

THE PLEASANTON GENERAL PLAN

X. COMMUNITY CHARACTER ELEMENT

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X. COMMUNITY CHARACTER ELEMENT

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Community Character Element is to identify the physical and social aspects of Pleasanton's unique identity and to establish goals, policies, and programs to preserve and enhance those aspects which make the city special and distinct.

OVERVIEW ~~EXISTING COMMUNITY CHARACTER~~

Pleasanton's community character is the physical reflection of its location, setting, **history**, and numerous design decisions made over time. It is an expression of community values as well as constraints as perceived at the time of each of those decisions. Some aspects of community character are the result of one-time actions while others have been adopted and repeated as traditions. ~~The~~ **m**Major contributors to Pleasanton's community character are discussed below.

Setting

Pleasanton is situated in a tree-covered valley defined by surrounding hills. The generally undeveloped hillside and ridgeline areas which enclose Pleasanton create a scenic visual backdrop and provide a physical and visual separation from adjacent communities. This gives Pleasanton a strong sense of individuality. Surrounding hillside and open space areas, along with trees and other landscaping which have been planted over the city's history, also give Pleasanton a strong visual connection to the natural environment.

Pleasanton's physical evolution between 1850 and 1970 resulted in a small-town feeling with an outlying rural atmosphere. This is evidenced by the city's historic Downtown, older residential neighborhoods, Alameda County Fairgrounds, the keeping of farm animals in the Happy Valley farming area, among other aspects described below. ~~This is a character which~~ **m**Many residents cherish and desire to preserve and enhance **this character**. **High** quality business park development which occurred during the 1980s and 1990s **and suburban neighborhood development from the 1960s to the present** also create design elements which the City would like to perpetuate in harmony with the rest of the community.

The design of future developments and the retention of a sense of open space and community separation will require careful attention to planning, landscaping, and building setbacks.

During this General Plan period, the City will likely see the development of land transitioning from dry-land agriculture to urban uses on the Staples Ranch property and the development of several hundred acres of land now transitioning from quarry uses east of Pleasanton. In addition, the development of numerous vacant infill parcels, building additions, renovations, and public improvements are expected within the next 20 years.

Freeway and Natural Edges Conditions

Pleasanton's physical edges are a combination of hard infrastructure such as freeways and soft natural forms such as hillsides and other open space. These edges consist of the following:

Interstate 580 forms a strong edge along the northerly boundary of Pleasanton. Gateways and buildings within the Hacienda Business Park create a distinctive impression, and the Hilton Hotel, with its rounded central tower, is a very prominent focal point. Tall monument signs oriented to the freeway are also becoming significant design elements. The Hacienda Business Park frontage on I-580, with its significant landscaping and no sound walls, contributes positively to the character of the City. Conversely, a somewhat negative image is created in areas where soundwalls with no landscaping exist.

The City's Interstate 680 edge is more uniform than I-580 by virtue of the Alamo Canal being located along its easterly side. Pleasanton Ridge to the west provides a sense of containment, especially in areas where residences adjacent to the freeway are located below sight lines over the adjacent soundwalls. Signage along the freeway frontages is minimal. Overall, the treatment of this Scenic Highway with set back and landscaped soundwalls contributes in a positive way to Pleasanton's community character.

Edge Environment

The Foothill Road area **including the Main and Pleasanton Ridges to the west** creates the western edge of the city. Although changing through increased housing development and street improvements, **it is this area** still **appears** semi-rural in character and closely connected to open space ~~and the Pleasanton Ridge~~. Many sections of Foothill Road are narrow and follow natural contours. Hills and riparian corridor trees ~~come very close to~~ **approach** the roadway in many locations. The road is generally elevated in height above the rest of the city; and provides at several locations a broad overview of the green valley below. Along Foothill Road, homes of varying size and style ~~are set~~ **sit** back substantially from the road and contribute to the impression of lower density development integrated with the adjacent natural environment.

The southern edge of the city ~~still has~~ **retains** a strong rural flavor, with narrow roads, white open-rail fences, farm structures; and animals, considerable open space, and many views of undeveloped hills. Historical names such as "Happy Valley" and "Chicken Alley" assist in identifying the area's uniqueness and past land uses. The Southern Hills **area** provides a major visual backdrop for South Pleasanton as well as **for** the entire city.

In Pleasanton's ~~eastern edge is~~ largely undeveloped **eastern edge;** ~~It is dominated by~~ quarry lands and the towering equipment at the sand-and-gravel operations **dominate**. These ~~land uses~~ **quarry lands**, along with the Livermore Golf Course and Livermore Municipal Airport, **currently** provide a major ~~open space~~ separation between Pleasanton and the adjacent City of Livermore.

Interstate 580 (I-580) freeway defines Pleasanton's northern edge, as described in more detail in the City Entryways section below.

[moved later] **City Entries**

~~City entries affect the way visitors see the community and are the “welcome home” points for returning residents. Pleasanton’s entries are generally well designed but in some cases not distinctively different from other communities.~~

~~I-580 entries to the community are typical of most freeway interchange entries and generally have minimal visual distinction or uniqueness at the freeway exit itself. The Hacienda Drive area is the exception by virtue of views to the large Hacienda Business Park entry arch. As Hopyard and Santa Rita Roads continue toward the Downtown, they have elements of strong visual interest including street and median trees. There are, however, areas where occasionally, weak landscaping and exposed soundwalls detract from the overall image.~~

~~I-680 entries are more unique for their relative softness of appearance and landscape quality. Bernal Avenue is a very strong visual entry created by its large trees, swale median, and curbless edges, all reminiscent of the area’s earlier rural character. Likewise, the Sunol Boulevard entry with its informal landscaping and relative absence of development close to the road has a soft, semi-rural feel. The Stoneridge Drive entry is not as distinctive in character, but nicely landscaped and includes a bridge structure over the Alamo Canal.~~

~~Stanley Boulevard, because of the major quarry land acreage to the east, provides a clear sense of entry to the City. Large trees along Stanley Boulevard, the creek bridge, landscaping, and the narrowing of the road width all contribute to a pronounced entry to Downtown Pleasanton.~~

~~East Vineyard Avenue passes through a semi-rural area bordered by hills and open space. Like South Pleasanton, it seems far removed from the more developed portions of the City. Some small vineyards and the vineyards at Ruby Hill establish the basis for potential future character enhancement.~~

Streetscapes and Patterns

[moved here] The general street patterns of the city vary widely from the traditional grid of the Downtown to more typically suburban subdivision cul-de-sac patterns in newer housing developments.

A much larger-scale road pattern exists within the business parks. The Bernal Avenue / Valley Avenue loop loosely defines the older inner core of the city, centered on the Downtown. The city’s main arterial streets all lead to the Downtown, further reinforcing that area as a major community focus.

Pedestrian pathways connect neighborhoods to parks, such as those in the Pleasanton Meadows and Birdland neighborhoods. However, few exist that connect to other neighborhoods or to schools, thus limiting the walkability of the city as a whole. To reach their destination, residents, including children walking to school, often use sidewalks along major arterials designed primarily for vehicle use.

Infrastructure

~~Major elements of the City's infrastructure also affect the character of the community. These include the railroad corridors, arroyos and canals, and streets.~~

The "Y" form of the former Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroad corridors has influenced street and subdivision layouts in the past, and continues to exert a strong influence on the character of the community. Most noticeable are the vistas to distant hills and Mount Diablo provided at road crossings of the **railroad** corridors. They **railroads** also influence perceptions of the community by focusing vehicular and pedestrian traffic along specific streets leading to the ~~railroad~~ crossings. **The East Bay Regional Park District and the City of Pleasanton are constructing portions of the Iron Horse Trail on the former Southern Pacific right-of-way in Pleasanton.**

[moved here] **Architectural Style and Character**

[moved here] Downtown has the most distinctive architectural character within the community, with its Victorian and "Main Street" buildings. The contemporary architecture and site planning of the newer business parks ~~is~~ **are** also distinctive and express ~~es~~ a strong image of progressive businesses with a concern for the working environment of employees. **Building heights remain relatively low, contributing to Pleasanton's small-town character.** [move below] ~~Other buildings within the community vary in style and character but not abruptly since most of the growth has occurred within a recent compressed time frame.~~

[moved here] ~~The~~ **Older** residential neighborhoods ~~were designed according to the "traditional neighborhood" planning concept. This concept includes many of the planning principles that were popular during the early 1900's. Street patterns are based upon a "grid system" whereby traffic is disbursed throughout the community instead of being funnelled into arterial and collector streets. Neighborhoods are open and accessible to one another instead of being closed by way of cul-de-sacs and limited through-streets. Parking garages sit behind homes leaving~~ **Front yards serve as areas for neighbors to gather and children to play, rather than for parking cars or as garage entries. Families and friends gather outdoors on the front Porches are used in the front of homes where they may greet pedestrians passing by, instead of closing themselves in back yards as outdoor family gathering areas., instead of as garage entries. Streets are generally narrower, traffic slower, and large canopy street trees are emphasized.**

[moved here] Other buildings within the community vary in style and character, but not abruptly, since most of the growth has occurred within ~~a recent compressed time frame~~ **the last few decades. Light colors and earth tones predominate in houses and commercial buildings throughout both urban and rural areas of Pleasanton. These colors blend in with the open areas and provide a sense of openness in more developed areas.**

Arroyos and Canals

Pleasanton's arroyos and canals are defining features of the community which have influenced past development decisions and offer future open-space linkage opportunities. Even more than the railroad corridors, they open up vistas to distant hills, provide open space within the heart of the city. ~~In addition, they~~ establish habitats for various forms of plant and wildlife; and allow a ~~revenue~~ for trails.

Adjacent to several arroyos are pedestrian and bicycle pathways that are safely separated from vehicle traffic. [moved below] ~~Bridge crossings of the waterways are significant visual elements. Although they have been landscaped and enhanced with special fencing within the Hacienda Business Park, some others have been treated in more of a utilitarian manner with solid railings and chain-link fencing. Some exceptions are the old Arroyo de la Laguna bridge at Bernal Avenue, and the Verona Road Bridge which is now limited to pedestrian use only.~~

[moved up] ~~The general street patterns of the City vary widely from the traditional grid of the Downtown to more typically suburban subdivision cul-de-sac patterns in newer housing developments. A much larger scale road pattern exists within the business parks. The Bernal Avenue/Valley Avenue loop loosely defines the older inner core of the City, centered on the Downtown. The City's main arterial streets all lead to the Downtown, further reinforcing that area as a major community focus.~~

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability and sustainable development is embedded in Pleasanton's community character in various ways. These include:

- **The preservation of open spaces which frame the City and encourage urban infill where development can be served most efficiently.**
- **The preservation and reuse of older and historic structures in the Downtown which saves the use of resources and energy, and creates linkages between the past, present, and future.**
- **The design of commercial areas, especially the Downtown, which attract businesses that contribute to the ongoing economic vitality of the community.**
- **The City's urban design which places schools, parks and neighborhood shopping centers close to residential areas.**
- **Landscaping that provides shade and is sparing in water use.**

SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS

[moved here] Pleasanton includes many clearly identified design districts such as the Downtown, Hacienda and Bernal Corporate business parks, Alameda County Fairgrounds, Foothill Road area, etc. ~~These~~ **The design of specific areas impacts Pleasanton's character in positive and negative ways. Many** areas **are highly visible, and** assist residents and visitors in visualizing the city's structure and layout ~~and provide residents with a sense of identity with the neighborhoods of the City.~~ **Some areas lack quality maintenance and are in need of upgrades.** The design

compatibility **and maintenance** of ~~future~~ structures **and improvements** within these ~~districts~~ **areas** will **play a critical role in shaping Pleasanton's character in years to come.** ~~be important in order to preserve the distinctive character of each district~~

