



CITY OF OAKLAND  
OPEN SPACE  
CONSERVATION  
AND  
RECREATION

AN ELEMENT OF THE OAKLAND GENERAL PLAN

# **OPEN SPACE, CONSERVATION, AND RECREATION (OSCAR) Element**

**An Element of the  
Oakland General Plan**

**City of Oakland, California**

Adopted by the Oakland City Council  
June 1996

The OSCAR Element has a two-volume Technical Report which is not part of the adopted Element. The Technical Report provides background information on the topics discussed in the OSCAR Element and does not contain policy or action items.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The OSCAR Element is divided into four major chapters (Open Space, Conservation, Recreation, and Area Plans). Each Chapter contains several sections.

### OPEN SPACE

This Chapter is divided into three major sections. *Open Space Land Uses* discusses the different types of open space within the city and presents basic principles for each. *Shoreline and Creeks* looks at ways to make these two assets more accessible. *Open Space for Community Character* examines open space as an element of Oakland's form and explores how it can be used to enhance the appearance and "sense of place" in the city.

The Open Space Land Uses section includes the following directives:

1. About 1,700 acres of *existing* parks and wetlands, including most of the rugged hill area parks, are assigned a new General Plan designation called "Resource Conservation Area"(RCA). A new zoning category will be created and applied to all RCAs except those within Port of Oakland. The new zoning will replace the existing residential (or unzoned status) that currently applies on the hill parks.
  2. Specific, measurable criteria are established for the City to follow when acquiring new parkland in the hills and in the flatlands. A priority will be placed on flatland open space acquisition, with other means (conservation easements, less permissive zoning on steep slopes, EBRPD participation, etc.) used to maintain open space in the hills.
  3. Conservation of ridges and knolls is promoted. Development regulations and density standards which protect the natural character of the Oakland Hills are supported.
  4. Schoolyards are acknowledged as an underutilized open space resource in the flatlands. Policies and actions direct the City to work collaboratively with the Oakland Unified School District to make schoolyards more accessible and attractive.
  5. The emerging community gardens movement is supported and promoted. A new community-based gardening program is recommended, with City staff providing technical support.
  6. A variety of innovative options for open space dedication would be supported by the City, including land banking, donations of land to the City, transfer of development rights, land trusts, and street closures. The emphasis will be on increasing open space in underserved areas and protecting environmentally sensitive areas.
  7. Retention of institutional open spaces (universities, military bases, etc.) will continue to be supported. Action programs include incorporation of open space as a major component of military base re-use planning; and designation of most of the University of California's landholdings as a Resource Conservation Area.
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8. As in the 1976 OSCAR, the Plan recommends that cemeteries and golf courses continue to be maintained as open space. A new zoning category for private open space is recommended. OSCAR suggests replacing residential zoning of cemeteries with this category.
9. Policies in the Element suggest that the City make the most of "functional open spaces," including freeway rights of way, EBMUD tank sites and watershed lands, large parking lots and storage areas, and the airport.
10. The rural "open space" character of large lot residential areas is to be conserved, with one-acre zoning considered in a number of existing rural areas now zoned R-10.
11. Private open space will continue to be required in multi-family residential development, although the requirements will be revisited. The Element also suggests that lot coverage requirements be explored to maintain some sense of openness and visual relief on single family lots.
12. The concept of a citywide linear park and trail system is endorsed. The system incorporates existing parks, creeks, the shoreline, and open space corridors such as freeway buffers, land under BART, grassland along transmission lines, and street medians.
13. In tandem with its linear park policies, the OSCAR Element supports an integrated network of bicycle and pedestrian trails in the City. The Element places a priority on links between the flatlands and the hills/ bay, and interconnections between the hill area parks. Priority trail segments are identified, including the Bay Trail, the Lake Merritt perimeter trail, and the Lake Merritt to Estuary connector. Maintenance of mid-block stairsteps and easements also is recommended, with an eye towards a future interconnected Urban Trails system.
14. Coordinated open space planning with EBRPD, adjacent cities and counties, and non-profit organizations is supported as a means of conserving regional open space resources.

