3 CITY DESIGN ELEMENT

Alameda has a clear identity – certainly it is among the half dozen Bay Area cities with the strongest visual image. During an era when bland, look-alike communities are the norm, unique cities are an increasingly prized resource. But identity cannot be taken for granted; the richness of Alameda's historic urban fabric must continually be defended against pressures for development conforming to current standard practice. And not all that is unique or memorable is pleasant – there are bleak areas, clutter, and missed opportunities, as well as opportunities to be seized.

The City Design Element addresses visual issues at a citywide scale. The quality of architectural and landscape design for individual sites and projects is also of great importance, as is constantly demonstrated by Alameda's wide variation in quality from block to block and lot to lot. Policy 3.3.e calls for detailed design guidelines. (See Figure 3-1, City Design Framework)

3.1 ENTRANCES

Arrival in Alameda is a distinct event, whether by tube, bridge, or along San Leandro Bay. The City design objective is to establish immediately the desired character of Alameda for a person entering for the first or 10,000th time. A handsome building, a cluster of trees, or other prominent entry feature can give form to the journey.

Guiding Policy: Entrances

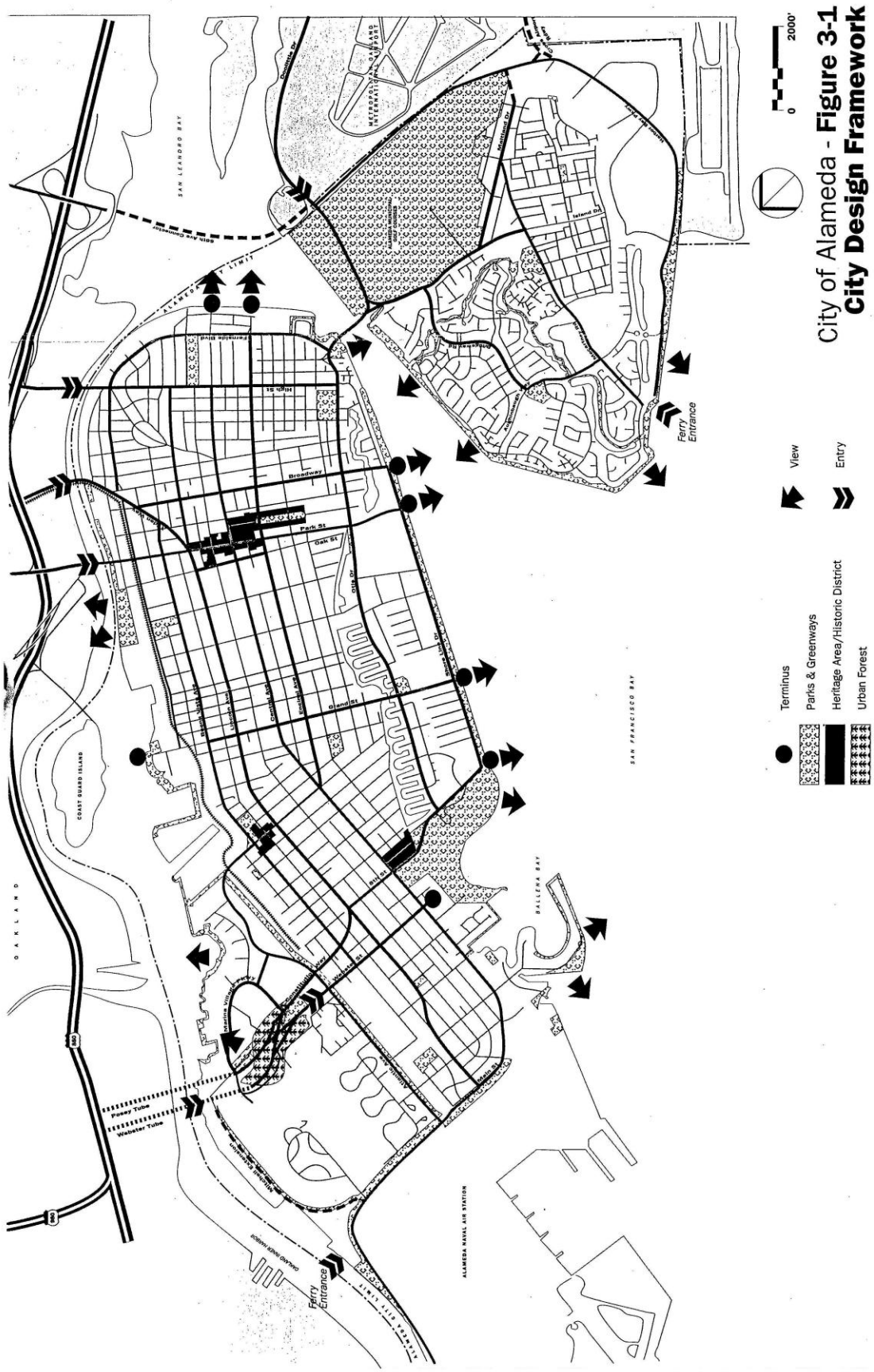
3.1.a Alameda's entrances should create a sense of civic pride.

