

II. BACKGROUND

2.1 PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

The Pleasant Hill BART Station has a 30 year history of planning and development. The following is an abbreviated chronology of the milestones:

- 1972: BART completes the station between the freeway and the low-density residential area.
- 1977: General Plan Amendment for transit-oriented development adopted by the Board of Supervisors.
- 1983: Pleasant Hill BART Station Specific Plan adopted by the County Board of Supervisors.
- 1984: County Establishes the Pleasant Hill BART Redevelopment Project.
- 1986: the first office building is completed under the specific plan
- 1987: the first of 7 additional traffic studies is completed.
- 1989: Loma Prieta earthquake.
- 1992-95: Economic recession.
- 1995: Theater/retail development is proposed for the 18 acres on the BART property.
- 1997: The theater development proposal is withdrawn.
- 1999: Amendments are adopted to the Specific Plan. The BART property commercial development capacity is reduced by almost 500,000 s.f.
- 1998: County undertakes a community planning process using the design and development standard of the specific plan. An acceptable plan was not developed.
- 2000: Decision made to undertake a subsequent community planning process using Charrette methods and New Urbanist development principals.
- 2000: Lennertz Coyle and Associates team is hired to initiate a design program using the Charrette design process.
- 2001 February: 6 day Public Charrette.
- 2001 April: 2 day follow-up.

2.2 THE PLEASANT HILL BART STATION SPECIFIC PLAN

The masterplan is required to meet the provisions of the Pleasant Hill BART Station Area Specific Plan. The Specific Plan mandates the requirements for land uses, development program, building form and massing, public spaces, circulation, and open space within 125 acres of land on and around the BART Station.

The current masterplan encompasses an 18 acre parcel described in the Specific Plan as areas 11 and 12, immediately adjacent to the station. The Specific Plan requires a mix of uses on the site



Pleasant Hill BART Station Area Specific Plan Cover



Remnants of the former rural character remain in a rapidly changing region.

that include locally-serving retail but specifically excludes regional retail and entertainment. It limits commercial office use to 800,000 gross square feet, and, depending on the location and proximity to adjacent housing and view sheds, limits height from five to twelve stories.

The Specific Plan reflects BART policy and requires the replacement of the existing BART surface parking spaces. It protects views from the BART platform towards Mount Diablo. The masterplan diverges from the Specific Plan in terms of minimum required building setbacks from existing streets in accordance with the New Urbanist principle of spatially-enclosing the streets to help create an active public realm. In the masterplan, nonresidential buildings will be built directly up to the sidewalk in a traditional main street fashion, like downtown Walnut Creek

2.3 REGIONAL CONTEXT

During the last three decades, there has been extraordinary population growth in Contra Costa County. One reason is the enviable quality of life: the availability of good jobs and housing, nearby cultural attractions, the climate and a beautiful natural landscape. Unfortunately, as new people moved in, the area has sprawled outward - threatening the very lifestyle and qualities that beckoned many people to the area begin with.

GROWING "SMART"

To help solve this dilemma, county leaders have begun to develop a land-use plan to control and focus growth in a way that uses land more efficiently and reduces future sprawl. Elements of this "smart growth" strategy include: creating an urban limit line beyond which urban densities are not allowed, encouraging "infill" development (residential or commercial buildings constructed on empty lots within a developed area), and looking at land-use and transportation initiatives simultaneously.

Three potential scenarios for responding to these mounting growth pressures have been defined. The likely effects of each one are:

SCENARIO #1 NO-GROWTH

Stop all new construction in the county

Housing prices will skyrocket without creating new housing opportunities. This will make it difficult to attract new residents or accommodate future generations of Contra Costa County residents and will ultimately drive out jobs.



The Pleasant Hill BART Station is located at the junction between many transportation systems.

New jobs will mean employees must commute from neighboring counties that do allow growth, placing additional strains on those communities. In addition, traffic congestion at the BART station and on streets and roads throughout the county will rise considerably.

SCENARIO #2 BUSINESS AS USUAL

Continue conventional subdivision and strip development

This choice means development will be built on the last remaining parcels between the existing built-up areas and the County's Urban Limit Line. Pressure will then mount to push the Urban Limit Line further out to accommodate even more "edge" development. The combination of low-density development and absence of public transit in these areas will ensure that virtually all trips will be by automobile, adding to traffic congestion.

Auto trips will grow longer since everyday services and most jobs are clustered in older, established areas near major roads. County residents will be forced to drive on streets that are burdened by even more traffic congestion.

SCENARIO #3 FOCUS-GROWTH

Encourage compact, pedestrian-oriented development in already urbanized areas and around existing transit centers.

There will be less reliance on the car, since transit station areas will become hubs of activity and provide a range of services



To improve access to the site, several connecting streets cut through the site, providing many route choices.

needed by people in their daily lives. Instead of relying solely on their cars to get to such services, residents will have the choice of using BART or other transit alternatives. Road congestion will increase at a slower rate than the first two options - minimizing the impact on local streets around the county.

This option offers the opportunity to create attractive, safe, and convenient town centers that consolidate growth instead of allowing it to sprawl. Compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development - also known as "smart growth" - is a pattern that helps maintain Contra Costa County's natural amenities while also accommodating new growth. Focusing growth also allows the protection of open space and valuable agricultural land from sprawl.

2.4 PRINCIPLES OF NEW URBANISM AND TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The following principles of New Urbanism have been incorporated into the Pleasant Hill BART Station Area Masterplan:

- The Station Area is well-connected to the surrounding neighborhoods and to the region. A continuous network of streets and paths provide a choice of safe, convenient, and interesting routes within and without the station area.
- The Station Area's streets, parks, and squares become the community's outdoor living rooms. They are safe, convenient, and comfortable places in which to spend time. No major pedestrian route should be through a desolate parking lot or through a lifeless street. These outdoor rooms become the places where the chance meetings of people occur on a daily basis and provide the space of support for the formation of community bonds.
- The station area has a mix of uses, where people live, work shop, and recreate, resulting in a safe twenty-four hour place.
- A choice of housing types allows people of different incomes and ages to live in the station area, supporting a healthy and diverse culture.
- The station area plan supports choice between walking, biking and transit. The benefit is a measure of independence for those who cannot drive, especially the young and the old.
- The architecture of the station area should represent diverse yet harmonious groupings of buildings respectful of historic architectural traditions.

- The station area will be well connected to a local and regional bicycle and pedestrian trail system

The Pleasant Hill BART Station Masterplan design is based on the principles of New Urbanism. New Urbanism principles, when applied to transit stations, result in the transit-oriented development (TOD). According to Peter Calthorpe, in his book *The Next Metropolis*,

“A transit-oriented development is a mixed-use community within a 2000 foot walking distance of a transit stop and core commercial area. TODs offer an alternative to traditional development patterns by providing housing, services, and employment opportunities for a diverse population in a configuration that facilitates pedestrian and transit access. TODs mix residential, retail, office, open space and public uses, in a walkable environment, making it convenient for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle, foot or car.”

“The provision of local services for TOD residents as well as the surrounding neighborhoods, results in reduced vehicle miles traveled within the immediate area. This is because nearby neighbors no longer have to travel outside the area for some of their daily needs. The safety of the Station area increases due to the number of visitors and residents providing eyes on the street on a twenty-four hour basis.”