

## I INTRODUCTION

The 23rd Street Specific Plan provides a long-term strategy to revitalize and increase the development potential for a major commercial corridor in the City of San Pablo. The 23rd Street corridor has the potential to become a vibrant community hub for residents, with improved access to parks and public open space, a safe environment for walking and biking and an active street life with cultural amenities. The strategy utilizes several of the City's available tools to facilitate the development of a well-organized, clearly identifiable and economically viable mixed-use corridor. The Specific Plan will help to prevent disjointed development, which often occurs in the absence of a comprehensive planning effort. This Plan builds upon and refines other City efforts to develop the 23rd Street corridor.

The City of San Pablo has already begun the transformation of 23rd Street into a lively commercial district. The City's Redevelopment Agency has invested in façade and streetscape improvements that create a unique sense of place and set San Pablo apart from its neighbors. The façade improvement program has been an ongoing economic development program for several years. The primary focus has been on creating a viable shopping district with a distinct character through improvement of the facades on existing businesses, and by providing potential new businesses with renovated space. Phase 1 of the program began in the mid 1990s. The project area for the first phase focused on businesses fronting on 23rd Street between Standard Avenue and Dover Avenue. This initial effort was completed in 1998. Phase 2 of the program was planned and implemented beginning in 2002. This latter phase included plans for both building façade and streetscape improvements. Additionally, the City's Small Business Assistance program has provided micro-loans that enable 23rd Street's small businesses to make improvements. These loans may be used for interior building improvements, equipment purchases and technology upgrades.



Facade improvements to a business on 23rd Street

In spite of these improvements and programs, 23rd Street still has many vacant or underutilized parcels. The City's General Plan calls for mixed-use buildings along 23rd Street that include both commercial and residential uses; however, strict limits on allowable square footage, existing small lot sizes and multiple landowners make development difficult. The General Plan states that 23rd Street should be oriented towards pedestrians, but current zoning dictates that new development include a large number of parking spaces, encouraging people to drive rather than walk.

The 23rd Street Specific Plan is intended to provide new regulations that overcome these development barriers and facilitate the mixed-use development desired for 23rd Street. The Plan also reflects the mission of the East Bay Community Foundation's Livable Communities Initiative (LCI). The Foundation partnered with the City of San Pablo for the creation of this Plan. LCI staff works in partnership with cities, local leadership, community based organizations and non-profits, and diverse community residents to foster sustainable development that supports a healthy environment, a vibrant economy and is socially equitable. By facilitating innovative collaborations and meaningfully engaging citizens in planning processes, LCI helps craft solutions to the challenges that many East Bay cities face today due to urban disinvestment, such as environmental pollution, lack of transportation choices and poor access to social services and programs.

The following sections describe the purpose of the Specific Plan in more detail and provide an overview of the 23rd Street Specific Plan Area. They also provide an overview of the process that created this Plan and explain how this document relates to the City's General Plan.

### *A. Purpose and Extent of a Specific Plan*

Under California law cities and counties may prepare Specific Plans to develop policies, programs and regulations to implement the jurisdiction's adopted General Plan. A Specific Plan frequently serves as a bridge between the General Plan and large development proposals. Specific Plans can also provide detailed guidance for a neighborhood or district that is of special importance to a community.

#### **1. Required Contents**

This Specific Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of California Government Code Section 65451. As prescribed by law, the Plan includes text and diagrams that generally describe the following:

- ◆ The distribution, location and extent of all land uses, including open space.
- ◆ The proposed distribution, location, extent and intensity of major components of public infrastructure.
- ◆ The standards and criteria by which new development will proceed.
- ◆ A program of implementation measures such as financing measures, policies and regulations, and public works projects.

California law also requires that a Specific Plan be consistent with a city's General Plan, and that findings regarding consistency be included in the Specific Plan itself.

#### **2. Finding of Consistency with the General Plan**

A General Plan update will be required as part of the of the Specific Plan approval. The recommendations in this Specific Plan are consistent with the broad goals of the General Plan. The General Plan's policies call for a pedestrian-friendly

shopping environment along 23rd Street, with businesses fronting on the sidewalk, transparent storefronts and pedestrian-scaled streetscape elements. They also call for non-commercial uses above the ground floor of buildings, including residential units. The recommendations contained in this Specific Plan further these goals.

