

SECTION 3:

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project, business venture, or entity such as a municipality. It involves specifying the objectives of the entity and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve those objectives.

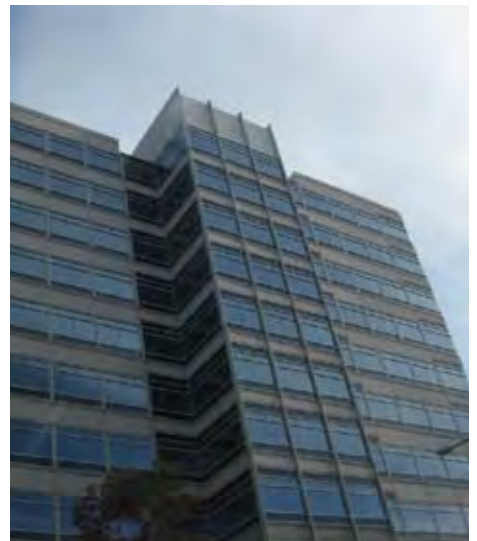
Performing a SWOT analysis for a city helps to develop a strategic plan that maximizes the municipality's strengths, minimizes its weaknesses, takes advantage of opportunities and limits its threats. Along with its internal benefits, a city can use its SWOT analysis to market to potential residents and prospective businesses.

For the purposes of a SWOT analysis for a city, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be characterized as:

- Strengths: characteristics of the city that give it an advantage over others in the area for particular criteria.
- Weaknesses: characteristics that place the city at a disadvantage relative to others in the area for particular criteria.
- Opportunities: external chances to better achieve stated objectives.
- Threats: external elements that could cause trouble for the city.

Identification of SWOTs can help establish a framework for future planning efforts including policy development and development review.

The SWOT analysis in this paper builds upon the findings in the Focus Groups and Stakeholders Interviews, as well as the Trends Analysis conducted for the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element of the Foster City General Plan. It provides a summary of analysis and findings together with recommendations for near- and long-term opportunities for Foster City.



