

3 LAND USE & PHYSICAL DESIGN

The purpose of the Land Use and Physical Design Element of the General Plan is to enhance community character, improve how the city looks, and to present a framework to guide future land use decisions and development approved in San Pablo. The element forms the core of the General Plan and its policies articulate the community's land use and growth priorities through 2035, including the Land Use Diagram, land use classifications, standards for density/intensity, and limitations on development.

Policies focus on Urban Form, Community Design, Residential Neighborhoods, Priority Development Areas, and Commercial, Entertainment, and Industrial Uses. In addition, San Pablo Dam Road, a special planning subarea is addressed at the end of the chapter. Policies help define San Pablo's physical development and reinforce its commitment to balancing land use requirements with community needs.

3.1 Background and Context

EXISTING LAND USE PATTERN

The City of San Pablo is one of the smallest cities in Contra Costa County with a Planning Area of only 2.8 square miles. Despite its size, San Pablo is highly urbanized and offers a full range of services and land uses that one would expect from a much larger city.

Geographically, the city is divided into two parts – a western larger section and an eastern smaller section – separated by Interstate 80. The city's more active areas lie at its center, along the retail and commercial corridors of San Pablo Avenue and 23rd Street. Surrounding these corridors are residential neighborhoods and

schools. Neighborhoods include the Old Town neighborhood located in the southwestern part of the city; Rumrill neighborhood situated roughly between Brookside Drive and Broadway Avenue to the west of Contra Costa College; Bayview neighborhood in the north of the city; El Portal neighborhood between the Contra Costa College campus and Road 20; the Rollingwood neighborhood adjacent to El Portal Drive; the Hillside neighborhood east of San Pablo Dam Road; and Central neighborhood on both sides of San Pablo Avenue roughly from McBride Avenue to Church Lane. The neighborhoods are defined by roads, natural features, time period of development, and pattern of development.

In general, industrial and service commercial land uses are located in the western part of the city, along Giant Road and to a lesser degree along Rumrill Boulevard. Despite being planned for industrial uses, industrial activity not highly prevalent and is intermixed with other uses. Today, the area is occupied by a mix of storage facilities, automotive businesses, residential uses, and wholesalers.

Due to the city's urbanized nature and small size, open space and parkland are limited in San Pablo. Davis Park is the largest public park at 11.6 acres. Other smaller parks are scattered across the city, close to residential neighborhoods. Other recreational uses include Rumrill Sports Park along Rumrill and the planned McNeil Park adjacent to Contra Costa College on Moraga Road.



Single-family housing is the most common type of land use in San Pablo.



On a clear day, the city and San Pablo Bay beyond the city can be seen from the hills.

LAND USE CHARACTERISTICS

The existing land use pattern is shown in **Figure 3-1**. San Pablo is a largely built out city with relatively little vacant land, as shown on Table 3.1-1. Residential uses account for 45 percent of land within the City limit, predominantly in single-family residential neighborhoods. Commercial uses are primarily concentrated along major transportation corridors - San Pablo Avenue, San Pablo Dam Road, 23rd Street and Rumrill Boulevard, comprising almost 10 percent of land within the City limit. Public and Institutional uses account for about 11 percent of land, including, schools, churches, government facilities, and Contra Costa College. Office uses account for less one percent of land in San Pablo and parks and open spaces account for about four percent.

