

CHAPTER 4 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

The Community Development and Design Chapter is extremely important because it, together with the Transportation and Circulation Chapter, provides the foundation for growth on which the other chapters are based. This chapter includes the state-mandated land use and housing elements, as well as the county-required Growth Management Element. Community design, not a required topic, is also included because of the importance the residents of El Cerrito place on improving the quality of development.

This chapter is divided into the following subsections:

- Land Use
- Community Design
- Housing
- Growth Management

LAND USE

Land use goals and policies establish the overall type and location of activities, while the community design goals and policies establish the “quality” of those places that contain or facilitate the activities. Land use is also closely related to housing and growth management because both have spatial implications.

A. Setting

Uses of Land

The land area within the city limits of El Cerrito is approximately 2,386 acres or about 3.7 square miles, including vacant land and rights-of-way. Of this total, 1,193 acres are in residential uses. The city has approximately 8,537 tax assessor’s parcels.

Residential

El Cerrito has a predominantly residential pattern of land use. Multiple family dwellings are concentrated along both sides of the BART right-of-way and west of San Pablo Avenue near Central Avenue. Elsewhere, single-family homes spread eastward into the hills and westward beyond I-80 into a small area on either side of Potrero Avenue. Within these residential neighborhoods are support facilities such as schools, parks, recreation facilities, and open space.

Almost 50 percent of the land area, or 1,193 acres, of El Cerrito is used for residential purposes. Of this total, 1,098 acres are occupied by single-family houses; 25 acres by duplexes, 69 acres by multifamily units, and 1 acre by hotels, motels, group housing, and trailer park units. The significant residential activity since the

last general plan has been continued infill of single-family lots and major apartment development such as Del Norte Place, Civic Plaza, and El Cerrito Royale.

Commercial

Approximately 5 percent of the land area, or 113 acres, of El Cerrito is used for commercial purposes. Of this, 84 acres are used for retail, residential, and entertainment purposes, 8 acres for offices, 13 acres for auto services and sales, and 8 acres for wholesale and manufacturing purposes. Some significant changes that have recently taken place include the new Target store, Del Norte Marketplace, and conversion of some automobile-oriented uses to retail uses.

Commercial development is almost exclusively concentrated along the San Pablo Avenue corridor with the greatest concentrations at the El Cerrito Plaza, the intersection of San Pablo and Moeser, and the Del Norte area. Region-serving retail facilities (Home Depot, Target, and Honda) are primarily located in the northern part of the corridor and at El Cerrito Plaza (although much less region-serving since the departure of the Emporium) along the city's southern boundary. Two neighborhood commercial centers are located on Fairmount Avenue between Colusa and Ramona and on Stockton between Ashbury and Everett.

Commercial office uses are located in the commercial corridor along San Pablo Avenue, in and adjacent to El Cerrito Plaza, and in the two neighborhood commercial areas (primarily in the Stockton-Norvell neighborhood, which contains several medical offices).

As noted above, the commercial land-use category also includes automobile and industrial uses. These include several automotive-related uses along San Pablo Avenue, a lumber mill on Schmidt Lane, and a sheet metal processing plant on Kearney Street near Madison.

Institutional

Institutional uses consume 116 acres, or approximately 5 percent of the land area, of El Cerrito. Of this total, school and childcare facilities account for 48 acres, government and utilities for 47 acres, and other institutions for 21 acres. In recent years the only significant change has been the conversion of a portion of the Madera School site to residential uses. Chapter 6 provides a more complete description of institutional uses.

Recreational/Open Space

Approximately 16 percent of the land area, or 379 acres, of El Cerrito is used for recreational and open space purposes. Of this total, 181 acres are in public parks or recreational facilities, 33 acres in utility-owned open space, and 165 acres in private recreational facilities or open space. Open space areas are located throughout the city. Major areas within the city include the Mira Vista Country Club in the northeastern portion of the city, the Hillside Natural Area located near the center of the city, and several parks and playgrounds at schools (see Chapter 6).