[moved below] **Downtown**

~~Pleasanton's Downtown is a treasure that most older but growing communities have long since lost. It reflects the City's heritage and is a source of pride to its residents. Older commercial and residential buildings lend richness to the area, and new development has generally been designed to complement the older structures and reinforce the small-scale character. The historic buildings, street trees, many restaurants, special paving, and street furniture along with unique shops all enhance the pedestrian scale and attractiveness of Downtown Pleasanton. Entries to the Downtown, consisting of bridge crossings and well-landscaped streets, are distinctive with the potential for even further strengthening. In addition, Downtown is the location of public buildings providing services and information to residents. These include the City Hall, Public Library, Veterans Building, and the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society Museum.~~

Historic Areas Resources

The Downtown contains most of Pleasanton's recognized historic resources. However, there are other **structures**, including the Alviso Adobe and Century House, which serve as reminders of Pleasanton's heritage of more than a century and a half. **Pleasanton has retained some of its early Spanish and Mexican roots not only in buildings such as the Alviso Adobe, but in other names. For example, the City named Bernal Avenue for its first Mexican settler – Augustin Bernal, while Pleasanton residents still refer to “creeks” as “arroyos” and students at Amador Valley High School as “Dons” – meaning “sirs” in Spanish. The City has recognized ~~Over 2080~~ individual buildings ~~have been recognized~~ as historically significant. Historic resources are discussed in more detail in the Cultural Resources section of the Conservation and Open Space Element.**

~~In addition to buildings, m~~Many heritage trees **also** assist in giving Pleasanton a unique character and image, ~~which is~~ often missing from other communities. **Walnut trees hark back to Pleasanton's agricultural past while sycamore, valley oak, black locust, elm, ash and other trees evoke Pleasanton's small-town heritage.**

Downtown

[moved here] Pleasanton's Downtown ~~is~~ **remains** a treasure that most older but growing communities have long since lost. It reflects the city's heritage and is a source of pride to its residents. Older commercial and residential buildings lend richness to the area, and new development has generally been designed to complement the older structures and reinforce the small-scale character. The historic buildings, street trees, many restaurants, special paving, and street furniture, along with unique shops, all enhance the pedestrian scale and attractiveness of Downtown Pleasanton. Entries **ways** to the Downtown, consisting of bridge crossings and well-landscaped streets, are

distinctive with the potential for even further strengthening. In addition, Downtown is the location of public buildings providing services and information to residents; these include City Hall, the [Public Library](#), the Veterans Memorial Building, and the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society Museum.

Residential Neighborhoods

Residential neighborhoods are the heart of Pleasanton. The neighborhoods perform a major role in what makes Pleasanton an attractive place to live, work, and play. Each neighborhood has a unique character, from the semi-rural Happy Valley, to the more conventional suburban homes in Pleasanton Valley, to the Victorian and bungalow architecture of residential streets around the downtown. In general, Pleasanton neighborhoods show a pride of ownership as reflected in improvements, such as home additions, and a high level of home maintenance. Neighborhoods consist not only of the residential buildings, but natural features (e.g. hills, creeks, and open space) and the physical arrangement of neighborhood amenities such as roads, schools, parks, playgrounds, and shopping areas. These again are generally attractive and well maintained, although, as noted below, some local neighborhoods built in the 1960s and 1970s would benefit from updating.

Often neighborhoods are identified by commonly known names related to the developer or tract name. Many recent developments have attractive, landscaped entryways with identifying signs. Signs and entrances also exist for some older tracts, although a few of these are showing their age (e.g., the entrance way to Pleasanton Valley off Hopyard Road). Figure II-1 and Table II-__ in the Land Use Element show the locations and names of over 70 residential neighborhoods in Pleasanton.

Residential Neighborhoods Built from 1960-1980

Neighborhoods developed in the 1960s and 1970s were typically designed with separated sidewalks and street trees on collector streets, and new infrastructure; however, delayed maintenance and upgrades in these subdivisions are changing the streetscape. Over time numerous street trees have died or been removed, large trees are substantially pruned to be lower in height or to accommodate overhead power lines, roadway patches exist where cuts have been made for cable and other services, and the street lights are weathered due to exposure to the elements. In some cases, property owners have delayed needed fencing, façade, and landscaping maintenance, which further diminishes the design character in these neighborhoods.

Commercial Areas

Unlike many cities that saw substantial development during the mid-20th century, Pleasanton has few commercial corridors. Main Street and First Street are the exceptions. However, unlike the “strip commercial” development in other cities where garish signs, franchise

architecture, and poorly landscaped parking lots dominate, development along these streets includes re-use of older, historic buildings, street trees, mixed-use buildings and neighborhoods, parking located at the rear of businesses, and pedestrian amenities. As of 2006, Pleasanton has upgraded First Street – which carries the bulk of the traffic through the Downtown area – with removal of overhead lines, installation of pedestrian-level streetlights, and reconstruction of the bridge over the Arroyo del Valle.

Most commercial development in Pleasanton lies within clearly defined neighborhood and community shopping centers, located at the intersection of major arterials, and conveniently serving the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Most are well maintained; however, some have not been updated over time to include more attractive signage, design treatments, paint colors, lighting, landscaping, outdoor seating, and pedestrian and bicycle connections. Commercial area design has a substantial impact on community character.

The Stoneridge Shopping Center attracts shoppers throughout the region. Opportunities exist at the shopping center to enhance its outdoor and pedestrian presence by providing more attractive outdoor seating areas, and creating well landscaped pedestrian and bicycle connections to nearby uses, including the future BART station.

[moved here from below] **In achieving its purpose of identification and information transfer,** private signage in commercial areas varies from extremely well-designed and effective to visually weak and ineffective ~~in achieving its purpose of identification and information transfer~~. Signs with good graphic design and high quality materials enhance commercial areas and streetscapes **and contribute to the building's appearance.**

Parks

The city is rich in parkland with the ~~Pleasanton~~ **Sports and Recreation Community Park, Val Vista Community Park,** Amador Valley Community Park, Augustin Bernal Park, Shadow Cliffs Recreation Area, Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park, school playgrounds, and many neighborhood parks. Some, such as Kottinger Community Park, provide distinctive linkages which enhance the feeling of community within their neighborhoods. Parks and City recreational programs facilitate by far the greatest amount of community activity in Pleasanton. **For a more in depth discussion of parks in Pleasanton, see the Parks and Recreation discussion in the Public Facilities Element.**

Design Districts

~~Pleasanton includes many clearly identified design districts such as the Downtown, Hacienda and Bernal Corporate business parks, Alameda County Fairgrounds, Foothill Road area, etc. These areas assist residents and visitors in visualizing the City's structure and layout and provide residents with a sense of identity with the neighborhoods of the City. The design compatibility of future structures within these districts will be important in order to preserve the distinctive character of each district.~~

[moved above] **Architectural Style and Character**

~~Downtown has the most distinctive architectural character within the community with its Victorian and “Mainstreet” buildings. The contemporary architecture and site planning of the newer business parks is also distinctive and expresses a strong image of progressive businesses with a concern for the working environment of their employees. Other buildings within the community vary in style and character but not abruptly since most of the growth has occurred within a recent compressed time frame.~~

~~The older residential areas of Pleasanton were designed according to the “traditional neighborhood” planning concept. This concept includes many of the planning principles that were popular during the early 1900’s. Street patterns are based upon a “grid system” whereby traffic is disbursed throughout the community instead of being funnelled into arterial and collector streets. Neighborhoods are open and accessible to one another instead of being closed by way of cul-de-sacs and limited through-streets. Front yards serve as areas for neighbors to gather, rather than for parking cars. Porches are used in the front of homes as outdoor family gathering areas, instead of as garage entries. Streets are generally narrower, traffic slower, and large canopy street trees are emphasized.~~

[moved below] **Landscape Character**

~~Pleasanton generally has a very green, well-landscaped appearance with extensive informal plantings on private lots contrasted with more formal public street landscaping. Many of the City’s streets have developed, or are in the process of developing, a significant canopy of trees which is reminiscent of neighborhoods in older, mature communities. Along the arroyos and at the edges of the City, the planted landscaping generally blends well with the natural vegetation. Pleasanton’s new business parks contribute significantly to the City’s landscape character through the special attention they have given to the appearance of streets and intersections within their boundaries. Hacienda Business Park has created strong identifying features with its arch structures, landscaping at intersections, and special street signage. Other features, such as the entry fountain and sculpture at the Bernal Corporate Park, add visual interest and an overall sense of quality to the City, as well as distinctiveness to the special City subareas in which they occur.~~

[split and moved] **Public and Private Signage**

~~The visual and informational quality of signage in Pleasanton varies widely. Public signage is generally background in character. Signage directing visitors to the Downtown lacks distinctive design and is somewhat ineffective because of the smallness of the lettering in the context of vehicular traffic speeds. Private signage varies from extremely well-designed and effective to visually weak and ineffective in achieving its purpose of identification and information transfer.~~

Other Activity Centers

The Downtown, ~~Stoneridge Shopping Center~~, Alameda County Fairgrounds, ~~parks~~, schools, churches, and other centers, including institutional facilities like the ValleyCare and Kaiser Medical Centers, all influence the character of Pleasanton and serve as reference points for orientation within the community. Significant events and festivals involving large numbers of residents and visitors occur in some of these areas, and these activities, perhaps more than any physical features, express the special character and spirit of Pleasanton. These include the Alameda County Fair Parade, the Farmers' Market, Friday Night Concerts in the Park, **First Wednesday Street Parties**, the Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony, and many other activities and celebrations.

Agriculture

Until the mid 1960s, agriculture predominated throughout Pleasanton with many dependent businesses, including the Garatti Winery¹ on Saint John Street – the largest business in Pleasanton in the 1950s² – and the Cheese Factory on Main Street. Residences commonly were adjacent to cattle-grazing areas, dairy farms, walnut orchards, and hop, tomato, or sugar beet fields. See also the discussion under Farmland in the Conservation and Open Space Element.

Although no longer the most important activity in Pleasanton, agriculture still contributes to the rural flavor around and within parts of the city. Some names indicate agriculture that once predominated in a particular area, such as the former hop fields along Hopyard Road, vineyards along Vineyard Avenue, and former walnut groves around Walnut Grove Elementary School. The Alameda County Fair started as a racetrack for a local horse farm and then expanded to exhibit local agricultural products. To this day, the County Fair showcases horse races and farm animals, along with various agricultural machines and products.

Most open land in the Southeast Hills and in the Pleasanton Ridglands – except for woodland areas – is used for grazing livestock. The Vineyard Avenue Corridor and Happy Valley (South Pleasanton) areas contain many ranchettes with livestock. Vineyards grow near Ruby Hill and along East Vineyard Avenue. All of these agricultural properties contribute to the open area surrounding Pleasanton.

[moved from above] City Entryways

City entryways affect the way visitors see the community and are the “welcome home” points for returning residents. Pleasanton’s entryways are generally well designed, but in some cases not distinctively different from other communities. **Some of the city-entry street landscaping areas are privately maintained, such as those in Hacienda Business Park.**

1 In 1960, the Scotto family bought the Garrati Winery, renamed it Villa Armando, and then increased the winery capacity. Grossman, Deborah, “Pleasanton welcomes a new winery,” Pleasanton Weekly Online Edition, August 30, 2002.

2 *The Pleasanton Times*, September 24, 1954, page 1.

I-580 Freeway Entryways

I-580 ~~entries~~ **yways** to the community are typical of most freeway interchange entries, ~~and~~ generally have minimal visual distinction or uniqueness at the freeway exit itself, **and advertising signage and bright franchise colors dominate some areas.** The Hacienda Drive area is ~~the~~ **an** exception, ~~by virtue of~~ **with** views of the large Hacienda Business Park entry arch. As Hopyard and Santa Rita Roads continue toward the Downtown, they ~~have~~ **contain** elements of strong visual interest including street and median trees. There are, however, **some** areas where ~~occasionally,~~ weak landscaping and exposed soundwalls detract from the overall image.