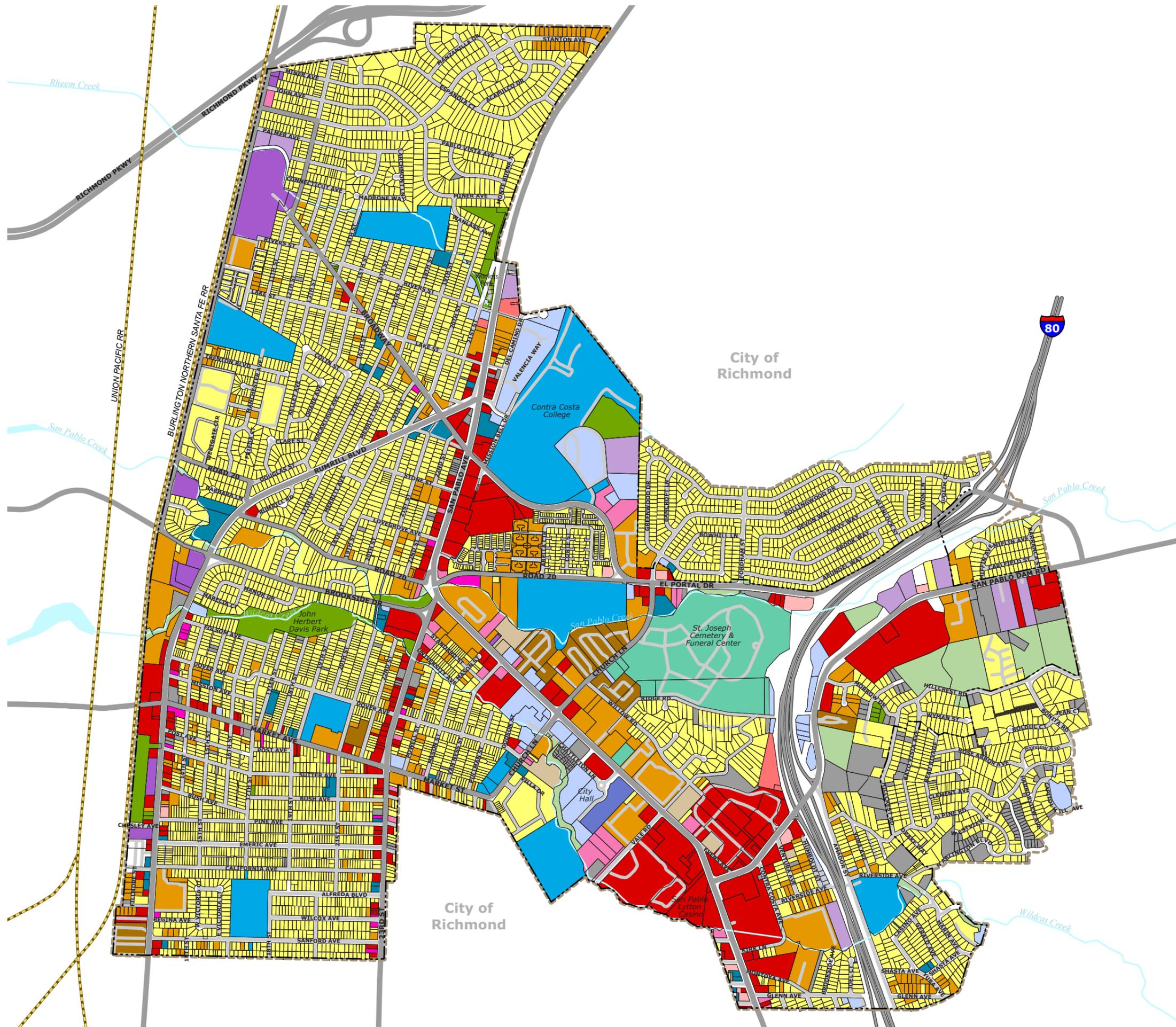
Table 3.1-1 Existing Land Use

<i>Land Use</i>	<u>City Limits</u>		<u>Sphere of Influence</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Total Acres</i>	<i>Percent of Total</i>
<i>Residential</i>						
Single-Family Residential	594.5	35.7%	151.6	66.5%	746.2	39.4%
Multi-Family Residential	132.4	7.9%	2.4	1.0%	125	7.1%
Mobile Homes	23.2	1.4%	-	-	111	1.2%
<i>Residential Subtotal</i>	<i>750.1</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>154.0</i>	<i>67.5%</i>	<i>904.2</i>	<i>37.7%</i>
<i>Commercial</i>						
Hotel, Motel, Lodging Commercial	4.0	0.2%	-	-	4.0	0.2%
Service Station	3.9	0.2%	-	-	3.9	0.2%
General Commercial	140.0	8.4%	-	-	140.0	8.4%
Office	13.6	0.8%	-	-	13.6	0.8%
Mixed Use	3.5	0.2%	-	-	3.5	0.2%
<i>Commercial/Office Subtotal</i>	<i>165.0</i>	<i>9.8%</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>165.0</i>	<i>9.8%</i>
<i>Industrial</i>						
Light Industrial	18.6	1.1%	-	-	19.5	1.2%
General Industrial	19.6	1.2%	-	-	19.6	1.2%
<i>Industrial Subtotal</i>	<i>39.1</i>	<i>2.4%</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>39.1</i>	<i>2.4%</i>
<i>Public/ Institutional</i>						
Church/Religious Facility	15.4	0.9%	0.2	0.1%	15.6	0.8%
Public/Institutional	44.5	2.7%	2.0	0.9%	46.5	2.5%
School/Educational Facility	116.5	7.0%	-	-	116.5	6.1%
Hospital	3.8	0.2%	-	-	3.8	0.2%
Assisted Living/Skilled Nursing Facility/ Residential Care	7.6	0.5%	-	-	7.6	0.4%
<i>Public/ Institutional Subtotal</i>	<i>187.9</i>	<i>11.3%</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>1.0%</i>	<i>190.1</i>	<i>10.0%</i>
<i>Other</i>						
Cemetery/Mortuary	51.5	3.1%	-	-	51.5	2.7%
Open Space/ Natural Areas	33.7	2.0%	-	-	33.7	1.8%
Parks/Recreation	29.0	1.8%	-	-	28.1	1.5%
Vacant	31.2	1.9%	10.7	4.7	41.9	2.2%
Vacant-Public	5.7	0.3%	0.1	0.1	5.8	0.3%
Roads/Row/Transportation/Other	374.8	22.5%	61.0	26.8	435.7	23.0%
<i>Other Subtotal</i>	<i>524.9</i>	<i>31.5%</i>	<i>71.8</i>	<i>31.6%</i>	<i>596.7</i>	<i>31.5%</i>
TOTAL	1,667.0	100%	228.0	100%	1,895.0	100%

Note: Due to rounding, subtotals may not equal individual row counts

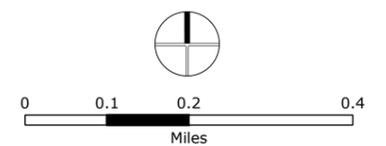
Source: Contra Costa County, 2008; City of San Pablo, 2009; Dyett & Bhatia, 2009; updated by City of San Pablo, 2025

Figure 3-1:
Existing Land Use



- Single Family Residential
- Multi Family Residential
- Mobile Homes
- Service Station
- Hotel, Motel, Lodging Commercial
- General Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Office
- Light Industrial
- General Industrial
- Assisted Living/Skilled Nursing Facility
- Public/Institutional
- School/Educational Facility
- Hospital
- Church/Religious Facility
- Cemetery/Mortuary
- Parks/Recreation
- Open Space/Natural Areas
- Vacant Land

- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Railroads



SOURCE: City of San Pablo, 2025; Contra Costa County GIS, 2025; Dyett & Bhatia, 2025

RECENT DEVELOPMENT

Since 2010, major development projects in San Pablo have primarily been concentrated within the San Pablo Avenue Priority Development Area. These include Alvarado Gardens, a 100-unit affordable housing project at the old City Hall location on San Pablo Avenue and Church Street; Chattleton Place, which involves 20 for-sale townhomes with 8 accessory dwelling units; and the new Police Headquarters and Regional Training Center on Gateway Avenue. A 54-unit supportive housing project was constructed on El Portal Drive near Contra Costa College in 2024, as well single-family housing primarily in neighborhoods in the southwest of the city. The City has also approved several affordable housing projects, although in a climate of rising construction costs and interest rates, the financial feasibility of affordable housing remains challenging.

3.2 General Plan Land Use Diagram

LAND USE FRAMEWORK

The land use framework embodies the Community's vision for the future development pattern in the city and is designed to reflect the planning themes presented in Chapter 1. These include:

- *Economic Development and Jobs.* Together with the regional commercial and neighborhood commercial land use classifications, new mixed use designations provide development opportunities for small businesses as well as large commercial, office, and light industrial uses to flourish.
- *Mixed-Use Development.* A major initiative in the General Plan is to introduce the concept of "mixed-use" to San Pablo. This is a land use that allows more than one single use to occur, either on the same lot (such as residential units above a grocery store), or on lots that are next to each other along key corridors or in districts within the city. Mixed use developments bring jobs close to places where people live. In turn, this increases the convenience of shopping or going to work and reduces the need for automobiles.

- *Enhanced Neighborhoods and Pedestrian-Oriented Design.* Policies are written with an eye toward promoting walkable neighborhoods. New developments along the city’s transportation corridors will accommodate a diverse range of housing types and be designed with pedestrian-oriented circulation and community-centered spaces.
- *More Parks and Open Space.* Responding to community feedback and parks and open space standards, a major goal of the Plan is to increase the amount of park and recreation area in the city. The Plan proposes to add seven potential generalized park locations and create a network of greenways so future residents can enjoy parks and open spaces within walking distance of their homes.
- *A Complete Roadway System.* The land uses presented on the Land Use Diagram are structured around the proposed roadway network, and the two components are interrelated. The types, location, capacity, and multi-modal use of these roadways are presented in Chapter 4: Circulation.
- *A Range of Commercial and Retail Opportunities.* The General Plan provides for the full range of commercial, retail, and workplace uses needed for the future population and local economy. Regionally-oriented establishments are placed on major roadway corridors; while neighborhood-oriented uses are placed within planned communities and neighborhoods.



Vacant and underused parcels such as those along Rumrill Boulevard will be gradually redeveloped with infill projects.

