



city of
mercedes
It Starts Here!

**Envision Mercedes 2035:
A Community Comprehensive Plan**

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Envision Mercedes 2035: A Community Comprehensive Plan (The Plan) is the blueprint for the physical and economic development of the City of Mercedes and the surrounding area over the next twenty-five (25) years. In the process of developing the Comprehensive Plan, the citizen volunteers who served on the steering committee, the City planning staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Commission sought to create a shared vision of where Mercedes wants to be in the next twenty-five (25) years and how best to get there.

The Plan addresses questions such as the location, amount, intensity and density, and character and quality of growth, development and redevelopment that is desired in the City and the surrounding area. The plan addresses the fiscal dimensions of growth and the relationship between growth and infrastructure. It attempts to put the City in a position to help determine how and where urban development and redevelopment will occur, rather than simply react to each development proposal on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, the Plan does not forget that it is the private sector, not City government, that builds houses we live in, buildings we work in and the places we shop.

HISTORY

Mercedes is in the Rio Grande Valley on U.S. Highway 83 twenty-five miles east of McAllen in southeastern Hidalgo County. According to the “Handbook of Texas Online”, the site was first settled by ranchers in the late 1770s and was part of the Llano Grande Spanish land grant issued on May 29, 1790, to Juan Jose Ynojosa de Balli. During the

1850s it was the location of the Anacuitas ranch, owned by Ramon and Manuel Cavazos. Apparently by the beginning of the 1900s it was replaced by the Fuste ranch, which was owned by the Cavazos family, alleged heirs of Ynojosa de Balli. Lon C. Hill, Jr., a local land promoter and developer owned 45,000 acres extending sixteen miles from the Rio Grande and including the site of what is now Mercedes. Hill, preparing to develop the area constructed the Estarito Canal. On May 29, 1904 he formed the Capisallo Town and Improvement Company to develop the town of Capisallo a mile east of what is now Mercedes. Hill later sold his company to the American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company, which renamed the new town Diaz. The name was changed three more times until it finally became known by the name Mercedes. Mercedes is recognized as the "The Queen City of the Valley" or "La Reina del Valle." The city was officially founded September 15, 1907 by the American Rio Grande Land & Irrigation Company, and was incorporated March 8, 1909. It is one of the oldest towns in the Rio Grande Valley, and the city celebrated its centennial in 2007.

The Rio Grande Valley area developed from brush land and ranch land into irrigated farmland with the advent of irrigation canals and irrigation infrastructure. The arrival of the railroad enabling farmers to transport the product gave further reason to colonize the area. Finally, the invention of refrigerated cars enabled shipping and trucking which encouraged more farmers to come into the area and begin experimenting with various crops in the early 1900s. The mild winters combined with the new found ability to get the product out to areas that were more populated led the area to grow in citrus fruit production and packing, cotton, grains, vegetables, and other truck crops. As crops and population grew, so did the need for support services such as packing sheds, banking, farm implements and feed stores among others.

The first hotel was opened in 1907 and a weekly newspaper named *The Enterprise* was started in 1908. Following its incorporation in 1909 the city was inundated by a destructive flood. But in 1911 the Mercedes Public Library was founded and by 1915 the population of the town was estimated to be 2,000.

In 1918 Camp Mercedes and Camp Llano Grande were home to 15,000 soldiers during World War I. In 1925 population was estimated to be 3,414. In 1935 oil was discovered, and the town's population grew to 7,624 by 1940. To support and promote the area's agricultural economy, the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show and Agricultural Exposition was organized as a project of the Mercedes Chamber of Commerce. The first show was held in 1940 on the grounds of a local livestock sales yard. During the 1960s Mercedes was making a name for itself in cotton, citrus, grain, vegetables, and livestock marketing and processing. Other industries included meat packing (H&H Industries), fruit and vegetable packing sheds, box and boot making, and farm-chemical manufacturing. In 1961 the population was estimated at 10,943.

In 1980 the population had reduced to an estimated 10,354 residents and by 1990 had grown to 12,694. In the 1970s and 1980s this area welcomed growth with the promotion of the Valley for tourism and retirement housing, particularly for Winter Visitors. Today the city is on the grow again with the 2006 opening of the Rio Grande Valley Factory Outlet Stores. The city's estimated population in July 2008 was 15,134 and climbing.

GOVERNANCE

The City of Mercedes is a home rule city with a manager-council form of government. It has the powers granted to cities by the constitution and laws of the State of Texas. It is managed by an appointed City Manager who follows the directives of the elected body of Commissioners which consists of a Mayor and four Commissioners. The City Charter

specifies that a Master Plan is to be used for the physical development of the City and “shall contain the planning commission’s recommendations for growth, development and beautification of the city.” The City Commission may adopt the plan in whole or in parts and future amendments must go through the similar process of approval recommendation by the Planning and Zoning Commission and approval by City Commission after at least one public hearing.

LOCATION

The City of Mercedes is located in the eastern part of Hidalgo County in South Texas as shown in **Figure 1-1**. Hidalgo County is bordered by Cameron County to the east, Starr County to the west, Willacy County to the north and the Rio Grande River and the Mexican state of Tamaulipas to the South. Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr and Willacy Counties comprise what is the “The Valley” or the Lower Rio Grande Valley region of Texas. The City’s nearest neighboring cities are Weslaco to the west and La Feria and Harlingen to the east.

PLANNING AREA

The City of Mercedes is located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Hidalgo County in south Texas. The study area for the *Envision Mercedes 2035: A Community Comprehensive Plan* includes the incorporated areas within city limits as well as the annexation extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) including areas up to one mile outside city limits in which Mercedes has annexation authority (**Figure 1-2**).

The incorporated area of the City of Mercedes encompasses a total area of approximately 7,236 acres or 11.3 square miles. The study area for this plan extends up to one mile outside city limits where not restricted by mutual agreements (such as with La Feria) or other incorporated cities (such as Weslaco). Within that ETJ area there is an additional 12,971

acres for a total planning area of 20,207 acres or 31.6 square miles. This ETJ area is subject to annexation and subdivision regulations of the City of Mercedes and is therefore included in the future plans. It is not anticipated that all that area would be brought into the city limits within the planning period, but the built environment patterns set early on in the development of a rural area can have a lasting imprint on the future fabric of a city.

PREVIOUSLY PREPARED PLANS

The current governing Master Plan of Mercedes is "Mercedes Texas: 1969 Comprehensive Plan Project Tex P-197". This plan was compiled by W.M. Peterson Consulting Engineers-Planners through a federal grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The eight sections of this plan are "Basic Data," "Land Use Studies," "Housing and Neighborhood Analyses," "Circulation Studies," "Transportation Studies," "CBD Studies," "Community Facilities Plan," and a "Capital Improvements Program." "Basic Data" includes city and regional history, population, a discussion of the general economy, comments on "Spanish surname" population of Texas, methods and data utilized in developing the projections, and socio-economic growth comments. The "Land Use Studies" include neighborhoods, neighborhood boundaries, existing land use, future land use, detailed analyses of nine different neighborhoods and a summary of land use studies. The "Housing and Neighborhood Analyses" includes survey standards, existing housing conditions, conclusions on those conditions, blight prevention and elimination, and socio-economic factors. "Circulation Studies" relates to transportation design and includes concept and process relating to thoroughfares, evaluation of existing street and their conditions, recommended standards for street classification and design and comments on existing and future thoroughfares. The "Transportation Studies" section examines other means of transport including airline, motor freight, rail, bus, and future

needs. The “CBD Studies” focuses on the downtown area (or central business district) as defined for this plan which generally included Texas and Ohio Avenues from Expressway 83 to 6th Street, Illinois and Missouri Avenues from 1st Street to 6th Street and 1st – 3rd Street from the main canal to the floodway. The plan evaluated the existing CDB, its traffic circulation, evaluation of on-street and off-street parking and comments about its future. The “Community Facilities Plan” focused on everything from existing and proposed water, sewer and storm drainage systems to parks, recreational facilities and public buildings. It included street rehabilitation plans and a review of the existing school system. The “Capital Improvements Program” included a financial analysis and capital budget for the proposed capital improvements program.

The 1969 Plan sets forth some goals and objectives that are still relevant today, including “to provide a total environment including standard housing that will attract new residents to the city,” “to solicit placement of new businesses and light industry in the Mercedes area to provide employment and income,” “revitalize the central business district,” “to evaluate the city’s total basic resources—fiscal, human and physical,” and “to provide the decision makers and citizens of the city with a long range capital improvements program which pin-points actions for implementation.” One note included in the plan seems to be a recurrent theme in the city’s documented past – “the existing codes and ordinances of the city have been at best sporadically enforced . . . (it is) recommended that revised and upgraded ordinances be part of the plan actions.” The historic information in this plan provides interesting background to those familiar with the city as well as newcomers and provides a base from which to build the current plan.

In 1992 The Austin Group prepared another plan simply entitled Comprehensive Plan for City of Mercedes, Texas, which was never formally adopted by the City Commission, though until recently the colored zoning maps in the document have served as the official zoning map for the planning department. This plan had two parts – Analysis and Recommendations. The Analysis included a Mercedes’ history, citizen survey summary, demographic trends, financial

status and trends, existing land use and zoning, administrative controls, condition of city infrastructure and business/industry trends in the region. The recommendations focused on land use planning and annexation, growth and economic development strategies, administrative controls, financial objectives/resource allocation, strategies for improved communications and a capital improvements program. The survey done at this time indicated priorities which included economic development, housing availability, revisions to zoning and subdivision ordinances to encourage and accommodate modern design alternatives, increasing emphasis on funding streets and parks, supporting existing businesses and better code enforcement.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

This plan was developed by the joint efforts of the Comprehensive Planning Ad Hoc Committee, city staff and residents who gave feedback. Staff drafted the project in-house one chapter at a time with approval sought by the Comprehensive Planning Committee; Planning & Zoning Commission; and ultimately adopted by resolution passed by the City Commission upon completion of each chapter. In addition, for the Parks Chapter, the Parks & Recreation Board was also asked to give their recommendation, and for the Economic Development Chapter, the Economic Development Corporation Board was asked for their recommendation. This makes for more meaningful participation by the community and a higher possibility of more people reading and absorbing the document in small manageable pieces. Upon completion of the final chapter, the individual resolutions were repealed and the entire document adopted as a whole under one ordinance.

The resulting plan contains ten (10) chapters including an introduction, eight elements: 2-demographics; 3-land use; 4-transportation; 5-image; 6-parks & recreation; 7-infrastructure, public facilities and public safety; 8-annexation and other planning tools; 9-economic development; and an implementation chapter that summarizes the goals and objectives

established in each of the elements. The elements to be emphasized were chosen as a result of public input and/or necessity. For instance, it is necessary to have certain base elements in the plan that help establish groundwork for all improvements such as an existing land use plan and demographics. Each chapter concludes with a set of goals and objectives by which to achieve the vision.

Goals are general statements of desirable outcome. Objectives are more specific and should be realistic, time defined, assignable and attainable. Objectives should be stated as action items which should be assigned to a specific participant who can be held accountable for attainment and meeting an established deadline. An understanding by participants of the goals and objectives can lead to a program of action and accountability that will ensure progress toward the long range vision.

This plan establishes a set of goals and objectives that are essential for maintaining and improving various aspects of community life in Mercedes. These goals and objectives are the basic framework for planning the future, a checklist if you will. The Plan must be flexible enough to add and redirect as necessary to take advantage of unique opportunities that may present themselves or when outcomes of specific actions do not produce the desired results.

Goals and objectives will also change over time. They should be reviewed and modified during future plan updates to reflect changing priorities and needs that face the city. The goals and objectives are organized along the major elements that comprise the comprehensive plan and are numbered for convenient reference, but the order is not meant to indicate prioritization. The goals and objectives for each plan element are contained in the report sections for the respective elements. Goals and objectives have been established specific to each chapter and uniformly placed near the end of each section. These goals have also been compiled into one Implementation Chapter at the end of the document. **The implementation chapter should be revisited annually to coincide with the fiscal year to incorporate necessary budget requests to accomplish tasks established to be that year's priority.**

This document is comprehensive and therefore may contain more material than the average reader will care to consume. The full set of detailed plan elements is the official working document intended primarily for use by City officials, staff and others who may be interested in that level of detail. However, as this is intended to be the citizen's plan, a more condensed overview of the plan will be made available in a separate Executive Summary document which is intended for broad distribution and use by the citizens of Mercedes.

Figure 1-1
Mercedes, Hidalgo County, Texas

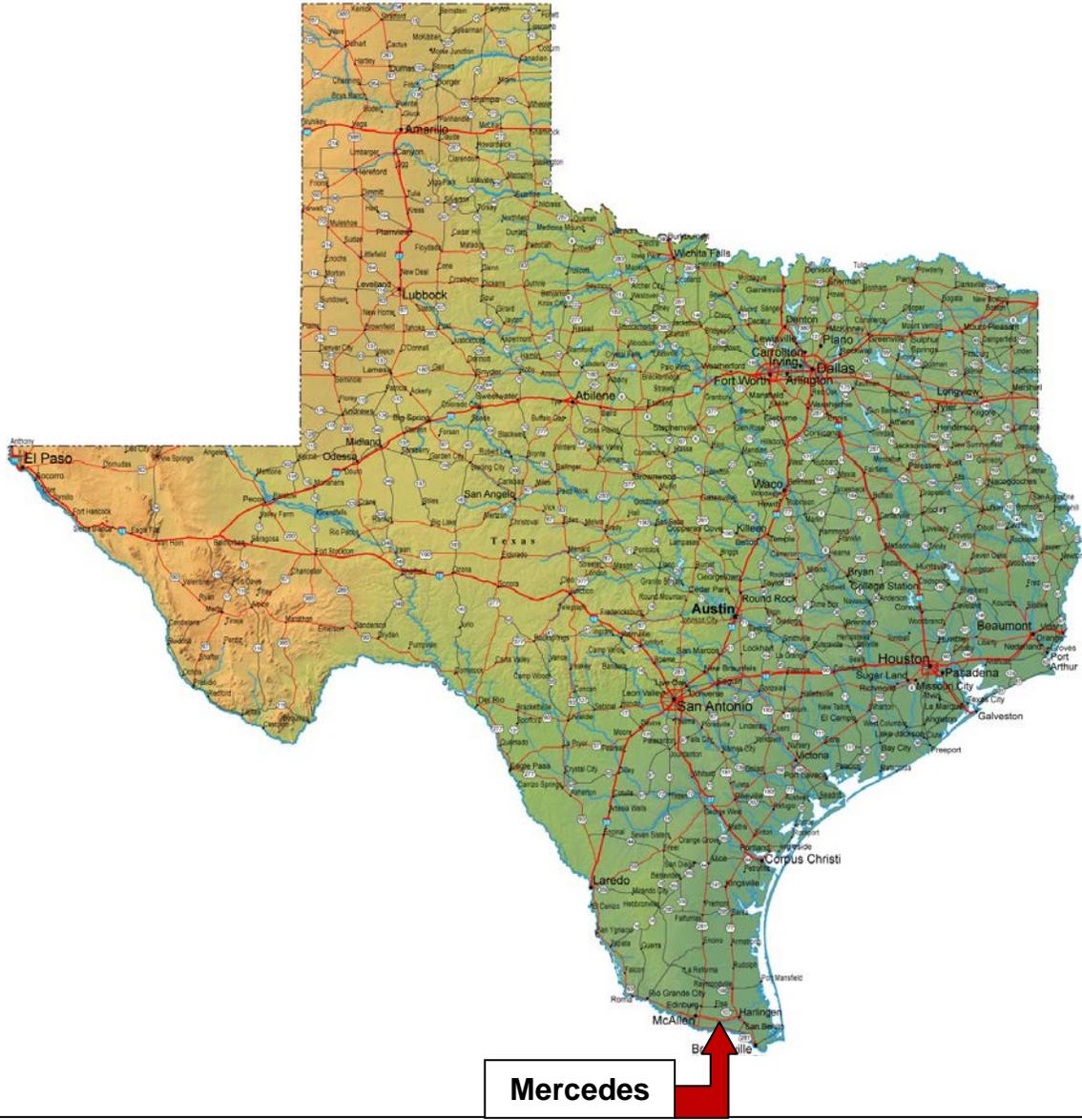
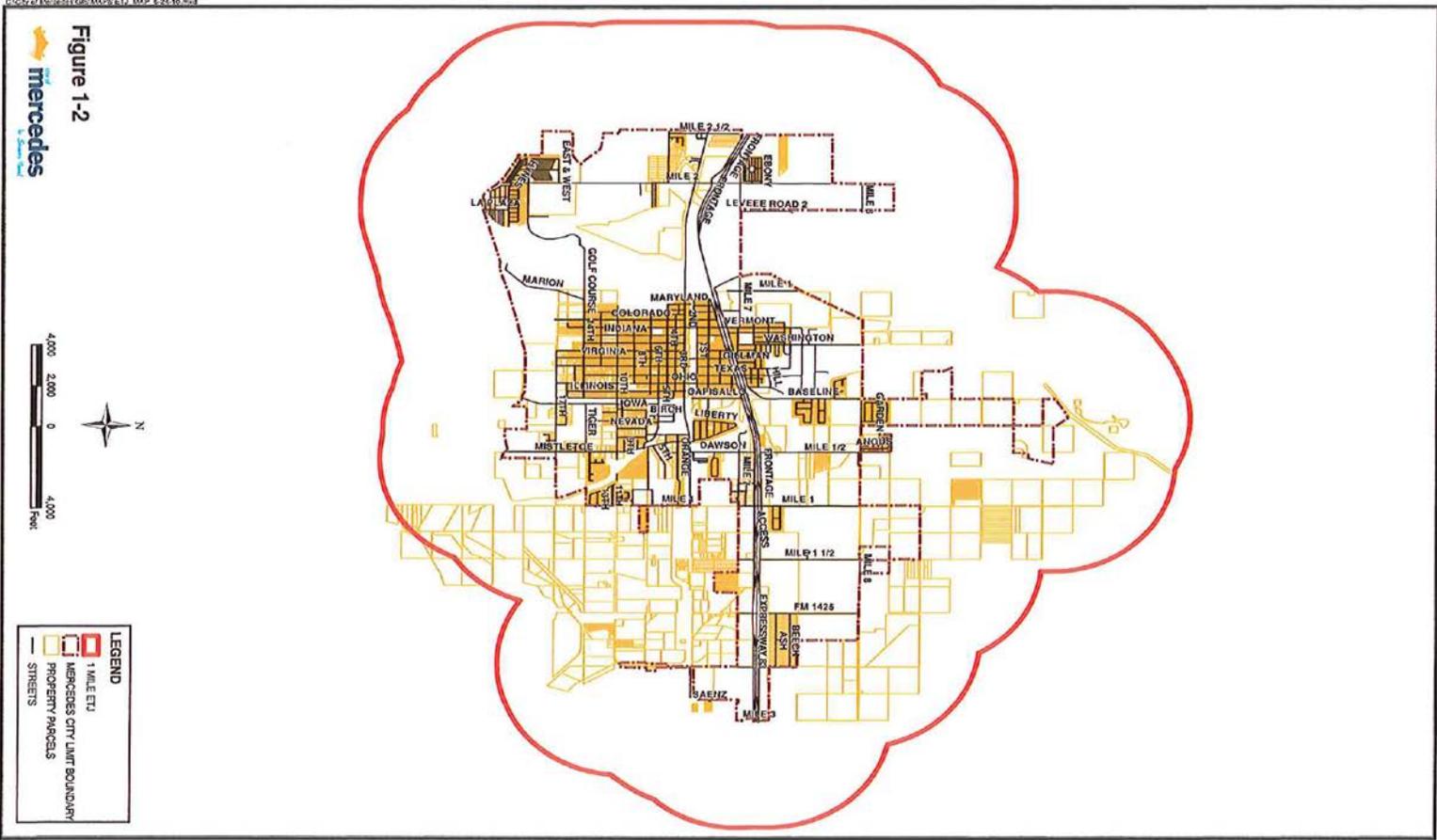


Figure 1-2
 Planning Area Map



**Figure 1-3
Comprehensive Plan Questionnaire**

Mercedes Community Planning Survey January – March, 2007

The City of Mercedes is updating its Comprehensive Plan. To get a better understanding of what is important to you and how you envision Mercedes in the future, we are asking that you fill out this questionnaire. Your answers will be held strictly confidential and will only be used in combination with answers from other residents in the City and surrounding areas. Please help us help you shape our future!

1. What four streets do you consider to be the boundaries of your neighborhood?
2. How would you rate the quality of the following community facilities and services in your neighborhood? (Circle one rating for each item then rank the importance of this item to you from 1 being most to 5 least.)

		Very					Not	Importance
		Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Sure	1 high – 5	
-.	Sample Rating	1	2	3	4	5	<u>3</u>	
A.	Animal Control	1	2	3	4	5	___	
B.	Community Appearance – Landscaping/Signage	1	2	3	4	5	___	
C.	Crime Prevention/Police Visibility/Patrols/Traffic Citation	1	2	3	4	5	___	
D.	Economic Development – Business Attraction/Retention	1	2	3	4	5	___	
E.	Emergency Medical Services	1	2	3	4	5	___	
F.	Employee Education/Training - Customer Service	1	2	3	4	5	___	
G.	Entertainment/Events/Cultural Events	1	2	3	4	5	___	
H.	Fire Protection	1	2	3	4	5	___	
I.	Garbage/Brush Collection	1	2	3	4	5	___	
J.	Junk Vehicle/Weedy Lot/Condemn Dilapidated Buildings	1	2	3	4	5	___	
K.	Parks/Playgrounds/Sports Facilities	1	2	3	4	5	___	
L.	Police Protection	1	2	3	4	5	___	
M.	Preservation of Agricultural Land/Environmental Quality	1	2	3	4	5	___	
N.	Promote/Improve Downtown	1	2	3	4	5	___	
O.	Protection of Historic Buildings	1	2	3	4	5	___	
P.	Public Library	1	2	3	4	5	___	
Q.	Public Water Supply/Taste	1	2	3	4	5	___	
R.	Sidewalks	1	2	3	4	5	___	
S.	Street Lights	1	2	3	4	5	___	
T.	Streets/Alleys	1	2	3	4	5	___	
U.	Use of Technology – Webpage	1	2	3	4	5	___	

(Figure 1-3 continued)

3. Other item(s) not listed or additional details: _____

4. Which of the following above mentioned items do you feel are in most need of improvement **in your neighborhood** area?
Indicate your top five choices by writing in the letters from above (A, B, C etc).

_____ 1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____ 3rd Choice _____ 4th Choice _____ 5th Choice

5. Which of the above mentioned items do you feel need the most improvement **in the City**? Indicate you top five choices by writing in the letters from above (A, B, C etc).

_____ 1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____ 3rd Choice _____ 4th Choice _____ 5th Choice

6. Overall, how would you rate the quality of life in Mercedes?

- a. Very good b. Good c. Fair d. Poor e. Not Sure

7. What actions could the City take to improve your rating in the above question?

8. How involved are you with the City affairs?

- a. Very involved b. Somewhat involved c. Fairly Involved d. Not involved

9. Would you be willing to participate in planning efforts to help direct the future of your community? If so please write your name, address, and phone number/e-mail address below.

Please return by March 31, 2007 to: City of Mercedes Planning Dept., 400 S. Ohio, Mercedes, TX 78570

Thank you for contributing to our community's future!

Appendix 1A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SURVEY RATINGS

Please remember that this was not a scientific survey, just an information gathering tool. However, the questionnaires returned were fairly well distributed geographically throughout the city (a map is available in the Planning Dept.)

Service Ratings/Rankings (1.0 very good - best to 4.0 poor - worst)

The overall ratings for the items are shown below with the best ranked service down to the worst ranked item.

Service (in order by rank)	Score	Rank	Best
Fire	2.20	1/21	
Police	2.24	2/21	
Library	2.30	3/21	
Emergency Medical Service	2.42	4/21	
Crime	2.43	5/21	
Garbage/Brush	2.45	6/21	
Environment	2.60	7/21	
Water	2.61	8/21	
Street Lights	2.71	9/21	
Economic Development	2.80	10/21	
Employees	2.86	11/21	
Webpage	2.96	12/21	
Entertainment	3.02	13/21	
Historic Protection	3.05	14/21	
Parks	3.08	15/21	
Community Appearance	3.12	16/21	
Downtown	3.16	17/21	
Animal Control	3.22	18/21	
Sidewalks	3.26	19/21	
Junk Veh./Code Enforcement	3.33	20/21	
Streets/Alley	3.44	21/21	Worst



These opinion of services are reflected in those things identified as the most important issues to the City overall.

- 1st (30 times) - Streets/ Alleys
- 2nd (22 times) - Promote/Improve Downtown
- 3rd (20 times) - Community Appearance/Landscaping/Signage
- 4th (19 times) - Junk Vehicle/Weedy Lots/Condemnation
- 5th (17 times) - Parks/Playgrounds/Sports Facilities
- 6th/7th (15 times ea.) - Sidewalks and Economic Development (business attraction/retention)
- 8th (10 times) - Entertainment Events/Cultural Events

The most important issues in neighborhoods are listed below. Keep in mind that those who answered the questionnaires were referring to their particular neighborhood and, as mentioned above, those neighborhoods are throughout the City as a whole.

- 1st (30 times) - Streets/ Alleys
- 2nd (23 times) - Junk Vehicle/Weedy Lot/Condemnation
- 3rd (21 times) - Animal Control
- 4th (20 times) - Community Appearance/Landscaping/Signage
- 5th (19 times) - Sidewalks
- 6th (12 times) - Parks/Playgrounds/Sports Facilities
- 7th (11 times) - Street Lights

Chapter 2

Demographics

POPULATION

Before envisioning the future of the City of Mercedes, it is useful to understand factors affecting the present such as population growth and the age, education and income of the City's residents. These demographic factors and trends can highlight needs of the community that should be considered when preparing the plan for the future development of the City. This chapter of *Envision Mercedes 2025* presents a snapshot of Mercedes' current socioeconomic characteristics and describes how the City's population has changed over time. Additionally, the Mercedes community is compared to Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, the State of Texas, and the United States. Finally, the chapter presents a projection of future population to ensure the city's comprehensive plan anticipates and accommodates this population growth.

The City of Mercedes has experienced significant and steady population growth over the last several decades. See Table 2.1. Indeed, except for the 1960s when Mercedes lost population, the population has grown significantly and steadily since the City's founding.¹ The most recent population estimate for Mercedes prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau is 15,131 (July 1, 2008). It is important to note that Mercedes' rate of growth has lagged behind the county and other communities in the County. Mercedes' population grew 9% between 1990 and 2000 and is estimated to have grown 8% between 2000 and 2008. The population of Hidalgo County has grown 48% and 28% in those same periods. See Table 2.1 and Appendix A.

¹ Many communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley lost population during that decade. The City of McAllen's Comprehensive Plan *Foresight McAllen* attributes the decline to Category 5 Hurricane Beulah and a freeze that damaged citrus crops. A U.S. Air Force base in nearby Harlingen also closed in that period.

TABLE 2.1. Population and Percent Change Compared to Prior Decade

YEAR	City of Mercedes	% change	Hidalgo County	% change	State of Texas	% change	United States	% change
1910	1,209		13,728		3,896,542		91,972,266	
1920	3,414	182%	38,110	178%	4,663,228	20%	105,710,620	15%
1930	6,608	94%	77,004	102%	5,824,715	25%	122,775,046	16%
1940	7,624	15%	106,059	38%	6,414,824	10%	132,155,963	8%
1950	10,081	32%	159,994	51%	7,711,194	20%	150,216,110	14%
1960	10,943	9%	180,904	13%	9,579,677	24%	180,684,000	20%
1970	9,355	-15%	181,535	0%	11,196,730	17%	203,211,926	12%
1980	11,851	27%	283,229	56%	14,229,191	27%	226,545,805	11%
1990	12,694	7%	383,545	35%	16,986,510	19%	248,709,873	10%
2000	13,870	9%	569,463	48%	20,851,820	23%	281,421,906	13%
7/1/07	14,943	8%	710,514	25%	23,904,380	15%	301,621,157	7%
7/1/08	15,131	8%	726,604	28%	24,326,974	17%	304,059,724	8%

Sources: Data from 1910 through 1960 are from *Mercedes Texas 1960 Comprehensive Plan* which cited to U.S. Census data. Data for 1970 through 2000 are from the U.S Census. 2007 and 2008 figures are U.S. Census population estimates.

Note: “% change” for July 1, 2007 and July 1, 2008 are both calculated as the change since 2000.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION

In this section, different descriptive characteristics of the population are presented including age, ethnicity, citizenship and naturalization, education levels, median family income, per capita income, and aggregate income. For some characteristics, the

Mercedes population will be compared to that of Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, the State of Texas and the entire country and current characteristics will be compared to the population in 1990.

One obvious limitation to this portrait is that it is the community reported to the U.S. Census Bureau as of April 1, 2000. The nine years since 2000 have brought profound change to Lower Rio Grande Valley communities. When 2010 Census municipal data is available—approximately 2013-- the changes since 2000 can be examined.

A. AGE

The City of Mercedes has relatively more youth (newborn to 17 years) than the country or the state. Youth constitute 33% of Mercedes' total population, whereas in the U.S. as a whole, youth constitute 26% of total population, and in Texas, 28%. The City's relative youth population is similar to Cameron County's (34%) and Hidalgo County's (35%). See Table 2.1. This represents an important resource for the future. These young people can be the future workforce of the community. The 2000 information is depicted graphically in Figure 2.1. Table 2.1 also shows that the City has relatively fewer residents in the prime working years of 25 to 64. That age cohort represents 41% of Mercedes' population whereas it represents 44%, 44%, 51% and 52% of Hidalgo County, Cameron County, Texas and the U.S., respectively. Between 1990 and 2000, Mercedes apparently lost young families. The population in the age cohorts 5 to 17 years and 25 to 39 years declined. Of the comparative geographies, Mercedes has the largest relative elderly population. Residents who are 65 years and older constitute 14% of Mercedes population and this age cohort in Mercedes grew at the fastest rate (37%) between 1990 and 2000, four times faster than the population overall grew.

B. IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The vast majority of Mercedes' residents are native born citizens of the United States. See Table 2.3. Only 15% of Mercedes' residents are foreign-born, about the same percentage as Texas (14%) but only about half that of Hidalgo or Cameron Counties.

TABLE 2.2. Population by Age Group in 2000 and Percentage Change by Age Group since 1990

	Mercedes			Hidalgo County			Cameron County			Texas			United States		
	age group as % of total	change from 1990		age group as % of total	change from 1990		age group as % of total	change from 1990		age group as % of total	change from 1990		age group as % of total	change from 1990	
Total	13,649	8%		569,463	50%	50%	335,227	30%	30%	20,851,820	24%	24%	281,421,906	15%	
< 5 yrs	1,314	10%	21%	58,138	10%	63%	31,744	9%	37%	1,624,628	8%	17%	19,175,798	7%	4%
5 - 17 yrs	3,176	23%	-9%	142,864	25%	37%	81,551	24%	19%	4,262,131	20%	24%	53,118,014	19%	17%
18 - 24 yrs	1,564	11%	6%	64,529	11%	44%	35,222	11%	20%	2,198,881	11%	16%	27,143,454	10%	2%
25 - 39 yrs	2,378	17%	-6%	122,693	22%	49%	68,661	20%	23%	4,850,966	23%	9%	62,598,388	22%	-1%
40 - 64 yrs	3,250	24%	27%	125,965	22%	62%	80,674	24%	45%	5,842,682	28%	43%	84,394,499	30%	32%
65 yrs & up	1,967	14%	37%	55,274	10%	56%	37,375	11%	48%	2,072,532	10%	34%	34,991,753	12%	24%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of the Population and 1990 U.S. Census of the Population

FIGURE 2.1 Population by Age Group in 2000

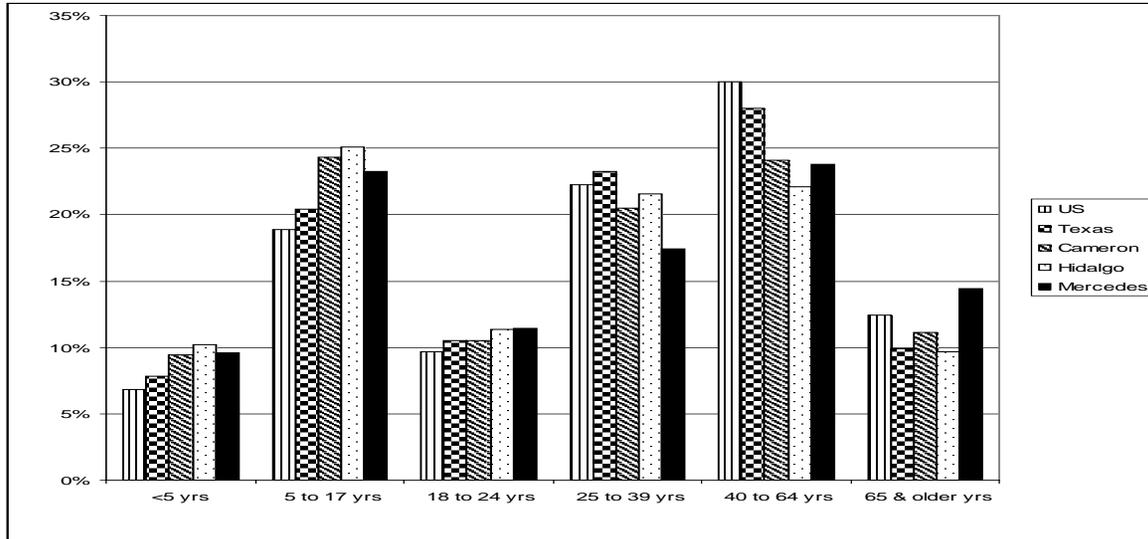
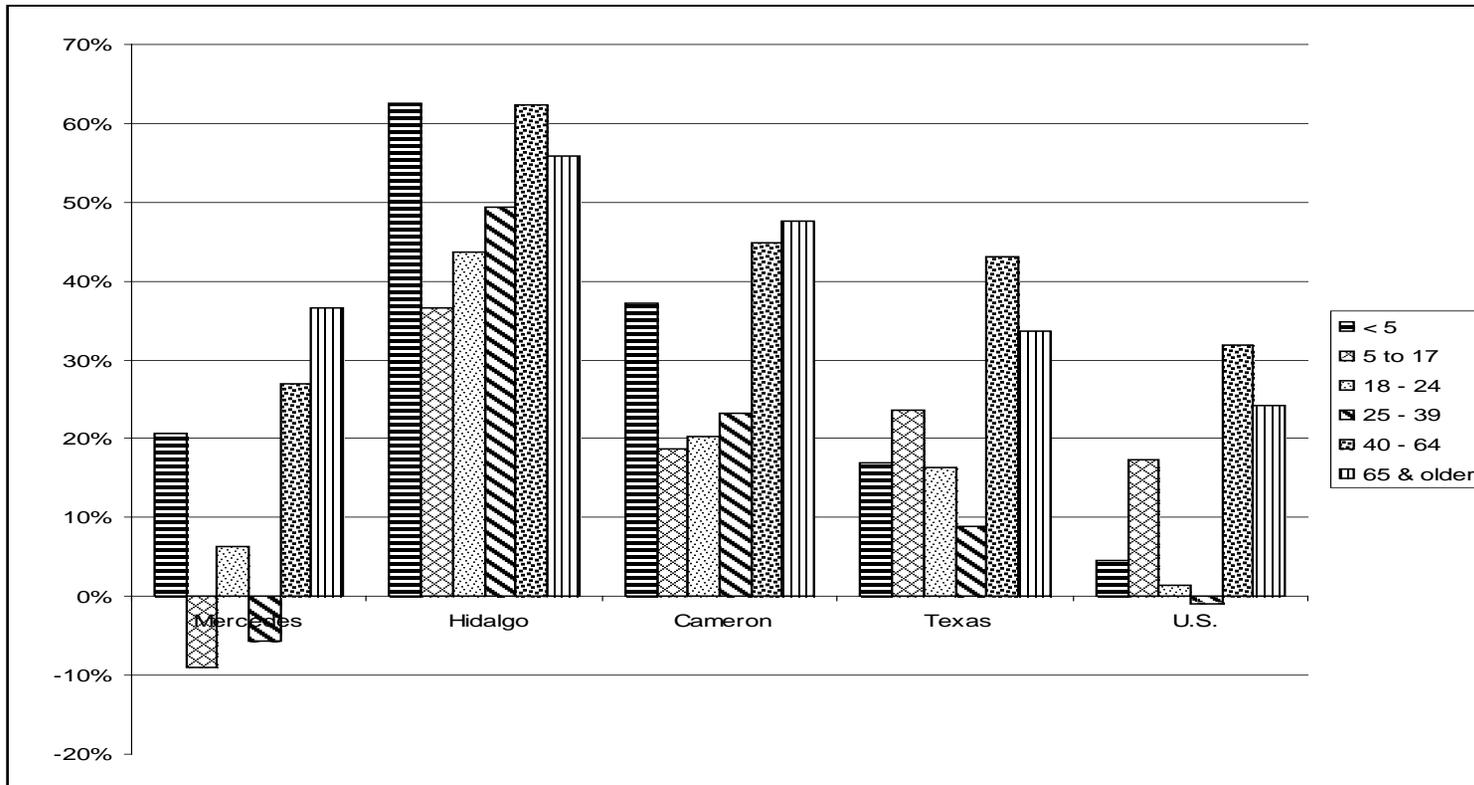


FIGURE 2.2 Percentage Change of Population by Age Group: 1990 to 2000



Interestingly, nearly as many of Mercedes’ foreign-born residents entered the country in the twenty years between 1980 and 2000, as entered in all of the preceding seventy years of Mercedes’ history. Of Mercedes’ 2,123 foreign-born residents, 36% have become citizens. This is a slightly higher rate of naturalization than occurred in Hidalgo County (29%), Cameron County (34%) or Texas (32%), but slightly lower than the country overall (40%). The explanation of these varying rates of immigration and naturalization

and what impact, if any, they may have on the community is beyond the scope of the Comprehensive Plan. However, Mercedes' lower rate of population growth compared to other Hidalgo County communities is correlated to lower recent immigration of foreign-born residents.

TABLE 2.3. Percentage of Population that is Foreign-born, Naturalized Citizen, and Year of Entry

	City of Mercedes	Hidalgo County	Cameron County	State of Texas	United States
% of population that is foreign-born	15%	30%	26%	14%	11%
% of foreign-born who have become citizens	36%	29%	34%	32%	40%
% of foreign-born who entered 1980 to 2000	49%	65%	61%	73%	70%
% of foreign-born who entered prior to 1980	51%	35%	39%	27%	30%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of the Population

C. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

As of the 2000 Census, ten percent (10%) of Mercedes' adults (more than 25 years of age) had earned a Bachelors Degree or higher; 12% have an Associates Degree or higher; and 3% earned an advanced or professional degree. Fifty-three percent (53%) have at least a high school diploma or GED. At the other end of the educational attainment spectrum, one-third of adults 25 years or older have less than a 9th grade education and 14% have some high school education but no diploma or equivalency diploma. The good news is that citizens of Mercedes are finishing high school and pursuing higher education in greater numbers than previously. See Table 2.4 and Figure 2.3. Unfortunately, educational attainment by Mercedes residents continues to lag behind that of the country,

the state and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties. Additionally, as might be expected, education levels are not consistent across the City and its surrounding area. In one Mercedes neighborhood, 58% of the adults completed high school, 19% earned at least an Associated Degree and 15% earned a Bachelor Degree. In another neighborhood, the corresponding numbers are 41%, 7% and 4%.

TABLE 2.4 Educational Attainment for Mercedes’ Adults 25 Years and Older in 1990 and 2000

	United States		Texas		Cameron County		Hidalgo County		City of Mercedes	
	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990
Less than 9th grade	8%	10%	11%	13%	29%	36%	34%	41%	33%	44%
Some HS, no diploma	12%	90%	13%	87%	15%	64%	16%	59%	14%	56%
HS Diploma or GED or higher	80%	75%	76%	72%	55%	50%	50%	47%	53%	42%
Some College, no degree, or higher	52%	45%	51%	47%	35%	30%	30%	27%	28%	21%
Associates Degree or higher	31%	27%	28%	25%	18%	16%	16%	14%	12%	10%
Bachelors Degree or higher	24%	20%	23%	20%	13%	12%	13%	11%	10%	8%
Advanced or Professional Degree	9%	7%	8%	6%	5%	4%	5%	4%	3%	3%

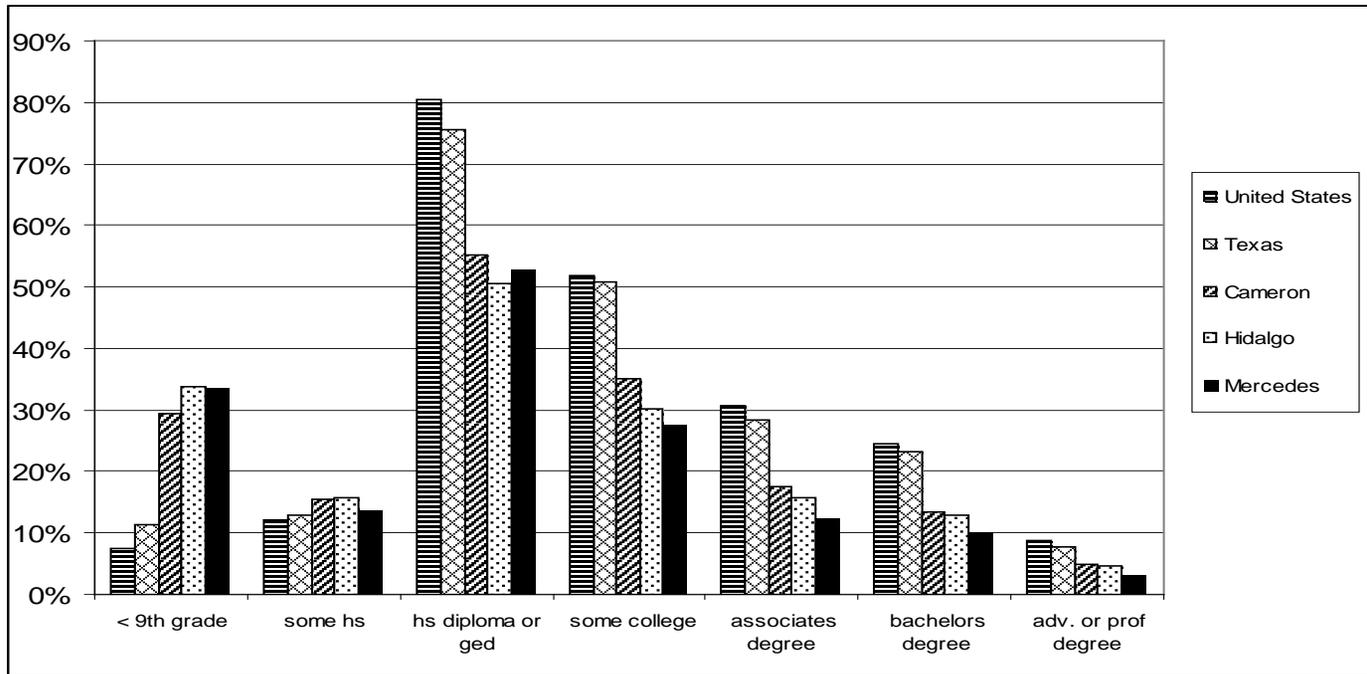
Source: 2000 U.S. Census of the Population and 1990 U.S. Census of the Population, P37.

D. INCOME

Generally, income corresponds to educational attainment: the more education, the higher the income. See Figures 2.3 and 2.4. Mercedes’ Median Family Income and Per Capita Income fall below the regional median family income² and per capita income, which in turn, are below those in the state and country. Additionally, as shown in Table 2.5, income disparities persist between ethnic

² Median Family Income (MFI) is the statistical income which one-half of families exceed and one-half of families fall below. MFI is different than average family income because an average is affected by “outliers,” a millionaire, for example.

FIGURE 2.3 Percentage of the population by educational attainment for comparative geographies



groups, both locally and nationally. In 2000, the MFI for Hispanics (\$21,106) was just 64% that of non-Hispanic- whites in the City (\$32,756). Especially given that the population of the City of Mercedes is 90% Hispanic, this disparity in income between ethnic groups is a particular concern to the City’s future.

FIGURE 2.4 Median Earnings by Education for Texas Residents Employed Full Time

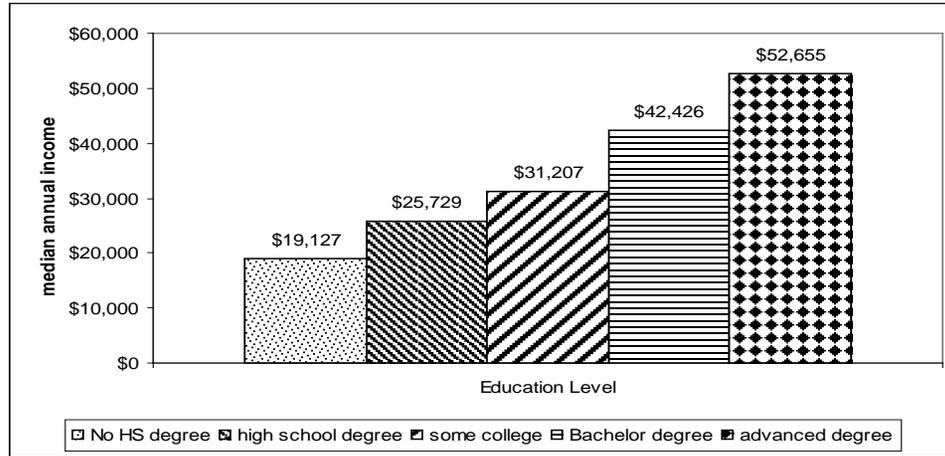


FIGURE 2.5 Median Family Income and Per Capita Income for Comparative Geographies

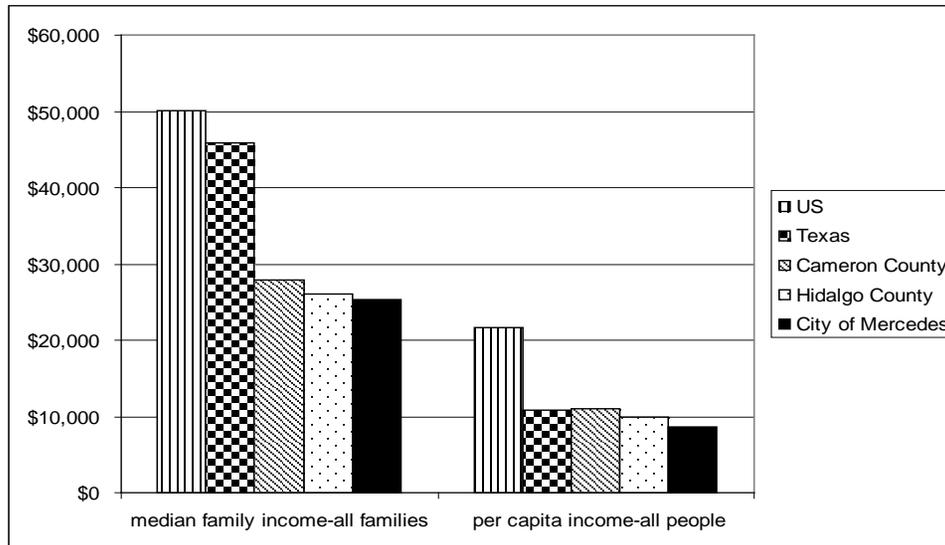


TABLE 2.5. Median Family Income and Per Capita Income in 1999 for comparative geographies and ethnicities

	Ethnic Categories	City of Mercedes	Hidalgo County	Cameron County	State of Texas	United States
Median Family Income	All families	\$25,339	\$26,009	\$27,853	\$45,861	\$50,046
	Hispanic	\$23,372	\$23,427	\$24,468	\$30,840	\$34,397
	non-Hispanic, white	\$34,487	\$43,045	\$46,524	\$57,194	\$54,698
Per Capita Income	All people	\$8,658	\$9,899	\$10,960	\$19,617	\$21,587
	Hispanic	\$7,434	\$8,012	\$8,546	\$10,770	\$12,111
	non-Hispanic, white	\$20,355	\$24,575	\$24,153	\$26,197	\$24,819

While the income of Mercedes’ residents remains below that of residents of the larger, comparative geographies, the increases in MFI and PCI between 1990 and 2000 for Mercedes’ residents are remarkable. See Table 2.6. The 2000 MFI in Mercedes increased 78% from 1990 to 2000, almost two times the rate of increase for the U.S. as a whole and significantly more than Texas or Cameron or Hidalgo Counties. Per capita income also increased dramatically.

TABLE 2.6 Growth in Median Family Income and Per Capita Income between 1990 and 2000

	City of Mercedes	Hidalgo County	Cameron County	Texas	United States
Median Family Income	78%	48%	49%	45%	42%
Per Capita Income	65%	49%	54%	52%	50%

Unfortunately, the poverty rates in Mercedes and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties far exceeds the poverty rates in Texas or the United States. Poverty thresholds vary according to the age and the number of people in the family. The 2000 poverty threshold for a family of four with two minor children was \$17,463; for a family of six with four minor children, it was \$23,009. Adjusted to reflect the value of a dollar in 2009, those figures would be \$21,839 and \$28,775 in 2009. See Table 2.7

TABLE 2.7. Percentage of the Population with incomes below poverty

	Mercedes # in poverty	% of age group below poverty level				
		City of Mercedes	Hidalgo County	Cameron County	Texas	United States
Population below poverty	5,045	36%	36%	33%	15%	12%
< 5 years of age	725	55%	46%	44%	22%	18%
5 to 17 years of age	1,436	45%	45%	42%	20%	16%
18 to 64 years of age	2,187	30%	31%	28%	13%	11%
65 years and older	558	28%	23%	29%	12%	9%

Source: U.S. Census of the Population 2000, Table P87.

The City also has a lower rate of participation in the labor force than does the state or the nation. See Table 2.8. Fifty percent (50%) of Mercedes population over the age of 16 participates in the labor force, whereas 71% of the Texas population 16 years and older is in the labor force. Similar differences exist when the male population and the female population are examined separately. This may partially reflect the lower percentage of Mercedes' population in the prime working years. See Table 2.2 and discussion thereof.

TABLE 2.8. Percentage of total population 16 years and older in the labor force

	TEXAS	HIDALGO COUNTY	CAMERON COUNTY	CITY OF MERCEDES
Men	71%	62%	61%	59%
Women	56%	44%	45%	42%
Total	64%	53%	53%	50%

Source: U.S. Census of the Population 2000, Table 43.

E. WINTER TEXANS

It is worth briefly noting that the population of the Lower Rio Grande Valley swells during the winter months. The sunny warmth of the sub-tropical climate, the cultural heritage and nearness to Mexico, relaxed atmosphere, and affordability entice many visitors from the cold north northern plain states and Canada. Additionally, migrant farmworkers may return to the valley during the winter. The majority of these part-time residents are not included in official population counts because by April 1st of each year they have returned north. When Mercedes’s two mobile home parks are fully occupied, approximately 2,037 additional people reside within the City, 14% of the July 2008 population estimate for Mercedes.³

³ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Paradise South Resort Park had 453 housing units and 177 residents. Eighty-percent of the housing (361 units) was vacant and 20% (92 units) was occupied. The average household in Paradise South is 1.9 people. When the park is 100% occupied, therefore, there would be 861 people, nearly five times the number present on April 1st. Llano Grande had 540 residents and 784 housing units on April 1, 2000. Sixty percent of the housing (470 units) was vacant and 40% (314 units) were occupied. With 1.7 persons per household, on average, if 100% full, Llano Grande would have 918 residents. Additionally, Llano Grande has grown since 2000. Currently, Llano Grande has a total of 1,114 mobile homes and recreational vehicle sites. Assuming 100% occupancy and 1.7 persons per vehicle, full occupancy now means nearly 1900 people.

FUTURE POPULATION

A population projection is an estimate of the population sometime in the future. It is important to attempt to project the community's future population to ensure that the change is properly planned for. Future residents will require essential municipal services such as drinking water, sanitary sewer service, drainage, streets, parks, police and fire protection, public schools, and library facilities.

All population projections are based on assumptions that may or may not be accurate. Projecting future population is an art more than a science. The population in the future will be the sum of the current population plus births and persons who move to the community, less deaths and persons who move from the community. Various projections differ in the weight given those components and may include special sources of data in deriving their final projection. For example, in formulating its population projections, the U.S. Census Bureau includes information about the number of federal income tax returns filed and the number of people reported in each household on those tax returns. That information is not available to other demographers. Some demographers include building permit data and school enrollment in their mathematical calculations, while others may not. Overall fertility and death rates vary across the population by race and ethnicity. The Texas State Data Center explains that immigration is the most difficult component to project. The smaller the geographic area projected, the larger is the risk of error. Also, the further the projection looks into the future, the larger the risk of error.

Table 2.9 sets forth several possible scenarios of the future population of the City of Mercedes. Figure 2.4 graphically depicts the information presented in Table 2.9.

Scenario 1 is extrapolated from the population projections prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau for the entire state of Texas for 2020 and 2025. The Census Bureau projects that the population of Texas will increase by 35% between 2000 and 2025. The population of the City of Mercedes was .067% of the population of the State of Texas in 2000. To derive the projections for Mercedes, the projections for the State of Texas for 2020 (25,729,000) and for 2025 (28,170,000) were simply multiplied by .06%.

(The percentage used (.06%) was reduced slightly from the actual 2000 ratio (.067%) in recognition that over many decades Texas has grown faster than Mercedes and consequently Mercedes' population as a percentage of the state population has decreased (.084% in 1970, .083% in 1980, .075% in 1990, .067% in 2000).

Scenario 2 utilizes the Texas State Data Center's population projections for Hidalgo County to derive the projections for Mercedes and assumes that the ratio between the population of Mercedes and the population of the County remains constant. The Texas State Data Center projects that Hidalgo County's population will more than double between 2000 and 2030 (increase of 108%). The 2000 population of the City of Mercedes represented 2.4% of Hidalgo County's 2000 population. Therefore, the Texas State Data Center population projections for the county in 2020 (956,485) and 2030 (1,185,695) were multiplied by 2.4% to project the population of the City of Mercedes in those years.

Scenario 3 acknowledges that the population of Hidalgo County has grown at a faster rate than the population of Mercedes and as a result, the population of Mercedes as a proportion of the population of the County as been declining. For example, in 1960, Mercedes' population was 6% of the county population; in 1970, 5.2%; in 1980, 4.2%, 1990, 3.3% and 2000, 2.4%. To project the future population of Mercedes, using the State Data Center's projections for Hidalgo County, Hidalgo County's population for 2007 was multiplied by 2.1%, 2020 by 2.0% and 2030 by 1.9%. These percentages assume that the difference in the rates of growth between Hidalgo County and Mercedes will diminish.

Scenario 4 was prepared by simple projecting the recent growth rate (1990 to 2000) of the population of the City to continue into the future (9% over ten years). The average ten-year growth rate for the City of Mercedes between 1910 and 2000 was 40%. If the outlier years between 1910 and 1930 are removed and the average ten-year growth rate is calculated from 1930 through 2000, the average ten-year growth rate was 12%. Nonetheless, Scenario 4 assumes the best predictor of the future is what has happened in the most recent past.

Scenario 5 simply reports the population projections prepared by the Texas Water Development Board. These are the most conservative projections for the City of Mercedes.

Scenario 6 is the numerical average of the results of the analysis of Scenarios 1 through 5.

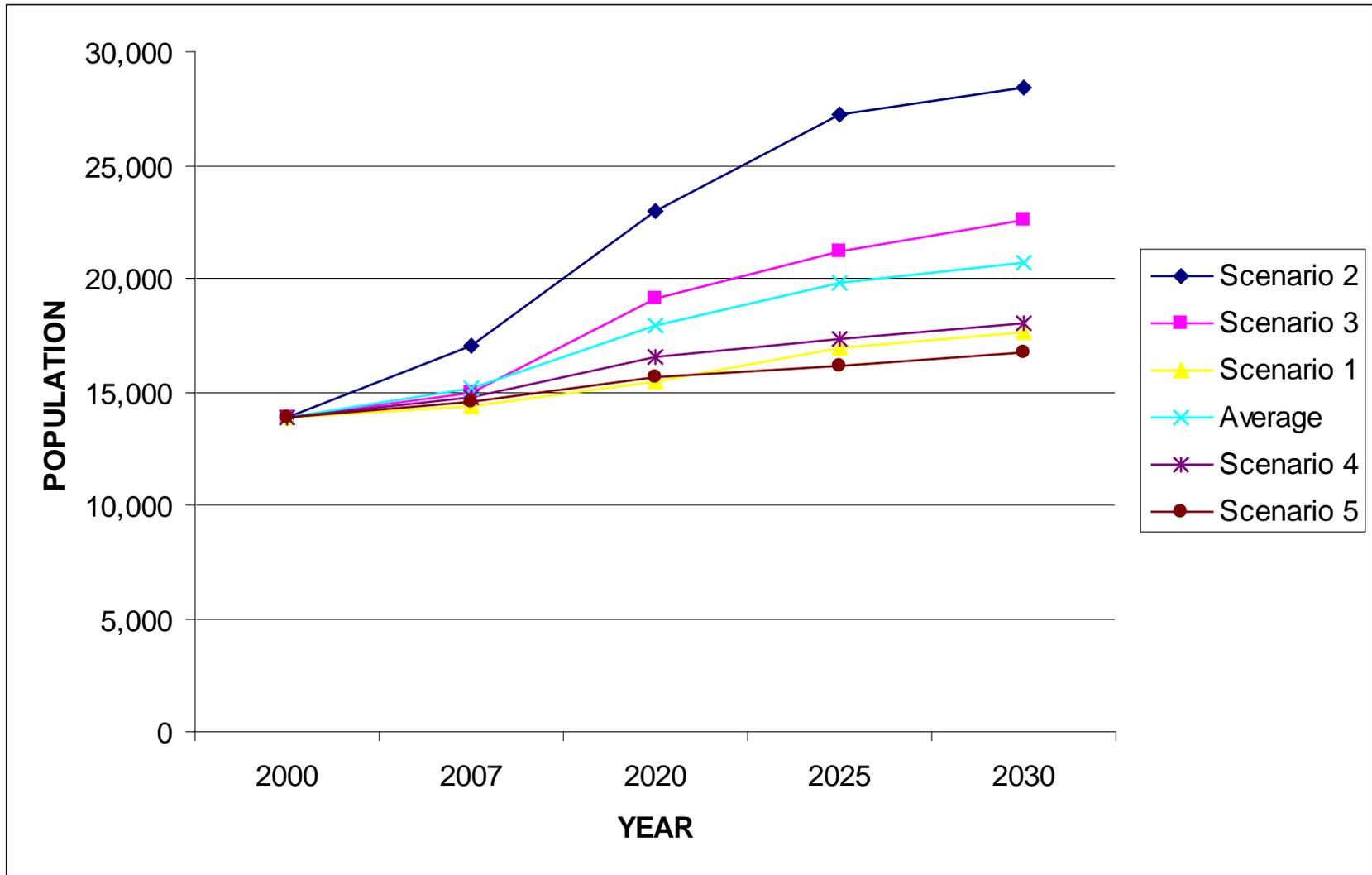
Review of Table 2.9 and Figure 2.6 indicates that it is reasonable to plan that the population of the City of Mercedes will grow at an annual rate of approximately 2% (result of Scenario 3 and the average of the 5 scenarios) and the population in 2020 will be 18,000 - 19,000, the population in 2025 will be 20,000 - 21,000, and the population in 2030 will be 21,000 - 23,000.

The slower rate of population growth experienced by the City of Mercedes over the last few decades compared to other Lower Rio Grande Valley communities presents a real opportunity for Mercedes' future. Mercedes can examine the growth that has occurred in other Valley communities, evaluate the costs and benefits of that growth, and learn from the experience of those communities to seek to achieve its desired future. The ample open lands in the country side surrounding the City, and, indeed, within current City boundaries, along with planned investments to increase capacity to treat and distribute drinking water, to collect and treat wastewater and to improve streets and roads, enable Mercedes to welcome economic and physical development while also preserving and expanding those aspects of the community character, tradition and quality of life that are highly valued by the residents of the City.

TABLE 2.9. Population Projections for the City of Mercedes

	2007		2020		2025		2030	
	population estimate	% change since 2000	population projection	% change since 2000	population projection	% change since 2000	population projection	% change since 2000
SCENARIO 1: Based on U.S. Census Bureau projections for State of Texas	14,343	3%	15,437	11%	16,902	22%	17,659	27%
SCENARIO 2: Based on Texas State Data Center projections for Hidalgo County	17,052	23%	22,956	66%	27,264	97%	28,457	105%
SCENARIO 3: Based on TX State Data Center projections for Hidalgo County (w/ city as diminishing % of county)	14,921	8%	19,130	38%	21,190	53%	22,528	62%
SCENARIO 4: 10-year growth rate of 9% continued into the future	14,768	6%	16,535	19%	17,293	24%	18,024	30%
SCENARIO 5: TX Water Development Bd.	14,546 (2010 est.)	5%	15,595	12%	16,149	16%	16,770	21%
SCENARIO 6: Average of Scenarios 1 – 5	15,126	9%	17,931	29%	17,098	23%	21,445	55%

FIGURE 2.6. Population Projections for the City of Mercedes



Chapter 3

Land Use

The Land Use Chapter is the heart of *Envision Mercedes 2035*. It sets forth the goals, objectives and policies for the future physical development of the city and its one-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Effective land use planning enables new development and redevelopment to ensure a vital and attractive community with a strong tax base, quality neighborhoods, appropriate and adequate community facilities, and efficient street and utility systems.

The Land Use Chapter includes an **Existing Land Use Map** and a **Future Land Use Plan**. The Existing Land Use Map documents the use of land in Mercedes and its one-mile ETJ as of April 2009. The Future Land Use Plan is the general plan for future land use and development. It is a strong guide for future land use decisions such as amendment of the zoning map and zoning ordinance, consideration and approval of proposed subdivisions, and public and private investment in infrastructure.

The development of the Land Use Chapter involved review of previous plans, analyses of existing conditions, consideration of community values and goals, and development of projections of future development within the city and the planning area. Land use analyses are coordinated with other elements of the Comprehensive Plan, recognizing the important interrelationships of land use with transportation, public utilities, recreation, and other elements.

The City Limits and Planning Area are shown in Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1 - Introduction. The City of Mercedes encompasses approximately 7,236 acres or 11.3 square miles (as of April 2009). The 1-mile ETJ encompasses an additional 12,971 acres or 20 square miles resulting in a total Planning Area for *Envision Mercedes 2035* of 20,207 acres or 31.6 square miles. In Mercedes' 1969 Comprehensive Plan, the City was described as 3,317 acres. In the draft 1990 Plan, it was described as 3,977 acres. The City is geographically 82% larger in 2009 than it was in 1990 and 118% larger than it was in 1969.

The *Envision Mercedes 2035* Planning Area is based on the City's ETJ for purposes of annexation, established by state law based on a community's population (Texas Local Government Code (LGC) § 42.021). Mercedes' population places it in the 5,000

to 24,000 bracket with a corresponding one-mile annexation ETJ. That is, Mercedes may annex land within one mile of its existing corporate boundaries that is not within the corporate limits or annexation ETJ of another municipality. The general rules governing annexation of land and the policies and priorities intended to govern annexation of land by the City of Mercedes are set forth in Chapter 11.

The western edge of Mercedes' ETJ is generally the eastern boundary of Weslaco's corporate limits. This ETJ, between Weslaco's city limits and Mercedes' city limits, lies within both cities' ETJ. Land in this joint-ETJ cannot be annexed by either Weslaco or Mercedes without the other's consent. On the east side, Mercedes and La Feria have agreed that Mile 3 East will be the ETJ boundary between them, with two small tracts east of Mile 3 being included in Mercedes' ETJ. See Figure 3.1.

The City of Mercedes can exert some control over the urbanization of land beyond the 1-mile ETJ. The City of Mercedes has the authority and responsibility to establish and implement standards for the subdivision of land and to review and approve (or disapprove if the established standards are not met) proposed subdivisions within 5-miles of its corporate limits. This five-mile ETJ was established by the Texas legislature in 1987 (Texas LGC §212.001) for all communities with 5,000 or more residents and located in a county bordering the Rio Grande. It was intended as a means to prevent creation of additional substandard *colonias*. The five-mile ETJ excludes any area within another city's corporate limits. Regarding land that lies within the five-mile ETJs of two or more communities, the municipality with the larger resident population controls subdivision review and approval. Therefore, if a parcel lies within the ETJ of both Mercedes and La Feria, Progreso or Elsa (2000 populations of 5,991, 4,949, 5,325, respectively), the City of Mercedes has jurisdiction to review and approve proposed subdivisions. On the other hand, the subdivision of a parcel that lies within the five-mile ETJs of both Mercedes and Weslaco is controlled by Weslaco (2000 population of 26,802). Within the five-mile ETJ, the City of Mercedes is required to ensure that, at a minimum, adequate water and wastewater utilities are currently, and will be in the future, available to serve the development. The City cannot control the type (e.g., industrial, commercial or residential) or the density of the development in the five-mile ETJ.

I. EXISTING LAND USE

The City of Mercedes has maintained an urban form that would be the envy of many Texas communities. The development of the land remains relatively compact. A dominant pattern of the street layout is the traditional “town grid,” facilitating access to and inter-connectedness between neighborhoods. Residential neighborhoods are convenient to commercial and public services and infrastructure can be provided efficiently. Urban development quickly transitions into large-scale, active agriculture without a lot of sprawling, uncoordinated growth. Many communities that have experienced large increases in population accompanied by even larger consumption of land now face the difficult tasks of creating a sense of place and community, protection of dwindling natural resources, and providing essential public services in an affordable manner. As Mercedes anticipates and plans for desired additional physical and economic development and the transition of agricultural and vacant lands into homes and businesses, it can build on its existing pattern to avoid a scattered and expensive development pattern.

An inventory of the existing land uses in the City of Mercedes and its 1-mile ETJ was completed in April 2009. The land use inventory was performed by means of a “windshield survey,” that is, driving and reviewing all areas and noting the classification of land uses currently existing. Aerial photographs were examined for lands not readily viewed from public roadways. The level of detail and accuracy is appropriate for the purpose of determining the general pattern and location of existing land uses within the Planning Area.

