

INTRODUCTION **1**

This chapter provides a setting and context for the Specific Plan, describes the area covered by the Plan, elaborates on previous planning efforts that have set the stage for this Plan and how it relates to other key City plans and programs, and lists the chapters that follow this introduction along with a short summary of their content.



From the time the City of East Palo Alto was incorporated in 1983, its residents and leaders have worked diligently to enhance the community. In many parts of the city, these efforts have borne fruit. But change has been slower to come to the Ravenswood Business District and 4 Corners.

In recent years, the City Council and the community have focused their attention on the Plan Area. New apartments have been built near 4 Corners, with rents that are more affordable to the city's residents. In addition, the City has upgraded the appearance and function of Bay Road, making it a more pleasant place for people to walk and ride bicycles. But much potential remains - there are still many vacant properties in Ravenswood Business District and 4 Corners that could be developed, as well as opportunities to add improvements and facilities that would better serve the community's needs. The area's public utilities, including water, stormwater, and sanitary sewer, must be improved so that significant new development can occur.

To shape the future of the RBD, the City of East Palo Alto has prepared this plan, the Ravenswood Business District / 4 Corners Specific Plan. The Specific Plan outlines how the area can be transformed into thriving mixed-use districts that provide places to live, employment opportunities for both residents and non-residents, parks and open spaces, transportation enhancements, and effective utility infrastructure and sea level rise protection. The Specific Plan focuses on a few key outcomes and strategies:

- The Plan establishes expectations and a framework for providing amenities that benefit East Palo Alto residents, such as a new library, a new community center, space for nonprofits and local

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organizations, subsidized local merchant or maker spaces, day care and play spaces, resource centers and job training spaces, and recreational and fitness facilities.

- Importantly, the Plan provides detailed regulations for all new development that occurs within its boundaries. These regulations will implement the community's vision.
- The Plan lays down policies for transforming Four Corners into a new, lively destination for East Palo Alto and activating key elements of Bay Road and other community-centered streets or spaces within the Ravenswood Business District.
- Finally, it establishes the required pedestrian and bicycle enhancements and Transportation Demand Management strategies that will ensure new development reduces its own vehicle trips and supports improved public transit in the future.

At its core, the Specific Plan was shaped by input from members of the East Palo Alto community, who all throughout the process offered a wide variety of ideas to guide the future of the RBD. As many of these concepts and desired outcomes as possible have been incorporated into this updated Specific Plan.

The following sections provide an overview of the Specific Plan and describe the chapters that follow this introduction.

Plan Context

Regional and Local Setting

East Palo Alto is located in the southeast portion of the San Francisco Peninsula, approximately 30 miles southeast of San Francisco and 18 miles northwest of San Jose. US 101 crosses through southeast East Palo Alto. The city is bordered on the south by Palo Alto and on the west and north by Menlo Park. The San Francisco Bay forms the city's eastern boundary. Figure 1-1 shows the regional location of East Palo Alto.

The Plan Area that is addressed in the Specific Plan is located in the northeast portion of the city, west of the San Francisco Bay. A portion of the Plan Area shares a boundary with the city limits.

