1. PLAN OVERVIEW

Summary

The Crow Canyon Specific Plan provides a vision for an area of San Ramon that is currently underutilized but has the potential to develop into an active, mixed use center for the community. The purpose of the Plan is to guide the evolution of this 128-acre office and service commercial area in a way that will encourage coordinated development, which responds to citywide and regional objectives as well as to local and neighborhood considerations. The goal is to create a new pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use community with concentrated commercial and residential uses, while maintaining viable light industrial and service commercial uses wishing to remain.

The intent of the Specific Plan is to encourage investment and new development within the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area through a coordinated program of public improvements and a clear pattern of land uses that provides investors with a level of certainty regarding the future form and character of development. The Plan provides policies and guidelines that encourage new development that complements and enhances existing uses, enabling these uses to remain as long as they wish and as long as market conditions allow. The Plan recognizes that the full buildout of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan will take many years to realize and that, to avoid piecemeal decisions and foreclosed opportunities, such a vision must be set forth now.

More specifically, the Crow Canyon Specific Plan provides for:

1. The intensification of underutilized properties within the area for a mixture of commercial and residential uses including:

    - Up to 735 residential units on sites north of San Ramon Creek and west of San Ramon Valley Boulevard to create a cohesive mixed-use neighborhood;

    - The allocation of at least 25% of these units to a mix of moderate, low and very-low income households, including families, workers, and senior citizens;

    - Up to 87,000 square feet of new, typically small-scale neighborhood-serving retail shops, restaurants, and local businesses oriented to Old Crow Canyon and Omega Roads between San Ramon Creek and Purdue Road to create a vital pedestrian-oriented activity center and provide community services for the Northwest Specific Plan area; and

    - The infill and intensification of the balance of the Specific Plan area with up to 270,000 square feet of new commercial uses, typically free-standing small and medium-scale businesses.

The plan would result in up to 735 new residential units and 427,000 square feet of new shops, restaurants and commercial development. Park and trail improvements would transform San Ramon Creek into an open space resource.

2. The establishment of development standards and design guidelines, which provide for:

    - The creation of a cohesive and pedestrian-friendly urban district with a strong identity, an intimate human scale, and a vertical and horizontal mixture of uses;

    - Appropriate separation and buffering between new development and existing service-commercial businesses; and

    - The upgrade and beautification of existing commercial and service-commercial businesses within the area.

3. Public investment to provide a catalyst for redevelopment and to establish a new identity for the area, including:

    - A mixed-use development with approximately 55 units of affordable housing, ground level retail, restaurant and community-oriented uses on existing Redevelopment Agency-owned property (1.3 acres) on Old Crow Canyon Road.

    - The improvement of Old Crow Canyon Road, Omega Road and Hooper Drive as village-scaled streets that provide convenient vehicular circulation, a generous

pedestrian environment, and the principal frontage for neighborhood-serving businesses and village commercial establishments within the area;

- The extension of Twin Creeks Drive north of Crow Canyon Road to connect with Old Crow Canyon Road, in order to improve local circulation and mobility through the area.

- The improvement of Purdue Road as a vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian linkage to the Northwest Specific Plan area;

- The further beautification of San Ramon Valley Boulevard as an important boulevard within the City;

- The provision of utility and infrastructure upgrades (e.g., water, sanitary sewer, storm drainage, electrical undergrounding) necessary to support new and existing development; and

- Improvements to San Ramon Creek and its tributary that will, in conjunction with private redevelopment, make it an important recreational and open space resource within the community.

Background

The Plan area is generally bounded by the Town of Danville to the north, the Crow Canyon Specific Plan and Northwest Specific Plan boundary to the west, Crow Canyon Road to the south and Interstate 680 to the east. The 128-acre Plan area lies generally within the center of the 610-acre Crow Canyon Planning Subarea, which extends west and east of the Specific Plan area from Bollinger Canyon Road to Alcosta Boulevard towards the northern edge of the City boundaries. The subarea contains the earliest commercial development in the City with a wide variety of retail, office, and auto-related commercial businesses. (See Figures 1-1 and 1-2.)

