

# COMMERCIAL ELEMENT

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## PRIMARY GOALS

- Revitalize retail areas by improving motor vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian circulation on and off site, and by improving the aesthetic quality of retail development.
- Provide commercial services to employees within industrially designated areas by encouraging support commercial uses to locate within these developments.
- Discourage freestanding retail and general commercial strip centers within industrially designated areas.
- Provide opportunities for commercial uses that serve commuters traversing Kearny Mesa.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

Commercial development in Kearny Mesa can be categorized as one of three types: general commercial, commercial visitor/recreation, or commercial office.

### **General Commercial**

General commercial development is primarily located in western Kearny Mesa between I-805 and SR-163 along the Clairemont Mesa Boulevard, Convoy Street and Balboa Avenue corridors. These areas are developed with a mixture of uses, including automobile sales and repair centers, ethnic restaurants, fast food outlets, and furniture stores. In addition, large volume retail stores have located along these streets and include K-Mart, Target, Home Depot-Expo, the Advantage Store, and Dixieline Lumber.

There are also areas of general commercial development east of SR-163 in Kearny Mesa. A majority are located along Clairemont Mesa Boulevard, particularly at SR-163 and at Ruffin Road. Additional general commercial development is located along the north side of Aero Drive, at Montgomery Field and at I-15. These sites are developed with automobile-oriented retail uses that primarily serve the working population.

### **Commercial Visitor/Recreation**

Visitor commercial uses have developed in the community at three freeway-oriented locations. They include two hotels and a restaurant on Clairemont Mesa Boulevard at SR-163 and a hotel on Montgomery Field at Aero Drive and Kearny Villa Road. A commercial recreation use, a miniature golf/recreational complex, has developed at Clairemont Mesa Boulevard and I-805.

### **Commercial Office**

Office uses are interspersed throughout Kearny Mesa. Offices are located in business parks, along the commercial corridors, and in freestanding office complexes.

## ISSUES

### Land Use/Zoning

Most of the commercial development in Kearny Mesa is zoned M-1A, with portions zoned M-1B. As previously discussed in the **Industrial Element**, these zones are intended for light industrial development but also permit support commercial uses. In Kearny Mesa, commercial development has become a competitive rather than a supportive use. **Table 2** provides an analysis of the actual land uses in the M-1A and M-1B zones in Kearny Mesa.

**TABLE 2  
EXISTING LAND USES PER ZONE (1992)**

	<b>Commercial</b>	<b>Industrial</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
<b>M-1A</b>	38%	35%	6%	21%
<b>M-1B</b>	15%	58%	7%	20%

In assessing the commercial land use issues in Kearny Mesa, it is imperative to recognize two fundamental distinctions. The first is the difference between support commercial and general commercial uses. The second distinction is the divergent land use patterns of eastern and western Kearny Mesa.

Supportive commercial uses provide goods or services as part of the ongoing operations of firms or for the daily needs of a firm's employees. Equipment and machinery repair facilities, part supplies, copy centers and mail services, as well as health clubs and other recreation amenities, credit unions, restaurants and child care centers are examples of supportive commercial uses.

Commercial enterprises that are not dependent on the clientele of a particular development include those typically found in shopping centers or freestanding commercial strips. These general commercial uses attract retail shoppers from outside of the community and should be located and designed in a manner that minimizes disturbance to industrial and office users.

The second fundamental distinction to bear in mind when considering commercial uses in Kearny Mesa is the contrasting patterns of development between eastern and western Kearny Mesa. West of SR-163, Kearny Mesa is a conglomeration of mixed uses. This area is characterized by a variety of single purpose industrial sites, business parks, and commercial uses. Commercial uses, though, have achieved an independent identity that warrants consideration in their own right.

Commercial development in eastern Kearny Mesa, in contrast, is limited and consists of office use, visitor commercial and relatively minimal retail. Large, single purpose industrial sites and business parks are the predominant land uses in eastern Kearny Mesa. However, office development has emerged as a competitive land use. Office developments, not within a business park setting, are being constructed in increasing numbers.

## **Urban Design**

The commercial corridors in Kearny Mesa consist of strip centers and freestanding strip commercial uses. The automobile-oriented emphasis has created an environment dominated by excessive signage, expansive asphalt parking lots, minimal landscaping and high traffic volumes. The improvements proposed in this plan to upgrade the commercial corridors focus on imparting a sense of place to these commercial districts. Increased landscaping, reduced signage, streetscape improvements and pedestrian scale amenities can provide a more aesthetic image for the various retail centers.

## **Landscaping**

Inadequate landscaping in the strip commercial developments has resulted partly because the majority of the commercial projects are located in industrial zones with landscape requirements designed for quite different uses. Fortunately, the citywide landscape ordinance now has landscaping standards dependent upon the actual use, not simply the zone. Commercial developments in industrial zones will be held to commercial standards. This will greatly enhance the commercial corridors as redevelopment occurs.

## **Signage**

Illegal signage is the single most conspicuous element of development along the commercial corridors in Kearny Mesa. These signs violate the concept enunciated in the General Plan of urban form enhancing the visual relationship between people and their environment. The expiration of the grace period for the removal of nonconforming signs will provide City sign code staff an opportunity to reduce the number of these signs in the community. Reducing the quantity while improving the quality of signage can also greatly enhance the primary function of signage to aid the public in locating specific businesses.

