City Council Considers Sending City Charter to Voters

Currently, El Cerrito is what is known as a “General Law” city but the City Council is considering asking voters to make it a “Charter City.” A general law city has the authority to act locally but its actions must be consistent with the California Constitution, state statutes, and state administrative regulations.

A charter city adopts a charter that defines how the city will be governed. It has the additional authority to adopt laws regarding “municipal affairs” that are different from state statutes, while still being consistent with the US and California Constitutions. Charter cities also have more control over local matters. Municipal affairs include the form of a city’s government; elections; aspects of zoning and land use; the process of contracting for public works; taxes; and assessments.

The City needs voter approval to become a charter city. In this area, most of our neighbors are charter cities, including Albany, Emeryville, Berkeley, Richmond, Oakland, Alameda, Piedmont, San Francisco, San Leandro, and San Rafael.

A charter city provides more options for funding important local services or capital projects. It may adopt—with voter approval—a Real Property Transfer Tax (RPTT) to fund critical City services. A RPTT is a tax that is paid upon the sale of property and is traditionally split between the buyer and seller. A portion could be rebated for seismic and conservation upgrades. Neighboring charter cities maintain RPTTs with an average rate of $12 per $1,000 of the purchase price.

Currently, as a general law city, El Cerrito is ONLY able to split a “Documentary Transfer Tax” with the county (each receives 55¢ for each $500 of the purchase price of real property), an amount far lower than the revenue that neighboring cities receive.

If the voters approve becoming a charter city, potentially the biggest impact for El Cerrito would be the ability to implement a RPTT. If implemented in El Cerrito at the same rate as in neighboring cities, a RPTT would generate approximately $2.7 million annually. The revenue could be used for maintaining rapid 9-1-1 emergency response times; City parks, paths, and playfields; library programs for children, adults, and families; senior services; affordable housing; and more.

35th Annual National Night Out

National Night Out (NNO) is a yearly block party for people nationwide and their local police and first responders. This year’s event is scheduled for August 7 and will mark the 35th anniversary of NNO with more than 38 million people across the country expected to participate. More than 30 El Cerrito neighborhoods participated in 2017.

NNO gives community members a chance to welcome new neighbors, reconnect with old friends, and develop better relationships with emergency personnel.

Celebrate your community by arranging a party for your neighbors. To host an event, contact Officer Sarah Perez at 215-4400. To ensure that the City can provide you with a host kit and schedule an officer to visit your party, please register no later than 6 p.m. on July 25.

For more information, go online to www.el-cerrito.org/NightOut.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, June 23
ARTIST IN RESIDENCE
WEAVING DEMONSTRATION
Sandy Drobny, El Cerrito Creative ReUse artist in residence and other members of the Golden Gate Weavers Guild of Berkeley will provide demos and instruction in weaving—including weaving with recycled materials.
When: 11 a.m.–2 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Recycling Center 7501 Schmidt Lane

Saturday, June 30
BONE MARROW
REGISTRY DRIVE
Join the Bone Marrow Registry—all it takes is a cheek swab! You must be between the ages of 18–44, in general good health, and committed to donating to someone in need. Co-hosted by the El Cerrito Police and Recreation Departments.
When: 11 a.m.–3 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Community Center 7007 Moeser Lane

Wednesday, July 4
4TH OF JULY
HOLIDAY
City administrative offices will be closed.

Tuesday & Wednesday, July 3–4
4TH OF JULY FESTIVAL
Details on page 4 and online at www.el-cerrito.org/July4.
When: July 3—Entertainment, 4–7 p.m.
July 4—Entertainment, rides, games, and food, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Music continues to 6:30 p.m.
Where: Cerrito Vista Park 950 Pomona Ave.

Thursday, July 26
FAQ’S ON ADU’S
HOMEOWNER’S WORKSHOP SERIES
This workshop will provide information for homeowners interested in creating an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU). See page 6 for more information.
When: 6:30–8:30 p.m.
Where: Council Chambers El Cerrito City Hall 10890 San Pablo Ave.