Mercedes’ Existing Land Use Map is shown as Figure 3.1. It classifies land into the following nine categories:

1. **Low Density Residential** – primarily single family residential dwellings built no denser than four units per acre (approx. 11,000 sq. ft. lots (¼ acre));
2. **Medium Density Residential** – primarily single family residential dwellings and duplexes built no denser than seven to eight units per acre (approx. 6,000 sq. ft. lots);
3. **High Density Residential** – multifamily dwellings such as apartments, rooming and boarding houses, and mobile home parks built denser than eight units per acre;
4. **Commercial** – wholesale and retail trade, services, offices, hotels and motels, and other general business uses;

5. **Industrial** – light manufacturing, goods assembly, warehousing, heavy manufacturing and other intensive uses;
6. **Institutional** – public and semi-public buildings and facilities, such as schools, churches and government uses;
7. **Recreational** – public and private parks, water areas, outdoor recreation areas;
8. **Agricultural** – active agricultural production, including citrus groves, field crops and cattle grazing areas; and,
9. **Vacant** – not in active use for any apparent urban or agricultural purpose or reserved for future transportation corridors. Some vacant lands may be providing environmental services such as storm water retention or wildlife habitat.

The Existing Land Use Map does not attempt to identify which individual lots within residential neighborhoods or subdivisions are vacant and which are developed. When the City is ready to produce Neighborhood and Housing Plans for existing residential areas, that detail will be helpful. It will be necessary in order to evaluate the potential for revitalization and in-fill development. Such detail will also be helpful for the City’s Capital Improvement Plan so that the City’s existing commitments to provide essential infrastructure, such as streets, drainage and water and wastewater services that it has not yet been called upon to provide can be quantified.

Agriculture, occupying 34% of total land (2,493 acres), remains the dominant land use within the city limits, followed by residential development, then by other development. It is interesting to note that 19% of the land within city-limits (1,363 acres) is “vacant,” that is apparently not being used for any purpose.

In order to analyze the use of developed land within Mercedes, agricultural and vacant lands were excluded (Columns B of Table 3.1). The largest single category of developed land use is residential, including low, medium, and high density, which occupies 54% of developed land within the City (1,838 acres). Medium density residential is the highest single land use, representing 32% of developed land. Institutional, with 525 acres, is next highest, occupying 16% of the developed acreage, followed by low density residential (415 acres or 12% of developed land), commercial (335 acres or 10% of developed acreage); high density residential development (333 acres or 10% of developed land.) Industrial uses occupy 257 acres (8%) of the developed city; and, last

but not least, recreational uses come in with 162 acres or 5% of the developed land in Mercedes. This information is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Table 3.1 reports that 263 acres or 4% of the City's total land is devoted to streets, canals, lakes, ditches, etc. That figure grossly under-reports the amount of land devoted to streets because only Expressway 83, Business 83 and Mile 2 ½ East between the Expressway and Bus. 83 are included. It might reasonably be estimated that Mercedes' extensive network of local streets, collectors and arterials occupy cumulatively occupy at least as much land as the Expressway and Bus. 83.

Agriculture is the dominant land use in Mercedes' ETJ—representing 60% of total acreage. Residential use covers 16% of the ETJ and other development occupies 10%.

The numerical information presented in Table 3.1 is presented graphically in Figures 3.2 through 3.5.

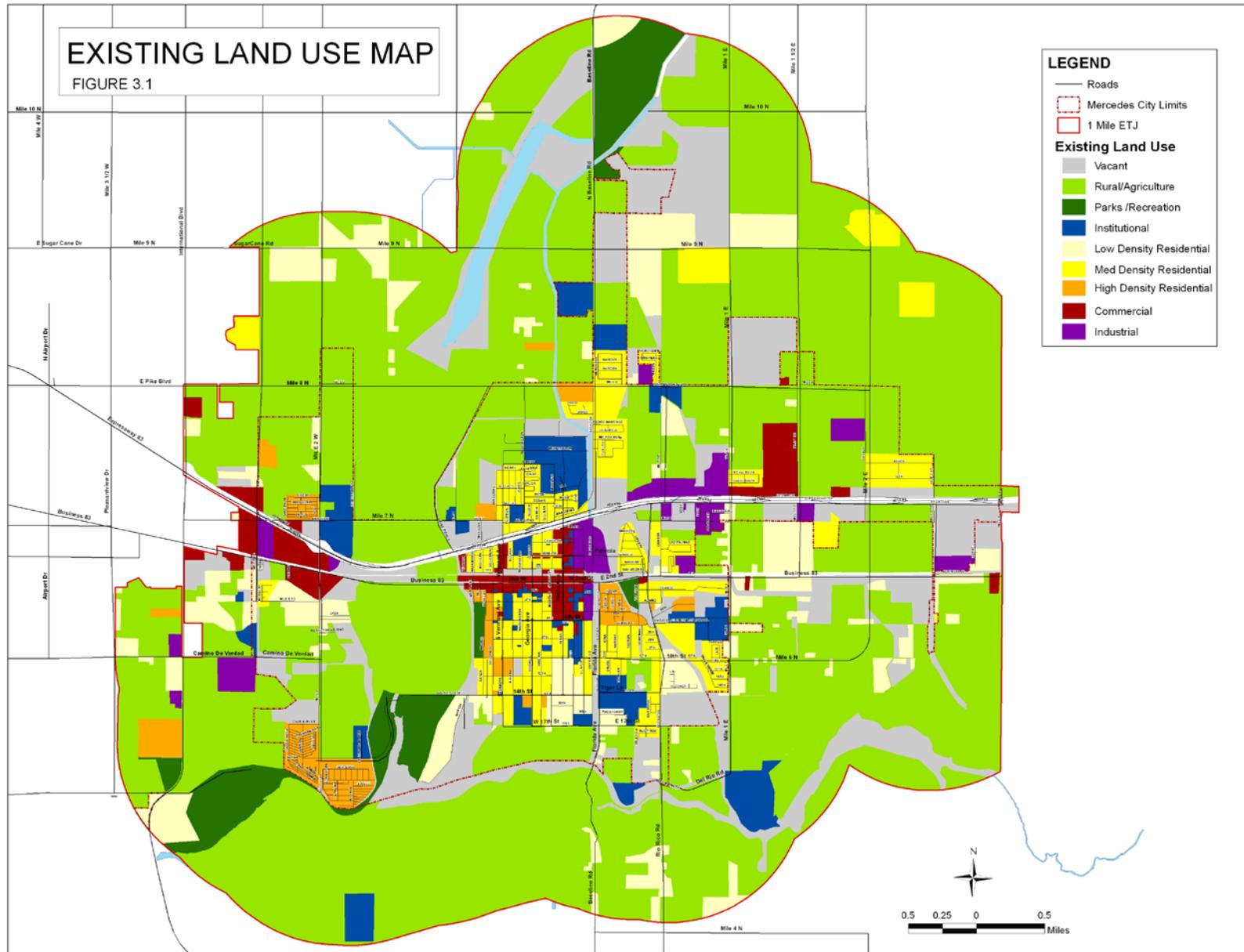


TABLE 3.1. Existing Land Uses as of April 2009

LAND USE	CITY			ETJ			TOTAL PLANNING AREA		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
	# of acres	% of developed land	% of total land	# of acres	% of developed land	% of total land	# of acres	% of developed land	% of total land
Low Density Residential	415	12%	6%	1,117	58%	9%	1,532	29%	8%
Medium Density Residential	1,090	32%	15%	210	11%	2%	1,300	25%	6%
High Density Residential	333	10%	5%	77	4%	1%	410	8%	2%
Sub-Total: Residential Development	1,838	54%	25%	1,404	73%	11%	3,242	61%	16%
Institutional	525	16%	7%	167	9%	1%	692	13%	3%
Commercial	335	10%	5%	78	4%	1%	413	8%	2%
Industrial	257	8%	4%	75	4%	1%	332	6%	2%
Recreational	162	5%	2%	451	24%	3%	613	12%	3%
Sub-Total: Other Development	1,279	38%	18%	771	40%	6%	2,050	39%	10%
Streets and canals, ditches & other water	263	8%	4%						
Sub-Total Urban Development	3,380	100%	47%	1,912	100%	15%	5,292	100%	26%
Vacant	1,363	40%	19%	1,269	66%	10%	2,632	50%	13%
Agricultural/Rural	2,493	74%	34%	9,670	506%	75%	12,163	230%	60%
Total: All Land	7,236		100%	12,971		100%	20,207		100%

FIGURE 3.2 Existing Land Use in City as a % of Total Land

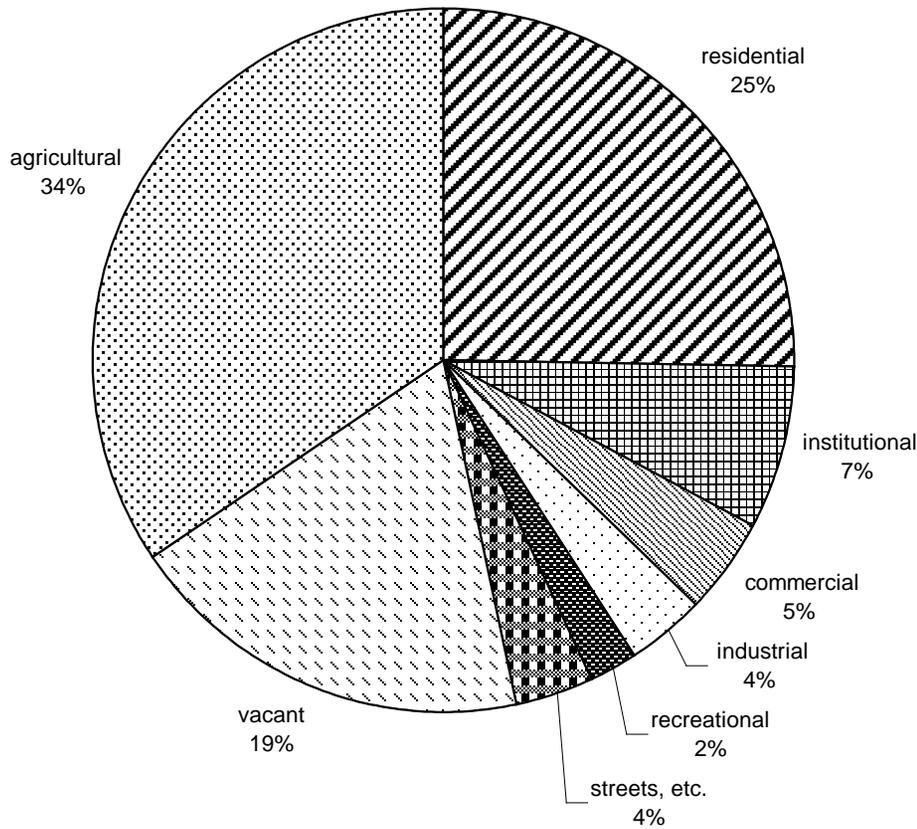


FIGURE 3.3 Existing Land Use in City as a % of Developed Land

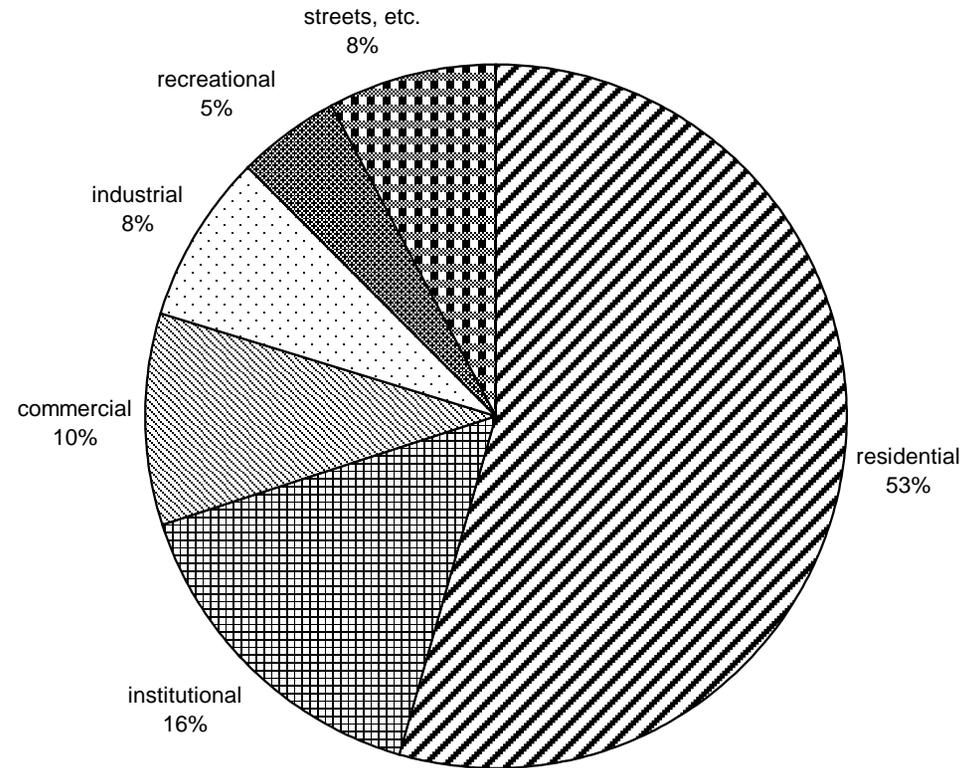


FIGURE 3.4 Existing Land Use in 1-Mile ETJ as a % of Total Land

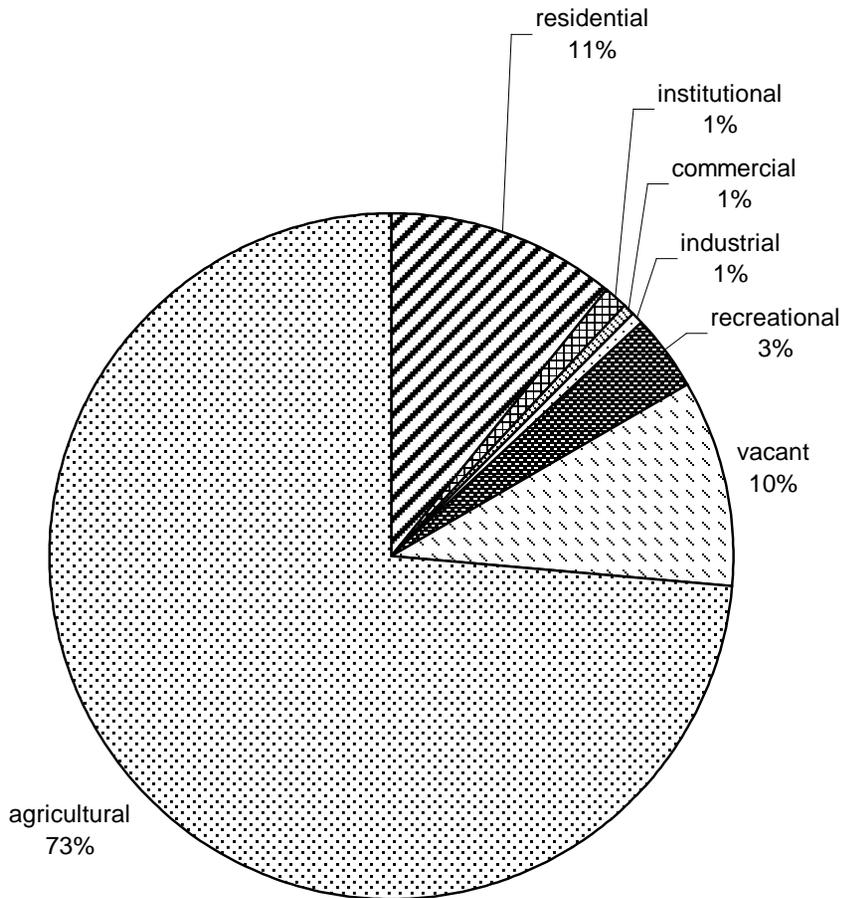
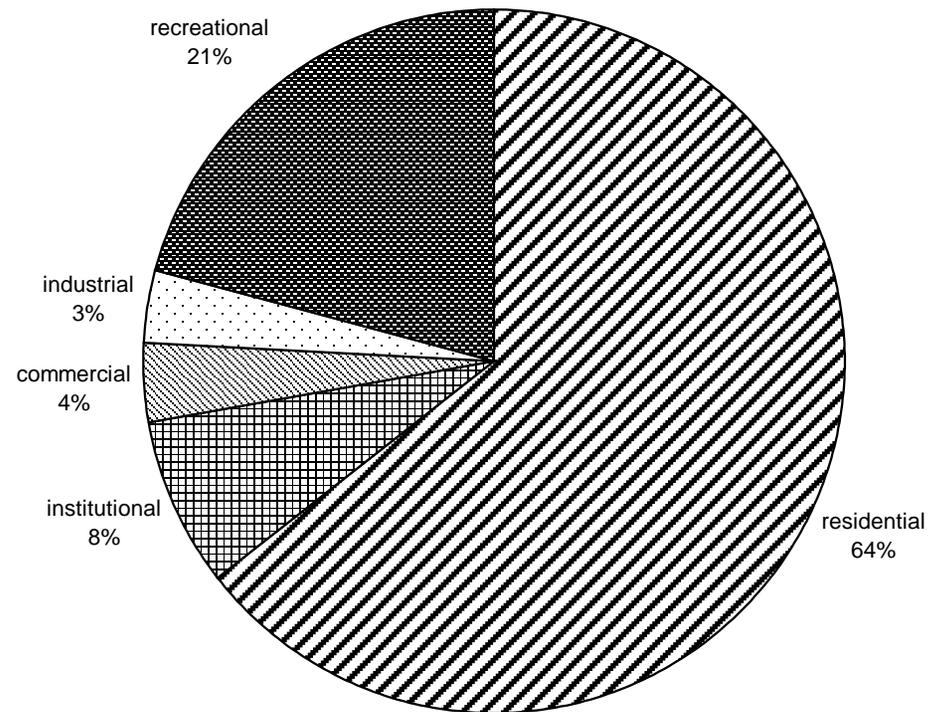


FIGURE 3.5 Existing Land Use in 1-Mile ETJ as a % of Developed Land



II. FUTURE LAND USE

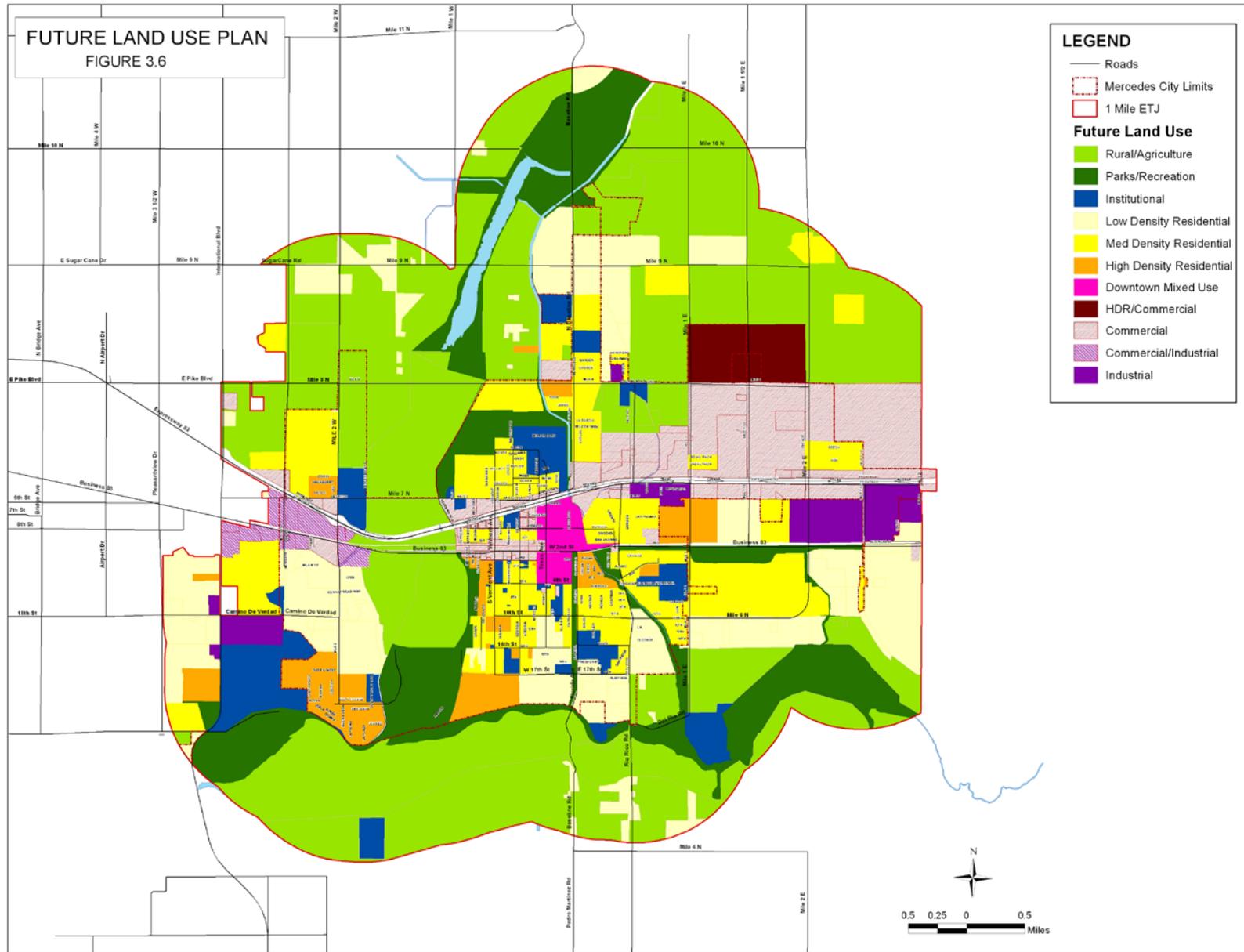
The Future Land Use Plan for the City of Mercedes is shown in **Figure 3.6**. This is the *general* plan for future development of the city based upon the City's desired future, as well as projected increases in population, economic growth, and infrastructure improvements planned to the year 2035. The Future Land Use Plan **is not** a zoning map. The Future Land Use Plan is intended to be more visionary and more flexible than a zoning map and a guide for future zoning decisions. *Envision Mercedes 2035* does not constitute or contain zoning regulations or establish zoning district boundaries. Rather, the Zoning Ordinance and its accompanying zoning map are primary tools to implement *Envision Mercedes 2035* and this land use plan, along with subdivision regulation and public investment in infrastructure. The detailed pattern and location of land uses on a parcel-specific basis cannot be accurately predicted 20 years into the future. Small area land use decisions should appropriately be made at the scale of neighborhood and project planning in the context of zoning and rezoning, subdivision and conditional use permit actions by the City. These land use decisions should be based upon consideration of the Future Land Use Plan, taking into account any significant changes in infrastructure and land use patterns since the adoption of the Plan, and should ultimately be consistent with the generalized land uses shown.

A. General Policies

The Future Land Use Plan establishes the following general policies:

1. Future development should be compatible with existing or planned land uses in the vicinity.
2. Land uses that are incompatible with existing or planned nearby uses should be gradually eliminated through a non-conforming use ordinance;
3. Access and internal circulation should be appropriate for the land use based on anticipated traffic generation.
4. Connectivity between adjacent land uses and neighborhoods should be designed for efficient movement while also discouraging through traffic in residential neighborhoods.

5. Development within flood hazard areas should be avoided. If development occurs within a flood hazard area, stringent flood plain management practices should be implemented, including verification that flooding will not be increased in any other location as a result of the development within the flood hazard area.
6. When possible, flood plains should be used for agriculture or parks and recreation.
7. The provision of adequate urban infrastructure should accompany urban development.
8. Residential and commercial development requires sufficient volume and pressure on public water lines for effective fire suppression. Water service areas will affect the rate, location and type of urbanization. Because North Alamo Water Supply Corporation and Military Highway Water Supply Corporation do not provide sufficient water volume or water pressure to support fire hydrants and fire suppression, development in these areas should be limited, consistent with continuation of agricultural production and rural character.
9. Commercial and retail development along Expressway 83 is encouraged.
10. Some older residential neighborhoods and commercial areas have experienced decline. Strategies for sensitive revitalization and re-development are necessary.
11. Mercedes can become the nicest place to live in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and can capitalize on the growing nature-tourism market, through the development of an extensive network of hiking and biking trails along existing irrigation canals and the Arroyo Colorado that link to places of interest such as downtown and existing parks.
12. Pedestrians and bicycles, as well as private automobiles, should be able to safely access, and connect between, different types of land uses. Land use planning and design that facilitates such access can conserve energy which is good for the environment and residents' budgets, the mobility needs of those without a car including children and teenagers, improved public health, and enhanced neighborhood cohesion. These considerations are especially important within one-mile of Mercedes' elementary and secondary schools.
13. Development of light industry is desired where efficient access to a major transportation corridor can be provided.



B. Category of Uses

The Future Land Use Plan increases the number of different types of land uses to include the following:

1. **Agricultural-Rural** – This category recognizes the continued dominance of agriculture. Development in this area maintains and protects the rural character through large minimum lot size, landscaping, clustering of development, or other methods, and where wastewater needs are met by on-site sewer facilities (OSSFs) and street lights, curbs, sidewalks, fire hydrants and other typical urban infrastructure may not be necessary or appropriate. Re-zoning may occur consistent with the extent to which City water, including volume and pressure to support fire suppression, and wastewater service is available.
2. **Recreational** – public and private parks, water areas, outdoor recreation areas;
3. **Institutional** – public and semi-public buildings and facilities, such as schools, churches and government uses;
4. **Low Density Residential** – primarily single family residential dwellings built no denser than four (4) units per acre (approx. 11,000 sq. ft. lots (¼ acre));
5. **Medium Density Residential** – primarily single family residential dwellings and duplexes built no denser than seven to eight (7-8) units per acre (approx. 6,000 sq. ft. lots);
6. **High Density Residential** – multifamily dwellings such as apartments, rooming and boarding houses, and mobile home parks built denser than eight (8) units per acre;
7. **High Density Residential/Commercial** – a mixed use zone accommodating land uses encouraged in both the high density residential and the commercial areas;
8. **Neighborhood Business** – smaller scale commercial activity intended to serve the residents of the nearby residential neighborhoods
9. **Downtown Mixed Use** - mixed retail, office, residential, and public uses in the central downtown area
10. **Commercial** – wholesale and retail trade, services, office uses, hotels and motels, and other general business uses;
11. **Commercial/Industrial** - a mixed use zone accommodating land uses encouraged in both the commercial and industrial areas;

12. **Industrial** – light manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, distribution, maintenance of products, research and development and other similar uses. Also includes larger-scale manufacturing and processing or distribution activities, which is often accompanied by outdoor activity areas or storage; and,
13. **Heavy Industrial** – heavy manufacturing, junk yards, truck stops. (No land is designated for heavy industry on the Future Land Use Plan.)

TABLE 3.2 Future Land Use Plan

LAND USE	CITY			ETJ			TOTAL		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
	# of acres	% of developed land	% of total land	# of acres	% of developed land	% of total land	# of acres	% of developed land	% of total land
Low Density Residential	854	14%	12%	1,934	32%	15%	2,788	23%	14%
Medium Density Residential	1,576	25%	22%	833	14%	6%	2,408	20%	12%
High Density Residential	538	9%	7%	180	3%	1%	718	6%	4%
Sub-Total: Residential Development	2,967	48%	41%	2,947	49%	22%	5,915	48%	29%
Institutional High Density Resid./Commercial	492	8%	7%	441	7%	3%	932	8%	5%
Commercial	159	3%	2%	161	3%	1%	320	3%	2%
Commercial/Industrial	1,241	20%	17%	390	6%	3%	1,631	13%	8%
Downtown Mixed Use	127	2%	2%	75	1%	1%	202	2%	1%
Industrial	161	3%	2%	0	0%	0%	161	1%	1%
Industrial	157	3%	2%	287	5%	2%	444	4%	2%
Parks/Recreational	648	10%	9%	1,705	28%	13%	2,354	19%	12%
Expressway 83 plus water features	263	4%	4%	0	0%	0%	263	2%	1%
Sub-Total: Other Development	3,248	52%	45%	3,059	51%	23%	6,307	52%	31%
Sub-Total Urban Development	6,215	100%	86%	6,006	100%	45%	12,221	100%	60%
Agricultural/Rural	1,021		14%	7,224		55%	8,245		40%
Total: All Land	7,237		100%	13,230		100%	20,466		100%

FIGURE 3.7 Future Land Uses in City
as a % of Total Land

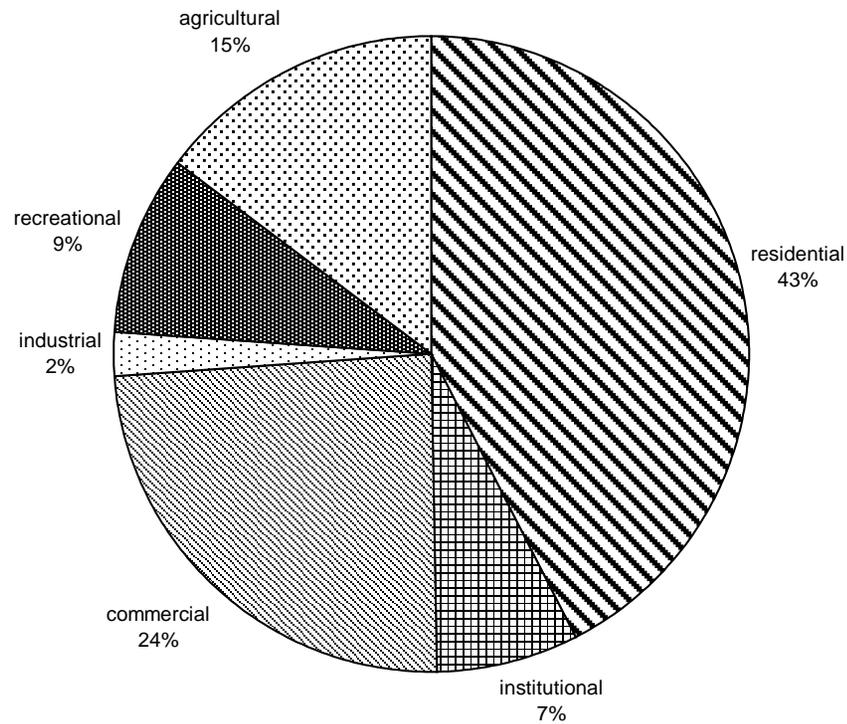


FIGURE 3.8 Future Land Uses in City
as a % of Developed Land

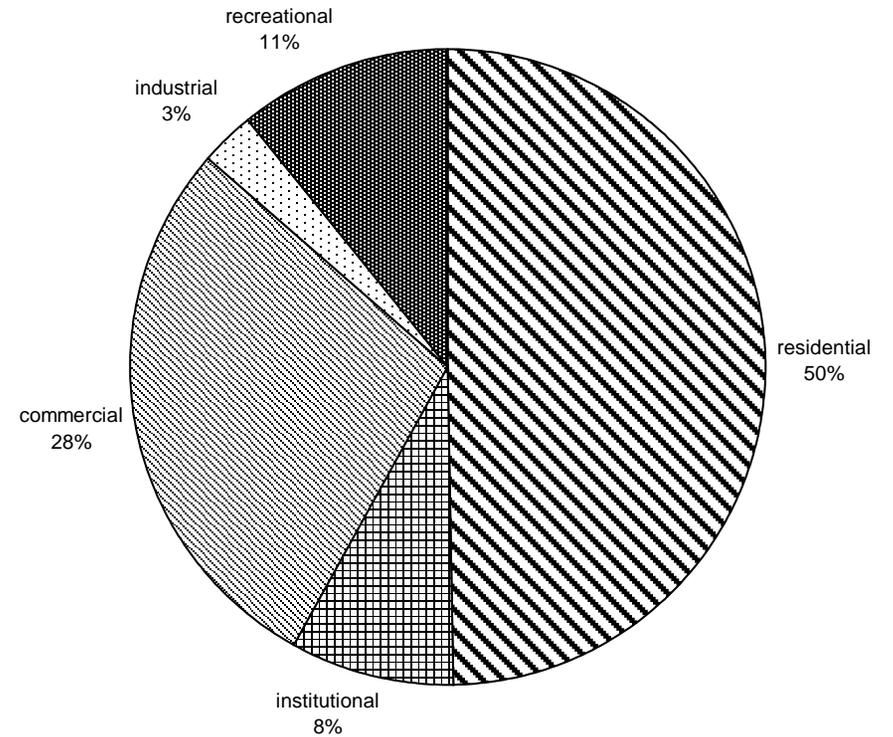


FIGURE 3.9 Future Land Uses in ETJ
as % of Total Land

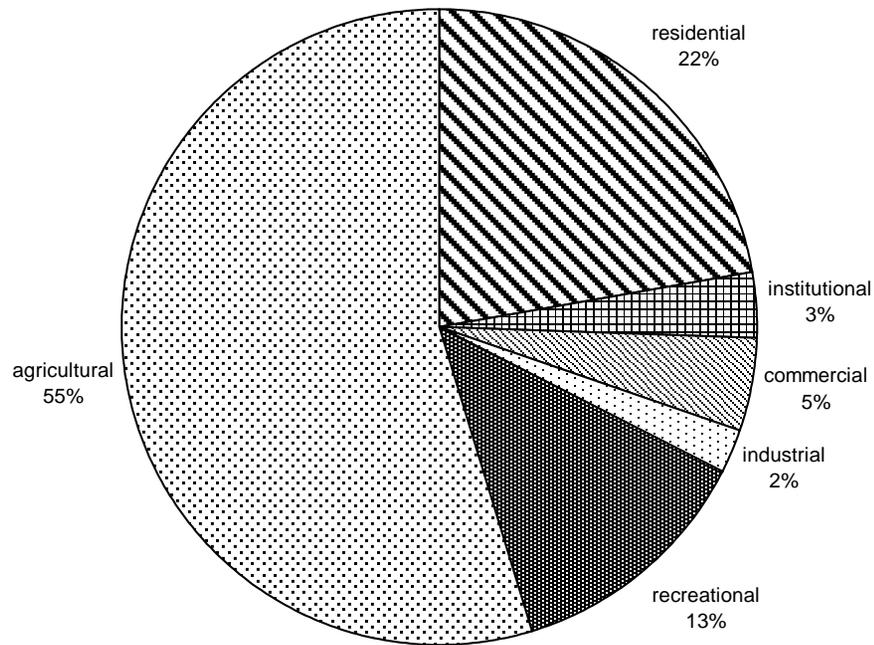
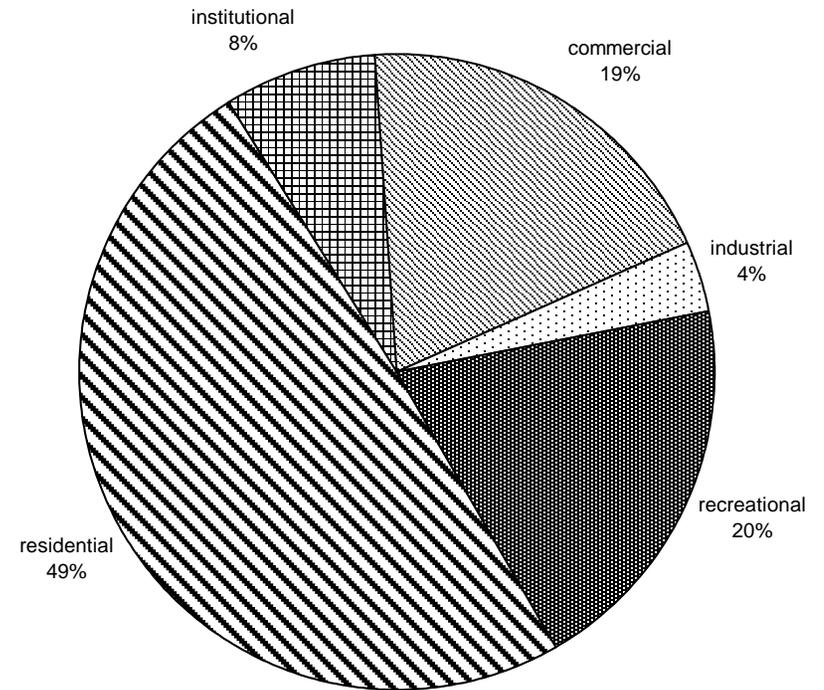


FIGURE 3.10 Future Land Uses in ETJ
as % of Developed Land



C. Mercedes' Rural/Agricultural Areas

The conversion of agricultural lands to residential or commercial use requires significant investment to provide infrastructure to collect and treat wastewater and to treat and distribute drinking water. Sufficient volume and pressure of water to support fire suppression is also needed. This plan calls for the rural/agricultural areas within the City of Mercedes and its Planning area to remain rural unless and until adequate urban infrastructure, including water lines that can support fire hydrants, is available.

The City of Mercedes' Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) for the provision of potable water covers only a limited area. The land within the City's 1-mile ETJ is outside of the City's service area, as are some areas within the current City boundaries. South of the Arroyo Colorado, Military Highway Water Supply Corporation has the certificate of convenience and necessity. North of the City's service area, North Alamo Water Supply Corporation has the CCN. See Figure 7.1 (Chapter 7-Infrastructure, Public Facilities and Public Safety). These rural water suppliers are not required to provide sufficient water volume and pressure to meet fire suppression needs and generally cannot be relied upon for that purpose.

The City is currently finalizing negotiations with North Alamo Water Supply Corporation to purchase service area from NAWSC. The service area to be transferred from NAWSC to the City lies between Business 83 and Expressway 83 from Mile 1 to Mile 2 ½. The City also has an unwritten agreement with NAWSC, that as land north of the Expressway converts from agricultural or vacant to commercial use, NAWSC will sell the service area to the developer so the City can provide fire protection which is not available on NAWSC lines. Finally, the City has a "gentlemen's agreement" with NAWSC that the City will be permitted to utilize its twelve-inch water line along Baseline Road to provide city water to development on either side of that thoroughfare, even though it is not included in the City's CCN. The CCN issue is fundamental to the further physical and economic development of the City and is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

In addition to the constraints on development caused by the CCNs of rural water suppliers, the Future Land Use Plan also recognizes that simply because land is located within the City's water service area does not mean that adequate water infrastructure is currently available to serve urban development. While land within the City's CCN will eventually have the infrastructure necessary to

support residential and commercial development, including the minimum 8-inch water lines needed for fire protection, it may be some time before there is sufficient demand to justify the public and private investment needed to install that infrastructure.

Because there is ample land available for development where City water is, or can be made available, the Future Land Use Plan calls for those areas where city water cannot be provided to remain primarily rural and agricultural. This policy also will help ensure that future urban development occurs in a more economically and environmentally efficient manner and that agriculture's contribution to the local economy and quality of life will not be sacrificed prematurely.

Accomplishment of this outwardly straightforward planning goal will require thoughtful analysis, ordinances and coordination. In the ETJ, neither the City nor the County has the legal authority to directly limit the number of residential units that can be built per acre of land or to regulate the use of any building or property for business, industrial, residential, or other purposes. However, for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, moral and general welfare and the orderly and healthful development of the municipality, the City is authorized to regulate the type of water or wastewater facility that can be constructed.¹

The Texas Local Government Code requires municipalities to exempt from platting those subdivisions which create lots of five or more acres, if access is provided and no new public infrastructure is needed. The State's current five-acre exemption from municipal regulation is a good starting point for consideration of what development is consistent with the land use goals for Mercedes' rural/agricultural areas.²

State statute generally requires only ½ acre for a residential lot served with an on-site sewer facility where public water is available or one acre if a private well will also be utilized. State statute does not require an OSSF permit for single family dwellings located on ten acres or larger. However, state regulations provide that local regulations may be more stringent so long as each more

¹ This authority is contained in the awkwardly drafted text of Chapter 212, §213.003(5) of the Texas Local Government Code which provides that a municipality *shall not regulate*: "a water or wastewater facility that can be constructed to serve a developed tract of land if: A) the facility meets the minimum standards established for water or wastewater facilities by state and federal regulatory entities; *and* (B) the developed tract of land is: (i) located in a county with a population of 2.8 million or more; *and* (ii) served by: (a) on-site septic systems constructed before September 1, 2001, that fail to provide adequate services; *or* (b) on-site water wells constructed before September 1, 2001, that fail to provide an adequate supply of safe drinking water.

² The City's current Subdivision Ordinance exempts the creation of lots 3 acres or larger from the definition of subdivision and therefore no plat review by the City is required, unless a new street or access easement is needed. This plan recommends increasing the minimum lot size exempt from platting to 5 acres or larger.

stringent requirement is justified based on greater public health and safety protection. The high clay content, high water table and poor percolation in local soils may be a sufficient public health and safety justification for larger lots.³

Single-family residential development on lots of five acres or larger is recommended as the standard for exemption from platting⁴ and provision of urban infrastructure. Lots of less than five acres should be developed with a water supply that can support fire suppression. This five-acre standard will reduce some pressure on the conversion of agricultural land to urban use and will reduce the impact of sprawling development somewhat. It is not recommended as the most efficient way to achieve these goals. Five-acre residential lots require large amounts of land to accommodate relatively small increases in population. Sprawl is discouraged primarily through reduced demand for lots caused by increased prices. To most effectively achieve efficient, planned growth, to preserve community character including agriculture's contribution to the local economy and small town quality of life, and to direct growth to existing and planned infrastructure, the City of Mercedes should combine this approach to subdivision with an assertive approach to annexation so that it can adopt zoning and other regulations to fully govern land use in agricultural/rural areas.

D. Relationship to Other Aspects of *Envision Mercedes 2025*

In every chapter of *Envision Mercedes 2025*, a stated objective is that the land use plan should advance the goals of the chapter. In Chapter 9—Economic Development, two related objectives are established—(1) expand business targeting and recruitment to include manufacturing and other light industrial enterprises and (2) ensure the land use map and zoning map encourage the type of economic development the city desires, especially the City's ability to accommodate manufacturing firms. At first glance, the land use plan may appear inconsistent with that objective. The future land use map only very slightly increases the amount of land considered suitable for industrial development. The Existing Land Use Map indicates that currently 257 acres or 4% of the total land

³ Currently in Hidalgo County, factors such as high clay content, high water table and poor percolation in local soils can result in the requirement that an engineered septic system be designed. According to a County Public Health employee, engineered systems are costly and a county determination that an engineered system is required usually results in no development taking place. The average individual is unlikely to anticipate the need for a costly engineered system at the time he or she purchases a lot.

⁴ Care must be exercised to ensure the City obtains additional right-of-way, even if no plat is filed, to facilitate implementation of the Thoroughfare Plan. If no plat is required, the City may accept dedication of right-of-way by a separate written instrument.

in the City is being used for industrial purposes. The Future Land Use Map shows only 157 acres for industrial use (2% of the total land in the City), as well as 107 acres, or another 1%, for mixed commercial/industrial use (total of 264). See Figures 3.1 and 3.6 and Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

The number of acres on the Future Land Use Plan, however, is not the end of the analysis. Firstly, it is impossible to capture all future land use policies in one picture. Secondly, as articulated earlier, the Land Use Plan is not a zoning map. Land use proposals that advance important goals and objectives of the plan may be accommodated, even if not in strict conformity with the Future Land Use Plan, so long as the consistency with plan goals and objectives can be clearly articulated. With regard to the Future Land Use Plan and industrial development, other policy considerations include the following:

1. The land designated for industrial use on the future land use map is more desirable and more likely to be utilized for that purpose than some of the land shown as industrial on the existing land use map. The industrial land on the future land use plan is a larger, contiguous area and has easy access to Business 83, the railroad and Expressway 83. It is “raw” land. Limited or no demolition of existing structures or relocation of existing businesses is required. Additionally, some of the land currently designated as industrial use is underutilized. While the area between Exp. 83 and Bus. 83, on both sides of the canal, is designated as industrial use, it is actually a mix of bars, packing sheds that operate four to five months per year, the City Public Works Shop, and small industrial operations.
2. While the Future Land Use Map shows the area between Exp. 83 and Bus. 83, on both sides of the canal, transitioning to Downtown Mixed Use, ongoing enterprises can continue to operate. Once a zoning map consistent with this plan is adopted, they will be protected as pre-existing, non-conforming uses. Therefore, this acreage is not immediately lost to industrial use.
3. Depending on the alignment and time of implementation of the future Hidalgo County Loop, some land currently designated agricultural/rural may become appropriate for development for industry.
4. Additionally, depending on the City’s annexation activity, land to the south of the City, in proximity to U.S. Highway 281, may also be appropriate for industrial development.

5. It is expected that city decision-makers, namely the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Commission, will have some flexibility regarding areas in proximity to Exp. 83 which the Future Land Use Plan shows as most appropriate for commercial development. Some of this land may quite reasonably accommodate industrial development without hindering the City's ability to attract additional destination retail. For example, where H & H Foods is currently located, the land south of the Expressway between Mile 1 East and Mile 2 ½ East, and land in the vicinity of the areas designated for industry, depending on other future development in the area, may all be suitable for industrial use. (On the other hand, some high density residential development may also be appropriate, north of the expressway in the area designated for commercial development.)
6. Finally, land located within the City's Empowerment Zone, along North Baseline Road, may be able to accommodate certain types of industrial development, so long as adjacent residential and school uses are properly buffered and protected.

With regard to new institutional uses, such as churches, schools, or government buildings, the Future Land Use Plan does not expressly designate any land for such uses. Institutional uses, such as schools and churches, should be treated as conditional uses within most zoning classifications and considered on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, the Existing Land Use Map does not show where utilities, such as lift stations or electrical substations, are located and the Future Land Use Plan allocates no land specifically for utilities. These should be permitted uses in commercial and industrial zones. In all other areas, they should be conditional uses.

Similarly, no land is designated for "Neighborhood Business." As the city moves forward and residential development increases, the Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend areas that are appropriate for small-scale commercial development intended to serve the residents of the nearby neighborhoods.

The Future Land Use Plan recognizes and advances the City's Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan. A large area to the north and west of the Rio Grande Valley Stock Show Fairgrounds is indicated as appropriate for park development. The designation was intended to accommodate the desired sports complex. This location is centrally located to a majority of Mercedes residents. It has access from Baseline Road and from the desired future collector along the eastern side of the floodway. Finally, it may be possible to share automobile parking areas with the Fairgrounds. By designating green parkland corridors along the Arroyo Colorado

and connecting to downtown along the main canal and several drainage ditches, the Future Land Use Plan seeks to take full advantage of one of Mercedes' most noteworthy natural features.

The Future Land Use Plan shows no additional parks and recreation space in the City's northwest quadrant. This may make sense if little or no additional residential development takes place in that area. However, another ideal location for a linear park that would serve the entire City or region exists in the northwest quadrant. An examination of the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map shows a flood hazard area originating near Mile 10N and continuing to nearly to Mile 8N. Drainage ditch #18 then continues to the Expressway and south to the Arroyo Colorado. Dual utilization of this natural corridor for both drainage and recreation would allow the city to create a complete loop, or "Emerald Necklace"⁵ around the City. Realization of this plan will position the City of Mercedes as a trails and open-space leader in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and could be the basis to attract high quality residential neighborhoods. Because this would be a regional resource, it may be possible to partner with Hidalgo County to accomplish the plan.

E. Mercedes' Municipal Neighbors to the East and West

Many factors affecting the quality of life in Mercedes do not recognize municipal boundaries. Traffic flow and traffic congestion, storm-water management and drainage, air quality, employment opportunities, affordability and diversity of available housing, and access to park land and recreational opportunities illustrate how the activities of one community impact the residents and businesses in nearby communities, for better or for worse. *Envision Mercedes 2035* urges regional communication and cooperation in all areas of mutual concern and opportunity. This Chapter will simply note the degree to which the proposed future land uses for the City of Mercedes and its Planning Area are consistent or inconsistent with the proposed future land uses in the Cities of La Feria and Weslaco.

⁵ In 1903, the Olmstead Brothers landscape architecture firm designed an "Emerald Necklace"—a 20- mile long system of large and small parks and scenic drives for Seattle, WA. The landscape architect looked forward 100 years when he anticipated the city would have 500,000 residents. The parks and the roadways connecting them treasured assets. The residential neighborhoods in the vicinity of the parks are very fine and various segments of the route is popular for bicycling and walking and jogging.

The City of La Feria, a town of approximately 7,000 residents, lies to the east. As noted previously, the Cities of La Feria and Mercedes have agreed that Mile 3 West is the dividing line between the two cities' ETJs. The predominant current land use within La Feria's planning area, in the vicinity of Mile 3 W, is agriculture, as it is in Mercedes. La Feria's Existing Land Use map depicts field crops as "undeveloped." Citrus orchards are the only agriculture acknowledged on La Feria's existing and future land use maps. In the Expressway 83 and Business 83 corridor, there is some industrial and institutional development.

The City of La Feria adopted its current Comprehensive Plan in September 2007. The proposed Future Land Use Map for the City of Mercedes and the proposed Future Land Use Map for the City of La Feria in the vicinity of Mile 3 W are generally consistent. La Feria's Future Land Use Map for 2025 indicates that the north side of Expressway 83 to the equivalent of Mile 7 ½ North, is most appropriate for commercial development. From Mile 7 ½ North to Mile 8 North, the La Feria has designated the land as most appropriate for industrial development. From Mile 8 North to north of Mile 9 North, La Feria projects single family residential development.

Between Expressway 83 to south of Business 83, for one-quarter mile east of Mile 3 W, La Feria projects industrial development. Further to the east, a narrow corridor along the south side of Business 83 is designated for commercial development. South of the industrial and commercial development along Business 83, from Mile 3 West, east to La Feria's main canal, the future land use is projected to be single family residential.

It should be noted that La Feria's definition of "industrial use" is expansive. Its zoning ordinance defines "industrial" as intended "to accommodate most industrial and manufacturing uses, provided such use is not noxious or offensive by reason of emission of odors, soot, dust, noise, fumes or vibration." However, the schedule of uses allowed with a specific use permit includes animal feed lots, wastewater treatment plants, refuse transfer stations, prisons, massage parlors, sexually oriented businesses, explosives and fireworks manufacturing, insecticide processing, and incinerators. While these uses require specific use approval from the La Feria City Commission, that process does not necessarily consider and protect the interests of residents in adjoining towns.

To the west of Mercedes lies the City of Weslaco, population 32,000. The City of Weslaco adopted its current Comprehensive Plan in May 2008. Mercedes and Weslaco have overlapping ETJs, but have not yet formally agreed to apportion it.

From approximately Mile 9 North south to Business 83, Mercedes' ETJ to the west is truncated by the City of Weslaco's corporate limits.

Along the shared boundary between Mercedes and Weslaco, just north of the floodway, is Estero Llano Grande State Park and World Birding Center. It is projected to remain natural parkland. North of the park is owned by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and Texas A & M University and the land is projected to remain agricultural. South of Business 83, Weslaco indicates the most appropriate use of the land is for institutional/research. Institutional/research is also desired from Mile 8 North south almost to Expressway 83 (Fronting on the Expressway, Weslaco sees commercial development). In the institutional/research designations, Weslaco seeks to expand the benefit and influence of the existing U.S.D.A. and Texas A & M University research facilities. It is possible that Mercedes could also attempt to benefit from proximity to these research employment centers. Texas A & M has research farms in Mercedes along Mile 2 West.

Between Mile 8 North and Mile 9 North, Weslaco projects a continuation of the existing single family residential and multi-family residential uses. North of Mile 9, Weslaco foresees agriculture on the eastern side with some neighborhood commercial on the western side.

All three cities--Mercedes, La Feria and Weslaco--designate the land between the levees along the Arroyo Colorado as open space/parkland. Overall, the projected future land uses in the Cities of La Feria and Weslaco and their planning areas are compatible with the projected future land uses in the City of Mercedes and its planning area. The one area of concern is the expansive definition of industrial that might be permitted near Mile 3 East in La Feria.

F. Capacity to Accommodate Mercedes' Future Population

One way to evaluate the reasonableness of the future land use plan is to determine the number of people who can be accommodated by the land allocated for residential development. By calculating population and housing densities in existing residential neighborhoods and applying the result to the acreage designated for future residential development, it is possible to project

the number of residents that can be accommodated by the future land use plan. The calculations are explained in more detail in Appendix A to this Chapter.

The assumptions underlying the residential capacity analysis are conservative (as explained in Appendix A). The current actual population and housing densities in existing neighborhoods are substantially below that which can be accommodated by the land use designation. For example, low-density residential development is defined as “no more than 4 houses per acre.” The actual current density on land currently being used for low-density residential is 1.3 houses per acre. Medium density residential is defined as having “7 to 8 units per acre.” However, the current density in existing medium density neighborhoods is less than 3 units per acre. Additionally, the calculation of the population to be accommodated relies on no additional housing development in the land designated rural/agricultural and no new residential development in the land designated for High Density Residential-Commercial. Current actual densities were used to calculate the population potential of the Future Land Use Plan shown in Table 3.3.

The Future Land Use Plan can accommodate 28,226 people in the City and 47,878 in the ETJ using current actual neighborhood densities. See Table 3.3. This is 34% more people than projected in 2025 and 23% more than projected in 2030 in Chapter 2-Demographics. If potential densities are used, the Future Land Use Plan can accommodate 58,396 within the City and

TABLE 3.3. Population accommodated by Future Land Use Plan (based on current actual neighborhood densities)

	# of Acres	Housing Units per Acre	People per Household	Total People
City of Mercedes				
Low Density	854	1.3	3.3	3,664
Medium Density	1,576	2.7	3.8	16,170
High Density	538	6.0	2.6	8,393
Sub-Total: City Limits	2,968			28,226
One Mile ETJ				
Low Density	1,934	1.3	3.3	8,297
Medium Density	833	2.7	3.8	8,547
High Density	180	6.0	2.6	2,808
Sub-Total: One-Mile ETJ	2,947			19,651
TOTAL PLANNING AREA	5,915			47,878

TABLE 3.4 Population accommodated by Future Land Use Plan (based on potential densities)

	# of Acres	Housing Units per Acre	People per household	Total People
City of Mercedes				
Low Density	854	4.0	3.3	11,273
Medium Density	1,576	6.0	3.8	35,933
High Density	538	8.0	2.6	11,190
Sub-Total: City Limits	2,968			58,396
One-Mile ETJ				
Low Density	1,934	4.0	3.3	25,529
Medium Density	833	6.0	3.8	18,992
High Density	180	8.0	2.6	3,744
Sub-Total: One-Mile ETJ	2,947			48,265
TOTAL PLANNING AREA	5,915			106,661

106,661 in the ETJ. See Table 3.4. For inside the City, this is 178% of the 2025 population projected for the City and 154% of the population projected for 2030.

The Future Land Use Plan is recommended. This plan gives the City and private developers much flexibility in deciding where to site new residential neighborhoods. To suggest further restriction on the amount of agricultural land to be converted to urban development could disadvantage Mercedes vis-à-vis other Lower Rio Grande Valley communities in attracting new, quality residential development. Additionally, knowing there is ample room to accommodate the expected population allows the City and developers to be creative in designing new communities and neighborhoods by, for example, accommodating greenbelts or other passive recreation areas to both separate and connect different neighborhoods. Finally, there is plenty of room to accommodate the future street network that will be needed to meet the circulation needs of the new neighborhoods while preserving capacity on existing roadways.

Allowing or encouraging development pursuant to the Future Land Use Plan, in isolation from the other policies, goals and objectives in this Chapter, could lead to expensive, uncoordinated growth. However, the Future Land Use Plan is just one element of *Envision Mercedes 2035*. Adoption by the City of detailed utility extension policies can be a very effective tool to help promote efficiency and facilitate timing and staging of new development. Implementation of the many land use policies, goals and objectives and the goals and objectives contained in all of the chapters of *Envision Mercedes 2035* can help assure that Mercedes achieves affordable, high quality residential neighborhoods for the current and future residents.

III. LAND USE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Land use goals are general statements of desired results. Objectives are a statement of direction for the selection of the appropriate strategy and the direction of resources for getting there. When the responsible party(ies) for each strategy begin working on a particular approach, they should further consider specific action items necessary to accomplish that strategy. This approach is most effective for accomplishing broad goals and ensuring that this is not just a plan that sits on a shelf. The following goals have been identified through community participation in the form of public hearings and written surveys and the work of the Ad-hoc Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.

Goal 3.1 Protect the integrity of established, stable neighborhoods.

- Obj. 3.1a** Development policies should encourage compatibility with nearby existing and proposed uses, both for land use and necessary infrastructure.
- Obj. 3.1b** Encourage buffers, intermediate, transition intensities, and proper design to separate or protect lower intensity land uses from higher intensity land uses.
- Obj. 3.1c** Promote, preserve and maintain public and private open spaces within the urbanized area to provide scenic and recreational amenities in appropriate relation to residential and commercial areas.
- Obj. 3.1d** Strengthen zoning regulations to better categorize and separate incompatible land uses.

Goal 3.2 Promote development, redevelopment and revitalization within Mercedes' existing urbanized area.

- Obj. 3.2a** Inventory the location, size, age and condition of existing water, wastewater and drainage systems in urbanized areas to identify inadequacies and develop a capital improvements plan to upgrade and modernize these systems.
- Obj. 3.2b** Develop a Downtown Plan in order to develop the vision and goals for downtown, and identify the resources, services and amenities necessary to preserve and enhance the vitality and commercial success of the downtown area.
- Obj. 3.2c** Encourage development of vacant land and redevelopment of underutilized land within the existing urbanized area, consistent with available or planned infrastructure and land uses.
- Obj. 3.2d** Develop neighborhood-specific plans to identify the goals and objectives for each neighborhood, the type of development and redevelopment that is appropriate, the vacant and under-utilized land that may be available for in-fill development, and what is needed to protect and enhance the quality of life in each neighborhood..
- Obj. 3.2e** Encourage revitalization, re-development and infill development in neighborhoods that have suffered from disinvestment or decline, which may include higher intensity uses that are compatible with other existing uses and located in appropriate areas

- Obj. 3.2f** Continue the City’s assertive code enforcement program, including specifically, the identification, condemnation and removal of dilapidated structures.
- Obj. 3.2g** Because many dilapidated structures that are ordered demolished are located on land that is in property tax arrears, the City should consider development of a land bank program by which such land can be sold to non-profit housing developers, for example, Habitat for Humanity, Proyecto Azteca, or Affordable Homes of South Texas, Inc. for the production of affordable housing.
- Obj. 3.2h** Review the City’s zoning and other development ordinances and code enforcement practices to ensure they facilitate and encourage development that will help keep older commercial areas, such as Business 83, viable and will attract quality new development.

<p>Goal 3.3 Promote fiscally responsible growth that can be efficiently and economically served by existing and planned infrastructure.</p>
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- Obj. 3.3a** Encourage development in areas that will take maximum advantage of existing water, sewer, street, and drainage systems.
- Obj. 3.3b** Plans for expansion and improvement of water, wastewater, street, drainage and fiber optics systems recognize, are coordinated with, and developed and implemented to accomplish the land use goals set forth in *Envision Mercedes 2025*.
- Obj. 3.3c** The intensity of land use should be related to the developer’s and city’s ability to provide adequate public facilities, public services, and water, wastewater, drainage, and fiber optics systems.
- Obj. 3.3d** The design, location and construction of water, wastewater, drainage and fiber optics systems should anticipate the efficient provision of utilities to existing and future development and advance the City’s economic development priorities.
- Obj. 3.3e** Work with schools and other agencies for creation of additional sporting facilities.
- Obj. 3.3f** New development should pay its fair share of costs for extension of public utilities serving its site.

- Obj. 3.3g** New development should pay its fair share of costs for extension of the street system to its site, consistent with the Thoroughfare Plan.
- Obj. 3.3h** Coordinate land use planning and development with nearby governmental entities—Mercedes Independent School District, Hidalgo County, Weslaco, La Feria, Progreso, La Villa—when appropriate to ensure the future land use plan is realized.
- Obj. 3.3i** Promote and encourage development of commercial, entertainment and cultural activities, sports and recreation, and similar facilities to serve tourism and visitation in Mercedes, help boost sales tax revenue, and increase the quality of life for Mercedes residents.
- Obj. 3.3j** Ensure subdivision and development of land provides safe and efficient access and circulation within the new development, the neighborhood, and the entire City, including access management, and the development, extension, improvement and continuity of local streets, collectors and arterials consistent with the City's *Major Thoroughfare Plan*.
- Obj. 3.3k** Plan for and fund Master Utility Plans including water, waste water, drainage and fiber optics systems.
- Obj. 3.3l** Convert the unwritten “gentlemen’s agreement” between North Alamo Water Supply Corporation and the City of Mercedes regarding water service to the east and west of Baseline Road into a written agreement.

Goal 3.4 Protect Public Health and Safety through prudent land use and development policies
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- Obj. 3.4a** Future damages and losses from flooding should be minimized and public health and safety protected by prohibiting new residential development in flood hazard areas, and ensuring that no development by any public or private property owner increases the risk of flood damage to any other property owner.
- Obj. 3.4b** As much as possible, floodplain lands should be utilized for agriculture, natural open spaces, and parks and recreation areas.
- Obj. 3.4c** To ensure urban and suburban development is accompanied by adequate public infrastructure and facilities, including, but not limited to, fire hydrants located on water lines with sufficient volume and pressure to provide 500 gallons per minute of water, the City’s subdivision ordinance should be amended to require the same.
- Obj. 3.4d** Continue to work with rural water supply corporations to establish the formulas that will govern the future purchase of water service area by the City or a private developer to ensure predictability and timeliness in the transaction.

Chapter 4

Transportation

Purpose and Overview

The Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for orderly development of the area's street system. This element includes Expressways, Arterials, Collectors, and Local Streets and is an overview of existing transportation corridors and services and recommendations for development of the thoroughfare system plan for Mercedes. The characteristics of the various types of roadways will be discussed further in “Classification of Thoroughfares” and “Classification Functions” sections of the Chapter.

Mercedes’ thoroughfare plan is shown in the ***Long Range Thoroughfare Plan***, that is the City's general plan for extending and widening of the streets and highways within the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. It is based on the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (HCMPO) thoroughfare plan for the County and incorporates local plans and identified needs.

Planning Area

This Transportation Element addresses the same geographic area as other elements of the Comprehensive Plan, which is the area encompassed by the City of Mercedes and its Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). The planning area boundary is illustrated in Figure 1-1, shown previously in Chapter 1.

Other Related Transportation Plans

The Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization (HCMPO) is responsible for regional transportation planning for Hidalgo County in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, and the Federal Highway Administration. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan is the County’s 25-year long-range transportation improvement plan which identifies planned improvements that are eligible to use federal and state funding. The HCMPO maintains a Thoroughfare Plan

for major arterials, collectors and other major roads that serve as a default Thoroughfare Plan for Mercedes. The approved Thoroughfare Plan and future revisions will dictate right-of-way dedication requirements for the purpose of future subdivisions.

Barriers to Thoroughfare Extensions

Mercedes has several natural and man-made barriers that were considered in the development of this element of the Comprehensive Plan. Major constraints include numerous water ways such as canals and irrigation ditches, the floodway and other features including the railroad that runs east-west through downtown Mercedes. Established neighborhoods also present constraints in certain areas of the city where it may be infeasible to extend corridors that were not anticipated when subdivision platting occurred. The establishment of a local Thoroughfare Plan will allow the City to provide future transportation corridors that will facilitate efficient traffic movement within the City and as it extends outside its boundaries.

Authority for Thoroughfare Right-of-Way Acquisition

Under the provisions of Article XI, Section 5 of the Texas Constitution and, Chapter 212.010 of the Texas Local Government Code, the City of Mercedes may require plats to conform to “the general plan of the municipality and its current and future streets...”and “the general plan for the extension of the municipality and its roads, street, and public highways within the municipality and in its extraterritorial jurisdiction ...” Article XI of the Mercedes Home Rule Charter also contains provisions relating to the regulation of plats and thoroughfare developments consistent with a Master Plan.

Requirements for right-of-way dedication and construction of street improvements apply to all subdivisions of land within the City limits and the extraterritorial jurisdiction. In accordance with Texas Local Government Codes, the City has adopted a Subdivision Ordinance regulating such dedication requirements.

Classification of Thoroughfares

Thoroughfares are grouped into classes according to the type of service they are intended to provide. This is measured in terms of their role in movement of traffic and access to adjacent land uses. The classifications to be in the City of Mercedes Thoroughfare Plan include the following six (6) classes:

- ✓ Expressways (350' right-of-way);
- ✓ High Speed Arterials (150' right-of-way);
- ✓ Principal Arterial (120' right-of-way);
- ✓ Minor Arterial (100' right-of-way);
- ✓ Collectors (80' right-of-way); and
- ✓ Local Streets (50' right-of-way)

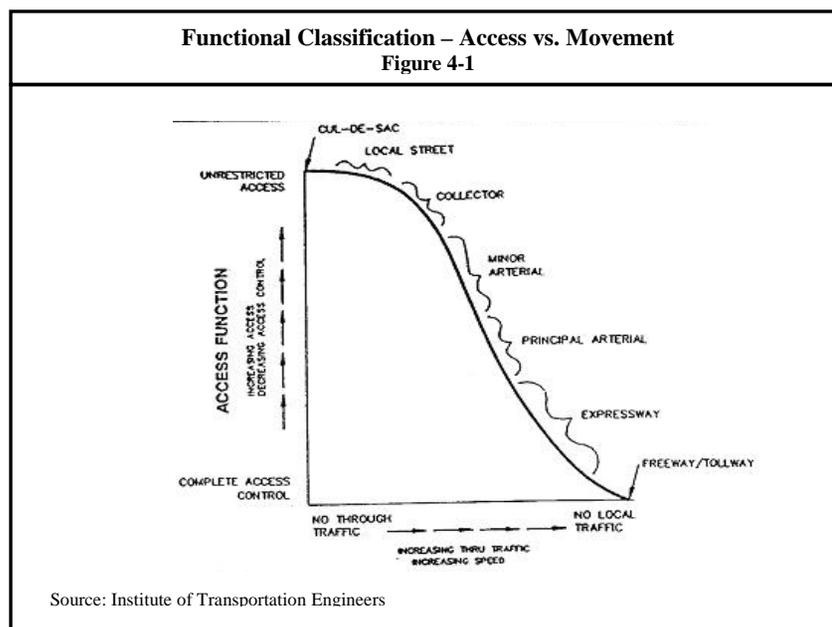
Figure 4-1 illustrates how a classification of a thoroughfare is determined based on increased movement versus limited access or slower movement and more direct land access. The classification of a thoroughfare does not normally change as traffic increases and improvements are made. Classification is based on each road's function in the network and the existing and future travel patterns for the areas served. Classification of the thoroughfare is not necessarily dictated by the number of lanes although higher classes tend to have multiple lanes. For example, a two-lane roadway may often function as an Arterial in developing rural areas. The relationship of classes to movement and access are not distinct boundaries, they represent a continuous gradient with each class having some characteristics of higher and lower classes. Therefore, a particular road may not meet all of the criteria for its designated classification. Those characteristics are further described in the following pages.