Planned developments should recognize the need for signs to be an integral part of the building and site design as well as an advertising medium.

## **Streetscape**

Strip commercial developments have generally been designed with an automobile emphasis. Providing pedestrian amenities such as transit shelters, benches, shade trees, pedestrian street crossings and information kiosks will help to establish a sense of character for the commercial district.

## **POLICIES**

The following policies are the basis for subsequent specific recommendations pertaining to property within the General Commercial land use designation.

- Properties within the General Commercial land use designation should be allowed to develop with a broad array of uses, including commercial uses (i.e. retail and office) and industrial uses (i.e. "traditional" industrial and R&D).
- General commercial uses, described in the Issues section above, should only be allowed within the area designated for General Commercial use. Support commercial development, however, should be allowed to locate within the industrially designated areas of Kearny Mesa.
- Hotel development should not be located where noise impacts exceed 65 decibels or Community Noise Equivalent Levels (CNEL) without mitigating interior noise levels to 45 CNEL.
- New development should be located in well-designed projects with adequate provisions for transit opportunities, bicycle commuting, off-street parking, landscaping, and service areas.
- Redevelopment should include upgrading the property to meet current development standards including landscaping and signage regulations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are intended to provide specific criteria for new development and redevelopment within the area designated for General Commercial use in Kearny Mesa.

### **Implementing Zones**

Establish the following zoning for areas designated General Commercial or Mixed Use Commercial/Residential:

- Mixed Use Commercial/Residential properties should retain (or be rezoned) to the CA or CO zone. Lands designated for General Commercial use currently zoned M-1A should retain the M-1A zoning and properties zoned M-1B should be rezoned M-1A or where appropriate, CA or CO.

### **Floor Area Ratio**

The maximum floor area ratio for commercial retail development in Kearny Mesa is 0.35, and the maximum FAR for office and industrial development is 0.50. Development proposals that exceed 0.50 FAR could be considered through a discretionary permit process that would address potential traffic and environmental impacts.

### **Commercial Development in Western Kearny Mesa**

West of SR-163, the commercial corridors of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard, Convoy Street, Balboa Avenue, and a portion of Kearny Mesa Road should be designated for General Commercial use to reflect existing conditions and to satisfy the demand for additional retail commercial development. Sites which front on these streets are currently underutilized, or are located adjacent to existing commercial development, have been designated General Commercial and are encouraged to develop or redevelop with the array of uses permitted by that land use category.

### **Commercial Development in Eastern Kearny Mesa**

Freestanding, retail commercial development to the east of SR-163 should be limited to the following areas: Clairemont Mesa Boulevard; the intersection of I-15 and Aero Drive, designated portions along Kearny Villa Road north of Balboa Avenue, and south of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard; and the airport-related commercial development located on Montgomery Field (north of Aero Drive). This is to provide necessary general commercial goods and services for the surrounding industrially-designated areas without promoting the indiscriminate location of strip retail development.

### **Provisions For Hotel/Motel Development**

Hotel/Motel Facilities will require a Planned Commercial Development (PCD) permit to implement the design recommendations of this Plan and ensure compatibility with the development regulations of the Montgomery Field Master Plan and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan for NAS Miramar. If the property is industrially zoned, a rezone to an appropriate commercial zone will be necessary.

### **Compatibility with Residential Uses**

Buffer residential uses from developments on commercially designated land. Twenty-five-foot setbacks with appropriately landscaped berms are the preferred treatment. If lot sizes preclude 25-foot setbacks, walls, berms and landscaping should be used with the smaller setback.

### **Signage**

Signs should be designed as an integral part of any site in order to provide comprehensible messages to employees and consumers in Kearny Mesa. Whether signs are used to identify buildings tenants or provide direction for vehicular parking, the desired objective is to accommodate effective signage consistent with citywide regulations. Comprehensive sign programs should be encouraged in any new development in order to address the signage needs of the entire property.



LEGEND

General Commercial
  Mixed Use Commercial/Residential



**Recommended Commercial Land Use**  
**Kearny Mesa Community Plan**

**8**  
 FIGURE

### **Traffic and Air Quality Mitigation**

New development should be required to provide its fair share of the mitigation measures suggested in this Plan to minimize additional negative traffic and air quality impacts within the community.

### **Transit Amenities**

Provide transit amenities commensurate with transit activity as identified in the Metropolitan Transit Development Board's Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) under transit facility guidelines. Currently, the MTDB is studying the feasibility of constructing a LRT system to serve central and northern San Diego, including the Kearny Mesa area. Any new transit policies that are adopted in the future should therefore be considered when new projects are proposed.

### **Design Features**

All new development and redevelopment within the area designated General Commercial should incorporate the following design recommendations:

- All of the elements of a project, such as building materials, elevations, landscaping, and parking configuration, should be designed together to act as a whole.
- Provide pedestrian connections between commercial centers and to surrounding development.
- Provide amenities that enhance commercial areas, such as trees and landscaped areas, lighting, bus shelters and street furniture, and secure bicycle parking facilities.
- Provide screened and landscaped parking areas that minimize conflicts between pedestrians and automobiles.

## **GENERAL COMMERCIAL DESIGNATION**

This land use designation is intended to accommodate most existing retail areas in Kearny Mesa. Additional retail development may occur by infilling currently underutilized or unused properties. Office and light industrial uses are also allowed within areas designated for General Commercial use. **Figure 8** identifies the areas where the General Commercial land use designation applies.