

Focus Group Meetings – December 2019 - Citizen/Service Organization Participation Comments

Quarter-page size advertisements inviting the community to these meetings were published in the Merced Sun-Star on December 6, 8, and 9, 2019; and on December 5, 2019 in the Merced County Times. Letters were also mailed directly to non-profit community organizations and church organizations.

RESIDENTIAL Focus Group – Monday, December 9, 2019 – 6:00 p.m.

Sam Pipes Room – Merced City Hall

Notes:

- **Service/local organizations attending this meeting were:** Merced County Habitat for Humanity (Jan Sorge)
- **Residents attending this meeting were:** Barbara Richey
- **Post-presentation and after a priority needs exercise, the discussion included topics on:** first-time homebuyer programs (downpayment assistance); owner-occupied housing rehabilitation; homelessness; community clean-up; mental health services; help with acquiring buildings for non-profit programs; senior community; affordable senior housing; foster child programs; and post-foster care/aging out (ages 18-24); lighting in downtown Merced

HOUSING Focus Group – Tuesday, December 10, 2019 – 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Sam Pipes Room – Merced City Hall

Notes:

- **Service/local organizations attending this meeting were:** Healthy House Within A Match (Linda Dash); Project Sentinel (Elizabeth Sanchez); Merced County Habitat for Humanity (Marie Medefind); and, Central Valley Coalition for Affordable Housing (Marissa Cardenas)
- **Residents attending this meeting were:** (none)
- **Post-presentation and after a priority needs exercise, the discussion included topics on:** needs assessment online survey – link will be posted; without housing, services won't succeed; elderly homeless; elder abuse; free legal help for homeless/low-income (barrier); transportation services; vouchers; acquisition of land for housing; affordable housing; student housing; housing counseling; fair housing for disabled and those with mental illness; domestic violence victims – access to money without barriers; education/outreach – low turn-out for pop-up clinics and other events; first-time homebuyer programs; code enforcement/rental safety ordinance

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Focus Group – Tuesday, December 10, 2019 – 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Sam Pipes Room – Merced City Hall

Notes:

- **Service/local organizations attending this meeting were:** (none)
- **Residents attending this meeting were:** Barbara Richey
- **Post-presentation and after a priority needs exercise, the discussion included topics on:** Tenants Together/California Association of Realtors; congressional appropriation to HUD allocation; small business financing; Merced Adult School – vocational programs; jobs

SOCIAL SERVICES Focus Group – Tuesday, December 10, 2019 – 3:30-5:00 p.m.

Sam Pipes Room – Merced City Hall

Notes:

- **Service/local organizations attending this meeting were:** Alpha Pregnancy Help Center (Debbie Croft); Valley Crisis Center (Rosa Rangel); Healthy House Within A Match (Sue Emanivang); Merced County Behavioral Health (Jennifer Jones)
- **Residents attending this meeting were:** Barbara Richey
- **Post-presentation and after a priority needs exercise, the discussion included topics on:** homelessness; family and children; economic development; affordable available units; housing ready; application fees a barrier; landlords being more supportive/willing to rent to the "not perfect" client; rental assistance; 2-bedroom space can be shared; 1-bedroom/studio space in demand for individual; group approach works better than not – working together; educating landlords/Housing Authority; underutilized vouchers; meeting with property management companies with services; Section 8; free notary services; permanent supportive housing units/Merced Behavioral Health/New Direction – works with homeless for a year before they are housing ready; school/college can be a barrier to housing (student can't be primary renter); Homeless Court-citations expunged if they are working on getting better; Mental Health Court-citation/legal issues, remanded to treatment; Sobering Center (not detox center)/Merced Rescue Mission; JMJ Maternity Home/All Moms Matter/All Dads Matter/HSP Program; work readiness program/Door Program; undocumented workers/New Direction; Workforce Investment Board; Restore Merced; Empower Program (transitional age 18-24)/Merced County Office of Education; families w/children/food stamps/HAS; preschools/Galen Clark; afterschool program/Boys & Girls Club/McNamara Park

**City Council Town Hall Meetings – February 2020
Citizen Participation Comments
That Could Be Addressed With CDBG or HOME Funding**

**Wednesday, February 19, 2020
Hoover Junior High, 800 E. 26th Street - 6:00 pm (Central Merced)**

Notes: Topics, Comments, and Suggestions from the public included (some Council responses were also noted):