Classification Functions

Expressways are devoted entirely to traffic movement with little direct access to land parcels. They are multi-land divided highways with a high degree of access control, meaning that most, if not all, intersections are grade separated and the main lanes provide no direct access to adjoining properties. This facility serves large volumes of high speed traffic and is intended primarily as

through traffic or major circulation within the urban area. Expressway 83 in Mercedes serves this function. It is good to have a parallel Arterial one-half to one mile along either side of an Expressway to provide circulation for traffic movement along one-way frontage roads. Since traffic movement is the primary function of an Expressway, access management is critical. The Texas Department of Transportation severely restricts the number of entrances land adjoining Expressway Frontage Road may have based on traffic volumes and speed limit of the Frontage Road.

Arterials are streets that provide a high degree of mobility, serve relatively high traffic volumes, relatively high operational speeds and service a significant portion of through travel. Expressways and Arterials together typically accommodate 30-40% of a city's travel on 5-10 % of the total road network. These facilities generally connect major traffic generators in the city such as the central business district, large employers, industrial centers and other major activity centers. Some examples of Arterials in the Mercedes area include Business 83, 10th Street (Mile 6 North), Mile 8 North, Mile 1 East, Mile 2 East, Mile 2 West and Rio Rico (FM491). Lower volume roadways that are continuous over long distances may function as Arterials particularly in rural areas. The cross section of an Arterial may vary from five lanes to two-lane roads in developing or fringe areas. A two-mile spacing is generally ideal between Arterials with one-mile spacing between an Arterial and an Expressway. Since traffic movement, not land access, is the primary function of an Arterial, access management is critical. Driveways connecting directly onto Arterials should be minimized to avoid delays caused by turning movements or accidents caused by vehicles entering higher speed roads from driveways. Off-peak travel speeds on Arterials are typically 30-50 mph and peak period speeds are about 20-35 mph. Intersection with other public streets and private access drives should be designed to limit speed differentials between turning vehicles and other traffic to less than 10-15 mph. Signalized intersection spacing should be long enough to allow a variety of signal cycle lengths and timing plans that can be adjusted to meet changes in traffic volumes.



Collectors are connections between Arterials and Local Streets. They serve to collect neighborhood traffic and distribute it to the Arterial network. Collectors also serve as direct access to a wide variety of land uses. They are often used for short distance trips within the City. They should be designed to provide efficient traffic circulation and efficient connection of neighborhoods. Ideally, Collectors should be spaced at one-quarter to one-half mile intervals. Collectors usually carry higher volumes of traffic than Local streets and may require a wider cross section or added turning lanes at Arterials to provide for turning movements. Operational speeds are typically 30-35 mph. Advance identification of local Collector streets is important in planning and managing traffic movement within the city. Future Collectors should be identified on the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan with alignments being approximated for planning in the plat review stage of subdivisions and other developments. Existing Collectors in the City of Mercedes include streets such as Texas Avenue, Florida Avenue, Vermont Avenue, 14th Street and 17th Street.

Local streets are all other streets and roads that are not classified. They include residential streets and access streets that provide direct entrance to residential or commercial property. Access is their primary role, but they must have efficient connections to

higher classifications of roads in order to provide the most efficient routes of travel. It is for this reason that long, dead end local roads (greater than 1,000 feet) should be discouraged. Through traffic and excessive speeds should be discouraged by using appropriate designs and traffic control devices including speed limit signs and appropriate stop and yield signs.

Existing Transportation System

Development of the Transportation Element for the Comprehensive Plan included analysis and evaluation of the existing transportation system. The roadway and traffic conditions of the street network and adjacent existing and proposed land uses were identified and analyzed to assist in determining long-range needs for thoroughfare system development. Some deficiencies in the effective movement of traffic were identified primarily around areas of barriers such as the floodway and other waterways throughout the City, but some were identified that were simple lack of connectivity and can be addressed by acquiring land and building connecting segments. The overall Transportation Thoroughfare Map for the City of Mercedes is included here as **Figure 4-2**.

Existing Roadway Conditions

The biggest factor that determines the ability of a road to carry traffic is the number of travel lanes available. Most of Mercedes' local network consists of two-lane and four-lane roadways. Roadway surface also affects the ability to carry traffic and the desirability of using that roadway. Surface types are generally either paved or unpaved. Most of the roadways within the Mercedes area are paved with asphalt. The condition of the asphalt paving varies with degree of usage and maintenance throughout the City and on the County fringe areas. The unpaved facilities are primarily rural roads or shortcuts that do not serve high traffic volumes and have caliche surfaces.

While it is important to have the capacity to move the traffic (mobility), maintenance of the existing network is also important because without property maintenance mobility is decreased. Users of the roads will find alternate routes if a road is poorly maintained, sometimes one that is not designed for the increased volume and the problem widens in scope. The City of Mercedes is undertaking an aggressive road repair program in 2007-08 and 2008-09 fiscal years using bond monies becoming available due to the cash flow produced by the newly opened Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlet Malls. It is anticipated that by the end of fiscal year

2009 nearly 75% of all existing roadways will either be overlaid, reconstructed, or reconstructed with drainage and utility improvements.

It will become critical that Mercedes develop an on-going annual resurfacing/rehabilitation program for the existing network to extend its lifespan. This program should aim to repair a certain percentage of the network each year and the facilities should be prioritized to maximize the overall usage and life of the developed roadways. There is an estimated network of nearly 75 miles of city streets at this time.¹

Expansion of the system must also be a separate on-going program. Some of the connections and improvements that can be made to improve circulation and mobility in and around the City of Mercedes include:

1. Extension of Mile 8 North from Baseline Road west through the floodway to connect at Mile 2W Road (and FM1015)
2. Extension of a north/south collector from Expressway 83 N. Frontage Road north to Mile 8 North near the eastern bank of the Floodway.
3. Extend a proposed collector between N. Baseline Road and Mile ½ East.
4. Extend the principal arterial Mistletoe/Rio Rico/FM 491 that ends now at Business 83 north to Expressway Frontage.
5. Change classification of Mile 1 ½ E south of Exp. 83 south to Business 83 to a collector for future industrial and retail traffic.
6. Change classification of Mile 2 ½ E south of Exp. 83 south to Business 83 to a collector for future industrial and retail traffic.
7. Show Mile 1 E as a minor arterial to a location north of the Bridge due west on Rio Rico Road and show an east-west connection between that minor arterial and Rio Rico Road.
8. Show a proposed collector extending west from the end of 17th Street to the extension southward of Vermont Ave.
9. Extend Vermont as a collector south all the way to a proposed westward extension of 17th Street.

¹ City of Mercedes Annual Financial and Compliance Report, September 30, 2007

Traffic control devices also play a role in facilitating safe and efficient traffic flow. The application of signals, traffic signs and pavement markings all have an impact on traffic flow and roadway capacity. There are over 1,500 street traffic control signs¹ in the City of Mercedes. In addition, there are twelve fully signalized intersections within the City of Mercedes, all on state maintained facilities (i.e. Texas Avenue, Business 83, Expressway 83 and FM 491). There are also two intersections which have stop signs with overhead flashing lights (Expressway 83 and Mile 1 E; FM 491 and Tiger Lane). Some of the traffic signals located in the City are time based or fixed-time, but some are traffic actuated. Traffic actuated means they have sensors that respond to traffic entering the intersection to provide greater flexibility in accommodating traffic demands in real time. This traffic actuated signal is a more efficient traffic control device and should be implemented whenever additional signals become necessary on the network. High intensity LED lights should also be considered for new and rehabilitation of existing signals. They are brighter and more energy efficient. Since Mercedes does not exceed 50,000 population, the Texas Department of Transportation is responsible for all maintenance on the signal lights located on state facilities (which currently includes all signal within the city of Mercedes).

Railroads

Mercedes is served by a Union Pacific Railroad company. The Union Pacific Railroad leases its facilities within Mercedes to the Rio Grande Valley Switching Company. The railroad crosses the city in an east-west direction on the north side paralleling Business 83. Major intersections are protected with cross-arms and blinking lights but need to be monitored and immediately reported when malfunctions occur. Most intersections in Mercedes are less protected with only advance warning signs or signs and flashing lights. There are only two intersections within the city limits that are protected by cross-arms: Mile 2 West and Vermont Avenue. Texas Avenue has signs and overhead lights only. Ohio Avenue has signs and lights but no cross-arms. The remaining six road crossings inside city limits have only signs as warnings.

The trains generally pass through the city at a nominal speed and provide minor delays on an infrequent basis. Stops and switching activity is at a minimum. Therefore, currently intersection safety is the only notable interest regarding the railroad functions in the city. The railroads have had a major influence on the history and growth of the area and throughout the Valley and continue to perform important transportation services that contribute to the area's economic vitality.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

The City of Mercedes has many irrigation and drainage canals as well as schools, parks and recreational areas that can present opportunities for future development of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. More detailed plans for the development of these opportunities is explored in Chapter 6 – Parks and Recreation.

Walking and bicycling facilities for recreation are one category of transportation, but when they are a necessity due to a lack of vehicular transportation, it is part of the citizenry needs and should be provided when and where possible providing linkages to needed land uses. Pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks are part of the transportation system that serves the need for pedestrian movement in residential neighborhoods, commercial business areas, around schools, parks and other community facilities. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be constructed in compliance with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The City should develop a Safe Routes to Schools Plan and compete for Texas Department of Transportation funding for infrastructure improvements.

Public Transit

The availability of public transit in Mercedes is provided by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council through a demand response service called the “Rio Transit Express”. Rio Transit Express is open to the general public. It is a transportation system that requires a 24-hour advance notice. Limited space is available and occupancy is on a first come, first serve basis. Customers can transfer from rural areas to and from medical facilities, shopping centers and other business locations in 76 communities throughout the Valley from South Padre Island to McAllen/Edinburg/Mission to Raymondville and Port Mansfield. Cost of service depends on which service area the passenger is traveling to but currently ranges from \$3 - \$10 one-way. Vehicles are wheelchair accessible and services are available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Children 0-6 riding with a paying adult ride free. Curbside pickup can be arranged by calling 1-800-574-8322 or for further information visit their website at <http://www.lrgvdc.org/transport.html>

The City also has some fixed stops for customer pickup and will be placing bus shelters during 2008-09 fiscal year. One location is at the City parking lot on 1st Street between Texas and Ohio Avenues. Another location will be at the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlet Malls once construction is completed.

These services provide increased mobility and access to social services, health care, and community activities for residents who are transportationally disadvantaged, including the elderly, handicapped, low income persons, and youths. Winter Texans also represent a potential population of transit users who can benefit from increased mobility provided by a public transit system.

As a participant in the system, the City of Mercedes provides a proportional share of funding to the LRGVDC to fund the system. Monthly ridership reports are made available through the LRGVDC and should be monitored to identify the usage of Mercedes' citizenry.

Major Traffic Generators

The location and type of land uses that generate large numbers of trips have a major influence on traffic volumes and flow patterns. Major traffic generators were identified and considered in reviewing the transportation system and developing the Transportation Chapter. Major traffic generators in the Mercedes area include the following uses and activities:

- RGV Livestock Showgrounds (FM491 north of Expressway 83)
- RGV Premium Outlet Mall (Mile 1 ½ E at Expressway 83)
- L&G Concrete and Engineering (Mile 2 W at Expressway 83)
- South Texas Independent School District Campus (Mile 2 ½ W at Expressway 83)
- Collier Sports Complex (4th to 10th Streets at Frances/Mathis/Garza Avenue)
- Civic Center/HEB Park (Business 83 at Chapman)
- Basketsful Food Pantry (6th Street and Missouri Avenue)
- Wes-Mer Drive In (Business 83 at Mile 2 W)
- Elementary, Middle and High School Campuses (throughout the city)
- City Hall/Library/Police Complex (4th Street and Ohio Avenue)

- H.E.B. (Texas Street at Hidalgo Avenue)
- Mercedes Flea Market (Mile 2 W at Expressway 83)
- Other existing and future large employers and activity centers

Mercedes' Long Range Thoroughfare Plan

The Transportation element of this Comprehensive Plan includes the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan for the City of Mercedes, which identifies the existing and proposed thoroughfare system of Expressways, Arterials and Collector streets. Mercedes' thoroughfare system is comprised of existing and planned expressways, major streets and highways, which require wider or new rights-of-way and may ultimately be developed as two-lane or multi-lane roadways with various cross sections. Mercedes' Long Range Thoroughfare Plan is shown in **Figure 4-2**.

The purpose of thoroughfare planning is to provide a general plan for thoroughfare system development, including the planned widening and extension of its roads, streets, and public highways within the municipality and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. The plan indicates the needed rights-of-way, general alignments, and typical sections for planned roadways, as well as for widening and extensions of existing thoroughfares. Proposed alignments are shown for planned roadways and roadway extensions, and the actual alignments may vary depending upon future subdivision and development.

The Long Range Thoroughfare Plan shows *approximate* alignments and right-of-way requirements for planned thoroughfares that should be considered in platting of subdivisions, right-of-way dedication, and construction of major roadways. The plan does not show future alignments for new local streets, because these function primarily to provide access to adjacent land and their future alignments vary depending on specific land development plans. Collector and local street alignments should be determined by the City and developers as part of planning for the new development.

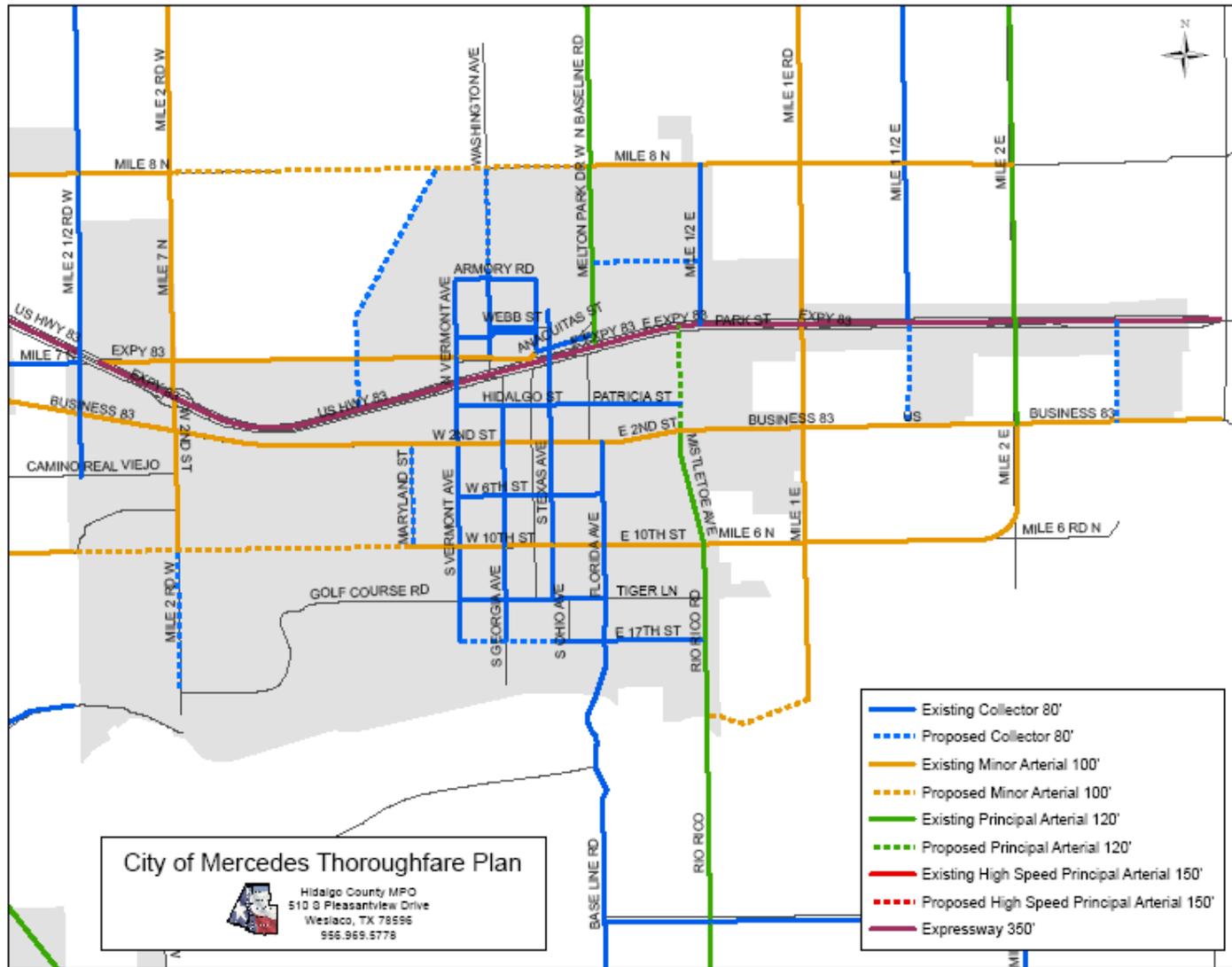
The primary goal of the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan is to ensure adequate right-of-way is reserved in appropriate locations and of sufficient width to allow the most efficient and orderly expansion of the thoroughfare system to serve existing and future transportation needs.

The benefits provided by thoroughfare planning and implementation of the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan includes the following:

- Reservation of adequate rights-of-way for future long-range transportation improvements;
- Making efficient use of available resources by designating and recognizing the major streets that will likely require improvements in the foreseeable future;
- Minimizing the amount of land required for street and highway purposes;
- Identifying the functional role that each street should serve in order to promote and maintain the stability of traffic flow and land use patterns;
- Informing citizens of the streets that are ultimately intended to be developed so that private land use decisions can anticipate which streets may become major traffic facilities in the future;
- Providing information on improvement needs which can be used to determine budget priorities and schedule it into the city's capital improvement program; and
- Minimize the negative impacts of street widening and construction on residential areas and the overall community.

Implementation of the thoroughfare system improvements occurs in slow stages over time as the city grows and builds toward the ultimate system shown in the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan. The fact that a thoroughfare is shown in the plan does not represent a commitment to a specific time frame for construction, nor that the city will build the roadway improvement. Individual thoroughfare improvements may be constructed by a variety of implementing agencies including the City of Mercedes, Hidalgo County – Precinct One, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), as well as private developers and land owners for sections of roadway located within or adjacent to their property.

Figure 4-2



The City of Mercedes, Hidalgo County – Precinct One and TxDOT as well as residents, land owners and developers can use the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan in making decisions relating to land development and the planning, coordination and programming of future transportation improvements. Review by city staff of preliminary and final plats for proposed subdivisions in accordance with the Subdivision Ordinance should include consideration of compliance with the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan in order to ensure consistency and availability of sufficient right-of-way for the general roadway alignments shown in the plan. By identifying thoroughfare locations where right-of-way is needed, land owners and developers can consider the roads in their subdivision planning, dedication of public right-of-way and provision for set backs on new buildings, location of utility lines and other improvements such as landscaping located along existing and planned thoroughfares. While other elements of the Comprehensive Plan are designed to look at potential needs over a 20 to 25 year period, thoroughfare planning requires an even longer-range perspective extending into the very long-term future.

Thoroughfare Development Requirements and Standards

Planning, design and construction of thoroughfares must comply with the development standards that are contained in the City of Mercedes’ Subdivision Ordinance. Requirements for thoroughfare development include standards and criteria governing the following characteristics of thoroughfares:

Location and Alignment of Thoroughfares - The general location and alignment of thoroughfares must be in conformity with the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan contained in the Comprehensive Plan. Subdivision plats should provide for dedication of needed right-of-way for thoroughfares within or bordering the subdivision.

Any major changes in thoroughfare alignment that are inconsistent with the plan require the approval of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Commission through a public hearing process. A major change would include any proposal that involves the addition or deletion of established thoroughfare designations, or changes in the planned general alignment of thoroughfares that would affect parcels of land beyond the specific tract in question.

Right-of-Way and Pavement Width - The pavement width and right-of-way width for thoroughfares and other public streets should conform to the following City minimum standards, unless a variance is granted:

- **High Speed Arterials** - 80 feet pavement width within 150 feet right-of-way width;
- **Principal Arterials** – 60 – 80 feet pavement within 120 feet right-of-way;
- **Minor Arterials** – 50 - 60 feet pavement width within 100 feet right-of-way width;
- **Collectors** - 48 feet pavement width within 80 feet right-of-way width;
- **Local Streets** - 32 feet pavement width within 50 feet right-of-way width.

Plats that include or are bordered by an existing thoroughfare with insufficient right-of-way width should be required to dedicate land to compensate for any right-of-way deficiency of that thoroughfare. When a new thoroughfare extension is proposed to connect with an existing thoroughfare that has narrower right-of-way, a transitional area should be provided.

Continuation and Projection of Streets - Existing streets in adjacent areas should be continued and, when an adjacent area is undeveloped, the street layout should provide for future projection and continuation of streets into the undeveloped area. Stub streets not exceeding 200 feet in length may be provided to permit future expansion of the street system.

Location of Street Intersections - New intersections of subdivision streets with existing thoroughfares within or bordering the subdivision should be planned to align with existing intersections, where feasible, to avoid creation of off-set or jogged intersections and provide for continuity of existing streets, especially collectors and higher classes of thoroughfares.

Angle of Intersection - The angle of intersection for street intersections should be as nearly at a right angle as possible. Corner cutbacks or radii should be required at the acute corner of the right-of-way line, to provide adequate sight distance and turning for emergency vehicles at intersections.

Off-Set Intersections – Offset or "jogged" street intersections must have a minimum separation of 150 feet between the centerlines of the intersecting streets.

Cul-De-Sacs – Cul-de-sac streets should have a maximum length of no more than 1,300 feet, with a paved turnaround pad of 100 feet diameter.

Residential Lots Fronting on Arterials - Subdivision layout should avoid the creation of residential lots fronting on major arterials. Lots should be accessed from collector or local streets within or bordering the subdivision.

Geometric Design Standards and Guidelines - Other requirements and guidelines for the geometric design of thoroughfares and public streets are provided in the Subdivision Ordinance. Standard roadway cross sections for thoroughfares and other public streets are contained in the geometric design guidelines.

Plan Amendment Process

It will be necessary to periodically consider and adopt proposed amendments to the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan to reflect changing conditions and new needs for thoroughfare system improvement and development. A systematic procedure should be followed for making plan amendments, including a set schedule for inviting and considering proposed changes.

The process for amending the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan should be established in the City's Subdivision Ordinance. Typically, plan amendment requests may originate from land owners, civic groups, neighborhood associations, developers, other governmental agencies, city staff, or other interested parties. Proposed revisions should be analyzed by the Planning and Development Department, City Engineer, Public Works Department and other city staff as considered necessary. Staff should be prepared to make a recommendation regarding the requested change at a Planning & Zoning Commission meeting where the matter will be considered first for action. The Planning & Zoning Commission should conduct a public hearing on proposed plan amendments, including required 15-days public notice in advance of the hearing. Proposed amendments should be considered in a fair, reasonable, and open process. The burden for proving compelling reasons for and public benefit of any proposed changes should rest with the requesting parties. Decisions and determinations should represent the best interests of the public.

The revised Long Range Thoroughfare Plan, including any approved plan amendments, should be adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission and submitted with a recommendation for adoption to the City Commission. The City Commission should then take all information available for review before passing the amendment by resolution.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives for the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan are outlined in this section. These goals and objectives are the framework for the Transportation Element.

Goal 4.1 Provide a safe and efficient transportation system to serve all needs and be compatible with existing and projected land use and mobility needs.

- Obj. 4.1.a** Establish an annual overlay program to maintain and improve existing transportation infrastructure on a regular basis.
- Obj. 4.1.b** Obtain right-of-way necessary to develop a unified roadway system of thoroughfares based on function and relative importance as adopted and shown in the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan to serve existing and future mobility needs.
- Obj. 4.1.c** Improve and/or protect access-control on arterials and collectors.
- Obj. 4.1.d** Communicate and cooperate with TxDOT to upgrade all signalized intersections with highly visible/environmentally efficient LED lighting and self-actuating signals.
- Obj. 4.1.e** Seek opportunities for improving north-south travel movement across the northern portion of the city particularly around major activity centers such as the Livestock Showgrounds.
- Obj. 4.1.f** Seek opportunities to make connections in existing urbanized areas, such as new roadways constructed across enclosed canals or within unimproved rights-of-way existing, consistent with objectives for maintaining neighborhood integrity.
- Obj. 4.1.g** Promote the designation and enforcement of load zoned thoroughfares for through movement of truck traffic, consistent with objectives for maintaining neighborhood integrity.
- Obj. 4.1.h** Wherever feasible, right-of-way dedication for thoroughfares should conform to the City of Mercedes' standards for right-of-way width, in order to accommodate thoroughfare improvements as needed in future years.
- Obj. 4.1.i** The policy of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Commission should be to maintain the consistency and integrity of the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan and keep exceptions and variances to a minimum.
- Obj. 4.1.j** Update necessary sections of the City Subdivision Ordinance to reflect the elements outlined in this element of the Comprehensive Plan.

<p>Goal 4.2 Promote the reduction of vehicular/rail traffic conflicts and increased safety while supporting the maintenance and expansion of facilities necessary for industrial development and international trade.</p>
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- Obj. 4.2.a** Cooperate with the railroad to identify needed improvements that will reduce traffic delays, improve safety, and alleviate other troublesome impacts of rail movements through the City.

Obj. 4.2.b Support and seek grant funding for safety improvements at roadway/railroad grade crossings.

Goal 4.3 Promote alternative modes of transportation and related facilities including pedestrians, bicycles, public transit, and others.

Obj. 4.3.a Prioritize funding for expansion of the walking trail at the Civic Center/H.E.B. Park

Obj. 4.3.b Continue exploration of opportunities to develop a bicycling and walking trail system to serve both recreational and alternative transportation needs for pedestrian and bicyclists, and enhance the natural, scenic and wildlife habitat qualities of the Mercedes urbanized area.

Obj. 4.3.c Continue to partner with agencies such as Los Caminos Del Rio to raise awareness and maximize opportunities for bicycling and trails facilities within existing canal and floodway right-of-ways.

Obj. 4.3.c Develop an integrated system of safe and efficient on-street bikeways and off-street paths and trails accessible for all areas of the city and connecting neighborhoods, schools, parks, shopping, and employment centers.

Obj. 4.3.d Continue to utilize programs such as Safe Routes To Schools to assist in the provision of pedestrian walkways, sidewalks, crosswalks, ramps, and curb cuts along city streets in areas with significant school pedestrian traffic, including compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Obj. 4.3.e Consider funding an annual sidewalk improvement program similar to the proposed street maintenance program to improve sidewalks in disrepair and construct new sidewalks in areas where high pedestrian traffic warrant, especially in areas of schools and parks where pedestrians are likely to be children.

Obj. 4.3.f Monitor needs and support the expansion of the demand response transit system for the elderly and disabled.

Obj. 4.4.g Continue to monitor transit ridership and cooperate with the LRVGDC to provide for the needs of the citizens

Chapter 5

Image

Image is not a chapter that is typically included in a Comprehensive Plan, but at the kickoff meetings for the Comprehensive Planning Effort for Mercedes and during the research performed in advance preparation for the updating of the Plan it became clear that “Image” would be an element demanded by the citizenry in Mercedes. “Image” includes both the physical appearance of the City as well as image of non-physical attributes in the way City works with citizens, businesses and developers and operates municipal services.

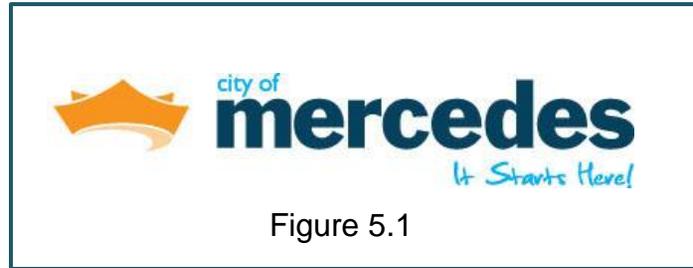
The term “image” is synonymous with appearance and impression so many of the items that would need to be addressed under image would be best captured under “Code Enforcement”. That was identified in the 1969 Comprehensive Plan as an issue and later in the 1992 Comprehensive Plan that was never adopted. In fact, the 1969 Plan made an ominous observation “It is painfully obvious that the existing codes and ordinances of the city have been, at best, sporadically enforced; if they . . . are not impartially enforced in the future, the city will not reach the potential we have outlined herein, but will very probably lose residents and show serious deterioration within the next twenty years.” Items specifically identified included weedy lots, and substandard and abandoned homes. Today we also get many complaints about junk vehicles, accumulation of junk and loose dogs.

How a city is perceived by its residents and by outsiders, whether it is accurate or not, has an impact on tourism and plays a vital role in whether companies decide to move operations to an area. Image is also vital in determining who will invest to build their homes in an area, and where outside investment will be brought in to provide affordable housing options for residents who may choose to live in the community. It is often in the smallest of details that the image of a place is made. A lack of attention to details

signals that there is a lack of accountability or the perception that larger issues are not attended to if the details are overlooked. Yet, many times, the details take more focused and protracted energy than some of the big items.

Having no perception is actually not a bad thing according to Allen Adamson, managing director of Landor Associates, a New York brand consulting firm that has helped overhaul city perceptions. A city with a negative image is much tougher to turn around. In order to create a perception or change a perception the city needs to focus almost exclusively on a single theme. For example if a city wants to create the perception that it is a good place for business then that should be its main focus. But it *really must be* business friendly or the image campaign will not succeed. Then it takes a marketing theme and campaign and several years of focused activity to achieve the goal.

The City of Mercedes in conjunction with the Economic Development Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce has undertaken an “image” campaign of sorts called a marketing plan that includes media objectives and strategies with a new progressive logo for all three entities that show a unity, yet distinct identity through their color. The logo incorporates a crown, traditional of “La Reina del Valle” but modernizes it and adds the catch phrase *‘It Starts Here’* (See figure 5.1). *‘It’* can be anything the city wishes to emphasize, whether it be shopping starts here, quality of life starts here, etc. This campaign includes saturation of the media including billboard, radio and television spots as well as trade shows and development of a variety of printed materials. However, the primary target of this material is visitors from outside the community. Another concentrated effort will be necessary to work on resident perceptions. This has begun with a State of the City address that took place in April 2010. Local newspaper stories and direct mail periodic newsletters as well as webpage development are also planned to address this need long-term.



SIGNAGE

A “legible city” is another goal of a desirable city image. Legible refers to accessibility and maneuverability of a city and how this can be used to increase movement and access and stimulate visitor usage, communication of information and job creation. Legible cities improve way-finding and information systems both in electronic form and hard format across the city, putting the customer first, to provide specific trip facility information prior, during and on arrival at the destination. Much of this “legibility” can be attributed to a good network of signage. A cluttered landscape of signs of all types, sizes and materials on major corridors can be unattractive and confusing particularly on major entrance corridors. Defunct signs add to the visual clutter and detract from a city’s legibility. All signs for businesses or functions that are no longer occurring, as well as outdated political signs should be required to be removed promptly. Yard sale signs in the right-of-way are already banned in Mercedes, but enforcing this regulation must remain a priority for the enforcement division.

In addition, the absence of dependable street signage and significant building way finding signage can be frustrating to the newcomer or visitor. Worse yet, the absence of reliable addressing whether located on the street block signs or on buildings can even be life threatening when emergency personnel are new or unfamiliar to the community.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE CITY IMAGE

An urban planner born in 1918, Kevin Lynch wrote a book published in 1960 entitled “The Image of the City”. In this book he outlined that the image of a city depended upon mental representations, along with the actual city. They are comprised of many unique elements, which are defined by Lynch as a network of **paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks**.

Paths are channels by which people move along in their travels. Examples of paths are roads, trails, and sidewalks. The second element – edges, are all other lines not included in the path group. Examples of edges include walls (such as Expressway Frontage walls), and levees. This can also include entranceway signage designed to mark the edges of the city. Citizens have suggested this type of signage with landscaping for the main gateways into Mercedes including Expressway 83, Business 83, FM 491 and others as the city grows.

Next, districts are sections of the city, usually relatively substantial in size, which have an identifying character about them. A wealthy neighborhood or a particularly decayed neighborhood, are examples. The fourth element – nodes, are points or strategic spots where there is an extra focus, or added concentration of city features. Prime examples of nodes can include a busy intersection or a popular city building such as the Mercedes Civic Center. Finally, landmarks are external physical objects that act as reference points. Landmarks can be a store such as Ten/Ten that all the locals know, the Outlet Mall that everyone knows, or any other object that aids in orientation when way-finding.

Focusing on these five elements can be costly and take a long time, but if a high quality, unique experience is provided through these five elements it is no doubt that visitors and residents alike will have a memorable city experience.

COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPING AND PHYSICAL APPEARANCES

The city and the economic development corporation have recently invested over one million dollars to upgrade the appearance of the downtown area. That investment included brick pavers, street furniture such as benches and trash cans and beautiful landscaping improvements including the watering systems necessary to sustain it. This investment has been coupled with an on-going façade improvement grant program. This provides some matching funds for property owners to improve their storefronts and signage which has stimulated many more of the downtown merchants to undertake improvements to their buildings. The result is a downtown appearance that is the envy of many neighboring cities.

The landscaping element adds a sharp visual contrast to the built environment and really catches the attention of those who might not normally notice the improvements. The flowering trees have been the subject of newspaper articles and many inquiries at city hall.

The city has set the example and can now raise the expectations. The current landscaping ordinance has minimal requirements for placement of landscaping at new businesses, none for existing businesses, and no requirements for watering systems to maintain any required landscaping. It would be desirable to update the existing landscape ordinance increasing requirements and perhaps establishing entrance corridors where the amount of required landscaping could justifiably be increased even further. This additional cost may be perceived as a burden by those who own property along the identified corridors, but education of the value of landscaping must be advocated. In addition, the economic development corporation has set up several categories of assistance matching grants for storefronts, signage, parking lot improvements and code compliance. Perhaps they would consider addition of landscaping and irrigation systems for beautification of existing businesses. This would accomplish two purposes: offset the additional requirements that might be seen as a burden to those identified entranceway corridors, and encourage existing businesses to improve since any new ordinance requirements would only apply to new businesses. Another consideration on major entrance corridors might be to consider

similar styles of landscaping. A common theme can have a bigger visual impact than a hodgepodge or variety of plantings. This has been established downtown and is quite effective.

Another detail of business that is a necessity for all is trash disposal. The appearance of the disposal area can greatly detract from the site if careful attention is not paid to the details. It should be required that all commercial dumpsters be screened on all sides and provide a landscape buffer on three sides. This is a small detail that would help decrease illegal dumping, animal rummaging and reduce other unsightly views.

RESIDENTIAL APPEARANCES

Mercedes recently celebrated its Centennial in existence. That is quite a milestone, but with age comes deterioration in many cases. Some of Mercedes' oldest neighborhoods are some of its most beautiful, with colonial homes that have been kept up and well maintained. However, some other neighborhoods have not fared as well. Maintaining an older home comes at a cost and some of the residents are unable to keep up with that responsibility or choose not to. We have to be prepared to address both situations.

The code enforcement program must provide owners and renters who are able to maintain their property but choose not to, incentive in the form of education and when necessary, consequences through Municipal Court. The most commonly reported 'image' violations include tall weeds and grass, junk vehicles, accumulation of junk and abandoned housing structures. While these are 'image' issues, they can also become more serious health and safety concerns which must be addressed in a timely manner. Tall weeds and grass can harbor rodents and allow ground for breeding mosquitoes. Junk vehicles can provide attractive nuisances that entice a bored child. Vacant structures can become safe houses for crime and delinquency. The City of Mercedes has ordinances that address all these issues and more. The city currently has one full time and one part-time code enforcement officer that administer all of these ordinances. A full time tractor mower is also employed to mow the lots where we do not get a timely response or in cases

where the property has been abandoned. The department tracks man and equipment hours, adds an administrative fee and bills the property owner for the work done. If payment is not received liens are placed on the property to be collected on at a future time when property is transferred or auctioned.

For those residents who genuinely want to keep up their property but cannot due to their own physical condition, age or financial situation we have to be prepared to offer options. The City started a program in 2009 that provides some seed money for paint and minor repairs for someone who falls into this category and could use some help. This year, the city is looking to implement a full blown partnership with Keep Texas Beautiful and start our own chapter – Keep Mercedes Beautiful. The Chamber of Commerce and EDC have committed to providing some additional funding to these efforts. That money, coupled with the seed money in the Code Enforcement division should be enough to expand the program significantly. The Keep Mercedes Beautiful program will need many volunteers to be successful. This program established a fifteen member board that is charged with creating a mission statement, doing a community assessment and prioritizing projects to be accomplished over a multi-year time frame. Some possibilities include:

- Evaluating the pros and cons of allowing cars to park on yards in residential neighborhoods
- Creation and maintenance of a historic district and/or historic landmarks
- Creation and maintenance of a museum
- Semi-parking within neighborhoods and on railroad right-of-way
- Outdoor vending limitations
- Increased parking lot landscaping requirements
- Review of overall landscaping requirements
- Review of sign regulations

FUTURE IMAGES

The City of Mercedes' image as a business community changed dramatically in 2006 when the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlet Mall opened and shattered sales records of all other Chelsea mall properties. This tremendous success has raised expectations of the citizens for their government. However, decades of forgone infrastructure improvements due to the lack of financial wherewithal cannot be reversed overnight or even in a few years. The elected officials and administration are working hard to meet the increased expectations of the citizens while lowering property taxes in the last three fiscal years. Property tax rates have been lowered from 0.87/\$100 valuation to 0.85 in fiscal year '07-'08; then to 0.8050 in fiscal year '08-'09; and below the 80 cent mark to 0.79 per hundred dollar valuation this current fiscal year '09-'10.

The city has undertaken a multi-year program of street repairs. We recognized that any asbestos clay sewer lines existing within the right-of-way needed to be replaced at the time of the reconstruction so that and any drainage improvements necessary were planned into the cost of the overall improvements. The first phase reconstructed a total of five different city streets constituting 36 city block or roughly two miles of city streets and was completed in April 2009 (See Figure 5.3). A second phase of street repairs commenced in April 2009 and is nearing completion in June 2010 (See Figure 5.4). This phase reconstructed portions of seventeen different city streets, approximately 55 city blocks, just over three miles of streets with accompanying utility, drainage and sidewalk improvements needed. Phase three is under design and scheduled to be bid out early fall 2010.

A new Public Works Facility is under construction on FM 491 north of Mile 8 North. It is expected to be completed Fall 2010. When Public Works moves out of the downtown area, that aged building will be demolished to make way for a new state of the art fire station and greatly modernize our fire facilities and improve the appearance of the downtown area.

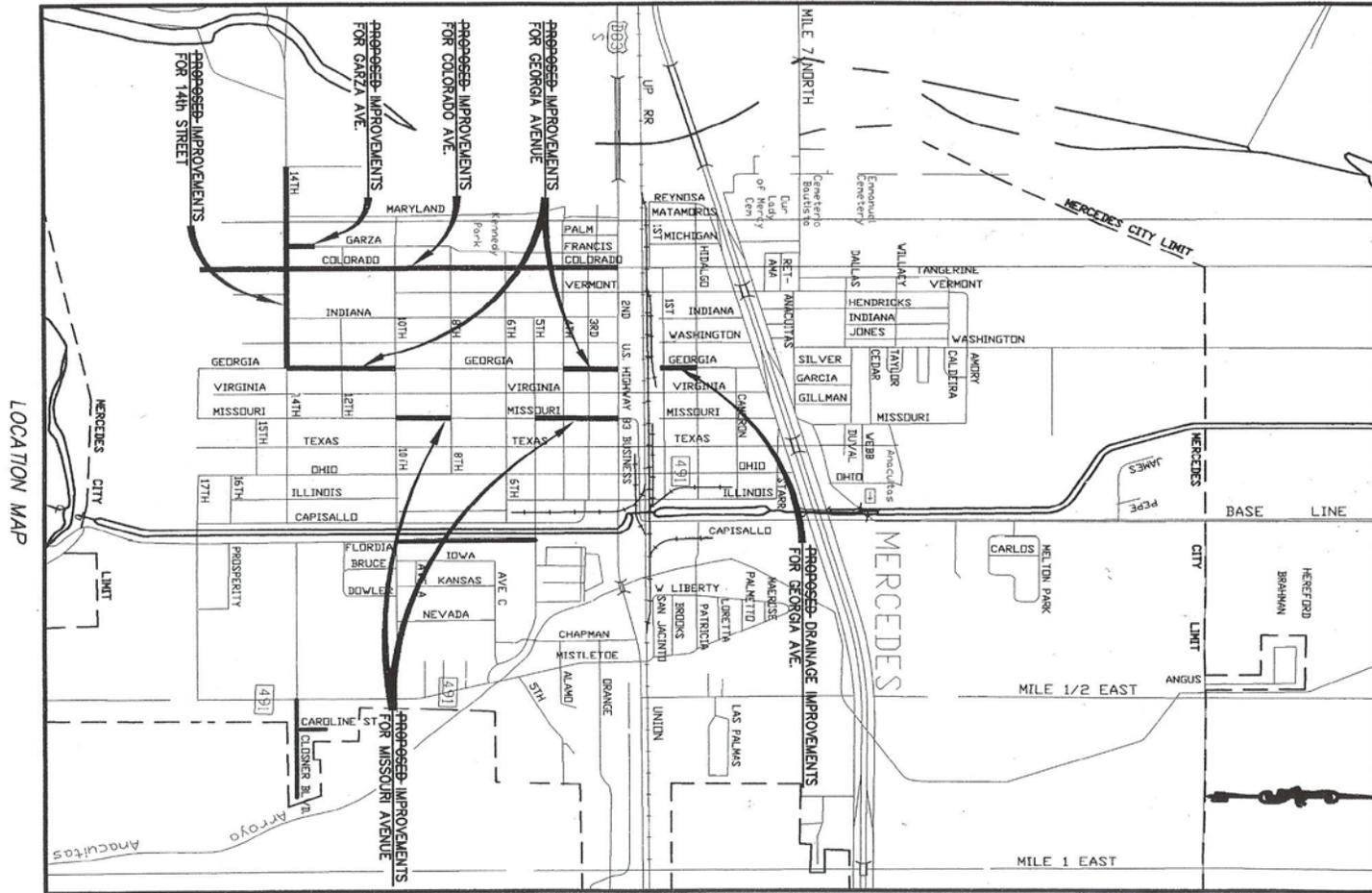


Figure 5.2

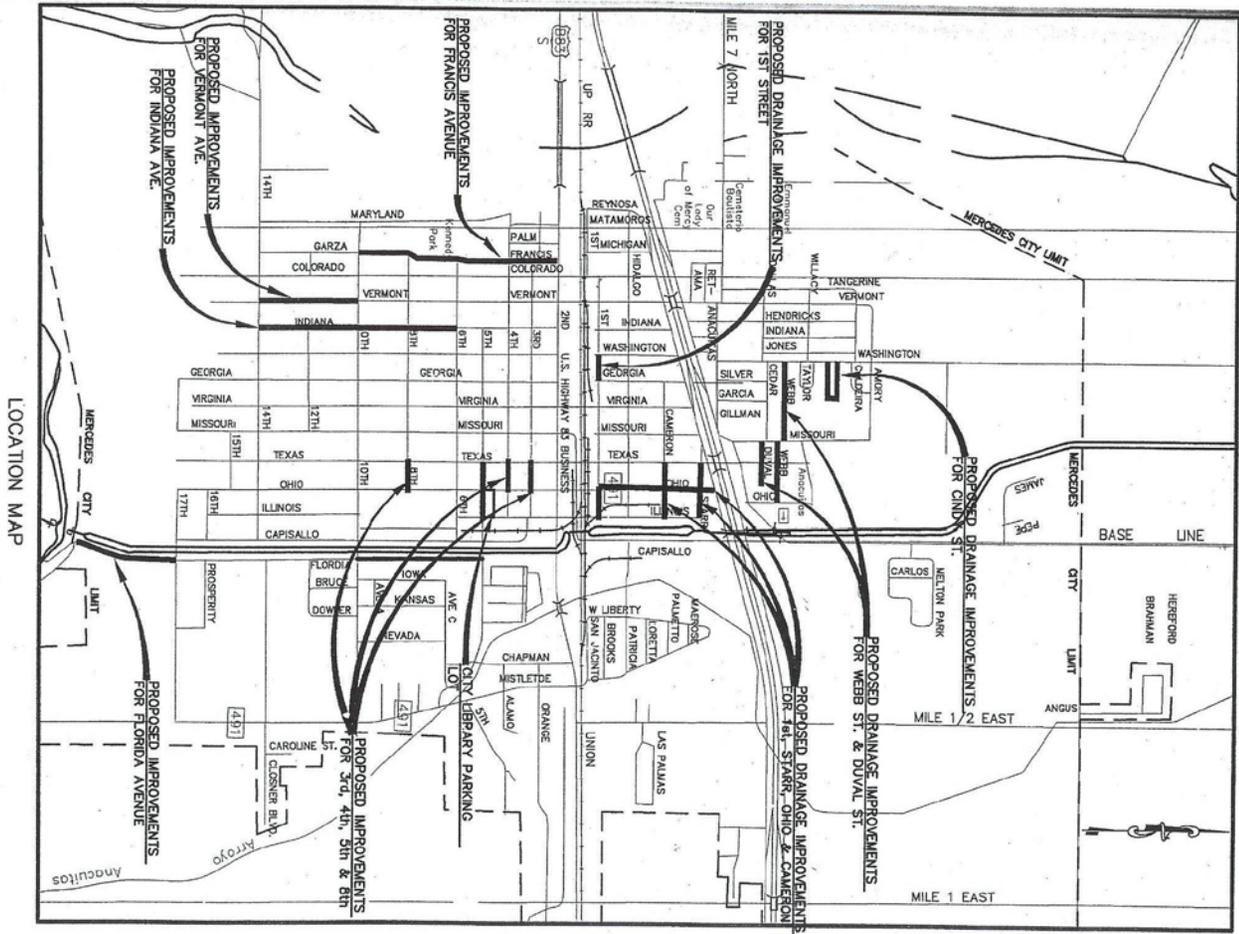


Figure 5.3

Also currently underway is a major sewer plant expansion that will more than double the capacity of daily waste water treatment (from 2.3 mgd to 5.0 mgd). Miles of decrepit underground sewer main lines are being relined with fiberglass coating that will greatly extend their service life without requiring excavation and street cutting. All of this and the myriad of other on-going efforts must be effectively communicated to our citizenry so they can be assured that the Mercedes of the past is gone and great things are coming now and in the future.

GOALS

The goals and objectives for the Image Element of the Comprehensive Plan are outlined in this section.

Goal 5.1 Continue to fund a strong Code Enforcement Division that can consistently and effectively implement ordinances relating to community health and image.

Obj. 5.1.a Ensure Mower has up to date, well maintained equipment for use on weedy lots.

Obj. 5.1.b Ensure continued education in Code Enforcement personnel seeking opportunities to update ordinances

Goal 5.2 Implement a “Keep Mercedes Beautiful” Committee

Obj. 5.2.a Partner with other agencies to obtain resources to hold quarterly neighborhood cleanups

Obj. 5.2.b Develop an annual clean up calendar so all parts of the city get some attention at least once a year

Obj. 5.2.c Establish a Keep Mercedes Beautiful to create a mission statement for the program and set further priorities in enhancement of Mercedes' image

Goal 5.3 Implement Recycling in Mercedes

Obj. 5.3.a Determine the market for recyclables, possibly partnering with neighboring cities that have successful recycling programs in place

Obj. 5.3.b Implement a drop-off recycling station at City Hall and at the new Public Works Facility

Obj. 5.3.c Investigate other drop-off recycling station location possibilities throughout the city to make it more convenient for citizens to recycle

Obj. 5.3.d Continue to monitor recycling efforts by citizens to investigate the long-term possibility of curbside recycling

Goal 5.4 Establish a Way-Finding Program Throughout the City of Mercedes

Obj. 5.4.a Ensure all city streets are marked with clear signage identifying both name and block address ranges

Obj. 5.4.b Utilize the Chamber of Commerce to solicit input from visitors to our community who can more readily identify shortcomings in our way-finding program

Obj. 5.4.c Establish way-finding signage in the community for important city facilities such as city hall, the library, municipal court, police, fire, the chamber of commerce, economic development corporation, etc.

Obj. 5.4.c Establish way-finding signage at City Hall

APPENDIX 5A – Properties on Condemnation List

#	PROPERTY ADDRESS	TYPE OF PROPERTY	STATUS
1	629 S INDIANA	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st noticed 5-21-10
2	832 S INDIANA	SINGLE FAMILY	owner has boarded up structure and clean property
3	1209 S MISSOURI	SINGLE FAMILY	approved for demo - owner pulled six months permit to repair
4	120 N VIRGINIA	SINGLE FAMILY	property owned by MISD - will notify all entities-will mail 1st notice ASAP
5	544 GARCIA	COMM. & RES.	approved for demo (Rcvd PO for asbestos-waiting for the final asbestos report)
6	225 N Colorado	Comm/Apartments	mailed 1st notice on 5-18-09 (for repairs only) will mail 2nd and final notice
7	750 S Texas	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st noticed 5-20-09 (owner pulled permit for repairs) repairs have been made
8	555 S Ohio	COMMERCIAL	mailed 1st notice on 5-18-09 (for repairs only) mailed 2nd & final notice 3-29-30 - Bagdad Apts.
9	Express/Frontage/Dawson	COMMERCIAL	mailed 1st noticed 4-20-09 (owner has repair structure and new business has open - (body shop)
10	540 W 6th	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st noticed 6-18-09 (approve for demo - owner requested more time to repair
11	740 N FM 491	COMMERCIAL	Scheduled for public hearing 5-3-10(Ross Cotton Gin) approve for demo
12	900 S Missouri	COMMERCIAL	mailed 1st noticed 7-7-09 - 9-25-09 owner pulled demo permit -demo by owner
13	950 S Texas	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st noticed 5-18-09 (12-8-09 owner pulled permit for demo)-demo by owner
14	605 S Missouri	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st noticed 7-18-09 - change of ownership and had to mailed them 1st notice 3-15-10
#	PROPERTY ADDRESS	TYPE	STATUS

15	718 S Georgia	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st noticed 7-22-09 (owner has advised they will demo) will mail 2nd and final notice
16	1401 S Ohio	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post (8-14-09) owner getting a home improvement loan to repair-mail 2nd and final notice
17	725 S TEXAS	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post (11-24-09) owner demo - mail notice to clean up all the rubbish
18	1245 S GEORGIA	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 12-2-09-3/1/10 - approve for demo - process of accepting bids for demo
19	9254 MILE 2 1/2 N	COMMERCIAL	mailed 1st notice and post 1-4-2010-order title-4-7-10 owner advised will start getting bids to demo
20	700 KANSAS	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 1-6-10
21	826 S TEXAS	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 1-6-10 (realtor has advised will they will do repairs-getting est.)
22	912 W 6TH	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 1-21-10 (owner has pulled permit to repair) repairs have been made
23	845 S WASHINGTON	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 1-29-10 (owner call-will see if structure can be repair or will demo-California)
24	1002 JONES	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 2-22-10 - will mail public hearing notice asap-order title report
25	405 E 10TH ST	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 3-4-10 (owner is waiting for ins. Adjuster) will mail 2nd and final notice
26	400 DAWSON	COMMERCIAL	mailed 1st notice and post 2-1-10 (owner has clean property and removed m/h)
27	1048 S GEORGIA	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 3-25-10
28	622 GARCIA AVE	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 3-25-10 (owner has advised they will demo structure asap)
29	1233 S WASHINGTON	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 2-22-10 (owner has advised they will repair)no permits pulled
#	PROPERTY ADDRESS	TYPE	STATUS

30	926 HEIDRICK	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 2-19-10 will mail public hearing notice asap-order title report
31	258 S MILE 2 W	SINGLE FAMILY	mailed 1st notice and post 5-10-10

Chapter 6

Parks and Recreation

Purpose and Overview

The Mercedes Parks and Recreation chapter recognizes the need for a comprehensive park plan that continues to enhance the quality of life for all residents and visitors to Mercedes. The redevelopment of existing parks and planning for future open space creates the need to develop a long-range strategic plan and implementation program that considers current needs, shifting demands, and multiple uses. Each park must be designed to have its own unique landscape character. The planners and designers, to create a unique sense of place for the neighborhood and to continually expand diversity in the landscape, should encourage diversity in design. As the parks system landscape evolves and develops over time, the identity of Mercedes will be further reinforced and increasingly appreciated by its citizens and visitors. The primary source of research for this chapter was an extensive municipal public consultation process.

The City of Mercedes provides its residents with a high quality of life that is enjoyed through its parks and open space system. The city has a comprehensive park system that provides ample opportunity for active and passive recreation activities. Currently, the City of Mercedes is responsible for 41.1 acres of developed parkland consisting of four neighborhood parks ranging in size from 1.1 acres to 11.3 acres and one community park containing 25.7 acres.

The purpose of the full parks plan is to guide development phasing and future parkland development; to position the city to be able to readily respond to emerging trends in the community; and to meet the challenges associated with continued growth. The plan also strengthens the city's competitive edge when applying for grants.

Public Input

The consultant team provided several different avenues of public input in the development of the plan during the needs assessment phase of the plan. First, individual interviews of key staff, community leaders, recreation providers and user groups helped provide insight into the park and recreation needs for Mercedes. Next there was a community needs assessment survey conducted in Spanish and English. These surveys were sent out through the local school children. This survey was distributed in February 2008. A total of 376 surveys were returned. Eighty-five percent (85%) of those were completed in English, with the remaining fifteen percent (15%) completed in Spanish. The results of the citizen survey do not provide a broad mandate to provide new or additional facilities, but rather emphasize maintaining and/or upgrading the current infrastructure in the parks and recreation system.

Finally, in July, August and September of 2007 the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board held public meetings and a public hearing specifically for the discussion and gathering of public input regarding the parks system and the overall plan. The City Commission also held public hearings in April and in May, 2008. Park standards and specific potential projects for various parts of town were discussed and incorporated before the plan's adoption.

Existing City Parks and Recreation System

There are four developed and one vacant neighborhood park. These consist of Goza Park (Melton #2) containing 1.5 acres, S.M. Hinojosa Park (Melton #1) containing 1.5 acres, Saladino Park (Queen City) containing 1.1 acres, HEB/Civic Center Park containing 11.3 acres and the undeveloped Las Flores del Valle tract with 1.2 acres. The community park is Collier Complex containing 25.7 acres. Each park has been inventoried and the results are shown in Table 6.1 below.

TABLE 6.1 Inventory of Mercedes' Parks

	Goza Park (Melton #2)	S.M. Hinojosa Park (Melton #1)	Kennedy/Collier Park	Saladino Park (Queen City)	HEB/Civic Center Park	Las Flores del Valle	TOTAL
ACREAGE	1.5	1.5	25.7	1.1	11.3	1.2	42.3
AMENITY							
Indoor Recreation Center			1				1
Civic Center					1		1
Competitive Baseball Fields			4				4
Basketball Courts	1.5	0.5	1	0.5	2		5.5
Multi-Purpose Court			1*				1
Swimming Pools			1				1
Picnic Tables	4	2	19		11		36
Large Pavillions					1		1
Benches	6	6	11	3	17		43
Exercise Stations					4		4
Skate Park					1		1
Playgrounds**	1	1	1	1	1		5
Spring Rider/Hoppers/Builders**	1	1	3	1	4		10
Swing Set (4 seat)**	1	1	4	1	3		10
Park Slide**	1	1	3	1	2		8

* One multi-purpose court (basketball, volleyball, etc) is inside the Indoor Recreation Center.

** Each playground is comprised of a minimum of one each of the following: spring rider/hopper/builder, swing set and park slide.

Standards for Development of Parks and Recreation

Standards for the development of parks and recreation involved a comparison of Mercedes' existing parkland and facilities to standards adopted by the Mercedes City Commission upon recommendation of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee. They are a modified version for the standards published by the National Recreation & Park

Association (NRPA). Acreage standards and facility standards, based upon Mercedes current and projected population numbers were analyzed to provide an objective summary of the surpluses and deficiencies review of the Mercedes park system.

The most common standards for park planning guidelines are the published standards by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). The NRPA recognizes the importance of establishing and using park and recreation standards as:

1. A national expression of minimum acceptable facilities for the citizens of urban and rural communities
2. A guideline to determine land requirements for various kinds of park and recreation areas and facilities
3. A basis for relating recreation needs to spatial analysis within a community wide system of parks and open space areas.
4. One of the major structuring elements that can be used to guide and assist regional development.
5. A means to justify the need for parks and open space within the overall land use pattern of a region or community.

The Mercedes City Commission has adopted a modified version for the standards published by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) based on the size of the community now and the close proximity of other cities in our area giving us a unique opportunity to share resources for efficiency.

Neighborhood Park - by size, program and location provides space and recreation activities for the immediate neighborhood in which it is located. They are one (1) to fifteen (15) acres in size and generally serve a one-half (0.5) to one and one-half (1.5) mile radius but may deviate based on arterial street patterns and serves a population range of 1,000 - 5,000. Mercedes has adopted the NRPA standard of 1 acre per 1,000 citizens. (Melton Park #2 - Goza, Melton Park #1 - S.M. Hinojosa, Saladino Park - Queen City, and HEB/Civic Center Park are all examples of Mercedes' neighborhood parks.)

Table 6.2 Facility Standards

Amenity	Min. National Standards	Mercedes		City Inventory	Surplus/(Def.)
		Recommends 1/	Target Based on 2007 Pop.		
Competitive Soccer Fields	1 per 10,000	5,000	3	0	(3.0)
Football Fields	1 per 20,000	20,000	1	0	(1.0)
Competitive Baseball Fields	1 per 5,000 1 lighted field per 30,000	5,000	3	4	1.0
Competitive Softball Fields	1 per 5,000	5,000	3	0	(3.0)
Basketball Courts	1 per 5,000	5,000	3	5.5	2.5
Tennis Courts	1 per 2,000	2,000	8	0	(8.0)
Volleyball	1 per 5,000	5,000	3	0	(3.0)
Swimming Pools	1 per 20,000	20,000	1	1	0.0
Civic Center	N/A	25,000	1	1	0.0
Playgrounds	N/A	3,000	5	5	0.0
Picnic Tables	N/A	600	27	36	9.0
Large Pavillions	N/A	5,000	3	1	(2.0)
Multi-purpose Court	1 per 10,000	10,000	2	1	(1.0)
Paved Trails (miles/system)	1 system/region	20,000	0.8	1	0.2
Skate Park	N/A	25,000	1	1	0.0
Multi-purpose Field	N/A	20,000	1	0	(1.0)

N/A - No minimum national standard has been established for this amenity

Community Park – by size, program and location provides space and recreation activities for a defined service area, the entire city or a significant geographic segment of the city’s population. They are between 15 – 99 acres in size and serve a wide segment to all of the city’s population generally within a two to five mile radius. These facilities should be centrally located if planned to serve a particular geographic segment of the city and should provide vehicular access and parking adequate to minimize adjacent neighborhood impacts. Mercedes has adopted the NRPA service standard for Community Parks at 5 acres per 1,000 citizens. (Collier Complex is an example of Mercedes Community Park.)

Metropolitan Park – are large park facilities that serve several communities and range in size from 100 – 499 acres. The NRPA standard for this park is 5 acres per 1,000 citizens but Mercedes has opted not to include this classification at this time due to its relatively small population.

Needs Analysis for Parks and Recreation

Therefore based on the existing conditions in the City of Mercedes a standard of 6 acres of parkland per 1,000 population (including 1/,1000 neighborhood parks and 5/1,000 community parks) has been adopted. Based on current and projected population figures the neighborhood park standard is currently at a small surplus, but the community park needs are at a deficit as detailed below in **Tables 6.3 and 6.4**.

The City of Mercedes is currently meeting its standard for Neighborhood parkland. However, if no new parkland is acquired, the inventory will become deficient by 2010 and that deficiency will continue to grow.

TABLE 6.3 Neighborhood Park Needs			
Recommended Standard - 1.0 acres per 1,000 population			
Current Acreage/Ratio - 16.6 acres/1.02 acres per 1,000 population			
Year	Population*	Recommended Standard (in acres)	Surplus/(Deficit) in acres
2000	13,649	13.65	2.95
2007	16,206	16.2	0.4
2010	19,241	19.2	(2.60)
2015	21,849	21.85	(5.25)
2020	24,525	24.53	(7.93)
2025	27,370	27.37	(10.77)

* Population Numbers for 2000 are from actual US Census Data; 2007 are estimates from the Texas State Data Center; 2010 – 2025 are estimates from the Texas State Data Center

TABLE 6.4 Community Park Needs			
Recommended Standard - 5.0 acres per 1,000 population			
Current Acreage/Ratio - 25.7 acres/1.9 acres per 1,000 population			
Year	Population	Recommended Standard (in acres)	Surplus/(Deficit) in acres
2000	13,649	68.24	(42.55)
2007	16,206	81.03	(55.33)
2010	19,241	96.21	(70.51)
2015	21,849	109.25	(83.55)
2020	24,525	122.63	(96.93)
2025	27,370	136.85	(111.15)

The City of Mercedes is currently deficient over 55 acres of Community Parkland. If no new Community Parkland is acquired that deficiency will steadily grow to a deficiency of almost 100 acres by 2020.

If the City is able to successfully negotiate joint use agreements with the local school districts, more facilities will be available to the public, thus reducing the stated deficiencies.

As seen in **Table 6.5**, the City of Mercedes is deficient in the following amenities:

Table 6.5: Park & Recreation Deficiencies Based on Facility Standards				
Facility	Current Deficiency	2010 Deficiency	2015 Deficiency	2020 Deficiency
Competitive Soccer Field	3	4	4	5
Football Field	1	1	1	1
Competitive Softball Field	3	4	4	5
Tennis Courts	8	10	11	12
Volleyball Courts	3	4	4	5
Large Pavillions	2	3	3	4
Multi-purpose Court	1	1	1	1
Multi-purpose Field	1	1	1	1

Summary of Key Recreation Needs

The recommendations for outdoor recreation in the **Northeast Quadrant** will provide for acquisition of a minimum of 10-acres to develop a wetland downstream from the City of Mercedes Wastewater plant. Acquisition of fifteen acres or more will help address the deficiency of Community Park land identified earlier. This project is already partially funded through a grant from TCEQ as well as a local match. The project will provide valuable tools for environmental education and outreach and for building awareness and participation in water quality improvement efforts in the Arroyo Colorado watershed.

The recommendations for the **Southeast Quadrant** are for improvement and renovations to the HEB/Civic Center Park and for a new walking trail along the irrigation canal. The HEB/Civic Center Park has a natural “seating area” that can be redeveloped into an amphitheater, enhancing passive recreation at this park. There are eleven uncovered picnic tables at HEB/Civic Center. New shade structures will provide much needed relief from the intense summer heat and ultraviolet rays. Playground renovations at HEB/Civic Center and Saladino (Queen City) parks will provide more up to date equipment. The walking trail at HEB/Civic Center Park should be expanded to incorporate the southern part of the parks. Exercise Stations should be strategically spaced along the walking trails.

The recommendations for the **Southwest Quadrant** are for the Collier Sports Complex. The shade structures at the pool are in need of replacement and will continue to provide much needed relief from the intense summer heat and ultraviolet rays. A new walking trail will provide a first time recreation opportunity at the park and in the quadrant, while also providing for improved connectivity and accessibility of the amenities. A sand volleyball court and splash amenities at the existing swimming pool location will provide additional areas of interest for different age levels in the community. The basketball court at the Collier Sports Complex is in need of renovation and the playground areas will

need to be renovated to include relocation and exercise stations strategically placed during the design of the new walking trail.

The recommendations for the **Northwest Quadrant** are for a new Sports Complex that will need to be developed in three phases. The first priority is to acquire 60-80 acres to provide for sufficient room for the program elements of a sports complex. In addition, this large land acquisition will bring Mercedes much closer to meeting the goal of 6 acres per 1,000 population. The first phase of the sports complex will have a baseball field, a multi-purpose field for playing football and soccer, a large pavilion to provide a gathering place and much needed relief from the intense summer heat and ultraviolet rays. The walking trail will provide a new recreation opportunity in the quadrant as well as connectivity and accessibility to the amenities in the park.

Master Plan Recommendations

Recommendations regarding future park development are based on the following:

- Responding to suggestions and feedback from stakeholders, City administration and the Community Needs Assessment;
- Analysis of socio-demographic variables including age, socioeconomic status, population density, etc.;
- Recognizing the need for flexibility and choice;
- Relating the supply of land and its function to the population it serves within a geographically defined area;
- Creating logical connections and filling gaps in the existing system;
- Providing a balance of new park development in all areas of the city.

Recommendations for future park development are also based on related studies and plans developed concurrently with the Parks and Recreation chapter. Pathways are a major component of park development that provide the necessary

pedestrian access, circulation and connection in the park system. Pathways help deliver the experience and give the park character.

General Recommendations for future park development are in four categories, Key Parkland Acquisitions, Park Upgrades/Renovations, Special Use Areas, and Preservation Areas.