The Shoreline and Creeks Section includes the following directives:

1. The Element establishes a policy framework for shoreline open space based largely on a 1992 report by the Oakland League of Women Voters. Policies and actions emphasize the Jack London to High Street waterfront as an opportunity area for improved public access, recreational amenities, and land uses which capitalize on the waterfront's presence.
2. The Element also encourages public access opportunities in the Airport and Harbor areas, although it recognizes that maritime and aviation uses preclude water access in most areas. It is noted that maritime and aviation activities are of interest to residents and visitors and that access points to view these activities are desirable. Vista points on the south side of the Bay Bridge approach and at the airport are recommended.
3. Construction of the Bay Trail is supported along the alignment already endorsed by the City Council.

4. A priority is placed on access linkages between the waterfront and nearby flatland neighborhoods deficient in open space. Opportunities for connections are identified.
5. Oakland's major creeks are identified as the framework for a system of open space corridors linking the hills to the bay, while also providing much-needed open space in flatland neighborhoods. Specific access improvements to creeks on public properties (Sanborn Park, etc.) are recommended. On private properties, a variety of erosion control, vegetation management, and building setback requirements are recommended.
6. The concept of creek "daylighting" (unearthing buried creeks) is supported, where certain conditions are met. Consistent with existing City practices, storm drain stenciling and other projects which raise public awareness of creeks are promoted.
7. The City will encourage Alameda County Flood Control to incorporate recreation/ public access in any creek improvement/ flood control project.
8. Public input and community involvement is mandated in creek planning.

The Open Space for Community Character Section includes the following directives:

1. The basic elements of Oakland's landform (hills, canyons, shoreline, creeks, etc.) are to be respected and conserved as development occurs.
2. Where feasible, open space (or natural landscape features) will be used as a way to define the edges of the city and individual neighborhoods.
3. Development will be required to protect and enhance views and create new points of visual interest where appropriate.
4. Urban plazas and other civic open spaces, such as rooftop gardens, are encouraged downtown and at BART stations.
5. Current requirements for public art are supported and possible ways to expand the public art program are suggested.
6. A broad policy framework supporting street trees is presented. The OPR and OPB are directed to update the Street Tree Plan and pursue its adoption. The Street Tree Plan would prioritize planting projects and identify tree palettes that are appropriate and cost-effective. The Element also mandates public involvement in street tree selection, planting, maintenance, and removal and establishes general criteria for tree removal.

## CONSERVATION

The Conservation Chapter consists of five sections, each dealing with a major natural resource area.

The Earth Resources Section includes the following directives:

1. Soil should be conserved, carefully managed, and considered a factor in building and road design. Grading, sedimentation, and erosion control ordinances should continue to be maintained and enforced.
2. General provisions for development are set forth to reduce landslide risks, seismic hazards, and subsidence in new construction.
3. Grading practices which minimize benching, removal of large vegetation, erosion, and adverse visual impacts are promoted.
4. Soil testing will be required for development on sites with a suspected history of soil contamination.
5. Archaeological resources will be safeguarded in areas known to contain such resources through pre-development survey requirements.
6. Oakland's rhyolite (rock quarry) deposits will be conserved and carefully managed. Continued extraction at the Leona Quarry is permitted, subject to mitigation measures (to be established through the conditional use permit process) and an approved reclamation plan.

The Water Resources Section includes the following directives:

1. Measures to conserve groundwater will be supported, including maintenance of open space in high recharge areas and minimizing the risks of groundwater pollution from leaching pesticides, gasoline tanks, etc.
2. Water conservation and recycling strategies will be supported, consistent with EBMUD's Long Range Plan. Public education on water conservation is promoted, along with the use of drought-tolerant landscaping, and increased use of reclaimed wastewater for landscape irrigation. Adoption of a Water-Efficient Landscape Ordinance is recommended, consistent with State law.
3. A policy framework for implementing the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program is presented, including the following components:
  - Limited requirements for stormwater retention and pre-treatment, consistent with State and federal law but sensitive to local economic constraints;
  - Regular City maintenance of the storm drain system, collection of litter and household hazardous waste (to avoid illegal dumping), street sweeping, and hazardous spill control plans;

