

CHAPTER 2 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The El Cerrito General Plan establishes the goals and policy framework for the future of El Cerrito. This Chapter, the Strategic Framework, outlines and prioritizes the key implementation strategies to achieve these goals and realize the community's vision for its future. It is a plan of action that efficiently manages the community's limited resources by concentrating efforts on actions that are most advantageous to reaching the community's goals.

Strategy planning is the process of identifying a community's strengths and challenges and developing the prioritizing specific implementation steps for achieving the community's shared vision. Strategic planning creates a framework for making decisions and allocating limited resources. In short, this Strategic Framework represents El Cerrito's view on what needs to be done and how it is going to get it done.

Thus, the strategic framework identifies the major issues facing El Cerrito, describes the overall vision for the City's future, and outlines the Strategic Action Plan – the actions, projects, and programs that the City and community will initiate to achieve the City's vision. To accomplish the goals of the El Cerrito General Plan, the City will pursue seven major strategic initiatives in partnership with other organizations, neighboring cities, and agencies, both locally and regionally.

A. Major Issues

As the City faces the new millennium, it must strive to preserve its historical character and traditions, while rising to new opportunities and challenges. The General Plan will be an important tool for protecting El Cerrito's past and guiding its future development. The current status of the City can be summarized as follows:

- **Residential Uses.** The residential sector, especially the single-family areas, is generally in good condition, but the public facilities that serve residents, such as parks and recreation facilities, are suffering from deferred maintenance due to lack of funds.
- **Retail Uses.** The size of the retail sector, in terms of square feet, is actually quite large in relation to the population of the City. Many stores, however, have low sales per square footage, and residents find that they must go elsewhere for many basic necessities as well as specialized goods. The El Cerrito Plaza area is especially underutilized.

- **Office Uses.** There is a very small amount of office space within the City and few parcels large enough to accommodate newer office park development.
- **San Pablo Avenue.** Development within the San Pablo Avenue Corridor is generally unattractive and does not provide a friendly environment for pedestrians.
- **Fiscal Condition.** The lack of a healthy retail and office sector contributes to the City's precarious fiscal position in maintaining adequate, much less high quality, public facilities and services.
- **Transit Opportunities.** The existence of El Cerrito's two BART stations provides an opportunity for future development that would take advantage of the transit system.

VISION FOR EL CERRITO IN THE YEAR 2020

In the year 2020, El Cerrito is a vibrant, attractive community. Its single-family, residential character is complemented by a mix of other housing types, active shopping areas, and business and professional offices that take advantage of the City's work force and proximity to a good transit system. El Cerrito is a place where people feel safe and value being physically out in the community. It is typical to see children walking home from school, people strolling their neighborhoods in the evenings, seniors exercising outdoors in the parks, and people bicycling during all times of the day.

El Cerrito's shopping areas are clustered near the Del Norte and Plaza BART Station areas and in several smaller concentrations located along San Pablo Avenue. These areas encourage people to walk from store to store, have a cup of coffee at a sidewalk café, and meet friends. The stores provide a convenient shopping experience for the residents of El Cerrito and surrounding communities, as well as people who work in the nearby offices. Several specialty stores attract people from throughout the region.

The City has a number of small to mid-sized office buildings that house small or branch financial, consulting, telecommunications, computer, and bio-technical companies. A number of small startup software and research companies have testing and limited production capabilities. Both BART station areas contain telecommuting centers for residents of the City and other people who share spaces for meetings. The offices are both attracted and supported by interesting retail stores and business services.

El Cerrito's strategic location has contributed significantly to its success. People are able to come by train from Solano County and other parts of West Contra Costa County and transfer to the BART system. El Cerrito also has become a link from Contra Costa and Alameda counties to the northern Bay Area counties – eastern Marin, Sonoma, and western Napa – because of its access to those areas. Congestion has increased, but less than in other Bay Area communities because of increased opportunities for residents to work and shop without using a car.

The City financial situation has improved substantially from previous years. The City tax base is strong and vibrant. Retail and office uses produce adequate sales and property tax revenues. The younger and more affluent residents who have been attracted to the City contribute to its financial health. Parks and community facilities now are maintained, as they should be. Most significantly, El Cerrito now has a civic center area that includes a modest but attractive City Hall and public gathering spaces.