Figure 1-1: Regional Location

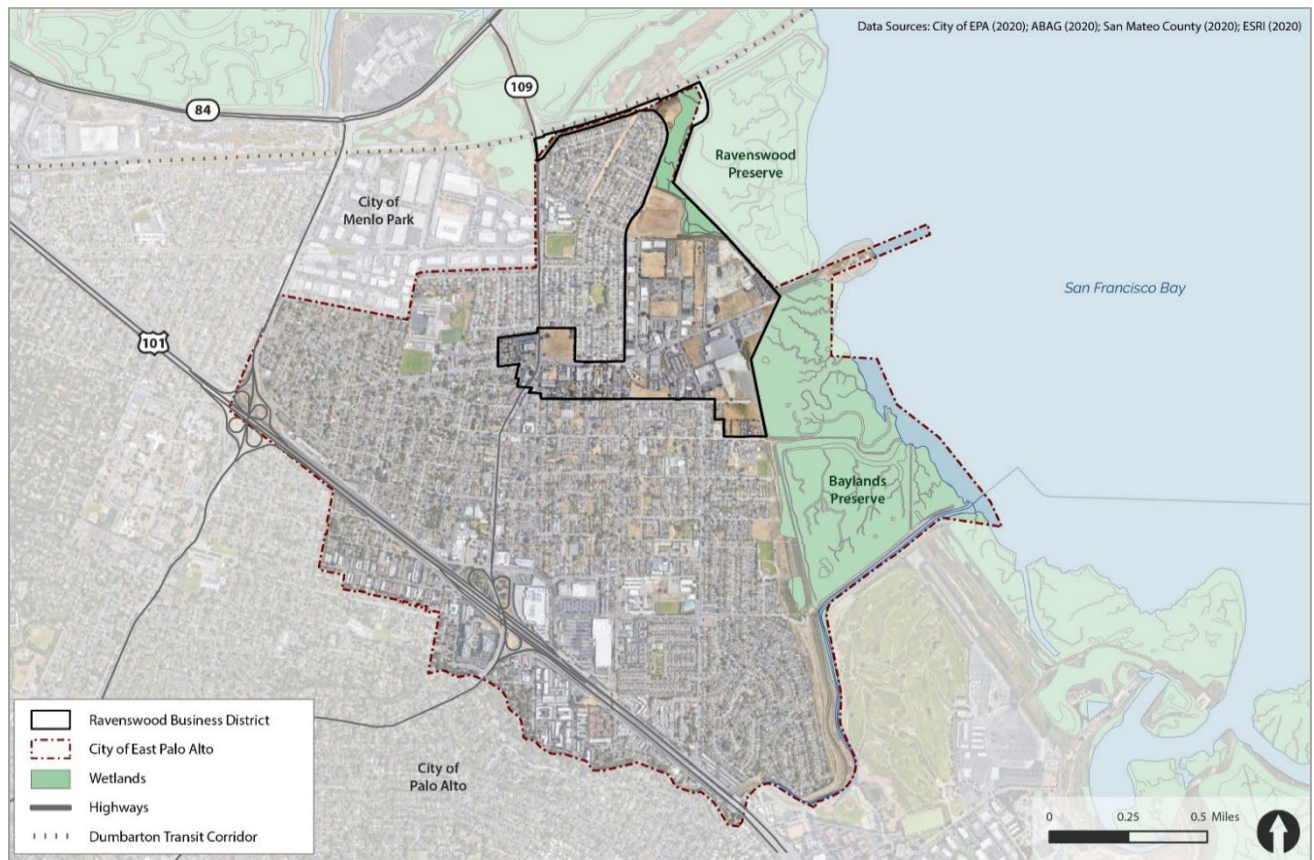
Specific Plan Area

The Plan Area encompasses approximately 207 acres and is located in the northeastern portion of East Palo Alto. The project area is generally bounded by the City limits/Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) tracks to the north, the western edge of the Union Pacific Railroad easement along the back of Illinois Street to the west, Weeks Street or Runnymede Street to the south, and the Ravenswood Open Space Preserve and Palo Alto Baylands