I-680 Freeway Entryways

Interstate 680 (I-680) entries ~~yways~~ are more unique **then I-580 entryways** for their relative softness of appearance and landscape quality. Bernal Avenue is a strong visual entry created by its large trees, swale median, and curbless edges, all reminiscent of the area's earlier rural character. Likewise, the Sunol Boulevard entry with its informal landscaping and relative absence of development close to the road has a soft, semi-rural feel. The Stoneridge Drive entry is not as distinctive in character **as those at Bernal Avenue and Sunol Boulevard**, but is nicely landscaped and includes a bridge structure over the Alamo Canal.

Foothill Road Entryways

The Foothill Road entryway from the south appears bucolic. From the northern entryway rural vistas are located to the west and office development is located to the east, which is generally well screened with landscaping. Landscaping, visual enhancement, and maintenance opportunities exist by the I-580 off ramp onto Foothill Road in non-landscaped areas where litter from the freeway blows, and subdivision sales signs proliferate.

Stanley Boulevard Entryway

Stanley Boulevard, because of the major quarry land acreage **between Pleasanton and Livermore** ~~to the east~~, provides a clear sense of entry to the city. Large trees along Stanley Boulevard, the creek bridge, landscaping, and ~~the~~ narrowing of the road width all contribute to a pronounced entry to Downtown Pleasanton. **The urban separation between Pleasanton and Livermore contributes to this sense of entry.**

Vineyard Avenue Entryway

~~East~~ Vineyard Avenue passes through a semi-rural area bordered by hills and open space. Like South Pleasanton, it seems far removed from the more developed portions of the city. **In 1999 the City adopted the *Vineyard Avenue Corridor Specific Plan*. The Specific Plan land-use concept features a mix of single-family homes, vineyards, open space, community park, elementary school, possible "wine country" related commercial uses, and possible limited aggregate mining activities. Along the Arroyo del Valle, Vineyard Avenue has been realigned to the**

~~north. Some small vineyards and the vineyards at Ruby Hill establish the basis for potential future character enhancement.~~

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS AND MAINTENANCE

~~Major elements of the City's infrastructure also affect the character of the community. These include the railroad corridors, arroyos and canals, and streets.~~

[moved] Public improvements and maintenance also affect the character of the community. Public improvement and maintenance areas include the arroyos and canals, bridge crossings, bus shelters, landscaping, ~~pedestrian pathways,~~ public signage, soundwalls, ~~and~~ berms, and utilities **(along with streets and pedestrian pathways that are discussed in the Circulation Element).**

Arroyos and Canals

The City provides maintenance along arroyo and canal trail areas while Zone 7 provides most of the maintenance for the waterways. Opportunities for enhancement of the arroyos abound: many of the pathways are not paved, do not have drinking fountains, benches, or restrooms, have little-to-no landscaping, and are not well signed. See the Recreation and Open Space section of the Conservation and Open Space Element for more information about open-space trails.

Bridge Crossings

[moved from above] Bridge crossings of the waterways are significant visual elements. Although **the Hacienda Business Park has**~~they have been~~ landscaped and enhanced **bridges** with special fencing ~~within the Hacienda Business Park,~~ some other **developments and bridge crossings** have ~~been~~ treated in a more utilitarian manner with solid railings and chain-link fencing. Some exceptions ~~are~~ **include** the old Arroyo de la Laguna bridge at Bernal Avenue, and the Verona Road Bridge, ~~which is~~ now limited to pedestrian use only. **Some of the street bridges in Hacienda Business Park have been enhanced with landscaping. Opportunities exist to enhance other existing bridges with landscaping, color, decorative railings, and/or lighting.**

Bus Shelters

Bus shelter design can impact the character of a street. The City, Hacienda Business Park, and Wheels, own and maintain bus shelters in Pleasanton. The majority of bus shelters in the city, while functional in providing shelter, seating, lighting, and views of oncoming buses, appear utilitarian with often weathered plastic siding. Thus the existing shelters do not contribute to unique design character when located near neighborhoods, parks, and the Downtown.

[moved from above] **Landscape Charactering**

Pleasanton generally has a very green, **well-landscaped appearance** with extensive informal plantings on private lots contrasted with more formal public street landscaping. Many of the City's streets have developed, or are in the process of developing, a significant canopy of trees which is reminiscent of neighborhoods in older, mature communities. **Well designed and maintained landscaping can greatly enhance the appearance of a streetscape. The City maintains over 15,000 trees near streets and private home and business owners maintain over 60,000 trees.** Pleasanton's ~~new~~ business parks contribute significantly to the city's landscape character through the special attention ~~they have~~ given to the appearance of streets and intersections within their boundaries. **In some areas of the city, such as near the intersection of West Las Positas Boulevard and Foothill Road, landscaping is sparse where future road widening and interchange improvements are, or were, anticipated.** ~~Hacienda Business Park has created strong identifying features with its arch structures, landscaping at intersections, and special street signage. Other features, such as the entry fountain and sculpture at the Bernal Corporate Park, add visual interest and an overall sense of quality to the City, as well as distinctiveness to the special City subareas in which they occur.~~

Native landscaping has been planted in several areas, especially along Foothill Road. New native landscaping often complements the existing hillside landscaping and reminds people of northern California's past. When allowed to grow naturally, native landscaping is attractive and sustainable. Native landscaping needs little to no watering within a few years of planting, if the planted area is large enough to adequately accommodate its growth.

Throughout the city there are several areas containing landscaped parkway strips between the sidewalk and street curb. These enhance the small-town character of the city and improve a pedestrian's sense of safety due to the physical separation between the sidewalk and street. Typically these strips measure five feet or less in width, whereas a width of six to ten feet is needed for trees to meet their growth potential and/or survive in the long term.

There are locations in the city where landscaped parkway strips could be added along street edges to soften their appearance and improve the pedestrian experience.

[moved from above] **Public and Private Signage**

The visual and informational quality of signage in Pleasanton varies widely. **There is a proliferation of new traffic signs. Penal codes often require multiple traffic signs to be installed, if the posted information is to be enforced.** ~~Public signage is generally background in character. Signage directing visitors to the Downtown lacks distinctive design and is somewhat ineffective because of the smallness of the lettering in the context of vehicular traffic speeds. Private signage varies from extremely well-designed and effective to visually weak and ineffective in achieving its purpose of identification and information transfer.~~

Soundwalls and Berms

Soundwalls along major arterial streets, such as those along Stoneridge Drive west of Hopyard Road, were installed in the 1970s and 1980s. These walls create a bland, monotonous appearance. In areas, the appearance of soundwalls has been softened by growing vines. In some areas, such as in the Country Fair and Del Prado neighborhoods, the maintenance of soundwalls has been delayed, further compromising their appearance.

Landscape berms provide sound attenuation and are attractive alternatives to soundwalls. Other design solutions include frontage roads with homes facing thoroughfares (such as portions of Hopyard and Foothill roads) and lush landscaping such as along portions of Valley Avenue. However this requires significant maintenance. A new landscaped berm was installed west of the freeway near the Pheasant Ridge neighborhood.

Utilities

The City and other utility providers own and maintain the above-ground utilities and utility boxes which are present on many streets in the city. These utilities include traffic control devices, irrigation controls, and backflow prevention devices. If not well designed, located, and screened, these utilities can negatively impact the character of city streets.

~~IMPLEMENTING CHARACTER~~EXISTING PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION

~~Family Orientation~~Community Programs and Activities

~~Family values are very important to the community. The nurturing of children and support for seniors provided by the family structure of all individuals, young and old,~~ has played a major part in making Pleasanton the community it is today. **Supporting community members is considered vital to maintaining a thriving, sustainable community in years to come. The programs and activities mentioned below can assist in generating a healthy, well-cared-for, and integrated community.**

Community Activities

Pleasanton provides numerous opportunities for families and individual community members through activities and special events which appeal to all age groups and bring members of the community into contact with one another. **Pleasanton uses a broad definition of family that encompasses a variety of family arrangements and lifestyles.** Centers for community activities include parks, religious facilities, restaurants, the Alameda County Fairgrounds, schools, etc. ~~The preservation and support of family values is considered vital to maintaining a thriving community in years to come. See also Human Services in the Pubic Facilities and Community Programs Element.~~

In Pleasanton, special events, while important for generating community interaction, are weighed against their potential impacts on the business community, such as disruptions to regular operations during street closures.

Community of Character Program

Pleasanton is a community of character. The City of Pleasanton, the Pleasanton Unified School District, and the Pleasanton Chamber of Commerce actively participate in a program which encourages people to embody the following six traits: responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, honesty, respect, and integrity. These character traits are considered essential to a healthy, positive community and lifestyle.

Implementing Community Character

The City often adopts specific plans (which are discussed in the Land Use Element), guidelines, and ordinances to support its goals, including its community character goals. The program, guideline, and ordinance examples described below, while all substantially different, will affect Pleasanton's character. This General Plan will likely see the development of similar plans and ordinances.

Bernal Property Specific Plan

The City adopted the Bernal Property Specific Plan in August of 2000. The Plan covers a 516-acre site, generally south and southwest of the Alameda County Fairgrounds. The plan provides for the orderly development of housing, commercial, office, and approximately 300 acres of public park land development.

Downtown Guidelines

After adopting an updated *Downtown Specific Plan* in 2002, the City adopted the *Downtown Design Guidelines* in 2003. The Guidelines provide a tool to help ensure high quality construction projects in the Downtown that complement the existing built environment. The Guidelines address the design of new buildings, the remodeling and expansion of existing buildings, the siting of new structures and parking areas, desired types of business signage, and the various details and public improvements that contribute to the appearance of the area.

The uniqueness of Downtown Pleasanton and its role as a major focus of the community should be preserved and enhanced through public actions and coordination of private sector improvements. Preparation of a specific plan for the older residential neighborhoods outlying the Downtown is addressed in the Land Use Element. Entry improvements including special lighting, landscaping, and signage should be used to more clearly identify the major roadway entries to the Downtown and reinforce its heritage and appearance. Alternatives for a Downtown activity focal point such as a "town square park" or other public open space area should be studied to serve as a location for community events and/or special activities, as discussed in the Land Use Element. Careful attention would, however, have to be given to not disrupting the retail continuity along Main Street. Preparation of a historic preservation ordinance as provided in the Conservation and Open Space Element should be adopted to address the preservation of structures possessing special historic quality on a site-by-site

~~basis. In addition, owners of buildings in and around the Downtown which have special architectural potential, but which may not be listed as structures of historic landmark significance, should be encouraged to retain such buildings wherever possible. Restoration of ornamentations and details removed during previous remodellings should also be encouraged.~~

~~Special sidewalks, lighting, signage, and street furniture should be encouraged to extend the Downtown's pedestrian village character beyond Main Street into adjacent commercial and residential areas to strengthen and broaden the feeling of this unique district.~~

Green Building Ordinance

Pleasanton is pioneering the implementation of an ordinance requiring Green Building techniques to be used in commercial, civic, and residential developments. Green Building is the concept of creating structures and site designs using construction, siting, design, and operation techniques and renewable and environmentally friendlier materials that limit the negative effects upon the surrounding natural environment and promote the health of building users. By encouraging buildings complementary to the environment, the City is increasing the awareness and importance of its natural setting. Green Building and preservation of the environment are integral parts to the enhancement of Pleasanton's community character. Structures such as Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Station Number 4 and the Applied Biosystems offices have led the way for Green Building in Pleasanton. Green Building is indicative of Pleasanton's efforts to plan for sustainability so that many generations can enjoy a high quality of life. See the Green Building section of the Energy Element and the Sustainable Development and Planning section of the Air Quality Element for further discussion of Green Building.

