

2005 Pleasanton Plan 2025

12. COMMUNITY CHARACTER ELEMENT



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12. 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. See Figure 12-1 Exiting Community Character.

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 both public and private 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, an abundance of street trees, among other aspects described below. Many residents cherish

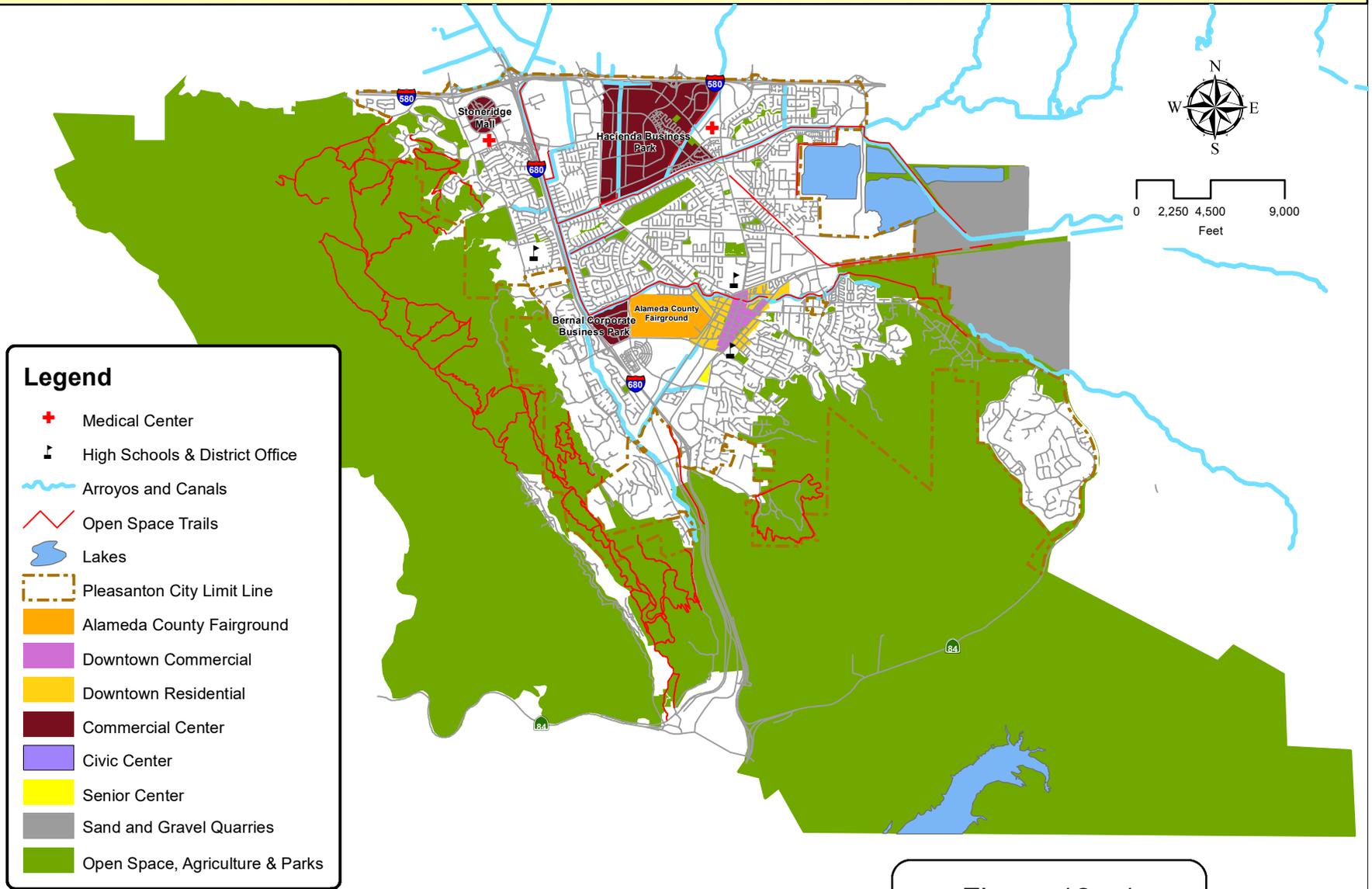


Pleasanton Arch on Main Street

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 commercial, residential, and park uses on the Staples Ranch property and the development of several hundred acres of land now transitioning from quarry uses