### 3. Purpose of the 23rd Street Specific Plan

The main purpose of this Specific Plan is to provide clear guidance for future development on 23rd Street. The land use regulations in this Plan are designed



Streetscape improvements on 23rd Street

to encourage neighborhood-serving development by making it more financially feasible, and to ensure that new buildings, streetscape improvements and added amenities contribute positively to the street's pedestrian experience. The Plan provides a framework in which jobs, economic development and housing opportunities will improve. This Plan also includes design standards and guidelines that will help ensure that new development be of a high quality. By creating more certainty for property owners and developers, these new regulations can help increase property values and development potential on 23rd Street, while creating benefits for the community as a whole.

The Plan also identifies public improvements that will further enhance the appearance and character of 23rd Street. By making these improvements, the City will reinforce the street's unique, vibrant identity. Further improvements will also demonstrate to property and business owners that the City is committed to 23rd Street's success.

The Specific Plan’s vision for the future of 23rd Street is based on five goals, which were created with community members during the planning process, and applicable goals and policies from the General Plan:

- ◆ Create a safer, more pedestrian-friendly streetscape. People should feel comfortable and safe when they walk on 23rd Street. There should be a hospitable environment with public open space, parks and other neighborhood amenities that take advantage of and enhance existing community assets.
- ◆ Identify opportunities for infill development. Take advantage of 23rd Street’s vacant parcels to enhance the street’s character, provide new housing and create retail destinations for the community.
- ◆ Provide parking for neighborhood businesses. Ensure that if visitors choose to drive to 23rd Street, they will have a place to park.
- ◆ Include existing 23rd Street merchants in revitalization and planning efforts for 23rd Street.
- ◆ Create an economically viable and healthy corridor. Reinvigorate the corridor so it is economically healthier, provides new jobs and is more economically competitive.

## B. Specific Plan Area

This section describes the regional and local settings of the Specific Plan Area.

### 1. Regional Location

The City of San Pablo is located in Contra Costa County, south of San Pablo Bay, as shown in Figure 1-1. San Pablo is bordered by the City of Richmond



Figure 1-1 Regional Context Map

and parts of unincorporated Contra Costa County. Interstate 80 connects the City with other parts of the Bay Area and with the Central Valley. In addition, AC Transit provides citywide bus service with destinations throughout the East Bay, and bus routes connect the city with Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and with Amtrak's Capitol Corridor train to Sacramento. The 23rd Street corridor also serves as a north-south connection between the historic Downtown Richmond area and the newer Hilltop Mall.

### 2. Plan Area Location

The Specific Plan Area includes roughly a half mile stretch of 23rd Street, from San Pablo Avenue at the north to Pine Avenue at the south, as shown in Figure 1-2. The Specific Plan Area contains a total of 22 acres. The Plan Area is composed of 76 parcels, most of which front on 23rd Street. A few additional parcels are included that face other

streets but are contiguous with the rest of the Plan Area. 23rd Street has several other important street connections. Dover Avenue and Market Avenue are both arterial streets that intersect 23rd Street within the Specific Plan Area. Additionally, Bush Avenue and Pine Avenue serve as collector streets that connect the adjacent neighborhoods to 23rd Street. San Pablo Avenue, a major artery running through the East Bay, connects to 23rd Street at the northern edge of the Plan Area.

