

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Date: February 3, 2022

To: State Clearinghouse
Responsible Agencies
Trustee Agencies
Merced County Clerk

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the University Vista Project

Lead Agency: City of Merced Planning Division
678 West 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340
Contact: Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager

Project Title: University Vista

Project Applicant: Playa Vista Equities

The City of Merced (City) is the lead agency for the proposed University Vista project (proposed project) and intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed project. The EIR will evaluate potential environmental effects associated with implementation of the proposed project. The project description, location, and environmental issue areas that may be affected by future development of the proposed project are described below. The EIR will evaluate the project-specific and cumulative impacts, identify feasible mitigation measures to reduce or avoid significant project impacts, and identify a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project.

Submitting Comments

The City is soliciting comments from public agencies, organizations, and members of the public regarding the scope and content of the EIR, and the environmental issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIR. Public agencies may need to use the EIR when considering permitting or other approvals that are germane to the agencies' responsibilities in connection with the proposed project.

Comments as to the appropriate scope of analysis in the EIR are invited from all interested parties. Written comments or questions concerning the EIR for the proposed project should be directed to Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager (address below). Due to time limits mandated by state law, public agencies and other interested parties must submit any written comments in response to this notice at the earliest possible date, but not later than **5:00 p.m., March 4, 2022**, to the address shown below (postmarks are acceptable). If you wish to be placed on the notification list for this project, or if you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Ms. Espinosa.

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City of Merced Planning Division
Attn: Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager
678 West 18th Street, Merced, CA 95340
Phone: (209) 385-6858, Fax: (209) 725-8775
Email: espinosak@cityofmerced.org

Public Scoping Meeting

In accordance with Public Resources Code section 21083.9 and section 15083 of the CEQA Guidelines, the City will hold two scoping meetings in connection with the proposed project, one to receive comments from public agencies, and one to receive comments from the public and other interested parties and agencies, regarding issues that should be addressed in the EIR. Members of the public or agency representatives may attend either session, however. The date, times, and address of the scoping meetings are as follows:

Thursday, February 24, 2022
3 to 4 p.m. – Public Agencies
6 to 7 p.m. – General Public
Merced City Hall—City Council Chambers (2nd Floor)
678 West 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340

Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings may need to be changed to virtual only. Please check the City's website on the day of the meeting to confirm whether in person attendance will be possible.

For at-risk individuals or those not wanting to attend an in-person meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic, please submit your public comment to the City electronically no later than 1:00 PM on the day of the meeting. Comments received before the deadline will become part of the record. Material may be emailed to espinosak@cityofmerced.org and should be limited to 300 words or less. Please specify that you are commenting on the University Vista Notice of Preparation.

You may provide telephonic comments via voicemail by calling (209) 388-7390 by no later than 1:00 PM on the day of the meetings to be added to the public comment. Voicemails will be limited to a length of three (3) minutes. Since this is a shared voice mail line with the Planning Commission, please specify that you are commenting on the University Vista Notice of Preparation.

Interested parties may also participate remotely by joining the meetings at the following link:
<https://cityofmerced.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Project Location

The University Vista project area is located in unincorporated Merced County and is generally bounded by Lake Road to the east, Bellevue Road to the south, and Golf Road to the west (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**). The University Vista project area is bordered by grazing land to the north, Yosemite Lake and Lake Yosemite County Park to the northeast, the UC Merced campus

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to the southeast, grazing land and scattered rural residences to the south, a small residential neighborhood located at the intersection of Bellevue Road and Golf Road to the southwest, and a large residential neighborhood to the northwest.

Proposed Project

The University Vista project area is located within the northeastern portion of the City of Merced's Sphere of Influence (SOI)/Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) area and the City is proposing to annex the entire 291-acre project site into the city limits subsequent to the City's annexation of the UC Merced campus pursuant to Assembly Bill (AB) 3312. Passed in 2020, AB 3312 allows the City of Merced to annex the UC Merced campus via a road strip (Bellevue Road or Lake Road) without annexing properties located between UC Merced and the city limits. The University Vista project would be eligible for annexation because its eastern boundary is contiguous to the university.