Before construction of the I-680 freeway in 1966, San Ramon Valley Boulevard was the principal north-south link between Walnut Creek and Pleasanton and was fronted by the auto-oriented commercial uses typical of such highways. Over time, the area has added office and service commercial uses, and evolved into the City's primary service-commercial district with automobile sales and repair, construction contractors, building materials, warehousing and storage, home repair services and maintenance supplies.

In May 1987, on the recommendation of the San Ramon Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors and San Ramon Planning Commission, the San Ramon City Council adopted Ordinance No. 104 which approved the City of San Ramon Redevelopment Project Area Plan. With a 45-year duration, the original Plan provides for the redevelopment of two specific, non-contiguous geographic areas in the City determined to be blighted and in need of physical improvement. Together these geographic sub-areas comprise

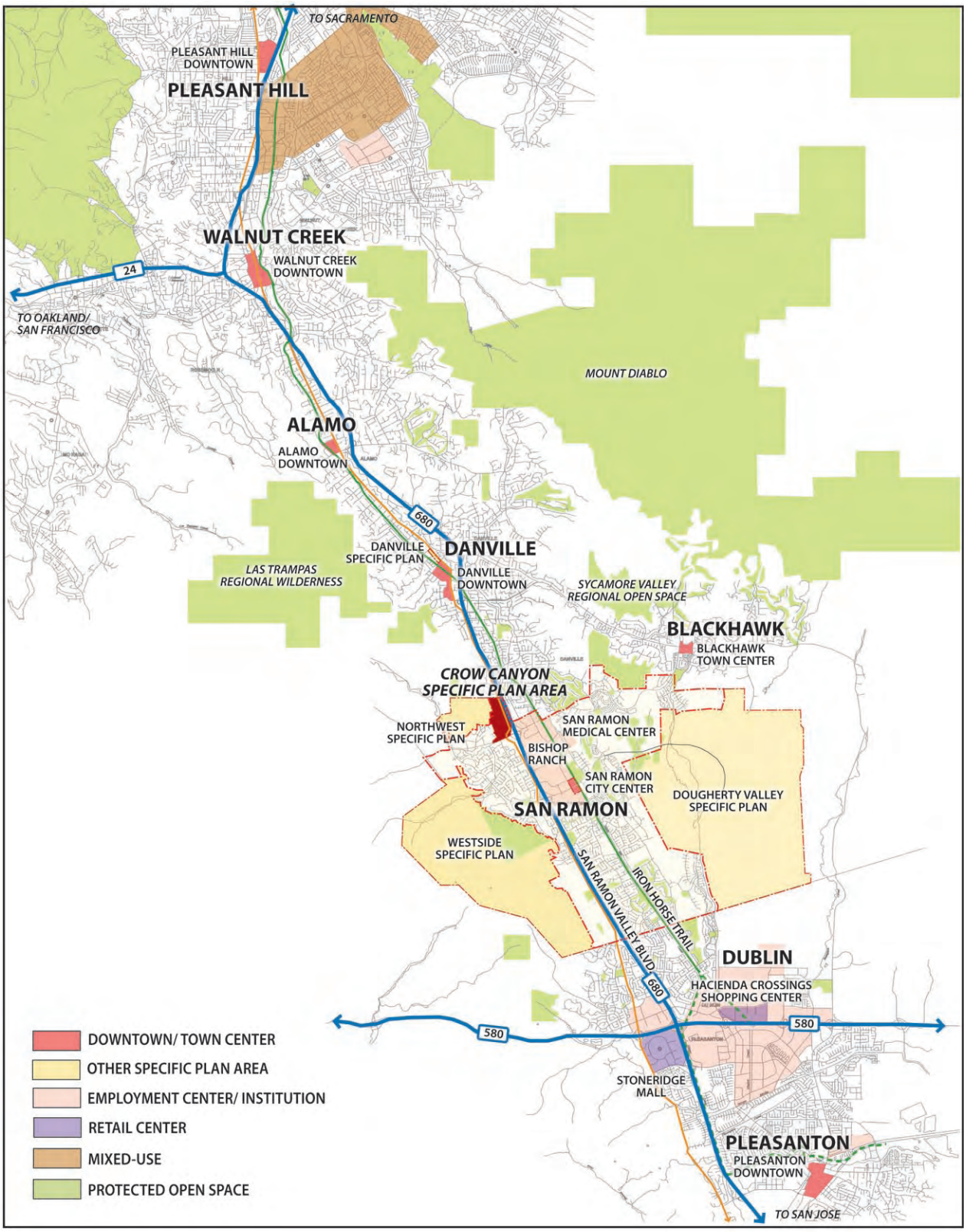


FIGURE 1-1

REGIONAL CONTEXT

the City's Redevelopment Project Area (RDA). The area covered by this Specific Plan is the most northerly portion of the 484 acres that comprise the Crow Canyon RDA sub-area. A major focus of the 1987 RDA plan was the elimination of vacant buildings, improvement of underutilized properties and abatement of other blighting conditions that existed in the Crow Canyon RDA sub-area. Many of those conditions remain present today on parcels that are located within the Specific Plan boundaries. These blighting conditions are discussed more specifically in Chapter 2, Summary of Existing Conditions.

The 1986 Downtown Specific Plan and the 1991 Conservation and Enhancement Program were unable to overcome the area's fragmented property ownership, and there was no progress on the plan's first goal of making the area San Ramon's "downtown" or the second goal of a "market responsive, business retentive approach."

Policy 4.7-I-2 of the General Plan, approved in March 2002, directed preparation of this Crow Canyon Specific Plan:

Prepare a Crow Canyon Specific Plan for the area delineated on the General Plan Diagram to guide the future redevelopment of this area as a mixed use neighborhood integrating multi-family housing with office, retail, and service uses at a pedestrian scale, and to implement the Smart Growth mandate of this General Plan. This specific plan should include as a minimum the following elements:

- Land use program, providing for a mixed use neighborhood, integrating about 460 multi-family housing units and about 570,000 square feet of non-residential floor area for retail, office, service commercial, and other uses at a pedestrian scale. Bonus provisions for workforce housing and other public benefits could increase the actual number of units and amount of floor area that could be built under the land use program.

