

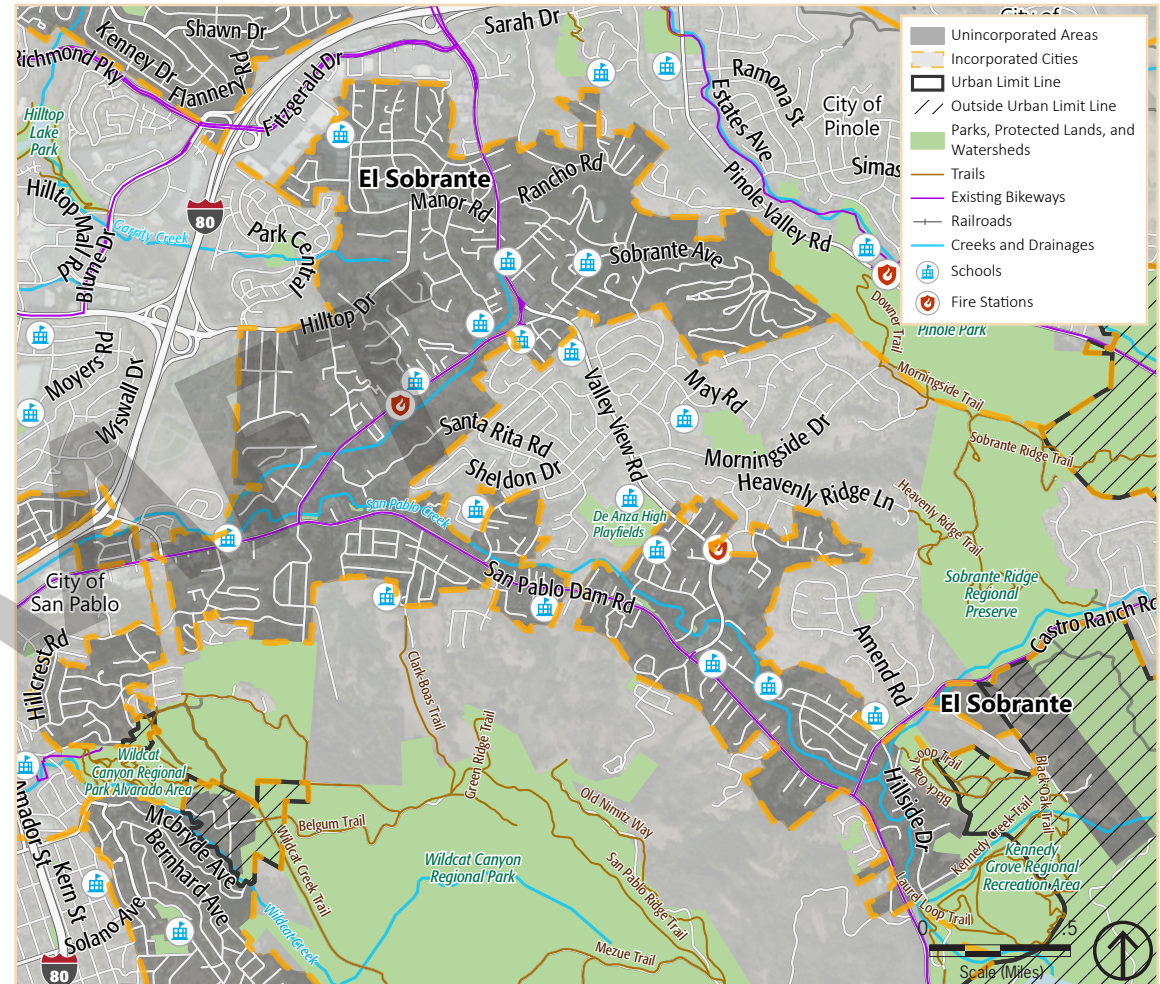
EL SOBRANTE | CONTEXT

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El Sobrante is entirely within the Sphere of Influence for the City of Richmond and City of Pinole, but has its own distinct identity shaped by its history, landscape, people, and built environment. The community originated as part of the Rancho San Pablo and Rancho El Sobrante Spanish land grants in 1841, with its name literally translated as “the remaining area.” The Ranchos were subdivided into smaller ranches during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many of these ranches were subdivided again in the mid to late 20th century, giving El Sobrante a semi-rural character. Today, the community includes a mix of ranchettes, residential subdivisions, and multi-family developments. Roughly 75 percent of the community’s housing stock was built between 1940 and 1979.

