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Community Design



Community Design

An important aspect of a community’s growth is its physical character and how this structure can contribute positively to the community’s identity and support a strong economic base. Through community design, the City can build an urban fabric that strengthens its assets and brings coherence and identity to Union City. The character of neighborhoods and centers, the design elements of buildings and public spaces, and role of scenic open space contribute to a sense of home for residents and a sense of place for visitors. The City’s overarching community design goal is to strengthen Union City's identity by improving the quality of places and images throughout the city.

Figure CD-1 illustrates the city structure for Union City. It is not intended to be interpreted as a land use diagram, but rather to show a broader overview of the city’s physical form and how the various neighborhoods, employment districts, shopping centers, mixed-use areas, transit-oriented development district, and natural open space areas fit together to create a cohesive community.

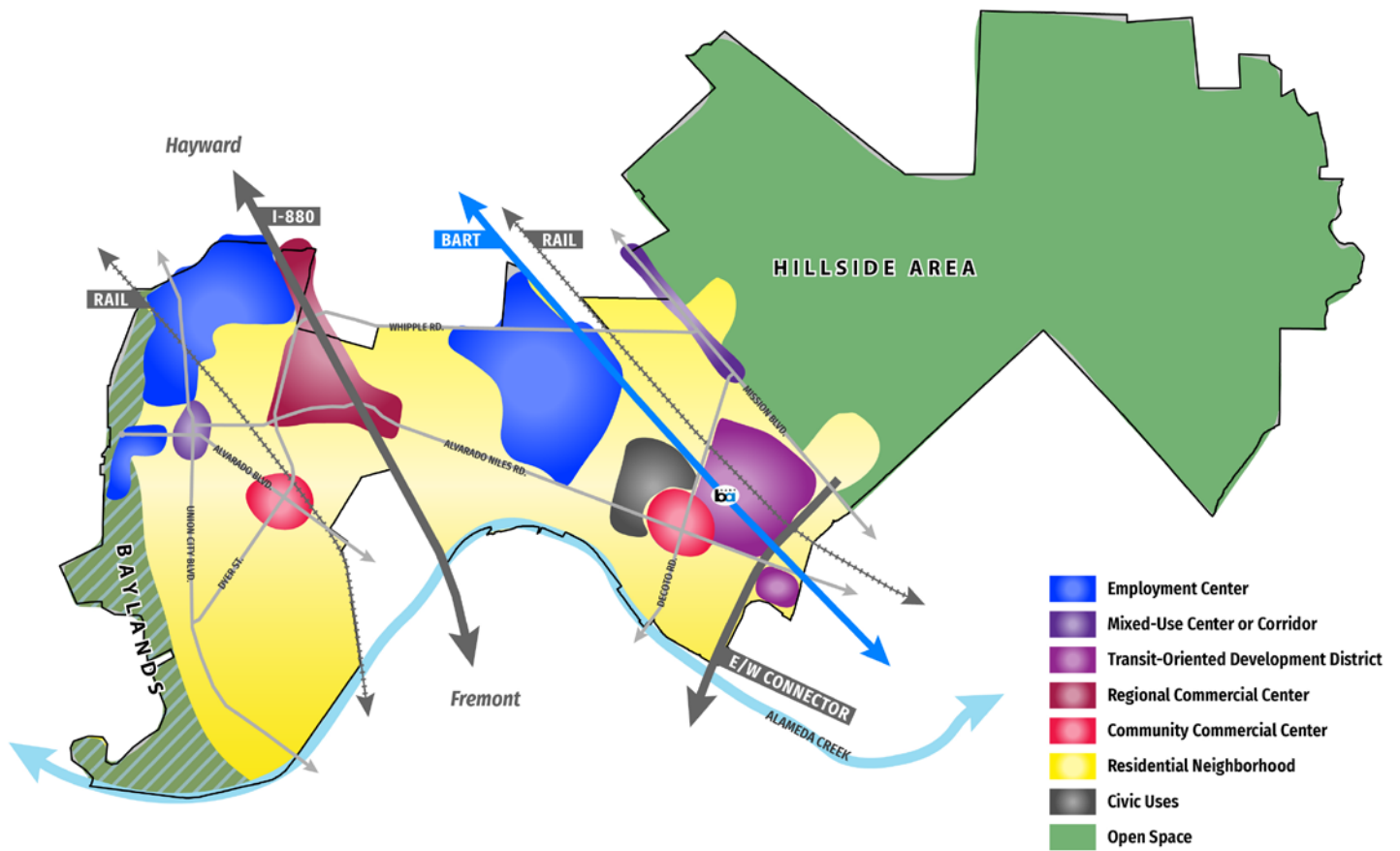


Figure CD-1: Urban Form Concept Diagram



City Form and Identity

Union City has evolved from two small historic settlements into a single cohesive community. Yet, the City still lacks a well-defined city center or downtown. As the city continues to evolve into the future and add jobs and population, the City is moving away from single-family development and low-density industrial parks towards more compact and denser building forms that strive to create mixed-use development with more intensive employment centers and pedestrian oriented/transit-friendly development. The City is working towards creating a city center at the Station District; transforming the city's shopping centers into more lively, mixed-use centers that serve as neighborhood gathering places; and transitioning its business parks into vibrant and innovative employment districts.

The policies in this section seek to ensure that every new addition or change made to the city fabric will make a positive contribution to the city's form and identity and help to create a stronger sense of place. The Special Areas Element contains policies specific to the Station District and other key areas of the city where redevelopment and investment in public spaces will strengthen the identity of Union City.

Goal CD-1: Ensure physical changes to the built environment enhance the city's form and help to create a stronger sense of place. *(Source: New Goal)*

Policies

- CD-1.1 Improve the City Image.** The City shall strive to ensure that land use, transportation, and infrastructure decisions made through development approvals and capital improvement programs improve the visual quality of the built environment and help to positively shape the image of Union City. *(Source: New Policy)*
