

THE PLAN IN BRIEF

The Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan will create a vibrant “full service” downtown with a stronger retail base, restaurants, commercial offices, public spaces for social and cultural events, small parks, walkways, apartments and condominiums.

The new downtown will provide an appealing, accessible shopping district that will attract local residents and visitors alike.

Specifically, this long-range plan will bring the following benefits to the downtown area along San Pablo Dam Road between El Portal Drive and Appian Way:

- A new Village Center of approximately 25 acres will be located along a large block formed by four streets. The streets that will form the focus of the Village Center are a portion of San Pablo Dam Road, between Hillcrest Road and Pitt Way; an improved Pitt Way; an improved Hillcrest Road; and a new east-west connecting street known as Village Center Drive. The Village Center will have a mixture of shops, offices, residential units and a public plaza, to serve as a focal point for the downtown area.
- Redesign of the San Pablo Dam Road cross-section from a five-lane roadway. Currently the road is four lanes plus a dedicated center lane that allows left turns into driveways throughout the corridor. The road will be reconfigured to provide four lanes with wide sidewalks

in the Village Center portion of San Pablo Dam Road and four lanes with a landscaped median in areas outside of the Village Center.

- A revised pattern of land uses in the downtown. Currently, much of the land in the downtown is devoted to automobile-dependent uses and are not conducive to a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood commercial district. These uses will be encouraged to gradually relocate over time to other more suitable areas of the County and a new mix of downtown uses will be encouraged through incentive and regulatory programs. A total maximum mixed use development of 375,000 square feet of commercial space combined with up to 580 residential units are possible according to the land use framework of this plan. Traffic studies indicate that if this maximum capacity were achieved, traffic within the downtown would not exceed acceptable county standards.
- Landscaped streets and wider sidewalks in the Village Center and along the entire length of San Pablo Dam Road.
- Traffic calming measures and pedestrian improvements on San Pablo Dam Road, making it easier to walk or bicycle in the downtown and easier to cross the street.

- Attractive street furnishings for bus stops and other public places along the street.
- Redesigned commercial properties along San Pablo Dam Road with storefronts located along the sidewalk and shared parking lots behind the businesses to encourage visitors to park their cars and walk around the downtown area.
- A total of approximately 1000 parking spaces in the downtown located in a combination of shared lots (established through a Parking District), private lots, and on-street parking. This is an increase of approximately 250 spaces over the current condition, most of which is now provided in numerous individual, on-site lots. Shared, concentrated parking will improve the pedestrian environment and visual appearance of the downtown.
- New downtown parks and open space including a new Village Center Park suitable for community gatherings, an improved and expanded Library Park, and two new creekside parks at the western end of the downtown.

The plan strikes a balance between the dual uses of San Pablo Dam Road as the access road to downtown El Sobrante on one hand, and a regional route on the other.

Some aspects of the plan likely can be accomplished within a couple of years, but other aspects are longer-term and may take five to ten years or more, depending upon funding, market conditions for development, and other factors.

The planning process was co-sponsored by Contra Costa County, the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce, the community-based 94803 Task Force, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). MTC provided a \$50,000 "Transportation for Livable Communities" grant that financed most of the consultant contract for the project. Additional funds came from the Chamber of Commerce, County Public Works Department and Community Development Department.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

The El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan is the result of a year-long process involving residents, business owners, citizens and Contra Costa County staff with the goal of improving the economic and physical environment of downtown El Sobrante, an unincorporated area of western Contra Costa County.

The elements of the Plan described in this report are initial concepts and are not final policy of Contra Costa County. Rather, they are intended to provide direction for further planning efforts for the downtown, including additional detailed studies leading to future capital improvements in the downtown area.

The Planning Process

This plan had its origins in a downtown visioning workshop that was conducted in El Sobrante in January 2000, at which about 75 residents and business-persons gathered to offer their views on the downtown commercial district. The visioning workshop was sponsored by the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce and funded with a \$40,000 Community Development Block Grant. A professional planning firm, Communities by Design, was hired to facilitate the workshop and help participants establish a vision for the downtown.

The visioning workshop resulted in agreement on the need to revitalize the downtown area. One of the key recommendations from the workshop was to create a community task force to lead the downtown improvement effort. The result was formation of the 94803 Task Force, named for the El Sobrante zip code. The Task Force became a co-sponsor of the downtown revitalization effort, and formed three subcommittees – a Landscape and Design Committee, a Traffic and Transportation Committee, and a Business Committee.

