

1. Vision and Guiding Principles

Overview

This chapter describes a vision for East Palo Alto for the next 20 to 30 years. It includes a vision statement, guiding principles and a list of the major strategies needed to achieve the vision.

Vision

We, the residents, institutions, and businesses of East Palo Alto, have developed a new vision for the City that will create a better tomorrow for future generations. We build on the City’s founding principles of self-determination, affordable housing, fiscal stability, community participation, equity and justice to become a City that is welcoming of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, language, age, or educational level. We strive to be the most diverse, peaceful, healthy and balanced community in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Over time, the physical form of the City will evolve as new jobs and housing are added to complement the City’s strong neighborhoods and diverse housing stock, aiming for a more sustainable jobs-housing balance. To that end, the Ravenswood area will be transformed from empty lots into a thriving business, research & development, and commercial center. We will have a new “main street” on Bay Road that serves as the City’s downtown with a City Hall and a variety of locally-owned neighborhood retail stores, restaurants and services. University Avenue will be transformed from a cut-through corridor into a beautiful mixed use boulevard with high-density housing, neighborhood-serving businesses and offices that capitalize on the City’s proximity to Silicon Valley. New housing will be added

throughout the City along with neighborhood shopping areas, and existing housing will be renovated and improved. The Gateway 101 Shopping Center will evolve into a dense retail and office district. The Westside of the City will become a beautiful residential area with high-quality affordable housing, parks, community facilities and enhanced connections to the rest of the City.

As the City’s tax base is strengthened and diversified, public services will also be enhanced. We will support small, locally-owned businesses. We will strengthen educational and recreational opportunities for our youth – the next generation of City leaders. And we will partner with the many organizations operating within our borders to support a high quality of life for all residents.

We will create a healthy and beautiful City by building new parks and recreational facilities, adding new trees and landscaping, and improving access to our unique and cherished natural resource, the San Francisco Bay and the Don Edwards S.F. Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

As the future of the City unfolds, the residents, institutions, and businesses of East Palo Alto will work collaboratively to continue our progress towards a financially stable and strong city, growing sustainably and inclusively.



A gateway sign marks the entrance to the City.

Guiding Principles & Values

To achieve the vision for the future, the City will follow the Guiding Principles and values described below.

1. **A City for all people.** East Palo Alto is a community of color that will be a city free of discrimination and prejudice, embracing the City’s history and founding vision as a place where everyone can thrive, regardless of race, class, income, age, culture, or sexual orientation. We will honor the personal history and unique point of view of every individual, acknowledging the inherent wisdom and value that they possess.
2. **A safe and healthy community.** We will protect the personal safety and welfare of people who live in, work in, and visit East Palo Alto, including from crime, pollution, natural disasters, and other threats and emergencies. We will improve the health of our community by supporting active transportation, access to healthy food, access to parks, access to healthcare, improved mental health, preventive care and fitness, and economic opportunity for residents.
3. **Fiscal health and stability.** We acknowledge that to achieve our goals, it is critical to create a revenue base sufficient to provide municipal services comparable with cities of a similar size. We recognize that achieving and maintaining fiscal health will require a consistent and multi-faceted strategy. Our land use, budgetary, program, and staffing strategies will improve the City’s fiscal health, and we will continue to make efforts to strategically phase growth to increase and stabilize City revenues and expenditures over time. The City will use the principle of land value recapture so that development rights will not be given away without a community benefit.
4. **Housing opportunity for all.** We recognize that providing safe, healthy, and affordable housing options will be one of the City’s major challenges for the future, and we will commit resources, political will, creativity, and persistent effort to this issue. We will seek to protect fair access to housing, reduce displacement of existing residents, decrease

homelessness, and provide a diversity of housing types and affordability levels to serve a broad and diverse community of new and existing residents.