Quality of Life Indicators

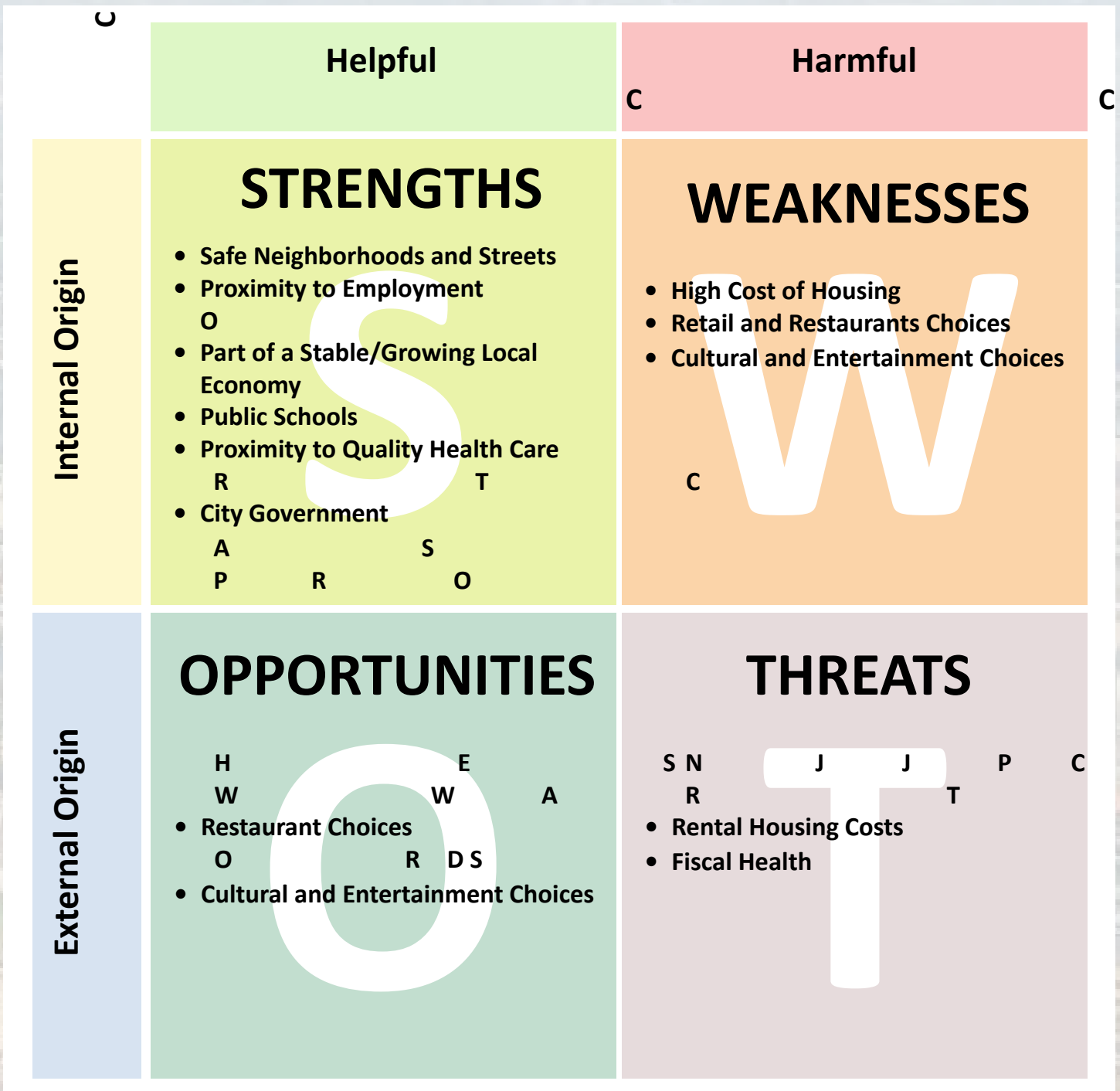
An important aspect of this analysis is establishing criteria for determining strengths, which is related to overall goals for the General Plan. The Planning Commission kick-off meeting established a set of “Quality of Life Indicators” used to gauge how strongly Foster City performs in respect to a range of quality of life measures:

- Safe neighborhoods and streets
- Proximity to employment opportunities
- Proximity to *high-quality/high income* employment opportunities
- Part of a stable/growing local area economy
- Safe and academically successful public schools
- Proximity to good quality health care
- Reasonable traffic and commute times
- Functional City government that provides a wide range of good public services
- Attractive setting/natural environment
- Weather
- A range of housing choices at reasonable prices
- Proximity to a wide range of retail/restaurant services
- Proximity to recreational opportunities/public parks/open space
- Proximity to cultural, artistic and entertainment opportunities
- Proximity to religious institutions

Where quantifiable data is available, Foster City was compared to neighboring communities to identify where Foster City is stronger, weaker, or threatened relative to its neighbors, and what opportunities exist.

Figure 3-1 provides a summary of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for the Quality of Life indicators, plotted on a chart to identify internal or external attributes, and whether or not they contribute to meeting the City’s objectives.

FIGURE 3-1: Summary of the Quality of Life Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats



Safe Neighborhoods and Streets

Foster City has a reputation for being a safe community with a low crime rate, which is confirmed by crime statistics.¹ Of nearby cities, Foster City has the lowest rates of violent and property crimes, and has the second-lowest rate of larceny-theft and arson. Foster City crime rates are also significantly lower than San Mateo County as a whole. Foster City’s safe neighborhoods and streets are community *strengths*.

