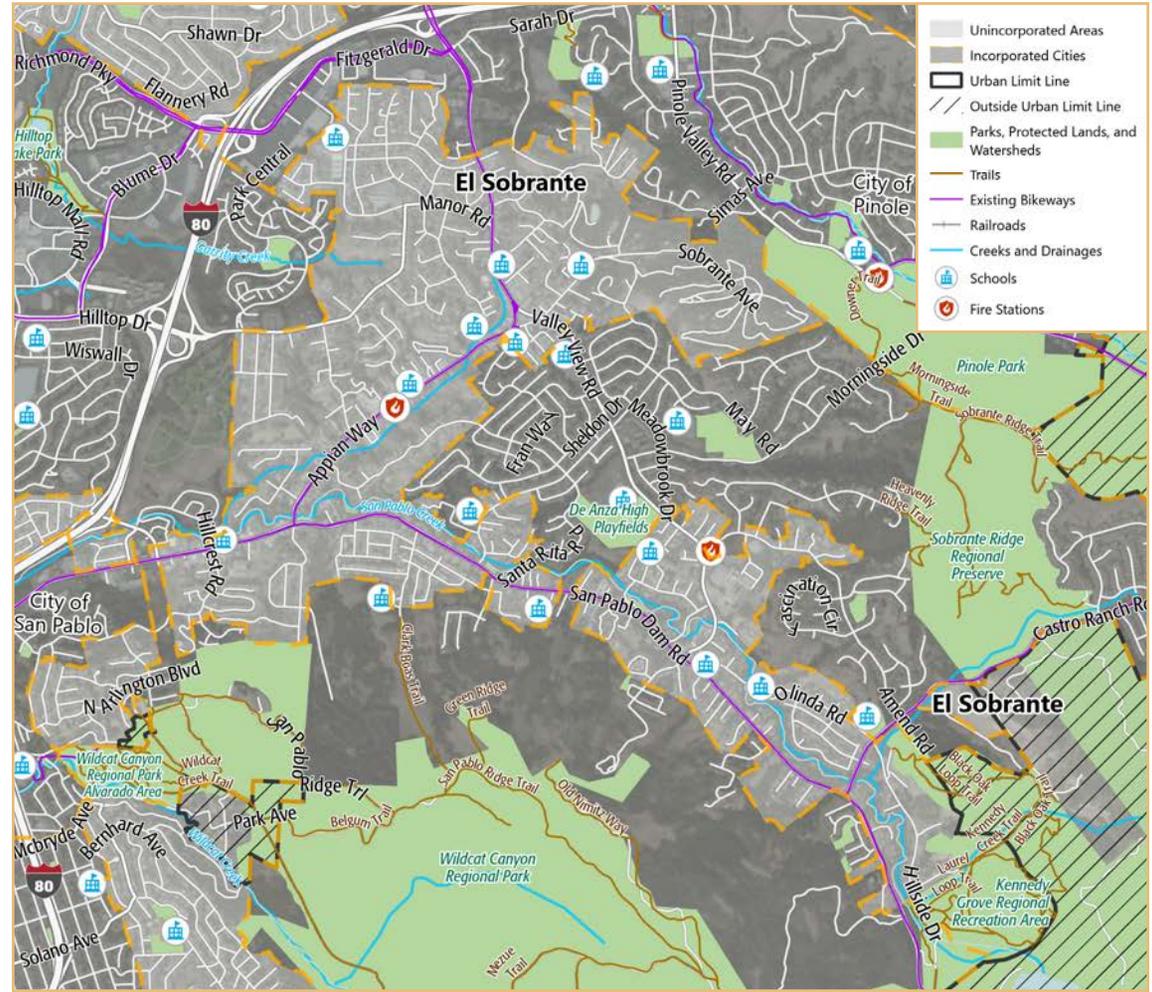


# EL SOBRANTE - CONTEXT - 1

El Sobrante is entirely within the Spheres of Influence for the cities of Richmond and 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 multiple-family residential developments. Roughly 75 percent of the community’s housing stock was built between 1940 and 1979. Important natural features such as San Pablo Ridge, Sobrante Ridge, San Pablo Creek, open hillsides, and oak woodlands provide visual beauty, plant and animal habitat, and opportunities for recreation.