With its proximity to UC Merced, the proposed project is envisioned as a mixed use community integrating market rate housing, affordable housing, student housing, retail, entertainment, hospitality, restaurant, office and research. The proposed project is also envisioned as a sustainable place to live as its compact form supports a walkable, bikeable and energy-efficient environment and encourages public transportation (see **Figure 3**). Finally, the proposed project would provide an extensive system of preserves, open space, and parks (see **Figure 4**).

The neighboring UC Merced campus is expected to reach its ultimate capacity of 15,000 students, 440 faculty, and 1,625 staff (on-campus) employees by the year 2030. Development allowed under the proposed project is intended to support growth on the campus by providing student housing, commercial, office and research facilities.

Buildout of the proposed project is estimated to accommodate the development of approximately 4,176 dwelling units and approximately 472,957 square feet of non-residential uses. Density within the University Vista project area would be the highest nearest to the UC Merced campus and at the center of the site and would decrease towards the western edge of the site.

The proposed project would include a network of new streets sized to meet the transportation needs of the development. Primary access would be provided by two major entry points, one along Bellevue Road and one along Lake Road. Secondary access would be provided by minor entry points along Lake Road, Bellevue Road and Golf Road. Finally, a roundabout at the Bellevue Road/Lake Road intersection would connect the University Vista project area to the UC Merced campus.

The proposed project would include development of wastewater, water supply, and drainage systems, and other supporting infrastructure to serve the University Vista project area. These systems will be described in detail in the EIR.

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The proposed project is anticipated to be developed in three phases over a 10-year period. Phase I would require four years to complete while Phases II and III would each require three years to complete.

Entitlements and Actions

Required entitlements and actions for the proposed project would include the following:

1. General Plan/Bellevue Community Plan Amendments
2. Annexation and Pre-zoning
3. Certification of the Environmental Impact Report
4. Approval for annexation by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)

Additional entitlements and actions may be required and will be identified in the EIR.

Project Alternatives

A reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project will be evaluated in the EIR. Consistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6(c), the range of potential alternatives to the proposed project will include those that could feasibly accomplish most of the basic objectives of the project and could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of the significant effects. The EIR will include sufficient information about each alternative to allow meaningful evaluation, analysis, and comparison with the proposed project. As required under CEQA, the alternatives analysis will include a discussion of a “no project alternative” to allow decision makers to compare the impacts of approving the proposed project with the impacts of not approving the proposed project (CEQA Guidelines section 15126.6(e)).

Potential Environmental Effects and Scope of the EIR

The EIR will evaluate whether the proposed project may potentially result in one or more significant environmental effects, which will be evaluated in the relevant EIR sections listed below.

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise and Vibration
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

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Environmental documentation for this project will be available for review at the City's website: <https://www.cityofmerced.org/>.

