2007 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE APPLICATION

City of El Cerrito: Baxter Creek Gateway Park & Restoration Project
December 14, 2006

Dear Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence Selection Committee,

Enclosed is our application for the Baxter Creek Gateway Park and Restoration Project Urban Design award. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to apply for this distinguished award. If additional information is needed, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Melanie Mintz
Environmental Analyst
510-215-4339
mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us
2007 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE APPLICATION

City of El Cerrito: Baxter Creek Gateway Park & Restoration Project
PROJECT DATA

Project Name: Baxter Creek Gateway Park & Restoration Project

Park Location: El Cerrito, California  Owner: City of El Cerrito

Project Use(s): Environmental Education; Civic Plaza; Multi-Use Path; Creek Restoration (Habitat, Water Quality Improvement); Community Revitalization; Streetscape Improvement

Project Size: 1.6-acres  Total Development Cost: $1,287,000

Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate):
< $5,000 Maintenance plus $5,000 to $15,000 To Be Determined Amount for Annual Watershed Stewardship and Education Program

Date Initiated: March 2003 (Purchased land from railroad)

Percent Completed by December 1, 2006: 100%

(Supplemental plantings will take place throughout the winter/spring; Park Entry sign, as a part of our San Pablo Avenue Streetscape project will be installed in March 2006)

Project Completion Date (if appropriate): The official project completion date was September 30, 2006 when we celebrated our Grand Opening. The park was actually opened in February 2006. (See Question #3, Project Description for other significant dates.)

Application submitted by:

Name: Melanie Mintz  Title: Environmental Analyst III

Organization: City of El Cerrito, Department of Public Works

Address City/State/Zip: 10940 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530

Telephone (510) 215-4339  Fax (510) 215-4319

E-mail: mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us  Weekend Contact No.: 510-459-7696

Key Participants (Attach an additional sheet if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Key Participant</th>
<th>Telephone/e-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of El Cerrito</td>
<td>Melanie Mintz</td>
<td>510-215-4339 <a href="mailto:mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us">mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Coastal Conservancy</td>
<td>Ann Buell</td>
<td>510-286-0752 <a href="mailto:abuell@scc.ca.gov">abuell@scc.ca.gov</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Architect/Designer         |                   |                                       |
| Restoration Design Group   | Bob Birkeland     | 510-644-2798 bob@rdgmail.com          |
| Studio L’Image             | Sue Labouvie      | 510-666-9799 slabouvie@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us |

| Developer                  |                   |                                       |
| City of El Cerrito         | Melanie Mintz     | 510-215-4339 mmintz@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us |

2007 Rudy Bruner Award: El Cerrito Application
Project Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Key Participant</th>
<th>Telephone/e-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Watershed Project</td>
<td>Ocean Halbert</td>
<td>510-685-3686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:ocean@thewatershedproject.org">ocean@thewatershedproject.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Baxter Creek</td>
<td>Maryann Aberg</td>
<td>510-236-5351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate how you learned of the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*. (Check all that apply).

- [ ] Direct Mailing
- [ ] Magazine Advertisement
- [ ] Previous RBA entrant
- [ ] Professional
- [x] Online Notice
- [ ] Previous Selection Committee member
- [ ] Organization
- [ ] Bruner/Loeb Forum
- [ ] Other (please specify)

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, and to post on the Bruner Foundation web sites, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature _______________________________ ___
ABSTRACT

Project Name: Baxter Creek Gateway Park & Restoration Project
Address: San Pablo Avenue, between Conlon and Macdonald, El Cerrito, CA, 94530

1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

The primary goal of the project was to transform a neglected, blighted old railroad property and degraded stream channel into a cherished, multi-purpose community place with healthy riparian habitat, opportunities for recreation and non-motorized transportation, community gathering places and educational resources. Specifically, the project:

- Transformed 750-feet of a linear ditch into a 950-foot meandering stream and riparian ecosystem.
- Increased the community’s awareness of the value of urban natural areas through interpretive signage, work days, tours and classes.
- Extended a Class 1-Multi-Use path to the City limits.
- Created an ecological gateway to the City, and community gathering place, along busy San Pablo Avenue (State Route 123).

2. Why does the project merit the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

Baxter Creek Gateway Park is unique in that it represents vision, partnership, and the integration of multiple values in the preservation, restoration and redevelopment of a community place. The park is intended to be the first pebble tossed into a pond whose ripples travel to the ponds edges and back again, in that the project will affect the character and design of the areas surrounding it. The ecological park is adjacent to vacant and underutilized parcels, at the intersection of two cities, along a regional multi-use trail and adjacent to a busy state highway in a built-out urban environment that has historically been auto-dominated. The project represents transformation, imagination and community investment and models how ecological values and goals can be beautifully integrated with urban design, and vice versa. Through the planning process, the project which was initiated as an ecological restoration project, became a small urban plaza which has already inspired a major streetscape revitalization on the state highway it fronts. In summary, the project is an example of the integration of ecological, community, urban design, and educational values in one small space.

The project was inspired by the vision and hard work of community activists who proclaimed that “Life Is a Ditch, Baxter Creek Isn’t.”

It is the result of partnership between community members, non-profit organizations and the City.

It represents the integration of multiple values through the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the project development phase (including community members, creek advocates, bicycle advocates, the Fire and Police departments, the Redevelopment Agency); through the provision of a variety of amenities (paths, floodplain, riparian plantings, benches, bike racks, civic plaza, drinking fountain, community kiosk); and through ongoing participation and collaboration to expand the benefits of the project to school groups, adjacent communities, and the general public.
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Describe the underlying values of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

The project's underlying values were to create a multi-purpose park that improved the ecological and human environment and promoted community stewardship and capacity. As a public park, it needs to be low-maintenance, safe, attractive and accessible. As a Class I path multi-use trail, it needs to provide a direct connection to adjacent facilities and lighting for evening and early morning commuters. As a place subject to previous dumping and illegal camping, it needs to promote community ownership and inhibit undesirable uses, as well as provide the Police and Fire Departments adequate visual and physical access. As an ecological restoration project, increasing species richness, improving water quality, accommodating seasonal flooding, establishing a native plant community were all key values. All of these perspectives needed to be accommodated. Tradeoffs included balancing the goals of restoration with the goals of public access and safety. Depending upon the park element being designed, the hierarchy and relationship of goals varied. For example, whereas the goals of restoration defined the shape of the channel, the design of the creek, and the location of paths--plant selection and location was strongly influenced by the need to provide adequate sightlines for user safety, while considering native plant and habitat goals.

2. How has the project impacted the local community? Please include relevant information on urban context.

The project was the first bold civic enhancement, and is the only civic gathering place, along San Pablo Avenue (State Route 123). Whereas, the current uses surrounding the project are mostly industrial, chain or underutilized, the future of the Avenue is intended to be mixed-use residential, commercial, and civic. This project is helping to initiate that change and sets a high standard for the quality of adjacent developments. It also provides a living example of what is possible and, therefore, helps nourish the imaginations of developers and agencies with similar opportunities. As the surrounding parcels redevelop, it will serve as a community civic space and influence the design quality standards held for those properties. Already, the City of El Cerrito has worked with the City of Richmond to influence how they approach a similar property across the street and is in contact with the parcel’s new owners (the Community Housing Development Corporation). The City has also used the successful implementation of the project to leverage funding for an ambitious streetscape project along the entire Avenue. Finally, the community stewardship aspect of the project has touched dozens of people through monthly workdays, class room visits and ongoing educational programs and has, and will continue to, strengthen their understanding of watershed issues.