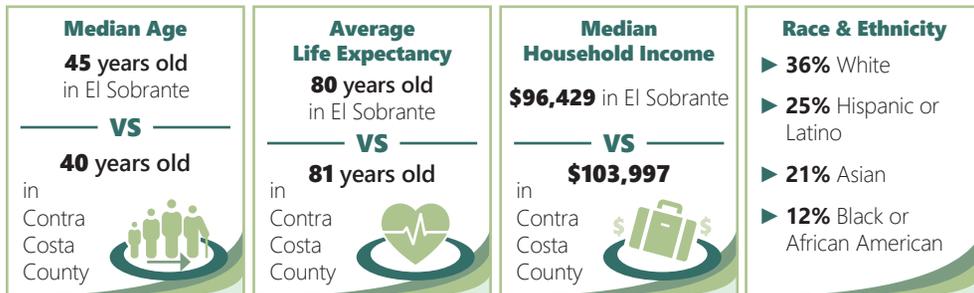
El Sobrante is oriented along three major thoroughfares. San Pablo Dam Road, the backbone of the community, extends from Interstate 80 east and south toward San Pablo Reservoir and Orinda and is home to many of El Sobrante’s commercial uses. Appian Way is a commercial and residential corridor that extends north/northeast from San Pablo Dam Road to Interstate 80 in Pinole, passing through the “triangle” area at the intersection with Valley View Road. Valley View Road is a residential corridor that extends southeast from the “triangle” to San Pablo Dam Road, passing De Anza High School. Most of the community is accessed via these three roads.

Several plans have been developed for El Sobrante over the years 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, 2022.

## WHO LIVES IN EL SOBRANTE?



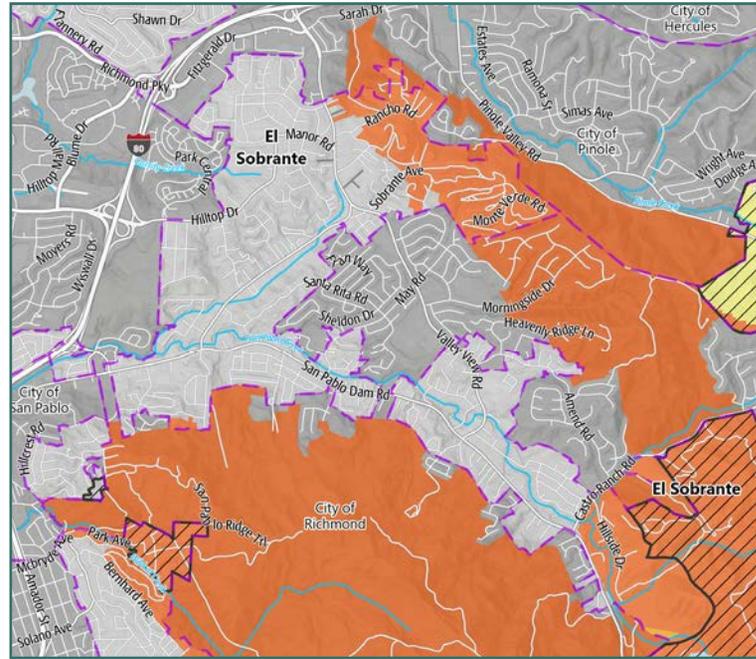
(Community-submitted photo.)



