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## Vision for Castro Valley 2025

### **2.1 CASTRO VALLEY 1985-2005**

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Castro Valley's previous General Plan was completed in 1985. At that time, flatter areas of the Castro Valley "bowl" were generally built out, and there were hillside subdivisions, such as Greenridge and Columbia, as well as other scattered "rural residential" homes throughout the hills. Since the 1985 plan, two large planned unit developments have been constructed: Palomares Hills in the late 1980s and Five Canyons from 1999-2004. In addition, extensive small residential infill development has occurred. Larger hillside lots have been subdivided into multiple lots and larger properties in flat areas have been redeveloped with townhomes and small lot single family developments. The total population of Castro Valley has increased from about 46,000 in 1985 to more than 61,000 people in 2005.

Job growth in Castro Valley has increased at a slightly faster rate than the population, increasing by 50 percent between 1980 and 2005. In comparison, the population grew by 35 percent over the same period. Most of the jobs in Castro Valley are in the health, education, and recreation fields, largely associated with Eden Medical Center Castro Valley (the Medical Center), the County's Fairmont health facilities, and the Castro Valley Unified School District. Retail jobs make up relatively little of the local employment market, actually declining between 1980 and 2000.

In the year 2000, Alameda County voters passed a ballot measure that defines future growth areas in Castro Valley. Measure D (see Appendix A) established an urban growth boundary, restricting the areas outside the boundary to agricultural, natural resource, and rural uses, and preventing the construction of infrastructure to support any urban development. As a result of Measure D, the canyonlands surrounding Castro Valley are now off-limits to development, and there are no large land areas left for new subdivisions. New growth will involve infill in existing developed areas, and redevelopment of older sites and structures. This land use prescription is part of a larger regional effort toward "smart growth," encouraging new development in areas with existing infrastructure and transportation, and preserving outer areas with agricultural and natural resource value.

## **2.2 DEVELOPING A VISION FOR CASTRO VALLEY 2005-2025**

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Residents in Castro Valley care deeply about their community, and have chosen to live here because of many positive community attributes. In the public workshops, there was general consensus about the things people like about Castro Valley and want to preserve.

- Community character and quality of life, which was described as a "hometown" or "small town" or "rural" character.
- Residential neighborhoods that are good for raising families, specifically including large lots, cul-de-sacs, children playing in the streets, and a sense of privacy.
- Small commercial establishments that people know and love, mostly locally-owned small businesses (Chabot Theater, the Ice Creamery, Lucca's Deli), but also new businesses that provide desired services like Trader Joe's.
- Great open space and recreation, both the proximity of neigh-

borhood and regional parks like Cull Canyon and Lake Chabot, and the views to the hills and canyon lands.

- Good schools and public facilities, including the Castro Valley Unified School District schools, the Castro Valley Adult School, the Medical Center, Kenneth Aitken Senior Center, and the Adobe Art Center.
- Location and transportation access, specifically the location in between the major employment centers of the east county and west county, and the proximity of two regional freeways plus access to BART. As one person put it, “You can get anywhere from here.”
- Great climate.

Residents are, however, concerned about many issues in Castro Valley, and want things to change for the better in several ways. They are worried that new growth could exacerbate certain conditions that are already a problem. The main issues they identified were:

- Traffic that detracts from the quality of life in the community, described as outsider traffic trying to avoid freeway congestion, and cut-through traffic that goes through residential streets.
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety. Residents expressed a strong need for sidewalks, street trees, medians, and other measures that create safe environments for pedestrians and bicyclists, and improve the appearance of the community.
- Loss of Community Character due to new development. Residents are very worried that new homes are oversized and do not fit in with the existing character of Castro Valley. They also are concerned that the natural environment which contributes so much to the character of Castro Valley – hillsides, canyons, and creeks – is being degraded or lost.
- Castro Valley Boulevard is unattractive. Residents want major improvement in the appearance of Castro Valley Boulevard, including both the public right of way and the buildings’ appearance.
- Lack of civic center and community facilities. Residents want more community facilities, a teen center, a better post office, a community meeting facility, and entertainment venues.
- South of I-580 not a part of the schools or the community. A number of people were concerned that the area south of I-580 is physically divided from the rest of Castro Valley and has a different school district. Most neighborhoods in the western part

of the planning area are also not in the Castro Valley Unified School District.

- Lack of quality shops and restaurants. People want to be able to do more of their shopping in Castro Valley, and to enjoy a greater range of quality shops, restaurants, and service businesses.