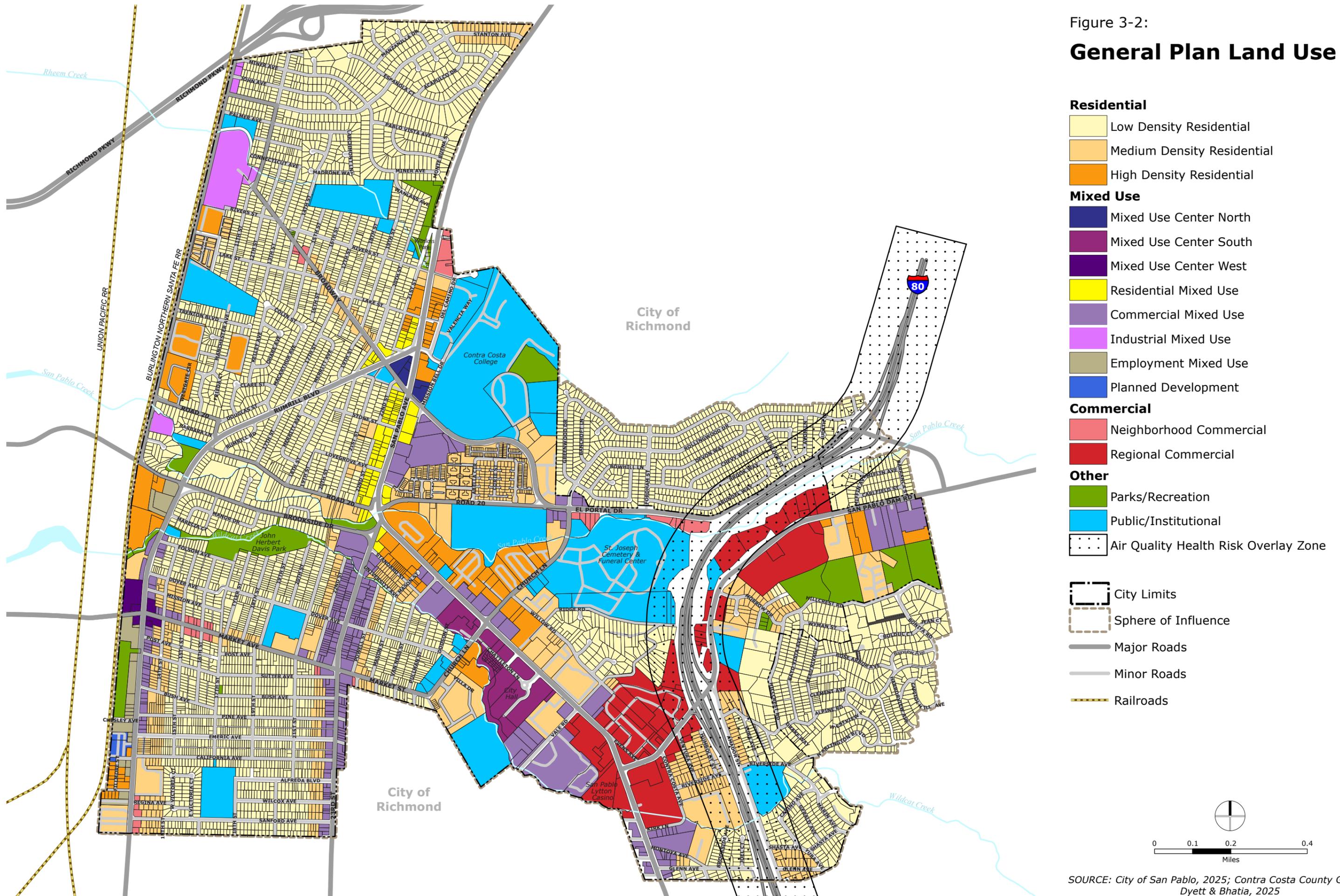


Medium to high density multifamily housing has been built along main roads such as San Pablo Avenue since the early 1990s.

THE LAND USE DIAGRAM

The General Plan Land Use Diagram (**Figure 3-2**) depicts the desired ultimate land use pattern for the City of San Pablo. The diagram is a graphic representation of land use classifications and locations, and should be used in conjunction with policies established in the Plan. The proposed general locations, distribution, and extent of land uses show the vision of development at buildout in 2035 and beyond. The Land Use Diagram includes a legend that shows land use categories whose densities and allowable uses are specified in the General Plan Land Use Classification section below. The Diagram is not parcel-specific, and uses on sites less than one acre in size are generally not depicted.

Figure 3-2:
General Plan Land Use



DENSITY/INTENSITY STANDARDS

The General Plan establishes density/intensity standards for each type of land use. The purpose of the density/intensity standards is to indicate how much development is allowed or recommended on a single plot of land. For residential uses, the density/intensity standards are expressed as the number of housing units per gross acre. For non-residential uses, a measure known as Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is specified. In design terms, FAR is defined as the permitted ratio of gross floor area to site area. It is a measure of building bulk that controls both visual prominence and trip generation. When FAR is specified for a residential and non-residential mixed-use classification in this Plan, the FAR includes the amount of non-residential use only.

The density (housing units per acre) and intensity (FAR) standards specified in this Plan are for gross developable land (that is, including rights-of-way that may need to be dedicated to the City). The reader should note that recommended density/intensity standards serve as a guide only, and do not imply that development projects must be approved at the intensity specified for each use. Additionally, zoning regulations consistent with General Plan policies and/or site conditions may reduce development potential within the stated ranges.

Residential neighborhoods are a fundamental part of the urban fabric of San Pablo and the General Plan seeks to enhance neighborhood quality of life. Single-family neighborhoods in the older parts of San Pablo west of I-80 are generally characterized by smaller lot sizes and those in the newer and hillier portions of the City are larger. The standard recommended minimum lot size is 5,000 square feet (6,000 square feet for a corner lot), but a lower minimum lot size of 2,500 square feet is recommended for the older parts of San Pablo. Establishing a smaller minimum lot size would help to enhance conformity with existing development patterns, allow improved redevelopment and infill potential and help to make housing prices more affordable.

Residential density in single-family neighborhoods in San Pablo ranges from 1 to 16 units per gross acre, with typical density at approximately 12 units per net acre. Densities are lowest in eastern and northern neighborhoods, with higher average densities in the older parts of the city where parcels are smaller.

San Pablo includes three Priority Development Areas (PDAs) (**Figure 3-3** Priority Development Areas in San Pablo), which are regionally targeted transit-rich areas that are planned for a higher intensity of residential and employment uses and have a strong potential for transit-oriented development. These PDAs include San Pablo Avenue, 23rd Street, and Rumrill Boulevard. Preparation of special or area plans for PDAs are encouraged to facilitate intensification of uses. A Specific Plan was prepared for San Pablo Avenue in 2011 and a Corridor Plan was completed for Rumrill Boulevard in 2025 and is included as a special Element of this plan (see Appendix A). As described in more detail below, the 23rd Street Specific Plan is envisioned for repeal and replacement with objective zoning standards following adoption of this General Plan.

LAND USE CLASSIFICATION

The Land Use Diagram illustrates land use classifications, organized into five categories: Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial, Industrial, and Public.

Residential

Low Density Residential. This designation is provides primarily for single family detached residential development. This designation provides for a range of lot sizes and allows up to 16 dwelling units per acre, with densities on the lower end of the range on larger lots and densities at the higher end of the range on small lots. In addition to single-family homes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs), other permitted land uses include schools, religious institutions, parks, and other community facilities appropriate within a residential neighborhood.

Medium Density Residential. This designation provides for a mix of housing types and may accommodate small lot single family, attached single family or townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, apartment buildings, or condominiums. Accessory Dwelling Units are also permitted in all residential districts. Permitted residential density for this designation ranges 13 to 24 units per gross acre.