2005 PLEASANTON PLAN 2025



Source: Community Development Department, 2008

Figure 12 - 1
Existing Community
Character

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 this area is **changing** due to increased housing development and street improvements, it 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 City's **award-winning** Callippe Preserve Golf Course is located on **rolling** hills in South Pleasanton and incorporates Happy Valley Creek and large oak trees. The golf course is surrounded by publicly-owned open space and **trails**. The Southern Hills area, mostly in private ownership, 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



Quarry lands that separate Pleasanton and Livermore (near Vineyard Avenue)

Livermore Municipal Airport, currently provide a major 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.

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

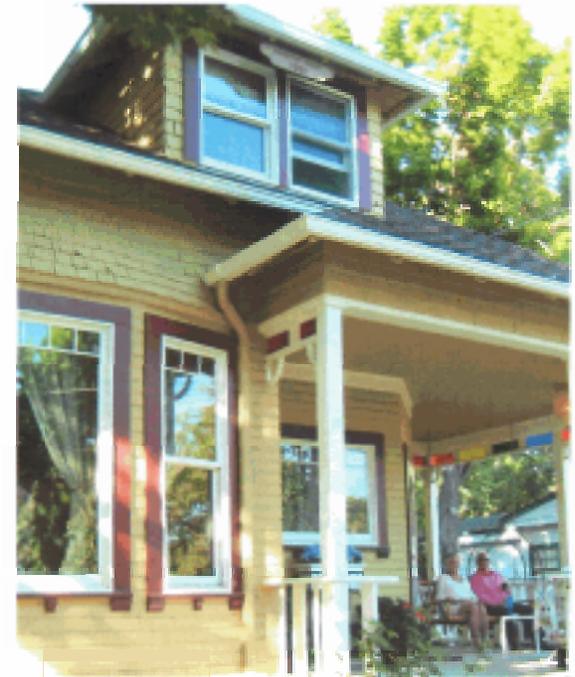
Downtown has the most distinctive architectural character within the community, with its Victorian and "Main Street" buildings. The contemporary architecture and site planning of the newer business parks are also distinctive and express a strong image of progressive businesses with a concern for the working environment of employees.



436-450 Main Street building

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 backyards. 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.



The Hamiltons on front porch at 637 St. Mary St

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. The City of Pleasanton is working in cooperation with the East Bay Regional Park District, Caltrans, Zone 7 Water Agency, and the City of Dublin to assess the feasibility and financing for an under-freeway **link** of the **Alamo Canal Trail**.

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.

- Trails, bike lanes, and other links that connect **neighborhoods**, schools, and open space for walkers and bicyclists, and provide an alternative to automobile **travel**.

Higher density and mixed-use **walkable** neighborhoods near alternate forms of transportation.

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 and surrounding residential neighborhoods contain 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.



Heritage sycamore in Kottinger Park

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. Historic buildings, the Pleasanton Arch, street trees, many restaurants, special paving, and street furniture, along with unique shops, **all** enhance the pedestrian scale and attractiveness of Downtown Pleasanton.

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 2-1** and **Table 2-1** in the Land Use Element

show the locations and names of over 70 residential neighborhoods in Pleasanton.



517 Saint Mary Street with garage in the rear

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 diminish 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



Stoneridge shopping center

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, Callippe Preserve Golf Course, school playgrounds, and many neighborhood parks. Some, such as Kottinger Community Park, provide distinctive linkages which enhance the feeling of community within their neighborhoods.