5. **Economic equity, vitality, and diversity.** We will increase East Palo Alto’s economic vitality and diversity for the equitable benefit of the entire community. We will leverage our unique and powerful Silicon Valley location to expand job opportunities and support a range of businesses and economic sectors. We will also seek to increase the balance between East Palo Alto jobs and residents, pursuing a citywide mix of employment and housing that allows families to both live and work in the City.
6. **High quality public facilities and infrastructure.** Well-functioning, reliable infrastructure and facilities are core requirements for a successful community, and without them residents and businesses cannot thrive. Recognizing this, the City will execute its responsibility to provide functional, safe, and well-maintained infrastructure for all residents, businesses, and institutions in East Palo Alto. The City will ensure the continued provision of reliable and continuously improving public services, including fire and police services, and will work to address any adverse impacts of development on these services.



New Menlo Park Fire District Station 2 on University Ave.

7. **Arts, culture, and education.** Arts, culture, and education are central components of human happiness. We embrace East Palo Alto’s creative culture and the artistic pursuits of our community. We endorse and support access to education as a human right, and a pathway to our resident’s success. We will enhance the cultural and creative

life of the community, cultivating the talents, expertise, and wisdom of the East Palo Alto community.

8. **Sustainability and environmental protection.** We will strive for environmental responsibility and sustainability in our community. We are committed to preserving a healthy and ecologically flourishing planet for our children and grandchildren. We will support innovative programs and policies for environmental sustainability, climate change mitigation and adaptation, livability, and resource protection.
9. **Strong and unique neighborhoods.** East Palo Alto's neighborhoods are at the core of its identity and unique character, and make up the majority of the City's land area. We will continue to protect, improve, and equitably re-invest in these neighborhoods, creating beautiful, livable places that our diverse population can call home.
10. **Transportation choices.** East Palo Alto will have equitable, safe, healthy, and reliable transportation choices for those living in, working in, and visiting the City. The network will equally feature motor vehicle and active transportation modes, and it will connect residents to jobs and services both within our city and the surrounding region while improving the quality and safety of neighborhoods, allowing residents to move freely and comfortably to meet their daily needs.



YUCA member explains how planned improvements to Cooley Landing and the Bay Trail can provide residents with better access to jobs, schools, and services.

11. **Social capital and community connections.** We will cultivate social connections between neighbors, neighborhoods, and those who visit and work in the City, acknowledging that our community is stronger when we work together. Our efforts at community building will foster connections between people and promote trust amongst neighbors. The fabric of the City will be enlivened by vibrant public spaces, attractive civic facilities, successful retail destinations, public spaces for gathering and socializing, public events and festivals, civic organizations and programming, and safe streets where residents can participate in the social life of the City.
12. **Increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency.** The City's operations and organizational effectiveness should be a model for the rest of the community. We will hold ourselves to a high standard of excellence to increase the quality of governance, improve its organizational practices, enhance civic participation, and serve the community with professionalism and commitment.
13. **Strategic engagement within the region.** We will engage strategically and proactively with the region to solve regional problems, understanding that East Palo Alto's fortunes are tied to the broader community. We will continue to develop solutions to City problems in coordination with adjacent cities, regional agencies, and nearby funders, businesses, or investors.
14. **Citywide greening.** We recognize the physical and mental health benefits that come from a close connection to nature, and commit to protecting and enhancing East Palo Alto's natural environment. This will include expanding the urban forest, greening public spaces, and protecting nature and habitat. We will improve our maintenance of the existing tree canopy and shift to drought-tolerant vegetation throughout City facilities.

15. **Revitalize and beautify the city.** We will create a beautiful City with a vibrant sense of place by providing well-designed public spaces and human-scale streets and streetscape design. The City will be an aesthetically pleasing, engaging place to live, work, and visit. Public art will be supported and included in major civic projects and spaces.
16. **Active community engagement in land use decision making.** The future of East Palo Alto should be planned by and for the community, with a focus on meeting community needs, reflecting community voices, improving quality of life for residents and building the capacity of residents to influence the decision-making process. The City shall continue to take steps to ensure ongoing participation in these planning processes, and any future citizens' advisory committees shall reflect the diversity of City residents and business interests.



Community leaders facilitate small group discussions at a General Plan Update workshop.