El Sobrante is oriented along several major thoroughfares. San Pablo Dam Road extends from Interstate 80 east and south toward San Pablo Reservoir and Orinda, and is home to many of El Sobrante’s businesses and commercial uses. Appian Way extends north from San Pablo Dam Road to Interstate 80 in Pinole, including the “triangle” area around the intersection of Appian Way and Valley View Road. Important natural features such as San Pablo Creek, open hillsides, and oak woodlands provide visual beauty, plant and animal habitat, and opportunities for recreation and green infrastructure.

Several plans have been developed for El Sobrante in the past two decades and remain generally applicable today, including a 2001 Transportation and Land Use Plan for the Downtown business district (along San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way) and P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines adopted in 2013. Both documents strive to enhance El Sobrante’s small town, rural residential, and vintage character, while creating new opportunities for housing, businesses, and civic uses in the heart of the community.



Source: Contra Costa County, 2018; PlaceWorks, 2020.

WHO LIVES IN EL SOBRANTE?

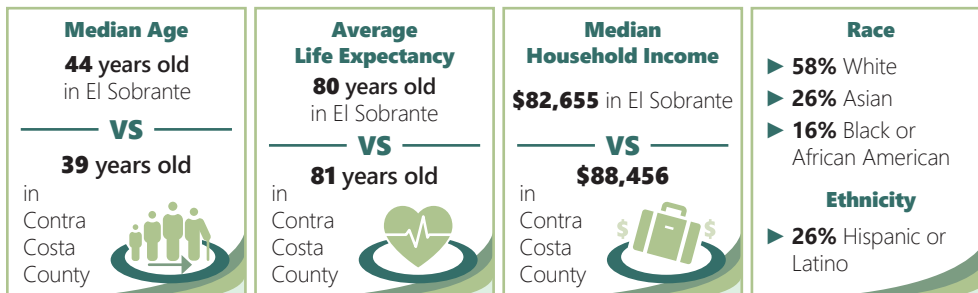


Photo by Amalia Cunningham



The information on this page presents a summary of hazards and vulnerabilities in El Sobrante based on the Contra Costa County Vulnerability Assessment; please see the [online Vulnerability Assessment](#) for a full description of these hazards and vulnerabilities.

Hazards

-  Extreme heat
-  Flooding
-  Human health hazards
-  Landslides and debris flows
-  Seismic hazards
-  Wildfire

Major Vulnerabilities

Persons experiencing chronic illnesses, homeless persons, and households in poverty are vulnerable to extreme heat and human health hazards.

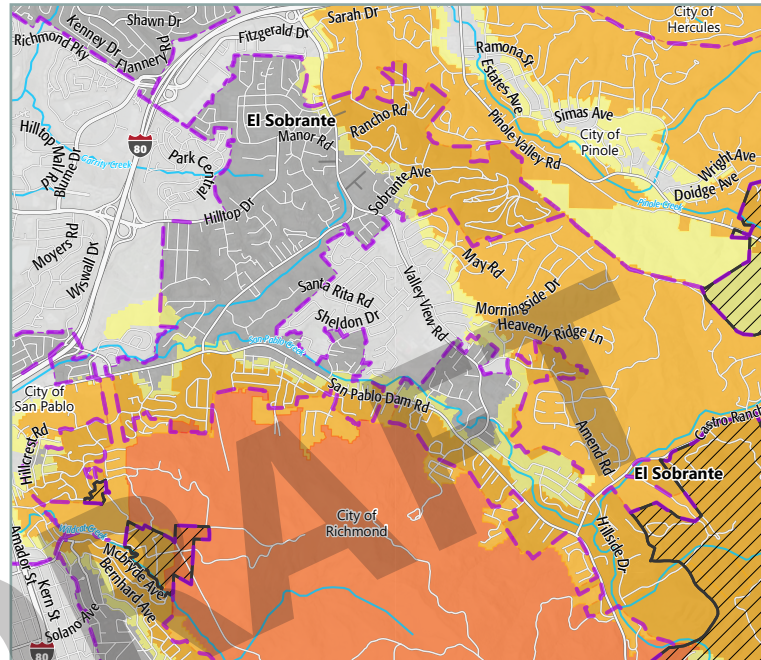
The community is vulnerable to dam-related flooding from the San Pablo Dam, if the dam were to be harmed by landslides or seismic hazards. However, San Pablo Dam has recently been upgraded to reduce the risk of dam failure, decreasing the potential for dam-related flooding.