3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

The project is the result of many years of collaboration, coordination and persistence.

- The project began with citizen concern over a proposed supermarket expansion on top of the site.
- After much effort and outreach by the Friends of Baxter Creek, in 1999 the City rezoned the property from Commercial to Open Space and then pursued funding to purchase the property from the Burlington Northern Railway Company.
- In 2003, the City purchased the property.
- To celebrate the purchase, a community design workshop was held in May 2003 where participants discussed design tools, developed alternative “Gateway Park” designs, and voted on the element they thought were most important and desirable for the site.
- The consensus elements were combined into a conceptual plan which was utilized to attract funding for design and development.

2007 Rudy Bruner Award: El Cerrito Application
Project Description
• In 2004, the Coastal Conservancy provided planning and design funding.
• In 2005, the State Water Resources Control Board provided funds for construction and start-up funds for maintenance, education, outreach and monitoring.
• In 2006, the project was constructed and the grand opening celebrated.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

The project has been financed by the City of El Cerrito; the City’s Redevelopment Agency; and two state agencies—the California Coastal Conservancy and the State Water Resources Control Board.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Financing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase ($400,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Design ($118,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of the project (including the creek restoration, planting, and site amenities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Outreach, Monitoring, Maintenance (for approx. 2-years.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

Yes, this project is a unique urban stream restoration project due to its integration of so many goals in a small setting and the utilization of high quality urban design features in a project that was initially motivated by ecological restoration purposes. The project is very transferable and demonstrates how an ecological restoration project can integrate sophisticated urban design characteristics.
1. Architects/Designer Perspective
   a. Restoration Design Group
   b. Studio L’Image

2. Professional Consultant Perspective
   a. The Watershed Project

3. Community Representative Perspective
   a. Friends of Baxter Creek
      i. Rosemary Loubal
      ii. Caitlin Smith
   b. Youth Empowerment Project

4. Public Agency Perspective
   a. California Coastal Conservancy

5. Other Perspective
   a. Assemblywoman Loni Hancock’s Office
1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

**Concept Background:** The Restoration Design Group (RDG) conceptual vision for the Baxter Creek Gateway grew from an early Community Design Workshop (May 2003) where the community's desires took form. RDG came onto the project after this initial effort and through a series of stakeholder meetings, and a public workshop, began to guide community aspirations into a preliminary site diagram that would accommodate the community desires for gathering spaces while acknowledging certain restoration engineering and design imperatives. Key goals for this northern edge of the city were to bring the ditched creek back to life, extend a regional trail, and create a community gathering place—possibly a city gateway. Through the initial design dialog with the community, and City of El Cerrito, the goals of the project were further refined, eventually recommending the creation of a "natural park" that would embody a collective commitment to environmental health and civic expression. "Natural park", at Baxter Creek Gateway intended to strike a balance, and tension, between wild habitat and civic use.

As the vision of what Baxter Creek could be was explored, the design began to articulate a landscape architectural and urban open space setting that supported community values, restoration imperatives, and an urban design confidence many did not realize was feasible. The formation of the Community/RDG concept was further driven by the overall project's ambitious goals to: catalyze area redevelopment; create the city's first civic gateway; restore a degraded creek into sustainable riparian habitat that would support environmental education; mitigate annual flood damage by re-establishing a functioning floodplain; extend the regional multi-use trail through the site to provide the "missing link" and motivate the completion of an adjacent community trail; and finally, provide universal access through the site and to the creek.

**Conceptual Vision Takes Shape—The Natural Park:** The conceptual design took hold when RDG committed to an integrated design that would meld restoration with civic design. The conceptual idea of the "natural park" took its form from an aesthetic response to flood control and geomorphologic imperatives—amazingly form did in fact grow out of function. An expansive, naturalized floodplain and an equilibrium creek channel were sculpted into the full width and breadth of the reclaimed railroad corridor. This bold gesture insured that the spatial needs of the flooding creek were accommodated and necessitated integrating the broad sweeping trail into the greater floodplain in a manner not previously envisioned.

The static trail with its life on the surface reflected the dynamic creek channel with much of its life beneath the surface. Both flowed through the new undulating floodplain, meeting the organic forms of the civic gateway at the trail's junction with El Cerrito's main street. Continuing the integration, the seatwalls, ramps, and boulder lined stairs created a subtle flood detention device as well as universal access.
access to the creek bank. At San Pablo Avenue, the right-of-way flares open, allowing an expansive tree-lined sidewalk, trail and civic gateway plaza to greet passing pedestrians and automobiles with the same respect. Users are invited into the plaza which can accommodate large civic celebrations, educational classes, and intimate visits in a visually and physically accessible and open setting. Restoration engineering and flood control are not inherently aesthetic pursuits though the resulting forms can reflect a naturalistic aesthetic when developed in harmony with natural park ideals. Creek restoration is foremost the science of hydrology and geomorphology—the successful incorporation of engineered function and aesthetic landform is one of the project's major design successes.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

Most important for the designers was the desire to use the natural park's wild setting in this dense, urban context, to reconnect visitors to the natural systems that underlie their world. The changing seasons, ebb and flood of the creek, and Northern California's dry summer environment are carefully articulated and interpreted in the restoration. Adding physical access to the visual access to the riparian area is a civic gesture guided by hope and some empirical knowledge that access can lead to understanding and stewardship.

Programmatically its functioning creek floodplain has already withstood record rain events with huge success and its extension of the Ohlone regional trail is spurring trail development in the neighboring community.

3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

We found the major design challenge to be the successful articulation of what we deemed to be a solid conceptual premise. The natural park was so compelling but was it achievable? Could a restored riparian corridor and trail terminate in a civic gateway to the city? Whether these two contrasting elements could coexist and support each other was a concern well into the final design. We feel strongly that the built form of the civic gateway both serves the functional needs and meets aesthetic expectations while respecting the primary goal of habitat restoration.

Compromise is inherent in the public realm. Financially every project suffers from a perceived lack of funds and appreciation. But at Baxter Creek we approached the budget as one of the inherent constraints we embrace in public work. What shocked us and inspired us was the community and city support for a seemingly modest gesture. A specific compromise we undertook on the site was to hold onto the civic form building elements of the project at the cost of reducing the planting. We knew that community support and future funding may become available for enhancing the planting—and this has now come to bear positively on the project—but we knew from experience that nothing is more permanent than temporary and that our vision for the gateway and civic frontage had to be built in this first effort.

4. Describe the ways in which the project relates to its urban context.

The natural park concept and urban location led designers to create bold sculptural forms that blurred the edges of habitat and civic form. A significant goal of the design was to ensure the project's scale, form, and detailing set the stage for a new look at El Cerrito's "Main Street" (San Pablo Avenue) and northern gateway. As a part of the regional Ohlone Greenway, the multi-use trail follows beneath the elevated tracks of the Bay Area Rapid Transit, or BART system. This modular stainless steel high speed commuter rail is part of the framework for the urban context around the redeveloping northern edge of El Cerrito. Transit-oriented housing and retail line the trail and "Main Street" and many new developments are in the planning stage. As a result of the completed Baxter Creek project, new adjacent developments will incorporate the once neglected creek as a neighborhood amenity, instead of turning their backs on a neglected creek. The Baxter Creek Gateway site has already begun to serve the established residential neighborhood nearby, and will welcome the growing community and serve as community open space.