### **Community Vision for Castro Valley**

Out of all the community input and planning analysis, a clear vision for Castro Valley emerged. The key objectives that the community desires for the Castro Valley of 2025 include:

- Revitalize the Central Business District. Create a pedestrian town center where people walk to shops, meet neighbors, and gather for community events. Provide a variety of shops, restaurants, and services, so residents do not need to leave Castro Valley for their daily needs, and remake Castro Valley Boulevard as a beautiful street where it is pleasant to walk.
- Preserve the area’s defining natural characteristics, embodied in the hills, canyons, creeks, and rural corridors, and views to those natural areas. Update policies to reflect the passage of Measure D, which established an Urban Growth Boundary limiting urban development in most of the rural areas of the county, including the Canyonlands surrounding Castro Valley.
- Improve access for children to schools, parks and recreation facilities, and provide safer streets for walking and bicycling, in order to create a good environment for raising a family.
- Provide facilities for activities and entertainment venues for all age groups, including places like the Chabot Theater, the Adobe Art Center, the Aitken Senior Center, and the Community Theater, and the new Performing Arts Center at the high school.
- Ensure safe residential streets where traffic speed and noise do not dominate residential streets, and where residents, especially children, can walk or bike to schools, neighbors, stores, and other destinations.
- Preserve the small town “rural” character of Castro Valley, with low scale buildings, views to the natural areas, many small local businesses, and a town center where people gather and see their neighbors.
- Reduce impacts of regional traffic and freeway traffic, so that local streets contribute rather than detract from the quality of life in the community.

- Only allow new infill housing on sites that have capacity in a way that fits in with the existing scale and character of the community. Provide a variety of types of housing that are available for all types of households and incomes, including single family homes, townhomes, apartments, condominiums, cottages, and mobile homes. Encourage new housing on designated sites in the Central Business District that are close to BART and other transit facilities.
- Identify regulatory changes that need to be made to implement the plan, including changes to the Alameda County Zoning Ordinance, the CBD Specific Plan, and other applicable regulations to implement the community’s vision.
- Establish priorities for the capital improvement projects that the County and other agencies make in the Castro Valley planning area in order to implement the community’s vision.

### **Major Initiatives to Accomplish the Vision**

The General Plan chapters that follow outline all the goals and policies for Castro Valley and implementation actions. However it is important to have a concise statement of the key initiatives that should be undertaken by government and community groups over the next 20 years to achieve the vision expressed above. The list of 15 initiatives below evolved from the community meetings during the development of the General Plan. Because Castro Valley is not a city, the community members need to provide the leadership to bring these about, working with the County government. Castro Valley has a tradition of this type of civic involvement and care for the community. That tradition will need to continue, and each community member should look for opportunities to be involved in some aspect of one of these initiatives. All of the initiatives below require funding in addition to community leadership, so securing long-term funding sources must be part of the effort.

1. **Valleys, Creeks, Canyons, and Hillsides Preserved:** Establish a framework of legal, managerial, and operational protections for the community’s natural resources, including the valleys, creeks, canyons, and hillsides, as well as views to those resources. Ensure that there is ongoing stewardship and maintenance.
2. **Greening Castro Valley:** Plant street trees, install planted medians, create parks and open views to green spaces, so that Castro Valley has a green landscaped character that makes it attractive and harkens back to its rural beginnings.

3. **Design Standards and Guidelines for New Housing:** Establish a comprehensive detailed framework of zoning and subdivision regulations, development standards and guidelines used in the review of all new housing projects to ensure that new residential development fits with the desired character for Castro Valley.
4. **Preserve Resources that embody Castro Valley’s Historic Rural Character:** Castro Valley evolved from a rural agricultural area to become a residential community. While there are few “historic resources” eligible for listing on the State and federal registers, there are some resources that can be preserved or enhanced to retain a connection with the community’s historic rural character. These include the natural hillside and canyon resource areas, some remaining agricultural sites, and the row of early 20th century commercial storefronts on the western end of Castro Valley Boulevard.
5. **Traffic Calming:** Allow traffic flow so that auto circulation is convenient for residents, but control the volume and speed of traffic on streets to maximize safety and ensure that the nature of the traffic fits with the character of the area. Develop a traffic calming program that includes education and enforcement as well as control devices such as signals, new sidewalks, speed limits, traffic humps, and roundabouts. Make sure that streets are safe for pedestrians and bicyclists.
6. **Walkable Town Center:** Create a central pedestrian-friendly shopping and restaurant area on a few blocks along Castro Valley Boulevard and key side streets, including Castro Village Shopping Center. Over time add and relocate buildings, sidewalks, and parking so that the area has a pedestrian environment. Add a plaza and features that create a public gathering place that can be identified as the heart of the community. If at all possible, create a place for a new post office as part of this area.
7. **Beautify Castro Valley Boulevard:** Complete a streetscape improvement project on Castro Valley Boulevard that adds street trees, lights, banners, medians, bulb-outs and other such features and removes billboards to make it a beautiful boulevard. Add bicycle lanes. Preserve two lanes of traffic in each direction so excessive traffic congestion does not occur. Establish or continue other programs that improve the appearance of the commercial area, including: Façade Improvement Program; Billboard Reduction Program; Revised Sign Regulations; and Design Review Guidelines for commercial projects.