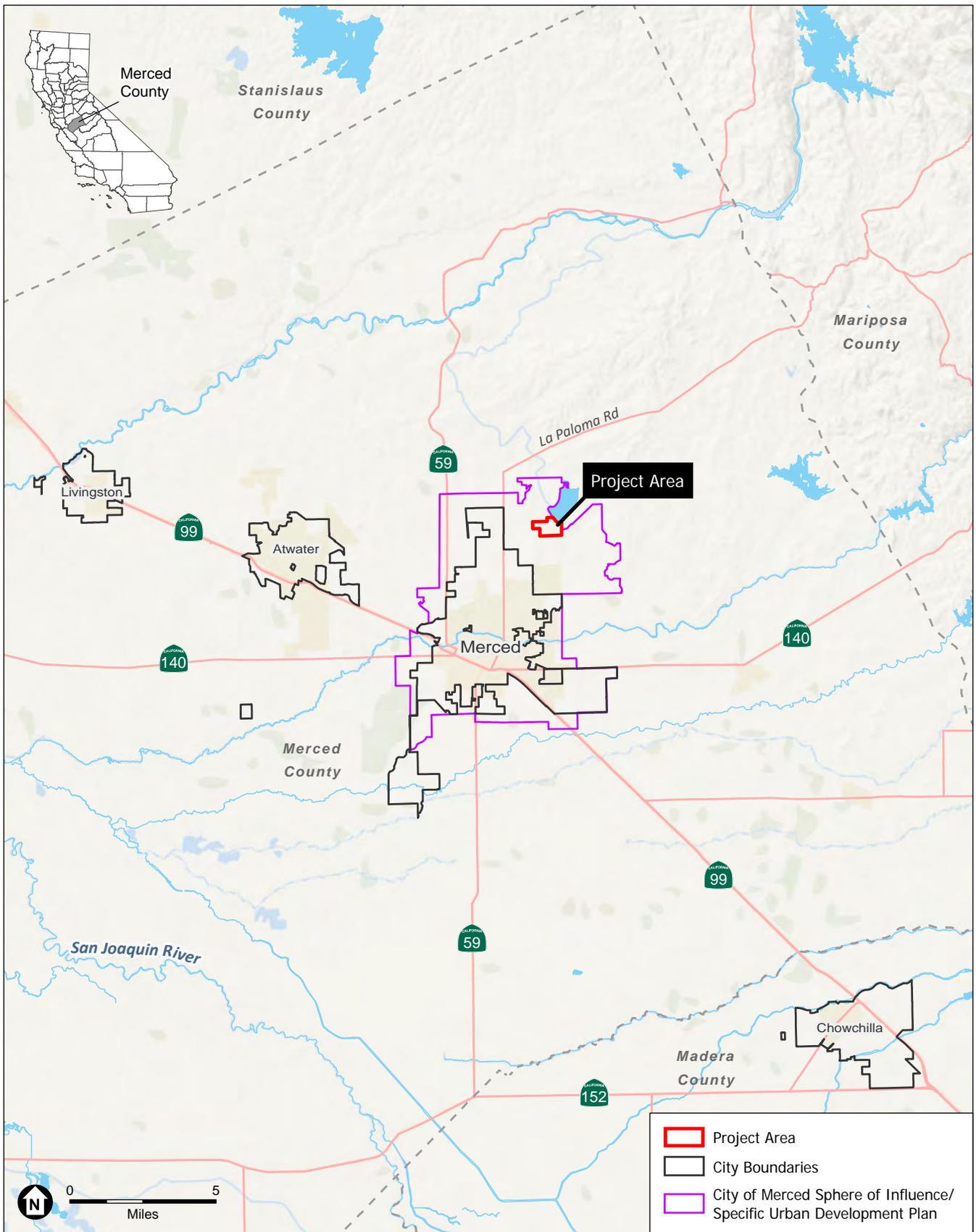
Depending on public health protection measures, printed copies of environmental documentation for the proposed project may be available for review at the City's Planning Division, 678 West 18th Street, Second Floor, Merced, CA 95340, during regular business hours.

Effects Found to be Less Than Significant

Unless specific comments are received during the NOP public comment period that raise specific concerns or request an issue be addressed unique to the project site, the following issue is anticipated to be less than significant.