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 if San Pablo Dam were to be compromised by landslides or seismic hazards. San Pablo Dam was upgraded in 2010 to reduce the risk of 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

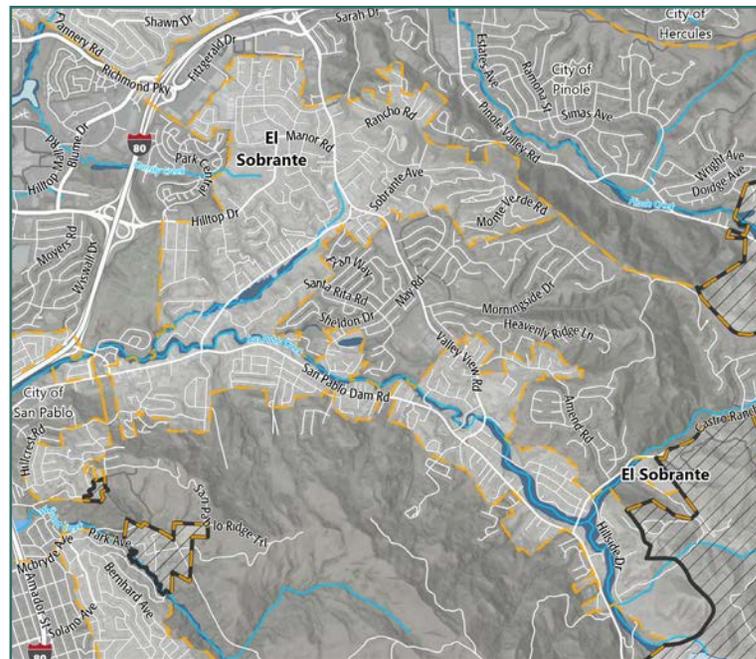
**Wildfire Severity Zones**

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Unincorporated Areas
- Incorporated Cities
- Urban Limit Line
- Outside Urban Limit Line
- Railroads
- Creeks and Drainages

0  1 ↑

Scale (Miles)

Source: CAL FIRE, 2024; Contra Costa County, 2018; PlaceWorks, 2022.



## 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

0  1 ↑

Scale (Miles)

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, 2022.

## PLANNED LAND USE

Land use designations for El Sobrante are shown on Figure LU-1, General Plan Land Use Map, and defined in Table LU-1 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 and open space comprising the rest of the community. Residential areas span a range of densities, from large lot single-family homes to higher density multiple-family apartments and condominiums.

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.” Hill-sides and ridgelines are primarily 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 Low Density and Mixed-Use Community-Specific Density, recognizing the existing mix of multiple-family residential 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 provide more prescriptive design standards for the downtown areas. The Public and Semi-Public designation identifies community assets, including Juan Crespi Middle School, Harbour Way Elementary School, De Anza High School, and the El Sobrante Library, as well as utilities such as an East Bay Municipal Utility District water filtration plant. Open spaces along the San Pablo Creek corridor, and other locations where topography or natural hazards preclude safe development, are designated Resource Conservation. Sites along the creek will be considered for a potential community park.



## DOWNTOWN EL SOBRANTE PLANNED LAND USES

The Downtown El Sobrante P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines cover the area shown in the map on the following page. Downtown El Sobrante includes three mixed-use areas; the text below describes the vision for each area. The Downtown El Sobrante P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines should be consulted for more specific direction related to 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 or residential. Interesting and innovative architecture is encouraged throughout each mixed-use area, but it should be harmonious in scale so that each area is perceived and functions as a cohesive district.