To deal with existing deficiencies, El Cerrito must simultaneously address two major strategic issues:

- **Residential Quality.** El Cerrito must maintain its high-quality single-family areas and improve the multi-family areas of the City, especially with regards to design and compatibility with surrounding areas.
- **Paying for Services.** The City must increase its tax base in order to maintain the parks and other public services and facilities that make El Cerrito an attractive place to live.

Many other issues are included in this General Plan. The above strategic issues, however, are the highest priority – they must be successfully addressed if El Cerrito is to achieve its vision for the 21st century.

B. Strategic Action Plan

This section details the Strategic Action Plan, including the actions, projects, and programs the City and community will implement to achieve its desired vision. The Action Plan includes both policy-oriented actions, as well as more specific projects to develop facilities, programs, and services by various City departments.

The City does not have all the necessary resources to undertake all the actions at one time. Thus the Action Plan phases projects and programs over time. In addition, it identifies ongoing projects and programs as well as those projects that could be implemented as opportunities for funding or implementation arise.

The Action Plan is not a static plan. Over time, resources, opportunities, and new challenges will inevitably present themselves to the community. The Action Plan should be periodically reviewed and revised as the primary actions have been accomplished and new actions, programs, and priorities are developed to face new challenges. Likewise, the City's vision should be periodically tested and revisited – the community's goals and direction may also need adjustments.

The following pages present the actions, projects and programs the City and the community will implement to achieve its desired future. For each action, the plan identifies:

- **Responsibility.** The responsible organization(s) or entity that could most appropriately assume the lead role for the implementation of the action;
- **Time Frame.** The time frame within which the action could reasonably be undertaken (immediate: 0-1 year; near-term (1-3 years); mid-term (3-5 years); and long-term (5+ years); and
- **Funding.** The potential funding sources that could possibly support the action.

Implementation Principles

Four principles guide the overall implementation of the Strategic Action Plan:

- **Build on what we have.** Successful existing programs must continue to be supported as new initiatives are implemented.
- **Encourage public-private and community partnerships.** The successful implementation of the Action Plan is contingent upon the continued support and cooperation the entire community, including the public and private sectors, community groups, and residents.
- **Identify roles and responsibilities.** The dedication, commitment, and accountability provided by a lead organization are key to successful implementation. Identifying the lead organization and establishing a process for accountability will turn plans into reality.
- **Monitor and evaluate ongoing progress.** Periodic assessments help to identify barriers to success and determine if “mid-course corrections” are needed. Furthermore, demonstrated success helps sustain and increase community support, commitment and enthusiasm toward common goals.

The Strategic Action Framework illustrated in Figure 1 provides an outline of specific actions that can be carried out over time to achieve the City’s vision, goals and polices for the future. The Strategic Action Framework establishes a series of projects and programs in a phased, prioritized framework directing the City’s efforts and limited resources to accomplish the General Plan goals. It is intended as a document to guide the overall coordination of implementation activities in the community.

Implementation actions and programs are assigned a relative priority according to the following two-tiered Strategy Framework – Primary Actions and Supporting Actions.

Primary Action Strategies

Seven Primary Action Strategies are identified as the most important steps to accomplishing the vision for El Cerrito. These seven Primary Action Strategies are selected because of their critical value in creating the greatest leverage (economically and physically) in the near term to achieve the City’s goals. The Primary Action Strategies are discussed in further detail in the next section of this chapter, and include the following:

1. Adopt a Del Norte Area Transportation Access/Land Use Strategy
2. Adopt a Midtown Area Revitalization Strategy
3. Adopt the El Cerrito Plaza Revitalization Strategy
4. Create an Economic Development Strategy
5. Adopt San Pablo Avenue Corridor Design Guidelines

