throughout the community. Trails can be designed for a single or multiple types of users. The trails and pathways emphasized here are those that are recreational and multiple use in nature. On-street bike routes with more emphasis on transportation are not included in this definition.

Trails and pathways are also addressed under linear parks. In general, Merced has preferred to locate its pathways within linear park corridors. It is recommended that the City continue with this very successful strategy. However, there is also a need for a secondary trail system within a 15' to 25' trail easement for the purpose of providing trails where no linear parks exist, connecting parks, and connecting the existing pathways.

Trail and path connections in South Merced should be expanded to the maximum to provide convenient and safe pedestrian and bike access in an area with very limited opportunities. The South Merced Strategic Plan contains a strategy to use storm drain channels to create a multi-use green trail network linking parks/open space. The Strategic Plan map identifies locations for these open space corridors. Implementation of the open space corridors should receive priority to balance Merced's bikeway system and provide off-street trail opportunities in South Merced. Within the developed area of South Merced, the City's transportation plan should consider improvements within existing rights-of-way to improve pedestrian and bike connections to park resources.

As a third tier of trail development, developers could provide connections from subdivisions that link into the city's trail and linear park system. However, this tier of trail development should not be funded by the City nor should it be a major priority.

Design and Development Policies:

1. General Land Use Guidelines:

- a. The following guidelines, site selection criteria and development standards apply to trails and pathways that are recreational in nature.
- b. Developers should be encouraged to provide pathways within their proposed developments to link with the city's overall trail system.
- c. Trails easements or dedications need to be secured in order to complete trail segments, link linear parks, and expand the overall trail network in areas where no natural features provide an opportunity for linear parks.

2. Site Selection Criteria:

- a. The primary purpose of recreation trails is to provide a recreation experience. Transportation to other parts of the community should be a secondary objective.

- b. Whenever possible, recreation pathways and trails should be separated from the roadway.
- c. Recreation trails should be interesting to the user and maximize the number and diversity of enjoyable viewing opportunities.
- d. Trails should be looped and interconnected to provide a variety of trail lengths and destinations. They should link various parts of the community, as well as existing park sites.
- e. Trails should be located and designed to provide a diversity of challenges. Enhance accessibility wherever possible, with high priority being nature trails and loop or destination opportunities on portions of trails near staging areas.
- f. Where routes use existing streets, the pathway should be designed to minimize potential conflicts between motorists and trail users
- g. Trails should be developed throughout the community to provide linkages to schools, parks, and other destination points. Particular attention should be given to those areas that do not contain stream corridors. The South Merced Strategic Plan provides creative ideas for making trail connections.

3. Design and Development Standards:

- a. Trail alignments should take into account soil conditions, steep slopes, surface drainage and other physical limitations that could increase construction and/or maintenance costs.
- b. Trails should be planned, sized, and designed for multiple uses, except for dedicated natural trails, and/or areas that cannot be developed to the standard necessary to minimize potential user conflicts.
- c. Centralized and effective staging areas should be provided for trail access. They should include parking, orientation and information, and any necessary specialized unloading features. Primary trailheads should have restrooms and trash receptacles; secondary trailheads might only have some parking and signage.
- d. Linkages and trail location and orientation should encourage users to walk or bicycle to the trail. Depending upon the expected and desired level of use. Secondary trailheads may have 3-8 parking spaces, whereas primary trailheads may have 20 or more parking spaces.

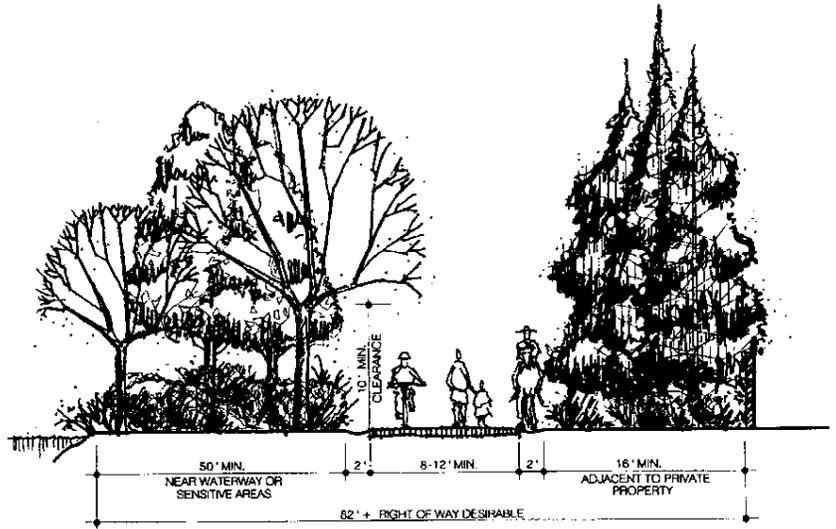


FIGURE 6.1
Off-Street Multi-Purpose Trail

Additional Recommendations:

The primary purpose of the trails and pathway system is to provide recreational walking, bicycling and hiking opportunities. This does not negate that these same trails may not also meet some transportation needs as well.

In addition, local trails are needed to connect subdivisions with the citywide trail system.

6.4 Indoor Recreational Facilities

Assessment:

Indoor Recreational Facilities include major indoor spaces such as gymnasiums, swimming pools, and community centers.

1. **Existing Conditions:** Currently, the City has one indoor recreational facility: McCombs Youth Center, which is operated by the Boys and Girls Club. Two other parks incorporate small youth centers. However, these facilities are elements of larger parks and are previously discussed in the park recommendations section.

The City does not have its own gymnasiums. Instead, gymnasium space is provided in the schools. The City of Merced schedules basketball and volleyball games at a number of school sites. However, gym time is very limited and the City is at risk of being bumped for school activities. There is more availability at elementary schools and middle schools than there is at high schools. Merced College has a gymnasium, but handles its own scheduling. Currently, Merced College is completely booked and the City is only able to obtain gym time once a week for the volleyball league.

2. **Service Areas:** The service area for indoor space is community wide.
3. **Needs Assessment:** In general, there was strong support for the development of additional indoor space by both community members and Community Services staff. In addition, the needs assessment identified a shortage of court time. If the City could own and control the use of the courts, there would currently be a **shortage of one (1) courts** based on the current seasons, or a **shortage of two (2) courts** if basketball and volleyball seasons overlapped as they do in most communities. **These figures do not take into account the uncertainty of maintaining existing gym time**, which is equivalent to about 4 full-time courts. At build-out, it is projected that Merced will need the equivalent of 9 courts to accommodate indoor recreation needs.

Design and Development Policies:

1. **General Land Use Guidelines:**
 - a) Prior to the development of any indoor facility listed in this section, a detailed cost/benefit analysis and maintenance impact statement should be prepared.
 - b) Indoor facilities should be reasonably central to the community or the area they are intended to serve.
 - c) Indoor facilities that generate significant traffic should be located off collector or arterial roadways so as not to adversely impact residential areas (traffic and parking).
 - d) The minimum size of the site will depend on the function it serves. For an indoor recreation center containing a gym,

the site should be large enough to accommodate support facilities such as parking and landscaping. If the facility is located adjacent to a residential neighborhood, large setbacks may be necessary to buffer neighbors from impacts.

- e) When new schools are developed, the City should consider a partnership with the School District to either upgrade to a full-sized gym (at elementary schools) or construct a second gym, thereby creating more flexibility and use potential for gym activities.

Recommendations:

One of the major needs identified during the planning process was indoor recreation space. More and more communities in California and the west are offering multi-use recreation centers because of the inclement winter weather and the ability to provide more indoor recreation opportunities. If designed correctly, recreation centers can offer a wide variety of community and youth activities at a reasonable cost. To generate maximum revenue, many centers offer community event space as well as areas for recreation. Most progressive community centers now provide rooms for receptions, meetings, and large group gatherings, as well as gymnasium and recreation space.

MIG has found that there is a lack of indoor recreation options in Merced because:

- The needs assessment shows a current need for gymnasium space.
- Input from the public indicates that there is a lack of space for community meetings and events, as well as for private gatherings and family events. Based on anecdotal evidence, a brief review of available facilities, and the high level of family and small group activity in the parks during the summer months, it appears that there is truly a lack of space.
- In addition to the lack of City-owned space, there is no YMCA (typically a major recreation provider in many communities) or similar non-profit organization offering a recreation program.
- Private facilities are also limited.

It is recommended that two multi-use recreation centers be developed, one in north Merced and one in south Merced. Two centers are recommended for several reasons:

- One site would not be adequate to serve the needs of the future planning area population.
- Geographically, two sites will provide better and more convenient recreation options for residents.
- Projected gymnasium needs will require more than one facility.

North Indoor Recreation Center**SU-49**

A park site approximately 7 acres in size has been designated as part of the Bellevue Ranch Specific Plan. This site is centrally located at a designated transit hub, major intersection, and commercial area. This is also a convenient location for north Merced, and the site is large enough to accommodate a recreation center and associated facilities, including parking.

Facilities to include in the north Recreation Center should include:

- Gymnasium (at least 2 full-sized courts. Should include in-floor mounting hardware for volleyball)
- Multipurpose room for special events, receptions, and dance-related classes
- Catering kitchen
- Classrooms/meeting rooms to accommodate various sized groups.
- Exercise room (aerobics, dance, fitness classes)
- Support facilities, including lobby, restrooms, office space for center staff, locker rooms, storage space, etc.
- Arts and crafts room
- Concessions/vendor space such as a coffee kiosk or snack bar.
- Potentially a youth center and/or a second senior center.

South Indoor Recreation Center**CP-42**

An indoor recreation center is recommended for location at community park site CP-42 in south Merced. A park about 40 acres in size is proposed for this site, and a recreation center should be incorporated into the park design.

Facilities to include in the south Recreation Center include:

- Gymnasium (at least 2 full-sized courts. Should include in-floor mounting hardware for volleyball).
- A youth center. This center is intended to replace the smaller centers at McNamara Park and Stephen Leonard park and provide enough space for expansion of youth programming. This should include a lounge area/game room and enough additional space to accommodate youth programming needs for south Merced. Potentially, the youth center should include separate areas for older and younger teens.
- Multipurpose room for special events, receptions, and dance-related classes
- Catering kitchen.
- Classrooms/meeting rooms to accommodate various sized groups.
- Exercise rooms (aerobics, dance, fitness classes)
- Arts and crafts room
- Support facilities, including lobby, restrooms, office space for center staff, locker rooms, storage space, etc.
- Concessions/vendor space such as a coffee kiosk or snack bar.

South Youth Center

The South Youth Center is proposed to be incorporated with the South Indoor Recreation Center, at the South Merced Community Park, site CP-42. When it opens, this youth center would replace the three small youth centers currently operated by the City, as well as provide additional capacity.