TABLE 3-1: CRIME RATES (PER 100,000 POPULATION)

	Population 2008 ¹	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate	Larceny-Theft Rate	Arson Rate
Foster City	30,836	17	233	326	4
San Mateo	91,457	360	1,100	1,766	17
Belmont	24,571	25	299	242	3
San Carlos	28,465	20	262	369	12
Redwood City	71,405	250	1,178	1,447	9
San Mateo County	693,113	2,167	9,463	11,698	118

Source: California Attorney General’s Office; www.ag.ca.gov; U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2008 (Population at time of reporting period)



Proximity to Employment Opportunities

The Peninsula functions as an employment region. It is not unusual for residents of a given city to work in a nearby municipality. When seeking a job, individuals will typically look throughout the entire Peninsula rather than within one specific jurisdiction. Therefore, proximity to employment opportunities should be judged on an area or regional scale rather than a local scale.

Total Number of Jobs

The total number of Jobs per Capita in Foster City falls in the middle of the range compared to other nearby communities.² Foster City has approximately 0.47 jobs per resident, determined by the number of employed residents divided by the total population, which is comparable with the City of San Mateo and San Mateo County as a whole. San Carlos and Redwood City both have higher jobs per capita, and Belmont has fewer jobs per capita.



This might be considered a *threat* if San Carlos and Redwood City are considered better locations for establishing or growing businesses. However, both of those communities have sizable industrial zones that serve the larger area beyond their respective city boundaries, and businesses will often cluster together in such specialized zones. Foster City indirectly benefits from the availability of jobs in nearby jurisdictions because they are relatively close by and would be available to Foster City residents. Given the proximity of jobs close by, overall this can be considered a *strength*.

¹ California Attorney General’s Office; www.ag.ca.gov

² Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG

TABLE 3-2: TOTAL NUMBER OF JOBS

	Ag/ Natural Resources	Manufact/ Wholesale/ Trans	Retail	Financial/ Prof Service	Health/ Ed/ Rec Service	Other	Total	Jobs per Capita
Foster City	0	2,320	1,400	6,760	2,080	1,950	14,510	0.47
San Mateo	160	3,320	5,870	15,480	14,960	7,170	46,960	0.51
Belmont	40	1,380	770	1,880	3,010	1,290	8,370	0.34
San Carlos	40	5,040	1,500	4,200	3,620	3,250	17,650	0.62
Redwood City	110	8,450	5,360	17,760	13,680	11,220	56,580	0.79
San Mateo County	1,900	73,940	33,840	90,990	93,420	52,230	346,320	0.50

Source: Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG

Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate in Foster City is lower than all neighboring communities except San Carlos.³ This could be considered a favorable indicator of proximity to employment opportunities relative to nearby communities, and hence a *strength*.

TABLE 3-3: UNEMPLOYMENT (2008-2009)

	2008	2009
Foster City	3.5%	6.3%
San Mateo	3.8%	6.8%
Belmont	4.1%	7.3%
San Carlos	3.2%	5.8%
Redwood City	4.8%	8.5%
San Mateo County	4.8%	8.6%
State of California	5.7%	9.2%

Source: California Employment Development Department

Home-Based Businesses

Business licenses for home-based businesses are not tracked separately from other businesses, so an exact number of home-based businesses is not available. The Economic Development Survey developed as part of the General Plan Update is intended to provide tracking for the future. In the first round of survey responses received, nearly half of all respondents indicated they were a home-based business.⁴ There are positive aspects of home-based businesses such as additional daytime population patronizing local businesses, and additional tax revenues spent on business expenses within the City. Because home-based businesses are required to maintain the residential character of the home and neighborhood, they do not have typical commercial impacts, provided they comply with requirements. Given the positive qualities, home-based businesses can be considered a *strength*.

³ California Employment Development Department

⁴ Of the 153 survey responses received in the first returns, 68 were commercial facilities, 69 were home-based businesses, and 16 were out-of-town businesses conducting business within Foster City.



