

The land area breakdown in 1975, 1998, and 2020 (projected) is shown in Table 4-1. The only significant change between 1998 and 2020 is the conversion of 124 acres of vacant land to other uses.

Table 4-1: Land Area by Type of Use

	Land Uses (acres)		
	1975	1998	2020
Residential	1,112	1,193	1,295
Commercial	105	113	120
Institutional*	185	113	115
Recreational & Open Space*	320	382	391
Rights of Way	456	461	465
Vacant	159	124	0
TOTAL	2,337	2,386	2,386

* The 1975 acreage figures for Institutional uses and Recreational & Open Space uses are based on a different classification system than is used for the 1998 and 2020 figures. Actual changes have been minimal.

The following sections provide more detail on how and where growth is expected to occur.

Eastern Residential Area

This plan preserves the predominantly single-family neighborhoods in their current land uses. These neighborhoods are characterized by two major patterns of development: first, a “historic grid” street pattern from Richmond Street east to Navellier Street and Colusa Avenue, and second, a hillside curvilinear development pattern from Navellier Street and Colusa Avenue to the top of the ridgeline.

The plan assumes that over the next twenty years the vacant lots in the residential areas will be infilled with new single family homes consistent with the density and development patterns (lot setbacks, building heights, lot coverage, etc.) of the surrounding land uses. In addition, it is likely that additional “in-law” units (known in El Cerrito as “accessory units”) will be constructed on existing single-family lots. Accessory units consist of small studios or one-bedroom apartments built within existing single-family houses or in small cottages in rear yard areas. These units often provide residences for family members, but may also be rented to non-family occupants, under El Cerrito’s regulations.

New single-family homes will add to the value of surrounding property by creating newer, larger homes. Family activity patterns in the new homes (auto trips, night and day use, size of families, etc.) will be similar to surrounding families and present no significant conflicts. Infill of vacant lots will help reduce potential vandalism, loitering, and the cleanliness of the area. New homes may also reduce potential for grass fires on vacant lots, improve safety and security of the neighborhoods, and generally improve the quality of life for neighborhoods with new families and children.

Ohlone Greenway Residential Area

The Ohlone Greenway Residential Area currently consists of a mixture of single- and multifamily residential development extending west from Richmond Street in and around the BART tracks to Kearney Street in the central and southern portions of the City. Higher intensity development generally occurs on the blocks closer to the BART tracks and San Pablo Avenue. A preponderance of single-family homes occurs on the blocks to the east from Liberty Street to Richmond Avenue.

This plan assumes that some of the existing older apartment buildings and single-family homes will be redeveloped with higher-density residential uses. In particular, older buildings in poor condition closer to San Pablo Avenue are the most likely candidates for replacement. Older “stucco box” apartment buildings will be replaced with more up-to-date and better quality apartments and condominiums. Higher-density apartments and condominiums will most likely replace some older single-family buildings, currently surrounded by apartments.

New buildings will be designed to meet contemporary development standards (setbacks, open space and yards, building heights, onsite parking spaces, etc.) and are expected to be of higher-quality design than current structures in the area. Building ornamentation and landscaping should be sufficiently detailed as to make the property attractive from the sidewalk as well as the street. Building design should maintain the visual rhythm of the street edge, avoiding abrupt changes in scale and setbacks except where the presence of important public buildings (e.g., churches, civic buildings, new library) would warrant.

A major concern of the residential land use pattern in the Ohlone Greenway Residential Area is high levels of noise due to proximity of the BART tracks and San Pablo Avenue. New construction standards and development requirements are expected to mitigate interior noise levels by incorporating required sound barriers such as double-paned windows, wall insulation, and building orientation. However, noise from BART and traffic on San Pablo Avenue will affect users of yards and patios.

New, higher intensity residential development will be compatible with surrounding residential uses in those blocks west of Liberty Street, where existing multifamily buildings presently exist. Land uses east of Liberty Street are generally single-family homes, and the Plan assumes that the design, style, and type of residential construction of any new development in the area will be similar to established development.

Del Norte BART Station Area

The Del Norte BART station area consists of the commercial areas along San Pablo Avenue adjacent to the El Cerrito Del Norte BART station north of Potrero Avenue and west of Key Boulevard. Currently this area consists of predominantly lower-intensity commercial uses, including “big box” retail establishments, fast-food restaurants, car sales, and two motels. The area contains the new mixed-use Del

Norte Place development, which includes high-density residential units, built above ground-floor retail uses. A number of lots and buildings in the area are currently vacant or underutilized. It is assumed that over the next 20 years, these lots will be developed with a higher-intensity use.

This plan assumes the development of current vacant and underused lots with a mix of residential units and offices with ground-floor commercial uses. It also assumes that new development will consist of mixed-use buildings on lots adjacent to San Pablo Avenue. Lower-density housing (townhouses, maximum three-story walk-ups) may replace a portion of the BART parking lots along Key Boulevard. The plan assumes that the retail uses will provide restaurants and services to both offices and residents, as well as to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Noise impacts to interior spaces from San Pablo and the BART tracks will be mitigated with double-paned windows and appropriate sound insulation. The mixed-use development will provide a more transit oriented development pattern and create a more pedestrian friendly environment. The greater mix of uses will also help support the retail activity in the area. This scenario will help reduce overall auto use and encourage transit use.

