

Chapter 1. A GUIDE TO THE GENERAL PLAN

Strategic Framework 2-13, Green Infrastructure Initiative

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 ... 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

Policies Relevant to Creeks in 1999 El Cerrito General Plan

PR 3.3 Creek Restoration. Integrate recreational amenities with creek restoration efforts in a way that protects riparian values, including natural habitats.

PS 4.2 Creek Restoration. Seek funding opportunities from State and federal agencies and from non-profit foundations for urban creek restoration efforts.

R 1.1 Habitat Protection. Preserve oak/woodland, riparian vegetation, creeks, native grasslands, wildlife corridors, and other important wildlife habitats. Loss of these habitats should be fully offset through creation of habitat of equal value. Compensation rate for habitat re-creation shall be determined by a qualified biologist.

R 1.2 Rare and Endangered Species. Limit development in areas that support rare and endangered species. If development of these areas must occur, any loss of habitat should be fully compensated onsite. If off-site mitigation is necessary, it should occur within the El Cerrito planning area whenever possible, and must be accompanied by plans and a monitoring program prepared by a qualified biologist.

R 1.3 Potential Environment Impacts. Encourage development patterns that minimize impacts on the City's biological, visual and cultural resources, and integrate development with open space areas.

R 1.6 Runoff Water Quality. Maintain, at a minimum, the water quality levels established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), implement Clean Water Program and NPDES requirements, and achieve the highest possible level of water quality reasonable for an urban environment in City creeks.

R 1.7 Creek Protection. Preserve riparian vegetation, protect owners and buyers of property from erosion and flooding, and increase public access to the creeks. Lands adjacent to riparian areas should be protected as public or private permanent open space through dedication or easements.

R 1.8. Creek Improvements. Accomplish design and improvements along creeks (Cerrito Creek, Baxter Creek, etc.) in consultation and cooperation with creek restoration and design professionals.

R 1.9 Development Near Creeks. For development adjacent to creeks and major drainages, provide adequate building setbacks from creek banks, provision of access easement for creek maintenance purposes and for public access to creekside amenities, and creek improvements such as bank stabilization. Also protect riparian vegetation outside the setback.

R 1.10 Cerrito Creek and Baxter Creek. In implementing improvements to Cerrito Creek, follow design objectives established in 1996 by the City Council. Similarly, establish a set of design objectives that are specific to Baxter Creek (See City Council resolution 96.103)

R. 1.11 Native Plant Communities. Encourage use of native plant species for landscaping in hillside areas, preserve unique plant communities, and use fire-preventive landscaping techniques.

R 1.15 Joint Watershed Partnership. Assure coordination between the cities of El Cerrito, Albany, Berkeley, and Richmond, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the University of California at Berkeley to restore the watershed of the join jurisdictions to a healthy condition. Cooperate closely to achieve the goals expressed in the Joint Watershed Goals Statement (see below).

CD3.1 Tree Preservation. Preserve existing significant trees and tree groupings where possible. Replace trees removed due to site development.

CD3.2 Usable Open Spaces. Require the provision of usable open spaces in the form of ground-floor patios, upper-floor decks, and balconies, as well as common recreational facilities.

CD3.5 Creek Preservation. Where possible, preserve and restore natural draining ways as part of the storm drainage system, coordinating with recreational and trail use.

CD3.6 Cerrito Creek. Where possible, open the Cerrito Creek channel, providing access and recreational opportunities along the creek in conjunction with its flood control function.

CD 3.8 Ohlone Greenway. Enhance the usability and aesthetic appeal of the Ohlone Greenway by integrating it into the fabric of the City. Design buildings with entries, yards, patios, and windows to open onto and face the Ohlone Greenway. Avoid blank walls, backs of buildings, and large parking lots adjacent to the greenway.

T1.3 Bicycle circulation. Create a complete, interconnected bicycle circulation system. Provide a bicycle system that serves commuter as well as recreational travel. Improve bicycle routes and access to and between major destinations.

T 1.7 Pedestrian Circulation. Provide a safe, convenient, continuous and interconnected pedestrian circulation system throughout the City. Ensure safe pedestrian access to local schools.

T 1.7 Regional Coordination. Recognize El Cerrito's role in the region and lead in regional efforts to increase transit and reduce congestion.

Goal T2: A land use pattern that encourages walking, bicycling, and public transit use.

T2.1 Land Use Patterns, item 3: Encourage pedestrian-oriented land use and urban design that can have a demonstrable effect on transportation choices.

T 2.2 Project Design. Projects should be designed to include features that encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use.

LU 5.5 Pedestrian, Bicycles, and Access. Ensure that business areas have adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities and accessibility for persons with disabilities, and that easy connections to transit are available wherever possible.

LU 6.1 Natural Features. Preserve or restore the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation on and neara development sites and open up buried creeks where opportunities can be found, unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot be done.

In addition, the following design objectives for El Cerrito Plaza were adopted into the plan:

Resolution 96-103

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EL CERRITO APPROVING DESIGN OBJECTIVES FOR CERRITO CREEK.

WHEREAS, Cerrito Creek is a significant natural resource in the City of El Cerrito and has the potential to become a recreational amenity which would create an accessible connection between the Ohlone Greenway and the Bay Trail; and

WHEREAS, Cerrito Creek also has the potential to be enhanced as a significant amenity which can contribute to the economic viability of El Cerrito Plaza shopping center; and

WHEREAS, the City of El Cerrito retained Brady and Associates to undertake preliminary design studies for the segment of Cerrito Creek along the south edge of El Cerrito Plaza for the purpose of guiding future design and development of the Cerrito Creek corridor; and

WHEREAS, a statement of nine objectives for the planning and development of Cerrito Creek and its relationship to El Cerrito Plaza and the trail system has been reviewed by advisory City advisory bodies; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission and the Design Review Board have recommended that such objectives be adopted by the City Council to demonstrate the City's basic intentions for the Cerrito Creek corridor,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of El Cerrito hereby adopts Resolution No. 96-103 approving the following statement of design objectives for Cerrito Creek:

1. Create a strong relationship between the creek and the Plaza by integrating retail, housing and civil uses with the creek, and improving the creek as an amenity of the Plaza.
2. Create a continuous pedestrian/bicycle corridor along the creek, linking this segment to creek alignments to the west and east.

3. Link Cerrito Creek to the Bay Trail.
4. The creek corridor should provide opportunities for visual and physical linkages between Albany and El Cerrito.
5. The creek should be an open natural channel along its entire length within the plaza area.
6. Restore the creek channel as a natural corridor with habitat enhancement.
7. Provide variety of uses and diversity along the creek alignment.
8. Extend the open channel to San Pablo Avenue and investigate the potential to realign the creek to the north of the Wells Fargo building, and to make a visible connection across San Pablo Avenue.
9. Provide for physical access by pedestrians to the creek channel.

Key to Proposed Land Use Amendments Map (proposed for 1999 General Plan) includes the following:
19. A strip along Cerrito Creek from BART to Creekside Park; from Commercial and High Density Residential to Park and Open Space; to signify the City's interest in preserving Cerrito Creek for conservation and recreation purposes.