

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY: **SMART GROWTH OR SPRAWL?**

*An in-depth analysis of the county's sprawl threats
and opportunities for smarter growth.*



GREENBELT ALLIANCE

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Contra Costa County: Smart Growth or Sprawl? is a guidebook for citizens, planners, local government officials, and members of the news media concerned about the future of development in one of the Bay Area's most rapidly growing counties. It assesses how sprawl can be contained and how smarter growth can be encouraged that provides much-needed housing while revitalizing existing urban areas.

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SUMMARY

Contra Costa County is experiencing the pains of decades of poorly planned growth, but it has also started to fix its quality of life problems with smart growth solutions.

Support for smart growth and open space protection in Contra Costa County is steadily growing. A few communities have focused development within existing urban areas to protect open space and promote the creation of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and shopping districts. At the county level, Supervisors have provided temporary protection to 15,000 acres of unincorporated county land by redrawing the county's Urban Limit Line. Through the dedicated work of local residents and organizations, Cowell Ranch and other areas have become permanently protected open spaces.

Despite this progress, the effects of poor land use planning and sprawl development throughout the county will continue to be felt for years to come. The environmental and social costs of decades of sprawl development include chronic traffic congestion, declining housing affordability, disappearing agricultural lands and open space, increased segregation along race and class lines, and rising infrastructure costs. The impacts of sprawl development on county residents is sometimes hard to measure, but several statistics demonstrate the breadth and depth of the problem:

- Since 1996, freeway congestion has increased in Contra Costa County by 50%.
- Ten percent of Contra Costa County's prime farmland has been lost since 1990, and 70% of its orchards have been chopped down since 1950.
- Of the Bay Area's nine counties, Contra Costa County is the second least affordable in terms of housing.
- Twenty three percent of Contra Costa County's open space is at risk of development – the highest percentage among the nine Bay Area counties.
- Contra Costa County is racially segregated, with the highest proportion of non-Caucasians living in the older communities of the county. For example, 37% of West County residents are non-Caucasian compared to only 8% in the communities of Central County which have faced most of their suburbanization over the last 30 years.

There is growing recognition of the problems caused by sprawl, but this new consciousness needs to be translated into action. County residents must work with local and county elected officials to pursue smart growth policies that breathe new life into existing communities, improve and expand public transportation, preserve open space and agricultural lands, and promote walking and bicycling as alternatives to driving. With smart growth, Contra Costa County can move toward environmental sustainability, social equity and economic vitality.

Contra Costa County can immediately take several concrete steps to turn the tide away from Los Angeles style sprawl toward smart growth:

- **Hold the Line! Preserve the County's Urban Limit Line.** Preserving the Urban Limit Line is essential for protecting the county's unincorporated open space and focusing reinvestment in existing urban areas. To prevent the lines from shifting each time new

Supervisors are elected, the Urban Limit Line should be put before the county's voters to encourage lasting protection of unincorporated lands.

- **Reward Cities that Promote Smart Growth and Affordable Housing.** The County Supervisors should create a Smart Growth Fund and provide other financial incentives to encourage well-planned, transit-oriented development that includes affordable housing.
- **Reduce Traffic Through Better Land Use and Transportation Choices.** When Measure C, the transportation and growth management measure approved in 1988, is placed before voters in the next few years for re-authorization, it should be improved to stimulate land use planning that reduces auto dependence. The new Measure C should condition transportation grants on local land use planning that avoids sprawl and makes efficient use of existing transportation investments.
- **Tackle Sprawl at the City Level.** Cities can play a significant role in stemming sprawl through examining, and modifying, their planning processes, ordinances and zoning codes. Cities should promote infill development by changing sprawl-inducing zoning codes, imposing high fees for developing open space, and preparing focused specific plans to build community consensus around smart growth projects.
- **Improve the Design of New Developments inside the Urban Limit Line.** New developments should create pedestrian-friendly towns and neighborhoods instead of auto-dependant malls and subdivisions. Both the county and its cities should adopt livable community design standards and apply them to all new projects.

The challenges of planning for the future are not easy, but the costs of continuing to follow antiquated sprawl-style development are high. Smart growth will not cure all of the county's ills, but it is the surest way for the communities of Contra Costa County to remain places where people want to live, work, and visit, for generations to come.

Infill Development at El Cerrito Plaza BART

In this vision of the future, new mixed-use development provides additional housing, shops, and street life on the current BART parking lot site and adjacent parcels. Before-and-after digital re-imaging courtesy of Steve Price/Urban Advantage.



1. INTRODUCTION

Contra Costa County has sometimes been known as “the Wild West of development” because of its free-wheeling approach to urban growth. New subdivisions, malls, and office parks have spread rapidly across the landscape in ways that work against long-term livability or sustainability. But a growing number of citizens have come to realize that current patterns of suburban sprawl aren’t inevitable. As a result new efforts are starting up to promote the alternative: smarter growth.

This report not only surveys current sprawl threats in each Contra Costa city (in the process updating the 1996 report *Contra Costa County: Land Use and Abuse*), but equally importantly identifies specific infill development opportunities and policies that can bring about an alternative path of development. This new approach would create more livable, walkable communities, provide more affordable housing, and save open space. Far from opposing growth, this report seeks to help create responsible development in localities where it is best suited.

Smart Growth or Sprawl? is intended to provide useful information to all those concerned about the county’s future—elected officials, urban planners, community activists, civic leaders, residents, and members of the news media.

The Costs of Sprawl

Much suburban development in recent decades tends to be characterized by the following features:

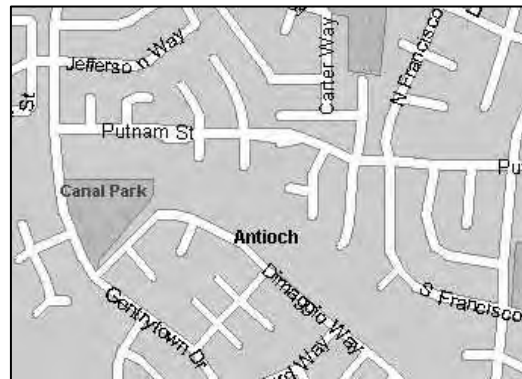
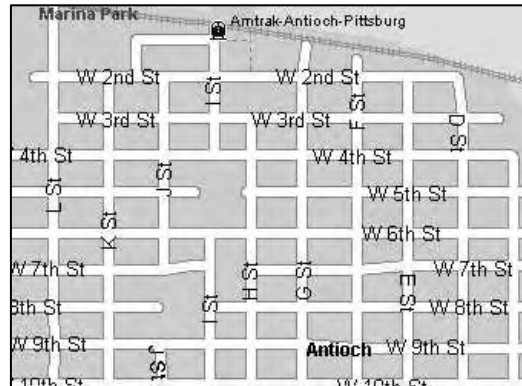
- **Traffic** Winding roads and cul-de-sacs form a fragmented, disconnected street pattern, severely limiting options for walking, bicycling, and public transportation. In addition, many subdivisions hide behind gates or privacy walls, creating further disconnections between subdivisions and the rest of the community.
- **Loss of Open Space.** Sprawl development gobbles up farmland and wildlife habitat. Rather than being contiguous with previous neighborhoods and connected to them, sprawl often leaps out onto new “greenfield” sites in the countryside. Even years later, after the spaces in between the initial projects fill in with urban development, the result is a hodgepodge of disconnected subdivisions. This mode of development consumes open space rapidly and creates fragmented street patterns that make walking difficult.
- **Lack of Housing Choices.** New housing in sprawling areas is predominantly single-family, which is unaffordable for middle and lower income households. In fact two-thirds of housing built in the Bay Area in the 1990s was single family homes, while the need for more affordable housing types – such as townhouses, condos, apartments, senior and assisted



Sprawl development in Antioch. Photo by Jennifer Kaufer.

housing – has continued to grow. Another feature of typical subdivision development is that it consumes greater amounts of land compared to neighborhoods with a mix of housing types.

- The Lack of Downtowns or Centers. Traditionally, cities had a core to them where people could go to shop, work, meet friends, or participate in cultural activities. Recent suburban communities often lack any sort of downtown at all, or have at most a faux downtown contained in a mall.
- Homogenous Land Uses. Large areas of one type of land use characterize sprawl development, for example single-family homes, office parks, malls, or commercial strips. This separation of land uses forces people to drive long distances. In contrast, the traditional North American town of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries featured mixed-use buildings and a greater balance of shops, homes, and offices within each part of a city.



Sprawl development in the southern portion of Antioch (lower image) features far more disconnected street patterns than traditional, walkable Antioch neighborhoods around the downtown (top).

These features combine to produce the automobile-dependent style of development that is often called “suburban sprawl.” Nationwide, sprawl development accelerated during the second half of the twentieth century. One result is a dramatic rise in consumption of open land around cities and towns. One study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that in most large metropolitan areas land consumption rose more than twice as fast as population growth between 1950 and 1990. In the boom economy of the 1990s this loss of open space reached three million acres a year.¹

There are a variety of factors – such as the construction of freeways, cheap gasoline, lending policies that favor suburbs, and the declining quality of urban schools – that lead to urban sprawl. Some are understandable, like the desire for clean, quiet, safe living. Others are less palatable like race and class-based prejudice. Together, these factors have led to an approach to development with enormous problems.

In California, the state tax system also encourages sprawl. Proposition 13 in 1978 rolled back property taxes and has limited local governments’ ability to raise taxes. As a result, many cities zone land for types of businesses, such as malls and automobile dealerships, that are likely to increase revenues from the portion of the sales tax that goes to local government. These land

uses contribute to sprawl. Cities also place high permitting fees on new development in order to fund new infrastructure and services, helping to raise housing prices.

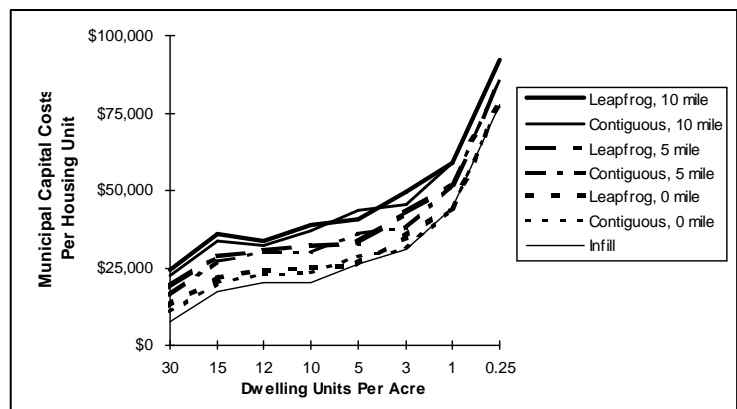
Sprawl development imposes huge financial, environmental, social, and cultural costs on society. Many of these impacts cannot be quantified, such as its contributions to global warming or to the loss of vitality and cultural identity in older cities. Still, a growing amount is known about the costs of sprawl.

Infrastructure Costs

Low-density sprawl costs municipal governments more in the long run than compact development or growth within existing urban areas. Sprawl requires that new roads, water mains, sewer pipes, and other infrastructure be extended into greenfield areas, while infill development often requires only upgrades to existing infrastructure. The exact amount of savings to municipalities is a subject of debate and depends on assumptions made about different types of development.

One authoritative 1992 study by Rutgers University professor Robert Burchell and others found that sprawl in some parts of the United States increased road costs 23.9 percent and water and sewer costs 7.6 percent compared with more compact development at the urban edge. A 1999 study by the Center for Energy and the Environment looked at different patterns of development in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area and found an even greater gap. Houses in a sprawl subdivision faced local infrastructure costs of \$18,374 per unit compared with \$7,813 per unit for homes in a Smart Growth scenario. Increased densities appeared to be the primary reason—more closely spaced houses require less new road, water, and sewer infrastructure per unit.² Still another study by James Frank for the Urban Land Institute in 1989 found municipal infrastructure costs for infill development lower by one-third or more (depending on density) than in various sprawl scenarios.³

Residential Infrastructure Costs (from Frank, 1989)



Local governments in California may benefit from new development initially because they charge high fees to cover infrastructure and services. In Contra Costa County these fees currently range from around \$10,000 per unit to as much as \$60,000. However, such assessments mainly cover up-front costs of new roads, schools, parks, and other public amenities, and don't pay for ongoing operations and maintenance. These expenses must be covered from general property taxes, which are severely limited by Proposition 13. So even if sprawl development covers its initial costs, it is often a long-term financial drain for local governments and residents.

The Contra Costa Grand Jury came to similar conclusions. In 1990 it issued a report recommending that the county stop permitting development in unincorporated areas. The Grand Jury concluded that “Both city and county governments actively foster new development in order to increase tax revenue, with apparent little attention to possible adverse long range consequences of emphasizing short term gains.”⁴ The report warned local governments that new demands for services such as schools, parks, police, fire protection, and social programs would outstrip the tax revenue that new residential development provides. Unfortunately this warning has not led to significant change within the county.

Traffic

Traffic congestion is the leading concern of many county residents. Throughout the Bay Area as a whole, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission expects congestion (measured as “vehicle hours of delay”) to increase 152 percent between 1998 and 2025.⁵ The duration of the average work trip is expected to increase by 25 percent over this period.⁶ Bay Area residents traveled in a motor vehicle an average of 11.6 miles daily in 1970 and 18.7 in 2000, but are expected to travel 21.5 miles daily in 2020.⁷

The nature of suburban development in places like Contra Costa County virtually requires automobile use. Freeway congestion in the county grew by 50 percent between 1996 and 2001.⁸ Congestion on many of the county’s arterial streets is also worsening, in part because of the lack of connecting through-streets within suburban development. Subdivisions, office parks, and shopping centers all dump their traffic onto a small number of arterial roads, and drivers have little choice of route. These main streets then become jammed with cars and require large, elaborately signalized intersections when they meet other arterials. Ygnacio Valley Road, San Pablo Boulevard, Treat Boulevard, Willow Pass Road, San Ramon Valley Boulevard, and Camino Tassajara are examples. Meanwhile, alternative modes of travel such as public transit, bicycling, or walking are often not feasible because of the spread-out nature of the county’s land use, the lack of connecting road patterns, and the pedestrian-unfriendly nature of arterial streets.

Lack of Housing Choices

The Bay Area, like the entire state, is in the midst of a deepening housing crisis. For more than two decades the number of new jobs and residents has far outstripped the number of new housing units. In addition new housing units are largely single-family homes, which are unaffordable to the vast majority of residents. The result is inflated housing prices, long-distance commuting, and growing hardship for less affluent residents.

Reasons for the lack of new housing include zoning codes that require low-density, sprawling types of development, the inherently greater challenge to developers of creating well-designed higher-density or infill neighborhoods, and NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) opposition from neighbors.⁹ Many cities also resist zoning for affordable housing since this often increases demand for city services (schools, parks, libraries, etc.) without contributing a corresponding amount of tax revenue (property taxes being limited by Proposition 13).

Under state law; the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) has established housing production targets for each city in the region. These goals are further broken down by income—cities are expected to change zoning and other regulations to ensure that housing is available to

those making at least 120 percent, 80-120 percent, 50-80 percent, and below 50 percent of area median income. But according to a 2002 report by Greenbelt Alliance and the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, 89 percent of the Bay Area cities and counties were not complying with this state-mandated “fair share” housing process.¹⁰ This regional failure to construct sufficient housing, especially affordable housing, affects nearly everyone through skyrocketing housing prices and rents.

Not only is there an overall lack of housing, but the balance between jobs and housing within various parts of the Bay Area has become seriously skewed and leads to increased traffic congestion as people have to commute long distances to work. Such “jobs/housing imbalance” is becoming especially acute in Silicon Valley, San Francisco, and the inner East Bay.¹¹ By allowing rapid economic development without ensuring sufficient housing for workers, cities in these locations have increased development pressure on other places such as northern and eastern Contra Costa County, which have been the place of least resistance to new housing.

Within Contra Costa County, new housing is being created in East County cities like Antioch and Brentwood, while new jobs are being created in Central County locations such as Walnut Creek and Concord. There is also a mismatch within particular cities between the types and prices of new housing and the incomes of many workers. In San Ramon, for example, the median price of new housing was about \$550,000 in 2002. But many jobs in that city’s businesses are for lower paid service workers, many of whom will have to commute long distances from areas with less expensive homes.

Equity Costs

Sprawl development poses huge but often unquantifiable costs on society in terms of increasing inequities between different demographic groups and geographical areas. In Contra Costa County, sprawl has meant that investment has flowed to Central and South County areas while West County cities such as Richmond have suffered from a lack of jobs, capital, and tax base. The result is a concentration of poverty and isolation of minority communities, in addition to declining urban schools and services.

Overall, 37 percent of West County residents are members of minority groups, compared with 8 percent of Central County residents.¹² Forty-nine percent of West County residents are also of low or moderate income, compared with 31 percent for Central County and 39 percent for the county as a whole. Some Richmond neighborhoods are now almost entirely African-American. Even in the real estate boom of the 1990s, very little new investment took place in the central neighborhoods of this city, despite its enviable location close to BART and freeways.

Suburban sprawl also causes the demise of downtowns. In cities such as Pittsburg and Antioch, for example, almost all new investment is focused on subdivisions in the hills south of Route 4, while empty buildings and vacant lots plague older downtown neighborhoods near the Delta. These wonderful historic districts could become a great source of community pride and identity—and could provide walkable, transit-oriented living environments for many people—but have suffered as city leaders have allowed development to sprawl elsewhere.

Other equity issues exist as well. The countywide lack of affordable housing hits elderly and lower-income residents extremely hard. Lower-income workers must often endure long commutes and spend more time away from their families. Residents of older West County or North County communities without cars may have no access to new jobs in South or Central County. Since inexpensive housing is often located near the county's oil refineries and other chemical industries—and other communities resist building affordable housing—lower-income residents may also suffer disproportionately from pollution and risks of toxic chemical exposure.

Environmental Costs

As of 2000, the Bay Area had 234,746 acres of land (366 square miles) at high risk of sprawl development over the next 30 years.¹³ Contra Costa had the highest percentage of its land threatened by development (22.8 percent) of any county. Besides this potential great loss of open space and wildlife habitat, the impacts of sprawl include fragmentation of the remaining habitat as wildlife corridors are cut by new roads and developments, water pollution (from road, yard, and construction runoff), and the introduction of often-invasive nonnative species used in landscaping into local watersheds.

Automobile-dependent sprawl development leads to higher resource consumption and generation of certain pollutants. Energy use in motor vehicles (almost entirely from petroleum) is expected to rise 28 percent in the Bay Area between 1998 and 2025.¹⁴ Such consumption helps make the United States even more dependent on imports of a non-renewable resource.

Although modeling by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) shows emissions of many local air pollutants declining due to cleaner engines, particulate emissions (including road dust and diesel engine emissions) are expected to rise 50 percent.¹⁵ These fine particles have been linked to a variety of respiratory problems including asthma. Carbon dioxide emissions from motor vehicle use are also expected to rise by 42 percent between 1998 and 2025,¹⁶ contributing to global warming.

One impact of sprawl just beginning to be appreciated nationwide is the loss of groundwater recharge as rainfall hits pavement in new communities and is channeled into storm drains rather than filtering into local aquifers. A recent study of U.S. metropolitan areas by American Rivers, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Smart Growth America finds that groundwater losses range as high as 132.8 billion gallons a year in the sprawling Atlanta region.¹⁷ Water consumption is also greater in the Bay Area's suburbs compared with its more urban communities, due to larger expanses of lawn and landscaping as well as the fact that eastern Bay Area locations are hotter than older urban areas closer to the Golden Gate.

Loss of Farmland

Eastern Contra Costa County is in possession of some of the best farmland in the world, with topsoil 30 feet deep in places. In addition to rich soil, the area enjoys a mild Mediterranean climate, availability of water, and close proximity to urban markets. Unfortunately, much of this ideal farming and grazing land is being converted for non-agricultural purposes, primarily residential development. Despite the loss of land, agriculture plays a significant role in Contra Costa's economy. In 1998 vegetable, field, seed, fruit and nut crops in East County produced \$51.2 million in gross revenue, a 65% increase in revenue from 1988.

In 1996, Greenbelt Alliance reported that more than 50 percent of Contra Costa County’s prime farmland had been lost over the previous 25 years, with much more threatened by suburbanization.¹⁸ Between 1992 and 2000 over 13,000 additional acres of farming and grazing land were converted to non-agricultural uses. In other words, Contra Costa lost over one thousand acres of the best farmland in the last eight years.¹⁹

Conversions to Non-Agriculture Uses	92-94	94-96	96-98	98-2000	TOTAL
Prime Farmland Converted	123	413	259	1,085	1,880
Total Agricultural Land Converted	3,375	2,220	3,220	4,999	13,814

Data compiled from California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program bi-annual *California Farmland Conversion* reports.

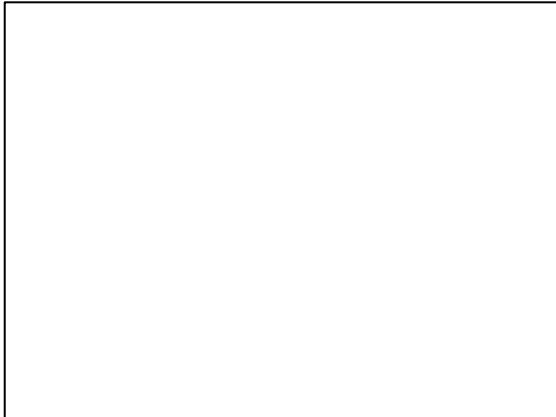
Not surprisingly, the total number of individual farms has also decreased. From 1992 to 1997 Contra Costa County lost 88 farms, with the total number declining from 675 to 587.²⁰ While the county saw 43,000 jobs added to its economy between 1996 and 2000, in the same time period it experienced a decline of 600 people working in agriculture from 3,200 to 2,600.²¹ As suburban development spreads, agriculture becomes less viable. Farmers are facing pressures of urban growth, rising land values, and increased taxes.²²

1,334 acres of farmland lost between 1998 and 2000 was a result of 16 individual conversions of various sized parcels from important farmland to urban land.²³ Most of this was for smaller housing developments, although a 500-acre parcel in the Brentwood area was converted for a golf community. The Diablo Vista Middle School and a new sewage facility on Jersey Island also occurred on previous farmland.