- CD-1.2 Create Memorable Places.** The City shall promote infill development and redevelopment projects that create memorable places throughout Union City through high-quality architecture, pedestrian-friendly streetscape improvements, and thoughtfully-designed public spaces. *(Source: New Policy)*
- CD-1.3 Strengthen Identity of Business Parks and Shopping Centers.** The City shall strive to strengthen the identity and visual quality of its business parks and shopping centers through appropriate infill development, high-quality architectural design, streetscape improvements, signage and wayfinding, and appropriate buffering and screening. *(Source: New Policy)*

- CD-1.4 Encourage Aesthetic Improvements to Shopping Centers.** The City shall encourage aesthetic improvements to its shopping centers that include the following features, as appropriate:
- a. A common architectural theme that is contemporary and attractive and has a unique relationship to the surrounding community;
 - b. Attractive building frontages that are readily visible from the public street;
 - c. Variation in the roofline (multi-planed, pitched roofs, varied cornice lines);
 - d. Articulation in the walls (insets, projections, canopies, wing walls, trellis);
 - e. Parking areas with tree coverage that are attractive and provide adequate shading;
 - f. Main entryways and primary internal driveways defined by using landscaping, textured paving, etc.;
 - g. Attractive landscaping to enhance business by softening buildings and parking areas;
 - h. Pedestrian-friendly design; and
 - i. Imaginative solutions to providing development features such as water features, public art, project lighting, signs, and screening. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-B.4.4)*
- CD-1.5 Clear Development Regulations.** The City shall promote design excellence by ensuring City development regulations clearly express intended outcomes and reinforce quality design. *(Source: New Policy)*
- CD-1.6 Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.** The City shall work with applicants to design buildings, streets, and public spaces that enhance public safety and discourage crime through a variety of means including provision of street-fronting uses (“eyes on the street”), adequate lighting, and clear sight lines. *(Source: New Policy)*
- CD-1.7 Walkable Blocks.** The City shall require new development to create walkable, pedestrian-scaled blocks and sidewalks appropriately scaled for the anticipated pedestrian use. *(Source: New Policy)*
- CD-1.8 Buildings that Engage the Street.** The City shall require new commercial, industrial, and residential mixed-use buildings to be oriented to and actively engage and complement the public realm through such features as building orientation, build-to and setback lines, façade articulation, ground-floor transparency, and location of parking. *(Source: New Policy)*