Increasing development away from existing parks will require acquisition of neighborhood parkland. In addition, acquisition of new community parkland acreage in the Northwest Quadrant is critical to providing space for larger organized activities such as athletics as well as for a potential new indoor recreation center. Acquisition criteria include:

- Acquisition of 60-80 acres for a sports complex.
- Acquisition of parkland to develop logical connections and enhance the park system;
- Acquisition of parkland adjacent to new school properties to reduce the duplication of amenities, thus saving the taxpayers significant dollars;
- Acquisition of natural area buffers of corridors around areas with significant wildlife or vegetation habitat;
- Acquisition of additional open space to support expansion of passive, nature-oriented recreation activities (i.e. walking, nature appreciation, picnicking, non-programmed open space, etc.)
- Parkland acquisitions in newly developing neighborhoods should be pursued on an opportunity basis. It is important to consider park development and integration when road reconstruction, developments or redevelopments are proposed.

Analysis of recreation trends, feedback from stakeholders, public open houses and the community needs assessment has identified priorities for retrofit and upgrade facilities. The following alternatives can be considered to meet current and future land-based recreation facility needs:

- Upgrade existing facilities (i.e. automated irrigation, energy efficient lighting, play facilities) at Goza/Melton #2, Hinojosa/Melton #1, and Saladino/Queen City Neighborhood Parks and the HEB/Civic Center and Collier Sports Complex;
- Extend the use of existing facilities/design for intensified use (i.e. multi-use/ basketball courts, festival areas);
- Convert under-utilized or obsolete facilities to meet other facility requirements (i.e. abandoned pool at HEB/Civic Center Park);
- Enhance access for multi use facilities (i.e. commuter pathways, parking lots);
- Expand service areas to maximize use of facilities in all areas of the City; and
- Use non-municipal resources to expand supply (i.e. Mercedes ISD)

Special-use parks provide city-wide recreation opportunities that respond to distinctive site circumstances, unique community needs, and provide unique programming opportunities for specific user groups. Development of the following special-use park facilities are recommended:

- Pedestrian Trails
- Sports Complex
- Off Leash Dog Parks
- Nature Park/Wetland

Preservation areas are protected environmentally significant areas that are sensitive to human activity. It is recommended that the City of Mercedes undertake a significant project in the Northeast Quadrant to create a wetland and restore native wildlife and plant habitat. By using the Texas Parks and Wildlife's *Texas Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy 2005-2010* document as a guidepost there is an increased likelihood that the project will be a success.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives have been established for the Parks System and were developed from comprehensive and park planning efforts and from meetings with the citizens of Mercedes, the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, City Staff, and the Mercedes City Commission.

Goal 6.1 Provide a variety of safe recreational experiences that provide appeal to all segments of the population of Mercedes and its visitors.

- Obj. 6.1.a.** Expand the range of recreational opportunities available to persons of all ages and abilities.
- Obj. 6.1.b** Limit obstacles to the physically challenged and elderly.
- Obj. 6.1.c** Segregate age groups by facility design to enhance the sense of security in all parks and open spaces.
- Obj. 6.1.d** Coordinate recreational programs with school curricula.
- Obj. 6.1.e** Develop joint facilities and maintenance agreements in conjunction with schools.
- Obj. 6.1.f** Coordinate cultural programs of interest to visitors and senior citizens.
- Obj. 6.1.g** Access existing parks utilizing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design methods. Redesign and make improvements as required.

Goal 6.2 To enhance the physical attractiveness and improve the urban environment of Mercedes by developing parks and open space amenities.

- Obj. 6.2.a.** Where feasible, develop neighborhood playgrounds in each neighborhood in conjunction with school districts.
- Obj. 6.2.b** Design Parks with sustainability in mind.

Obj. 6.2.c Improve maintenance and enhance the appearance of city parks, arroyos and drainage basins.

Goal 6.3	To protect the natural resources of Mercedes and Hidalgo County by preserving those resources.
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Obj. 6.3.a Integrate arroyos and drainage basins into the park system to expand park resources.

Obj. 6.3.b Implement energy efficient lighting and watering systems throughout the parks.

Obj. 6.3.c Utilize natural features to create unique recreation opportunities for Mercedes' citizens and visitors.

Goal 6.4	To increase private sector involvement in developing and maintaining parks and open spaces.
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Obj. 6.4.a Develop an Adopt-A-Park program to build neighborhood support for local parks.

Obj. 6.4.b Expand private sector support of park development and clean-up activities.

Obj. 6.4.c Develop and Implement a Park Dedication Ordinance to secure park land or funding in lieu of land as new communities are developed in Mercedes.

Obj. 6.4.d Increase the use of native plant materials and xeriscape to reduce maintenance and irrigation costs.

Obj. 6.4.e Encourage the planting of trees in parks and along streets.

Obj. 6.4.f Encourage the joint development of open spaces by private interests and public agencies which provide additional recreational and open space opportunities.

Chapter 7

Infrastructure, Public Facilities & Public Safety

Infrastructure, public facilities and public safety represent the core functions and responsibilities of local government. In Mercedes, as in most communities, items like streets and drainage are of top interest and concern to the citizens. The City of Mercedes has demonstrated progressive attitudes and policies that recognize the need to invest in essential infrastructure and public facilities to ensure a good quality of life and economic growth and development. The city recognizes there is some “catching-up” to do. This Chapter reviews Mercedes’ current water, wastewater, drainage, streets, fire, police, and library facilities and describes the investments needed to meet current demand and serve future growth. The provision of infrastructure is one of the strongest tools a community has to encourage and direct growth and achieve its own vision for its future.

I. WATER SUPPLY, TREATMENT and DISTRIBUTION

The short story is that the City of Mercedes has sufficient water to meet average daily demand into the reasonably foreseeable future. A combination of Rio Grande surface water rights and ground water production from a City-owned well and the capacity of the City’s water plant enable the City to meet average daily consumption of 27,333 people, more than the City’s projected population in 2030 (see Chapter 2--Demographics, page 2-14).

The longer story is more complicated. Texas public policy and prudence require conservative analysis of a public water supplier’s ability to meet demand. The conservative analysis evaluates the City’s ability to meet demand based on surface water supplies only. Ground water supplies are excluded. When ground water is excluded, Mercedes can still meet current average demand. However, it has very limited ability to provide service to new customers.

Furthermore, planning for reliable utility service requires consideration of not simply average demand, but “peak” demand as well. The City must be prepared to supply the greatest demand for water during any given period of time. Additional water supply, treatment capacity, storage capacity and demand management, or some combination thereof, is needed for those infrequent days with unusually high demand. Good planning dictates that the City implement water conservation strategies, acquire additional surface water rights, develop expanded water treatment capacity, and increase capacity to pump ground water to meet peak water demand for a larger, future population.

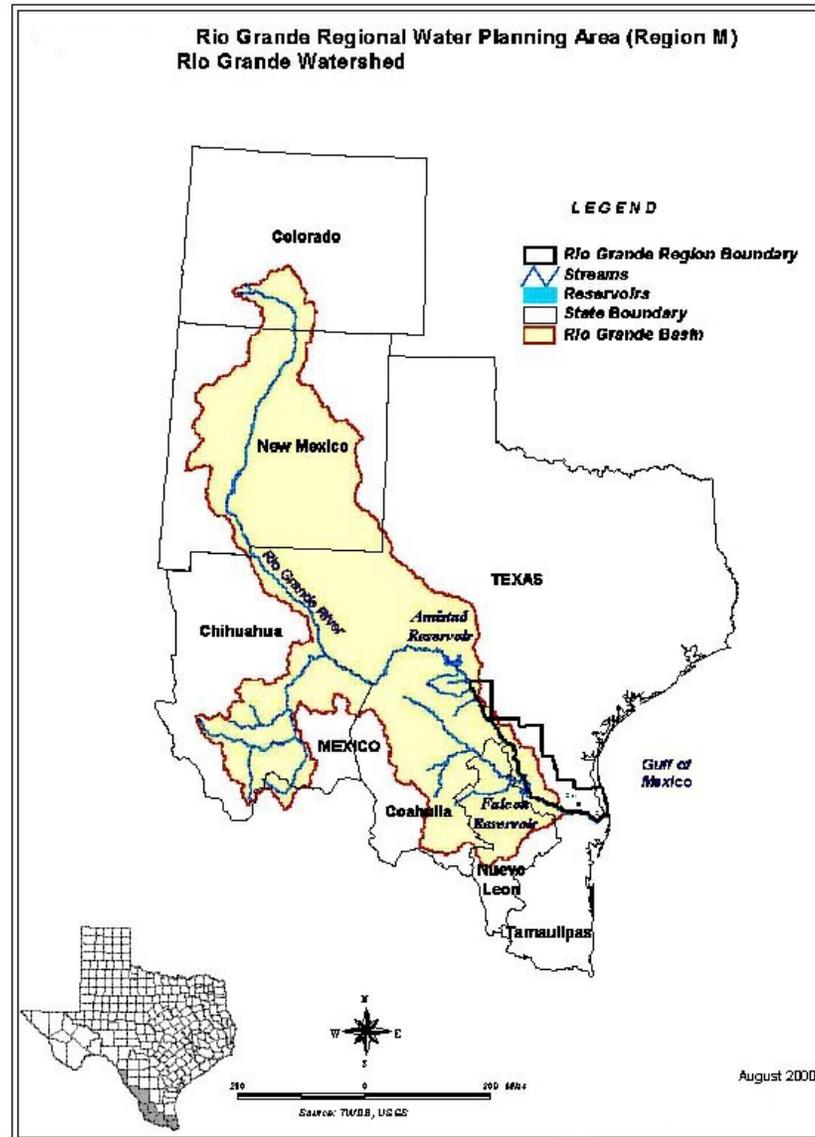
Given the City’s climate and geography (24 to 26 inches of precipitation per year (Source: 2006 Region M Water Plan, Figure 1.4), that its primary source of potable water is a finite natural resource, the primary source of drinking and irrigation water for all people and farms in a seven county area and substantially over-prescribed, and the likely future pressure on ground water resources caused by increasing withdrawals, it is worthwhile to develop a fuller understanding of water in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

A. The Rio Grande Hydrological System

The City of Mercedes is located within the State of Texas’ Water Planning Area M – the Rio Grande Planning Area--which encompasses Maverick, Zapata, Starr, Cameron, Hidalgo, Webb, Jim Hogg, and Willacy Counties. The drinking water for all of these counties is the Rio Grande and its Amistad-Falcon Reservoir system. The Rio Grande also serves as the primary source of drinking and irrigation water for a significant swath of northern Mexico. The Rio Grande Regional Water Plan, adopted in 2006, is part of the 2007 Texas State Water Plan. The State Water Plan is scheduled to be revised and re-adopted every five years and work is already underway for the 2012 State Water Plan. The draft update for Region M is scheduled to be adopted in March 2010. The data, analysis and statements of fact in this discussion of the Rio Grande are taken directly from the 2006 Region M Plan.

The Rio Grande Basin extends southward from the Continental Divide in southern Colorado through New Mexico and Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. The entire Basin (United States and Mexico) covers approximately 355,500 square miles; however, only about half of that area yields runoff to the Rio Grande. See Figure 7.1. Most of the River’s flow is diverted for irrigation and municipal

FIGURE 7.1. The Rio Grande Watershed and Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Area



uses at the American Canal in Texas and the Acequia-Madre Canal in Mexico before it reaches El Paso. Downstream of the City of El Paso, the river's flow consists primarily of treated municipal wastewater and irrigation return flow. The Texas portion of the contributing watershed is about 54,000 square miles, about one-third of the total. The Pecos and Devils Rivers, which flow into the Amistad Reservoir, are the principal Texas tributaries. On the Mexican side, the Rios Conchos, Salado, and San Juan are the largest tributaries. The Rio Conchos drains more than 26,000 square miles and flows into the Rio Grande near Presidio; the Rio Salado drains about 23,000 square miles and discharges directly into Falcon Reservoir; the Rio San Juan drains about 13,000 square miles and enters the Rio Grande below Falcon Dam near Rio Grande City.

Figure 7.1 shows that Region M represents a small portion of the overall Rio Grande watershed. There are many people and land uses claiming the water before it the Amistad and Falcon dam reservoirs. Figure 7.1 also shows that the City of Mercedes and most of Hidalgo and Cameron Counties are outside of the contributing watershed.

The vast majority of the Rio Grande Basin is rural land used principally for farming and ranching. In Texas, the major urban centers are El Paso, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Laredo, Mission, McAllen, Harlingen and Brownsville (total population in 2000 of 1,145,626). These and most other cities in the Lower Valley are located outside of the contributing watershed of the Rio Grande.¹ Much of the surface water diverted from the Rio Grande for both municipal and agricultural use is in the Lower Rio Grande Valley where some three-quarters of a million people reside on the U.S. side and more than a million on the Mexican side and irrigated farming is extensive. Water diverted from the Rio Grande in the Lower Valley is not returned to the river either as irrigation return flow or treated wastewater effluent. The natural slope of the land is away from the river due to historical depositions of sediment along the floodplain. Generally, irrigation and municipal return flows are discharged into interior drainage channels and floodways (the Arroyo Colorado, north floodway and Mansfield Ditch) that ultimately flow into the Laguna Madre and the Gulf of Mexico (via

¹ The 2010 Region M Water Plan indicates that there are nearly 7 million people living along the Lower Rio Grande, 6 million of whom live in Mexico. According to the 2005 Mexican Census, population of the major Mexican border cities was: Ciudad Juarez (1,500,000), Ojinaga (18,378), Ciudad Acuña (217,000), Piedras Negras (143,915), Nuevo Laredo (355,827), Reynosa (526,888), Ciudad Rio Bravo (106,842) and Matamoros (422,711). Planning for Region M does not take into account population growth in, or water demand from, Mexico. However, as explained later, nor does the Region M Water Plan rely on Mexican compliance with the 1944 Treaty.

the Nueces-Rio Grande Basin). One exception is a City of Brownsville wastewater treatment plant which discharges into the Rio Grande.

Most precipitation occurs from April through June and from August through October. Spring precipitation is the result of inflowing warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean which generates thunderstorms. June 1 through November 30th is hurricane season, during which Atlantic and Gulf storms may move ashore along the Texas or Upper Mexican Gulf Coast. These storms can generate tremendous amounts of rainfall over short periods and provide a large portion of the surface water run-off captured in water supply reservoirs within the Rio Grande Basin.

The Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs are the two major international reservoirs located on the Rio Grande. They are under the supervision and control of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) whose purpose is to provide bi-national solutions to issues that arise during the application of United States-Mexico treaties regarding boundary demarcation, ownership of waters, sanitation, water quality, and flood control in the border region. The United States section of the IBWC functions as an arm of the U. S. State Department.

Amistad and Falcon provide controlled storage for more than eight million acre-feet of water owned by the U.S. and Mexico, of which 2.25 million acre-feet are allocated for flood control purposes and 6.05 million acre-feet are reserved for water supply. *Falcon Reservoir*, completed in 1953, was the first major reservoir constructed on the Rio Grande under the 1944 Treaty between the United States and Mexico. The U.S. has 59 percent (or 1.56 million acre-feet) of the silt and conservation storage in Falcon Reservoir; Mexico owns the balance (1.10 million acre-feet) of storage in the dam. *Amistad Reservoir* was completed in 1968. The United States controls 56 percent of its conservation storage capacity, or about 1.77 million acre feet. The remainder--1.38 million acre-feet--is owned and used by Mexico. *Anzalduas Dam*, completed in 1960, serves as a storage and flow regulation facility for partially controlling and managing the U.S. share of water in the lower reach of the Rio Grande and provides for diversion into an interior floodway system. It also enables the gravity diversion of water into Mexico's main water supply canal, the Anzalduas Canal.

Anzalduas Reservoir has a total storage capacity of about 15,000 acre-feet; between 3,037 and 4,214 acre-feet of which is available as conservation storage by the US.

Mexico has constructed an extensive system of reservoirs on tributaries of the Rio Grande with combined storage of some two-and-a-half times its water supply storage capacity in the Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs (6,358,000 acre-feet). Much of Mexico's reservoir development has occurred in the Rio Conchos Basin in the State of Chihuahua. The Rio Conchos is one of the six Mexican tributaries of the Rio Grande named in the 1944 Treaty from which the United States is allocated 350,000 acre-feet of water each year, on average, over a five-year cycle. The potential impact of the Mexican Reservoirs on the delivery to the US of the expected water is of concern especially since Mexico has stated its tributary reservoirs are operated solely to capture water for meeting its own internal water demands.

B. Rio Grande Water Rights and Water Use

While average annual water use remains below the “firm annual yield”² of the Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs, the Rio Grande, particularly with regard to Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs, is over-prescribed under drought conditions. Rio Grande water rights in the amount of 2,159,476 acre-feet³ per year are held by municipal, industrial, irrigation and mining users within the eight Texas Counties comprising the Rio Grande water planning area. See Table 7.1. However, the projected firm annual yield for 2020 from the Amistad-Falcon dam system for the U.S. is 1,056,719 acre-feet per year, meaning a deficit of 1,102,757 acre-feet under drought conditions. The firm annual yield for the Rio Grande Water Planning Area is less than one-half of the water rights held.

Within Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties, there are holders of additional water rights from the Nueces-Rio Grande Basin, totaling 87,857 acre-feet. They are not included in Table 7.1, which reports only Rio Grande water rights.

Unlike the rest of Texas, holders of water rights downstream of Amistad Reservoir on the Rio Grande are not assured water based on the seniority of their rights. Instead, a Water Master controls annual water allocations under a complex system that

² Firm Annual Yield is the maximum amount of water that can be withdrawn from a reservoir each year during the occurrence of the “drought of record” without causing the reservoir to go dry.

³ An “acre-foot” is the amount of water required to cover one acre with one foot of water, approximately 325,851 gallons.

apportions water first for municipal uses. While other uses, such as industry and mining, get a share of the remaining water, irrigation districts and

TABLE 7.1 Rio Grande Water Rights by County in Acre-Feet per Year

	Cameron	Hidalgo	Jim Hogg	Maverick	Starr	Webb	Willacy	Zapata	Region M
Municipal	132,743	135,123	-	9,756	6,881	48,349	998	2,566	336,417
Irrigation	573,586	928,927	-	138,538	40,651	27,113	88,287	10,205	1,807,307
Other	2,430	11,841		204	1,668	3313	0	344	15,753
TOTAL	708,759	1,073,461	-	148,498	47,584	78,774	89,284	13,115	2,159,476

Source: Region M Regional Water Plan, Texas State Water Plan, January 5, 2006, page 3-38.

agricultural users consume most of it. This system evolved from the 1969 “Rio Grande Valley Water Case⁴” after droughts in the 1950s resulted in people with “senior” rights at the east end of the Rio Grande receiving no water after upstream holders had legally diverted their water. Water rights upstream of Amistad follow the Prior Appropriation Doctrine. There are no unclaimed water rights on the river.

Each month the Water Master re-establishes a municipal reserve of US waters in Amistad and Falcon reservoirs of 225,000 acre-feet, the average annual diversion for all municipal demands downstream from Amistad Dam. When the reservoirs have more than that amount, the Water Master divides the surplus among the non-municipal claimants. This quantity is called “storage balance” and accumulates up to the amount of assigned water rights.

One critical shortcoming in the Rio Grande allocation system is that no ecological needs are considered and no water is allocated to maintaining a healthy natural environment or a minimum “in-stream flow.” As the interconnectedness between the health

⁴ *State of Texas, et al. vs. Hidalgo County Water Control and Improvement District No. 18, et al*, 443 S.W.2d 728 (Court of Civil Appeals-Corpus Christi 1969)

and well-being of human communities and the health and well-being of the natural environment is increasingly recognized, it might be expected that this failure to allocate any water for minimum in-stream flows will change within the time horizon of *Envision Mercedes 2035*.

In 2003, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) prepared water use estimates for Region M. Hidalgo County uses more water than any other county in the region; Cameron County is second. Water consumed for irrigation dwarfs the other uses. See Table 7.2.

The conversion of irrigation rights to domestic-municipal-industrial (DMI) use through voluntary, market-based transfers between willing buyers and willing sellers is the established trend. To illustrate, in 1971 there were some 155,000 acre-feet of Rio Grande water rights held for DMI use. Presently, there are approximately 240,000 acre-feet of water rights for DMI use in the area below Falcon Reservoir and approximately 58,000 acre-feet of water rights for DMI use in the middle Rio Grande. Water rights are converted from irrigation use to municipal use on a 2:1 ratio. This conversion trend is assumed to continue and is the method by which the water needs of a growing, urbanized population will be met.

C. Ground Water

Use of ground water is another way the water management in the Lower Rio Grande Valley differs from the rest of Texas. In the State as a whole, approximately 60% of the water consumed is groundwater. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where significant quantities of groundwater are available, only about 5% of water need is met with ground water. Groundwater has not been heavily used and water levels have remained relatively stable over the years because, generally, in the Valley, it is high in dissolved solids including salt, calcium and other minerals and requires treatment by reverse osmosis or membrane filtration.

The Gulf Coast aquifer exists in an irregular band along the Texas coast from the Texas-Louisiana border to Mexico. In 1997, approximately 22,770 acre-feet of groundwater was pumped from the Gulf Coast aquifer. The greatest total groundwater use in recent years was estimated at 37,990 acre-feet in 1991, primarily driven by irrigation demands of 26,540 acre-feet. The largest volume of

Table 7.2. 2010 Estimated Use of Rio Grande Water by Hidalgo and Cameron Counties and Region M (Acre-Feet per Year)

	Hidalgo County	Cameron County	Region M Total
Assumed Population	775,858	424,762	1,628,279
Municipal Water Use	87,151	56,587	203,012
Irrigation	290,971	128,066	518,938
All Other - Mining, livestock, steam electricity, manufacturing	5,265	3,534	14,422
Total Water Use	383,387	188,188	533,360

Source: Region M Regional Water Plan, Texas State Water Plan, page 1-27 (March 2006)

groundwater used to meet municipal demands was 11,685 acre-feet in 1996. Because groundwater is generally considered a secondary source, higher demand for groundwater usually coincides with times of reduced availability of surface water.

The Gulf Coast aquifer consists of interbedded clays, silts, sands, and gravels, which are hydrologically-connected to form a leaky system comprised of several aquifer layers: the *Catahuolla* (the deepest), the *Jasper* aquifer located in the Oakville Sandstone above the *Catahuolla*, and the *Evangeline* aquifer contained within the Fleming and Goliad sands, and the *Chilcot*. The Gulf Coast aquifer is basically considered to be full. However, well yields can vary significantly and the primary water-producing zone varies

from one area of the region to another. The Chicot aquifer is the primary water-producing zone in western Cameron and eastern Hidalgo counties. The Evangeline aquifer produces significant quantities of water in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties. In the Oakville Sandstone (a middle zone aquifer), average production is about 120 gallons per minute (gpm), while in the Chicot aquifer (the uppermost zone) the average well yield is about 10 times this rate, or 1,200 gpm. In the Catahoulla formation (the deepest zone), yields range from 30 to 150 gpm. The depth of the different geological layers and the different aquifers depends on where the measurement is taken east to west and north to south. Generally, the aquifers are closer to the surface of the land towards the west and north and deeper towards the east and south.

Recharge to the Gulf Coast aquifer occurs primarily through percolation of precipitation that does not run off of the land surface and not lost through evapotranspiration. This may be supplemented in some areas by the addition of irrigation water from the Rio Grande. In some areas recharge may be limited by shallow subsurface drainage systems designed to control the buildup of salts resulting from continued irrigation operations.

The Rio Grande Region Water Plan defined groundwater availability as the amount of groundwater that can be withdrawn from an aquifer over the next 50 years and not cause more than 100 feet decline in the water level compared to 2000 levels. This criterion guided the ground-water availability assessment for each aquifer in each county. Region M's Groundwater Availability Model indicates that Hidalgo County could withdraw 52,500 acre-feet per year from the Gulf Coast Aquifer and stay within the above-stated criterion.⁵ Presently, however, there is no legal mechanism to limit withdrawals from the Gulf Coast Aquifer to a sustainable level. In Texas, groundwater is generally considered the property of the owner of the overlying land. Each land owner can pump as much water as they can, without regard to the effect such pumping has on the ability of another land owner to utilize the ground water. In 1949, the State Legislature allowed for the creation of groundwater conservation districts—local governmental entities that work to balance the rights of individual landowners with the need to protect the resource for the benefit of all.

⁵ See Chapter 3, page 3-56, of the 2010 Region M “Initially Prepared Plan.”

D. Meeting Future Regional Water Needs

Many uncertainties impact planning for water supply. Assumptions must be made about precipitation, population growth, water demand, Mexican cooperation with the 1944 treaty, and future investments in water supply infrastructure. The population projections adopted by the TWDB for water planning closely track the population projections recommended to counties by the Texas State Data Center for long-term planning. The Rio Grande Valley Water Plan assumes population of the eight-county area will increase 94% from 2000 to 2030 (from total population of 1,236,246 to total population of 2,401,223). The Plan is based on the worst “drought of record” which occurred in the 1950s.⁶ The Plan assumes only very modest advances in municipal and domestic water conservation. Because the State Water Plan must be reviewed and revised every five years and because uncertainties of population growth and water demand are expected to more substantially impact the adequacy of water supply, the 2007 State Plan determined that it is not necessary at this time to attempt to plan for climate change.

For water supply planning purposes, the TWDB mandates that no more than the firm annual yield be considered available from a reservoir system for meeting future water demands. In calculating the firm annual yield for the Amistad and Falcon Reservoir System, the 350,000 acre-feet per year expected from Mexico by the 1944 Treaty, except “in the event of extraordinary drought or serious accident” were excluded. The 2006 Rio Grande Region Water Plan concludes that there is adequate water supply to meet domestic and industrial needs in our area through 2060. This conclusion depends on the continued conversion of irrigation rights into DMI water rights.

Because municipal and industrial users have priority over agricultural users, the costs and hardships caused by the water deficit under drought conditions will be borne by farmers and ranchers. Water rights in the amount of 1,807,307 acre-feet per year are held for irrigation. Only 694,273 acre feet per year are projected to be available for irrigation under firm annual yield after

⁶ Precipitation data for the Rio Grande region is available only for the last 100 years or so. As the 2007 State Water Plan notes, available tree-ring data evidences regional droughts in the last 1000 years far worst than the “drought of record.” Additionally, many experts believe the drought late in the 1990s and early 2000s, exceeded the drought of the 1950s, based on the length of time that drought conditions existed.

satisfying existing authorized diversions for municipal, manufacturing and steam-energy uses in 2020. In 2030, 687,785 acre-feet will be available for agriculture under firm annual yield.

E. Texas Commission Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Requirements

An essential element of planning and operating a public water supply system is compliance with the state regulations governing these systems. TCEQ regulations establish minimum standards that the City of Mercedes' water system must meet. The basic rule is that Mercedes must have sources of supply—ground or surface—that have a “safe yield capable of meeting the maximum daily demand during extended periods of peak usage and critical hydrological conditions.” Some of the detail of this overall standard is set forth in Table 7.3. These are basic parameters by which the City can evaluate the current sufficiency of its system and its ability to meet the future demands of a larger population.

F. Mercedes' Water System

Mercedes' surface water flows from the Rio Grande in the main Mercedes Canal. From the canal it is pumped directly to the water treatment plant. After it is treated and made suitable for human consumption, it is pumped into the storage tanks and the distribution lines to the residential and commercial consumers. Appendix A provides some additional detail on the process.

The City has available 4.1 million gallons per day (MGD) of water from surface and ground water sources to meet the needs of its residents and businesses. From the Rio Grande and the Amistad-Falcon reservoir system, the City of Mercedes owns adjudicated rights to 1,015 acre feet of water per year in its own name (adjudication number 823-000) and 2,580 acre-feet in the name of the Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 9 (adjudication number 812-002). This equals 3.2 MGD. In addition to the amount of raw water actually received into the City's water treatment plant, the Irrigation District charges to the City 26% as a “water loss factor.” This water loss factor is counted as utilization of water rights. Therefore, the surface water available to the City is actually 2.4 MGD (3.2 MGD x 26% = 832,000. 3,200,000 less 832,000 = 2,368,000).

TABLE 7.3 Basic TCEQ Capacity Requirements for a Public Water System

➤	Capacity to pump raw water at 0.6 gpm per connection, with largest pump out of service.
➤	Capacity to treat 0.6 gpm per connection.
➤	Covered clearwell storage capacity of 5% of daily plant capacity.
➤	Total storage capacity of 200 gallons per connection.
➤	Elevated storage capacity of 100 gallons per connection.
➤	Service pump capacity of 2 gpm/connection with largest pump out of service. If elevated storage of 200 gallons/connection is provided, two pumps with combined capacity of 0.6 gpm/connection at each pump station.
➤	Minimum pressure of 35 psi at all points in the system with minimum flow rates of 1.5 gpm per connection (for domestic flows only).
➤	If the system is designed to support fire fighting, then a minimum pressure of 20 psi under combined fire and drinking flow conditions.

The City of Mercedes' water plant is designed to treat 3.78 MGD. The plant was constructed in phases over time with major components being built in the 1930s and 1950s. Most of the original plant constructed in the 1930 is no longer in service. The plant was most recently upgraded and improved in 2000.

In addition to surface water from the Rio Grande, Mercedes owns a well into the Gulf Coast aquifer which can produce 1.7 MGD (1,200 gallons per minute). The water from the well is disinfected only, does not flow through the treatment plant, and therefore is in addition to the capacity of the treatment plant. The well is located on the same property as the City's water treatment plant in downtown Mercedes. The relatively good quality of Mercedes' well is an anomaly. While more electricity is required to utilize the ground water, it is less expensive to use than canal water because the well water requires less chemical treatment. However, high mineral content and turbidity limit the City's ability to produce more water from the well. Currently the City's well water is not filtered and higher production increases turbidity. In addition to being regulated by TCEQ, turbidity and mineral content affect the look and taste of water. The water plant operators believe the well is capable of higher production if fitted with filters.

Mercedes contracts with OMI to operate its water treatment plant. There are currently 4 full-time OMI employees devoted to the water plant, which is the same number of employees as 20 years ago, but the volume of water treated and distributed has increased. OMI personnel have indicated that 4 employees may be inadequate to provide the occasional 24-hour staffing required by an emergency or problem in the system. City Public Works employees are responsible for maintenance and repair of the water distribution lines.

New water lines being installed in the City and its planning area are PVC pipes. However, in certain locations throughout the City, there are water pipes made of concrete asbestos and to a more limited extent, cast iron. The City is systematically replacing the concrete asbestos and cast iron lines as funds are available.

OMI reports daily water distribution in 2009 averaged 2.27 MGD. See Table 7.4 However, water demand changes year to year, related primarily to precipitation. There is also seasonality to water demand, primarily dependent upon temperature and precipitation and the correlated water used to irrigate lawns and gardens and fill swimming pools. For example, in none of the last

five years was December, January, February, March or April the month with the highest average daily demand, despite the fact that these are the months with the highest population. The months with the highest average daily water demand were May, June, July, August and November. (The month with the highest average daily water demand is marked in bold on Table 7.3.) Additionally, 2009 had the second lowest annual average daily water demand when it is reasonably assumed that 2009's population was the highest of the 5 years presented. Water demand also fluctuates with the clock over the course of a typical 24-hour day.

The increased reliance on well water in times of drought, such as 2000 and 2009, can be seen in Table 7.4. During the drought experienced in the summer of 2009 (no rain for 4 months), other nearby cities were required to implement mandatory conservation and request water from Mercedes, but the City of Mercedes had sufficient supply. Important to emphasize, however, is the risk of relying on ground water. Currently, the City has a good well that produces reliable quantities and quality water. However, the City has no means of protecting that source. As the pressures on surface water supplies increase, municipalities face increased expense of buying water each year to meet demand that exceeds municipally-owned water rights, it can be expected that more municipalities will seek to increase utilization of well water. The City has no information as to what the effect would be on the quantity or quality of water available from its well if, for example, Progreso, La Feria and Weslaco, or many private farmers start drawing significant quantities of ground water.

Establishment of a groundwater conservation district (GCD) for the Mercedes area may have both positive and negative impacts on Mercedes' ability to use ground water. On the one hand, if a GCD is established, with the ability to regulate withdrawals from the aquifer, then Mercedes can count ground water to meet TCEQ water supply standards. On the other hand, the GCD may not allow Mercedes to withdraw the same quantities as it does presently. As indicated previously, Region M's water availability model concludes that Hidalgo County can sustainably withdraw 52,500 acre-feet of ground water per year (17 billion gallons). If management of groundwater intends the resource to be equally available to all, then the Gulf Coast aquifer can sustainably supply the

TABLE 7.4. Average Daily Water Production by City Water Plant, by Month and Year-- in Millions of Gallons

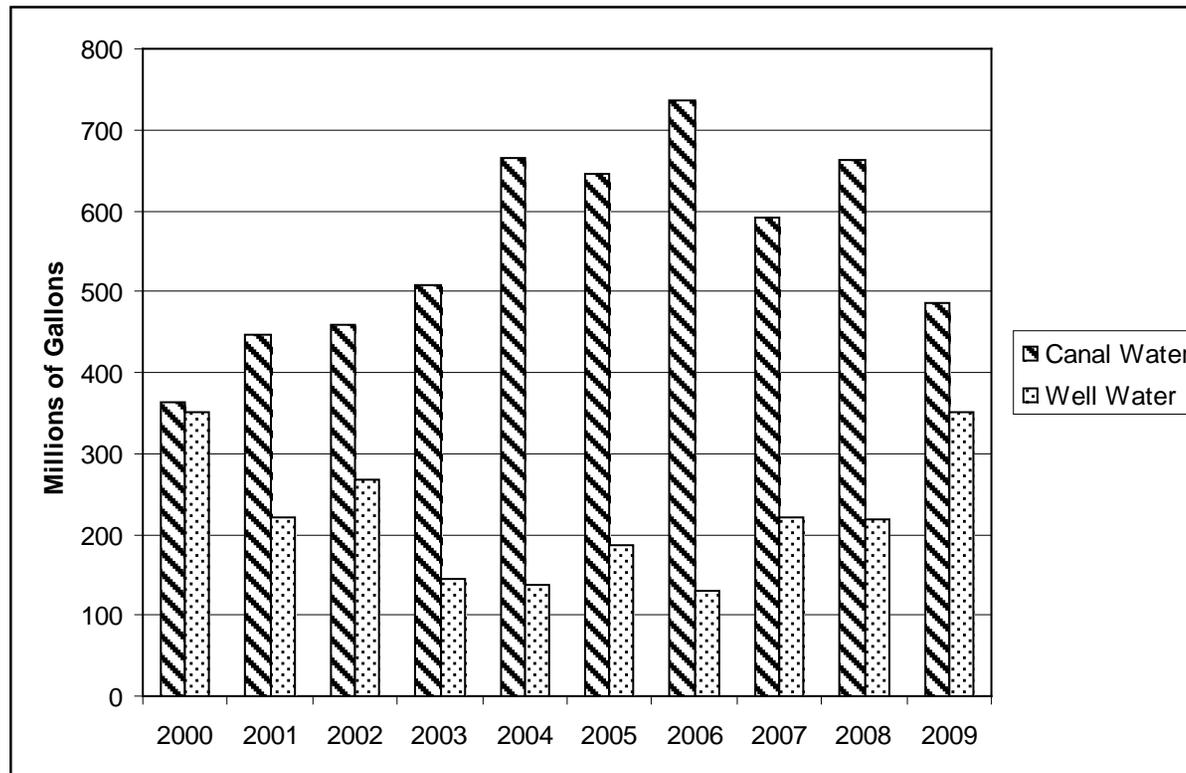
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	5-year average
January	2.04	2.28	1.86	2.10	2.04	2.06
February	2.10	2.27	1.77	2.21	2.03	2.08
March	2.28	2.30	1.86	2.36	2.20	2.20
April	2.55	2.48	1.65	2.46	2.39	2.31
May	2.46	2.52	1.66	2.49	2.94	2.41
June	2.51	2.51	1.88	2.88	2.37	2.43
July	3.32	2.60	1.61	2.44	2.83	2.56
August	2.65	2.73	1.95	2.67	2.86	2.57
September	2.26	2.01	1.92	1.89	1.83	1.98
October	2.98	1.75	1.99	2.24	1.83	2.16
November	2.45	2.06	3.21	2.15	1.81	2.34
December	2.62	1.88	2.12	1.88	1.71	2.04
Yearly Avg.	2.52	2.28	1.96	2.31	2.24	2.26

Source: OMI Monthly Operating Reports.

2010 population of Hidalgo County approximately 60 gallons per person per day. Currently, Mercedes uses 105 gallons per person per day from the aquifer. In other words, Mercedes’ use of groundwater exceeds sustainable withdrawals on a per capita basis by 75%. A GCD may seek to reduce the City’s withdrawals. Additionally, there may be some philosophical concerns related to the diminishment of individual land owners’ rights to use ground water as they see fit.

The City’s finished water is stored in three clear wells (underground storage tanks) with capacities of 1.23 million gallons, 186,000 gallons and 86,000 gallons, and in two elevated towers, each with a 750,000 gallon capacity. The City’s total drinking water

TABLE 7.5 Surface Water and Ground Water consumed by the City of Mercedes from 2000 through 2009



storage capacity is 3,002,000 gallons. OMI is seeking to de-commission the smallest clear well due to leaks. The larger clear wells are also known to leak, but less severely. Since 2000, TCEQ has not allowed the construction of underground clear wells. All water storage must now be on the surface of the ground. While the City’s water storage capacity more than meets TCEQ minimum requirements, given the condition of Mercedes’ existing clear wells and that total water storage capacity equals only about 36 hours of average demand, more and new water storage capacity may be in the City’s best interests.

As mentioned earlier, when planning utility service it is insufficient to plan to meet average demand. The City of Mercedes must also prepare to meet peak demand, that is, the maximum total demanded in a given time period. Table 7.5 presents the peak amount of water demanded on a single day in each month for the last five years. The single highest daily demand was 3.88 MGD in August of 2009.

TABLE 7.6. Peak Daily Water Demand by Month and Year, 2005 – 2009 (in millions of gallons)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
January	2.38	3.49	2.25	2.62	2.31
February	2.46	2.89	2.09	2.54	2.30
March	2.75	2.67	2.32	2.67	3.42
April	3.30	2.84	1.95	2.90	2.83
May	2.92	3.02	2.04	3.14	2.94
June	2.90	3.32	2.99	3.30	3.07
July	3.32	3.48	2.35	3.15	3.30
August	2.65	3.25	2.71	2.68	3.88
September	2.68	2.98	2.42	2.33	2.09
October	2.98	2.70	2.67	2.50	2.15
November	2.45	2.43	3.21	3.52	2.16
December	2.62	2.27	2.65	2.26	1.95
Average	2.78	2.94	2.47	2.80	2.70

Source: OMI Monthly Operating Reports

The City’s water plant is well-equipped to respond to electrical outages. There is diesel back-up for the water plant. Additionally, before the close of 2010, a back-up diesel-operated high service pump will be installed on the largest clearwell. Furthermore, the use of auxiliary power, that is, rented generators, in the event of an emergency, extends the duration of the City’s ability to operate in the event of an electrical outage.

The problem of “lost” or “unaccounted for” water in the Mercedes water system is shown in Table 7.5. Lost or unaccounted for water is the difference between the amount of treated potable water flowing from the water treatment plant and the water consumption reflected in city water bills. Some of the difference can be explained by estimating amounts used for fire suppression, routine flushing of water lines, and due to breaks in water lines. Malfunctioning meters and undetected leaks in the water distribution system are other sources of “lost” water. Without detailed study, it cannot be known if water losses are on the customer side of the meter or the distribution side of the meter.

Possible problems with master meters may also contribute to “lost” water. Currently, the City sells water to NAWSC, based on the amount that individual NAWSC customer water meters indicate was consumed. The City cannot control the accuracy of those individual NAWSC customer meters. However, the water sold by the City to NAWSC flows through a City-owned master meter prior to being distributed through NAWSC’s lines. The City can control the accuracy of the master meter. Furthermore, in some cases, master meters are equipped with “by-pass” lines so that in the event that work is needed on the meter, continuous water supply is not affected. However, the City has limited ability to deter unauthorized use of the by-pass lines.

Total water “loss” represents water valued at approximately \$451,860 in 2006-2007 and \$273,069 in 2007-2008. (The dollar value was calculated by simply dividing the estimated water loss by \$1.91 per 1,000 gallons based on the residential rate charged for city water (the initial base rate of \$11.68 for the first 10,000 gallons was ignored).

“Unaccounted for” water can complicate planning for future water consumption. Future water consumption generally is projected by examining previous consumption data per connection and per capita. The question is which number to use—the total water which the City sold to individual customers or the total water distributed from the City’s water plant. In 2008, when the amount of water sold to residential customers (396,124,000 gallons) is divided by the number of residential connections (3,326 connections), according to data provided by OMI and the City Finance Department and reported in the City’s Water Conservation - Drought Contingency Plan, the result is average water consumption of 100 gpd per capita or 327 gpd per household. (According to 2000 U.S. Census, average household size in Mercedes is 3.27 people.) If the total amount of water distributed from the water plant,

TABLE 7.7 Water Distributed and Water Sold from 2004 through 2008 (millions of gallons)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	5-yr. Annual Average
TOTAL DISTRIBUTED	838	726	778	708	782	767
TOTAL SOLD	593	599	555	472	639	572
DIFFERENCE	245	128	223	237	143	195
% DIFFERENCE	29%	18%	29%	33%	18%	25%

Source: Mercedes Water Conservation and Drought Contingency Plan, submitted in August 2009 to TCEQ

adjusted to reflect the proportionate purchase by residential and commercial customers (according to billing records in September 2009, 62% of water was sold to residential customers and 38% was sold to commercial customers), then divided by the number of residential connections, per capita consumption is 122 gpd per capita and household consumption is 399 gpd. However, for water conservation planning and drought contingency planning, the Texas Water Development Board requires the total amount of water brought into the treatment plant (amount “diverted”) to be divided by the population served. TWDB methodology results in 150 gpd per capita and 491 gpd per household consumption.

F. Sufficiency of City's Water Resources to Meet Present and Future Demand

Does the City have enough water?

Will the City have enough water in the future?

The answers to these simple questions require the evaluation of many interrelated factors. In brief, the time to begin planning for the expansion of the City's water treatment plant is now. The City has sufficient water, water treatment capacity, and water storage to meet current average water demand. However, the City has sufficient water treatment capacity to serve only 300 additional connections. The facts and calculations supporting these conclusions follow.

i. Current Average Demand

1. Average per capita water consumption in Mercedes is 150 gallons per day.
2. The City has available 4.1 MGD (1.7 MGD from its well and 2.4 MGD from the Rio Grande).
3. 4.1 MGD divided by 150 gallons daily per capita consumption = 27,333 people.

Therefore, when ground water currently produced from the City well is included as available water supply, the City can meet the average daily water demand of a city with a population of 27,333, more than is anticipated in Mercedes in 2030.

However, because Mercedes cannot protect its ground water resource, the evaluation required by TCEQ excludes the well water. Notwithstanding the exclusion of the well water, the capacity of Mercedes' water system exceeds TCEQ's minimum requirements for the current population. Table 7.8 compares the capacity of the City of Mercedes' water system to TCEQ's minimum water system capacity requirements.

Nonetheless, the capacity of the City's water plant is only 7% more than the minimum required. Additionally, the quality of the canal water varies tremendously depending on weather, water level and other factors. Poor water quality can force plant operators to reduce the volume of water pumped into the plant in order to slow the flow and increase "contact time" through the plant to assure the finished drinking water meets state standards. Reducing the volume of water pumped into the plant obviously reduces the volume of treated water produced. Creation of a reservoir to provide pre-treatment of canal water is one way to assure that the City can obtain

the full capacity of its water plant. The costs and benefits of a reservoir should be included in the analysis of the alternatives available to the City to meet future water needs.

TABLE 7.8 Comparison between Mercedes' Water System in September 2009 and TCEQ minimum capacity requirements

Facility	TCEQ Minimum Capacity Requirements	# of connections (residential & commercial)	Required Capacity	Available Capacity	Excess or Deficiency
raw water pumps	0.6 gpm per connection	4081	2,449 gpm	5,000 gpm	2,551 gpm
treatment plant	0.6 gpm per connection	4081	2,449 gpm	2,625 gpm	176 gpm
elevated storage	100 gallons per connection	4081	408,100 gallons	1,500,000 gallons	1,091,900 gallons
clear well	5% plant capacity	4081	189,000 gallons	1,502,000 gallons	1,313,000 gallons
total storage	200 gallons per connection	4081	816,200 gallons	3,002,000 gallons	2,185,800 gallons
service pumps	0.6 gpm per connection	4081	2,449 gpm	2,900 gpm	451 gpm

ii. Future Average Demand

The City has sufficient capacity to pump raw water to meet future needs. It also has sufficient water storage capacity to meet future needs. However, the City has limited ability to provide water for new growth. Comparing the water treatment plant's existing capacity (3.78 MGD or 2,625 gpm) to TCEQ's minimum required capacity (0.6 gpm per connection) indicates that the City can serve

fewer than 300 additional connections. The City currently has 4,081 connections (90% of which are residential). The maximum number of connections it can have and meet the 0.6 gpm per connection standard is 4,375. See Table 7.9.

TABLE 7.9 Population that can be served by Mercedes' Existing Water System

Facility	TCEQ Minimum Capacity Requirements	Mercedes' Current Capacity	Maximum Connections	Maximum Population
raw water pumps	0.6 gpm per connection	5,000 gpm	8,333	24,525
treatment plant	0.6 gpm per connection	2,625 gpm	4,375	12,876
elevated storage	100 gallons per connection	1,500,000 gallons	15,000	44,145
clear well	5% plant capacity	1,502,000 gallons		
total storage	200 gallons per connection	3,002,000 gallons	15,010	44,174
service pumps	0.6 gpm per connection	2,900 gpm	4,833	14,225

NOTE: This analysis assumes that 90% of connections are residential and each residential account represents 3.27 people.

Looking forward, and assuming the same ratio of City population to the number of water accounts (15,131 people and 4,081 water accounts in September 2009 means 6,203 water accounts when City population is 23,000),⁷ to meet the average demand of its population in 2030, the City will need an additional 1.6 MGD capacity in its water treatment plant. See Table 7.10. (required capacity

⁷ The City's water CCN is again a factor in planning and analysis. In September 2009, the City had 3,650 residential water accounts. Assuming 3.27 people per residential account, the City was providing water to 11,936 people. At that time, the City's estimated population was 15,131. Some City residents receive water from North Alamo Water Supply Corporation and 362 City water accounts represent customers who reside outside City limits. For simplicity purposes, it is assumed that City population and City water customers are the same.

of 3,722 gallons per minute equals 5,359,680 gallons per day; capacity deficiency of 1,097 gallons per minute equals 1,579,680 gallons per day.).

TABLE 7.10 Mercedes’ Current Water System when Population is 23,000

Facility	TCEQ Minimum Required Capacity	# of connections	Required Capacity	Available Capacity	Excess or Deficiency
raw water pumps	0.6 gpm/ connection	6203	3,722 gpm	5,000 gpm	1,278 gpm
treatment plant	0.6 gpm/ connection	6203	3,722 gpm	2,625 gpm	(1,097) gpm
elevated storage	100 gallons/connection	6203	620,300 gallons	1,500,000 gallons	879,700 gallons
clear well	5% plant capacity	6203	310 gallons	1,502,000 gallons	1,501,690 gallons
total storage	200 gallons/connection	6203	1,240,600 gallons	3,002,000 gallons	1,761,400 gallons
service pumps	0.6 gpm/connection	6203	3,722 gpm	2,900 gpm	(822) gpm

iii. Peak Demand

Mercedes faces greater challenges meeting peak demand. The City has insufficient water rights, treatment capacity and storage capacity to meet peak demand if such demand were to occur for a protracted period. One day in August 2009, 3.88 million gallons was demanded from the City’s water plant (the single highest daily demand in the previous five years). That number by itself

raises concern—demand exceeded the plant’s capacity. Water storage and production from the well allowed that demand to be met. In August 2009, there were 4,081 water accounts. Therefore, peak water demand was 951 gallons per account.⁸

Again, assuming the same ratio of City population to number of water accounts (in September 2009, the City had population of 15,131 and 4081 water accounts), a City population of 23,000 will generate 6,203 water accounts. If the August 2009 peak demand day is repeated, a City population of 23,000 may translate into peak water demand as high as 5.9 MGD. (Multiply the peak demand of 951 gallons per account by 6,203 accounts equals 5,899,053).

However, the average peak demand for all months between 2005 through 2009 was 2.74 MGD. 2.74 MGD divided by 4,081 accounts equals average peak demand of 671 gallons per day per account (because the number of water accounts increased over the five years, this average understates the average peak demand). When the population reaches 23,000, using this average peak figure of 671 gallons per day per connection, peak demand will be 4.2 MGD. That is a more manageable number pointing to the advisability of implementing strong conservation and demand management programs.

The City will need to increase its surface water rights and expand its treatment plant capacity to meet future peak demand. It should also engage in aggressive demand management processes. The City should assertively implement its water conservation and drought contingency plan to moderate peak demand.

⁸ The distinction between residential accounts and commercial accounts is ignored in this analysis as it is in TCEQ’s minimum capacity requirements. However, it is worthwhile to note that in August 2009, when the peak demand day occurred, the City had 3,650 residential accounts and 405 commercial accounts. While residential accounts represented 90% of total accounts, average total daily residential consumption of 518,548 gallons (142 gpd per residential account) equaled only 62% of total consumption. On the other hand, commercial accounts represented 10% of total accounts, but average total daily commercial consumption (315,960 gallons) equaled 38% of total average daily consumption (780 gallons per account).

iv. Surface Water Rights

The City has surface water rights in the amount of 3.2 MGD. That amount is reduced by 26% to account for water lost in the conveyance system from the River to the City's intake pump on the canal. Therefore, the City can utilize 2.4 MGD.

The current capacity of the City's water treatment plant exceeds the City's water rights. The City's water rights are barely sufficient to meet current average demand. For example, average daily water production at the water plant exceeded 2.4 MGD in 22 of the 60 months between 2005 through 2009. See Table 7.4.

TCEQ does not require that the City own sufficient surface water rights and it may be possible to purchase water on an ad-hoc, year-to-year basis or by longer-term contract from the Irrigation District. However, the City's future will be more secure if it can acquire additional rights. To own sufficient surface water rights to fully supply the capacity of a water treatment plant sized to meet the needs of 23,000 people, the City needs an additional 3.0 MGD in surface water rights.

v. Other Factors

This effort to simplify the complex analysis about water capacity and water demand ignores other critical factors that the City must address, in consultation with the City Engineer and OMI. These include minimum flow rates, minimum pressure on water distribution lines for both domestic use and fire suppression, and TCEQ water quality standards.

G. Water Service Areas

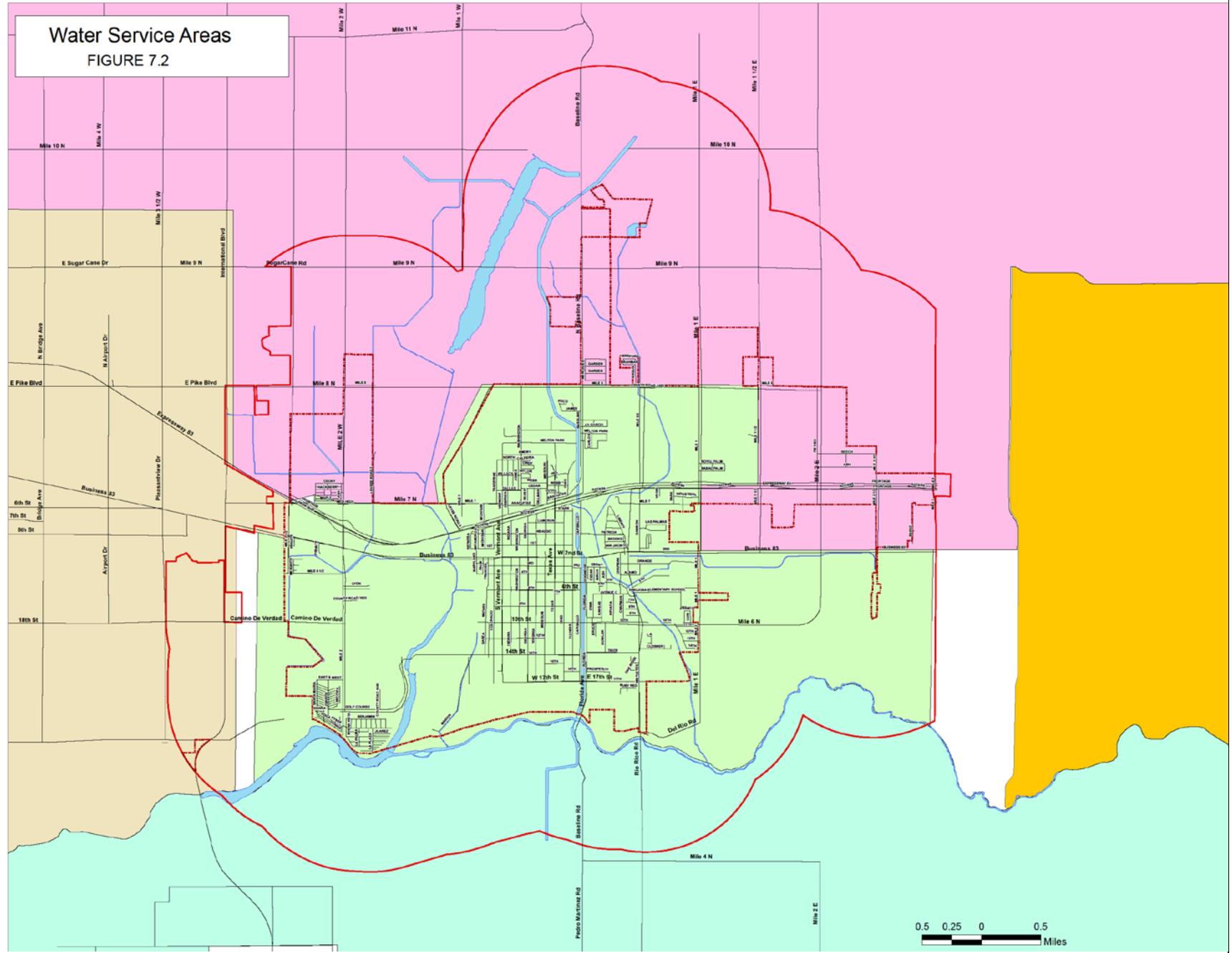
Planning for adequate water supply, treatment and distribution to accommodate future development in the Mercedes Planning Area is complicated by the fact that most of the City's ETJ is located within the water service areas of North Alamo Water Supply Corporation or Military Highway Water Supply Corporation. See Figure 7.2. Even some areas within current City limits--west of the floodway and north of Mile 7 North, north of Mile 8 from the floodway to Mile 1 ½ East, between Business 83 and the Expressway from Mile 1 E to Mile 1 ½ East, and north of the Expressway from east of Mile 1 ½ East--are within NAWSC's service area.

These rural water suppliers cannot, and are not required by law, to provide sufficient water volume and pressure to support fire hydrants and sprinkler systems. The minimum flows required for fire fighting depend on the predominate type of the surrounding land use. According to the State Board of Insurance's "Key Rate for Grading Cities and Towns of Texas," scattered residential development, should have a minimum flow of 500 gallons per minutes (gpm); congested residential areas, 750 gpm; light mercantile areas, 1500 gpm; principle mercantile and industrial areas, 3000 gpm; all at 20 pounds per square inch (psi) pressure.

For that reason, in Chapter 3-Land Use, it is recommended that commercial and residential development be strictly limited in these areas unless and until volume and pressure to support fire suppression can be provided. Because most of the City's Planning Area does lie within the City's wastewater service area, but not its water service area, any cross-subsidization occurring in the Utility Fund between wastewater and water systems, creates a fiscal and equitable issue to be resolved. For example, if any revenue from the sale of drinking water is being used to finance the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater, then a smaller universe of water customers are subsidizing the potentially much larger universe of wastewater service customers.

It is important to the City's future development that cooperative and professional working relationships with the rural water suppliers be maintained and strengthened. When the City agreed to provide water service to Indian Hills Subdivision, it installed a twelve-inch water line along Baseline Road north to Mile 10, which is outside of the City's water service area. A "gentlemen's agreement" exists between NAWSC and the City of Mercedes that the City will provide water to future development in this area (roughly the width of one farm tract to the east of Baseline Road and to Lake Campacuas to the west) even though the land is located within NAWSC's water service area. Furthermore, the City of Mercedes has successfully negotiated from NAWSC the purchase of service area in the vicinity of Expressway 83 in order to provide the water infrastructure essential to support commercial development and individual private developers have also negotiated the transfer of service area from NAWSC to the City in order to permit their development to proceed.

Water Service Areas
FIGURE 7.2



G. GOALS FOR THE CITY OF MERCEDES' WATER SYSTEM

Goal 7.1 Ensure that the City is able to meet future demands for water.

Obj.7.1a Mercedes will immediately begin to plan to expand the capacity of the City's water treatment plant.

Obj.7.1b The City will adopt a policy to acquire from the Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 9 any and all water rights associated with land within its water service area that is converted from agriculture to urban use. Alternatively, the City will enter into long-term contracts (e.g., 40 years) for the same water rights.

Obj. 7.1c The City will consider adopting an ordinance that requires developers to contribute some or all of the cost of acquiring water rights from the Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 9. (The cost, as provided by state statute, is 67% of the average of the three highest priced sales of Rio Grande water rights in the previous year.).

Obj. 7.1d The City investigates the costs and benefits of increased water storage as a means to meet peak demands.

Obj. 7.1e The City investigates and analyzes the costs and benefits of establishing a reservoir to enable the pre-treatment of canal water before it enters the water plant.

Obj. 7.1f The City investigates and analyzes the costs and benefits of installing filters on the City well.

Goal 7.2 Ensure that Mercedes has a fiscally sustainable water system.

Obj. 7.2a The City evaluates the financial sustainability of the water supply, treatment and distribution system and ensures that rates charged include sufficient amounts for maintenance and repair as well as replacement of aged or out-dated elements.

Obj. 7.2b In negotiating its contract with OMI, the possible need for additional staffing should be addressed.

Obj. 7.2c Technological upgrades that improve water quality and increase plant efficiency are made on an ongoing basis to the water treatment plant. Examples include replacement of the air hose vacuum system in the flocculation tanks with a more up-to-date system and replacement of the plastic tube settlers with a stainless steels inclined plate settler.

Obj. 7.2d The City will continue to assertively seek state and federal grant funding for the modernization of its water treatment plant and distribution system.

Goal 7.3 Develop tools to ensure than City Staff and Water Plant Operators can readily answer developers’ questions about capacity in the system and can promptly find and fix any problem that occurs.

Obj. 7.3a The City’s entire water supply and distribution system, including the location, size and materials of all water lines and the location of all valves, and other equipment will be accurately mapped.

Obj. 7.3b Once an accurate and up-to-date map is acquired, adequate systems are in place to assure the continued, regular updating of the map as the system is expanded or modified.

Obj. 7.3c The City should continue to work with the rural water suppliers to obtain accurate maps of their water supply systems.

Goal 7.4 The City maintains and strengthens its cordial and professional relationships with the other entities involved in the meeting the water needs of Mercedes and its planning area.

Obj. 7.4a The “gentlemen’s agreement” with North Alamo regarding the provision of City water to the east and west of Baseline Road, north of Mile 8 North, is committed to writing.

Obj. 7.4b The City acquires agreement North Alamo Water Supply Corporation and Military Highway Water Supply Corporation regarding a predictable method for the future transfer of service area from these rural water suppliers to Mercedes.

Obj. 7.4c The City explores with the rural water supply corporations alternatives to service area “buy-outs,” such as additional interconnection between lines, to meet the water volume and pressure required by urban development.

Obj 7.4d The City supports local, regional, state and federal funding to increase the efficiency of the Irrigation District’s water delivery system.

Obj. 7.4e The City supports the establishment of a Groundwater Conservation District to regulate withdrawals and protect the future sustainability of the Gulf Coast aquifer.

Goal 7.5 Ensure that the City is prepared to effectively respond to protracted drought.

Obj. 7.5a Keep the City’s Drought Contingency and Water Conservation Plan adequate and accurate and ensure the most effective technologies and methods are being used.

Obj. 7.5b Reduce the amount of “unaccounted for” water for example by billing NAWSC for water flowing past the master meter rather than that based on the amount of water NAWSC’s customers’ meter indicates was consumed; installing meters on “by-pass” lines such as for NAWSC and Llano Grande Resort Park

Obj. 7.5c Find and fix leaks in the City’s water distribution lines by investing in newer technology for detection.

Obj. 7.5d Continue the systematic replacement of residential water meters.

Goal 7.6 Replace existing substandard lines in the City and vicinity.

Obj. 7.6a Provide water service to three *colonias* northeast of the City that now have undersized lines and one southeast of the city (Capisallo North in NAWSC service area and Boyd #1, Colonia George and Conner in the city’s service area).

Obj. 7.6b Pressure loss and dead-end mains are eliminated by looping the water system northeast of the City, near De Anda and Saenz Subdivisions in the southeast, and in the southwest of the city near Llano Grande Resort Park.

Goal 7.7 The City achieves recognition as a “Superior Public Water System.”

Obj. 7.7a The physical facilities of Mercedes’ water system meet all TCEQ requirements .

Obj. 7.7b The city has a minimum of two certified water plant operators.

Obj. 7.7c The microbiological record for the City’s water system for the previous 24 months indicates no violations.

Obj 7.7d The quality of Mercedes’ drinking water complies with all primary drinking water quality parameters.

Obj. 7.7e The chemical quality of the City’s water meets all secondary drinking water standards.

Obj. 7.7f The water system complies with all minimum acceptable operating practices for drinking water supplies.

Obj 7.7g Mercedes’ water system meets or exceeds all minimum capacity requirements (capacity to pump treated water into the distribution system must be increased).

Obj 7.7h The water system shall maintain at least two wells or two surface water pumps, or one of each, with combined capacity to meet average daily demand with largest pump out of service.

Obj. 7.7i The facilities of the water system shall be well maintained and present a pleasing appearance to the public.

II. WASTEWATER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT

A. Mercedes Wastewater Collection and Treatment System

OMI operates and maintains the City’s wastewater treatment plant and its 31 wastewater lift stations. City Public Works Personnel are responsible for maintenance and repair of the wastewater collection lines.

The City currently provides waste water collection and treatment services to most residents of the City of Mercedes as well as the residents of some 16 *colonias* located outside of the City. As of October 2009, the City had 4,261 customers for wastewater services. That total includes single-family residential, multi-family residential and commercial accounts, both inside City limits and

outside of the City. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the City's wastewater accounts are residential (3,930 accounts). According to the U.S. Census, the average household size in Mercedes is 3.7 people. Therefore, the City's 3,930 residential customers represent wastewater collection and treatment services for some 14,541 people. The average daily wastewater flow from a residential connection is 328 gallons per day (gpd).⁹ The 8% of the City's wastewater customers that are commercial, (327 accounts) produce an average of 1,852 gpd of wastewater per connection. While 92% of the wastewater customers are residential, only 65% of wastewater is produced by residential connections and while commercial wastewater accounts represent only 8% of total accounts, they produce 35% of current wastewater production.

The City's wastewater treatment plant has current design capacity of 2.3 million gallons per day (MGD). It uses activated sludge and secondary treatment technologies. In part due to the first-time provision of public wastewater collection and treatment to more than 500 households in the 16 nearby *colonias* (in the period 2004 through 2007) and the opening of some 180 retail stores at the Premium Outlets, the plant is currently treating 2.8 MGD. According to OMI, the City has been able to remain within the other parameters of its TCEQ wastewater discharge permit by devoting significant extra staff time to very active and careful monitoring and management of the system.

Fortunately, the construction has begun to expand the capacity of the City's waste water treatment plant from 2.3 MGD to 5.0 MGD as well as make other improvements to upgrade the system. The City has received a grant of \$6 million and a loan of \$7.5 million from the Texas Water Development Board through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to pay for the improvements. The expanded capacity of the wastewater treatment plant should be on-line by June 2011.

Other improvements to the wastewater system now being undertaken include \$4.4 million worth of improvements to select lift-stations and sewer line rehabilitation. There is additional capacity in all but one of the City's thirty-one (31) lift stations. The number of hours that the pump in each lift station runs as a percentage of the 24 hours available in a day is a rough approximation of the capacity being used and the capacity available. That information, as well as the location of each of the lift stations is presented in

⁹ There are no flow meters on wastewater lines. To bill for wastewater services, the city uses a formula based on the amount of water consumed.

Table 7.5. However, proper functioning of lift stations is severely impacted by electrical power outages. Without electricity, the essential pumps do not operate. To keep lift stations functioning requires intensive human attention and mitigation including manually moving diesel-powered pumps or diesel generators from lift station to lift station during severe weather events. Additionally, currently accurate monitoring of the City's 31 lift stations requires OMI staff to visit each lift station daily. This is labor intensive and problems can remain undetected for 24-hours. A retrofit project to make all lift stations SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) ready and equipped with back-up electrical power is included in the improvements scheduled to be completed sometime after January 2011.

In addition to insufficient capacity at the wastewater treatment plant, there are other deficiencies in the existing system to be resolved. During high intensity rains, storm water infiltration and inflow is estimated to be as high as 15% of wastewater flow. This is believed to be caused, at least in part, to water leakage into aged brick manholes and clay wastewater collection lines.¹⁰ The excess storm water flow causes localized back-ups at manholes and delivers more volume to lift stations than the pumps at the lift stations are designed to handle. Another source of storm water inflow and infiltration is that some residents in areas subject to flooding open the clean-out to their sanitary sewer service line or open manholes to drain storm water more quickly from their property. This exacerbates the problem just described and also creates serious public health risks from exposure to untreated human sewage. Damage to pumps and system malfunctions also occur from improper disposal of objects and debris into storm and sanitary sewers.

As the City systematically identifies the source of inflow and infiltration into the sanitary sewer system and plans the remediation of that problem, efforts should be made to quantify the extent to which storm water runoff is currently drained from an area via the sanitary sewer system. The risk of increased localized flooding and the need to prevent that result should be evaluated at the time the repairs to the sanitary sewer system are planned.

Finally, while the City of Mercedes has made great strides in protecting the public health and well-being of many residents of nearby *colonias* that were built without adequate wastewater collection and treatment systems, there are still a few remaining

¹⁰ Clay wastewater lines are subject to storm water infiltration; they are also prone to breakage.

neighborhoods in the vicinity of Mercedes that require public services, primarily due to insufficiently-sized lots. Now that the capacity of the City's wastewater treatment plant is being expanded, it is in the best interests of the City, as well as the residents of those neighborhoods, to work to eliminate those remaining public health risks.