2007 Rudy Bruner Award: El Cerrito Application
Landscape Architect Perspective
As a civic gateway Baxter Creek sets a stage for the redevelopment of its Main Street. Raw, unadorned forms and materials set a frame for nature allowing the revitalized restoration to be the performer. Soft materials used in the site’s interior—boulders, native plants, and crushed granite surfacing; meet assertive curvilinear board-formed concrete seatwalls and a ceremonial circle of elevated turf at the civic plaza. Along the sidewalk, monolithic circular concrete and steel bollards create a legible gateway while functioning to control vehicular access onto the site. Detailing is cognizant of the pedestrian and the vehicular passerby as both experience the gateway.
ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services.

Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name: Sue Labouvie  
Title: President  
Organization: Studio L'Image  
Telephone 510.666-9799  
Address: 1790 Fifth Street  
City/State/ZIP: Berkeley CA 94710  
Fax (510.649-9640)  
E-mail slabouvie@studiolimage.com

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, for any purpose whatsoever, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature Sue Labouvie

1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

A primary design decision was to develop interpretive signage and an information kiosk that co-existed with the delicate nature of the site. Warm friendly colors were chosen to reflect and co-exist with the palette of the surrounding wildflowers, native habitats, and seasonal changes of the natural environment.

The white metal structure of the kiosk and interpretive signage complements the site street furniture and landscaping details, designed by the landscape architect for the project.

The scale and placement of the signage was designed for easy readability, universal access, and with an orientation to the ecological feature being communicated by the interpretive text and images.

The thin profile of the interpretive signage was developed to create a small environmental footprint, without disrupting information and readability.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

A major consideration was to create ‘universal access’ for all user groups: pedestrians, bicyclists, and the non-ambulatory. Siting for each interpretive sign was carefully worked out to ensure equal and unencumbered usage by these groups.

The ‘tone and voice’ of the interpretive content was carefully selected. Since this program was a community outreach effort, we hoped to educate as well as provide an environment for recreation and community connection. Our approach was to make the content educational, without being ‘preachy’
in-order to clarify the relationship between behavior and impact on ones ecosystem. We hope that our efforts will lead to environmental stewardship on behalf of the nearby residents.

3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

The site itself is very open, although as it matures, density will follow. We were concerned about creating a site littered with signs. To enable a good balance between signs and site, we made the footprint of the signs small and their profile very slim. We prioritized our text on the interpretive panels to present only critical ecological messages, made it brief and direct, and left many content messages (e.g. historical) to be presented through other resources.

Fabrication costs were a major concern. Since this program was funded through grants, budgets were tight and fixed. Original fabrication bids came in over double our budget, so reworking the entire design program, from the standpoint of materials and design details was required. We managed to maintain the aesthetics of the design program, but many subtle design and material detailing ideas had to be eliminated. A significant community request was to include a bulletin board as part of the entrance kiosk. Although we managed to include the bulletin board, the ease of use of the casing was compromised, due to the required cost reduction.

4. Describe the ways in which the project relates to its urban context.

The siting of the entrance kiosk was the most difficult challenge. It needed to be visible to the neighborhood park entrance so the community would readily see it. However, it also had to be accessible to trail walkers, without interfering with path traffic and usage. Additionally, we did not want the triangular kiosk to compete or interfere with the site landscaping and viewing areas. Several locations were tried, before coming up with a placement that gave 'presence' to the kiosk, without making the kiosk an overly predominant component in the landscape.

A primary goal of the interpretive information was to relate to the surrounding community and residents. The most relevant topic was the interpretive panel that explained why 'urban parks' (and in this case, a restored creek) were important for the health and well being of community, as well as the plant and animal habitats.
PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services.

Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name: Ocean Halbert
Title: Community Programs Coordinator
Organization: The Watershed Project
Telephone: (510) 665-3686
Address: 1327 South 46th St. #155
City/State/ZIP: Richmond, CA 94804
Fax (510): 665 – 3642
E-mail: ocean@thewatershedproject.org

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, for any purpose whatsoever, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature

1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project?

The Watershed Project provides technical and organizational support for the Friends of Baxter Creek, the community group which was the inspiration to preserve and restore the piece of land that has now become Gateway Park. Through our partnership with the Coastal Conservancy, Water Resources Control Board and the City of El Cerrito, the Watershed Project helped to organize and support the voice of the community during the project development, and has provided the structure and staff for outreach, education and all aspects of the water quality monitoring. As the community programs coordinator, I am now aiding the community in their next stage of growth in relationship to the project: from the goals of project advocacy and site design to those of active ecological land stewardship, city beautification, and exploring new models of environmentally oriented urban development. The Watershed Project will also analyze all environmental data surrounding the project and complete the final documents of the project grant.

2. Describe the project’s impact on its community. Please be as specific as possible.

This project was the vehicle through which El Cerrito and Richmond residents were able to dramatically influence the development of their own community and introduce new language and concepts into their City’s development perspective. This project mobilized over one thousand local residents and introduced many to the process of civic engagement, negotiations with private stakeholders, and the power of the community voice to influence the shape of the physical landscape around them. Individuals organized to form the ‘Friends of Baxter Creek’ and began the project by stopping the burying of the creek for development purposes. Next they educated themselves, developers and their respective cities on the economic, habitat and water quality benefits of open creeks and helped to negotiate the sale of the land from the Railroad. They introduced new policies into the El Cerrito City’s General Plan to preserve and restore creeks and natural drainage ways, encourage habitat protection, create land use development that encourages walking, bicycling and public transit use, and encourage education to achieve the highest possible level of water quality.

2007 Rudy Bruner Award: El Cerrito Application
Professional Consultant Perspective
reasonable for an urban creek environment and the San Francisco Bay. Residents became a community and established themselves as an entity in which negotiations were necessary for the planning of the park and all aspects of the park's development. Now that the park is built, residents are actively engaged in keeping the park clean and in the establishment of the rare California native grass habitat that is a part of the park’s design. In addition, this issue mobilized the community to replant and care for three other public parks within the watershed.

3. **How might this project be instructive to others in your profession?**

This project demonstrates the growing public support for inspiring, ecologically based urban development and I hope will encourage non-profit workers to nurture the collaboration of community groups with their respective local governments. The community involvement in writing new language into the City of El Cerrito’s General Plan provides a model for citizen inclusion in the planning process. The project demonstrates that citizen input can be a constructive process for city governments and I hope it will encourage other cities to elicit feedback from their own citizens in the local development process.

4. **What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?**

The least successful aspects of this project, in my opinion, is the lack of long term funding for water quality monitoring and restoration assessment activities due to the newness of restoration projects in general, and the expenses associated with these activities. In order to gather meaningful scientific data regarding the success of creek and habitat restoration projects, we need to have post project monitoring of water quality and habitat assessment. Local governments and developers are already moving in the direction of “green development” and we need scientific data and analysis to inform and direct projects in the future. Fresh water is one of our most valuable and scarce resources and its remediation and use will be an important future concern.

Aside from the amazing collaboration that went into this project’s inception, I consider the most successful aspect of this project to be its value as a site where local residents, businesses and volunteer groups can come and learn about the power of community action to create a place of urban ecological restoration. The primary statement this project makes, to me, is that as a community we value our creeks and land, enough so that we have spent ten years restoring this section of Baxter Creek, and turning it into a park for the public. This project demonstrates that we can build successfully in the urban landscape while considering many objectives, including the environment. I believe that this project will change the shape of development around it, and will inspire the creation of human structures which are integrated within and inspire the expansion of regenerated natural landscapes.
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services.

Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name _____________________________

Organizations:
I belong to Friends of Baxter creek since it formed in 1998.
I am a member of EC Park and Rec. Comm. Term 2000 thru 2008
I am a 40 year plus member of the Sierra club, Audubon Society, 20 + year member Save the Bay, Nature conservancy, Wilderness society, Friends of El Cerrito Trees, etc, etc,

Telephone (510) 233-8027 Address 6502 Morris Ave.
City/State/ZIP El Cerrito, CA, 94530
Fax (510) 233-8072 E-mail rosemarytrees@hotmail.com

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, for any purpose whatsoever, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature _____________________________

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

In 1993, when we were looking to buy a house in El Cerrito, we rode our bikes from Berkeley and ended at the undeveloped Baxter creek "Ditch". We were charmed to see some undeveloped nature, but it clearly needed cleanup. We bought a house 4 blocks away, and rode or walked by there almost daily. We also enjoyed Canyon Trail Park, just two blocks up the hill from where Baxter Creek is daylighted. We soon met like minded neighbors and talked about how to make this a park and daylight the Creek. We met MaryAnn Aberg and Lisa Viani who were working hard to rehab the area.

I got the idea to publicize the creek and raise money for publicity. This was to hold a city wide PLANT sale on the property near the emergence of the creek. Hundred of people donated plants of all sorts. It was a lot of work. In particular Emmy Damon and her husband helped with this. We raised about $3000. People really liked the plant sale and said the didn't know the creek area existed. The next year's sale also was a great success. Some of the private schools and girl scout groups got interested in the area and began bringing their students. Then MaryAnn and Lisa wrote a successful grant application and the project was on its way.
As a formal group developed, I attended most meetings, spoke at the EC City Council about the project, arranged with my church to hold meeting there, and most recently was a member of the core group in finalizing the development of the park and readying it for the “grand Opening” in Sept 2006. Melanie M, EC staff was a good asset.

I organized and helped manage a children’s choir, from several local schools, which sang both known and improvised environmental songs, like “we’ve got little green tree frogs in our park” etc. I continue to frequently visit the park and inform staff about problems.

2. From the community’s point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

The main objections we had to surmount were:

"The site is in the slumy part of town, too close to MacDonald’s and San Pablo Avenue. The proposed amenities, benches and a public toilet, will attract vagrants, drug users and day laborers from Home Depot across from the creek."

The money should be spent on other things or on other parks, the Ohlone greenway is too dangerous and will bring crime to the area. The best answer to these (partly) valid concerns is that we now have a successful park, greatly appreciated by most users.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

“Friends of Baxter Creek” and also “Friends of El Cerrito Trees” were a strong and continuous force to create the park and heal the creek. But other organizations and individuals joined in. The grant that MaryAnn and Lisa got did not cover all the costs. EC contributed some from its redevelopment money. But they did not contribute enough to do everything that was needed. More money had to be provided.

There were many, many public meetings where hundreds of people, over the years, contributed ideas. The big lack, is not enough money to continue the park from the “Arroyo Seco stretch of the Greenway, that runs from Baxter creek to the Del Norte Apartments. Also paid staff tends to be mainly interested in an “artistic” “look good” park rather than a people friendly park. For example, I think there should be more benches and more sitting areas. Also, the Rotunda area, right by San Pablo is too noisy and too windy to be hospitable for people to sit and hang out. I tried and failed to have a permanent restroom included, presenting examples of relatively inexpensive, safe, unobtrusive, easy to maintain designs. In the end we compromised on a “porto-potty” on a platform.

A lot of people think there should have been twice as much planting in the beginning. Both to look good and to cut down on weeding. I don’t know whether this was a design issue or lack of money. I do have other ideas to improve and develop the park and the area, and will keep working (and weeding).
4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

Yes, beauty, hope, a destination, an inspiration to save our wetlands. Commuters walking to and from BART now can follow a pleasant path, AND have a toilet. But mainly, the park is crucial connector between El Cerrito's "Ohlone Greenway" and the soon to be opened Richmond "BART trail".

5. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

No time to answer this question adequately. Mainly, there was a possibly inevitable disconnect between the public vision, and hired designers coming on board and working under deadlines and with limited funds. But, overall I am very pleased and feel the effort was a worthwhile use of "our" time and money.

I'd like to see some more dots both east and west of the stream. I'd like to see a park-oriented cafe - possibly coupled with a bike & stroller rental shop.

The cafe should serve modest prices healthy food - reusable utensil + dishes - model good outdoor food, without litter. This sort of cafe-club friendly of course would be a gathering place for families + singles + elders.

I, and others at workshops would have preferred a central gathering place near the Emily Damon tree, with the Rotunda being elsewhere.

Rosemary A. Loubal
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services. Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name: Caitlin Smith
Organization: FOBC       Telephone: 510 234-0033
Address: 2687 Tamalpais Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530
Email: caitsmi@earthlink.net

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, for any purpose whatsoever, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature: (Sent via email)

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

I became involved in the Gateway project in about 2001 when I first moved to El Cerrito and was interested in becoming involved in local environmental and land use issues. I grew up by a creek, have always loved creeks and wildlife, and thought joining Friends of Baxter Creek would be a good way to meet people in my community with similar interests. I also thought this would be a way to give to my community in a way that was important to me.

I became involved in the Gateway Project by participating in planning meetings aimed at restoring the creek and developing ways for the public to use the area. I also serve on the maintenance committee for the Gateway where we look at how to maintain and enhance the habitat value of the creek and maintain the park improvements.

2. From the community’s point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

The primary issue regarding the Gateway was to restore Baxter Creek to a viable and flourishing habitat for wildlife. The idea was to slow down the flow of water in order to create riffles and shallow pools so that a greater diversity of insect life could thrive there, and to plant the creek with native riparian plants which would provide cover for the creek, lowering the water temperature for aquatic life, and providing cover and habitat for
birds and other wildlife. This entailed elongating the creek by creating sinews and planting the re-routed banks with willows to stabilize the channel.

One issue that arose was how to stabilize the creek and create the best habitat possible without creating an environment that would attract homeless people who had previously camped in the area.

Another issue was the continuation of the Ohlone Greenway pathway.

Also of interest was a community gathering place where people could meet and post notices.

People also wanted to see the creek.

3. **What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?**

We compromised on the number of plantings, and on the method of planting grasses. The banks of the creek and riparian area have been underplanted for habitat and there is little diversity in the plantings. Grasses were planted by hydroseed which was not successful over a majority of the park. Upland species were planted in the riparian zone. Many of these decisions were made by the Coordinator at the Watershed Project who ran Friends of Baxter Creek, design consultants, and the City of El Cerrito. Funding was a concern as well as security. With additional funding, I would hope that FOBC members who have expertise in this area would be able to participate more fully in the planting decision-making.

Initially, I believe we wanted more benches, and seating areas, and a restroom, but money was not available.

4. **Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?**

Many people use the park to stroll, walk their dogs and bike. I've seen children looking at the creek. It's become a peopled area, rather than a somewhat edgy meadow with a creek relegated to a ditch. You can now see the creek and an overview of the park. Many birds such as Black phoebe, American goldfinch, White crowned sparrow, Ruby crowned kinglet frequent the willows. I've seen raccoon paw prints in the creek. The Gateway is generally a success. It has significant habitat value and is now a beautiful place in a sea of big box stores and traffic. It is a place of respite from commercialism and the hub bub of the modern world. It has a peaceful bucolic feeling. I wish more of El Cerrito looked like this.

5. **Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?**

I would change how decisions were made about landscaping and planting along the creek. I didn't feel like the knowledge in the community about habitat restoration was listened to very well. Meetings specifically on habitat restoration should be held.
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services.

Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name: Deborah Espinoza   Title: Program Coordinator, Youth Empowerment Program
Organization: Bay Area Community Resources   Telephone: 510 847-8763
Address: 3219 Pierce Street   City/State/ZIP: Richmond/CA/94804
Fax: (510) 559-5552   E-mail: despinoza@bacr.org

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, for any purpose whatsoever, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

I am currently the program coordinator for the Youth Empowerment Program, a one-on-one Mentorship Program that focuses on empowering youth through education and social support. We provide “high-risk” youth with positive, consistent and caring role models who guide youth to make improvements in grades, school attendance and behavior, involvement with gangs/drugs, resiliency, and confidence. The Youth Empowerment Program is a project of the West Contra Costa Unified School District in Collaboration with Bay Area Community Resources (BACR), a non-profit organization whose mission is to support the healthy development of individuals and families in the community. In addition, BACR encourages and promotes volunteerism within the communities that we are living. To follow the guidelines of this mission, we have made a program requirement for Mentors/Mentees to be involved in community service projects. We have made it a priority for our program to not only expose them to the notion of giving back to their communities, but to be an active participant and advocate for it for the healthy development and preservation of it.

The Water Shed Project was recommended by one of our volunteer Mentors who has been actively involved with it from its conception. It was a natural fit for the goals and objectives of the community service component of our mentorship program.

Our group made up of 30 youth and adults spent the day picking up garbage within and surrounding the creek, removing harmful plants and weeds, and cleaning up walking and riding paths. In addition, the project staff conducted a well organized and hands on presentation about our local watershed, the need to protect it, ways that our daily behavior affects our local water supply, vegetation, air quality, and wild life. And finally, they gave us the tools to be active in preserving the natural qualities of those listed above.
2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

Most of our youth live within three miles of this project. Within 5 miles in the surrounding area are few parks where they feel safe. Our agency participated in another service project in the heart of Richmond, which has one of the highest murder rates in the nation. This park was blocks from where a few of our youth live. During the clean up, we found countless, broken alcohol/beer bottles, picked up dirty diapers, various forms of drug paraphernalia, blunts and cigarette butts. In addition, there were drug sales being conducted on the corner of park and several homeless individuals were camped out. Needless to say, this is not a place that our youth feel comfortable or safe. Our youth need safe places to be kids. Gateway Park has become one of these places.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

N/A

4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

Absolutely. As mentioned above, this project was not only recommended by one of our mentors, but I had also been exposed to the project by two other community members who had either participated in a service day at the site or learned about it in local publications. The word is spreading, and the day that we spent with the project, educated 30 more individuals about the importance of environmental protection on this local level. None of our inner-city youth had EVER participated in a service project, especially of this nature. I was unsure about the responses that we would receive about it. The idea of picking up trash and getting dirty to some 11-13 year olds, who would rather be walking around the mall on a Saturday, is appalling. However, we received a wonderful response by both our adult mentors and teen mentees. The project enabled us to work as a team, empowered youth by giving them tools to make a difference and educating them to make healthier decisions. The project is crucial and was one of the most memorable experiences of our program last year. We look forward to working with this project again this year.
1. What role did your agency play in the development of this project? Describe any requirements made of this project by your agency (e.g., zoning, public participation, public benefits, impact statements).

The California State Coastal Conservancy authorized two grants to the City of El Cerrito to help fund first the acquisition and then the design of this project. The acquisition grant was for $350,000 and the design grant was for $100,000. We required matching funds for both grants. For the design project in particular, we required strong public support and the commitment of the City of El Cerrito to continue supporting the project through its construction. A maintenance plan for the finished site was a required element of the project design.

2. How was this project intended to benefit your city? What trade-offs and compromises were required to implement the project? How did your agency participate in making them?

The Coastal Conservancy is only able to fund regionally significant projects that meet the guidelines established by our enabling legislation as well as the restrictions of the funding we have available at any given time. The restoration and design project at Baxter Creek included several elements that raised it above the level of being significant to the City of El Cerrito alone. The first was the potential of connecting a regional bike and pedestrian transportation corridor called the Ohlone Greenway from Berkeley all the way to the marina and San Francisco Bay Trail in Richmond. The second was the restoration of a section of creek that was upstream of a section of the same creek we had already helped fund, and which drains directly into San Francisco Bay.

These two regional factors were given more weight in our decision to fund the design by virtue of the fact that this project is located on a very busy thoroughfare and that the design was intended to draw attention to the greenway connection and the creek. We felt it would serve as a model for other projects and increase public support for similar projects. There were no trade-offs or compromises, but a sizeable risk that the remainder of the regional trail might never be completed.
3. Describe the project’s impact on your city. Please be as specific as possible.

Stewardship of Baxter Creek began with the strong support of a volunteer group called “Friends of Baxter Creek” and several non-profit organizations with which it regularly collaborates. These groups have galvanized whole neighborhoods and involved local school groups and artists in their projects, thus intensifying the sense of community and ownership for creek and other environmentally sensitive projects. They have also helped the City of El Cerrito change its attitude about the importance of urban creeks, which has had far-reaching and important consequences for resource protection in the region as the city has joined forces with neighboring cities to protect watersheds in common.

I would say that the project had a significant impact on the neighboring city across the road: Richmond. The visible nature of this project, both by location and design, rendered it immediately desirable as a model to be imitated by Richmond. The support that the Coastal Conservancy and other public funding agencies gave to the City of El Cerrito helped inspire other public and private groups working to complete the regional trail between El Cerrito and San Francisco Bay through Richmond (for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Trust for Public Land).

4. Did this project result in new models of public/private partnerships? Are there aspects of this project that would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities?

I think that one of the most interesting aspects of this project was the public involvement in the design itself. There were a number of participatory workshops where local residents provided ideas on how the public space should be used and configured. The inclusion of artists and not solely planning or restoration specialists brought a vibrancy and strong community element to the final configuration of space. Having the public gathering space near the roadway was also a successful element, because public safety is very important in our urban environment and people will be more likely to gather and enjoy the restored site if they feel safe.

5. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The design has succeeded in bringing the creek itself back to a sinuous and natural form, and has encouraged the public to enjoy the creek while walking or bicycling by or sitting for awhile. People passing by are going to become aware of a major urban pedestrian/bicycle corridor that they might not have been aware of before the project. The Ohlone Greenway is now poised to cross San Pablo Avenue and connect to the Richmond Greenway, which is well on its way to being constructed. Community members are now more interested in keeping the site clean and the site no longer has a homeless encampment. Local school children can learn about creek ecology and take ownership of the restored riparian corridor. The interpretive signs are attractive and other signage is creative, too (frog crossing, for example). The project was completed in a timely manner and on budget.

I cannot think of any aspect of the project that was not successful.
OTHER PERSPECTIVE

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services.

Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name __________ Kisasi Brooks
Title __________ Field Representative
Organization __________ Office of Assemblywoman Loni Hancock
Telephone __________ 510-559-1406
Address __________ 712 El Cerrito Plaza, El Cerrito, CA 94530
City/State/ZIP __________ El Cerrito, CA 94530
Fax (510) 559-1478
E-mail __________ kbrooks13@hotmail.com

The undersigned grants the Bruner Foundation permission to use, reproduce, or make available for reproduction or use by others, for any purpose whatsoever, the materials submitted. The applicant warrants that the applicant has full power and authority to submit the application and all attached materials and to grant these rights and permissions.

