

EL SOBRANTE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BEAUTIFICATION ‘TIPS’ PROGRAM

It's exciting to see how inviting El Sobrante's downtown looks with its new streetscape upgrades!

New curbs, gutters and sidewalks, new street trees, traditional style bus benches and trash receptacles, sidewalk planters and historic markers have beautified the downtown and made it more pedestrian friendly. Additional improvements are expected that will help slow speeders and improve pedestrian safety and comfort. ***These value-added improvements have come at no direct cost to benefitting property owners or businesses.***

It's now time for every downtown business and property owners to take clean-up/fix-up action. To help guide and motivate owners, we have created this Beautification ‘Tips’ Program, specific action recommendations in twelve different categories. ***These tips apply not only to the downtown;*** they are equally applicable to the Appian Way, Triangle and Valley View business districts. Any business or business property can benefit from them.

Don't feel overwhelmed by these beautification tips. They can and should be tackled in steps. They begin with the simplest, least costly ones and gradually progress toward those requiring a greater investment in the business or property. ***By tackling a single tip each month, positive results can be achieved over one-year and larger expenses more comfortably planned for.***

The Chamber’s Beautification Committee Chairperson, Maurice Abraham, is available to meet and consult with any business or property owner about applying these tips to specific conditions. Contact him at 510 243-6652 (home), 408 921-9176 (mobile) or mpabraham@aol.com. to arrange a meeting.

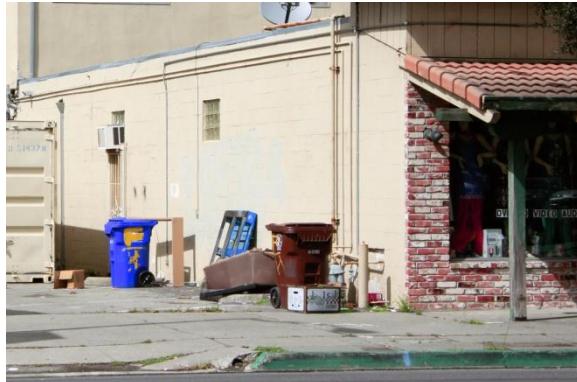
Your Chamber of Commerce Board is asking every business and property owner to do their part to add to the downtown beautification efforts. ***Just imagine how the business district image will change with everyone's participation!***

TIP NO.1 - TRASH & DEBRIS REMOVAL

The presence of trash and debris in and around the premises reflects poorly on your business. A tidy business shows respect for the community and says you care, while accumulated trash and debris sends the opposite message. Customers generally want to support clean, well-run enterprises whose actions support a cleaner, more attractive business community.



Conditions like this...



...and like this, attract more illegal dumping.

ACTIONS:

- It's simple; clean it up. Trash breeds trash. Yes, irresponsible individuals are often part of the problem, but staying on top of trash and debris removal says "we care" and will discourage others from illegal dumping.
- Be diligent. Pick up trash and debris daily (or more often), before it grows into a major clean-up effort.
- Provide trash receptacles. If your business tends to generate trash such as "take out" food places, it's essential that a place be provided for trash dumping and arrangements made for frequent collection, not allowing them to overflow.
- Power wash. This is effective and inexpensive. Sidewalks, awnings, building walls and signs should be regularly power washed as needed.

TIP NO. 2 - TRASH BINS, SHIPPING CONTAINERS & DONATION RECEPTACLES

Visible trash bins and shipping containers detract from the appearance of your business and, collectively, downgrade the entire business district. While these containers may be functional, they are something neither your customers nor the community-at-large want to see.

Clothing donation receptacles, though placed with the best of intentions, should also be removed. They degrade the image of your business and the business district as a whole. They become filled to capacity resulting in donated items being dumped beside the receptacle. They are also a target of vandals that "fish" for items or break into the receptacles, leaving unwanted items strewn about.



Donation receptacles often lead to dumping.



Trash bins should be stored out of sight.



Imagine if EVERY business had a storage container on site. Maybe its time to purge or store off-site.



Storing heavy equipment and inoperable vehicles is a zoning violation that invites enforcement action.