High Density Residential. This designation is intended primarily for higher-density multifamily apartments, townhomes, and condominiums. Developments in this category are typically three to six stories high and located along major roads. Common area open space and shared amenities are required within a development. Permitted residential density for this designation ranges from 25 to 60 units per gross acre.

Figure 3-3:

Priority Development Areas in San Pablo



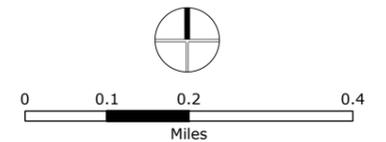
Opportunity Sites

- Vacant Sites
- Underused Sites

Priority Development Area (PDA)

- San Pablo Avenue PDA
- 23rd Street PDA
- Rumrill Boulevard PDA

- City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Railroads



SOURCE: City of San Pablo, 2025; Contra Costa County GIS, 2025; Dyett & Bhatia, 2025

Mixed Use

Mixed Use Centers. This designation is intended for high density mixed use development. There are three mixed use center subcategories with different land use intentions, housing densities and typical FARs.

- *Mixed Use Center North.* Mixed use development on Mission Plaza, at the junction of Rumrill Boulevard, San Pablo Avenue, and Broadway Avenue, will be primarily residential with retail or other active commercial uses at the ground floor. The residential units will be small in size (averaging 600 square feet) to cater to students of the College and other smaller households. Typical height is expected to be four to six stories. The maximum permitted FAR is 2.5 for residential and non-residential uses combined. No separate residential maximum density is specified, to enable maximum use of FAR by smaller housing units geared to students.
- *Mixed Use Center South.* Mixed use development at the former Circle S site, bounded by San Pablo Avenue, Church Lane, and Wildcat Creek, includes retail, medical, residential, and public/institutional uses. Active uses that promote pedestrian activity are encouraged on the ground floor. Typical height is two to three stories, with up to six stories allowed in certain locations. The area is actively being developed, with several institutional uses, including the West County Health Center and San Pablo City Hall, as well as a Walgreens building already built, and active construction on a new police headquarters and training facility and new townhomes. The maximum permitted FAR is 2.5 and maximum permitted residential density is up to 60 units per gross acre prior to the application of any density bonus.
- *Mixed Use Center West.* Mixed use development at this prominent western gateway into San Pablo will include multiunit residential development with a permitted density of 30-60 units per gross acre and/or activity-generating commercial uses with a maximum FAR of 2.5 inclusive of residential uses. The maximum permitted density and FAR may be calculated over the total area of adjoining parcels if they are proposed for redevelopment together as part of a single project. A mix of uses is encouraged but not required on individual sites. Typical building height is expected to be four to five stories with mixed use in either a vertical or horizontal format. Desired commercial uses include a grocery store, restaurants, and community-serving shops and services. Other potential commercial uses include a food truck park with communal seating, a production facility with a tasting

room or retail sales point, and/or a commercial kitchen with on-site sales and dining. Residential developments that are "affordable by design" are encouraged, such as co-housing, micro-apartments, and modular construction. Bonus density and other regulatory incentives will be available for projects that provide public plazas, on-site recreational amenities, public art, and high-quality design features that build the visual presence of the Rumrill/Market gateway.

Commercial Mixed Use. This designation is intended to foster a mix of commercial, office, service retail, public and residential uses. A mix of uses is encouraged but not required on individual sites. Typical height is expected to be two to three stories. The maximum permitted FAR is 1.5. Residential uses are allowed only when the commercial FAR is 0.50 or greater. Permitted density is 20 to 40 units per gross acre.



A major goal of the Land Use Element is to encourage mixed use development in San Pablo.

Employment Mixed Use. This designation seeks to foster a range of production, distribution, and repair-oriented businesses, including food production and distribution; small-scale auto and appliance repair; apparel, electronics, and furniture manufacturing; and a host of other creative demonstration, showcase, and assembly uses. The intent is to provide opportunities for smaller scale commercial, office, industrial, and hybrid uses seeking affordable spaces that do not require direct access to the regional transportation network and to provide jobs with good wages that do not require a college degree for local residents. On-site live/work housing is also encouraged within this designation. On sites over 0.25 acres, multiunit housing is permitted where adequate buffering and noise mitigation is provided. Maximum permitted FAR for non-residential uses is 0.6.

Residential Mixed Use. This designation provides for a mix of uses that includes residential, office, and retail. Development that fronts onto San Pablo Avenue is encouraged to have active commercial or community-serving uses at the ground floor; elsewhere, residential uses are permitted on the ground floor. Non-residential uses may include administrative, financial, business, professional, medical, dental and public uses that promote comings and goings. The typical height is expected to be two to three stories. The maximum permitted FAR is 1.5 for residential and non-residential uses combined.

Commercial/Industrial

Neighborhood Commercial. This designation provides for small-scale commercial uses that primarily provide convenience, personal services and social services such as retail and specialty shops, eating and drinking establishments, and commercial recreation that are convenient to those living nearby. It is designed to foster a pedestrian atmosphere along public streets. Residential uses are discouraged, unless they are incidental to the commercial use or part of a small-scale mixed use. The maximum permitted non-residential FAR is 1.0. On smaller parcels, additional FAR may be permitted to achieve the desired vision for the area.

Regional Commercial. This designation is intended for medium to large-scale commercial development that serves local, community, and regional needs. It is typically easily accessible by freeways and regional roadways, and contains a range of goods and services such as retail, eating and drinking establishments, hotels and motels. Multifamily residential uses are permitted at between 20 and 60 units per gross acre. The maximum permitted non-residential FAR is 0.75.

Entertainment District Overlay. This overlay district allows for intensification of an underlying commercial or mixed use designation. The entertainment district is easily accessed by freeways and regional roadways, and serves community and regional needs with a focus on entertainment, retail, health/medical, and recreation uses. This includes nightlife venues, various types of theaters, arcades/game rooms, and eating and drinking establishments. Typical height is expected to be three to five stories. The maximum permitted FAR is 0.6 above the FAR of the base district.

Industrial Mixed Use. This designation is intended for light manufacturing, distribution, sales and services with ancillary commercial and office space, including single and multi-story office, flex-space, and industrial buildings for single and multiple users, storage uses, and research and development activities. Uses

in this designation may require staging and support spaces, often outdoors. The maximum permitted FAR is 0.60.

Planned Development/Infill Opportunity. This designation is intended to promote high density residential and/or mixed-use development on a cluster of adjacent City-owned sites. Permitted residential density is up to 60 units per net acre prior to any density bonus and an affordable housing component is required, consistent with Gov. Code, §§ 54220-54234. Residential development should include a mix of unit types, including studios, one-bedroom units, micro-units and other smaller unit types suitable for singles and students as well as larger units for families. Live/work housing that provides opportunities for compatible home-based businesses is encouraged. The site may be developed with residential uses alone; however, complementary non-residential uses such as business incubator space, commercial recreational uses, or space for workforce development and training activities are also desired.

Public/Institutional. This designation is intended for uses that serve a public purpose, including public and private schools, administrative offices, corporation yards, and public facilities, such as hospital and medical centers, police stations, and fire stations. There is no assumed buildout intensity for non-residential development.