Mineral Resources

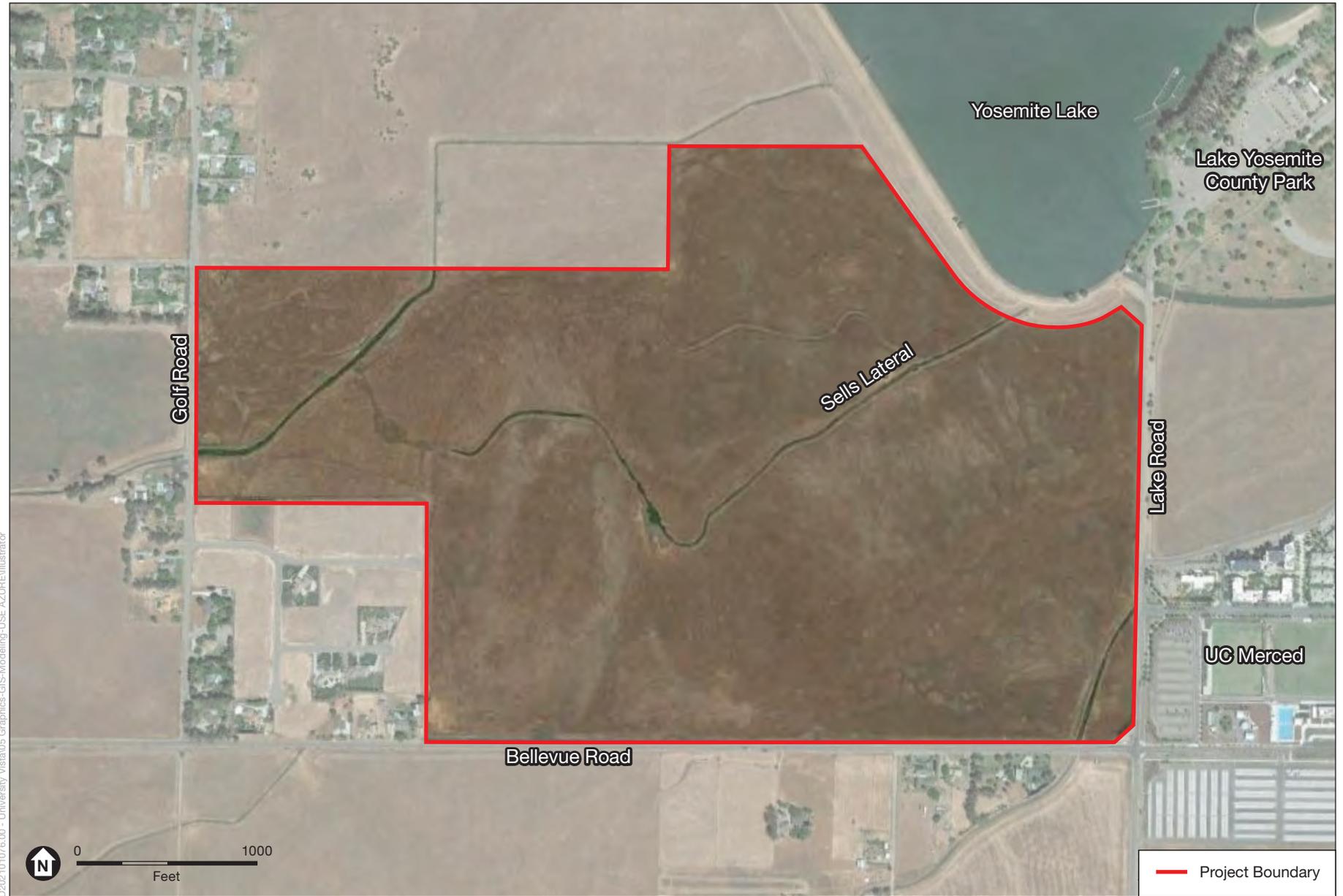
The project site does not support mineral extraction operations. Neither the State of California nor the City or County of Merced designates the project site as a location of known mineral deposits. These conditions preclude the possibility of a loss of mineral resources of statewide or local importance. No impacts would occur.