Proximity to High-Quality/High Income Employment Opportunities

Median Household Income

Median Household Income, when cross-referenced with Unemployment Rate and Travel Time to Work, can give a representation of proximity to High Quality/High Income Employment. Foster City has the highest Median Household Income of all neighboring cities, with the exception of San Carlos.⁵ The high median household income, relatively low unemployment rate, and comparable travel time to work suggests that Foster City residents have good Proximity to High Quality/High Income Employment Opportunities. This is a *strength*.

TABLE 3-4: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2000 and 2008)

	2000	2008
Foster City	\$95,279	\$107,448
San Mateo	\$64,757	\$82,401
Belmont	\$80,905	\$101,992
San Carlos	\$88,460	\$112,282
Redwood City	\$66,748	\$74,433
San Mateo County	\$70,819	\$84,684

U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 2006-2008.

Financial/Professional Services Jobs

Another indicator of Proximity to High Quality/High Income Employment Opportunities is the number of jobs in typically higher-paying job sectors per capita. Among its neighboring cities, Foster City has one of the highest numbers of Financial/Professional Services jobs per capita, higher than all neighboring communities except Redwood City.⁶ In terms of Proximity to High Quality/High Income Employment Opportunities, this is a *strength*.

TABLE 3-5: FINANCIAL/PROFESSIONAL SERVICES JOBS

	Financial/ Professional Service	Per Capita
Foster City	6,760	0.22
San Mateo	15,480	0.17
Belmont	1,880	0.08
San Carlos	4,200	0.15
Redwood City	17,760	0.25
San Mateo County	90,990	0.13

Source: Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG

⁵ U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 2006-2008.

⁶ Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG

Health/Education/Recreation Service Jobs

Foster City has a concentration of biotech jobs, with large biotech employers such as Gilead and Life Technologies. While these businesses represent some of the largest single employers in Foster City, when taken within the context of the City's residential population, the per capita number of Health/Education/Recreation Service jobs is lower than neighboring cities.⁷ This is partly explained by the large medical facilities in San Mateo and Redwood City, but could also indicate a further *opportunity* for Foster City to tap into a job sector currently represented more strongly in neighboring communities.

TABLE 3-6: HEALTH/EDUCATION/RECREATION SERVICE JOBS

	Health/Ed/Rec Service	Per Capita
Foster City	2,080	0.07
San Mateo	14,960	0.16
Belmont	3,010	0.12
San Carlos	3,620	0.13
Redwood City	13,680	0.19
San Mateo County	93,420	0.13

Source: Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG

⁷ Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG



Part of a stable/growing local area economy

As noted above in the discussion of Proximity to Employment Opportunities, the Foster City unemployment rate is lower than most neighboring cities, and lower than San Mateo County and the State. The statistics do not provide direct explanation for why the rate is lower than the other communities, but the higher than average household income suggests that Foster City residents are employed in higher-paying jobs in strong job sectors. This is a *strength*.

Commercial vacancy rates are another indicator of the local economy. In the third quarter of 2010 Foster City / San Mateo Office Vacancy Rates and Research & Development (R&D) were lower than neighboring cities and San Mateo County, and Industrial Vacancy Rates were lower than neighboring cities and San Mateo County except for Belmont/San Carlos.⁸ This is also a *strength* because Foster City’s industrial and R&D areas have consistently stayed occupied.

TABLE 3-7: OFFICE VACANCY RATES

	Q3 2010
Foster City	7.4%
San Mateo	19.4%
Belmont/San Carlos	35.0%
Redwood Shores	11.4%
San Mateo County	17.7%

Source: San Francisco Peninsula Research & Forecast Report, Colliers International, Q3 2010

TABLE 3-8: RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (R&D) VACANCY RATES

	Q3 2010
San Mateo/Foster City	5.1%
Belmont/San Carlos	22.4%
Redwood City	19.2%
San Mateo County	19.4%

Source: San Francisco Peninsula Research & Forecast Report, Colliers International, Q3 2010

TABLE 3-9: INDUSTRIAL VACANCY RATES

	Q3 2010
San Mateo/Foster City	10.1%
Belmont/San Carlos	3.4%
Redwood City	12.1%
San Mateo County	10.6%

Source: San Francisco Peninsula Research & Forecast Report, Colliers International, Q3 2010

⁸ San Francisco Peninsula Research & Forecast Report, Colliers International, Q3 2010

Safe and Academically Successful Public Schools

The Academic Performance Index (API) of Foster City public elementary and middle schools is higher than other schools in the San Mateo-Foster City Elementary District, as well as neighboring communities. Both Foster City and neighboring districts also have higher API numbers than the State as a whole.⁹ This is a *strength*.

