

2 ABOUT LIVERMORE

This chapter provides a brief introduction to Livermore. Additional background information is contained in each of the Plan Elements in Chapters 3 through 12.

A. Physical Setting

Livermore is situated in the Livermore Valley, in eastern Alameda County. The Livermore Valley is edged to the north, south and east by rolling hills, within which the urbanized area of the City lies. Livermore is bisected by Interstate 580 (I-580) which runs east-west through Alameda County. The Union Pacific Railroad, which now serves the ACE train commuter rail service, roughly parallels the freeway to the south.

The most distinctive features of Livermore's natural setting are the hills and ridgelines that surround the City, most of which lie outside the City limits. Ridgelines are pronounced along the southern edge of the City, where views of rolling hills, interspersed with sycamore woodland areas, are complemented by intervening vistas of agricultural land and vineyards. Significant ridgelines are also located north of the I-580 corridor, particularly those associated with Brushy Peak to the northeast, as well as the Altamont Hills east of Vasco Road and Greenville Road. Other open space to the north consists of more moderate topography, with rolling hills and rangelands. Several creeks and arroyos lie within the Planning Area, including Altamont Creek, Arroyo Seco, Arroyo Mocho, Arroyo Las Positas, Collier Canyon Creek, and Arroyo del Valle. These creeks support vegetation and trees for portions of their length, imparting important topographical and visual features to the general landscape.

Livermore's historic Downtown lies south of the railway corridor and I-580, in an area bounded roughly by the railway to the north, Fourth Street to the south and east, and Murrieta Boulevard to the west. Residential development extends outwards from the Downtown core. Older residential developments, mostly built before Livermore's major growth period in the 1950's, lie adjacent to the Downtown to the north, south and east. Streets in these areas generally conform to the more traditional grid pattern seen in Livermore's Downtown.

Beyond the center of the City, radiating outward to the urban edge, are numerous residential subdivisions. Mostly built since 1950, these residential neighborhoods occupy the greater part of the City's land area. The urban fabric of these areas reflects a classic suburban development pattern; large tracts of one- and two-story single-family homes of largely similar style, arranged on cul-de-sacs and curvilinear local streets. Multi-family housing and apartment complexes are generally located along larger streets and arterials.

Other significant features of the urbanized area include a large triangular land area of low-density light industrial development that radiates northeast between the railway and I-580 from east of Downtown to the City limits, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) and Sandia National Laboratories in the southeastern part of the City, and the Municipal Airport to the west, south of I-580. The outlying urban edge reflects the interface of the City and surrounding open space and agricultural areas. Here, newer residential development is interspersed with older ranches, generally consisting of a clustered home and outbuildings, surrounded by pasture or other cultivated lands.

B. History

The City of Livermore was founded in 1869 by William Mendenhall, who saw an opportunity to develop a new town on the railway line that was built through the valley. County records from that year describe the town as "950 acres, with a population of 830 persons, occupying 234 buildings, 143 of which are private houses and 91 are businesses." In the years leading up to incorporation in 1876, the Livermore Valley was mainly used as grazing land for Mission San Jose's cattle and sheep. Mendenhall named the City in honor of Robert Livermore, his friend, and a prominent rancher in the Livermore Valley. He was also responsible for providing the land to the railroad for a railroad depot. Livermore's development as a City was based on the Western Pacific Railroad and the commerce that the railroad brought with it, as well as cattle ranches and vineyards.

Up until the second half of the 20th century, Livermore's economy was predominantly agriculture and natural resource based. Coal production was a major element in the economy of the Valley until the early twentieth century, and rock and gravel from Livermore's quarries and creeks was used extensively in the construction of the road and cities of the burgeoning San Francisco Bay region. Industry has always been a significant part of Livermore's economy, and the City has remained on the forefront of successive waves of technological innovation. The Coast Manufacturing and Supply Company, which manufactured electrical safety fuses, came to Livermore in 1913, and evolved its business to include fiberglass and glass fabrics production by the 1950's. Nuclear research facilities became a prominent part of the Livermore landscape following World War II, with the employment that they provide being an important factor in Livermore's community growth in the post-war period. Livermore continues to attract high technology and computer-based businesses, and has shared in the rapid growth of the Bay Area's high-tech industries over the past 20 years.

Over 125 years later, Livermore's historic origins are more than just traces on the landscape. Several of the ranches and vineyards that were the early engines of economic development still ring the City and contribute significantly to civic identity. Reminders of Livermore's history are seen throughout the City, in its historic buildings and monuments, and in symbols of the City's connection to the past, including its agricultural heritage and the Centennial Light Bulb, which has been burning continuously since 1901. The Livermore Rodeo, an annual event in the City since 1918, continues to evoke Livermore's roots in the agriculture and ranching economy of the late nineteenth century.

C. Demographics

In 2002, Livermore had a population of roughly 76,700. Livermore's population grew steadily over the 30 year period from 1970 to 2000, with a twenty-nine percent increase between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, the US Census found that Livermore's population was predominantly Caucasian, with fourteen percent Hispanic, six percent Asian and seventy-four percent Caucasian. The Housing Element (Chapter 6) provides a more in-depth discussion of Livermore social and economic demographic data.