Major Strategies

To implement the vision and guiding principles of the General Plan, the community, through the public process, has identified a series of major strategies and physical improvements that should occur over the next 20-30 years. The strategies range from specific physical improvements (such as building a pedestrian bridge across Highway 101) to long-term transformations of different parts of the City. The major strategies are listed below and, where possible, shown in Figure 1-1. These actions are consistent with the physical improvements proposed in Chapter 12, "Implementation."

1. **Implement the Ravenswood/4 Corners Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Specific Plan.** The largest potential for new development, increased parklands/open space, enhanced economic activity, and an improved jobs-housing balance is implementing the vision in the Ravenswood TOD Specific Plan. To do so, the City should enhance public-private partnerships, seek funding for infrastructure improvements, market the area to technology companies, secure long-term sources of water, and pursue catalytic development projects that attract additional development. The improvements must also be done in a way that is sensitive to the existing residents to ensure that the changes not only bring in increased tax revenue but also advance the economic conditions of East Palo Alto residents.
2. **Create a main Street on Bay Road.** The City of East Palo Alto lacks a traditional main street that serves as the central meeting, gathering and shopping location for residents. This lack of a main street has impacted social cohesion and connectedness. The Ravenswood TOD Specific Plan envisions a pedestrian-friendly main street along Bay Road with ground floor retail and residential uses on the upper floors. Making this vision a reality is a critical component of the General Plan.



Bay Road is envisioned as an active and vibrant spine that serves as a focal point for Ravenswood and 4 Corners, as well as for the City as a whole.

3. **Revitalize University Avenue.** Transform University Avenue from a through-traffic corridor with a diversity of low density uses into a beautiful, mixed use corridor designed for all modes of travel. Specific activities will include streetscape improvements, incentivizing mixed use development with ground floor retail at key nodes, and pedestrian amenities.
4. **Enhance the Westside.** The area west of Highway 101 presents one of the biggest planning challenges over the next generation. Due to the Westside’s predominant role in providing affordable housing, development is directed to the other areas of the City, including the Ravenswood Business District , Bay Road, and University Ave. Any change in development intensity or land uses on the Westside will have to provide the affordable housing protections and other requirements included in the General Plan and other City policies. The community aims to preserve the affordability levels that provide housing for the working class while also beautifying the area with new streets, parks and open spaces, community facilities, flood protection, new pedestrian connections (including the pedestrian bridge over Highway 101), and an improved Newell Bridge. In the affordable housing area the City will review projects to ensure that there to be no net loss in the number of residential units or the number of deed-restricted affordable housing units during any future reconstruction or renovation on the Westside.
5. **Redevelop the Gateway 101 shopping center.** The Gateway 101 Shopping Center presents a long-term opportunity to add jobs and expand the tax base. The General Plan envisions redeveloping portions of this shopping center with neighborhood-serving and office development on the upper floors to capitalize on the freeway access and visibility, and the booming office market in Silicon Valley.
6. **Construct office uses at University Avenue and Highway 101.** The General Plan envisions a small office/Research and Development (R&D) area near the intersection of Donohoe Street and University Avenue, just north of Highway 101. This area has the potential to add hundreds of new jobs, expand the tax base, and improve the jobs-housing balance.
7. **Preserve and enhance residential neighborhoods.** Residential neighborhoods are the heart and soul of East Palo Alto, a melting pot of races, ethnicities and cultures. The General Plan envisions preserving and enhancing the residential neighborhoods in the City. Activities include upgrading all streets with curbs, gutters and sidewalks wherever possible, developing neighborhood parking strategies, planting street trees to green the area and allowing second units where feasible to increase the housing supply and accommodate multi-generational housing.
8. **Expand neighborhood retail areas.** East Palo Alto residents desire quality and affordable retail and services within walking distance of their homes. The General Plan builds off of the exiting retail areas and identifies multiple retail “nodes” for enhancement and expansion.
9. **Add middle density and multi-family housing.** The community desires a diverse and affordable housing stock. The new General Plan land use designations allow multi-family housing at moderate densities in selected locations. This housing will diversify the existing housing stock east of Highway 101 and support new retail and services.
10. **Build new parks and open spaces.** The City currently lacks parks, green spaces and access to the Bay Trail and National Wildlife Refuge – specifically, there is a