Signature __________

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

For many years, our office has played a major role in convening a collaborative planning process with all of the jurisdictions and stakeholders along San Pablo Avenue. Our objective has been to motivate local jurisdictions to develop and implement projects and design guidelines along San Pablo Avenue that collectively contribute to transforming the Avenue from an alternative to Interstate 80, into a grand destination replete with transit-oriented and mixed-use development, public art, open space and a vibrant commercial life. In June 2004, our office sponsored a bus tour of the Avenue, after which participants were asked to complete a survey. El Cerrito's pursuit and completion of the Baxter Creek Gateway Park, incorporating feedback received from the bus tour, is an inspiring example for other cities of the type of multi-purpose projects we envision along the Avenue and helps to build momentum for the transformation.

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on your community. Please be as specific as possible.

The project provides a small, but very significant, inspiration to adjacent communities and sets the type of design standards in El Cerrito that will help move the Avenue towards the grand boulevard it is envisioned to become. The project helps the vision move from idea to reality and is a building block for other projects that will complete the vision. Already, the completion of the project helped leverage funding for a broader San Pablo Avenue Streetscape renovation project, and has influenced the design of two significant pending projects downstream in the adjacent City of Richmond.
3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

We were not specifically involved in the design process, although our staff did visit the site several times. One of the ongoing tradeoffs in an undertaking as broad as transforming San Pablo Avenue, is the inevitable piece-by-piece implementation of the vision. This project is only one small project in an area in need of a major overhaul. Given the limited size of the project, i.e. one piece of property, it could only do so much—yet, it integrated a whole host of features, including a streetscape revitalization effort, a small civic plaza, a neighborhood gathering place, the extension of the regional Ohlone Greenway, and numerous ecological features. Our office very much hopes to see multi-family housing and commercial opportunities sprout on the adjacent properties. The City of El Cerrito is participating in an informal coalition of agencies, sponsored by our office, called the San Pablo Avenue Working Group. Through this group, we hope to engage the cities and potential developers along the corridor to undertake projects that implement the larger vision, including the transformation of the properties immediately adjacent to Baxter Creek Gateway Park.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The most successful aspects of this project are numerous; perhaps the most successful was the partnership and persistence it took to create it. In the project's early day, neighborhood activists had to persuade elected officials of the value of the "ditch" and dissuade the permitting of a supermarket expansion over the creek. They had to then work with the City to raise money for the project's purchase. Collectively, the City and the Friends group involved neighborhood residents and regional trail users in a community design process that resulted in the project on the ground today. The least successful aspect, as noted above, is that it is only one project in an area needing a major transformation. Of course, as noted above also, this is also part of the project's strength as it will help to inspire the type of transformation envisioned.
BAXTER CREEK GATEWAY
CREEK RESTORATION & SITE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

LEGEND

BID SET

L-2
Ohlone Greenway

San Pablo Avenue
Richmond Trail Ends 550 ft

I-80 Bikeway
Canyon Trail Park 0.2 mi

CONLON AVE.

IN EMERGENCY, CALL EL CERRITO POLICE DISPATCH
510-237-3233

EL CERRITO
For years, this stretch of Baxter Creek was thought of as nothing more than a ditch — it had been straightened, had little vegetation along its banks, and had become a dumping ground. Fortunately, community residents saw life in the “ditch.” Active community members helped make it what it is today — a healthy stream with native riparian habitat and a community gathering place.

The Rancho Years

This land became part of Rancho San Pablo in 1823, awarded by the Mexican government to Francisco Castro for his service in the army. Ranging from Cerrito Creek in southern El Cerrito, north to Pinole, and east to El Sobrante and Lafayette, the Rancho’s 17,000 acres were primarily used for grazing cattle, which were watered in local creeks.

By the late 1800s, European settlers had moved in and taken over the Castros’ land. They, too, grazed cattle here, and later on, many dairy farms operated in the area. In the mid-1800s, locals may have called the stream “Bishop Creek.”

Railroad Days

During the late 1800s, the California & Nevada Railroad — a narrow-gauge line with a wood-burning locomotive — laid tracks through this site. The railroad was purchased by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad in 1899, and it was presumably sometime early in the Santa Fe era that the creek was straightened and relocated. The last train ran through the area on May 12, 1979.

A Creek Reborn

After the railroad abandoned its line, this site sat dormant for several decades. In the early 1990s, proposals to develop it with an auto supply shop, a parking lot, and a grocery store were met with protests by El Cerrito and Richmond residents. They had a vision for what the site could be: a restored creek and a natural park.

Prehistory

No one knows exactly what this area looked like in pristine condition, but we do know that Native Americans lived here as early as 2,500 years ago. Expert hunters and gatherers, Ohlones of the Huchiun clan probably drank from the creek’s clear, spring-fed waters in Canyon Trail Park, Mira Vista Park, and elsewhere in the watershed.
After the City daylighted and restored a stretch of Baxter Creek upstream in Poinsett Park in 1997, El Cerrito and Richmond residents officially formed the Friends of Baxter Creek. They passed out leaflets, held meetings and spoke at council meetings to build support for saving and restoring this stretch of Baxter Creek at the “Gateway” property.

From 2000–2004, the Friends of Baxter Creek, the Watershed Project, and the City of El Cerrito worked together to write several grants to purchase this property from the railroad and preserve it as open space — forever.

The creek was restored in 2005, and the park officially opened in May 2006. Now, the City and Baxter Creek volunteers collaborate in maintaining the restored creek and native plant habitat for all to enjoy.

A small group of people can make a difference.

The Baxter Creek Restoration Project was made possible through partnerships and funding from the following:
California Coastal Conservancy
Proposition 12 Parks Water Bond
Proposition 13 Watershed Grant Program
State Water Resources Control Board
City of El Cerrito

Thanks also to the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program for outreach assistance to the Restoration Advisory Group for design reviews, to Hardin Applied Restoration & Conservation for identification of the Baxter Creek Salt marsh, to the Watershed Project for environmental programming, and to all the friends of Baxter Creek volunteers past and present who helped make the park a reality.

Meetings and workshops involved the community in the process of planning the new park and its facilities.
Restored streams, riparian areas, and the people living in the Baxter Creek watershed all play a role in keeping the water that flows to the Bay safe for fish, wildlife, and humans.

Stormwater often contains oil, grease, copper from brake linings, bacteria, and chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Restored creeks help the city of El Cerrito improve its stormwater runoff in a cost-effective, natural way. While creekside trees and shrubs help filter pollutants, we need to do our part, too.

- When you see trash in a creek or about to enter a storm drain, please pick it up. Plastic, styrofoam and other trash ends up in the Bay and ocean, where it harms wildlife.
- Please pick up after your pet. In wet weather, pet waste — high in bacteria — washes into storm drains and creeks.
- Wash your car at the car wash, where the runoff will be routed to a water treatment facility, or on your lawn so the soap can infiltrate and degrade. Never wash your car on the street, where the runoff flows into storm drains and on to the Bay.
With open space such as this protected creek, urban residents can enjoy nature close to home. The more restoration we complete, the more wildlife habitat and corridors we create — bit by bit. Here at Baxter Creek we have restored a riparian (creekside) ecosystem by planting native trees, shrubs, and grasses along the creek. The creek itself was reshaped too, with pools and riffles for creek critters.

Closest to the creek, willows, alders, and big leaf maples provide a tree canopy that shades the creek's water, keeping it cool for aquatic life. In the water, fallen leaves provide nutrients for insects that form the base of the creek's food web. Back on the banks, dogwood, buckeye, and ninebark make up the middle layer of the riparian forest. Blackberry, currant, and native grasses form an understory.

