



OHPLONE GREENWAY MASTER PLAN

EL CERRITO, CALIFORNIA
ADOPTED JUNE 15, 2009

GATES
+ ASSOCIATES



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EL CERRITO CITY COUNCIL

EL CERRITO PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

CITY OF EL CERRITO PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT STAFF

Thank you to all the Residents of El Cerrito, Ohlone Greenway users, and Boards and Commissions of El Cerrito for your valuable input during the planning process

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INTRODUCTION

Ohlone Greenway

The Ohlone Greenway is a pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle path in the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay Area. The site currently extends almost 4 miles beginning in Berkeley and running through Albany, El Cerrito and terminating near the Richmond city limit, where it will soon connect to the central Richmond Greenway and on to the 400 Mile Bay Trail system.

The terrain ranges from a bicycle path on city streets at portions in Berkeley close to the North Berkeley BART station to a dedicated course within an open greenspace right-of-way through the cities of Albany and El Cerrito. Most of this dedicated open space is a rails-to-trails site along what was formerly a railroad right-of-way. The segment from North Berkeley BART to Rose Street in Berkeley was previously the Key System's Westbrae line. Above Rose Street and continuing along the entire Greenway to north of the El Cerrito Del Norte BART Station was once the right-of-way of the Santa Fe Railroad.

Extensions to the existing Ohlone Greenway are currently underway, both in Berkeley where the Greenway is being extended in short segments to Strawberry Creek Park, and at the Richmond end where eventually the Ohlone Greenway's terminating connection at the Baxter Creek Gateway Park will connect to the new Richmond Greenway. That trail will extend all the way to Point Richmond and the Bay Trail.

Scope of Study

Approximately 2.7 miles of the Greenway, more than half of its current total length, is within the City of El Cerrito. The Greenway serves as an important bicycle and pedestrian transportation corridor, running the length of the City in a north-south direction. It connects to two BART stations, several bus lines and to civic, recreational and shopping destinations.

The Ohlone Greenway is more than a transportation corridor. It is also a recreation resource for both passive and active uses – a place to sit, stroll, recreate, and enjoy a variety of features such as stream crossings, demonstration forests, play structures and gathering spaces. It is a neighborhood connector, and a visible thread through the community. Surveys have shown that it is one of the most used open spaces in the City of El Cerrito.

This Master Plan sets forth the City's vision of how the Ohlone Greenway will evolve and develop over time, to maximize the public's safety as well as the use and enjoyment of this unique place.



The Ohlone Greenway begins in Berkeley at Ohlone Park at the corner of Hearst Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way.



Crabapple blossoms grace the Albany section of the Greenway in the springtime.



The elevated BART trackway is a prominent feature of the Ohlone Greenway site in El Cerrito and Albany.



A community wildflower garden at the Greenway's northern end in El Cerrito, adjacent to Baxter Creek Gateway Park.

PROJECT OVERVIEW



Purpose

The purpose of this document is to articulate the overall vision and goals for the Greenway so that future improvements contribute to the vision and further the goals. As a Master Plan, this document does not provide detailed design for every area of the Greenway, but does provide guidelines and programmatic recommendations that ensure that future design efforts are coherent and consistent with the overall vision.

The document is organized into individual sections:

- **Introduction** – provides the reader with a general overview of the Master Plan.
- **Site Analysis** – orients the reader to the site and its context, and to the opportunities and constraints that affect the design and programming of the site.
- **Master Plan Design Vision** – sets the larger framework for the Greenway, discussing overall goals, image and character desired for the Greenway.
- **Design Guidelines** – discusses treatment of specific elements that occur throughout the Greenway, such as trail width, design and materials choices as they relate to safety and maintenance, treatment of roadway crossings, signage and lighting. It describes attributes of the recurring elements along the Greenway, such as drainage swales and plant palettes.
- **Public Improvements** – addresses programmatic and design elements of specific areas along the trail, for example, locations of active use areas, potential dog park locations, frog habitat or possible stream restorations or enhancements.
- **Implementation** – discusses possible scenarios and strategies for building the improvements described in the Master Plan, and provides a general cost analysis for the various proposed improvements.
- **Appendix** – refers the reader to additional sources of information regarding the Greenway, and chronicles the public participation in the efforts that resulted in the creation of this Master Plan.

Process

A great deal of effort and energy has been invested in the development of this Master Plan document for the City of El Cerrito. People from every sector have come together to share ideas, brainstorm, and work together to produce a plan that from its inception has had its roots firmly planted in the desires and needs of the city and its residents.

• **The Master Plan Process:** To develop this Master Plan, City staff and its consultants (David Gates & Associates) held several public meetings and met with numerous community user groups to determine their needs and wishes for the Greenway as well as to solicit feedback on proposed elements. Meetings were held that focused on **Trail Alignment and Design; Landscape and Ecology; Park and Recreation Amenities; Personal Safety/Crime Prevention;** and **Senior Issues**. Additionally, focus group meetings were held with populations with special needs including the **visually impaired and disabled** users. Finally, internal interdepartmental staff meetings were held, in particular to review **maintenance and public safety** issues.