Saturday, September 15
NATIONAL DRIVE ELECTRIC WEEK EVENT IN BERKELEY
Join the City of El Cerrito’s Environmental Quality Committee in supporting the National Drive Electric Week event in Berkeley this September. Details are still to be determined but check the event website at driveelectricweek.org/event.php?eventId=1301.
When: Various times
Where: Berkeley, CA

Sunday, July 8, Saturday, September 15, & Sunday, November 18
EL CERRITO GREEN TEAMS
Help El Cerrito’s Green Teams clean up the environment at locations throughout the City. For more information, please contact the Operations + Environmental Services Division at 215-4350 or green@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.
When: Mornings, call for times
Where: Various El Cerrito locations

Saturday and Sunday, September 29–30, & Saturday, October 6
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY BOOK SALE
Friends of the El Cerrito Library’s annual fall sale features books, DVDs, CDs, and other items for children and adults. For details, visit the Friends website at friendselcerritolibrary.wordpress.com/.
When: Saturday, September 29 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sunday, September 30 11 a.m.–3 p.m. (Everything half price!)
Saturday, October 6 10 a.m.–4 p.m. (Fill a bag for $4.00!)
Where: El Cerrito Library 6510 Stockton Ave.

Saturday, October 13
FALL CITYWIDE GARAGE SALE
Keep waste out of the landfill, explore your community, and find great deals! To host a sale, register by September 10. To register, or for more information, go online to www.el-cerrito.org/garagesale.
When: Register September 10 by 4 p.m.
Sale, October 13 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
Where: Various locations in El Cerrito
International Markets and Local Recycling

Due to recent changes in Chinese recycling markets, recycling programs throughout the world need to do a more thorough job of sorting and cleaning recycled materials before sending them to importers and manufacturers. This means the public needs to do a better job of sorting and cleaning before giving their materials to the recyclers.

Manufacturers rely on high quality recycled materials to produce new products, such as cereal boxes and shipping cartons. When food waste, debris, oil, or other materials contaminate recycling streams, it becomes more costly and difficult for the manufacturers to use those materials to make new products. If the materials are too badly contaminated, they become a new waste stream for the country accepting the material. China has responded to this problem by reducing the amount of contamination allowed in its recycling materials.

Correctly sorting materials and cleaning items before pickup helps the City maintain the Recycling + Environmental Resource Center. Better yet, bring your beverage containers, cardboard, white bond paper, and scrap metal directly to the Recycling Center. The City receives the best pricing for materials that are sorted and collected at the Center. It is still perfectly good to use your gray bin but taking items to the Center means that the material retains top value and will more likely be reused through recycling. Of course, you can continue to bring your harder-to-recycle items to the Recycling Center as well.

Ongoing

RECYCLING + ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE CENTER FREE TOURS
For a behind-the-scenes look at El Cerrito’s LEED Platinum Certified Recycling Center, take a tour on the first Wednesday of each month. Tours at different times can also be arranged for a fee. For more information, call 559-7686.

When: First Wednesday of each month, 3 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Recycling Center 7501 Schmidt Lane

RECYCLING CENTER SPRING/SUMMER HOURS
The Recycling Center is on its Spring/Summer schedule through October 31.

DROP OFF RECYCLABLES
MONDAY–FRIDAY 8 a.m.–5:45 p.m.
WEEKENDS 9 a.m.–4:45 p.m.
HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE Tuesdays 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

2. Clean: Scrape or wipe any food out of the containers and lightly rinse the item with a small amount of water to remove any remaining residue.

3. Dry: Gently shake out any excess water or let the item air-dry.

4. Recycle: Now the item is ready to go into the recycling bin.

RECYCLING PROGRAM FINANCIALS
These market changes will impact the bottom line of recycling programs throughout the country. The City of El Cerrito operates both the curbside recycling program and the El Cerrito Recycling + Environmental Resource Center. Due to the market changes, prices for commingled materials (those in your gray bin) have fallen. They command lower prices because they often include food-soiled items that belong in your green bin or plastics and other items that should have gone in the trash.

Some materials continue to do well and are valuable to manufacturers if they are Empty, Clean, and Dry. These materials include:

- Beverage containers (aluminum, glass, and plastic)
- Narrow-neck #2 plastic bottles
- Cardboard
- White bond paper
- Scrap metal

For more information contact the City’s Recycling + Environmental Resource Center at 215-4350.
Come to the El Cerrito and worldOne 4th of July Festival!

