

MERCED COUNTY
2023 WINTER STORM FLOOD RELIEF PROGRAM PLAN
(PLANADA FLOOD RELIEF)

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the legislative efforts of Senator Anna Caballero and Assemblywoman Esmeralda Soria, \$20 million was secured in the FY 2023-2024 State Budget to assist the community of Planada in its flood recovery effort. Approximately 843 households were impacted as a result of the unprecedented storms of early 2023. The community experienced damage to homes, personal property, vehicles and loss of inventory.

The 2023 Winter Storm Flood Relief Program Plan is consistent with the enabling legislation that made this funding possible and is focused on the health, safety and welfare of Planada residents. It is organized into distinct categories that align with the community’s overarching goals. Within each category, we have addressed specific needs and priorities identified through community engagement. The content of this Plan is the result of significant community engagement which included six public workshops, numerous community discussions, and individual meetings with residents and community advocates.

A sincere thanks to each of our community partners, the University of California, Merced Community and Labor Center, Valley Onward and Leadership Council for Justice and Accountability, and our community leaders who were instrumental in the County’s engagement efforts. And, most certainly a sincere thank you to the community itself who has well demonstrated its resilience over this past year.

GOALS

The 2023 Winter Storm Flood Relief Program Plan has identified the following goals:

Goal 1: Prioritize Health, Safety, and Welfare of Planada Residents.

The 2023 Winter Storms had devastating impact on Planada residents, small businesses, and community assets. Flooding has required significant repairs and remediation to ensure homes are free of mold and structurally sound, that neighborhoods are free of debris, and that residents are not living in substandard housing. While this devastation touched every member of the Planada community, it concentrated in specific areas of Planada and damaged some homes and families more than others. In allocating Flood Relief, the County has prioritized those investments that first and foremost address health and safety. This prioritization is demonstrated in the allocation of funds to Home Repair (and prioritization within Home Repair to those repairs that ensure health and safety), and the elevation of funding to those areas of Planada that experienced the most significant health and safety impacts.

Goal 2: Remove Barriers to Applying and Receiving Relief

Planada residents face both real and perceived barriers in seeking and securing aid. As the federal flood response demonstrated, a number of barriers such as immigration status, language and literacy levels, available documentation, and difficulty navigating complex funding requirements can slow aid efforts and cause frustration. Alternatively, simplified application processes, continuous communication and transparency, and streamlined attestation and documentation can greatly expand access, build trust, and facilitate system efficiencies.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

County staff conducted a community engagement strategy that sought to hear directly from residents about their intent and aspirations related to the \$20M investment made by the State. This included the development of a project name, Planada20M, and a corresponding web address (Planada20M.com) which hosted meeting announcements and will serve as the central point of information during implementation. The community engagement included phases: (1) three identical survey workshops to receive residents’ input on plan components; (2) a session aimed at to get reaction on plan ‘decision-points’ developed from resident input; and (3) presentation of preliminary and final drafts of the plan.

Collectively, this effort engaged approximately 200 unique residents who participated in one or more of the sessions, with individual attendance ranging from 50 to 150; in aggregate, the sessions hosted more than 450 attendees and gathered an estimated 7,000 points of input. To ensure accessibility and support capacity, sessions were held in three locations: Planada Community Center; Chavez Middle School; and Planada Elementary School. A sub-committee of Community-based Organizations and leaders served as an important sounding board for this effort.

Information gathered at sessions were recorded and translated, shared among the Community sub-committee, and presented and discussed at each of the County’s internal Planada Flood Relief Planning Meetings. When new opportunities or issues arose, staff met with impacted members of the Planada community to better understand how proposals addressed or did not address their concerns.

This final Plan was directly informed by this input. Data gathered from sessions shifted initial proposals regarding categorical allocation, inclusion of small business owners, application processes and filing windows, home repair processes, and methods of prioritization.

