New El Cerrito City Hall and Plaza Nears Completion

It has been 20 years since the City’s Administrative Offices have been in a permanent building, but that will change this spring, as the new City Hall building is completed.

In early 2006, the City Council approved construction of a new City Hall building and public plaza, together called “Civic Center Plaza.” The Civic Center Plaza is currently under construction at the site of the original City Hall, which was torn down in 1987 and replaced with temporary trailers because of seismic concerns and a termite infestation.

The Civic Center Plaza is the culmination of five years of planning to build a new facility that would create a more efficient, customer-friendly space for residents and businesses, as well as have a community presence that represents El Cerrito.

The departments included in City Hall are Community Development (Building, Planning, and Economic Development/ Redevelopment), Public Works/Engineering, Finance, and Administration. The City Hall building will feature a lobby with ample space for the public, intended to enable staff and elected officials to serve you better. Customers will be served at one central counter, eliminating the current need to go from department to department. The main lobby features large glass windows, representing an open and transparent government. The City Council Chambers will move from its current home at the Community Center into the new building. There will also be a gallery on the second floor to display local artwork. Thanks to a generous donation, the City Hall also includes a special room that will recognize and honor El Cerrito’s history.

The outdoor plaza area provides open space for the public to enjoy, and connects City Hall with the Public Safety building (located across the street along Manila Avenue). The plaza also includes design elements that represent El Cerrito’s heritage, such as native plants, stone, and a water feature resembling a creek.

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BUCKLE UP PROPERLY!

Child Safety Seat Checks Offered

Did you know you can have your child’s installed safety seat examined by a trained child safety seat technician? Parents who have installation problems, or are unsure if their child safety seat is properly installed, can contact the El Cerrito Fire Department or the El Cerrito Police Department for a free inspection. This program is supported by three Fire Department personnel and one traffic officer from the Police Department. Properly installed child safety seats are critical to the survival of infants and toddlers in car crashes.

You can have your children’s car seats checked by appointment through Linda.
UPCOMING EVENTS!

Saturday, March 22
ANNUAL EGG HUNT
Children will enjoy this traditional egg hunt with candy and eggs. Plan to come early, so you won’t miss the start. Rain or shine.
When: Saturday, March 22
   10 a.m. sharp
Where: Arlington Park,
       1120 Arlington Blvd.

Friday, Saturday, & Sunday
April 25–27
ANNUAL ART SHOW
The El Cerrito Art Association is proud to present its 32nd Annual Art Show the weekend of Friday, April 25, through Sunday, April 27.
When: Friday through Sunday,
      April 25–27
      Check website for times
Where: El Cerrito Community Center,
       7007 Moeser Lane
For more information, contact Shielaugh Divelbiss, Jr. at 685-4747.

Saturday, April 26
EARTH DAY 2008
Save the date for this fun annual Earth Day Celebration! Last year, more than 200 El Cerrito residents turned out in force, working at 25 sites throughout the City, to make our community a cleaner, more beautiful, and better place to live. For more details, call 215-4351.
When: Saturday, April 26
       Work parties begin, 9 a.m.
       Lunch for volunteers, 12 noon
Where: Sites throughout the City

Sunday, May 4
BRINGING BACK THE NATIVES GARDEN TOUR
The City of El Cerrito is proud to sponsor the fourth annual “Bringing Back the Natives” Garden Tour, which showcases water-conserving, pesticide-free gardens. Information and registration (for both the free and guided tours) is available at www.bringingbackthenatives.net. For more information e-mail Kathy@KathyKramerConsulting.net or call 236-9558.
When: Sunday, May 4, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Where: Various gardens and nurseries in the East Bay.
A guidebook including maps will be provided to all who register by April 26.

For Earth Day in 2006, residents lent a hand at 25 work sites throughout the City including Huber Park, shown here.

CAR SEATS: Continued from page 1

White, 215-4452 or lwhite@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us; or drop in at one of El Cerrito’s three fire stations to arrange for an inspection. Residents may also contact Police Officer John Molica at 215-4436 to schedule a car seat inspection on Tuesdays through Fridays.

For more information, go to www.el-cerrito.org/police and click on “Traffic.”

The Police and Fire Departments are member agencies of the Contra Costa County Car Seat Coalition. To find an upcoming safety seat checkpoint, visit www.el-cerrito.org/police or call 1-877-CARSEAT.

Voters to Decide on Measure A in February

AFTER MONTHS of hearing input from residents about their priorities for repairing and maintaining neighborhood streets, in November the El Cerrito City Council voted unanimously to place the El Cerrito Pothole Repair, Local Street Improvement and Maintenance Measure on the February 2008 ballot. Measure A asks voters to consider a half-cent sales tax to be used exclusively for repair and street improvements such as fixing potholes, improving neighborhood streets, curb ramps, crosswalks, and bike lanes, as well as maintaining the roads including signage and markings.