8. **New Shops, Restaurants, and Entertainment in Castro Valley:** Establish a business attraction program to bring new shops, restaurants, entertainment, and services to Castro Valley, that helps existing businesses expand or upgrade, and new businesses to get established. Support small local businesses.
9. **Castro Valley Community Center:** Complete construction of the community library on Norbridge Street. Over time, add other facilities on the library site, or elsewhere if that is not feasible, to create an additional community center that could include a meeting room and facilities for seniors and teenagers.
10. **Castro Valley Parks/Recreation Centers:** Over the next twenty years, add at least one new neighborhood park in the underserved western area of Castro Valley, and a large community gym/recreation center. Add quality after-school facilities to make fuller use of existing schools and parks.
11. **Lake Chabot Road Medical District:** Allow the rebuilding of the Medical Center so it can continue to provide high-quality medical and emergency services in structures that can withstand earthquakes. The hospital and the citizens of Castro Valley should form a working committee to ensure that the new campus and surrounding sites create an attractive and functional medical district with medical offices, retail, restaurants, and supportive housing. Establish standards and guidelines to ensure that the medical facility construction and operation does not negatively impact the surrounding residential neighborhoods.
12. **Castro Valley Neighborhood Centers:** Renovate or rebuild on the neighborhood commercial sites in Castro Valley so that there are convenience stores and services close to residences, and the properties look attractive and well maintained so they contribute to the community. Establish zoning that allows the construction of housing or other uses that make the renovation or rebuilding financially viable; and work with project applicants to facilitate the renovation through all means available, including Redevelopment Agency tools.
13. **Housing In and Around the Town Center:** Adding new housing in and around the town center is a way to meet housing needs for smaller and more affordable units, and offer housing choice where residents can walk to shops and transit. It will also help support downtown businesses by locating customers within walking distance. The neighborhood between Somerset and Castro Valley Boulevard, the BART station, and some of the existing mobile

home parks all offer potential housing sites. New housing should fit in with the desired character of the area, in attractive buildings no more than 2-4 stories tall that preserve views to the hillsides.

14. **An Improved Look for Castro Valley:** Improve the general appearance of Castro Valley by establishing and funding several types of programs: Streetscape Improvements, Planting Programs, Façade Renovation, New Sign Regulations, and Gateway Entry Structures. Review the design of new structures and façade renovations to achieve a greater consistency and unity in the overall appearance of downtown Castro Valley.
15. **Enforcement:** Enforce the zoning regulations, conditions of approval, traffic regulations, the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance, and all the other types of agreements that the community has adopted through public participation and/or legislation. Enforcement is a critical component that is often neglected. Establish more thorough plan check and inspections to make sure buildings are constructed as approved, public notice is sent when project designs are substantially revised, etc.

## 2.3 PRIORITIES

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As part of the General Plan process, the community discussed the different types of projects and programs that are necessary to implement the General Plan, and evaluated priorities. The focus of the discussion was to identify the recommendations of the General Plan that require additional funding, and establish the community's priorities for use of available funds. A range of suggestions was provided that included:

- Capital projects such as new buildings or street improvements,
- Land purchase for open space preservation,
- Redevelopment Agency assistance to property owners and/or businesses,
- Educational and marketing programs,
- Regulations, and
- Enforcement programs and personnel.



### **Top Ten Priorities for Castro Valley**

At workshops conducted during the planning process, community residents agreed that the following ten actions should be the top priorities over the lifetime of the General Plan. Successful execution or attainment of these clear and realistic items, which are listed in descending order of importance, will help bring Castro Valley closer to achieving its desired future.

1. Highly Visible Hillside or Canyon Sites Preserved as Open Space.
2. Castro Valley Streetscape Improvements.
3. Enforcement of Zoning and Design Review Regulations, as well as property maintenance requirements.
4. Residential Design Standards and/or Guidelines.
5. Billboards Eliminated .
6. Neighborhood Commercial Center Sites at Heyer/Center and Lake Chabot Road/Seven Hills Renovated and/or Redeveloped.
7. Commercial Façade Improvement Program.
8. Revised Subdivision Standards – Lot Size, Private Streets, Landscaping, etc.
9. Commercial Design Review Standards and/or Guidelines.
10. New neighborhood park in the western area of Castro Valley, and/or in other areas.

### **Other Recommended Implementation Projects and Programs**

It is important that Alameda County and the Castro Valley community also pursue investments and policy changes that will help bring about the vision laid out in the General Plan. Many of these projects and programs will take longer to execute than the top ten priorities, and can be engaged concurrently with those actions.

**Capital Projects**

- Library Enhancements
- Performing Arts or Music Venues
- Traffic Calming Projects
- Sidewalks on Somerset, Miramar, and Heyer
- Gateway Landscaping or Structures at Key Entrances to Castro Valley
- Streetscape Improvements to Identified Arterials
- Tree Planting
- Fitness Center/Recreation Center

**Land Purchase for Preservation**

- Buy Creekside Property
- Buy Sensitive Biological Sites
- Buy Historic Resource Sites

**Redevelopment Assistance**

- Retail Site Creation Program
- Downtown Parking Lots
- BART Site Joint Development

**Programs**

- Business Attraction Program
- Local Cultural Resource Preservation Program
- School Safety Plans – County and School District to jointly prepare detailed circulation plans for safe drop-off/pick up; and safe walking routes; and improvements plans

**Regulations**

- Changes to the Zoning Ordinance Map and Text
- Residential Design Review Process
- Commercial Design Review Process
- Standards for Private Streets
- Overlay Districts for Creeks and sensitive habitat areas
- New Sign Regulations