KEY DATES

<i>January 9, 2024</i>	<i>Presentation to the Merced County Board of Supervisors</i> Presentation of the Final Plan during a regularly-scheduled meeting of the Merced County Board of Supervisors, with request for approval.
<i>February 2024</i>	<i>Outreach and Application Preparation</i> In the month of February, the County will be working with community partners to conduct outreach for this funding. That outreach will include going door-to-door to provide flyers with information on application time frame and hours of operation, a verification checklist which will list examples of possible verifications, and helping the community become familiar with the application process. This is intended to make the application process as easy to complete as possible.
<i>March 11, 2024</i>	<i>Application Window Begins</i> Applications will begin to be accepted, in-person, at the Planada Community Center, Monday through Friday from 9AM-7PM and Saturdays from 9AM-1PM.
<i>April 20, 2024</i>	<i>Last day of Application Window</i> Applications will not be accepted after this day, however, applicants can still complete their applications if documentation is still needed. Though not likely, an additional application period may be made available if necessary or if funds remain unallocated.
<i>December 31, 2025</i>	<i>Deadline for Funds to be Expended</i> All allocated funds must be expended by December 31, 2025.

PROGRAM BUDGET

\$8,000,000	Home Repair
\$4,000,000	Direct Assistance
\$3,000,000	Infrastructure
\$500,000	Business Assistance
\$2,500,000	Additional Program Areas
\$2,000,000	Program Administration
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\$20,000,000	

APPLICATION PROCESS

One application will serve for all categories of assistance. Applicants will apply for assistance via in-person appointments, which will be scheduled on-site and available same-day, if possible. Staff will help applicants complete the application through an initial appointment and any necessary follow-up appointments. The Planada Community Center (9167 Stanford Avenue, Planada, CA 95365) will serve as the Application Center. Application intake will be open for a six-week period from March 11, 2024 – April 20, 2024. Operating hours will be Monday through Friday from 9AM-7PM and Saturdays from 9AM-1PM. Follow-up appointments may be needed to complete the application process. Applications will be processed by priority and application date once the application window closes.

In completing their application, applicants will be requested to produce:

1. A form of Photo Identification
2. Proof of Financial Need or Impact (Receipts, Documentation of destroyed items, Attestation of damages, Pictures of damages)
3. Proof of Planada Residency as of January 9, 2023
4. Social Security Number or Tax Identification Number (Note that this will be requested but is not required unless applicable to household members)

The application cannot request the Duplication of Compensation or Assistance Received. Importantly, this includes: (a) FEMA Compensation/Assistance (Rental Assistance Non-Congregate and Congregate Shelter, Personal Property compensation, Vehicle compensation, Non-Profit Compensation/Assistance, Gift Cards, Cash, Donated goods/items or services, State Compensation/Assistance, CalFresh Disaster Assistance, Storm Assistance for Immigrants, Disaster Unemployment Assistance); (b) Insurance Compensation (Personal Property compensation, Vehicle compensation, Homeowners insurance compensation, Flood insurance compensation; or (c) County Assistance Programs (CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, Housing/Homeless Programs, Dignity At Home Falls Prevention, HomeSafe, Whole Person Care, etc.)

HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE – Budget: \$8,000,000

a. Eligible Applications and Application Types

Funds may only be used to aid in repair, remediation, or reconstruction of structures damaged by flooding.

b. Application Types and Priorities

Home Repair (HR) Assistance is organized into four Priority Levels. *HR-Priority 1* is made up of *New Work*. This includes new repairs related to existing health and safety issues. *HR-Priority 2* is made up of *Reimbursement with Permits*. Aid to property owners that have already made repairs with permits related to health and safety repairs. *HR-Priority 3* is made up of *Reimbursement where No Permits were required*. Aid to property owners that have already made repairs to health and safety issues that did not require permits. *HR-Priority 4* is made up of All Other Repairs, such as preventative measures, cosmetic (e.g. fencing, upper cabinets), and business structure repair (if funding available after residential repair is completed).

c. Permit Requirement

Nearly all health and safety repairs require permits. Health and safety repairs may be funded for principal dwellings and permitted accessory dwellings that have experienced damage caused by flooding. Examples include: structural repairs, plumbing and electrical, or heater replacement.