North Youth Center

Currently, the City's youth programs and facilities are concentrated in south Merced. These include two small youth centers at park sites and the McCombs Youth Center, operated by the Boys and Girls Club. It is proposed that a larger youth center be constructed as part of the proposed South Recreation Center to provide space for expanded programming and replace the two smaller sites. Youth facilities are also needed to serve north Merced, particularly as this area undergoes development. If space allows, the best options would be to locate the north youth center at the north recreation center. However, depending on the final programming for the recreation center, there may not be enough space to also accommodate the youth center on the site. The alternative option for the north youth center is to locate it in one of the three proposed northside community parks (sites CP-43, CP-44, or CP-45) or to obtain a stand-alone site for the youth center.

The north youth center should contain similar facilities to the south youth center. It should be relatively centrally located and easily accessible from transit. In addition, the site should have convenient access via the City's Class I or Class II bikeways, if possible.

6.5 Outdoor Sports Facilities

Assessment:

Field sports are an important recreation activity in Merced. At the current time there is a need for additional soccer and adult softball fields. At build-out, there will be a considerable need for all types of fields (soccer, youth baseball/softball, and adult softball). Many of the sports fields in Merced are provided at middle school sites. It is anticipated that middle schools will continue to be a major source of sports fields in Merced, and the City and MCSD will continue their cooperative relationship.

1. **Existing Conditions:** Currently, the City provides 5 lighted adult softball fields at Joe Herb Park and McNamara Park, 2 youth baseball/softball fields at the Youth Sports Complex, and space for soccer at Joe Herb Park, the Youth Sports Complex, and Ada Givens Park. The remaining fields are located at local school facilities, some of which are maintained by the City.
2. **Service Areas:** Depending on the configuration, sports fields can either be designed to serve a single portion of a community or an entire region. In Merced, the preference is for grouped sports fields to facilitate game scheduling.
3. **Needs Assessment:** There is currently a need for fields for soccer and softball. At build-out, there is a need for all types of athletic fields. The table below summarizes the findings of the needs assessment for sports fields.

Table 6.8
Future Sport Field Needs¹
Merced Planning Area

Field Type	Existing Inventory	Build-out Demand	Additional Need
Adult Softball Fields	5	11	6
Youth Baseball /Softball Fields	23	40	17
Soccer Fields	16	33	17

¹ Includes school facilities as well as City of Merced facilities., even if no use agreement exists.

Recommendations:

The needs identified above are based on normal amounts of league play and practice and reflect demand based on data received from local leagues. The demand will be partly satisfied by the development of fields on the future community park, large urban park and special use sites. This will enable the City to meet the long-term needs and increase the ability to host tournaments. In addition, it is recommended that the City coordinate with the local school districts to provide suitable athletic facilities at school sites.

Adult Softball Fields

There is currently a shortage of 1 adult softball field in Merced, and the 2 fields at McNamara Park are substandard. To meet softball needs, it is recommended that the City provide a second lighted adult softball complex with space for an 8 field layout. The ideal location for the second field complex is in north Merced, which would provide a geographic distribution of facilities. This could be a stand-alone facility, or it could be included in one of the three proposed north Merced community parks, if the site is large enough. Once a complex site is selected and master planned, at least three fields should be constructed as soon as possible. At that time, the two adult softball fields at McNamara Park should be redeveloped into a soccer field. As the population grows and additional fields are needed, they can be constructed at the complex.

Soccer Fields

There is a shortage of soccer fields in Merced. Currently, there is a shortage of 3 soccer fields. At build-out, a total of 33 soccer fields will be needed. One additional field is planned to be constructed at Joe Herb Park in late 2003. Once this field is complete, there still will be a shortage of 2 fields given the existing demand for soccer.

Soccer needs are currently not being met very well in Merced. The Youth Sports Complex is intended to serve both baseball and soccer. However, the open field area is not ideal for soccer play and is fairly small. Much of the other soccer play is occurring at school sites or on open turf areas not necessarily developed for soccer use.

It is proposed that a soccer complex be provided at the new South Merced Community Park, site CP-42. A complex of approximately 20 acres is envisioned for this site, with at least a portion of the fields lighted. A complex of this size could accommodate up to 8 full sized soccer fields. If a combination of field sizes was provided, more fields could be developed. Restrooms, parking, and potentially concessions should be provided within the field complex area.

Additional soccer fields should be provided at each of the three proposed north Merced community parks, with at least 2 fields (if possible) located at each park, depending upon the size of the sites and the overall site master plans. The remaining need for soccer fields should be met at school sites. Once additional soccer fields are constructed, it is proposed that the Youth Sports Complex become a youth baseball/softball complex only.

Youth Baseball/Softball Fields

The supply and demand analysis indicated that there is no need for additional youth baseball/softball fields at the current time. However, the supply and demand calculation takes into account all the developed fields in Merced, not just those that are currently scheduled for play or the preferred locations for play. Although the leagues have indicated that the facilities they use are at capacity, there appears to be sufficient fields available in Merced to accommodate the current use. At least six existing fields are not currently being used.

Based on the analysis, better utilization of existing fields would accommodate current league play. Improvements to the Tenaya and Cruickshank Middle School fields, including lighting, to ensure a

similar quality to the facilities currently being used could encourage more use of these facilities. It is recommended that the City coordinate with the school district to make improvements at both Tenaya and Cruickshank Middle Schools.

At build-out, it is projected that 17 additional fields will be needed. It is recommended that the Youth Sports Complex be built out to be a baseball/softball-only complex, and that two additional baseball/softball fields be constructed at the site. This should only occur after additional soccer fields are constructed to replace the open field area at the Sports Complex. To meet future field needs, it is recommended that the City coordinate with MCSD to develop additional field complexes such as the ones at Hoover and Rivera Middle School. If possible, some of these fields should have lights. Finally, if feasible, the City should consider providing land for a second lighted youth baseball/softball complex in north Merced so that baseball/softball facilities will be geographically dispersed throughout the community. This complex could be located within one of the three proposed community parks, if space permits, or it could be a stand-alone facility. Another option is to construct a complex at a school site in north Merced.

Basketball, Tennis, and Volleyball Courts

There are currently outdoor basketball courts in only a few of Merced’s parks, although most school sites include courts. Outdoor basketball courts are proposed for inclusion in most neighborhood and community parks to provide convenient courts within walking distance of most residents.

The only City-owned tennis courts are the two in the center of Applegate Park, which appear to get very little use. In the long term, it is recommended that these courts be removed. It is difficult to assess the need for tennis courts in Merced because the City doesn’t offer a program, and there are few public facilities. However, to ensure that recreation needs are being met, there should be tennis courts available to the public at several locations in the city. Tennis courts are an appropriate element to include in neighborhood parks, as well as community parks. There are four tennis courts at Tenaya Middle School which have been used for a City-sponsored youth tennis program in the past. These courts are in poor condition and in need of major upgrades. It is recommended that the City consider participating in the upgrade of these facilities in exchange for use.

There are no designated outdoor volleyball courts in Merced parks, even though badminton, volleyball, and a similar game (ka da) are played on a similar type of court. There is currently a high level of volleyball and ka da activity in a number of Merced’s parks, particularly parks where groups can gather and picnic while playing. According to input by staff, sand courts are not favored by community members. Turf wear and tear as a result of these popular games has occurred at certain parks. As parks are redesigned and more picnic facilities are added, the demand at the frequently used parks may be reduced. If there continues to be high wear and tear at these parks, City staff should organize a summit with regular players. The purpose of this meeting would be to identify a design solution to develop facilities to accommodate the games but that

Merced's Role in Sports Leagues

will reduce wear and tear and the overall maintenance level. One option that was discussed with players in Autumn 2003 was using artificial turf for the courts. The players that Parks and Community Services staff met with seemed to be amenable to this solution. As more facilities are developed, turf wear and tear should be monitored. If it continues to be a problem, artificial turf could be considered for a test court

Adult Softball

The City should continue the same role in adult softball: to provide the fields and manage the program. This includes forming and managing the leagues, field scheduling, and hosting tournaments. Additional recommendations include:

- The City should evaluate program costs, including the cost of field maintenance, and adjust fees as necessary. At minimum, the adult softball program should be completely self-supporting. In many communities, this program turns a profit.
- MIG also recommends that Merced seek to expand the adult softball leagues, particularly after additional fields are constructed. There are fewer teams in Merced than we would expect for a city of its size. This may be due to a lack of awareness of the program, poor league management, league fees, condition of the fields, or other factors. The City should conduct a survey of league players to determine what changes should be made to promote more interest.
- The City may also want to consider adding beer to the concessions at adult softball complexes to increase concessions revenue. An outside concessionaire handles concessions, and should be consulted on this issue. If beer is added to the concessions, changes may be needed to address risk management and state liquor control issues.

Tackle Football

The City should continue in its current role for tackle football.

Youth Flag Football

There is no independent league for this sport. The City should continue to operate this program as long as it is a success, or until an independent league is established. Currently, tackle football is the only type of football offered by an independent league.

Youth Softball, Baseball, and Soccer

The City's role in youth softball, baseball, and soccer should primarily be to schedule the fields it owns or maintains (certain school fields). The Community Services Department should continue to work cooperatively with the youth sports leagues and should continue to provide contact information for the leagues within the program guide and on the website. However, consistent policies need to be developed now to address City/league relationships. Currently, there is only one organization for each field sport. This is not the case in many cities, particularly those of Merced's size. If additional leagues are established, clear and consistent policies about field allocations, responsibilities, and funding will help minimize conflicts.

Suggested policies are as follows:

- The City should work with local leagues and any new leagues that may form to establish a Sports Council that will develop policies for field scheduling and other field sports-related topics. This group should include representatives from all field sports, and should meet regularly (at least quarterly).
- The City will be responsible for scheduling blocks of time for youth field sports on City-owned and City-maintained school fields. The Sports Council will be responsible for establishing policies to determine how much time each league will receive. The leagues will be responsible for scheduling games and/or practices within their assigned time slots. Note: While this is currently a fairly simple task, it has the potential to become controversial, particularly if a new league splinters off and wants field time. Specific policies on priorities for field scheduling should be adopted by the Sports Council to ensure that leagues have equal access to fields.
- Fields in neighborhood parks are intended for local residential use. These will not be scheduled by the City for practices, although they may be used on an unscheduled, unreserved basis.
- The Leagues will be responsible for scheduling field time on fields not owned or maintained by the City. This would include school fields not maintained by the City.
- The City will be responsible for turf maintenance, general maintenance such as sweeping parking lots, and general repairs.
- The City will be responsible for providing recreation-grade fields, including site grading, installation of turf, basic goals or backstops and foul line fencing, etc.
- The City should evaluate the costs of field preparation, maintenance, and other items such as field lighting. Based on this evaluation, user fees should be established for youth sports leagues. The user fees should be based upon the City's policies for youth recreation program subsidies. Subsidies and cost recovery are discussed in Section 7.
- The Leagues will be responsible for paying field use fees to help recover some of the costs of field maintenance and scheduling.
- The Leagues will be responsible for management of the programs, field preparation (marking lines, dragging fields, etc.), and desired upgrades at field sites (upgraded backstops, dugouts, outfield fencing, scoreboards, etc.). Any upgrades must meet City standards.