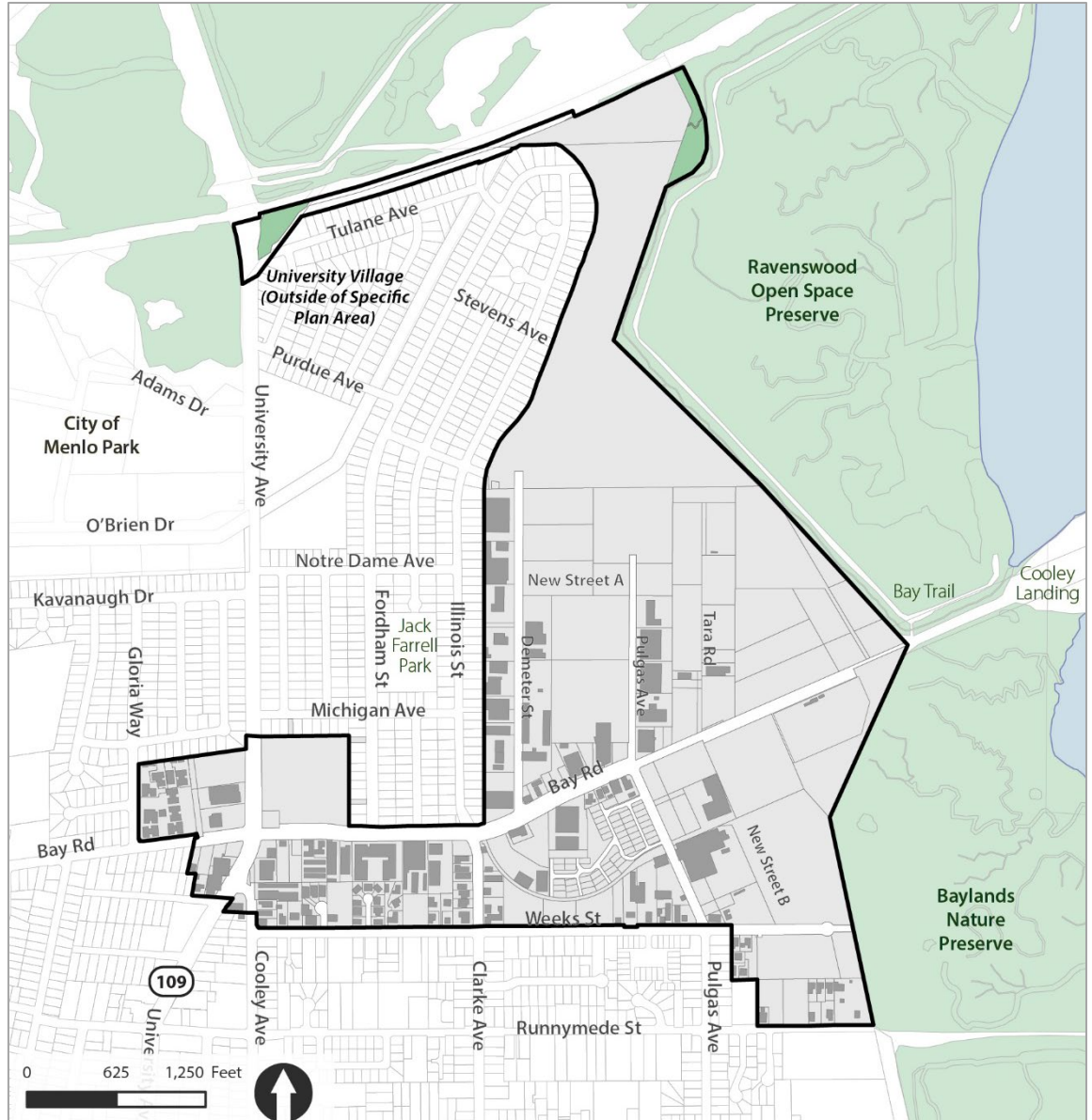
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Nature Preserve to the east. Existing development within the Specific Plan area includes single-family and multi-family residential, retail, office/medical office, light and general industrial, and civic/institutional land uses. In addition to University Avenue, which is an important corridor within the city as well as the region, the Plan Area includes Bay Road, a major east-west corridor in East Palo Alto. Figure 1-2 shows how the Plan Area fits within the city. Figure 1-3 shows the Plan Area boundary.

Figure 1-2: Plan Area



The Plan Area does not include University Village, a single-family neighborhood immediately east of University Avenue. The Specific Plan does not call for new development or land use changes in University Village; however, mobility and infrastructure improvements related to the implementation of the Plan will occur in the neighborhood to help make University Village a better place for existing residents to live.