Parks/Recreation. This designation is intended for improved and unimproved park facilities, including neighborhood, community, and regional parks; and recreational facilities that provide open space and serve the outdoor recreational needs of the community. No FAR is assumed.

Air Quality Management Health Risk Overlay Zone. The purpose of the 500-foot overlay zone on both sides of Interstate 80 is to protect sensitive receptors from toxic air emissions, consistent with Bay Area Air Quality Management District guidelines. The City will avoid siting new sensitive uses, such as hospitals and medical facilities, schools, senior centers, and child care centers in this area, and will require special mitigation measures for any residential development built in this zone. New development is required to provide project-level mitigation measures to reduce vulnerability to toxic air emissions from the highway. The Air Quality section in the Open Space and Conservation Element provides details.

Table 3.2-1 San Pablo General Plan Land Use Density and Intensity Standards

<i>Land Use Classification</i>	<i>Floor Area Ratio (FAR; includes all uses—non-residential and residential)</i>		<i>Density</i> <i>(units per gross acre)</i>
	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Range or Maximum</i>
Low Density Residential	-	-	up to 12
Medium Density Residential	-	-	12.1 - 24
High Density Residential	-	-	24.1 - 60
Mixed Use Center North	0.30 ²	2.5	up to 80 ¹
Mixed Use Center South	0.50 ²	2.5	up to 60 ¹
Mixed Use Center West	0.30 ⁷	2.5	30-60 ¹
Commercial Mixed Use	0.40 ²	1.5	up to 50 ^{1,4}
Employment Mixed Use ⁶	-	0.6	up to 60 -
Residential Mixed Use	-. ⁵	1.5	up to 50 ¹
Neighborhood Commercial	0.30	1.0	-
Regional Commercial	0.30	0.75	-
Entertainment District Overlay		0.6 above base district maximum ³	-
Industrial Mixed Use		0.60	-
Public Institutional	-	-	-
Planned Development/ Infill Opportunity	-	-	up to 60
Parks/Recreation	-	-	-

¹ Included within the FAR limit.

² The frontage of a site along San Pablo Avenue is required to be devoted to active uses.

³ Additional FAR available for entertainment uses only.

⁴ Residential uses only allowed when commercial FAR is 0.5 or greater, except on sites within the PDA overlay, where standalone residential projects are permitted.

⁵ While no minimum FAR is specified, development along San Pablo Avenue must have active uses on the ground floor.

⁶ Multiunit housing is permitted only for sites over 0.25 acres, where adequate buffering and noise mitigation is provided.

⁷ Minimum FAR applies to non-residential uses only. Exceptions may be permitted if the proposed non-residential use would generate substantial pedestrian activity and contribute to the desired vision for the area.

Source: City of San Pablo, 2010; Dyett & Bhatia, 2010 and 2025

GENERAL PLAN BUILDOUT

The term “buildout” refers to the hypothetical situation where all anticipated development under the General Plan has occurred. It should be noted that although the General Plan assumes a year horizon of approximately 20 years and anticipates buildout to occur in 2035, the actual timeline may be different. Additionally, the designation of a site for a certain use does not necessarily mean that site will be developed with that use. Market conditions and General Plan amendments and updates may affect what is ultimately developed.

As described in Chapter 1 and shown on **Table 3.2-2**, based on development trends, regional growth forecasts, and assumptions for future growth, it is estimated that the San Pablo Planning Area will accommodate approximately 34,950 residents, 11,510 housing units, and 8,510 jobs in 2035. This represents an increase of approximately 2,750 residents, 990 homes, and 2,610 jobs between 2010 and 2035. New development is projected to occur primarily in PDAs and new residential development would primarily be multifamily housing.

Table 3.2-2 Population, Housing Units, Households, and Jobs at Buildout (2035)¹

	2010	Additional	Buildout (2035)	Percent Annual Growth
Population	32,200	2,750	34,395	0.4
Households	9,680	940	10,620	0.5
Housing Units	10,520	990	11,510	0.5
Jobs	5,900	2,610	8,510	1.8

¹ Existing and projection numbers rounded to the nearest ten.

² Buildout population calculations assume 3.1 persons per household and 1.5 persons per secondary unit.

Source: Association of Bay Area Governments, 2009; City of San Pablo, 2010; Dyett & Bhatia, 2025.

A. Urban Form

San Pablo’s future land use development is guided by the community’s vision of an urban community, with medium to high-intensity mixed-use development in PDAs and generally low- to mid-density small lot residential development in the neighborhoods. The policies in this section are intended to help San Pablo achieve growth within the PDAs, without compromising the predominantly low-density and low-rise single-family residential character of established neighborhoods.

GUIDING POLICIES

- LU-G-1 Promote a sustainable, balanced land use pattern that responds to existing and future needs of the City, as well as physical and natural constraints.*
- LU-G-2 Ensure planned land uses are compatible with existing uses and provide for appropriate transitions or buffers for new uses, as needed.*

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

- LU-I-1 Amend the Zoning Ordinance to:
- Implement General Plan land use designations;
 - Implement the Sustainable Transit Oriented Development Master Plan;
 - Promote Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) at appropriate locations; and
 - Reduce minimum parcel size for multifamily development and incorporate development standards to facilitate high quality multifamily projects on opportunity sites in San Pablo.
- LU-I-2 Establish incentives in the Zoning Ordinance for the consolidation of small, adjacent lots to create more developable parcels.
- LU-I-3 Ensure that land use development occurs in an orderly fashion and in pace with the expansion of public facilities and services.
- LU-I-4 Ensure appropriate transitions between single-family neighborhoods and higher intensity uses.
- LU-I-5 Study the feasibility of annexing the Hillside area south of Hillcrest Road that is within the City's Sphere of Influence.

B. Community Design

This section contains urban design policies that provide direction and guidance for the development of the City's built environment. These policies seek to enhance San Pablo's image as a distinctive community with diverse architectural styles and to promote concepts such as pedestrian-oriented streets, landscaped streetscapes, and environmentally responsible design. Additionally, policies promoting crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and defensible space considerations are also included to respond to community priorities.



The use of landscaping, a uniform building setback line, and ground floor retail can help promote walkability.

GUIDING POLICIES

LU-G-3 Preserve and strengthen the City's overall image and create a safe, walkable and attractive urban environment for current and future generations of residents.

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

LU-I-6 Require design review of all new construction and visible exterior alterations of large non-residential buildings.

Any new non-residential construction or remodeling of an existing building where exterior work alters more than 50 percent of visible building façade,

including exterior improvements, such as new windows, doors or signage, should be subject to design review.

LU-I-7 Provide incentives for new pedestrian-friendly anchor retail or active commercial uses at high visibility intersections to attract retail and service clientele and maximize foot traffic.

Incentives may include increased floor area ratios, deferred impact fees, and priority processing.

LU-I-8 Apply Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles in the design of new development and encourage the provision of adequate public lighting; windows overlooking streets or parking lots; and paths to increase pedestrian activity within private development projects and public facilities in order to enhance public safety and reduce calls for service.

LU-I-9 Continue to involve the Police Department in the development review process to ensure new buildings are designed with security and safety in mind.