TABLE 7.11 Available Capacity in Wastewater Lift-Stations (Source: OMI report produced August 2009)

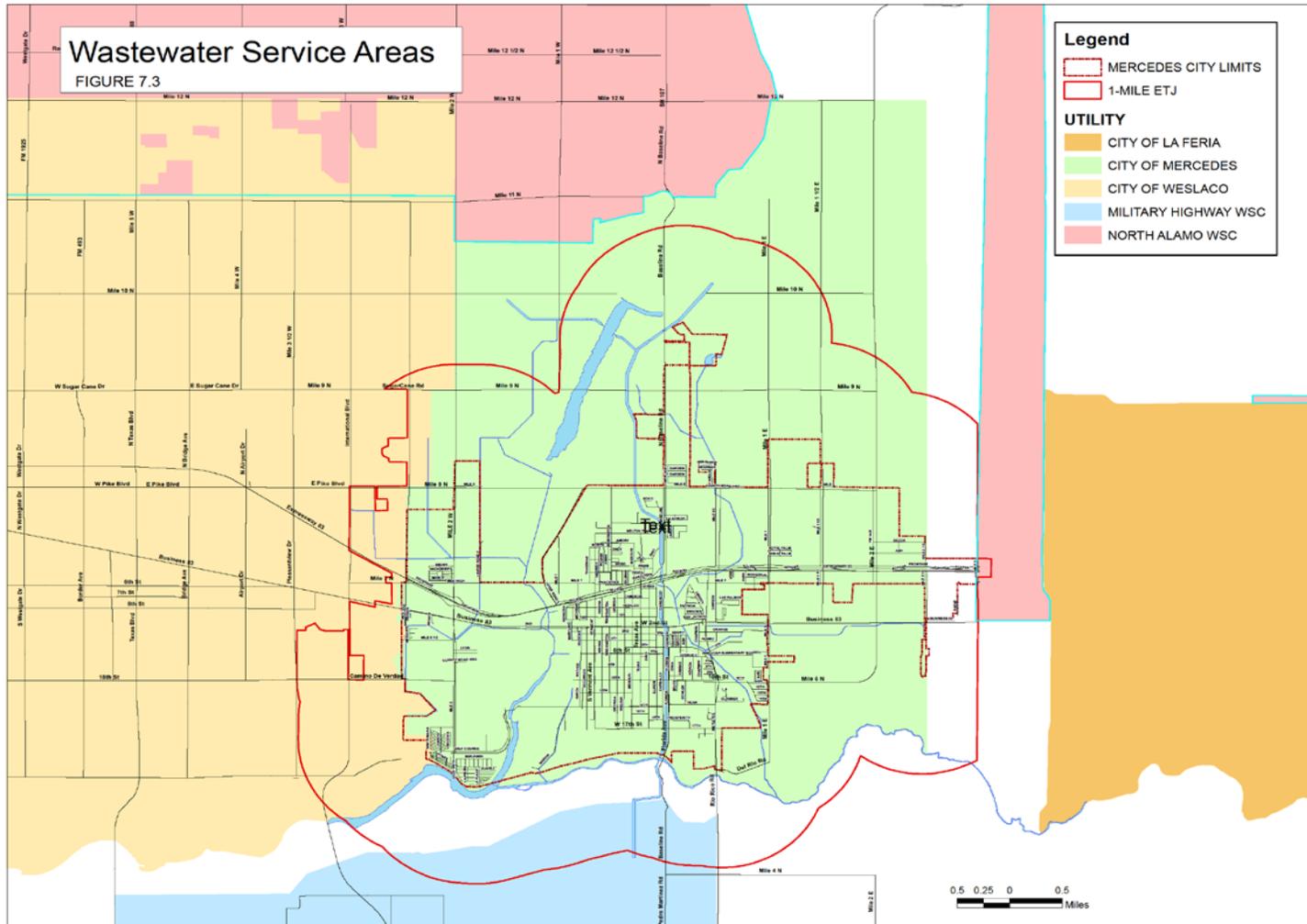
Lift Station	Average daily run times in hours	% of design capacity available (hrs. of run-time as a % of 24-hurs is roughly equivalent to capacity being used)	Location
1	9	63%	on Exp. 83, East of the Ohio, on FM 491, ¼ mile north of Exp. 83 on FM 491, north of Melton Park at the WWTP, Mile 8 N and Mile ½ E on FM 491, near Indian Hills
2	3	88%	
3	1	96%	
4	24	0%	
5	2	92%	
6	3	88%	near H&H, north of Exp 83 near Mile 1 E Industrial Park, East Queen City On 10 th St E, Valley Verde Sub. On FM 491, Closner Subdivision
7	5	79%	
8	15	38%	
9	0.5	98%	
10	1	96%	
11	3	88%	On 17 th Street, Rio Rico Estates 17 th and Florida Streets 6 th and Colorado Streets Business 83 and Floodway La Casa Gardens RV Park
12	5	79%	
13	9	63%	
14	13	46%	
15	7	71%	
16	2	92%	Llano Grande East Park Llano Grande, south of main gate Encore RV Park (formerly Paradise South) La Herencia Subdivision Industrial Park, west
17	6	75%	
18	1	96%	
19	13	46%	
20	2	92%	
21	3	88%	Frontage Road and Mile 1 ½ East North of new pond at Llano Grande Mile 11 North and Sunrise Park East of Llano Grande,, next to levee Mile 1 ½ East behind Outlet Mall
22	2	92%	
23	4	83%	
24	5	79%	
25	4	83%	
26	4	83%	On Washington St., N of Livestock Show On Mile 9 North, next to Rudy's Feed Store Mile 9 N and FM 1425 Mile 1 W, north of new Water Tower Mile 6 North and Mile 2 ½ E, on the curve Mile 2 ½ E, between Exp. 83 and Bus. 83
27	4	83%	
28	9	63%	
29	2	92%	
30	3	88%	
31	2	92%	

Assuming the current proportional split between wastewater production from residential accounts (65%) and commercial accounts (35%) remains constant into the future, the 5 MGD capacity in the wastewater treatment plant will enable the City to provide service to nearly 10,000 residential connections and nearly 1,000 commercial connections. Based on the population projections contained in Chapter 2, and the assumption about relative share of commercial and residential accounts, the 5 MGD capacity should be sufficient for the city through the horizon of *Envision Mercedes 2035*, indeed the wastewater treatment capacity should be sufficient though at least 2030.¹¹

Other improvements currently underway within the \$13 million plan include rehabilitation of lift stations 2, 8, 12, 14 and 16, emergency electrical power improvements at 24 lift stations, and rehabilitation of aged clay wastewater collection lines with a new high-tech “cured-in-place pipe-within-a pipe” system.

Unlike the water system, where the City’s ability to provide water to its ETJ is constrained by the Certificates of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) held by NAWSC and MHWSC, the City holds the wastewater CCN for the entire city and most of the current ETJ to the north. The southern boundary of the City’s wastewater service area is the Arroyo Colorado. MHWSC has the wastewater service area south the City and west of Rio Rico Road. To the east of Rio Rico Road, south of the City, there is land that belongs to no entities’ CCN. See Figure 7.3.

¹¹ The Demographics Chapter makes population projections only for the City of Mercedes, not for the much larger geographic area outside of City limits but within the City’s wastewater CCN. Projected rates of growth for the residential population within Mercedes’ wastewater service area, but outside of the City, are not available. Nonetheless, it should be expected that many of the City’s future residents will be residing on land that is not yet part of the City, though it may become part of the City through annexation at the time of development.



B. GOALS FOR THE MERCEDES WASTEWATER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT SYSTEM

Goal 7.8 Ensure the City has a thoroughly modern and adequate wastewater collection and treatment system

- Obj. 7.8a** All wastewater lift stations are equipped to operate reliably regardless of the weather or in the event of an electrical outage (portable pumps are available or the lift stations are equipped with back-up diesel generators).
- Obj. 7.8b** All wastewater lift stations are equipped with SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) -- a computerized system that allows electronic monitoring from a centralized, remote location.
- Obj. 7.8c** The public health and safety of the residents of DeAnda Subdivision, Colonia Saenz, Colonia George, and Perez Subdivision, is protected and advanced through the extension of first time public wastewater collection and treatment.
- Obj. 7.8d** Complete an updated Inflow and Infiltration Study on the City's wastewater collection system to accurately identify the sources and quantities of stormwater in the sanitary sewer system and prioritize and accomplish the needed repairs.
- Obj. 7.8e** Prioritize infiltration problems identified in the study and address top priorities each year.
- Obj. 7.8f** A public information campaign is waged to residents of areas subject to flooding regarding the serious consequences of using sanitary sewer clean-outs to drain storm water and of dumping debris into sanitary sewer or storm water manholes and compliance is enforced.
- Obj. 7.8g** Replace or refurbish cast iron and asbestos/clay lines in the downtown area, southwest of the City and any other location where they exist with PVC lines.
- Obj. 7.8h** Any and all remaining brick-lined manholes are replaced.
- Obj. 7.8i** Consider requiring facilities with major effluent flows to the City's waste water treatment plant to monitor their discharges into the system.
- Obj. 7.8j** Conduct an inventory of the existing septic systems in the City.

Goal 7.9 Develop tool so that City Staff and Wastewater Plant Operators can readily answer developers' questions about capacity in the system and can promptly find and fix any problem that occurs.

Obj. 7.9a The entire waste water collection system, including the location, size and materials of all waste water lines and man holes and the location of all lift stations, valves, and other equipment is accurately mapped.

Obj. 7.9b Once the map is updated, a system is put in place to ensure timely and regular updates are made to maintain its accuracy.

III. STREETS

Perhaps the number one concern and priority of City residents is the condition of City streets. After many years of street maintenance being deferred, the City is in the 4th year of an improvement program to repave or reconstruct all city streets. Sections of Garza, Vermont, Indiana, Florida, Palm, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 8th Streets were improved pursuant to a 2008 street improvement project. Improvements to Cindy, Webb, Duval, 1st, and 5th Streets are underway. Improvements to Washington, Matamoros, Michigan, Vermont, Starr, Cameron, Ohio, 1st Streets, Las Palmas Drive, and Closner Blvd., as well as parking improvements for the City Library and Police Department will occur next.

Within city limits there are an estimated 86 miles of paved roads. The City's Public Works Department is responsible for maintaining approximately 73 miles of local streets. To improve property values and quality of life in the City, the City must continue the street repair program currently underway. Additionally, the City should establish a regular program of re-surfacing to extend the useful life of streets and avoid the need to re-construct.

The City is currently constructing a new facility for the Public Works Department. It will house the city staff responsible for maintaining all city parks, water lines, sanitary sewer lines, streets, and storm water drains and ditches. In addition to offices, work areas, and a fueling station for city vehicles, it will also include an 18,000 square foot warehouse.

As identified in Chapter 4--Transportation, there is a need to develop and upgrade many roads in the City's planning area. Outside of City limits where population is somewhat sparse, the roadway network is limited. Hidalgo County Precinct 1 and the City of Mercedes are working cooperatively to improve Mile 2 West, north of the Expressway. Details are still being resolved. This is a county priority because it serves as a major transportation route for Edcouch-Elsa, LaVilla, Weslaco, South Texas and Mercedes' ISDs. Its current condition makes it difficult for buses to operate safely, especially during times of inclement weather. Other road improvement priorities identified by the City include reconstruction of Mile 1 East between U.S. Business 83 and U.S. Expressway 83 (daily traffic count of 4500) to a five-lane roadway (\$1.3 million) , improvement of Mile 2 West south of Business 83 to Camino de Verdad.

Appendix C sets forth the alignments where Hidalgo County owns the right-of-way as described, though the road is not yet fully developed to the extent of the existing ROW. The information in these Tables is based on work-in-progress by staff of the Hidalgo County Precinct #1 Office, which involves examining the deeds for the land involved.

GOALS FOR THE STREET NETWORK IN MERCEDES AND ITS PLANNING AREA

GOAL 7.10: Develop and implement a systematic and on-going schedule of street maintenance, repair, re-paving, re-construction and improvement within the City and the 1-mile ETJ.

- Obj. 7.10a** Work with Hidalgo County Precinct 1 and adjacent jurisdictions to develop the criteria and methodology for identifying which county roads will receive priority for repair or improvement.
- Obj. 7.10b** Adopt a capital improvement program for the City that provides for regular re-paving of streets on a life-span cycle.
- Obj. 7.10c** Develop a budget line item for street overlays to extend the life of streets before reconstruction becomes necessary.
- Obj. 7.10d** To help ensure roads in areas to be annexed are in good condition before annexation, the city coordinates with Hidalgo County to make improvements to county roads prior to such roads becoming the City's responsibility.

Obj. 7.10e Re-establish a regular street-sweeping schedule and program.

Obj. 7.10f Develop and maintain records of street maintenance and repair to support the other street maintenance and repair objectives.

GOAL 7.11: Mercedes' street network efficiently advances its circulation, land development, and public safety needs.

Obj. 7.11a Subdivision development standards require long-lived local streets and collectors and newly constructed streets are designed to those standards.

Obj. 7.11b Inspection of subdivision construction and road improvements completed on behalf of the city ensures that construction adheres to the City's standards.

Obj. 7.11c Subdivision development standards ensure that new subdivisions have adequate streets both within the interior of the subdivision and on the perimeter.

Obj. 7.11d Subdivision and development review ensures that right-of-way consistent with the Thoroughfare Plan is acquired at the time of subdivision and development.

Obj. 7.11e Street development and re-development accommodates bicyclists and pedestrians as well as automobiles, especially within one-mile of schools and in proximity to parks, downtown and other shopping areas.

Obj. 7.11f Given the numerous barriers to affordable extension of the street network in the City and its Planning Area—Expressway 83, railroad, floodway, Arroyo Colorado, canals and ditches—providing for the future extension of the street network and connection to adjacent land uses is strongly encouraged where those barriers do not exist.

GOAL 7.12: Develop and maintain accurate maps of streets within the City and the 1-mile ETJ Planning Area.

Obj. 7.12a Work with Hidalgo County Precinct 1 and the Hidalgo County MPO to update and correct the street maps.

Obj. 7.12b Work with the Hidalgo County MPO to correct all labeling on the Thoroughfare Plan map.

- Obj. 7.12c** Especially within the city and one-mile ETJ, the road maps should identify the width of the existing ROW, as well as the desired ROW width, and identify whether the road is paved, caliche, dirt or simply ROW.
- Obj. 7.12d** Ensure that right-of-way is acquired upon subdivision of land as per the Thoroughfare Plan in the Transportation Chapter.

IV. STORM WATER MANAGEMENT

A. Drainage and Flood Prevention

Given the City's location on the delta of the Rio Grande, approximately 40' above mean sea elevation, and the episodic torrential rains that occur, it is not surprising that certain locations in the City are prone to flooding. It should also be no surprise that drainage vies with streets as the number one concern and priority of city residents.

Some of the areas where periodic flooding occurs include Melton Park Estates #2, Capisallo Terrace Subdivision, Marion Drive, the east-bound and west-bound Expressway Frontage Roads, Business 83, Texas Blvd. near Business 83, and Valley de Palmas. Melton Park, recorded in 1962, was apparently constructed without any storm water drains, and, according to the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) prepared by FEMA, is in or adjacent to a special flood hazard area. Drainage at Capisallo Terrace was a key topic throughout review of the proposed plats for that subdivision and included a comment during review of the first phase by a drainage district manager that he personally had seen several feet of water on the land that was proposed for development. Marion Drive is also identified as a special flood hazard area. The expansion of U.S. Expressway 83 worsened drainage along the Frontage Roads and in other areas in the City as run-off from the expanded roadway overwhelmed the capacity of the local drainage system.

The drainage and flooding problems that exist in these areas can be prevented by avoiding development in flood-prone areas and implementing modern planning and engineering standards and methodologies to all development.

The FEMA' Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for the City of Merced became effective in July 1979. Its accuracy 30-years later may be questioned. In some instances drainage improvements have reduced the risk of flooding, while, in other areas, additional impervious surface may have increased flooding risk. The manmade boundaries that precisely delineate different relative flood risks may also lead to some doubt as to the accuracy of the maps (for example, Mile 3 East and Mile 3 West). FEMA is in the process of updating all of its Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Those for Hidalgo County have not yet been released. However, it is known that the International Boundary and Water Commission de-certified long stretches of the levees it manages because they are no longer believed to protect from a storm the intensity of which is 1% likely to occur any year, or 26% likely to occur over the life of a thirty-year mortgage (formerly referred to as "the 100-year storm"). When the revised FIRM for Merced and its planning area is released by FEMA, the Future Land Use Plan may need to be re-evaluated in light of the new information.

FEMA has also recently modernized its designations of relative flood risk. Any zone containing the letter A is considered a Special Flood Hazard Area. Zones with the letter A are those that have a 1% chance of flooding in any given year and a 26% chance of flooding over the life of a 30-year mortgage. For communities that participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, such as Merced, flood insurance is mandatory in all A Zones. FEMA's new FIRM designations describe Zones B, C and X identically:

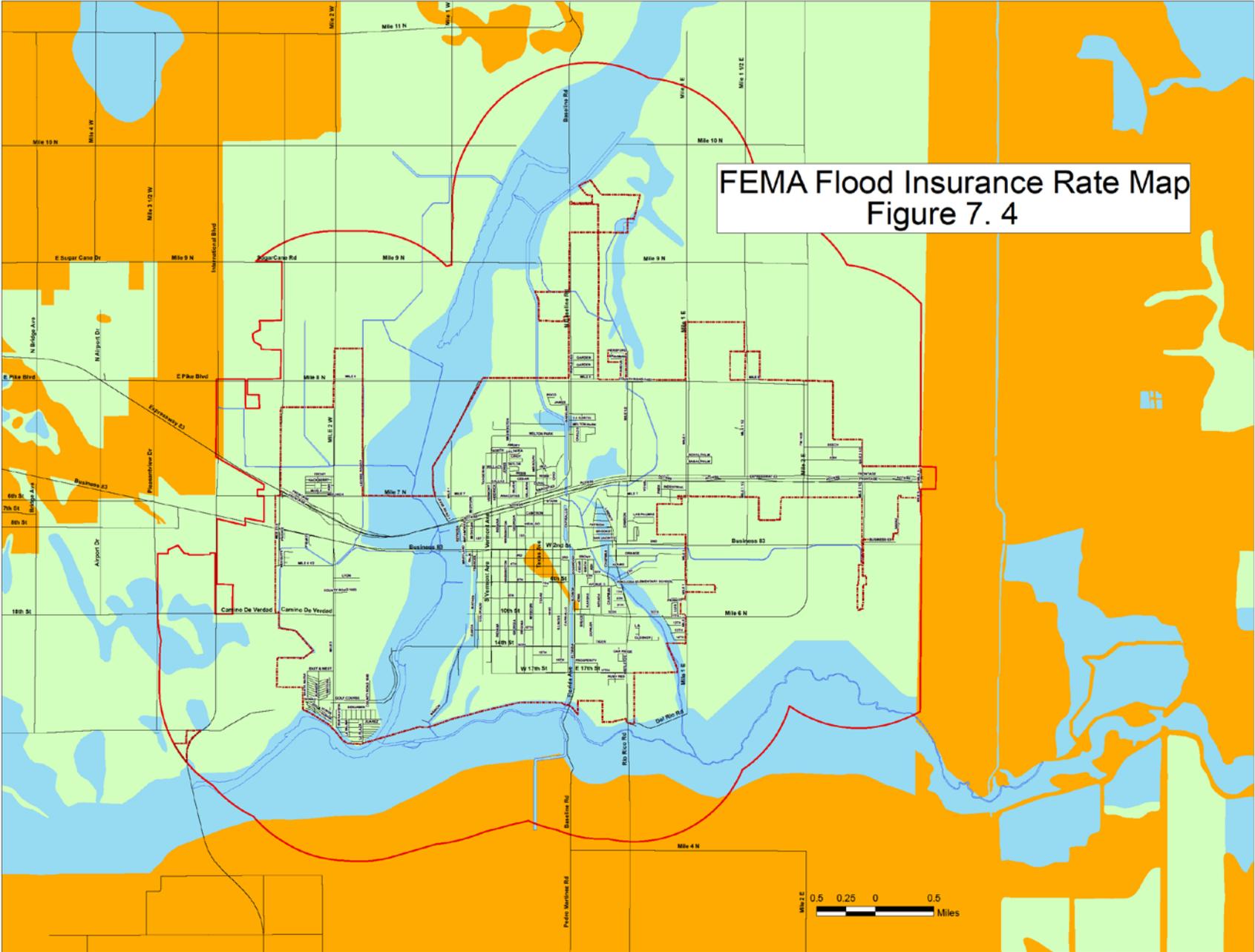
Areas outside the 1-percent annual chance floodplain, areas of 1% annual chance sheet flow flooding where average depths are less than 1 foot, **[or]** areas of 1% annual chance stream flooding where the contributing drainage area is less than 1 square mile, **or** areas protected from the 1% annual chance flood by levees. No Base Flood Elevations or depths are shown within this zone. Insurance purchase is not required [but is available to owners and renters in communities that participate in the National Flood Insurance Program] in these zones. (emphasis added)

The 1979 FIRM for Merced is depicted as Figure 7.4. It uses the old designations, under which the vast majority of Merced is designated Zone B. Zone B is an

area between 100-year and 500-year flood; **or**, (b) certain areas subject to 100-year flood with average depths of less than 1' **or** where contributing watershed is less than one square mile; **or** areas protected by levees from the base flood. (emphasis added)

Mercedes has only a very small area considered to be an area of minimal flooding (Zone C).

FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map
Figure 7.4



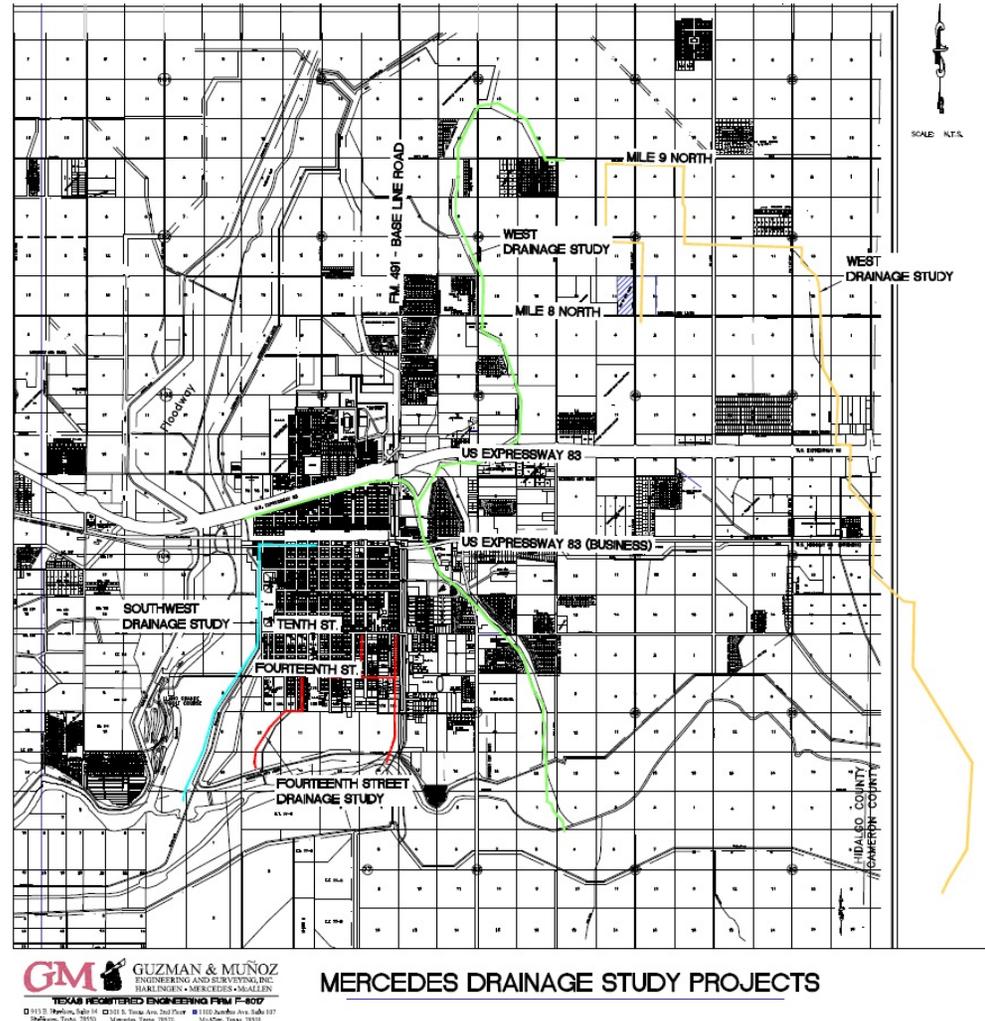
B. Drainage Infrastructure

Mercedes relies on drainage ditches owned and managed by Hidalgo and Cameron County Irrigation District No. 9 and Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 for much of its drainage infrastructure. Irrigation District No. 9 owns and manages many miles of canals, pipelines and ditches. The Irrigation District is organized primarily to handle the irrigation and drainage needs of agriculture. Currently, the City and Irrigation District have a cooperative relationship in keeping the drainage ditches cleared. As the City continues to grow, it should be expected that the Irrigation District and the City will want to formalize an agreement regarding maintenance of the ditches. It will also be important to explore and work cooperatively with the Irrigation District over the long term if the great promise of passive recreation use on or adjacent to drainage and irrigation right-of-way is to ever become a reality.

At the time this Chapter was prepared, the City Engineer was engaged in three drainage studies for the City of Mercedes. When complete, the report will evaluate the existing drainage routes and structures, present the results of the mathematical modeling used to calculate capacity of the routes and structures to detain and convey storm water, review the drainage needs of the areas served by these systems, and recommended alternative remedial actions. The drainage routes being evaluated are shown in Figure 7.5. The three drainage studies are:

- (a) the 14th Street Drainage Study (red on the map). This study includes south from 10th to 14th Street along Texas Avenue, along 14th Street from Georgia Avenue to Capisallo Road, and from 10th Street to the Arroyo Colorado along Capisallo. It also includes south from 14th Street along the western boundary of Travis Elementary School (Illinois Street alignment), then into the Irrigation District's drainage ditch to the Arroyo Colorado. The drainage ditch, south of 14th Street currently traverses farmland or natural thorn scrub. The southern portion of the ditch is defined by FEMA as a floodway.
- (b) the Southwest Drainage Study (blue on the map). This covers along Business 83 from Washington Avenue, west to Maryland, south on Maryland to the ditch on the eastern flank of the levee, where it continues south to the Arroyo Colorado. This area is also designated by FEMA as a Floodway.

Figure 7.5. Drainage Studies currently underway by Mercedes City Engineer



- (c) the Central Drainage Study (green on the map). This study examines several drainage ditches that traverse the entire City from north to south--from north of Mile 9 North, east of Baseline Road, all the way to the Arroyo Colorado. The Irrigation District's existing drainage_ ditches 9B travels north from Mile 9 for more than a quarter mile before reversing course and heading south generally parallel to Baseline Road, as drainage ditch 18. Ditch 18 runs along the eastern edge of Valle de Palmas Unit 1 Subdivision, past the City's wastewater treatment plant, along the eastern edge of Ryan Estates Subdivision, south to the Expressway, under the Expressway, west along the south Expressway ROW, where northwest of Queen City it enters the City's largest drainage ditch, which flows south-south west to the Arroyo just west of Mile 1 East. North of Valle de Palmas, Drainage Ditch 9B and Drainage Ditch 18 closely parallel a FEMA identified Floodway.
- (d) the East Drainage Study (yellow on the map). This study will examine several drains starting at Mile 8 N and Mile 1 ½ East, north to Mile 9 N, east about one-half mile, then south, and east to approximately Mile 2 ½ East and Mile 8 ½ North, then south, south-east to the Arroyo by Mile 3 ½ East.

When the Engineer releases the drainage studies to the City, they should be appended to this Chapter and the recommended investments considered in the Capital Improvements Program. The alignment of several of the drainage ways in these studies closely approximates areas that the Future Land Use Plan designates as most appropriate for parks and recreation. The remedial alternatives should include that desired future land use.¹² When these drainage studies are completed, the City should consider engaging the engineer to evaluate and make recommendations for remaining areas of the City that are subject to drainage problems and flooding. For purposes of economies of scale, to reduce the amount of prime commercial land that must be set aside for drainage, and to simultaneously accomplish several planning and land use objectives, the creation of regional storm water detention facilities should be included in the alternative solutions considered.

¹² Drainage Ditch 18 is located in an area designated as appropriate for single family residential development. The area is also significantly impacted by a special flood hazard area. If residential development is to take place in this area, cluster development with preserved, common open space for passive recreation, is likely to be the most appropriate type of development that advances several complimentary land use goals.

Federal funds are often available to implement projects that will reduce the long-term risk to people and property from flooding. FEMA manages four separate hazard mitigation grant programs designed to break the cycle of damage-reconstruction-repeated damage unrelated to the declaration of a national disaster. The federal program can fund up to 75% of the costs of each project. Urban County funds can be used towards the local government's required 25% match. As with all grant programs, there are many rules and regulations. \$238 million was available nationwide in 2008; \$216 million was available for 2009 (unrelated to disaster recovery efforts). Projects can include property acquisition, structure demolition, structure re-location, structure elevation, and minor local flood reduction projects. The hydrologic and hydraulic engineering or drainage studies that may be necessary to the development and implementation of a mitigation project are not eligible for funding. At least 50% of the structures directly benefiting from the mitigation activity must be NFIP-insured. Projects must be cost-effective. If a property has been determined by the City to have been substantially-damaged, property acquisition and demolition or relocation is considered *de facto* cost effective. Projects must be consistent with the Texas FEMA-approved State Hazard Mitigation Plan and the local hazard mitigation plan, if one is in effect, except if applying for funds to develop a hazard mitigation plan. Creative packaging of funding from different sources can allow a community to comprehensively address a problem. For example, money may be available from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help re-locate residents out of flood hazard areas and Texas Parks and Wildlife or other funds may be available to transform the flood hazard area into the desired public parks and open space.

C. Drainage and Pollution Prevention

In addition to planning for and managing the *quantity* of storm water run-off generated in the City, amendments to the federal Clean Water Act require the City to manage and control the *quality* of its storm water. Storm water runoff is generated when rain flows over land or impervious surfaces (e.g., streets, parking lots and rooftops) and does not percolate into the ground. As the runoff flows over the land or impervious surfaces, it accumulates debris, chemicals, sediment and other pollutants that can adversely affect water quality. The City of Mercedes discharges storm water to the Arroyo Colorado and subsequently to Laguna Madre Bay. To

prevent polluted storm water being discharged into the Arroyo and subsequently, Laguna Madre, Mercedes adopted its first Storm Water Management Plan in February 2008.

Starting in 1990, medium and large cities with populations of 100,000 or more and eleven industrial categories, including construction activity that disturbs five or more acres, were required to obtain individual National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits for their storm water discharges. The federal EPA began to regulate small “MS4s” in 1999. An “MS4” is a system owned by a municipality that is designed or used to collect or convey storm water run-off. The definition of an “MS4” includes streets, storm water sewers, and drainage ditches. Each regulated MS4 is required to develop and implement a storm water management program (SWMP) to reduce the contamination of storm water runoff and prohibit illicit discharges. In Texas, small MS4s are regulated under a general permit issued to TCEQ, General Permit TX04000.

Because the City conveys its storm water to the Arroyo via Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1, the City entered an interlocal agreement with that entity to share efforts through a common storm water management plan. The City’s Storm Water Management Plan contains minimum control measures, goals and best management practices (BMPs) in six separate areas:

1. Public education and outreach to residents, visitors, public employees, businesses, commercial and industrial facilities and construction site personnel on storm water quality issues;
2. Public involvement and participation in reducing pollutant loading of storm water;
3. Detection and elimination of illicit discharges of pollutants into storm water;
4. Construction site storm water and erosion and sediment control;
5. Post-construction storm water management in areas of new development and re-development; and,
6. Pollution prevention and municipal good housekeeping

The regulatory goal is to “reduce pollutants to the maximum extent practicable.” The effectiveness of the BMPs and success in achieving goals are to be evaluated annually. It is interesting to note for Mercedes and other communities in the Lower Rio Grande

Valley that have only relatively recently begun to require curb and gutter and underground storm water pipelines, and have focused on moving storm water out of the area as quickly as possible, that BMPs for storm water quality often call for less hard infrastructure and increased reliance on grassy swales as well as slowing down the movement of storm water. Achievement of storm water management goals can also advance other City goals. For example, some cities in Hidalgo County have successfully created storm water detention areas that serve an entire neighborhood and which double as recreations areas when dry. As we move forward into the future, we can expect to see traditional methods of handling storm water being reinvigorated with some modern planning and engineering to meet multiple goals.

D. GOALS FOR STORM WATER MANAGEMENT INCLUDING FLOOD PREVENTION AND POLLUTION PREVENTION

GOAL 7.13 Help minimize future property losses and safety risks from flooding by preventing inappropriate development in FEMA-designated special flood hazard areas and other areas known to become inundated.

Obj 7.13a No new residential development will occur in areas designated by FEMA as special flood hazard areas or other areas known to become inundated.

Obj. 7.13b Any new development in a special flood hazard area shall be required to ensure it does not increase flooding elsewhere.

GOAL 7.14 Minimize future property losses and safety risks from flooding by improving the City’s storm water management system.

Obj. 7.14a The City obtains a comprehensive study of its drainage system including an up-to-date map of the drainage infrastructure, calculation of the system’s total capacity, identification of bottle-necks and obstacles, quantification of the ability to pump water into the floodways, if needed, and identification of alternative remedial solutions to be considered and implemented.

Obj. 7.14b The City considers the costs and benefits of establishing neighborhood or regional storm water detention basins, which can also be designed to accommodate passive recreation during dry times.

GOAL 7.15 Reduce future property losses and safety risks from flooding in existing neighborhoods that are prone to flooding.

Obj. 7.15a The feasibility and cost of improving drainage or reducing vulnerability to storm water damage by, e.g., raising the base floor elevation of existing residences, is evaluated in those existing residential neighborhoods that are prone to flooding.

Obj. 7.15b In areas prone to frequent or severe flooding, the feasibility of re-locating households out of harm's way shall be evaluated.

Obj. 7.15c The City applies to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for funds to reduce or eliminate long-term flood risks to people and property.

GOAL 7.16 Ensure future property losses, safety risks and public inconvenience from flooding are not increased by new commercial, residential, industrial or institutional development.

Obj. 7.16a The City evaluates the costs and benefits of increasing the mandatory minimum storm water detention requirements from the "ten-year storm" that is used currently to the "25-year storm" (an increase in mandatory detention).

Obj. 7.16b No subdivision drainage plan relies on swales on individual residential lots to detain storm water.

GOAL 7.17 Implement the City's Storm Water Management Plan, thereby reducing the City's of Mercedes' contribution to non-point source pollution into the Arroyo Colorado and Laguna Madre.

Obj.7.17a The City's land development ordinances are reviewed and updated to include the legal authority for requiring best management practices regarding the quality of storm water run-off.

- Obj. 7.17b** Area-wide or neighborhood wide storm water detention basins are designed and utilized to simultaneously address the quantity and quality of storm water run-off while also creating passive recreation space.
- Obj. 7.17c** Map and identify all storm water outfalls.
- Obj. 7.17d** Adopt storm water management requirements for the issuance of building permits and for subdivision plat review and approval.

V. PUBLIC SAFETY

A. The Mercedes Police Department

The City of Mercedes' Police Department provides for the peace, good order and public safety of the City and its 15,131 residents, approximately 200 business establishments and their employees, the four to five thousand people who visit the City each day to shop at the Outlet Mall, and the 160,000 visitors to the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show. The Mercedes Police Department has 35 peace officers. That is, in 2007, there was one peace officer for each 360 Mercedes' residents. The mall and the Livestock Show create significant demand on the Police Department. Additionally, it is feared that the ongoing violence between the Mexican drug cartels could spill over to border communities in the U.S. and this too could place great demands on the Mercedes Police Force.

Similar to many police departments in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, intensive recruiting and hiring underway by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection creates challenges for the Mercedes Police Department to recruit and retain officers. The federal government can generally offer higher pay and better retirement and other benefits than a municipality can. However, the City has made strides in the last four or five years in making police salaries competitive with other nearby municipalities. However, turn-over among the sworn peace officers, as well as constant changes in the laws governing police work, create a need for continuous training for new recruits and seasoned officers alike.

The most officers on duty at any one time during normal business hours, not counting special functions held within the City, such as the Livestock Show, is 14. This number of sworn officers includes Patrol Officers, Investigators, Warrants Officers, Crimestoppers Officer, and Education Resource Officer. During week time evening hours, the Police Department averages four on-duty patrol officers. On weekends, the department has up to seven officers on duty. However, during certain special operations, there may be as many as fifteen officers on the street at the same time. The Police Chief explains that the public safety of the City would be better served by having six officers patrolling at all times. For example, a traffic accident involving an injury requires no fewer than two officers on the scene. With four officers on duty, the officers frequently simply respond to one call after another leaving no time for routine patrolling.

While not reflecting on the professionalism and expertise of the Police Force and its leadership, the community has expressed concern that the Department has been underfunded for many years. Underfunding can lead to staff shortages, inadequate equipment, insufficient training and ultimately, a less well protected public. As the City's financial wherewithal improves, Mercedes must recognize the importance of increased funding for the Department to meet deferred and future needs.

Staff shortages create a demand for over-time (OT) hours. While officers and their families appreciate the higher take-home pay that OT provides, routine OT adds stress to the officers' lives and financial challenges to the City. Whether the money being used to pay over-time could instead be used to hire additional officers should be vigorously explored. Some communities in other parts of the country have responded to episodic needs for increased law enforcement created by special events, such as home football games and the annual RGV Stock Show, by creating a reserve force of officers. It has been suggested that, if Texas law allows a reserve force of sworn peace officers, that may be an avenue worth exploring for Mercedes.

A modern police department needs modern vehicles and equipment. The Department currently has 30 vehicles. However six of them are at least ten years old and 17 are at least five years old. Of these 23 older vehicles, six are not operational. The Police Chief has indicated that the department needs 25 to 30 good vehicles, to reduce over-use of the vehicles and extend their useful life. Additionally, pursuit and other law enforcement activity sometimes require officers to drive on irrigation and drainage rights-of-way.

Four-wheel drive vehicles are needed for that, but the department does not have 4-wheel drive vehicles. Finally, across the nation, it is estimated that 45% of peace officers killed in the line of duty are killed in vehicle accidents. Safe, reliable vehicles are essential to the well-being of the City's officers.

Officers have also indicated that they need breathalyzers in their vehicles. Unfortunately, the rate of drunk-driving fatalities in Texas is among the worst in the nation. In 2008, Hidalgo County had 75 deaths by auto accident, 27 of which were known to involve a DUI. In 2008, there were 781 auto accidents in Hidalgo County known to have involved DUI. Breathalyzers are basic equipment needed by officers to investigate and prosecute drunk driving and perhaps prevent serious accidents. Yet, Mercedes police vehicles are not equipped with breathalyzers.

Another concern police departments across the nation face is the increased power and sophistication of the weapons used by criminal. Local police officers are often out-gunned.

A modern training program also requires sufficient funding. The law governing the activities of police officers is constantly modified by the legislature and the courts. In order to protect themselves and the City from liability and to protect the rights of the citizens, it is essential that officers stay current. It is also crucial that sufficient ammunition be available to allow officers to maintain their expertise in the use of their weapons.

The Mercedes Police Department includes among its ranks officers that have been trained as SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) officers. However, the City does not have its own SWAT Team. SWAT Teams are trained to perform high-risk operations that fall outside of the abilities of regular officers, such as hostage rescues and counter-terrorism, serving high risk arrest and search warrants, subduing barricaded suspects, and engaging heavily-armed criminals. A SWAT team is usually equipped with specialized firearms and equipment including heavy body armor, entry tools, armored vehicles, advanced night vision optics, and motion detectors. In situations that indicate a paramilitary response is warranted, the City calls upon its larger neighbor, Weslaco, for assistance. As the City's population grows, and if the threat of the activities of nearby Mexican drug cartels spilling over into the vicinity of Mercedes increases, the City may need to consider making the investment to create its own SWAT Team.

Annexations to the physical territory of the City and increasing population require additional officers. Public safety needs and consequent demands on the police department must be thoroughly and adequately considered when the decision to annex land is made. State law now requires that newly annexed lands be provided the services of the police department immediately upon annexation without reducing the level of service to the rest of the city. The very limited connectivity across the floodway, the irrigation canals and the Expressway, negatively impact the ability of the department to respond quickly to certain neighborhoods of the City. Improved connectivity across these barriers would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the police response to requests for assistance.

As the City grows, it will be important to plan for the police department's needs for physical space. Ideally, the police department would be provided sufficient space specifically designed to meet the needs of law enforcement. Investigators should have private offices in order to maintain the confidentiality of their work. The requirements that police departments make, maintain, and access voluminous records also warrants specialized attention and space designed to facilitate efficient management of these records.

Law Enforcement can be a stressful profession. Officers witness some despicable aspects of human behavior, face risk of personal injury and death, must communicate tragic news to next-of-kin, and work long and odd hours that conflict with normal family and social life. Health professionals increasingly recognize the toll that stressful occupations can wreck on individual and family health and well-being. For example, divorce rates are higher among couples with one spouse employed in law enforcement. Approximately five years ago, the City Commission approved a chaplaincy program for the Mercedes Police Department but it has never been established. Some officers have expressed that it would be beneficial to do so.

Establishment and maintenance of good relations between the police and community help reduce crime and increase apprehension of suspects. Support of neighborhood crime watch groups is one way to foster mutual trust and understanding.

Despite the limitations outlined above, due to the professionalism and commitment of the police force and its leadership, the City of Mercedes Police Department continues to serve the City day-in and day-out and fortunately, the crime rate in the City of Mercedes has declined in the past two years following sharp rises in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. (See Table 7.8.)

TABLE 7.12 Number of Requests for Police Services

	Number of Requests for Police Response	% Change from Prior Year
2009	16,006	-0.5%
2008	16,092	-11.7%
2007	17,980	18%
2006	14,618	37%

GOALS FOR THE CITY OF MERCEDES' POLICE DEPARTMENT

GOAL 7.16 The City Police Department is adequately-housed and adequately-staffed.

- Obj. 7.16a** The Police Department is provided adequate offices and facilities especially designed to accommodate police work, including the need for privacy when detectives interview witnesses or victims, and extensive records-storage.
- Obj. 7.16b** The needs of the City for an Emergency Operations Command Center are addressed. In a future police or fire station, planning includes a location where the City can coordinate and manage response and recovery resources and actions during an emergency, such as a hurricane. This facility can also meet other City needs for operations, training, meetings and other uses.
- Obj. 7.16c** The staffing of the police department reflects the particular geographic constraints on efficient circulation within the city, such as the Expressway, railroad, floodways and canals, which can impede response time, and the demands created by special events such as football games, the RGV Stock Show, and the thousands of shoppers who visit Mercedes daily.

Obj. 7.16d Staffing of the police department supports Neighborhood Watch Groups, Crimestoppers, and other crime prevention techniques.

GOAL 7.17 The Police Department is well-equipped.

Obj. 7.17a The Mercedes Police Department provides its officers modern, reliable vehicles. The City replaces police vehicles on a regular schedule and routine maintenance is completed in a timely and efficient manner.

Obj. 7.17b As a part of future vehicle acquisition, the Department obtains some four-wheel drive vehicles.

Obj. 7.17c The Department's cameras and communications equipment are up-to-date.

Obj. 7.17d Police vehicles are equipped with breathalyzers.

Obj. 7.17e The adequacy of the offensive and defensive weapons provide to police officers is continually evaluated in light of the weaponry typically carried by criminals.

GOAL 7.18 The Police Department is well-trained.

Obj. 7.18a A regular and ongoing training program keeps the officers fully up-to-date on the law governing their activities and modern trends in police work.

Obj. 7.17b The Department has sufficient ammunition to enable officers to remain expert in their handling and use of their service weaponry.

GOAL 7.19 Land Use planning and decision-making takes into account the residents needs for public safety.

Obj. 7.19a The public safety needs of residents of the areas to be annexed and the additional demands that will be placed on the City's police department are fully considered and accommodated when the city's boundaries are expanded.

Obj. 7.19b To facilitate faster emergency response, as well as to generally improve circulation within the City, the thoroughfare plan is implemented.

GOAL 7.20 The Mercedes Police Department works to mitigate adverse consequences that can be caused to law enforcement personnel by the nature of their work.

Obj. 7.20a The Police Department establishes a chaplaincy program.

Obj. 7.20b The Department explores the feasibility and desirability of establishing a volunteer police officer family support group.

B. The City of Mercedes Fire Department

The Mercedes Fire Department provides fire suppression services to 85 square miles, stretching from Mile 14 1/2 North to the Rio Grande and from Mile 2 1/2 West to Mile 3 East. The Fire Department provides those services with six full-time professional fire fighters and 25 well-trained volunteers, some of whom are full-time professional fire fighters in nearby cities. Between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. and during weekends, the Fire Department is staffed by volunteers. The City of Mercedes receives payment from the Hidalgo County Fire District #1 for services provided outside of city limits.

As the population of the City and the Fire Department's service area has increased, so has the need for its services. See Table 7.9. The Fire Department responds to approximately 950 requests for service annually.

Similarly to the Police Department, the community believes that the Fire Department has been underfunded and should become a higher priority in City budgeting. The Fire Department currently operates one station –south of the Expressway on 4th and Ohio Streets. The Fire Station was constructed in 1928 to house the town's municipal offices and fire station. While the building is a striking Texas Historic Landmark designed by a renowned local architect, it is in a deteriorated condition and insufficient for the

TABLE 7.13. Number of Requests for Fire Suppression Services

	Requests for Fire Services	% Change from Prior Year
2009	895	- 6%
2008	953	9%
2007	878	24%
2006	708	N/A

needs of a modern fire department. Plans to provide a new 10,190 square feet fire station are underway. Construction is expected to begin in 2012 at an approximate cost of \$1.6 million. The new station, to be located on Ohio and First Streets, will contain five bays, conference and training facilities, an exercise room, offices and a modern dormitory.

Because significant, additional residential and commercial growth in the City and its vicinity is anticipated, the community believes that the time to begin planning for a second fire station is at the same time that the new facility at Ohio and Fourth Streets is planned and designed. A second fire station is needed. Given the very large service area of the City’s Fire Department, the geographic obstacles to circulation such as the Expressway, railroad, canals, and floodways, maintenance of acceptable response times necessitate a Fire Station north of the Expressway.

The safety of the community and emergency personnel requires that first responders know about any hazardous materials that may be present at the scene of a fire, especially any industrial or commercial facility. The City needs to ensure the necessary information is kept accurate, communicated timely, and accessible to all fire fighters who will need it. Additionally, large volumes of national and international truck traffic traverse the City each day and present some small, though constant, risk of a spill of a hazardous material. The Mercedes Fire Department personnel should be trained to respond to such an occurrence.

When the new station is operational, the Department will transition to 24-hour work shifts, so there are full-time, paid professional fire fighters on duty at all times. The community supports the plan to have full-time paid fire fighters working each shift and encourages the City to consider whether that change must wait until the new building is operational. The community also believes the citizens will be better served when the City operates its own emergency medical response and has licensed EMTs on duty at all times, under the auspices of the Fire Department.

The Fire Department has modern equipment. It has four pumper trucks which each carry 750 gallons of water and can disburse up to 1,250 gallons of water per minute, one mini-pumper which can disburse up to 350 gallons per minute, two tanker trucks (one with 2000 gallon capacity and one with 3000 gallon capacity), two brush trucks, and two rescue boats. However, the City has a few high rise buildings in the downtown area and it does not have a ladder truck.

A fire hydrant requires 500 gallons per minute (gpm) to operate, which requires an 8” water line. As discussed in Chapter 3 - Land Use, one significant factor impacting the ability of the Fire Department to suppress fires and protect public safety outside of city limits is the lack of city water lines and the lack of sufficient water volume and pressure for hydrants. Inside City limits, the Fire Department color-codes hydrants according to the gpm the hydrant can produce. Red indicates up to 500 gpm; yellow 501 to 1,000 gpm; and green, more than 1,000 gpm. The Fire Department tests and verifies the capacity of hydrants within the city on an annual basis. The fire fighters will not hook-up to a hydrant coded red unless there is no alternative available. Outside of city-limits, it is the responsibility of the owners of the hydrants to test and maintain them. However, a fire hydrant requires 500 gpm, which generally requires an eight inch water line. The rural water suppliers own and operate very few eight inch water lines.

Every fire is different, of course, but a hypothetical fire can illustrate the concern. Firefighters will use 400 to 600 gpm to suppress a “typical” house fire. At 500 gpm, the pumper truck and 2000 gallon tanker truck will be emptied in six minutes. If the fire is not extinguished in that time, and the available fire hydrant produces only 200 gallons per minute, there will be a full ten minute delay while the 2000 gallon tanker truck is refilled. Or, if no hydrant is available, the tanker truck must leave the scene and re-fill elsewhere. During these delays, the fire is not being fought, “hot spots” may re-ignite, and public safety and property are at continued risk.

The City’s Subdivision Ordinance requires 500 gpm fire hydrants to be placed in residential areas no less than every 1000 feet. Generally, each hydrant can serve a 500’ radius. However, residential subdivisions in the City’s ETJ have been approved without meeting this standard because NAWSC’s water lines cannot support such hydrants. *Envision Mercedes 2025* recommends a change to that practice and recommends that the minimum infrastructure standards established by the City’s subdivision ordinance be fully implemented in the City and its ETJ.

GOALS FOR THE CITY OF MERCEDES’ FIRE DEPARTMENT

GOAL 7.21 The Mercedes Fire Department is well-equipped.

- Obj. 7.21a** All fire apparatus is in proper working order to support the firefighters in the delivery of excellent emergency services.
- Obj. 7.21b** The Fire Department continues to implement its preventive maintenance program for all fire equipment to maximize the service life.
- Obj. 7.21c** The Fire Department and Public Works Department work cooperatively to ensure fire hydrant testing and maintenance is timely and ongoing.
- Obj. 7.21d** Accurate records are regularly made and maintained to support the previous two objectives—maintenance of fire equipment and fire hydrants.

- Obj. 7.21e** The sufficiency of the Fire Department’s trucks, equipment and apparatus keeps pace with growth in the residential population and commercial establishments and activity.
- Obj. 7.21f** When the purchase of a new fire truck is being considered, the ability of the width of existing streets to handle the truck and whether the new truck would result in wider minimum streets and cul-de-sacs in new development is evaluated.
- Obj. 7.21g** The Fire Department acquires a ladder truck.
- Obj. 7.21h** The fire station and equipment and vehicles are maintained in a clean and respectable condition.

GOAL 7.22 The Mercedes Fire Department is able to respond quickly to a request for service.

- Obj. 7.22a** The City develops a second fire station.
- Obj. 7.22b** The number and location of fire stations acknowledges the Fire Department’s 85-square mile service area and the geographic constraints within the city such as the Expressway, floodways and numerous canals which can impede response time.

GOAL 7.23 The Mercedes Fire Department is adequately housed.
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- Obj. 7.23a** The Fire Department is provided adequate stations, offices and facilities especially designed to accommodate the needs and mission of the department, the fire fighters and emergency response.
- Obj. 7.23b** The needs of the City for an Emergency Operations Command Center are addressed. In a future police or fire station, planning includes a location where the City can most effectively coordinate and manage response and recovery actions and resources during an emergency, such as a hurricane. This facility can also meet other City needs for operations, training, meetings and other uses.

GOAL 7.24 The Mercedes Fire Department is adequately staffed to provide first-rate emergency response services.

- Obj.7.24a** Fire Department personnel is increased to meet the rising demand for emergency services created by a growing residential population and intensifying commercial activity.
- Obj.7.24b** Firefighters are offered up-to-date training and volunteer firefighters receive basic, intermediate and advanced certification.
- Obj.7.24c** The Fire Department’s manual of standard operating procedures is reviewed and updated.
- Obj.7.24d** Staffing is sufficient to provide fire safety education for the general public and school children.
- Obj.7.24e** Fire Department personnel are trained and prepared to respond to a hazardous materials incident.
- Obj.7.24f** Full-time, professional fire fighters, augmented by volunteer fire fighters as needed and available, are on duty “24/7.”

GOAL 7.25 Land use decisions acknowledge the needs of emergency response.

- Obj. 7.25a** To facilitate faster emergency response the thoroughfare plan is implemented and street continuity is emphasized in the platting of new subdivisions.
- Obj. 7.25b** In areas where water lines cannot properly support fire hydrants, development is limited.

GOAL 7.26 The ISO rating for the City of Mercedes is improved.

- Obj. 7.26a** ISO is informed when land is annexed to the city to facilitate property owners obtaining the best insurance rates.
- Obj. 7.26b** The City identifies all factors considered by the ISO and makes improvements where warranted and possible.

C. Emergency Medical Services

It is difficult to provide emergency medical services to a small community. For example, in Mercedes in 2009, a total of 947 calls for emergency medical assistance were made, an average of 79 calls per month. Furthermore, many residents lack medical insurance, have low-incomes, and are unable to pay the ambulance bill. Because of the low number of calls for service and lack of insurance, the costs of expensive equipment and trained and skilled staffing 24 hours per day, seven days per week, can be covered by only a few paying customers. That is why the City of Mercedes provides a subsidy to a private ambulance company to provide services in Mercedes, \$180,000 in the 2009-2010 fiscal year. For some twenty years or so, the City has contracted with a private company to provide emergency medical services and emergency medical transportation. Some local perception exists that response times are too long. However, for the cost reasons set-forth above, there are no easy solutions to that concern. While, at this time the City does not intend to change the provision of emergency medical services by private contractor in the near future, the community expressed that it believes citizens will be better served when the City operates its own emergency medical response services and EMTs are on-duty at all times under the auspices of the Fire Department. High turnover in staff and lack of knowledge of the community by the EMTs contributes to slower response time. Additionally, some isolated lingering problems with proper 911 addressing can also hinder response time.

At the future point in time when the size of the City's population might reasonably support a City ambulance service, the City intends to examine that option. In addition to the capital outlays required, the ongoing costs of recruiting and retaining qualified personnel will be a primary consideration. The City will have additional control over response time if the service is operated by City personnel. The provision of emergency medical services is never expected to generate a surplus of income. The goal would be to try to cover expenses with revenues.

GOALS FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES FOR THE CITY OF MERCEDES

GOAL 7.27. The residents of the City of Mercedes have reliable and professional emergency medical services.

Obj 7.27a Possible options for increased cooperation with other publicly-owned emergency medical services are investigated.

Obj 7.27b The City operation of the City's own emergency medical services under a uniform command structure with the Fire Department is established as a priority and the detailed planning and analysis necessary to accomplish that is undertaken.

VI. LIBRARY

The Mercedes Public Library is a beautiful, well-stocked facility. City support for the library has grown substantially over the last decade. The library has strong reference, Spanish-language and children's collections. At the same time that the City has supported improved library services, the Mercedes Independent School District has also invested in school libraries. The community's many church-based, Head-Start and private child care centers find the library is a very popular place to bring the children in the summertime. For example, between June and July 2009, 537 young children participated in story hour at the library, 265 in arts and crafts, 17 watched a movie and 46 attended a puppet show. The library has separate programs for older elementary school children and 250 of them participated in "book talk" and 104 in arts and crafts.

In 1996, the library acquired its first computer. In 1998, a grant from the Gates Foundation enabled the library to acquire six more computers. Now, the library has modern, well-equipped computer centers with 25 computers for adults and ten computers for children, with special educational software geared towards youngsters. The demand for the computers is high; often people wait in line to use them. The computers are equipped with GED coursework and UTPA and other entities offer computer classes for adults in using the internet, word processing and spreadsheets.

The library is part of the Hidalgo County Library System. Mercedes receives financial support from the county library system to assist it in providing library services to people residing outside of the City. The City received approximately \$19,000 from the County in 2008-2009. According to the formula used by the County library system to allocate the County residents who residing in outside of a municipality with a library and financial resources to serve them, the Mercedes Public Library has a “service area” population of 22,500. Approximately 12,000 people have Mercedes Library cards. In June of 2009, 129 new cards were issued and 6,187 people used the library. The adult computer lab attracted 1,669 users that month.

The Texas Library Association has established certain standards for library services. See Table 7.10. Mercedes comes close to meeting them. One tremendous unmet need of the library is for a community meeting room. The library receives many requests from community groups and government agencies such as Texas Workforce Commission for access to a community meeting room.

TABLE 7.14 Comparison between Texas Library Association Standards and the City of Mercedes Library

	Texas Library Association Standards (TLA)	TLA standard applied to Mercedes service area	Mercedes Library
Square footage of library space per person in the service area	.6 square feet	13,500 sq. ft.	11,000 sq. ft.
Number of circulating volumes per person in the service area	2 circulating volumes	45,000	37,795 books 43,393 total library items

GOALS FOR THE CITY OF MERCEDES' PUBLIC LIBRARY

Goal 7.28 The City Library continues to meet the needs of the residents of the city and the surrounding area with a beautiful modern facility and up-to-date research and circulating collection.

- Obj. 7.28a** The Mercedes Public Library, perhaps in partnership with the Hidalgo County Library System, Weslaco Public Library, and the MISD, commences operation of a book mobile to serve remote and low-income areas in the area surrounding Mercedes.
- Obj. 7.28b** The Mercedes Public Library meets or exceeds Texas Library Association standards.
- Obj. 7.28c** The Mercedes Public Library has expanded evening and weekend hours to better meet the needs of potential users of the library.
- Obj. 7.28d** The staffing of the library increases to keep pace with expanded hours of operation and greater usage by the public.
- Obj. 7.28e** The Library has available a public meeting room for use by community groups and agencies and for conduct of workshops, presentations and classes.
- Obj. 7.28f** Off-street parking available to library patrons is increased.

VII. SANITATION

A. Solid Waste Management in the State and Nation

Solid Waste Management is another essential public service that benefits from and is impacted by regional planning and cooperation, or lack thereof. Previously many cities, including the City of Mercedes, operated their own municipal landfills. Due to increasing environmental standards and economies of scale, it is now understood that not every community needs its own landfill. Despite reduced numbers, landfill capacity has grown significantly, indicating a continued move away from smaller community landfills towards larger regional landfills. According to Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), in 1986, the average

landfill in Texas was 50 acres with an average depth of 6.5 feet and a height of 13 feet. In 2007, the state average was 214 acres with an average maximum permitted depth of 34 feet and an average maximum permitted height of 72 feet. 2007 was the fifth consecutive year in which there was an increase in the number of landfills with maximum heights more than 100 feet (54, up from 44 in 2005 and 31 in 2000). See Table 7.15.

Technological improvements in waste compaction have also extended the useful life of the state’s landfills. In 1986 the average compaction rate was 650 pounds of waste per cubic yard. In 2000, the average compaction rate was 1,200 pounds per cubic yard. The compaction rate has remained nearly constant since 2000 indicating that compaction technologies may have reached peak efficiencies.

TABLE 7.15. The Number of Active Landfills and Total Landfill Capacity in Texas in 1988 and 2007

YEAR	# OF LANDFILLS ACCEPTING WASTE	% CHANGE	CAPACITY	% CHANGE
1988	750	N/A	377,771,754 tons	N/A
2007	188	-75%	1,403,592,411 tons	+272%

Source: “Municipal Solid Waste in Texas: A Year in Review,” TCEQ, September 2008, page 17.

Nationally, current per capita waste generation (4.5 pounds per person per day) is higher than it was previously (2.68 pounds per person per day in 1960 and 3.66 pounds per person per day in 1970). However, since 1990 it has leveled-off and the country has made great strides in recovering resources from the municipal solid waste stream. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), in 2008, Americans recycled and composted 33% of the municipal solid waste generated (up from less

than 6% in 1960, 17% in 1985, and 26% in 1995). On average, Americans recycled and composted 1.5 pounds of the 4.5 pounds per person per day waste generated. Table 7.12 identifies commonly recycled materials and the percent of the national waste stream that is recycled. (State and national per capita waste generation figures are not comparable. Texas includes construction debris in the definition of municipal solid waste. Nationally, construction debris is a separate category.)

The U.S. EPA calculated that the 83 million tons of municipal solid waste that was recycled or composted in 2008, eliminated the equivalent of the annual greenhouse gas emissions from some 33 million cars and trucks. According to the EPA, recycling has environmental benefits at every stage in the life cycle of a consumer product. The ultimate benefits from recycling are cleaner land, air, and water, overall better health, and a more sustainable economy.

TABLE 7.16. National Recycling Rates for Different Materials

Material	Recovered from the Waste Stream
lawn and yard trimmings	65%
office-type paper	71%
corrugated boxes	77%
aluminum cans	48%
tires	35%
plastic bottles	7%
glass	23%

Source: *Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling, and Disposal in the United States: Facts and Figures for 2008*, U.S. EPA

B. The Lower Rio Valley Regional System

The Texas Legislature first required the preparation of regional solid waste management plans in 1989. TCEQ, pursuant to state law, makes available solid waste management planning grants and project grants to each of the state's 24 Regional COGs (Councils of Governments). TCEQ dedicates one-half of the state fees on municipal solid waste discarded at landfills to the state's 24 COGs based on a formula that takes into account population, land area, solid waste fee generation, and public health needs. The COGs are directed to use the funds to develop and maintain a regional solid waste management plan, develop and maintain an inventory of closed landfills, and administer pass-through grants for regional and local solid waste projects.

Our regional COG, the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, oversaw the development of the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan for Willacy, Cameron and Hidalgo Counties. The Plan was first adopted in 1995 and was amended and revised in 2002 and 2004.¹³ Sometime around 2002-2004, the North American Development Bank (NAD Bank) also funded a regional solid waste study. Between the preparation of the LRGVDC's 1995 and 2002 Regional Plans, the LRGV saw a 27% increase in the amount of solid waste disposed at landfills, on a per capita basis. Between 2002 and 2007, there was some progress: the per capita landfill disposal of solid waste declined 15%. Nonetheless, 2007 per capita solid waste disposal rates still exceed 1995 rates by 12%.

The combination of rapidly increasing regional population and increasing per capita waste disposal rates can cause the region's solid waste facilities to reach capacity at an accelerated rate. Because continued regional population growth is expected and desired, the LRGV Regional Solid Waste Management Plan establishes the goal of reducing the per capita amount of waste disposed of at a landfill. See Table 7.13. As evidenced by the 2007 data (4.04 pounds per person per day), thus far, the region is lagging behind those goals. While, the regional per capita disposal rate of 4.04 lbs/person/day fails to meet the aggressive waste reduction goals, it is the seventh lowest rate achieved by the 24 Texas COGs. Statewide per capita municipal waste production is higher than it is locally. In 1988, statewide daily per capita waste generation was 5.95 pounds. In 2007, it was 7.61 pounds, an increase of 28%.

¹³ According to TCEQ guidelines, the regional solid waste management plans are supposed to be updated every four years. No update is planned at this time.

The LRGV is served by five landfills, four in Hidalgo County and one in Cameron County. These facilities receive waste from Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy, as well as Starr, Webb, Zapata, Jim Hogg, Kennedy, and Brooks Counties. Additionally, some ten percent of the waste deposited in LRGV landfills comes from *maquiladoras* in Mexico. TCEQ's 2008 Solid Waste Annual Report indicates that these five licensed landfills have 28 years of combined remaining capacity based on 2007 disposal rates. See Table 7.14. The calculation of remaining capacity does not address increased population. It assumes population increases are mitigated completely by increased recycling and waste reduction measures.

TABLE 7.17 Waste Disposal Projections of the 2002-2022 LRGV Solid Waste Management Plan

		WASTE DISPOSAL GOALS		CURRENT PER CAPITA RATE OF DISPOSAL CONTINUES	difference between Current Disposal Rate and Reduction Goals
YEAR	Regional Population Projection	in Tons/Year deposited at landfill	in Lbs/person/day deposited at landfill	in Tons/Year deposited at landfill	in Tons/Year deposited at landfill
2003	1,021,288	670,986	3.60	838,733	167,747
2005	1,085,632	624,238	3.15	891,575	267,337
2010	1,264,291	623,295	2.70	1,038,299	415,004
2015	1,462,904	600,522	2.25	1,201,410	600,888
2020	1,672,700	549,482	1.80	1,373,705	824,223
2022	1,761,591	572,253	1.80	1,446,707	874,454

Source: LRGV Regional Solid Waste Management Plan Amendment, 2002-2022, Table 16, page 22.

The BFI landfill in Donna, Texas will close in 2011, or soon thereafter. However, BFI, now operating as Republic Services, Inc., has received a TCEQ permit for a large sanitary landfill near McCook, in northwest Hidalgo County. Municipalities that have used the Donna facility must make arrangements to utilize Edinburg or Brownsville landfills or the new Republic Services landfill. For some communities, including the City of Mercedes, this will represent increased transport distance and therefore increased costs.

With the exception of a comprehensive voluntary program in the City of McAllen and a limited voluntary program in the City of Weslaco, the LRGV region has no curbside recycling services. However, significant efforts have been made by city and county governments and the private sector to provide voluntary recycling drop-off locations. Drop-off stations generally accept materials such as paper, plastic, steel, and aluminum cans, as well as automotive wastes (used motor oil and tires). Some stations also host yard waste and Christmas tree recycling programs with composting or chipper services available.

The obstacles to expanded recycling in the LRGV include: (1) limited markets for recycled materials and erratic prices paid for them; (2) lack of a State mandate; (3) the relatively low cost and abundant available capacity of landfill disposal; and, (4) many costs associated with extraction of raw materials and production and disposal of consumer goods are externalized and not reflected in the cost to purchase or dispose of the product.