Thirty-seven additional developments took place on grazing land, farmland of lesser importance (low quality soil, lack of irrigation, or other hindrances to high-quality farming), and “other” non-agricultural land—wetlands, dense brush areas, low-density rural settlements, etc.²⁴ A total of 11,934 acres were converted in this way, including the 700-acre Gale Ridge community, other medium sized and smaller housing developments, and a few golf courses and golfing communities.

Quality of Life

Sprawl leads to the decline of many older downtowns and neighborhood centers, with their rich history and sense of identity. New malls with national chain stores drive traditional, locally owned downtown stores out of business— for example, Hilltop Mall helped kill stores in downtown Richmond and Sun Valley Mall helped undermine shops in downtown Concord. New office parks and subdivisions also draw residents away from older cities, which then suffer a declining tax base and a concentration of poverty. The result is the near-total abandonment of certain communities with the richest historic and cultural legacies. In their place we have generic subdivisions, strips, malls, and office parks that form a “geography of nowhere” as author James Howard Kunstler has noted.²⁵



Antioch is planning sprawl development on the 2,700-acre Future Urbanization Area 1 (FUAI), at the very fringe of the Bay Area. Photo by Jennifer Kaufer.

Recent suburban development does offer benefits for many residents but at the cost of declining quality of life for other Bay Area communities. As traffic mounts, open space disappears, older cities decline, and affordable housing vanishes, individuals and businesses begin to wonder whether the advantages of the region are worth the costs, and consider moving elsewhere. For those committed to the region, daily life becomes slowly more difficult.

A landmark 2002 report by Reid Ewing at Rutgers University, Rolf Pendall at Cornell University, and Don Chen of the nonprofit organization Smart Growth America, comparing metropolitan regions nationwide, concluded that

“People living in sprawling regions tend to drive greater distances, own more cars, breathe more polluted air, face a greater risk of traffic fatalities, and walk and use transit less.”²⁶

Conversely, a 2000 study by the Natural Resources Defense Council and the U.S. EPA comparing an infill subdivision in Sacramento with a sprawling counterpart found that the infill neighborhood offered many quality-of-life advantages. Residents traveled only half as much in motor vehicles each year, and the average distance to supermarkets, schools, and public transit was about one-tenth that in the sprawl location.²⁷

What Is Smart Growth?

Smart growth seeks to reverse the basic processes of sprawl. Though there is no universally accepted definition, ABAG defines the term as “development that revitalizes central cities and older suburbs, supports and enhances public transit, promotes walking and bicycling, and preserves open spaces and agricultural lands.” The American Planning Association defines the concept as follows:

“Smart growth means using comprehensive planning to guide, design, develop, revitalize and build communities for all that:

- have a unique sense of community and place;
- preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources;
- equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development;
- expand the range of transportation, employment and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner;
- value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short term incremental geographically isolated actions; and
- promotes public health and healthy communities.

“Compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use development patterns and land reuse epitomize the application of the principles of smart growth.

“In contrast to prevalent development practices, smart growth refocuses a larger share of regional growth within central cities, urbanized areas, inner suburbs, and areas that are already served by infrastructure. Smart growth reduces the share of growth that occurs on newly urbanizing land, existing farmlands, and in environmentally sensitive areas. In areas with intense growth pressure, development in newly urbanizing areas should be planned and developed according to smart growth principles.”²⁸

A main motivation of the smart growth movement nationally has been to create more efficiency in government expenditures, since sprawl requires greater expenses for roads, sewers, water mains, schools, and public services. But smart growth also uses land more efficiently—saving open space—and makes walking, biking, and public transportation more feasible.

Smart growth differs from previous growth control or management techniques in that it tries to rethink the form of development, rather than just setting limits. Whereas growth caps or moratoria are often criticized on equity grounds—for raising housing prices and thus excluding lower-income people from communities—smart growth can potentially ensure a diverse mixture of housing types and prices that can meet the needs of many residents.

States such as Maryland, New Jersey, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington have become leaders in pursuing smart growth. These and other states have enacted statewide land use planning principles and created incentives for local governments to improve their development practices. Maryland, for example, makes state infrastructure grants conditional on local establishment of “priority funding zones,” and has also established state programs to preserve “rural legacy” lands and to locate public buildings within downtowns and urban centers. Similar programs could be developed by the state of California or Contra Costa County. For example, the county might provide incentive funds for planning and development within older downtowns or other designated smart growth zones throughout the county. The MTC already makes some such grants available through its Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) and Housing Incentive Program (HIP) grant programs.



Cities have allowed prime sites like the ElCerrito Del Norte BART Station area to be used for strip-style development, often to gain sales tax revenue. However, these areas can eventually be redeveloped as mixed-use transit villages with boulevard-style street design.

During the past ten years the urban design movement known as the “New Urbanism” has influenced community design principles. This movement calls for the creation of walkable, people-oriented neighborhoods based often on traditional town models from a century or more ago. These design ideals fit closely with smart growth efforts.

Smart growth goes beyond New Urbanism and concentrates on accommodating new residents and jobs within existing urban areas. Doing this requires careful planning by various levels of government to establish a context in which good development will happen. Local governments may need to rezone key sites, develop detailed plans and design guidelines for development, improve amenities such as sidewalks, street trees, and parks, and upgrade community services.

Under a smart growth framework, infill development can occur in several ways: through building on vacant lots, reuse of underutilized sites such as parking lots and old industrial lands, and rehabilitation or expansion of existing buildings.

Such infill is typically possible in certain types of locations:

- In older downtowns that have been neglected for years,
- Along arterial strips that have many parking lots, vacant parcels, and older one-story buildings,
- Near BART stations and other transit facilities,
- On “grayfield” lands occupied by older shopping centers, office parks, and parking lots,
- On “brownfield” lands that may require cleanup from industrial contamination, and
- In existing residential neighborhoods where landowners can be encouraged to add “secondary units” to existing properties.

Smart growth then becomes a process of identifying opportunity sites within existing cities and towns—in particular areas large enough to become new neighborhood centers—and developing collaborations between city governments, community groups, and developers to ensure that appropriate development happens.

The Regional Context

From a population of 4.6 million in 1970, the Bay Area grew to 6.0 million in 1990 and 6.7 million in 2000, and is expected to add another one million residents by 2020. Similar growth is occurring statewide. Coupled with rapid increases in urbanized land area, resource consumption, and traffic, this trend is extremely worrisome. Yet many citizens and elected leaders throughout the region are realizing that by growing smarter the Bay Area can accommodate additional residents while minimizing negative environmental impacts, and while actually improving the vitality of many existing communities.

Smart Growth Planning

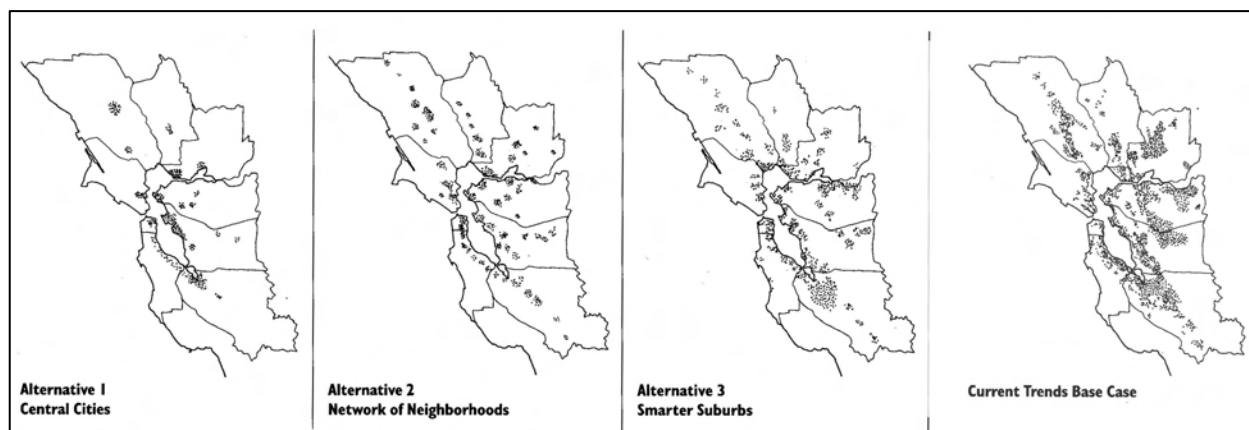
Concern about the negative impacts of growth has been mounting in the Bay Area for decades. Greenbelt Alliance staff and board members have been at the forefront of a number of efforts to rethink growth. In 1991, for example, the Bay Vision 2020 report, compiled by a blue-ribbon commission of leaders from throughout the region, concluded that “we must improve our ways of managing growth or we will lose many of the qualities that make this region such a special place.” Unfortunately followup efforts in the state legislature to strengthen our regional governance structure were narrowly defeated.

In 1996, representatives of nonprofit organizations including Greenbelt Alliance formed a regional campaign—now known as the Transportation and Land Use Coalition—to improve

regional planning. This coalition has succeeded in revising some regional transportation funding priorities, especially to support public transit, and has been a catalyst for smart growth planning.

At the same time, another regional coalition—the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities—began a wide-ranging consideration of how goals of environment, economy, and equity might be simultaneously met within regional development. This group has produced a Compact for a Sustainable Bay Area (available at www.bayareaalliance.org), and has also helped stimulate smart growth discussions.

In 1998 these two coalitions and staff of existing regional agencies initiated a regional smart growth planning process. This process has been coordinated by ABAG with support and participation from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Two rounds of workshops were held in 2001 and 2002, with public gatherings in every county. Analysts distilled three alternative growth scenarios from the



Smart Growth Alternatives. *The Association of Bay Area Governments and other agencies developed these three scenarios after workshops in 2001 and 2002. Shaded areas indicate locations of new development.*

public input: one in which most growth takes place in central cities, one in which growth emphasizes a “network of neighborhoods” built around transit corridors and the existing transportation system, and one which emphasizes “smarter suburbs” that are more compact, walkable, mixed-use, and mixed-income.

The regional smart growth process has now developed a single growth scenario combining elements of all these alternatives but most closely aligned with the network of neighborhoods model. This scenario is likely to be used as the basis for implementation incentives, and as an alternative land use scenario to be modeled within the next Regional Transportation Plan. Further information is available at ABAG’s web site, www.abag.ca.gov/planning/smartgrowth/.

Various pieces of state legislation are also seeking to promote smart growth. In particular, in September 2002 Governor Davis signed into law A.B. 857, authored by Assemblymember Pat Wiggins. This bill requires state infrastructure funding to be evaluated according to planning priorities, and establishes these priorities as 1) to promote infill development and equity, 2) to

protect environmental and agricultural resources, and 3) to encourage efficient development patterns.²⁹ So after decades of inaction California as a state for the first time has adopted smart growth-oriented planning principles.

Contra Costa Compared with Other Counties

As a rapidly growing and recently developed county, Contra Costa feels growth pressures more acutely than many other parts of the Bay Area. San Francisco and San Mateo counties for example have long been urbanized and are relatively stable in population. Marin County has much of its land off-limits to development in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Point Reyes National Seashore, and agricultural preserves. Napa County has adopted relatively strict zoning provisions to protect its vineyards and scenic landscapes.

With almost 23 percent of its open space lands threatened by development, Contra Costa County now has the most lands at risk of development of any county in the Bay Area. Although parts of the county still feel relatively rural, and its residents have managed to preserve an impressive number of parks and agricultural areas, the county is among the most rapidly urbanizing parts of the Bay Area and faces great challenges in bringing about smarter growth.

2. HISTORY OF COUNTY GROWTH & OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

County History

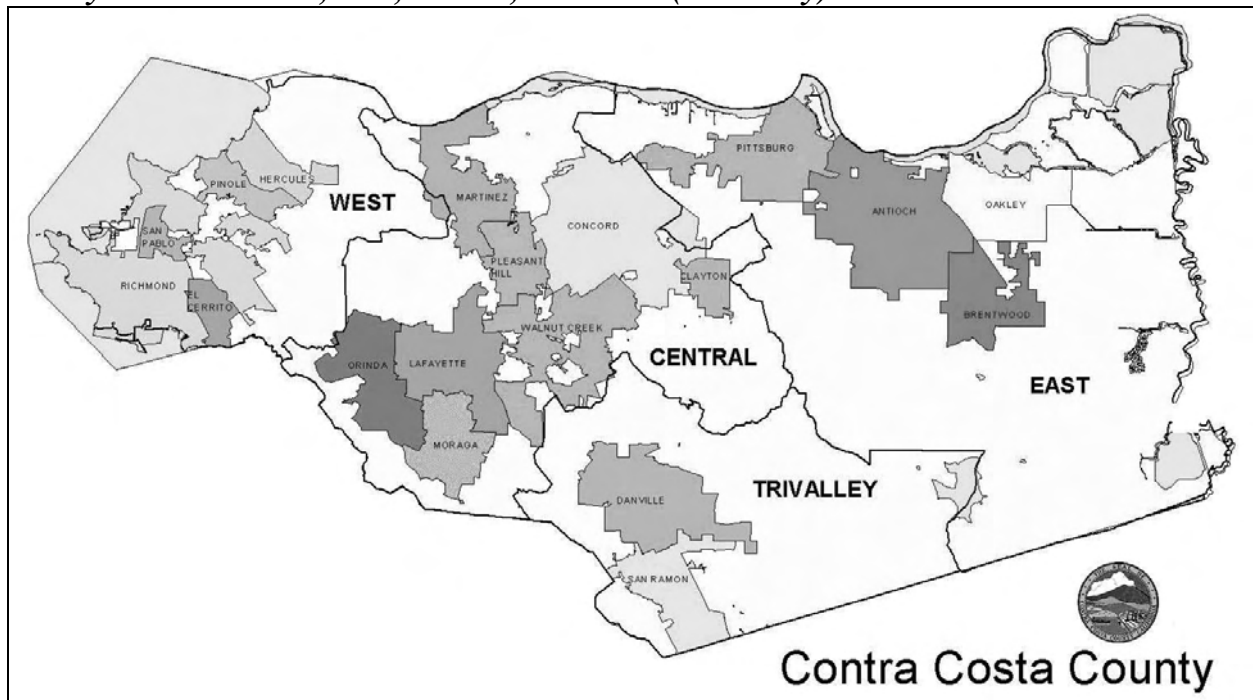
When white settlers first set eyes on what is now Contra Costa County, they were met with a stunning landscape. Mt. Diablo dominated the skyline, but it towered above a very different environment than what we see today. There were miles of pristine Bay coastlines, lush valleys filled with salmon streams, and rolling grasslands carpeted in wildflowers and sprinkled with majestic oak trees. Tule marshes teeming with wildlife covered vast stretches of the valley floor. There was an abundance of food for the Native American villages that flourished here.



Contra Costa County still contains stunningly beautiful views of open space, although sprawl development has covered a growing percentage of the landscape.

During the early 1800s the land was divided into Spanish ranchos of as much as 16,000 acres. When American settlers arrived in the 1850s they quickly discovered that the soil was exceptionally fertile, the water table easily accessible, and the climate conducive for growing a tremendous variety of crops. Contra Costa—the “opposite shore”—was soon transformed into one of the most productive farming regions in the United States.

County SubAreas: West, East, Central, and South (Tri-Valley)



Martinez became its first city, serving as a popular stopover for steamboats filled with 49ers in search of gold. Port Costa served as a bustling shipping port until a railroad bridge across the Carquinez straits cut into its business. Mining towns sprouted in the foothills near Black Diamond Mine when coal was discovered there in the 1860's. Richmond and San Pablo were predominantly wheat-growing areas until 1902, when Standard Oil built what was at the time the world's largest oil refinery. During World War II, the population on the county's west side grew rapidly as people were brought in to work in the shipyards.

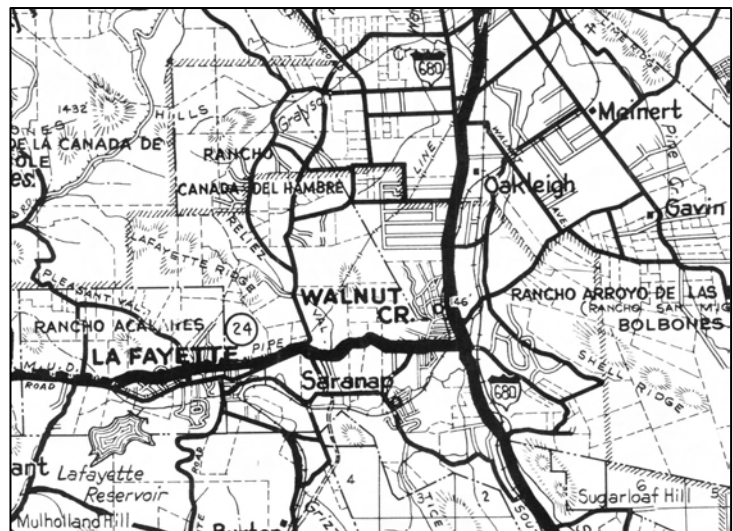
In 1937 the Caldecott tunnel and accompanying road improvements considerably shortened the distance from Central County to Oakland and San Francisco. Visitors came in droves, fell in love with the scenic landscape, expansive orchards, sleepy towns, and sunny weather, and decided to stay.

Suburbanization, fueled by low interest GI loans after World War II, rapidly transformed Central County into a bedroom community for job centers in Oakland and San Francisco. The construction of Highways 24 and 680 in the mid-1960s also opened up enormous areas to development. But even at that time orchards still stretched from Concord to San Ramon. Picturesque towns connected by two-lane country roads dotted Central and East County, and there was not an office building or shopping center to be seen in most towns.

Back then, a child growing up in Walnut Creek could enjoy a bicycle ride to Danville along mile after mile of orchards, encountering only a handful of farm workers along the way. The Delta served as a wonderful playground for young people who could go clamming or fishing along its banks. The fish were plentiful and 12 foot sturgeons and 40-50 pound stripers were not uncommon. Catching frogs and tadpoles along the streambeds was a ritual of growing up.

Much has changed over the last 30 years. The orchards have disappeared from Central County and are rapidly giving way to suburban sprawl in East County. The creeks have been mostly channelized for flood control. The clam beds are all gone and the fish population has dwindled. Even if you do catch a fish, chances are it is unsafe to eat. Many priceless experiences of childhood, taken for granted just one generation ago, are no longer a possibility for our children today.

Today, typical visitors enter the county by freeway, most of which are congested for extended periods of the day. A visitor's first impression might be to admire the remaining natural ridges which serve as a scenic



Walnut Creek in 1960 was a small town, and Pleasant Hill did not exist. Much of central Contra Costa County was still ranched or farmed. The roads marked 24 and 680 are smaller predecessors of the current freeways. (Metsker's Map, 1960).

backdrop to a vast sea of suburban homes pouring out over the lowlands, creeping up hillsides, and spilling out towards Brentwood and the Central Valley. Air pollution hangs over the interior valleys on warm summer days, and noise and congestion have become part of daily life.

The once idyllic towns have been transformed into mostly undifferentiated communities connected by a maze of freeways and mile after mile of suburban tract homes. Contra Costa County was once known for having some of the richest soils in the world. Now, much of the prime agricultural land is under pavement and the remaining acreage seems destined for the same fate. Many of the scenic charms that once beckoned people to come and stay are no longer evident, and those that remain are now in danger of being irretrievably lost.

No one expects to return to the halcyon days of yore. But while growth may seem inevitable, it does not have to come at the expense of destroying the very qualities that have made Contra Costa County an attractive and inviting place. Contra Costa does not have to follow the example of Los Angeles and urbanize all its remaining farmlands and open space. Instead, growth can be channeled in ways that will enhance and revitalize the county's existing communities.

County General Plan Update, 1984-1990

One of the first efforts by citizens to shape the future of Contra Costa County began in 1984. Large-scale developments were being proposed for Bethel Island, Marsh Canyon, Briones Valley, Deer Valley, Lone Tree Valley, Cowell Ranch, Discovery Bay, Veal Tract, and the San Ramon Valley. East County was being transformed from a quiet farming area to a patchwork of bedroom communities. Much of the development was taking place in areas that lacked infrastructure, causing traffic conditions to deteriorate and draining investment away from existing cities. Development was not proceeding in an orderly fashion, but was instead hopscotching all over the county, fragmenting the urbanized and rural areas and ruining the basic character and charm of the places it touched. This type of development did not make economic or environmental sense and was detrimental to the long-term best interest of the entire county.

In 1984, local representatives of People for Open Space (now called Greenbelt Alliance), the Sierra Club, and Audubon Society urged the county government to undertake a comprehensive update of its General Plan. This planning document is supposed to serve as a blueprint upon which all land use decisions are based, yet it had not been thoroughly revised since 1963. The Board of Supervisors agreed and set up a General Plan Advisory Committee to complement the work of county staff.

A coalition of citizen groups worked together on this committee to advocate for a visionary General Plan that included permanent protection for significant resource areas, including riparian corridors, wetlands, scenic ridges, and agricultural lands. They also worked to get policies adopted that would direct growth to existing cities or contiguous lands with adequate public services, have new growth pay its own way and not depend on subsidies from current residents, and encourage the county and cities to work together cooperatively to ensure that the future quality of life would be equal to or better than the present.

The revision of the General Plan would take years to complete. In the meantime, the county was still approving scores of new developments. In 1986 the citizen groups called on county leaders

to enact a moratorium on new approvals until the new General Plan was finished. They organized a campaign and convinced a dozen cities to join with them in calling for the moratorium. At first it looked like the citizen groups would prevail, but it wasn't long before development interests organized and pressured many of the cities to back off. These forces also took control of the General Plan process and made sure that the final outcome would ensure the floodgates remained open for continued sprawl development. By 1990, after years of effort, it appeared to the citizen coalition that working through the official channels would be fruitless.

Measure F versus Measure C, 1990

Unable to influence the General Plan process directly, the citizen groups organized a campaign to protect the county's open space by initiative. They collected 33,000 signatures to put Measure F, "The Open Space and Wildlife Conservation Initiative," on the ballot. It called for city-centered growth, large parcel zoning outside of cities to protect farmland and open space, and permanent protection of scenic ridges and other natural features. Meanwhile, the Board of Supervisors in cooperation with development interests countered by putting their own measure on the ballot to confuse the voters: Measure C: the "65/35 Land Preservation Plan." This measure purported to allow only 35 percent of county land to be urbanized, but actually contained loopholes allowing considerably more development.