Public Art Plans, Programs, and Procedures

The City is currently developing a Downtown Public Art Master Plan. The Plan will identify opportunities for temporary and permanent public art, preferred themes, and preferred media. The City also has a memorial public arts program in which monetary contributions for public art are accepted in memory of others. In addition, the current procedure of encouraging developers to install public art is achieving success. Several office and commercial developments, such as Bernal Corporate Park and the new development at 5050 Hopyard Road, include distinctive public art.

There are opportunities for public art throughout the city, including entryway art, such as at the BART stations, and especially in/near public rights-of-way. See also Community Facilities and Cultural Arts section in the Public Facilities and Community Programs Element.

City Entries Enhancement

Street entries to the City should reinforce Pleasanton's unique character, exemplify residents' pride, and welcome visitors. Quality signage and landscaping should be considered at all major entries from freeways and surrounding communities.

Arroyo del Valle Enhancement

The Arroyo del Valle is a natural waterway which runs through Pleasanton and touches the northern edge of the Downtown. Some pedestrian access is currently available along the Arroyo, and considerably more is planned by the Community Trails Master Plan. Additional study should be given to the Arroyo and improvements considered as part of a comprehensive plan to enhance resident awareness of this unique asset and to integrate it more fully into the urban design fabric of the City.

Bridge crossing improvements to open up views of the Arroyo along with special lighting, improved signage, and appropriate landscaping at the Bernal Avenue, First Street, Santa Rita Road, Division Street, and Valley Avenue crossings should be considered. This could enhance the entries to the Downtown and increase awareness of the Arroyo's existence and visual richness.

Wildlife habitats along the Arroyo should be identified to ensure that plans for increased visibility and access are consistent with the preservation of these areas. Special efforts should be made to ensure that future flood control activities maintain the natural character of this waterway.

~~Improved pedestrian walkways along the Arroyo should be developed to provide a safe and convenient pathway through the City, separated from vehicular traffic. Greater awareness of access points to the Arroyo should be provided through special signage and visual connections between the street level and the Arroyo.~~

~~Downtown uses, such as restaurants, should be encouraged to orient activity areas and outdoor decks to the Arroyo. Other uses should also integrate the Arroyo into their design through view windows looking out over it or by other means.~~

Improved Public Signage

~~Improved street identification and directional signage should be considered along major arterials within the City to enhance the special visual character of the community and to assist residents and visitors in easily finding important destinations. Signs to the Downtown, Fairgrounds, Sports Park, historic structures, and other public places should be distinctively designed to reflect the unique character of Pleasanton.~~

Street Landscaping Enhancements

~~Major arterial streets leading to the Downtown, specifically Sunol Boulevard, Bernal Avenue, Hopyard Road, Santa Rita Road, and Stanley Boulevard, should be considered for enhanced landscaping. Portions of these streets are currently well-landscaped, however, improvements to other sections~~

~~adjacent to the Downtown have generally been deferred. Additional street tree and median plantings should be supplemented with landscaping to soften the appearance of existing soundwalls where landscaping does not currently exist.~~

~~Design Standards~~

~~In the coming years, the design of new development will remain very important. As more infill development takes place and construction occurs at the edges of the City or in close proximity to the hills and open space, careful design attention will be necessary to protect the community character.~~

~~Design standards would be useful for the Vineyard Avenue Corridor Area. Special attention should be given to maintaining a semi-rural character along Vineyard Avenue. Care should be taken to ensure sensitive design on hillsides. Architecture and landscape design should be reflective of the outlying Livermore Valley wine country. Design standards should also be adopted for the Happy Valley Area. Emphasis here should be placed on preserving the semi-rural character in terms of rural road design, architecture, fence design, etc.~~

~~Design standards would assist in the development of hilly areas. The sensitive placement of homes, grading of building sites, architecture, and landscaping will continue to be very important considerations. General standards for development on hillsides, regardless of location, should be considered as complementary to standards for specific areas such as the Vineyard Avenue Corridor Area.~~

~~New commercial development and the renovation of existing commercial properties has the potential for substantially influencing community character in both positive and negative ways. Current review and approval of project designs relies heavily upon precedent, and changes to development and signage proposals are more difficult to achieve after property owners have invested considerable time and money into professional fees and processing. Commercial design standards would be helpful to give better up-front direction to developers and property owners relative to community expectations. Special consideration should also be given to sign design standards to control and enhance the community's image, particularly along the freeways.~~

~~Finally, residential design standards would also benefit the City. Increasingly, residential development is becoming more automobile oriented and less neighborhood. Residential design standards should be considered to address the differing conditions within the City. Traditional neighborhood planning should be encouraged in areas where such principles will not conflict with surrounding development patterns or the physical conditions of the site.~~

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ELEMENTS

Land Use

The Land Use Element provides guiding principles for the type, location, size and density of land uses throughout the City of Pleasanton. The design and layout of land use in Pleasanton

affect community character in a fundamental way. Thus land use goals and objectives relate to the Community Character Element.

Circulation

The Circulation Element strives to improve traffic and circulation systems – including pedestrian pathways – throughout Pleasanton. Circulation objectives that slow down traffic in residential neighborhoods, improve pedestrian walkways and open space trails would comply with the Community Character Element.

Public Facilities and Community Programs

The Public facilities and Community Programs Element strives to improve Pleasanton's infrastructure and public programs, including water, wastewater, garbage, education, libraries, parks and recreation, community facilities and cultural arts, and human services. Public Facilities and Community Program objectives that improve the City's infrastructure and community programs, including art, would also pertain to the Community Character Element.

Conservation and Open Space

The Conservation and Open Space Element identifies existing and planned open space and recreational uses, as well as historic resources, throughout the City of Pleasanton. Conservation and Open Space objectives that would improve and/or make the outdoor environment more accessible would pertain to the Community Character Element. The Conservation and Open Space Element encourages an open space buffer surrounding Pleasanton and also encourages preservation of historic buildings and areas, both of which would comply with the Community Character Element.

Energy

The Energy Element guides Pleasanton toward a sustainable energy future. Green Building techniques from the Energy Element would also pertain to the Community Character Element.

Air quality

The Air Quality Element strives to improve air quality in Pleasanton. Cleaner air would affect Pleasanton's character in a positive way and thus pertains to the Community Character Element.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

The following goals, policies, and programs, in addition to those contained in other Elements, constitute an action program to implement the objectives described in this Element.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Goal 1: Preserve and enhance Pleasanton's community character.

Downtown Pleasanton

Goal 12: ~~To~~ Preserve and enhance Downtown Pleasanton as a major focus of the community.

Policy 1: Encourage the retention, **reuse**, and enhancement of older buildings of historical importance and architectural heritage.

~~[moved to Conservation and Open Space Element] Program 1.1. Consider expanding the City's low interest Downtown commercial rehabilitation loan program.~~

Implement programs from the Conservation and Open Space Element related to historic preservation.

Policy 2: Improve the visual appearance of the Downtown.

Program 2.1: Improve the major gateways into the Downtown to create a sense of arrival and to enhance the aesthetics along these roadways, as described in the *Downtown Specific Plan*.

Program 2.2: Implement the design and beautification goals, policies, and objectives of the *Downtown Specific Plan*.

~~Program 2.1: Adopt a plan to improve the visual appearance of major street entries to the Downtown with special landscaping, lighting, and signage.~~

~~Program 2.2: Adopt a Downtown street tree planting and maintenance program.~~

Program 2.3: Concentrate **immediate** Building Code enforcement efforts on the old residential areas of the Downtown.

Program 2.4: Use the *Downtown Design Guidelines* to evaluate the design of new development proposals.

Policy 3: Maintain the scale and character of the Downtown.

Program 3.1: Require the height, mass, setbacks, and architectural style of new buildings to **reflect the unique character and pedestrian scale of the Downtown, as exemplified in the *Downtown Design Guidelines*.** ~~be reflective of the current Downtown scale and character~~

Policy 4: Enhance the Downtown as a focus of community activity.

Program 4.1: Provide opportunities for people to gather as a community and enjoy the unique environment of the Downtown while limiting the impacts of street closures on local commerce.

~~Program 4.1: Study ways in which to encourage additional parades, ceremonies, outdoor markets, and other community activities.~~

Arroyos and Canals

Goal 23: ~~To~~ Enhance the appearance and usability of the arroyos **and canals.** ~~del Valle~~

Policy 5: Encourage commercial development with frontages on arroyos **and canals** to orient outside activity areas, decks, and views to the arroyos and canals.

Program 5.1: When property owners apply for site changes, provide suggestions for additional integration of uses with the arroyos and canals.

~~Program 5.1: Conduct an inventory of sites which possess the potential for orienting to the Arroyo, and provide suggestions to property owners for additional integration of uses with the Arroyo.~~

~~Policy 6: Provide continuous trail access along the Arroyo del Valle.~~

~~Program 6.1: In conjunction with trails proposed on Figure III-9 of the Circulation Element, prepare an inventory of wildlife habitats and other conditions along the Arroyo, and develop a plan for increased pedestrian access which is sensitive to wildlife habitats and the privacy of adjacent residents.~~

Policy ~~67~~: **Enhance the visual appearance of the arroyos.** ~~Encourage the visual enhancement of the Arroyo as it passes through the City.~~

Program 7.1: Improve the appearance of bridges over the arroyos with new railings, landscaping, lighting, signage, and other design techniques.

~~Program 7.2: Study the potential of greater access to and use of the Arroyo near Main Street.~~

Program 7.2: **Work with Zone 7 to P**romote strategies for improving the cleanliness of the arroyos.

Program 7.3: Work with Zone 7 to improve landscaping along the arroyos and canals, to minimize fencing where appropriate, and to provide aesthetically pleasing arroyo and canal fence designs when fencing is necessary.

City Entryways and Edges

Goal 34: ~~To~~ Enhance the appearance of major city entryways.

Policy ~~89~~: Improve the visual quality of ~~entries~~**ways** to Pleasanton.

Program 9.1: **As part of the design review process, encourage the installation of ~~Adopt a plan to install~~ distinctive landscaping, and discourage advertising signage and bright franchise colors and possibly signing at major street **entryways** to the City.**

Program 9.2: ~~Land use planning in areas adjacent to City entryways~~**The City** should be particularly sensitive to aesthetic considerations **when land-use planning in areas adjacent to City entryways**.

~~Policy 10: Soften the visual appearance of existing soundwalls, where feasible, and require the treatment of future soundwalls with landscaping and design features:~~

~~Program 10.1: Inventory existing soundwall conditions within the City and prepare a plan for additional landscaping and/or other beautification improvements:~~

~~Program 10.2: Prepare design standards for future decorative soundwall construction and landscaping:~~

Policy 10: Continue to maintain a visual separation between Pleasanton and Livermore along Stanley Boulevard.

Program 10.1: As part of the East Pleasanton Specific Plan, require architectural and/or site design treatments, such as larger setbacks, and dense landscaping, to maintain the visual separation between the eastern edge of Pleasanton and western edge of Livermore.

Program 10.2: Continue to support the Chain-of-Lakes concept as a buffer between the two cities.

~~Streetscapes and Freeways~~

Goal 45: Enhance streetscapes and areas near the freeways.

Policy ~~911~~: ~~Provide significant~~**Enhance** landscaping **along city streets and the freeways**. ~~along all arterial streets leading from City entries to the Downtown.~~

[moved] Program 119.1: Complete and infill the street tree and median landscaping along major streets leading to the Downtown, when feasible.

Program 11.2: When the opportunity arises and when feasible, add landscaped parkway strips along street edges to soften their appearance and improve the pedestrian experience.

Program 11.3: Increase the width of existing narrow parkway strips when the opportunity arises, and encourage applicants of new developments to provide parkway strips which are at least 6-10 feet wide.

Program 11.4: Install landscaped instead of paved medians and replace paved medians with landscaped medians wider than 6 feet, whenever possible and feasible.

Program 11.5: In new developments, require developers, owners associations, or maintenance associations to maintain landscaped medians.

Program 11.6: Provide landscaping to soften the visual appearance of existing and new walls and fences that abut city streets, whenever possible and feasible.