The Planning Division will continue to coordinate with the Police Department with respect to reviewing new development proposals. Issues to be considered include the design and location of entries, lobbies, hallways, and parking lots to ensure public safety.

LU-I-10 Enhance the City’s unique identity and image by adopting a consistent or harmonious palette of landscaping, street trees, lighting, and signage within the public rights of way for neighborhood street improvements.

LU-I-11 Enhance and celebrate key entrances to the City with signs, landscaping, street trees, lighting, banners, gateway and/or entry features.



Street trees provide shade and also helps improve air quality.

C. Residential Neighborhoods

San Pablo is a city of neighborhoods. Residential land use accounts for nearly half of the land within the City limit, with single-family homes as the predominant housing type. San Pablo neighborhoods

typically feature single-story homes on smaller lots with some smaller scale multifamily developments interspersed. Neighborhoods east of Interstate 80 feature larger lots with some two story homes. Although San Pablo's neighborhoods are largely built out, increasingly, accessory dwelling units provide smaller, more affordable housing options in residential neighborhoods for relatives, friends, and renters. The City operates a robust residential health and safety program that helps ensure that existing housing complies with building, electrical, fire and plumbing code standards, ensuring that structures are safe for occupancy and that housing stock is adequately maintained. Most neighborhoods are within a 1/2 mile of shops and services, and the relatively flat terrain in most of the city makes walking and bicycling an easy option for residents.

In community engagement activities, participants emphasized the desire to expand the supply and affordability of housing, improve the safety and attractiveness of neighborhoods, protect the local character of San Pablo, and prevent displacement of existing residents. Reflecting this input, General Plan policies strive to promote infill development and expand the range of housing options within established neighborhoods, while ensuring appropriate transition in scales between high density and low-density areas. The Plan also seeks to promote the development of community-centric public spaces for recreation and amenities in housing developments, including private and public open space, landscaping, sidewalks, playgrounds, and other community-focused amenities.

GUIDING POLICIES

- LU-G-4 Protect and enhance quality of life in the city's residential neighborhoods.*
- LU-G-5 Promote a variety of housing types and prices within neighborhoods to serve the needs of all economic segments of the community.*

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

- LU-I-12 Allow for a range of residential development intensities throughout the community to cultivate a mix of housing types at varying sales price points and rental rates, provide options for residents of all income levels, and protect existing residents from displacement.*

- LU-I-13 Promote the development of a greater variety of housing types and sizes in existing neighborhoods to meet the needs of future demographics and changing household sizes, including single-family homes on small lots; accessory dwelling units; alley-facing units; townhomes; live-work spaces; duplexes; triplexes; fourplexes; bungalow courts; and senior and student housing.
- LU-I-14 Facilitate the development of 3 and 4-bedroom homes and accessory dwelling units that cater to larger, multi-generational families.
- LU-I-15 Promote the preservation, maintenance, and improvement of property through code enforcement to mitigate or eliminate deterioration and blight conditions, and to help encourage new development and reinvestment.
- LU-I-16 Encourage building placement variations, roofline variations, architectural projections, and other embellishments to enhance the visual interest along residential streets.
- LU-I-17 Allow small-scale non-residential uses that contribute to residential character or provide complementary services within the neighborhood, such as child care, neighborhood retail, and other stores.
- LU-I-18 Ensure that new development in or adjacent to established neighborhoods is compatible in scale and character with the surrounding area by:
- Promoting a transition in scale and architectural character between new buildings and established neighborhoods; and
 - Requiring pedestrian circulation, transit access, and vehicular routes to be well integrated.
- LU-I-19 Provide regulatory, process, and/or market-based incentives for housing that offers residents a range of amenities, including public and private open space, landscaping, and recreation facilities with direct access to commercial services, public transit, and community gathering spaces.

- LU-I-20 Promote the development of public spaces that serve as a neighborhood square or “commons” for the surrounding neighborhood.
- Neighborhood “commons” are concentrations of activity and uses that serve an important social function. They should be located within close proximity and easy walking distance to adjacent residences, generally no more than 5 minutes away. These public spaces should be at least 5,000 square feet in size and include outdoor seating and other pedestrian amenities.*
- LU-I-21 Support residential infill on vacant and underused lots within existing neighborhoods.
- Infill should be sensitive to the design elements (building elements, setbacks, and heights) of adjacent properties. Use of accessory dwelling units, by-right duplexes, and missing middle-density residential can help add housing and enhance affordable housing opportunities in existing neighborhoods.*
- LU-I-22 Encourage the use of innovative and cost-effective building materials, site design practices and energy and water conservation measures to conserve resources and reduce the cost of residential development.
- LU-I-23 Require new senior and supportive housing to meet standards for accessibility.
- Senior and supportive housing projects should be located in areas that provide convenient access (vehicular as well as pedestrian) to community amenities, including transit; shopping, services (including medical); parks and recreation; and social and educational activities.*
- LU-I-24 Provide relocation assistance to low-income residents if they are displaced due to redevelopment and for those in mobile home parks, if the park is redeveloped for another use.

D. Priority Development Areas

San Pablo's principal commercial corridors - San Pablo Avenue, 23rd Street, and Rumrill Boulevard - offer significant potential for redevelopment with residential and job-generating uses. Today, these corridors are typically lined with older buildings and low-slung strip mall developments with large areas of surface parking. Recognizing the potential for redevelopment to help further community priorities for economic development, housing choice, and improved quality of life, the City has designated three corridor segments as Priority Development Areas (PDAs), making them eligible for regional grant funding to support planning and public investment in transportation and utility infrastructure which in turn will help attract private investment to achieve the envisioned land use pattern and growth.

Shown on **Figure 3-3** above, the three PDAs are:

- *San Pablo Avenue PDA*. This PDA spans the full length of San Pablo Avenue as it passes through the city. A specific plan was adopted in 2011 to guide the redevelopment of the 261-acre area, envisioning several new mixed-use districts centered around key community services and regional destinations, like Contra Costa College and Lytton Casino. Since 2011, this PDA has been the primary focus of development activity in the city.
- *23rd Street PDA*. This PDA extends the full length of 23rd Street from Brookside south to the City limit, encompassing an area of 22 acres. A specific plan was adopted in 2007 to provide a long-term strategy for the revitalization of 23rd Street by facilitating mixed use infill development on vacant and underutilized parcels, fostering a safe and pedestrian-friendly streetscape, and supporting the vitality of neighborhood businesses. While the area has significant potential for new housing development, almost no construction has occurred since 2011. Regulatory barriers have contributed, and repeal of the specific plan is envisioned under this Plan. General Plan policy provides guidance for redevelopment within the 23rd Street PDA with the intent of fostering a vibrant, walkable mixed use area. Zoning standards will be updated as part of 2035 General Plan implementation.

- *Rumrill Boulevard PDA.* Rumrill Boulevard is a two-lane arterial corridor that extends north from San Pablo’s southwestern City limit to connect with Broadway and San Pablo Avenue. The southern portion of the corridor between Brookside and Costa is designated as a PDA. The area includes several large multi-family apartment complexes and a mobile home park, along with smaller multi-family and single-family residences. With a grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, a Corridor Plan was prepared to guide revitalization of the Rumrill Boulevard PDA in 2025, incorporating strategies to foster transit-oriented development, enhance equity, and bring mobility, housing, and economic development opportunities to the area. The Rumrill Corridor Plan is included as Appendix C of this General Plan.