Figure 1-3: Plan Boundary

Purpose and Intent of the Plan

This Specific Plan is intended to serve as the primary document and reference guide for the future development and redevelopment of Ravenswood Business District and 4 Corners. In addition to providing the community and decision-makers with clear documentation of the vision for the Specific Plan Area, this Specific Plan is intended to provide a clear

policy and regulatory framework by which future development projects and public improvements will be reviewed. Finally, this Specific Plan provides guidance on design, potential public investments, and implementation. It should be noted that a Specific Plan is not a detailed site plan or design plan and does not commit to any specific building design on any specific properties.

Key Community-Generated Land Use and Design Goals

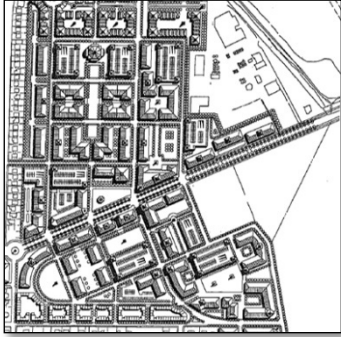
The community engagement process undertaken for this Specific Plan yielded eight key goals, which are reflected throughout the remainder of the document in its vision, policies, land use regulations, objective design standards, development requirements, circulation improvements, infrastructure recommendations, Community Benefits Framework and priorities, and implementation strategy.



#1. Create a Complete Neighborhood. The community expressed a strong desire for a vibrant and accessible area that is ultimately greater than the sum of its individual developments, more than isolated office parks or clusters of market-rate housing. The Plan's benefits framework sets forth targets for community-serving land uses and facilities in order to ensure that the district is enlivened

with an appropriate mix of activities. Chapter Six describes allowed land uses by zone and the various regulations that govern specific uses. The City expects that:

- Office, R&D, light industrial, retail, and market-rate and affordable housing are blended together with public open space, community amenities, and civic uses.
- The area is developed in a coordinated and cohesive fashion
- A network of community-serving spaces and places is developed over time, through a combination of private and public efforts
- Adequate utility infrastructure (water, storm drainage, flood control, and sewer) is provided to accommodate new development.



#2. Build walkable blocks. The community explained that the Plan Area is difficult to travel through in part due to the very large distances between public roads or paths. Therefore, the expectation is that the area is broken down into smaller, more accessible blocks with more frequent connections for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. The community anticipates that:

- New high-quality, wide pathways and sidewalks will be provided by all major developments.
- Alleys, paseos, and greenways are deployed strategically to increase access throughout the area.



#3. Create an interconnected transportation network. A key design goal emphasized by the community was improving circulation north and south of Bay Road in the RBD area, including new public streets that would link existing access roads and increase connectivity throughout the area. This new road is identified in Chapter Seven, Circulation, which includes detailed cross-sections to ensure that new roads will be complete streets that accommodate the anticipated volumes of vehicular traffic as well as transit, pedestrians, and bicycles. The community asked that:

The community asked that:

- New streets and trails be aligned with existing networks, community desired-connections, and/or adjacent developments.
- Heavy traffic is diverted away from residential neighborhoods.
- Protected bicycle infrastructure is expanded in key locations.

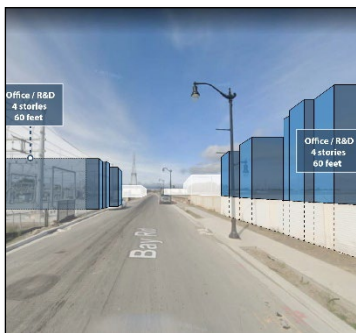
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#4. Activate Bay Road. The community stated repeatedly that Bay Road should be the “heart” of East Palo Alto. To that end, the Specific Plan includes policies and standards that are focused on achieving an active, walkable corridor that becomes a destination for residents and visitors alike. Land use regulations, design standards, and unique ‘active frontage’ requirements in the Plan are

tailored to creating this environment:

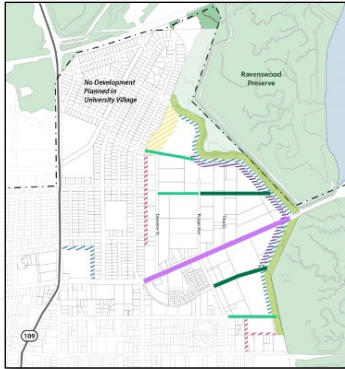
- Active uses such as shops, restaurants, entertainment, government services, community merchant spaces or makerspaces must be located along ground floors facing Bay Road
- On key streets, new buildings must present friendly faces to pedestrians with high levels of transparency and frequent entrances
- Most buildings are to be set relatively close to public streets
- Blank facades are to be avoided, especially facing parks or plazas



#5. Moderate building size. As the prospect of additional development was discussed, the community shared hesitations over the potential impacts of tall, bulky buildings next to their homes. In response, the Plan includes objective standards that aim to reduce how large new buildings seem, especially for upper stories. To avoid overshadowing existing residential properties or wetland

areas, the Plan’s requirements focus on:

- Requiring the use of downward transitions in height or massing breaks/articulation or encouraging treatments such as material changes, screening, and trees
- Limiting the amount of floor area that can be built up to the maximum height
- Minimizing building dimension perpendicular to the waterfront



#6. Enhance public views of the Bay. The community expressed a desire to preserve and enhance the protection of public views. The Specific Plan has addressed this through custom development standards for the public views that are most critical to preserve in Chapter Six, Land Use. The community wishes to:

- Ensure that regular and consistent views of the Bay are provided, especially from Bay Road
- Sufficiently wide view corridors are maintained through future developments to preserve visual access to the Bay from varying heights and directions; in short, “don’t block the bay!”



#7. Connect people to the waterfront.

One common thread expressed by residents of nearby neighborhoods was the need for better access to the Bay Trail. Therefore, it is incumbent upon waterfront-adjacent projects to:

- Build out relevant portions of the comprehensive circulation network identified in Chapter Eight, including upgrading or rebuilding adjacent sections of the Bay Trail
- Create roughly linear through-connections that provide regular public access to the Bay Trail and/or the future trail along the SAFERBAY improvement



#8. Develop a welcoming network of open spaces. Finally, the community expressed a very strong interest in having a diverse mixture of parks and open spaces, in terms of the size and character of the space as well as the types of activities that are encouraged.

- Create spaces that can be used and accessed easily by the community
- Ensure new parks and trails are connected to the rest of the City
- Line public and common open space with active uses and engage ground floor architecture
- Create transitions between different spaces
- Minimize surface parking lots and maximize permeable surfaces

Previous Planning Efforts

This section describes previous planning efforts that have been undertaken within the Specific Plan Area.

Weeks Neighborhood Plan

The Weeks Neighborhood Plan is a plan prepared in 1997 that provided a vision for future change in the Weeks Neighborhood. The study area for this project included much of the southeastern portion of the Plan Area, including properties located on the north side of Weeks Street. While the Plan's vision did not become formal City policy, the Weeks Neighborhood Plan later influenced the development of the East Palo Alto Revitalization Plan, which is described below.

East Palo Alto Revitalization Plan

The East Palo Alto Revitalization Plan, prepared in 2000, explored potential development strategies and regulations for Ravenswood Business District, 4 Corners, and other areas of the city. In 2005, preliminary work took place to adopt the Plan's recommendations, but this work was not completed and the Plan was never officially adopted.

Community Vision for the Bay-Clarke-Weeks-Pulgas Project Area

In 2003, a Community Vision was created for the Bay-Clarke-Weeks-Pulgas Project Area, a large block bounded by Bay Road, Clarke Avenue, Weeks Street, and Pulgas Avenue. The community's vision included a mix of housing and retail stores, with additional space for nonprofit groups. The

Ecumenical Hunger Program, a non-profit food kitchen that operates on Pulgas Avenue, grew out of this community vision.

Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project Study

The Dumbarton Rail Study, which took place during 2018-2021 and was supported largely by Facebook, identifies possible solutions to traffic impacts created by the Dumbarton Bridge and Highway 101 corridor.

Relationship to Other Plans and Programs

Previous Specific Plan (2013)

This Specific Plan represents a comprehensive update to the prior Plan, which was adopted in 2013, and as such, wholly supersedes the previous Plan. This revised Specific Plan honors the extensive community input provided during the drafting of the original Plan (from October 2009 through March 2011, the City led a community process that included 15 public meetings, of which three were highly interactive public workshops) but also recognizes new concerns and priorities as expressed by residents during more recent engagement.

This Plan Update was initiated by the City Council in 2021 to study the impacts related to a larger buildout of the Plan Area, to build a complete neighborhood, to put in place requirements that maximize benefits that accrue to the City and its residents.

General Plan and Other Area Plans

The City last updated its General Plan in 2016, which incorporated the 2013 Specific Plan by reference. The General Plan also included an area plan for the Westside of the City.

City Ordinances and Municipal Code - Inclusionary Housing Ordinance, Commercial Linkage Fee, Measure HH, Measure L

During the past decade, the City has augmented its baseline expectations for new development, with a focus on building affordable housing, improving infrastructure, and funding job training. These include:

- Commercial Linkage Fee. The City assesses affordable housing impact fees on non-residential development. See <https://www.cityofepa.org/finance/page/city-fee-schedules> for the current fee schedule.

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- Inclusionary Housing Ordinance. Residential developments must provide 20 percent of all new housing units on-site at a level affordable to low- and moderate-income households or provide an alternative mitigation.
- Measure HH. A tax that applies on a per square foot basis to all commercial office or R&D developments greater than 25,000 square feet. These are subject to an additional annual parcel tax to fund job training and affordable housing.
- Measure L. Establishes a 2.5% tax on the gross receipts of local residential landlords, to be used for general government uses such as programs for affordable housing, providing tenant rental support, and protecting local residents from displacement and homelessness.

Current Development Impact Fees

The City is completing a nexus study and financial feasibility analysis to update the City's development impact fees for transportation infrastructure, water capacity, storm drainage, parks and trails, and public facilities.. These fees are required to be paid by future developments in the Plan Area and will be adjusted periodically by City Council.

Sixth Cycle Housing Element

The City has adopted an HCD-certified Housing Element for the Sixth Cycle RHNA as of March 19, 2024. The City anticipates meeting its regionally provided allocation across all income levels, in part through new housing expected to be built in the Plan Area.

SAFER Bay Flood Control Project

To provide comprehensive flood protection, the City, as a funding partner with the SFC Joint Powers Authority, is undertaking a shoreline protection effort that spans the eastern length of the City, from north to south. This will take the shape of a levee, flood wall, pumps, and other related infrastructure. The project is expected to be FEMA-certified when completed.

Parks Master Plan and Urban Forest Master Plan

The City adopted a Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan in 2023 to guide the future improvements of existing parks and the development of new parks, trails, and open spaces. This plan was developed in coordination with this Specific Plan. The City's Urban Forest Master Plan,

adopted in 2022, also provides more detailed guidance on the requirements for planting new trees in public and private spaces.

Statutory Requirements of the Specific Plan

This section discusses how this Specific Plan meets the requirements of California State law.

Required Contents

This Specific Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of California Government Code Section 65451. As prescribed by law, the Plan includes text and diagrams that generally describe the following:

- The distribution, location, and extent of all land uses & open space.
- The proposed distribution, location, extent, and intensity of major components of public infrastructure, such as transportation and utility systems.
- The standards and criteria by which development will proceed.
- A program of implementation measures, such as financing measures, policies, regulations, and public works projects.
- A statement about the relationship of the Specific Plan to the General Plan.