El Cerrito Plaza Area

The El Cerrito Plaza area consists of El Cerrito Plaza, El Cerrito Plaza BART property, and the area along both sides of San Pablo Avenue to just north of Central Avenue. The existing land uses include an underused and outdated community shopping center and BART parking lots. The existing shopping center layout and design sets retail stores back from San Pablo Avenue within a large surface parking lot. Some of the existing stores are vacant, the most notable vacancy being the one large department store at the Plaza, the former Emporium building.

This General Plan encourages the development of a more balanced, mixed-use development at the Plaza and the surrounding area. Both retail and office uses will be encouraged in this area, most likely with retail on the ground floor. The plan does not preclude housing uses as part of a mix of uses in this area. This overall approach is compatible with surrounding land uses in the area. A mixed-use development pattern will support use of the BART transit system and reduce reliance on auto trips by local residents. The many different users will contribute to a lively and active street life during weekdays, evenings, and weekends.

San Pablo Avenue Between the Del Norte BART Station Area and El Cerrito Plaza Area

The area between the two BART station areas contains a mix of land uses including housing, office, retail, and more traditional industrial uses (lumberyard and a sheet metal plant). The development pattern is varied and includes auto-oriented “strip development,” several mixed-use office/retail centers, and limited housing. Many of the lots are small with retail stores that lack adequate onsite parking. Some of the

older retail store buildings are in very poor condition or vacant. Much of the area on the west side of San Pablo Avenue is within the Richmond city limits.

This plan assumes a mix of retail, office, and housing uses along San Pablo Avenue. This mix will include new retail, housing, and mixed-use developments (housing with ground-floor retail uses). The commercial development pattern will accommodate a range of retail types and services, including additional “big-box” uses (to the extent adequate sites can be assembled) as well as community and neighborhood uses.

Opportunities also exist for creating a more intense mixed-use development pattern at the major cross-streets (Fairmount Avenue, Stockton Avenue, Moeser Lane, and Manila Avenue). In particular, the “Midtown” area, extending from south of Moeser Lane to north of Manila Avenue, provides a significant re-use opportunity as obsolete buildings are vacated and either rehabilitated or replaced. The range and variety of activity will create the most variation in activity during the day, night, and weekends. Auto traffic and pedestrian movements will be more balanced throughout the day and week. Noise levels from the street will be mitigated with construction and design techniques.

Residential Areas West of San Pablo Avenue

This plan assumes that the two residential neighborhoods west of San Pablo Avenue will have no major land use changes. West El Cerrito (the neighborhood west of Highway 80) will be maintained as a predominantly single-family residential neighborhood. A few individual single-family homes may be constructed on vacant lots in the area. All new homes will be compatible with the neighborhood.

In the area near Central Avenue, this plan will allow for a small increase in residential units over time as older single-family houses are replaced by new multifamily structures (duplex, three- and four-unit apartments, condos, and townhouses). All new development will conform to local development standards and design and development review requirements. In most cases, the plan assumes that new construction will be better designed, providing for more amenities than the structures being replaced.

C. Land Use Categories

The general type and location of land uses in the City of El Cerrito for the next 20 years are shown in Figure 5, Land Use and Circulation. Definitions for each land use type or category are provided below. The allowable densities and intensities of development for all land use categories are described in the final section before the Goals and Policies. The Land Use and Circulation map will be amended in the event that the City makes changes to the designations of any land areas, or the routes or classifications of circulation facilities.

Residential

Residential land uses are areas suitable for dwellings. Residential land uses are divided into five subcategories based on dwelling unit density expressed as the number of allowable residential units on each “net” acre of land (“net acres” is the total site area less the area devoted to public streets). Planned Unit Development (PUD) communities, which allow for clustering of both detached and attached homes, can be incorporated into all residential categories if the overall development design is compatible with adjoining residential areas and the overall goals and objectives of the General Plan are accomplished. All residential areas allow for private uses such as parks, playgrounds, churches, day-care centers (both for children and the elderly), open spaces and home occupations, with appropriate zoning permits. The addition of accessory units on single-family lots is allowed in single-family zones.

Very Low Density (Up to 6 dwelling units/net acre)

The Very Low Density category of residential land uses is intended for single-family, residential units on large lots. Typically the Very Low Density category is to protect sensitive hillside areas from extensive development and to protect against hazards related to earthquakes, unstable terrain, and wild fires. In addition, Very Low Density land uses are also intended to protect sensitive environmental areas and features, and provide sites for larger, distinctive residences.

Low Density (7 to 9 dwelling units/net acre)

The Low Density category of residential land uses is intended to promote and protect single-family neighborhoods.

Medium Density (10 to 20 dwelling units/net acre)

The Medium Density category of residential land use accommodates more intensive forms of residential development while still remaining compatible with surrounding land uses. This category is intended to provide greater housing choice in the City for different family sizes and incomes. Medium density residential uses are intended to be located closer to community and retail services, such as neighborhood shopping centers, parks and open spaces areas, and near minor and major collector streets where greater access can be provided. This land use category includes a number of housing development types including duplexes, townhouse projects, apartments, and small-lot, single-family residential designs.

High Density (21 to 35 dwelling units/net acre)

The High Density residential land use category is intended to provide opportunities for multiple-family residential development in a well-designed environment. The range is intended to be located in areas where higher traffic volumes and buildings can be accommodated. These developments should be located outside of single-family residential communities, where services and transportation systems are adequate to serve the increased densities.