Another shortcoming in the local solid waste management program is that the LRGV region currently operates no permanent, ongoing household hazardous waste (HHW) programs. Periodically, local governments or private entities host collection events. Household hazardous wastes are leftover household products that contain corrosive, toxic, ignitable, or reactive ingredients. This includes insecticides, paints, cleaners, batteries and florescent light bulbs. Certain types of HHW have the potential to cause physical injury to sanitation workers, contaminate septic tanks or wastewater treatment systems if poured down drains or toilets, and present hazards to children and pets if left around the house. It is not illegal to put these items in the regular trash stream. Improper disposal of household hazardous wastes can include pouring them down the drain, on the ground, into storm sewers, or in some cases putting them in the trash. While the dangers of such disposal methods might not be immediately apparent, improper disposal can pollute the environment and pose a threat to human health.

TABLE 7.18. 2007 Landfill Capacity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Willacy, Cameron and Hidalgo Counties)

Site Name	Type ¹⁴	Waste Landfilled in 2007 (Tons)	Remaining Capacity in Cubic Yards	Compaction Rate (pounds/cubic yard)	Remaining Capacity (Tons)	Remaining Capacity (Years)
EDINBURG REGIONAL LANDFILL	1	302,364	10,438,063	1,200	6,262,838	21
BROWNSVILLE LANDFILL	1	249,485	30,935,407	1,020	15,777,057	80
PENITAS LANDFILL	1AE	5,452	7,264	1,200	4,358	1
BFI - DONNA	1	522,652	3,407,122	1,295	2,206,112	4
EDINBURG TYPE IV LANDFILL	4	62,122	12,557,998	1,200	7,534,799	121
TOTAL		1,142,075			31,785,164	28

Source: "Municipal Solid Waste in Texas: A Year in Review" (Fiscal Year 2007 Data Summary and Analysis, September 2008)

¹⁴ A "Type 1" Landfill is the standard landfill for the disposal of municipal solid waste. A "Type 1AE" is an arid-exempt landfill meaning it is located in a arid part of the state, limited in the amount of solid waste it can accept, and exempt from liner and groundwater monitoring requirements. A Type IV Landfill can accept only brush, construction and demolition debris, and other similar waste that will not putrefy.

According to the LRGV Regional Solid Waste Management Plan, Hidalgo County has 19 general and 30 automotive waste recycling drop-off locations. None are located in the City of Mercedes. Many auto parts retailers, including AutoZone, Oil Can Harry's, O'Reilly's, and Wal-Mart, accept used oil for recycling. Some also accept used anti-freeze, transmission fluid brake fluid and tires.

Illegal dumping of household trash and construction debris along roadways and in empty lots is probably the solid waste problem of highest visibility in the region. The problem tends to be more prevalent in the rural and unincorporated areas surrounding the cities. However, the cleanliness of the surrounding countryside reflects well or poorly on nearby municipalities. As one way to tackle that problem, Cameron County has instituted mandatory residential curbside trash services in unincorporated areas of the County. Hidalgo County has declined to mandate curbside services, due to concern about the impact of the expense on low-income households. Instead Hidalgo County has established trash drop-off stations in each precinct. A Precinct One county solid waste drop-off center is located just outside of Mercedes' city limits on Mile 1 South, near 17th Street. Trash can be disposed of at these sites for no charge but the individual household must transport the waste to the site. Another method that some municipalities have employed to reduce illegal dumping is to require a monetary deposit when a demolition permit is issued. The deposit is refunded when evidence of proper disposal of the demolition debris (a receipt from a licensed landfill) is presented.

The 2002-2022 LRGV Solid Waste Management Plan established the following goals:

Goal 1: Reduce waste generation and landfill disposal and develop responsible waste disposal practices.

Objective 1 - Stop illegal dumping.

Objective 2 - Promote recycling and reduce waste generation.

Objective 3 - Expand disposal service to rural areas and *colonias*.

Goal 2: Plan for and provide adequate regional waste disposal capacity.

Objective 1 - Maintain a minimum of ten 10 years of regional landfill capacity.

Objective 2 - Provide for disposal of special wastes (used tires, hazardous household waste, yard waste, etc.)

Objective 3 - Maintain regional solid waste data and promote sub-regional studies.

The LRGVDC distributes and administers approximately \$300,000 each year to local entities to advance these goals. Examples of projects supported by the grant program include the purchase of a chipper by the City of Weslaco so that tree limbs from City Parks could be chipped and used as mulch. The Mission Independent School District purchased a cardboard compactor for use by its food services department. The District now earns some \$10,000 annually from the sale of corrugated cardboard, in addition to the cost savings of trash disposal. The City of San Juan purchased a truck for their recycling program. The obvious limitation to this grant program is that the funds are insufficient to operate a successful program. A participating City must also allocate its own financial and staffing resources to be eligible. An application by the City of Mercedes was unsuccessful in 2008.

C. Mercedes' Solid Waste Services

The City of Mercedes contracts with a private company—Waste Management—to handle all residential and commercial solid waste services within the City. With the pending closure of the BFI landfill in Donna in 2011, the city may experience increased costs because the other landfills are further away from the City. The current contract allows Waste Management to bill the city a fuel surcharge for commercial customers if the price of fuel rises more than a certain percentage. The City Administration is not empowered by ordinance to pass on those fuel surcharges to the customers. That would require the action of the City Commission. There is no similar fuel surcharge provision in the contract for residential customers. Waste Management provides twice weekly residential curb-side pick-up services pursuant to a three-year contract. The current monthly charge to residential customers within the City of Mercedes is \$11.50 for one can or \$15.50 for two cans. Residential customers outside of the city pay \$14.50 for one can. A separate monthly charge of \$4.50 is levied on each residential customer for brush and bulky item pick-up. The cost for commercial pick-up depends on the numbers of times per week that trash is collected and the volume of the trash bin. The lowest commercial rate is \$19 per month for a single 96 gallon container (equivalent to a residential container) collected once weekly to \$70 per month for a three cubic yard bin that is picked-up once weekly to \$672 for trash collection six days per week for eight cubic yards.

The City has no current plans to resume providing solid waste services through the use of city equipment and city employees. The City cannot match the efficiency that a national company can provide. Therefore, there is no need for Envision Mercedes 2025 to directly plan for the capital needs related to refuse collection and disposal. The City may wish to ensure that Waste Management adequately plans for the routine replacement of capital equipment so that the City is not surprised with a sudden escalation in costs related to replacement of sanitation trucks and other large equipment. Periodically opening the process to competitive bids is also recommended.

With the exception of a Christmas tree drop-off at the public works building, Mercedes operates no recycling programs—mandatory or voluntary. At one point previously, recyclable materials were accepted at the Public Works Facility on Ohio Street. Given the increased consciousness about the need to conserve finite natural resources, and the probable continued rise in the cost of transporting and disposing of trash at a landfill, the City should begin to encourage more recycling of solid waste. Whether motivated by a desire to conserve natural resources or extend the life-span of the local landfill, recycling of newspaper, office paper, cardboard, aluminum, tin, glass, plastic, leaves, brush and yard waste, and construction debris has become the norm in many parts of the United States. Newcomers moving to the Lower Rio Grande Valley from other parts of the country may expect recycling to be provided as a basic municipal service. The extent to which a community provides or encourages recycling services can impact its reputation as a progressive and forward-looking community or as one with outmoded operations. The private solid waste management companies, including Waste Management, operate successful recycling programs in other communities. The City may wish to consider testing the waters with some voluntary drop-off sites in the next contract for solid waste services.

D. Street Sweeping

Regular street-sweeping improves the appearance of the city, prevents debris from clogging the storm drainage system, and can decrease the pollution-loading of storm water run-off. Unfortunately, street sweepers are another piece of expensive equipment which require skilled and licensed operators. The City owns two street sweepers. However, only one employee is available to operate

the street sweeper. The streets in the downtown area are normally swept twice weekly. However, there is no regular schedule for sweeping the streets in the remainder of the City.

GOALS FOR SANITATION IN THE CITY OF MERCEDES

Goal 7.22 The City of Mercedes operates comprehensive, efficient and modern solid waste management services.

- Obj. 7.22a** City residents continue to receive affordable, reliable curb-side trash collection services.
- Obj. 7.22b** City residents have reliable information about, and convenient access to, local recycling opportunities, including chipping or composting of brush and yard waste.
- Obj. 7.22c** Mercedes continues its assertive program to ensure waste illegally dumped on private property is promptly cleaned-up.
- Obj. 7.22d** The City works with Hidalgo County Precinct 1 to minimize illegal dumping in the City’s extra-territorial jurisdiction.
- Obj. 7.22e** To improve the appearance of the City and to facilitate storm water management, the City implements a schedule of regular street-sweeping throughout the City.
- Obj. 7.22f** A pilot program of recycling drop-off sites within the City is developed.

VIII. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The City’s needs and desires for improved infrastructure, public facilities, and capital equipment and public safety will likely always exceed the financial resources available. Therefore, it is essential that the City systematically prioritize and schedule its capital investments. There are many good reasons for the City to adopt a five-year Capital Improvement Plan or Capital Improvement Program (CIP). A CIP can help avoid waste and mismanagement by coordinating improvements. For example, planned work on underground utility systems should be completed before planned street improvements in the same vicinity to avoid tearing-up newly

re-paved or reconstructed streets. The CIP can help stabilize property tax rates through prudent debt management and avoiding wildly fluctuating annual expenditures. It can enable the City to take advantage of opportunities to, for example, acquire land before the price rises, even if the planned improvement is several years down the road. The adoption of a CIP can provide an opportunity for the residents of the community to work with elected and appointed official to identify the City's priorities. When the citizens are involved in reviewing a community's needs and establishing its goals, they are more likely to be supportive of the expenditures and for assuming any debt which is required to finance the project. Most importantly, a CIP helps ensure that the City's long-term capital improvement goals are achieved.

The determination as to which items belong in the CIP can vary based on the size and budget of the community. CIPs, as the name implies, do not include expenses related to on-going operations, staffing and maintenance. The CIP identifies the relatively large and expensive capital investments that the city must make, or desires to make, in community facilities, infrastructure and equipment that generally cannot be paid-for out of annual operating funds. Capital expenditures are usually determined based on their projected life span and initial cost estimates. In some jurisdictions a capital expenditure may be an item that costs more than \$2,500 with a useful life of five or more years. Other communities might set initial cost limits at \$20,000 with minimum life span expectations of ten years. The investments can be for new facilities or renovated or expanded facilities. Costs related to engineering and architectural services and land acquisition for the various items contained in the CIP should be included.

In addition to identifying future capital expenditures, the CIP should also identify how the capital items will be paid for. Revenue sources can include the City's general fund, reserve funds, users fee's (such as the fees paid for water, wastewater, or trash collection services), grants, revenue bonds, general obligation bonds, certificates of obligation, community development block grant funds, special assessments, or some combination of these resources.

GOALS FOR THE CITY OF MERCEDES' CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

GOAL 7.23 The City of Mercedes will adopt a Capital Improvement Plan.

- Obj. 7.23a** The Capital Improvement Plan will project the City's capital investments for the next five years and will be reviewed and updated annually.
- Obj. 7.23b** The CIP processes will allow for citizen review and input.
- Obj. 7.23c** The CIP will address the capital needs of water treatment and distribution and waste water collection and treatment independently due to the expectation that these services should be self-supporting. Depreciation should be included as a regular expense in order to establish reserve funds for the necessary future replacement or renovation of the capital assets
- Obj. 7.23d** The CIP will include an accurate inventory of all of the City's capital assets and depreciation will be included as a regular expense, especially with regard to City vehicles, in order to establish reserve funds for the future replacement of capital assets.

Appendix 7-A

Description of processes at the City of Mercedes Water Treatment Plant

1. Water is pumped from the Rio Grande into the Mercedes Main Canal by the Hidalgo and Cameron County Irrigation District #9.
2. The water gravity flows from the canal to a lift station at the City's water plant. There are three raw water pumps at the lift station. They can pump 1900 gallons per minutes (gpm), 1500 gpm and 1600 gpm. Though only one raw water pump is used at a time, the total raw water pumping capacity is 5000 gpm.

(While the quality from the canal water can vary greatly, generally water pumped from the canal has a turbidity measurement of about 150. Turbidity is cloudiness in water caused by individual particles that are generally invisible to the naked eye. Turbidity is a key water quality measurement. In drinking water, the higher the turbidity level, the higher the risk that people may develop illness because contaminants like viruses or bacteria can become attached to the suspended solids. The suspended solids interfere with water disinfection because the particles act as shields for the virus and bacteria.)

3. On its way to two aerators, aluminum sulfate and a polymer mix are added to the water.
4. Flowing through the aerator stacks, which function like waterfalls, oxygen is added to the water. Each aerator stack can handle in the range of 1500 to 1800 gpm.
5. From the aerators, the water flows into the "rapid mix" which does just what its name implies—rapidly mixes the water so that the alum and polymer can be quickly and uniformly dispersed to facilitate the removal of suspended particulate matter. The capacity of the rapid mix chamber is 6,283 gallons.
6. Following the rapid mix basins, the water is gently stirred in flocculation basins where particulate matter continually collides and sticks together into progressively larger particles called floc. There are 2 flocculation chambers. Each can hold 35,970 gallons.
7. From the flocculators, the water passes through settling basins, where additional solid particles settle out of the water. There are four settling basins. Two have capacity of 261,381 gallons each and two have capacity of 45,427 gallons each.

8. The next step is passage through the tube settlers which again serve to facilitate the settling out of any fine particulate matter. When leaving the tube settlers, the turbidity measurement is 1 to 2.
9. Now the water is disinfected with chlorine and ammonium sulfate. The ammonium sulfate converts the chlorine to chloramines which are long-lasting disinfectants.
10. Now the water passes through mixed media filters for the final removal of particulates. The filters reduce the turbidity measurement to less than 0.3. The filters each can hold 13,518 gallons.
11. The water is now drinking water quality and then enters the clear wells.
12. In the clear wells, canal water that has passed through the treatment plant and well water that has simply been disinfected with chlorine and ammonia is mixed.
13. From the clear wells, water is pumped into water distribution lines using “high service” pumps. The City has five high service pumps.

<u>Pump</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Notes</u>
#5	1200 gpm	Currently, the only pump tied to an emergency generator. Funding has been obtained to upgrade the generator and tie all high service pumps and the well to the emergency generator.
#8	850 gpm	This pump cannot be used. It is located too close to where well water is injected into the system. Use of pump #8 will result in insufficient “contact time” ¹⁵ for the well water.
#9	1500 gpm	
#12	700 gpm	This pump can potentially produce 1200 gpm. Repair is needed to realize full capacity.
#13	1000 gpm	This pump is temporarily out of service because the meter is not working.
TOTAL Potential Capacity:		4,900 gpm (pump # 8 has been excluded)
TOTAL Current Capacity:		4,400 gpm
Capacity when largest pump is out:		2,900 gpm

¹⁵ “Contact Time” is the amount of time between when the water enters the plant until it enters the clear wells for distribution. The maximum flow permitted by TCEQ through the City’s water plant is 3.78 million gallons per day, alternatively stated as 2,625 gpm. This maximum flow ensures that the City has approximately 30 minutes to make the raw water suitable for drinking. However, depending on the quality of the raw surface water, sometimes the plant operators must significantly reduce the flow through the plant in order to increase “contact time.”

Appendix 7-B

I. South-West Quadrant

(south from Business Highway 83 and west of Canal)

	LOCATION	LENGTH	SIZE & MATERIAL	NOTES
1	Business Highway 83	Mile 2 West to Francis	10" AC	
2	Business 83	Francis to		
3	Mile 2 West	Business 83 to Llano Grande Resort Park	8" AC	
4	Mile 2 ½ West	Expressway 83 to Business 83		dead-end at Dakota Street
5	Mile 2 ½ West	Camino Real Viejo (M 6.5 N), 1000' north	8" PVC	
6	Mile 6 ½ North (Camino Real Viejo)	Mile 2 W to Mile 2 ½ West	8" AC	
7	Camino de Verdad	Mile ~2.25 East to M. 6 ½	6" PVC	
8	Mile ~2.25 East	Camino de Verdad to M. 6 ½	6" PVC	
9	Lyon Street loop		6" PVC	
10	Mesquite Drive and Lane		8" PVC	
11	Golf Course Road	Mile 2 West to IBWC levee	6" AC	
12	Maryland	Bus. 83 (or railroad?) to 4th	8" AC	
13	Palm	Bus. 83 to	6" PVC	

14	3 rd Street			
15	4 th Street			
16	5 th Street			
17	6 th Street	Indiana to Capisallo	8" PVC	
18	8 th Street			
19	10th Street ??			
20	12 th Street			
21	14 th Street	Capisallo to Maryland	AC	middle of street
22	14 th Street	Georgia to Maryland	8" PVC	2009
23	17 th Street	Missouri to Capisallo	8"	
24	Francis/Mathis Avenue	2 nd to 8 th	8" PVC	street
25	Mathis/Garza Avenue	8 th to 10th	8" AC	back of curb - eastside
26	Garza & Colorado (alley)	10 th to 14th	4" AC	
27	Mathis/Garza and Colorado Avenues (alley)	6 th to 10th	6" PVC	
28	Colorado Avenue	2 nd to 6 th	6" PVC	

29	Colorado & Vermont Avenues (alley)	2 nd to 3 rd	6" PVC	
30	Colorado & Vermont Avenues (alley)	3 rd to 4 th	4" PVC	
31	Colorado & Vermont Avenues (alley)	4 th to 10 th	6" PVC	
32	Colorado & Vermont Avenues (alley)	10 th to 11 th	6" AC	
33	Colorado & Vermont Avenues (alley)	11 th to 14 th	4" AC	
34	Vermont & Indiana (alley)	11 th to 14 th	4" AC	
35	Indiana & Washington (alley)	12 th to 14 th	6" AC	
36	Washington & Georgia (alley)	2 nd to 8 th	6" PVC	
37	Washington & Georgia (alley)	8 th to 14 th	4" AC	
38	Georgia & Virginia (alley)	8 th to 10 th	6" AC	
39	Georgia & Virginia (alley)	10 th to 14 th	4" AC	
40	Georgia & Virginia (alley)	14 th to 17 th	4" AC	
41	Virginia & Missouri (alley)	2 nd to 4 th	8" metal	
42	Virginia & Missouri (alley)	10 th to 14 th	4" AC	
43	Virginia & Missouri (alley)	15 th to 17 th	2" PVC	

44	Missouri Avenue	14 th to 17 th	4" AC west side	west side
45	Missouri Avenue	14 th to 17 th	8" AC	east side
46	Missouri & Texas (alley)	10 th to 12 th	2" PVC	
47	Missouri & Texas (alley)	12 th to 14 th	6" AC	
48	Missouri & Texas (alley)	14 th to 15 th	6" PVC	
49	Missouri & Texas (alley)	15 th to 17 th	4" AC	
50	Ohio Avenue	10 th to 14 th	6" PVC	
51	Ohio Avenue	14 th to 17 th	6" AC	
52	Illinois Avenue	10 th to 16 th	6" AC	
53	Vermont Avenue	1 st to 6 th	8" PVC	
54	Vermont Avenue	1 st to 3 rd	10" AC	second line; west side
55	Indiana & Washington (alley)	2 nd to 8 th	6" PVC	
56	Indiana & Washington (alley)	8 th to 10 th	6" AC	
57	Capisallo Road	3 rd St. (water plant) to 5 th St.	10" PVC	
58	Palm Avenue	6 th to 10 th Streets	4" AC	
59	Illinois Avenue	3 rd to 5 th	10" metal	

Appendix C

East–West Roadway Network in City’s One-Mile ETJ

ROAD	EXTENT OF RIGHT-OF-WAY	CURRENT STATUS
Mile 3 North	PFC Pedro Martinez Road to Mile 3 E.	There is no road at Mile 3N between PFC Pedro Martinez and Rio Rico Roads.
Mile 4 North	PFC Pedro Martinez Road to Mile 3 E.	Mile 4 N. becomes a dirt road at Mile 2 ½ E.
Mile 5 North	FM 88 to Mile 2 W (plus 2 farm tracts west of Florida Avenue to Florida Ave)	Mile 5 N does not exist east of FM 1015. If the road existed, it would cut through Llano Grande Lake Park, the Mercedes Cemetery and the Arroyo Colorado floodway.
Mile 8 North	Midway Rd. (M. 7 West) to Mile 3 E.	Mile 8 N dead-ends at Mile 1 ½ W and at Washington Street. On eastern side, Mile 8N becomes a dirt track east of Bixby Road.
Mile 9 North	Midway Rd. (M. 7 West) to Mile 3 E. (not across Campucas Lake)	
Mile 10 North	Midway Rd. (M. 7 West) to Mile 3 E. (with N & S jogs at floodway to Baseline.	
Mile 11 North	Midway Rd. (M. 7 West) to Mile 3 E.	
Mile 12 North	Midway Rd. (M. 7 West) to Mile 3 E.	

North-South Roadway Network

ROAD	EXTENT OF RIGHT-OF-WAY	CURRENT STATUS
Mile ½ East		Caliche south of Mile 9N; like private driveway north of M 9N
Mile 1 East	Rio Grande to Mile 18N	Caliche north of Mile 9N; caliche south of Mile 6N to Arroyo Colorado levy; paved from Mile 4N to levy; no road between Mile 4N and Mile 3N; dirt road south of Mile 3N
Mile 1 ½ East		Caliche N and S of Mile 9N; dirt road south of Mile 6N; caliche and dirt south of the Arroyo Colorado.
Mile 2 East (FM 1425)	Mile 6 N to Mile 18N	paved road, yellow painted center line; dead ends at Mile 6N; paved south from Mile 4N to south of Mile 3N.
Mile 2 ½ East		Caliche south of Mile 9N; non-existent north of Mile 9N; dirt road south of the Arroyo Colorado to Mile 3N.
Mile 3 East	2 farm tracts north of floodway to Mile 18N	Caliche and dirt from Exp. 83 to Mile 8N; dirt track north of Mile 8N.
PFC Pedro Martinez	South of Mile 2 N to Mile 18N	Caliche across the floodway. Becomes Florida Ave. inside Mercedes. (County Thoroughfare map still calls it Baseline Rd.)
Mile 1 West	Just south of Mile 9N (shore of Lake Campacuas) to Mile 18N	Caliche north of Mile 10N
Mile 1 ½ West		Dirt from Mile 9N to M. 10N; south of M. 8N, it is dirt path.
Mile 2 West	Arroyo Colorado to M 18 N	
Mile 2 ½ West		Non-existent north of Mile 9N; caliche south of Mile 9N

Chapter 8

Annexation and Other Planning Tools

Envision Mercedes 2035: A Community Comprehensive Plan for the City of Mercedes is a guide for use by current and future City officials, administrative staff, and citizens in making decisions that shape the future growth and development of the community. Comprehensive planning is a continuous process of articulating a broad set of interrelated goals and objectives for the City, establishing policies and procedures, and formulating detailed programs of action for achieving those goals and objectives. In order to carry out the resulting plans, the City utilizes a variety of implementation tools, including annexation, zoning, and subdivision regulations which all have a significant role in the physical development of the city. This chapter of the Plan focuses on the City of Mercedes' Annexation process and plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Subdivision Ordinance in order to understand the limitations of the existing policies and to provide recommendations for better utilization of these important plan implementation tools.

The City of Mercedes' existing zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and annexation procedures were reviewed during the development of this comprehensive plan. The Zoning and Subdivision ordinances were reviewed for compatibility with State enabling legislation and court decisions pertaining to relevant cases. Procedures of the Planning and Zoning Commission for zoning and subdivision processing were also reviewed. Zoning, subdivision and annexation are summarized in the following sections.

ANNEXATION

Annexation is the process by which the City extends its municipal services, regulations, voting privileges, and taxing authority to new territory. The City annexes territory to provide municipal services to developed and developing areas, and to exercise regulatory authority necessary to protect public health, safety and general welfare. Annexation is also a means of ensuring that residents and businesses outside the City's corporate limits, who benefit from access to the City's facilities and services, share the tax burden associated with constructing and maintaining those facilities and services. Annexation and the imposition of land development regulations may also be used as a growth management tool to implement the comprehensive plan.

Annexation also extends the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), enabling the City to regulate the subdivision development of land over an expanded area. Annexation authority extends into the ETJ of the City, which is the area outside the corporate limits but within a certain distance of the corporate limits. The City of Mercedes' ETJ for annexation purposes extends two (2) miles beyond the city limits. The City of Mercedes, as a Home-Rule City, has authority under Texas annexation law to annex territory on a non-consensual basis. However, in annexing property without consent there are stringent procedural and service requirements that must be met by the City relative to the State of Texas enabling legislature that took effect September 15, 1999.

The City must prepare a three-year annexation plan that specifically identifies annexations that may occur beginning on the third anniversary of the date the annexation plan is adopted. The City must compile a comprehensive inventory of services and facilities provided by public and private entities in each area proposed for annexation. The inventory must be available to the public for inspection. Before the first day of the 10th month after the month in which the inventory is

prepared, the City must complete a service plan that provides for the extension of full municipal services to the area to be annexed. The service plan must provide for the extension of basic fire, police, and solid waste services within sixty (60) days of annexation and for maintenance of water, sewer, streets, street lights, parks and recreation facilities, and other public facilities currently serving the proposed annexation area. There are many other time sensitive actions that must take place during the course of the three years to avoid having an improper annexation. Texas Municipal League (TML) publishes a sample calendar to help cities stay on task with the timeline (see Appendix 8A).

If the annexed area had a lower level of services, infrastructure and infrastructure maintenance than the level of service provided within the City before annexation a service plan must provide the annexed area with a level of services, infrastructure and infrastructure maintenance that is comparable to the level in other similar parts of the City. If the annexed area had equal services, a service plan must maintain the same level of services. If the annexed area had a superior level of services, a service plan must provide the annexed area with a level of services that is comparable to the level of services available in other parts of the City. Construction of capital improvements required for extension of municipal services must begin within two and one-half (2 ½) years of the annexation and be completed within four and one-half (4 ½) years. These requirements may not apply if the annexation is initiated by the landowners to be annexed and the City and owners agree that the improvements will not be completed within four and one-half (4 ½) years.

The geographical size of areas annexed in any given year is limited to a total area equal to ten percent (10%) of the City's existing incorporated land area. The amount of land that can be annexed in a given year is cumulative, so if the City does not annex ten percent (10%) of its existing area one year, it may carry forward that acreage and combine it with another ten percent the next year. If the City is carrying over an allocation, it may not annex in a calendar year a total

area greater than 30 percent (30%) of the incorporated area of the City as of January 1st of that year. An annexation area must be contiguous to the existing City Limits and must be at least 1,000 feet in width at its narrowest point. The City may preclude the incorporation of a new municipality within its ETJ.

The key legislative caveat impacting annexation of land by Mercedes are the provisions governing annexation of land which are appraised for ad valorem tax purposes as agricultural, wildlife management or timber. These tracts of land are eligible to be the subject of a development agreement pursuant to Chapter 212. This apparently includes the majority of land within the City's one-mile ETJ and apparently covers the land between the City's current corporate boundaries and U.S. Highway 281. The basic restriction is that the municipality cannot unilaterally annex land, that is, annex land without the consent of the owner, without first offering to enter into a development agreement with the owner. That agreement guarantees the continuation of the ETJ status of the area so the property owner is not required to pay city property taxes and the city is not required to provide city services, but it does authorize the enforcement of all regulations and planning authority of the municipality that do not interfere with the use of the land for agriculture, wildlife management, or timber. If the landowner rejects the agreement or does not respond to the offer, the property is annexed into the city and subject to taxes and city services. The development agreement is void upon the filing by the land owner of any type of subdivision plat or related development document. Land covered by such a development agreement is considered part of the municipality for the limited purpose of determining whether land is "adjacent" to the municipality.

There are some limitations on the ability of a municipality to regulate land use on a newly annexed area. For example, a municipality may not prohibit a person from continuing to use land in the manner in which the land was

being used on the date the annexation proceedings were instituted if the land use was legal at that time. The inability to prohibit a use that was lawful at the time of annexation does not prohibit a municipality from regulating sexually-oriented businesses, development in a *colonia*, preventing imminent destruction of property or injury to persons; public nuisances; flood control; the storage and use of hazardous substances; the sale and use of fireworks or the discharge of firearms or other weapons.

Other annexations may take place, without being on the three-year plan, for areas that qualify under the exemptions set out by state law. The most notable of the exemptions are areas containing fewer than 100 separate tracts of land on which one or more residential dwellings are located, areas subject to non-annexation contracts through an industrial district agreement, areas in which a majority of the property owners request annexation or areas located in economically distressed subdivisions commonly called ‘colonias’. Annexations completed outside the three-year plan have different hearing and notification requirements than set forth in this section and Appendix 8A.

Why Annex?

So with all the complications of annexation, coupled by the fact that you rarely find the population in the proposed annexation area willing to become new citizens and pay more taxes – why annex? A municipality may choose to annex land within its ETJ for many reasons. These include

- to guide and regulate land use so that the City’s vision for its own long-range future can be attained;
- to assure that the costs and benefits of city services such as city streets and city parks are equitably shared by those who benefit from them;

- to provide for orderly expansion of city infrastructure such as water and wastewater services and city services, such as trash collection and police protection;
- to expand the municipality's tax base;
- for economic development purposes;
- to help square up the city limits for ease of emergency service provisions; and
- for strategic protection of city resources.

History of Annexation in Mercedes

The City of Mercedes is currently 7,236 acres or 11.3 square miles (as of June 2010). The 1-mile ETJ encompasses an additional 12,971 acres or 20 square miles. In Mercedes' 1969 Comprehensive Plan, the City was described as 3,317 acres. In the draft 1990 Plan, it was described as 3,977 acres. The City encompasses 118% more land than it did in 1969 and 82% more land in 2009 than it did in 1990. This increase in the size of the City is the result of annexation. The City follows state law procedures regarding annexation and has adopted a 3 year annexation plan in December 2007 that will culminate in December 2010. More routinely, developers request annexation when subdividing property to be able to offer city services when marketing the lots for sale.

The City of Mercedes may annex land within one mile of its corporate limits if it is not within the corporate limits or annexation ETJ of another municipality. The western edge of Mercedes' ETJ is generally the eastern boundary of Weslaco's corporate limits. The city of Weslaco, with a 2009 estimated population of 34,245, has an annexation ETJ of two miles. The land, between Weslaco's city limits and Mercedes' city limits, lies within both cities' annexation ETJ. Land in

this joint ETJ cannot be annexed by either Weslaco or Mercedes without the other's consent. At one time there was an apparent "gentlemen's agreement" between the City of Weslaco and the City of Mercedes regarding the allocation of this joint ETJ. However, it was never adopted by either City Commission, a prerequisite to legal effect. Additionally, there have also been divergent understandings about the allocation. There have apparently been annexations by both Weslaco and Mercedes into that overlapping ETJ area.

On the eastern side of Mercedes, in 2003, the City Commissions of Mercedes and La Feria formally allocated their joint ETJ between them as a result of a court case settled to the benefit of Mercedes forcing La Feria to disannex some territory previously annexed. La Feria, with a 2000 population of 6,115, has an annexation ETJ of one half mile. Generally, Mile 3 East, which is the boundary between Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, is the ETJ boundary between them, with the exception of two tracts straddling U.S. Expressway 83, east of Mile 3. These tracts are located in Cameron County, but included in Mercedes' ETJ.

Annexation Plan

The City's current 3-year annexation plan is shown in **Figure 8-1**. Land included in this proposed annexation consists of approximately 235 acres from Business 83 north to current city limits near Expressway 83 from Mile 1 ½ East to Mile 2 ½ East. All actions required under the statute have been completed at this time with the exception of the final adoption of the annexation ordinance which will take place in December 2010. The city has not adopted any other future annexation plans at this time.

ZONING ORDINANCE

Zoning establishes types of uses allowable by zone classification, setbacks, density, parking requirements and other physical characteristics of land use. It is only applied within the city limits. There is no zoning in the county which is one of the reasons a city will annex in order to control land use and future development of land near the city proper. The Future Land Use Plan (Figure 3.6) is used to guide rezoning decisions. It is the long-term desire for land use which should gradually be implemented by rezoning land to match the desired future land uses. City initiated rezoning can be undertaken to transform the zoning map to more closely mirror the future land use plan.

The City of Mercedes Zoning Ordinance currently consists of ten separate ordinances, the earliest of which was adopted in 1957 and is the predominant body of the ordinance. The remaining ordinances simply make amendments to this original.

The first amendment was done in 1977 to create a Planning & Zoning Commission and establish their duties and procedures for appointment of the members. In 1978 it was amended to establish a rezoning fee (and that fee has never been increased). In 1980 a variance fee was added (and also has never been increased). In April, 1982 another amendment added a Board of Adjustment that was capable of hearing cases and making special exceptions to the terms of the Zoning Ordinance. In October of that year another amendment established the appointment method of the members of the Board of Adjustment. In November of 1982 an amendment established the Conditional Use Permit for home occupations which limits the visibility and interference a home-based business may have on its surroundings and establishes an annual renewal requirement for the permit.

In March of 1986 a new classification of zoning was added for mobile homes, modular homes and recreational vehicles. This amendment established additional definitions, allowable uses for the zoning category and setbacks for both mobile home parks and subdivisions. In June of 1986 another zoning category was added for light industrial uses, establishing permitted uses in the zone and setbacks. In 1997 an amendment was made that reduced the rear yard setback to 10' for a detached utility building in the back yard of a property zoned for single family or two family residential zone.

No amendments have been made to the zoning ordinance since 1997. This document has never been codified to integrate all the amending ordinances into one document. It is of interest that there are also a number of freestanding ordinances that have been created that are typically included within a zoning ordinance, but were not done as an amendment and therefore not tied to the zoning ordinance. This creates the situation that they are not eligible for relief through a variance issued by the Zoning Board of Adjustments since state law only authorizes a Board of Adjustments four specific powers: to hear and decide an appeal that alleges error by an administrative official (ie to overturn staff interpretation of the zoning ordinance); hear and decide special exceptions to the terms of a zoning ordinance when the ordinance requires the board to do so; authorize in specific cases a variance from the terms of a zoning ordinance if it is not contrary to the public interest and enforcement would result in an unnecessary hardship; and to hear and decide other matters authorized by an ordinance adopted under the specific subchapter of Texas law that allows for creation of the Board (Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 211.009).

One of the ordinances that have been adopted as a freestanding ordinance includes a mobile home ordinance regulating mobile home subdivisions and parks, providing for licensing fees. This ordinance was adopted in 1972. The

amendment to the zoning ordinance that occurred in 1986 establishing a mobile home zoning category makes no reference to this ordinance and in some cases conflicts with information contained in the original stand-alone ordinance. Then the stand-alone ordinance was amended once in 2000 to amend the definition of mobile home or travel trailer.

Another ordinance that is freestanding is the sign ordinance originally adopted in 2000 and amended in 2001 to refine the billboard sign definition. It is a lengthy and cumbersome ordinance that is difficult to understand and interpret and doesn't address currently emerging sign technologies. The landscaping ordinance is also a stand-alone ordinance originally adopted in 1999 and never amended. The landscape requirements are dependent upon "street yard" which is the area between the front of the building and the front property line, so landscaping can be almost nonexistent in commercial areas if the building is set closer to the street with parking in the rear. The percentage of landscaping for street yards varies by zoning classification with no requirements for single family residential and up to fifteen percent (15%) required for most other zoning classifications. Automatic irrigation is not a current requirement, nor is keeping the landscaping alive once the final inspection is given. The ordinance also lays out an Appeals Board of Landscape Ordinance violations. It states that the Board of Adjustment shall be this board, but does not reference the local government code as authority for providing such as the Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 211.009 requires. This makes the city's position weaker should a court case result from a variance, though city records do not show this has ever occurred probably because the landscape requirements are minimal to begin with.

There are many other ordinances that could possibly be brought under the zoning ordinance as protection of the public health, safety, welfare and morals that would provide a more unified development code for the city and make the job of the builder, casual home improver, landscaper and city staff simpler. Implementation of these changes will go

much further toward enacting the goals laid out in the various chapters of the Comprehensive Plan particularly the land use, transportation and infrastructure goals.

SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE

In addition to zoning regulations, subdivision regulations are equally instrumental in shaping future development of the City. Their purposes are broad and currently include the following objectives:

- Achieve orderly urban development through land subdivision
- To promote and develop the utilization of land to assure the best possible community environment in accordance with the Master Plan of the City of Mercedes
- To provide for adequate municipal services and safe streets; and
- To protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare

The original ordinance was adopted in 1961 and has been amended eight times. It was amended in 1974 to add sidewalk requirements. ETJ subdivision requirements were added in July 1978. Meter box requirements were added in October of 1978. Streetlight requirements were added in 1980, followed by storm drainage improvements in 1981. In 1982 there were amendments to a number of existing sections plus the addition of townhouse regulations, curb and gutter construction and plat approval time limits. In 1987 the new five mile ETJ established by state law was added. In 1998 construction inspection fees were added, a limit of 3:1 width to length ratio was added and development of adjacent thoroughfares was addressed. These nine ordinances were codified into one document in 2006 for ease of reference and

use. No updates were undertaken at this time due to the Comprehensive Plan effort being underway, but a historical list of the amendments was added.

As in the case of the zoning ordinance there are a couple of ordinances that could be incorporated into a new subdivision ordinance that are freestanding ordinances at this time. One mentioned in the zoning that is also applicable to subdivision regulations is the stand-alone mobile home ordinance in regard to platting requirements and lot sizes. Another ordinance that can be incorporated is the utility extension policy which allows developers required to extend city utilities to recoup up to fifty percent (50%) of their up-front investment over a time period of ten years.

Subdivision regulations govern the conversion of raw land into buildable lots and parcels. They apply to land within the corporate limits and also to the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) of the City. Because Hidalgo County is a county along the Rio Grande River, Mercedes' ETJ for subdivision regulation purposes extends five (5) miles beyond the City limits, except where reduced by agreement with another municipality with an overlapping ETJ area. The City of Mercedes has a formal agreement with La Feria which was established by a court case in 2003. Conditions of overlapping ETJ also exist with Weslaco. It would be advantageous for both communities and future developers in this area if the cities could come to an agreement in writing to prevent future costly litigation and delay of development.

Subdivision Regulations establish requirements for public improvements such as utilities, drainage, and streets; specify minimum standards for land development; and prescribe the procedures for submittal, review and approval of subdivision plats. Enforcement of the subdivision regulations occurs through the plat review and approval procedures, which enable the City to ensure that new subdivisions are developed to established standards.

Approval of a subdivision is not discretionary as a zoning change can be. If a subdivision meets the terms of the city's subdivision regulations, it *must be approved*. As such, state law allows the City Commission to delegate this subdivision approval duty wholly to the Planning & Zoning Commission. The City of Mercedes does not currently exercise that option and plats must be approved by both the Planning & Zoning Commission and the City Commission. State law also allows administrative approval of minor plats which are clearly defined within Texas Local Government Code Section 212.0065. This helps expedite development. In a recent telephone survey we found that __ out of 15 communities within the Rio Grande Valley require both board approvals. Four communities - Brownsville, Harlingen, Pharr and San Juan allow the more expedited process. (see Figure 8-2).

In order to be competitive for commercial development it is always essential to be streamlined in your permitting processes. Subdividing land is the most time consuming part (on the city's side) to permitting. It would be worth considering adopting the most streamlined regulations allowed under statute. If the City Commission is concerned about being in touch with development, that situation could be easily addressed through a reporting process which would place the burden of time on the staff rather than the developer.

GOALS

Goal 8.1 Develop a long-term annexation plan strategy which can help guide future three-year plans

Obj. 8.1a Identify areas of strategic annexation that align with the city's purposes for annexation

- Obj. 8.1b** Annexation should occur prior to, or concurrent with development, where possible, to coordinate the extension of public facilities and services in developing areas.
- Obj. 8.1c** Annexation should occur in order to de-complicate City limit lines for ease of providing public safety services
- Obj. 8.1d** Fiscal impact analysis should be utilized to assess the estimated costs of providing municipal services and weigh them against the anticipated revenues of each annexation program. First-year costs may exceed revenues because of the lag time between annexation and collection of taxes and fees, and annexations may require one-time expenditures for capital facilities. The fiscal impact should be assessed on a multi-year timeframe
- Obj. 8.1e** The potential future annexation areas were identified based upon the future land use plan and anticipated stages of continuing development for five, ten and 20 year timeframes.
- Obj. 8.1f** Present annexation priorities to Planning & Zoning Commission and City Commission for alignment with their strategic priorities for infrastructure provisions
- Obj. 8.1g** Develop a procedure of annual annexation review in November to establish three year plans that can be completed in December to narrow the gap of taxes to services window

Goal 8.2 Develop a modernized urban development code that includes revised zoning and subdivision ordinances

- Obj. 8.2a** Work with developers and Planning & Zoning Commission to create a list of the notable portions of our ordinances we should keep.
- Obj. 8.2b** Create a table of objectives we want to accomplish with changes to our Ordinances.

- Obj. 8.2c** Consolidate the Mobile Home Ordinance into the Zoning and Subdivision ordinances, including necessary revisions.
- Obj. 8.2d** Update and incorporate the Landscape Ordinance into the Zoning Ordinance.
- Obj. 8.2e** Update and incorporate the Sign Ordinance into the Zoning Ordinance
- Obj. 8.2f** Consider overlay districts and planned unit development zoning
- Obj. 8.2g** Consider decreasing the number of residential zoning categories
- Obj. 8.2h** Consider expanding the use of conditional use permits for land uses that may not be allowed by right, but given the right circumstances can be compatible with surrounding land uses.
- Obj. 8.2i** Conduct an area-wide zoning study to determine and recommend appropriate rezoning for areas currently zoned "N" - Newly Annexed"
- Obj. 8.2j** Draft a new ordinance and hold several public hearings to allow public input regarding proposed changes.
- Obj. 8.2k** Adopt and implement new zoning and subdivision ordinances incorporating all stand-alone ordinances.

<p>Goal 8.3 Develop tools to help developers and staff to deal with questions about doing business in Mercedes</p>

- Obj. 8.3a** Create a Developer's Guide that summarizes the most pertinent development requirements to provide outside developers a snapshot of processes and timelines for development in Mercedes.

- Obj. 8.3b** A zoning map atlas should be prepared to provide easy reference to zoning for all staff members and the public at a convenient scale (1 inch = 400 feet) and useable page size and format, with individual atlas sheets covering small portions of the entire City.
- Obj. 8.3c** Develop a series of pamphlets dealing with frequently asked questions.

APPENDIX 8A - Texas Municipal League Sample Annexation Calendar

SAMPLE CALENDAR Unilateral Annexation of Area Included in Annexation Plan¹

Note: Prior to any other action, the city must determine whether an area is subject to the requirements of Section 43.035 – required offer of development agreement (see detailed discussion above), and must comply with those requirements if so.

- Day 1: Area placed in the annexation plan.
- Day 90: Before this day city must give written notice to landowners, service providers, and railroads in area placed in the plan. §43.052(f).

The notice to service providers must request information for the inventory of services. §43.053(c).
- Day 180: Last day for service providers to furnish information for inventory (unless city and service provider agree to an extension). §43.053(c).
- Day 240: City must compile and make available inventory of services by this date. §43.053(g). And city should begin preparing service plan that will be available at the public hearings. §43.056(j).
- Day 330: City must give notice of, and conduct, two public hearings by this day. §43.0561.

The schedule for the public hearings could be as follows²:

- Day 1: Publish notice of first hearing. §43.0561. Obtain required affidavit of publication from newspaper.

Post notice of first public hearing on internet website, if city has an internet website. §43.0561(c).

Send written notice to each public school district in the area to be annexed. §43.905.

¹ This calendar is intended for ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY. Many of the dates contained herein may be modified by a city and still be in compliance with Chapter 43. Any calendar that is prepared by a city should be reviewed by local counsel prior to implementation.
² Prior to beginning the process shown by this sub-calendar, a city must prepare an inventory pursuant to §43.053 that lists services currently provided in the area to be annexed and a service plan pursuant to §43.055 that details the specific services that will be provided to the area after it has been annexed. The service plan should be available for inspection at the public hearings. Also, the internal procedures of the city are not included here, such as giving notice of, and passing, the ordinance calling the public hearings and preparing a metes and bounds description of the area to be annexed.

- Send written notice to public or private entities that provide services in the area to be annexed, and railroads with right-of-way in area to be annexed. §43.0561.
- Day 9: Post notice of first public hearing under Open Meetings Act.
- Day 12: Hold first public hearing. §43.0561.
- Day 15: Publish notice of second hearing. §43.0561. Obtain required affidavit of publication from newspaper.

Post notice of second public hearing on internet website, if city has an internet website. §43.0561(c).
- Day 23: Post notice of second public hearing under Open Meetings Act.
- Day 26: Hold Second public hearing. §43.0561.
- Day 360³: Hold negotiations with property owners and special districts in the area to be annexed for provision of services after, or in lieu of, annexation.⁴ §43.0562.
- Day 540: This is an *approximate* date - before the first day of the 10th month after the month in which the inventory is prepared, the final service plan should be prepared. §43.056(a).
- Day 1095: This is the third anniversary of the date the area was placed in the plan. The area may not be annexed until after this date. §43.052(c).

Post notice of, and adopt, annexation ordinance.⁵
- Day 1125: The annexation must be completed before the 31st day after the third anniversary of the date the area was included in the annexation plan. §43.052(g).⁶

³ These negotiations may occur sooner than this date, but must not take place until AFTER the two public hearings are held.
⁴ At this point, the process may come to a halt because the city may enter into contract in lieu of annexation with landowners and/or special districts. If neither a contract nor annexation is agreed upon, an arbitrator will be appointed to resolve the dispute. *Id.* at §43.0564. If the annexation is agreed upon, the process continues normally.
⁵ Following the adoption of the annexation ordinance, the city must send notice to appropriate federal, state, and local agencies and service providers. See "Other Matters Affecting All Annexations," *supra*.
⁶ If the annexation is not completed by this date, the city may not annex the area for five years. §43.052(g).

Chapter 9

Economic Development

Overview

Today's economy is global. Technological revolutions in transportation and communications have created global competition for stable, living-wage jobs in all sectors of the economy. Work can easily be moved to a lower-cost area.

Creating new jobs and developing human capacity are not easy tasks. Globalization creates many opportunities for local firms and communities but it requires us to be global players whether we want to be or not. Additionally, the current economy is rapidly changing. An ever increasing share of our nation's economy is based on information rather than the production of tangible goods or services. Furthermore, there are few if any federal or state grants or subsidies to assist local jurisdictions. Finally, the City of Mercedes has little capacity to directly intervene in the regional economy, let alone the global economic structure.

While the challenges to local economic development are numerous, communities which seek to preserve and enhance their quality of life and fiscal sustainability have no choice but to engage in the effort. The City can work, with other jurisdictions in the region, to align human resources, infrastructure and quality of life to match both regional and global demand. The City and the Development Corporation of Mercedes can strive to attract or assist businesses that create jobs that fit Mercedes and its people.

Economic development can be defined as the use of public resources to stimulate private investment. There are different approaches to local economic development. Generally speaking, the local economy can be developed by increasing exports, that is, receiving money for goods and services that are sent outside of the region, or by decreasing the amount of money that leaves the community by meeting local demand with locally produced products and services. The most common approach to economic development is business attraction, which targets outside businesses and offers incentives to them to locate in the community. Business attraction models developed after World War II in the Southern U.S. which, facing declining agricultural revenues, used tax inducements, free land, low union environments, industrial bonds and other financial packages to attract new businesses from higher

cost areas. These techniques eventually spread to all communities in the nation (and, some would say, the world). More recently, some concern has developed about the skyrocketing costs of these incentive programs, as businesses play one community against another, and the often disappointing job creation that results. Another risk of the business attraction approach is that if a company can be lured from one location on the basis of the lower costs or other advantages being offered by a local community, that company may be lured away again. An easy example of this are the textile manufacturers that moved from the Northeast US to the South and have now largely moved to Mexico, Central America, or China. Finally, there is the seeming unfairness of subsidizing the cost of doing business for new firms being attracted to the community, which may be in direct competition with existing, loyal, local businesses that have not received the same public investment. Nonetheless, despite the inherent drawbacks of the business attraction model of local economic development, most economic development professionals consider it an essential strategy.

To address the weaknesses of the business attraction model, efforts are usually also deployed to retain and expand existing local businesses. The same factors that attract new businesses can be used to assist existing businesses stay and grow. The prevailing wisdom that small firms (up to 500 employees, in one definition by the United States Small Business Administration) generate the vast majority of new jobs in the U.S. also points to the advisability of a focus on retention and growth of existing local businesses. One of the strongest pulls for an existing firm to stay in its existing location is inertia. Ties to the local community such as a workforce that meets its needs, efficient and cooperative business relationships with suppliers and customers, and a supportive public sector, may be further cemented by personal relations of the business owners or executives. Building strong relationships between local businesses and between local business and the local government can be an effective business retention tool. A third method of local economic development is to incubate start-up businesses.

A modern trend in local economic development planning is to move the focus beyond attracting or retaining individual firms on a case-by-case basis to instead use regional resources to support the growth of specified, inter-related industrial clusters. While

proximity to markets, transportation and natural resources is generally becoming less important to business location and growth, proximity to a skilled labor force remains essential. Increasingly, high capacity telecommunications infrastructure is also essential.¹

This chapter of *Envision Mercedes 2025* focuses on developing knowledge and understanding of the local economy—as it is now and how it has changed over the recent past. Such understanding is an important first step in developing a plan for economic development in Mercedes. Identifying how the community wants to see the local economy grow in the future, articulating realistic goals and objectives, and specifying how the local government can influence the development of the local economy are touched upon in the last pages of this Chapter, and should serve as guides for City efforts. However, more in depth attention is warranted and a necessary next step in developing a plan for economic development. The City’s Economic Development Corporation, assisted by the City’s Planning Department, should take the lead in developing a detailed long-range plan including strategic goals with shorter-term time horizons that is reviewed annually.

The Economy of the City of Mercedes

The City of Mercedes is located within McAllen-Edinburg-Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), whose boundaries are identical to Hidalgo County’s. *Hidalgo County is ranked first in job growth in the U.S. and second in wage and salary growth in the U.S.*². These attributes make clear the tremendous opportunity for growth and development in the Mercedes economy.

While deep South Texas is geographically isolated from the rest of the U.S., it is a center of international commerce with 5 bridges to Mexico. The City of Mercedes is 5 miles north of the Mexico-US international border and 35 miles west of a deep water

¹ These opening paragraphs rely heavily on Planning Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice, 3rd Edition by Edward Blakely and Ted Bradshaw, (2002) and Local Economic Development-Analysis and Practice by John P. Blair, 1995.

² Source: Milken Institute/ Greenstreet Real Estate Partners Best Performing Cities Index 2008.

seaport. According to the Mercedes Development Corporation, Mercedes serves a consumer market of more than 2.3 million people within 50 miles and 10 million people within 200 miles. Mercedes receives over 7 million visitors annually primarily due to the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlet, which opened for business in 2006.

The current economy and recent changes over time indicate likely future trends and may suggest strategies to enhance economic development in the City and the future demand for land for different types of uses. Within zip code 78570, in 2006 there were 268 businesses, 70 more than in 1998 (198), an increase of 35%. The most notable change occurred in the retail sector, with a 90% increase (43 additional retail businesses), primarily resulting from the opening of the Premium Outlet Mall. There were also increases in the number of professional, technical and scientific establishments, wholesale trade, finance and insurance, real estate, rental and leasing, and health care and social assistance. See Table 9.1. (For clarification about the data utilized in this Chapter, please see Appendix A.)

In addition to the 35% increase in the number of business establishments, Zip Code 78570 experienced a 9% increase in employment, a 77% increase in total annual payroll (44% in constant dollars), and a 62% (32% in constant dollars) increase in payroll per employee. The fact that the increase in total payroll exceeds the increase in number of employees demonstrates that employees command a higher average wage in 2006 than in 1998 (an average increase of \$9,736 (\$6,114 in constant dollars)). See Table 9.2.

All employers in Zip Code 78570 satisfy the official definition of “small business” (less than 500 employees) and the distribution of business enterprises by number of employees has remained stable. The increase in business establishments has been most vigorous among the smallest firms (1 – 4) employees). See Table 9.3. The industries with the largest individual employers are utilities, construction and manufacturing, which each have one firm with 250 to 499 employees, followed by wholesale trade and retail trade, which each have one establishment employing 100-249 persons. The data in Tables 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3 is from the U.S. Census Bureau’s County Business Patterns, which does not have data for the geographic limits of the City of Mercedes. The U.S. Census Bureau’s Economic Census provides data for the City of Mercedes for 1997 and 2002 and is presented in Appendix B.

TABLE 9.1 Business Establishments by Industry in Zip Code 78570

NAICS	Industry	Number of Business Establishments					change 1998 - 2006
		2006	2004	2002	2000	1998	
11	Forestry, fishing, hunting, agricultural support	1	1	2	2	1	0
21	Mining	1	1	1	1	1	0
22	Utilities	1	1	1	1	1	0
23	Construction	21	20	18	18	20	1
31	Manufacturing	15	11	13	11	15	0
42	Wholesale trade	13	16	10	12	10	3
44	Retail trade	91	46	46	49	48	43
48	Transportation & warehousing	7	11	12	9	7	0
51	Information	1	2	3	2	2	-1
52	Finance & insurance	13	10	11	10	9	4
53	Real estate & rental & leasing	10	11	8	6	8	2
54	Professional, scientific & technical services	8	7	6	3	2	6
56	Admin, support, waste mgt, remediation service	6	5	4	4	4	2
61	Educational services	3	3	2	1	2	1
62	Health care and social assistance	21	26	19	16	12	9
71	Arts, entertainment & recreation	3	4	4	6	3	0
72	Accommodation & food services	23	17	18	20	22	1
81	Other services (except public administration)	28	30	32	30	25	3
	TOTAL	268	224	216	203	198	70

TABLE 9.2 Establishments, Employees, Annual Payroll and Payroll per Employee for Zip Code 78570

	2006	2004	2002	2000	1998	change 1998 - 2006	% change 1998 - 2006	% change 1998-2006 (in constant \$)
# of establishments	268	224	216	203	198	70	35%	
# of employees	2,826	3,059	3,133	2,850	2,592	234	9%	
Annual payroll in \$1000s	\$71,672	\$61,975	\$59,370	\$50,807	\$40,502	\$31,170	77%	44%
annual payroll per employee	\$25,362	\$20,260	\$18,950	\$17,827	\$15,626	\$9,736	62%	32%

TABLE 9.3 Number of Business Establishments by Number of Employees for Zip Code 78570

	2006	2004	2002	2000	1998
1 - 4 employees	161	120	113	107	100
5 - 9 employees	47	49	45	36	39
10 - 19 employees	32	27	33	30	29
20 - 49 employees	18	16	13	21	21
50 - 99 employees	5	7	5	3	4
100 - 249 employees	2	3	5	5	4
250 - 499 employees	3	2	2	1	1
500 - 999 employees	0	0	0	0	0

In 2006 there were three local private employers with 250 or more employees. These are Magic Valley Electric Coop, L & G Concrete, and H & H Foods, Inc. The major public employers are the Mercedes Independent School District with some 950 employees, followed by South Texas Independent School District with 420 employees, and the City of Mercedes with 102 full-time employees, plus 20 plus summer part-time employees.

The Regional Economy

The City of Mercedes is part of the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). MSAs are communities with a high degree of economic and social integration. This Chapter includes Cameron County as part of the City's economic region because, given Mercedes' location at the eastern edge of Hidalgo County, it would seem to be as easy to commute to Harlingen to work or shop as it is to commute to McAllen and nearly as easy to travel to parts of Brownsville as to parts of Edinburg or Mission. However, it is indeed true that the degree of economic integration between Mercedes and other Hidalgo County communities is much greater than between Mercedes and Cameron County communities. The 2000 Census counted 4,158 workers aged 16 and older residing in Mercedes. Three thousand four hundred and eighty-three (3,433) of these worked in Hidalgo County (83%) and 664 worked in another county (16%). Interestingly, 1,254 workers (30%) were employed within the City of Mercedes. Later discussion will also show that the economies of the two counties differ in terms of total employment and total payroll.

A snapshot of Mercedes' regional economy in 2006 looks like this:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ◀ 16,364 business establishments
- 10,011 in Hidalgo and 6,353 in Cameron | ◀ 249,708 employees
- 154,037 in Hidalgo and 95,671 in Cameron |
| ◀ \$5.7 billion annual payroll
- \$3.6 billion in Hidalgo and \$2.1 billion in Cameron | ◀ \$22,917 annual payroll per employee
- \$23,342 in Hidalgo and \$22,261 in Cameron |

The rapid economic growth in the Lower Rio Grande Valley over recent years is evident everywhere one looks. With regard to the percentage increase in total payroll per employee, Zip Code 78570 far outperformed the comparison economies. *In Mercedes, total payroll per employee increased more than 30%! (The percentage change in total payroll and payroll per employee was calculated using constant dollars. \$1 in 1998 was equivalent to \$1.24 in 2006.)*

Also to be celebrated is the local rate of growth in total private employment. It far exceeded statewide and national growth. Between 1998 and 2006, total private employment in the State of Texas grew by 15% and in the U.S. by 11%. In Hidalgo and Cameron Counties private employment increased 52% and 20%, respectively. In Zip Code 78570, total employment increased by 9%.

Finally, *total private payroll in Zip Code 78570 increased 44%! In Hidalgo County, total payroll increased 54%! Statewide, total private payroll increased 22% and nationwide 17%. In Cameron County, payroll grew 20%, less than Texas and much less than Hidalgo. The percentage change between 1998 and 2006 in total private employment, total private payroll and private payroll per employee for the United States, Texas, Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, and the City of Mercedes is presented graphically in Figure 9.1.*

This tremendous local progress in total employment, total payroll and payroll per employee is moderated by the fact that average wages in the local region remain far below those paid statewide and nationally. Unfortunately, workers in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties failed to close the gap in annual payroll per employee and in fact, lost ground. While wages in Hidalgo County increased, wages statewide and nationally increased more rapidly. In Cameron County, total payroll per employee was below the rate of inflation. However, as pointed out previously, Zip Code 7850 out performed the local regional economy. The gap between total payroll per employee between workers in Zip Code 78570 and the state and nation narrowed slightly. See Figure 9.2.

FIGURE 9.1. Percentage Change in Total Employment, Total Payroll and Payroll per Employee in the United States, Texas, Hidalgo County and Cameron County between 1998 and 2006

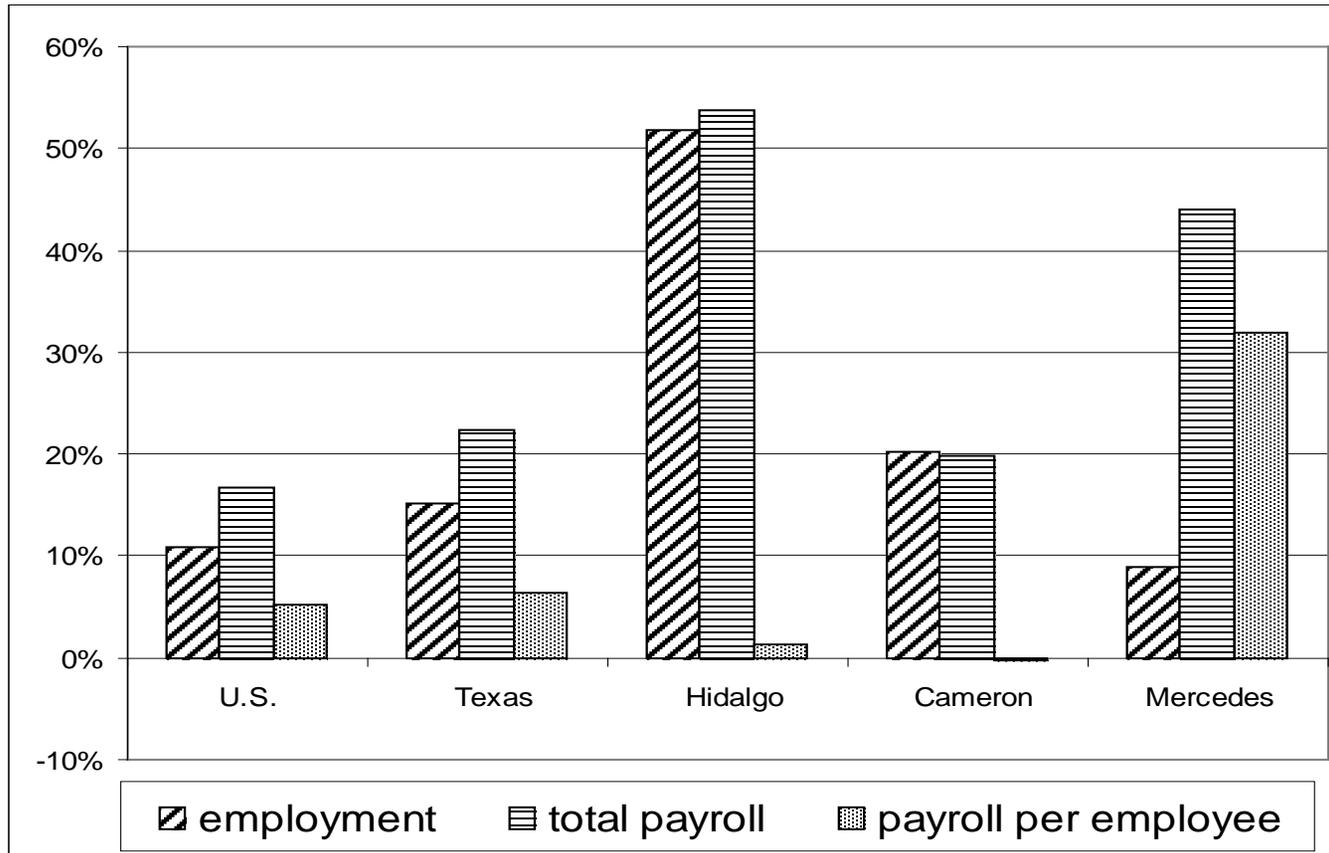


FIGURE 9.2 Total Payroll per Employee in the U.S., Texas, Hidalgo County, Cameron County and Zip Code 78570 (Mercedes)

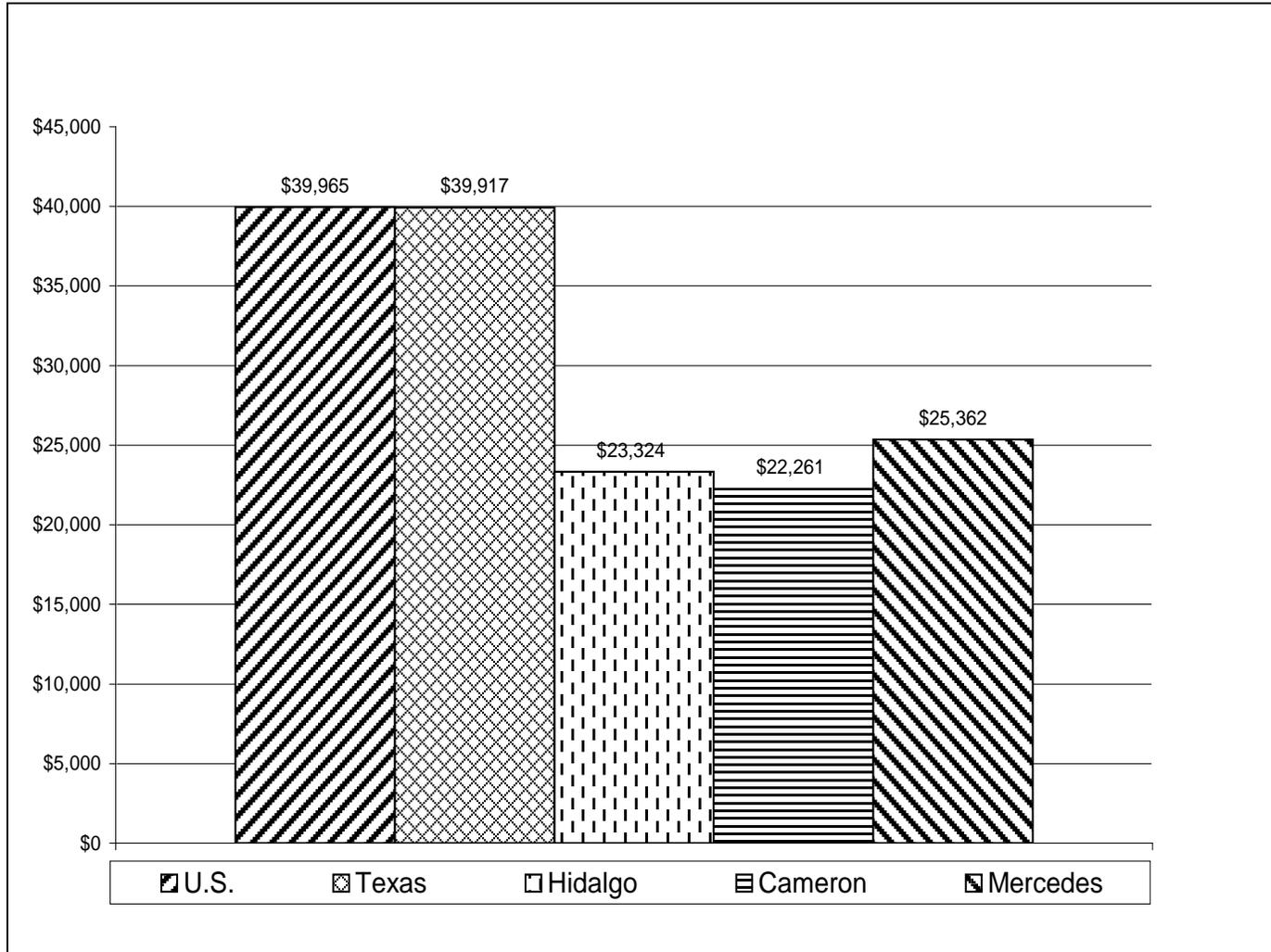


TABLE 9.4. Payroll Per Employee in the U.S., Texas and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties PPE as a % of National or State PPE

	Payroll Per Employee (PPE)		Local PPE as a % of US or TX PPE	
	1998	2006	1998	2006
United States	\$30,609	\$39,965		
State of Texas	\$30,272	\$39,917		
Hidalgo County	\$18,568	\$23,324	61%	58%
Cameron County	\$18,011	\$22,261	59%	56%
Zip Code 78570	\$15,626	\$25,362	51%	64%

The four industries with the largest absolute increases in local employment between 1998 and 2006 were:

1. health care and social assistance – increase of 35,168 employees (24,212 in Hidalgo County;10,956 in Cameron County);
2. retail trade – increase of 10,792 employees (7,589 in Hidalgo County; 3,203 in Cameron County);
3. accommodations and food services – increase of 8,283 employees (5,539 in Hidalgo County; 2,744 in Cameron County); and,
4. administration and support and waste management and remediation – increase of 8,902 employees (5,416 in Hidalgo County; 3,486 in Cameron County).