City recreational programs facilitate by far the greatest amount of community activity in Pleasanton. In the future, the City will develop the Bernal Grand Park which will provide a location for additional community activities. Lakes, wetlands, the Grand Meadow, sports field, and other facilities will be visible from I-680 and Bernal Avenue. For a

more in depth discussion of parks in Pleasanton, see the Parks and Recreation discussion in the Public Facilities Element.



Kottinger Community Park

Other Activity Centers

The Downtown, Alameda County Fairgrounds, schools, churches, and other centers, including institutional facilities like the Valley Care 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 and Parade, the Farmers' Market, Friday Night Concerts in the Park, First Wednesday Street Parties, the Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony, the soccer parade, the Children's Fair, the Century House Poetry Reading Series, and many other activities and celebrations.

Agriculture

Until the mid 1960s, agriculture predominated throughout Pleasanton with many dependent businesses, including the Garrati 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. Jackson & Perkins located its rose-growing operations in Pleasanton briefly in the 1960s. The Spotomo family has actively ranched its land for over 140 years. 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 and in 2006 drew more than 380,000 attendees to the 17-day event. The 4-H Program for youth, administered by the Cooperative Extension Service of the US Department of Agriculture, is active in Pleasanton, with several clubs participating in County-Fair animal and craft competitions. 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

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

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

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 visual sense of an open area surrounding Pleasanton.



Llama on a ranchette at Independence Drive and Bernal Avenue

Entryways to the Downtown

Downtown entryways, 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.

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.

1-580 Freeway Entryways

I-580 entryways to the community are typical of most freeway interchange entries, with minimal visual distinction or uniqueness at the freeway exit itself, and advertising **signage** and bright franchise colors dominating 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 soundwalls detract from the overall image.

1-680 Freeway Entryways

Interstate 680 (I-680) entryways are more distinctive 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. Although the City has made efforts to preserve the native black walnut trees located on the north side of Stanley Boulevard just west of California Avenue, their age and the nearby earth-level differential are causing their decline; the City should consider developing a plan for their replacement. The *Downtown Specific Plan* proposes improvement to this and other gateways into the downtown.

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. The Mitchel Katz Winery is located at the southern end of Vineyard Avenue, and the future Ruby Hills Winery will be located at the intersection of Vineyard and Isabel avenues; together with the extensive vineyard planting, this development reinforces the "wine country" character of this area.

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



Bernal Avenue automobile bridge over Arroyo de la Laguna

bridges with special fencing, some other developments and bridge crossings have been 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



New bus shelter

character when located near neighborhoods, parks, and the Downtown. The location of a bus shelter is as important as its design. The location should be safe and convenient for passengers going to and from residential, commercial, and public areas.

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,



Downtown residential neighborhood with mature street trees

mature communities. Well designed and maintained landscaping can greatly enhance the appearance of a streetscape. The City maintains over 15,000 trees near streets while 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 due to the smallness of the lettering in the context of vehicular traffic speeds.

In Downtown Pleasanton, distinctive new **signs** now direct people to additional stores along side streets. Throughout the year,



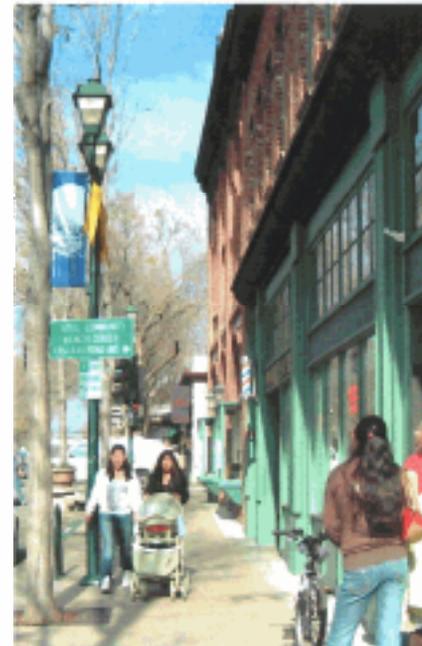
Street sign and seasonal banner

the Downtown area also displays decorative seasonal banners on **streetlight** standards.