Mixed-Use Commercial

The Mixed-Use Commercial designation is intended primarily for all types of commercial uses and secondarily for residential uses or a combination of the two. The designation is intended to encourage ground floor, pedestrian friendly, retail sales and service uses with upper floors of office and residential uses. The Mixed-Use Commercial category applies to commercial activity ranging from neighborhood convenience stores to community shopping centers and regionally oriented specialty stores.

In addition to retail stores, the Mixed-Use Commercial designation is also intended to allow for residential and office uses, including administrative, professional, medical and dental offices, and “high-tech” research and development uses and laboratories. The Mixed-Use Commercial designation also allows for limited, small-scale specialty manufacturing uses, such as arts and crafts, woodworking, and assembly processes, when located on sites compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.

Parks and Open Space*

This designation is applied to public and privately owned lands used for low-intensity, open space activities, such as hiking, walking, or picnicking; environmentally sensitive lands and habitats; creeks; and City parks and recreation facilities.

Institutional and Utilities

This designation is applied to public and privately owned lands used for activities such as private utilities (electrical, gas, water, and telecommunications), schools (both private and public), and other city, county, state or federal facilities. A major intent of this land use designation is to preserve and protect limited valuable resources, facilities and sites for possible future public use and to allow for careful consideration by the City Council of changes in land use when private institutional uses are no longer viable.

Development Densities and Intensities

The density and intensity ranges for the above land use categories are as shown on Table 4-2. Residential and mixed-use projects shall comply with both the floor-area ratio (FAR) requirements and the density requirements, except that the FAR for

* In 1997, the City sold a site of approximately 2.76 acres between Moeser Lane and the PG & E transmission lines, near Seaview Avenue. The site was designated open space at the time of the sale. The buyer has stated an intention to subdivide the property for single-family lots. It is proposed through this General Plan to retain the open space designation of this property in contemplation of the property owner’s application for a General Plan amendment as part of the owner’s application package for subdivision approval. In this manner, the General Plan amendment for the property can be processed as part of development review for the subdivision thereby allowing for a clearer focus regarding development of this property.

projects built pursuant to state-mandated density bonuses may be increased beyond the city's allowable limits if necessary to accommodate the increased density.

State laws and guidelines for General Plans require that maximum building intensities be stated in the Land Use element. The adoption of a FAR – the total floor space of a building divided by the area of its site – is a common and acceptable way of meeting the requirement to define a maximum intensity. The FAR provides an outside measurement of how much building may be developed on a site; it does not provide any specifications about how tall a building is or otherwise how it is shaped or how it looks. Thus, the FAR does little to define the character of a building or the quality of buildings within a neighborhood.

Those tasks are left to other mechanisms that are more precise than the General Plan. To better regulate the quality and character of single buildings and groups of buildings, cities may specify various restrictions on height, bulk, coverage and setbacks of buildings, usually through the zoning ordinance. Another means of defining character is through adoption of a “form code” which may contain more definitive formulas of how buildings are shaped and how they relate to each other and to streets and open spaces. More qualitative standards addressing architectural style, materials, and other details are frequently set through a set of adopted design guidelines.

State-mandated density bonuses and city incentives may be used for the same project, but in no case should any combination of city incentives and state-mandated density bonuses result in a density in excess of the maximum allowed under either program as shown in Table 4-2.

For purposes of interpreting Table 4-2, the following definitions apply:

- Density is the number of permanent residential dwelling units per total net acre of land in the development site.
- Floor area ratio (FAR) is the gross floor area, excluding the area devoted exclusively to parking, divided by the total net area of the development site.
- Incentives include density bonuses, FAR bonuses, and other benefits that the City may grant in return for special benefits provided by the development project to the City; density and FAR bonuses may only be given pursuant to the criteria contained in the City's zoning or other land use regulations.

In order to convert density expressed in units per acre to density expressed in persons per acre, multiply by 2.32, the 1998 estimate by the California Department of Finance for the average number of persons per household in El Cerrito.

Table 4-2: Density and Intensity Ranges

	Density (du/acre)			Intensity (FAR)	
	Normal Range	With City Incentives	With State-Mandated Density Bonuses	Normal Range	With City Incentives
Residential					
Very Low Density	Up to 6	NA	Up to 7.5	NA	NA
Low Density	7-10	NA	7-12.5	NA	NA
Medium Density	11-20	11-25	11-25	NA	NA
High Density	21-35	21-45*	21-45	NA	NA
Mixed-Use Commercial					
General	Up to 35	Up to 45*	Up to 45	Up to 2.0	Up to 3.0
Neighborhood Commercial	Up to 20	Up to 25	Up to 25	Up to 1.0	NA
Parks and Open Space	NA	NA	NA	Up to 0.1	Up to 0.5
Institutional and Utilities	NA	NA	NA	Up to 1.0	Up to 2.0

* Within the High Density Residential and Mixed-Use Commercial land use categories, up to 70 dwelling units per acre may be allowed through a city density-bonus incentive program for housing for elderly and handicapped persons where there is a commitment to provide services such as congregate care, onsite counseling, or medical services for residents.