- CD-1.9 Link New and Existing Neighborhoods.** The City should make every effort to identify and implement design solutions that will physically link new and existing neighborhoods and make residents feel connected to each other and the larger Union City community. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-A.1.7, modified)*
- CD-1.10 Encourage Compatible Development.** The City shall encourage development that is visually and functionally compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-A.1, modified)*
- CD-1.11 Avoid Gated Communities.** The City shall encourage new residential communities to connect to surrounding neighborhoods so that they avoid becoming isolated walled enclaves. Gated communities shall be specifically discouraged. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-A.1.11, modified)*
- CD-1.12 Require Undergrounding of Utilities.** The City shall require undergrounding of utility lines in new development and as areas are redeveloped, except where infeasible for operational or financial reasons. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-A.1.12)*
- CD-1.13 Undergrounding Utilities in High Priority Areas.** The City shall strive to underground overhead utilities. The following street sections shall be considered the highest priority: Decoto Road between the city of Fremont and Alvarado-Niles Road, Whipple Road between I-880 and Mission Boulevard, sections of Dyer Street, Union City Boulevard, and Smith Street between Dyer Street and Union City Boulevard. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.17, modified)*

Implementation Programs

- CD-1.A Amending Zoning Ordinance to Include Design Criteria for Shopping Centers.** The City shall amend the Zoning Ordinance to include design criteria and maintenance standards for new and substantially renovated shopping centers. *(Source: New Program)*
- **Responsibility:** Economic and Community Development Department
 - **Time Frame:** FY 19-20

Natural Setting

Union City is blessed with beautiful hills, Baylands, and meandering creeks/streams. The most dramatic of these natural features are the foothills of the Coastal Range (i.e., Hillside Area), which frame the eastern edge of the city. The San Francisco Baylands, including the 5,040-acre Eden Landing Ecological Reserve, form the western boundary of Union City, though the reserve is largely in the city of Hayward. However, as a result of the Baylands' physical separation from the rest of the city, the Reserve is generally underutilized and underappreciated by the public. Union City also has a number of creek corridors within the city limits that flow through the urban areas, the largest of which is Alameda Creek, which flows from Niles Canyon to the Bay, defining much of the city's southern boundary. All of these channels have been engineered to enhance flood control, so their scenic characteristics have been compromised (e.g., limited vegetation, lack of natural meanders).

Not only do these natural features provide important functional benefits such as providing quiet retreats and recreation opportunities (i.e., trails), but the features are key components for maintaining a strong city identity. In order to preserve this identity, the City must ensure that development adjacent to natural features responds to the context of views and natural forms. Therefore, the following policies emphasize providing visual and physical access to Union City's natural features.

Goal CD-2: Protect and enhance the visual and physical access to the hillsides, Baylands, and creeks. (Source: Existing General Plan, Goal CD-E.1, E.2, E.3, combined)

Policies

- CD-2.1 Frame Visual Access to Hillside Views.** As the city redevelops, the City shall use the layout of streets, blocks, and pedestrian corridors to provide visual access to hillside views. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.1.1)*
- CD-2.2 Minimize Hillside Viewshed Impacts.** The City shall minimize the viewshed impacts of development at the base of the hillsides. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.1.2)*
- CD-2.3 Minimize Visual Impact on Baylands.** The City shall ensure that new development near the Baylands respects its natural setting by maintaining visual harmony with the Baylands and using buffers such as pedestrian trails, linear parks, and landscaped rights-of-way. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.2.2)*



- CD-2.4 Restore Natural Edges Along Creeks.** The City shall support efforts by property owners and relevant public agencies to restore the natural edges along the city’s creek system by planting natural vegetation. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.3.1, modified)*
- CD-2.5 Increase Access to Creeks.** The City shall work with the Alameda County Flood Control District to provide joint-use pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists along creeks and flood control channels. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.3.2, modified)*
- CD-2.6 Provide Visual Access to Creeks.** Wherever practical, new development shall provide visual access to creeks. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.3.4, modified)*
- CD-2.7 Locate Parks and Open Space Near Creeks.** When possible, the City shall locate open space, parks, and new trails adjacent to creeks. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-E.3.5, modified)*
- CA-2.8 Creek Beautification.** The City shall support Alameda County Flood Control District efforts to enhance and beautify their existing channels and creeks. *(Source: New Policy)*

Corridors

Union City has a variety of circulation corridors including streets, rail lines, and pedestrian pathways/trails that define Union City's travel experience by connecting key parts of the city. The City has an opportunity to enhance important corridors through various design concepts that focus on streetscape improvements (i.e., street trees, median landscaping), building frontage improvements, visible landmarks, street edges, and focal points.