Findings of Consistency with the General Plan

California law requires a Specific Plan to be consistent with a City's General Plan and that findings regarding consistency be included in the Specific Plan itself. Although amendments to the City's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance will be necessary as part of the Specific Plan's adoption process, the recommendations, and objectives of the Ravenswood Business District/4 Corners Specific Plan are consistent with the overarching goals of the East Palo Alto General Plan. The land use designations in the General Plan will be updated to reflect the adopted Specific Plan.

Standards and Guidelines

The Plan's objective standards and design guidelines respond to the Plan's vision and design principles and govern future development and infrastructure in the Plan Area.

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Objective Design Standards are requirements that must be followed by project applicants and property owners, unless an exception to a standard is otherwise noted, or a variance is approved. These standards apply to both residential and non-residential projects. Objective standards are typically written with “shall” statements and include numeric requirements that cannot be exceeded or other clear and non-subjective criteria. Per State law, these standards shall involve no personal or subjective judgement and are to be verifiable by reference to an external and uniform criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant and the City prior to submittal” (California Government Code, Section 65913.4).

Guidelines are the City’s expectations for how site, building, and infrastructure improvements should be designed. There is flexibility in how projects meet each guideline depending on project-specific design and location. These guidelines are typically written with a “should” statement. In some instances, guidelines allow an activity to occur but do not mandate its implementation; these are written with a “may” statement.

Plan Structure and Contents

The chapters described below follow this introduction.

- **Chapter Two: Community Process and Outreach** provides a detailed discussion of the community process that helped to create this Specific Plan. In particular, this chapter describes the opportunities for public input as the City worked to identify key issues of concern and the most vital community benefits.
- **Chapter Three: Existing Conditions** provides a brief description of the Specific Plan Area as it was when this Plan was adopted, including existing land use, transportation, and utilities.
- **Chapter Four: Vision and Concepts** includes the Vision Statement that guides the remainder of the Specific Plan. It also discusses the land use, urban design, and public space concepts that are proposed for Ravenswood Business District and 4 Corners.
- **Chapter Five: Land Use Policies** contains general goals and policies pertaining to land use and development in the Plan Area, including best practices to follow and desired outcomes, and are an extension of the General Plan’s goals and policies that focus on the Plan Area.

- **Chapter Six: Land Use and Development Standards** provides the land use, zoning, and development framework for the Specific Plan Area, including the zoning map, the land uses that are allowed in each land use zone, the objective standards that apply in each zone (the rules that must be followed when undertaking new development or significant modifications of existing development), and the supporting design guidelines.
- **Chapter Seven: Open Space, Parks, and Public Facilities.** This chapter describes the vision for a network of parks and open spaces throughout the Plan Area that is well connected, accessible to residents and users of all ages and abilities, consists of both passive and active recreation, and preserves natural, undeveloped open spaces where possible. This chapter includes standards and guidelines to ensure these concepts are implemented.
- **Chapter Eight: Circulation** describes how the movement of pedestrians, vehicles, bicycles, and transit can be improved within the Plan Area. The chapter provides recommendations for specific streets and street types within the Specific Plan Area.
- **Chapter Nine: Utilities** provides recommendations for stormwater, wastewater, and water infrastructure improvements. This chapter also discusses potential improvements to police and fire service, schools, libraries, and parks within the Specific Plan Area that may be necessary as the Specific Plan is implemented.
- **Chapter Ten: Community Benefits** describes the requirements, guidelines, and processes related to community benefits that apply to major office/R&D development projects. This chapter reflects the top priorities for benefits to be provided by entitled projects as articulated during the creation of this Specific Plan.
- **Chapter Eleven: Implementation** discusses the implementation process that will follow immediately upon adoption of the Plan, the requisite physical and programmatic improvements needed to effectively carry out the Plan’s vision, and finally potential funding opportunities and financing strategies for improvements recommended in this Plan.

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- **Appendix A: Fiscal Impact Analysis.** This appendix provides employment and fiscal impact analyses for implementation of the Specific Plan [to be included with final Plan]
- **Appendix B: Land Use Definitions** [to be included with final Plan]
- **Appendix C: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP)** [to be included with final Plan]