Pedestrian bridge along Bay Trail and National Wildlife Refuge.

shortfall of 56 acres with respect to the 3 acres/1,000 resident standard. Since significant new park facilities are unrealistic beyond the 30 acres contemplated in the Ravenswood TOD Specific Plan given the built-out nature of the City, this General Plan envisions a layered network of new parks open spaces that includes new mini-parks, improved access to the Bay Trail at key junctures, multiple new linear parks on existing public rights of way (including the San Francisquito Creek in the Westside), shared streets that provide recreation for residents, and greening existing streets with new trees and landscaping.

11. **Implement citywide traffic calming.** The City suffers from significant cut-through traffic due to its location within the region and the large number of commuters who must pass through the City to travel from homes in the East Bay to jobs in Silicon Valley. To offset the impact, the General Plan envisions a citywide traffic calming effort that includes roundabouts, bulbouts, and road diets (that is, reducing the number of travel lanes) on key thoroughfares including Pulgas Road, Clarke Road, East/West Bayshore, and Bay Road. Priority locations for improvements should be on the major cut-through streets and near schools and parks as these areas have the highest levels of pedestrian activity.
12. **Expand the educational hub.** Enhancing the educational quality and attainment is critical to the long-term success of the City. With multiple schools already in existence, the area around Pulgas Avenue,

Clarke Road, Myrtle Street, and O'Connor Street is emerging as an educational hub with multiple schools and educational facilities. The City should build on the success of this area to create a beautiful, diverse and high-quality educational hub that serves both East Palo Alto Residents and residents from neighboring communities. Improvements include streetscape enhancements and marketing the area as an educational hub.

13. **Build connections across Highway 101.** The Westside is physically isolated from the rest of the City and the University Avenue overpass is unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. The General Plan includes new connections across Highway 101 – a bridge south of University Avenue and re-opening up an existing underpass north of University Avenue and enhanced multi-modal opportunities along University Avenue.



Renderings of planned Highway 101 pedestrian/bicycle bridge.

14. **Enhance gateways to the City.** To enhance the City's identity and character, new gateway treatments should be developed at key entry points to the City including University Avenue at Highway 101, Adams Drive, and Woodland Avenue, on Newbridge Road at Willow Road, and along East Bayshore.

15. Build new civic and public uses. The City currently does not have a stand-alone City Hall and public offices are spread throughout the City. In the future, the City will build a new City Hall with public meeting and gathering spaces, Council Chambers and offices. New public uses such as community centers and libraries will be spread throughout the City to meet the needs of existing and future residents.

16. Secure stable water resources for new development. Adding new housing and jobs in the City is constrained by a lack of water to support development. A critical step to strengthen the economy and achieve fiscal stability is to address the water shortage in the City, which may include: securing additional water from SFPUC, diversifying the City’s sources of water supply, establishing a water offset policy for new development, and implementing water efficiency/conservation measures. Once this occurs, intensification and redevelopment can occur in areas such as along University Avenue and in the Ravenswood TOD Specific Plan area.

17. Comprehensively address flooding. Throughout its history, the City has suffered from flooding from the San Francisquito Creek. The City will continue to work collaboratively with regional agencies and surrounding jurisdictions to address this issue and develop a comprehensive plan to mitigate potential impacts to residents and businesses in the City.

18. Preservation of housing affordability. The City of East Palo Alto is a leader in providing affordable housing. Approximately 39% of all the housing units in the City are affordable (including RSO, income restricted rentals, and BMR units). Preserving and expanding the existing affordable housing units and expanding the number of affordable housing units are key strategies to preserve the affordable character of the City of East Palo Alto, especially on the Westside.



New levee built along the San Francisquito Creek.

Figure 1-1: Major Strategies (labeled numbers correspond to Major Strategies list above)