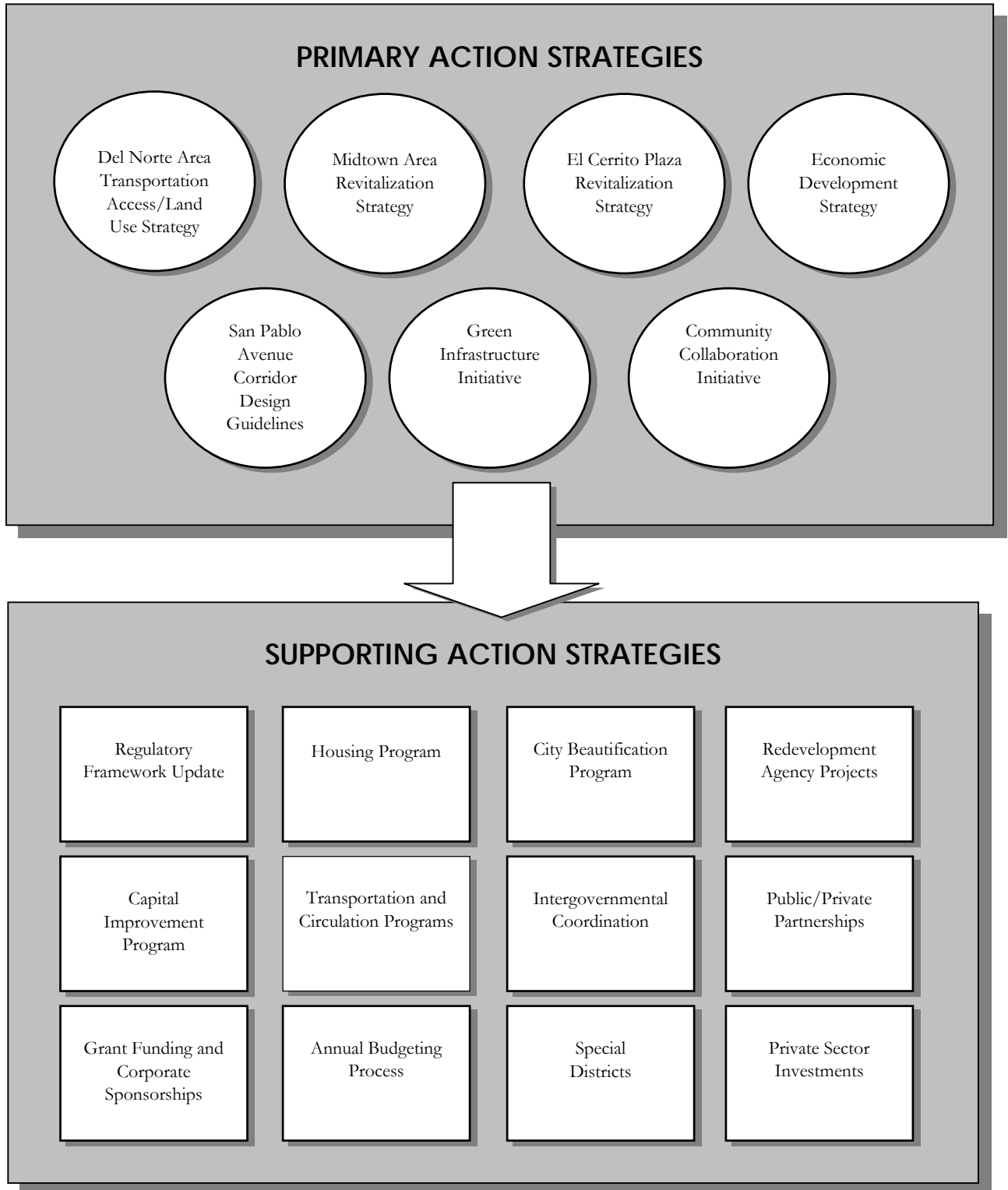
6. Create a Green Infrastructure Initiative
7. Create a Community Collaboration Initiative

Supporting Action Strategies

Twelve additional actions and programs are identified to support the Primary Action Strategies. These Supporting Action Strategies are necessary to ensure the success of the Primary Action Strategies and help the City to achieve its goals and policies. These actions are discussed in the relevant sections of this document and are not detailed in this chapter. Supporting Action Strategies include the following:

1. Regulatory Framework Update
2. Housing Programs
3. City Beautification Programs
4. Redevelopment Programs
5. Capital Improvement Program
6. Transportation and Circulation Programs
7. Intergovernmental Coordination
8. Public/Private Partnerships
9. Grant Funding and Corporate Sponsorships
10. Annual Budgeting Process
11. Special Districts
12. Private Sector Investments

Figure 1 STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



C. Primary Action Strategies

1. *Del Norte Area Transportation Access/Land Use Strategy*

The Del Norte Area is a major regional transportation hub in the East Bay. El Cerrito plays host for regional commuters along the I-80 corridor by providing a major connection to the BART system and bus lines at the Del Norte station. HOV lanes provide direct access to the station, and a parking structure provides commuter parking. BART, buses, Interstate 80, and San Pablo Avenue all converge on this location and significantly impact local traffic, land uses, and the economic vitality of El Cerrito.