ACTIONS:

- Store trash containers at the rear of your building in an inconspicuous location. If possible, construct a fence or enclosure that screens them from street view.
- Remove trash containers from the sidewalk as soon as possible after pickup. Clean up any sidewalk trash that may have fallen from the container during pickup.
- Shipping containers are a prohibited use. While removal is preferred, at a minimum they should be painted (preferably black, dark brown or dark green) and a landscape screen planted to soften their 'out of place' look.
- Clothing donation bins are a growing problem and should be removed. Although well intentioned, they are unsightly and become an attractive nuisance as people often 'dump' goods

outside the bin. Others manage to rummage through the bin contents and leave them strewn about.

- Remove inoperable vehicles and equipment. Storage of inoperable vehicles and heavy duty equipment contributes to ‘junk yard conditions’ that could bring County Code Enforcement action.

TIP NO. 3 - GRAFFITI REMOVAL

Graffiti has not been a huge problem in El Sobrante’s business districts, but occasionally it shows up. Just as trash breeds trash, graffiti breeds graffiti. So, prompt removal is a must to preventing its getting out of control. Graffiti not immediately and correctly removed can be the start of an image decline for the entire business district.



Quick fix...okay only for an immediate response.



Color mismatch and ‘splotchy’ look not good.

ACTIONS

- Attack the problem as soon as it’s noticed. Graffiti removal solvents are available at many hardware and cleaning supply stores. If time is an issue, hire someone that specializes in removal.
- A better alternative is to paint over the graffiti. But painting with a non-matching paint is the next worse thing to the graffiti itself. Paint stores will computer match the paint color if you provide them a small chip of the existing paint.
- Avoid the ‘splotchy’ look. If the paint can’t be matched, get as close as possible and, preferably, paint the entire affected wall. If painting an entire wall is not possible, paint an area between logical stopping points such as trim or board seams, or full wall height between two tape-masked lines.
- Why not buy a can of matching paint in advance and have it on hand when needed?

TIP NO. 4 - THE WINDOW TO YOUR BUSINESS

Storefront window conditions are one of the most important visual impressions your customer receives. Windows can be an invitation to your customer or a barrier. Your business windows can showcase the products or services you sell. Providing a clear, brightly lit view of your store’s interior says to your

customer, “we run a clean and tidy business”. A view obscured by dirty windows, excessive signage, unkempt window displays and poor lighting is a customer turnoff.



Storefront window...open for business. REALLY?



Excessive window signs compete for attention

ACTIONS:

- Wash the windows; a simple and VERY effective action.
- Remove excessive window signs. Multiple signs compete for customer attention and can cause them to be ignored. Too much information, if not read, equals no information.
- At a minimum, replace non-operating interior light fixtures and bulbs. Upgrading to energy efficient (and brighter) LED fixtures or bulbs is encouraged. They will save significantly on energy costs.
- Interior window coverings should, in most cases, be avoided. If they're necessary for your business (such as client privacy), be sure they are clean, hung correctly, simple in design and of a neutral color (no bold patterned multi colored fabrics).
- Remove holiday lighting at season's end. If you want year round string lights, use white lights and be sure they are installed tight to the window frame or wall. Sagging string lights look temporary and carelessly placed; not a message you want to send.
- Clean window sills and window display areas. There's nothing worse than seeing dead insects, dust and cobwebs on window sills and displays.
- Periodically refresh your window displays. Without change, the business looks tired and not freshly stocked. Good examples can be seen in most national chain stores.

TIP NO. 5 - BANNERS ARE BANNED

Banner and flag advertising has proliferated in many business communities, primarily because of their low cost. Banner signs should be temporary only, used for advertising special events or sales. They are a zoning code violation and should not stay for extended periods of time.

If a banner is used as the main business sign, it gives the impression the business is temporary or not yet well established. That's probably not the message you want to send, and you may be driving business

away as a result. Permanent signage has exactly the opposite effect; it conveys a sense of permanence and stability to potential customers. Now that's a message!



Banner signs are not allowed...and they just look bad. They should not be used as the main business sign.



Wouldn't a good word-of-mouth reputation better serve this business? **Pole banners are also banned.**

ACTIONS:

- Remove temporary banner signs. Banner signs should only be used for short term promotional efforts...a maximum of 30-days.
- Never use more than one temporary banner sign at a time. Multiple banners are confusing and create a cluttered appearance.
- Remove banners that currently serve as your primary business sign, Replace with professionally designed signs such as individual raised letters attached to the building. Be sure any new signage conforms to the Downtown El Sobrante P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines.