Foster City does not have a public high school (which some residents consider a weakness). High school students are assigned to schools in the San Mateo Union High School District. API numbers specific to Foster City high school attendees are not available, but the API numbers for the San Mateo Union High School District are higher than both the neighboring Sequoia Union High School District (which includes students in Belmont, San Carlos, Redwood City, and other communities), as well as the State as a whole. Additionally, between 2009 and 2010, all API scores have increased in the area, which indicates that the schools are constantly improving. High test scores attract families to this area, including Foster City. This is one factor that promotes home ownership in the City and maintains high property values. This is a *strength*.



TABLE 3-10: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE INDEX (API) (2010)

Elementary Districts:	2009 API	2010 API
Average of F.C. Schools	920	931
San Mateo Foster City El. Dist.	836	846
San Carlos Elementary Dist.	896	899
Belmont-Redwood Shores El.	896	904
California	780	790

High School Districts:	2009 API	2010 API
San Mateo Union High School	920	931
Sequoia Union High School	836	846
California	896	899

Source: California Department of Education; www.api.cde.ca.gov

⁹ California Department of Education; www.api.cde.ca.gov



Proximity to Good Quality Health Care

Looking at physicians and surgeon offices, Foster City has fewer providers per capita than neighboring communities.¹⁰ San Mateo and Redwood City have considerably more medical offices per capita, most likely as a result of the large hospital complexes in those communities. However, medical offices tend to cluster close to hospitals; likewise, hospitals are often located in districts zoned to accommodate medical uses, so other medical uses will also locate in the same zone. It is unclear whether having a special “medical zone” in Foster City would attract additional medical providers, given the tendency for medical offices to cluster near hospitals.

Taking a wider view, Foster City is in an area that is well served by a range of health care practitioners and facilities. Large health care centers have regional service areas, and people will travel longer distances for a specific provider or specialty. There are several major medical facilities within twenty miles of Foster City, including several that are considered among the top facilities in the country. For example, Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Redwood City is approximately seven miles from Foster City and takes approximately 15 minutes by car. Also, a new Kaiser facility is being constructed at the former Bay Meadows site in San Mateo, and will be less than ten minutes from Foster City by car, once completed. Mills Peninsula Medical Center in Burlingame is approximately 20 minutes away. Additionally there are nearly 2,000 medical office listings within Foster City, San Mateo, Belmont, San Carlos, and Redwood City.

Given the regional nature of health care, it is less important for there to be facilities within the City limits as it is to have a range of quality facilities in the area close by. On an area scale, Proximity to Good Quality Health Care is a *strength*.

TABLE 3-11: PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

	Physicians & Surgeons	Physicians & Surgeons per 1000 residents
Foster City	4	0.13
San Mateo	187	2.04
Belmont	18	0.73
San Carlos	21	0.74
Redwood City	111	1.55

Source: Valley Yellow Pages Physicians & Surgeons category. Through the progression of the General Plan Update, as more reliable data becomes available this data source will be replaced.

¹⁰ Valley Yellow Pages Physicians & Surgeons category.