The regional role of the area is both a constraint and an opportunity for future development of properties surrounding the BART station and the I-80 interchange. This study will examine these constraints and opportunities to develop an overall strategy for the future development of the Del Norte BART Area. The study will investigate the market potential for alternative land uses and their potential for improving the City's fiscal well being, the area's attractiveness, and the quality of life for the community.

The transportation and land use strategy will include the following elements:

- **Multi-Modal Development Strategy**
 - Land Use Development Concept
 - Transportation and Circulation Concept
- **Site Development Concept**
 - Site Layout and Design
 - Building Design Concepts
 - Landscape Development Concept
- **Financing and Economic Development Strategy**
 - Financing
 - Regional Participation (MTC, BART, Caltrans)
 - Implementation Program and Phasing of Development Actions
- **Impact Analysis**
 - Traffic Impacts
 - Economic Impacts
 - Fiscal Impacts
 - Environmental Impacts

Responsible Organization: City El Cerrito

Participating Organizations: Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)
Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
City of Richmond
Contra Costa County
West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory
Committee (WCCTAC)
AC Transit

Time Frame: Near-Term (1-3 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito
Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)
BART
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
Contra Costa County
City of Richmond
Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)

2. Midtown Area Revitalization Strategy

The Midtown Area of El Cerrito, extending from south of Moeser Lane to north of Manila Avenue, provides a unique opportunity for creating a major new activity hub in the City of El Cerrito for a mixed-use and commercial center with housing above ground floor retail stores. The Midtown Area also provides opportunities for a new civic center complex with a new city hall and the remodeled public safety building.

The existing area includes two large suburban shopping centers, a lumber mill, a temporary City Hall complex, and the public safety building. Because of changing retailing patterns, the existing land uses in the area potentially will undergo major changes in the coming years. A Midtown Revitalization Strategy that plans for the future of this area will position the City to take advantage of these anticipated changes to create a new mixed-use, pedestrian friendly center in the “heart” of El Cerrito.

The Midtown Area Revitalization Strategy will include:

- Land Use Concept
- Site Development and Layout Concept
- Transportation and Circulation Concept
- Building Design Concepts
- Landscape Development Concept
- Financing and Economic Development Strategy
- Implementation Action Program
- Analysis of Transportation, Economic, Fiscal, and Environmental Impacts to the Area

Responsible Organization: City of El Cerrito

Participating Organizations: Chamber of Commerce

Time Frame: Near-Term (1-3 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito
El Cerrito Redevelopment Agency
Midtown Business Association

3. El Cerrito Plaza Revitalization Strategy

The El Cerrito Plaza area is located at the southern City limits along San Pablo Avenue adjacent to the El Cerrito BART station. The site currently contains an aging shopping mall but, due to its prominent location along San Pablo Avenue and easy access to BART, the site has potential for additional development as a major activity hub of retail activity in El Cerrito.

Much of the existing plaza is underutilized with vacant stores surrounded by a large expanse of empty parking lots. The Plaza today is a remnant of an older, suburban style, community shopping center. Changing retail marketing practices and the Plaza's distance from the freeway has led to its current economic status.

Despite its current lack of success, the Plaza provides a major opportunity to improve the City's economic position. A process is currently underway to revitalize this area. The General Plan, however, should take a longer view of the opportunities and provide guidance for continued actions over the next 20 years and a vision beyond this period.

Through a major redesign of the area and a change in focus of retail activities in the Plaza, the area can provide a vital new economic resource for the community. An overall long-range revitalization strategy for the Plaza area will provide the framework for future improvement efforts to create a new active retail center in El Cerrito.

The El Cerrito Plaza Revitalization Strategy will address the El Cerrito Plaza site as well as adjacent blocks. The Land Use and Design Strategy will guide the physical development of the El Cerrito Plaza area. The Strategy will base its recommendations on studies of the market potential for alternative land uses in the El Cerrito Plaza area, fiscal impacts of these land uses, circulation and access, quality of life, and other relevant issues.

The Strategy will include four main elements:

- Land Use, Circulation and Design Elements
- Financing and Economic Development Strategy
- Implementation Program
- Analysis of Transportation, Economic, Fiscal, and Environmental Impacts

Responsible Organization: City of El Cerrito

Participating Organizations: AC Transit

Time Frame: Mid-Term (3-5 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito
 El Cerrito Redevelopment Agency
 El Cerrito Plaza Business Association
 BART
 Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)

4. Economic Development Strategy

The Economic Development Strategy will coordinate the City's efforts to retain and attract desirable businesses to El Cerrito, including retail and office uses. The Economic Development Strategy will be based on market studies and economic impact analyses of retail and office uses for the El Cerrito area, and will include strategies for:

- Fiscal Improvements and Stabilization;
- Business Development and Retention;
- Business Promotion and Marketing; and
- Optimum Synergy and Spatial Relationships among Businesses.