The number of business establishments, number of employees, total annual payroll and annual payroll per employee for the 20 major industrial classifications in 2006 in the United States, State of Texas, and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties are presented in

Appendix C. Appendix C also shows that in every industrial classification the local payroll per employee is less than it is statewide or nationally.

Tables 9.5A, B, and C extrapolate from Appendix C and compare those industries with the highest employment (Table 9.5A), highest total annual payroll (Table 9.5B) and highest payroll per employee (Table 9.5C) in the U.S., Texas and locally. These tables show that the local regional economy shares certain attributes with the state and national economy and diverges in other aspects. Health care and social assistance is the largest local employer, as it is nationally. It is the second largest employer statewide. Healthcare also has the largest local total payroll and the second highest total payroll in the U.S. and Texas. Retail is the second largest private employer in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties and in the nation and is the second largest employer in Texas. Locally, retail has the second highest total payroll and has the 4th highest payroll in the nation. While the overall impact of retail is substantial, retail’s average annual payroll per employee is low. Out of 20 major industrial classifications, retail’s payroll per employee is 16th in Texas, 13th in Hidalgo County, and 19th in the United States.

Tables 9.5A, 9.5B and 9.5C show that manufacturing remains an important component of the local, state and national economies. Manufacturing is a top employer and contributes one of the highest total payrolls in all three geographies. As far as payroll per employee, however, manufacturing is not among the top six. In the U.S., Texas, and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, manufacturing pays the 8th highest average payroll per employee.

As might be expected, those industries with the highest average payroll per employee are generally not the industries with the most employees. Of the eight industries with the highest annual payroll per employee (Table 9.5C), none also appear in Table 9.5A (highest total employment). Several industries with high average payroll per employee, however, are also among the industries with highest total payrolls--management, finance and insurance and wholesale trade. These three industries-- management, finance and insurance and wholesale trade—make the “top 6 list” for total payroll in all three geographies—nationally, statewide and locally.

TABLE 9.5A. Ranking of industries by highest total employment in the U.S., Texas, and Hidalgo & Cameron Counties

	UNITED STATES			TEXAS			HIDALGO & CAMERON COUNTIES		
	Industry	# of employees	% of total work-force	Industry	# of employees	% of total work-force	Industry	# of employees	% of total work-force
1st	Health Care & Social Assistance	16,451,361	14%	Retail	1,128,050	13%	Health Care & Social Assistance	70,221	28%
2nd	Retail	15,767,866	13%	Health Care & Social Assistance	1,126,394	13%	Retail	45,707	18%
3rd	Manufacturing	13,631,683	11%	Admin. support and waste mgmt & remediation	868,646	10%	Accommodations & Food Service	27,620	11%
4th	Accommodations & Food Service	11,381,226	9%	Accommodations & Food Service	850,618	10%	Admin., support and waste mgmt & remediation	15,881	6%
5th	Admin., support and waste mgmt & remediation	10,003,626	8%	Manufacturing	846,465	10%	Manufacturing	14,262	6%
6th	Construction	7,338,799	6%	Construction	553,834	6%	Wholesale Trade	11,851	5%

TABLE 9.5B. Ranking of industries by total annual payroll in Unites States, Texas, and Hidalgo & Cameron Counties.

	UNITED STATES			TEXAS			HIDALGO & CAMERON COUNTIES		
	Industry	Total Payroll	% of Total Payroll	Industry	Total Payroll	% of Total Payroll	Industry	Total Payroll	% of Total Payroll
1st	Manufacturing	\$628B	13%	Manufacturing	\$41B	12%	Health Care & Social Assistance	\$1.7B	30%
2nd	Health Care & Social Assistance	\$627B	13%	Health Care & Social Assistance	\$40B	12%	Retail Trade	\$908M	16%
3rd	Finance & Insurance	\$481B	10%	Professional, Scientific & Technical	\$36B	10%	Manufacturing	\$396M	7%
4th	Retail Trade	\$368B	8%	Management	\$27B	8%	Wholesale Trade	\$355M	6%
5th	Wholesale Trade	\$323B	7%	Finance & Insurance	\$26B	8%	Finance & Insurance	\$326M	6%
6th	Construction	\$322B	7%	Wholesale Trade	\$26B	8%	Construction	\$298M	5%

TABLE 9.5C Ranking of industries by highest average pay per employee in the U.S., Texas, and Hidalgo & Cameron Counties

	UNITED STATES		TEXAS		HIDALGO & CAMERON COUNTIES	
	Industry	Payroll per Employee	Industry	Payroll per Employee	Industry	Payroll per Employee
<i>1st</i>	Management of Companies & Enterprises	\$91,324	Management of Companies & Enterprises	\$108,404	Utilities	\$47,858
<i>2nd</i>	Utilities	\$77,621	Mining	\$79,266	Management of Companies & Enterprises	\$41,273
<i>3rd</i>	Finance & Insurance	\$72,362	Utilities	\$74,640	Transportation & Warehousing	\$30,443
<i>4th</i>	Information	\$62,798	Professional, Scientific & Technical	\$64,442	Finance & Insurance	\$35,409
<i>5th</i>	Wholesale Trade	\$53,605	Information	\$58,538	Information	\$30,431
<i>6th</i>	Transportation & Warehousing	\$38,588	Finance & Insurance	\$58,158	Wholesale Trade	\$29,942

Location Quotient

There are various ways to study a local economy. One common analysis—“the Location Quotient”— assesses a region’s specialization in a given industry. It quantifies how concentrated a particular industry is in the local economy. For this chapter, Mercedes’ location quotient (LQ) is the ratio of the percentage of total regional employment in a particular industry to the percentage of total statewide employment in that industry.³ An LQ of “1” means the industry is present in the local economy to the same degree as in the larger economy; less than 1 indicates the industry is underrepresented locally; and more than 1 means the industrial sector is concentrated in the local economy.

Four major industrial classifications have a regional LQ greater than one. This means that business activity in these industries is a larger share of Mercedes’ regional economy than it is in the state economy overall. These industries are:

1. Health Care and Social Assistance (LQ of 2.17);
2. Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Agricultural Support Services (LQ of 1.48);
3. Retail Trade (LQ of 1.41); and,
4. Accommodations and Food Services (LQ of 1.13).

³ Given the strong bi-national aspects of the regional economy, the use of Texas as the larger comparison economy could be criticized. The economies of Matamoros, Reynosa, and perhaps Monterrey are very relevant to the economy on this side of the Rio Grande River. A more detailed analysis of the local regional economy would include data on the industrial mix and employment figures for northern Mexico. Summary information on the Reynosa economy was provided by Malini Natarajarathinam, Assistant Professor of Engineering Technology and Industrial Distribution, Texas A & M University, in a presentation made at the Texas-Mexico Trade Competitiveness Conference in February 2009. Dr. Natarajarathinam identified the current industrial clusters in Reynosa to be electric/electronics with 53 companies and 37,800 employees; automotive with 27 companies and 16,500 employees and textiles with 17 companies and 2,700 employees. The total Reynosa labor force is 480,000 people. Dr. Natarajarathinam projected future industrial growth in Reynosa in the areas of machinery and equipment (to serve biotechnology companies, recycling Companies and hybrid Systems); medical and optical equipment (to serve the medical, dental and veterinary markets); and chemical products including organic chemical products, new fertilizers, and plastic recycling resins)

The LQs for all industrial sectors in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties for which specific employment numbers are available is presented in Appendix E. LQs can also be calculated using total annual payroll.

The reasons the Lower Rio Grande Valley has a concentration of employment in particular industries might be traced to historical locational advantage, for example, wholesale trade of fresh fruits and vegetables. Alternatively, an industry that generally is declining in the larger economy may be consolidating locally, for example, manufacture of metalworking machinery. Industries with an LQ higher than one represent opportunities to attract or strengthen other sectors that come earlier or later in that industry's supply and customer chain.

It is useful to look at the specific types of business activity within an industry that are concentrated in our local economy. For example, Table 9.6 presents the LQ of particular sectors of NAICS 62—Health Care and Social Assistance—that are concentrated in the local economy.⁴ It is also useful to examine specific industrial sectors with an LQ greater than 1 even if the major industrial classification is not concentrated locally (LQ less than 1). For example, manufacturing has a 2006 LQ of only .59 in the Hidalgo-Cameron County economy. Furthermore, it declined from 1998 when it was 1.0. Manufacturing, overall, is underrepresented in the local economy compared to the statewide economy. Nonetheless, there are manufacturing sectors with a local specialization, some demonstrating an increasing specialization. Table 9.7 shows these.

Industrial sectors with a LQ less than 1 should also be studied to determine the feasibility of attracting that sector to the local economy or helping that sector grow. If products and services from outside the local region are necessary to meet local demand, there may be an opportunity to grow that industrial sector to meet local demand with local production. Additionally, an LQ of less than 1, accompanied by strong growth in employment, payroll or sales, indicates an emerging market in which further growth and development might be fostered.

⁴ NAICS means the North American Industrial Classification System. It replaces the previously used SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) Code.

In addition to overall employment numbers and employment LQs, total payroll and payroll per employee are important factors to consider when studying the local economy for the purpose of identifying possible targets of economic development efforts. For example, paper manufacturing (NAICS Code 322) represents less than 1% of overall regional employment. However, paper manufacturing's average annual payroll per employee is \$39,272 and is up \$6,940 in eight years, the local region shows some strength vis-à-vis the state economy in paper manufacturing, and total employment has increased since 1998. Therefore, paper manufacturing, and the suppliers to that industry, might present a niche that can be expanded. Obviously, more study and investigation is warranted before any strategies are developed or decisions made.

On the other hand, given the unrelenting decline of the textile industry in the United States and in Texas, it would appear that the local region's annual payroll per employee of \$29,094 (\$3,562 higher than at the state level) for NAICS 314-Textile Product Mills, coupled with an increase in total payroll, may not be sufficient to justify recruitment or retention efforts in this sector. Local employment and payroll in this sector are less than 1% of total regional employment, payroll and total employment have declined by 102 employees (56%) in eight years, and the LQ of the region's textile product mills has declined.⁵ See Table 9.7.

⁵ Nonetheless, in 2008, the City of Edinburg and State of Texas announced a \$1.65 million loan from the Texas Enterprise Fund and significant local infrastructure improvements to assist a Brazilian company to build a 300,000-square-foot denim factory that will eventually employ 800 people. While labor costs will be higher in the U.S., the U.S. plant is expected to save costs on energy and cotton. The benefit to local cotton growers of the plant is also touted. Local cotton acreage has declined from 260,000 acres in 2006 to 60,000 (perhaps due to desire to avoid the mandatory boll weevil eradication program or due to declining prices).

TABLE 9.6. Location Quotients, Total Payroll and Payroll per Employee for sectors of NAICS 62--Health Care and Social Assistance—with LQs more than 1 in Hidalgo County.

NAICS Code	Description	Local Employment	2006 LQ	1998 LQ	2006 Hidalgo County payroll	2006 Hidalgo County payroll per employee
62	Health Care & Social Assistance	70,221	2.17	1.61	\$1,041,343,000	\$24,887
6216	Home health care services	26,695	5.48	3.51	\$192,056,000	\$14,111
6241	Individual & family services	7,799	4.88	2.77	\$67,944,000	\$11,064
62134	Offices of physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists & audiology	1,016	4.19	1.35	\$36,460,000	\$35,886
621	Ambulatory health care services	43,216	3.10	2.22	\$656,997,000	\$25,973
6214	Outpatient care centers	3,367	3.04	1.64	\$93,086,000	\$38,291
624	Social assistance	12,096	2.82	NA	\$93,985,000	\$11,577
6219	Other ambulatory health care services	1,477	2.56	1.76	\$26,324,000	\$19,748
6213	Offices of other health practitioners	2,186	2.02	1.39	\$50,277,000	\$31,209

TABLE 9.6 (continued) Location Quotients, Total Payroll and Payroll per Employee for sectors of NAICS 62--Health Care and Social Assistance—with LQs more than 1 in Hidalgo County.

NAICS Code	Description	Local employment	2006 LQ	1998 LQ	2006 Hidalgo County payroll	2006 Hidalgo County payroll per employee
6243	Vocational rehabilitation services	921	1.79	2.54	\$4,482,000	18,146
6242	Community, emergency & other relief services	435	1.75	NA	\$1,790,000	14,435
6211	Offices of physicians	7,708	1.74	1.62	\$260,225,000	50,696
6244	Child day care services	2,941	1.52	1.01	\$19,769,000	12,309
62131	Offices of chiropractors	228	1.09	1.75	\$4,420??	26,788
6215	Medical & diagnostic laboratories	548	1.14	.89	\$11,261??	26,372
622	Hospitals	10,944	1.13	NA	\$243,256,000	39,058
6221	General medical & surgical hospitals	9,407	1.11	1.21	\$223,181,000	39,376

TABLE 9.7 2006 Textile Employment and Payroll in the U.S., Texas and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties & % change since 1998

NAICS	Industrial Sector	United States		Texas		Hidalgo County		Cameron County	
		employment	Total payroll	Employment	Total payroll	Employment	Total payroll	Employment	Total payroll
313	Textile Mills % change	187,766 -51%	6,027,949,000 -41%	3,085 -48%	104,373,000 -16%	0-19	na	20-99	na
314	Textile product mills % change	155,586 -28%	4,631,794,000 -9%	7,380 -16%	188,429,000 16%	234 -30%	\$6,808,000 7%	20 -30%	\$289,000 7%
315	Apparel Manufacturing % change	216,238 -68%	5,344,379,000 -57%	6,514 -84%	148,484,000 -80%	100-249	na	20-99	na
	TOTAL % change	559,589 -56%	\$16,004,121,999 -42%	16,978 -69%	\$441,285,999 -57%				

Economic development goals may also be informed by examining LQs of particular sectors over time. For example, local wholesale trade of fresh fruits and vegetables is clearly concentrated in the local economy (LQ of 9.7). However, it is less concentrated in 2006 than it was in 1998 (LQ of 12.42). What factors are at play? Declining local production of fresh fruits and vegetables? Has the trend continued since 2006? Does the sector remain strong, and the declining LQ simply reflects local growth in other sectors? What will be the impact of full implementation of NAFTA when Mexican trucks are permitted to travel throughout the U.S. and Canada?

These few examples illustrate the kind of analysis that will increase understanding of the local economy and can facilitate effective targeting of economic development efforts. Of course, data analysis must be combined with experiential and first-hand local knowledge of the industry and the local, national and global factors potentially effecting growth and decline.

TABLE 9.8 Location Quotients, Total Payroll and Payroll per Employee for sectors of NAICS 31-33--Manufacturing— with LQs of more than 1 in Hidalgo County or the Hidalgo-Cameron County Region.

NAICS Code	Description	Local employment	2006 LQ	1998 LQ	2006 Hidalgo County payroll	2006 Hidalgo County payroll per employee
3162	Footwear Mfg.	100 - 249	2.2– 5.5	1.8 – 4.5	NA	\$23,954 (state figure)
326	Plastics & Rubber Products Mfg.	1,993	1.5	.35	\$41.4 million	\$25,081
316	Leather and Allied Products Mfg.	100 - 249	1.4 – 2.6	1.6 – 1.8	NA	\$24,115 (state figure)
311	Food Mfg.	3,382	1.3	1.8	\$34.2 million	\$18,633
322	Paper Mfg.	650	1.3	1.1	\$17.7 million	\$39,273
314	Textile Product Mills	254	1.2	1.7 – 2.1	\$6.8 million	\$29,094
3335	Metalworking Machinery Mfg.	151	1.2	1.1	\$1.8 million	\$33,648

Shift-Share Analysis

A second common economic analysis tool is called “Shift-Share Analysis.” Shift-Share Analysis evaluates change in the local economy over time and assigns local growth or decline in particular industries to the growth or decline of the overall larger economy, growth or decline of that particular industry in the larger economy, or to some local competitive advantage or disadvantage. Shift-Share Analysis disaggregates local change in an industry into three contributing parts:

- (1) During overall economic expansion or economic recession, all industries and all localities are affected to some degree. Economic growth in a local community benefits or suffers along with changes in the overall economy. This factor, the local share of the overall economic change in the larger economy, is called the “share.”
- (2) The second factor shaping a local economy is the industrial mix. To the extent industries that are expanding in the larger economy are present locally, local expansion should be expected, regardless of any local impediment or advantage. For example, health care and finance and insurance have been expanding strongly and consistently in the national economy. These industries are therefore proportionately more likely to contribute to growth in the local economy. On the other hand, forestry and agriculture have been declining nationally and the local presence of these industries would be expected to contribute to stagnation or decline in the local economy. This factor is the “industrial shift” or “proportional shift.”
- (3) The last factor is the local competitive advantage. It is the difference in the growth or decline in a local industry relative to the growth or decline in the same industry in the larger economy. For example, if an industry is losing employment nationally, but losing employment at a slower rate locally, the local economy is considered advantaged regarding that industry. Alternatively, an industrial sector that is growing faster locally than it is nationally also represents a local competitive advantage,

The Shift-Share Analysis of the Local Economy is presented in Appendix F. To use shift-share analysis, the first step is to identify those industries with very large positive or negative absolute changes. The second step is to examine the local competitive advantage column for those industries. This column will give the first indication as to whether the local area is performing well or poorly and will help identify industry sectors in which the local area may have comparative advantage. Generally, the industrial

sectors with the greatest potential for job growth are those that have both a positive industry mix effect and a positive local competitive advantage. Where the local competitive advantage number is larger than the industrial mix number, and both figures are positive, this is an indication that the local area may have some comparative advantage. It is important to remember that shift-share analysis is a descriptive tool not a diagnostic one. It does not explain why particular local industries are more or less competitive—differences that may be due to technology, management, natural resources, wage rates, workforce productivity, or regional transportation networks.

Shift-Share Analysis can help identify emerging markets which have a LQ lower than 1. If a local economic sector demonstrates growth in excess of what should be expected as the result of overall growth in the larger economy, and growth in excess of that experienced by that particular sector in the larger economy, the local area has demonstrated some competitive advantage with regard to that industry, even if that industry is not yet a dominant factor in the local economy.

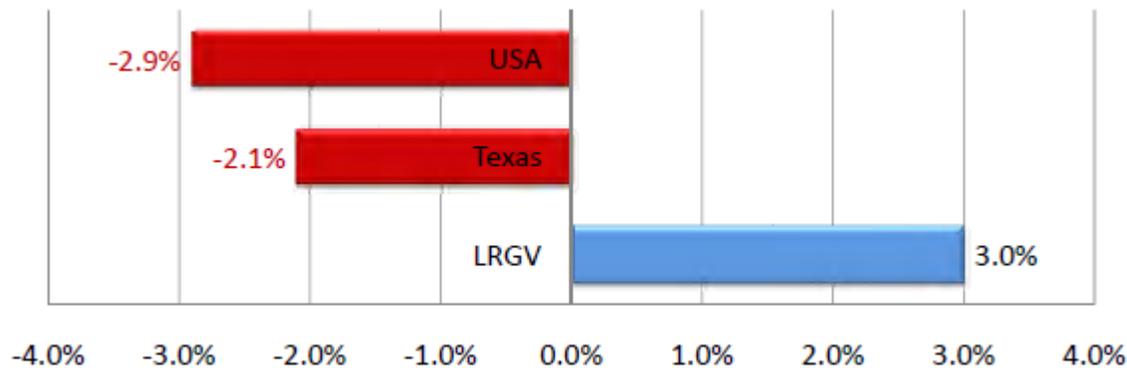
Overall, the local economy shows strong local competitive advantage. That is, the local economy has grown faster than would be expected based on overall economic growth at the state level or based on statewide growth in those industries present in the local economy. Overall, between 1998 and 2006, the local region gained 68,664 jobs, 40% of which are due to the local region's share of growth in the state economy and 60% are due to some local advantage.

About one-half of the growth in the local retail sector can be explained as representing the region's share of total growth in the state economy and one-half can be explained to a local competitive advantage. Paper manufacturing was highlighted by the location quotient analysis because it showed increasing concentration locally. Paper manufacturing is also highlighted by shift-share analysis. If employment in paper manufacturing grew at the same rate as the overall state economy, it would have increased by 85 jobs. If local employment in paper manufacturing was affected only by changes in paper manufacturing statewide, the local economy would have lost 185 paper manufacturing jobs (statewide employment in paper manufacturing declined by 18% between 1998 and 2006.). In actuality, local employment in paper manufacturing increased by 84 jobs. Therefore, local paper manufacturing outperformed the state industry.

NAICS 81—Accommodation and Food Services--illustrates change that is nearly evenly attributed to total statewide growth, statewide growth in this particular industry, and growth that is the result of a particular local advantage.

Manufacturing employment declined at a faster rate locally than it did in Texas overall ((40% reduction in manufacturing jobs locally compared to 14% reduction statewide). Nonetheless, some experts predict manufacturing employment in the local region to grow despite continued declines in manufacturing employment in Texas and the U.S. See Figure 9.2. Perhaps this represents a belief that a declining industry will concentrate locally to supply Mexican producers or assemble Mexican-produced parts, because of labor, land and utility cost advantages, or it includes Mexico in its definition of the “Lower Rio Grande Valley.”

FIGURE 9.2. Projected Change in Manufacturing Employment in the U.S., Texas, and Lower Rio Grande Valley 2004-2014



SOURCE: Malini Natarajathinam, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Engineering Technology and Industrial Distribution, Texas A & M University, “Opportunities for Industry Development: Reynosa and McAllen,” presentation made at the Texas-Mexico Trade Competitiveness Conference, February 2009.

Additionally, well publicized regional efforts are being devoted to reversing the trend in the loss of manufacturing jobs. Examples are the efforts of McAllen and Mission to attract an automobile manufacturing or assembly plant and the efforts of Edinburg and the State to assist a textile manufacturer to locate here.

Public Employment

Government is a major employer in the Mercedes' economic region, but is not included in the earlier analysis of the local regional economy. Local school districts are the largest employers in most Hidalgo and Cameron County communities. Mercedes Independent School District is the largest employer in Mercedes (950 employees) followed by South Texas Independent School District (420 employees). School districts also have among the highest average annual payrolls per employee in the local economy. During 2004-2005, the actual average salary for teachers at Mercedes Independent School District was more than \$40,000. The total 2008-2009 MISD budget was nearly \$49 million. Finally, because of the proportion of local public education funding that originates with the state and federal governments (approximately 80% in the case of MISD), local public education contributes more to the local economy than might otherwise be the case. The federal and state revenue represents money from outside the local jurisdiction being invested and spent within the local area.

Agriculture

Agriculture provided the economic rationale for establishment of the City of Mercedes and all of the towns and cities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. While agriculture represents a declining proportion of the total local economy, it remains a significant sector and the predominant land use in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In 2007, the market value of agricultural products from Hidalgo and Cameron County in 2007 was \$427 million, an increase of 19% since 1997 (constant dollars). Planning for the future of Mercedes is not complete without a plan for agriculture.

Planning for the continuation of farms and ranches in the local economy can be a sound investment. In addition to the provision of jobs on and off the farm, agriculture is an "export" industry bringing money from outside of the area. Additionally, according to USDA's Economic Research Service, every \$1 of exported agricultural products creates another \$1.48 to process, package, finance and ship the product. Furthermore, farmland enhances the visual appeal of the landscape to local residents and

visitors alike. Because the population and urbanized land in Mercedes has grown more slowly than other Lower Rio Grande Valley communities, Mercedes can market the beautiful surrounding open space to attract new home builders and owners who seek a quieter, more verdant community. Another benefit of privately-owned farmland is that it generates more in local tax revenue than it costs in public services. Moreover, agricultural lands can provide important public environmental services such as storm water retention, wildlife habitat, carbon dioxide sequestration, and community beautification for which we pay nothing. Finally, much of the land in the Lower Rio Grande Valley is prime farmland. Fertile delta soils, combined with irrigation and sub-tropical climate, yield high productivity.

The United States is the largest exporter of agricultural products in the world and agriculture is one of the few sectors of our economy that consistently enjoys a trade surplus. Because 96% of the world's consumers live outside the U.S., many are in developing countries where almost all income growth is spent on food, and the U.S. is a highly competitive producer of many products, it can be expected that agricultural exports will continue to grow.

According to the USDA Economic Research Service, Texas is the nation's second-leading agricultural-producing state. The sale of cattle and calves accounts for 51% of the state's agricultural sales, followed by greenhouse and nursery production, cotton, chicken and milk. Texas is number one in baled hay and wool production. According to Texas Land Trends⁶, Texas is home to more than 142 million acres of private farms, ranches and forestlands (84% of the state's entire land area), thus leading the nation in privately-owned working lands.

Nonetheless, according to American Farmland Trust, America loses 1.2 million acres of farmland annually, much of it the best and most productive farmland near where most Americans live. 86% of America's fruits and vegetables are grown near metro regions, in the path of development. Between 1997 and 2007, 156 counties in Texas lost farmland (2,140,317 acres) and 97 counties

⁶ Wilkins, R. Neal, Amy G. Snelgrove, Blair C. Fitzsimons, Brent M. Stevener, Kevin L. Skow, Ross E. Anderson, Amanda M. Dube. "Texas Land Trends." Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources. 2009. Texas A&M University. <<http://texaslandtrends.org/>

gained agricultural lands (618,781 acres), for a net decrease of 1,521,536 acres. The Lower Rio Grande Valley has been identified as an area with high rates of conversion from agricultural land to urbanized land. Because the market value of land is so much higher for development purposes than for agriculture, the conversion pressures are expected to continue unabated. And, much of the land facing urbanization is prime farmland, the land most suited for production of crops and livestock.

TABLE 9.9 Value of U.S. Agricultural Exports and Imports
(current dollars; not corrected for inflation)

YEAR	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	TRADE BALANCE
1935	\$670,000	\$930,000	(\$270,000)
1945	2,190,000	1,730,000	460,000
1955	3,140,000	3,780,000	(640,000)
1965	6,100,000	3,990,000	2,110,000
1975	21,820,000	9,440,000	12,380,000
1985	31,200,000	19,740,000	11,460,000
1995	54,610,000	29,790,000	24,820,000
2005	62,520,000	57,710,000	4,810,000
2008	115,450,000	79,320,000	36,130,000

In the period 1997 to 2007, Hidalgo County saw a 14% increase in the total amount of land on “farms,”⁷ bucking national and statewide trends. See Table 9.11. Nonetheless, the amount of harvested cropland and average farm size declined more dramatically

⁷ The United States Department of Agriculture defines a “farm” an operation that produces, or would normally produce and sell, \$1,000 or more of agricultural products per year. This definition apparently has not changed since at least 1974.

locally than statewide or nationally. The amount of irrigated farmland in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties declined at a similar rate to that of Texas but at a faster rate than in the U.S. overall. Despite the decreases in average farm size, harvested cropland and irrigated land, the market value of farm products continues to increase locally, statewide and nationally. *The market value of agricultural products from Hidalgo and Cameron County in 2007 was \$427 million, an increase of 19% since 1997 (constant dollars).* The market value of local crops increased 21% while the market value of livestock and poultry declined 1%. See Table 9.12. As in other economic sectors, the current status and recent changes in agriculture are different in Hidalgo County than in Cameron County. Table 9.12 also shows that while the value per acre of local farmland and buildings increased substantially (27%), that rate of increase was less than half the rate of statewide and national increase. Consistent with the decline in the average size of farms, but contrary to national and statewide trends, the average market value of an individual local farm decreased 6%.

TABLE 9.10 Land on Farms, Average Size of Farms, Harvested Cropland and Irrigated Land in 1997 and 2007

		Land on Farms	Average Size of Farms	Harvested cropland	Irrigated land
United States	1997	931,795,255	487	309,607,601	56,599,305
	2007	922,095,840	418	309,395,475	55,058,128
	% change	-1%	-14%	0%	-3%
Texas	1997	131,308,286	567	19,607,847	5,484,663
	2007	130,398,753	527	19,174,301	5,010,416
	% change	-1%	-7%	-2%	-9%
Cameron County	1997	368,528	409	190,935	108,990
	2007	349,479	282	181,663	101,093
	% change	-5%	-31%	-5%	-7%
Hidalgo County	1997	635,884	463	344,665	185,330
	2007	722,582	336	304,529	169,322
	% change	14%	-27%	-12%	-9%

TABLE 9.11 Estimated Market Value of Farmland & Buildings, Machinery & Equipment and Agricultural Products Sold in 1997 and 2007 for the U.S., Texas and Hidalgo and Cameron Counties (% change uses constant dollars)

					Agricultural Products Sold			
		Land & Buildings		Machinery & Equipment	Total		Crops	Livestock & Poultry
		\$ value per Farm	\$ value per Acre	\$ per farm	in \$1000s	\$ value per farm	total value in \$1000s	total value in \$1000s
United States	1997	449,748	933	57,678	196,864,649	102,970	98,055,656	98,808,993
	2007	791,138	1,892	88,357	297,220,491	134,807	143,657,928	153,562,563
	% change	36%	57%	19%	17%	1%	13%	20%
Texas	1997	398,126	593	40,062	13,766,527	70,852	4,293,474	9,473,054
	2007	669,154	1,270	64,350	21,001,074	84,874	6,565,576	14,435,499
	% change	30%	66%	24%	18%	-7%	18%	18%
Cameron County	1997	445,917	1,143	61,866	79,414	88,042	69,651	9,762
	2007	544,393	1,933	73,172	112,350	90,532	105,039	7,311
	% change	-5%	31%	-8%	10%	-20%	17%	-42%
Hidalgo County	1997	609,058	1,360	62,956	197,235	143,652	181,134	16,100
	2007	732,730	2,181	88,682	314,256	146,098	288,480	25,777
	% change	-7%	24%	9%	23%	-21%	23%	24%
Hidalgo and Cameron Counties combined	1997				276,649	231,694	250,785	25,862
	2007				426,606	236,630	393,519	33,088
	% change				19%	-21%	21%	-1%

The distribution of local farms by size is similar to statewide and national distribution, though locally the smallest farms represent a larger proportion of farms and mid-range-sized farms are underrepresented. Similarly, farms with the lowest value of total annual sales are over-represented locally (56% of Hidalgo County farms sold less than \$5,000 worth of agricultural products). However, the highest grossing farms are also over-represented locally. Twelve percent of Cameron County farms and 11% of Hidalgo County farms grossed at least \$100,000. See Table 9.13

TABLE 9.12 Distribution of Farms by Size in Acres and Value of Agricultural Products Sold

SIZE IN ACRES	U.S.	Texas	Cameron County	Hidalgo County
1 to 9	11%	8%	23%	24%
10 to 49	28%	29%	40%	38%
50 to 179	30%	29%	16%	16%
180 to 499	17%	17%	7%	8%
500 to 999 acres	7%	7%	6%	7%
1,000 or more	8%	9%	8%	8%
ANNUAL SALES				
< \$2,500	9%	47%	44%	46%
\$2,500 to 4,999	10%	12%	13%	10%
\$5,000 to 9,999	11%	12%	11%	8%
\$10,000 to 24,999	7%	12%	11%	11%
\$25,000 to 49,999	6%	6%	5%	7%
\$50,000 to 99,999	11%	4%	5%	6%
\$100,000 or more	5%	7%	12%	11%

TABLE 9.13 Net Cash Income from Farm Operations in the U.S., Texas, and Cameron and Hidalgo Counties

	UNITED STATES	TEXAS	CAMERON COUNTY	HIDALGO COUNTY
Net cash income of farm operations	\$74,581,098,000	\$3,167,114,000	\$50,076,000	\$102,009,000
% increase from 1997	36%	23%	92%	71%
Average per farm	\$33,827	\$12,800	\$40,351	\$47,424
% increase from 1997	18%	-3%	40%	9%
Primary occupation of principal operator is farming	45%	40%	40%	44%

Both total net income and average net income per farm of farm operations in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties increased substantially between 1997 and 2007. The increased profitability of total local farm operations dwarfed the increased profitability of farms in Texas and nationally. Table 9.14 also shows that a majority of farm operators do not identify their primary occupation as farming. This is true nationally, statewide and locally. Therefore, farm operators do not depend on farm profits as their sole livelihood.

An effective plan for agriculture first requires that a conversation about the role of agriculture in the future Lower Rio Grande Valley begin. It is not growth and urbanization per se that causes the loss of farmland but inefficient growth. Many studies point to the fact that each new resident now consumes much more land than previously. The amount of urbanized land increases at a much

faster rate than the population increases. Many studies also document that sprawling development is more costly to service—to distribute drinking water and collect wastewater, to install and maintain electric and telephone lines, to transport school students, to provide police patrol and response and fire suppression services, to collect solid waste, etc..

A land use and economic development plan that seeks to continue a productive agricultural economy would include land use policies and programs that help keep land available and affordable for farming, economic development tools to improve profitability, and conservation practices to keep the land healthy. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, reservation of sufficient water for agriculture and water conservation are needed. (The allocation of water in the Lower Rio Grande Valley is discussed in Chapter 7—Infrastructure, Public Facilities and Public Safety.) An effective plan for agriculture requires coordination and cooperation on a regional basis, partnerships between farmers, land owners, and others, and leadership at the local, state and national level. Some of the commonly used tools to promote the sustainability of the agricultural economy include:

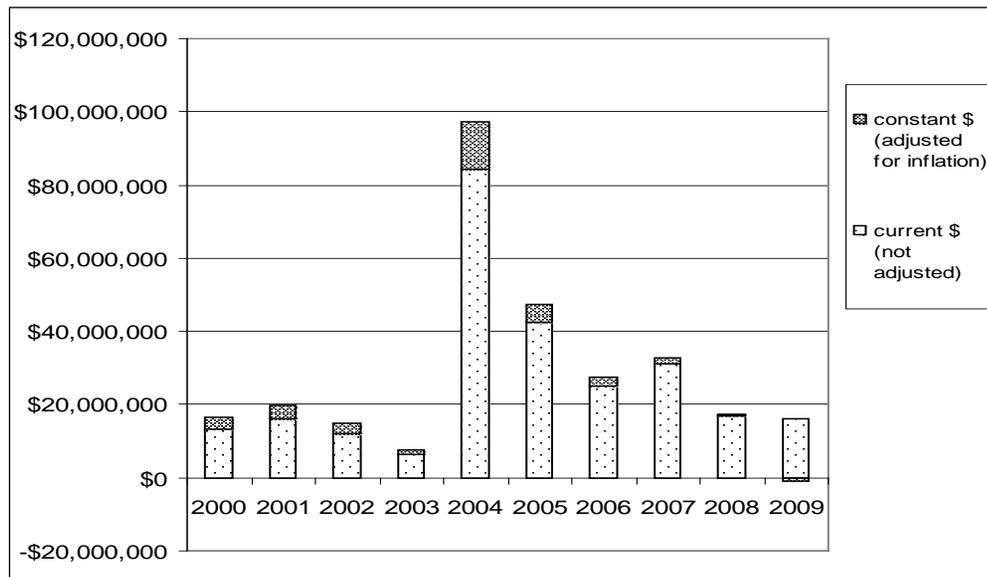
1. **Land Use Policies and Programs:** Purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, agricultural districts, zoning, cluster zoning, right-to-farm laws and tax relief.
2. **Economic Development Tools:** Agri-tourism, direct marketing, branding of local agricultural products, value-added processing and product diversification.
3. **Farming and Ranching Techniques:** organic production, integrated pest management, nutrient management and grass-based farming.

Building Permit Data

Building permit data provides an important perspective on real estate investment within the City. During the last 10 years, the City issued building permits for projects totaling \$259,000,000. Construction activity has varied year to year during this time. The variation occurred in both total amount of activity and in the relative strength of the different construction sectors. 2004 saw the most activity, with the issuance of permits for construction valued at more than \$84 million. In constant 2009 dollars, 2004 constituted fully one-third of total permit activity for the decade. School construction dominated that year, with 90% of the building

project valuation. While school construction does not lead directly to increased property or sales tax revenue for the City, quality, modern schools represent a noteworthy investment in the city’s youth and in future economic development. It can also lead to employment in local firms that are awarded construction bids. 2005 was the next busiest year, as measured by the total value of construction for which permits were issued. The activity of these two years—2004 and 2005—represented one-half of the total construction activity for the decade. Commercial construction led in 2005 with projects valued at nearly \$25 million receiving permits (58% of that year’s total). Table 9.14 provides a detailed look at Mercedes’ building permit activity over the last decade. The value of construction by sector and year and as a percent of the total activity each year and over the decade is presented. The data from Table 9.14 is presented graphically in Figure 9.4.

FIGURE 9.3. Total Valuation for Building Permits Issued in the City of Mercedes



Note: 2009 data is for seven months only (January through July 2009)

TABLE 9.14 City of Mercedes Valuation of Construction by Sector and Year as reflected in Permits Issued

YEAR	SINGLE-FAMILY		OTHER RESIDENTIAL		COMMERCIAL		INDUSTRIAL		SCHOOLS & CHURCHES		OTHER		TOTAL
	Valuation	% of annual total	valuation	% of annual total	valuation	% of annual total	valuation	% of annual total	valuation	% of annual total	valuation	% of annual total	valuation
2000	2,036,257	16%	94,417	1%	615,303	5%	625,005	5%	9,731,485	74%	27,144	0%	\$13,129,611
2001	1,665,635	10%	360,762	2%	4,945,429	31%	330,500	2%	6,941,641	43%	1,831,675	11%	\$16,075,642
2002	1,548,700	13%	341,887	3%	1,350,084	11%	45,927	0%	7,360,088	61%	1,460,271	12%	\$12,106,957
2003	2,529,492	40%	853,194	14%	898,815	14%	749,500	12%	73,500	1%	1,202,660	19%	\$6,307,161
2004	3,271,092	4%	4,039,079	5%	1,381,145	2%	700,000	1%	74,853,650	89%	65,596	0%	\$84,310,562
2005	2,827,870	7%	11,699,324	28%	24,660,238	58%	0	0%	2,967,261	7%	352,984	1%	\$42,507,677
2006	5,992,543	24%	1,542,460	6%	14,898,996	59%	213,014	1%	2,204,000	9%	355,844	1%	\$25,206,857
2007	6,384,993	21%	1,292,765	4%	15,131,302	49%	5,187,200	17%	2,824,000	9%	142,930	0%	\$30,963,190
2008	1,965,248	12%	988,435	6%	13,752,984	81%	0	0%	42,000	0%	183,839	1%	\$16,932,506
2009**	803,890	5%	487,911	3%	3,993,903	25%	0	0%	10,889,000	67%	77,400	0%	\$16,252,104
TOTAL	\$29,025,720		\$21,700,234		\$81,628,199		\$7,851,146		\$117,886,625		\$5,700,343		\$263,792,267
% of decade total		11%		8%		31%		3%		45%		2%	

** Note: 2009 figures are for first 7 months only: January through July.

FIGURE 9.4 Proportion of Construction Valuation by Type, 2000 through 2009 (2009 data is January through July only).

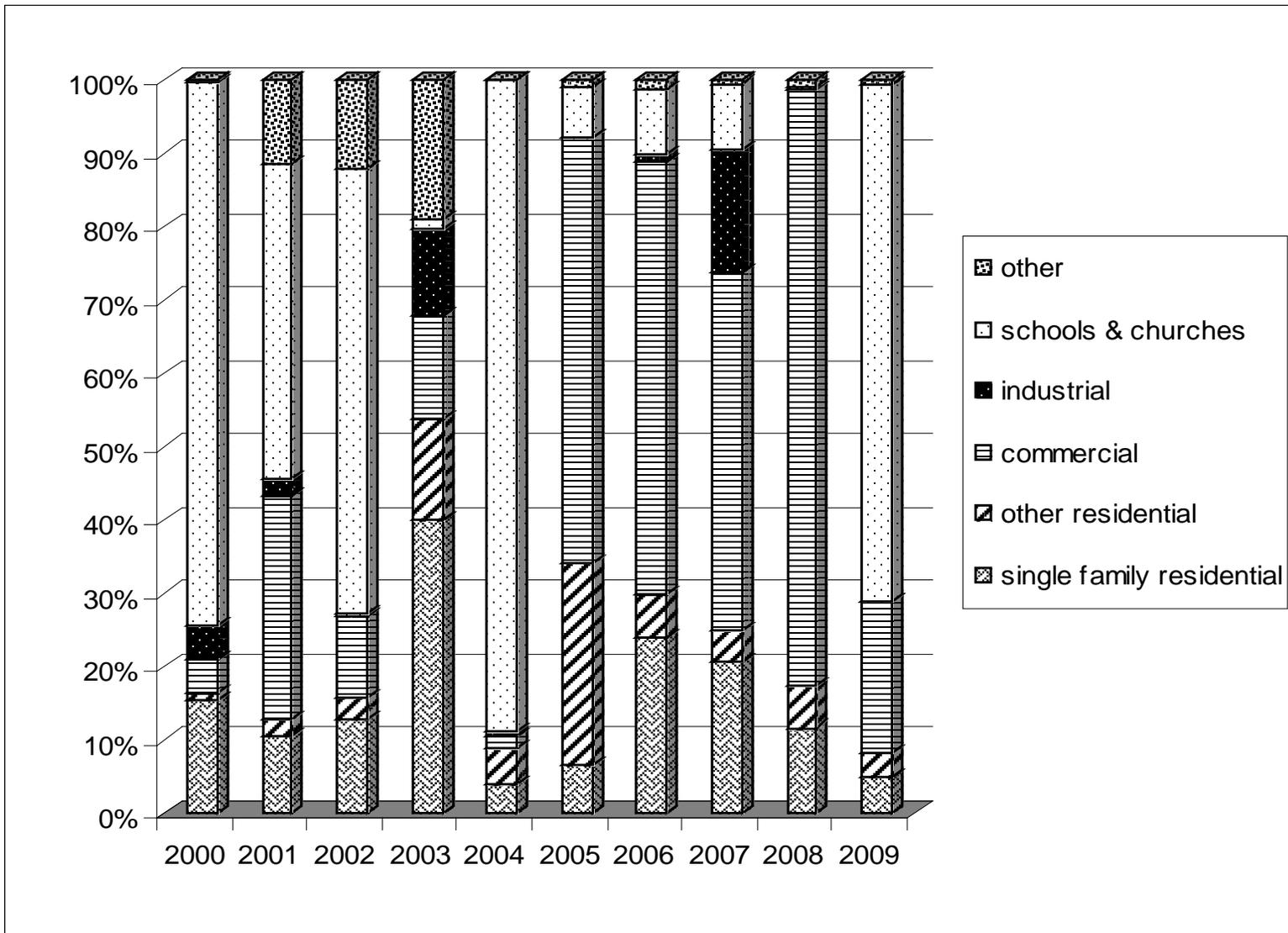
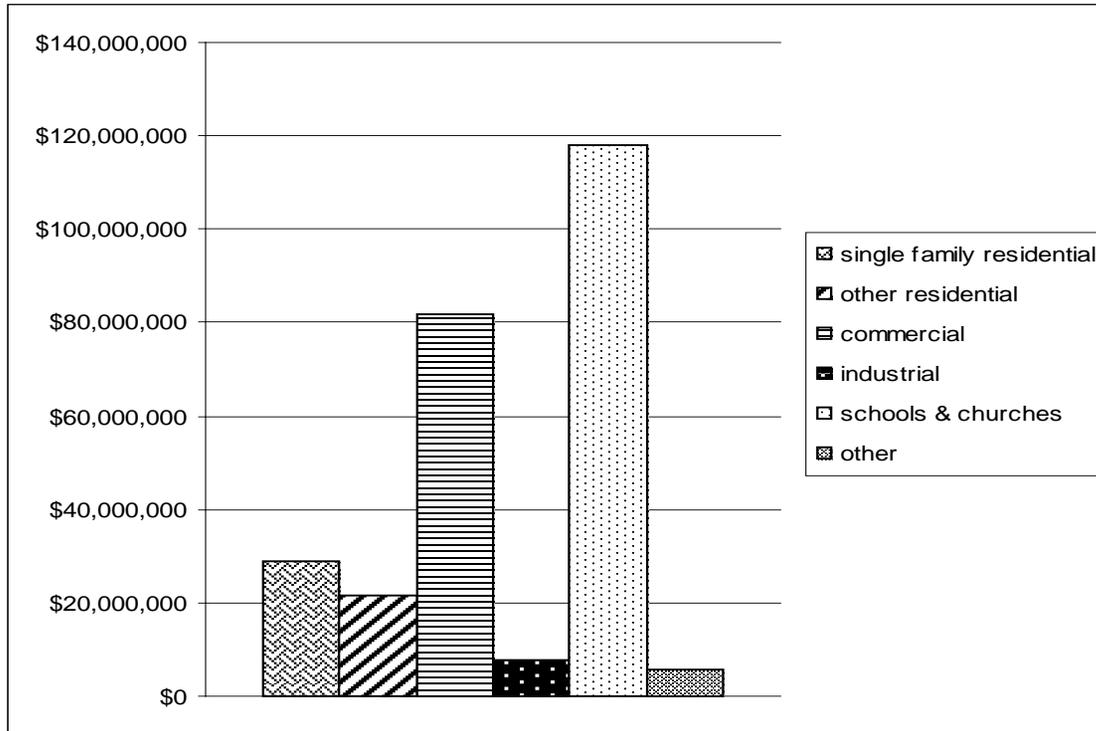


FIGURE 9.5 Total Valuation of Construction by Type 2000 through 2009 in City of Mercedes



Sales Tax Revenue

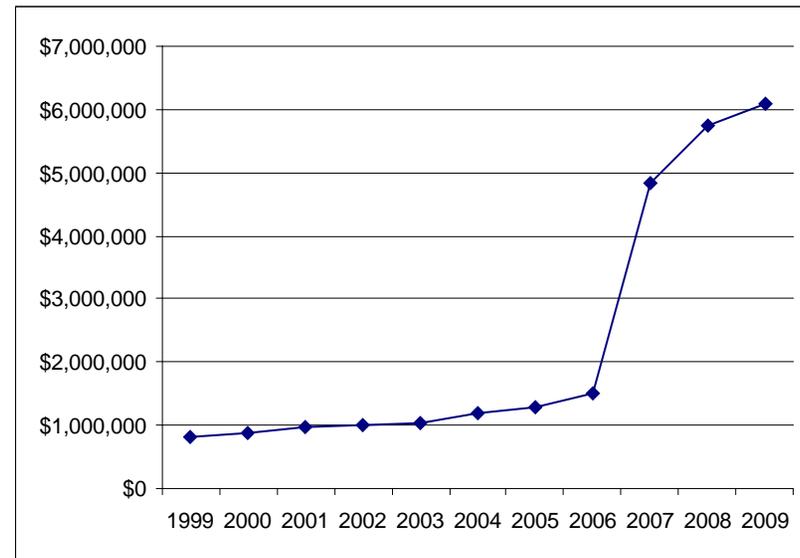
Sales tax revenue reflects the growth and development of the retail sector. The percentage increase in local sales tax revenue to the City of Mercedes as the result of the opening of one project—the Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlets--has made the City the envy of the valley. See Table 9.15 and Figure 9.6. While it is unreasonable to expect the 2007 rate of increase to be repeated in the short term, further development of the Retail Corridor will ensure continued growth in sales tax revenue to Mercedes. The total revenue figures presented in Table 9.15 and Figure 9.6 do not account for the reimbursement made to the developers of the Premium

Outlets Mall for some of the investment it made to develop the Mall. Between 2006 and 2015, the City will pay to the developer one-half of the local sales tax revenue that is generated by retailers at the Mall. When the ten year agreement is concluded, all local sales tax revenues will be available to the City of Mercedes.

TABLE 9.15 Sales Tax Revenue 2000 – 2009

YEAR	LOCAL SALES TAX REVENUE	% increase from prior year
1999	\$816,358	
2000	865,539	6%
2001	962,523	11%
2002	1,004,307	4%
2003	1,047,262	4%
2004	1,189,982	14%
2005	1,292,176	9%
2006	1,509,705	17%
2007	4,841,434	221%
2008	5,730,075	18%
2009	6,078,624	6%
TOTAL	\$25,337,984	

FIGURE 9.6 Local Sales Tax Revenue in the City of Mercedes 2000- 2009



Source: Texas Comptroller, Local Sales Tax Allocation

EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

As discussed in Chapter 2-Demographics, personal income is closely correlated to educational attainment. Creating opportunity for local residents to increase their salaries and wages requires both increased educational opportunities and increased utilization of those educational opportunities that are available. Educational institutions are a crucial component of the local economic development infrastructure. The major educational resources available to residents of Mercedes are as follows:

Mercedes Independent School District - MISD serves 5,336 students and employs 950 individuals through the operation of one early childhood development center, three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Dual enrollment in classes at South Texas College by high performing Mercedes High School students is an increasingly popular option. This facilitates attainment of an Associates Degree or Bachelor's Degree by these students. Table 9.16 presents information from the Texas Education Agency's 2009-2008 Accountability Rating and the 2007-2008 Academic Excellence Indicator System's report on Mercedes ISD schools.

South Texas Independent School District - STISD is a magnet district that attracts students from Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy Counties to its junior high in Edinburg and three high schools in Mercedes. The district specializes in business, education, medicine and science. South Texas ISD receives many national awards and has been repeatedly ranked by Newsweek magazine as among the best high schools in the nation. Ninety-five percent (95%) of its graduates continue their education at major universities. Table 9.17 presents information from the Texas Education Agency's 2009-2008 Accountability Rating and the 2007-2008 Academic Excellence Indicator System's report on South Texas ISD Schools located in Mercedes.

University of Texas-Pan Am in Edinburg offers 56 undergraduate degree programs, 46 masters degrees, and doctoral programs in education and international business and many certificate programs.

University of Texas at Brownsville offers 79 undergraduate degree and certificate programs and 21 masters degree programs in nursing, education, and engineering.

South Texas College in Weslaco and McAllen offers 90 associate degree and certificate programs, a unique industrial start-up program designed to reduce training costs of new or expanding industries, and two bachelors degree programs. Certificates of Completion facilitate entry-level employment in areas of high demand in the local economy, including bookkeeping, automotive mechanics, electronic servicing, general office clerk, industrial maintenance mechanics, medical records and nursing assistant.

Texas State Technical College in Harlingen offers technical training programs geared to meet the demands of industry and retail. Certificates offered include clerical specialist, dental hygienist, and nursing assistant.

Table 9.16 Texas Education Agency Ratings for MISD Schools, July 2009

School	School Accountability Rating	Gold Performance	Commended Performance
Mercedes High School	2008-09 Academically Acceptable (every year since 2004)	Recommended High School Program -Class of 2007	
Mercedes Junior High School	2008-09 Academically Unacceptable (Academically Acceptable 2004 - 08)	Attendance -2006-07	Reading/English Language Arts
Ruben Hinojosa Elementary	2008-09 Recognized (Recognized in 2004, 2008; Academically Acceptable in 2005, 2006 and 2007)		
John F. Kennedy Elementary	2008-09 Academically Acceptable (every year since 2004)	Attendance (2006-07) Comparable Improvement: Reading/English Language Arts	
Taylor Elementary	2008-09 Academically Acceptable		
Travis Elementary	2008-09 Recognized (every year since 2004)	Attendance -2006-07	Writing
Mercedes Alternative Academy	2008-09 Academically Unacceptable (Alternative Education Standard) (Academically Acceptable 2004 through 2008)	Recommended High School Program-Class of 2007 Texas Success Initiative- English Language Arts	

Table 9.17 Texas Education Agency Ratings for STISD Schools located in Mercedes, July 2009

School	School Accountability Rating	Gold Performance	Commended Performance
South Texas Science Academy (Sci-Tech)	2008-09 Exemplary (Exemplary in 2004 and 2006-2009); Recognized in 2005.	Attendance -2006-07 Advanced Academic Courses -2006-07 Advanced Placement/ International Baccalaureate Results -2006-07 College Admissions -Class of 2007 Recommended High School Program – Class of 2007 Texas Success Initiative-English Language Arts Texas Success Initiative - Mathematics	Reading/English Language Arts Mathematics Science Social Studies
South Texas High School for Health Professions (Med-High)	2008-09 Exemplary (Recognized 2004-2008)	Attendance -2006-07 Advanced Academic Courses -2006-07 Recommended High School Program – Class of 2007 Texas Success Initiative - Mathematics	Reading/ELA Mathematics Social Studies Comparable Improvement: Reading/ELA
South Texas Academy of Medical Technology (Med-Tech)	2008-09 Exemplary (Recognized in 2004-2006 and 2008; Academically Acceptable in 2007)	Recommended High School Program – Class of 2007 Texas Success Initiative - Mathematics	Reading/ELA Social Studies Reading/ELA Mathematics

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is fundamentally important to Mercedes' economy. Convenient access is essential for supplies, customers and employees. Mercedes is well-served by land, air and sea.

Highways - Mercedes is positioned along US Expressway 83 and between US Highway 281 and US Highway 77. US Expressway 83 provides access to the entire Rio Grande Valley and 8 nearby bridges to Mexico while US Highways 281 and 77 provide access to the rest of Texas and the United States. While still in very preliminary design, the proposed "Hidalgo Loop" toll-road will greatly impact transportation and economic development in Mercedes. In keeping with its name, the Hidalgo Loop is intended to connect U.S. 281 and Expressway 83 and allow through-traffic to avoid the congested urbanized sections of those roadways. There are currently some six different alignments under consideration for the north-south section on the eastern end of the loop. Four of the six alternatives traverse Mercedes and two are located between Donna and Alamo. The extent of the impact on Mercedes will depend on the chosen alignment, the capacity of the roadway, and the location and design of on and off ramps and interchanges. With the increasing dominance in the local economy of international trade, the need for more capacity in the region's roadways to handle increasing truck traffic and more convenient freight rail access across the Rio Grande is evident. The adequacy of U.S. Expressway 83 and U.S. Highway 281 to serve as evacuation routes for private personal automobiles from the Lower Rio Grande Valley also deserves careful study. Looking to the future, the region should investigate the feasibility of attracting investment in modern, innovative freight moving technologies.

Airports – Three airports provide passenger and cargo service to Mercedes. Brownsville-South Padre Island International Airport, McAllen Miller International Airport and Valley International Airport-Harlingen serve 845,000 passengers annually and provide access to most major airports in the United States via American, Delta, Continental, and Southwest Airlines.

Rail services – While freight railroad has commanded a declining share of freight hauling in this country for many decades, the ability of freight rail to move large quantities of cargo in a very fuel efficient way cannot be over-looked and may result in increasing competitiveness in rail freight. As the nation strives to reduce its energy consumption, in order to protect the environment

and human health and to increase national security, the value of the Rio Valley Switching Company to the economic welfare of Mercedes and the region will increase. Rio Valley Switching Co. maintains daily freight service out of Hidalgo County. It started operating in March 1993. Rio Valley Switching Co. has 49 miles of track, running from Harlingen to Mission and a branch to the McAllen Foreign-Trade Zone. Rio Valley Switching Company collaborates with Union Pacific Railroad to transport equipment and merchandise throughout the United States. Four major Mexican international ports on both the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico are linked by rail to the U.S.-Mexico border at McAllen. However, no rail bridge crosses the river there. International rail bridges are located in Brownsville, Laredo, Eagle Pass and El Paso. The construction of an additional international rail bridge will increase the importance of rail in the local region's economy.

Seaports - The Port of Brownsville is 38 miles away and has a 42 foot deep channel. It is an important regional asset for any business that seeks to import or export internationally and needs access to a deep water port. The Port is investigating the economic feasibility of deepening the channel to fifty feet (50').

Public Transit - The greater Mercedes area has bus lines serving local, national, and international travel needs. Greyhound Bus Lines and Valley Transit Company have daily destinations throughout the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, United States and Mexico. Autobuses Adame and Tornado Bus Line provide daily bus service throughout central Texas, the eastern United States, and Mexico. Rio Metro bus lines provide daily local transportation for intercity and Rio Grande Valley areas. At this time, less than one-half of one percent of workers in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties get to work by public transportation. Levels of traffic congestion have not created a public demand for better public transit service. Land development patterns will greatly impact the ability of public transit to meet future mobility needs of people.

TAX STRUCTURE

Texas offers favorable tax rates. It has been ranked as having the second to the lowest per capita state tax. Texas is one of the few states in the U.S. that does not levy corporate income taxes. This is an advantage to existing business and those considering locating in Texas.

The City of Mercedes ad valorem property tax has been reduced by the City Commission from eighty-seven cents (87¢) per \$1,000 valuation in 2006-2007, to eighty and one-half cent (80.5¢) per \$1,000 valuation in 2008-2009, to seventy-nine cents (79¢) per \$1,000 valuation for 2009-2010 (a reduction of 9% in three years). The property tax rate devoted to the City's ongoing maintenance and operations has been reduced from seventy-four cents (74¢) per \$1000 valuation in 2003 – 2004 to just fifty-three cents (53¢) per \$1,000 valuation in 2009-10 (a 28% reduction in six years). At the same time, the quality of city services has improved and the ability of the city to make capital investments for the long-term well-being of the community has increased. These fiscal improvements were made possible by prudent public investment in infrastructure which set in motion private investments which increased total property tax valuation from just over \$200 million in 2003-2004 to \$459 million in 2009-2010. Nonetheless, the City's ad valorem tax rate is the 16th highest of the 20 municipalities in Hidalgo County. The City's tax rate is 141% of the average of the 20 Hidalgo County municipalities. The MISD ad valorem tax rate is 12th highest of the 16 school districts in Hidalgo County. It is 104% of the 16 Hidalgo County school districts. Appendix G contains the tax rates and total taxable property for the municipalities and school districts in Hidalgo County.

The City assesses a local 7% hotel occupancy tax. This is 7% of the price paid to rent the hotel room. With the opening of La Quinta Inn in 2007 and La Copa Inn in 2009, plus the Mercedes Executive Inn, and increased tourism in Mercedes, the hotel occupancy tax fund will become an increasingly important resource to the City. In 2008-2009, it generated \$86,000. The permitted use of these funds is limited by state and local law to the promotion of tourism and the convention and hotel industries, including improvements to the Civic Center, advertising, historic preservation, and encouragement of the arts.

THE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF MERCEDES

The Development Corporation of Mercedes is the primary actor in local economic development efforts. The Economic Development Corporation of Mercedes was formed under Section 4A of the Texas Development Corporation Act. Section 4A allows for the imposition of a local sales and use tax dedicated to economic development. Mercedes voters authorized a one-half cent sales tax for this purpose (The other one-and-a-half cent local sales tax goes to the City's general fund.) The EDC is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors appointed by the Mercedes City Commission.

The primary purpose of Section 4A sales tax for economic development is to create new jobs and investment in the community. Since 2003, the use of the economic development sales tax is required to focus the creation or retention of "primary jobs." A primary job is a job at a company which exports the majority of its products or services to regional, statewide, national or international markets, infusing new dollars into the local economy. These sectors of the economy which have "primary jobs" are identified by the NAICS. Expenditures from local sales tax revenue can be for land, buildings, equipment, facilities, improvements and expenditures related to:

1. Manufacturing, industrial, research and development, recycling, small warehouse and corporate headquarters facilities;
2. Distribution facilities;
3. Job training for primary jobs and commercial retail;
4. Business airport facilities;
5. Job training and infrastructure assistance to retail or commercial projects; and,
6. To facilitate retail development, funds can be expended for infrastructure in the form of streets and roads, rail spurs, gas and electric facilities, drainage, telecommunications and internet improvements.

Additionally, the Mercedes Industrial Foundation, which works closely with the Development Corporation, owns two tracts of land which are available for high quality economic development. One tract is 15 acres located on Expressway 83 and the other tract is six acres in the Vogel Industrial Park.

The Mercedes Retail Corridor

The further development of Mercedes Retail Corridor is the EDC's primary goal at this time. It encompasses 640 acres of prime commercial real estate with access to US Expressway 83. Eighty percent (80%) of the acreage directly fronts the expressway frontage road. The \$80 million expansion and renovation of Expressway 83 recently completed by Texas DOT further increases the attractiveness of the Mercedes Retail Corridor.

The Mercedes Retail Corridor is anchored by Rio Grande Valley Premium Outlets. The first phase, opened in November 2006, was a \$65 million, 400,000 square foot outlet mall housing more than 100 tenants. Phase II, completed in the fall of 2007, provided an additional 150,000 sq. ft., and a smaller third phase has also been completed. The development of the Outlet Mall has spurred additional commercial development including two chain hotels and a restaurant. The City of Mercedes invested approximately \$5 million in infrastructure improvements to enable the Outlet Mall to open. The water, sewer and roadway improvements were sized to enable significant additional development in the area. Additionally, the City agreed to rebate to the property owner one-half of the sales taxes paid on purchases at the Outlet Mall for ten years. Even with substantial additional development facilitated by this investment in infrastructure still to occur, the Premium Outlets has already yielded significant return to the City on its investment. Furthermore, as the sales-tax rebates expire, in 2017 and later, the City will benefit tremendously from the additional retail sales tax.

The key strategy for the further development of Mercedes Retail Corridor is to recruit additional national franchises. The goal is to attract "destination" retail of a sufficient caliber to attract persons from a great distance. At this time, local population and income figures do not warrant additional significant investment in "community" retail, that is, retail intended to serve the needs of the local population, especially given the intense competition within short travel times. Retail is usually not considered a "primary industry," that is, it is not believed to bring new money to the community, but rather, involve the spending of money that already exists in the community. However, in the Rio Grande Valley, the retail sector does attract money from the consumers from outside of the area, including significant expenditures by affluent shoppers from Mexico City and Monterrey, Mexico. Mexican visitors

expend \$1.4 billion annually in the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission MSA. The City of McAllen attributes 36% of its retail sales to Mexican residents. According to the Mercedes EDC, 85% of Mexican visitors cite shopping as the primary reason for their visit. Forty-five percent (45%) of Mexican visitors visit the area several times per year, while 35% visit several times per month. Thirty-eight percent (38%) are from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, 23% from Reynosa, Tamaulipas. Average expenditure per visitor is \$213. Average annual expenditures per visitor are \$4,547. The results of the first years of operation of the Outlets bodes well for the ability of Mercedes to attract additional high performing retailers to its Retail Corridor.

A second focus of the City and its EDC is Downtown Mercedes. There are some 65 individual businesses located in Mercedes' downtown district. Recent investments of \$1 million in new sidewalks, landscaping and other improvements have resulted in a beautiful downtown streetscape. The City's façade improvement program is also resulting in marked improvement in the physical appearance of some key downtown structures. These improvements will result in improved property valuations and therefore increased property tax revenue to the City, but, more importantly, will breathe new life in the traditional and historical center of community life.

The City of Mercedes utilizes a number of incentive programs designed to make resources available for businesses that create new jobs in the community. These are outlined in Appendix H.

Economic Development Opportunities and Obstacles

Many economic development opportunities exist for Mercedes to take advantage of. First and foremost, the vibrant regional economy creates a positive outlook for each community and many employment opportunities within reasonable commuting distance. Within the overall growth, there are certain sectors whose particular vitality creates prospects for Mercedes. This includes medical facilities such as a hospital and geriatric care centers, the expansion of high quality destination retail in the vicinity of the Rio Grande Premium Outlets, and the development of retail stores affordable to the local residents to capture spending now done in nearby

communities. Regional efforts to organize and market the lower Rio Grande Valley as a superior location for manufacturing and industrial development also create potential for Mercedes.

The many thousands of people who visit Mercedes to shop or attend the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show represent an audience or market to support recreational and entertainment venues and additional restaurants. These can serve visitors and Winter Texans as well as local residents. Specifically, while some members of the family spend the afternoon shopping, other members of the family engage in recreational pursuits or entertainment venues, such as bowling, skating, movie theaters, video arcades, miniature golf, and go-karts. Or, visitors spend one-day shopping and another day engaging in other enjoyable pursuits. The beautiful natural resources and private and public open space, including the Arroyo Colorado, nearby Estero Llano Grande State Park and World Birding Center, Lake Campacuas, and even the floodways, create opportunities for nature-tourism including horseback riding, bike riding, bird watching, fishing, and nature photography. The people who engage in these activities will also shop in local stores and eat in local restaurants. Sports-tourism is another economic development tool that also meets the needs and improves the quality of life of local residents. Development of a large, high quality sports-complex would permit Mercedes to host regional, state and even national athletic tournaments. Finally, the fact that Mercedes still has much land available for development which is more affordable than other valley communities and the fact that Mercedes City Government and local public finances are stable are economic development assets.

The constraints that must be overcome include that land owners are not eager and sometimes seek unrealistic prices for their land. The costs of subdividing land, including the amount of land required to be dedicated to street rights-of-ways and utility and drainage easements, as well as engineering costs, discourages some land owners from developing. Mercedes has higher ad valorem property tax rates than some comparable communities, even though the City has recently reduced the tax rate. (See Appendix I for property tax rates of Hidalgo County Municipalities and School Districts). The high rate can be a disincentive to invest here, all other things being equal. The limited extent of the City of Mercedes' water service area and the inability of the rural water supply

corporations to provide adequate volume and pressure to support proper function of fire hydrants pose an obstacle to residential and economic development.

Residents of Mercedes are held back individually by their limited educational achievement. Likewise, low educational levels affect the ability of the area to attract higher paying jobs which require higher skills. Most of the local growth in employment has been in economic sectors that pay low wages and offer few benefits. Therefore, currently local employment prospects do not create the incentive to seek higher education and skills. This vicious cycle can and must be overcome.

The slower residential growth, small population in Mercedes, and relatively low incomes reduces the ability to recruit some popular retail businesses. The lack of a hospital in Mercedes will make it harder to grow the local health care industry. The floodway creates an artificial boundary in the City and occupies valuable Expressway frontage. Similarly, the decision to locate Expressway 83 through existing residential neighborhoods has resulted in valuable Expressway frontage being occupied by residences. Finally, parochialism--the desire of community and political leaders and local banks to protect existing local businesses from competition—which was formerly more prevalent than it is today, but still exists to some degree, is believed to negatively impact the City's competitiveness and economic vitality.