Implementing Policies: Entrances

3.1.b **Posey-Webster Tubes**:
Work with Caltrans to refurbish, paint and light the portal towers.

Prepare an overall landscaping and design scheme as part of the Webster Street specific plan. Use large-growing trees to unify the entrance area and make a strong visual statement. (See Policy 2.5.g)

Diminish the visual perception of an expanse of pavement along Constitution Way and Webster Street by creating a grove of trees on existing excess right-of-way, in Neptune Park, on the College of Alameda campus, and in parking lots for adjoining office buildings.


City of Alameda - Figure 3-1
City Design Framework
0
2000'
View
Entry
Terminus
Parks & Greenways
Heritage Area/Historic District
Urban Forest
Ferry Entrance
Ferry Entrance
Broadway
Park St
Oak St
Grand St
Buena Vista Ave
Central Ave
Encinal Ave
Pacific Ave
Webster St
Posey St
Posey Tube
Webster Tube
Island Dr
Bridge Way
Bay Farm Island
Doolittle Dr
Tinker Ave
Hibbard St
Hills St
Fernside Blvd
Otis Dr
Shoreline Dr
Atlantic Ave
Mariner Square Dr
Marina Village Pkwy
Constitution Way
Clement Ave
Main St
Alameda Shoreline
Alameda Beach
Alameda Point
Alameda Point Collection
Metropolitan Oakland International Airport
Doolittle Dr
Coast Guard Island
Oakland Inner Harbor
Alameda City Limit
Alameda Naval Air Station
Bay Farm Island
Bridge
Oakland
San Leandro Bay
San Francisco Bay
Bay Farm Island
Bridge
Ballena Bay
Alameda City Limit
Oakland City Limit
Alameda City Limit
Oakland City Limit
880
880

Preserve the view of the Oakland skyline and hills for northbound travelers.

Work with Caltrans to replace freeway-scale directional signs with smaller ones that convey the slower-speed character of Alameda.

Bleak, wide open spaces have made the Tube Alameda's least friendly entrance, but a strong planting scheme combined with completion of Neptune Park, approved offices, and development on the drive-in site can transform it.

3.1.c **Park Street Bridge:**
Discuss with County staff the possibility of painting the bridge a strong color that will give it more visual weight. Add trees on Park Street.

This busiest and most cluttered entrance can convey the quality of Alameda without severe limitation on signs along auto row.

3.1.d **Miller-Sweeney (Fruitvale) Bridge:**
Add trees on open land to the west and south to announce the transition from an industrial area to a residential neighborhood and to improve the environment for existing and planned homes.

3.1.e **High Street Bridge:**
Discuss with County staff the possibility of painting the bridge a color appropriate to a residential neighborhood. Improve the landscape quality of this entrance in conjunction with traffic improvements to the High Street/Fernside Boulevard intersection.