If approved by two-thirds of the voters, the measure would go into effect on July 1, 2008. The City would incur debt so that it could immediately begin repairing streets. The money raised by Measure A would be placed in a restricted fund to only be used for street repair and maintenance. An independent citizen’s oversight committee would be established to ensure proper spending of taxpayer money.

Information about Measure A can be found online at www.el-cerrito.org, in your voter’s guide, or by calling the City Manager’s Office at 215-4318.
Prepared for Disaster? Get CERT-ified!

One of the key components of disaster preparedness is preparing your own home and family. The El Cerrito Fire Department offers the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, a 20-hour training course designed to help you protect yourself, your family, your neighbors, and your neighborhood in an emergency situation.

This valuable course is a positive and realistic approach to emergency and disaster situations where you or family members may initially be on your own and your actions can make a difference. While most people can respond to others in need without CERT training, one goal of the program is to help you do so effectively and efficiently without placing yourself or others in unnecessary danger.

CERT training includes:
- Disaster first aid training
- Disaster preparedness
- Basic firefighting
- Light search and rescue
- Damage assessment
- How to turn off utilities

“In addition to CERT certification, this year we are planning to present specialized trainings on topics such as home preparedness; emergency communications; sheltering (presented by the Red Cross); and pet preparedness (presented by Contra Costa County Animal Services),” said Dave Gibson, Battalion Chief with the El Cerrito/Kensington Fire Department.

The CERT program is also expanding into El Cerrito High School as part of the community service requirement of graduating seniors, which will also help to prepare the high school for a disaster.

The community disaster preparedness training program began as the “Neighborhood Emergency Assistance Teams” (NEAT) program in 1992. In 2005, the program was revised and is now called the CERT program. Over the past 15 years, over 2,500 El Cerrito and Kensington residents have learned how to be prepared for a disaster, including 204 people who have completed the current CERT program.

Please plan to join us in 2008 if you want to better prepare yourself, your family, your home, your neighborhood, and your community. CERT training is presented in several different training formats throughout the year to fit most schedules. For more information, including the 2008 training schedule, please call the El Cerrito Fire Department at 215-4450 or visit www.el-cerrito.org/fire.

CITY HALL: Continued from page 4

Veterans memorial garden and flagpole will be a part of the new plaza as well. The new building was structurally designed to withstand earthquakes or storms, and the City Council Chambers will serve as the City’s Emergency Operations Center in case of a disaster. As part of the City’s Emergency Preparedness Plan, the Chambers are equipped with the technology the City would need in order to operate under emergency conditions, including a generator to provide onsite emergency power.

The new two-story City Hall building is also a “green building” and will save the City money through reduced energy consumption and maintenance costs. Green building technology promotes construction that reduces impacts on the environment and creates a healthier environment for people who work in or visit the building. Green buildings are designed to be affordable, preserve the health of building occupants, conserve natural resources, and reduce both energy and transportation costs.

After the construction is completed in the spring, the project will undergo a rigorous third-party commissioning process to certify the building as a LEED building. (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or “LEED,” certification from the US Green Building Council is the recognized standard for measuring building sustainability.)

Below are some examples of green elements in the new City Hall:

• Uses less water inside and outside through water-efficient landscaping and water-efficient fixtures, such as dual flush toilets, waterless urinals, and water faucets with motion sensors.
• Maximizes natural light where possible and uses motion sensors so that the lights go off when a room is not in use.
• Reduces water pollution through landscape elements called bioswales, which are designed to remove silt and pollution from surface runoff water.
• Encourages visitors and employees to use alternative transportation by offering convenient bike racks, lockers, and designated parking for carpool and alternative fuel vehicles.
• Maintains healthy indoor air quality by avoiding toxic products, including furnishings and janitorial products.
• Aims to recycle/salvage at least 50% of construction and demolition (“C&D”) waste.
• Uses recycled-content products and sustainable wood products, such as carpet, floor tiles, ceiling tiles, and numerous furnishings.
• Uses onsite renewable energy to provide 2.5% of the building’s total energy through photovoltaics (solar panels) installed on a portion of the roof.

“The Civic Center Plaza is a reflection of the El Cerrito community, and we are excited that in the near future we will be able to provide residents and business owners with excellent customer service in a professional setting while also helping the environment,” said City Manager Scott Hanin.