- Development and design program, including standards and guidelines for building scale and location, transition from lower to higher densities, streetfront orientation and transparency, performance requirements, noise buffering, parking location and design, landscaping, undergrounding of utilities, signs, etc.

- Bonus/incentive program for additional FAR and housing units in return for the provision of workforce housing, public amenities, pedestrian and transit facilities, etc.

- A workforce housing program providing that at least 25 percent of all units within the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area are affordable to Very Low, Low, and Moderate income households. Such a program will determine the timing for workforce housing relative to the City's employment growth, the most appropriate income split, rental-to-ownership ratio, deed restrictions, and phasing requirements. As an additional incentive for workforce housing, if more than 25 percent of the housing units provided are affordable, then the development limit set in the land use program may be exceeded by one housing unit for every one affordable unit provided in excess of the minimum requirement.

  A specific schedule of incentives for various levels of affordability (25%, 30%, 35%, etc.) will be established as a guideline, using the City's Affordable Housing Density Bonus Program as a base.

- Infrastructure improvement program, including street, sewer, water, electricity, and drainage improvements.

- Implementation program, including Zoning Ordinance amendments (if required), cost of and responsibility for necessary capital and other improvements, phasing of development, financing measures, plan administration and enforcement, etc.

FIGURE 1-2
LOCAL CONTEXT

Scope of the Specific Plan

The Crow Canyon Specific Plan establishes the location, intensity and character of land uses, the circulation pattern and necessary infrastructure improvements to support development, the location and configuration of parks and community facilities within the area, and the implementation actions required to realize the Plan's objectives. As such, the Specific Plan provides detailed policy, elaborating on the San Ramon General Plan, which is the principal tool that guides growth and development within the City. Because the Specific Plan is also adopted by ordinance, it is the primary land-use regulatory tool for the area, taking precedence over the Zoning Ordinance.

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared to evaluate the Crow Canyon Specific Plan. In conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the EIR is finalized and certified before the Specific Plan is adopted.