The contest between the two measures was never on a level playing field. The county counsel gave Measure F the unappealing official ballot name of "Land Use Initiative for Unincorporated Areas." The Yes on C/No on F campaigns raked in a combined \$430,000—more than ten times the amount raised by Measure F supporters. The local newspaper also came in solidly behind Measure C, which was not surprising as it had consistently been a cheerleader for sprawl development.³⁰ Most voters who chose Measure C thought they were voting for open space protection. Instead they received a new General Plan that opened up 110 square miles to development and allowed most of the remaining open space to be carved up into five-acre ranchettes.

Measure C's "Urban Limit Line"

Measure C also expropriated the concept of an urban limit line (ULL) from conservationists, but watered it down to render it almost meaningless. An urban growth boundary is a long-term fixed line drawn around cities that divides land to be developed from that which is to be protected as open space. The idea is to accommodate growth more compactly by encouraging investment within existing cities. In Contra Costa County's case, the supervisors chose to seek a countywide ULL rather than pushing for city-by-city growth boundaries, as has occurred to a large extent in Sonoma County. While both strategies can potentially be effective, a countywide approach runs the risk of including more land for development between cities.



Tassarjara Valley east of Danville and San Ramon has been one of the most recent development battlegrounds.

Unfortunately the land outside Measure C's line was not properly protected, as it could be subdivided into five-acre residential parcels. Furthermore, so much land was included inside the ULL that it actually encouraged more sprawl instead of reining it in. As of 1990, when the plan passed, 75,000 acres of open space were up for grabs, an amount of land about twice the size of San Francisco. This was far more than necessary to meet the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) population growth projections. The capacious ULL opened up vast areas for more sprawl development, while doing nothing to encourage investment in existing cities.

According to arguments for Measure C, only 35 percent of the county was to be urbanized, yet the ULL actually included 46 percent of the land. This was rationalized on the basis that golf courses and unbuildable portions of each property could be re-dedicated as open space to meet the 65 percent requirement. Theoretically, the whole county could be urbanized under this plan if the developers only built on 35 percent of each parcel and left 65 percent as "open space." Moreover, the line itself was a moving target that could be changed by a 4-1 vote of the Supervisors. Adjustments to the urban limit line were soon made to accommodate development in both Dougherty Valley and Discovery Bay. In other words, Measure C and the 1990 General Plan simply borrowed environmental rhetoric to gloss over a business-as-usual approach. Many of the land use policies influencing development today still depend on decisions made by a largely misinformed electorate over a decade ago.

In the mid-1990s Contra Costa County revised the Land Use Element of its General Plan to more fully take into account the impact of various ballot measures and amendments. Other parts of the plan were not updated, but the document is now known as the 1996 General Plan covering the time period from 1995-2010. (As required by state law, the Housing Element was updated further in 2002.)

Urban Limit Line Tightened in 2000

Under Measure C, every five years the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors has the right to review the county's urban limit line and redraw it if certain findings are made. During the 1990s citizen pressure to save open space grew dramatically, and the national movement for smart growth gained adherents in the county. In the summer of 2000, after much anticipation and debate, the supervisors moved in the ULL by unanimously passing the latest updated version. The 2000 modifications to the line saved more than 14,000 acres—22 square miles—from sprawling development, mostly in the eastern part of the county and the Tassajara Valley. It was a huge victory for the county supervisors and greenbelt preservationists. Through this action the county essentially restricted sprawl outside of the cities of Antioch, Brentwood, and Pittsburg. It also prevented sprawl development in parts of the Tassajara Valley near San Ramon. The revised ULL encourages developers to plan smart projects inside already existing cities.

In recent years public agencies and nonprofit organizations, such as the East Bay Regional Park District, Save Mount Diablo and the Martinez Land Trust, have also been instrumental in protecting much public open space. As of 1992, 94,700 acres had been permanently protected. By 2002, that figure had grown to 116,464 acres (not including the 69,184-acre Los Vaqueros Reservoir site or the 6,853-acre Concord Naval Weapons Station).³¹ This increase in protected land came from the passage of Measure AA in 1988, providing \$225 million worth of park bonds

that agencies used to permanently preserve 5,000 acres in Contra Costa County. Protected land now represents some 25 percent of the County's 460,000 acres.

Cowell Ranch

Until the summer of 2000, the nearly six-square-mile Cowell Ranch, Brentwood's largest Special Planning Area, was at risk of being developed. Developers proposed about 5,000 units, a golf course, and a two million square foot business park for this site located on county land outside city borders.

However, in the summer of 2000 the County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to pull in the Urban Limit Line and put the majority of Cowell Ranch out-of-bounds for development. Then-Supervisor (now Assemblymember) Joe Canciamilla negotiated a compromise with the Cowell Foundation, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and developer Signature Properties that would allow 460 acres to remain inside the ULL (without any guarantees of development) while the balance of the land was optioned to TPL for permanent protection. In 2002 TPL raised the necessary \$13.5 million and the state Parks and Recreation Department has agreed to manage the land as a state park. The Cowell Foundation retains the 460-acre parcel that will be considered for development.

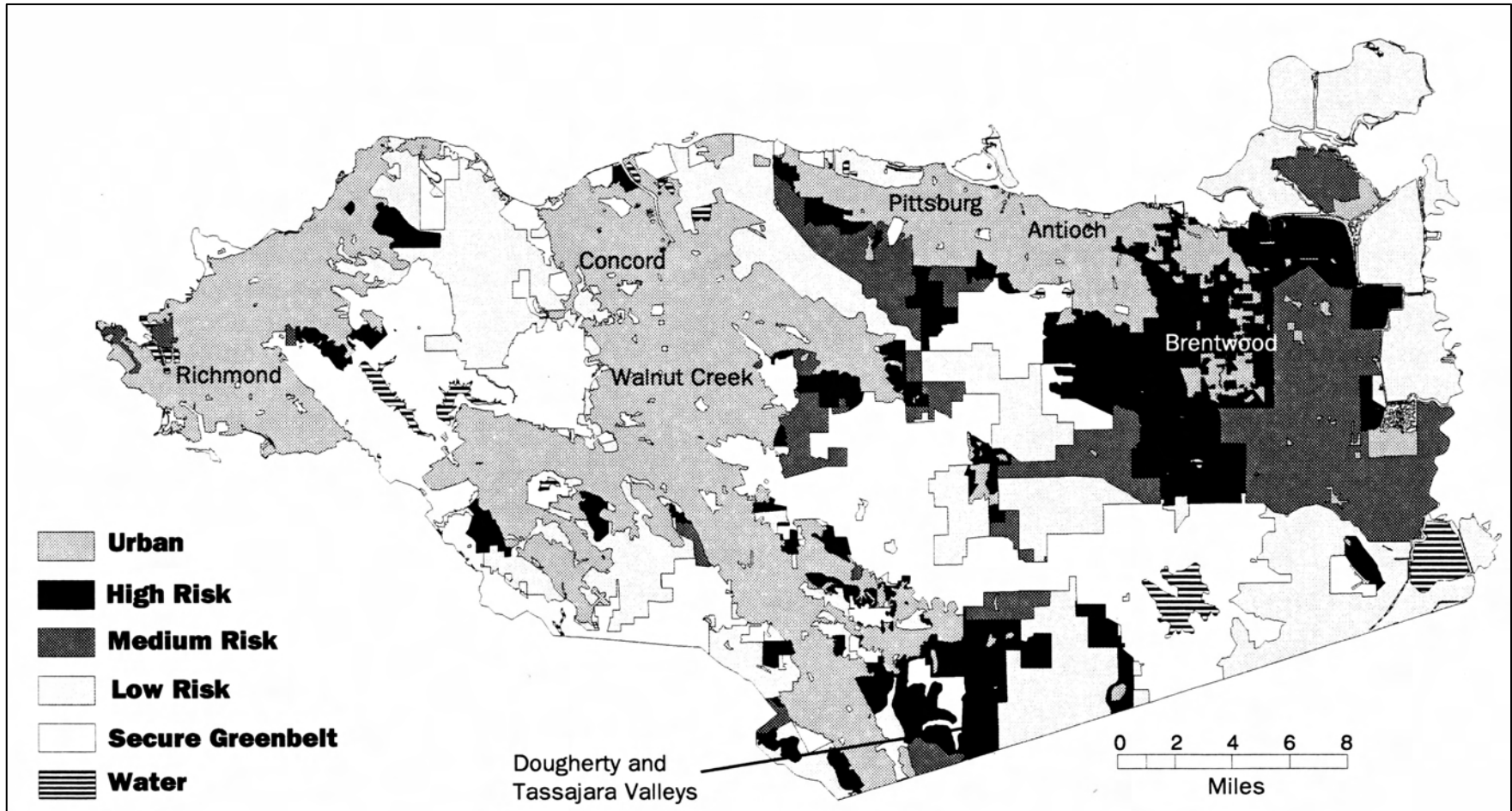
The Shaping Our Future Process

After opting out of the regional smart growth process conducted by the Association of Bay Area Governments and four other agencies, in April 2002 Contra Costa County began its own growth vision project known as Shaping Our Future. The process is designed to develop a community-based 20-year vision for dealing with challenges such as reducing traffic congestion, using land more efficiently, revitalizing older downtowns, and preserving the integrity of existing neighborhoods. Whereas national smart growth advocates have frequently pushed for affordable housing programs, improved public transit, and other equity-oriented provisions—and equity issues were frequently raised within the ABAG-led regional process—Shaping Our Future materials did not mention improving equity as a goal.

The County hired Fregonese-Calthorpe Associates, a consulting firm based in Portland, to run the Contra Costa process. One of the consultants' first acts was to commission a poll of county residents, which showed strong support for growth management planning and improved public transit. Traffic congestion was highest on the list of public concerns, with 71 percent of residents saying they were "very concerned" about it. Using open space for new development instead of redeveloping previously developed areas was also of high concern, with 52 percent "very concerned" and 84 percent either "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned."³²

The project began with a 2001 workshop held jointly with the regional agencies. Then the county's consultants conducted additional public meetings in Walnut Creek and Martinez in late 2002, with workshops in Richmond and East County to be held in early 2003. More information is available through www.shapingourfuture.org.

Lands "At Risk" of Development in Contra Costa County



3. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

EAST COUNTY

Connoisseurs claim that East County produces the world’s sweetest bing cherries. Yet over the last 50 years, more than 70 percent of orchards and croplands have been lost and much of what is left is threatened by suburbanization. East County is currently one of the Bay Area’s leading hot spots for development. If prevailing trends continue, its population will explode from 160,000 in 1996 to nearly 250,000 by the year 2010—equivalent to adding another city the size of Concord.

The new homes being built in East County are marketed primarily to commuters, even though jobs are often up to 60 miles away, reachable only along already-congested highways. The low cost of homes is more than offset by high commuting costs. At 32 cents per mile (a typical rate for calculating the cost of driving), a 120-mile round trip commute costs \$280,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage. It also adds up to a tremendous waste of time, a drain on family life, and a deterrent to community involvement. Developers and local jurisdictions now advocate the building of business parks to bring jobs to East County. However, instead of creating new jobs, these are more likely to take jobs away from older Bay Area communities, causing employment loss and increased commuting elsewhere in the region.

Building roads in the East County to accommodate all new residents will cost billions of dollars and exacerbate traffic impacts downstream in Central County. Highway 4 is already operating beyond design capacity, and the funds do not exist to widen it east of Bailey Road in Pittsburg. Traffic projections show that building out East County will more than double the traffic demand on Highway 4 by the year 2010.³³ East County also lacks the sewage disposal capacity and a reliable water supply for anticipated growth. Nevertheless, the cities of Antioch, Pittsburg, Brentwood, and Contra Costa County itself continue to approve new projects and have become highly dependent on development fees to balance their budgets.

Amidst all this growth, the historic downtown centers of Antioch and Pittsburg have languished, with many vacant lots and empty storefronts. Pittsburg’s downtown has been almost entirely abandoned, and the city has allowed dozens of blocks to be redeveloped with suburban-style single family homes. Both cities have become “divided communities,” with newer, more affluent areas to the south of Highway 4 very different from older districts to the north. “Big box” commercial developments being promoted throughout East County are likely to further undercut traditional downtown businesses.

The historic downtowns of Antioch and Pittsburg offer considerable development potential...older corridors, such as Railroad Ave. and Willow Pass Road in Pittsburg and “A” Street in Antioch, also offer extensive possibilities for infill.

East County possesses great opportunities for smarter growth, however. The historic downtowns of Antioch and Pittsburg offer considerable development potential, and unlike most suburban areas have the potential to create dynamic, walkable, mixed-use centers of activity. Certain older

corridors, such as Railroad Ave. and Willow Pass Road in Pittsburg and “A” Street in Antioch, also offer extensive possibilities for infill development that could convert these streets into attractive, pedestrian-oriented boulevards. Vacant lots, surface parking lots, and older one-story buildings could be redeveloped into three to five story structures with apartments above storefronts. At the same time, streetscape improvements such as wider sidewalks, street trees, pedestrian-oriented street lighting, and storefront retail should be encouraged to help make these corridors centers of community activity.

The Bay Point BART station and underused commercial and industrial land near Suisun Bay and the San Joaquin River offer further opportunities for Smart Growth in East County. Eventually large, inefficient uses of land such as County East Mall in Antioch might also be redeveloped as mixed-use neighborhoods with a substantial number of residential units.

Antioch

This city is situated in a unique natural setting that gives it much of its character. The San Joaquin River Delta area provides the boundary to the north. To the south, Antioch is bordered by rolling foothills that stretch up towards Mount Diablo. The rich soils that underlie much of the flatlands between the hills and the Delta were once one of the best wheat growing areas in the region. Since the 1970s, Antioch has transformed itself from an industrial-based economy to a bedroom community that has recently surpassed Richmond to become the second largest city in Contra Costa County. Antioch has expanded its borders greatly in recent years, and its current city limits encompass 28.8 square miles. The city’s growing population has generated substantial traffic on local roadways and Highway 4. In the late 1990s 74.2 percent of residents drove alone to work with an average travel time of 41.6 minutes.³⁴



Downtown Antioch has a wealth of historic buildings, many now empty or used for storage.

Antioch Growth in Population and Employment

	Current Population (2000)	Expected 2025 Population	Number of Housing Units (2000)	Expected Housing Units in 2025	Number of Jobs (2000)	Expected Jobs in 2025
Antioch	91,293	118,800	29,656	40,870	17,060	29,850

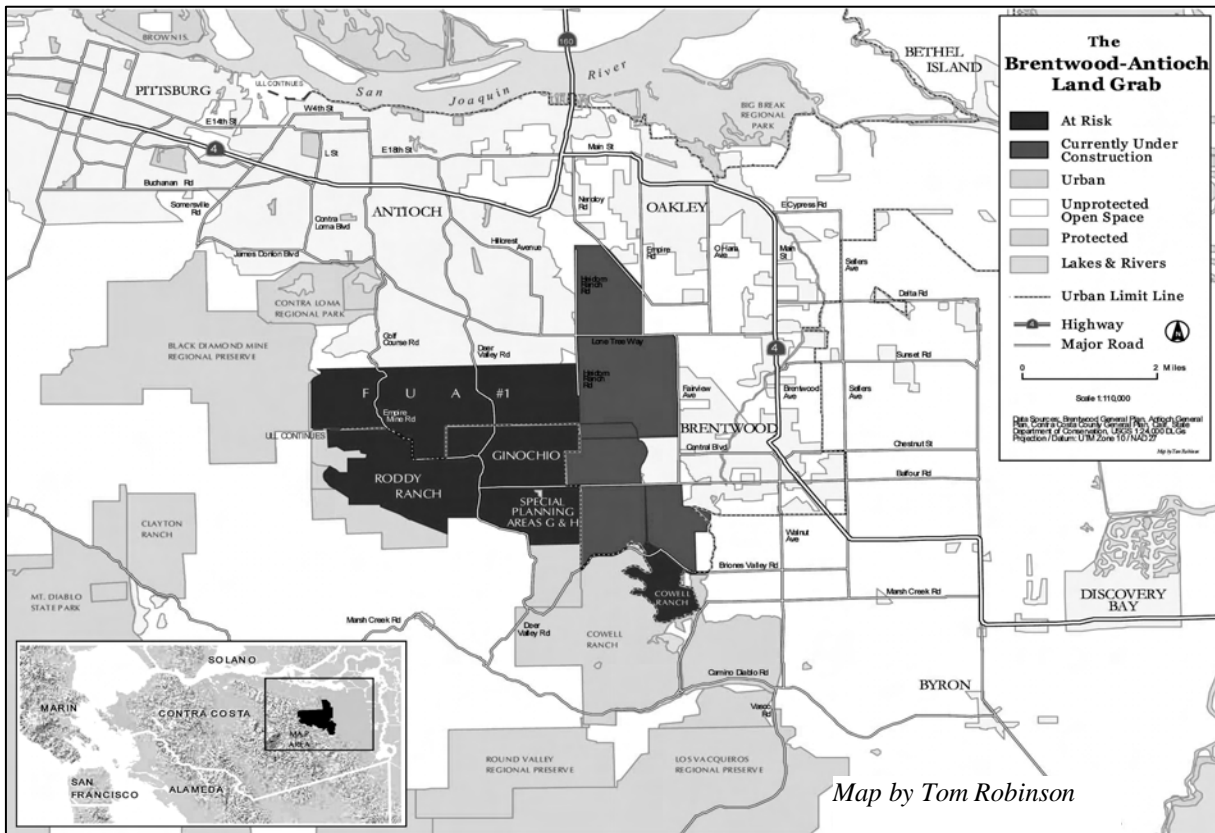
Lone Tree Valley (FUA-1)

Antioch is planning development of a 2,700-acre swath of grazing land at the city’s southern border in Lone Tree Valley. The Sand Creek Specific Plan, which covers Lone Tree Valley also known as FUA#1, calls for building 5,000 housing units, two employment centers, and a golf course. One of the employment centers is the approved Kaiser medical center, estimated to provide 2,600 jobs. The other is planned for the eastern portion of Lone Tree Valley. Even though economic analyses show there is no market for a business park in that part of town, the

city expects this second location to generate 2,500 to 3,000 jobs. Additionally, when built out retail and small businesses proposed for Lone Tree Valley are expected to generate an additional 3,000 jobs.³⁵ Thus, if built out as currently proposed, the Sand Creek Specific Plan would create 5,000 new units of housing and 8,600 jobs. All of this development would generate an estimated 143,331 two-way car trips per day,³⁶ greatly aggravating traffic on Route 4 and arterial streets.

In order to attract new businesses to Antioch the western portion of Lone Tree Valley is planned for estate-sized executive housing, a very inefficient use of land. This rugged area borders Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and, according to the environmental review for the Sand Creek Specific Plan also presents a hazard of land subsiding beneath the houses since the area is riddled with abandoned mines.

Development in Lone Tree Valley would likely induce growth on two properties to the south, Roddy Ranch and the Ginnochio/Nunn properties. Antioch has already shown interest in expanding south of Lone Tree Valley by proposing a General Plan that includes both of these properties for urban use, even though both are outside the county's urban limit line (ULL). The pressure to develop these lands will only increase if city infrastructure and utilities are brought to their borders through development of the Sand Creek Specific Plan. The city may then be able to petition the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to allow annexation outside the ULL.



Lone Tree Valley doesn't need to be developed into sprawling subdivisions. The city of Antioch has 3,683 acres of vacant land within their city limits without the inclusion of Future Urban Area

#1 that can be developed for housing and other needs. The City should focus development within their existing infrastructure and preserve the rolling hills and ranchlands to the South by establishing an Urban Growth Boundary and only allowing development beyond the urban growth boundary if the voters of Antioch approve.

Downtown

The downtown and Rivertown areas of Antioch are home to many historic buildings and opportunities for new infill commercial and residential development. In addition, the Antioch Amtrak station can provide a focus for transit-oriented development.



Eden Housing is building 57 units of affordable housing in downtown Antioch.

The Rivertown Business District is the advocate for Downtown Antioch and aims to create an economically vital and attractive downtown through a “Rivertown Renaissance.” The group’s goals include attracting arts and entertainment related businesses and events, identifying available sites, and marketing these locations to businesses suited to the area.³⁷

Some plans for the revitalization of the area are presented in the West Rivertown District Urban Design Concept Plan.³⁸ There has been little development downtown in the last 10 years, but in April 2002 Eden Housing broke ground for 57 units of affordable housing at 4th and J streets. This project may act as a catalyst for further infill development.

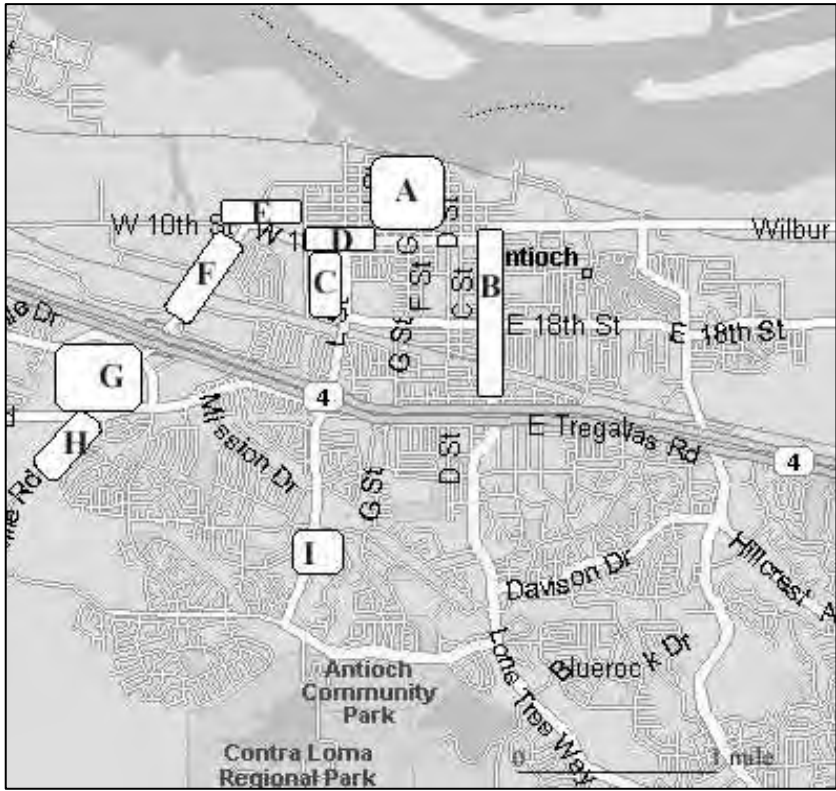
To ensure efficient use of land Antioch should consider revising its zoning code and General Plan Land Use designations. Currently, the general plan has a maximum residential density of only 20 dwelling units per acre (less than that of many small apartment buildings) and a large minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet (preventing small-scale development such as found in many traditional American towns) for the more intensive multifamily residential zones.