SOURCE: Merced County, 2021; Esri, 2021; ESA, 2022

University Vista

Figure 1
Regional Location



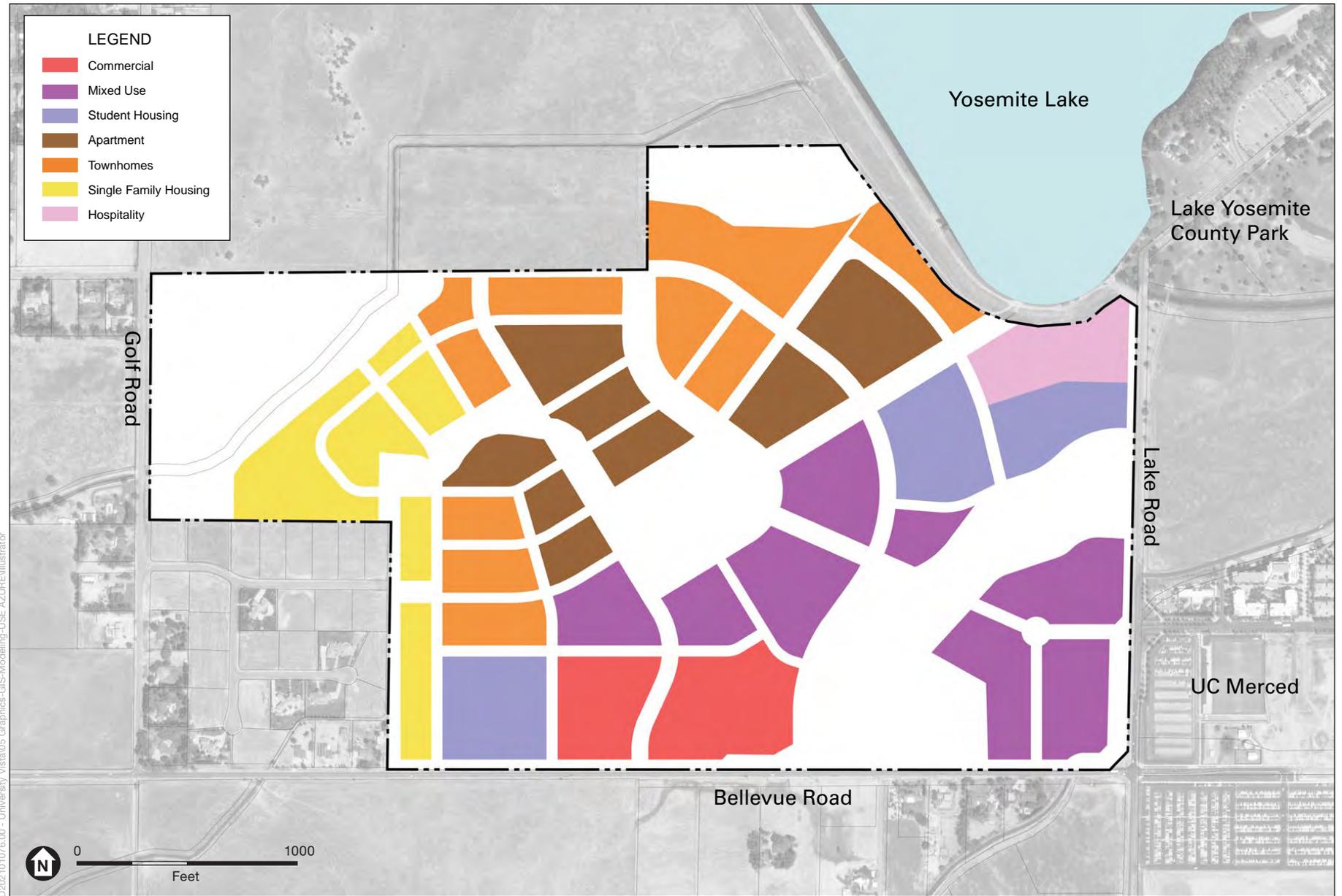
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SOURCE: Google, 2021; ESA, 2022