Goal CD-3: To create distinct and attractive corridor environments along Union City's major roadways and transit lines. (Source: Existing General Plan, Goal CD-C.1)

Policies

- CD-3.1 Prepare Streetscape Master Plans.** The City shall prepare streetscape master plans for major corridors, on an as-needed basis, that identify various improvements such as providing a variety of light fixture styles, accent landscaping, street furniture, decorative signage, landscape medians, and bollards. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.1, modified)*
- CD-3.2 Reinforce Alvarado-Niles Road as the Central Spine.** The City shall reinforce Alvarado-Niles Road as Union City's "central spine" by implementing design concepts that reflect its civic importance, emphasizing continued streetscape investments, visible landmarks, and focal points. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.5)*
- CD-3.3 Activate Decoto Road as a Complete Street.** As a primary roadway that serves the Greater Station District, the City shall transform Decoto Road into a complete street with a more active and pedestrian-friendly environment by widening sidewalks, improving bike lanes, improving the streetscape environment, and encouraging new buildings to be oriented to the street. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.8, modified)*
- CD-3.4 Collaborate to Beautify Major Corridors.** The City shall work collaboratively with the Cities of Hayward and Fremont to improve and beautify Mission Boulevard, Union City Boulevard, and Whipple Road. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.15, modified)*



CD-3.5 Improve Image along Rail Corridors. The City shall proactively work with BART and Union Pacific Railroad to address graffiti, illegal dumping, and other issues that will improve the image of Union City for those arriving/departing on Union City’s rail transit system . *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.16, modified)*

CD-3.6 Require Masonry Walls on Major Arterials. The City shall require installation of well-designed masonry walls on major arterials. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.18, modified)*

Implementation Programs

CD-3.A Prepare Streetscape Master Plans for Major Corridors. The City shall prepare streetscape master plans for the major arterial corridors that have not yet had plans prepared, such as Decoto Road, Union City Boulevard, and Whipple Road. Streetscape master plans that have already been prepared shall be updated as appropriate. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Implementation Program CD-C.1)*

- **Responsibility:** Public Works Department
- **Time Frame:** As funding becomes available

CD-3.B Masonry Wall Master Plan. The City shall prepare a master plan to identify the replacement of wooden residential fences on major arterials with well-designed masonry walls, and develop a program to identify methods of funding the replacements. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Implementation Program CD-C.4)*

- **Responsibility:** Public Works Department, Economic and Community Development Department, City Manager’s Office
- **Time Frame:** As funding becomes available

Gateways

Inviting and well-designed gateways are essential to a city’s identity. Gateways let people know they have arrived in Union City. They create the first impression that visitors have when entering the city, and they help define how residents feel when returning home. Gateways help people feel welcome and can help direct them where to go for information or how to get to the business district, shopping centers, or other local attractions. The city has several points of entry, including regional freeway entries and community gateways, that provide access to key residential and commercial neighborhoods. Through such measures as streetscape improvements and signage, the City will help define the gateways.

Goal CD-4: To create positive first impressions for travelers entering the city through enhancement of the city’s gateways. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Goal CD-D.1)*

Policies

- CD-4.1 Enhance City Gateways.** The City shall enhance all city gateways by providing city identification signs, additional lighting, and accent planting. The City shall consider installation of public art at city gateways. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-D.1.1, modified)*
- CD-4.2 Implement a Gateway Sign Program.** The City shall create and implement a consistent sign program for gateway signs along major corridors to help distinguish Union City from Fremont and Hayward. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-C.1.2, modified)*
- CD-4.3 Provide Landscaping Near Gateways.** The City shall provide attractive landscaping that reduces the visual impact of sound walls near gateways into Union City. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-D.1.2)*
- CD-4.4 Site New Development to Define Gateways.** In addition to landscape and signage improvements, the City shall site new development to help define gateways. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-D.1.4)*