The City has an incentives program in place (Zoning Ordinance Chapter 19.32, adopted 1977, amended 1997). Under the program, development incentives may be granted for a project where the incentives will promote closer adherence to City objectives. Incentives may include increased density reduced parking, greater building height, or other deviations from regular zoning standards. In exchange for such incentives, the City will require desirable features, such as exceptional design, creative design of off-street parking, enhancements to public amenities, environmental benefits such as creek restoration, and similar benefits to the community. The program most frequently has been used for minor density increases in projects ranging from 5 to 20 dwelling unites, never exceeding 40 units per acre. The program has allowed more substantial density increases for projects for the elderly and disabled, up to 76 units per acre. Some of those projects have also been granted increased height, reduced parking, and reduced setbacks. Appendix G is a tabulation of the results of applying the Incentives Program from 1983 through 1997.

D. Goals and Policies

The Implementation Measures associated with each policy are described at the end of this chapter.

Goal LU1: A high-quality residential character within El Cerrito.

Policies	Implementation Measures
<p>LU1.1 Predominate Single-Family Use. Ensure that the existing single-family neighborhoods remain in predominately single-family use, but including accessory units, by prohibiting incompatible uses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • General Plan Consistency Review
<p>LU1.2 Multifamily Neighborhoods. Ensure that new development in multifamily neighborhoods supports, rather than detracts from the existing residential character of the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Development Review • Design Guidelines • CEQA Review
<p>LU1.3 Quality of Development. Ensure that all multifamily or mixed-use development in residential areas addresses compatibility and quality of life issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Development Review • Design Guidelines (except existing single-family) • CEQA Review • General Plan Consistency Review
<p>LU1.4 Intrusions into Residential Areas. Eliminate, to the greatest extent possible, intrusions into residential areas from nonresidential areas, such as noise and commercial traffic and parking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • CEQA Review
<p>LU1.5 Suitable Housing. Promote suitably located housing and services for all age groups within the city.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Housing Program • Redevelopment Program

- LU1.6 Variety of Housing Types.** Encourage diverse housing types, such as live-work units, studio spaces, townhouses, co-housing, congregate care, and garden apartments.

 - Development Regulations (zoning)
 - Development Review
 - Redevelopment Program
 - Design Guidelines
 - Housing Program
 - Incentives Program

- LU1.7 Maximum Density.** Maintain the maximum multifamily density at 35 dwelling units per acre, except as otherwise provided in this Plan.

 - Development Regulations (zoning)

- LU1.8 Neighborhood Maintenance.** Maintain the appearance of existing residential areas by discouraging paving of front yards and parkway strips, excessively wide curb cuts and driveways, and inappropriate fence materials in front yards.

 - Development Regulations (zoning)

Goal LU2: A land use pattern and mix of uses that contribute to the financial health and stability of the community.

Policies	Implementation Measures
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| <p>LU2.1 San Pablo Avenue. Promote retail, office, and mixed uses along San Pablo Avenue to provide more tax revenues to the city.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy • Design Guidelines |
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LU2.2	Commercial Diversification. Maintain a diversity of commercial land uses to ensure stability during economic cycles and enrich the lives of residents. The maintenance of diversity includes encouragement of small businesses, both in terms of creation of new firms and retention of existing ones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy
LU2.3	Local Employment Opportunities. Promote economic development that offers local employment opportunities for El Cerrito residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy
LU2.4	Fiscal Impacts. Evaluate the fiscal impact of projects as part of the development review process to assure that new development does not reduce standards or unduly increase the burden on existing residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Review • Public Facilities Fee • Traffic Impact Fee • Impact Fees • Fiscal Impact Assessment
LU2.5	Maximum FARS. Allow a maximum floor-area-ratio of 2.0 in all commercial areas except the neighborhood commercial centers where the maximum is 1.0 and except as otherwise provided in this Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning)

Goal LU3: A development pattern that enhances a strong sense of community.

Policies **Implementation Measures**

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| <p>LU3.1 Commercial/Residential Interaction.
Encourage easy access to local businesses as focal points for neighborhood social interaction.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Design Guidelines • Development Review |
| <p>LU3.2 Midtown Center. Promote the organization of properties along San Pablo Avenue from south of Moeser Lane to north of Manila Avenue into a “Midtown Center” which may include a civic center.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Specific Plans • Capital Improvements Program • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy |

Goal LU4: A safe, attractive, and interesting community

Policies **Implementation Measures**

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| <p>LU4.1 Mixture of Uses. Encourage a mix of uses that promotes such community values as convenience, economic vitality, fiscal stability, public safety, a healthy environment, and a pleasant quality of life.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy |
| <p>LU4.2 Availability of Goods and Services. Provide for economic development that assures the availability and diversity of resident-serving goods and services.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy |

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| LU4.3 | Street Frontages. Encourage attractive and accessible street frontages that contribute to the retail vitality of all commercial or mixed-use centers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Design Guidelines • Development Review |
| LU4.4 | Amenities. Ensure that new development provides a high level of amenity for users of the development, and, wherever possible, includes community-serving facilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Design Guidelines • Development Review • Redevelopment Program • Development Incentives |
| LU4.5 | Quality of Development. Ensure that all development in nonresidential areas addresses compatibility and quality of life issues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Design Guidelines • Development Review • General Plan Consistency Review |
| LU4.6 | Crime Prevention. Encourage the use of planning and design features that promote crime prevention to make the city safer and relieve the burden on law enforcement services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Design Guidelines • Development Review |

Goal LU5: A land use pattern and types of development that support alternatives for the movement of people, goods, and ideas.