Planning Approach and Process

To guide the preparation of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan, a seven-member Crow Canyon Specific Plan Advisory Committee was created. This group balanced a diverse range of interests, including area property and business owners and others interested in the area's development. The Advisory Committee provided overall direction and guidance throughout the planning process. Over a nine month process, periodic meetings were held with the Advisory Committee to discuss the progress of the Plan, to review and refine alternatives, and to establish the policies presented in this document. Public comment and input were received at all of these meetings, providing the Advisory Committee with a direct dialogue with the community.

The Advisory Group hosted five public workshops on the following topics:

- Workshop 1: Issues and Opportunities. February 27, 2003.

- Workshop 2: Alternative Concepts. April 10, 2003.

The Crow Canyon Specific Plan Advisory Committee hosted six public workshops.

- Workshop 3: Review of Alternatives. May 22, 2003.

- Workshop 4: Summary of Alternatives. July 17, 2003.

- Workshop 5: The Preferred Plan. October 13, 2003.

The consultant team, headed by ROMA Design Group, prepared a report for each workshop as well as a comprehensive summary of Existing Conditions, Issues and Opportunities (March 12, 2003). Immediately following Workshop 5, City staff and the consultant team presented the recommended plan to the City Council.

In addition to the regular Advisory Committee meetings, City staff and the consultant team conducted a series of interviews with key stakeholders and interest groups to better understand issues of concern and to provide clarification and explanation of the plan as it evolved. Their responses are summarized in the February 27 and March 12, 2003 reports. Under the direction of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan Advisory Committee, the plan was drafted to incorporate and balance the multiplicity of concerns and ideas expressed during the extensive public participation process.

On July 22, 2004, the Advisory Committee conducted a sixth public workshop to review the Preliminary Draft of the Specific Plan. The Draft Specific Plan incorporated the committee's comments.

The development of this Plan has resulted from an iterative process of exploring and refining alternatives. Options focused on the realization of clearly stated objectives established by the Advisory Committee early in the process. The alternatives were effective tools for focusing discussion, testing and evaluating concepts, and achieving general consensus within the Advisory Committee for the ultimate concept.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan is: to guide the future redevelopment of the area as a mixed-use neighborhood, integrating multi-family housing with office, retail and service uses at a pedestrian scale and to implement the Smart Growth mandate of the General Plan.

Objectives:

1. Provide for the phased redevelopment and recycling of underutilized lands within the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area.

2. Create a pedestrian-friendly district with retail shops, restaurants and other amenities that provide San Ramon with an attractive community-gathering place, a stronger identity and a sense of place.

3. Develop housing that contributes to the creation of a vibrant mixed-use district and to the City's affordable housing goals.

4. Pursue new development and improvements that promote a human scale and establish a town character within the area.

5. Ensure that existing viable businesses can continue to operate as redevelopment occurs.

6. Promote sustainability through compact development that encourages alternative modes of travel and innovative building and

open space design that conserves and protects natural resources.

7. Establish a staged program of public improvements (e.g., open space, roadways, infrastructure) that provide required services to new and existing development and that minimize impacts on adjacent areas.

8. Establish a Façade and Landscape Improvement Program to support commercial rehabilitation and beautification, as well as streetscape enhancements on private property.

Summary of Opportunities and Constraints

Key opportunities for achieving the stated objectives include:

- The City's 2020 General Plan has already established public policy for the intensification of the area as a mixed-use district.

- Numerous sites within the Plan area appear to be underutilized or have become available for redevelopment. Several property owners are interested in redeveloping their properties.

- The real estate market appears to be supportive of a range of residential developments including townhouses, apartments and condominiums.

- The area immediately to the west of the Specific Plan area has already developed with medium density housing and the Northwest Specific Plan area proposes up to 829 new homes.

- The Plan area is within a redevelopment area and can utilize tax increment financing for new infrastructure and public improvements; redevelopment set-aside funds for affordable housing development are also available.

San Ramon Creek and its tributary offer an important open space resource.

- San Ramon Creek and its rich riparian vegetation, which winds through the southernmost portion of the area creates a unique environment that could contribute to the identity and amenity value of the area. Undeveloped portions of the channel and banks might be improved with walking and bicycling trails and open spaces, including the Redevelopment Agency-owned parcel on the south side of Old Crow Canyon Road.