The City plans to hold a grand opening celebration, including tours of the City Hall, in the spring. Details about this event will be available online at the City’s website, www.el-cerrito.org.

IT TAKES A FAMILY

Family Effort Reduces Carbon Footprint

Members of the Montes-Clemens family in El Cerrito recycle and re-use whenever they can, even composting food scraps. They are mindful of what they purchase, and are working with neighbors to plant more trees on their street. Parents Steven and Maria were inspired by their children to do even more to reduce their household’s carbon footprint, so they recently made investments to their home: they insulated the attic, installed double-paned windows and a new efficient furnace, and added solar panels to their home. “It’s really a family effort,” explained Maria.

If you have recently taken steps to reduce your household’s carbon footprint, please let us know! Residents and local businesses who have already reduced greenhouse gas emissions should email gschultz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

In December, workers painted the exterior of the new City Hall building, which is located at 10890 San Pablo Avenue.
A Vision for the Path and Parks of the Ohlone Greenway

The City of El Cerrito is fortunate to have the Ohlone Greenway (also called the “BART path”), which provides recreation, relaxation, and a non-motorized transportation north-south route through El Cerrito. It is a linear corridor with numerous “pocket” or neighborhood parks. It even provides habitat for frogs, birds, and other wildlife.

The Greenway was built by the City and planted mostly by volunteers in the 1980s. Over the years, the City has invested in security, safety, and recreation upgrades through installation of lighting, playgrounds, and crosswalk improvements. However, the Greenway has also long been in need of a facelift. Its recreational equipment and playgrounds could be more accessible and more useful, safety features could be enhanced, and the overall trail design could better serve the variety of users who use the Greenway.

Just as the City was embarking upon planning for Greenway improvements, representatives from the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) informed the City of upcoming Earthquake Safety Program retrofit work. Beginning in 2009, BART plans to improve its columns and overhead tracks to enhance the system’s performance during an earthquake. The retrofit work will create some short-term impacts to the existing Ohlone Greenway. Among these would be the destruction of parts of the trail and some landscaping, caused by heavy equipment, excavation etc.

With the impacts of the Earthquake Safety Program retrofit in mind, BART, the City, members of the Parks and Recreation Commission, and interested residents have been working together to determine the best way to restore the Greenway upon the completion of BART’s earthquake safety project. The City has hosted meetings with residents since November, and additional meetings are scheduled in February and March to develop a Master Plan for the Greenway. With a completed plan, the City and BART will determine which features will be feasible to include as a part of BART’s restoration work. The City will then need to identify how to prioritize, fund, and implement the remaining features and upgrades.

If you are interested in receiving more information about the Ohlone Greenway, or would like to be added to the contact list for the planning project, please contact the Department of Public Works at 215-4382 or e-mail Melanie Mintz at mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Taking the Lead on Climate Change

The City of El Cerrito is committed to the environment. In both its own activities, and by supporting residents and businesses, the City has established programs to protect, preserve, and enhance the environment. In addition to building a green City Hall, celebrating Earth Day each April, and running a popular Recycling Center, the City Council has adopted policy resolutions to reduce global warming pollution.

In 2006, the City passed a resolution in support of the State of California’s greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 2000 levels by 2010.

El Cerrito has committed to making changes in the City’s operations as well as to educating the public about ways to reduce emissions in an effort to meet reduction targets. Last year, the City initiated a “greenhouse gas inventory” to look at all emissions generated from City facilities and operations, such as the energy efficiency of City buildings, vehicle eets, and public infrastructure such as street lights and traffic signals. The inventory will also estimate the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted by the entire El Cerrito community—the City, residents, and businesses.

The City’s greenhouse gas inventory is an important first step toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions because it establishes El Cerrito’s current “carbon footprint.” The inventory will detail which sectors of our community produce more emissions than others and identify areas where emissions can be reduced cost-effectively. Knowing which facilities and operations are major greenhouse gas emitters will help the City create a climate action plan to reduce emissions in these categories.

Staff hopes to be able to present the plan to the City Council for consideration in the spring. If approved, El Cerrito will be one of the first cities in Contra Costa County to adopt a climate action plan.

You Can Get Involved!

When cities and large employers take actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase energy efficiency, they provide benefits to the community by improving air quality and public health, reducing energy expenditures, saving money, and demonstrating “best practices.” However, reducing greenhouse gas emissions for El Cerrito will require much more than reductions in governmental emissions alone.

The efforts of the entire El Cerrito community will be needed to achieve meaningful reductions. Therefore, the City anticipates sponsoring events in 2008 to help El Cerritans reduce their own carbon footprint.