Celebrate Independence Day and diversity in El Cerrito with main stage entertainment, kids’ rides, traditional carnival games, craft shopping, information about local organizations, and delicious food. Admission is free. The celebration begins Monday, July 3, in Cerrito Vista Park at 4 p.m. Bring a picnic dinner or buy food at the park and enjoy free performances by Tahitian musicians Te Orama + Otea Api, and Circus Imagination. The first day’s festivities end at 7 p.m.

Independence Day Program

Main stage performers on July 4 will include: Otea Api + Te Orama (Tahitian Music & Dance), Sharon Gilchrist (Blue Grass), Jeff Chambers (Jazz), John Robinson (Hip Hop Fusion), The Big Takeover Band (Reggae), La Gente SF (Latin/Caribbean), and Non-Stop Bhangra (Punjabi Dance). The infamous Circus Imagination will also return to delight children of all ages. For more information, visit our website at www.el-cerrito.org/July4.

Join in a Sosakete Round Dance and swirl your hips with Hoopin’ Heather.

Things to Know

- Street parking around Cerrito Vista Park is limited.
- Portions of Pomona Avenue and Moeser Lane will be closed.
- Free, valet bike parking will be available.
- Bring a picnic blanket or a low-back folding chair.
- Be sure to visit the food court in the Contra Costa Civic Theater parking lot and all the vendors along Pomona Avenue.
- Compost that plate! All food will be served with compostable dishes and utensils.
- Purchase a wristband to give your child unlimited rides and bounce house entries.
- Dogs are not allowed at the event (except service dogs and dogs in carriers).

Games and rides will close at 6 p.m. and music ends at 6:30 p.m.


For more information, visit the City website at www.el-cerrito.org/July4.

JULY 4 PHOTOS ©2017 FLETCHER OAKES

MCE Living Lightly Challenge

In partnership with MCE Clean Energy and the City’s Environmental Quality Committee, the City of El Cerrito has created a “Living Lightly” team to encourage the community to opt-up to 100% renewable energy (“Deep Green”) through our local electricity provider, MCE.

Deep Green costs just a penny more per kilowatt-hour, or less than $5 per month for the average household.

When you make the switch, select El Cerrito under “Team Name” and help the City meet its goals for the Living Lightly Challenge. The challenge, part of the Environmental Quality Committee’s 100x100 Initiative, was begun in 2017 as part of an effort to convince all residents and businesses to shift to 100% renewable energy for the City’s 100th Anniversary. Over 200 users switched to Deep Green in 2017 and the challenge is still going strong.

Last year, the City Council also opted to switch all of its municipal accounts to Deep Green, providing 100% renewable electricity to all of the City’s facilities. Join the City and help El Cerrito increase the number of 100% renewable energy users in our community!

For more information or to sign up, visit MCE’s Living Lightly page at mcecleanenergy.org/LivingLightly/ or contact City staff Will Provost at wprovost@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 525-7622.
New Developments Along San Pablo Avenue

CHANGE IS COMING to San Pablo Avenue! By adopting the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan in 2014, the City laid the groundwork to develop its main thoroughfare into a unique East Bay neighborhood with a variety of opportunities for living, working, and community life. The plan’s goals include:

- Deepening the sense of place and community identity
- Attracting both public and private investment
- Strengthening partnerships
- Enhancing the public realm (aka public spaces)
- Promoting the everyday use of public transit, walking, and biking
- Adding housing and commercial space

Since the adoption of the Plan, the City has approved 24 improvements to existing buildings, including the buildings now housing these businesses: Mr. Pickles (opened in April), Cigar Box Kitchen (scheduled to open this summer), and 24-hour Fitness (also scheduled to open this summer). The City has also approved six newly constructed buildings, including the Mayfair project adjacent to the Del Norte BART station (156 market rate residential units, 67 affordable residential units, and 8,894 square feet of new commercial space, approved in August of 2017), and three new condominium projects totaling 67 units on San Pablo Avenue near Eureka and Lincoln Avenues.

The City is in the process of reviewing a hotel project and more residential projects along the San Pablo Avenue corridor, some including new ground floor commercial spaces for businesses and restaurants. To read more about major projects currently under review or recently approved, go to www.el-cerrito.org/MajorProjects. There you will also find a link to a map showing the locations of the projects.