In studies for its new General Plan, the City of Antioch has identified Somerset Road, “A” Street, and County East Mall as sites for potential redevelopment. All of these should be aggressively pursued as an alternative to continued sprawl on open land to the south and east. In addition, the 73-acre County Fairgrounds just to the west of downtown Antioch, currently used for stock car racing and other activities, is a prime site for a new residential neighborhood. This well-located parcel, near downtown and a possible future BART or commuter transit station, is appropriate for urban development. Fairgrounds activities could be relocated to another location in the county.

Potential Antioch Transit Village



Intensive development of a mixed-use transit village is possible where the Union Pacific tracks cross L Street in Antioch. BART or e-BART service (using self-propelled diesel-powered rail cars) is possible on this line. The underutilized County Fairgrounds could be redeveloped as a new neighborhood, with fair activities relocated to a more peripheral site. Before-and-after digital re-imaging courtesy of Steve Price/Urban Advantage.



Brentwood

This city is situated on some of the best agricultural soils in the world and is bounded on the south and east by rich farmlands and the Delta waterways. Historically a farmtown, Brentwood has recently been transformed into a sprawling bedroom suburb. It is currently the third fastest growing city in California.³⁹ The population at the end of 2002 was estimated at 31,000, which is 8,000 more than shown in the 2000 census. Brentwood’s city limits encompass 11.9 square miles, the sphere of influence is 20.8 square miles, and the entire planning area covers 66

square miles. The city’s General Plan would triple the current population and create a community the size of Antioch.

Brentwood Growth in Population and Employment⁴⁰

	2000 Population	Expected 2021 Population	Number of Housing Units (2000)	Expected Housing Units in 2021	Number of Jobs (2000)	Expected Jobs in 2021
Brentwood	23,302	76,226	7,497	26,653	5,160	43,087

In November 2000 Brentwood finalized annexation of its central area. Development in this area and throughout the northern part of the city exhibits classic leapfrog patterns.

Developments

Like Antioch, Brentwood has included the Ginocchio/Nunn property in its planning area as Special Planning Area (SPA) R, despite the site being outside the county’s ULL. Two other sites located south of Ginocchio/Nunn, SPAs G and H, are also outside the ULL. The city has annexed 154 acres of SPA H (outside the ULL) to accommodate a high school and middle school. Projects within Brentwood are already under construction that will bring infrastructure to the border of these areas.⁴¹

Nearly 6,000 acres of agricultural land lie within Brentwood’s planning area, some 2,500 acres of which fall within the City of Brentwood Agricultural Conservation Area. Despite ideal soil and various strategies suggested or employed by the city to preserve farmland, farming can be difficult in this fast-developing area. The city’s Agricultural Enterprise Program cites expensive

land and labor, and the proximity of new residential development, as negative impacts on local farming.⁴² Some landowners are actively seeking urbanization. Of the sixteen conversions of agricultural land to urban land in Contra Costa County between 1998 and 2000, twelve of them took place in the Brentwood area.⁴³ Most of this land was converted for new housing developments, such as the 500-acre Summerset golf community.

Downtown

Brentwood's small but historic downtown provides the traditional business core for the city. However, many of Brentwood's newer residents commute to other communities for work and shopping patterns often follow. Big box retailers are currently locating on Lone Tree Way in Antioch and will probably be interested in Delta Expressway locations in the future, draining further revenues from the small business district in the heart of town.⁴⁴

A smart growth strategy for Brentwood would include focusing development within this downtown area while avoiding competing outlying retail that would undercut local businesses. Redeveloping underused lots and adding floors to existing structures to provide housing would increase pedestrian traffic downtown and counter the loss of business to outlying areas. The city may need to revise its General Plan and zoning code to ensure that such development happens. Currently, for example, the General Plan restricts height in the downtown to one or two stories. Two stories might be a minimum instead of a maximum, with three-to-five story buildings allowed. A modest expansion of the downtown area might also be pursued, to make it a focus of surrounding development.

Pittsburg

Located along the southern shore of Suisun Bay just west of Antioch, Pittsburg stretches toward rolling hills to the south. The city experienced rapid growth during the 1970s and 1980s as it morphed from an industrial center into a bedroom community. Pittsburg's current city limits encompass 15.6 square miles, its sphere of influence (land the city is able to annex) covers 18.2 square miles, and its planning area (land the city may eventually be able to annex on landowner

request) covers 41.1 square miles. West of Pittsburg is the unincorporated community of Bay Point, which falls within Pittsburg’s sphere of influence and planning area.

Pittsburg/Bay Point Growth in Population and Employment⁴⁵

	Current Population	2020 Projected Population	Number of Housing Units (2000)	Expected Housing Units in 2020	Number of Jobs (2000)	Jobs Expected in 2020
Pittsburg	54,300	83,600	19,100	29,300	19,500	39,900
Bay Point	15,000	15,700	6,200	6,500	4,800	5,300
Total	69,300	99,300	25,300	35,800	24,300	45,100

Developments

The San Marco development south of Bay Point and Highway 4 consists of 3,000 units on 554 acres. It remains underway despite the fact that the development company, owned by Albert Seeno, Jr., has been fined \$1 million under the Endangered Species Act for killing threatened red-legged frogs and deliberately destroying their habitat.⁴⁶ The Seeno family has been behind many of the developments that have led Pittsburg to sprawl southwards across Highway 4 into the foothills.

Two other projects are currently stalled. Despite having the proposal approved by the Planning Commission, Albert Seeno III withdrew his application for the 779-unit, 231-acre San Marco Meadows and Sky Ranch II developments before the city council vote scheduled for early October 2002. These projects were being contested because of their size, location, and lack of environmental review.⁴⁷ It was assumed that Seeno would gain an advantage in the November 2002 election if the vote was postponed. However, the Seeno-supportive council majority was not reelected. It is unclear when or if these developments will be approved.

Bailey Estates, one of the few large projects in Pittsburg that the Seeno family is not involved in, is also on hold. The city’s planning commission was poised to consider approval of a full environmental study for the 257-unit, 122-acre development when the project application was withdrawn by the developer, Bailey Estates LLC. The project site is surrounded by open space and is adjacent to the Concord Naval Weapons Station’s blast easement.⁴⁸

BART Station Area Development

The Pittsburg/Bay Point BART station that opened in 1996 represents yet another failure to take advantage of the system's transit-oriented development opportunities. The City of Pittsburg allowed a shopping center and single-family housing to be developed near the station site, and much of the remaining land is occupied by a large BART surface parking lot.



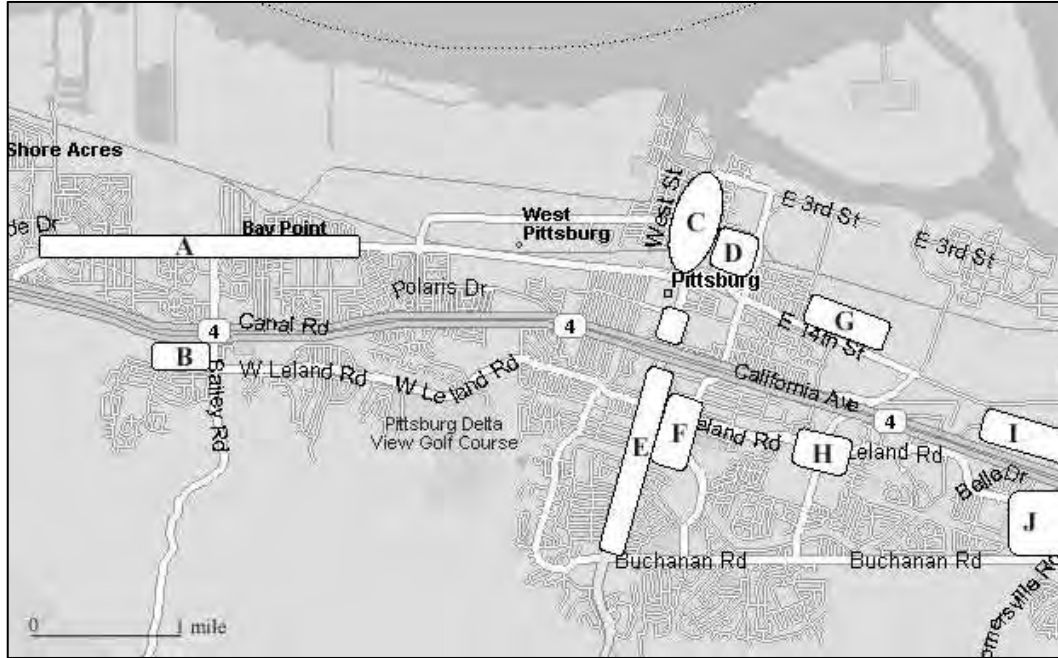
To its credit, the municipality did develop a Pittsburg/Bay Point BART Station Area Specific Plan that covers 295 acres of land adjacent to the station. This plan calls for a high intensity mixed use area in the immediate vicinity of the station.⁴⁹ However, the city council then decided to downzone the 35 acres of the Alves Ranch property, near the BART Station, from high density to low. The landowner has successfully sued the city council alleging conflicts of interest with two of the council members because of their relationship with prominent local developer Albert Seeno, Jr. who owns neighboring high-density zoned property and unsuccessfully attempted to purchase Alves Ranch.⁵⁰ Such squabbles—and the undue influence of developers such as Seeno—are a serious obstacle to better land use in such areas.

Pittsburg has allowed a shopping center to be built next to the new Bay Point BART station, along with a low-density subdivision. By local developer Albert Seeno, Jr. In time the shopping complex can potentially be redeveloped into more intensive transit-oriented development.



Remaining opportunities at the BART station include construction on BART's parking lot (with parking accommodated underneath or in a structure), development on an adjoining 3.5-acre parcel, and eventual redevelopment of the 9.7-acre Oak Hills Center commercial site.

Pittsburg's General Plan also proposes another BART station at Railroad Avenue. This station's proximity to downtown could provide the impetus for its revitalization, and could also help spur "transit village" type development along Railroad Ave. However, there currently is no timeframe or funding for this extension, which would also have to be evaluated in comparison with other regional needs.



Leading Infill Opportunities in Pittsburg

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| A — Willow Pass Road | F — Atlantic Shopping Center |
| B — Bay Point BART | G — POSCO vacant industrial land |
| C — Historic Downtown | H — North Park Plaza |
| D — 10 th Street Area | I — Commercial and vacant land |
| E — Railroad Ave. Corridor | J — County East Mall/Century Plaza |



Downtown Pittsburg is full of empty lots and abandoned buildings, yet its small blocks and street grid are well suited for redevelopment as a compact, walkable community.

Downtown

As development has spread south of the freeway and west past Bay Point, downtown Pittsburg has languished, with many vacant buildings, empty lots, and commercial properties used mainly for storage. Yet this nineteenth-century center provides an excellent opportunity for infill development. One of the oldest settlements in Contra Costa County, the city’s New York

Landing Historic District contains many buildings of historic character as well as large vacant parcels.

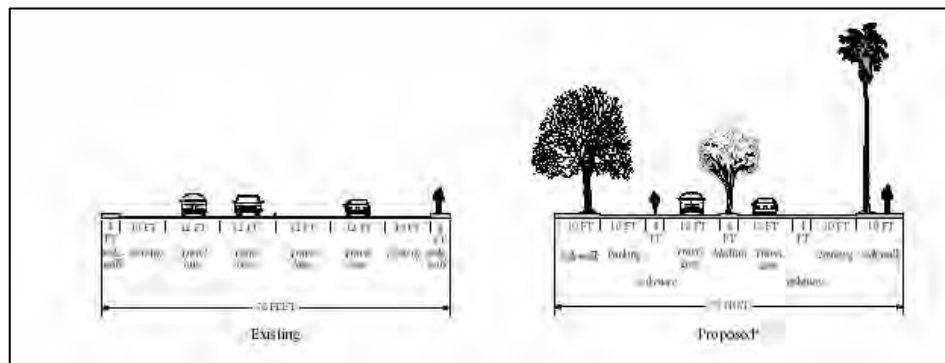
Unfortunately, much redevelopment to date in downtown Pittsburg has seen suburban-style housing replace old cannery buildings. Privacy walls and cul-de-sacs have in some places replaced the old gridded neighborhoods. But many other development opportunities still remain, particularly in the core of the downtown. The city devoted a chapter of its recent General Plan to the downtown area and expects the area’s population to almost double to 7,814 from a 2000 count of around 4,000.

Corridor Redevelopment

Large infill development opportunities also exist along several older arterial corridors in Pittsburg, especially Railroad Ave., which forms a central spine of the city between downtown and the hills, and the 10th Street/Willow Pass Road corridor, which runs from downtown west through the community of Bay Point. Both of these are wide streets with many vacant or underutilized sites.



Three-to-five story buildings along the street right of way, combined with an extensive package of streetscape improvements, could house thousands of residents in transit-accessible locations.



The City of Pittsburg General Plan develops a new, boulevard-style street design proposal for Willow Pass Road. Photo: City of Pittsburg.

Oakley

Although Oakley is a very new city, incorporated in 1999, many of the buildings in the city’s small business district date back to the beginning of the 20th century. This core offers possibilities for new development that would help establish a real community center. Otherwise virtually all growth is taking place in undeveloped agricultural areas.

The various alternatives currently under consideration for the city's new General Plan call for population to grow from 27,000 currently to 40,000-52,000 residents by 2020, with most new growth in greenfield areas. This historic farming community will become a new bedroom suburb. Though the proposed plan has statements in support of mixed-use developments and

multi-family buildings that might liven up the historic business district; most of the new housing would be built within single family home subdivisions. The General Plan intends to preserve the city's "rural character" on 451 acres of agricultural land, primarily for vineyards, orchards and equestrian facilities, and on luxury residential lots where horses will be permitted. But this token amount of upscale rural uses will bear little resemblance to traditional agricultural land.

Projects

Included in the City of Oakley planning boundary and within the City's proposed Expansion Areas are several projects of note.⁵¹

The 2,371-acre Cypress Corridor Special Planning Area encompasses all of Oakley east of Marsh Creek and northeast of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad. Included in this area is the Dutch Slough (described below). With the exception of the Slough, this entire area has been designated as a primary residential area with some commercial and public services, specifically at the intersection of Sellers and East Cypress Roads. In order to accommodate these developments and those proposed further east in the Cypress Corridor Expansion Area, infrastructure would have to be expanded significantly. Cypress Road would be widened into a divided four lane arterial, water and wastewater transport systems would be upgraded, and levees along Marsh Creek would have to be reinforced, as some of this area is in the 100-year floodplain. Further, the sandy Delta soils pose a risk of liquefaction in the event of an earthquake, requiring builders to incur greater costs.

The Dutch Slough is a 1,166-acre tract in the northeast corner of Oakley between the Contra Costa Canal and the San Joaquin Delta. Formerly the property of Emerson Dairy, the county's last dairy farm, the land was to be the site of 4,500 units of housing. Urban expansion closing in on the dairy was one factor in the owners' decision to close the business.⁵² However, this family that has been on the land for 150 years decided to work with the Coastal Conservancy and the Natural Heritage Institute to turn the property into a protected tidal marsh. Due to its topography, ecology, and soil composition this parcel is uniquely suited as a research site on marsh ecosystems. After negotiating with the city of Oakley, CALFED (a collaboration of federal and state agencies concerned about the Delta) and the California Coastal Conservancy purchased the land in October, 2002 for \$30 million.

Cypress Lakes, a development of 1,330 homes with man-made lakes and a golf course, was approved by the County in 1993. Some site engineering has begun, but a list of conditions still needs to be met before a plan is finalized and building permits are issued. This is expected to happen by April of 2003, but must occur no later than April of 2004 if the development is to move forward. Because it is located in the 100-year flood plain, this project will have its own system of levees rumored to cost \$10 million. The proposed development falls outside of the Oakley city limits but within the city's proposed Cypress Corridor Expansion Area and the county's urban limit line. Oakley is hoping to annex this project to better manage its sphere of influence and gain additional tax revenues. Originally set up by Brookfield Homes, the project was sold to Shea Homes when Brookfield found the development too challenging. Though the subdivision has its own school, the thousands of people commuting to and from their homes every day is expected have a significant impact on local traffic conditions.

The Hotchkiss Tract, or Leshar Lakes, lies between the newly designated Dutch Slough and the future Cypress Lakes development, and is significantly larger than the latter. Like Cypress Lakes, it is within Oakley's proposed Cypress Corridor Expansion Area and is designated in the new city's draft General Plan as primarily low-and medium-density single family housing (roughly .8 – 3.8 dwelling units per acre). Unlike Cypress Lakes, however, the Hotchkiss Tract is below sea level and would require even more expensive levees to make the area habitable. Because the tract is currently divided among only three owners, it could be acquired relatively easily for either conservation or development.

Bethel Island is 6,000 acres of former marsh drained in the 1800's and still used mostly for agricultural land. It is surrounded by levees and docks for recreational power boats. Approximately 2,300 people call the island home. The main issue faced in attempting to develop the island is the fact that it is below sea level and depends on the strength of the levees to keep it habitable. These levees are built on the island's unstable sand and peat soils, making them vulnerable in the event of an earthquake. Because of the risk of flood, homes have to be built with sufficient protection in the form of elevation or levees. Lastly, because it is so remote, Bethel Island cannot command the property values other areas can, making it difficult for developers to make a profit above the additional costs imposed by the island's characteristics.

Delta Coves, a proposed 556-unit development, has been controversial since the early 1970's. Despite winning a federal court order in the 1980's requiring the county to approve the project (and \$1.5 million in damages), the developers have not submitted any specific plans for the use of the site.

One of the Bay Area's most environmentally destructive developments is Discovery Bay, a 6.7-square-mile, 10,000-resident subdivision east of Oakley built around artificial waterways. Isolated from commercial services and employment centers, built behind levees to channel flood water away from the community and into existing, less-protected settlements, and designed around man-made canals with backyard docks, this development represents one of the worst forms of suburban sprawl. Though not completely built, the project is fully approved, so it is mentioned here simply as an example of what not to do. Though the development has attempted to incorporate as a city, and thereby expand into surrounding unincorporated land, it has no tax revenue and so has not been able to finance the process. A Safeway has recently opened nearby, which should help reduce the distance residents need to travel in order to shop. This development is made all the worse for having inspired others like it, such as Delta Coves.

Heron's Landing is a recent name for an area of approximately 1,000 acres east of Discovery Bay and west of the San Joaquin River. Because this land is within the ULL, it is coveted by developers, but due to the challenges of building in the Delta (flood control, flammable peat and unstable sandy soils) and the remoteness from the rest of the county, every project has proven too expensive to pursue so far.

The land immediately east of Discovery Bay Boulevard is owned by the Mormon Church and is protected from development by the urban limit line.

Unincorporated Areas in East County

Bay Point (formerly West Pittsburg) is an unincorporated community just west of Pittsburg, population 19,500 people. This area has seen rapid growth in recent years as commuters flock to its relatively inexpensive housing and BART access. Many vacant or underutilized parcels still offer great opportunities for new housing, especially along Willow Pass Road and the Port Chicago Highway (the latter offers opportunities for creation of a small downtown). The county has designated much of Bay Point as a redevelopment area, and in 2002 drafted a plan for rezoning this area. This effort may facilitate infill development. However, the draft plan unnecessarily restricts building heights to three stories and densities to 29 units per acre in many locations. These limits should be raised and minimum heights and densities added to ensure efficient use of land.

Byron, a tiny farming community southeast of Brentwood, has big plans. Though this area is not incorporated, a group of landowners and the chamber of commerce have drawn up an unofficial general plan that imagines this town of 916 growing into the tens of thousands in the coming years. This ambition is in stark contrast to the county's General Plan, which allows for far less urbanization.

Byron Airport, currently used mostly for recreation, will be the subject of study by a consultant to assess the feasibility of upgrading the facility to serve more flights and large craft, such as private and commercial passenger craft and air freight. Land surrounding the site is highly sensitive due to the presence of various endangered species.

Knightsen, population 861, is still a traditional agricultural community. Most residents want it to remain agricultural. Although parts of this hamlet fall within the Urban Limit Line, it looks as if this community will be known more for its horses than its houses for the foreseeable future.

CENTRAL COUNTY

The central portion of Contra Costa County saw intensive suburban development between 1950 and 2000. Now many early subdivisions have become sleepy enclaves with mature trees and older, relatively affluent residents. Core areas of Walnut Creek, Concord, and Pleasant Hill are seeing dramatic new office development in response to regional growth pressures and BART accessibility.

Although the central area has seen some of the county's best development, sprawl continues in a number of locations, frequently in the form of upper-end residential developments. Orinda's Montanera development in Gateway Valley, Martinez's projects in the Reliez and Alhambra Valleys, Crystal Ranch in Concord, and recent subdivisions in Clayton are classic sprawl projects that consume large amounts of open space and are poorly connected to existing cities. Developers are also eyeing the former Concord Naval Weapons Station lands, which if approved for development would re-open the floodgates of sprawl in Central County.



Oak Grove Plaza in Concord is an example of an older shopping mall that could be transformed into a walkable neighborhood center.



This large vacant parcel is within a few blocks of the Concord BART station.

Affluent Central County communities, especially in the Lamorinda area (Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda), tend to resist infill development and affordable housing, and don't see themselves as interdependent with struggling West County cities such as Richmond or the rapidly sprawling East County. Overcoming such isolationist attitudes will be a major challenge in county smart growth planning.

Traffic continues to grow in Central County. I-680 is already built out to the physical limits of its right-of-way and expanding it further would

require taking homes by eminent domain or building double-decker structures at exorbitant cost. Many arterial streets are increasingly jammed, and new East County and South County development will only add additional vehicles.