University Vista

Figure 2
University Vista Project Area

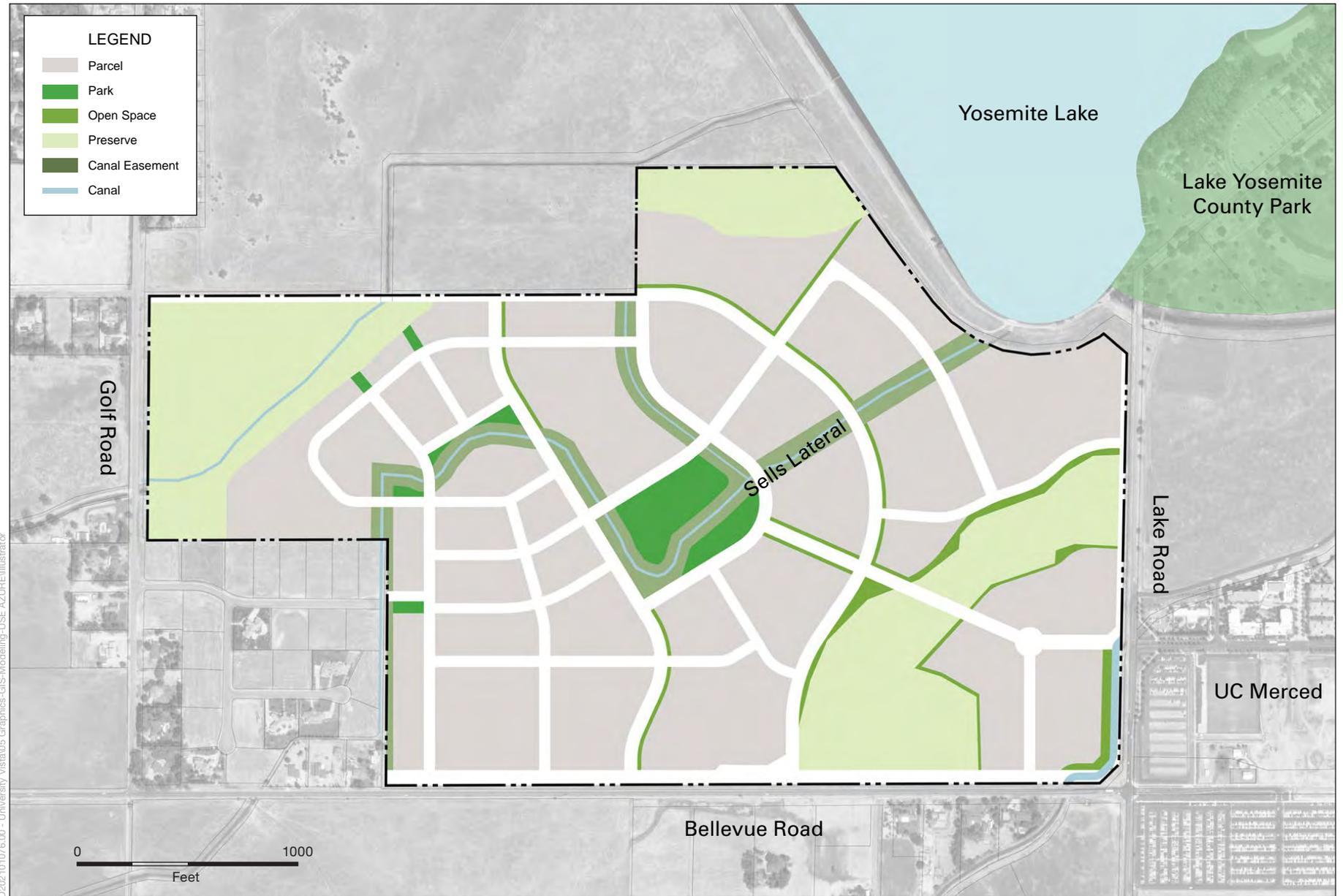




SOURCE: University Vista

University Vista

Figure 3
Proposed Land Use Diagram



SOURCE: University Vista

University Vista

Figure 4
Preservation, Open Space, and Parks