- Code Enforcement: citizen noted & appreciates increase in code enforcement in the area
- Downtown: parking concerns near downtown Tioga and Mainzer Building projects - parking structure funding to be determined; appreciation of investment in downtown and its buildings
- Street/Public Improvements: request for road projects; road projects ranked by condition and cost; appreciation for pothole repairs; take condition of surrounding streets into consideration when planning detours through neighborhoods
- Homeless: warming vs. cooking fires by homeless; summer concert series hoped to help alleviate encampments in Applegate Park
- Other/Misc: Noted debris in Bear Creek; theft of benches on bike path; solicitors knocking on doors too late at night; lawn clippings swept into street; inquiry regarding acceptable tree species in the city; block party trailer available; Climate Action Plan update due

**Thursday, February 20, 2020
Golden Valley High School, 2121 E. Childs Avenue - 6:00 pm (South Merced)**

Notes: Topics, Comments, and/or Suggestions from the public included (some Council responses were also noted):

- City Parks: request for drinking fountains and lighting at skate park in McNamara Park
- Youth services: request sports vouchers for city parks leagues; need for youth homeless shelter with wraparound services; victims and those committing are young people
- South Merced: requested grocery store in south Merced; no urgent care except Mercy's at old hospital
- Street/Public Improvements: streets in need of repaving; requested more lighting on S. Hwy 59 (State hwy)
- Homeowner Rehabilitation: requested rehab program & homebuyer classes (was informed of City's existing homeowner rehab program)
- Homeless: requested a study on the status of vacant homes that attract homeless; stated people are having problems with affordability
- Other/Misc: discretionary portion of Cannabis tax revenue. Tax revenue could go towards programs for youth

**Thursday, February 26, 2020
Herbert H. Cruikshank Middle School, 601 Mercy Avenue - 6:00 pm (North Merced)**

Notes: Topics, Comments, and/or Suggestions from the public included (some Council responses were also noted):

- Code Enforcement: trash, shopping carts; debris along Black Rascal Creek at bike path; litter and graffiti maintenance was better under city management, not as good contracted out
- City Parks: at dog park, water fountain is off and park needs maintenance; overall parks need maintenance and equipment; sports complex is good; request horseshoe pits (bocce ball fields not used); need park hours signs
- Loughborough Area: upcoming cleanup events; need a community center in this area
- South Merced: needs grocery store, especially with new residential construction in the area again
- Airport Industrial Area: needs improvements
- Youth Services: need youth sports; invest in youth services, safe parks
- Street/Public Improvements: need more benches at transit bus stops; streetlights too dim; bot dot lane markers are faded; paving condition bad; Hwy 59 bridge widening project; bike path maintenance (broken pavement, weeds); engineering road repair projects; condition of asphalt at BNSF railroad tracks at M St; speed bumps needed; deteriorated condition of sidewalks; alleys deteriorated; improvements in S. Merced needed
- Other/Misc: traffic safety; request for stop sign on Yosemite Avenue; safety at intersection of Hwy 59 and Shadowbrook Drive; City block party trailer a good idea; Climate Action Plan update deadline soon

NOFA/Information Meetings – March 2020 - Citizen/Service Organization Participation Comments

(note: choice of location of these meetings was limited due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the need for safety)

Monday, March 2, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.

Merced City Hall, Third Floor Conference Room

Notes: Staff presentation included information about what the CDBG and HOME programs are, what types of programs have been funded in the past, availability of funds this year, and the process of applying for funding as a public service organization.

- Service organizations attending this meeting were: Sierra Saving Grace Homeless Project (Joe Carroll); Merced County Habitat for Humanity (Don Spiva); Symple Equazion (Kelly Turner); Valley Crisis Center (Chee Vang)
- Post-presentation discussion included topics on: HUD's definition of public service, economic development, and acquisition; matrix codes, and Federal/HUD regulation code sections governing use of CDBG and HOME funds.

Tuesday, March 3, 2020 – 2:00 p.m.

Merced City Hall, Third Floor Conference Room

Notes: Staff presentation included information about what the CDBG and HOME programs are, what types of programs have been funded in the past, availability of funds this year, and the process of applying for funding as a public service organization.

- Service organizations attending this meeting were: Healthy House Within a Match (Belle Vallador); Central Valley Opportunity Center – CVOC (Claudia Guzman)
- Post-presentation discussion included topics on what CVOC does in the community and what types of programs they could create within their current capacity using CDBG funding – vocational training, etc. Also discussed was networking with other organizations in the city and information sharing.