Other Recreational Leagues and Clubs

In many communities, recreational leagues and clubs for "non-traditional" sports are formed that want field space for games and practices, including activities such as rugby, lacrosse, or ultimate Frisbee. The Sports Council should address how to prioritize field requests from other groups, and should also include representation from some of these groups if they become established.

6.6 Specialized Recreation Facilities

Recommendations:

Specialized Facilities: These are unique one-of-a-kind of facilities such as unique playground areas, skateboard parks, and group picnic facilities.

1. Specific Recommendations:

Group Picnic Areas

Merced has three fairly large picnic shelters (the shelters at Rahilly and Joe Herb Parks and the Soroptomist shelter at Applegate Park). Both the Rahilly and Applegate shelters are extremely popular, and are almost completely booked. The facilities at Joe Herb are not as popular, but will likely get more use after upgrades are completed.

Facility rental is currently one of the largest revenue sources for the Community Services Department. In addition, picnicking is a very popular activity at many of the parks, even where reservations aren't possible. It is recommended that more reservable picnic areas be developed at community park sites throughout Merced. Various sized facilities should be provided, including at least one capable of hosting large groups (100+).

Aside from meeting a recreation need, these types of facilities can generate revenue. A group picnic area usually requires a large site in order for the group area to be separated from the rest of the park. It is recommended that this element be incorporated into the future community and large urban parks. It is also recommended that the picnic area at Joe Herb Park be upgraded. See the recommendations for Joe Herb Park for additional detail.

Group picnic facilities should contain one to two large shelter buildings equipped with BBQ's and an outdoor patio area. In order to insure some privacy, this area should be somewhat separated from the other parts of the park by trees and landscaping.

Adventure Playground

Since most of the children's playgrounds in Merced are basic in design and not very imaginative, it is recommended that a special playground be developed that contains a wide variety of children's play facilities. It should be unique enough to warrant a drive half way across town to visit it and hold a child's attention for several hours.

Sometimes these types of facilities are built as part of a community-wide "building party", where donations of labor and materials are available. Since Merced is geographically spread out, it is recommended that at least two of these special playgrounds be developed. These facilities should be located in community or large urban parks.

Second Skate Park

Merced has a skate park at Applegate Park that appears to be frequently used. The City should consider providing a second park in a community or large urban park. An ideal location would be to locate a skate park adjacent to one of the two proposed youth centers. BMX bike use should also be considered if a second site is developed.

Aquatics Complex

Based on the needs assessment, additional swimming pool space is needed in Merced. This plan recommends eventual closure of the Ada Givens and Stephen Leonard pools because of their small size, operating costs, and limited facilities. This will further increase the need for additional pool space. The City should consider providing an Aquatics Complex offering a variety of pool types and configurations to meet community swimming needs. Although a detailed feasibility study and operations analysis should be made to develop a design program, the initial recommendation is to include a 6 lane, 25 yd. pool (or an L-shaped 25 m x 25 yd pool), a training tank, and a large leisure pool with a zero depth entry.

Due to the many competing priorities in Merced, the implementation plan prepared as part of this Master Plan does not include an aquatics complex because of its significant cost. However, space for a future aquatics complex is something the City may want to keep in mind over the coming years when new parks are being added to the system.

The appropriate location for an aquatics complex is at one of the four proposed new community parks. Because the existing pool at McNamara Park is located in south Merced, it would be preferable to locate the second pool complex in one of the three community parks proposed in north Merced. This would provide a geographic distribution of pool facilities. However, the proposed south Merced community park site would also be appropriate if none of the north sites was suitable.

Large Water Playground

There are no facilities of this type within the City or nearby. Children enjoy this type of facility, which can be designed without standing water. Water playgrounds can be designed to be staffed or unstaffed, and their operation cost is low compared to pools. Merced's hot climate should make a large water playground a very attractive feature for most residents.

It is recommended that the City develop a large water playground that is interesting enough to draw people from throughout the community. This facility should be located at a community or large urban park. Applegate Park would be an

excellent location because of its central location, if a water playground could be integrated into an overall master plan for the park. It is also recommended that the large water playground be elaborate enough so that the City could charge admission. Admission costs could help offset operations costs.

BMX Course

The City may want to consider including a BMX circuit in one of its community or large urban parks. BMX bicycling is a popular activity with youth, and there are currently several "unofficial" places in Merced used by BMX riders. As Merced undergoes additional development, there will be fewer vacant areas available for this activity. Incorporating facilities for BMX bikers into a park facility would provide a sanctioned place for this activity. Another currently popular activity with BMX bikes is doing jumps and tricks, similar to what skateboarders do. As another alternative to meeting youth recreation needs, the City could consider adding BMX hours if a second skate park is built.

Disc Golf Course

Disc golf, or Frisbee golf, is an activity that is growing in popularity. A member of the public suggested providing accommodations for disc golf during the park and recreation planning process. Disc golf is played much like traditional golf, except players throw Frisbees instead of hitting balls with clubs. The sport was formalized in the 1970's, and shares with "ball golf" the object of completing each hole in the fewest number of strokes (throws). A golf disc is thrown from a tee area to a target which serves as the "hole". This is typically an elevated metal basket. Courses can typically be integrated into park sites in a very low profile manner. The courses require a mix of open and wooded terrain. The City may wish to consider incorporating a disc golf course into a future community park, if community interest warrants.

Golf Course

A golf course was mentioned as a potential community need by several sources during the planning process, with the loss of a local golf course to the U.C. Merced campus cited as a main reason. A detailed feasibility study for a golf course is beyond the scope of the master plan project. A golf course would not be incompatible with the City's park and open space goals, if a suitable site could be located. However, given the numerous other priorities for parks, open space, and recreation services in Merced, a golf course should be considered a very low priority. The City should consider constructing a course only if a defensible analysis determines that the facility will be self-supporting.

6.7 Applegate Zoo

Applegate Zoo is located within Applegate Park. It is a fairly small zoo that has been located within the park for decades. In 1989, the zoo adopted a regional theme with the intent of focusing on animals and plants native to the San Joaquin Valley and the Sierra Nevada mountains.

The Merced Zoological Society was established in 1983 to support the Applegate Park Zoo. Zoo volunteers run the gift shop and collect admissions. In 1994, the City and the Society developed a formal relationship regarding financial support of the zoo. However, the terms of the agreement (which were to eventually eliminate City funding of the zoo) were never enforced.

Currently, the zoo is primarily supported through the City's General Recreation Fund. Operations costs include two full-time keepers, general maintenance by the City Parks Maintenance crews, and supplies and services (including veterinary care). The Zoological Society provides funds from the gift shop and admissions, but the majority of operating costs are paid by the City. For fiscal year 2003-04, the Zoo's operating budget was \$178,481. The City's planned contribution was \$135,582 for operations plus an additional \$16,000 for capital improvements.

The nearest zoos are in Fresno and Lodi, and people in Merced mention fond childhood memories of visiting the zoo at Applegate. The focus on local wildlife is a nice emphasis, particularly since there aren't any other interpretive or nature centers within the City.

However, the space at Applegate Park is limited, which means there is very little opportunity for the Zoo to expand. The master plan for the Zoo does call for a very small expansion of the Zoo. This plan was developed by the Society, and does not necessarily include input from the overall community. The overall community benefits of further zoo expansion into Applegate Park should be evaluated, because Applegate Park is the most popular park in Merced and it faces heavy demand for use. Expansion of the Zoo, even if small, could have negative consequences for the park.

Although there have been a number of upgrades at the Zoo, the facilities are not comparable to the more sophisticated environments provided in modern zoos, and the lack of space at Applegate inhibits the ability to provide this type of exhibit. Unless the Zoo was to expand significantly into Applegate Park, its current location is very limited in terms of upgrading the exhibits.

The Zoo has been working to comply with all USDA requirements, and most recently made plumbing upgrades to meet regulations. However, regulations typically get more stringent as time passes. It is possible that the Zoo could be required to make significant upgrades at some point in the future, if the regulations changed. With the lack of space at the current site, this could be problematic.

There are a range of options for the Zoo. These generally include:

- Keep it at the same site. A caveat is that changing regulations could make this unworkable in the future.

- Move it to another site.
- Maintain City funding and involvement.
- Cut back or eliminate public (tax) funding and/or City staff involvement.

While no decisions have to be made at the current time, the City should begin evaluating what its role in the Zoo should be in the future.

General recommendations on the Zoo include:

- Track Zoo expenses and revenues in a separate budget category within the City's overall budget document. Currently, zoo expenditures and revenues cannot be derived from the budget document.
- Partnerships with U.C. Merced should be explored. The University will have many resources, including the various science departments. In addition, the University will be preserving many acres of land near the campus due to its environmental sensitivity. Given the Zoo's focus on native wildlife, there may be opportunities for partnerships.
- Consider moving the Zoo to another site in the long term, regardless of the City's desired level of financial commitment to the Zoo. Because of the lack of space for expansion at Applegate, the general demand on that park, and its position as the signature Merced park, Applegate is not the best site for the Zoo. If the City passed a funding mechanism for park improvements, it could include within that capital improvement plan some funds for moving the Zoo. Depending on the City's desired commitment of public money to the Zoo, the Zoological Society could be responsible for raising the remaining funds, through fundraisers, grant requests, and other methods.
- Two potential options for relocation of the zoo were identified during the Master Plan process, both of which would shift the emphasis of the zoo. The first is the proposed South Merced Community Park, site CP-42. If moved to this site, the focus of the zoo would shift somewhat to provide more experiential exhibits and activities. The Great Basin Adventure in San Rafael Park in Reno was envisioned as an example of how the zoo might shift its emphasis if it moved to the south Merced park site. The second alternative is to seek space for the Zoo on a portion of the University grounds as part of a combined nature preserve and interpretive center. If moved to this site, the Zoo would become part of a larger interpretive center and nature preserve. A third suggestion that was not discussed in detail was to seek a location at Merced County's Lake Yosemite.

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California



*Photo: Entrance to Applegate Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 7: Management, Maintenance, and Program Recommendations

- *Introduction*
- *Management*
- *Recreation Programs*
- *Fees and Charges*
- *Maintenance*
- *Street Beautification*
- *Park Design*
- *Public Restrooms*

7.1 Introduction

This section of the Park and Open Space Master Plan discusses management, maintenance, and recreation program recommendations.