### APPIAN WAY MIXED-USE AREA

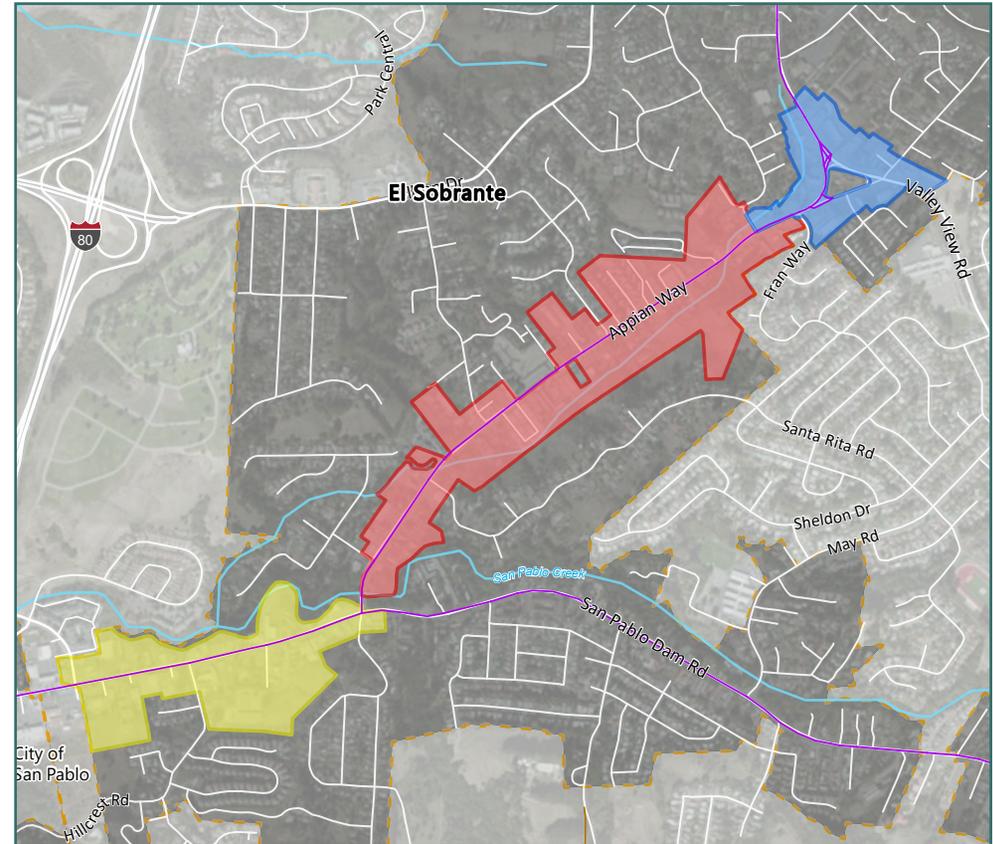
The Appian Way Mixed-Use Area is intended to facilitate development of the Appian Way corridor as a unified, well-designed, walkable neighborhood, including new mixed-use development and improved services, shopping, offices, and restaurants. Neighborhood-scale commercial uses are allowed on all parcels. Residential-only projects and mixed residential-commercial projects are permitted but not required, and residential uses may be integrated into existing commercial developments. 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 is envisioned as a distinct neighborhood retail district. Allowable uses are similar to those in the Appian Way area. Mixed-use projects are preferred, though projects that are entirely commercial are permitted on all parcels, subject to P-1 standards and use limitations. The same building design, streetscape, and parking guidelines that apply in the Appian Way area apply in the Triangle area. The Triangle differs from the Appian Way area in that it is far more compact and offers an opportunity to create a walkable activity node that anchors the northern end of the community. The community has expressed a desire for an arts district in this area, further emphasizing its potential as a cultural and commercial hub.

## SAN PABLO DAM ROAD MIXED USE AREA

The 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 multiple-family residential, offices, retail, and mixed-use projects. The town square is envisioned on the Mechanics Bank property on the south side of the block between Hillcrest Avenue and Pitt Way or other centrally located parcel. Consolidation of existing small parcels is encouraged to create more viable development sites. The mass, height, and shape of buildings should preserve views and be compatible with community character. Potential improvements to San Pablo Dam Road include new bike lanes (possibly separated), wider sidewalks, 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

Source: Contra Costa County, 2018; PlaceWorks, 2023.