Starting from the time that the City issues a land use permit for a project, it can take months, or even years, before the project is completed. Developers must submit construction drawings to the City for review and these must be approved before the City can issue a building permit. Approvals and permits alone take a minimum of 6–9 months, depending upon the applicant and available private financing. Construction often takes another 18 months, depending on the size of the project.

For all new projects, developers pay fees to the school district and to help the City build transportation improvements along San Pablo Avenue. Starting in June of this year, projects must also include a set number of affordable housing units or developers must pay an in-lieu fee to the City to finance affordable housing in the future. (See the Affordable Housing Update box on this page.)

To be involved in the public review of a project, or to look at current or past agendas, visit the webpages of the planning commission (www.el-cerrito.org/PlanningCommission) and the design review board (www.el-cerrito.org/DesignReviewBoard). Plans are also available for view at City Hall or online at www.el-cerrito.org/MajorProjects.

Affordable Housing Update

ON MAY 1ST, the El Cerrito City Council adopted an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance as identified in the 2017 Affordable Housing Strategy. Inclusionary zoning is a way to meet affordable housing goals by leveraging private, market-rate development.

The ordinance goes into effect in June of this year and will apply to all new developments, including those still completing applications on the effective date. It will require all market-rate residential projects to set aside 10–12 percent of their units for low- to moderate-income households or pay an in-lieu fee to the City’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund. In-lieu fees will help to fund affordable housing in the future.

To learn more about the City’s affordable housing strategy, visit our website at www.el-cerrito.org/AffordableHousing or contact Affordable Housing Analyst Aissia Ashoori at aashoori@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4361.
Prevent Fires through Vegetation Management

We have come to the end of another “rainy” season without enough rain falling early enough in the winter to protect against fire. Here in El Cerrito, vegetation will be drying out quickly by summer’s end. While we won’t have the same amount of growth as last year, the effects of any amount of dry fuel are still very hazardous.

Last year’s fire season demonstrated that we now need to manage vegetation on our properties year around. We were deploying firefighters in Southern California as late as December of last year, only a short while after fighting the fire storms in Sonoma County.

Now that the rain has stopped, it’s time to start cutting dead branches, trimming brush, and limbing up trees within 100 feet of your home. Creating defensible space gives your home the best protection against embers in the event of a large-scale fire in the area.

The City will begin conducting annual vegetation management inspections shortly, so please make sure that your property is fire-safe and ready for the up-coming season. If you need assistance, contact Captain Joe Gagne in the Fire Prevention Division at 215-4457.

Create defensible space around your home by 1) cutting dead branches, 2) trimming brush, and 3) limbing up trees (removing some branches).

Homeowner’s Workshop Series

Find solutions to common homeowner problems at the Community Development Department’s new series of homeowner workshops, open to all members of the community.

First 72 Hours

The most recent workshop in the homeowner series covered the importance of preparing for a disaster, such as an earthquake, and what to do in the first 72 hours after a catastrophic event. The workshop included topics such as preparedness kits, go bags, and emergency drills to keep your family safe.

FAQ’s on ADUs

The next workshop is for homeowners wishing to create an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU). An ADU (also called an in-law unit, granny flat, or backyard cottage) is a small, second unit, including a kitchen and bathroom, on the premises of an owner-occupied residential property. The workshop will also cover Junior ADUs—bedrooms with exterior access, cooking facilities, and access to a shared bathroom.

The City recently revised ADU requirements to remove some of the obstacles to creating an ADU or Junior ADU. ADUs can provide a much-needed, new housing option as well as an additional source of income for homeowners.

If you have ever considered adding an ADU, this workshop will help to answer your questions. Come to the council chambers at City Hall on Thursday, July 26, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Interested in a previous workshop? You can download PowerPoint presentations, handouts, and other useful information from the Homeowner’s Workshop Series webpage at www.el-cerrito.org/HomeownersWorkshops.

If you are interested in knowing about upcoming workshops, please sign up for the Community Development’s e-Newsletter at www.el-cerrito.org/commDev or email jpeat@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Charter City: Continued from page 1

and long-term financial stability for the City and services. The City Council has established a Charter Review Committee, consisting mostly of city residents, to develop a charter that would:

1. Give the City the power to adopt local rules in all matters of municipal affairs
2. Require the City to follow California law regarding the payment of prevailing wages for public works projects and collective bargaining with represented employee groups, and
3. Authorize the City Council to consider the use of all available means for generating additional revenue that do not alter the current City Municipal Code, including, but not limited to, a Real Property Transfer Tax.