Subsequently, the Task Force and its subcommittees identified goals and initial strategies for improvement of downtown El Sobrante. These are summarized in the Community Goals section of this report.

In September 2000, the transportation planning firm of ARUP, in association with BMS Design Group (urban design), Mundie Associates (economics) and Pittman

Associates (environmental) were selected by the 94803 Task Force and Contra Costa County to prepare specific transportation and land use recommendations that would help achieve the goals established by the Task Force. This report is the result of that work effort.

The work process has included meetings with a 19 member Steering Committee, a Town Hall meeting to introduce the study to the community and four community meetings. Individual presentations also were made to various organizations including the El Sobrante Joint Planning Effort, the Aquatic Outreach Institute, the El Sobrante Rotary Club, the El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Council, downtown residents, St. Callistus Church, and the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee.

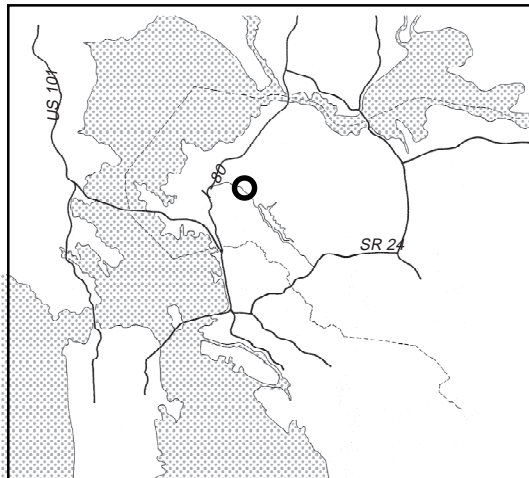


Figure 1. El Sobrante in the context of the San Francisco Bay Area.

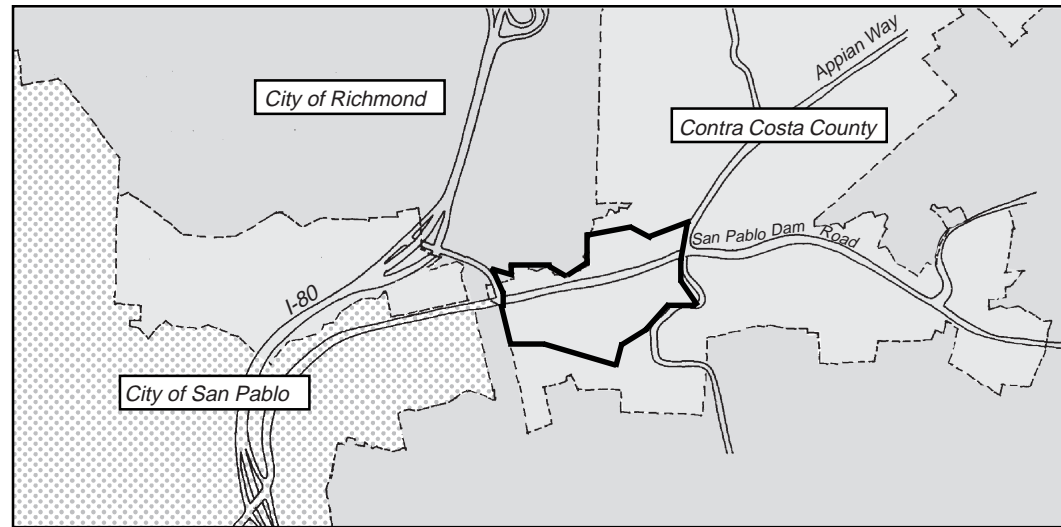


Figure 2. El Sobrante is located at the intersection of three jurisdictions: the City of San Pablo, the City of Richmond and Contra Costa County.

Location

Downtown El Sobrante is located along a ½ mile portion of San Pablo Dam Road between Interstate 80 and State Route 24 in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. It is situated in the El Sobrante Valley at the intersection of three jurisdictions: Contra Costa County, the City of Richmond and the City of San Pablo.

The physical landscape of Contra Costa County varies widely, from the urbanized shoreline of the Bay in the west to the Diablo Mountain Range to the east. The El Sobrante Valley lies in the western portion of the county, in a semi-rural pocket of low density residential development and local-serving businesses, surrounded by the highly developed urban and suburban areas

that typify the I-80 corridor. The natural landscape of the area is characterized by rolling hillsides, oak trees, creeks and lush vegetation, all of which contribute to valley residents' appreciation of the area's woodland character. San Pablo Creek, which flows out of San Pablo Reservoir above the downtown area, passes through the downtown parallel to San Pablo Dam Road on the north.

