

B2 Public Participation

This section documents the efforts the City of Atwater made to engage the public and gather input to inform development of this Housing Element update. There were several public engagement efforts conducted at a regional level, including a community survey and stakeholder interviews. These efforts are described in Chapter 1, *Introduction and Regional Collaboration*.

B2.1 Pop-up Events

City staff set up a tabling event at the Atwater Town Hall at the Atwater Community Center on May 30, 2023. Additionally, City staff handed out flyers with links to project website and survey to increase community awareness of the Housing Element process and encourage participation.

B2.2 Community Workshops

Flyers advertising the workshops were posted on City of Atwater's website in advance of the workshop series to encourage public attendance and participation. The flyers provided meeting details (dates, times, locations, zoom links), the Housing Element Update website and email list, and were bilingual (English and Spanish).

A workshop on the Housing Element was hosted in Atwater on August 28, 2023. The workshop consisted of an informative PowerPoint presentation on housing sites, a questionnaire about the proposed sites, and a Q&A and public discussion period. The workshop activities invited participants to share their opinions on what makes their neighborhood great and their experience finding housing, take part in a sticker activity to rank the most effective housing programs, and reasons it is difficult to find housing in their communities. Participants were also asked to weigh in on the selected housing opportunity sites. The PowerPoint presentation was available in Spanish via written translation. Live Spanish translation was available upon request.

Atwater's participants voiced their concerns regarding housing affordability and lack of housing due to strict development regulations. Participants hope to see greater development near places of work and essential resources.

Key findings from the workshops are as follows:

- Off-site improvement requirements make housing development expensive.
- High prices, lack of affordable housing, and cost of building housing make it difficult to find housing.
- Residents would like housing in proximity to schools, job opportunities, and parks.
- Residents' ability to maintain their home helps improve a neighborhood.
- Rent-restricted affordable housing development, a variety of new housing, and fair housing services were the most voted programs for effectively addressing needs in Atwater with 3 votes each. This was followed by the development of rental housing for large households, housing for special needs housing development, and housing rehabilitation and repair with 2 votes each. Renter protection and support and homelessness prevention and housing each received one vote.

B2.3 Survey

The City conducted a community survey to inform the 6th Cycle Housing Element update. The survey was made available from March 27 through December 22, 2023. The survey was also made available during various community outreach events. The survey consisted of 16 questions and used different formats for questions: checkbox, ranking, and open-ended questions. A total of 172 people responded to the survey. Of these, 18 participants, or 10 percent of responses, either live, work, attend school, or own a business or property in Atwater.

The input provided by the participants included the following major themes:

- Affordability was the most important aspect when looking for new housing, followed by close to resources such as commercial, medical facilities, and work and school. Safe neighborhoods were also noted as important when searching for housing. Participants want housing near public transit stops, employment, and shopping centers.
- The largest barriers to affordable desirable housing are cost of housing and the limited supply of housing, particularly affordable housing. Respondents also noted the lack of good paying jobs to be able to afford housing.
- In addition to affordability and availability of housing, respondents noted that homelessness and housing quality were also urgent issues in the Merced Region.
- Respondents would like to see programs related to housing vouchers, landlord/tenant mediation services and home rehabilitation assistance.
- Housing with three or more bedrooms, housing with one or two bedrooms, and efficiency homes are the most needed housing in the region.
- In Atwater, participants suggested areas for housing development on Main Street and on vacant lots throughout the city.

Full survey results can be found in Appendix 1 to the Regional Housing Element, *Community Survey Results*.

B2.4 Stakeholder Interviews

The City also participated in a series of stakeholder interviews with service providers, residents, and housing developers held between August 8, 2023, and August 23, 2023. A complete summary of the stakeholder interviews can be found in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, to the Regional Housing Element.

Key findings included:

- Service providers stated there is a need for affordable housing throughout the county with access to resources.
- Residents expressed that rental units need maintenance and repair.
- Additional housing services are needed throughout communities in the county include transitional housing, rental assistance, first-time homebuyer assistance, and education on tenants' rights.
- Residents expressed concern over the high cost of housing, particularly for renters.
- Residents identified a need for more community engagement efforts that allow residents to participate in a meaningful way, including workshops and translation services during outreach events.