TIP NO. 6 - BUILDING SIGNS

When you add your business name sign to your store building you want people to see and remember it. So what does your business sign look like? Is it still fresh and clean or has it faded over time? Is it well lit

at night? What is its quality? Does it look homemade or professionally done?

Having your main sign seen and remembered is often hampered by too many signs. Multiple product signs are frequently added which then compete for customer attention. Multiple signs create a confusing, cluttered look and shift attention away from the main business sign. When excessive or overly wordy signage is used, customers usually react by not reading them. That is certainly not what you want.



Signs, signs everywhere...on the building, the windows and more.



Way too much to read.



Clean windows...tasteful signage. Simple, well done signage...no banner signs needed here.

ACTIONS:

- Step back and look at your building signage...objectively. How does it compare to store signs at other, newer commercial buildings, particularly national chains and mall stores?
- Freshen up your primary business sign(s) by cleaning or painting as necessary.

- Business signs should not be hand painted, unless professionally done.
- Be sure lighted signs are in good repair and operational. Replace burned out bulbs or fluorescent tubes. Consider LED bulbs and fixtures; brighter, consume about 75% less power and last in excess of 30 years.
- Multiple signs compete for attention, confuse customers and add to a cluttered appearance. Only one primary business name sign should be necessary (unless you have a corner building).
- Remove superfluous product or brand advertising signs. You want people to read and remember the business name, not be distracted by competing signage.
- Reduce, reduce, reduce. The rule in signage is, “less is more”.
- Be sure any new signs conform to the new Downtown El Sobrante P-1 Zoning and Design Guidelines.

TIP NO. 7 - SECURITY BARS & DOORS

Customers want to shop in a safe place. Nothing speaks louder about safety (or lack thereof) than heavy security doors and visible bars on your store windows. These devices suggest to criminals that you must have valuables to protect. They also say to potential customers “This is an unsafe neighborhood!” and discourages them from stopping. Though customer fears may be driven by a perception of risk, perception absolutely influences people’s behavior. The increased customer traffic you might realize by eliminating these security measures could help offset the added cost of alternative measures such as an alarm service or theft insurance.



Steel bars tell customers they are in a crime-ridden area.



How welcoming is this door?

ACTIONS:

- If you can’t afford to lose it, don’t leave it in the store.
- Remove highly visible security devices such as window bars and heavy ‘steel cage’ security doors. If not visible from the street and not your customer entrance, these devices are acceptable.
- Insure your business for theft, burglary and vandalism.
- Implement alternatives such as closed circuit TV and/or an alarm system.

TIP NO. 8 – ABOUT THOSE DETAILS

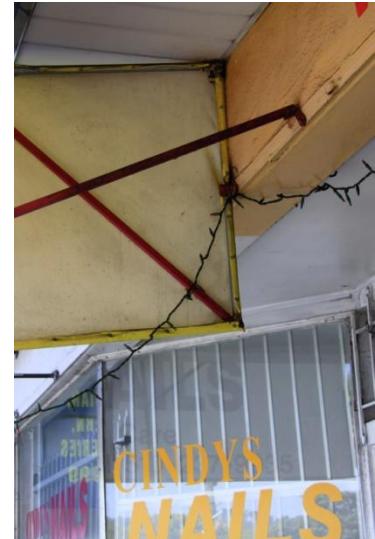
Adding to the poor image of some buildings are non-functioning carryovers from the past. Often these are little things that have been there so long you don't even notice them. Look for old unused brackets and hardware...even old nails and screws. Is there unused wiring, cable or similar items tacked to or dangling from the building? What about old light fixtures or old unused signs in disrepair?



Exposed sign enclosure.



Services in disrepair.



Dangling wires.



Unused rooftop sign poles.



Newspaper racks no longer in use.

ACTIONS:

- Visually inspect the building to identify non-functioning appurtenances such as sign frames, brackets, non-functioning lights and loose dangling wires.
- Remove these items wherever possible. Dangling, functioning wires should be enclosed in conduit or cable managers and painted to match the building or, at a minimum, stretched tight and secured.
- Holiday lights and decorations should be removed immediately after the holiday ends. This contributes to a fresh seasonally changing appearance.

- Year-round string lights, if used, should have clear, non-colored bulbs so as not to be confused with seasonal holiday lights. Wires should be stretched tight and secured to create a straight line, not allowed to sag or dangle.
- A simple rule; If its broken, fix it. If it no longer has a purpose, remove it.