Policies	Implementation Measures
<p>LU5.1 BART Station Areas. Encourage higher densities and a mix of uses near the city’s two BART stations to take advantage of the transit opportunities they provide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Specific Plan • Redevelopment Program
<p>LU5.2 Mixed-Use Centers. Encourage mixed-use centers along San Pablo Avenue – including development along Fairmount Avenue, Stockton Avenue and Moeser Lane, between San Pablo Avenue and the Ohlone Greenway – that provide the opportunity for people to walk among businesses, employment, and residences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Specific Plan • Redevelopment Program • Economic Development Strategy
<p>LU5.3 Mixed-Use Projects. Encourage mixed uses, especially offices or housing over ground-floor retail uses, where commercial uses are allowed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Design Guidelines
<p>LU5.4 Neighborhood Commercial Centers. Support the maintenance and revitalization of small commercial centers within residential neighborhoods, recognizing that they serve as valuable community amenities. Where feasible, intensification or limited expansion of the three established locations, as displayed on the Land Use Map, may be permitted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Economic Development Strategy
<p>LU5.5 Pedestrians, Bicycles, and Access. Ensure that business areas have adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities and accessibility for persons with disabilities, and that easy connections to transit are available wherever possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Development Review • Capital Improvements Program • Design Guidelines

- LU5.6 Development Along the Ohlone Greenway.** New or substantially altered development abutting the Ohlone Greenway will be evaluated with respect to how the development enhances the aesthetics and ambiance of this important linear recreational and transportation facility, and how the development contributes to the security of users of the Greenway. The City will expect frontage along the Greenway to be treated as if it were public street frontage, with commensurate attention to design quality.
- Development Regulations (zoning)
 - Development Review
 - Design Guidelines

Goal LU6: Development patterns that promote energy efficiency, conservation of natural resources, and use of renewable rather than nonrenewable resources.

Policies	Implementation Measures
<p>LU6.1 Natural Features. Preserve or restore the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation on and near development sites and open-up buried creeks where opportunities can be found, unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot be done.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Development Review • CEQA Review
<p>LU6.2 Circulation Alternatives. To the extent possible, encourage alternatives to the use of private automobiles. Encourage a full range of transportation options – driving, transit, walking and biking – without allowing any one to preclude the others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Regulations (zoning) • Specific Plans • Redevelopment Program
<p>LU6.3 Environmental Businesses. Encourage businesses that deal in environmentally sound products and services to set an example for residents and other communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development Strategy • Redevelopment Program

LU6.4 Water Conservation. Require water conserving landscape design and fixture types in all new development. This policy is not intended to encourage the substitution of paved surfaces and other hardscape for plant materials.

- Development Regulations (zoning)
- Development Review

COMMUNITY DESIGN

Community design is the process of giving physical design direction to urban growth, conservation, and change. It is understood to include directions for site organization and planning, landscape design, as well as building design, including rehabilitation, preservation, and new construction.

The physical form and appearance, which are related to land use and transportation, establishes the character and image of the city, and influences the quality of life of residents and visitors. Land use policies establish the overall type and location of activities, while the community design goals and policies establish the “quality” of those places.

The process of making an urban design concept politically viable or economically feasible is a “piece-meal” decision-making process that goes on continuously, day after day, site by site. To shape the physical form and direction of the city, decision-makers need both a strong vision of what ought to happen and the opportunities to influence critical decisions.

Making physical improvements in the city is a process intimately connected to the social and economic conditions of the community. The design of cities is often unintentional, but it is not accidental. It is the product of decisions made for single, separate purposes, with interrelationships and side effects that have not been fully considered. The design of our cities has been determined by engineers, surveyors, lawyers, and investors, each making individual, rational decisions for rational reasons, but leaving the overall design of the city to take care of itself later, if at all.

This section identifies development patterns, community assets, challenges, and opportunities for change and improvement in the City’s physical form and appearance. Taken together, these elements influence El Cerrito’s visual image and character, and create a “sense of place.”

The “sense of place,” which can be designed, affects how one perceives and experiences the environment around us. A major goal of the community is to strengthen and protect those special qualities that make El Cerrito a great place to live while enhancing the character of the City through improving the quality of design and amenities. These special qualities include making El Cerrito a pedestrian friendly place with attractive streets, buildings, and public places.

A. Setting

El Cerrito lies between the dramatic shoreline of the San Francisco Bay and the green backdrop of the East Bay hillsides. The rising topography of the hills forms a strong north-south edge to the City on the east, while the I-80 freeway creates a formidable north-south barrier on the west.

To those who know it, El Cerrito is a community of graceful neighborhoods, rich with vistas and open spaces, and a number of distinct landmarks, physical features, and activity areas. To many “outsiders,” however, El Cerrito’s identity is primarily shaped by the views from the I-80 corridor and the suburban auto-oriented commercial strip along San Pablo Avenue. The freeway with its raised structure, berms and sound walls creates a visual, physical, and psychological barrier on the western edge of the City.

The tree-lined neighborhoods of Kensington and Albany bound the city on the south. The hillside housing of the City of Richmond and the unincorporated area of East Richmond Heights bound the City on the north. Just west along much of San Pablo Avenue is a section of Richmond called the Richmond Annex. Although within a different city, this residential neighborhood has a strong visual connection with El Cerrito.

Development Patterns

El Cerrito’s urban development pattern can be divided into a series of distinct north-south bands or “layers” from the Bay lowlands on the west to Wildcat Canyon ridge tops to the east. These layers are differentiated by major physical elements, including the type and pattern of streets, primary activities, land uses and structures, and changing topography.

