CHAPTER 7

Governance

Walnut Creek was first known as The Corners—the point where the two roads leading south from Pacheco and east from Lafayette converged (now the intersection of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and North Main Street). A U.S. Post Office was established at The Corners in December 1862, around which time the community was renamed Walnut Creek.

On October 21, 1914, the original town and a surrounding area—totaling 500 acres—were incorporated as a general law city governed by a board of trustees. In 1928, State law was amended to allow cities to call their boards city councils, and the Walnut Creek board of trustees became the board of councilmen, and later, the town council and city council (Council minutes, October 25, 1929).

The City governs through a council/manager system, one of two main variations of representative municipal government. The other system is the mayor-council system.

In the council-manager system, an elected city council is responsible for making policy, passing ordinances, voting appropriations, and having overall supervisory authority in the city government. The mayor performs ceremonial duties and acts as a member and presiding officer of the council. The council hires a city manager who is responsible for supervising government operations and implementing policies adopted by the council. The manager serves at the pleasure of the council, usually with a contract that specifies duties and responsibilities.

The role of city government is the focus of one segment of the Vision and Principles that underlie this plan (see pages 1-12 through 1-14).

The vision statement seeks to ensure that the city government will interact positively and consistently with the community, be fiscally responsible, provide regional leadership, and continue to forge cooperative regional relationships.

This chapter addresses those topics as well as community involvement and participation in the planning process. The chapter comprises four sections: Regional Leadership, Local Leadership, Fiscal Responsibility, and Public Information and Education.

Planning commissioners listen to an applicant’s presentation, 2004
REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

Many issues affecting Walnut Creek are best, and sometimes only, addressed at the regional level. The City has a responsibility to participate actively in regional issues and to work closely with other governments and agencies to forge regional alliances and seek cooperative solutions and decisions that work for both the city and the region.

GOAL 1

Provide leadership in regional, state, and national policy discussions affecting the community.

Policy 1.1. Support active participation of City Council members, city staff, and other city leaders in resolving regional issues relevant to Walnut Creek.

Policy 1.2. Encourage participation by Walnut Creek residents and businesses in regional programs and organizations.

Policy 1.3. Address regional concerns, such as traffic, parking, housing, trails, open spaces, views, and air pollution, in cooperation with neighboring communities.

Action 1.3.1. Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with neighboring and regional governments and civic organizations.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

One of Walnut Creek’s greatest assets is its involved citizenry. Residents offer their time and skills on an array of commissions and committees, as well as volunteer in the delivery of community services.

The City encourages the public to participate in government affairs. Citizens serve on the City Council, five different commissions, and a number of standing and ad hoc committees.

A Citizen’s Institute offers a series of workshops in which citizens learn first-hand how the city works. Held semi-annually, the Institute allows citizens to meet and get to know City officials and employees, gain an improved awareness of available city services and community resources, and discover opportunities to be involved with city government.

Electronic media and online technologies and services have expanded the ways in which the public can participate in local government.

Regular community input on city planning and urban design issues keeps the City Council, Planning Commission, and staff informed of community concerns early in these processes.

Community development staff members conduct a focus group on downtown issues, 2004
Chapter 7, Governance

**GOAL 2**
Engage the public in the civic affairs of the community, at both the city and neighborhood level.

Policy 2.1. Encourage inclusive, participatory, and collaborative problem solving for issues and decisions facing the city.

Action 2.1.1. Provide open and highly interactive processes.

Action 2.1.2. Encourage the formation and operation of neighborhood and civic organizations.

Action 2.1.3. Provide opportunities for neighborhood and community organizations to communicate local priorities and concerns to the City.

Action 2.1.4. Work with neighborhood and community organizations on emergency preparedness and security programs.

Action 2.1.5. Encourage participation in local elections.

Policy 2.2. Encourage active participation by all segments of the community in city governance.

Policy 2.3. Improve the methods and technology used for communications on citywide and neighborhood issues.

Action 2.3.1. Promote the use of technology in providing public information and obtaining public input.

Action 2.3.2. Provide technologically advanced communication opportunities at city libraries.

Action 2.3.3. Work with technology providers to improve and expand communications systems in the city.

**GOAL 3**
In areas where changes are proposed, encourage collaboration among the public, property owners, neighborhood associations, and the City.

Policy 3.1. Encourage open, inclusive, participatory planning processes that emphasize the collaborative exchange of ideas.

Policy 3.2. Provide decision-makers, project applicants, and residents with information about planning policies and regulations, and advance information about upcoming changes, projects, or issues.
G O A L 4

Involve citizens as volunteers in the delivery of community services, including recreation and elder care.

Policy 4.1. Encourage and support volunteerism.

Action 4.1.1. Partner with local civic organizations whose activities and actions will help achieve City goals.

Action 4.1.2. Continue and expand opportunities and venues for civic organizations serving the City to offer information about and to publicize their goals, programs, and services to the public.

Action 4.1.3. Allocate City staff time and resources to volunteer-initiated projects that otherwise could not be accomplished.

Action 4.1.4. Recognize and support the efforts of individual, group, and business volunteers within the city.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Walnut Creek’s government has been, and will continue to be, fiscally responsible. That means working creatively to use and expand existing revenue sources and to promote a diverse and stable economic base with potential for new sources of revenue. It also means continuing its significant, long-term financial planning efforts.

G O A L 5

Maintain and enhance Walnut Creek’s fiscal vitality.

Policy 5.1. Balance City expenditures with revenues.

Action 5.1.1. Annually review and refine the City’s Long-Term Financial Plan.

Action 5.1.2. At least every two years, review the level of fees charged for City programs and services.

Policy 5.2. Foster a balance of tax generating businesses (e.g., retail, hotel, business-to-business, and auto sales and service).

Policy 5.3. Make strategic decisions in the context of their long-term sustainability and contribution to overall quality of life and the City’s fiscal vitality.
PUBLIC INFORMATION
AND EDUCATION

The City can gather and provide information to the wider community about countless topics, with the understanding that the information will contribute to the safety and/or quality of life in Walnut Creek. Towards the same end, the City can present or foster educational programs on various topics.

During the general plan update process, many potential topics were identified, and undoubtedly other topics will emerge over time.

The following is a list of topics where the City could take the lead in providing information.

- Quality of life—community resources, social services, arts programs and events, recreation programs
- Natural environment and public spaces—open space and creek protection, trail use and safety, parks
- Built environment—healthy community design, green building, conservation, air and water quality
- Transportation—“Park once and walk” downtown program, options for getting children to school, transit availability
- Safety—hazardous material disposal, natural hazards such as fires, floods and earthquakes
- Governance—city government, community involvement opportunities

GOAL 6
Provide information on topics important to the City and community.

Policy 6.1. Working with other public agencies and civic organizations, provide information useful to the community via new resident packets, the Nutshell, the City’s website, the City’s review processes, information pamphlets, Community Cable TV, and similar tools and avenues.

Action 6.1.1. In cooperation with other public agencies and civic organizations, create and distribute information and maps on subjects important to the community.

Action 6.1.2. In cooperation with other public agencies and civic organizations, sponsor workshops on topics important to the community.

Action 6.1.3. Display posters and banners throughout the city highlighting special events, including those at local parks.
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