Vacant Land

As noted above, vacant land accounts for 124 acres, or approximately 5 percent of the land area, in El Cerrito. This low inventory of vacant land reflects the city's maturity as it approaches build-out. This amount of developable vacant land has decreased in recent years due to the gradual infill of scattered sites.

Compatibility Issues

El Cerrito is fortunate in that the number of land-use compatibility issues is relatively limited. There are noise compatibility issues in the western part of the city, caused primarily by traffic on I-80 and by the BART system. (Although I-80 and BART noise can be nuisance in other parts of the city, the area where significant effects have been measured is limited to location generally west of Richmond Street.) There are also some fire-related compatibility issues in the eastern part of the city due to potential fire hazards in natural areas near residential neighborhoods.

There are land-use compatibility issues, perhaps more potential than current, along the San Pablo Avenue corridor. Parking, noise, and scale of development (both recent and proposed) in this area have been raised as concerns by some residents. Some incompatibility exists, not so much because the actual uses are incompatible, but because of wide differences in building condition and maintenance. Also, vacant lots next to developed lots can be considered a compatibility problem because vacant lots are sometimes poorly maintained and because they can cause pedestrians to feel concerned about safety, especially at night.

Economic Development Activities

In 1999, the City began structuring a new economic development program which aims to retain and attract business and other activities, with the particular objective of improving the City's fiscal well being.

El Cerrito has a Redevelopment Agency, which was created in 1974. As of July 1, 1999, the City placed the Redevelopment Agency in an inactive status. The Agency remains a legal entity, however, and the City may find occasion in the future to activate the Authority of the Agency in support of broad economic development strategies.

After years of relatively few developments and several significant setbacks, there are many signs of renewed developer interest and economic strength that hold promise for El Cerrito. Projects recently completed or under construction are transforming the areas around the Del Norte BART station. The potential to revitalize and transform the El Cerrito Plaza BART station site and the adjacent shopping center continues to attract the interest of developers. The next ten years may be critical in the transformation of the San Pablo Corridor into a vital center (or sequence of centers) for the city – a development that is critical for the city's long-term financial health.

By law, the Redevelopment Agency must address affordable housing needs through its redevelopment activities. While residential uses may be incorporated into new

redevelopment projects near the BART stations (to support businesses as well as transit use), the manner in which such housing is to be incorporated in these projects—if at all—is a subject of considerable community debate.

B. Trends

Due to the largely “built-out” nature of the city, its existing development pattern will remain largely unchanged in the 20-year planning period. The city is characterized by single-family homes in most areas, with commercial uses and higher density housing clustered along the San Pablo Corridor and in the vicinity of the two BART stations. Although the overall pattern is not expected to change, some replacement of and changes in individual businesses will take place.