B2.5 Response to Community Input

During community outreach, community members identified the following overarching themes regarding housing in Atwater. Below is a summary of how each theme is addressed in the Housing Element.

Need more affordable housing for both renters and buyers.

The City will accommodate at least 3,088 units affordable to very low-, low-, and moderate-income households. The City will accommodate these units on sites that are currently vacant or underutilized, including 36 sites that will be rezoned to allow higher residential densities.

At least 67 percent of units assumed to be affordable to moderate- and above moderate-households will be on sites that support multi-family housing, encouraging the development of townhomes and condominiums for more affordable homeownership opportunities.

Housing Program 5 includes actions to encourage the development of at least 10 accessory dwelling units (ADUs) during the planning period by creating standard plans and streamlining the permit process. ADUs often provide relatively affordable rental options.

Through Housing Program 7, the City will expand opportunities for multi-family housing development by contacting non-profit and private developers to facilitate the production of affordable housing as well as pursue funding opportunities available at the local, regional, state and federal levels. Multi-family development provides affordable housing options to add into the City's housing stock.

The City has 35 housing units that are deed-restricted as affordable housing for lower-income households. Although these are not at immediate risk of conversion to market-rate units, under Program 8, the City will work to preserve these units as affordable housing and will proactively monitor all other units to encourage continued affordability beyond existing covenants and work proactively with owners of affordable units to assist in rehabilitation needs.

Support for transit-oriented development and increasing density in areas with existing services.

Housing opportunity sites were prioritized by location, including proximity to transit, job centers, and community services. Site selection focused heavily on infill development of vacant and nonvacant sites along strategic corridors and in neighborhoods with existing services.

Housing Program 1 directs the City to collaborate with other jurisdictions on housing efforts, including funding opportunities, best practices, and other efforts to address housing, transit, economic development, and homeless issues in Merced County. This Program includes participation in the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) to manage and implement regional transit services, including an annual community workshop to identify transportation needs for Atwater residents.

Housing Program 12 directs the City to create a well-maintained city infrastructure to provide a safe and accessible urban environment. The City will collaborate with Merced County Transit (the Bus) to determine locations of bus stops to serve new developments in annexed neighborhoods. The city will also partner with local employment organizations to connect Atwater residents with job

opportunities such as collaborating with the Bus to provide free bus passes to residents attending job fairs and interviews.

Need for rental assistance for low-income families and rent-restricted housing.

Housing Program 10 directs the City to assist in the development of housing to meet the needs of extremely low, very low- and low-income households and special needs households. The City will continue to work with Housing Authority of the County of Merced to provide housing choice vouchers, public housing, project-based vouchers, and migrant housing centers. The City was allocated Permanent Local Housing Allocation funds and will promote the availability of these funds on the City's website with the goal of assisting eight households through this program.

Need to increase the variety of available rental and for sale housing types, including apartments and townhomes, and more options for three-bedroom units.

In order to facilitate a variety of housing types, especially housing for lower-income households and those with special needs, the City will remove constraints to housing development by amending the Zoning Code through Housing Program 6.

Through Housing Program 7, the City will expand opportunities for multi-family housing development by contacting non-profit and private developers to facilitate the production of affordable housing and pursuing funding opportunities at the local, regional, state and federal levels. Multi-family housing will increase the variety of available rental and for-sale housing types.

Need for housing rehabilitation services homeowners with aging housing stock and those with flood damage.

Housing Program 9 directs the City to utilize various programs and community partnerships to encourage the rehabilitation of housing units, as well as maintaining the supply of affordable housing. The City will work with non-profits in their community to assist with rehabilitation, annually research funding opportunities, with a goal to assist with five rehabilitation projects over eight years.

Need increased education on housing rights and legal resources for tenants and landlords.

Under Housing Program 13 the City works with the Merced County Housing Authority to provide fair housing information and resources to residents and housing providers. Educational flyers and factsheets will be distributed and shared on the City's website, and annual staff trainings will start in 2025 on how to refer residents for fair housing complaints.