These forest layers attract different bird species (especially songbirds) and the beneficial insects they feed on. Upslope from the creek's banks, coast live oaks provide another canopy, with an understory of native grasses and wildflowers. This oak grassland also provides habitat for insects and birds, and traps and filters pollutants.

As you walk around, see how many plants you can identify...
In 1997, El Cerrito brought a section of Baxter Creek above ground from an underground pipe in the hills at Poinsett Park. That "daylighting" project galvanized a group of citizens to form Friends of Baxter Creek, and to work to save the Gateway site. In 2000, the group also restored the section of Baxter Creek that flows through Booker T. Anderson, Jr. Park. And, in 2006, the creek at this park was restored.

Like beads on a necklace, restoration projects such as this one help fill in habitat gaps in the watershed.

Ideally, our creeks and riparian forests would be solid ribbons of green flowing from the hills to the Bay. Urbanization and development have broken up those ribbons. With this project, we add one more "green bead" to the Baxter Creek necklace.
if you were a drop of water...

...where would you flow if you fell in the Baxter Creek watershed?

A watershed, also known as a drainage basin, is all of the land that drains to a particular body of water—in this case Baxter Creek and ultimately San Francisco Bay. Within the Baxter Creek watershed there are several sub-watersheds, defined by hills and low points. The low points are where the creeks flow—either openly or in pipes underground. Each of the Baxter Creek sub-watersheds drains to one of the creek’s three branches: Mira Vista, Poinsett, or Canyon Trail–Gateway.

You are currently on a segment of the Canyon Trail–Gateway branch.

The Canyon Trail–Gateway branch meets up with the other two branches just across San Pablo Avenue in the city of Richmond. After flowing through that site, the single stream travels through a pipe until it appears again above ground at Booker T. Anderson Park in Richmond. Baxter Creek then flows on to meet the Bay at Stege Marsh.

Every drop of rain, including every drop of water from a hose that does not evaporate or get intercepted by trees, plants, or lawns ends up in the Canyon Trail–Gateway branch (and eventually the Bay).
BE CONSIDERATE

TRAIL ENDS 500 FEET
BAXTER CREEK RESTORATION

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE

After many years of dreaming and effort by the Friends of Baxter Creek, neighbors, and the City of El Cerrito, the initial phase of the Baxter Creek restoration project and Ohlone Greenway extension will soon be nearing completion. The anticipated completion date is mid-December.

Once construction is complete, the restored creek, park and landscaping will require neighborhood “TLC” (tender loving care). Beginning in January, the Watershed Project and the City will sponsor monthly work parties and activities. A kiosk will be built on site with a calendar of such activities. We hope to see you there!

For more information, contact the City at 215-4339 or the Watershed Project/Friends of Baxter Creek at 665-3686 or visit the Friends of Baxter Creek website at www.creativedifferences.com/baxtercreek/.

NOTE: The November 12 tour was cancelled due to ongoing construction. Tours will be scheduled to coincide with work parties in January and a grand opening celebration will take place in Spring.

SPONSORS
CITY OF EL CERRITO & A PROPOSITION 13 WATERSHED PROTECTION GRANT ADMINISTERED BY THE STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD
Children's "Frog Skit" and the West County Winds Ensemble

Ribbon Cutting

Tree Planting

Baxter Creek Gateway Park: Grand Opening Celebration, September 30, 2006
Volunteer with the Baxter Creek Gateway Stewards Program

Looking to spend more time out doors? Get a little exercise? Meet your neighbors?

Then, join the Baxter Creek Gateway Stewards! We meet on the first Saturday of every month from 9:30-12:30 at the Baxter Creek Gateway Park, for a fun morning of volunteering. Activities include planting, weeding, and removing trash, with breaks to snack and socialize. At the end of the morning, you will be able to see the remarkable improvement you've made in your neighborhood park!

The Gateway Stewards workdays are also a great way for kids and teens to fulfill their community service commitments. We can also host civic and business groups.

To get involved, just come to a workday, or contact Ocean at (510) 665-3686 or ocean@thewatershedproject.org. See you at the creek!

Changes at the Watershed Project...From Apple to Ocean

Dear Friends of Baxter Creek,

After six wonderful years with the Friends, I am leaving to spend more time with my family. It's been a pleasure working with so many great people and I will miss all of you! I'll be at the Watershed Project through September 30, and then I'll see you at the work parties.

Ocean Halbert is joining the Watershed Project, and will be leading the Baxter Creek Gateway Stewards Program, including the restoration and monitoring events. Ocean is also a permaculture (ecological design and living) consultant and educator, and designs and constructs ecological gardens. She can be reached at (510) 665-3686 or ocean@thewatershedproject.org.

The Friends of Baxter Creek's stewardship activities associated with the Baxter Creek Gateway project include watershed education, outreach, and monitoring activities, and are coordinated by the Watershed Project, with funding from the City of El Cerrito and a Proposition 13 Watershed Protection Program grant.
Baxter Creek Gateway Stewards Program

For more information, contact:
Department of Public Works
Telephone: 510-215-4382

El Cerrito invites you to the:
Baxter Creek Gateway Park Ribbon Cutting
Saturday
September 30, 2006
10 AM - 12 noon

Come enjoy El Cerrito's newest park!
- Snacks!
- Music!
- Kid's Activities!
- Creek Restoration Tours!
- Native Plant Demonstrations!
- Free T-shirts for Creek Stewards!
- Music
  - Children's Choirs
  - "The Attendees" - Folk Music
  - West County Winds Ensemble

Also come join monthly work parties!

Join the Friends of Baxter Creek on Saturday, October 7 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (and on the first Saturday of every month) to plant, remove invasive weeds and trash, and conduct stewardship activities at the newly restored Baxter Creek Gateway Park. Tools, gloves and snacks will be provided. For more information contact Apple at (510) 665-3686 or apple@thewatershedproject.org.

Please also join the Friends for a ceremonial planting that will memorialize beloved FOBCer Emmy Damon at 9:30 a.m.
Healthy Homes, Gardens, and Creeks  
Free Workshop Series in El Cerrito

The City of El Cerrito Department of Public Works in partnership with the Watershed Project is presenting a five-part workshop series on environmentally-friendly gardening and cleaning practices. The workshops are FREE but require pre-registration. Sign up for as many as you like, no pre-requisites required. All workshops will be held at the El Cerrito Community Center, 7007 Moeser Lane.

Bay-Friendly Gardening Basics  
Saturday, October 7  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
Many types of gardens can be enhanced by the Bay-Friendly approach that works with nature to protect our creeks and watersheds. Beginning and experienced gardeners alike can learn to make environmentally-friendly gardening choices. This workshop provides an overview of design and maintenance considerations and practices that will help you make smart choices at the nursery.

Healthy Homes  
Wednesday, October 11  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
Improve the health of your home and community, and protect your children and pets. Explore less toxic alternatives to commonly used housecleaning and home pest control products. Everyone will leave with recipes and supplies to make easy low-toxic cleaning kits.

Bay-Friendly Gardening for Wildlife  
Saturday, October 21  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
Attract birds, butterflies and beneficial insects that add color, movement and interest to your landscape. Learn to diversify your garden by including California native plants that provide food, shelter and nesting places for wildlife.

Gardening for Creekside Residents  
Wednesday, October 25  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
Do you have a stretch of creek flowing through your property? Would you like to learn how to preserve and protect your creek and property? The Urban Creeks Council and the Watershed Project will give a presentation on stream processes, techniques for bank stabilization, and how to use local vegetation to help preserve your stretch of creek and the surrounding property.