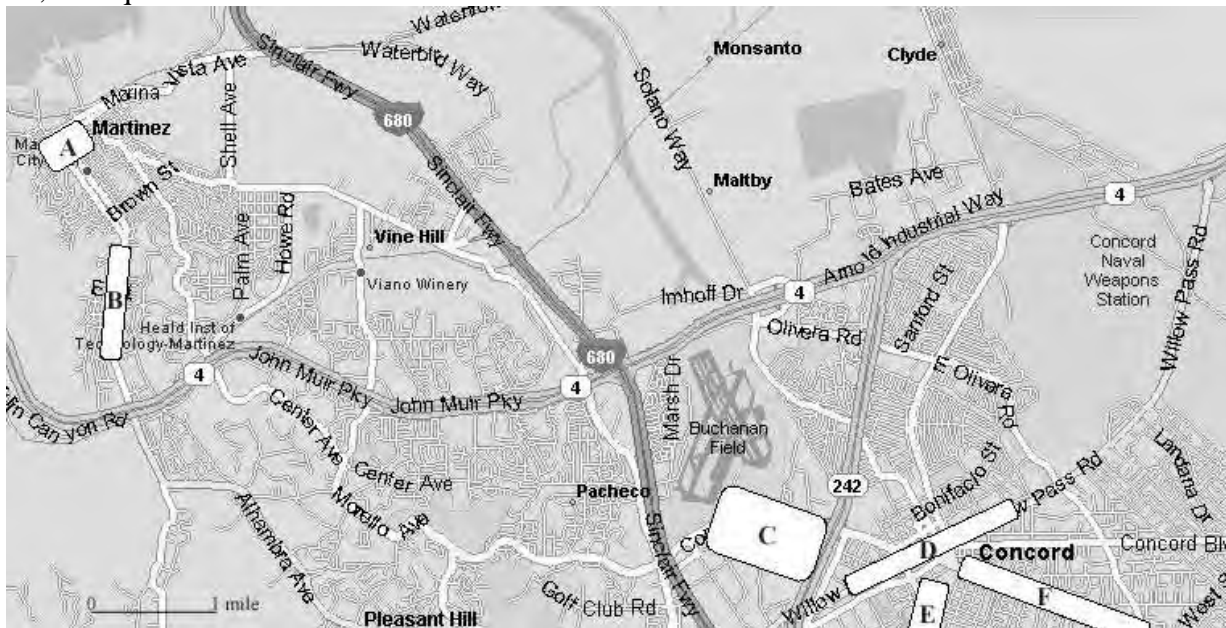
Concord

Downtown Concord is a prime candidate for infill development given its proximity to BART and the availability of businesses and services. Thousands of county residents might be accommodated here rather than in East County sprawl development. However, the City of Concord's redevelopment efforts that began in the 1970s have never come to complete fruition.

The downtown area remains sleepy and half-deserted, with many surface parking lots, vacant lots, and underutilized parcels still available near BART. A number of new office buildings have been constructed in recent years, but these tend to be suburban-style glass boxes that do not relate well to the streetscape and provide little visual interest.

Still, Concord’s downtown potential may yet be realized. The 259-unit Legacy Partners luxury apartment project on Galindo Street at Clayton Road is to be completed in 2003. The city has also invested in urban design improvements and a parking garage at Todos Santos Plaza, the heart of the downtown.

Planners are now in the middle of a two-year process to update the city’s zoning codes—an opportunity to rethink code obstacles to infill development. The city might for example become one of the first Bay Area communities to enact minimum zoned densities, as called for by its new Housing Element. This document also recommends smaller allowable lot sizes for single family homes, and identifies 22 “key housing opportunity sites” totaling 68 acres that could accommodate 1432 units even under existing zoning. When combined with other vacant and redevelopable land, the city believes it has room for 3,346 infill homes. Even more could be built if current zoning limits were changed, since these limit density on some multifamily sites to 10-24 units per acre and set large minimum lot sizes for single family homes of between 6,000 and 40,000 square feet.



Leading Infill Opportunities in the Martinez/Concord Area

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| A — Downtown Martinez | D — Willow Pass Road, Concord |
| B — Alhambra Ave, Martinez | E — Concord BART Station Area |
| C — Commercial/Industrial Lands, Concord | F — Clayton Road, Concord |

Like most Contra Costa County jurisdictions, Concord has a looming problem in meeting its affordable housing needs. The “fair share” targets set by ABAG for the city for the 1999-2006 period call for 726 low- or very-low-income units and 987 above-moderate-income units. However, only 168 low- or very-low-income homes were built, under construction, approved, or

under review between January 1999 and late 2002, compared with 1307 above-moderate-income dwelling units. The city will need to make substantial efforts to reduce this disparity.

Martinez

Bypassed by development in recent decades in favor of more centrally located suburbs like Walnut Creek and Concord, downtown Martinez nonetheless has enormous possibilities for new housing and other revitalization.

The city began preparing a Master Plan for its downtown and waterfront areas in 1999, and expects to prepare a further Specific Plan for these areas with detailed zoning changes to promote new development. The Master Plan foresees as many as 3,000 new dwelling units in the downtown area. It also endorses the idea of a continuous Alhambra Creek “creekwalk” through town, forming a central urban amenity similar to the restored San Luis Creek in San Luis Obispo. A number of landscaped paths and public spaces along Alhambra Creek have already been created.



To help revitalize downtown Martinez, the city is creating a “creekwalk” along Alhambra Creek.

The city has adopted a strategy called a downtown overlay district zoning that somewhat increases allowable densities and reduces parking requirements for infill buildings in the downtown. However, height limits are still two stories in most cases and maximum residential densities are set at the average of surrounding lots (which may be very low). These and other regulations are likely to preclude intensive infill development. Further zoning revisions should be considered to take advantage of the downtown’s possibilities. Other infill opportunities exist along Alhambra Avenue south of the downtown, which might become a more dynamic corridor leading into the city’s center.

Sprawl development, however, is proceeding in southern portions of Martinez near Briones Park, with a number of pending or recently approved developments off Reliez Valley Road and Alhambra Valley Road. The county and city should work together to forestall future growth in these locations.

Clayton

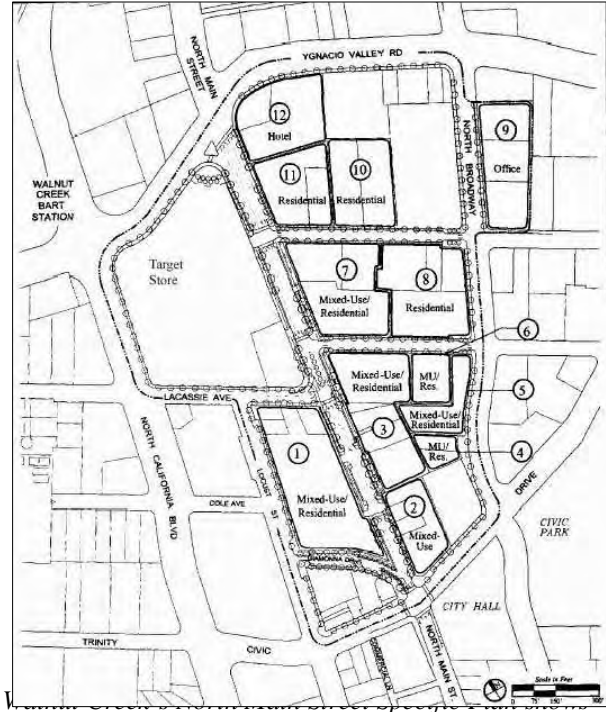
Clayton Ranch, an area of 1,038 acres located four to five miles east of the City of Clayton, was once intended as the site of a large development. Opposition to this proposal helped launch the countywide effort to pull in the urban limit line. In 1999, the East Bay Regional Park District purchased an easement to protect the ranch permanently as open space. Unfortunately, the Measure K park bond that would have provided the needed funding to open this area as a park was narrowly defeated in 2002.

Although mainly a collection of upper-middle-class subdivisions, Clayton is now trying to reconstruct an historic downtown for itself. A few nineteenth-century buildings have been

preserved in the Main Street area, and the City has added old-fashioned street lamps, benches, and boardwalk-style sidewalks. Planners also envision a new downtown park that can serve as a community gathering place. A modest amount of infill housing is possible in the downtown. Elsewhere the city continues to issue permits for small amounts of sprawl development at the foot of Mount Diablo.

Walnut Creek

After five decades of rapid growth Walnut Creek has relatively little vacant land remaining. However, the city has many opportunities to pursue infill development and in particular to bring more housing and mixed use development to its downtown.⁵³ In its draft North Main Street Specific Plan, for example, the city developed several alternative scenarios for a six-block area just north of downtown. These options included a transit village that would provide 657 housing units and 95 hotel rooms, even without using the site of an existing Target store. The plan envisions making North Main Street a far more attractive pedestrian corridor between the downtown and BART.⁵⁴



development opportunity sites that could create a Transit Village near BART.

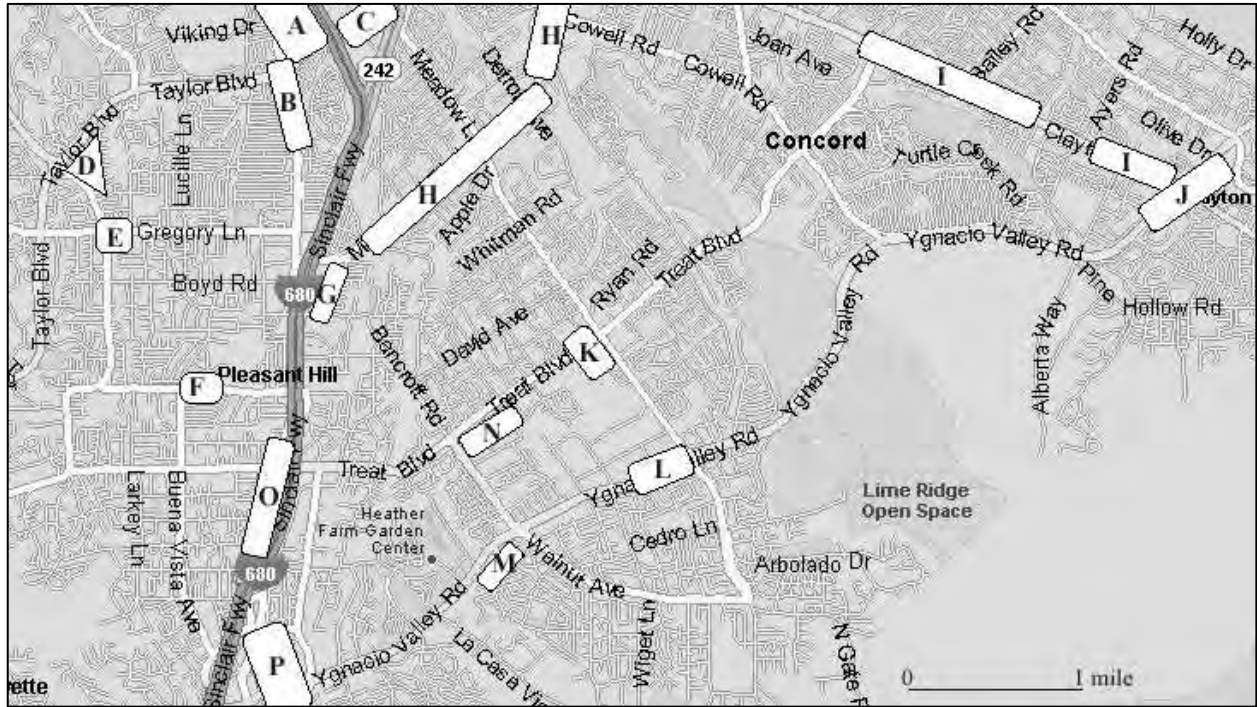
One factor preventing new downtown housing in recent years has been high land prices driven by the office market. Rezoning some commercial land for residential uses with ground-floor retail could help. Another problem is the height limit measure that Walnut Creek voters passed in 1985, which places a six-story limit on the entire city and freezes building heights at the level allowed in each zoning district at that time. Single family homes are generally limited to 25 feet and multiunit buildings to 30 feet, except for a 50 foot limit in certain downtown locations.⁵⁵ This measure limits new housing development in many areas, particularly on former commercial or industrial sites with low zoned heights. Modifying or repealing this ill-advised measure should be considered.

Another 1993 growth limitation plan passed by voters capped commercial development at 750,000 square feet and limited residential growth to 2,550 units during the 1993-2003 period. The city expects to consider whether to continue this limit during a General Plan



Design guidelines such as established in the North Main Street Specific Plan can help ensure attractive and pedestrian-oriented infill development.

revision in 2003, the first since 1989. Planners expect this process to provide an opportunity for considering infill housing in the downtown. Other zoning revisions might be considered as well: lot size and parking requirements are relatively high in most areas. Even under existing zoning the city estimates it has vacant sites for 728 single family homes and 1,085 multifamily units, excluding the North Main Street area.



Leading Infill Opportunities in Pleasant Hill/Walnut Creek

- | | |
|--|--|
| A — Sun Valley Shopping Center | I — Clayton Road |
| B — Commercial/Industrial Land | J — Ygnacio Valley Rd and Clayton Road |
| C — Contra Costa Boulevard | K — Oak Grove Shopping Center |
| D — Taylor Blvd.W of Pleasant Hill Rd. | L — Underutilized Commercial Land |
| E — Gregory Lane at Pleasant Hill Rd. | M — Underutilized Commercial Land |
| F — Oak Park Blvd. at Putnam Blvd. | N — Countrywood Shopping Center |
| G — Contra Costa Shopping Center | O — North Main Street, Walnut Creek |
| H — Monument Boulevard | P — North Main St./BART Station |

Pleasant Hill

The Pleasant Hill BART station area—actually mainly on unincorporated county land—has been an ongoing experiment in transit-oriented development for more than 20 years, with mixed success. Much office and residential construction has indeed taken place in this area largely under county jurisdiction. But the large, bland office buildings and inward-facing condominium complexes add little to the vitality of the place. Many buildings turn their back on the street, and the core area around the BART station area remains dominated by surface parking lots and wide, pedestrian-unfriendly arterials.

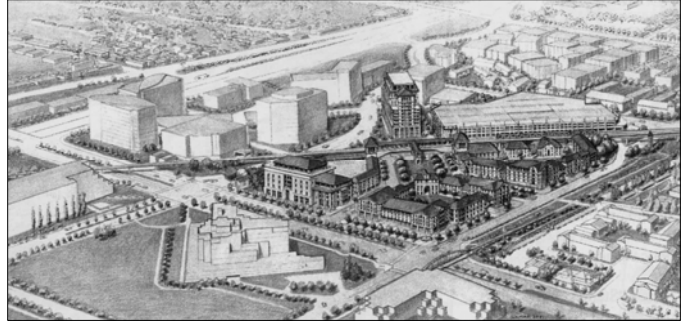
However, planning around Pleasant Hill BART is poised to embark on a new phase that would at long last provide a walkable center to the station area. A Pleasant Hill BART Station Area Master Plan in 2001, based on public design “charettes” or workshops, set forth detailed urban design standards. The plan envisions buildings of between four and 12 stories providing apartments, shops, offices, and public spaces next to the BART station. While more residential units might have been obtained, this plan goes a long way toward creating a more attractive, human-scaled core to this “transit village.”

Additional infill development elsewhere in Pleasant Hill is possible in a number of locations:

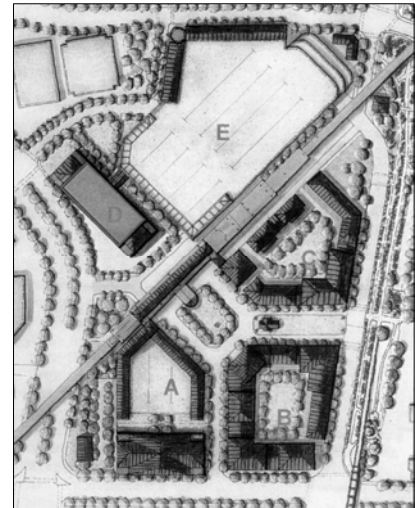
- along Contra Costa Boulevard,
- at the DVC Plaza (K-Mart) Shopping Center,
- at the intersection of Patterson Boulevard and Oak Park Boulevard,
- at the intersection of Gregory Lane and Pleasant Hill Road,
- along Taylor Boulevard near Pleasant Hill Road, and
- in and around the Contra Costa Shopping Center, which might be redeveloped.

Small bits of remnant farmland also remain in various places, which might be developed into apartment housing (current zoning allows only single family housing on some prime sites). Pleasant Hill should also encourage second units on its many large residential lots (the city passed an ordinance in 1989 allowing such units but few have been built), and should change its zoning to raise its 2 1/2-story, 35-foot height limit on residential buildings and to institute minimum heights of approximately this level along major streets.

The city is aggressively promoting a newly created “downtown” along Contra Costa Boulevard. While this 28-acre private retail and entertainment center does provide a walkable shopping district for a town that never had one, the original promise of a 1991 plan was watered down



Aerial perspective and plan of station area development at Pleasant Hill BART. Contra Costa County/Lennertz Coyle.



under pressure from retailers, and the development now consists largely of one-story buildings housing chain stores, with little housing. Another problem is that this apparently public space is owned by a private firm when public ownership would be preferable. Still, there remains possibility that a pedestrian-oriented district will develop around this nucleus and extend further down Contra Costa Boulevard.

Lafayette

Although local residents sometimes believe that the Lamorinda area is completely built-out, downtown Lafayette offers great potential for transit-oriented development. This one-mile stretch along Mount Diablo Boulevard near the BART station could house several thousand new residents and become a dynamic, pedestrian-oriented center for much of the tri-city area.

Several recent projects have begun Lafayette's transformation. In 2001 the four-story Town Center Apartments complex opened immediately adjacent to the BART station, providing 75 market-rate units. A loft housing project nearby is set to open in early 2003. And in recent years the city has put substantial effort into upgrading its town square and relandscaping a portion of Mount Diablo Boulevard as a pedestrian-friendly, tree-lined avenue.

Many more vacant or redevelopable sites exist downtown in addition to the BART station parking lot, where housing might be built over parking. The main problem is likely to be local opposition, especially to affordable housing. In 2001 Lafayette rejected a proposal for an assisted living facility north of Highway 24 adjacent to the BART station. This location may be a prime example of a situation in which county, regional, or state agencies need to put pressure on the local government to accommodate its fair share of the Bay Area's housing need.



Built in 2001, the new Town Center Apartments in downtown Lafayette next to BART have proven very popular.

Lafayette's 2002 General Plan calls attention to the downtown's potential, but sets maximum residential densities in multifamily buildings at 35 units per acre and a height limit of 35 feet (two-and-a-half stories) for many areas. There is no minimum height limit, and several recent one-story buildings have been constructed. To realize the downtown's potential, the City should consider creating a Downtown Specific Plan with zoning revisions.

Orinda

Although more limited in size, downtown Orinda also offers possibilities for transit-oriented development near a BART station. The city is considering establishing a redevelopment zone in its downtown, which might help in this regard.

In its 2002 Housing Element the city identified 272 parcels that could accommodate residential development, but expected these to produce at most 571 units. This is probably due to the fact that city zoning requires very large minimum lot sizes of 20,000 to 40,000 square feet (one to two units per acre) in many areas. The city's highest density multifamily residential zoning only

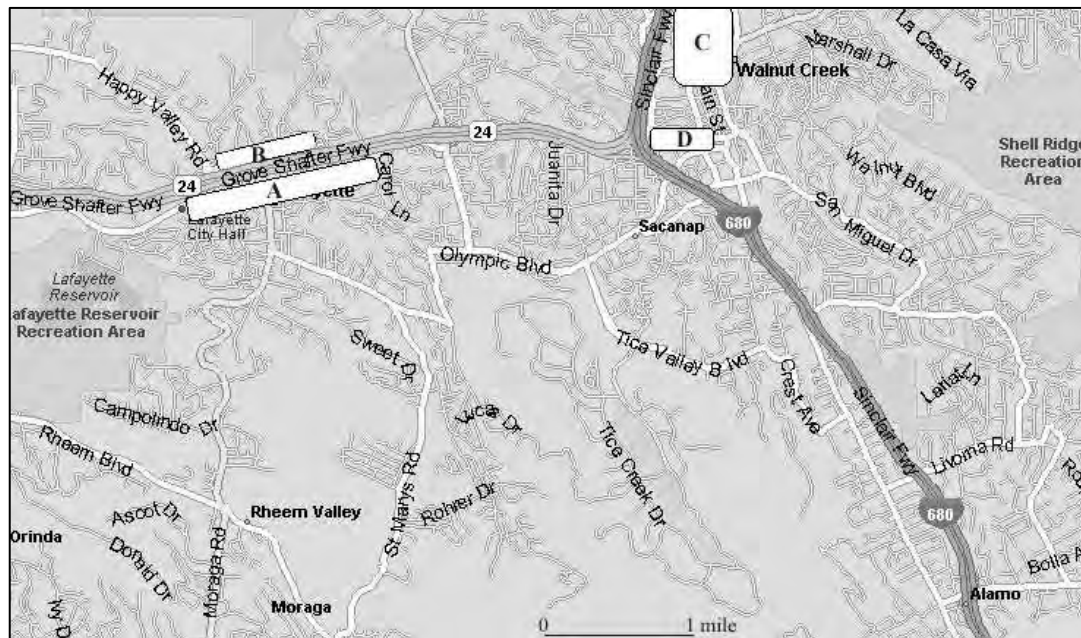
allows 7-10 units per acre and a height of 27 feet (two stories), making the city a prime example of a place where local codes prevent the possibility of more intensive development. Again, regional action to require compliance with fair share housing goals may be required.

Orinda is also threatened by sprawl. In 1999, the city approved the Montanera project consisting of 225 luxury homes on 978 acres with a golf course. The development would be located in the steep Gateway Valley just east of the Caldicott Tunnel. The project is controversial because of threats to endangered species, the proximity to East Bay Regional Park District Land, and the massive amount of grading required. The city also failed to require the developer to make any units affordable to lower income residents. Currently Montanera is being challenged in court by environmental groups. It is unclear if this development will move forward in its current form.

Moraga

Like Orinda, Moraga has adopted zoning codes that prevent the possibility of any sort of intensive infill development, such as apartment buildings that might provide housing for modest-income workers. The city's highest allowable residential densities are six to eight units per acre with a two-story height limit. However, since the city is not located near BART and freeway access, it is less desirable as a smart growth location.

In July 2000, the city approved a general development plan for Palos Colorados, a 123-unit development, although this project is delayed by litigation. Another proposed development, Rancho Laguna, is currently undergoing an environmental assessment.



Leading Infill Opportunities in Lafayette and Downtown Walnut Creek

A — Downtown Lafayette/Mt. Diablo Blvd
 B — Lafayette BART Parking Lots

C — North Main St./BART Station Area
 D — Mt. Diablo Blvd., Walnut Creek

TRI-VALLEY

Until the mid-1970s the San Ramon Valley was a rural agricultural area nestled between scenic hillsides, with the small village of Danville and the hamlet of San Ramon as its main settlements. However, the opening of Interstate 680 in 1966 improved access to the area and suburban sprawl began to cover the valley. Bishop Ranch in San Ramon became one of the Bay Area's largest business parks. In recent years battles have been fought over enormous residential developments proposed for Dougherty Valley and Tassajara Valley.