To learn more about actions the City is taking to help the environment, visit www.el-cerrito.org and click on “Environmental Resources.” To get involved, contact Garth Schultz, Waste Prevention Specialist, at 215-4351, gschultz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.
Creating a Specific Plan for the Avenue

T HE AVENUE is a major commercial corridor for area residents, businesses, and visitors. Together, the Cities of El Cerrito and Richmond are currently discussing how to make San Pablo Ave. a more vibrant and viable place to live, work, and get around.

Most people think that San Pablo Ave. is wholly an El Cerrito street; however, the city limits zig-zag along the Avenue and actually run along the front of some buildings on the west side of the street. In an effort to create an attractive and unified visual character, the City of El Cerrito and the City of Richmond have joined together and are co-producing a “Specific Plan” for the shared segment of San Pablo Ave.

A Specific Plan is a planning tool for long-range economic development and improvements that will result in a detailed guide for all future land use and design along San Pablo Ave. The Specific Plan covers the 35-block stretch of mostly commercial properties along the Avenue from Macdonald Ave, south to just beyond El Cerrito Plaza. Serving as a guidebook for development, the plan will unify design themes, emphasize public transit opportunities, and use smart-growth standards to attract new businesses and residents.

The Specific Plan includes economic development and urban design elements as well as development policies (such as zoning), which will help to alleviate existing confusion for property owners and developers, since the two cities currently have differing zoning policies within the area.

Along with El Cerrito and Richmond, the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC) has also contributed funding to cover the cost for local planning consultants, Moore Iaco-fano Goltsman, to develop the Specific Plan. The process started in June and is expected to be completed by the end of 2008, at which time the plan will be presented to both the El Cerrito and Richmond City Councils for adoption.

The San Pablo Ave Specific Plan Advisory Committee (SPAAC) is leading efforts to create the Specific Plan. The committee is comprised of two Council members from each city, a Planning commissioner from each city, a Design Review Board member from each city, a member of the El Cerrito Economic Development Board, four business owners, three residents, and representatives from WCCTAC, BART, and AC Transit. The SPAAC meets periodically, and the public is invited to attend the meetings.

In August 2007, the SPAAC hosted an interactive half-day workshop with El Cerrito and Richmond residents and business owners, which focused on developing a vision for San Pablo Ave. Participants discussed the assets, issues, and opportunities for the Avenue, and they shared their visions for the corridor. Issues discussed included safety, transportation, streetscape and urban design, land use, and parking. A SPAAC meeting with expanded time for public input was held in November, and at least one additional community workshop is planned.

In addition to general improvements along the Avenue, a number of areas have been identified as being of particular interest, such as the Del Norte Transit Center, the Macdonald Gateway, El Cerrito Mid-Town/Civic Center and El Cerrito Plaza. The Specific Plan may propose ways for these areas to maintain and enhance their unique character.

The City of El Cerrito is committed to reinvesting in the Avenue by making public improvements, ensuring high-quality design for new developments, and creating a vision for the future of the Avenue. For more information about the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, contact Jennifer Carman, Planning Manager, at 215-4380. For background information, reports from prior meetings, and information about upcoming meetings, visit www.el-cerrito.org/planning/Avenue.html.
Updating the El Cerrito Zoning Ordinance

In 1999, the City of El Cerrito adopted a new General Plan, based on several years of extensive citizen input. The General Plan laid out direction for the future evolution and growth of the City, covering issues such as the type and intensity of future development, transportation, parks and recreation, community design, and housing.

The Zoning Ordinance, Zoning Map, and Subdivision Code are the three key documents that implement the General Plan, and under California law these documents must be updated to be compatible with the General Plan.

Over the past five years, the City has been working to revise these documents comprehensively. Numerous public meetings and study sessions were held. Here is some basic information about these important City documents.

Q: What is a Zoning Ordinance?
A: The purpose of El Cerrito’s Zoning Ordinance is to implement the City’s General Plan. The Zoning Ordinance is also intended to:
- Provide residents and businesses with clear rules for development and use of their property;
- Ensure that development and land uses maintain and enhance the public health, safety, and welfare; and
- Provide direction so that development is of a high-quality design, which is harmonious and compatible with the surrounding community.

Q: How does the Zoning Ordinance affect me?
A: Zoning directly affects every resident, and all business and property owners in the City because it sets the rules for the uses and buildings that are allowed on your property. Regulations cover a wide range of items, including building height, parking, required landscaping, signs, uses that are not allowed, noise levels, etc.

Q: Where can I read the Draft Revised Zoning Ordinance?

It is also available for review at City Hall and the City Library.