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, the maintenance of soundwalls has been delayed, further **compromising** their appearance.



Street signs and seasonal banner

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 embraces 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, the senior center, the Pleasanton Library, 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



Former Kolln Hardware store during renovation

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 friendly 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



Solar panels on the roof of Borg Fencing Company

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 has adopted 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 residents' 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 Element

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 Element

The Circulation Element smves 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,

and maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment Downtown would comply with the Community Character Element.

Public Facilities and Community Programs Element

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 Element

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 concepts of which would comply with the Community Character Element

Energy Element

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 and Climate Change Element

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

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 historic Downtown and surrounding residential areas.

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 and natural condition of the arroyos.

Program 6.1: Improve the appearance of bridges over the arroyos with new **railings**, landscaping, **lighting**, **signage**, and other design techniques.

Program 6.2: Work with Zone 7 to promote **strategies** for improving the cleanliness of the arroyos.

Program 6.3: 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.

Program 6.4: Work with Zone 7 to implement projects referenced in the *Stream Management Master Plan* within Pleasanton.

City Entryways and Edges

Goal 4: Enhance the appearance of major city entryways.

Policy 7: Improve the visual quality of entryways to Pleasanton.

Program 7.1: 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 7.2: The City should be particularly sensitive to aesthetic considerations when land-use **planning** in areas adjacent to City entryways.

Program 7.3: **Design** and install City **identification signs** at major entryways to the City.

Program 7.4: Give the Hopyard/I-580 area a **high** priority for visual improvement when making land-use and public investment decisions.

Program 7.5: Consider new locations near entryways for community-service-organization **signboards**.

Program 7.6: Explore **public/private** partnerships to clean up and improve the appearance of **Caltrans** freeway on/off ramps at Foothill Road and I-580 and at other locations as needed.

Policy 8: Continue to maintain a visual separation between Pleasanton and Livermore along Stanley Boulevard.

- Program 8.1: 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 8.2: 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 9: Enhance landscaping along city streets and the freeways.

- Program 9.1: Complete and infill the street tree and median landscaping along streets, when feasible.
- Program 9.2: When the opportunity arises and when feasible, add landscaped parkway strips along street edges to soften their appearance and improve the pedestrian experience.
- Program 9.3: 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 9.4: Install landscaped instead of paved medians and replace paved medians with landscaped medians wider than 6 feet, whenever possible and feasible.
- Program 9.5: In new developments, require developers, owners associations, or maintenance associations to maintain landscaped medians.
- Program 9.6: Provide landscaping to soften the visual appearance of existing and new walls and fences that abut city streets, whenever possible and feasible.
- Program 9.7: Require additional setbacks and screening of development adjacent to a freeway.
- Program 9.8: Work with Caltrans to enhance landscaping along the freeways.
- Program 9.9: 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.

Program 9.10: Encourage the Dublin-San Ramon Services District and Zone 7 Water Agency to improve and maintain screening and landscaping **surrounding** their regional facilities along streets and near freeways.

Policy 10: 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 10.1: 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 10.2: In new developments, require the project developer, owners association, maintenance association, or similar association to maintain sound **barriers**.

Program 10.3: Maintain City-owned walls facing streets and enforce the maintenance of those that are privately owned.

Policy 11: Improve the appearance of existing bridges.

Program 11.1: Inventory **existing** bridge **conditions** and prepare a plan for improving their appearance with **landscaping**, color, decorative railings, **lighting**, and/or other design techniques.

Program 11.2: Implement the **design** and beautification policies in the Downtown Specific Plan related to the Wixom Bridge.

Policy 12: Improve street identification and traffic **signage** along city streets.

Program 12.1: **Minimize** the number and size of traffic signs, to the extent allowed by law.

Policy 13: Enhance bus shelter design in the city.

Program 13.1: 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, and are located to maximize walking convenience.

Program 13.2: Encourage the regular maintenance and restoration of bus stop facilities.

