

E2 Public Participation

This section documents the efforts the City of Livingston made to engage the public and gather input to inform the 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*.

E2.1 Community Workshops

A workshop on the Housing Element was hosted in Livingston on August 29, 2023. Flyers advertising the workshops were distributed by the City of Livingston in advance of the workshop series to encourage public attendance and participation. The bilingual (Spanish and English) flyers provided meeting details (dates, times, locations, and Zoom links) and links to the Housing Element Update website and email list.

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, their experiences finding housing, and reasons it is difficult to find housing in their communities. Participants took part in a sticker activity to rank the most effective housing programs. Participants were also asked to weigh in on the selected housing opportunity sites. The PowerPoint presentation was available in Spanish via written translation and live Spanish translation was available upon request.

Participants in Livingston found it difficult to find housing, especially affordable housing, both rental and for-sale.

Key findings from the workshops are as follows:

- Housing affordability makes it difficult to find housing and homeownership is difficult.
- In looking for housing, residents care about safety and maintenance.
- Rent affordability was voted as the greatest housing need in Livingston, followed by difficulty to locate type of housing needed and difficulty buying a home.
- Community opposition to new housing was cited as a constraint to housing development, and lack of housing close to stores, schools, or work was also cited as a housing need.

E2.2 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, three respondents either live, work, attend school, or own a business or property in Livingston.

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

- Affordability is the most important aspect when looking for new housing, followed by proximity to resources such as commercial areas, medical facilities, jobs, and schools, and the quality and size of housing. Safe neighborhoods were also noted as important when searching for housing. Respondents want housing near public transit stops, employment, and shopping centers.
- The largest barriers to affordable, desirable housing are the cost and limited supply of 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, overcrowding, and fair housing/discrimination were also urgent issues in the Merced County region.
- Respondents would like to see programs related to housing vouchers and homebuyer loan counseling services.
- Housing with three or more bedrooms and accessory dwelling units are the most needed housing in the region.
- In Livingston, participants recommended housing development in the northwestern parts of the city and near Peach Avenue and Robin Avenue.

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

E2.3 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.

E2.4 Response to Community Input

During community outreach, community members identified the following overarching themes regarding housing in Livingston. 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 825 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 six sites that will be rezoned to allow higher residential densities.

All moderate and above-moderate housing units 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 eight 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 8, the City will facilitate 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 housing provides affordable housing options to add to the city's housing stock.

There are 181 housing units that are deed restricted as affordable housing for lower-income households in Livingston. Although these are not at immediate risk of conversion to market-rate units, under Program 9, 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 Livingston residents.

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

Housing Program 11 directs the City to assist in the development of housing to meet the needs of lower-income and special needs households. The City will continue to work with the Housing Authority of the County of Merced (HACM) to provide housing choice vouchers (HCV), public housing, project-based vouchers, and farmworker housing. Starting in 2025 the City will annually conduct an outreach event for landlords to increase participation in the HCV program, with a goal of seven events during the planning period.

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 amending the Zoning Code to constraints related to development standards, density bonus, ADUs, single-room occupancy, emergency shelters, residential care facilities, farmworker housing, and supportive housing (Housing Program 6).

In order to facilitate a variety of housing types, specifically multi-family housing, the City will update the General Plan to facilitate multi-family residential uses in commercial zones for the encouragement of mixed-use development.

Through Housing Program 8, the City looks to expand multifamily housing stock through 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 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 10 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 the community to assist with rehabilitation, annually research funding opportunities, with a goal to assist with five units annually through the Weatherization Program.

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

Under Housing Program 14, the City will work with HACM to provide fair housing information and resources to residents and housing providers. The City will coordinate with Central California Legal Services (CCLS) and other fair housing non-profit organizations to provide fair housing and tenant and landlord services. The City's goal is to assist at least 15 residents and landlords with fair housing services annually throughout planning period.