CITY OF SAN PABLO  
23rd STREET SPECIFIC PLAN  
INTRODUCTION

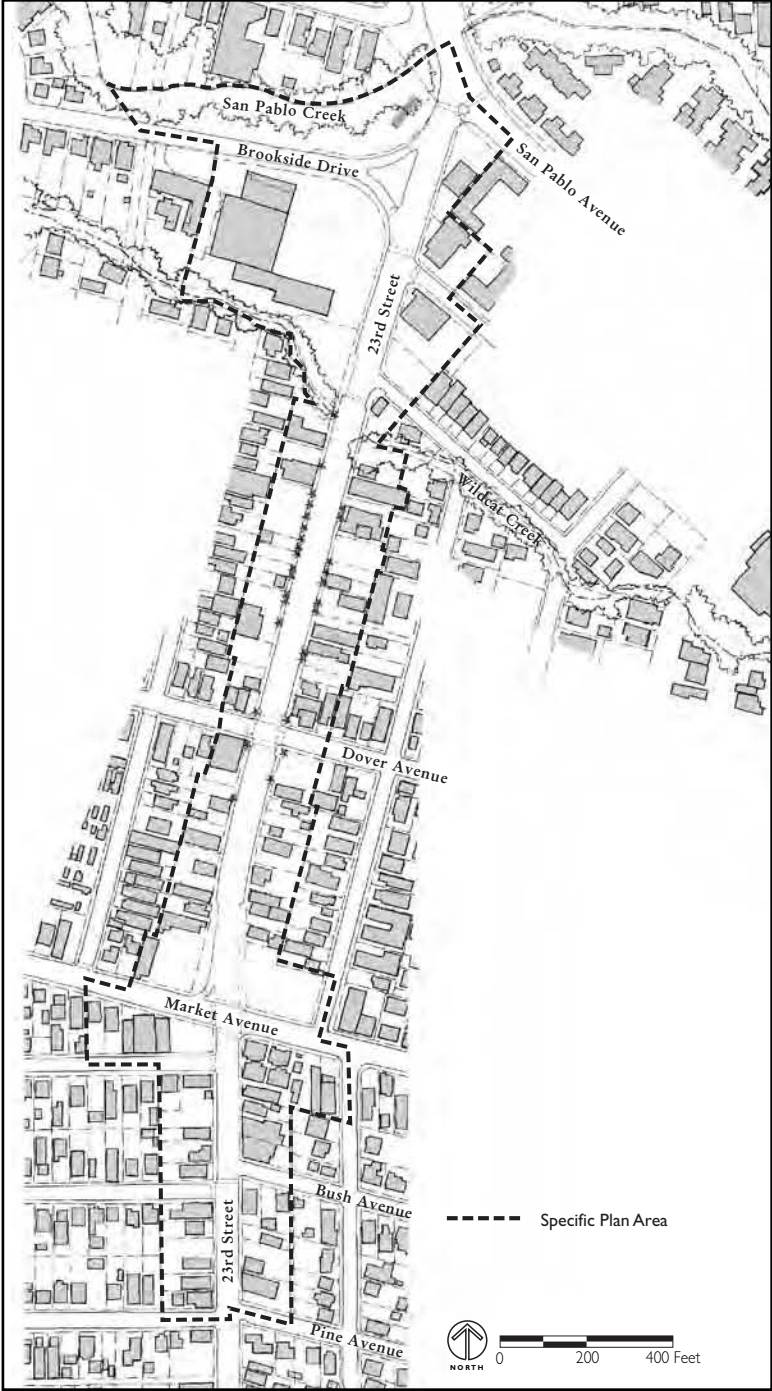


Figure I-2 Specific Plan Area

### *C. Planning Process*

This section describes the planning process that led to the completion of the Specific Plan.

#### **1. Initial Steps**

Work on the 23rd Street Specific Plan began in the summer of 2005 with an assessment of the Specific Plan Area's existing setting, which is summarized in Chapter 2. The information gathered during this process helped inform the community workshops. This information was also used to create the improvement strategies that followed. This process also helped to foster a collaborative relationship among those who attended.

#### **2. Walking Tour**

A walking tour of the Plan Area was conducted in July 2005 with interested merchants, property owners, residents, developers and City staff to discuss

common concerns and ideas about the area. Participants received a workbook that included spaces to record their own observations, along with potential opportunities and constraints that they identified. These comments helped to define the traffic, parking, streetscape and development issues that affect the Plan Area.

#### **3. Developer Panel**

A discussion was held in September 2005 with a panel made up of local and national developers that analyzed strengths, constraints and opportunities for new developments in the Plan Area. The meeting was well attended by merchants, property owners and community members. Meeting participants discussed 23rd Street's potential for mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development. They also considered development regulations that are relevant to the revitalization of the Plan Area.