3.1.f **Bay Farm Island Bridge:**
Ensure that the design for Bridgeview Park enhances the Bay Farm Island Bridge entry onto the Main Island.

3.1.g **Cross Airport Roadway:**
Evaluate design treatment options for the entry of the Cross Airport Roadway into Alameda.

The nearby Teleport Tower at Harbor Bay Business Park will be the landmark, but City identity will need to be established.

3.2 EDGES, VISTAS, FOCAL POINTS

Guiding Policies: Edges, Vistas, Focal Points

3.2.a Maximize views of water and access to shorelines.

The sense of being on an island is easily lost where views of the water are blocked. On the northern and eastern shorelines of the Main Island, few opportunities now exist for views or access to these shorelines and marinas impede visual access to open water.

3.2.b Deleted: (GPA 99-05)

3.2.c Maintain and extend Alameda's outstanding street tree system using the adopted Street Tree Management Plan as a guide in the decision-making process.

The City's 12,000 street trees make the wide, heavily trafficked boulevards livable and place the Gold Coast among the finest existing Victorian neighborhoods.

The few barren streets in Alameda demonstrate how bleak a densely built city can be without trees. The Street Tree Management Plan includes detailed proposals for care of existing trees and for the more than 3,500 identified vacant planting sites.

Implementing Policies: Edges, Vistas, Focal Points

3.2.d Maintain views and access to the water along streets and other public rights-of-way that extend to the bulkhead line. Construct benches, ramps, rails, and seating appropriate for viewing and access, and provide walls or other screening where needed to protect adjoining property.

Westline Drive, Grand Street, Park Street, Central Avenue and Encinal Avenue are candidates for architectural or landscape features that would enhance the meeting of land and water.

3.2.e Encourage landmark structures at prominent locations.

The Housing Authority site at the southwest corner of Webster and Lincoln is an example of such a location.

3.2.f Work to establish continuous greenways adjoining Main Street and Atlantic Avenue extending east through the railroad yard to Sherman Street, provided that the greenway design on each parcel allows for connection throughout the length of the greenway. (GPA 96-4)

In addition to providing bike and pedestrian ways, a 100-foot-wide greenway could have landmark trees in the sector of the City that is most in need of a greater presence of nature.

3.2.g Work with BCDC staff to prepare a schematic plan for development of the 100-foot-wide strip above mean high tide on properties likely to require BCDC development approval.

The schematic plan should provide for public access and provide shoreline streets wherever possible. Specific opportunities for shoreline streets should be identified. The plan should include design standards and guidelines for buildings, streets, pedestrian and bicycle routes, signage and landscaping.

Bay Farm Island, Park Street Landing, and the San Leandro Bay shoreline east of the Aeolian Yacht Club demonstrate BCDC's ability to secure high-quality development of the shoreline for public use. Similar opportunities exist on portions of the Northern Waterfront.

3.2.h Work with the East Bay Regional Park District to plan and build a promenade along Shore Line Drive of a quality comparable to the promenade bordering Harbor Bay Parkway.

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) stresses the importance of avoiding encroachment onto the dune system put in place to protect the beach and Shore Line Drive. EBRPD recommends that any promenade, if built, should occupy existing 60-foot street right-of-way.

3.2.i Ensure that sections of the Estuary waterfront remain visually unobstructed.

Most of the Estuary waterfront not devoted to industrial use is developed as marinas which block vistas. The proposed Estuary Park will be on the most prominent viewpoint.

Alameda beach and waterfront

3.3 ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES

The Historic Preservation Element, adopted in 1980, was based on a survey of about 80 percent of the Main Island; it identified 4,000 addresses as having architectural and historical resources. The report noted that 1,400 structures, most of them built before the turn of the century, had been demolished since World War II. Recommendations for preservation include designation of Heritage Areas (no added regulation), and Historic Districts (design regulation). Historic preservation district boundaries were not proposed, but three Heritage Areas subsequently have been studied under the Certified Local Government Program, and designated by the City Council: Bay Station (1986), Park Avenue (1988), and Burbank-Portola (1989). Since the adoption of the Historic Preservation Element, the City completed detailed surveys of unreinforced buildings, commercial buildings on Webster Street, and buildings and sites in the northern waterfront These surveys fill in gaps in the original survey, leaving few buildings and sites undocumented.