Development in this part of the county has occurred on a large scale, with huge subdivisions and less of the incremental development that took place in Central or West County locations. Since much of the development is so new and few urban areas existed before 1960, there are fewer opportunities for infill development. Still, some opportunities exist, mainly in central Danville and San Ramon.

The Tri-Valley area (which includes the San Ramon Valley as well as Alameda County's Amador and Livermore Valleys to the south and east) is currently in an approximate jobs-housing balance. The shortage is in affordable housing. Many of the jobs, despite Bishop Ranch, are low-paid service sector positions, while most of the housing is upscale single-family residential. This has resulted in heavy traffic due to in-commuters from other parts of the Bay Area and an equally heavy out-commute to Silicon Valley and San Francisco. Less than 25 percent of people who live in the Tri-Valley work there.

Danville

Although not incorporated as a city until 1982, Danville began as a small agricultural town in the mid-nineteenth century. The opening of the Caldicott Tunnel in 1937 increased access to central and southern portions of the county and led to a small amount of suburban development in the 1940s. However, most of the town's residences and businesses have been constructed in only the last 20 or 30 years. Some infill development opportunities exist in and around the historic downtown, and in particular along Railroad Avenue and San Ramon Valley Boulevard. Several older shopping centers along these corridors might eventually be recycled as more intensive mixed-use development.

Much to its credit, Danville approved an open space protection measure in 2000. It was also the first city in Contra Costa County and the Tri-Valley Area (including part of Alameda county) to finish and get approval for its housing element, and has donated substantial city resources toward building assisted living facilities. City leaders have also been active participants in regional planning efforts.

However, the city's zoning code makes infill and affordable developments difficult. Future development is restricted to as little as one unit per five acres in single family home areas, and a modest 22 units per acre in multi-unit-building zones. Much of the city is also zoned for very large minimum lot sizes (10,000 to 100,000 square feet for single-family homes), creating housing too expensive for most working families. Not surprisingly, the median new single-family home price in Danville in 2000 was \$908,000.⁵⁶ Building heights are limited to 35 feet

throughout the city, and developers must provide two parking spaces per unit for all new residential construction, both factors likely to reduce future housing supply and drive up costs. The city allows owners of existing single-family homes to construct second units, but charges permitting fees of \$33,355 for these, a policy likely to discourage this additional source of housing.

San Ramon

San Ramon consisted only of farms and a few scattered buildings along San Ramon Valley Boulevard until the mid-1960s. Incorporated in 1983, the city consists almost entirely of strip malls and single family subdivisions.

Lacking a downtown, San Ramon is now planning a new civic center at the intersection of Camino Ramon and Bollinger Canyon Road, and in 2002 hired consultants to conduct workshops and come up with plans. However, rather than creating a vibrant downtown for the City, the process seems likely to produce several large public office buildings in standard suburban style on two blocks divided by large arterials.

Still, there is potential for a much more traditional, walkable downtown at the civic center location if several empty adjoining parcels are used, a network of secondary streets and blocks is created, and buildings are oriented along these streets. A more traditional mix of shops, housing, entertainment, and civic buildings could be sought, with parking tucked behind structures or in garages. The adjoining Bishop Ranch office park also offers huge opportunities for infill development. Residential towers could easily be placed on the enormous spaces between office buildings, and secondary streets added. This is one location in which high-rise housing would make sense: there are no single-family homes nearby, and such apartments could house large numbers of single workers or couples employed at the office complex.

Unincorporated Areas

Most South County development has occurred on lands controlled by the county. These unincorporated communities include Alamo, an affluent suburban area along I- 680 between Danville and Walnut Creek, and Blackhawk, the huge gated enclave east of Danville. Built in the 1980s, this sprawling development consumed several thousand acres of rolling rangeland at the foot of Mount Diablo and is one of the prototypical American gated communities.

The county supervisors have also approved major new development in Dougherty and Tassajara Valleys outside the limits of existing cities.

Dougherty Valley

This development sits on 5,978 acres in an unincorporated part of Contra Costa County adjacent to the city of San Ramon. After years of controversy the supervisors approved this 11,000-home development in 1992, and it is now being built. Although project backers promised to create affordable housing, after approval the main developer, Shapell Industries, asked for and received a change in the affordable housing requirement. This enormous subdivision will now have only five percent of units available for below-market-rate incomes, a much lower percentage than found in existing housing in nearby incorporated communities.

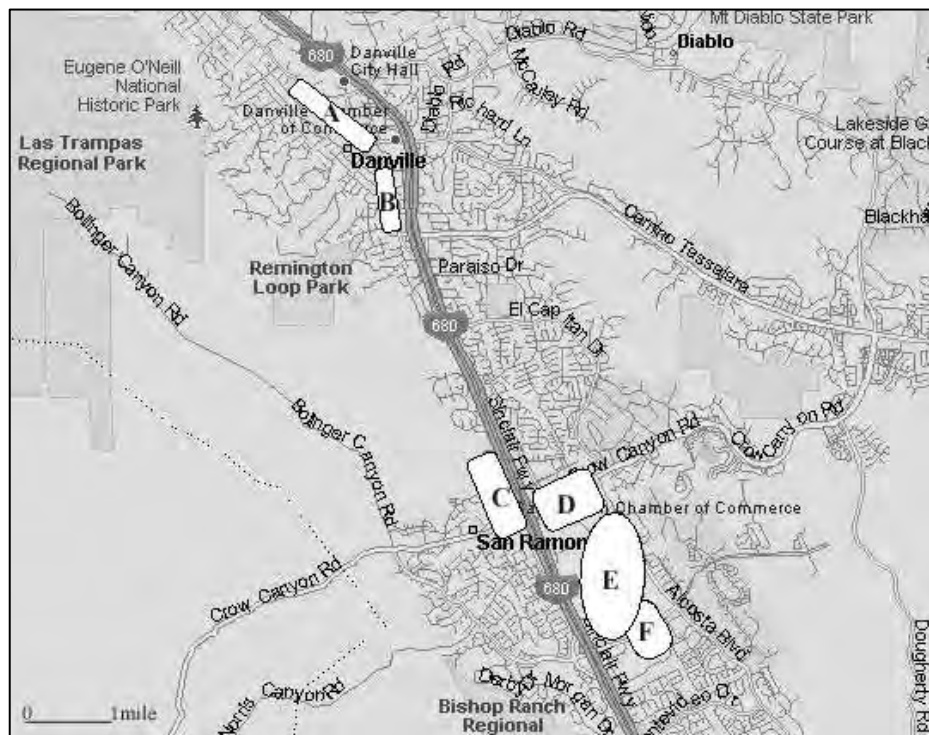
Other promised amenities such as a grocery store and a town center have also been eliminated from the plan. One of the most bitter issues for opponents of the development concerns schools. At the time of the approval, Shapell offered to build the schools without any financial assistance. But the local school district then spent state school bond money to reimburse Shapell for school construction. Now project backers brag about turning a profit building public schools.

Tassajara Valley

The Tassajara Valley, just east of Dougherty Valley, is the site of another major planned development. In 1995 the Tassajara Valley Property Owners Association asked the County to rezone 4,491 acres of ranch land for 5,950 houses and 300,000 square feet of commercial or office space. Originally the project proposal included the entire area from Danville town limits south to the Alameda County line.

In 1996 Shapell Industries filed a separate development application for part of the property, the 300-acre Wendt Ranch. Although this site was isolated, outside the service area for the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), and the most sensitive area biologically with two creeks traversing the property, a lame duck Board of Supervisors approved the development during the week of Thanksgiving (the last meeting before the new board would take office).

After a town hall meeting in Danville and significant opposition throughout the county, the property owners withdrew the larger development plan in 1997. Two years later the Board of Supervisors examined the feasibility and environmental impacts of moving the urban limit line northward to exclude the valley from urbanization. However, at the same time the supervisors allowed Shapell to “study” development on the northern portion. Labeled the Camino Tassajara site, this 1000-acre parcel east of Danville on the southern slopes of Mount Diablo had been previously designated “scenic ridgeland” and “grazing land of regional significance.”



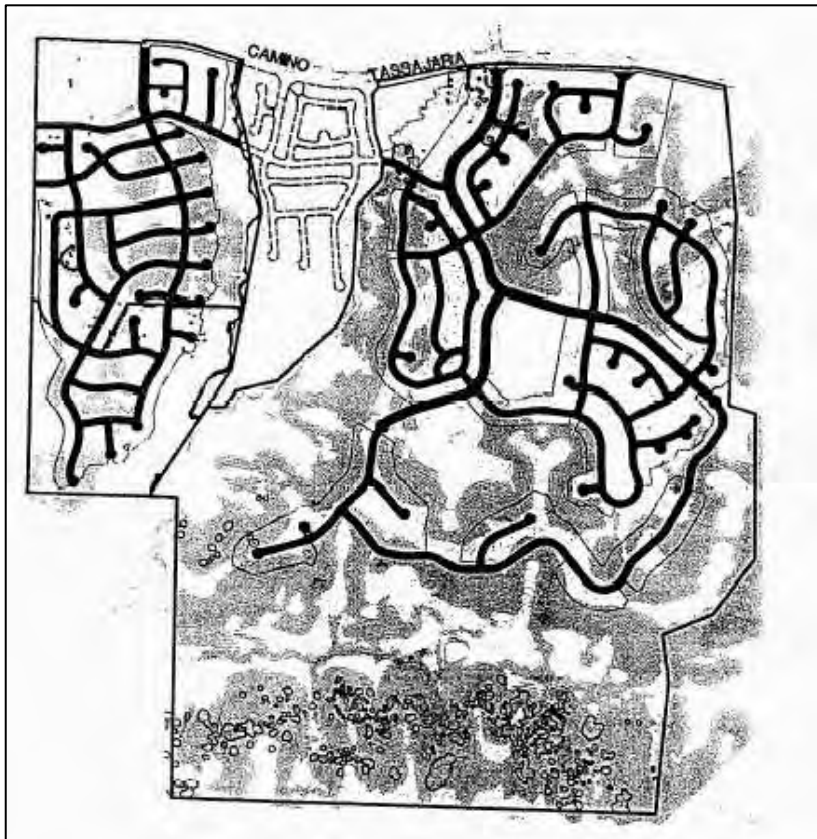
Leading Infill Opportunity Areas, Danville and San Ramon

- A — Railroad Ave., Danville
- B — San Ramon Valley Blvd.
- C — San Ramon Valley Blvd.
- D — Crow Canyon Commons and Adjoining Malls
- E — Bishop Ranch Business Park
- F — San Ramon Civic Center and Adjoining Lots

In 2000, the supervisors did in fact contract the ULL, preventing development on much of the original Tassajara site. Yet despite the pleas of the environmental community and the Town of Danville, the board voted 4-1 to allow the Camino Tassajara portion to remain open for potential development.

The current plan for what Shapell now calls “Alamo Creek” calls for approximately 1,400 housing units on 767 acres, 1,060 of which will be luxury homes. In a small concession to the need for affordable housing, an outside contractor would construct and operate some senior low-income units. Again rejecting the advice of many throughout the county, the Supervisors approved the proposal in July 2002 with only Supervisor Gerber, the representative from the district dissenting.

When this billion-dollar development was approved Shapell offered to pay a relatively modest \$8.5 million into a county livable communities fund; this fund still has not been established or defined. The county avoided channeling these monies into existing programs for affordable housing and open space acquisition that have well-established goals, guidelines, and policies but very little money.



Approved by the County Board of Supervisors in 2002, the Tassajara Valley development lacks a walkable street network, local stores, a neighborhood center, or a significant amount of affordable housing. All traffic will be funneled onto Camino Tassajara, increasing congestion on this route.

WEST COUNTY

Much of the west side of the Contra Costa hills has already been developed. However, some sprawl threats remain, particularly in the unincorporated community of El Sobrante and in Hercules, where several large-scale developments are underway.

When it comes to smart growth, West County has many opportunities for infill and transit-oriented construction. Development opportunities around its BART stations, for example, have still been largely overlooked. San Pablo Avenue, the historic spine of West County, has enormous potential for new neighborhood centers and boulevard-type development. Cities such as Richmond have been almost totally bypassed by investment in the real estate boom of recent years, with the exception of isolated areas such as along the waterfront, and could house tens of thousands of new Contra Costa residents, although efforts to improve local schools would also be needed.

A main challenge will be to ensure that the benefits of future growth are spread countywide to include such West County areas, which were almost totally bypassed during the real estate boom of the 1990s.

El Cerrito

Traditionally resistant to infill development, El Cerrito may now be changing somewhat with a new planning process to establish urban design guidelines for the San Pablo Avenue corridor near Del Norte BART. Still, the city's track record has been poor to date. City decision-makers succumbed to fiscal zoning pressures in the late 1990s by allowing El Cerrito Plaza to be redeveloped with big-box retailers, a Honda dealership, and Target store to occupy prime parcels next to Del Norte BART. The one bright spot has been Del Norte Plaza, a 135-unit mixed-use project next to BART completed in 1994.



This abandoned Albertson's store along San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito is ripe for redevelopment.

If it can summon the political will, this small city of 23,000 has enormous potential to make San Pablo Avenue into a dynamic mixed-use boulevard housing many new residents. In 1992 the city in fact set a goal of adding 1,018 additional multifamily units within its Housing Element. However, to date only 271 have been built. The biggest problem seems to be lack of political interest, combined with NIMBY opposition. Politicians have simply been more interested in commercial businesses producing sales tax revenue than in housing projects that might produce little revenue but require city services.

Another obstacle may be zoning limits of 35-45 units per acre along the San Pablo corridor, and restrictive lot size, setback, and parking standards. For example, under current zoning a developer of two-bedroom condominiums next to BART would have to provide two parking

spaces per unit plus guest parking—greatly raising construction costs—even though this is an ideal location for households to own at most one vehicle. Also, the city’s Redevelopment Agency is out of money until 2005-6, reducing the city’s ability to assist new infill housing.

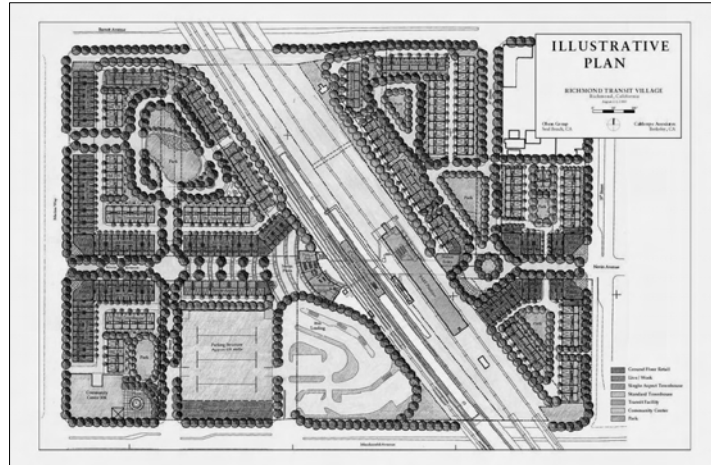


Smart Growth Creates Street Life

In this re-envisioning of El Cerrito’s Fairmont Ave. between the BART station and San Pablo Avenue, new infill buildings and street redesign help add vitality to a neighborhood. Digital re-imaging courtesy of Steve Price/Urban Advantage.

Richmond

While Central, East, and South County have grown exponentially in recent decades, Richmond has stagnated. There has been virtually no new investment in the city's downtown, except for a small number of affordable housing projects built by nonprofits. Like East Oakland and West Oakland—and the East County municipality of Pittsburg—Richmond is a prime example of how current patterns of sprawl lead to the isolation of lower-income minority groups within older cities.



The Richmond Transit Village plan calls for 231 townhouses, shops, a small performing arts center, and pocket parks near the BART station. Credit: City of Richmond/Calthorpe Associates.

ABAG's regional smart growth vision and early drafts of Shaping Our Future documents call for focusing much new development in places like Richmond instead of on East County farmland. However, given past experience this will not happen without strong policies to limit sprawl development elsewhere and to share the tax benefits of recent growth with West County. Places like Richmond (and to a lesser extent other West County cities) are caught in a cycle of disinvestment that includes deteriorating housing and infrastructure, poor schools, a lack of jobs, crime, and rising social service needs. Only systematic reinvestment is likely to make a difference long-term. State, regional, and county leadership will be needed to make this happen.

There is hope that reinvestment will happen. Richmond's central location, excellent transportation connections, and beautiful shoreline and views offer strong advantages. Work on the transit village development at the BART station area is about to begin, although the decision to build 231 relatively low-density townhouses instead of more intensive residential development is questionable. Excellent infill development potential also exists along San Pablo Avenue and at Hilltop Mall if this aging 1960s shopping center is redeveloped. The city's Redevelopment Agency has been pursuing several projects on former brownfield sites, including a North Shoreline Specific Plan, ongoing residential and commercial development at Marina Bay (the site of World War II shipyards), and a "Rosie the Riveter" Museum at the old Ford Plant on the waterfront.



Hilltop Mall in Richmond is a large 1960s mall that could be redeveloped into a compact urban village served by rapid bus or light rail transit on San Pablo Ave.



Leading Infill Opportunity Areas, El Cerrito and Richmond

- A — Downtown Richmond/BART/AMTRAK
- B — Downtown San Pablo
- C — San Pablo Avenue
- D — El Cerrito Del Norte BART
- E — El Cerrito Plaza/BART

San Pablo

Sandwiched almost entirely within the City of Richmond, San Pablo is the smallest city in the county in terms of geographic size. It is perhaps best known these days for its casino, which has been a huge revenue generator for the city. Substantial redevelopment potential exists along San Pablo Avenue, and the city has the potential to create a vibrant new downtown for itself where shopping center development currently exists near the intersection of Broadway and San Pablo Avenues.

Pinole

North of Richmond, the City of Pinole contains a small but delightful historic downtown around the intersection of Tennent and San Pablo Avenues. This center has substantial infill development possibilities, and could become a center of shops, services, dining, and culture for the northern portion of West County.



Pinole has a historic downtown center that could become a center of shops, services, and restaurants for surrounding suburban areas.

Hercules

Hercules, which grew from just 252 residents in 1970 to 17,000 in 1990, continued to expand in the subsequent decade, adding almost 3,000 more residents in the 1990s. Although Hercules has created more multi-family housing than places like San Ramon, conventional subdivisions and big-box retail dominates the landscape. The city's greatest sprawl threat is in a hilly area adjacent to the Franklin Canyon Golf Course along Highway 4, where 630 acres were annexed in 1990. This site is currently proposed for a 577-unit development, a hotel, and a retail center on the slopes above the golf course.⁵⁷ The project is currently under review. Another area in the city's sphere of influence, east of the city limits to Christie Road on both sides of Highway 4, is also proposed for annexation, but there is not presently any timeline for annexation or development.

In 2000-2001 the city conducted a New Urbanist-inspired series of workshops to develop a new Central Hercules Plan for the large vacant site in the community's center, once occupied by the Hercules dynamite factory. City leaders even took a trip to Florida to view New Urbanist projects there. Zoning and design regulations have been revised to promote more mixed, pedestrian-oriented housing in this location. Relatively dense housing around the future Capitol Corridor rail station is also underway, as is the 880-unit Victoria-by-the-Bay development on the city's northern fringe, billed as the nation's largest residential subdivision on a brownfield site.

The municipality's Housing Element calculates that even without Franklin Canyon some 2,700 additional units can be built in the city under current zoning, which favors low-density single family homes (most recent subdivisions in the city have been built at densities of three to five units per acre). If the New Urbanist-style Regulating Code for the Central Hercules Plan were extended to the entire city, probably two or three times as many units could be constructed.



A Neighborhood Center in Hercules
In this reimagining of a suburban arterial streetscape, new shops, offices, and sidewalk design help create a pedestrian-oriented atmosphere. Before-and-after digital re-imaging courtesy of Steve Price/Urban Advantage.



Unincorporated Areas

El Sobrante

El Sobrante, literally translated, means “the leftovers,” and much of this unincorporated community east of Richmond has been left over from development because of its difficult topography, clay soils, and the cost of pumping water to serve homes at elevations above 400 feet. However, the Bay Area housing crunch and the decrease in developable land near San Francisco have made El Sobrante’s hard-to-build parcels increasingly attractive.

Of major concern to residents is a proposed development along Clark Road, which presently dead-ends at Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. One hundred and eighty single family homes are proposed for this 144-acre parcel adjacent to the park.⁵⁸ This project is currently under review. Residents are concerned about traffic impacts and about stability of the development, which will require a complex underground buttressing system to anchor it on the hillside.

Another development in the preliminary study phase in El Sobrante is Forest Green, a project of 135 homes proposed on 81 acres adjacent to the Clark Road project and the East Bay Waldorf School.⁵⁹ Underground water on this site has slowed down development plans.

The Park Glen development, located on 400 acres of San Pablo ridge between Valley View Road and Tri Lane is also a sprawl threat, but a steadily shrinking one. Proposed over a decade ago as a 1,400-home development, the project disappeared and later reappeared as “Emerald Heights,” consisting of 172 homes on the parcel’s more stable locations. This project is still in the preliminary study phase and now calls for only 24 homes near San Pablo Dam Road and Castro Ranch Road.