**Walking tour participants**



Panelists and community participants generally agreed that the Plan Area should be oriented towards pedestrians and should support a range of activities, including housing, shopping, employment and recreation. All participants appeared to agree that the neighborhood is in need of a central gathering place.

City development standards play a crucial role in the success of mixed-use corridors. Several panelists said that the City's existing standards for the Plan Area are too restrictive, making mixed-use development economically infeasible. Panelists supported flexible density and height restrictions that will allow for taller buildings with limited vehicular parking, helping to create the economies of scale that make mixed-use development feasible.

A number of panelists agreed that San Pablo's market conditions make for-sale housing more viable than rental housing. It was further noted that homeownership often leads to greater civic involvement, which would help to strengthen residents' sense of place. Several panelists said that mixed-income housing, which provides dwellings that are affordable to people with a variety of income levels and social backgrounds, would help foster and sustain diversity in the Plan Area.

#### **4. Development Alternatives**

Several strategies were identified during the walking tour and developer panel for revitalizing 23rd Street. These strategies were then applied to a series of four prototypical development sites so community members could see how the different strategies would affect each site. For example, one development alternative for a group of vacant parcels showed a retail storefront with housing units on upper floors, while a second alternative showed a shared parking lot for neighborhood businesses.

The development alternatives were presented at a community workshop in October 2005. Participants examined the alternatives for each site and offered

critiques of each approach. They also held a large-group discussion of ways to improve the development alternatives. The community's recommendations were used to determine what policies would be appropriate for the Plan Area as a whole.

Many participants agreed that more discussion was needed regarding the potential development site at the corner of 23rd Street and Brookside Drive, as well as the accompanying improvements to Brookside Drive and Kennedy Plaza. A later community workshop re-examined these issues.

#### **5. City Council/Planning Commission Work Session**

At a joint work session in February 2006, the City Council and Planning Commission discussed the potential benefits of mixed-use development on 23rd Street and evaluated the preferred development alternatives that were identified at an earlier workshop. They also provided guidance regarding other components of the Specific Plan, such as revised parking requirements for new development in the Plan Area.

#### **6. Brookside Drive Alternatives**

A second community workshop was held in March 2006 to reevaluate alternatives for the potential development site at Brookside Drive, along with proposed improvements to Brookside Drive and Kennedy Plaza. Comments from this workshop led to the development of a new preferred alternative for the site, combining elements from the prior alternatives.

#### **7. Community Workshop**

A final community workshop was held to provide a Specific Plan overview, update participants on other City efforts within the Specific Plan Area, respond to questions and solicit further input from the community.

## 8. Old Town Merchant’s Meeting Association

The project team was also able to attend meetings of the Old Town Merchant’s Association. This provided the team with additional input from merchants and residents in the Plan Area.

### *D. Plan Overview*

This Specific Plan provides guidance for the future development of 23rd Street. A clear vision and set of urban design concepts are provided, along with goals and policies to carry them out. The Plan contains the following chapters:

- ◆ **Chapter 2, Existing Conditions:** This chapter contains a summary of the history, demographics, existing policies, physical character and constraints within the Specific Plan Area.
- ◆ **Chapter 3, Vision and Urban Design Concept:** This chapter provides an explanation of the overall vision for 23rd Street and the related urban design concepts.
- ◆ **Chapter 4, Goals and Policies:** This chapter provides a list of specific goals for 23rd Street and the policies that will promote the attainment of those goals.
- ◆ **Chapter 5, Land Use:** This chapter outlines the new land use regulations that will implement this Plan’s vision for mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development.
- ◆ **Chapter 6, Development Standards:** This chapter provides a set of standards for development within the Specific Plan Area.
- ◆ **Chapter 7, Design Standards and Guidelines:** This chapter provides a set of design standards and guidelines for development within the Specific Plan Area.
- ◆ **Chapter 8, Implementation:** This chapter provides a clear explanation of the changes to the current regulatory policies for future 23rd Street development and possible financing strategies for physical improvements. Economic development strategies and resources for new businesses are also included.

CITY OF SAN PABLO  
23rd STREET SPECIFIC PLAN  
INTRODUCTION