Program 11.7: Require additional setbacks and screening of development adjacent to a freeway.

Program 11.8: Work with Caltrans to enhance landscaping along the freeways.

Program 11.9: Along streets, work with developers and property owners to place a greater emphasis on the use of native plant species and on pruning techniques which allow species to appear more as they would in a natural setting, especially in larger planting areas.

Policy 12: Repair existing City-owned soundwalls and fences facing city streets, when in disrepair, and discourage the installation of new soundwalls facing city streets and freeways.

Program 12.1: Encourage the construction of landscaped berms, similar types of significantly landscaped sound barriers, larger setbacks, frontage roads, and/or other design techniques, instead of soundwalls.

Program 12.2: In new developments, require the project developer, owners association, maintenance association, or similar association to maintain sound barriers.

Program 12.3: Maintain City-owned walls facing streets and enforce the maintenance of those that are privately owned.

Policy 13: Improve the appearance of existing bridges.

Program 13.1: Inventory existing bridge conditions and prepare a plan for improving their appearance with landscaping, color, decorative railings, lighting, and/or other design techniques.

Policy 14~~2~~: Improve street identification and traffic signage along ~~major entry streets to the~~ City streets.

~~Program 14.1: Conduct an inventory of existing conditions and prepare a plan for new street and directional signage along major streets leading to the Downtown.~~

Program 14.1: Minimize the number and size of traffic signs, to the extent allowed by law.

Policy 15: Enhance bus shelter design in the city.

Program 15.1: Work with Wheels to help ensure that new and remodeled bus shelters in and near residential neighborhoods, parks, and the Downtown are architecturally designed to reflect a small-town character, allow for visibility of oncoming buses, offer safety and protection from the elements and adequate lighting, and provide maps and transit information.

Program 15.2: Work to enhance the appearance of magazine and newspaper dispensers near bus stops.

Program 15.3: Encourage the regular maintenance and restoration of bus stop facilities.

Policy 16: Improve the appearance of utility boxes.

Program 16.1: Whenever feasible, place all utility boxes underground. If not feasible, locate utility boxes so they are in the least visible location possible, when viewed from public areas and public rights-of-way.

Program 16.2: Have the City and utility companies paint all existing and new utility boxes to blend in with their environment, and screen all existing and new utility boxes with landscaping, when possible and feasible.

Commercial Areas and Residential Neighborhoods

Goal 56: ~~To~~ Preserve and enhance the city's ~~distinctive neighborhoods and activity centers~~ commercial areas and residential neighborhoods.

Policy 13~~7~~: ~~Enhance the quality of~~ **Encourage** new commercial ~~office, and industrial~~ **area** development and **redevelopment, including stand alone retail buildings, restaurants, and hotels, to incorporate attractive architectural and site-design features** ~~industrial development and encourage the upgrading of older commercial centers~~

~~Program 13.1: Prepare city-wide commercial, office, and industrial design standards to include site planning, architectural design, signage, and outdoor lighting.~~

Program 17.13.2: Develop design standards for freeway frontage signs.

Program 17.2: Consider creating incentives, such as low interest loans, to encourage the redevelopment of commercial areas.

Program 17.3: Encourage developers to include the following features in the development of new and the redevelopment of existing commercial areas:

- **Pedestrian amenities such as landscaping, benches, trellises, fountains, public art, and attractive lighting**
- **Pedestrian walkways and bikeway connections that create safe paths of travel through the shopping center and parking, and to transit, nearby sidewalks, and surrounding residential neighborhoods.**
- **Attractive sign design and higher quality sign materials**
- **Outdoor seating**
- **Decorative paving at driveway entrances and pedestrian areas**
- **Attractive colors, minimizing bright franchise colors**
- **Higher quality façade materials**
- **Orientation of buildings to transit facilities, where applicable**
- **Orientation of the businesses to adjacent creeks, where applicable**
- **Shared parking**
- **Attractive and convenient bicycle parking**

Program 17.34: Institute an Annual Design Awards Program to recognize new and remodeled projects of special quality.

Policy 184: Discourage franchise and prototype architecture and signage.

Program 184.1: Develop a procedure to work with development applicants to modify formula design to more closely relate to and reinforce the special character of Pleasanton.

Program 18.2: Encourage the use of higher-quality graphic signage design and materials.

Program 18.3: Update the City's sign ordinance and sign programs.

Policy 159: Maintain **and enhance** the quality, character, and distinctiveness of ~~existing~~ **residential** neighborhoods.

~~Program 15.1: Prepare city-wide residential design standards to strengthen the scale and character of neighborhoods.~~

~~Program 15.2: Prepare a plan to preserve and enhance the distinctiveness of special neighborhoods and districts within the City.~~

~~Program 15.3: Encourage the use of traditional residential neighborhood planning in areas where such principles will not conflict with surrounding development patterns or the physical conditions of the site.~~

Program 19.1: In existing and new residential areas, where such principles will not conflict with surrounding development patterns or the physical conditions of the site, encourage the use of traditional residential neighborhood planning which incorporates the following design features:

- Usable front porches
- 6- to 10-foot-wide parkway strips
- Large canopy street trees
- Home fronts facing the street, instead of walls abutting streets
- Minimal garage presence
- Narrower streets
- Pathways to parks, schools, and other neighborhoods
- Neighborhoods open and accessible to one another

Program 19.2: In high-density developments, encourage design treatments that enhance the attractiveness of the streetscape and other publicly accessible areas through architectural detail, neighborhood and public gathering areas, gardens, and public art.

Program 19.3: Work with PG&E to underground power lines in existing residential neighborhoods, when the opportunity arises.

Program 19.4: In older neighborhoods, schedule the maintenance and replacement of public improvements, such as pavement and streetlights, commensurate in quality and appearance to those in more recently constructed neighborhoods.

Program 19.5: Consider a City-sponsored street tree replacement program in neighborhoods where street trees have died, been removed, or substantially damaged.

Program 19.6: Sponsor an Annual Yard and Vacant Lot Clean-Up Day.

Program 19.7: Establish an annual awards program to recognize individual and neighborhood efforts in improving home and yard appearance.

Program 19.8: Adopt a city street tree ordinance to protect existing and future street trees that are maintained by property owners, and establish planting, care, and pruning standards.

Open Space

Goal 76: ~~To~~ Preserve the open space character at the edges of the city.

Policy 1620: Require ~~that~~ **the** design of new residential development in hillside areas ~~to~~ complement the natural appearance of the open space.

~~Program 16~~ **20.1:** Adopt hillside design standards.

Vineyard Corridor

~~Goal 6:~~ ~~To enhance the special visual quality of the Vineyard Avenue Corridor Area.~~

~~Policy 17:~~ ~~Preserve the natural appearance of hillsides, promote a wine country architectural and landscape design character, and enhance the natural riparian appearance along the Arroyo del Valle.~~

~~Program 17.1:~~ ~~Adopt design standards for the Vineyard Avenue Corridor Area.~~

South Pleasanton

~~Goal 7:~~ ~~To preserve and enhance the semi-rural character of South Pleasanton.~~

~~Policy 18:~~ ~~Preserve the semi-rural character of the Happy Valley area.~~

~~Program 18.1:~~ ~~Adopt design standards for public and private development in the Happy Valley area.~~

Policy 21: Preserve scenic hillside and ridge views, and other natural features on the Pleasanton Ridge and southern hills.

Program 21.1: Continue to support the Pleasanton Ridgeland Initiative of 1993 (Measure F).

Program 21.2: In new developments, preserve scenic hillsides and other hillside features including ridges, plants, streams, and wildlife.

Program 21.3: Discourage major grading on slopes of 25 percent or greater.

Housing Maintenance

~~Goal 8:~~ ~~To reinforce a city-wide image of attractiveness and well-maintained housing.~~

~~Policy 19:~~ ~~Encourage residential property improvements and the maintenance of attractive residential street frontage yards.~~

~~Program 19.1:~~ ~~Sponsor an Annual Yard and Vacant Lot Clean-Up Day.~~

~~Program 19.2: Actively implement the City's low-interest residential rehabilitation loan program.~~

~~Program 19.3: Establish an annual awards program to recognize individual and neighborhood efforts in improving home and yard appearance.~~

Public Art

Goal 8: Encourage the installation of art to enhance Pleasanton's character.

Policy 22: Pursue the installation of public art.

Program 22.1: Adopt a Downtown Arts Master Plan to enhance the Downtown character and to encourage the public to visit the Downtown.

Program 22.2: Institute an Arts Master Plan for the entire city which identifies where opportunities for temporary and permanent public art exist, preferred themes, and preferred media.

Policy 23: Encourage the installation of public art in residential and commercial developments.

Program 23.1: In new developments, encourage project applicants to work with the City's Planning Department and Civic Arts Commission on the installation of art visible from public rights-of-way.

Community Activities

Goal 9: ~~To~~ Preserve and support community and family activities.

Policy 24~~0~~: Promote facilities and activities ~~which~~that accommodate community and family use and accommodate persons of all physical abilities.

Program 24~~0~~.1: Provide opportunities for people to gather as a community while limiting the impacts of street closures on local commerce. ~~Study and implement measures to encourage additional parades, ceremonies, outdoor markets, and other community activities~~

Program 24.2: Encourage commercial, recreational, social, and cultural events and uses which are enriching to family and community life.

Program 24.3: Celebrate the agricultural heritage of Pleasanton through community events.

Policy 25: Reinforce Pleasanton as a community of character.

Program 25.1: Promote the following six personal traits: responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, honesty, respect, and integrity.

THE PLEASANTON GENERAL PLAN

X. COMMUNITY CHARACTER ELEMENT

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X. COMMUNITY CHARACTER ELEMENT

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Community Character Element is to identify the physical and social aspects of Pleasanton's unique identity and to establish goals, policies, and programs to preserve and enhance those aspects which make the city special and distinct.

OVERVIEW

Pleasanton's community character is the physical reflection of its location, setting, history, and numerous design decisions made over time. It is an expression of community values as well as constraints as perceived at the time of each of those decisions. Some aspects of community character are the result of one-time actions while others have been adopted and repeated as traditions. Major contributors to Pleasanton's community character are discussed below.

Pleasanton is situated in a tree-covered valley defined by surrounding hills. The generally undeveloped hillside and ridgeline areas which enclose Pleasanton create a scenic visual backdrop and provide a physical and visual separation from adjacent communities. This gives Pleasanton a strong sense of individuality. Surrounding hillside and open space areas, along with trees and other landscaping which have been planted over the city's history, also give Pleasanton a strong visual connection to the natural environment.

Pleasanton's physical evolution between 1850 and 1970 resulted in a small-town feeling with an outlying rural atmosphere. This is evidenced by the city's historic Downtown, older residential neighborhoods, Alameda County Fairgrounds, the keeping of farm animals in the Happy Valley farming area, among other aspects described below. Many residents cherish and desire to preserve and enhance this character. High quality business park development which occurred during the 1980s and 1990s and suburban neighborhood development from the 1960s to the present also create design elements which the City would like to perpetuate in harmony with the rest of the community.

The design of future developments and the retention of a sense of open space and community separation will require careful attention to planning, landscaping, and building setbacks. During this General Plan period, the City will likely see the development of land transitioning from dry-land agriculture to urban uses on the Staples Ranch property and the development of several hundred acres of land now transitioning from quarry uses east of Pleasanton. In addition, the development of numerous vacant infill parcels, building additions, renovations, and public improvements are expected within the next 20 years.

Edge Environment

The Foothill Road area, including the Main and Pleasanton Ridges to the west, creates the western edge of the city. Although changing through increased housing development and street improvements, this

area still appears semi-rural in character and closely connected to open space. Many sections of Foothill Road are narrow and follow natural contours. Hills and riparian corridor trees approach the roadway in many locations. The road is generally elevated in height above the rest of the city and provides at several locations a broad overview of the green valley below. Along Foothill Road, homes of varying size and style sit back substantially from the road and contribute to the impression of lower density development integrated with the adjacent natural environment.