The committee recommended a draft charter to the City Council in May. The council will hold public hearings on the charter and hopes to complete its work in July so that the charter can qualify for the November ballot.

For more information on El Cerrito as a charter city, visit www.el-cerrito.org/CharterCity.
OVER THE NEXT few years, more housing and businesses will open on San Pablo Avenue. The City plans to build a more walkable and bikeable environment to support the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan’s vision of a vibrant place that provides a “multitude of opportunities for living, working and community life.”

Since 2014, over 1,400 new housing units and 65,500 square feet of new or updated commercial space have been proposed or approved in or near San Pablo Avenue, and some are now under construction. To support multimodal (bicyclist, pedestrian, transit, and vehicle) access to the new commercial and residential developments, the City continues to plan for and construct improved transportation facilities. The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, adopted in 2014, includes two primary sections: the Form Based Code, which regulates the buildings or “built environment” and the Complete Streets Plan, which will improve traffic circulation and make San Pablo Avenue more welcoming to bicyclists and pedestrians.

More information about private developments currently under review or approved for construction on or near the Avenue is in the San Pablo Avenue story on page five. But private investment in the built environment is only one way of improving an area. The City and its public agency partners are also investing in improvements to build out the San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Plan and improve the environment surrounding the City’s two BART stations. Projects are underway at the Ohlone Greenway and significant improvements are coming to the Del Norte BART Station and surrounding streets. These improvements will address issues of traffic circulation, public transit access, bicycle tracks, pedestrian pathways, and parking management. Below is information about the parking and bicycle improvement studies currently underway.

PARKING

The City is partnering with a consultant to undertake a parking demand study within the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan area and adjacent streets. This effort is made possible through funding from Contra Costa Transportation Authority and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Priority Development Area technical assistance grants. The purpose of the study is to consider existing parking conditions, forecast future parking demand, identify best practices, and make recommendations of ways that the City can update its parking management practices and policies. The study will examine both commercial and residential parking demand with the objective of maintaining access to businesses and commercial areas, given the decreased number of off-street parking spaces required for new residential and commercial developments.

In coming months, the City will host a series of community workshops to present the findings of the study and solicit input. For more information, visit www.el-cerrito.org/SPASP; contact Melanie Mintz, Community Development Director at mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4339; or call Aissia Ashoori, Community Development/Affordable Housing Analyst, at 215-4361 or email aashoori@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

CYCLE TRACK

A cycle track along San Pablo Avenue between Lincoln and Potrero Avenues was approved as part of the Complete Streets Plan that was adopted with the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan. A cycle track is a protected bike lane that separates bicyclists from motorists and pedestrians. Because this is the widest section of San Pablo Avenue, it provides an opportunity for a cycle track that will result in safer travel and less stress for bicycle riders of all levels.

As part of a MTC Safe Routes to Transit grant, City staff are working to complete a preliminary design for the cycle tracks. Cycle tracks all provide space exclusively or primarily for bicycles, separate from motor vehicle travel lanes, parking lanes, and sidewalks. But the tracks can take different forms. For example, they can be one-way or two-way; street level, sidewalk level, or an intermediate level; and separated by color, texture, or raised medians.

The design process will include public meetings on dates to be announced later in the summer. The preliminary designs will be used in competition for grants to fund the final designs and construction.

The cycle track is just one of many plans for bicycle and pedestrian improvements to be completed with new development contributions and grant funding. For more information, contact the Public Works Department at streets@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4382.
Time to Renew Your Business License

You need a current City business license to operate a business in El Cerrito. Before last year’s license expires on June 30, business and rental property owners must complete a renewal form and pay the required tax to avoid a late fee.

The City of El Cerrito requires anyone who engages in business within city limits to obtain the business license and pay the license tax. This includes those owning commercial or residential rental property. Quarterly and semiannual licenses are available for some business categories.

To operate your business legally in El Cerrito, you may also need a City-issued use or building permit. Some types of businesses also need licenses or permits from the State of California or Contra Costa County. For more information about business licenses, call 215-4335 or visit the City Finance Department’s webpage at www.el-cerrito.org/bl.