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



## 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 commonsense 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 agricultural heritage, and preserve its scenic environment and open spaces.
3. Although new amenities are desired, the costs and benefits of improvements should be compared and disclosed to the public before investments are made. Where feasible, existing facilities should be improved before new facilities are developed.
4. Growth and economic development should:
  - a. Conserve and strengthen established neighborhoods.
  - b. Meet local needs and fulfill the desire to be a complete community.
  - c. Improve visual and architectural quality.
  - d. Provide a range of economic opportunities.
  - e. Revitalize the commercial core with local-serving and locally owned businesses.
  - f. Enhance the quality of life for 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 the cities of Richmond, San Pablo, and Pinole surround El Sobrante on three sides, coordination is essential and the County should work proactively to address the effects of decisions by Richmond, San Pablo, and Pinole on the quality of life in El Sobrante.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)

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 to prevent "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, providing community gathering places and destinations with new opportunities for housing, businesses, and open space.
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.
17. Local businesses should act as gathering places for residents and contribute to El Sobrante's sense of community and cultural diversity.



## POLICIES

1. In mixed-use areas, support development and retention of commercial uses and local-serving businesses in mixed-use areas to meet the daily needs of the community while promoting new residential development.
2. Continue improving downtown El Sobrante to create a stronger sense of this area as a town center and destination for residents, using the Downtown El Sobrante Planned Unit Development (P-1) Zoning and Design Guidelines to guide land use and development decisions.
3. Encourage development of small and locally-owned businesses, especially markets offering healthier food choices.
4. Encourage the combining of adjacent narrow parcels along San Pablo Dam Road, Appian Way, and Valley View Road to facilitate infill development and limit the number of potential streets and driveways entering these major thoroughfares.
5. Improve the pedestrian and bicycle environment, particularly along major thoroughfares, by closing gaps in the sidewalk system, widening sidewalks, discouraging “drive-through” businesses, and enforcing speed limits and traffic safety rules.
6. Increase local park acreage, including pocket parks within new development and preserve open space along San Pablo Creek with the goal of creating a trail along San Pablo Creek between Appian Way and El Portal.
7. Encourage new commercial and mixed-use projects to incorporate safe, well-maintained open areas or gathering places.
8. Encourage multiple-family residential projects to provide on-site recreational facilities for residents.
9. Partner with East Bay Regional Park District to maintain and improve access to regional open spaces and parks on the perimeter of El Sobrante.
10. Partner with community organizations to conserve and restore portions of San Pablo Creek as a community open space, natural resource, and visual amenity, and conserve the natural elements of other local creeks, such as Appian Creek and Wilkie Creek.

## POLICIES (CONTINUED)

11. Encourage the City of Richmond to preserve the visual character and natural qualities of San Pablo Ridge, the hillside area that defines the southern edge of El Sobrante, by supporting land use decisions that protect areas above the 400-foot elevation contour as open space and maintain trail access to Wildcat Canyon Regional Park.
12. Work with neighboring jurisdictions to ensure that the impacts of development on the El Sobrante community are addressed and mitigated.
13. Deny applications for entitlements to establish new automotive uses (auto/body repair, oil change, gas stations, etc.) in El Sobrante.

## 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.
2. Implement a road diet for San Pablo Dam Road between Appian Way and Castro Ranch Road and identify funding to build a dedicated bike lane through this corridor.
3. 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.
4. Improve drainage infrastructure to reduce local flooding problems, especially along portions of Appian Way and San Pablo Dam Road that still have open roadside ditches.
5. 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.



## ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

6. Work with 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.
7. Develop a façade improvement and beautification program to assist El Sobrante businesses.
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.
10. Pursue development of a full-service community center that can accommodate meetings, events, recreational, cultural, and educational activities.
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.
12. Continue assessing the feasibility of a creekside boardwalk, trail, or path along the segment of San Pablo Creek between Appian Way and El Portal Boulevard and pursue development of a neighborhood downtown park along San Pablo Creek.
13. Amend page 18 of the land use matrix in the *Downtown El Sobrante Planned Unit District Zoning and Design Guidelines* to disallow automotive uses.