Implementation Programs

CD-4A Gateway Sign Program. The City shall create a consistent wayfinding sign program for gateway signs along major corridors to help distinguish Union City from Fremont and Hayward. *(Source: Existing General Plan, Implementation Program CD-C.2, modified)*

- **Responsibility:** Public Works Department
- **Time Frame:** FY 22-23

Public Realm

The “public realm” is defined as the spaces around and between buildings, including streets, sidewalks, plazas, parks, landmarks, and other open spaces. It is the main space where civic interaction occurs and acts as an important dimension of the built environment that helps to give a city its identity. The character of a community is determined as much by their public spaces as by the buildings that front those spaces. A quality public realm is a key ingredient in the health and wellness of a community, and a critical element in economic development. Great cities are those with a vibrant public realm that attracts people to live, work, and visit.

In Union City, much of the existing development either faces away from public streets or is separated from the public realm with deep setbacks and expansive surface parking lots. As a result, these public spaces typically have very little pedestrian activity. The policies in this General Plan encourage new development to engage the public realm by orienting buildings closer to the street and reducing the presence of parking to provide the opportunity to create lively, thriving, pedestrian-friendly spaces that serve as gathering places for the community.

Goal CD-5: To create a vibrant and inviting public realm that enhances Union City’s identity and encourages community gathering. *(Source: New Goal)*

Policies

CD-5.1 High Priority Public Realm Improvements. The City shall place high priority on improvements to the public realm, including street furniture, street trees, paving, landscaping, and lighting improvements, and installation of public art in civic spaces. *(Source: New Policy)*

CD-5.2 Public Gathering Spaces. The City shall encourage new development to include public gathering spaces, including plazas, pocket parks, and similar spaces, that are designed to stimulate pedestrian activity, provide community gathering places, and complement the overall appearance and form of adjoining buildings. *(Source: New Policy)*



Public Art

Public art can include sculpture, statues, monuments, murals, fountains, and other forms of art that beautify and enrich civic spaces within the city. Public art can increase a sense of community, place, and identity. It can celebrate the history and heritage of a place, and showcase the work of local artists. Since the late nineties, Union City has worked to integrate public art into new development. The Station District is an excellent example of an area that has integrated art into the urban fabric, with its large murals and sculptures. Union City's Public Art Board reviews and advises the City Council, City staff, and project sponsors on proposed public art installations. The policies in this section call for the continued installation of art in public places.

Goal CD-6: Use public art as a way to beautify and enhance the public realm and create a sense of identity for Union City's different neighborhoods and districts. (Source: New Goal)

Policies

- CD-6.1 Require Public Art Installation.** The City shall continue to require new development to install public art or provide an in-lieu contribution where the installation of public art is not feasible due to site constraints or not preferable due to limited visibility. (Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-A.1.3, modified)
- CD-6.2 Placement of Public Art.** Public art shall be placed in highly visible and high traffic areas, such as along major thoroughfares or in public gathering spaces. (Source: Existing General Plan, Policy CD-A.1.4, modified)
- CD-6.3 Highlight Existing Public Art.** The City shall make an effort to highlight existing public art in the city. (Source: New Policy)

Implementation Program

CD-6.A Public Art Master Plan. The City shall work through the Public Art Board to prepare a citywide Public Art Master Plan that identifies opportunities for public art throughout Union City.

(Source: New Program)

- **Responsibility:** Economic and Community Development Department
- **Time Frame:** FY 23-24

CD-6.B Mural Program. The City shall implement a mural program, in which the City contracts with local artists to paint murals on utility boxes, buildings, and structures throughout the city.

(Source: New Program)

- **Responsibility:** Economic and Community Development Department
- **Time Frame:** Ongoing

CD-6.C Public Art Inventory. The City shall conduct and maintain an inventory of existing public art throughout the city and make the inventory available online. *(Source: New Program)*

- **Responsibility:** Economic and Community Development Department
- **Time Frame:** FY-20-21