The Economic Development Strategy consists of two programs:

- The Business Development and Retention Strategy may include technical and financial assistance programs for new businesses, land assembly for sale to larger developers, and streamlined permitting for desirable developments.
- The Retail/Business Promotion and Marketing Program will coordinate the promotion of El Cerrito businesses to the community and region.

Responsible Organization: City of El Cerrito

Time Frame: Near-Term (1-3 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito
City Business Associations
El Cerrito Chamber Of Commerce

5. *San Pablo Avenue Corridor Design Guidelines*

Retail and office uses along the San Pablo Avenue Corridor are the major economic engines in the City of El Cerrito. The success of the San Pablo Avenue Corridor supports the programs and services of the residential neighborhoods. Future revitalization of the San Pablo Avenue corridor requires that existing lots and buildings be designed and developed to their highest and best use, while preserving and enhancing the residential neighborhoods that adjoin them.

The San Pablo Avenue Corridor contains El Cerrito's main north-south arterial, with extensive commercial development based on automobile access. This development pattern is consistent with development along San Pablo Avenue as it continues through the neighboring communities of Richmond, Albany, and Berkeley. Design Guidelines for San Pablo Avenue will provide direction for the enhancement of existing business and the development of new business opportunities. These improvements will create an attractive and functional development pattern that meets today's retail and office needs.

The design guidelines will address mixed-use commercial development, high-density residential uses, public spaces, and streetscapes design. Residential area guidelines will address density, parking, pedestrian access, noise, and open space needs for new and rehab of existing residential areas. Mixed-use commercial area guidelines will address density and development intensity, parking, access (pedestrian and auto) and circulation, signage, open space and setback requirements, land use buffer areas, and building design and image characteristics.

Streetscape guidelines will recommend the use of landscaping, street furniture, and lighting to improve the experiences of both pedestrian and automobile users of San Pablo Avenue. The pedestrian experience can be further improved by creating public spaces such as plazas, courtyards, and street bulb-outs, and creating a stronger buffer between the sidewalk and automobile traffic. Streetscape design guidelines should include on and off street parking strategies, standards for pedestrian crossing and intersection design, sidewalk widths, street tree planting, signal timing and other functional issues such as ease of movement, pedestrian safety and security, and accessibility.

Responsible Organization: City of El Cerrito

Participating Organizations: Caltrans
 San Pablo Avenue Business Association
 West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory
 Committee (WCCTAC)
 AC Transit

Time Frame: Mid-Term (3-5 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito
 El Cerrito Redevelopment Agency
 Caltrans

6. Green Infrastructure Initiative

The major amenities enjoyed by El Cerrito residents are the parks and open spaces provided in the City. These parks and open spaces need to be preserved and enhanced to maintain this major community resource that contributes so significantly to the City's "quality of life." The Green Infrastructure Initiative is intended to develop a range of improvement measures including the Ohlone Greenway, parks and recreation improvements and programs, creeks restoration projects, open space preservation, and new and revitalized cultural facilities.

The Ohlone Greenway provides a safe and contiguous path for commuters to reach BART stations and for residents to use as a walking, running, and bicycling trail. The Green Infrastructure Initiative will assess the condition of the Greenway and provide guidelines, development standards, and improvement projects to enhance the facility to serve its users better. These standards shall include adding lighting as needed for safety and security along the Greenway and creating a "green street" concept that encourages adjoining uses to create access points to active areas, yards, building entries, outdoor patios, and gardens, opening into the Greenway. Windows should overview the Greenway to increase visual surveillance ("eyes on the street") of the "green street" improving safety.

Parks and recreation programs provide opportunities for El Cerrito youth, singles, families, and seniors. The Initiative will assess the parks and recreation services and facilities available to El Cerrito residents and recommend improvements. El Cerrito is fortunate to possess an extensive open space system in the hillsides. The Green Initiative will identify improvements to the open space network such as ongoing maintenance programs, public trail access improvements, and scenic overlooks.

El Cerrito is blessed with a number of creeks and water drainage ways. The Green Initiative will assess the condition of the creeks and identify areas where they can be improved, restored, and used as both natural open space and a significant recreation resource. Restoring riparian vegetation along buffer areas will help protect against flooding and improve water quality by filtering urban runoff. Access points to the creeks provide education opportunities and additional recreation possibilities.