The southern edge of the city retains a strong rural flavor, with narrow roads, white open-rail fences, farm structures and animals, considerable open space, and many views of undeveloped hills. Historical names such as “Happy Valley” and “Chicken Alley” assist in identifying the area’s uniqueness and past land uses. The Southern Hills area provides a major visual backdrop for South Pleasanton as well as for the entire city.

In Pleasanton’s largely undeveloped eastern edge, quarry lands and the towering equipment at the sand-and-gravel operations dominate. These quarry lands, along with the Livermore Golf Course and Livermore Municipal Airport, currently provide a major separation between Pleasanton and the adjacent City of Livermore. The Interstate 580 (I-580) freeway defines Pleasanton’s northern edge, as described in more detail in the City Entryways section below.

Streetscapes and Patterns

The general street patterns of the city vary widely from the traditional grid of the Downtown to more typically suburban subdivision cul-de-sac patterns in newer housing developments. A much larger-scale road pattern exists within the business parks. The Bernal Avenue / Valley Avenue loop loosely defines the older inner core of the city, centered on the Downtown. The city’s main arterial streets all lead to the Downtown, reinforcing that area as a major community focus.

Pedestrian pathways connect neighborhoods to parks, such as those in the Pleasanton Meadows and Birdland neighborhoods. However, few exist that connect to other neighborhoods or to schools, thus limiting the walkability of the city as a whole. To reach their destination, residents, including children walking to school, often use sidewalks along major arterials designed primarily for vehicle use.

The “Y” form of the former Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroad corridors has influenced street and subdivision layouts in the past, and continues to exert a strong influence on the character of the community. Most noticeable are the vistas to distant hills and Mount Diablo provided at road crossings of the railroad corridors. The railroads also influence perceptions of the community by focusing vehicular and pedestrian traffic along specific streets leading to the crossings. The East Bay Regional Park District and the City of Pleasanton are constructing portions of the Iron Horse Trail on the former Southern Pacific right-of-way in Pleasanton.

Architectural Style and Character

Downtown has the most distinctive architectural character within the community, with its Victorian and “Main Street” buildings. The contemporary architecture and site planning of the newer business parks are also distinctive and express a strong image of progressive businesses with a concern for the working environment of employees. Building heights remain relatively low, contributing to Pleasanton’s small-town character. Older residential neighborhoods are open and accessible to one another instead of being closed by way of cul-de-sacs and limited through-streets. Parking garages sit behind homes leaving front yards for neighbors to gather and children to play, rather than for parking cars or as garage entries. Families and friends gather outdoors on the front porches where they may greet pedestrians passing by, instead of closing themselves in back yards. Other buildings within the community vary in style and character, but not abruptly, since most of the growth has occurred within the last few decades. Light colors and earth tones predominate in houses and commercial buildings throughout both urban and rural areas of Pleasanton. These colors blend in with the open areas and provide a sense of openness in more developed areas.

Arroyos and Canals

Pleasanton’s arroyos and canals are defining features of the community which have influenced past development decisions and offer future open-space linkage opportunities. Even more than the railroad corridors, they open up vistas to distant hills, provide open space within the heart of the city, establish habitats for various forms of plant and wildlife and allow a venue for trails. Adjacent to several arroyos are pedestrian and bicycle pathways that are safely separated from vehicle traffic.

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability and sustainable development is embedded in Pleasanton’s community character in various ways. These include:

- The preservation of open spaces which frame the City and encourage urban infill where development can be served most efficiently.
- The preservation and reuse of older and historic structures in the Downtown which saves the use of resources and energy, and creates linkages between the past, present, and future.
- The design of commercial areas, especially the Downtown, which attract businesses that contribute to the ongoing economic vitality of the community.
- The City’s urban design which places schools, parks and neighborhood shopping centers close to residential areas.
- Landscaping that provides shade and is sparing in water use.

SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS

Pleasanton includes many clearly identified design districts such as the Downtown, Hacienda and Bernal Corporate business parks, Alameda County Fairgrounds, Foothill Road area, etc. The design of specific areas impacts Pleasanton's character in positive and negative ways. Many areas are highly visible, and assist residents and visitors in visualizing the city's structure and layout. Some areas lack quality maintenance and are in need of upgrades. The design and maintenance of structures and improvements within these areas will play a critical role in shaping Pleasanton's character in years to come.

Historic Resources

The Downtown contains most of Pleasanton's recognized historic resources. However, there are other structures, including the Alviso Adobe and Century House, which serve as reminders of Pleasanton's heritage of more than a century and a half. Pleasanton has retained some of its early Spanish and Mexican roots not only in buildings such as the Alviso Adobe, but in other names. For example, the City named Bernal Avenue for its first Mexican settler – Augustin Bernal, while Pleasanton residents still refer to “creeks” as “arroyos” and students at Amador Valley High School as “Dons” – meaning “sirs” in Spanish. The City has recognized over 80 individual buildings as historically significant. Historic resources are discussed in more detail in the Cultural Resources section of the Conservation and Open Space Element.

Many heritage trees also assist in giving Pleasanton a unique character and image, often missing from other communities. Walnut trees hark back to Pleasanton's agricultural past while sycamore, valley oak, black locust, elm, ash and other trees evoke Pleasanton's small-town heritage.

Pleasanton's Downtown remains a treasure that most older but growing communities have long since lost. It reflects the city's heritage and is a source of pride to its residents. Older commercial and residential buildings lend richness to the area, and new development has generally been designed to complement the older structures and reinforce the small-scale character. The historic buildings, street trees, many restaurants, special paving, and street furniture, along with unique shops, all enhance the pedestrian scale and attractiveness of Downtown Pleasanton. Entryways to the Downtown, consisting of bridge crossings and well-landscaped streets, are distinctive with the potential for even further strengthening. In addition, Downtown is the location of public buildings providing services and information to residents; these include City Hall, the Library, the Veterans Memorial Building, and the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society Museum.

Residential Neighborhoods

Residential neighborhoods are the heart of Pleasanton. The neighborhoods perform a major role in what makes Pleasanton an attractive place to live, work, and play. Each neighborhood has a unique character, from the semi-rural Happy Valley, to the more conventional suburban homes in Pleasanton Valley, to the Victorian and bungalow architecture of residential streets around the downtown. In

general, Pleasanton neighborhoods show a pride of ownership as reflected in improvements, such as home additions, and a high level of home maintenance. Neighborhoods consist not only of the residential buildings, but natural features (e.g. hills, creeks, and open space) and the physical arrangement of neighborhood amenities such as roads, schools, parks, playgrounds, and shopping areas. These again are generally attractive and well maintained, although, as noted below, some local neighborhoods built in the 1960s and 1970s would benefit from updating.

Often neighborhoods are identified by commonly known names related to the developer or tract name. Many recent developments have attractive, landscaped entryways with identifying signs. Signs and entrances also exist for some older tracts, although a few of these are showing their age (e.g., the entrance way to Pleasanton Valley off Hopyard Road). Figure II-1 and Table II-__ in the Land Use Element show the locations and names of over 70 residential neighborhoods in Pleasanton.

Residential Neighborhoods Built from 1960-1980

Neighborhoods developed in the 1960s and 1970s were typically designed with separated sidewalks and street trees on collector streets, and new infrastructure; however, delayed maintenance and upgrades in these subdivisions are changing the streetscape. Over time numerous street trees have died or been removed, large trees are substantially pruned to be lower in height or to accommodate overhead power lines, roadway patches exist where cuts have been made for cable and other services, and the street lights are weathered due to exposure to the elements. In some cases, property owners have delayed needed fencing, façade, and landscaping maintenance, which further diminishes the design character in these neighborhoods.

Commercial Areas

Unlike many cities that saw substantial development during the mid-20th century, Pleasanton has few commercial corridors. Main Street and First Street are the exceptions. However, unlike the “strip commercial” development in other cities where garish signs, franchise architecture, and poorly landscaped parking lots dominate, development along these streets includes re-use of older, historic buildings, street trees, mixed-use buildings and neighborhoods, parking located at the rear of businesses, and pedestrian amenities. As of 2006, Pleasanton has upgraded First Street – which carries the bulk of the traffic through the Downtown area – with removal of overhead lines, installation of pedestrian-level streetlights, and reconstruction of the bridge over the Arroyo del Valle.

Most commercial development in Pleasanton lies within clearly defined neighborhood and community shopping centers, located at the intersection of major arterials, and conveniently serving the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Most are well maintained; however, some have not been updated over time to include more attractive signage, design treatments, paint colors, lighting, landscaping, outdoor seating, and pedestrian and bicycle connections. Commercial area design has a substantial impact on community character.

The Stoneridge Shopping Center attracts shoppers throughout the region. Opportunities exist at the shopping center to enhance its outdoor and pedestrian presence by providing more attractive outdoor seating areas, and creating well landscaped pedestrian and bicycle connections to nearby uses, including the future BART station.

In achieving its purpose of identification and information transfer, private signage in commercial areas varies from extremely well-designed and effective to visually weak and ineffective. Signs with good graphic design and high quality materials enhance commercial areas and streetscapes and contribute to the building's appearance.

Parks

The city is rich in parkland with the Sports and Recreation Community Park, Val Vista Community Park, Amador Valley Community Park, Augustin Bernal Park, Shadow Cliffs Recreation Area, Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park, school playgrounds, and many neighborhood parks. Some, such as Kottinger Community Park, provide distinctive linkages which enhance the feeling of community within their neighborhoods. Parks and City recreational programs facilitate by far the greatest amount of community activity in Pleasanton. For a more in depth discussion of parks in Pleasanton, see the Parks and Recreation discussion in the Public Facilities Element.

Other Activity Centers

The Downtown, Alameda County Fairgrounds, schools, churches, and other centers, including institutional facilities like the ValleyCare and Kaiser Medical Centers, all influence the character of Pleasanton and serve as reference points for orientation within the community. Significant events and festivals involving large numbers of residents and visitors occur in some of these areas, and these activities, perhaps more than any physical features, express the special character and spirit of Pleasanton. These include the Alameda County Fair Parade, the Farmers' Market, Friday Night Concerts in the Park, First Wednesday Street Parties, the Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony, and many other activities and celebrations.

Agriculture

Until the mid 1960s, agriculture predominated throughout Pleasanton with many dependent businesses, including the Garatti Winery¹ on Saint John Street – the largest business in Pleasanton in the 1950s² – and the Cheese Factory on Main Street. Residences commonly were adjacent to cattle-grazing areas, dairy farms, walnut orchards, and hop, tomato, or sugar beet fields. See also the discussion under Farmland in the Conservation and Open Space Element.

1 In 1960, the Scotto family bought the Garrati Winery, renamed it Villa Armando, and then increased the winery capacity. Grossman, Deborah, "Pleasanton welcomes a new winery," Pleasanton Weekly Online Edition, August 30, 2002.

2 *The Pleasanton Times*, September 24, 1954, page 1.

Although no longer the most important activity in Pleasanton, agriculture still contributes to the rural flavor around and within parts of the city. Some names indicate agriculture that once predominated in a particular area, such as the former hop fields along Hopyard Road, vineyards along Vineyard Avenue, and former walnut groves around Walnut Grove Elementary School. The Alameda County Fair started as a racetrack for a local horse farm and then expanded to exhibit local agricultural products. To this day, the County Fair showcases horse races and farm animals, along with various agricultural machines and products.

Most open land in the Southeast Hills and in the Pleasanton Ridglands – except for woodland areas – is used for grazing livestock. The Vineyard Avenue Corridor and Happy Valley (South Pleasanton) areas contain many ranchettes with livestock. Vineyards grow near Ruby Hill and along East Vineyard Avenue. All of these agricultural properties contribute to the open area surrounding Pleasanton.