Homes are vulnerable to landslides and debris flows, seismic hazards, and wildfire.

Single access roads and neighborhoods are vulnerable to landslides and wildfire.

San Pablo Dam Road is vulnerable to landslides, seismic hazards, and wildfire.

Public transit access, water and wastewater services, energy delivery services, and solid waste removal services are vulnerable to multiple hazards.



WILDFIRE

Wildfire Severity Zones

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Unincorporated Areas
- Incorporated Cities
- Urban Limit Line
- Outside Urban Limit Line
- +

 Railroads
- Creeks and Drainages



Source: CAL FIRE, 2007; Contra Costa County, 2018; PlaceWorks, 2020.



FLOOD ZONES

Flood Hazard Areas

- 100-Year Flood Zone
- 500-Year Flood Zone
- Areas of Undetermined but Possible Flood Hazard
- Water
- Unincorporated Areas
- Incorporated Cities
- Urban Limit Line
- Outside Urban Limit Line
- +

 Railroads
- Creeks and Drainages

A 100-year flood zone represents a 1% chance of flooding in any given year.

A 500-year flood zone represents a 0.2% chance of flooding in any given year.

Source: FEMA, 2019; Contra Costa County, 2018; PlaceWorks, 2020.

PLANNED LAND USE

Land use designations for El Sobrante are shown on the Land Use Map and defined in the Land Use Element.

Planned land uses in El Sobrante include mixed-use and commercial corridors along San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way, with residential neighborhoods on either side. Residential areas span a range of densities, from rural to high. Most neighborhoods are designated for low-density residential, consistent with existing single-family uses. New development will generally consist of infill projects on vacant or mostly vacant properties along San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way that have been previously “passed over.” Hillsides and ridgelines are largely designated for open space, protecting El Sobrante’s visual context and avoiding urban sprawl.

Areas along San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way that serve as Downtown El Sobrante are designated Mixed Use Corridor, recognizing the existing mix of multi-family and commercial properties, as well as the desire for new projects that combine these uses, either vertically or horizontally. As noted in the following section, zoning regulations adopted in 2013 provide more prescriptive design standards for the Downtown.

The land use map also identifies community assets with a designation for public uses, including Juan Crespi Middle School, Harbour Way Elementary School, and the El Sobrante Library, as well as utilities such as an East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD) water filtration plant. The map also depicts open spaces along the San Pablo Creek corridor, and in other locations where topography or natural hazards preclude safe development. Sites along the creek will be considered for a potential community park.



Existing commercial use in El Sobrante.



Existing single-family home in El Sobrante.



Existing multi-family residential use in El Sobrante.



Existing public use in El Sobrante.

DOWNTOWN EL SOBRANTE PLANNED LAND USES

In 2013, the County adopted the Downtown El Sobrante P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines covering the area shown in the map on the following page. Zoning for Downtown El Sobrante includes a combination of traditional designations (generally matching existing land uses) and three mixed-use areas. Each mixed-use area aims for a slightly different outcome. The text below provides a summary of the three mixed-use areas and the vision for each area. The Downtown El Sobrante P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines should be consulted for more specific direction and is considered the governing document for long-range planning decisions in this area.

Each of the three mixed-use areas shares a common set of design principles intended to create a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment. Key principles include allowing varied setbacks and encouraging new buildings to be located close to the street frontage. Windows and entries should face the street, with surface parking to the rear of the building rather than in the front. Mixed-use development is strongly encouraged, although all three districts allow projects that are entirely commercial. Interesting and innovative architecture is encouraged throughout each mixed-use area, as long as the area as a whole is harmonious in scale and functions as a cohesive district.

APPIAN WAY MIXED-USE AREA

The Appian Way Mixed-Use Area is intended to facilitate the development of the Appian Way corridor as a unified, well-designed neighborhood, including new mixed-use development and improved services, shopping, offices, and restaurants. Neighborhood commercial uses are allowed on all parcels. Residential-only projects and mixed residential-commercial projects are permitted but not required, and residential uses may be integrated into existing commercial developments. A 27-foot height limit applies, with an 8-foot height bonus for mixed-use projects or projects eligible for a density bonus (subject to specific findings set forth in the P-1 Zoning Plan). Residential-only projects in this area are subject to a maximum density of 8 units per acre, while commercial and mixed-use projects have a maximum total floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.0 and no density limit.