Non-health and safety repairs may not require a permit. Examples include: paint, carpentry trim or baseboards, laminate flooring, or front door replacement.

d. Ineligible Funding Uses

Repairs that are not eligible for repairs include: (a) Unpermitted repairs; and (b) Damage caused by non-flood occurrences, such as roof damage caused by high winds, fence damage caused by high winds, and structural damage caused by a tree fall.

e. Required Application Information

Applications for repair funding may need information in addition to the general application. Such information may include:

- Proof of home ownership (or, if renting, property owner authorization).
- Proof of flood damage (photos, official reports, etc.).
- Description of repairs needed, including measurements of flood damaged areas/fixtures.
- Information pertaining to repairs already completed, such as: Building permits; Receipts for materials and/or labor; Contractor information; Photos of completed work.

f. Application Options and Funding Limits

There is no overall maximum funding amount per property. Applicants may apply for New Work or Reimbursement funds, or a combination of both. All reimbursement applications will receive award amounts based on the lower of actual costs expended, or an average of labor and material costs for same or similar repairs identified by Partner organizations.

New Work: "Over the Counter" Application (direct payment) – Maximum of \$5,000 Note: Only available for work that does not require permits. "Partner" Application (work with non-profit partner) – No maximum funding amount. Note: Awards may be limited if applications exceed available funds.

Reimbursement with Permits: No maximum funding amount.

Reimbursement where No Permits were required: No maximum funding amount.

All Other Repairs: Maximum of \$15,000 total.

g. Repair Process

First, an application must include: (a) description of work that needs to be completed; (b) approximate measurements of new material needed (Example: square feet of flooring, square feet of drywall, number of toilets/showers); and (c) verification of flood damage: photos, acknowledgement from partner contractor. Next, a non-profit partner organization, such as Self-Help or Habitat for Humanity, will visit your home to list the repairs needed. These organizations will identify the total cost and request approval. These organizations will not report property issues to the County.

DIRECT ASSISTANCE – Budget: \$4,000,000

a. Three Assistance Types: Housing, Vehicle, and Personal Property

Direct assistance includes the following subcategories: (a) **Housing Assistance**, such as, Moving Expenses, Temporary Lodging Expense Reimbursement, Deposits for New Residence, First Month's Rent for New Residence, Utility Arrears, Rental/Mortgage Arrears; (b) **Vehicle Offset**, which includes Damaged or Destroyed Vehicles that had been registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV); and (c) **Personal Property Replacement**. Personal Property includes: *Appliances* (ex: television; refrigerator; washing machine; dryer; freezer; stove; dishwasher); *Furniture* (ex: sofa, loveseat, recliner, sectional sofa, coffee table/end table set, dining set, bar stools, mattress and bed frame, crib and mattress, dresser, portable crib); *Other household items* (ex: area rugs, bath rugs, shower curtain, bedding, baby, swing/bouncer); and *Personal Items* (ex: clothing, shoes, durable medical equipment, wheelchairs, and walkers).

b. Application Priorities

Direct Assistance (DA) Priority Levels have been established to ensure that assistance is provided to those most impacted. *DA-Priority 1* is made up of the Flooded Street Zones, which include the following streets. Homes on these streets were within the flooded area and experienced the most severe flood impacts.

Benecia Ct. Coronado Ct. Durango Ave. Hupp St. N. Plainsburg Rd. Terry St

Bodega Ave.	Cortez Ave.	E. Childs Ave.	Kino Ct.	Park St.	Topeka St.
Broadway	Dana Ave.	Fancher St.	Latham Dr.	Pico St.	Vallejo St.
Brodrick Ave.	Dana Ct.	Fremont St.	Live Oak Ave.	Santa Fe Dr.	
Cabrillo St.	D.L Guerra St.	Gage St.	Live Oak St.	S. Plainsburg Rd.	
Cody Ave.	Division St.	Gwinn St.	Market St.	Stanford Ave.	.
Columbus Ct.	Dulcinea St.	Haskell Ave.	Mills St.	Sutter St.	