Tuesday, March 3, 2020 – 5:30 p.m.

Merced City Hall, Third Floor Conference Room

Notes: Staff presentation included information about what the CDBG and HOME programs are, what types of programs have been funded in the past, availability of funds this year, and the process of applying for funding as a public service organization.

- Service organizations attending this meeting were: Calvary Assembly of God/Harvest Time (Pastor Juan Ochoa and Cindy Ochoa)
- Post-presentation discussion included topics on: Assisted with ideas/provided technical assistance for a potential new program partnering with Harvest Time, who currently provides a program to feed the homeless. They are in need of a new commercial-size freezer/refrigerator unit to be located in a different building than the current one on the church site. There is also a vacant house on their property which they are currently using for storage. Housing staff discussed the potential of this being a rehabilitation project in the future, with the goal of renting the home to low-income individuals/families.

**Summary of Citizen Comments Received
by Housing Department During 1st Comment Period 6/10/2020 – 7/10/2020**

Written Comment submitted to City Clerks office for 7-6-20 Council Meeting, but was not read into the record:

- 7-6-2020 - Gloria Sandoval/California Central Valley Journey for Justice – concerned with lack of affordable housing options in the community; encourages inclusionary zoning policies to increase housing opportunities; also concerned about evictions occurring during the Coronavirus pandemic; there should be a plan that involves the whole community; asks for Public Hearing Townhalls to be held to educate the community and explain the process for involvement; suggests to councilmembers to hold town halls within their own districts to allow for maximum participation.

Written Comments receiving by Housing Division:

- 7-8-2020 – Sheila Garcia – feels all the projects listed in the Annual Action Plan are well deserving and will benefit the community.
- 7-9-2020 – Sheila Garcia/Harvest Time – thanked the City of Merced for consideration of funding for their CDBG funding proposal to replace their 20-year-old walk-in refrigerator/freezer unit that was originally donated to the organization when they first began feeding Merced's hungry twenty years ago. The unit is expensive on utilities, not energy efficient, and requires frequent repairs. It also will allow them to consolidate their operations, eliminate the need for hauling food across the parking lot to their warehouse, and will help them make a positive impact on the community.
- 7-10-2020 – Leticia Luque – Annual Action Plan is a good investment for the City and in favor of the Harvest Time walk-in refrigerator/freezer replacement project.
- 7-10-2020 – Maryann Almanza – She has been receiving help from Harvest Time for approximately 7 months after an injury; is grateful to have Harvest Time's help when she needs and is in favor of the Harvest Time project to allow them to continue their work in Merced, as it is needed.

No voicemail comments were received by the Housing Division.

As a result of the City Council extending the 30-day comment period five additional days to allow time for more written comments at the 7/6/20 Public Hearing, the following was received via email:

- 7-15-2020 – Sheng Xiong/Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability –
After receipt of this letter, staff met with Ms. Xiong for multiple meetings to discuss some of the Leadership Counsel's concerns that could be alleviated in this manner. Additionally, at the 7/20/2020, after this letter was received, the City Council agreed to delay review and approval of the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan – essentially restarting the process at a later date – in order to hear from additional residents who were not reached during the previous outreach efforts due in part to constraints put on the process from the Coronavirus pandemic. On September 24 and 30, 2020, the City co-hosted two virtual outreach workshops with the Leadership Counsel to address and discuss the concerns written in their letter. The comments received at the two workshops are incorporated into the plan. Several suggestions were made at these workshops that staff will bring to the City Council when the approval process is re-started with new public hearings and a new comment period.

The following is an outline of the complaints in the Leadership Counsel's letter:

- I. The City's Public Outreach efforts do not satisfy the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations
 - a. The City of Merced did not allow sufficient time or resources for community outreach and participation
 - b. Citizen participation process lacked diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic representation
 - c. Expand outreach to local schools
- II. The Draft Plan omits information essential to informed public review and comment
- III. The Draft Plan fails to evaluate past performance
- IV. The Draft Plan's Strategic Plan fails to comply with 24 C FR 91.215
- V. The Draft Plan fails to identify and address public policy barriers to affordable housing that would allow it to remove or ameliorate them.
 - a. Proposed strategies to remove or ameliorate barriers to affordable housing lack basis or relevance to public policy
 - b. The City should ensure that the transfer of City-owned properties for affordable housing are not concentrated in low-income neighborhoods of color
 - i. Adopt a commercial linkage fee
 - ii. Reduce fees for residential development that addresses affordable housing
 - iii. Apply for available funding to support affordable housing development