The San Francisco Bay

While physically separated from the Bay’s shoreline by industrial and residential areas in Richmond, the San Francisco Bay forms our perception of El Cerrito’s edge and is a strong orientation feature in the region.

The I-80 Corridor

With extensive sound walls, berms, freeway structures and constant noise and vehicular movement, the freeway provides an inhospitable environment for the pedestrian and limits direct connections to the Bay. The I-80 corridor, with its sound walls and berms, increases the City’s isolation and auto-oriented character. The few connections under the freeway (Central, Potrero, and Cutting) offer limited visual relief and a generally foreboding environment.

The San Pablo Avenue Commercial Corridor

A wide, auto-oriented suburban boulevard and an irregular pattern of strip commercial development characterize the San Pablo Avenue commercial corridor.

The Historical Grid Neighborhoods

The residential areas east of San Pablo Avenue and the BART tracks consist of a traditional street grid, relatively small lots and a mix of housing types, ages, and designs. The higher density areas just east of San Pablo Avenue offer a transition from commercial to residential use. Some existing moderate density housing has been designed to integrate into the neighborhood fabric, while other box-like structures create a negative image. Lower density neighborhoods further east have

generally quiet streets and a variety of housing designs. Several streets function as a north-south bypass to San Pablo Avenue (such as Richmond Street).

BART Tracks

The elevated BART tracks, with the Ohlone Greenway below, run north-south through the City of El Cerrito and accentuate the linear development pattern and form of the community. Higher intensity housing and commercial areas generally lie west of the BART tracks along the San Pablo Avenue Corridor. Lower intensity residential neighborhoods lie east of the BART tracks.

“Hidden” El Cerrito

Perhaps less well known are the residential areas west of San Pablo and Carlson, “hidden” El Cerrito. The Carlson residential area located at the base of Albany Hill shares the traditional grid street pattern and has a mix of housing types. With imposing views of Albany Hill, it is also bounded by an open and accessible part of Cerrito Creek. A second “hidden” area, West El Cerrito, is located just west of I-80, off Potrero. This area is physically separated from the rest of the City by I-80 but shares many of the positive qualities of the other traditional residential areas.

The Hillside Residential Districts

Further east, as development moves into the hillsides, curvilinear streets follow the hillside contours, the housing is generally larger and newer, informal trees and landscaping mask the houses, and urban sidewalks give way to street edges with curbs and gutters only. The diversity of these hillside areas is striking. Some are heavily landscaped, while other areas offer sweeping vistas of the Bay and beyond. Housing densities, ages, and styles vary. Steep open hillsides separate many of the lower hillside homes from upper areas. In most cases, the Bay view is the most prominent visual feature from the homes and streets. However, the views toward these hillsides from other parts of the City and the freeway are as visually important as the outward views.

The Ridgelines

The final layer encompasses the East Bay hills and the open spaces and ridgelines of Wildcat Canyon Park. In some places, view homes back onto these open spaces. In other locations, the ridges extend into the open spaces of the Mira Vista golf course. These open spaces and ridgelines form a continuous and dramatic green edge to the City.

B. Community Design Elements

Community design is the process of organizing and shaping physical form in the landscape. This section outlines the major physical elements in the City of El Cerrito that contribute to making a more attractive place to live.

Gateways and Entry Features

Because it is bounded by urban development on the north, south, and west, there are few visual clues that one is entering El Cerrito. However, there are opportunities to create a more distinct identity and improve legibility and direction for residents and visitors. The BART stations lack signage, graphics, landscaping, and other symbols of entry. Orientation signage, kiosks, maps, art and distinctive landscaping and pedestrian features could help inform visitors approaching on BART and create a “sense of arrival” to the City.

Along the Ohlone Greenway, bicyclists and pedestrians have pleasant views of adjoining parks and open spaces, and are generally served by adequate signage for cross-streets and entry into the City. There are several areas where the views from the road into the greenway, with its variety of landscape features (such as a restored creek corridor), creates an inviting image. These areas merit protection and further enhancement. The Ohlone Greenway lighting program, recently completed, has been very effective, and additional lighting along the Greenway should be completed in the future. Signage may need improvement to make drivers and pedestrians more aware of the greenway.

For the driver entering El Cerrito there are few distinctive entries. The character of buildings, signage, landscaping, and land uses are relatively undifferentiated from one developed area to the next. Arriving from the north or south along San Pablo Avenue, there is a continuous uneven commercial strip development pattern with minimal signage and few landmarks. At El Cerrito Plaza, a driver views only a conventional City limits sign obscured by poles and retaining walls.

Similarly, residential neighborhoods are undifferentiated with surrounding communities. Many neighborhoods increasingly lack street trees as one moves north from North Berkeley and Kensington into El Cerrito.

The freeway interchanges also have no distinctive features that help identify entry. Opportunities for signage, landscaping, lighting, sculpture, and art, can enhance the “sense of arrival” and help create a distinctive and identifiable entrance for the auto users.

From the Arlington, an interesting brick gateway remains between Terrace and Arbor. This feature creates a distinctive tone and quality for the area. Other “gateways” of unique design could be used to distinguish and announce neighborhoods and commercial hubs throughout the City. Residential streets with a substantial tree canopy offer visual relief and interest along streets. Even a relatively discontinuous tree pattern can create visual gateways. Other street features can be used to identify commercial and residential areas such as traffic circles (e.g., Kensington Circle and Marin Circle) or extended sidewalks and planting beds.