The Green Initiative should include standards, guidelines, and other improvement projects and beautification programs to protect parks and open spaces, including exploring opportunities for acquisition of additional parks and open space lands. It will include an analysis and improvement strategy for the following:

- Ohlone Greenway Improvements
- Creek Restoration
- Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs
- Cultural Facilities
- Open Space Preservation
- Strategies for Long-term Maintenance

Responsible Organization: City of El Cerrito Parks and Recreation
Department

Participating Organizations: East Bay Regional Parks District
County Flood Control District
Contra Costa County
City of Albany
BART
El Cerrito Greenway Committee

Time Frame: Near-Term (1-3 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito
El Cerrito Redevelopment Agency

7. Community Collaboration Initiative

Continued participation and commitment by all segments of the community, both private and public, are required to successfully implement the City's goals and policies as outlined in the General Plan. Success will depend on collaboration between city departments, civic organizations, adjoining City agencies, and federal, state and regional agencies.

A community collaboration initiative will provide an ongoing information and team building approach to help create partnerships and alliances to build consensus on project priorities and strategies for improvement. The collaboration initiative includes a program of community capacity building, leadership development, and continuing education on City projects, goals, programs, and good citizenship.

Responsible Organization: City of El Cerrito

Participating Organizations: City Homeowners Associations
City Business Associations
Chamber of Commerce
City Civic Organizations

Time Frame: Near-Term (1-3 years)

Potential Funding Sources: City of El Cerrito

D. Supporting Action Strategies

1. **Regulatory Framework Update.** Amend zoning ordinance, design guidelines, and other regulations to reflect the intent of the General Plan and support the implementation of the action strategies presented in this chapter.
2. **Housing Programs.** Utilize federal and state programs to encourage homeownership, assist first time homebuyers, provide home improvement loans and grants, and ensure adequate provision of affordable housing. Provide incentives to encourage development of new housing in targeted areas, such as near BART stations.
3. **City Beautification Programs.** Implement city beautification programs such as street tree planting, public art, neighborhood cleanups, sign ordinance amendments, improved lighting, and graffiti prevention to make El Cerrito a more pleasant environment to live, work, and play.
4. **Redevelopment Programs.** The San Pablo corridor is designated as a redevelopment area under California State Law, enabling the use of tax increment financing to fund projects and programs within the area. Additionally, the process allows for partnerships with private developers to acquire land and invest in new projects in the area.
5. **Capital Improvement Program.** Incorporate infrastructure improvements, such as street, sidewalks, landscaping and lighting, in the City's Capital Improvement Program to ensure the allocation of funding to these projects.
6. **Transportation and Circulation Programs.** Utilize existing traffic and circulation programs such as federal and state funding for transportation improvements and Bay Area Air Quality Management District programs for travel demand management. El Cerrito should also coordinate plans and major proposed development activities with adjacent jurisdictions to ensure continuity of transportation services and facilities.
7. **Intergovernmental Coordination.** Numerous governmental bodies, such as Contra Costa County, neighboring cities, transportation agencies, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the Flood Control District play roles in the implementation of the General Plan. The City of El Cerrito should continue to communicate with these agencies on relevant issues, and participate in existing programs that could improve the quality of life in El Cerrito.
8. **Public/Private Partnerships.** Encourage public/private partnerships, which can combine advantages of both government and private industry to create projects that benefit the community – public sector support reduces uncertainty for private developers, and private sector investment reduces financial burden for the City.

9. **Grant Funding and Corporate Sponsorships.** Actively pursue grant funding from federal agencies, state agencies, and foundations, as well as corporate sponsorships for projects. For example, federal grant programs under TEA-21 can be used to create bicycle trails, support alternate transportation programs, and improve pedestrian safety. Local businesses should be encouraged to invest in their community by sponsoring public projects such as entryways, signage, and landmark features.
10. **Annual Budgeting Process.** Project future funding needs according to the Strategic Action Plan, and secure funding for priority action projects through the City's budgeting process.
11. **Special Districts.** Special assessment districts can be used to fund improvements that benefit a specific area. For example, business improvement districts (BID) can be used by retail areas to fund streetscape, parking, and other improvements that benefit the area. Special assessment districts are often funded through bonds paid for by tax increases to district property owners.
12. **Private Sector Investments.** Work with private developers to encourage the development of desirable new projects and land uses in El Cerrito.