The 2035 General Plan seeks to focus new development primarily within PDAs, capitalizing on transit accessibility and integrating complementary non- residential and residential uses to foster the creation of vibrant mixed use districts. The overall intent is to accommodate growth while helping to reduce auto dependence; preserve open space; promote economic development; and increase housing opportunities. PDAs will feature employment generators, such as offices or retail shops, supported by medium and high density residential uses. Public amenities and facilities will also be an important part of the PDAs and may include urban open space, pedestrian-oriented walkways, and streetscape improvements.

Within the PDAs a range of uses, densities, and intensities is permitted, responding to the particular opportunities, constraints, and characteristics of the area. Overall, General Plan goals for PDAs support complementary uses, mitigate potential conflict, and promote pedestrian-oriented amenities.

GUIDING POLICIES

- LU-G-6* Focus new development primarily in San Pablo's Priority Development Areas to accommodate growth while helping to reduce auto dependence; preserve open space; promote economic development; and increase housing opportunities.
- LU-G-7* Recognize the importance of the promoting mixed-use development within Priority Development Areas to the vitality and quality of life in San Pablo

- LU-G-8 *Promote site sensitive design and pedestrian-oriented activities in mixed-use developments.*

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

- LU-I-25 Integrate a vibrant mix of residential and commercial uses and promote redevelopment within Priority Development Areas (see **Figure 3.2**) to revitalize San Pablo's commercial corridors, support economic vitality, and foster new uses to serve the community.
- LU-I-26 Encourage mixed use development and the co-location of residential and commercial uses within site distance of one another on the site to promote day and evening vitality.
- LU-I-27 Facilitate the development of high density housing within Priority Development Areas to provide townhomes, apartments, and condominiums that cater to the needs of residents of all ages and stages of life. Encourage a mix of for sale and rental housing units.
- LU-I-28 Encourage site designs that create an active street frontage and screen parking from the frontages of San Pablo Avenue, 23rd Street, and Rumrill Boulevard. Desired elements include public plazas, outdoor seating, public art, shade trees, landscaping, and other features that contribute to the pedestrian environment.
- New development can help create pedestrian environments with buildings oriented to the street, continuous walkways and sidewalks, limited blank walls, pedestrian-scaled buildings and signage, parking screened from street view, landscaping and shading devices, and places for people to rest and meet.*
- LU-I-29 Orient residential uses to the street and discourage the use of walls and fences. Employ a variety of techniques to buffer residential uses on the corridors from traffic and noise, including setbacks, landscaping, stoops, and raised entries.

- LU-I-30 Encourage new mixed-use and commercial development to incorporate visual quality and interest in architectural design on all visible sides of buildings through the following approaches:
- Utilizing varied massing and roof types, floor plans, detailed planting design, or color and materials;
 - Maintaining overall harmony while providing smaller-scale variety; and
 - Articulating building facades with distinctive architectural features like awnings, windows, doors, and other such elements.
- LU-I-31 Ensure that ground floor commercial uses are designed to incorporate transparency and promote pedestrian activity.
- LU-I-32 Provide regulatory, process, and market-based incentives for residential and mixed use projects that are designed around open space, greenery, and/or recreational features for residents.
- LU-I-33 Identify opportunities to provide publicly accessible open spaces and plazas and ensure clear connections to them.
- LU-I-34 Encourage multi-family developments and live-work units in residential mixed use areas to provide housing options that are affordable for entrepreneurs, emerging industries, and home-based business operators.
- LU-I-35 Screen and buffer nonresidential projects to protect adjacent residential property and other sensitive land uses when necessary to mitigate noise, glare and other adverse effects on adjacent uses.
- LU-I-36 Work with property owners of commercial centers to facilitate redevelopment of underutilized parcels.
- LU-I-37 Adopt regulations, mechanisms, programs, or incentives to facilitate the development or temporary active use of vacant buildings and property.

- LU-I-38 Continue to require development on parcels adjacent to Wildcat Creek to use Best Management Practices to prevent erosion, sedimentation or spills into the creek, including a minimum setback of 25 feet from top of bank.
- LU-I-39 Require reciprocal parking and access agreements between individual parcels where practical.
- LU-I-40 Ensure that noise, traffic, and other potential conflicts that may arise in a mix of commercial and residential uses are mitigated through sensitive site planning, building design, and/or appropriate operational measures.
- LU-I-41 Facilitate the relocation of existing non-conforming uses to appropriate sites where necessary.
- LU-I-42 Support redevelopment or improvement projects that involve private partnership or mutual investment to optimize the use of remaining Local Successor Agency funding.

The *Housing Element* includes additional policies and programs on housing in mixed use areas.

- LU-I-43 Develop a distinct design theme with defined objective standards and guidelines for each of the special planning areas to foster an identifiable image for each area.
The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan includes such standards and guidelines. Implementation of this policy will focus on other special planning areas.
- LU-I-44 Use the development and design standards and guidelines established by the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan for development review in the San Pablo Avenue corridor.
- LU-I-45 Use the Rumrill Corridor Plan to guide the evolution of the Rumrill Priority Development Area into a highly livable corridor and a destination for “food and fun” that attracts San Pablo residents as well as visitors from around the region. The goal is to foster a vibrant neighborhood with a variety of housing choices for people of all ages and incomes, popular recreation and entertainment destinations, and

successful businesses that provide quality jobs for corridor residents as well as opportunities for local entrepreneurs can locate and thrive.

- LU-I-46 Repeal the 23rd Street Specific Plan and replace with objective zoning standards to guide development and design of projects in the 23rd Street PDA.

E. Commercial, Entertainment, and Industrial Uses

COMMERCIAL AND ENTERTAINMENT USES

Commercial uses are primarily concentrated along San Pablo Avenue, 23rd Street, and Rumrill Boulevard within Priority Development Areas; however, there are some larger commercial uses on San Pablo Dam Road in the northeastern part of the city, as well as neighborhood serving commercial uses on Market Avenue, Broadway, and El Portal Drive. The largest concentration of commercial uses is at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and San Pablo Dam Road, where San Pablo Lytton Casino and the city's major regional commercial centers are located. These regional shopping centers feature larger parcels and expanses of surface parking that present an opportunity for redevelopment with complementary uses to better serve the community. The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan establishes an Entertainment Overlay Zone applicable in this area to facilitate this type of redevelopment, and General Plan policy seeks to foster a wider mix of uses in the area, including national or regional retail chains that will help create a vibrant entertainment and retail destination within walking distance of the Casino.

INDUSTRIAL AND SERVICE COMMERCIAL USES

Industrial and service commercial uses are generally located around the periphery of the city. There are industrial and service commercial uses on Rumrill Boulevard and Giant Road at the western edge of city near the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks, and long San Pablo Dam Road close to Interstate 80. In particular, industrial and service commercial properties along Rumrill Boulevard may be attractive to smaller scale

manufacturing and repair-oriented businesses that seek more affordable space and do not require ready access to freeways and highways. The General Plan incorporates an Employment Mixed Use category applicable to these properties to help facilitate this type of development and the Rumrill Corridor Plan incorporates strategies to support the integration of this type of use into the fabric of the Rumrill PDA.