TIP NO. 9 – PAINT – AN IMAGE BOOSTER

A clean, nicely painted building attracts customers by providing a clean, welcoming appearance, especially combined with well done signage. Faded, peeling paint suggests a lack of care...about the business and the community. Fresh paint can boost your business' image, and image is important for getting customers in the door. Only then will you have an opportunity to make a sale.



Before: In need of attention...



...and after, a more inviting appearance



Before the new paint....



...and after, a fresh new look. Nice job!

ACTIONS

- Paint all sides of the building, not just the front.
- Paint schemes should complement and enhance the buildings architecture. Color changes should occur where building wall planes change or trim marks a change.
- Exposed utility service meters and conduits should be painted to match the building. Better yet, build an enclosure around them
- Wall murals and large wall graphics should we used sparingly. These can be effective if professionally done, but can also look terrible if overdone.

- Faded awnings should be cleaned, if possible, or painted for a fresh, new look.
- Keep extra paint on hand for possible graffiti removal. Keep a record of the paint colors for future touch up or graffiti removal.

TIP NO. 10 – ADD A TOUCH OF NATURE

Landscaping has perhaps the greatest impact when it comes to beautification. Not only does the introduction of nature soften the often impersonal feel of commercial buildings and parking lots, it also greatly enhances the customer experience. It is said that a walk in nature is one of the best stress relievers; introducing bits of nature into a business community can have a similarly calming effect.

So, look around. Do you have plant containers or planter areas adjacent to your building or in your parking lot? Are they planted or are they just debris collectors? Why not replant these with drought tolerant, low maintenance plants? Imagine the impact if every business along Dam Road added some landscaping. What a difference it would make!



Does this not look better...



...than this? Such opportunities abound in El Sobrante.

ACTIONS:

- Remove weeds and dead plants.
- Replant existing planting areas as necessary using drought tolerant, low maintenance plants.
- Ideally, add irrigation or repair existing irrigation system.
- Maintain plants and planting areas regularly.
- Avoid colored decorative rock as an alternative to plants. It adds little to the appearance. If rock must be used, natural river rock is recommended.

- Avoid the use of wood bark. It makes maintenance more difficult and costly and often finds its way onto sidewalks and parking lots.

TIP NO. 11 - THE PARKING LOT

Yes, the parking lot. A clean, neatly striped parking lot is another way to showcase a building or business. What can you do to improve the appearance of your parking lot?



This El Sobrante strip mall is a perfect local example of a clean, well maintained parking lot.

ACTIONS:

- Above all, keep it clean and free of debris, dirt and weeds.
- Repaint stall striping and tire bumpers.
- Be sure you're in conformance with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements. If in doubt, an experienced striping contractor may be a good resource.
- Look for opportunities to landscape...in existing unused planter areas or to create new ones by removing pavement. Large plant containers can also be effective.
- Consider joint parking agreements with adjoining property owners. Often times combined parking areas can be laid out with greater efficiency and more spaces overall.

TIP NO. 12 – WORKING WITH THE ARCHITECTURE

Most of El Sobrante's commercial buildings were constructed during a ten-year period of rapid growth boom from the mid-50s through the mid-60s. The architecture of many El Sobrante commercial buildings, even the simplest ones, generally reflects the styles of that era. Flat roofs, broad canopy-like overhangs, simple geometric form and large glass areas are common characteristics.

These characteristics are taken from the mid-century modern style that today is being passionately preserved in some communities. El Sobrante's downtown is fortunate to have a few decent examples of mid-century modern. Some have been 'adorned' with false-work, paint schemes and even graphics that mask the original building, actions that do more to spoil its appearance than enhance it.



Bold graphics detract from this buildings architecture and do nothing to attract customers.



On this building, paint highlights architectural details and provides an understated yet inviting look.



Mowery's El Sobrante Richfield...



...Oh, the possibilities!! (Photo: Ely, Nevada)

ACTIONS:

- Look for opportunities to restore the original character of your building.
- Once trendy things such as mansard-style roof facades and decorative exterior false work can be easily removed to expose a simple original design.
- Look for opportunities to enhance the buildings architecture with paint that provides contrast between strong defining design elements. Elements such as exposed structural features and geometric masses of stucco, brick, stone or concrete block all pose opportunities to bring out that character.