DA-Priority 2 is made up of damaged vehicles (only). *DA-Priority 3* is made up of Community Residents in non-impacted flooded zones.

c. Payments and Categorical Maximums

Housing Assistance payment will be calculated using the actual costs, based on verified receipts. Personal Property will be calculated using a fixed-cost, in which each item would be associated with a specific cost. Vehicle Offset payment will be calculated using the actual costs of repair, and the Kelly Blue Book fair market value with standard equipment. Key notes:

- There is a maximum of two (2) vehicles per household.
- Housing Assistance and Personal Property has a combined maximum of \$15,000 per household.

INFRASTRUCTURE – Budget: \$3,000,000

Investments in Infrastructure are those that will help ensure the long-term storm resilience of Planada. These three investments are potentially limited to:

- Study and analysis to capture or divert future flood waters. This would help secure additional government funds to improve infrastructure.
- Improvements to sewer system to make it more resilient to future floods.
- Removal of vegetation within Miles Creek to improve capacity of the channel.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE – Budget: \$500,000

Businesses were also impacted by the 2023 Winter Storms and serve as a vital piece of the community and economic fabric of Planada. Business impacts have been considered in four core areas:

- *Inventory*: Goods available for sale that were damaged or lost
- *Equipment Loss*: Damage or loss of equipment, such as refrigerators, display counters, etc.
- *Lost Revenue*: Sales lost as a direct result of the Flood and its aftermath
- *Building Damage*: Repair of a building housing a business or community agency

Businesses may apply for compensation in Inventory, Equipment and/or Revenue Loss by providing documentation in each category. Required documentation will include receipts for inventory purchases, receipts of original equipment purchase or replacement, and prior quarter sales receipts as a predictor of loss during business closure due to the Flood. For these three categories, a maximum of \$100,000 is available for each business, and funds will be distributed proportionate to total requests. Damages to buildings housing businesses will also be considered, using the available funds in the Additional Program Areas and Contingency Budget. Churches and other community agencies may also request building damage in the Additional Program Areas and Contingency Budget.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM AREAS – Budget: \$2,500,000

This category is dedicated to the following three subcategories:

1. Lost Wages

The Planada Community Needs Assessment survey (UC Merced) indicated that more than 300 workers did not qualify for Unemployment Insurance but missed work due to the floods.

Other workers may have qualified but were not able to access those benefits. The median number of weeks of work missed by those surveyed was two weeks, with a mean (average) of five weeks. To support residents that were not eligible for State Unemployment Insurance or were not able to access Unemployment Insurance benefits, the Plan has established a flat \$300 of assistance for every week of work missed. Utilizing an average of five weeks (5 weeks X \$300/week) and an estimated 400 residents taking advantage of the benefit, a total of \$600,000 has been identified to support Lost Wages.

2. Additional Programs Areas

These may include, as funds are available, the repair of Business and Community Agency Buildings, such as those housing churches, small businesses, the local Post Office, and other community-serving facilities.

3. Contingency

This includes funds available to cover requests in the other categories (except Program Administration) if those requests are greater than available funds in that category, or for unforeseen costs or needs.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION – Budget: \$2,000,000

This category supports the administrative costs associated with the 2023 Winter Storm Flood Relief Program which includes:

- Partner agency contracts, primarily those coordinating inspections, home repairs, permitting requests and reimbursement and payment.
- County staff time dedicated to the 2023 Winter Storm Flood Relief Program, and not supported by any other funding source.
- Fiscal and audit-related costs.

The County is committed to administering the 2023 Winter Storm Flood Relief Program as efficiently as possible and will redistribute funds from Program Administration to direct resident relief if possible.

Disclaimer

It is important to note that receipt of 2023 Winter Storm Flood Relief Program assistance is subject to availability of funds. Any award of assistance may be subject to federal and state taxes and may affect pending claims, including claims for FEMA Assistance. To the extent necessary, application information will be shared with other governmental agencies and non-profits. The County of Merced cannot provide legal or tax advice to individual applicants. If applicants have questions or concerns, they are encouraged to retain legal counsel or other professional assistance.