7.2 Management

Organizational Structure

Parks Maintenance / Parks and Community Services

Currently, Parks and Community Services and Parks Maintenance are in two separate departments. The City should consider merging Parks Maintenance within Parks and Community Services to improve park and recreation operations, cost of service accounting, and funding allocations. Many cities find that a single department addressing all aspects of parks and recreation services allows for better and more efficient park and recreation operations. If this occurs, the Parks Superintendent position should be responsible to the Parks and Community Services Director. Under this scenario, the Parks Superintendent would continue to manage the Parks Maintenance Division, but the Division would be located within Parks and Community Services instead of Public Works.

If Parks and Community Services and Parks Maintenance remain within separate departments, stronger links between Parks Maintenance and the Community Services staff should be established to ensure that Merced is providing the best park and recreation services possible. For example, while Parks Maintenance is responsible for the appearance of Merced’s parks, the Parks and Community Services Department staff are the faces that the public sees when they visit the parks or reserve a picnic area. These staff members hear both the complaints and compliments about the physical park system. Parks Maintenance needs to be aware of these public comments to ensure that they are providing high quality customer service. In addition, there needs to be a stronger connection between the Parks Maintenance and Recreation staff in the design of parks. Park designs need to be maintenance-friendly, while being supportive of recreation programming and community recreation needs.

Parks and Community Services Staffing and Organization

1. Organize the Parks and Community Services Department into new divisions.

Parks and Community Services should be organized into three divisions: Administration, Recreation, and Code Enforcement. Although the existing Code Enforcement Division is not addressed within this plan, it is anticipated to remain its own division of Community Services. If Parks Maintenance is moved, then a Parks Division will be needed. This organization is proposed to prepare the Department for the increase in population and concurrent increase in park land and demand for services.

Although this plan does not specifically address Code Enforcement, management of this division is the responsibility of the Director of Parks and Community Services, and is supposed to account for about 20% of his time. At the current time, there is insufficient staff to meet the Code Enforcement demands in the City and greater demands are being placed on the Director's time. It is recommended that at least one additional Code Enforcement Officer be hired to meet immediate needs, and that the Code Enforcement workload be reviewed periodically to ensure that there is sufficient staff to meet the workload.

2. Use professional help to design parks.

Merced is undergoing a high level of growth and the City's population is expected to almost double within the next 25 years. Most of the growth is expected in areas of the City that are currently undeveloped. As a result, the City is anticipating a significant amount of park development to meet park needs. It is important for the City to ensure that its citizens are getting the full value and benefit of these new parks, because deficiencies are difficult and expensive to fix, whether in park land dedication or in the design of the parks. Professional help is needed to make sure that the City receives maximum benefit from park dedications, new park designs, and new or renovated park facilities. Professional design and planning assistance will make sure that new parks are safe, interesting and attractive, and contribute to the neighborhood. Professional help can be provided by outside consultants or by an in-house park planner. The City should evaluate which route will best meet its financial and staffing goals.

Currently, the role of parks planning is filled by a combination of Planning Division staff and the Parks Superintendent. Both the Planning and Parks Maintenance staff have a myriad of other responsibilities, and are not experts in park and recreation planning or design. A professional parks planner or landscape architect could represent the community's needs during the planning process for new development to ensure that adequate park facilities are being provided, and that park designs proposed by developers are acceptable. Professional park planning and design assistance is needed in Merced for three main roles: 1. negotiation and acquisition of land for future parks; 2. negotiation and design approval for developer-built parks; and 3. management of contracts and construction for park improvements. In addition, some master planning and design will be needed for existing City parks.

If contract assistance is used, the consultant should work with the Planning Division and also coordinate with Community Services and the Parks Superintendent. If a new position is added, the person should be housed in the Planning Division. As an alternative, this position could be added to Community Services, but a separate Parks Planning Division (consisting of the Parks Planner) should be established if this occurs.

In addition, there will be a large number of park construction projects in Merced over the next ten to twenty years, between the anticipated new development (with associated parks) and the numerous upgrades and park improvements proposed in this Master Plan. Before the City accepts developer-provided

park improvements, a City representative needs to review the parks to ensure that they meet City standards. For park improvement projects provided by the City, a City representative needs to manage the bidding and construction process. For large park master planning projects, someone from the City will need to manage the work of subconsultants. A parks planner could serve all of these roles.

The Park and Open Space Master Plan recommends that the City undertake master plans for a number of park sites, a step that historically has not been part of the parks planning and construction process in Merced. While master plans for larger sites will require a subconsultant, many of the master plans for neighborhood parks could be completed in-house by a qualified parks planner. Because there is enough work to keep a parks planner busy, completing the smaller master plans in-house would be much more cost-effective than hiring a subconsultant for each of these sites.

Finally, a parks planner could serve as a liaison between the Parks Maintenance Division, especially if Parks Maintenance remains a division of Public Works, and Parks and Community Services.

Suggested Qualifications:

- Licensed landscape architect
- Experience with park design and construction
- Minimum of 5 years experience

3. Expand recreation programs.

Recreation programs provide the most revenue of any leisure services provided by the City. Successful recreation programs can reduce the net cost per capita of providing park and recreation services. Merced's current cost per capita of providing service is high. This cost could be brought down by generating revenue to offset other departmental costs.

It is recommended that the City hire another recreation program person on a two year trial basis or contract this service to a private party. The charge of this person would be to develop revenue-generating programs. Whether contract or a temporary city position, the person hired for this job should be given a two year trial to generate enough revenue through recreation programs to cover their costs (contract cost or salary, fringe benefits, etc.).

4. Designate a Recreation Director.

One of the four recreation program positions should be designated also to serve as Recreation Director, to head the Recreation Division. In addition to recreation programming duties, the Recreation Director would be responsible for oversight of the overall recreation program for Merced, and would provide leadership for all the Recreation Supervisors and recreation program staff.

5. Address the lack of opportunity for advancement for recreation program staff.

With the exception of the Recreation Supervisors, all of the recreation program positions are part-time, including the

directors of each of the youth centers. These staff are limited in the number of hours they can work each year, to 960 hours per year which is less than half time. This is acceptable for program staff or for seasonal programs, such as for camps or after school programs. However, youth center managers and other similar positions should be full-time and permanent. With the current status, the City trains people but has no opportunities to offer for advancement. This means that talented young people move on to jobs with other agencies or businesses, and the City loses out on that talent pool as well as incurs the costs of training. Moving to increase the number of full-time permanent staff will increase costs for the City. However, these costs may be offset by increased program revenue, as discussed in Section 7.3.

Additional Recommendations

1. Establish a cost tracking system.

The City should establish a cost tracking system that accurately reflects the costs of all park and recreation related services offered by the City, and the revenues generated by each service area. All costs and revenues should be tracked for each major facility or program area. With this type of information available, better tracking of costs can occur for the service. It is important to know the cost of providing each type of service and managing each facility. Accurate cost tracking also provides more information for setting budget allowances, and for planning future facilities. Cost tracking should also be established for parks maintenance, as discussed in Sections 7.3 and 7.4. At the very least, Parks and Community Services costs should be broken out by:

- Administration and planning
- Aquatics
- Recreation programs. There should be separate categories for different program areas, such as Sports, Youth Programs, Senior Programs, Special Events, and General Recreation. Additional categories should be included if new program areas, such as child care, are added. Recreation Centers operations (each center should be tracked individually)
- Parks maintenance

In addition, the Department should set program cost recovery goals for each program area. This will be discussed further in the section detailing fees and charges.

2. Establish annual goals and a work program.

Each year, the division heads and staff of both the Parks and Community Services Department and the Parks Maintenance Division should meet as a group to set goals and specific work tasks for the coming year. At the end of the year, an evaluation should be made to measure how well the goals were met.

3. Prepare a department policy manual.

As the department grows, a policy manual should be prepared that defines how the Department will react to given issues. This will help maintain a level of consistency and help staff render consistent decisions.

- 4. Prepare an annual report.**
As the park program becomes more established, the City should prepare an annual report describing the costs, activity participation, and changes in operation that occurred over the past year. This can be a valuable document at budgeting time, and can help demonstrate the popularity and effectiveness of the department.
- 5. Provide volunteer opportunities.**
The use of volunteers should not be overlooked as a means of providing more service on a limited budget. In addition to expanding staff capabilities, the use of volunteers promotes good public relations and increases individual support for services. Volunteers can be used in a variety of ways such as assistance with special events, conducting minor maintenance duties, and assistance with administrative tasks. It may be necessary for the City to designate a volunteer coordinator. The City currently uses high school interns to assist with administrative tasks in the Parks and Community Services office.
- 6. Establish an Adopt-a-Park program.**
To gain more ownership, pride, and upkeep in local parks, it is recommended the City initiate an "Adopt-A-Park" Program. This is an informal agreement with a neighborhood or service club to perform and assume certain responsibilities and duties. These include limited maintenance tasks, such as litter pick-up, watching for and reporting vandalism or other inappropriate behavior, or hosting neighborhood activities.
- 7. Improve park security.**
Based on public input, there is a perception that Merced's parks are not always safe. There are several ways to address this concern, some of which are included in Section 7.6 on Park Design Recommendations. Park security can also be improved by regular patrol of bike paths and parks. If available, police patrol by bicycle would provide additional security in the parks and on the bike paths, while at the same time providing opportunities for friendly interactions between police and citizens. If regular police patrol is not possible, it may be possible to provide park security through volunteers, Explorers, or paid park rangers.
- 8. Develop customer service policies.**
Customer service policies should also include Parks Maintenance. The policies should include methods for collecting complaints, methods for seeking public input (such as evaluation forms for recreation classes), policies on refunds, and standards for response time to complaints. These policies should include ways to solicit positive comments, as well as complaints. There should be a specific procedure to notify the Parks Maintenance Division of maintenance-related comments, including standards for response time. The purchase and implementation of a computerized registration system will also improve customer service.

9. Continue to build partnerships.

To share in the service cost, promote better coordination, and build community support, the City should continue to partner with private groups, the local school districts, Merced College, and the new U.C. Merced.

10. Update impact fees.

It is recommended that the City review its impact fees to ensure that park impact fees reflect the cost of developing new park and recreation facilities to accommodate new development. While it is up to the City Council to make this judgment call, it is recommended the fee schedule be evaluated and an increase in fees be sought if warranted.

11. Purchase and implement a computerized registration program.

Merced currently uses outmoded hand-written registration forms for program registrations. Program registrants come in to the office to fill out registration forms and pay fees. This is very inefficient and requires a lot of staff time. In addition, there are no computerized databases of program participation. In most communities, computerized records make analyzing program participation simple. This is not possible with Merced's current system. In addition, implementation of a computerized registration program will improve customer service. The current registration procedure is time-consuming for both staff and community members. Parks and Community Services needs a computerized registration program, preferably one that will allow registration via the internet. This is a very high priority improvement, which will be needed prior to expansion of the City's recreation programs. Some of these recreation management software systems have optional modules which could be used for code enforcement. This could be a cost savings.