As information was gathered from each community workshop, focus group, and internal meeting the feedback was then integrated into the overall Master Plan vision. As various aspects of the plan became more detailed, concepts were folded into the site specific area sections and/or the design guideline sections to produce a comprehensive document for the city to use as a guide to design the Ohlone Greenway site, as opportunities for the development of specific areas present themselves in the future.

The Plan was recommended for adoption by the Parks and Recreation Commission on October 22, 2008, and adopted by the City Council on June 15, 2009. Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, an Initial Study and Negative Declaration were prepared for the Plan. On May 20, 2009 the El Cerrito Planning Commission adopted a Resolution recommending adoption of a Negative Declaration for the Plan. (Planning Commission Resolution PC09-08) (See Appendix Sec. G, pp. 76-81 to view agendas and comments received during the meetings.)



Consultants and members of the Parks and Recreation Commission meet early in the Master Plan process.



Community members from many user groups discuss Trail Alignment issues in a hands-on workshop environment



An Amenities workshop was held to gather input from El Cerrito residents about what they would like to see on their Greenway.

PURPOSE AND PROCESS



History

The Ohlone Greenway site is upon ground that was part of native tribal lands for countless years before the first European settlers came to the Bay Area. The Huchiun were the group of the Ohlone tribe who lived in this area and though evidence of their presence has been left behind in grinding stones and other archeological artifacts, little else was left of their impact on the land once Europeans arrived. Another rich history in this area has grown through the years as groups of inhabitants have come to the El Cerrito area and made it their home; many ranchers, businessmen, and others came to the area as time passed, supported by the rail line that ran north through the land on its way to Chicago and beyond.

The Ohlone Greenway developed over many years on what was a portion of the historic Atchison-Topeka Santa Fe (ATSF) railroad right-of-way. At one time, the old "Oakland Local" ATSF railroad line ran from Oakland all the way to Garrard Street in Richmond. In the late 1960's BART built elevated tracks alongside the right-of-way, and through an Urban Beautification Demonstration Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development built a linear park in the cities of El Cerrito and Albany to demonstrate how land under a transit line could be made more useful and beautiful.[1] In the early 1990s, the volunteers from the El Cerrito BART Path Tree Planting Project planted hundreds of trees along the Greenway, and since that time volunteers and the City have continued to maintain and improve portions of the Greenway. Over the years, the City has made modest investments in lighting, signage, and crosswalk improvements. In 2005, the City extended the northern edge of the Greenway to San Pablo Avenue, through building Baxter Creek Gateway Park. In the next few years, the City will work with the City of Richmond to connect the Ohlone Greenway to the Central Richmond Greenway, which is under development. Closing the gap will create a Class I multi-use path all the way from Berkeley to the San Francisco Bay where it will connect with the Bay Trail.

The Greenway was originally called the Santa Fe Greenway. In the 1990s the cities of Berkeley, Albany and El Cerrito adopted the Ohlone Greenway as the official name to honor the area's local Native American Heritage and to create a regional identity for the path. The name was advocated for by Greenway volunteers and supported by numerous civic organizations.[2]

[1] Linear Parkway, Bay Area Rapid Transit Urban Beautification Demonstration Project Report, 1975
 [2] Ohlone Greenway News, 1993



El Cerrito was once wide open fields and farms. Beyond the fenceline is the Santa Fe railroad track, later the Ohlone Greenway. (Photo courtesy ECHS collection)



The "California Limited" heading north along the future Ohlone Greenway on its way from California to Chicago. (Photo courtesy ECHS collection)



This groundbreaking of a demonstration BART beautification project was one of the beginnings of a years-long effort that has resulted in today's Ohlone greenway. (Photo courtesy ECHS collection)



The last train travels along the Santa Fe rail line before it is closed forever. The El Cerrito Plaza BART station can be seen to the left.



Volunteers plant the Ohlone Greenway with trees in the early 1990's. (Photo courtesy of Steve Price)



The Baxter Creek Gateway project began in 2003 and is another example of El Cerrito residents' devotion to their open spaces. © 2005 by Michael Meija

HISTORICAL REFERENCE



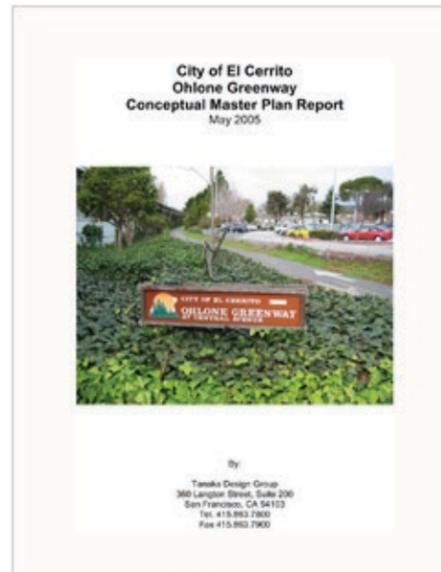
Background

Planning: *Integrating the Greenway into the Fabric of the City*

The City’s General Plan identifies actions and opportunities to specifically develop and use the Greenway as an amenity. Additionally, Greenway enhancements support several other General Plan goals and objectives. The key goal identified was to “enhance the usability and aesthetic appeal of the Ohlone Greenway by integrating it into the fabric of the City.” (Community Design Policy 3.9 - see Appendix Sec. G, pg. 82 for a compilation of additional Greenway related policies and goals.) As a Community Design Element, improving the Greenway is also identified as a way to create a sense of arrival to the City.