City Entryways

City entryways affect the way visitors see the community and are the “welcome home” points for returning residents. Pleasanton’s entryways are generally well designed, but in some cases not distinctively different from other communities. Some of the city-entry street landscaping areas are privately maintained, such as those in Hacienda Business Park.

I-580 Freeway Entryways

I-580 entryways to the community are typical of most freeway interchange entries, generally have minimal visual distinction or uniqueness at the freeway exit itself, and advertising signage and bright franchise colors dominate some areas. The Hacienda Drive area is an exception, with views of the large Hacienda Business Park entry arch. As Hopyard and Santa Rita Roads continue toward the Downtown, they contain elements of strong visual interest including street and median trees. There are, however, some areas where weak landscaping and exposed sound walls detract from the overall image.

I-680 Freeway Entryways

Interstate 680 (I-680) entryways are more unique than I-580 entryways for their relative softness of appearance and landscape quality. Bernal Avenue is a strong visual entry created by its large trees, swale median, and curbless edges, all reminiscent of the area’s earlier rural character. Likewise, the Sunol Boulevard entry with its informal landscaping and relative absence of development close to the road has a soft, semi-rural feel. The Stoneridge Drive entry is not as distinctive in character as those at Bernal Avenue and Sunol Boulevard, but is nicely landscaped and includes a bridge structure over the Alamo Canal.

Foothill Road Entryways

The Foothill Road entryway from the south appears bucolic. From the northern entryway rural vistas are located to the west and office development is located to the east, which is generally well screened

with landscaping. Landscaping, visual enhancement, and maintenance opportunities exist by the I-580 off ramp onto Foothill Road in non-landscaped areas where litter from the freeway blows, and subdivision sales signs proliferate.

Stanley Boulevard Entryway

Stanley Boulevard, because of the major quarry land acreage between Pleasanton and Livermore, provides a clear sense of entry to the city. Large trees along Stanley Boulevard, the creek bridge, landscaping, and narrowing of the road width all contribute to a pronounced entry to Downtown Pleasanton. The urban separation between Pleasanton and Livermore contributes to this sense of entry.

Vineyard Avenue Entryway

Vineyard Avenue passes through a semi-rural area bordered by hills and open space. Like South Pleasanton, it seems far removed from the more developed portions of the city. In 1999 the City adopted the *Vineyard Avenue Corridor Specific Plan*. The Specific Plan land-use concept features a mix of single-family homes, vineyards, open space, community park, elementary school, possible “wine country” related commercial uses, and possible limited aggregate mining activities. Along the Arroyo del Valle, Vineyard Avenue has been realigned to the north.

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS AND MAINTENANCE

Public improvements and maintenance also affect the character of the community. Public improvement and maintenance areas include the arroyos and canals, bridge crossings, bus shelters, landscaping, public signage, soundwalls, berms, and utilities (along with streets and pedestrian pathways that are discussed in the Circulation Element).

Arroyos and Canals

The City provides maintenance along arroyo and canal trail areas while Zone 7 provides most of the maintenance for the waterways. Opportunities for enhancement of the arroyos abound: many of the pathways are not paved, do not have drinking fountains, benches, or restrooms, have little-to-no landscaping, and are not well signed. See the Recreation and Open Space section of the Conservation and Open Space Element for more information about open-space trails.

Bridge Crossings

Bridge crossings of the waterways are significant visual elements. Although the Hacienda Business Park has landscaped and enhanced bridges with special fencing, some other developments and bridge crossings have treated in a more utilitarian manner with solid railings and chain-link fencing. Some exceptions include the old Arroyo de la Laguna bridge at Bernal Avenue, and the Verona Road Bridge, now limited to pedestrian use only. Some of the street bridges in Hacienda Business Park have been enhanced with landscaping. Opportunities exist to enhance other existing bridges with landscaping, color, decorative railings, and/or lighting.

Bus Shelters

Bus shelter design can impact the character of a street. The City, Hacienda Business Park, and Wheels, own and maintain bus shelters in Pleasanton. The majority of bus shelters in the city, while functional in providing shelter, seating, lighting, and views of oncoming buses, appear utilitarian with often weathered plastic siding. Thus the existing shelters do not contribute to unique design character when located near neighborhoods, parks, and the Downtown.

Landscaping

Pleasanton generally has a very green, well-landscaped appearance with extensive informal plantings on private lots contrasted with more formal public street landscaping. Many of the City's streets have developed, or are in the process of developing, a significant canopy of trees which is reminiscent of neighborhoods in older, mature communities. Well designed and maintained landscaping can greatly enhance the appearance of a streetscape. The City maintains over 15,000 trees near streets and private home and business owners maintain over 60,000 trees. Pleasanton's business parks contribute significantly to the city's landscape character through the special attention given to the appearance of streets and intersections within their boundaries. In some areas of the city, such as near the intersection of West Las Positas Boulevard and Foothill Road, landscaping is sparse where future road widening and interchange improvements are, or were, anticipated.

Native landscaping has been planted in several areas, especially along Foothill Road. New native landscaping often complements the existing hillside landscaping and reminds people of northern California's past. When allowed to grow naturally, native landscaping is attractive and sustainable. Native landscaping needs little to no watering within a few years of planting, if the planted area is large enough to adequately accommodate its growth.

Throughout the city there are several areas containing landscaped parkway strips between the sidewalk and street curb. These enhance the small-town character of the city and improve a pedestrian's sense of safety due to the physical separation between the sidewalk and street. Typically these strips measure five feet or less in width, whereas a width of six to ten feet is needed for trees to meet their growth potential and/or survive in the long term.

There are locations in the city where landscaped parkway strips could be added along street edges to soften their appearance and improve the pedestrian experience.

Public Signage

The visual and informational quality of signage in Pleasanton varies widely. There is a proliferation of new traffic signs. Penal codes often require multiple traffic signs to be installed, if the posted information is to be enforced. Signage directing visitors to the Downtown lacks distinctive design and is somewhat ineffective because of the smallness of the lettering in the context of vehicular traffic speeds.

Soundwalls and Berms

Soundwalls along major arterial streets, such as those along Stoneridge Drive west of Hopyard Road, were installed in the 1970s and 1980s. These walls create a bland, monotonous appearance. In areas, the appearance of soundwalls has been softened by growing vines. In some areas, such as in the Country Fair and Del Prado neighborhoods, the maintenance of soundwalls has been delayed, further compromising their appearance.

Landscape berms provide sound attenuation and are attractive alternatives to soundwalls. Other design solutions include frontage roads with homes facing thoroughfares (such as portions of Hopyard and Foothill roads) and lush landscaping such as along portions of Valley Avenue. However this requires significant maintenance. A new landscaped berm was installed west of the freeway near the Pheasant Ridge neighborhood.

Utilities

The City and other utility providers own and maintain the above-ground utilities and utility boxes which are present on many streets in the city. These utilities include traffic control devices, irrigation controls, and backflow prevention devices. If not well designed, located, and screened, these utilities can negatively impact the character of city streets.

EXISTING PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Community Programs and Activities

The nurturing of all individuals, young and old, has played a major part in making Pleasanton the community it is today. Supporting community members is considered vital to maintaining a thriving, sustainable community in years to come. The programs and activities mentioned below can assist in generating a healthy, well-cared-for, and integrated community.

Community Activities

Pleasanton provides numerous opportunities for families and individual community members through activities and special events which appeal to all age groups and bring members of the community into contact with one another. Pleasanton uses a broad definition of family that encompasses a variety of family arrangements and lifestyles. Centers for community activities include parks, religious facilities, restaurants, the Alameda County Fairgrounds, schools, etc. See also Human Services in the Public Facilities and Community Programs Element.

In Pleasanton, special events, while important for generating community interaction, are weighed against their potential impacts on the business community, such as disruptions to regular operations during street closures.

Community of Character Program

Pleasanton is a community of character. The City of Pleasanton, the Pleasanton Unified School District, and the Pleasanton Chamber of Commerce actively participate in a program which encourages people to embody the following six traits: responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, honesty, respect, and integrity. These character traits are considered essential to a healthy, positive community and lifestyle.

Implementing Community Character

The City often adopts specific plans (which are discussed in the Land Use Element), guidelines, and ordinances to support its goals, including its community character goals. The program, guideline, and ordinance examples described below, while all substantially different, will affect Pleasanton's character. This General Plan will likely see the development of similar plans and ordinances.

Downtown Guidelines

After adopting an updated *Downtown Specific Plan* in 2002, the City adopted the *Downtown Design Guidelines* in 2003. The Guidelines provide a tool to help ensure high quality construction projects in the Downtown that complement the existing built environment. The Guidelines address the design of new buildings, the remodeling and expansion of existing buildings, the siting of new structures and parking areas, desired types of business signage, and the various details and public improvements that contribute to the appearance of the area.

Green Building Ordinance

Pleasanton is pioneering the implementation of an ordinance requiring Green Building techniques to be used in commercial, civic, and residential developments. Green Building is the concept of creating structures and site designs using construction, siting, design, and operation techniques and renewable and environmentally friendlier materials that limit the negative effects upon the surrounding natural environment and promote the health of building users. By encouraging buildings complementary to the environment, the City is increasing the awareness and importance of its natural setting. Green Building and preservation of the environment are integral parts to the enhancement of Pleasanton's community character. Structures such as Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Station Number 4 and the Applied Biosystems offices have led the way for Green Building in Pleasanton. Green Building is indicative of Pleasanton's efforts to plan for sustainability so that many generations can enjoy a high quality of life. See the Green Building section of the Energy Element and the Sustainable Development and Planning section of the Air Quality Element for further discussion of Green Building.

Public Art Plans, Programs, and Procedures

The City is currently developing a Downtown Public Art Master Plan. The Plan will identify opportunities for temporary and permanent public art, preferred themes, and preferred media. The

City also has a memorial public arts program in which monetary contributions for public art are accepted in memory of others. In addition, the current procedure of encouraging developers to install public art is achieving success. Several office and commercial developments, such as Bernal Corporate Park and the new development at 5050 Hopyard Road, include distinctive public art.

There are opportunities for public art throughout the city, including entryway art, such as at the BART stations, and especially in/near public rights-of-way. See also Community Facilities and Cultural Arts section in the Public Facilities and Community Programs Element.

City Entries Enhancement

Street entries to the City should reinforce Pleasanton's unique character, exemplify residents' pride, and welcome visitors. Quality signage and landscaping should be considered at all major entries from freeways and surrounding communities.

Arroyo del Valle Enhancement

The Arroyo del Valle is a natural waterway which runs through Pleasanton and touches the northern edge of the Downtown. Some pedestrian access is currently available along the Arroyo, and considerably more is planned by the Community Trails Master Plan. Additional study should be given to the Arroyo and improvements considered as part of a comprehensive plan to enhance resident awareness of this unique asset and to integrate it more fully into the urban design fabric of the City.

Bridge crossing improvements to open up views of the Arroyo along with special lighting, improved signage, and appropriate landscaping at the Bernal Avenue, First Street, Santa Rita Road, Division Street, and Valley Avenue crossings should be considered. This could enhance the entries to the Downtown and increase awareness of the Arroyo's existence and visual richness.

Wildlife habitats along the Arroyo should be identified to ensure that plans for increased visibility and access are consistent with the preservation of these areas. Special efforts should be made to ensure that future flood control activities maintain the natural character of this waterway.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ELEMENTS

Land Use

The Land Use Element provides guiding principles for the type, location, size and density of land uses throughout the City of Pleasanton. The design and layout of land use in Pleasanton affect community character in a fundamental way. Thus land use goals and objectives relate to the Community Character Element.

Circulation

The Circulation Element strives to improve traffic and circulation systems – including pedestrian pathways – throughout Pleasanton. Circulation objectives that slow down traffic in residential

neighborhoods, improve pedestrian walkways and open space trails would comply with the Community Character Element.