There have been some victories against sprawl in El Sobrante in recent years. The Golden Oaks, a 254-home subdivision proposed for 230 acres along San Pablo Dam Road adjacent to the slide-plagued Carriage Hills developments, was effectively stopped when the parcel was placed outside the urban limit line. Similarly, the Castro Ranch development of roughly 200 homes adjacent to Kennedy Grove Regional Recreation Area was delayed by a citizen lawsuit. The East Bay Regional Park District and the county's El Sobrante Service District were then able to garner funds to purchase the majority of the property.⁶⁰ A smaller project of 52 homes on the remaining 33 acres is awaiting final permits and will probably begin construction in spring 2003.⁶¹

Finally, in early 2002 Contra Costa County approved a Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan that, if implemented, would promote pedestrian and streetscape improvements, traffic calming, multi-family housing and a village center. These improvements could help transform El Sobrante into a real town rather than a collection of sprawling subdivisions.⁶²

Rodeo

An attractive but sleepy town right on the Bay, Rodeo would be a prime location for future development were it not for the giant Philips 66 refinery next door. As it is, this unincorporated community has delightful residential streets with early twentieth century homes and space for

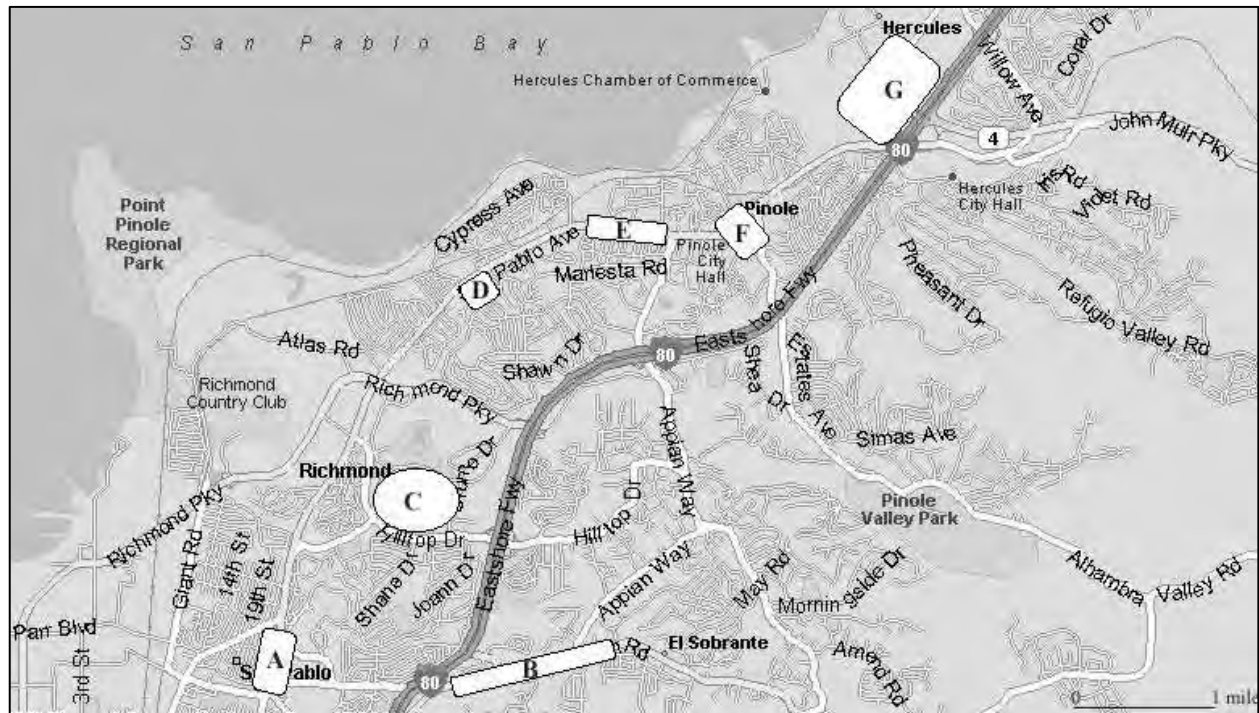
substantial infill development. But this 8,000-person settlement is unlikely to expand greatly with the refinery looming over it.

Crockett

Also an unincorporated community governed by the county, Crockett is a charming and hilly town right next to the Carquinez Bridge with little room to expand. But there is potentially space for hundreds of new housing units within its compact, 30-block grid.

Other Unincorporated Lands

Many other unincorporated bits of county land are left in and around Richmond. In past decades the county allowed most of these areas to be developed with sprawl subdivisions for middle-class residents, and much of this housing stock is now showing its age. The area at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and Tara Hills Drive perhaps holds the most potential for redevelopment into a village center that might be linked by rapid bus service with Richmond and points south.



Leading Infill Opportunities, Richmond/El Sobrante/Pinole/Hercules

- A — San Pablo Ave./San Pablo Downtown
- B — San Pablo Dam Road/El Sobrante
- C — Hilltop Mall
- D — Tara Hills Drive at San Pablo Ave.
- E — San Pablo Ave./Pinole
- F — Downtown Pinole
- G — Hercules at I-80

4. INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

Transportation

As shown by a poll conducted for the Shaping Our Future process, citizens in Contra Costa County are deeply concerned about traffic congestion. While it might seem that the solution is to expand and improve major roads, doing so may only worsen conditions. Expanding road capacity induces further sprawl and automobile use, leading to further congestion. One U.C. Berkeley study found that up to 90 percent of new road capacity is filled within five years.⁶³ Expanding roads also reduces incentives for carpooling, for riders to take public transit, or for workers to choose to live near their jobs.

A new strategy is clearly needed, one that links transportation investment to smart land use planning. Contra Costa County will have an enormous opportunity in coming years to rethink its transportation planning.

The Transportation Sales Tax Measure C

When the Measure C sales tax for transportation improvements—not to be confused with the 1990 Measure C affecting land use—first went to ballot in 1986, it was rejected. When the supervisors placed this ballot proposition before voters again in 1988, it passed due to added growth management and open space components. The Contra Costa Transportation Improvement and Growth Management Ordinance imposed 20-year one-half-percent sales tax that was intended to relieve existing congestion problems and ensure that future developments were self-sustaining in terms of public infrastructure.

The measure required the county and its cities to adopt Growth Management Elements as part of their General Plans, including performance standards for fire, police, parks, water, flood control, and sewer facilities. General Plans were also mandated to include traffic service standards for key intersections and routes of regional significance. While these requirements sound promising, in practice the success of Measure C has been limited.

In order to receive their share of funds for local road improvements, jurisdictions must submit an annual compliance checklist to the Contra Costa County Transportation Authority (CCTA) affirming that new developments or adopted General Plan amendments are in compliance with the requirements of Measure C. If they are unable to submit a satisfactory compliance checklist, they must simply produce a “Statement of Progress” outlining their work to meet the standards of compliance.⁶⁴ A major problem with this approach is that enforcement depends on CCTA members deciding to “punish” other cities. To date, no Measure C funding has been withheld.

One requirement of Measure C is that a traffic analysis is required on any project that will generate more than 100 vehicle trips per day. The analysis must demonstrate that important intersections and regional routes of significance will not drop below their adopted level of service (LOS) standard. Exceptions are only permitted if a five-year capital improvement program is in place to bring the service up to the adopted standard, or if the developer pays to fully mitigate the impacts of the development. One loophole in the ordinance is that a waiver is granted if an intersection or roadway already exceeds the set traffic standards, as long as a consistent LOS is maintained. In practice, this means that a roadway that is already at level F

(most congested) is exempt from growth restrictions as it can remain at level F even with continued growth. That jurisdiction may increase congestion indefinitely without resulting in a loss of funding. Another problem is with the automobile LOS itself, which measures the flow of cars instead of the ease with which people can reach their destinations by any mode. Relying on the LOS tends to encourage double right-turn lanes, triple left-turn lands, and huge intersections that may speed up car traffic but are dangerous and unfriendly to pedestrians.

In addition to such loopholes, Measure C's growth management provisions have been flagrantly violated on more than one occasion. One example of such violations is the 2002 Camino Tassajara Combined General Plan Amendment allowing some Tassajara Valley development to go forward. When a level of service study was done for the intersection of Camino Tassajara and Crow Canyon Road/Blackhawk Road, county staff determined that standards were met. Upon investigation by the Town of Danville it was found that the numbers used in the study were highly inaccurate and that the Camino Tassajara action was therefore in violation of the Contra Costa County General Plan. The Town of Danville has challenged the County on these issues as well as concerns about the accuracy of the Environmental Impact Report of the plan, but no Measure C funding has been withheld thus far.

Despite these problems Measure C was a step in the right direction. "Measure C has provided a structured way to plan transportation projects county wide," says Millie Greenberg of the Danville Town Council and the CCTA. "It has given us a unified county voice when dealing with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission."

While Measure C will not expire until 2009, a renewal measure is being planned by the CCTA for 2004. This

reauthorization of Measure C offers an opportunity to create a better balance between transit and roads, and also to add much stronger linkages between transportation funding and local smart growth planning. The previous version of Measure C devoted only 5 percent of its funding to buses, less than 3 percent to paratransit for the elderly and disabled, and almost nothing towards bicycle and pedestrian safety. As a result (when combined with sprawling land use) Contra Costa County has the worst bus service of the central Bay Area and is one of the most unsafe places to be a pedestrian, according to reports by the Surface Transportation Policy Project. Instead, the previous Measure C spent most of its money on highway expansions and the very expensive extension of BART to Bay Point. While this BART extension has the potential to help focus East County growth in a compact, transit-oriented way, this potential has mostly been squandered by the City of Pittsburg.



*Lone Tree Road in Antioch is one of the many expanded farm roads that have made possible East County sprawl. The land opposite is designated for a business park.
Credit: Jennifer Kaufer.*

Highway 4 East

Because of the road's role as the main gateway to East County, pressure has built for years to widen Highway 4. The portion between the Highway 242 interchange and Bailey Road in Pittsburg has been widened to eight lanes from four, and now includes two High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes. Additional plans call for continuing the eight lane widening to Loveridge Road, including a 44- to 60-foot-wide median for future BART extensions. As a consequence of this widening, the interchanges at Railroad Avenue and Loveridge Road in Pittsburg will be reconstructed.

Projects that are top priority for the CCTA but not yet funded include further widening from Loveridge to SR 160 (the Antioch Bridge), with modified interchanges at Somersville Road, Lone Tree Way, and Hillcrest Avenue.⁶⁵ HOV lanes are included with all widening plans. But this Highway 4 capacity expansion is likely to facilitate further East County sprawl.

Increased traffic from an expanded Highway 4 threatens congestion on outlets at either end of the highway. No significant changes are planned for Interstate 680 and State Route 24 aside from an HOV lane between Marina Vista in Martinez and North Main Street in Walnut Creek. These highways are already at capacity during peak commute times, and doubling the size of Highway 4 is guaranteed to add further congestion.

Highway 4 Bypass

In 1990 Assemblymember Bill Baker sponsored a bill to authorize four demonstration private toll road projects. Many legislators voted for it based on his assurances that no state or federal funds would be used. The proposed 85-mile Mid-State Toll Road, from Sunol to Vacaville, was chosen as one of the projects. The California Toll Road Company, a consortium of the Bank of Paris, Westpac of Australia, and Parson's Engineering based in Southern California, contracted to build the road, but later abandoned the project. However, efforts to increase road capacity in the East County portions of this route continue.

Currently a road extension is being constructed from Brentwood to Highway 4 at Lone Tree Way. The plan is to construct three segments funded by local governments and Measure C. Segment Two, a two-lane section from Lone Tree Way to Balfour Road, was completed and opened to traffic in April of 2002. Segment One is currently being designed and will include a four lane highway from Highway 4 just south of Main Street to Lone Tree Way. Construction is scheduled for 2004 to 2006. Segment Three, planned for between 2005 and 2010, is also in the design stage. This section would include a two-lane highway from Balfour Road to the County's Agricultural Core.⁶⁶

Vasco Road connects East County cities south to Livermore, and the "general safety improvements" that are planned will likely increase the use of this road further. These improvements include straightening the road to allow for higher speeds and widening to allow for shoulders.

These East County road expansions will facilitate sprawl development in the area and lead to rapidly increasing traffic volumes in this agricultural area. Once again, infrastructure built with taxpayer dollars is subsidizing suburban sprawl. The new Measure C should fund infrastructure

that supports smart growth in existing urban portions of the county rather than sprawl-serving East County road projects.

Highway 4 West

Highway 4 has already been expanded to a four-lane expressway between Interstate 80 and Cummings Skyway. Now Caltrans wants to do an additional upgrade to freeway standards that will cost \$40 million and add two more lanes to the corridor. There is no traffic demand currently for this “full freeway” and it would just spur more sprawl along the corridor, for example increasing pressure to develop Franklin Canyon in Hercules. Ignoring past experience, the Contra Costa Transportation Authority expects that “demand—and congestion—will remain relatively low” on the route despite this expansion.⁶⁷

Caldecott Tunnel

One main factor limiting commutes between Contra Costa County and Alameda County or San Francisco is the limited capacity of the Caldecott Tunnel through the Oakland Hills. Designed with two bores of constant direction and one reversible bore to accommodate the direction of commute traffic, the tunnel has been a bottleneck for commuters for many years.

In 1998, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, along with the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency, the Contra Costa Transportation Authority, and Caltrans, began to brainstorm about ways to relieve the congestion at the Caldecott Tunnel bottleneck. They produced a study showing several possibilities. The most popular was to drill a fourth bore through the hill. The study failed to seriously pursue other options such as improving BART or bus service on the corridor, adding tolls or other market pricing mechanisms to reduce automobile traffic, converting a lane to carpool and bus-only use, or improving regional land use planning to reduce commuting.

As there are already two bores allowing travel in the direction of commute traffic, this fourth bore would mostly affect reverse commuters and weekend travelers who are slowed by the two lane tunnel currently allotted to them. The study found that by 2020, a fourth bore “would allow 1,600 additional reverse commuters to travel through the tunnel and eliminate the 12-minute backup anticipated for reverse-commute and weekend traffic 20 years from now.”⁶⁸

Proponents argue that a fourth bore is not a road capacity increase, since it would not accommodate the main commute direction. However, this new tunnel would definitely represent a capacity increase for the growing flow of reverse-commute traffic. Also, these additional lanes are quite likely to be used to expand capacity in whatever direction desired a decade or more from now, when initial agreements about their use have long been forgotten. Combined with other current and planned road expansions, an expanded Caldecott Tunnel would encourage further auto development in Central, South, and East County.

The fourth bore project receives most of its support from Contra Costa County and the California Transportation Commission. Ultimately, funding will make or break this project. While Governor Gray Davis has included \$36 million in the state budget package for a fourth bore, the actual cost of a two-lane bore would be \$185 million.⁶⁹ The earliest the new tunnel would be constructed is in 2006-7.

BART, e-BART, and Buses

For years politicians have promised additional BART extensions in the county but have never had money to back up such promises. The original BART tax did not fund anything beyond Concord. The 1988 Measure C transportation sales tax supported the extension of BART to Pittsburg/Bay Point with 28 percent of its funds, meaning that East County received more money per capita from Measure C than any other region of the county. However, a further extension of this BART line would cost at least \$768 million just to extend service to Hillcrest Road in Antioch.⁷⁰ This is more than is expected to be available even with optimistic assumptions.

Planners have been exploring other alternatives. One would be to develop a lower-cost rail system, dubbed e-BART, using self-propelled diesel rail cars on existing or new tracks within existing railroad right-of-ways. Frequencies would be similar to BART schedules. Constructing e-BART with new tracks would cost \$433 million to reach Hillcrest Road and \$802 million to reach Byron (half as much per mile as BART). However, there is an option to use existing tracks, which would have a capital cost of \$257 million to Hillcrest Road and \$377 million to Byron. This option has the downside of sharing one set of tracks with freight trains, and service would have to be scheduled carefully. However, this set-up could later be upgraded by adding new tracks. A phased e-BART option would have the benefit that it could be constructed in a timely fashion (seven years) at much lower cost than BART. However, the cost of e-BART is still likely to be high enough that East County will have to choose between an extension only to Hillcrest or more limited service all the way to Byron.

Two bus options could also be pursued. An express bus system could be developed with \$44 million in capital funding and operated for \$7 million a year, running on seven express bus corridors connecting East County to Walnut Creek, Concord, the Tri-Valley area, and the BART system. This system could be in place within two years.⁷¹

Likewise, the county could develop a “bus rapid transit” (BRT) system in which buses would operate on dedicated lanes with light-rail-type stations.⁷² Such a program would cost \$184 million to construct to Hillcrest and \$406 million to extend to Byron—one quarter as much per mile as a BART extension and one-half as much as e-BART. This system would use high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Highway 4, transitioning to a two-lane busway on an existing rail right-of-way between Loveridge Way and Byron. This alternative could be up and running within seven years and could be upgraded to BART later if there is enough ridership. Buses could also pick people up in their neighborhoods before getting on the BRT busway. BRT could have all the transit-oriented-development-attracting benefits of e-BART, but would be cheaper and would have the flexibility of being able to accommodate buses coming from city streets.

Water

Alamo Creek

The East Bay Municipal Utility District and the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Committee (LAFCO) agreed in October, 2002 that EBMUD will expand its water service area to include the unserved portion of the Alamo Creek residential development project in Tassajara Valley, east of Danville.⁷³ This agreement will provide service to the approximately 800 homes in the 1,400-unit development that did not already have a water source.

To receive approval for the expansion, developers promised a minimum of \$8.5 million for various water conservation measures. Much of the money will go for water-saving devices installed in the new homes, although some funds will pay for water savings programs EBMUD is currently planning in the rest of the service area. Under the agreement, residents of the new development will be asked to limit their water usage. However, they will only be held accountable by their own homeowners' association, which is unlikely to penalize water wasters.

Opponents of the development do not believe that conservation measures will hold up in the long term or in the case of drought. One critic pointed to EBMUD's past statements that it does not have enough water even for population expansion within its former area.⁷⁴ Danville and the Sierra Club are suing the county, with the help of a former EBMUD board member, claiming, among other problems, that the development will negatively impact the area water supply.

In response to critics, the EBMUD Board voted 6 – 1 in 2003 to require an advisory vote of EBMUD users for any future expansions of the district's Ultimate Service Boundary. This requirement will make future expansions much more difficult.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir

The completion of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir between 1996 and 1998 led to a total loss of nearly 1,300 acres of non-prime farmland and more than 100 acres of grazing land.⁷⁵ The Contra Costa Water District is currently looking into a massive expansion of the reservoir between Brentwood and Livermore from 1,500 to 3,330 acres and to increase the volume of water by 500%. The project, which could cost up to \$900 million, would make Los Vaqueros one of the largest reservoirs in the Bay Area.⁷⁶

The water district claims that the proposed project would increase the overall quality of water that would be received by Contra Costa and other nearby customers by taking fresher, less-salty water from the Delta in the spring and storing it for drier times. District officials also say that the reservoir would use current amounts of Delta water more efficiently, rather than taking a larger quantity.

However, opponents are concerned that increasing the amount of water available could encourage more suburban sprawl and increased water consumption, and argue for better conservation rather than expansion. Some people are also upset that the district is not keeping the promise it made upon approval of the original reservoir in the 1980s that the local Contra Costa customers who pay for the reservoir through their water bills would be its sole beneficiaries. The proposed expansion would serve customers in Fremont and eastern portions of Alameda and Santa Clara counties, as well as Contra Costa.

The project is dependent upon the approval of District customers, who will get to cast a vote on the issue in November of 2003. The District will not undertake comprehensive environmental impact studies unless voters give their approval.

5. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Contra Costa County, like the Bay Area as a whole, faces a housing shortage that is forcing growing numbers of people to devote a high percentage of their income to housing and/or to commute long distances to their jobs from communities with more inexpensive housing. Many Bay Area workers can't afford to live where they work, including such important community members as firefighters, schoolteachers, and nurses. Only strong action by many levels of government—including cities, the state, and regional agencies—can help increase the supply of housing in general and affordable units in particular, and better match new homes with job locations. In particular, municipal action is needed to review city zoning, parking standards, permitting processes, and development fees, as well as to assist affordable housing developers with loans, grants, or infrastructure.

In an effort to provide more housing affordable to households making 80 percent or less than the county median income, the state requires cities and counties to develop General Plan Housing Elements that set forth realistic strategies for accommodating people of all income levels. ABAG also sets “fair share” new housing targets by income level for each municipality.

These mechanisms, however, haven't led to sufficient change. During the 1988-98 period, 40 key cities in the Bay Area provided less than a third of the affordable housing that ABAG indicated was needed in their communities. Within Contra Costa County, the city of Walnut Creek met only 38 percent of its affordable housing need and San Ramon met only 6 percent.⁷⁷ ABAG assigned Concord a fair share goal of 1,413 new affordable housing units for the 1988-1995 period, but between 1988 and 1998 only 56 were built while the city allowed construction of 1,154 market-rate units.⁷⁸ On unincorporated county lands developers built only one-sixth of the housing needed for low and very-low income families, but were allowed to construct more than three times as many units as needed for moderate and above-moderate income families. According to the Contra Costa Smart Growth Action Plan, Contra Costa was the second least affordable county in the Bay Area.

Projected Housing Need and Units Built, 1988-1998, Unincorporated Contra Costa County

Income Group	1988-95 Projected Housing Need	1988-98 Actual Units Built	Difference
Very Low	1,289	259	-1,030 (Shortage)
Low	903	90	-813 (Shortage)
Affordable Housing Total	2,192	349	-1,843 (Shortage)
Moderate	1,289	2,228	+939 (Surplus)
Above Moderate	2,966	11,316	+8,350 (Surplus)
Moderate and Above Total	4,255	13,893	+9,638 (Surplus)

Affordable Housing Needs by City

Housing Elements from the county's cities were due to be updated in 2001 for the first time in ten years. These documents are an excellent place for municipalities to start implementing smart growth principles such as allowing higher density development, lowering parking requirements, and instituting minimum densities for new development. However, by late 2002 only two out of

18 cities along with the county government itself had submitted a document that the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) certified as compliant with state standards. Reasons for noncompliance include local antigrowth policies, aversion to new housing – particularly affordable units – on the part of some residents, and the lack of meaningful state penalties for not submitting timely and satisfactory Housing Elements. Another explanation is the basic attraction of high-end homes and commercial or retail projects that return higher profits to developers and higher tax revenues to cities than affordable housing.

Cities can be sued in order to halt development of lucrative commercial projects until they develop and implement adequate affordable housing programs. After its housing element was rejected by HCD in 1992, the Sacramento County community of Folsom built thousands of market rate homes. A suit by Legal Services of Northern California and the California Affordable Housing Law Project on behalf of a low income, disabled renter forced Folsom to stop development and adopt several model policies that could have been included in the rejected Housing Element in the first place.⁷⁹ The city zoned more land for compact, affordable housing, established a new housing trust fund, increased the amount of redevelopment money it set aside for affordable housing, and created a new jobs-housing linkage fee for commercial and industrial development. It also adopted “inclusionary zoning” requiring that 15 percent of all new housing be affordable to lower income residents.

Legal methods are the last option affordable housing advocates want to use. They prefer that cities draft a good housing element initially and then follow through with their plans. The Nine County Housing Advocacy Network, an alliance of affordable housing advocates, smart growth proponents, environmentalists, and faith-based organizations, has worked with cities to adopt policies for the recent housing element updates that will create significantly more affordable housing.