Policy 14: Improve the appearance of utility boxes and newspaper racks.

- Program 14.1: 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 14.2: 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.
- Program 14.3: Work to enhance the appearance of magazine and newspaper dispensers.

Commercial Areas and Residential Neighborhoods

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

Policy 15: Encourage new commercial area development and redevelopment, including stand alone retail buildings, restaurants, and hotels, to incorporate attractive architectural and site-design features.

- Program 15.1: Develop design standards for freeway frontage signs.
- Program 15.2: Consider creating incentives, such as low interest loans, to encourage the redevelopment of commercial areas.
- Program 15.3: Require developers to include the following features, as feasible, 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, shade structures, and **drinking** fountains
 - 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 15.4: Institute an Annual Design Awards Program to recognize new and remodeled projects of special quality.

Policy 16: Discourage franchise and prototype architecture and signage.

Program 16.1: 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 16.2: Encourage the use of **higher-quality** graphic **signage** design and materials.

Program 16.3: Update the City's sign ordinance and sign programs.

Policy 17: Maintain, enhance, and protect the quality, character, and distinctiveness of residential neighborhoods.

Program 17.1: 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 17.2: 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 17.3: Work with PG&E to underground power lines in existing residential **neighborhoods**, when the opportunity arises.

Program 17.4: 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 17.5: Consider a City-sponsored street tree replacement program in neighborhoods where street trees have died, been removed, or substantially damaged.
- Program 17.6: Sponsor an Annual Yard and Vacant Lot Clean-Up Day.
- Program 17.7: Establish an annual awards program to recognize individual and neighborhood efforts in improving home and yard appearance.
- Program 17.8: 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.

Policy 18: Evaluate land-use changes in the context of overall City welfare and goals, as well as the desires of the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Program 18.1: When evaluating development proposals or changes in land use consider General Plan and Specific Plan policies, Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance standards, existing land uses, environmental impacts, safety, and resident, merchant and property owner concerns.
- Program 18.2: Require appropriate buffers, edges, and transition areas between dissimilar land uses and neighborhoods.
- Program 18.3: Through the City’s review process, address issues of privacy, proximity and orientation.

Open Space

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

Policy 19: Require that design of new residential development in hillside areas complement the natural appearance of the open space.

- Program 19.1: Adopt hillside design standards.

Policy 20: Preserve scenic hillside and ridge views, and other natural features in the hills.

- Program 20.1: Continue to support the Pleasanton Ridglands Initiative of 1993 (Measure F).
- Program 20.2: In new developments, preserve scenic hillsides and other hillside features including ridges, plants, streams, and wildlife.

Program 20.3: Discourage grading on slopes of 25 percent or greater.

Public Art

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

Policy 21: Promote the installation of public art and its enjoyment by the public.

Program 21.1: Implement a Downtown Arts Master Plan to enhance the Downtown character and to encourage the public to visit the Downtown.

Program 21.3: 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.

Program 21.4: Showcase the City's public art collection on an occasional basis.

Program 21.5: Map the location of public art in the City and make this information widely available.

Policy 22: Encourage the installation of public art in residential and commercial developments

Program 22.1: 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 23: Promote facilities and activities that accommodate community and family use and accommodate persons of all physical abilities.

Program 23.1: Provide opportunities for people to gather as a community while limiting the impacts of street closures on local commerce.

Program 23.2: Encourage commercial, recreational, **social**, and **cultural** events and uses which are enriching to **family** and community life.

Program 23.3: Celebrate the **agricultural** heritage of Pleasanton **through** community events.

Program 23.4: Construct a permanent installation showcasing the work of the City's Poets Laureate.

Policy 24: Reinforce Pleasanton as a community of character.

Program 24.1: Promote the following six personal traits: responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, honesty, respect, and integrity.

Program 23.4: Construct a permanent installation showcasing the work of the City's Poets Laureate.

Policy 24: Reinforce Pleasanton as a community of character.

Program 24.1: Promote the following six personal traits: responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, honesty, respect, and integrity.