Q: What are some key changes to the Zoning Ordinance?
A: New zoning districts have been created in the revised Zoning Ordinance to give permanent protection to open space and public uses. There have not been major revisions to regulations for single-family homes, but existing regulations have been clarified and refined. A significant improvement in the revised Ordinance is a new format and structure, which includes tables and graphics to make it more readable and user-friendly.

Q: What is the next step?
A: It is anticipated that the City Council will begin adoption of the revised Zoning Ordinance in early 2008. El Cerrito residents are encouraged to attend City Council meetings and to provide comments during the public hearing. Visit www.el-cerrito.org for meeting information.

New Building and Fire Codes

In November, the City Council adopted the 2007 California Building and Fire Codes. By State law, the 2007 California Building Standards Codes, which includes the Fire Code, became effective in California cities on January 1, 2008.

The California Codes are applicable to all construction within the City of El Cerrito and regulate Building, Fire, Mechanical, Plumbing, Electrical, Building Conservation, and related uniform construction codes, as well as the State Housing Law Regulations. Typically, the California Building Standards Commission reviews and revises the California Codes every three years. However, as part of a nationwide shift toward uniform building standards, it has been six years since the State adopted new codes.

The Building and Fire Codes safeguard life, health, property, and public welfare. The City Building Division enforces the building and construction codes set forth under the City Municipal Code and the California Codes through plan review and field inspections of new building construction and building alterations or renovations. Similarly, the Fire Department enforces the Fire Code for construction projects, and during annual building inspections.

In addition to the State Codes, the City also adopted new El Cerrito specific codes. The local El Cerrito codes have not changed significantly since the last code cycle. However, we encourage anyone who is planning a construction project in El Cerrito to become familiar with the City’s building codes.

The 2007 California Codes are available for review at the City’s Building Division. The El Cerrito Municipal Code is available at www.el-cerrito.org; click on “Municipal Code.” If you have any questions about building codes, please contact the Building Division at bldg@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4360. If your questions are regarding the Fire Codes, contact Fire Prevention Officer Michael Bond with the El Cerrito/Kensington Fire Department at 215-4457 or mbond@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

El Cerrito News and Views, Winter 2008
EL CERRITO CITY COUNCIL
Mayor William C. Jones, III
Mayor Pro Tem Sandi Potter
Councilmember Janet Abelson
Councilmember Jan Bridges
Councilmember Letitia Moore

CITY WEBSITE  www.el-cerrito.org
CITY HALL (Temporary)
10940 San Pablo Ave.
El Cerrito, CA 94530
(All area codes 510)
Administration  215-4300
City Council  215-4305
City Clerk  215-4305
City Manager  215-4300
Employee Services  215-4315
Finance  215-4310
Community Development  215-4380
Building  215-4360
Economic Development/Redevelopment  215-4380
Planning  215-4330
Public Works
Engineering  215-4382
Maintenance  215-4369
Corporation Yard  7450 Schmidt Lane
Corporation Yard  215-4355
Recycling Center
7501 Schmidt Lane
Integrated Waste Mgmt.  215-4350

Community Center and
City Council Chambers
7007 Moeser Lane
Recreation Department  559-7000
Swim Center  (recorded message)  273-9096
The Open House Senior Center
6500 Stockton Ave.
Senior Services  559-7677
Public Safety Building
10900 San Pablo Ave.
Emergency*  911
Police/Fire/Medical Dispatch  237-3233
* Cell phone users should call dispatch in an emergency for direct local response.
Fire (Administration)  215-4450
Police (Administration)  215-4400
City Offices and the Recycling Center will be closed for the following holiday:
President's Day (Feb 18)
City Council regular meeting schedule:
February 4 and 19, March 3 and 17, April 7 and 21. Meetings are held at the Community Center, 7007 Moeser Lane, and broadcast live on Comcast Cable channel 28. Schedules are subject to change; please check www.el-cerrito.org for updates.
To download the City Council meeting agenda packet, go to www.el-cerrito.org, then click on “Government” and follow the “City Council Agenda” link. Agendas are available three days prior to each meeting.

City of El Cerrito
City Hall
10940 San Pablo Ave.
El Cerrito, CA 94530

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REMEMBER TO VOTE!

Presidential Primary
February 5th

The California Presidential Primary Election will be held on Tuesday, February 5, 2008. The polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Questions regarding voter registration, voting by absentee ballot, or the location of your polling place should be directed to the Contra Costa County Election Department in Martinez at (925) 335-7800.

The Contra Costa County Elections Department is responsible for consolidated federal, state, county, local school board, City and special district elections. Visit www.cocovote.us for more information; for the Spanish version, go to http://www.cocovote.us/spanish.

VOTE

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