The P-1 Guidelines provide direction for Appian Way itself, including development of a landscaped median, new storm drains, on-street parking bays, lighted pedestrian crossings, improved sidewalks and bus bays, and retention of bike lanes. Traffic signalization and vehicle flow improvements are encouraged. The Guidelines also support development of open space and parks, preservation of mature trees, and streetscape and frontage planting in this area.

TRIANGLE MIXED-USE AREA

The El Sobrante “triangle” is formed by the intersection of Valley View Road, Appian Way, and Sobrante Avenue. Like the Appian Way Mixed-Use Area, this area also aims to create a distinct neighborhood retail district with opportunities for mixed-use infill projects. The allowable uses are similar to those in the Appian Way area. However, projects that are entirely residential are not permitted. Projects that incorporate housing as part of a mixed-use project are encouraged, provided that safe walking and recreational opportunities can be made available. Projects that are entirely commercial are permitted on all parcels, subject to P-1 standards and use limitations.

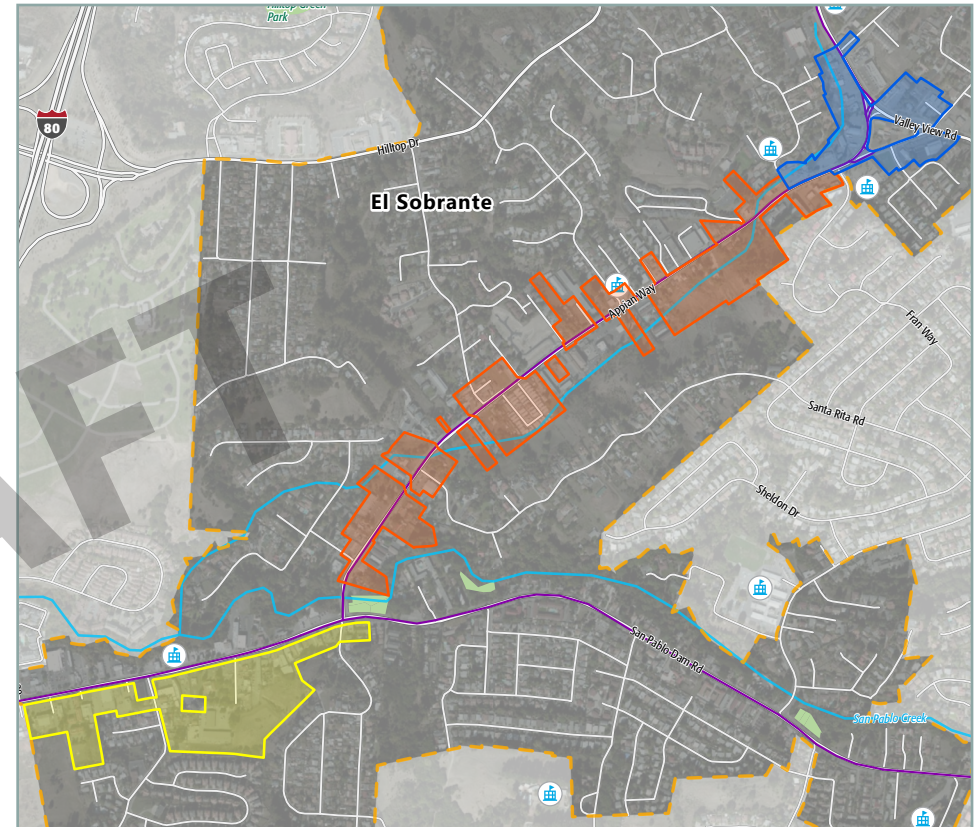
The triangle area is subject to the same density and floor area ratio standards as the Appian Way Mixed-Use Area, with a 27-foot height limit and the potential for an 8-foot height bonus for mixed-use projects. The maximum FAR for commercial and mixed-use projects is 1.0. The same building design, streetscape, and parking guidelines apply. The triangle block itself is designated for general commercial uses and is not considered an appropriate location for housing.