Reasonable Traffic and Commute Times

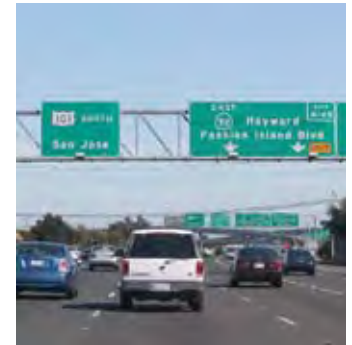
Level of Service

Overall, roadways and intersections in Foster City function well. Intersection and freeway facility operations are evaluated using a term called Level of Service (LOS) which is a qualitative measure of capacity and operating conditions directly related to vehicle delay. LOS is given a letter grade – A through F – with LOS A representing very short delays and LOS F representing very long delays. With the exception of three separate locations during peak periods (at: Chess Drive/SR 92 Ramps, Foster City Blvd/Triton Drive/Metro Center Blvd, and East Hillsdale Blvd/Edgewater Blvd), Foster City intersections operate at LOS thresholds deemed to be locally-acceptable, using industry standards.¹¹ This is a *strength*.



Travel Time to Work/Commute Times

Travel Time to Work is a logical indicator of commute times. Foster City and its neighboring communities have very comparable Travel Time to Work statistics,¹² though Foster City commute times are slightly longer. This could be attributed to Foster City's somewhat isolated location relative to the rest of the Peninsula (which has both positive and negative impacts on quality of life), as well as fewer access points. However, the difference is not significant and is comparable to San Mateo County as a whole.



Taking a wider view, the Foster City commute and that of its neighboring cities is shorter than other parts of the Bay Area. For example, mean travel time from home to work in Alameda County is 27.9 minutes, Marin County is 28.4 minutes, Solano County is 29.4 minutes, and Contra Costa County is 32.1 minutes. Outlying communities have even longer commutes: the mean travel time to work in Antioch is 39.8 minutes and Tracy is 42.1 minutes.¹³ Foster City is centrally located between major employment areas. From this perspective, overall commute times are a *strength* provided area traffic does not become significantly worse and regional transit options are maintained or expanded. Notably, commute times in the region have consistently gone down since 2000, which could reflect a number of variables including the higher unemployment rates, or an increase in telecommuting. If area traffic becomes worse and/or transit services are reduced, commute time could become a *threat, however, this would be a regional problem, not just focused in Foster City*.

TABLE 3-12: MEAN TRAVEL TIME TO WORK (IN MINUTES)

	2000	2008
Foster City	27.3	26.0
San Mateo	25.5	23.4
Belmont	27.1	25.8
San Carlos	26.1	25.7
Redwood City	25.0	23.1
San Mateo County	27.0	25.0

Source: U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 2006-2008.

¹¹ Foster City Multi-Project Traffic Analysis – Final Report, December 2008. All intersections operate at a Level of Service (LOS) of D or better, except during peak periods at: Chess Drive/SR 92 Ramps, Foster City Blvd/Triton Drive/Metro Center Blvd, and East Hillsdale Blvd/Edgewater Blvd

¹² U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 2006-2008.

¹³ U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 2006-2008.

Functional City Government That Provides a Wide Range of Good Public Services

There are fewer measures readily available for gauging functional City government than there are for other Quality of Life indicators. In focus group meetings for the General Plan Update, individuals generally gave high marks to the City’s municipal government and programs.

Public Employees Per Capita

Number of public employees per capita is one measure of level of government service. Foster City is lower in number of public employees per capita, than San Mateo and Redwood City.¹⁴ This may indicate fewer services or programs, but could also indicate a more efficient personnel structure. In focus groups and surveys, respondents did not widely criticize the City’s services or programs, so the efficient personnel structure seems a likely explanation and would be a *strength*.

Belmont and San Carlos were not included in this comparison because they share police and fire departments, making a direct comparison difficult. Redwood City has their own police and fire departments, and Foster City and San Mateo recently consolidated management of their Fire Departments and currently have a shared Fire Chief managing both departments.