Mercedes has many strengths, assets, and opportunities. No obstacle or constraint is insurmountable. All require acknowledgement, a bold plan and courageous determination. City leadership, the EDC, the private sector, and residents and community leaders of Mercedes, working together, with a common vision, will continue the tremendous progress that City has achieved.

The City of Mercedes Economic Development Goals

Goal 9.1 Develop an Economic Development Plan, equivalent to the *Envision Mercedes 2025*, using this chapter as a springboard.

- Obj. 9.1a** Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan for the City which addresses tourists (including Winter Texans and shoppers at the Outlet Mall), developers and investors, and includes strategies specifically for the Mercedes Industrial Park as well as methods to measure the effectiveness of the different strategies and activities.
- Obj. 9.1b** Identify businesses that considered a location in Mercedes but instead invested elsewhere and identify the factors that caused them to locate elsewhere in order to evaluate how those factors might be addressed.
- Obj. 9.1c** Identify targets for business attraction, retention and expansion in retail as well as other industrial sectors.
- Obj. 9.1d** Identify local businesses which exhibit a regional advantage and assess whether there is an appropriate role for public sector involvement in facilitating expansion.
- Obj. 9.1e** Actively participate in regional economic development efforts such as (a) the México – Texas Trade Corridor Consortium, a consortium of manufacturers, distributors, infrastructure providers and economic development entities focused on understanding how to create the ideal regional manufacturing zone for high potential industries. Brownsville, McAllen and Laredo Economic Development Corporations are members; and (b) Rio South Economic Development Council, a non-profit membership organization that seeks to bring together the economic development interests of Lower Rio Grande Valley cities, counties, chambers of commerce, educational institutions, workforce board, ports, and businesses to work towards regional prosperity. More specifically, the Rio South Economic Council seeks to coordinate marketing and develop regional economic development strategies.
- Obj. 9.1f** Develop a beautification plan for major transportation and business corridors (e.g., Expressway 83, Business 83,

Texas Avenue and Baseline Road) including landscaping, regulation of signage, code enforcement, and design standards.

Obj. 9.1g Acquire certification as a “GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Community.”

Obj. 9.1h Periodically update the data in this chapter and reevaluate the City’s economic development goals and strategies in light of what is learned about trends in the local economy.

Goal 9.2 Develop city infrastructure that advances its economic development priorities.

Obj. 9.2a Monitor and participate with the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority in the planning and development of the Hidalgo County “Loop,” identify the interests of Mercedes that are at stake and advocate for the interests of Mercedes to be protected and advanced.

Obj. 9.2b Monitor and participate in the development of plans by the Hidalgo County Light Rail District, identify the interests of Mercedes that are at stake, and advocate for the interests of Mercedes to be protected and advanced.

Obj. 9.2c Partner with the Hidalgo County Light Rail District to locate in Mercedes the maintenance and engineering services for future passenger rail services.

Obj. 9.2d Improve public transportation between Mercedes and institutions of higher education--South Texas College in McAllen and Weslaco, UT-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas Technical College in Harlingen, and UT-Brownsville.

Obj. 9.2e Complete the purchase of the water service area between Bus. 83 and Exp. 83 from North Alamo Water Supply Corp.

Obj. 9.2f Acquire additional water service area or enter into agreements with rural water agencies with pre-established buy-out formulas to ensure adequate public facilities accompany urban development.

Obj. 9.2g Recognize that telecommunications infrastructure, including fiber optics, has become as essential as streets in the modern economy. Determine the need for upgrades in local telecommunications infrastructure to meet the needs of new and existing businesses and advocate with the relevant providers for those improvements.

Goal 9.3 Encourage an expanded healthcare industry in the City of Mercedes.

Obj. 9.3a Advocate with federal and state lawmakers, Veteran’s Administration officials, and other federal administrative officials and network with local veterans’ activists regarding the benefits, including centralized location and reasonably priced land, of locating new veteran’s healthcare facilities in Mercedes.

Obj. 9.3b Utilize the growing local and regional elderly population to market the City of Mercedes as good location for geriatric health care and assisted living facilities.

Goal 9.4 Attract and create recreational and entertainment opportunities and facilities for the benefit of visitors and residents.

Obj. 9.4a Attract and encourage expansion of full service restaurants.

Obj. 9.4b Recruit and develop children’s and family-oriented recreation and entertainment such as a bowling alley, movie theater, and a facility similar to “The Zone” which has a video arcade, skee ball, miniature golf, water rides, and go-karts.

Obj. 9.4c Develop a Sports Complex of sufficient size and quality to host regional, state and national tournaments.

Obj.9.4d Encourage the development of public or private facilities for fishing, horseback riding, bike riding, birding watching, and nature photography for the benefit of the local community and to develop and promote nature-tourism.

Obj. 9.4e Develop an outdoor amphitheater for the hosting of concerts, plays and other cultural events.

Goal 9.5 Consider agricultural land use an important contributor to Mercedes' economy.

Obj. 9.5a Develop land use and zoning policies and regulations that avoid sprawling, hop-scotch development.

Obj. 9.5b Organize a task force of farmers to develop a plan that includes goals and objective for local agriculture.

Obj. 9.5.c Work with local farmers to evaluate the feasibility of additional value-added processing locally.

Goal 9.6 Attract additional retail development to Mercedes.

Obj. 9.6a Target, recruit and facilitate “destination” retail to Mercedes' Expressway 83 retail corridor.

Obj. 9.6b Target, recruit and facilitate development of retail stores which are affordable to local residents and develop a strategy to promote businesses in Mercedes that will reduce spending of local dollars outside the community for products and services desired by residents of Mercedes. Examples include fast food (e.g., McDonalds, Burger King, etc.), affordable retail (e.g., Payless Shoes), a “Big Box” retailer (e.g., Target, COSTCO), and services (e.g., mechanics and repair shops and physician's offices).

Goal 9.7 Identify and minimize obstacles to economic development.

Obj. 9.7a Review the City's subdivision and development ordinances and policies to ensure there are no requirements that are not necessary to advance the public health, safety or welfare, or that unduly hamper entrepreneurs from establishing small or home-based businesses, and that development applications are reviewed in an efficient and effective manner.

Obj. 9.7b Increase the City's competitiveness by continuing to reduce the city ad valorem property tax rate while at the same time raising the level and quality of public services.

- Obj. 9.7c** Ensure the City’s land use map, zoning map and zoning regulations encourage the kinds of economic development the City desires, especially with regard to the City’s ability to accommodate manufacturing firms.
- Obj. 9.7d** Improve the City’s presence on the internet and ensure the City and its economic development entities are readily found by commonly used search engines.

Goal 9.8 Ensure that residents of Mercedes have access to jobs, including jobs which require above-average skill levels and pay above-average wages.

- Obj. 9.8a** Expand business targeting and recruitment efforts beyond retail to include manufacturing, assembly and other light industrial enterprises.
- Obj. 9.8b** Develop a satellite campus in Mercedes of the Texas State Technical College, University of Texas-Pan American or the University of Texas-Brownsville.
- Obj. 9.8c** Improve public transportation to the main campuses of South Texas College, University of Texas-Pan-Am, Texas State Technical College, and University of Texas-Brownsville.
- Obj. 9.8d** Improve communications and cooperation between the Mercedes Independent School District and the Mercedes City Commission and community leaders and work with the Board and administration of the MISD and the community at-large to improve academic achievement and reduce the high school drop-out rate.
- Obj. 9.8e** Work with the MISD, STC and others to improve educational attainment and literacy of adults and reduce the number of adults who do not have a high school diploma or graduate equivalency degree (GED).
- Obj. 9.8f** Develop a strategy to create partnerships to locate county, state and federal government offices in Mercedes.

Goal 9.9 Support a vibrant, successful downtown Mercedes.

- Obj. 9.9a** Develop a neighborhood specific strategic plan for Downtown Mercedes.
- Obj. 9.9b** Assure continued maintenance of the newly improved physical appearance of downtown including the sidewalks, street “furniture” such as street lights, benches, and trash receptacles, street trees and building façade improvements.
- Obj. 9.9c** Organize and host special events, like the Texas Street Fair, that bring residents and visitors to downtown Mercedes.
- Obj.9.9d** Ensure that any walking or bicycle trails developed in the future include a direction connection to downtown.
- Obj. 9.9e** Encourage the development of high density housing in downtown or the vicinity of downtown to enhance the customer base for downtown merchants and services.

Goal 9.10. Ensure that Mercedes is positioned to benefit from the growth in trucking, warehousing and goods assembly along U.S. 281 and the future Regional Mobility Authority Loop.

- Obj. 9.10a** Adopt a strategic annexation plan to protect Mercedes’ interests south, east, northwest and northeast of current City limits.

Chapter 10

Plan Implementation

No long-range plan is complete without a plan for action. The observations and recommendations contained within this document must be implemented in order to effect positive change. To assist in developing and implementing a plan of action this chapter restates and organizes all goals and objectives contained in the preceding chapters. The goals must be prioritized and funded where necessary. Since a plan of this magnitude is designed for a twenty-five (25) year implementation time-frame the goals are divided into short-, medium-, and long-range goals. Those that require relatively little or no funding, but can have immediate impact should receive a high priority ranking as short-range goals, while those that will cost a great deal of money will need to be placed on a long-range capital plan. There are also goals that take a long time to implement due to their nature, those that are incrementally implemented such as “protect the integrity of established stable neighborhoods”. That is not a goal that is accomplished in one action, but with an accumulation of actions over time. Ultimately, and most importantly each goal and objective needs to be assigned to someone who can be held accountable for its implementation. The determination of short-, medium-, or long-range and which department should be held accountable has been included in this chapter behind the actions. While the accountable party can, and may change, this assignment gives us a starting point for implementation and prioritization. It goes without saying that

the City Commission, through the implementation of policy and administration of fiscal resources must ultimately be responsible for each and every goal indirectly.

The City has a number of different departments and divisions within departments that have specialized functions. A list of those is provided in Figure 10-1 for ease of reference. In addition, the current city organizational chart showing reporting responsibilities is included in Figure 10-2. It must also be mentioned that the City cannot be responsible for every aspect of community development and improvement and there are a number of other community organizations that work in partnership with the city on many projects. The Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, Mercedes Housing Authority and the Mercedes Independent School District are probably the most notable partners with respect to implementation of the long-range goals of the community.

FIGURE 10-1

POLICE

MUNICIPAL COURT

FIRE

PUBLIC WORKS

Parks
Public Works (Maint. & Admin.)
Streets
Utilities

LIBRARY

RECREATION
(former Boys & Girls Club)

PLANNING

Building Inspections
Code Enforcement
Health Department
Planning

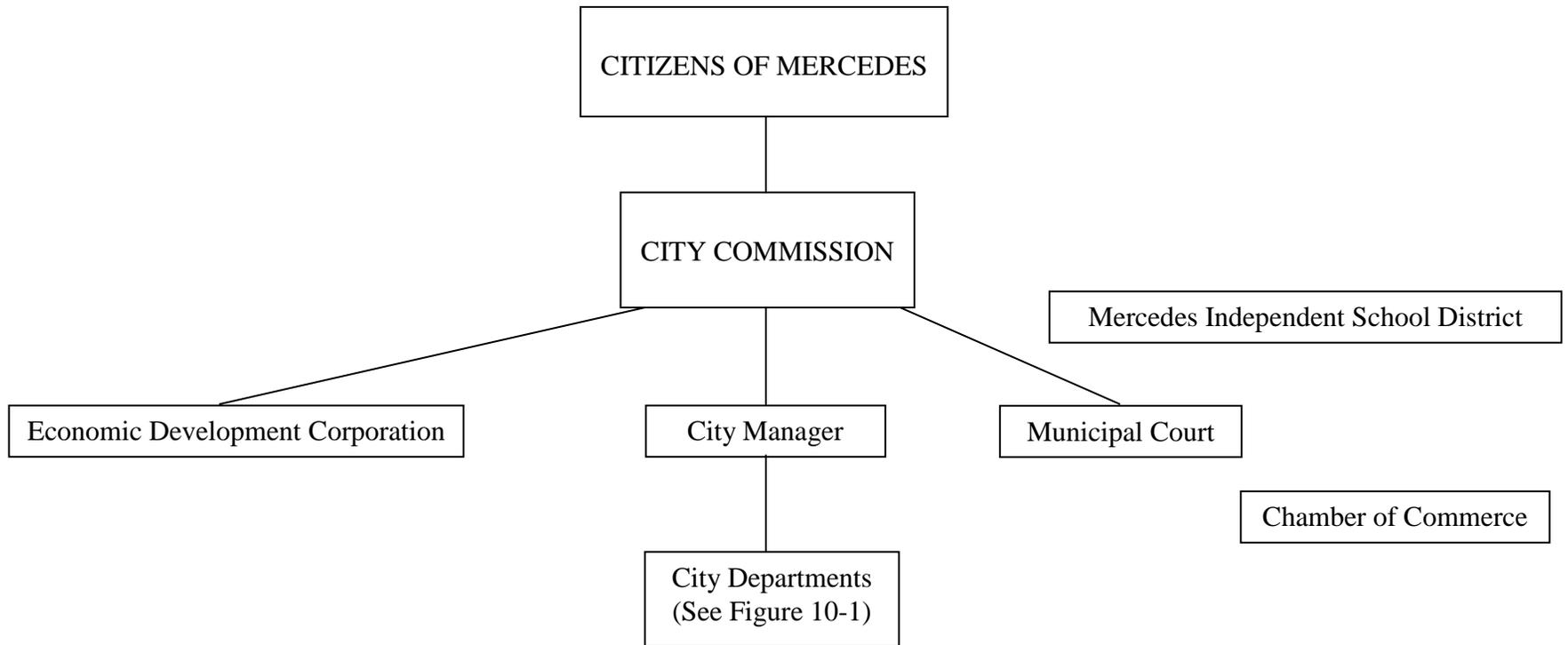
ADMINISTRATION

City Commission
City Manager
Human Resources

FINANCE

Finance
Information Technology
Utility Billing

FIGURE 10-2



CHAPTER 3 - LAND USE GOALS

Goal 3.1 Protect the integrity of established, stable neighborhoods. (LONG-TERM - Planning Dept.)

- Obj. 3.1a** Development policies should encourage compatibility with nearby existing and proposed uses, both for land use and necessary infrastructure (Planning Dept.).
- Obj. 3.1b** Encourage buffers, intermediate, transition intensities, and proper design to separate or protect lower intensity land uses from higher intensity land uses (Planning Dept.).
- Obj. 3.1c** Promote, preserve and maintain public and private open spaces within the urbanized area to provide scenic and recreational amenities in appropriate relation to residential and commercial areas (Planning/Parks Dept.).
- Obj. 3.1d** Strengthen zoning regulations to better categorize and separate incompatible land uses (Planning Dept.).

Goal 3.2 Promote development, redevelopment and revitalization within Mercedes' existing urbanized area. (LONG-TERM - Planning/EDC/Public Works/City Engineer)

- Obj. 3.2a** Inventory the location, size, age and condition of existing water, wastewater and drainage systems in urbanized areas to identify inadequacies and develop a capital improvements plan to upgrade and modernize these systems (Short-Mid-Range Planning/Public Works/City Engineer).

- Obj. 3.2b** Develop a Downtown Plan in order to develop the vision and goals for downtown, and identify the resources, services and amenities necessary to preserve and enhance the vitality and commercial success of the downtown area (Planning).
- Obj. 3.2c** Encourage development of vacant land and redevelopment of underutilized land within the existing urbanized area, consistent with available or planned infrastructure and land uses (Planning).
- Obj. 3.2d** Develop neighborhood-specific plans to identify the goals and objectives for each neighborhood, the type of development and redevelopment that is appropriate, the vacant and under-utilized land that may be available for in-fill development, and what is needed to protect and enhance the quality of life in each neighborhood (Mid-Range Planning).
- Obj. 3.2e** Encourage revitalization, re-development and infill development in neighborhoods that have suffered from disinvestment or decline, which may include higher intensity uses that are compatible with other existing uses and located in appropriate areas (Planning/EDC).
- Obj. 3.2f** Continue the City's assertive code enforcement program, including specifically, the identification, condemnation and removal of dilapidated structures (Code Enforcement).
- Obj. 3.2g** Because many dilapidated structures that are ordered demolished are located on land that is in property tax arrears, the City should consider development of a land bank program by which such land can be sold to non-profit housing developers, for example, Habitat for Humanity, Proyecto Azteca, or Affordable Homes of South Texas, Inc. for the production of affordable housing (Administration/Planning/City Attorney).

Obj. 3.2h Review the City's zoning and other development ordinances and code enforcement practices to ensure they facilitate and encourage development that will help keep older commercial areas, such as Business 83, viable and will attract quality new development (Short-Term Planning).

Goal 3.3 Promote fiscally responsible growth that can be efficiently and economically served by existing and planned infrastructure (Long Term - Planning/Public Works).

Obj. 3.3a Encourage development in areas that will take maximum advantage of existing water, sewer, street, and drainage systems (Planning).

Obj. 3.3b Plans for expansion and improvement of water, wastewater, street, drainage and fiber optics systems recognize, are coordinated with, and developed and implemented to accomplish the land use goals set forth in *Envision Mercedes 2035* (Public Works/Planning/Administration).

Obj. 3.3c The intensity of land use should be related to the developer's and city's ability to provide adequate public facilities, public services, and water, wastewater, drainage, and fiber optics systems (Public Works/Police Dept./Planning).

Obj. 3.3d The design, location and construction of water, wastewater, drainage and fiber optics systems should anticipate the efficient provision of utilities to existing and future development and advance the City's economic development priorities (Public Works/Planning/EDC).

Obj. 3.3e Work with the School District and other agencies for creation of additional joint-use sporting facilities (Administration/Planning/MISD).

Obj. 3.3f New development should pay its fair share of costs for extension of public utilities serving its site (Planning).

- Obj. 3.3g** New development should pay its fair share of costs for extension of the street system to its site, consistent with the Thoroughfare Plan (Planning).
- Obj. 3.3h** Coordinate land use planning and development with nearby governmental entities—Mercedes Independent School District, Hidalgo County, Weslaco, La Feria, Progreso, La Villa—when appropriate to ensure the future land use plan is realized (Planning).
- Obj. 3.3i** Promote and encourage development of commercial, entertainment and cultural activities, sports and recreation, and similar facilities to serve tourism and visitation in Mercedes, help boost sales tax revenue, and increase the quality of life for Mercedes residents (EDC).
- Obj. 3.3j** Ensure subdivision and development of land provides safe and efficient access and circulation within the new development, the neighborhood, and the entire City, including access management, and the development, extension, improvement and continuity of local streets, collectors and arterials consistent with the City's *Major Thoroughfare Plan* (Planning/Public Works).
- Obj. 3.3k** Plan for and fund Master Utility Plans including water, waste water, and drainage and fiber optics systems (Administration/Public Works).
- Obj. 3.3l** Convert the unwritten “gentlemen’s agreement” between North Alamo Water Supply Corporation and the City of Mercedes regarding water service to the east and west of Baseline Road into a written agreement (Administration).

Goal 3.4 Protect Public Health and Safety through prudent land use and development policies (Long-Term Planning)

- Obj. 3.4a** Future damages and losses from flooding should be minimized and public health and safety protected by prohibiting new residential development in flood hazard areas, and ensuring that no development by any public or private property owner increases the risk of flood damage to any other property owner (Planning).
- Obj. 3.4b** As much as possible, floodplain lands should be utilized for agriculture, natural open spaces, and parks and recreation areas (Planning/Parks Dept.).
- Obj. 3.4c** To ensure urban and suburban development is accompanied by adequate public infrastructure and facilities, including, but not limited to, fire hydrants located on water lines with sufficient volume and pressure to provide 500 gallons per minute of water, the City's subdivision ordinance should be amended to require the same (Planning/Fire).
- Obj. 3.4d** Continue to work with rural water supply corporations to establish the formulas that will govern the future purchase of water service area by the City or a private developer to ensure predictability and timeliness in the transaction (Administration/Planning).

CHAPTER 4 - TRANSPORTATION GOALS

Goal 4.1 Provide a safe and efficient transportation system to serve all needs and be compatible with existing and projected land use and mobility needs (Long-Term City Engineer/Planning).

- Obj. 4.1.a** Establish an annual overlay program to maintain and improve existing transportation infrastructure on a regular basis (Administration/City Engineer).
- Obj. 4.1.b** Obtain right-of-way necessary to develop a unified roadway system of thoroughfares based on function and relative importance as adopted and shown in the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan to serve existing and future mobility needs (Planning).
- Obj. 4.1.c** Improve and/or protect access-control on arterials and collectors (Planning).
- Obj. 4.1.d** Communicate and cooperate with TxDOT to upgrade all signalized intersections with highly visible/environmentally efficient LED lighting and self-actuating signals (Administration/Public Works).
- Obj. 4.1.e** Seek opportunities for improving north-south travel movement across the northern portion of the city particularly around major activity centers such as the Livestock Show grounds (Administration/Planning).
- Obj. 4.1.f** Seek opportunities to make connections in existing urbanized areas, such as new roadways constructed across enclosed canals or within unimproved rights-of-way existing, consistent with objectives for maintaining neighborhood integrity (Administration/Planning).
- Obj. 4.1.g** Promote the designation and enforcement of load zoned thoroughfares for through movement of truck traffic, consistent with objectives for maintaining neighborhood integrity (Public Works).

- Obj. 4.1.h** Wherever feasible, right-of-way dedication for thoroughfares should conform to the City of Mercedes' standards for right-of-way width, in order to accommodate thoroughfare improvements as needed in future years (Planning).
- Obj. 4.1.i** The policy of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Commission should be to maintain the consistency and integrity of the Long Range Thoroughfare Plan and keep exceptions and variances to a minimum (Planning).
- Obj. 4.1.j** Update necessary sections of the City Subdivision Ordinance to reflect the elements outlined in this element of the Comprehensive Plan (Planning).

Goal 4.2 Promote the reduction of vehicular/rail traffic conflicts and increased safety while supporting the maintenance and expansion of facilities necessary for industrial development and international trade (Long-Term Public Works).

- Obj. 4.2.a** Cooperate with the railroad to identify needed improvements that will reduce traffic delays, improve safety, and alleviate other troublesome impacts of rail movements through the City (Public Works).
- Obj. 4.2.b** Support and seek grant funding for safety improvements at roadway/railroad grade crossings (Public Works/City Engineer).

Goal 4.3 Promote alternative modes of transportation and related facilities including pedestrians, bicycles, public transit, and others (Long-Term Public Works/Recreation/Planning).

- Obj. 4.3.a** Prioritize funding for expansion of the walking trail at the Civic Center/H.E.B. Park (Medium-Term Public Works)

- Obj. 4.3.b** Continue exploration of opportunities to develop a bicycling and walking trail system to serve both recreational and alternative transportation needs for pedestrian and bicyclists, and enhance the natural, scenic and wildlife habitat qualities of the Mercedes urbanized area (Public Works/Planning).
- Obj. 4.3.c** Continue to partner with agencies such as Los Caminos Del Rio to raise awareness and maximize opportunities for bicycling and trails facilities within existing canal and floodway right-of-ways (Planning).
- Obj. 4.3.c** Develop an integrated system of safe and efficient on-street bikeways and off-street paths and trails accessible for all areas of the city and connecting neighborhoods, schools, parks, shopping, and employment centers (Public Works/City Engineer).
- Obj. 4.3.d** Continue to utilize programs such as Safe Routes To Schools to assist in the provision of pedestrian walkways, sidewalks, crosswalks, ramps, and curb cuts along city streets in areas with significant school pedestrian traffic, including compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (Public Works/Planning).
- Obj. 4.3.e** Consider funding an annual sidewalk improvement program similar to the proposed street maintenance program to improve sidewalks in disrepair and construct new sidewalks in areas where high pedestrian traffic warrant, especially in areas of schools and parks where pedestrians are likely to be children (Public Works).
- Obj. 4.3.f** Monitor needs and support the expansion of the demand response transit system for the elderly and disabled (Planning/MPO).
- Obj. 4.4.g** Continue to monitor transit ridership and cooperate with the LRVGDC to provide for the needs of the citizens (Planning /MPO)

CHAPTER 5 - IMAGE GOALS

Goal 5.1 Continue to fund a strong Code Enforcement Division that can consistently and effectively implement ordinances relating to community health and image (Long-Term, Planning).

Obj. 5.1.a Ensure Mower has up to date, well maintained equipment for use on weedy lots (Code Enforcement).

Obj. 5.1.b Ensure continued education in Code Enforcement personnel seeking opportunities to update ordinances (Code Enforcement)

Goal 5.2 Implement a “Keep Mercedes Beautiful” Committee (Short-Term, Planning)

Obj. 5.2.a Partner with other agencies to obtain resources to hold quarterly neighborhood cleanups (Planning)

Obj. 5.2.b Develop an annual clean up calendar so all parts of the city get some attention at least once a year (Planning)

Obj. 5.2.c Establish a Keep Mercedes Beautiful to create a mission statement for the program and set further priorities in enhancement of Mercedes’ image (Planning)

Goal 5.3 Implement Recycling in Mercedes (Long-Term, Planning /Public Works)

Obj. 5.3.a Determine the market for recyclables, possibly partnering with neighboring cities that have successful recycling programs in place (Planning/Public Works)

- Obj. 5.3.b** Implement a drop-off recycling station at City Hall and at the new Public Works Facility (Planning/Public Works)
- Obj. 5.3.c** Investigate other drop-off recycling station location possibilities throughout the city to make it more convenient for citizens to recycle (Planning)
- Obj. 5.3.d** Continue to monitor recycling efforts by citizens to investigate the long-term possibility of curbside recycling (Public Works/Planning)

Goal 5.4 Establish a Way-Finding Program Throughout the City of Mercedes (Short-Mid Range, Planning/Public Works)

- Obj. 5.4.a** Ensure all city streets are marked with clear signage identifying both name and block address ranges (Public Works)
- Obj. 5.4.b** Utilize the Chamber of Commerce to solicit input from visitors to our community who can more readily identify shortcomings in our way-finding program (Chamber of Commerce/Planning)
- Obj. 5.4.c** Establish way-finding signage in the community for important city facilities such as city hall, the library, municipal court, police, fire, the chamber of commerce, economic development corporation, etc. (Public Works/Planning/EDC/Chamber of Commerce)
- Obj. 5.4.c** Establish way-finding signage at City Hall (Planning)

CHAPTER 6 - PARKS & RECREATION GOALS

Goal 6.1 Provide a variety of safe recreational experiences that provide appeal to all segments of the population of Mercedes and its visitors. (Long-Range, Public Works - Parks Division)

- Obj. 6.1.a.** Expand the range of recreational opportunities available to persons of all ages and abilities. (Public Works - Parks Division)
- Obj. 6.1.b** Limit obstacles to the physically challenged and elderly in parks and playgrounds. (Public Works - Parks Division)
- Obj. 6.1.c** Segregate age groups by facility design to enhance the sense of security in all parks and open spaces. (Public Works - Parks Division)
- Obj. 6.1.d** Coordinate recreational programs with school curricula. (Public Works - Parks Division/MISD)
- Obj. 6.1.e** Develop joint facilities and maintenance agreements in conjunction with schools. (Public Works - Parks Division/MISD)
- Obj. 6.1.f** Coordinate cultural programs of interest to visitors and senior citizens. (EDC/Chamber of Commerce)
- Obj. 6.1.g** Access existing parks utilizing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design methods. Redesign and make improvements as required. (Public Works - Parks Division/Police Department)

Goal 6.2 To enhance the physical attractiveness and improve the urban environment of Mercedes by developing parks and open space amenities. (Mid-Range, Public Works – Parks Division)

- Obj. 6.2.a.** Where feasible, develop neighborhood playgrounds in each neighborhood in conjunction with school districts. (Public Works – Parks Division/MISD)
- Obj. 6.2.b** Design Parks with sustainability in mind. (Public Works – Parks Division)
- Obj. 6.2.c** Improve maintenance and enhance the appearance of city parks, arroyos and drainage basins. (Public Works – Parks Division)

Goal 6.3 To protect the natural resources of Mercedes and Hidalgo County by preserving those resources. (Long-Range, Planning/Engineering/Architect/Public Works)

- Obj. 6.3.a** Integrate arroyos and drainage basins into the park system to expand park resources. (Engineer/ Architect)
- Obj. 6.3.b** Implement energy efficient lighting and watering systems throughout the parks. (Engineer/Public Works – Parks Division)
- Obj. 6.3.c** Utilize natural features to create unique recreation opportunities for Mercedes’ citizens and visitors. (Public Works – Parks Division)

Goal 6.4 To increase private sector involvement in developing and maintaining parks and open spaces. (Mid-Range, Planning/Keep Mercedes Beautiful)

- Obj. 6.4.a** Develop an Adopt-A-Park program to build neighborhood support for local parks. (Keep Mercedes Beautiful/Planning)

- Obj. 6.4.b** Expand private sector support of park development and clean-up activities. (Keep Mercedes Beautiful/Planning)
- Obj. 6.4.c** Develop and Implement a Park Dedication Ordinance to secure park land or funding in lieu of land as new communities are developed in Mercedes. (Planning)
- Obj. 6.4.d** Increase the use of native plant materials and xeriscape to reduce maintenance and irrigation costs. (Public Works – Parks Division)
- Obj. 6.4.e** Encourage the planting of trees in parks and along streets. (Public Works – Parks Division/ Keep Mercedes Beautiful)
- Obj. 6.4.f** Encourage the joint development of open spaces by private interests and public agencies which provide additional recreational and open space opportunities. (Administration/Public Works – Parks Division)

CHAPTER 7 - INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS

Goal 7.1 Ensure that the City is able to meet future demands for water (Long-Range, Administration).

- Obj.7.1a** Mercedes will immediately begin to plan to expand the capacity of the City's water treatment plant (Engineering/ Administration).
- Obj.7.1b** The City will adopt a policy to acquire from the Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 9 any and all water rights associated with land within its water service area that is converted from agriculture to urban use. Alternatively, the City will enter into long-term contracts (e.g., 40 years) for the same water rights (Administration/Planning).
- Obj. 7.1c** The City will consider adopting an ordinance that requires developers to contribute some or all of the cost of acquiring water rights from the Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 9. (The cost, as provided by state statute, is 67% of the average of the three highest priced sales of Rio Grande water rights in the previous year.). (Planning)
- Obj 7.1d** The City investigates the costs and benefits of increased water storage as a means to meet peak demands (Engineering/OMI).
- Obj. 7.1e** The City investigates and analyzes the costs and benefits of establishing a reservoir to enable the pre-treatment of canal water before it enters the water plant (Engineering/OMI).
- Obj. 7.1f** The City investigates and analyzes the costs and benefits of installing filters on the City well (Engineering/OMI).

Goal 7.2 Ensure that Mercedes has a fiscally sustainable water system (Long-Range, Administration)

- Obj. 7.2a** The City evaluates the financial sustainability of the water supply, treatment and distribution system and ensures that rates charged include sufficient amounts for maintenance and repair as well as replacement of aged or out-dated elements (Engineering/OMI).
- Obj. 7.2b** In negotiating its contract with OMI, the possible need for additional staffing should be addressed (OMI/Administration).
- Obj. 7.2c** Technological upgrades that improve water quality and increase plant efficiency are made on an ongoing basis to the water treatment plant. Examples include replacement of the air hose vacuum system in the flocculation tanks with a more up-to-date system and replacement of the plastic tube settlers with a stainless steels inclined plate settler (OMI).
- Obj. 7.2d** The City will continue to assertively seek state and federal grant funding for the modernization of its water treatment plant and distribution system (Engineering/Administration).
- Obj. 7.2e** Reduce the amount of “unaccounted for” water by, for example, (a) billing NAWSC for water flowing past the master meter; (b) installing meters on “by-pass” lines that go around master meters; (c) finding and fixing leaks in the City’s water distribution lines; (d) continue the systematic replacement of residential water meters; and (e) investigating the use of technologies such as ultra-sound to find leaks in the water distribution system (Public Works – Utilities/OMI).

Goal 7.3 The City maintains and strengthens its cordial and professional relationships with the other entities involved in the meeting the water needs of Mercedes and its planning area (Long-Range, Administration).

- Obj. 7.3a** The “gentlemen’s agreement” with North Alamo regarding the provision of City water to the east and west of Baseline Road, north of Mile 8 North, is committed to writing (Administration).
- Obj. 7.3b** The City acquires agreement North Alamo Water Supply Corporation and Military Highway Water Supply Corporation regarding a predictable method for the future transfer of service area from these rural water suppliers to Mercedes (Administration).
- Obj. 7.3c** The City explores with the rural water supply corporations alternatives to service area “buy-outs,” such as additional interconnection between lines, to meet the water volume and pressure required by urban development (Administration).
- Obj. 7.3d** The City supports local, regional, state and federal funding to increase the efficiency of the Irrigation District’s water delivery system (Administration).
- Obj. 7.3e** The City supports the establishment of a Groundwater Conservation District to regulate withdrawals and protect the future sustainability of the Gulf Coast aquifer (Administration).

Goal 7.4 Develop tools to ensure than City Staff and Water Plant Operators can readily answer developers' questions about capacity in the system and can promptly find and fix any problem that occurs (Mid-Range, Planning/Public Works/OMI).

- Obj. 7.4a** The City's entire water supply and distribution system, including the location, size and materials of all water lines and the location of all valves, and other equipment will be accurately mapped (Planning/Public Works/OMI).
- Obj. 7.4b** Once an accurate and up-to-date map is acquired, adequate systems are in place to assure the continued, regular updating of the map as the system is expanded or modified (Planning).
- Obj. 7.4c** The City should continue to work with the rural water suppliers to obtain accurate maps of their water supply systems (Planning).

Goal 7.5 Ensure that the City is prepared to effectively respond to protracted drought (Long-Range, Engineering/Administration).

- Obj. 7.5a** Keep the City's Drought Contingency and Water Conservation Plan adequate and accurate and ensure the most effective technologies and methods are being used (Planning/Public Works/OMI).

Goal 7.6 Replace existing substandard lines in the City and water service area (Long-Range, Public Works/Engineering/Administration).

- Obj. 7.6a** Seek funding to provide water service to three *colonias* northeast of the City that now have undersized lines (Capisallo North in NAWSC service area and Boyd #1 and Colonia George in the city's service area) (Administration/Engineering).
- Obj. 7.6b** Pressure loss and dead-end mains are eliminated by looping the water system northeast of the City, near De Anda and Saenz Subdivisions in the southeast, and in the southwest of the city near Llano Grande Resort Park (Engineering/Administration).

Goal 7.7 The City achieves recognition as a "Superior Public Water System" (Mid-Range, OMI/Utilities).

- Obj. 7.7a** The physical facilities of Mercedes' water system meet all TCEQ requirements (OMI/Public Works).
- Obj. 7.7b** The city has a minimum of two certified water plant operators (OMI/Public Works).
- Obj. 7.7c** The microbiological record for the City's water system for the previous 24 months indicates no violations (OMI).
- Obj. 7.7d** The quality of Mercedes' drinking water complies with all primary drinking water quality parameters (OMI).
- Obj. 7.7e** The chemical quality of the City's water meets all secondary drinking water standards (OMI).

- Obj. 7.7f** The water system complies with all minimum acceptable operating practices for drinking water supplies (OMI).
- Obj. 7.7g** Mercedes' water system meets or exceeds all minimum capacity requirements (capacity to pump treated water into the distribution system must be increased)(OMI/Engineering).
- Obj. 7.7h** The water system shall maintain at least two wells or two surface water pumps, or one of each, with combined capacity to meet average daily demand with largest pump out of service (Engineering/ Administration).
- Obj. 7.7i** The facilities of the water system shall be well maintained and present a pleasing appearance to the public (OMI/Public Works).

Goal 7.8	Ensure the City has a thoroughly modern and adequate wastewater collection and treatment system (Long-Range, OMI/Public Works)
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- Obj. 7.8a** All wastewater lift stations are equipped to operate reliably regardless of the weather or in the event of an electrical outage (portable pumps are available or the lift stations are equipped with back-up diesel generators) (Administration/OMI/Public Works).
- Obj. 7.8b** All wastewater lift stations are equipped with SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) -- a computerized system that allows electronic monitoring from a centralized, remote location (Engineering/ Administration).
- Obj. 7.8c** The public health and safety of the residents of DeAnda Subdivision, Colonia Saenz, Colonia George, and Perez Subdivision, is protected and advanced through the extension of first time public wastewater collection and treatment (Administration/Engineering).

- Obj. 7.8d** Complete an updated Inflow and Infiltration Study on the City’s wastewater collection system to accurately identify the sources and quantities of stormwater in the sanitary sewer system and prioritize and accomplish the needed repairs (Engineering).
- Obj. 7.8e** Wage a public information campaign to educate residents of areas subject to flooding regarding the serious consequences of using sanitary sewer clean-outs to drain storm water and of dumping debris into sanitary sewer or storm water manholes and compliance is enforced (Utility Billing).
- Obj. 7.8f** Replace or refurbish cast iron and asbestos/clay lines in the downtown area, southwest of the City and any other location where they exist with PVC lines (Engineering/Public Works).
- Obj. 7.8g** Any and all remaining brick-lined manholes are replaced (Public Works).
- Obj. 7.8h** Consider requiring facilities with major effluent flows to the City’s waste water treatment plant to monitor their discharges into the system (OMI/Utility Billing).
- Obj. 7.8i** Conduct an inventory of the existing septic systems in the City (Public Works/Engineering).

Goal 7.9 Develop tools so that City Staff and Wastewater Plant Operators can readily answer developers’ questions about capacity in the system and can promptly find and fix any problem that occurs (Mid-Range, Planning/Public Works/OMI).

- Obj. 7.9a** The entire waste water collection system, including the location, size and materials of all waste water lines and man holes and the location of all lift stations, valves, and other equipment is accurately mapped (Planning/Public Works/OMI).

Obj. 7.9b Once the map is updated, a system is put in place to ensure timely and regular updates are made to maintain its accuracy (Planning).

GOAL 7.10: Develop and implement a systematic and on-going schedule of street maintenance, repair, re-paving, re-construction and improvement within the City and the 1-mile ETJ (Short-Range, Public Works/Engineering/Administration).

Obj. 7.10a Work with Hidalgo County Precinct 1 and adjacent jurisdictions to develop the criteria and methodology for identifying which county roads will receive priority for repair or improvement (Administration).

Obj. 7.10b Adopt a capital improvement program for the City that provides for regular re-paving of streets on a life-span cycle (Public Works/Engineering).

Obj. 7.10c Develop a budget line item for street overlays to extend the life of streets before reconstruction becomes necessary (Public Works/ Administration).

Obj. 7.10d To help ensure roads in areas to be annexed are in good condition before annexation, the city coordinates with Hidalgo County to make improvements to county roads prior to such roads becoming the City's responsibility (Planning).

Obj. 7.10e Re-establish a regular street-sweeping schedule and program (Public Works).

Obj. 7.10f Develop and maintain records of street maintenance and repair to support the other street maintenance and repair objectives (Public Works).

Goal 7.11	Mercedes' street network efficiently advances its circulation, land development, and public safety needs (Long-Range, Public Works/Planning/Engineering)
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- Obj. 7.11a** Subdivision development standards require long-lived local streets and collectors and newly constructed streets are designed to those standards (Planning/Engineering).
- Obj. 7.11b** Inspection of subdivision construction and road improvements completed on behalf of the city ensures that construction adheres to the City's standards (Engineering).
- Obj. 7.11c** Subdivision development standards ensure that new subdivisions have adequate streets both within the interior of the subdivision and on the perimeter (Planning).
- Obj. 7.11d** Subdivision and development review ensures that right-of-way consistent with the Thoroughfare Plan is acquired at the time of subdivision and development (Planning).
- Obj. 7.11e** Street development and re-development accommodates bicyclists and pedestrians as well as automobiles, especially within one-mile of schools and in proximity to parks, downtown and other shopping areas (Planning).
- Obj. 7.11f** Given the numerous barriers to affordable extension of the street network in the City and its Planning Area—Expressway 83, railroad, floodway, Arroyo Colorado, canals and ditches—providing for the future extension of the street network and connection to adjacent land uses is strongly encouraged where those barriers do not exist (Planning).

Goal 7.12 Develop and maintain accurate maps of streets within the City and the 1-mile ETJ Planning Area (Medium-Range, Planning/Public Works/Engineering)

- Obj. 7.12a** Work with Hidalgo County Precinct 1 and the Hidalgo County MPO to update and correct the street maps (Planning).
- Obj. 7.12b** Work with the Hidalgo County MPO to correct all labeling on the Thoroughfare Plan map (Planning).
- Obj. 7.12c** Especially within the city and one-mile ETJ, the road maps should identify the width of the existing ROW, as well as the desired ROW width, and identify whether the road is paved, caliche, dirt or simply ROW (Planning/Engineering).

GOAL 7.13 Help minimize future property losses and safety risks from flooding by preventing inappropriate development in FEMA-designated special flood hazard areas and other areas known to become inundated (Short-Range, Building Inspections/Planning).

- Obj. 7.13a** No new residential development will occur in areas designated by FEMA as special flood hazard areas or other areas known to become inundated (Building Inspections).
- Obj. 7.13b** Any new development in a special flood hazard area shall be required to ensure it does not increase flooding elsewhere (Building Inspections/Planning).

GOAL 7.14 Minimize future property losses and safety risks from flooding by improving the City's storm water management system (Long-Range, Public Works/Engineering).

- Obj. 7.14a** The City obtains a comprehensive study of its drainage system including an up-to-date map of the drainage infrastructure, calculation of the system's total capacity, identification of bottle-necks and obstacles, quantification of the ability to pump water into the floodways, if needed, and identification of alternative remedial solutions to be considered and implemented (Engineering).
- Obj. 7.14b** The City considers the costs and benefits of establishing neighborhood or regional storm water detention basins, which can also be designed to accommodate passive recreation during dry times (Planning/Engineering).

GOAL 7.15 Reduce future property losses and safety risks from flooding in existing neighborhoods that are prone to flooding (Long-Range, Public Works/Engineering/Planning).

- Obj. 7.15a** The feasibility and cost of improving drainage or reducing vulnerability to storm water damage by, e.g., raising the base floor elevation of existing residences, is evaluated in those existing residential neighborhoods that are prone to flooding (Engineering).
- Obj. 7.15b** In areas prone to frequent or severe flooding, the feasibility of re-locating households out of harm's way shall be evaluated (Planning).
- Obj. 7.15c** The City applies to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for funds to reduce or eliminate long-term flood risks to people and property (Planning).

GOAL 7.16 Ensure future property losses, safety risks and public inconvenience from flooding are not increased by new commercial, residential, industrial or institutional development (Planning).

- Obj. 7.16a** The City evaluates the costs and benefits of increasing the mandatory minimum storm water detention requirements from the “ten-year storm” that is used currently to the “25-year storm” (an increase in mandatory detention) (Engineering/Planning).
- Obj. 7.16b** No subdivision drainage plan relies on swales on individual residential lots to detain storm water (Planning/Engineering).

GOAL 7.17 Implement the City’s Storm Water Management Plan, thereby reducing the City’s of Mercedes’ contribution to non-point source pollution into the Arroyo Colorado and Laguna Madre (Public Works/Planning).

- Obj.7.17a** The City’s land development ordinances are reviewed and updated to include the legal authority for requiring best management practices regarding the quality of storm water run-off (Planning).
- Obj. 7.17b** Area-wide or neighborhood wide storm water detention basins are designed and utilized to simultaneously address the quantity and quality of storm water run-off while also creating passive recreation space (Engineering).
- Obj. 7.17c** Map and identify all storm water outfalls (Engineering/Planning).
- Obj. 7.17d** Adopt storm water management requirements for the issuance of building permits and for subdivision plat review and approval (Planning).

GOAL 7.18 The City Police Department is adequately-housed and adequately-staffed (Police Dept.).

- Obj. 7.18a** The Police Department is provided adequate offices and facilities especially designed to accommodate police work, including the need for privacy when detectives interview witnesses or victims, and extensive records-storage (P.D.).
- Obj. 7.18b** The needs of the City for an Emergency Operations Command Center are addressed. In a future police or fire station, planning includes a location where the City can coordinate and manage response and recovery resources and actions during an emergency, such as a hurricane. This facility can also meet other City needs for operations, training, meetings and other uses (Administration).
- Obj. 7.18c** The staffing of the police department reflects the particular geographic constraints on efficient circulation within the city, such as the Expressway, railroad, floodways and canals, which can impede response time, and the demands created by special events such as football games, the RGV Stock Show, and the thousands of shoppers who visit Mercedes daily (P.D.).
- Obj. 7.18g** Staffing of the police department supports Neighborhood Watch Groups and other crime prevention techniques (P.D.).

GOAL 7.19 The Police Department is well-equipped (Police Dept.).

- Obj. 7.19a** The Mercedes Police Department provides its officers modern, reliable vehicles. The City replaces police vehicles on a regular schedule and routine maintenance is completed in a timely and efficient manner (P.D.).

- Obj. 7.19b** As a part of future vehicle acquisition, the Department obtains some four-wheel drive vehicles (P.D.).
- Obj. 7.19c** The Department's cameras and communications equipment are up-to-date (P.D.).
- Obj. 7.19d** Police vehicles are equipped with breathalyzers (P.D.).
- Obj. 7.19e** The adequacy of the offensive and defensive weapons provide to police officers is continually evaluated in light of the weaponry typically carried by criminals (P.D.).

GOAL 7.20 The Police Department is well-trained (Police Dept.).

- Obj. 7.20a** A regular and ongoing training program keeps the officers fully up-to-date on the law governing their activities and modern trends in police work (P.D.).
- Obj. 7.20d** The Department has sufficient ammunition to enable officers to remain expert in their handling and use of their service revolvers and other police department weaponry (P.D.).

GOAL 7.21 Land Use planning and decision-making takes into account the residents needs for public safety (Police Dept./ Planning).

- Obj. 7.21a** The public safety needs of residents of the areas to be annexed and the additional demands that will be placed on the City's police department are fully considered and accommodated when the city's boundaries are expanded (P.D./Planning).

Obj. 7.21b To facilitate faster emergency response, as well as to generally improve circulation within the City, the thoroughfare plan is implemented (Planning).

GOAL 7.22 The Mercedes Police Department works to mitigate adverse consequences that can be caused to law enforcement personnel by the nature of their work (Police Dept.).

Obj. 7.22a The Police Department establishes a chaplaincy program (P.D.).

Obj. 7.22b The Department explores the feasibility and desirability of establishing a volunteer police officer family support group (P.D.).

GOAL 7.23 The Mercedes Fire Department is well-equipped (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.23a All fire apparatus is in proper working order to support the firefighters in the delivery of excellent emergency services (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.23b The Fire Department continues to implement its preventive maintenance program for all fire equipment to maximize the service life (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.23c The Fire Department and Public Works Department work cooperatively to ensure fire hydrant testing and maintenance is timely and ongoing (Fire/Public Works).

Obj. 7.23d Accurate records are regularly made and maintained to support the previous two objectives—maintenance of fire equipment and fire hydrants (Fire/Planning).

- Obj. 7.23e The sufficiency of the Fire Department's trucks, equipment and apparatus keeps pace with growth in the residential population and commercial establishments and activity (Fire Dept.).
- Obj. 7.23f When the purchase of a new fire truck is being considered, the ability of the width of existing streets to handle the truck and whether the new truck would result in wider minimum streets and cul-de-sacs in new development is evaluated (Fire Dept.).
- Obj. 7.23g The Fire Department acquires a ladder truck (Fire Dept.).
- Obj. 7.23h The fire station and equipment and vehicles are maintained in a clean and respectable condition (Fire Dept.).

GOAL 7.24 The Mercedes Fire Department is able to respond quickly to a request for service (Fire Dept.).

- Obj. 7.24a The City develops a second fire station (Fire Dept.).
- Obj. 7.24b The number and location of fire stations acknowledges the Fire Department's 85-square mile service area and the geographic constraints within the city such as the Expressway, floodways and numerous canals which can impede response time (Fire Dept.).

GOAL 7.25 The Mercedes Fire Department is adequately housed (Fire Dept.).

- Obj. 7.25a The Fire Department is provided adequate stations, offices and facilities especially designed to accommodate the needs and mission of the department, the fire fighters and emergency response (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.25b The needs of the City for an Emergency Operations Command Center are addressed. In a future police or fire station, planning includes a location where the City can most effectively coordinate and manage response and recovery actions and resources during an emergency, such as a hurricane. This facility can also meet other City needs for operations, training, meetings and other uses (Fire Dept.).

<p>GOAL 7.26 The Mercedes Fire Department is adequately staffed to provide first-rate emergency response services (Fire Dept.)</p>

Obj. 7.26a Fire Department personnel is increased to meet the rising demand for emergency services created by a growing residential population and intensifying commercial activity (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.26b Firefighters are offered up-to-date training and volunteer firefighters receive basic, intermediate and advanced certification (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.26c The Fire Department’s manual of standard operating procedures is reviewed and updated regularly (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.26d Staffing is sufficient to increase fire safety education for the general public and school children (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.26e Fire Department personnel are trained and prepared to respond to a hazardous materials incident.

Obj. 7.26f Full-time, professional fire fighters, augmented by volunteer fire fighters as needed and available, are on duty “24-7” (Fire Dept.).

GOAL 7.27 Land use decisions acknowledge the needs of emergency response (Planning).

Obj. 7.27a To facilitate faster emergency response the thoroughfare plan is implemented and street continuity is emphasized in the platting of new subdivisions (Planning).

Obj. 7.27b In areas where water lines cannot properly support fire hydrants, development is limited (Planning).

GOAL 7.28 The ISO rating for the City of Mercedes is improved (Fire Dept.).

Obj. 7.28a ISO is informed when land is annexed to the city to facilitate property owners obtaining the best insurance rates (Planning).

Obj. 7.28b The City identifies all factors considered by the ISO and makes improvements where warranted and possible (Fire Dept.).

GOAL 7.29. The residents of the City of Mercedes have reliable and professional emergency medical services (Administration).

Obj 7.29a Possible options for increased cooperation with other publicly-owned emergency medical services are investigated (Administration).

Obj. 7.29b The City operation of the City's own emergency medical services under a uniform command structure with the Fire Department is established as a priority and the detailed planning and analysis necessary to accomplish that is undertaken (Fire Dept.).

Goal 7.30 The City Library continues to meet the needs of the residents of the city and the surrounding area with a beautiful modern facility and up-to-date research and circulating collection (Library).

Obj. 7.30a The Mercedes Public Library, perhaps in partnership with the Hidalgo County Library System, Weslaco Public Library, and the MISD, commences operation of a book mobile to serve remote and low-income areas in the area surrounding Mercedes (Library).

Obj. 7.30b The Mercedes Public Library meets or exceeds Texas Library Association standards (Library).

Obj. 7.30c The Mercedes Public Library has expanded evening and weekend hours to better meet the needs of potential users of the library (Library).

Obj. 7.30d The staffing of the library increases to keep pace with expanded hours of operation and greater usage by the public (Library).

Obj. 7.30e The Library has available a public meeting room for use by community groups and agencies and for conduct of workshops, presentations and classes (Library).

Obj. 7.30f Off-street parking available to library patrons is increased (Administration).

Goal 7.31 The City of Mercedes operates comprehensive, efficient and modern solid waste management services (Administration).

Obj. 7.31a City residents continue to receive affordable, reliable curbside trash collection services (Administration/Public Works).

Obj. 7.31b City residents have reliable information about, and convenient access to, local recycling opportunities, including chipping or composting of brush and yard waste (Public Works/Utilities/Planning).

Obj. 7.31c Mercedes continues its assertive program to ensure waste illegally dumped on private property is promptly cleaned-up (Planning – Code Enforcement).

Obj. 7.31d The City works with Hidalgo County Precinct 1 to minimize illegal dumping in the City’s extra-territorial jurisdiction (Planning – Code Enforcement).

Obj. 7.31e To improve the appearance of the City and to facilitate storm water management, the City implements a schedule of regular street-sweeping throughout the City (Public Works).

Obj. 7.31f A pilot program of recycling drop-off sites within the City is developed (Planning/Public Works).

GOAL 7.32 The City of Mercedes will adopt a Capital Improvement Plan (Administration).

Obj. 7.32a The Capital Improvement Plan will project the City’s capital investments for the next five years and will be reviewed and updated annually (Administration).

Obj. 7.32b The CIP processes will allow for citizen review and input (Administration).

- Obj. 7.32c** The CIP will address the capital needs of water treatment and distribution and waste water collection and treatment independently due to the expectation that these services should be self-supporting. Depreciation should be included as a regular expense in order to establish reserve funds for the necessary future replacement or renovation of the capital assets (OMI).
- Obj. 7.32d** The CIP will include an accurate inventory of all of the City's capital assets and depreciation will be included as a regular expense, especially with regard to City vehicles, in order to establish reserve funds for the future replacement of capital assets (Public Works).

CHAPTER 8 - ANNEXATION AND OTHER PLANNING TOOLS GOALS

Goal 8.1 Develop a long-term annexation plan strategy which can help guide future three-year plans (Planning.)

- Obj. 8.1a** Identify areas of strategic annexation that align with the city's purposes for annexation (Planning).
- Obj. 8.1b** Annexation should occur prior to, or concurrent with development, where possible, to coordinate the extension of public facilities and services in developing areas (Planning/Utilities).
- Obj. 8.1c** Annexation should occur in order to simplify City limit lines for ease of providing public safety services (Planning).
- Obj. 8.1d** Fiscal impact analysis should be utilized to assess the estimated costs of providing municipal services and weigh them against the anticipated revenues of each annexation program. First-year costs may exceed revenues because of the lag time between annexation and collection of taxes and fees, and annexations may require one-time expenditures for capital facilities. The fiscal impact should be assessed on a multi-year timeframe (Planning).
- Obj. 8.1e** The potential future annexation areas were identified based upon the future land use plan and anticipated stages of continuing development for five, ten and 20 year timeframes (Planning).
- Obj. 8.1f** Present annexation priorities to Planning & Zoning Commission and City Commission for alignment with their strategic priorities for infrastructure provisions (Planning).

Obj. 8.1g Develop a procedure of annual annexation review in November to establish three year plans that can be completed in December to narrow the gap of taxes to services window (Planning).

Goal 8.2	Develop a modernized urban development code that includes revised zoning and subdivision ordinances (Planning).
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Obj. 8.2a Work with developers and Planning & Zoning Commission to create a list of the notable portions of our ordinances we should keep (Planning).

Obj. 8.2b Create a table of objectives to accomplish with changes to Ordinances (Planning).

Obj. 8.2c Consolidate the Mobile Home Ordinance into the Zoning and Subdivision ordinances, including necessary revisions (Planning).

Obj. 8.2d Update and incorporate the Landscape Ordinance into the Zoning Ordinance (Planning).

Obj. 8.2e Update and incorporate the Sign Ordinance into the Zoning Ordinance (Planning).

Obj. 8.2f Consider overlay districts and planned unit development zoning (Planning).

Obj. 8.2g Consider decreasing the number of residential zoning categories (Planning).

Obj. 8.2h Consider expanding the use of conditional use permits for land uses that may not be allowed by right, but given the right circumstances can be compatible with surrounding land uses (Planning).

Obj. 8.2i Conduct an area-wide zoning study to determine and recommend appropriate rezoning for areas currently zoned "N" - Newly Annexed" (Planning).

- Obj. 8.2j** Draft a new ordinance and hold several public hearings to allow public input regarding proposed changes (Planning).
- Obj. 8.2k** Adopt and implement new zoning and subdivision ordinances incorporating all stand-alone ordinances (Planning).

Goal 8.3 Develop tools to help developers and staff to deal with questions about doing business in Mercedes (Planning).

- Obj. 8.3a** Create a Developer’s Guide that summarizes the most pertinent development requirements to provide outside developers a snapshot of processes and timelines for development in Mercedes (Planning).
- Obj. 8.3b** A zoning map atlas should be prepared to provide easy reference to zoning for all staff members and the public at a convenient scale (1 inch = 400 feet) and useable page size and format, with individual atlas sheets covering small portions of the entire City (Planning).
- Obj. 8.3c** Develop a series of pamphlets dealing with frequently asked questions (Planning).

CHAPTER 9 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 9.1 Develop an Economic Development Plan, equivalent to the *Envision Mercedes 2025*, using this chapter as a springboard (EDC).

- Obj. 9.1a** Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan for the City which addresses tourists (including Winter Texans and shoppers at the Outlet Mall), developers and investors, and includes strategies specifically for the Mercedes Industrial Park as well as methods to measure the effectiveness of the different strategies and activities (EDC).
- Obj. 9.1b** Identify businesses that considered a location in Mercedes but instead invested elsewhere and identify the factors that caused them to locate elsewhere in order to evaluate how those factors might be addressed (EDC).
- Obj. 9.1c** Identify targets for business attraction, retention and expansion in retail as well as other industrial sectors (EDC).
- Obj. 9.1d** Identify local businesses which exhibit a regional advantage and assess whether there is an appropriate role for public sector involvement in facilitating expansion (EDC).
- Obj. 9.1e** Actively participate in regional economic development efforts such as (a) the México - Texas Trade Corridor Consortium, a consortium of manufacturers, distributors, infrastructure providers and economic development entities focused on understanding how to create the ideal regional manufacturing zone for high potential industries. Brownsville, McAllen and Laredo Economic Development Corporations are members; and (b) Rio South Economic Development Council, a non-profit membership organization that seeks to bring together the economic development interests of Lower Rio Grande Valley cities, counties, chambers of commerce, educational institutions, workforce board, ports, and businesses to work towards regional prosperity. More specifically, the

Rio South Economic Council seeks to coordinate marketing and develop regional economic development strategies (EDC).

- Obj. 9.1f** Develop a beautification plan for major transportation and business corridors (e.g., Expressway 83, Business 83, Texas Avenue and Baseline Road) including landscaping, regulation of signage, code enforcement, and design standards (EDC/Planning).
- Obj. 9.1g** Acquire certification as a “GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Community” (EDC).
- Obj. 9.1h** Periodically update the data in this chapter and reevaluate the City’s economic development goals and strategies in light of what is learned about trends in the local economy (EDC).

Goal 9.2 Develop city infrastructure that advances its economic development priorities (Administration/EDC).

- Obj. 9.2a** Monitor and participate with the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority in the planning and development of the Hidalgo County “Loop,” identify the interests of Mercedes that are at stake and advocate for the interests of Mercedes to be protected and advanced (Planning).
- Obj. 9.2b** Monitor and participate in the development of plans by the Hidalgo County Light Rail District, identify the interests of Mercedes that are at stake, and advocate for the interests of Mercedes to be protected and advanced (Planning).
- Obj. 9.2c** Partner with the Hidalgo County Light Rail District to locate in Mercedes the maintenance and engineering services for future passenger rail services (Administration).
- Obj. 9.2d** Improve public transportation between Mercedes and institutions of higher education--South Texas College in McAllen and Weslaco, UT-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas Technical College in Harlingen, and UT-Brownsville (Planning/MPO).

- Obj. 9.2e** Complete the purchase of the water service area between Bus. 83 and Exp. 83 from North Alamo Water Supply Corp. (Administration).
- Obj. 9.2f** Acquire additional water service area or enter into agreements with rural water agencies with pre-established buy-out formulas to ensure adequate public facilities accompany urban development (Administration).
- Obj. 9.2g** Recognize that telecommunications infrastructure, including fiber optics, has become as essential as streets in the modern economy. Determine the need for upgrades in local telecommunications infrastructure to meet the needs of new and existing businesses and advocate with the relevant providers for those improvements (Information Technology).

Goal 9.3 Encourage an expanded healthcare industry in the City of Mercedes (EDC/Administration).

- Obj. 9.3a** Advocate with federal and state lawmakers, Veteran’s Administration officials, and other federal administrative officials and network with local veterans’ activists regarding the benefits, including centralized location and reasonably priced land, of locating new veteran’s healthcare facilities in Mercedes (Administration).
- Obj. 9.3b** Utilize the growing local and regional elderly population to market the City of Mercedes as good location for geriatric health care and assisted living facilities (EDC/ Administration).

Goal 9.4 Attract and create recreational and entertainment opportunities and facilities for the benefit of visitors and residents (EDC).

- Obj. 9.4a** Attract and encourage expansion of full service restaurants (EDC).
- Obj. 9.4b** Recruit and develop children’s and family-oriented recreation and entertainment such as a bowling alley, movie theater, and a facility similar to “The Zone” which has a video arcade, skee ball, miniature golf, water rides, and go-karts (EDC).
- Obj. 9.4c** Develop a Sports Complex of sufficient size and quality to host regional, state and national tournaments (EDC/Administration).
- Obj.9.4d** Encourage the development of public or private facilities for fishing, horseback riding, bike riding, birding watching, and nature photography for the benefit of the local community and to develop and promote nature-tourism (EDC/Administration).
- Obj. 9.4e** Develop an outdoor amphitheater for the hosting of concerts, plays and other cultural events (EDC/Administration).

Goal 9.5 Consider agricultural land use an important contributor to Mercedes’ economy (Planning).

- Obj. 9.5a** Develop land use and zoning policies and regulations that avoid sprawling, hop-scotch development (Planning).
- Obj. 9.5b** Organize a task force of farmers to develop a plan that includes goals and objective for local agriculture (Planning).

Obj. 9.5.c Work with local farmers to evaluate the feasibility of additional value-added processing locally (Planning).

Goal 9.6 Attract additional retail development to Mercedes (EDC).

Obj. 9.6a Target, recruit and facilitate “destination” retail to Mercedes’ Expressway 83 retail corridor (EDC).

Obj. 9.6b Target, recruit and facilitate development of retail stores which are affordable to local residents and develop a strategy to promote businesses in Mercedes that will reduce spending of local dollars outside the community for products and services desired by residents of Mercedes. Examples include fast food (e.g., McDonalds, Burger King, etc.), affordable retail (e.g., Payless Shoes), a “Big Box” retailer (e.g., Target, COSTCO), and services (e.g., mechanics and repair shops and physician’s offices) (EDC).

Goal 9.7 Identify and minimize obstacles to economic development (EDC).

Obj. 9.7a Review the City’s subdivision and development ordinances and policies to ensure that requirements that are not necessary to advance the public health, safety or welfare, or that unduly hamper entrepreneurs from establishing small or home-based businesses are removed, and that development applications are reviewed in an efficient and effective manner (Planning).

Obj. 9.7b Increase the City’s competitiveness by continuing to reduce the city ad valorem property tax rate while at the same time raising the level and quality of public services (Administration).

Obj. 9.7c Ensure the City’s land use map, zoning map and zoning regulations encourage the kinds of economic development the City desires, especially with regard to the City’s ability to accommodate manufacturing firms (Planning).

Obj. 9.7d Improve the City's presence on the internet and ensure the City and its economic development entities are readily found by commonly used search engines (EDC).

Goal 9.8 Ensure that residents of Mercedes have access to jobs, including jobs which require above-average skill levels and pay above-average wages (EDC).

Obj. 9.8a Expand business targeting and recruitment efforts beyond retail to include manufacturing, assembly and other light industrial enterprises (EDC).

Obj. 9.8b Develop a satellite campus in Mercedes of the Texas State Technical College, University of Texas-Pan American or the University of Texas-Brownsville (EDC/Administration).

Obj. 9.8c Improve public transportation to the main campuses of South Texas College, University of Texas-Pan-Am, Texas State Technical College, and University of Texas-Brownsville (MPO/Planning).

Obj. 9.8d Improve communications and cooperation between the Mercedes Independent School District and the Mercedes City Commission and community leaders and work with the Board and administration of the MISD and the community at-large to improve academic achievement and reduce the high school drop-out rate (Administration/MISD).

Obj. 9.8e Work with the MISD, STC and others to improve educational attainment and literacy of adults and reduce the number of adults who do not have a high school diploma or graduate equivalency degree (GED) (Administration/MISD).

Obj. 9.8f Develop a strategy to create partnerships to locate county, state and federal government offices in Mercedes (EDC).

Goal 9.9 Support a vibrant, successful downtown Mercedes (EDC/Administration).

- Obj. 9.9a** Develop a neighborhood specific strategic plan for Downtown Mercedes (Planning).
- Obj. 9.9b** Assure continued maintenance of the newly improved physical appearance of downtown including the sidewalks, street “furniture” such as street lights, benches, and trash receptacles, street trees and building façade improvements (EDC/ Administration).
- Obj. 9.9c** Organize and host special events, like the Texas Street Fair, that bring residents and visitors to downtown Mercedes (EDC).
- Obj.9.9d** Ensure that any walking or bicycle trails developed in the future include a direction connection to downtown (Planning).
- Obj. 9.9e** Encourage the development of high density housing in downtown or the vicinity of downtown to enhance the customer base for downtown merchants and services (Planning).

Goal 9.10. Ensure that Mercedes is positioned to benefit from the growth in trucking, warehousing and goods assembly along U.S. 281 and the future Regional Mobility Authority Loop (EDC).

- Obj. 9.10a** Adopt a strategic annexation plan to protect Mercedes’ interests south, east, northwest and northeast of current City limits (Planning).

CLOSING COMMENTS

In order to ensure that Mercedes' reaches its vision:

“Mercedes endeavors to be a historic, culturally rich, proactive community where citizens live, learn, work, and recreate in a healthy and safe environment. It embraces diversity in its visitors, welcomes international commerce, and seeks progressive opportunities to promote its richness.

it will truly take the combined efforts of the entire city staff as well as other community partners working together to reach this vision and accomplish the goals laid out in this chapter. Mercedes' future is brighter than it has been in decades and now is the time for us to embrace the future and shape it for the betterment of all residents and visitors to this fine community. An ongoing updating effort of the plan should be the responsibility of the Planning Department to ensure that the Plan remains current and suitable for the residents of today and those to come. It is recommended that an update take place at least every five years to reflect the values of the current community. Ongoing actions that conflict with the Plan should be noted and incorporated at updates. New trends should be observed and also incorporated at updates. Any variances granted to the Thoroughfare Plan should be immediately updated in the adopted document and re-adopted.

A summary version of this Plan will be made available to the general community and on the city's website. A copy of this Chapter will be given to respective department heads and other agencies listed as responsible for any of the goals within this Plan so they will fully understand their role in making this Plan

successful. So now the time has come to Envision Mercedes 2035 in her fullest glory and take action to achieve the vision!