

F2 Public Participation

This section documents the efforts the City of Los Banos 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*.

F2.1 Pop-up Events

At the City's Merced Mercado on May 4, 2023, City staff distributed flyers with links to project's website and survey to increase community awareness of the Housing Element process and encourage participation.

F2.2 Community Workshops

A workshop on the Housing Element was hosted in Los Banos on August 31, 2023. Flyers advertising the workshops were distributed by the City of Los Banos 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).

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

Through their feedback, participants prioritized housing rehabilitation and a wider variety of housing types. They hoped to find housing closer to work and essential services.

Key findings from the workshops are as follows:

- When looking for housing, residents care about walkability, neighborhood schools, parks, and transportation.
- Housing rehabilitation and repair, the provision a variety of housing types in new development, homelessness prevention and housing, and homeownership opportunities were all high priorities for residents in Los Banos.
- Difficulty to buy a home was the most voted housing difficulty in Los Banos. This was followed by difficulty to locate type of housing needed and rent affordability or increases.

F2.3 Survey

The County 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, eight respondents either live, work, attend school, or own a business or property in Los Banos.

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

- Affordability is the most important aspect when looking for new housing, followed by close to resources such as commercial, medical facilities, and work and school, and 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 of housing and the limited supply of affordable housing. Respondents also noted the lack of well-paying jobs to be able to afford housing.
- In addition to affordability and availability of housing, respondents noted that homelessness, overcrowding, and housing quality were also urgent issues in the Merced County region.
- Respondents would like to see programs related to housing vouchers, homebuyer loan counseling services, landlord/tenant mediation services, and home rehabilitation assistance.
- Housing with three or more bedrooms and housing with one or two bedrooms are the most needed housing in the region.
- In Los Banos participants suggested new housing development near Walmart, on vacant lots, and near Hostetler, Stonefield Homes, and Ranchwood Park.

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

F2.4 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.

F2.5 Response to Community Input

During community outreach, community members identified the following overarching themes regarding housing in Los Banos. The following 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 1,778 units affordable to very low-, low-, and moderate-income households. The City will accommodate these units on sites that are currently vacant or underutilized.

Housing Program 5 includes actions to encourage the development of at least 40 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 multi-family 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 584 housing units in Los Banos that are deed restricted as affordable housing for lower-income households. Although these are not at immediate risk of conversion, 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.

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 the Housing Authority of the County of Merced to provide housing choice vouchers (HCVs), public housing, project-based vouchers, and farmworker housing centers. Starting in 2025, the City will annually conduct an outreach event for landlords on 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 remove constraints on housing development by amending the Zoning Code through Housing Program 6.

Through Housing Program 7, the City will facilitate multi-family housing development by contacting non-profit and private developers to facilitate the production of affordable housing and 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 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. If feasible, the City will apply for one funding opportunity for residential rehabilitation assistance annually.

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

Under Housing Program 12 the City will continue to partner with the Housing Authority of the County of Merced 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.