Leadership Counsel concerns letter outline - continued:

- c. The Draft Plan fails to adopt critical strategies to address the need for affordable housing in Merced
 - i. Redesignate and rezone residential land to higher densities in growth areas
 - ii. Require developers to achieve minimum residential densities for individual parcels
 - iii. Adopt an inclusionary zoning policy
 - iv. Adopt a commercial linkage fee
 - v. Reduce fees for residential development that addresses affordable housing needs
 - vi. Apply for available funding to support affordable housing development
 - vii. Implement the City's 2015 Housing Element
- VI. The Draft Plan's non-housing community development plan does not include key community development needs
- VII. The Draft Plan fails to affirmatively further fair housing by restricting affordable housing to racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty

City Council Public Hearing Meetings, 1st Round – Public Comments Received Public Hearings

Monday, July 6, 2020; 6:00 p.m. – Agenda Item J.2

Merced Civic Center – City Council Chambers, 678 W. 18th Street, Merced (in-person meeting)

Notes: Comments and Suggestions from the public included:

- **Comment emailed to City Clerks prior to meeting:** *Gloria Sandoval/California Central Valley Journey for Justice* – a copy of this email was given directly to the councilmembers and not read into the meeting record. As the comment was submitted during the 30-day comment period,, the comment will be filed as such.
- **Comments receiving during the Public Hearing:** *Sheng Xiong/Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability* – should be a more aggressive effort to address affordable housing need; adopt policies to address disproportional housing opportunities and equity, racial groups isolated in low-income census tracts; suggested housing trust fund, inclusionary zoning policy, and rezoning to allow higher densities in growth areas as ways to get more affordable housing; *No Name Provided* – disagrees with spending government money on housing to fix racial inequality; *Gabriela Spiva* - extend public hearing to give time to read and respond;
- **Voicemail comments played during the meeting included:** *Marilyn Moshel* – need health policy decisions; increasing number of residents are concerned about housing; request extension of the public hearing to 8/3/20
- **Other:** Council extended the written comment deadline to 7/15/20, and added an additional meeting date (7/20/20) and extended PH to 7/20/20 and 8/3/20 to accommodate additional public comment.

Monday, July 20, 2020; 6:00 p.m.

Merced Civic Center – City Council Chambers, 678 W. 18th Street, Merced (in-person meeting)

Notes: Comments and Suggestions from the public included:

- **Comments submitted to City Clerks prior to meeting:** None
- **Comments receiving during the Public Hearing:** *Sheng Xiong* – reviewed the points expressed in the written letter submitted to Housing Division on 7/15/20 during the extended comment period; not enough affordable housing; South Merced area racially disproportionate; public participation racially disproportionate; need for affordable housing trust fund; *Blanca Areda* – large proportion of low-income renters/RHNA needs unmet; *Gabriela Spiva* – beneficiaries not represented in outreach; disconnect between who is doing and who needs; lack of youth representation; requested delay in approving plan in order to reach more ethnic groups; *No Name Provided* – need more low-income housing options not in South Merced or in food deserts; *Kelly Turner/Symple Equazion* – also need to focus on Continuum of Care to express community need and offered help to facilitate; *Melinda Gonzalez* – affordable housing should be more widespread
- **Voicemail comments played during the meeting included:** *Gloria Sandoval/California Central Valley Journey for Justice* – lack of affordable housing is an emergency; *Colton Dennis* – more time is needed to review the draft; affordable housing needs to be in other areas of the city; public policy section incomplete; connection between crime and unstable housing; *Katelynn Bishop* - urged the use of general fund dollars towards affordable housing and consideration of inclusionary zoning policies, more outreach; *Alyssa* – requested delay of approval to complete policy sections; *Nelly* – significant lack of affordable housing in North Merced; people are not able to pay rent; *Robert* – requested delay in approving; more affordable housing is needed; *Marilyn Moshel* - remove barriers to affordable housing; housing policy is important; design and quality of housing impacts health; *Noelle Anderson* – fair housing needs to be addressed; rent prices and evictions rising; racial and socio-economic disparities; policy barriers not addressed; suggested inclusionary zoning, rezoning to higher densities, and housing trust fund

Monday, August 3, 2020

Merced Civic Center – City Council Chambers, 678 W. 18th Street, Merced (meeting held virtually)

Notes: Comments, and Suggestions from the public included:

- **Comments submitted to City Clerks prior to meeting:** *Sandra Hay* – expressed support for delaying approval of ConPlan until more community input can be received.
- **Comments receiving during the Public Hearing:** *Sheng Xiong/Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability* – stated that she and residents/partners have met separately with four councilmembers and city staff since the last Council meeting to discuss ways to strengthen the ConPlan; supports reopening the public participation process and restarting the public hearing process after conducting additional outreach and receiving more input from residents.