- Continued requirements for new construction which mitigate potential impacts from runoff and erosion;
  - Continued water quality monitoring by Alameda County and the Regional Board;
  - Correction of runoff problems from the old sulfur mines near Ridgmont;
  - Management of marina development and houseboats to minimize illegal discharges;
  - Continued upgrading of the regional wastewater treatment plant;
  - Continued public education on water pollution, including billboards and storm drain stenciling
4. Continued efforts to improve water quality in Lake Merritt are supported, including catch basins, monitoring, and replacement of cardboard garbage bins.
  5. Development in the watershed of Redwood Creek/ Upper San Leandro Reservoir is discouraged. The OSCAR Element suggests that stormwater detention be used where development does occur in this watershed.
  6. Flood control projects will be required to preserve the natural character of creeks rather than burying creeks or creating concrete culverts.
  7. Dredging of the Estuary is supported, subject to mitigation of potential water quality impacts and close monitoring of dredge spoils disposal.
  8. Management of San Leandro Bay and the Emeryville Crescent as estuarine sanctuaries is supported, and land or water activities which would impede this function without providing sufficient benefits are discouraged.
  9. Preparation of a Creeks Master Plan is endorsed, along with development guidelines for properties abutting creeks and strengthening of the existing Watercourse Protection Ordinance. Also, stronger penalties for creek dumping, and additional creek maintenance, clean-up, and education campaigns are recommended.

The Plant and Animal Resources Section includes the following directives:

1. The Element calls for conservation of the city's remaining oak woodlands, redwood forests, native perennial grasslands, and riparian areas. Precise mapping of these plant communities is recommended. Standardized mitigation measures for development on properties containing these plant communities are suggested, and the use of conservation easements to protect these resources is encouraged.
2. Plant diversity in wildland areas is encouraged, and native and drought-tolerant plants are encouraged in the landscaping of developed areas.
3. Tree removal is discouraged without due cause; continued enforcement of the tree preservation ordinance is recommended.

5. Pre-development surveys will be required where rare, endangered, and threatened species are potentially present, and (pursuant to CEQA and NEPA) potential adverse impacts will need to be mitigated. A list of these species and their habitat is included in the Element.
6. The Element emphasizes strategies for fire prevention on public properties (through vegetation management), private properties (through fire safety laws), and in new development (through landscaping and site planning practices). It suggests that grant funding be pursued for a demonstration garden showing fire-resistant landscaping. It also recommends that guidelines for fire-resistant landscaping be prepared and distributed to homeowners in high hazard areas
7. Wildlife corridors are designated on specific undeveloped (mostly public) properties in the hills. Where such corridors are in private ownership, habitat protection is recommended as new development occurs.
8. The Element promotes public education and programs on Oakland's natural environment.

The Air Resources Section includes the following directives:

1. The Element endorses a land use pattern which reduces auto dependency, minimizes vehicles miles traveled, and reduces the necessity of long commutes. The Element calls for a transportation system which reduces auto dependency by making ridesharing, transit, pedestrian, and bike circulation more viable.
2. Reduced air quality impacts in new development are to be pursued through landscaping, energy efficiency, transit-friendly design, and other measures.
3. Construction, demolition, and grading practices will be required to minimize dust emissions.
4. Coordinated air quality planning at the regional level is promoted, including increased monitoring of air contaminants in Oakland. An Air Quality General Plan Element is suggested.

The Energy Resources Section includes the following directives:

1. Energy conservation in municipal operations, local businesses, and residences is promoted.
2. A land use and transportation pattern which conserves energy (by minimizing dependence on single passenger autos) is promoted.
3. The use of energy-efficient construction methods and materials is promoted.
4. Site planning which maximizes energy efficiency (solar access, etc.) is encouraged.
5. Alternative energy sources, particularly solar, waste-to-energy, and cogeneration, are supported and will be accommodated where feasible.