SAN PABLO DAM ROAD MIXED-USE AREA

The third mixed-use area in Downtown El Sobrante applies to San Pablo Dam Road between El Portal and Appian Way. This is the core of the Downtown area. The intent is to create a more unified and vibrant district by creating a town square, improving San Pablo Dam Road, and encouraging new multi-family residential, offices, retail, and mixed-use projects. The town square is envisioned on the south side of the block between Hillcrest Avenue and Pitt Way and includes a new public parking area and a new collector street connecting Pitt Way to Hillcrest Avenue. Consolidation of existing small parcels is encouraged to create more viable development sites.

A 50-foot height limit applies to parcels within this zone, provided that the mass, height, and shape of buildings preserve views and are compatible with community character. Residential-only projects are permitted and are subject to a density limit of 12 units per acre. Mixed-use projects that include housing are not subject to a density limit but are subject to a total FAR limit of 1.0. Parking and access issues must be addressed and resolved where such projects are proposed. Projects that are entirely commercial are permitted and are also subject to a 1.0 FAR.

The vision for this area also includes improvements to San Pablo Dam Road. Potential improvements include new bike lanes or a separated bike lane, wider sidewalks, more off-street parking, new pedestrian crossings, and more attractive and coordinated signage. New buildings should complement the streetscape improvements and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.



MIXED-USE AREAS

Downtown El Sobrante Mixed-Use Areas

- Appian Way Mixed-Use Area
- Triangle Mixed-Use Area
- San Pablo Dam Road Mixed-Use Area
- Unincorporated Areas
- Incorporated Cities
- Trails
- Existing Bikeways
- Creeks and Drainages
- S Schools



Source: Contra Costa County, 2018; PlaceWorks, 2020.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles articulate the values, priorities, and aspirations for the future shared by El Sobrante community members:

1. El Sobrante should remain independent and eclectic, with common sense land use regulations that respond to the community's varied development and building patterns.
2. Change should be managed to enhance El Sobrante's unique semi-rural/small-town character, sustain its farming heritage, and preserve its scenic environment and open spaces.
3. Although new amenities are desired, the costs and benefits of improvements should be determined and disclosed before public investments are made. Where feasible, existing facilities should be improved before new facilities are developed.
4. Growth and economic development should be focused in a way that conserves and strengthens established neighborhoods, meets local needs and the desire to be a complete community, improves visual and architectural quality, provides a range of economic opportunities, revitalizes the commercial core with local-serving and locally owned businesses, and enhances the quality of life for area residents.
5. El Sobrante's built environment should be designed and developed at a human scale, incorporating healthy community concepts that provide for walking, bicycling, and other non-motorized transportation; recreation; access to healthy foods; and energy- and resource-efficient buildings and development.
6. El Sobrante should be a model for sustainable development and sustainable living, including local food and energy production, zero waste, and green building construction.
7. Because Richmond and Pinole surround El Sobrante on three sides, coordination with the City of Richmond and City of Pinole is essential, and the County should work proactively to address the effects of Richmond's and Pinole's decisions on the quality of life in El Sobrante.
8. Transportation options should be improved, particularly public transit connections to BART and bicycle facilities along major thoroughfares.
9. Long-term solutions should be developed to address traffic safety and congestion, particularly "cut-through" traffic on local streets and congestion on San Pablo Dam Road.
10. San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way should be safer and more attractive for walking and cycling and communicate a positive and cohesive image of El Sobrante.
11. Stronger, more vibrant, and walkable centers should be created in El Sobrante, providing community gathering places and destinations with new opportunities for housing, businesses, and open space.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)

12. Greater housing choices should be provided, including affordable housing, live-work spaces, and alternative dwelling types such as tiny homes.
13. El Sobrante should be a culturally diverse and inclusive community with amenities and services for people of all ages, incomes, abilities, and backgrounds.
14. San Pablo Creek and its tributaries should be protected as accessible open spaces, wildlife corridors, and natural amenities that add beauty, character, and ecological value to the community.
15. Access to local hospitals, health care, and social services is critically important and should be improved.
16. El Sobrante should become more resilient and better prepared for disasters, particularly wildfires, floods, and earthquakes.