San Ramon Valley Boulevard links San Ramon with other valley communities.

Old Crow Canyon Road has the potential to be transformed into a pedestrian-friendly village street.

- The Plan area has other positive characteristics and features that could contribute to the creation of a unique mixed-use district, including:
    - Direct regional access and visibility from Interstate 680 and Crow Canyon Road;
    - San Ramon Valley Boulevard, an important north-south arterial providing linkages to San Ramon and other valley communities from Walnut Creek to Pleasanton;
    - Old Crow Canyon Road which is largely unimproved but has the potential to be transformed into a pedestrian-friendly village street at the core of the district;
    - Close-in views to the adjacent hillsides and distant views to Mount Diablo, that establish a distinctive sense of place; and
    - Established office and service-commercial businesses that can contribute to the diversity of the area.

There are several constraints that will need to be addressed to accomplish the project objectives:

- The area has historically served as the City's service commercial district. There are numerous viable automotive and light industrial businesses in the area. New residential and mixed-use development will need to be planned in a way that is complementary and not disruptive to uses that wish to remain and continue to provide important services within the community.
- There are several key property owners who have held their land for a long time and do not wish to participate in redevelopment.
- Because many of the existing uses in the Plan area are economically healthy, proposed uses must command higher land values than existing uses in order for redevelopment to occur.
- Property ownership is highly fragmented, and the San Ramon Project Area Redevelopment Plan does not give San Ramon's Redevelopment Agency the power of eminent domain to facilitate site assembly.

The Specific Plan area contains many auto-service uses.

Auto-oriented retail uses dominate on San Ramon Valley Boulevard.

- The image of the area is not currently conducive to new residential or mixed-use development; land area sufficient to establish "critical mass" and a new neighborhood identity will be required for successful residential development.

- Properties east of San Ramon Valley Boulevard abutting I-680 are particularly constrained because of their small area and shallow depth (55 to 185 feet).

- Properties south of San Ramon Creek are largely developed with uses that are not likely to change in the foreseeable future (e.g., Sierra Suites Hotel, Sleepy Hollow office complex).

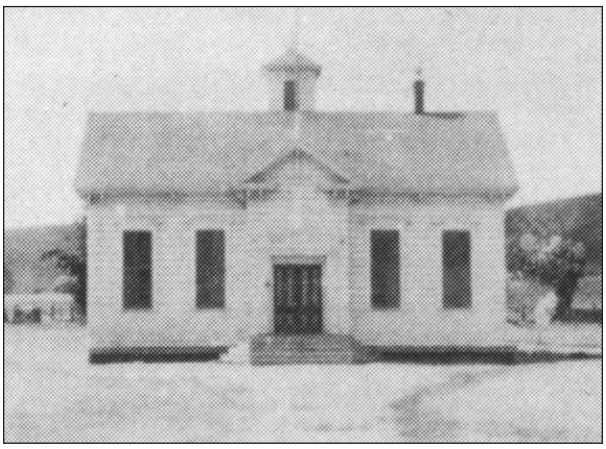
- The City's ambitious goals for affordable housing within the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area and other priority sites (i.e., 38 units affordable to very-low-income households, 58 to low-income households and 97 to moderate-income households) will require significant public investment, as private development is not likely to achieve these targets alone.

- Residential redevelopment will have fiscal implications, requiring additional public services and new public open space within the area.

- There is little public land in the area for new open space; the properties designated for open space in the 2020 General Plan are only partially owned by the City, and San Ramon Creek is mostly in private ownership.

- Freeway noise in excess of 70 dB will need to be mitigated to support residential development and to create a comfortable pedestrian environment.

- Any trail or open space improvements to the channel or banks of San Ramon Creek need to avoid significant impacts on habitat and wildlife.



On this 1855 map, the Specific Plan Area is in the left center bounded by Las Trampas Ridge to the northwest and San Ramon Creek to the south and east (top). Until the arrival of the railroad in 1891, the Specific Plan Area was the center of the San Ramon community. San Ramon General Store and Post Office c.1880 (left) and the San Ramon School c.1867 (right).