The San Pablo Avenue Commercial Corridor

San Pablo Avenue is a continuous suburban, strip-commercial street. Typical of an older state highway, the strip has a variety of low-scale commercial malls, surface parking, and older one- and two-story commercial and residential buildings in a variety of sizes, characters, ages, and styles. These conditions will require a cooperative effort with the City of Richmond to create an attractive and unified visual character.

The streetscape changes throughout its length, with a mix of landscaped median designs and sidewalk character. The west side of San Pablo Avenue from approximately Bay View Avenue on the north to San Jose Avenue on the south is outside the City limits. Sidewalks are in various states of disrepair. There are few benches or other pedestrian amenities, and maintenance is generally lacking. Landmarks, distinctive architecture, crosswalks, and unique commercial and public activity areas are lacking. San Pablo Avenue could benefit from a conscious strategy to create distinct nodes of higher density and activity with public space and pedestrian amenities.

With the mixed-use Del Norte Place near one end of San Pablo Avenue and opportunities for El Cerrito Plaza redesign at the other end, El Cerrito's segment of the avenue has the unique potential for two lively and definable places adjacent to BART.

Activity Centers

Activity centers are where people gather to meet, recreate, shop, or do business. Centers can be formed at major grocery stores, neighborhood retail hubs, transit stops, and civic or community locations. Successful activity nodes work better when a variety of uses cluster in and around a common location, create day and night activity, and provide a public space for meeting people. The most successful centers have a variety of places to eat, shop, play, and work—a place to see and be seen. El Cerrito has several existing centers of activity, but many need improvement to meet their potential.

Retail Centers

Several neighborhood retail centers are located along San Pablo Avenue. Generally anchored by a grocery store and a drugstore, these retail activity centers can also include banks, restaurants, and neighborhood-serving convenience retail stores. The existing centers are located at approximately half-mile intervals along San Pablo Avenue and provide retail access to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Although not pedestrian friendly environments from surrounding residential neighborhoods, they do provide for everyday necessities. These centers generally lack the visual character and distinction of more active and vital town centers. They are low-scale, single-use, and auto-oriented retail centers with large parking lots fronting the street, few pedestrian amenities, suburban-style architecture, and no public gathering space.

Just west of the City limits in the City of Richmond, the new Ranch 99 Market has created a regional serving, specialty retail center. Just north of the city limits, on San Pablo Avenue in the City of Richmond, is another major retail center. This center provides local shopping and retail stores to El Cerrito residents living in the northern portion of the City.

El Cerrito's centers could be enhanced with the addition of a small plazas and public meeting places, cafés and coffee shops, and the addition of pedestrian amenities, improved building facades, landscaping, and safe connections to surrounding residential areas.

Del Norte Area

The northern area, Del Norte, is more regional serving in character, providing a "big box" shopping destination around and north of the corner of Cutting and San Pablo Avenue. The Del Norte area is an area in transition. Some of the older retail stores are now vacant. Due to the direct freeway access, new "big box" retail uses are replacing older strip commercial uses along this portion of San Pablo Avenue. The proximity to the Del Norte BART station, however, provides a unique opportunity for higher intensity, transit-oriented development.

El Cerrito Plaza

Some uses and stores in the El Cerrito Plaza are currently being remodeled. The current visual and design problems are evident: a sea of surface parking; blank building facades far from the street and sidewalk, no landscaping or pedestrian amenities, inhospitable buildings, single use with limited marketability, poor entries and signage, and an unattractive retaining wall. The importance of this site lies not only in its location at the door to El Cerrito, the commercial district, and BART, but also in its proximity to Cerrito Creek and its future development potential.

BART Transit Centers

The Ohlone Greenway provides a unique foreground to the BART stations. However, other design elements are lacking around the BART stations. The stations could be enhanced with new signage, landscaped parking, safe pedestrian ways to surrounding neighborhoods, and distinctive landmarks. BART patrons should be able to see inviting architecture and land uses as they exit BART.

Neighborhood Convenience Centers

El Cerrito has two interesting and attractive neighborhood serving, retail centers including the Fairmount Center at Colusa and the neighborhood retail cluster on Stockton. Another small neighborhood center at the Colusa Circle lies just south of the City limits. These areas offer attractive retail nodes to the east of San Pablo Avenue.

Midtown City Center

Some portions of San Pablo Avenue offer opportunities to create additional centers both large and small. The civic uses at San Pablo Avenue and Manila provide an opportunity to create a major Midtown City Center. Presently this is a single-use destination. Adding mixed-use retail activity, residential and office uses, and a public place for meeting and gatherings would enhance the site considerably.

Parks, Open Spaces, and Environmental Resources

Parks, open spaces, and environmental habitat areas are valuable resources for the community, both for active recreational use and passive visual enjoyment. The open space areas include existing schools and park spaces, as well as a portion of the steep El Cerrito hillsides. The existing Mira Vista Golf and Country Club and the Sunset View Cemetery add valuable open space to the city character and form. Several of the major hillside features add to the quality of these open spaces, including the Albany Hill just south of the city, the Canyon Trail Park, Poinsett Park, and Tassajara Park.

Creeks and drainages could make up a more significant part of the City's visual and recreational environment. The few locations where creeks are open provide opportunities for viewing points, critical habitats, and walkways. Portions of Cerrito Creek may have potential to be "daylighted" and used for recreational purposes.