Historic
homes

Implementing Policies: Architectural Resources

3.3.a Continue to identify quality architecture of all periods in Alameda's history and participate in programs to increase owners' and buyers' awareness of the importance of preservation.

3.3.b Consider formation of Historic Districts within which alterations to existing structures would be regulated to maintain neighborhood scale and historic character.

3.3.c Maintain strong demolition control for historic properties.

3.3.d New construction, redevelopment and alterations should be compatible with historic resources in the immediate area.

3.3.e Develop detailed design guidelines to ensure protection of Alameda's historic, neighborhood, and small-town character. Encourage preservation of all buildings, structures, areas and other physical environment elements having architectural, historic or aesthetic merit, including restoration of such elements where they have been insensitively altered. Include special guidelines for older buildings of existing or potential architectural, historical or aesthetic merit which encourage retention of original architectural elements and restoration of any missing elements. The design guidelines include detailed design standards for commercial districts.

3.3.f Regulate development in neighborhood business districts to maintain a street-wall, with most structures built to the property lines, entrances directly facing the sidewalk, and parking at the rear.

3.3.g Encourage off-site and multi-level parking in the Park Street and Webster Street business districts as essential to Main Street character. To maintain pedestrian character and visual interest, avoid locating parking structures at street level on corners and along retail streets.

These areas should be occupied by retail activities and public uses.

3.3.h Regulate development in the Park Street and Webster Street business districts to encourage two- and three-story buildings extending to the front and side property lines, with entrances directly facing the sidewalk, and parking at the rear.

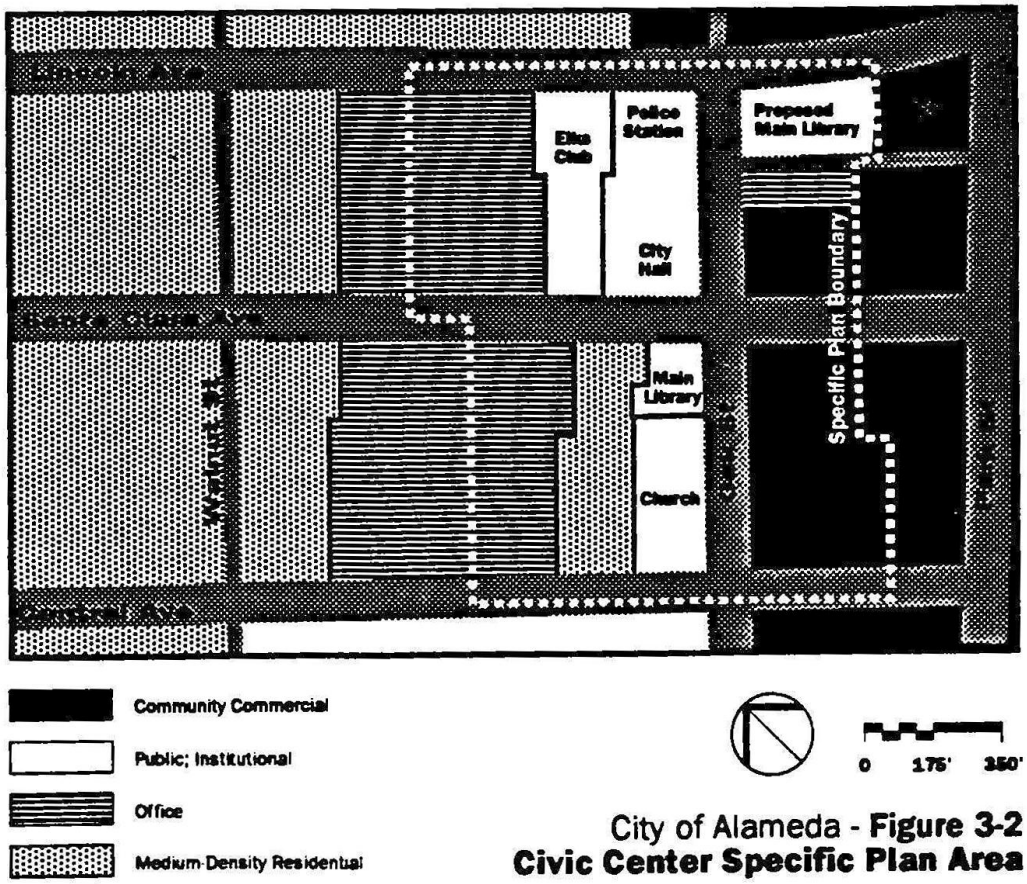
3.3.i Preserve all City-owned buildings and other facilities of architectural, historical or aesthetic merit. Prepare a list of these facilities and develop an Historic Facilities Management Plan that provides procedures for preserving their character-defining elements, including significant interior features and furnishings. Include in the Management Plan design guidelines or standards and a long-term program to restore significant character-defining elements which have been altered.