POLICIES

1. The maximum allowed density and intensity of development in the Mixed Use designation is X units per acre and Y floor area ratio (FAR).
2. Continue to improve Downtown El Sobrante to create a stronger sense of this area as a town center and destination for local residents, using the Downtown El Sobrante Planned Unit Development (P-1) Zoning and Design Guidelines to guide land use and development decisions in this area.
3. Encourage and prioritize small and locally owned businesses, including markets offering healthier food choices. Local businesses should provide gathering places for residents and contribute to El Sobrante's sense of community and cultural diversity. (3-170)
4. Encourage the combining of adjacent narrow parcels along San Pablo Dam Road, Appian Way, and Valley View Road in order to facilitate infill development and limit the number of potential streets and driveways entering these major thoroughfares. (3-171, 3-172)
5. Consider the effects of new development on aging infrastructure and, where appropriate, require infrastructure improvements as a condition of approval.
6. Improve the pedestrian and bicycle environment in El Sobrante, particularly along major thoroughfares, by closing gaps in the sidewalk system, widening sidewalks, improving wayfinding signage, discouraging "drive-through" businesses, and enforcing speed limits and traffic safety rules. (3-166)

7. Increase neighborhood park acreage in El Sobrante, including requiring parks within new development, preserving open space along San Pablo Creek, and acquiring land using development fees and other sources. Funding for ongoing maintenance should be identified when a park is created. (3-175)
8. Incorporate safe, well-maintained open spaces and gathering places in new commercial and mixed-use development projects where feasible. In addition, multi-family development in El Sobrante should provide on-site recreational facilities for occupants and contribute toward the development of parks and recreational facilities that serve the community at large. (3-204, 3-207)
9. Maintain, and where feasible improve, access to regional open spaces and parks on the perimeter of El Sobrante, including new trails and existing fire trails with the potential for recreational use.
10. Conserve and restore portions of San Pablo Creek as a community open space, natural resource, and visual amenity. In addition, conserve the natural elements of other local creeks, such as Appian Creek and Wilkie Creek. (3-177)
11. Encourage the City of Richmond to preserve the visual character and natural qualities of San Pablo Ridge, the roughly 1,000-acre hillside area that defines the southern and western edge of El Sobrante, by supporting land use decisions that maintain trail access to Wildcat Canyon Park and preserve areas above the 400-foot elevation contour as open space. (3-210)
12. Work with neighboring jurisdictions to ensure that the impacts of development on the El Sobrante community are addressed and mitigated. (3-180)

ACTIONS

1. Continue to work with residents, businesses, property owners, and other stakeholders on improvement and beautification plans for San Pablo Dam Road, including the addition of Class II bike lanes, pedestrian crossings, lighting, and other design changes that better accommodate bicycles, pedestrians, and transit users. Consider similar improvements on other local streets. (3-166, 167)
2. Reconstruct Appian Way as an attractively landscaped thoroughfare, with improved storm drainage, redesigned travel lanes, parking and curb improvements, new streetscape features, trees, and landscaping. (3-204)

ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

3. Undertake drainage improvements to reduce local flooding problems, especially along portions of Appian Way and San Pablo Dam Road that still have open roadside ditches. To the extent feasible, incorporate "green streets" principles in the design of such projects. (3-179)
4. Consider alternatives and identify an approach for financing community beautification, such as a landscape and lighting assessment district, a business improvement district, or similar measures. (3-168)
5. Work with AC Transit and other local public transit agencies to improve local service, restore BART feeder lines, and better connect El Sobrante to regional transit and community services such as hospitals. (3-169)
6. Develop a façade improvement and beautification program to assist El Sobrante businesses.
7. Pursue construction of a new collector street connecting Pitt Way to Hillcrest Road.
8. Implement a community wayfinding and signage program that creates a unified and positive impression of El Sobrante, identifies community gateways, and helps orient and direct travelers in and around the community.
9. Increase the supply of off-street parking available along San Pablo Dam Road to meet business, customer, and resident needs. Parking should be clearly identified with directional signage and located and managed in a way that does not interfere with traffic flow and safety. (3-174)
10. Pursue development of a full-service El Sobrante community center that can accommodate meetings, events, recreational, cultural, and educational activities. (3-176)
11. Periodically evaluate traffic flow and speeds on Appian Way between Valley View Road and the Pinole city limit to determine appropriate traffic calming and improvement strategies. Periodically consider traffic management improvements along other major streets in the community. (3-186, 3-187)
12. Continue to explore the feasibility of a creekside boardwalk and park along publicly owned segments of San Pablo Creek. (3-209)
13. Develop a mechanism to consider the transfer of allowable densities among different parcels designated for mixed use so long as the transfer does not increase the overall maximum number of dwelling units or commercial square footage for such designations in El Sobrante. (3-204)