Community Outreach Workshops – September 2020 - Citizen Participation Comments

Thursday, September 24, 2020; 6:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting – 42 pre-registrants

Notes: Staff presentation included explanations of what the Housing Division does and how CDBG and HOME funds can be used in the community, as well as what projects will be funded during the 2020 Program Year. Following the presentation, staff received comments and suggestions for policy and other changes, and answered questions.

Comments, Questions, and Suggestions from the public included:

- Need to include policies that address barriers to affordable housing for all income levels that have a lasting impact; upzoning to create more multifamily-zoned sites; inclusionary zoning policies; seek affordable housing developers
- Offer incentives to affordable housing developers – reduce impact fees and partner with organizations
- Cost of rent increasing; competition for vacant units; need more 1-bedroom and studio units/single-occupancy
- City properties formerly owned by RDA – location & could be potential for single-family/duplex affordable housing
- Data on local homeownership; how to put renters on the path to homeownership; first-time homebuyer education and mortgage assistance
- Potential loss of affordable housing through Section 8 contract expirations/Merced Co. Housing Authority
- Need equity perspective-focus on very low- and low-income affordable units; more than half residents rent and 60% are housing cost burdened; renter protection
- Families struggling to pay rent; majority are farmworkers making extremely low wages; creates serious barriers for youth and their families living in the city, forcing them to move to outskirts and blighted areas; segregation that families can only afford South Side housing; rent control policies; downpayment assistance; maintenance of properties by landlords; undocumented residency/legal representation to prevent discrimination and eviction
- Mental health component/permanent supportive housing – need more education about this; gaps in Continuum of Care
- Extend impediments – flush out to extend to economic barriers re lack of employment opportunities
- Credit check fees is barrier, when families/individuals are applying at multiple housing units to find rent; some owners want them to be making twice the rent before they'll lease to them
- Find surplus land to encourage developers; don't let affordability covenants expire – how do we make units affordably for perpetuity; Affordable Housing Trust Fund; anti-displacement policies; AB 1505; commercial linkage fees; people have to leave the city to afford rent; affordable downtown developments
- Eviction prevention; how to get people back into stable housing after eviction; community land trust
- Incentives to landlords to rent to low-income; some landlords turn away renters with vouchers
- Concerns that single-family homes are being bought out by investors and turning to rentals, taking buying opportunities away from local families
- Policy to consider inequalities – homeowners see their equity go up and renters are getting poorer
- Current zoning discourages urban density; density bonus; accessory dwelling units
- Homeowners not able to keep their homes in good repair due to low-income; homeowner rehabilitation program
- Affordable housing impact fee

Wednesday, September 30, 2020; 6:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams) – 40 pre-registrants

Notes: Staff presentation included reviews of the differences between the eligible activities of CDBG vs. HOME funding, what projects will be funded during the 2020 Program Year, impediments listed in prior AI plans, relevant public policies and assessments, as well as a recap of the comments received at the 9/24/20 Workshop and how they might be incorporated into the Draft plan documents. Following the presentation, staff received additional comments and suggestions, and answered questions.

Comments, Questions, and Suggestions from the public included:

- Questions were answered regarding the City Council's choice in 2009 not to take action on inclusionary zoning policies
- Process in adopting and implementing new policies
- Rent increases; landlord-tenant issues; Sacramento has rent control board; Merced does not have comparable staffing levels to Sacramento
- Maximum capacity of housing units is often not met; how can vacant land be zoned for higher density
- Sewer/water delivery capacity a potential barrier to higher densities
- Land use density questions; does this plan take UC student housing into account/impacts on housing
- Housing for Harvest program for farmworkers
- Housing staff – limited capacity to take on more projects; can volunteers/interns be used; contractors
- How residents can continue to advocate for policy after plan adoption – Housing Element, Council meetings, Annual Plan cycle; town hall meetings; City budget process; CAPER review
- Elimination of Housing Land Trust from Housing Element - reasons