The City of El Cerrito General Plan identifies specific development opportunities for the Ohlone Greenway.



City of El Cerrito - Ohlone Greenway Conceptual Master Plan Report, May 2005 - The “Tanaka Plan”

In 2005, the City’s Parks and Recreation Commission worked with the Tanaka Design Group to develop a Conceptual Master Plan for the Ohlone Greenway (see Appendix Sec. G, pg 72-73 and Bibliography Sec. G, pg. 83). The Parks and Recreation Commission recognized the importance of the Greenway as a recreational and non-motorized transportation corridor and the need to improve and update the amenities along the Greenway. Key issues of concern to the Commission included increasing safety; decreasing maintenance costs; providing better access for users; improving recreational opportunities; developing better educational opportunities; incorporating and replacing amenities; and protecting and enhancing ecological values. The resulting plan is referred to as the “Tanaka Plan”.

The current Master Plan builds upon the Tanaka Plan by providing a more fully developed plan based upon the previous plan’s key principles, with an additional focus on improving the urban design character of the Greenway. The Master Plan was developed, also, to coordinate with the upcoming

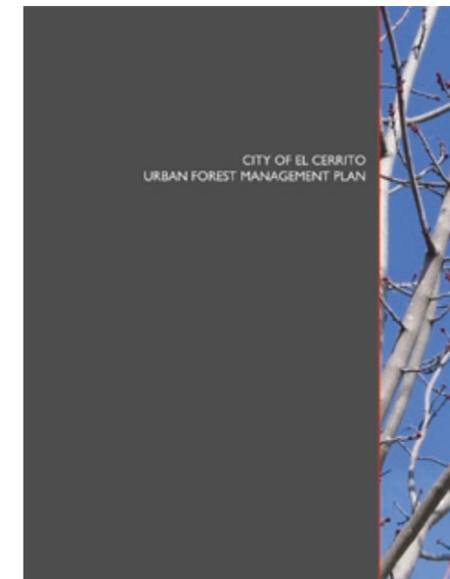
BART Earthquake Safety Retrofit Program (ESRP) which will begin in 2009 (see Bibliography Sec. G, pg. 83). The ESRP will cause damage to the Greenway which will be repaired by BART. The City funded development of the current plan to coordinate restoration of the Greenway with a future vision of the Greenway, e.g. to capitalize upon the opportunity created by the trail closure and subsequent restoration to upgrade certain features to more contemporary standards. The Master Plan also considers guidelines outlined within the City of El Cerrito Urban Forest Management Plan and the City of El Cerrito Circulation Plan for Bicyclists and Pedestrians (see Bibliography Sec. G, pg. 83)

Redevelopment: *A Unique Urban Amenity*

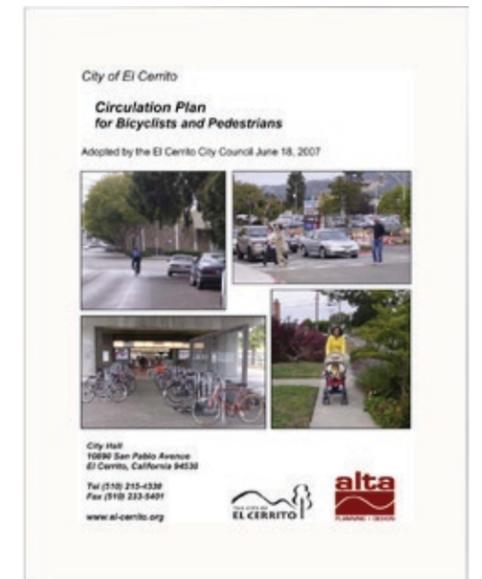
The Greenway is within the City’s Redevelopment Agency boundaries and is adjacent to San Pablo Avenue and future development sites. The Greenway is a key amenity as it traverses north-south the entire length of the City and provides a recreational, open-space and transportation corridor that makes adjacent housing and commercial sites more appealing. It also provides access to two BART stations, including the Del Norte Transit Hub. Through redevelopment, the Greenway has the potential to make an even more important and positive urban design contribution. Land Use Policy 5.6 requires that new or altered development abutting the Greenway be evaluated with respect to how it can “enhance the aesthetics and ambiance of this important linear recreational and transportation facility”. This Plan can be used to identify improvements that adjacent developments may be able to contribute towards through payment of park in-lieu fees and/or through on-site or adjacent physical improvements. Implementation of portions of this plan can also help set a standard for improvements.



BART’s Earthquake Safety Retrofit Program (ESRP) will begin in the spring of 2009



City of El Cerrito Urban Forest Management Plan, May 2007



City of El Cerrito Circulation Plan for Bicyclists and Pedestrians, June 2007

BACKGROUND