Public Facilities and Community Programs

The Public facilities and Community Programs Element strives to improve Pleasanton's infrastructure and public programs, including water, wastewater, garbage, education, libraries, parks and recreation, community facilities and cultural arts, and human services. Public Facilities and Community Program objectives that improve the City's infrastructure and community programs, including art, would also pertain to the Community Character Element.

Conservation and Open Space

The Conservation and Open Space Element identifies existing and planned open space and recreational uses, as well as historic resources, throughout the City of Pleasanton. Conservation and Open Space objectives that would improve and/or make the outdoor environment more accessible would pertain to the Community Character Element. The Conservation and Open Space Element encourages an open space buffer surrounding Pleasanton and also encourages preservation of historic buildings and areas, both of which would comply with the Community Character Element.

Energy

The Energy Element guides Pleasanton toward a sustainable energy future. Green Building techniques from the Energy Element would also pertain to the Community Character Element.

Air quality

The Air Quality Element strives to improve air quality in Pleasanton. Cleaner air would affect Pleasanton's character in a positive way and thus pertains to the Community Character Element.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

The following goals, policies, and programs, in addition to those contained in other Elements, constitute an action program to implement the objectives described in this Element.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Goal 1: Preserve and enhance Pleasanton's community character.

Downtown Pleasanton

Goal 2: Preserve and enhance Downtown Pleasanton as a major focus of the community.

Policy 1: Encourage the retention, reuse, and enhancement of older buildings of historical importance and architectural heritage.

Implement programs from the Conservation and Open Space Element related to historic preservation.

Policy 2: Improve the visual appearance of the Downtown.

Program 2.1: Improve the major gateways into the Downtown to create a sense of arrival and to enhance the aesthetics along these roadways, as described in the *Downtown Specific Plan*.

Program 2.2: Implement the design and beautification goals, policies, and objectives of the *Downtown Specific Plan*.

Program 2.3: Concentrate immediate Building Code enforcement efforts on the old residential areas of the Downtown.

Program 2.4: Use the *Downtown Design Guidelines* to evaluate the design of new development proposals.

Policy 3: Maintain the scale and character of the Downtown.

Program 3.1: Require the height, mass, setbacks, and architectural style of new buildings to reflect the unique character and pedestrian scale of the Downtown, as exemplified in the Downtown Design Guidelines.

Policy 4: Enhance the Downtown as a focus of community activity.

Program 4.1: Provide opportunities for people to gather as a community and enjoy the unique environment of the Downtown while limiting the impacts of street closures on local commerce.

Arroyos and Canals

Goal 3: Enhance the appearance and usability of the arroyos and canals.

Policy 5: Encourage commercial development with frontages on arroyos and canals to orient outside activity areas, decks, and views to the arroyos and canals.

Program 5.1: When property owners apply for site changes, provide suggestions for additional integration of uses with the arroyos and canals.

Policy 6: Enhance the visual appearance of the arroyos.

Program 7.1: Improve the appearance of bridges over the arroyos with new railings, landscaping, lighting, signage, and other design techniques.

Program 7.2: Work with Zone 7 to promote strategies for improving the cleanliness of the arroyos.

Program 7.3: Work with Zone 7 to improve landscaping along the arroyos and canals, to minimize fencing where appropriate, and to provide aesthetically pleasing arroyo and canal fence designs when fencing is necessary.

City Entryways and Edges

Goal 4: Enhance the appearance of major city entryways.

Policy 9: Improve the visual quality of entryways to Pleasanton.

Program 9.1: As part of the design review process, encourage the installation of distinctive landscaping, and discourage advertising signage and bright franchise colors at major street entryways to the City.

Program 9.2: The City should be particularly sensitive to aesthetic considerations when land-use planning in areas adjacent to City entryways.

Policy 10: Continue to maintain a visual separation between Pleasanton and Livermore along Stanley Boulevard.

Program 10.1: As part of the East Pleasanton Specific Plan, require architectural and/or site design treatments, such as larger setbacks, and dense landscaping, to maintain the visual separation between the eastern edge of Pleasanton and western edge of Livermore.

Program 10.2: Continue to support the Chain-of-Lakes concept as a buffer between the two cities.

Streetscapes

Goal 5: Enhance streetscapes and areas near the freeways.

Policy 11: Enhance landscaping along city streets and the freeways.

Program 11.1: Complete and infill the street tree and median landscaping along streets, when feasible.

Program 11.2: When the opportunity arises and when feasible, add landscaped parkway strips along street edges to soften their appearance and improve the pedestrian experience.

Program 11.3: Increase the width of existing narrow parkway strips when the opportunity arises, and encourage applicants of new developments to provide parkway strips which are at least 6-10 feet wide.

Program 11.4: Install landscaped instead of paved medians and replace paved medians with landscaped medians wider than 6 feet, whenever possible and feasible.

Program 11.5: In new developments, require developers, owners associations, or maintenance associations to maintain landscaped medians.

Program 11.6: Provide landscaping to soften the visual appearance of existing and new walls and fences that abut city streets, whenever possible and feasible.

Program 11.7: Require additional setbacks and screening of development adjacent to a freeway.

Program 11.8: Work with Caltrans to enhance landscaping along the freeways.

Program 11.9: Along streets, work with developers and property owners to place a greater emphasis on the use of native plant species and on pruning techniques which allow species to appear more as they would in a natural setting, especially in larger planting areas.

Policy 12: Repair existing City-owned soundwalls and fences facing city streets, when in disrepair, and discourage the installation of new soundwalls facing city streets and freeways.

Program 12.1: Encourage the construction of landscaped berms, similar types of significantly landscaped sound barriers, larger setbacks, frontage roads, and/or other design techniques, instead of soundwalls.

Program 12.2: In new developments, require the project developer, owners association, maintenance association, or similar association to maintain sound barriers.

Program 12.3: Maintain City-owned walls facing streets and enforce the maintenance of those that are privately owned.

Policy 13: Improve the appearance of existing bridges.

Program 13.1: Inventory existing bridge conditions and prepare a plan for improving their appearance with landscaping, color, decorative railings, lighting, and/or other design techniques.

Policy 14: Improve street identification and traffic signage along City streets.

Program 14.1: Minimize the number and size of traffic signs, to the extent allowed by law.

Policy 15: Enhance bus shelter design in the city.

Program 15.1: Work with Wheels to help ensure that new and remodeled bus shelters in and near residential neighborhoods, parks, and the Downtown are architecturally designed to reflect a small-town character, allow for visibility of oncoming buses, offer safety and protection from the elements and adequate lighting, and provide maps and transit information.

Program 15.2: Work to enhance the appearance of magazine and newspaper dispensers near bus stops.

Program 15.3: Encourage the regular maintenance and restoration of bus stop facilities.

Policy 16: Improve the appearance of utility boxes.

Program 16.1: Whenever feasible, place all utility boxes underground. If not feasible, locate utility boxes so they are in the least visible location possible, when viewed from public areas and public rights-of-way.

Program 16.2: Have the City and utility companies paint all existing and new utility boxes to blend in with their environment, and screen all existing and new utility boxes with landscaping, when possible and feasible.

Commercial Areas and Residential Neighborhoods

Goal 6: Preserve and enhance the city's commercial areas and residential neighborhoods.

Policy 17: Encourage new commercial area development and redevelopment, including stand alone retail buildings, restaurants, and hotels, to incorporate attractive architectural and site-design features

Program 17.1: Develop design standards for freeway frontage signs.

Program 17.2: Consider creating incentives, such as low interest loans, to encourage the redevelopment of commercial areas.

Program 17.3: Encourage developers to include the following features in the development of new and the redevelopment of existing commercial areas:

- Pedestrian amenities such as landscaping, benches, trellises, fountains, public art, and attractive lighting
- Pedestrian walkways and bikeway connections that create safe paths of travel through the shopping center and parking, and to transit, nearby sidewalks, and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

- Attractive sign design and higher quality sign materials
- Outdoor seating
- Decorative paving at driveway entrances and pedestrian areas
- Attractive colors, minimizing bright franchise colors
- Higher quality façade materials
- Orientation of buildings to transit facilities, where applicable
- Orientation of the businesses to adjacent creeks, where applicable
- Shared parking
- Attractive and convenient bicycle parking

Program 17.4: Institute an Annual Design Awards Program to recognize new and remodeled projects of special quality.

Policy 18: Discourage franchise and prototype architecture and signage.

Program 18.1: Develop a procedure to work with development applicants to modify formula design to more closely relate to and reinforce the special character of Pleasanton.

Program 18.2: Encourage the use of higher-quality graphic signage design and materials.

Program 18.3: Update the City's sign ordinance and sign programs.

Policy 19: Maintain and enhance the quality, character, and distinctiveness of residential neighborhoods.

Program 19.1: In existing and new residential areas, where such principles will not conflict with surrounding development patterns or the physical conditions of the site, encourage the use of traditional residential neighborhood planning which incorporates the following design features:

- Usable front porches
- 6- to 10-foot-wide parkway strips
- Large canopy street trees
- Home fronts facing the street, instead of walls abutting streets
- Minimal garage presence
- Narrower streets
- Pathways to parks, schools, and other neighborhoods
- Neighborhoods open and accessible to one another

Program 19.2: In high-density developments, encourage design treatments that enhance the attractiveness of the streetscape and other publicly accessible areas through architectural detail, neighborhood and public gathering areas, gardens, and public art.

Program 19.3: Work with PG&E to underground power lines in existing residential neighborhoods, when the opportunity arises.

Program 19.4: In older neighborhoods, schedule the maintenance and replacement of public improvements, such as pavement and streetlights, commensurate in quality and appearance to those in more recently constructed neighborhoods.

Program 19.5: Consider a City-sponsored street tree replacement program in neighborhoods where street trees have died, been removed, or substantially damaged.

Program 19.6: Sponsor an Annual Yard and Vacant Lot Clean-Up Day.

Program 19.7: Establish an annual awards program to recognize individual and neighborhood efforts in improving home and yard appearance.

Program 19.8: Adopt a city street tree ordinance to protect existing and future street trees that are maintained by property owners, and establish planting, care, and pruning standards.

Open Space

Goal 7: Preserve the open space character at the edges of the city.

Policy 20: Require that design of new residential development in hillside areas complement the natural appearance of the open space.

Program 20.1: Adopt hillside design standards.

Policy 21: Preserve scenic hillside and ridge views, and other natural features on the Pleasanton Ridge and southern hills.

Program 21.1: Continue to support the Pleasanton Ridgeland Initiative of 1993 (Measure F).

Program 21.2: In new developments, preserve scenic hillsides and other hillside features including ridges, plants, streams, and wildlife.

Program 21.3: Discourage major grading on slopes of 25 percent or greater.

Public Art

Goal 8: Encourage the installation of art to enhance Pleasanton's character.

Policy 22: Pursue the installation of public art.

Program 22.1: Adopt a Downtown Arts Master Plan to enhance the Downtown character and to encourage the public to visit the Downtown.

Program 22.2: Institute an Arts Master Plan for the entire city which identifies where opportunities for temporary and permanent public art exist, preferred themes, and preferred media.

Policy 23: Encourage the installation of public art in residential and commercial developments.

Program 23.1: In new developments, encourage project applicants to work with the City's Planning Department and Civic Arts Commission on the installation of art visible from public rights-of-way.

Community Activities

Goal 9: Preserve and support community and family activities.

Policy 24: Promote facilities and activities that accommodate community and family use and accommodate persons of all physical abilities.

Program 24.1: Provide opportunities for people to gather as a community while limiting the impacts of street closures on local commerce. Program 24.2: Encourage commercial, recreational, social, and cultural events and uses which are enriching to family and community life.

Program 24.3: Celebrate the agricultural heritage of Pleasanton through community events.

Policy 25: Reinforce Pleasanton as a community of character.

Program 25.1: Promote the following six personal traits: responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, honesty, respect, and integrity.