7.3 Recreation Programs

It is important to note that recreation programs provide more service per unit of cost than any other type of recreation activity. It is also important to recognize that private non-profit groups and even commercial businesses are an essential part of a city-wide recreation delivery program. Because the community as a whole benefits from this partnership approach, the City of Merced should encourage and promote joint efforts, as this plan recommends.

At the same time, the overall level of recreation program service in Merced is low when compared to other cities of similar size. There aren't many private or non-profit providers. Because of the cost effectiveness of offering recreation programs and the need in the community, the city should expand its recreation programming. However, to do so will require innovative thinking and the commitment of the staff. It may require additional staff or a shifting of staff responsibilities to free up time for program development. The important thing to keep in mind is that City recreation staff do not need to conduct the class or lead the program. Outside contractors and teachers can do this. In most cases, the more appropriate role for recreation staff is to set up the program, find instructors, and register participants.

Additional Recommendations

Section 7.2 contains recommendations to expand recreation programs by hiring or contracting out another recreation programming position and to designate a Recreation Director. The new recreation programmer will be charged with increasing programming, with a focus on generating revenue.

1. **At risk programs.** Merced experiences gang activity and juvenile delinquent behavior. This was identified as a problem by a number of sources during the planning process. For example, graffiti in parks increases significantly in the summer when school is out of session and there are very limited supervised activities for youth. As an alternative to spending more money on reactive approaches (i.e. more jails and police), preventative approaches should be pursued. One way is to add "at risk" youth programs to the City's recreation program curriculum. This could be a joint effort between the Community Services Department, the Police Department, and other community agencies. The intent of this type of program is provide youth with positive alternative activities on weekends and in the evenings.
2. **Innovative programming.** Be more innovative in the approach to offering recreation programs. While the City should not necessarily attempt to compete with private businesses and established successful programs, there is a very limited selection of recreation opportunities in Merced. Although there are limitations to the facilities available, innovative thinking and creative problem solving can result in successful recreation programs within the City's constraints.
3. **Other potential program areas.** Program areas to consider are the previously mentioned youth at-risk programs, arts and crafts, special one day events, cultural events, day camps, sports instructional programs, indoor instruction and special interest classes. Another potential program area is additional recreational sports, especially for youth. While this type of program is not necessarily revenue-generating, it may be needed in the community. Youth leagues can become costly, and are sometimes too competitive for a more recreational level of play.
4. **Arts and cultural programming.** Parks and Community Services should seek to develop a stronger partnership with the Merced County Arts Council to expand arts and cultural programming opportunities and events in the City, and leverage the Council's success in this area.
5. **Program evaluation.** The Recreation Division should evaluate each and every program it offers in terms of cost, revenue, participation levels, and user feedback. User evaluation methods should be developed (questionnaires offered after classes, internet comment forms, etc.) and implemented, and the results should be analyzed regularly. Participation should be tracked, and participation rates should be reviewed regularly so that programming can be adjusted to meet demands. Cost and revenue evaluation is discussed in greater detail in Section 7.4.

6. **Organization of the Recreation Division.** It is recommended that the recreation division be organized to reflect accountability and the fact that new indoor recreation facilities are planned. The issue is who should be responsible for assuring that budget and program goals are being met for the new facilities? Should it be the facility manager who schedules and manages the facility, or should it be the recreation programmer who sets up the programs? It is recommended that the recreation programmer be assigned the responsibility of programming the facilities to the maximum. It should be the responsibility of the facility manager to see that the facility is open, clean, and ready for use.

7. **Publicity and marketing.**

Publicize the park and recreation services and operations. To promote more interest in programs and services (and to gain more support), the Department should make a major effort to publicize its operations and the services it offers. There are many ways to approach this, such as increasing advertisements of special events and distributing news releases.

Merced should prepare a detailed marketing and publicity plan. A city the size of Merced, particularly with an expanded recreation program, may warrant a marketing person, possibly contracted services. This person would be responsible for marketing and promoting Department programs. Specific tasks should include:

- Developing a consistent look for materials to promote individual programs
- Developing a more readable and user friendly program guide. As more programs are added, this will become more and more important.
- Increasing the promotion and advertisement of programs.
- Increasing the Department's web presence.

7.4 Fees and Charges

The ratio of operating cost to revenue from fees and charges is extremely low in Merced. Causes can be attributed to several factors, including:

- Minimal program offerings
- Low fees and charges
- Lack of revenue-producing facilities
- Concentration on youth programs which have low fees
- Large ratio of organized sports, which can be high cost items.

There are also budgetary constraints on park and recreation services in Merced, which have generally been given a lower priority than other City operations. To provide improved services within these budget constraints, it is recommended that the Department emphasize the importance of revenue. When budgets are tight, the first thought is usually to cut costs. However, increasing revenue can have the same net result while providing additional resources to provide park and recreation services. The Merced park and recreation budgets are so tight it doesn't seem likely that any

Additional Recommendations

significant budget reductions will be able to occur, while keeping parks open and the limited recreation programming operating.

1. Establish a cost tracking system.

One of the most important items in controlling costs and producing revenue is a good budget reporting system. While this is recommended department-wide, there are specific elements that should be included in a cost tracking system for recreation programs.

Costs and revenues should be tracked for individual program areas. At minimum, it is recommended that expenses be tracked for Aquatics, Sports (may want to separate adult and youth sports programs), Youth Programs, Senior Programs, the Zoo, and General Recreation classes. If child care programming is added, these costs should be tracked in their own category. In addition, program staff may want to consider tracking special events as a separate category.

Costs that should be attributed to each program area include direct costs (supplies, etc.), the fees for the contractor who provides the program, room rental, facility or field maintenance, recreation coordinator, and Recreation Division administration. Some agencies charge a share of the Park and Recreation Director's time out to different program areas. Merced may wish to consider this in the future.

2. Set goals for cost recovery.

Goals should be set each year for cost recovery for each major program area. Typically, youth and senior programs are subsidized the highest, while adult sports programs are priced to recover 100% of costs.

Currently, the overall cost recovery rate for Merced's park and recreation services is 7.5%. If parks maintenance is eliminated from the calculation, the overall cost recovery rate for Recreation/Community Services (not including code enforcement) is 22.3%. It is recommended that Merced immediately set a goal of an overall cost recovery rate of 25% for park and recreation services, and an overall cost recovery rate of 50% for Recreation/Community Services. This is an initial recommendation, and these goals should be reevaluated once they are attained. The overall parks and recreation revenue rate should be more in the range of 35% to as much as 50%, but the initial recommendations are meant to be a realistic goal that is an improvement, but that is attainable within a short time frame.

3. Establish a subsidy rate/cost recovery goal for each recreation program area.

In keeping with the above discussion, the City should establish policies on how program fees will be charged. These policies should include the degree of subsidy for the various program areas. Note that a subsidy rate for a program area means that overall, the program area should hit the targeted cost recovery level. Within that program area, certain programs could have higher or lower subsidies. The specific fee schedule should be

reviewed annually. As a point of beginning, the following subsidy rates are recommended:

- Adult sports: 0% subsidy, 100% cost recovery
- Youth sports: 20% subsidy, 80% cost recovery
- Other youth programs: 50% subsidy
- Seniors programs: 50% subsidy
- Special events: 0% subsidy, 100% cost recovery
- Aquatics: 50% subsidy
- General recreation programs: 15% subsidy, 85% cost recovery

These subsidy rates /cost recovery goals are a beginning point. These will need to be phased in over time, since fee revenue is currently very low. Once these cost recovery goals are achieved, the City should re-evaluate. For example, Aquatics should have a higher level of cost recovery, if possible. As another example, the City may wish to turn a profit on adult sports programs and set the cost recovery goal at 110%.

4. Establish a non-resident surcharge.

City residents pay for park and recreation services through their taxes. Non-residents do not contribute taxes. Therefore, it is recommended that the City establish a non-resident surcharge of 15% to 20% on all fees. Instead of a non-resident surcharge, some agencies establish a resident discount.

5. Establish a scholarship / exchange program to ensure that recreation programs remain affordable for all of Merced's residents.

As new fees and charges policies are instituted, the Department needs to make sure there are program offerings available to populations with high needs, including at risk youth, people with low incomes, etc. While this can occur through free or low cost programming, the City should also consider establishing and publicizing a need-based scholarship program. Increased revenue from more programming would allow the City to establish a scholarship budget without using General Funds.

The City should also consider establishing an exchange program, where residents could volunteer their time in exchange for free or reduced rates for recreation programs or facilities. This type of program could be managed by the volunteer coordinator. It would be particularly useful for youth.

7.5 Maintenance

Based on the analysis of the park system, many of the parks require renovation and/or the addition of new facilities. One overriding issue is that park maintenance appears to be primarily devoted to mowing and litter pickup with little time or effort devoted to preventive maintenance or general upgrading of facilities.

1. **Park maintenance budget:** Over time it can be expected the City budget will have its shortfalls. One of the first services usually cut is park maintenance. While reduced maintenance can occur for a short duration, over time, reduced maintenance will result in the loss of facilities and infrastructure. The cost to bring them back to an acceptable level then becomes significant. It is recommended that the City establish a minimum threshold for park maintenance services. It is suggested that it be established at \$6,000 per developed acre. After several years, the actual cost can be re-evaluated. This figure is exclusive of major capital renovation and repairs.
2. **Capital outlay:** Develop a specific budget line item for park and facility repair.
3. **Maintenance operations analysis:** A detailed maintenance operations analysis should be completed for Merced's parks maintenance division. This will assist in planning for the future growth of the park system. The data collected and the recommendations in the analysis will also assist in the development of a park maintenance management plan.
4. **Park maintenance management plan:** A park maintenance management plan is a management approach where maintenance and time standards are established, priorities are identified, and yearly work schedules prepared. By approaching park and facility maintenance on a systematic basis, crisis maintenance can be reduced, the quality of maintenance improved, and work tasks spread out more evenly over the year.

This type of plan can also help the Park Maintenance Division track maintenance costs so that the costs of different parks can be compared and the cost of different tasks can be compared. If maintenance levels and costs are evaluated, informed judgments can be made regarding where to cut. Many agencies that use this approach establish different levels of maintenance for different types of parks. In Merced's case, there could be three levels of maintenance: one for highly visible parks such as Applegate, one for community parks, and one for neighborhood parks. Natural areas along the creeks have their own special needs and should be managed accordingly.

5. **Balance of maintenance levels for sports fields:** All fields shouldn't necessarily be maintained to the same level. For example, sports complexes for games should have the highest level of maintenance, but fields for practice only should have a lower standard. Fields for young children may need a lower level of maintenance than those for older youth or adults. However, the standards should be similar for fields that get a similar level of use. For example, neighborhood parks should all have a similar level of maintenance so that older parks and

newer parks receive similar care. The Parks Maintenance Division should work with Recreation staff to develop acceptable maintenance levels for the different types of sports fields maintained by the City (complexes, school fields, neighborhood parks, community parks, etc.)