Views and Vistas

Views from the upper hillside areas of El Cerrito are spectacular, offering grand vistas of bridges, the San Francisco and San Pablo bays, Mt. Tamalpais and Marin County, the Golden Gate and, on a clear day, the Pacific Ocean beyond. The hillsides offer dramatic night views of San Francisco and other Bay cities. While many of the dramatic views are from private residences, the hillside streets, such as Moeser, Potrero, Cutting, and Barrett, provide public views along the streets.

Views from Moeser Lane are most impressive. The wide-open street, the steep elevation changes, and the low landscaping help create the wide-open vistas. Overhead power lines, however, detract from the view throughout the length of the street.

Many significant views in El Cerrito are those looking back at the East Bay hills from the city below. Views to Albany Hill also add to the unique quality of the community, particularly in the southeast portions of the city, such as along Fairmount and Rockway Streets.

Special Features, Landmarks and Sacred Places

Landmarks and "sacred places" also shape our image of the city. Landmarks are typically special buildings, towers, spires, or natural features such as trees, rock outcroppings and hillsides. Landmarks help us to locate ourselves in space, mark special destinations, differentiate one location from another, and create a distinct image.

El Cerrito has several distinguishing landmarks. Some of the most dramatic are natural features, such as a large rock outcropping at the top of Cutting Boulevard. Other landmarks are the churches and schools in the residential areas, such as the distinctive Chinese architecture of Windrush School on Cutting and Elm Street, and the Sunset View Cemetery Chapel at the end of Fairmount Avenue.

Sacred places are significant activity places in a community—places where people meet for either formal or informal events. Sacred places are created by tradition and use and not necessarily by distinctive architecture. Sacred places help to create a “sense of community” and history. Sacred places provide memorable experiences of our communities that give meaning and significance to our everyday lives.

El Cerrito has a number of interesting sacred places. Some are natural, such as Cerrito Creek, and others are created through traditional use, such as the Pastime Hardware Store on San Pablo Avenue, schools, City Hall, the library and the Community Center. Many informal, local meeting and eating places are also considered sacred places, such as Fat Apples restaurant on Fairmount Avenue.

Opportunities exist for creating new landmarks in the community, while enhancing and protecting existing landmarks and sacred places. Landmarks can be encouraged at the major activity centers in the community and along San Pablo Avenue. Landmarks can also be used to help identify the major commercial centers and the BART stations. New civic buildings, such as a new city hall can provide opportunities to create significant landmarks through dramatic architectural design, use of clock or bell towers, and a central public plaza.

C. Trends

This section outlines a number of design trends as major organizational concepts and design principles for shaping the future of El Cerrito. These concepts build on the existing land use and development patterns in the City of El Cerrito, listed above, and help set the policy direction for future design and development improvements, both in the private and public sector.

A City of Homes

El Cerrito will continue to be a “City of Homes.” The predominant land use pattern in the city consists of single-family residences extending into the East Bay Hills. Residents of the upper hillside homes have commanding views of the scenic San Francisco Bay. Smaller, well-kept homes form quiet residential neighborhoods in the areas closer to San Pablo Avenue. Residential densities increase in scale and intensity as one approaches San Pablo Avenue and the BART tracks. Housing types and design reflect the character, scale, and height of adjoining single-family residents.

This major land use and organizational pattern will not change in the foreseeable future. Thus a major goal of the plan is to protect and preserve the character of these residential neighborhoods. Improvements to the residential areas include undergrounding utilities over time, planting street trees, and improving sidewalks, streets and recreational amenities.

Three Major Activity Centers

The San Pablo Avenue corridor provides virtually all the development opportunities for new office work places and shopping. Recent development trends reflect that retail development forms are shifting from suburban strip commercial and community malls to more pedestrian friendly, transit oriented villages. El Cerrito's unique location provides an opportunity to take advantage of these changing marketing trends.

El Cerrito has the potential to create three major centers—the El Cerrito Plaza Area, the Del Norte Area, and a Midtown Area. These three major activity centers are envisioned as pedestrian friendly, mixed-use villages, with ground floor retail uses and upper floors of office and residential uses. Both El Cerrito Plaza and Del Norte Center take advantage of their regional location next to the BART stations.

These three major centers are connected along San Pablo Avenue, BART and the Ohlone Greenway with additional office, retail, and housing uses in between. Each center has its own unique character and function. The Plaza provides an opportunity for larger, high-end retail users providing goods and services both locally and more regionally. Del Norte provides an opportunity for a new regional work place with new office space for smaller, entrepreneurial enterprises, live-work studios, R&D office space, and for traditional insurance and banking services. The Midtown Center provides an opportunity to cluster development around new civic functions.

Neighborhood Retail Centers

Another design concept is to continue to provide local neighborhood retail opportunities in smaller neighborhood retail centers away from San Pablo Avenue. These small, unique shopping areas are clustered at the end of Fairmount Avenue and on Stockton Street.

A Pedestrian Friendly Place

Future improvements in the City of El Cerrito are linked by a system of pedestrian friendly streets, pathways, and open spaces. The pedestrian friendly concept is to create an environment that places an emphasis on the pedestrian, bicyclist, and public transit systems, slowing auto traffic and providing an attractive setting. Pedestrian friendly places are intended to improve the “quality of life” for residents by making safer, more attractive, and walkable places throughout the city.