Bay-Friendly Gardening to Manage Pests Naturally  
Saturday, November 4  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
Control pests without the use of pesticides. Attract beneficial insects to your garden. Discover least-toxic methods for managing common garden pests, such as snails, slugs, aphids and yellow jackets.

Workshops are offered by the Watershed Project, with funding from the City of El Cerrito, West Contra Costa Integrated Waste Management Authority, and a Proposition 13 Watershed Protection Program grant administered by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Call 510-665-3546 to register or visit www.thewatershedproject.org

Registration Form: Healthy Homes, Gardens, and Creeks

Name ____________________________

Home Address ____________________  City ___________  Zip __________

Phone ____________________________  Email ______________________

Please check the workshops you would like to attend. Confirmation will be sent via email 2 weeks prior to workshop.

☐ B-F Gardening Basics  
Saturday, October 7

☐ B-F Gardening for Wildlife  
Saturday, October 21

☐ Healthy Homes  
Wednesday, October 11

☐ Gardening for Creekside Residents  
Wednesday, October 25

☐ B-F Gardening to Manage Pests Naturally  
Saturday, November 4
What is Bay-Friendly Gardening?

The Bay-Friendly Gardening Program offers the home gardener tools for creating a beautiful and healthy Bay-Friendly garden. Bay-Friendly practices foster soil health, conserve water, and other valuable resources while reducing waste and preventing pollution in the San Francisco Bay Watershed. Download free materials and get more information at www.BayFriendly.org.

In addition to Bay-Friendly gardening, using less toxic alternatives to household cleaning products and taking care of creekside habitats can help to protect our watersheds. Learn how with a free workshop series offered by the Watershed Project, with funding from the City of El Cerrito, West Contra Costa Integrated Waste Management Authority, and a Proposition 13 Watershed Protection Program grant administered by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Learn how to make our homes, gardens, and creeks healthy with this five-part FREE workshop series in El Cerrito this Fall. Spots are limited, register today!

Healthy Homes, Gardens, and Creeks
Free Workshops
Fall 2006
El Cerrito

Create a sustainable, healthy, and beautiful garden using Bay-Friendly practices with our five-part seminar series. Find out how to bring native wildlife into your garden and how to manage pests naturally in your yard. Clean up your act with less toxic alternatives to everyday household cleaners, and get a lesson in how to protect your creekside property.

DETAILS INSIDE!
Big changes have been happening at the Baxter Creek Gateway, located on San Pablo Avenue just south of MacDonald, in northern El Cerrito. Over the past five months, this formerly neglected property has been recontoured and transformed into a community park with a lovely, meandering creek, a paved extension of the Ohlone Greenway trail, and two community gathering areas. Park construction will be complete in mid-February.

Thanks to all the Friends of Baxter Creek, who provided vision and leadership over the years to transform this dream into reality. Thanks also to the City of El Cerrito for funding and building this project and for partnering with FOBC on fundraising and planning efforts. This spirited collaborative process will provide a model for other communities to follow in the future.

Because Baxter Creek Gateway Park will be a "living" landscape, volunteers are needed to help maintain the restored habitat both in and around the creek. Native plants, insects, birds, and animals will soon be making their homes in the park, and we want to be sure it's a hospitable place for them to live.

**Become a Baxter Creek Watershed Steward!**

**Baxter Creek Gateway Workparties**

*Join FOBC on March 4 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and on the first Saturday of every month. We'll plant native shrubs and flowers, remove invasive weeds and trash, spread mulch, and conduct other stewardship activities.*

This is a great way to learn about native plants and creek restoration, so bring your kids and friends along! Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. And, if your neighborhood group or company would like to arrange a special volunteer day, contact Apple Szostak (contact information is below).

**Water Quality Monitoring**

Help us assess the success of the Gateway restoration by participating in monthly water quality monitoring on the third Saturday of every month. We'll conduct a variety of monitoring activities, including use of an electronic probe to measure basic water quality at five sites on Baxter Creek.

We'll also photograph the Gateway to track changes in the creek and its surrounding vegetation over time. We hope to see fewer weeds and more native plants over time. If you're free during the week, monitors are also needed on the third Wednesday of the month.

*Come learn how to monitor Baxter Creek's water quality on February 21st from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Meet at the Canyon Trail frog pond at the west end of Canyon Trail Park, just off of Conlon Avenue in El Cerrito.*

**Baxter Creek Steward Meetings**

*FOBC will host meetings every other month which will feature presentations on how to improve the health of your neighborhood's creek.*

**Friends of Baxter Creek Meetings**

*Location TBA*

**Fourth Wednesday of every other month, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.**

- **Wednesday, March 22, 7:00-8:30 P.M.**
- **Wednesday, May 24, 7:00-8:30 P.M.**
- **Wednesday, July 26, 7:00-8:30 P.M.**
- **Wednesday, September 27, 7:00-8:30 P.M.**

No meetings in April, June, or August.

For more information on FOBC events contact Apple Szostak, of the Watershed Project, at (510) 665-3686 or apple@thewatershedproject.org. For directions to these events, see www.creativedifferences.com/baxtercreek/announce.html#directions.
Baxter Creek Gateway Stewards Program

Get involved, continued from front page

of your community through simple changes in your cleaning and gardening practices. Because rain water washes over our gardens and streets before flowing into local creeks, we can all participate in improving the water quality of our watersheds and San Francisco Bay.

To learn more, join FOBC at our bi-monthly meetings on the fourth Wednesdays of the month from 7 to 8:30 p.m. At our March 22 meeting, we’ll enjoy a presentation on Gardening for Wildlife. Look for more information in the next FOBC newsletter.

Another Way to Get Involved:
Join the Baxter Creek Working Group

If you’re interested in stewarding Baxter Creek and enjoy program and events planning, community arts programs, and/or have a love of native plants, consider joining the Working Group.

This citizen volunteer group (coordinated by the Watershed Project) will: (1) help craft a maintenance and management plan for the Gateway, and implement the plan, (2) assist in the creation of site art programming, (3) guide educational and volunteer programs at the Gateway and throughout the Baxter Creek watershed, including planning a spring ribbon-cutting event, and (4) take an active role in stewarding the Gateway and building community and volunteer support. The Working Group has formed three committees to address the issues above (all committees will work on item #4), so you can join the committee you are most interested in. To learn more about this opportunity, please contact Apple at (510) 665-3686 or apple@thewatershedproject.org.

The restored Baxter Creek flowing beautifully during the December 22, 2005 storm. For more photos of this long-awaited restoration, see the FOBC website at http://www.creativedifferences.com/baxter-creek/GatewayViews.html Photo by Melanie Mintz.

Call if You See Dumping or Spills in Baxter Creek

- For a dumping in progress, call 911.
- For spills and dumping in El Cerrito, call the Maintenance and Engineering Department at (510) 215-4382.
- For sewer leaks in El Cerrito, call Stege Sanitary District at (510) 524-4667.
- For spills and dumping in Richmond, call (510) 412-2001.
- For water main breaks (i.e. increased flow and lots of sediment in the creek, even though it hasn’t just rained), call EBMUD (866) 403-2883.

The Friends of Baxter Creek’s stewardship activities associated with the Baxter Creek Gateway project, including watershed education, outreach, and monitoring activities, are coordinated by the Watershed Project, with funding from the City of El Cerrito and a Proposition 13 Watershed Protection Program grant.
Life’s a ditch...
Baxter Creek isn’t.