Several Contra Costa cities have taken steps to address affordable housing needs. Walnut Creek has proposed a jobs-housing linkage fee in its new housing element. San Ramon has proposed language that would require developers to make 25 percent of all new units affordable. Most cities allow “secondary” units to be constructed at existing single family homes, potentially a way to increase the supply of small, affordable units.

However, there is room for improvement everywhere. Most cities still have no policies mandating a certain percentage of affordable units within new development (known as “inclusionary zoning”). Concord spends more of its redevelopment tax increase on sidewalk repair than on affordable housing. Walnut Creek requires more parking for a two-bedroom apartment than for a single family home, reducing the area available for new apartment construction and increasing costs.

Despite these obstacles, several new affordable housing developments are planned or currently under construction. Coggins Square in Pleasant Hill is a good example of a so-called inclusionary development. Developed by BRIDGE, a large non-profit affordable housing developer, and located adjacent to the Pleasant Hill BART Station, it contains 87 units of affordable family apartments. The five-story building provides parking in a common enclosed garage. Above the parking, four floors of with a mixture of unit types enclose two public courtyards.

In Antioch, non-profit Eden Housing is building 56 affordable apartments in its West Rivertown Village project between 4th and 5th and I and J streets. At 25 units/acre this is a medium density development of three-story buildings that fits with the surrounding neighborhood. The development includes an on-site daycare center, a community room, a computer lab for residents, laundry facilities, and play areas for children.

Compliance With State Requirements

At the end of 2002 most Contra Costa County cities’ Housing Elements were still out of compliance with state Department of Housing and Community Development requirements:

<u>City</u>	<u>Local Status</u>	<u>Date Adopted</u>	<u>HCD Review</u>	<u>Compliance</u>
ANTIOCH	ADOPTED			OUT
BRENTWOOD	DRAFT	08/28/2002		OUT
CLAYTON	DRAFT	03/08/2002		OUT
CONCORD	DRAFT	09/30/2002		OUT
DANVILLE	ADOPTED	03/05/2002	04/15/2002	IN
EL CERRITO	DRAFT			IN REVIEW
HERCULES	DRAFT	10/04/2002		OUT
LAFAYETTE	DRAFT	07/18/2002		OUT
MARTINEZ	DRAFT	03/12/2002		OUT
MORAGA	ADOPTED	06/04/2002		IN REVIEW
ORINDA	DRAFT			IN REVIEW
PINOLE	DRAFT			IN REVIEW
PITTSBURG	DRAFT	08/06/2001		OUT
PLEASANT HILL	ADOPTED	08/19/2002		IN REVIEW
RICHMOND	ADOPTED			OUT
SAN PABLO	ADOPTED	08/05/2002	08/23/2002	IN
SAN RAMON	ADOPTED	10/16/2002		OUT
WALNUT CREEK	DRAFT	07/18/2002		OUT
COUNTY	ADOPTED	12/18/2001	03/26/2002	IN

Ways to Increase Affordable Housing

Cities in Contra Costa County can take a number of steps to ensure that sufficient quantities of affordable housing are built. These strategies include:

- Complete a state-certified Housing Element listing policies to increase affordable housing
- Establish an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to provide grants or loans to non-profit builders
- Revise zoning to decrease minimum lot sizes, increase allowable densities, and raise allowable building heights (usually to the three-to-five story level)
- Adopt “inclusionary zoning” requiring 12-15 percent of units to be affordable in projects of more than 10 units
- Increase the redevelopment “set-aside” funds for affordable housing from the state-mandated 20% to 25% or 30%, and target a significant portion of these to low, very-low, and extremely-low income households.
- Reduce parking standards near transit or downtown locations, to reduce development costs
- Assemble and market land for affordable housing development

- Encourage owners of single family homes to create secondary units
- Prepare Specific Plans on likely infill development areas, establishing urban design standards and conducting environmental review in advance of development
- Reduce permitting delays for projects meeting zoning requirements
- Stand up to neighborhood opponents of development and/or ensure that there is a community process to obtain neighbors' buy-in

6. SMART GROWTH STRATEGIES

There is substantial sentiment in the county, as shown by the polling done by Shaping Our Future, in favor of saving Contra Costa's remaining open space and pursuing smart growth instead. Many local officials and planners agree. But given the juggernaut of interests in favor of sprawl it will not be easy to reverse direction. Decades-long processes of sprawl coupled with disinvestment from older parts of the county will not be reversed quickly. Strong action by county and local governments is needed to begin the process.

Some of the main strategies likely to bring about Smart Growth in the county include the following:

At the County Level:

- **Preserve and Strengthen the County's Urban Limit Line.** Doing this is essential not just to preserve open space, but to begin to create conditions under which developers will move away from relatively easy greenfield projects and instead consider reinvestment in existing urban areas. To avoid sprawl within the existing ULL, the line should be moved further in to preclude development on the edges of Brentwood, Antioch, Pittsburg, Hercules, Danville, and other locations. Areas further East like the Veal Tract and Bethel Island should not be considered for development. City development should be kept within existing urban areas, and city requests to annex open land denied.
- **Adopt Design Standards for New Developments.** Develop a set of "livable community" design standards for any new infill or greenfield subdivisions. These might require appropriate minimum densities, connecting street networks, good connections to surrounding neighborhoods and transit, short block sizes, sidewalks, a neighborhood center with stores and other facilities, a mix of unit sizes and types, garages set back from streets, and preservation of creeks, hillsides, and wetlands.
- **Strengthen Open Space Acquisition.** To ensure that greenbelt lands are secure, they must be permanently protected through open space easement or acquisition as parkland. The county can take the lead by building a strong open space acquisition fund to assist in such protection.
- **Adopt Large-Lot Agricultural Zoning.** Contra Costa County agricultural zoning should be revised to prevent subdivision of farmland for "McMansions" and hobby farms. Currently the county allows five-acre parcels to be subdivided; neighboring Alameda County has a 160-320 acre minimums. For ranchland, 160-acre minimum zoning should be adopted. For more intensive agriculture, a 20- to 40-acre minimum parcel size is appropriate.
- **Establish and Use the Smart Growth Fund.** The Livable Communities Fund under the Tassajara Valley development agreement should be defined. The fund should provide

planning grants to Contra Costa County cities for Specific Plans covering infill development areas or designated smart growth zones. It might also offer incentives such as infrastructure or public amenity grants to support affordable housing in smart growth locations.

- **Update Transportation Sales Tax Measure.** When the Measure C transportation sales tax is put to the voters the next time, it should focus on improved mass transit and maintenance of local streets, plus important community-building transportation programs such as transit for the elderly and disabled (“paratransit”) and programs improving safety and access for pedestrians and bicyclists. Contra Costa County needs to improve individuals’ transportation choices by ensuring safe routes to schools for children and access to jobs for working people. The county needs to look closely at which transportation systems get people where they need to go, rather than focusing on sprawl-inducing highway projects. Lastly, if the county is to have a decent transportation system, it needs to change the way it is growing. Rather than a complicated Growth Management Program, it must adopt and stick to urban growth boundaries, and encourage developments that support public transportation. The new Measure C should tie cities’ funding grants to local land use planning that avoids sprawl and revitalizes existing neighborhoods.
- **Ensure Affordable Housing Gets Built.** To make sure that all Contra Costa County cities work aggressively to provide affordable housing, the County should offer incentive funding similar to that provided by the housing incentive programs offered by both the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and San Mateo County (both of which make available incentive grants of \$1-2,000 per bedroom for infill housing near transit). Other county infrastructure grants to local governments should be conditioned on local compliance with state affordable housing law and regional fair share housing targets.
- **Sponsor Design Charettes and Educational Processes.** The workshops sponsored by Shaping Our Future should be a first step toward continuing county dialogue and education about future growth choices. The county should sponsor additional design charettes to develop innovative approaches for reuse of old malls and revitalization of downtowns and commercial corridors. The county could also send newsletters and other materials to every household outlining growth options for the county’s future.
- **Consider Countywide Fiscal Reform.** Cities throughout the county will have difficulty escaping the temptations of fiscal zoning unless incentives for this are removed. Less-well-off Contra Costa cities will also have a hard time escaping the cycle of disinvestment and concentrated poverty unless sales tax revenues are more equitably apportioned. The county should seek state legislation allowing it to establish a countywide pool to share local sales taxes, to be apportioned to local governments on the basis of population.

At the City Level:

- **Stop Permitting Sprawl.** By allowing sprawl development, cities ensure development that over time will cost more to service and degrade the countywide quality of life. Even if some development is allowed on greenfield land, it should be in the form of compact, mixed-use communities with well-connected street networks and clearly defined neighborhood centers. In most cases this will mean changing city zoning codes and

developing detailed Specific Plans and design standards in advance of development to ensure that these characteristics are incorporated.

- **Focus on Existing Downtowns.** The greatest assets most cities possess are their historic downtowns and neighborhood centers. These sites offer the possibility of accommodating thousands of dwelling units as well as creating walkable districts rich in local history and culture. In Contra Costa County the historic downtowns of Concord, Pittsburg, Antioch, and Martinez, among others, have been neglected for decades and offer substantial infill development opportunities. Even Walnut Creek, which has perhaps the county's most active historic downtown, could create thousands of units of downtown housing and undertake additional streetscape improvements to go with its successful development of downtown retail.
- **Focus on Arterial Corridors.** Underutilized arterial corridors are another main smart growth opportunity. Again, targeted municipal planning will be necessary to ensure smart development. The starting point is to change zoning codes to prevent strip development and large surface parking lots along these routes. Mechanisms include minimum height requirements of at least two stories for buildings, minimum floor-area ratios, requirements that buildings be built along the street, and provisions allowing or encouraging housing. City action to redesign sidewalks and streets and to assemble or redevelop certain parcels may be necessary as well.
- **Focus on Brownfield/Greyfield Sites.** Cities can take the lead by identifying brownfield sites (often contaminated former industrial areas) and grayfield sites (large surface parking lots and underused commercial facilities such as failing shopping centers). Municipal planners can then prepare Specific Plans for these areas, develop design standards, change zoning where appropriate, and work with developers, neighbors, and community groups to ensure that appropriate redevelopment occurs.
- **Prepare Specific Plans.** Highly focused plans for particular locations are an essential tool for smart growth because they develop community consensus on specific types of development. To be effective, Specific Plans should include detailed urban design guidelines, zoning changes, and environmental review. While a powerful vehicle for bridging the gap between neighbors and developers, such plans can also reflect broader city-wide and regional needs, and should not necessarily give immediate neighbors the final say over development. Once a Specific Plan has been approved for an area, development should be fast-tracked. Any project meeting the design guidelines and zoning established for the area should not have to wait through extensive conditional use permit hearings.
- **Change Zoning.** Every city in Contra Costa County has provisions in its zoning code that work against smart growth. These typically take the form of low building height limits, large minimum lot size requirements, density restrictions on multifamily housing, and high parking requirements even for sites next to public transit. Revising these counterproductive zoning requirements should be a priority.
- **Establish Differential Fees for Infill, Smart Growth, and Accessory Units.** While some Contra Costa cities do charge higher fees for greenfield development compared to infill, the differences are not great. Since sprawl imposes a wide range of long-term costs on the community, it should be discouraged through initial impact fees that are far higher, perhaps double or triple those for infill. Permitting fees might be waived entirely for affordable housing in infill locations or for accessory (secondary) units on existing single

family home lots. (While most Contra Costa cities now permit such secondary units, they charge permitting fees of up to \$30,000 per unit, discouraging their development.)

- **Establish Design Guidelines and Stronger Design Review.** One main problem with both infill and greenfield development to date is that it is often not designed to enhance the entire city's character and livability. New developments often hide from surrounding neighborhoods behind privacy walls. Apartment or commercial buildings turn blank walls to the street. Subdivisions fail to include sidewalks or to connect their streets to surrounding areas. Seas of asphalt surround shopping centers or fast food outlets, discouraging pedestrians. Detailed design standards for everything from block size and street connectivity to building facades and their relation to the street can help ensure more livable and walkable urban landscapes. Such guidelines are in fact being developed in many forward-thinking jurisdictions around the nation and in Contra Costa cities such as El Cerrito (for the San Pablo Avenue corridor) and Walnut Creek (for its North Main Street Area).
- **Ensure Affordable Housing.** It is not enough for cities to identify vacant sites or even to zone these for relatively high-density housing; municipal governments must ensure that affordable housing actually gets built. In practice this may mean establishing and enforcing an inclusionary zoning ordinance requiring developers to make at least 10 to 15 percent of units in new housing developments permanently affordable. Other steps may include setting up a well-capitalized city housing fund to assist nonprofit builders of affordable housing, purchasing and assembling sites for affordable housing, and changing fees and permit processes to make such development easier. Cities may also need to play a lead role in mediating conflicts with neighbors and overriding NIMBY opposition. (For a list of suggested strategies, see p. 21)

7. CONCLUSION

Smart growth requires more work than sprawl development—by citizens, public agencies, and builders—especially since for many decades incentives have been put in place to favor the latter. However, the advantages for Contra Costa County are great in the long run. Livable communities and revitalized downtowns are positive socially, fiscally, and environmentally for cities. Local governments and residents should *want* to move in this direction.

Growing smarter will require political leadership and careful planning. Incentives must be set up to encourage better development. A county smart growth or livable communities fund is one important device to provide those incentives. But there are many other potential initiatives, such as countywide tax sharing, an improved Measure C transportation sales tax, and new design standards for development on county land. Cities for their part will need to revise their zoning codes, develop plans for prime infill areas, establish stronger urban design guidelines, and aggressively work to ensure that affordable housing gets built. These activities will not be easy politically until a majority of citizens realizes that the American Dream of suburban life has produced a nightmare for many people instead. But such steps are possible in many cases if presented as positive, constructive strategies to create more livable communities.

Incentives alone will not be enough, however. Even stronger steps will be necessary. State or regional agencies may need to require local governments to create affordable housing and follow growth management goals as a condition of receiving infrastructure grants. Political leaders may also need to make substantial changes to the state tax structure, so as to reduce pressures for fiscal zoning and potentially to share revenue between rich and poor municipalities. Given the entrenched nature of current problems, only powerful actions such as these will bring about change in some Contra Costa cities.

Residents of Contra Costa County are deeply concerned about long-term growth directions, as shown by responses to Shaping Our Future polling. Leadership can help channel this general concern into specific action. The challenge now before the county's planners, elected officials, and civic organizations is to develop and nurture understandings of how to do this.

APPENDIX A: AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS BY CITY, 1999-2006

Jurisdiction	Total Projected Need	Very Low	Low	Moderate	Above Moderate	Average Yearly Need
ANTIOCH	4,459	921	509	1,156	1,873	595
BRENTWOOD	4,073	906	476	958	1,733	543
CLAYTON	446	55	33	84	274	59
CONCORD	2,319	453	273	606	987	309
DANVILLE	1,110	140	88	216	666	148
EL CERRITO	185	37	23	48	77	25
HERCULES	792	101	62	195	434	106
LAFAYETTE	194	30	17	42	105	26
MARTINEZ	1,341	248	139	341	613	179
MORAGA	214	32	17	45	120	29
OAKLEY	1,208	209	125	321	553	161
ORINDA	221	31	18	43	129	29
PINOLE	288	48	35	74	131	38
PITTSBURG	2,513	534	296	696	987	335
PLEASANT HILL	714	129	79	175	331	95
RICHMOND	2,603	471	273	625	1,234	347
SAN PABLO	494	147	69	123	155	66
SAN RAMON	4,447	599	372	984	2,492	593
WALNUT CREEK	1,653	289	195	418	751	220
CONTRA COSTA UNINCORPORATED	5,436	1,101	642	1,401	2,292	725
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY TOTAL	34,710	6,683	3,782	8,596	15,649	4,628

Compiled from Association of Bay Area Governments documents.

Project/Area	Units	Not Built/status	Acres
East County			
Antioch:			
S. E. Antioch Planning Area	13666	Under Construction	4500
Future Urban Area #2	1300	Under Construction	800
Future Urban Area #1	5000	Not yet approved;likely in '03	2700
Mira Vista, Almondridge, Sky Ranch	1437	Under Construction	250
Total Antioch:	21403		8250
Brentwood:			
Corner future Grant & Shady Willow	220	Approved / Not yet built	81.24
At Shady Willow/Sand Creek/Fairview	56	Approved / Not yet built	11.6
Corner Fairview & Apricot	138	Approved / Not yet built	48.79
At New Sand Crk/Fairview/UPRR	56	Approved / Not yet built	23
S of Balfour/W of Concord Ave	60	Approved / Not yet built	11.9
W of Fairview/S of Apricot	55	Approved / Not yet built	18.6
W of Fairview/S of Lone Tree	132	Approved / Not yet built	44.03
E of Fairview/N of Minnesota	53	Approved / Not yet built	29
Crossroads	64	Under Construction	23.73
At Sunset/Brentwood Bl/Havenwood	133	Approved / Not yet built	25.74
Tuscany	51	Under Construction	29.3
Summerset Orchards	245	Under Construction	74
At Fairview/UPRR/Sand Creek	73	Under Construction	23.73
Brentwood Park	245	Under Construction	86
Garin Ranch	156	Under Construction	24.2
California Orchard	196	Under Construction	87.34
Meridian Point	115	Under Construction	35.37
Traditions	69	Under Construction	18.95
Diablo Vista	119	Built	24
Campanello	192	Under Construction	57.1
Hearthstone	82	Under Construction	27
Hallmark, Heritage	183	Built	45.26
Summerset Development	992	Under Construction	356
California Grove	71	Built	14.52
Ashton Place/ Glenwood/Lyon Groves	442	Under Construction	114
Trailside	68	Built	11.5
Providence	121	Built	24.92
Summerset 7939	511	Under Construction	26
Brentwood Hills	278	Built	98.4
Shadow Lakes	937	Under Construction	283
Deer Ridge	1031	Under Construction	308.6
Summerset 7642	1213	Built	227
California Spirit / California Glory	483	Built	141
Total Brentwood:	8840		2454.82
Oakley:			
Stonewood II	167	Reduced from 248 to 167 lots	47
Marsh Creek Glen	225	Approved 8/00	41
Amberwood 2, 5, 7 & 8	182	Approved 7/01	41.7
Delta Point	98	Red. fr. 145; under constr.	21.09
Laurel Woods II	55	Completed	15.74
Laurel Crest	72	Under construction	19.04

Sterling Oaks	57	57 lots instead of 53	32.8
Laurel Crest II & III	128	Almost complete	35.9
Delta Isle	197	Reduced from 236 to 197 lots	35.9
Quail Glen sub	36	Partially approved	17.1
Amador Estates	12	Grading has begun	4.34
Sterling Vineyards	42	Almost complete	15.09
Sub 7599	11	Approved	3.6
Total Oakley:	1282		330.3
Pittsburg:			
Bailey Estates	252	Final EIR being prepared	122
Brickyard Americana	193	Completed	43
Harbor Lights	253	Under Construction	46.3
Highlands Ranch	600	Under Construction	174
Jubilee	51	Completed	9.5
Marina Walk	120	Completed	23
Montreux	154	Final EIR being prepared	147
Oak Hills South	442	Completed	87.3
Oak Hills South	459	Under Construction	211
Oak Hill South Unit 5	245	Under Construction	53
Ridge Farms	243	Under Review	76
Rockridge	56	Completed	7.6
San Marco	1363	Under Construction	415
Sky Ranch	370	Under Review	166.5
Village at New York Landing	114	Completed	26.99
Willow Heights	120	Approved	16.5
Total Pittsburg:	5035		1624.69
East County Unincorporated			
Discovery Bay:			
Discovery Bay West	1947	Under construction	753
Heron's Landing	N/A	App. for 3745 u. withdrawn	N/A
Total Discovery Bay:	1947		753
Central County			
Martinez:			
Brittany Hills	80	Under construction	20
Images	68	Approved	66.6
Alhambra Highlands I & II	144	Final Map Pending	163.2
Total Martinez:	292		249.8
Concord:			
Crystyl Ranch	454	Under Construction	454
Montecito	183	Under Construction	85
Parkside Residential	61	Under Construction	6.77
Total Concord:	698		545.77
Moraga:			
Palos Colorados	123	Incomplete application	460.2
Total Moraga:	123		460.2
Orinda:			
Montenera in Gateway Valley	225	Apprvd; challenged in court	1000

Total Orinda:	225		1000
Central County Unincorporated			
Mt. Diablo/Morgan Territory:			
Mountain Meadows II	40	Tentative map appvl pending	96
Total Mt. Diablo/Morgan Terr:	40		96
South County			
Danville:			
Magee Ranch	259	Under Construction	583
The Meadows	192	Selling Units	44.4
Total Danville:	451		627.4
San Ramon:			
Henry Ranch	104	0 units built	197.9
Thomas Ranch	140	0 units built	117
Four Oaks	53	0 units built	17.58
Cambrio Townhomes	85	0 units built	10
San Ramon Heights	154	0 units built	116
Bollinger Crest	72	0 units built	4.39
Crown Ridge	104	0 units built	85
Deerwood Ridge/Highland	126	0 units built	21.5
Canyon Point	114	0 units built	12.76
Old Mill Village	125	Completed	6.12
Wiedemann Ranch/Norris Cyn Estates	371	Approved tentative maps	1100
Total San Ramon:	1448		1688.25
South County Unincorporated			
Alamo:			
Stone Valley Oaks	47	Development commencing	100
Total Alamo:	47		100
Danville Unincorporated:			
Dougherty Valley	11000	Under Construction	5978
Tassajara Valley (Alamo Creek)	1400	Approved	767
Total Danville Unincorporated:	12400		6745
West County			
Hercules			
Shuler	139	0 units built	20
Waterfront General	217	Under construction	40
Waterfront Town Center	TBD	0 units built	60
New Pacific / Catellus	880	Under construction	110
KB Home	125	0 units built	35
MRB Cottage Lane	58	Completed	20
Franklin Canyon	1156	Pending completion of EIR	630
Total Hercules:	2575		915
San Pablo:			
Abella	292	Under Construction	21

Total San Pablo:	292		21
Richmond:			
Clark Road	204	Pending completion of EIR	144
Forest Green	188	Pending completion of EIR	81
Pinole Pointe	211	Tentative map under Review	32
Seacliff villas/Estates	150	Approved	34.35
Canyon Oaks	65	Under construction	17.74
Castro Ranch	51	EIR in progress	33
Johnson Property	188	Awaiting Geotech report	81
Country Club Vista	644	Under construction	290
Total Richmond:	1701		713.09

TOTAL CONTRA COSTA COUNTY:	58799		26574.32
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NOTES

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