6. **Performance standards:** Performance standards should be established for every basic park maintenance task. This will clarify what tasks are expected and the general amount of time required. This is an effective tool when budget cuts occur so that everyone knows what level of maintenance will occur in the future.
7. **Seasonal employees:** Seasonal employees cost less than half as much as a permanent employees, and park maintenance is an activity with increased seasonal demands. A larger ratio of seasonal employees can help meet the increase maintenance demands in a more cost efficient manner. Merced should increase its ratio of seasonal employees within Parks Maintenance.
8. **Cost tracking system:** As previously recommended, cost tracking systems are needed in Merced. The cost tracking system for park maintenance should track costs by site and task. This system needs to accurately track park maintenance cost as well as other maintenance responsibilities such as the beautification areas and maintenance districts.
9. **Future budget allocations:** As the city park system evolves, additional maintenance dollars will need to be budgeted to maintain facilities as they are developed. The costs will be reflected in terms of additional staff, supplies, and new maintenance equipment. It is recommended that the city budget a minimum of \$7,000 for each acre of developed park land for maintenance services. This should be periodically reviewed and raised to reflect increases in labor and supplies.
11. **Consistency of design and materials for ease of maintenance:** While "original" architectural components may make for an interesting park system, they are very costly option because the cost of design and original construction. For some items such as restrooms, irrigation systems, and playground equipment the use of standard equipment is highly recommended. The consistent use of similar materials and products will reduce the amount of inventory for replacement parts.
12. **Labor saving opportunities:** Proper design standards and use of correct equipment can substantially reduce the amount of time and labor needed to maintain a park system. As new parks are developed, considerations for maintenance should have a high priority.

Some examples of labor saving devices are:

- Use of curbs and mowing strips to reduce hand mowing and trimming;

- Reduction of high-maintenance plant materials; and
- Design of mowing areas that permit the use of larger mowers.

Other design factors such as adequate spacing between trees, correct selection of plant materials and paving all contribute to easier maintenance.

13. Customer Service: As previously mentioned, there is a divide in communication because parks maintenance and recreation are within two different departments. The recreation staff hear the complaints if the parks aren't up to standards and the compliments if they are. Park maintenance is responsible for the face the City of Merced presents to the public, and a procedure needs to be developed where maintenance hears and can respond to user feedback on the park system.

14. Division Organization: With Merced's growing park system, it may make more sense to organize the maintenance division differently. Whether Parks Maintenance remains a division of Public Works or is moved to Parks and Community Services, the day-to-day lead supervisor (currently called the Parks & Street Trees Division Supervisor) should meet weekly with the Community Services Director or a designated representative (such as a park planner) to discuss maintenance issues.

The maintenance crews should then be broken into a turf unit (the mowing crew), a north unit, and a south unit. The pesticide applicator position should remain a roving position, with responsibility throughout the park system. To assist in cost tracking, if the pesticide applicator does work for other departments or divisions, his time should be charged to those budgets.

The turf unit would be responsible for all turf maintenance, including mowing, overseeding, aeration, and fertilization as called for in the maintenance management plan. The north unit would be responsible for north Merced parks, and the south unit would be responsible for all south Merced parks.

As the City grows and more parks are added, a third crew may be needed. If possible, one person should be assigned to beautification areas and general City property maintenance to facilitate cost tracking.

Finally, one person should be responsible for pools. Alternatively, the City could contract out its pool maintenance. Pool maintenance should not be a full-time job, unless more aquatic facilities are added.

15. Restroom Maintenance: Parks Maintenance should consider taking over responsibility for maintenance of restrooms in parks. This may be more cost-effective, if it is permitted by the City's labor agreements. It is very inefficient to have City custodial crews driving around to the same parks daily for restroom maintenance, when parks maintenance crews are already at those same parks daily.

7.6 Street Beautification

16. **Water use:** Merced's turf may be overwatered. The water bill seems high for a park system of this size. The City should consider installing computerized watering systems in new parks, and upgrading existing irrigation. This type of system adjusts the watering based on temperature, climate, and water needs.

Parks maintenance currently maintains a number of street right-of-ways and other beautification areas. Many of these areas are listed on the City's park inventory and some are even called a park (such as MacReady Park) but don't serve a recreation function. The maintenance of some of these areas is funded through assessment districts, but the maintenance of others is funded by general tax dollars. While Parks Maintenance may be best equipped to conduct this type of maintenance, one could argue whether this is a park and recreation function.

It is recommended that street landscaping and beautification areas be funded as a separate budget item. Generally, those areas not specified in the park inventory contained in Appendix B should be considered beautification areas, and their maintenance should be tracked within the proposed line item. This information will allow the City to track park and recreation expenses more accurately. In addition, the City can make an informed decision on what level of maintenance is desired in beautification areas.

Many of these areas are quite small, and turf is used in most of them. This places a heavy burden on the mowing crew, and creates a lot of equipment unloading and loading time. The use of turf should be minimized or completely eliminated in the smaller beautification areas.

Policies should be developed so that City acceptance of street beautification projects is consistent and equitable. The following policies are recommended:

- The level of design, quality of development, and amount of maintenance should depend upon their location and public visibility.
- Sites should be larger than 10,000 square feet. Smaller sites should only be considered when unique conditions exist and the maintenance cost can be justified. The design of these areas should be attractive but low maintenance. The use of non-plant materials and drought tolerant plant materials should be encouraged in the design of these areas. The use of annuals and other high maintenance plant materials should be minimized, and considered only in very high visibility areas (such as downtown, or at major gateways to Merced).
- The potential for vandalism should be considered in the design of these features.
- Street beautification should have its own budget, although it can remain part of the Parks Maintenance responsibilities.
- Turf should be eliminated from beautification areas less than 10,000 s.f. in size and replaced with hardy plantings or non-plant materials to minimize maintenance demands.

7.7 Park Design

Park design is also addressed in Section 6, in a discussion of program elements to include in each type of parks. The additional recommendations contained in this section address general design principles for Merced's park system.

1. **Consistency of design:** It is recommended that a standard restroom building, picnic table, sports field, playground, and other typical park items be used throughout the park system. These standards should be used throughout the park system, particularly within the neighborhood parks. Exceptions may be made for community or large urban parks, which may warrant special designs if part of an overall master plan for the site.
2. **Consistency of materials:** The consistent use of materials and products reduces the amount of inventory needed for replacement parts. Also, products with a known track record reduce the potential for poor service.
3. **Park amenities:** At a minimum, all parks (except natural areas) should include looped pathways, signs, benches, play areas, picnic tables, trash receptacles, bike racks, and water fountains.
4. **Quality of site amenities:** The amenities found in the Merced's parks should be upgraded. Park signage is the first priority to upgrade.

A consistent sign should be developed and placed in all parks, at each significant entrance or street frontage. The newer concrete sign that has been used in recent years would be adequate for use as the City's standard park sign. The location of the signs should be prominent and highly visible from surrounding streets. The quality of trash receptacles should also be upgraded. Trash receptacles should appear to be more permanent in appearance and be secure.

5. **Use of curbing:** The use of curbing should be encouraged to separate grass from other use areas. This will reduce maintenance demands. In addition, the use of curbing under fences will eliminate the problem of keeping grass under control.
6. **Pathways:** If properly designed and laid out, pathways improve the recreation value of parks as well as reduce maintenance demands from worn turf. All of Merced's parks need pathways.
7. **Access and visibility:** Ada Givens Park, Santa Fe Strip Park, and Burbank Park illustrate the importance of adequate access to a park. In the future, ease of direct pedestrian access to a park should be considered in the subdivision design or in the siting and layout of the parks.
8. **Lighting:** Lighting should be integrated into park design and into the bicycle path system to improve security and reduce the perception of the parks as being unsafe.
9. **Storm water detention basins:** Because new development in Merced is typically required to provide storm water detention basins, developers have dedicated a number of parks that are

contained in detention basins to the City within recent years. Because there have been no standards for park development and design, many of these parks are not very functional or welcoming to the user. In addition, there is very little usable space outside of the basin.

For neighborhood parks, at least 2 usable acres should be provided outside the basin. For community parks, at least 8 acres should be provided outside the basin. In addition, basin acreage should not count for 100% of park dedication requirements. Finally, the storm basins should be designed with recreation in mind. They should not be rectangular depressions with a little fringe of park amenities. For example, the shape of the basins could be varied to provide additional space for recreation.

For open turf areas contained within the basin, a typical approach to park design in Merced, grading should be carefully considered so that some usable area remains after smaller storm events. If playing fields are established within basins in community parks, policies should be established on when to close the fields to playing to reduce wear and tear on the turf when the ground is saturated.

7.8 Public Restrooms

Public restrooms are normally considered an integral part of a park system. However, they are expensive to construct and maintain, and are often susceptible to vandalism. Several options for restroom facilities are possible. These include:

- **Standard restroom with one section devoted to each gender.** This type is the most common, but is most susceptible to vandalism. This type of restroom should be located in a very visible location and near the front of the park.
- **Single occupancy restroom.** These are small independent units located within a building. They may be designed for each gender or available to all. This type attracts less vandalism than the traditional restroom.
- **Portable restroom.** This is a single occupancy facility. Usually, running water is not available. The major disadvantages are that they are often tipped over and are not very attractive. To offset these problems, they are often placed within a concrete shell. By proper design, the entire unit can be an attractive element in a park.

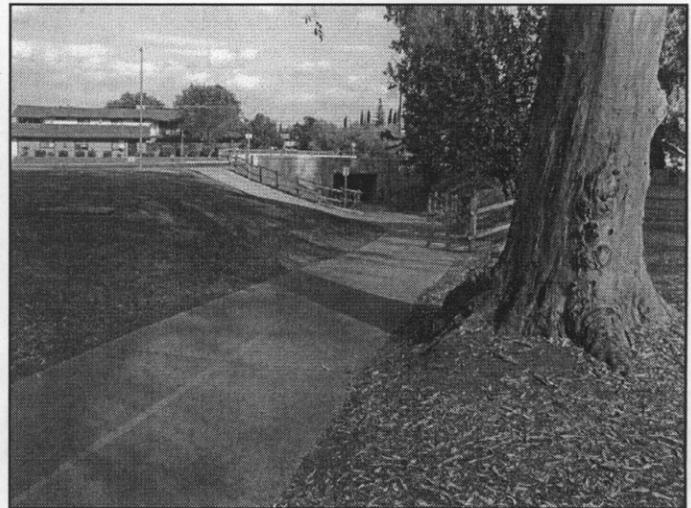
It is recommended that Merced provide permanent restrooms, preferably single occupancy, at large urban and community parks and at athletic parks.