3.3.j Encourage owners of poorly remodeled but potentially attractive older buildings to restore the exterior of these buildings to their original appearance. Provide lists of altered buildings which present special design opportunities and make the lists widely available. Develop financial and design assistance programs to promote such restoration.

3.3.k Require that any exterior changes to existing buildings receiving City rehabilitation assistance or related to Use Permits, Variances or Design Review, or other discretionary City approvals be consistent with the building's existing or original architectural design unless the City determines either (a) that the building has insufficient existing or original design merit of historical interest to justify application of this policy or (b) that application of this policy would cause undue economic or operational hardship to the applicant, owner or tenant.

3.4 CIVIC CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN

The imposing red-brick City Hall (1896), the Carnegie Library building (1903), and the Elks Club (1909) form the nucleus of Alameda's civic center. The Police Administration Building (1978) was designed to relate to the City Hall, and the library proposed on the site of the LinOaks Motel east of Oak Street provides an opportunity to create an identifiable civic center. New and existing private buildings of compatible design and multi-level parking structures replacing parking lots would serve both the civic center and the adjoining Park Street business district. (See Section 6.4, Cultural Facilities, for related policies.) (See Figure 3-2, Civic Center Specific Plan Area.)



City of Alameda - **Figure 3-2**
Civic Center Specific Plan Area

Guiding Policies: Civic Center

3.4.a Using City Hall as the centerpiece, develop the surrounding area as an identifiable civic center that will enhance civic pride in Alameda.

3.4.b Rely on design character and provision of coordinated open spaces rather than narrow restrictions on use to create a sense of civic center. In addition to public and institutional facilities, permitted uses are to include pocket parks, offices, retail stores, residential units, and parking.

Historic buildings in the area surrounding City Hall, including the main library constructed in neo-classical style and the Elks Club in the Colonial Revival style, could contribute to the design theme of the Civic Center.

Implementing Policies: Civic Center

3.4.c Prepare a list of desired public and private civic center users and their space needs. In addition to a new library, the list might include City functions now located elsewhere, a museum, a new theater, or a refurbished Alameda Theater, a downtown minipark, offices, and restaurants.

3.4.d Prepare and adopt a Civic Center Specific Plan for the 12-acre Specific Plan area delineated on the General Plan Diagram. The plan is to include uses, building footprints and envelopes (location and bulk), architectural and landscape design character, street and pedestrian way design, and schematic design of parking areas/structures.

The level of regulation and means of implementation of the Specific Plan can vary over a broad range. Initial actions may include only library design and parking management or construction of the first parking structure, but these must occur in the context of a plan for the entire area. Property owners will need to know where parking will be located, how it will be financed, and what regulations, if any, in addition to current zoning will affect their holdings.

3.4.e Encourage and consider City participation in an assessment district to build parking structures serving private and public uses.