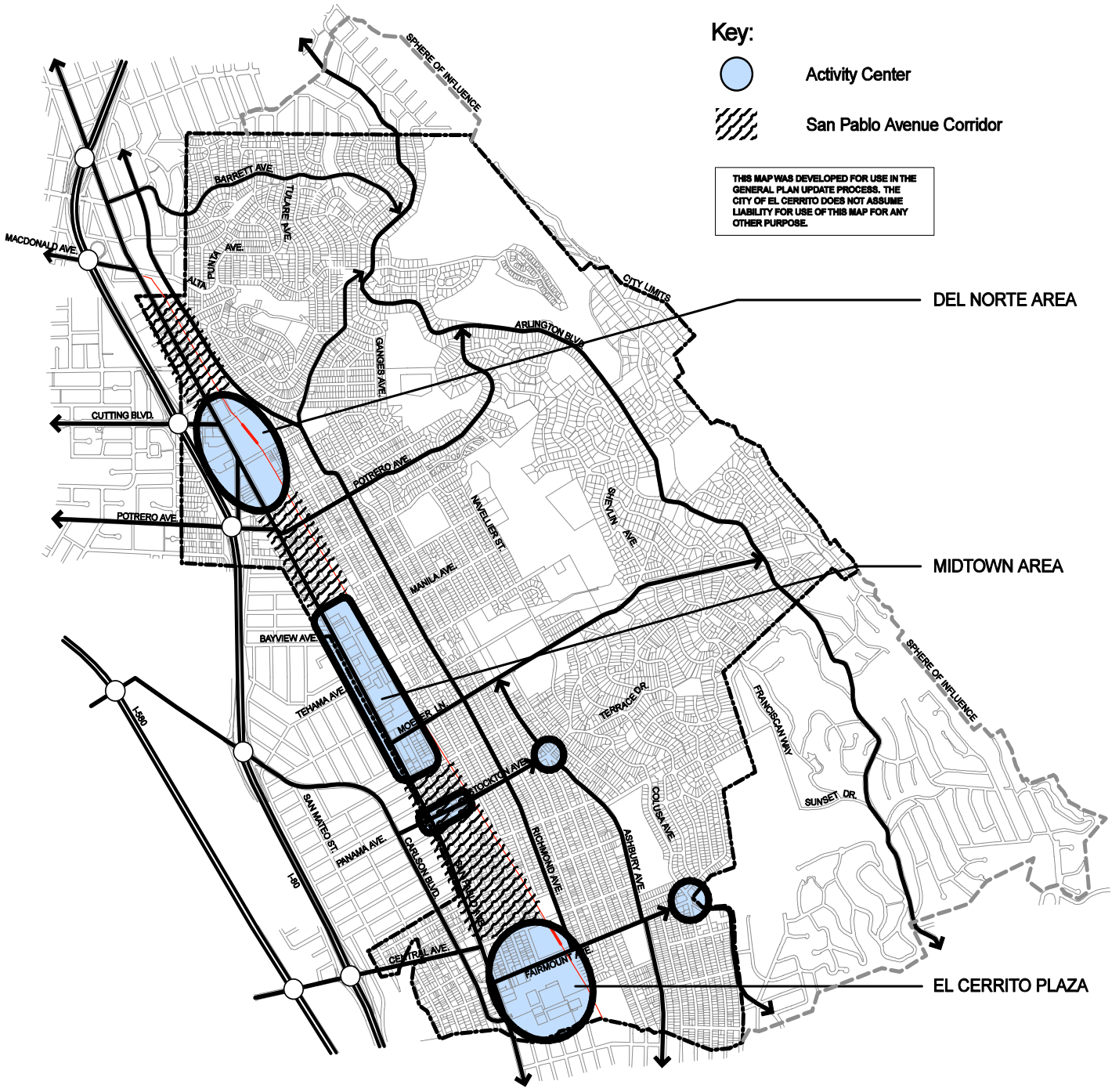
In most cases, issues of development compatibility can be ameliorated on a site-by-site basis through good design and site planning. Building and site design standards, and a City design and development review process will ensure proper setbacks, heights, building massing, scale, and style of new development. In addition, design guidelines should be adopted in order to provide continuity of judgement in the development review process, as changes take place over time among staff and members of the Planning Commission and Design Review Board.

Growth Strategy



This General Plan calls for a balanced growth strategy with emphasis on retail and office uses. The Plan assumes that all commercial growth and most residential growth will take place within the San Pablo Avenue corridor. Specifically, the Plan assumes 189,350 square feet of additional retail space, 166,570 square feet of additional office space, and 775 new housing units. Of these totals, the only development assumed to be someplace other than the San Pablo Avenue corridor are 90 housing units, which represent a combination of accessory units and infill of vacant lots.

It should be noted that new retail and office space will actually be more than as indicated above because some existing retail and office space will be replaced by new development. No replacement of residential units is assumed, although some may occur.

The balanced growth strategy calls for most of the growth to take place in three areas along San Pablo in order to take advantage of the two BART stations and a large area between the stations that offers an opportunity for a large-scale mixed-use concept. These focal points—Del Norte BART Station Area, Midtown Area, and El Cerrito Plaza Area—are shown on Figure 4, Development Concept.



Key:

-  Activity Center
-  San Pablo Avenue Corridor

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Figure 4 DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