Except where noted in the recommendations, permanent restrooms should not be provided at neighborhood parks. If restrooms are necessary, portable restrooms are recommended. It is recommended that the City construct concrete shells for any portable restrooms to reduce the risk of vandalism.

PARK AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Merced, California

The page is left intentionally blank.



*Photo: Bike Underpass, Fahrens Park
Merced, California*

SECTION 8: Implementation

- *Introduction*
- *Potential Funding Sources*
- *Project Costs*
- *Financing Strategy*

8.1 Introduction

This section of the report identifies methods for funding park and facility improvements. It also includes a specific funding strategy for a short-term (six-year) capital facilities plan, reviews recommendations for partnerships, and discusses funding for park maintenance.

8.2 Potential Funding Sources

The following are possible funding sources for developing, upgrading and maintaining parks and other recreational facilities in Merced.

1. **General Fund:** This is the City's primary source for operating revenue. Since Parks and Community Services and Parks Maintenance must compete with other City operations, such as Police, for these funds, this can be an unstable source.
2. **Park Reserve Fund (Park Impact Fees):** This fund includes the fees paid by developers for acquisition and development of parks. All fees paid in lieu of land dedications are paid into this fund, which tracks funds by five different geographic areas of the City. The rate varies by type of household and area of the City. Rates were increased in July 2004, and range from \$1,230 to \$2,552 for single family homes.
3. **PFFP Fund:** These are Public Facilities Impact Fees which are used to fund park and bikeway projects with communitywide benefit. The specific projects are identified in the Financing Plan that established those fees.
4. **Community Development Block Grant Funds:** Grants from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are available for a wide variety of projects. These funds are mainly used for projects and programs in the lower income areas of the community. Merced's HUD Annual Plan specifies the use of CDBG funds, and typically includes some funds for park improvements in South Merced Parks. The 2003 plan included \$72,000 for improvements to the youth center building at Stephen Leonard Park and \$50,000 for rehabilitation of Flanagan Park. It is anticipated that some CDBG Funds will continue to be allocated for park improvements.
5. **General Obligation Bond:** These are voter-approved bonds with the assessment placed on real property. The money can only be used for capital improvements but not maintenance. This property tax is levied for a specified period of time (usually 15-20 years). Passage requires a two-thirds majority approval by the voters. Major disadvantages of this funding option are the high approval requirement and the high interest costs.
6. **Revenue Bonds:** These bonds are sold and paid from the revenue produced from the operation of a facility. Merced does not have any recreational facilities that are funded in this manner.

7. **Donations:** The donations of labor, land, or cash by service agencies, private groups or individuals are a popular way to raise small amounts of money for specific projects. Such service agencies as Lions and Rotary often fund small projects such as playground improvements.
8. **Exchange of Property:** If the City has an excess piece of property with some development value it could be traded for a private piece of property more suitable for park use.
9. **Joint Public/Private Partnership:** This concept has become increasingly popular for park and recreation agencies. The basic approach is for a public agency to enter into a working agreement with a private corporation to help fund, build, and/or operate a public facility. Generally, the three primary incentives that a public agency can offer is free land to place a facility (usually a park or other piece of public land), certain tax advantages and access to the facility. While the public agency may have to give up certain responsibilities or control, it is one way of obtaining public facilities at a lower cost.
10. **Grants and Foundations:** Grants and foundations provide money for a wide range of projects. They are sometimes difficult to find and equally difficult to secure because of the open competition. They usually fund unique projects or ones of extreme need. Merced could be a good candidate for some private grants because of its diversity, the needs of its youth, and the high percentage of people with low incomes.
11. **Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA):** Over the years, California has received considerable revenue for trail-related projects. Originally called The *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act* (ISTEA), it funded a wide variety of transportation related projects. In 1998 this program was modified somewhat and became known as TEA-21. The program primarily funds regional trail systems. The money can be used for both maintenance and capital construction. TEA-21 was recently reauthorized by Congress, and is known as SAFE-TEA.
12. **City Redevelopment Funds:** The City has an active redevelopment agency. Some park improvements may qualify for redevelopment funds.
13. **Land and Water Conservation Funds:** This grant program is funded by the National Park Service and administered by California State Parks. About \$14 million is distributed to state and local agencies for land acquisition and park development. The grant requires a 50% match.
14. **State Bicycle Funds:** This is revenue from state gas taxes that are distributed to the Cities for the development of bicycle lanes. This is a good funding source for developing bicycle lanes and off street trails.

15. **Statewide Park Bond (Proposition 40):** California has recently passed two state-wide bond measures for funding parks and open space. The most recent one, Proposition 40, will allocate at least \$492,133 to the City. The funding program has several elements including a grant based on a per capita allocation, a matching grant and several competitive grant programs.
16. **Landscaping and Lighting Act:** This funding mechanism permits a public agency to assess housing units or land parcels. The assessment revenues can be used for park land acquisition, development and/or maintenance. The agency can choose to use the revenue generated on a pay as you go basis or can sell bonds in order to receive a lump sum amount. The bonds are then paid back from the annual revenue generated from the assessment. Establishment of a district or revision to an assessment requires a vote of property owners. The majority of returned votes must be in favor of establishment of the district. Although there are a variety of maintenance districts in place in Merced, there is no citywide Landscape and Lighting District for park improvements.

8.3 Project Costs

Table 8-1 includes a cost allowance for all projects recommended in the plan. It assumes the sale of seven of the ten mini-park sites, and the development of five specialized facilities: two recreation centers, two youth centers, and an adult softball complex.

The Merced park system has so many needs due to current deficiencies and the need to provide facilities for significant growth that it was necessary to prioritize projects. The goal of the recommendations and implementation plan is to provide enough land and improve the facilities to serve the incorporated city, with a similar level of service and facilities in all areas. In addition, the recommendations seek to meet the serious need for indoor recreation space and for youth services. The recommended projects included in Table 8-1 will meet these objectives. However, such items as a new pool and a second skate park are not included in the table because these were deemed a lower priority.

Table 8-1 begins on the next page.

**Table 8-1
Estimated Project Costs¹
Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan**

Site #	Park Name	Opinion of Probable Cost	Comment
Mini-Parks			
MP-1	8 th and V Mini-Park	(\$195,000)	Selling site
MP-2	11 th and H Mini-Park	(\$36,000)	Selling site
MP-3	12 th and G Mini-Park	\$250	Transferring site
MP-4	Dennis Chavez Park	(\$76,000)	Selling site
MP-5	William Lloyd Garrison Park	\$273,500	Major upgrade
MP-6	Diego Rivera Park	(\$36,000)	Selling site
MP-7	Love Veasley Family Park	(\$36,000)	Selling site
MP-8	Harnet Tubman Park	(\$76,000)	Selling site
MP-9	Charles Richard Drew Park	\$147,000	Major upgrade
MP-10	Circle Drive Park	\$92,000	Major upgrade
Subtotal		\$512,750	
Neighborhood Parks			
NP-12	Stephen Leonard Park	\$454,500	Major upgrade
NP-13	Gilbert Macias Park	\$3,200	Minor upgrade
NP-14	Burbank Park	\$472,000	Major upgrade
NP-15	Rahilly Park	\$140,500	Major upgrade
NP-16	Bob Carpenter Park	\$63,500	Minor upgrade
NP-17	Roland D. Brooks Park	\$800,000	Development
NP-18	Flanagan Park	\$300,000	Major upgrade
NP-19	Alfarata Ranch Park	\$990,000	Development
NP-20	Weaver Park	\$990,000	Development
NP-21	New Neighborhood Park	\$1,350,000	Acquisition and development
NP-22	Willowbrook (Gabriault) Park	\$950,000	Development
NP-23	Yosemite Gateway Park	\$1,200,000	Development
NP-24	Santa Fe Strip Neighborhood Park	\$600,000	Development
NP-25	New Neighborhood Park	\$1,350,000	Acquisition and development
NP-26	Davenport Ranch	\$1,425,000	Development
NP-27 to NP-37	New Neighborhood Park	\$14,795,000	Acquisition and development
SP-38	Ada Givens Park	\$270,000	Major upgrade
Subtotal		\$26,153,700	
CP-39	McNamara Park	\$340,000	Major upgrade
CP-40	Joe Herb Park	\$520,000	Major upgrade
CP-41	Fahrens Park	\$940,000	Development
CP-42	New Community Park	\$9,800,000	Acquisition and development
CP-43 to CP-45	New Community Parks	\$15,870,000	Acquisition and development
LU-46	Applegate Park	\$1,900,000	Major upgrade
Subtotal		\$29,370,000	

**Table 8-1
(Cont.)**

Site #	Park Name	Opinion of Probable Cost	Comment
Specialized Recreation Parks			
UP-11	Bob Hart Square	\$6,300	Minor upgrade
AP-47	Youth Sports Complex	\$0	None
SU-48	McCombs Youth Center	\$0	None
Subtotal		\$6,300	
Recreation Facilities			
SU-49	North Recreation Center	\$4,500,000	Land acquisition, design, construction
CP-42	South Recreation Center	\$4,800,000	Design and construction
TBD	North Youth Center	\$2,100,000	Land acquisition, design, construction
CP-42	South Youth Center	\$1,900,000	Design and construction
TBD	Softball Complex	\$3,400,400	Acquisition and development
Subtotal		\$16,700,400	
Linear Parks			
LP-50	Bear Creek Bikeway	\$450,000	Upgrade
LP-51	Black Rascal Creek Bikeway	\$230,000	
LP-52	Fahrens Creek Bikeway	\$230,000	
LP-53	Santa Fe Strip Park	\$40,000	
LP-54	Cottonwood Creek Bikeway	\$400,000	
Subtotal		\$1,350,000	
Total		\$74,093,150	

¹ Based on current 2003 dollars. Numbers in parentheses reflect a revenue source rather than a cost.

The total cost to develop the parks and facilities identified in the plan is about \$74 million, a number that seems daunting. However, it is important to remember that the City is planning to almost double in size in the next twenty-five years. About \$13 million of the above figure is for land acquisition, some of which will be required by new development. Also, more than \$30 million is for new park development, most of which is needed to accommodate new development. Impact fees and land dedications should provide for the development of parks required to serve new development.

This plan is intended to be a twenty to twenty-five year document. A short-term six year capital improvement plan is proposed for initial implementation of the plan. It is anticipated that work on the park system would continue beyond the initial 6 year strategy, and that successive CIPs would continue to be prepared and updated. With the degree of new development planned for Merced, there are a number of uncertainties about timing of new park development.

8.4 Financing Strategy

(which will occur with housing development) and the level of funding from park impact fees. A six year time frame is a reasonably foreseeable future for capital project planning, and is the basis for the financing strategy.