GUIDING POLICIES

- LU-G-9 Retain and enhance commercial, industrial, employment, and entertainment land use areas to strengthen San Pablo's economic base.*
- LU-G-10 Foster high quality design, diversity, and a mix of amenities in new commercial, industrial, employment and entertainment focused development.*

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

Commercial and Entertainment Uses

- LU-I-47** Support the continued viability of regional retail and entertainment uses in San Pablo and strengthen their role as destinations for San Pablo residents and visitors to shop, dine, and gather.
- LU-I-48** Facilitate redevelopment and site improvements at existing regional commercial and entertainment centers that enhance business vitality, establish pedestrian-orientation, create more attractive buildings and public spaces, support transit service, and reduce vehicle trips.
- LU-I-49** Encourage existing regional and neighborhood shopping centers to integrate amenities, events, and programming that strengthen their role activity hubs within the community. Features to integrate may include pedestrian amenities; electric vehicle charging; bicycle parking; plazas and public areas; shade trees; lighting; public art; and community events.

- LU-I-50 Preserve and encourage neighborhood stores that enable shoppers to walk or bike for everyday needs, provide access to healthy foods, and promote a sense of community.
- LU-I-51 Focus on attracting essential services, such as medical clinics, a grocery store, banks, and dry cleaners to shopping centers to provide for the needs of area residents and ensure the vitality of the shopping centers over time.
- LU-I-52 Ensure that shopping centers and commercial developments are designed in a manner compatible with adjacent residential areas.
- LU-I-53 Ensure that shopping centers conform to regulations limiting the size, location, and general character of signage and facades so as not to disrupt the residential character of the neighborhood.
- LU-I-54 Work with existing business owners to promote the improvement and maintenance of facades of commercial uses.
- LU-I-55 Amend the Zoning Ordinance and Map to incorporate the Entertainment District Overlay regulations and boundaries. The overlay is intended to promote compatible development through standards and bonus/incentive provisions.
- LU-I-56 Establish design guidelines to assure high quality design and site planning for large commercial, and employment-based developments. The guidelines should address:
- Architectural finishes, coordinated color palette, massing, and hierarchy in scale;
 - Pedestrian-scaled amenities, signage, and lighting;
 - Site improvements, including parking lot landscaping, perimeter landscaping, foundation landscaping, street trees, walkways, and passageways.
 - Ground floor transparency requirements along shopping streets and limitations on blank walls in these areas.

- Promotion of public art and community based outdoor space.
- Anti-theft glass on windows, instead of bars or roll-down metal screens, that are architecturally compatible with building design.

LU-I-57 Ensure the timely completion of necessary infrastructure to support new commercial, employment-based, or industrial development.

LU-I-58 Establish zoning standards, including maximum size and separation requirements, for any commercial land use type that could adversely affect adjacent residential areas or create health and safety impacts.

Adult businesses, check-cashing establishments, and alcohol sales are typical of the types of uses that would be subject to this policy.

Industrial and Manufacturing Uses

LU-I-59 Focus industrial, manufacturing, and service commercial uses along major roadways in the western part of the city, subject to development standards that limit noise, odor and emissions beyond the boundaries of the site.

LU-I-60 Maintain sufficient land to accommodate a range of production, distribution, and repair-oriented uses, including manufacturing, repair, food production and distribution uses.

LU-I-61 As market conditions permit, facilitate the conversion of existing industrial and service commercial uses to production, distribution and repair-oriented spaces (ie. artist live/work, small scale manufacturing, production) that provide new jobs and comparable employment opportunities without the environmental impacts of traditional industrial uses.

LU-I-62 Allow secondary uses in light industrial and manufacturing developments, such as restaurants, gift shops, cafés, dry cleaners, day

care, and other complementary employee-serving uses, upon finding that such uses are compatible with the primary use.

LU-I-63 Allow for the introduction of compatible residential and commercial uses, such as live-work units, artisan shops/studios, brew pubs, coffee shops, and tasting rooms, in Employment Mixed-Use areas.

LU-I-64 Encourage the development and maintenance of well-designed industrial and light industrial properties and structures that meet adopted standards for visual quality and design.

F. Civic and Institutional

Civic and institutional uses, such as government facilities, hospitals schools, community centers, parks, and religious institutions; provide essential services to the San Pablo community. Sites allocated for these facilities are indicated on the General Plan Land Use Diagram and are spread throughout the city to ensure convenient access for all residents. Plan policies in this section pertain specifically to the land use needs of these facilities. Additional policies promoting their development and affecting their management are located in the Public Facilities and Utilities Element.

GUIDING POLICIES

LU-G-11 *Provide for the development of civic and institutional land uses to meet the educational, medical, social, economic, cultural, and religious needs of the community.*

LU-G-12 *Protect civic and institutional areas from incompatible uses that could affect their vitality and service to the community.*

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

- LU-I-65 Designate land for civic and institutional land uses, including parks and open spaces, health and medical facilities, emergency services, educational institutions, and other public services.
- LU-I-66 Coordinate with Contra Costa College on the planning and design of the Mixed-Use Center North area so that this institutional facility will have strong physical and social connections to the surrounding neighborhood. Participate on future campus planning efforts to better integrate the College into the community and vice versa.
- LU-I-67 Create community “hubs” by allowing civic uses to be mixed with retail and service uses, in appropriate locations.
- The library, for example, can provide an anchor tenant for a community gathering area.*

G. Special Planning Subarea

Located east of Interstate 80, the San Pablo Dam Road subarea is distinct from other parts of the city. It features steeper hillside terrain and is developed at a less-dense more suburban pattern than the rest of the city. Existing development consists of commercial uses, small shopping centers, and multi-family apartment and condominium complexes. The area contains properties with steep wooded slopes that are not suitable for development. The General Plan goal for this subarea is to retain and enhance its neighborhood identity and focus on residential land use patterns that will not disrupt the semi-rural quality of area. Future development should optimize freeway accessibility and encourage the use of the existing retail and commercial activities centered on Princeton Plaza. Pedestrian and bike access to the low-density residential uses in the hillside should be facilitated through multi-modal circulation improvements while existing open space in the east hills due to development hazards from wildfire and slope instability and as an important visual resource for future residents.



The City aims to protect the semi-rural nature of the hillside areas east of San Pablo Dam Road through open space protection strategies.

GUIDING POLICIES

- LU-G-13 *Preserve and enhance the distinctive character of San Pablo Dam Road and the surrounding hillside neighborhoods.*

IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

San Pablo Dam Road

- LU-I-68 Focus sub-regional and neighborhood commercial development, and other complementary uses within or adjacent to Princeton Plaza on San Pablo Dam Road.
- LU-I-69 Protect the semi-rural character of the hillside area through the integration and balance of usable open space areas and residential uses.
- LU-I-70 Improve pedestrian access within the hillside neighborhood, its connection to the regional park system, and connections to the Entertainment District across the I-80 overpass.
- LU-I-71 Consider designating vacant parcels with limited access, steep topography, and irregular size for public open spaces uses, with adequate wildfire protection provisions.

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