Purpose of the Study

Historically, San Pablo Dam Road between El Portal Drive and Appian Way has served as downtown El Sobrante's local commercial and retail area. Until the 1950's the corridor was a vibrant center containing shops, restaurants, small department stores and grocery stores serving local needs. In recent years, however, urban growth patterns in the surrounding area have resulted in a shift in commercial activity to areas outside the downtown, with a resulting decline in economic activity. At the same time, increasing development in the surrounding region has increased traffic demands on highways in and adjacent to El Sobrante. San Pablo Dam Road now functions as an important commute corridor for West Contra Costa County.

Today the economic decline and increased traffic along San Pablo Dam Road has resulted in a 5-lane roadway (4 lanes plus left turns). Motorists often speed through the area at speeds well in excess of the posted 25 mile per hour speed limit. Acres of parking and an abundance of auto-serving uses such as auto repair, gas stations and auto sales dominate the area. The area has become almost entirely dependent on the use of the automobile, with poor facilities for pedestrians, transit and bicycle users.

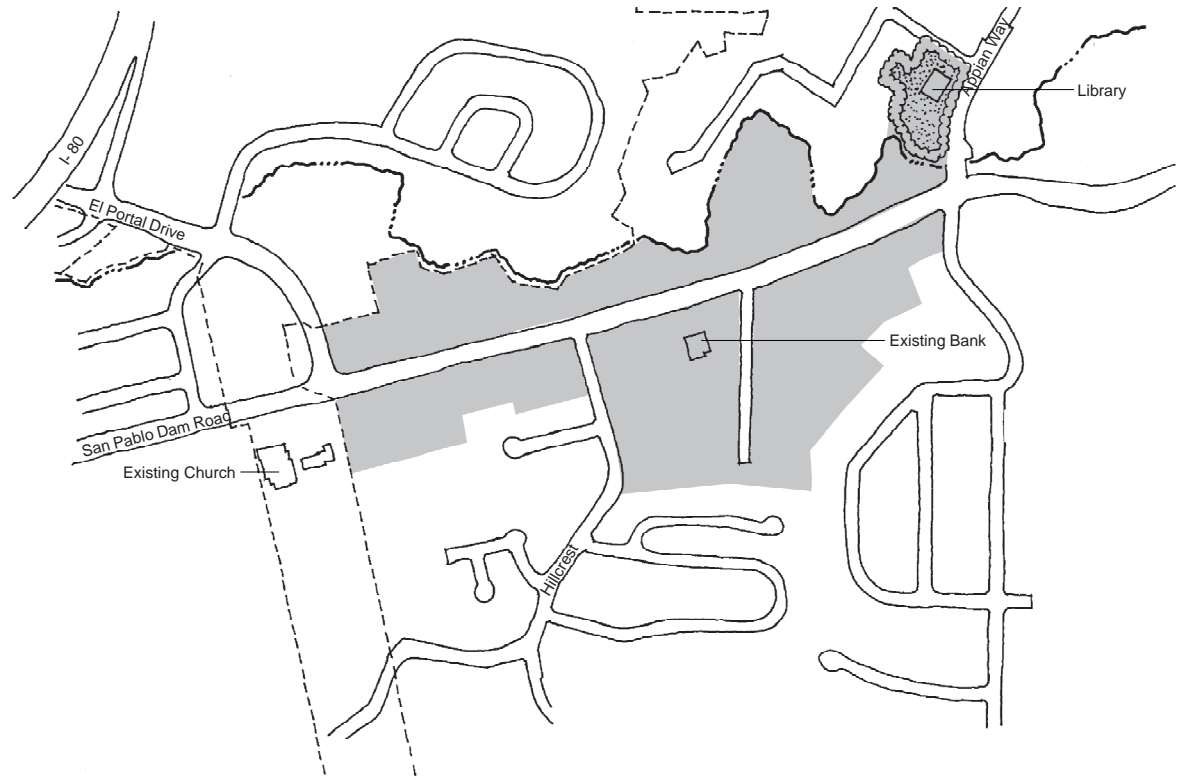


Figure 3. Study Area

The purpose of this study is to define a plan to reverse the economic, transportation and development trends that have occurred in the area over the past 40 years and reestablish a pedestrian-oriented mixed use neighborhood commercial district.