## RECREATION

The Recreation Chapter consists of four major sections. The Park Land Use Section includes the following directives:

1. A classification system for parks is created based on their characteristics, function, and service areas. Ten categories are created (region-serving, community, neighborhood, active mini-park, passive mini-park, linear park, resource conservation area, special use park, athletic fields, schoolyard). Management and future development of each park should be consistent with its classification.
2. An "Urban Parks" zoning district is recommended, with a list of permitted, conditionally permitted, and prohibited uses developed for the zone. The list of uses will be different for each category of park.
3. The City will pursue a "no net loss" goal for its urban parklands. The total park area covered by buildings in the future must be less than the new park area created or enhanced through acquisitions and capital improvements.
4. An official process for changes in use within parks is established. This process ensures public input and requires that findings of fact be made by the PRAC or Planning Commission.
5. An Oakland Parks Master Plan is recommended, including a 5-year capital improvement program. Master plans for individual parks are also recommended, especially where land use issues or conflicts exist.
6. New non-recreational buildings in urban parks are strongly discouraged unless construction is a matter of necessity and no other options exist. For recreational buildings, OSCAR recommends that sites adjacent rather than within parks be considered to avoid loss of open space. In any case, park master plans are recommended prior to building construction.
7. The Element recommends that park activities be sited to minimize conflicts between uses, ensure compatibility with surrounding areas, respect the natural environment, and maintain a high standard of design.
8. Historic resources within city parks are to be conserved. Certain city parks, including the original city "squares", Clinton Square, and San Antonio Park, and certain park features, are recommended for designation as local landmarks. The Element recommends continued inventory of historic resources within parks.
9. Level of Service standards are formally adopted as a means of prioritizing where future park improvements and acquisitions should be located.
10. A commitment is made to prioritizing investment in underserved areas, as identified in a series of maps showing areas without access to parks.

11. Basic principles to be followed in the design of new parks are established.

The Park Operations Section includes the following directives:

1. Park maintenance, rehabilitation, and safety are established as top priority concerns for budgeting purposes. Renovation of existing facilities is emphasized as a more cost-effective alternative to new construction in many instances.
2. On-going maintenance costs should be seriously considered when evaluating any new City park or recreation project.
3. A strategy for making parks safer is established. Components include increasing park activities and bringing new users to the parks; incorporating physical design changes (lighting, fencing, signage, emergency response features, etc.); using vandal-resistant construction; providing program alternatives for youth; improving law enforcement and neighborhood watches; promoting civic responsibility; and addressing equipment and environmental hazards.
4. The Element promotes sharing of facilities between OUSD and OPR to maximize service delivery to the community. It also identifies Peralta College facilities and major utility (EBMUD, PG&E) properties as having the potential for joint use.
5. Private or non-profit projects which meet public recreational needs are encouraged, particularly where lower income communities are served.
6. Interagency coordination is recommended to avoid redundancies and to maximize cost-effective service delivery.

The Human Resources Section includes the following directives:

1. Recreational programs should be diverse and equitably distributed. Future recreation programs should be designed to meet the needs of the communities they serve and to reflect local priorities.
2. Adequate staffing of recreation centers is emphasized. The use of underutilized recreation centers for other social services is encouraged to increase activity levels in some underused parks.
3. Volunteer involvement will continue to be actively promoted.
4. Coordination with the school district (and other recreational service providers) in service delivery is promoted. Expansion of the After School Program is also suggested.
5. Recreational services which reflect the multi-cultural make-up of the city, including non-English speaking persons, are stressed. Festivals and other programs which celebrate diversity are promoted.

6. Programs which meet the needs of certain target groups, including young children, youth-at-risk, seniors, very low income households, homeless, and disabled persons are established as priorities.
7. Increased citizen involvement and participation is encouraged, using the Recreation Advisory Councils as building blocks. Interaction between OPR staff, park neighbors, and community groups is encouraged. Community participation in park construction, landscaping, maintenance, and safety is encouraged. Involvement of the local arts community in park design and improvement is also encouraged.
8. The OSCAR calls for improved public information on Oakland's parks, including press releases, coordination with transit agencies, brochures, kiosks and maps, better signage, and information targeted towards children.

The Funding Section includes the following directives:

1. Adoption of a park impact fee is supported to cover the cost of recreational service delivery generated by new residential development. In theory, the cost of meeting recreational needs created by future growth would be provided by fees paid by that growth.
2. A diverse strategy is set forth for park funding, including use of the general fund, redevelopment funds, special assessments, public-private partnerships, gifts and donations, grants, state and federal program funding, user fees, bond financing, and EBRPD investment in Oakland.