While there are many combinations of specific financing sources to implement the plan, there are two general approaches to funding park improvements: a pay-as-you-go approach based on availability of grants and local funding and a more aggressive approach based on a voter-supported tax measure paying for selected improvements.

It is recommended that Merced pursue the "pay as you go" approach. If the budget situation and the economic climate stabilizes in the next few years, the City should evaluate whether there is community interest in more park and recreation improvements and facilities, and consider whether to pursue tax-supported financing.

Pay As You Go Financing Approach:

Under this option, capital projects will be funded through existing funding mechanisms such as the General Fund, Park Reserve Fund, CDBG funds, Proposition 40 Fund Allocations, private donations, and grants. New parks will mainly be provided in areas undergoing development, and will be funded based on the availability of impact fees and land dedications.

Note that this option does not include the possibility of developers building parks, an option that the City has pursued with some success in the past. The City will pursue the developers building the proposed new parks, reducing projected development costs approximately 20% for each park.

In past years, the City's collection of park fees was limited because the rates had not been updated and were not sufficient to provide the services required by new development. As recommended in this plan, impact fees were increased in July 2004, and the revenue projections have increased.

Based on the current funding levels, about \$1,873,000 is generated annually from the Park & Recreation Fund and about \$1,018,563 is generated annually from the Park Reserve Fund/PFFP. These funds can be used for park capital expenditures. The "pay as you go" option assumes revenue from impact fees at the current level of development as well as continued use of CDBG funds for some park improvements. Over a six year period, about \$21,036,734 could be used for capital projects, including the funds currently contained in the Park Reserve Fund.

**Table 8-2
Proposed Funding Sources (6 Year)
Pay As You Go Financing Option**

Source	Amount
Park & Recreation Fund (\$1,873,000 annually)	\$11,238,000
Park Reserve Fund /PFFP (\$1,018,563 annually)	\$6,111,378
Proposition 40 Allocation	\$469,989
Proposition 12 Allocation	\$570,000
CDBG (\$125,000 annually)	\$750,000
Bicycle/TEA Funds	\$450,000
Donations (average \$5,000 annually)	\$30,000
Grants (average \$50,000 annually)	\$300,000
Current Resources	\$1,116,845

It is important to note that many of the available funding sources may only be used for specific types of projects. For example, development fees must be used to pay for acquisition or development of parks within the same impact fee zone as the development, and bicycle or TEA funds can only be used for trail improvements.

The capital projects listed in Table 8-3 attempt to balance the proposed improvements with restrictions on the anticipated funding sources. However, this may need to shift somewhat based on funding limitations. This option is less flexible than tax-supported financing in terms of flexibility in how the funds are allocated.

To supplement the impact fees, which are the bulk of the “pay-as-you-go” funds, staff should aggressively pursue grant funding on its own and in cooperation with the School District to leverage its funds to the extent possible. The City has had great success with obtaining grants for its bicycle path system, and should seek to build on this success in other areas.

It is also recommended that the staff concentrate on “kick starting” the Plan by selecting one or two projects at a time and really building them well. These can serve as demonstration projects that can be used to garner community support for additional park projects.

**Table 8-3
Proposed Expenditures (6 Year)
Pay As You Go Financing Approach**

Project Name	Site #	Opinion of Probable Cost	Comment
Charles Richard Drew Park	MP-9	\$147,000	Upgrade
William Lloyd Garrison Park	MP-5	\$132,087	Partial Upgrade
Santa Fe Strip N'hood Park	NP-24	\$581,500	Development
Flanagan Park	NP-18	\$300,000	Upgrade
Alfarata Ranch	NP-19	\$990,000	Development
Yosemite Gateway	NP-23	\$1,190,625	Development
New Neighborhood Park	NP-27	\$1,345,000	Acquisition/Dev.
New Neighborhood Park	NP-30	\$1,345,000	Acquisition/Dev.
New Neighborhood Park	NP-32	\$1,345,000	Acquisition/Dev.
Ada Givens Park	SP-38	\$270,000	Upgrade
McNamara Park	CP-39	\$340,000	Upgrade
Fahrens Park	CP-41	\$940,000	Development
New Community Park	CP-42	\$5,000,000	Acquisition/Phase I Dev.
New Community Park	CP-43	\$5,290,000	Acquisition/Dev.
New Community Park	CP-44	\$1,400,000	Acquisition
Applegate Park	LU-46	\$20,000	Volleyball, Top Spin Courts
Bikeway Development/Improvements		\$400,000	Development

Tax-Supported Financing:

To undertake a tax-supported financing approach, a voter-supported tax measure is required. The two most viable tax options are a general obligation bond or the formation of a landscape and lighting district (L&L). Of the two, the formation of an L&L district seems most appropriate because it only requires 50% voter approval, the cost to the individual property is lower, and the money can also be used for maintenance. If an L&L is formed, bonds would be sold and repaid from the annual amount raised by the assessment district. This would generate enough revenue to fund larger capital projects, such as a recreation center.

If there is community interest in additional recreation facilities after a few years of "pay-as-you-go" implementation, the City should consider whether to pursue tax-supported financing. This should only be considered if there is a high level of community support.

8.5 Partnerships

Partnerships can result in more efficient use of resources, leveraging of scarce funds, and reductions in duplications in services. Three general types of partnerships are possible: 1. public/public, 2. public/not-for-profit, and 3. public/private. Merced has several good examples of effective partnerships, such as the longstanding public/public partnership with the Merced City School District, and the well-developed public/not-for-profit partnership with the Boys and Girls Club. The City has few public/private partnerships.

The City should evaluate its existing partnerships and actively seek additional ones that have the potential to improve services for Merced residents. There may be other public/public and public/not-for-profit partnerships that could be developed. Some current relationships, such as those between the City and the sports leagues, could be formalized into partnerships. In addition, the City could seek to establish a volunteer program for assistance with park maintenance or operations. Other agencies have had success in this area, and supplement paid park maintenance staff with volunteers. A successful volunteer program would require dedicated staff time to establish and run, but could pay off in terms of hours volunteered in Merced parks. Another potential area is partnerships with private businesses, either through an "Adopt-A-Park" program or through sponsorships.

Overall recommendations on partnerships are:

- **Seek balanced partnerships.** Merced should seek partnerships to help provide park and recreation services to residents, but only when the partnership supports the City's goals and when clear benefits exist
- **Be proactive in seeking partnerships.** Merced should actively seek partnerships to maximize the benefits delivered to residents for each dollar of public investment. This includes exploring the possibilities for partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and private organizations or businesses, in addition to more public/public partnerships.
- **Establish written agreements for all partnerships.** For all partnerships, even those currently considered "informal", the City and the proposed partner should establish a clearly written agreement that specifies the responsibilities (financial and others) of each party. These agreements could range from something as simple as a one page document signed by both parties to a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- **Designate liaisons.** All partnership agreements should assign liaison responsibility to a specific staff person or position at each organization, so that reassignments are made when staff changes occur.
- **Identify specific goals with quantifiable performance measures.** Specific goals should be established for each partnership as part of the agreement process. Each partnership likely will have individualized goals based on the intent of the partnership, and the types of goals may vary depending on the type of partnership. For example, a public/public partnership may have very different goals from a public/private partnership. Some

8.6 Financing Parks Maintenance

partnerships may have specific financial goals, while other goals may be broader, such as “increase community awareness of Merced’s services.”

- **Evaluate success annually.** An annual assessment should evaluate how well goals have been met and whether any revisions are needed in the partnership agreement. A recommendation should be made regarding the desirability of continuing the partnership.

Financing for parks maintenance can be challenging. While a host of options exist for funding of capital improvements, funding options are much more limited for maintenance and operations. Merced’s situation is particularly challenging, because the City has many parks and anticipates a significant increase in its park inventory as development occurs.

Merced already uses some creative method of paying for parks maintenance. As an example, the Downtown Redevelopment District pays for maintenance of specific parks and streetscapes within its boundaries through a special service district. If other redevelopment areas are established, this may be an option if there are parks within the boundaries. The City also approved a number of new Community Facilities Districts (CFDs) in January 2004 for new development. The parks and recreation portion of these funds will pay for park facility maintenance and personnel.

Other options for financing parks maintenance are:

- **Landscaping and Lighting District.** Landscaping and Lighting Districts (L & L Districts) can be used for capital improvements and/or operations. Merced could consider establishing a citywide L&L for the purpose of parks maintenance. As previously mentioned in this section, L&L Districts must be passed by public vote. This can be especially challenging for funding maintenance only. Another option which can be more attractive to voters is a combined operations and capital L & L. This could be set up in a variety of ways. One example would be using the proceeds for capital projects for a specified duration, such as 10 years, and after that using the proceeds for operations and maintenance. If Merced does seek an L&L District for funding capital projects in the future, the City should consider also including parks maintenance.
- **Increasing Program Revenue:** It is difficult to generate revenue through park facilities, but relatively easy to generate revenue through recreation programs. If more revenue were generated through programs, some General Funds currently dedicated to recreation services could be reallocated to parks maintenance. This would be an increase in park maintenance dollars without an impact on the City’s budget.
- **Increase Revenue from Park and Facility Rentals:** The City should consider revising its fee schedule for rental of picnic areas and other facilities. Also, more group areas and other rental areas should be added to Merced’s parks because of the market demand.

- **Volunteers:** As described previously in this section, volunteers can be a significant resource for park maintenance, for agencies that are willing to devote time to volunteer recruitment and direction. Park systems with successful volunteer programs typically offer two basic types of volunteer commitments: ongoing, regular commitments and one-time commitments. "Adopt-A-Park" opportunities are also usually available to local businesses and service groups. All of these can provide valuable assistance. Some examples of volunteer opportunities that Merced could establish are:
 - Adopt-A-Park: For example, Merced might seek a local garden group to adopt the Rose Garden at Applegate Park. Other potential "Adopt-A-Park" volunteers are service organizations such as Rotary or Kiwanis, church groups, or local businesses.
 - On-going Volunteer Commitments: The City can set up a program for ongoing volunteer commitments, for those seeking a regular commitment but who are unable to adopt an entire park.
 - Natural Areas and Open Space Volunteers: In many communities, natural areas and open space attract a significant number of volunteers, either at city-sponsored work days or to projects sponsored by private groups such as Audubon. Earth Day in April often is a good opportunity to attract volunteers for natural areas. For example, Merced could set up "Creek Corridor Clean-up Day" on a Saturday in April.
 - Park Work Days: The City could also sponsor work days in its active use parks. These can also be effective.
- **Alternative Work Forces:** There are other alternative work forces available. Like volunteers, these groups are a potential resource but would require some staff time for management and direction. Examples are community service programs (where people are sentenced to community service rather than jail), prison work crews, or work training programs for people with disabilities. Merced could explore some of these options for suitability in providing parks maintenance assistance.

This page left intentionally blank.