TABLE 3-13: PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

	Public Employees	Public Employees per 1000 residents
Foster City	190	6.23
San Mateo	960	10.49
Redwood City	833	11.67

Source: City of Foster City Human Resources Department, Silicon Valley Mercury News 2010 Public Employee Salaries listings (<http://www.mercurynews.com/salaries/bay-area/2010>). Includes all individuals listed as receiving public compensation comprising the following departments: Administrative Services, City Clerk, City Council/Planning Commission, City Manager’s Office, Community Development, Financial Services, Fire, Human Resources, Library, Parks & Recreation, Police, and Public Works.

Fiscal Health

In terms of fiscal health, as we enter the 2011-2012 Fiscal Year budget cycle, Foster City’s financial condition continues to be relatively strong, with a General Fund reserve of over 63 percent of annual operating expenditures. As a reference, other peninsula cities have been struggling to maintain a 25 percent reserve level. However, Foster City faces a deficit of nearly \$2.6 million for FY 2011-2012, with a five-year outlook of an additional \$2.8 million.¹⁵ The amount of money the City has in reserves can be viewed as a *strength*, in comparison to other cities, however, the deficit amount remains a *threat*.

¹⁴ Silicon Valley Mercury News 2009 Public Employee Salaries listings

¹⁵ City of Foster City “Mid-Year Financial Review for FY 2010-2011” City Council staff report, January 31, 2011

There are some aspects of the Governor's proposed State Budget for FY 2011-2012 that could represent additional threats to Foster City. First, there are proposed realignments of various fire, criminal justice, and health and social services to the local level. Sales taxes and an extension of the existing vehicle license fee would help pay for those services.

Especially significant to Foster City, the Governor's budget also proposes the elimination of redevelopment agencies, whereby future tax increment not under contractual, legal obligation would revert back to taxing agencies, and any surplus housing funds would be transferred to local housing authorities. The City/District/Agency has taken steps to help ensure the Agency's financial resources go to the benefit of the project areas within Foster City.¹⁶ The outcome of the City's efforts will depend upon the adoption of a California State Budget. Due to the uncertainty of this outcome, this is a *threat*.

Attractive Setting and Natural Environment

Attractive setting and natural environment is highly subjective, but in focus group meetings for the General Plan Update, individuals gave it higher marks than any other Quality of Life indicator. Respondents to the online survey also frequently cited the attractive setting as a factor that attracted them to move to Foster City, and frequently ranked it as one of the City's greatest assets. Foster City has been intentionally designed to be aesthetically pleasing, from site planning to design of parks and open spaces, and to the design quality of buildings and developments. Overall, although subjective, the attractive setting and natural environment can be considered a *strength*.

Weather

Weather is another subjective indicator. Some people prefer mild weather with moderate variation between seasons, as is found on the Peninsula and in Foster City; other people may prefer hot, dry weather, or prefer a wider variation between seasons. The Peninsula and Foster City have a climate characterized by mild and moderately wet winters and by dry, cool summers. The daily and annual range in temperature is small, with winter temperatures ranging from an average low of 39 degrees to an average high of 58 degrees, and summer temperatures ranging from an average low of 54 degrees to an average high of 82 degrees. In focus group meetings, individuals gave weather high marks so it could be considered a *strength*.

While Foster City weather is similar to that of neighboring communities, a distinction is that Foster City experiences strong afternoon breezes in the spring and summer months. These breezes are less pronounced in other neighboring Peninsula communities. The breezes are also subjective: while some people may dislike them, others consider them to have a "cleansing" aspect on the air, and find them invigorating. Depending on one's preference, this aspect of Foster City's weather could either be considered a *strength* or a *weakness*. The wind also provides an *opportunity* for promoting wind-related recreational activities such as sailing and windsurfing.



¹⁶ City of Foster City "Mid-Year Financial Review for FY 2010-2011" City Council staff report, January 31, 2011



A Range of Housing Choices at Reasonable Prices

Foster City has the highest average rents and sales prices in the area. Foster City is known to have low crime, good public schools, and well maintained homes and neighborhoods, which allows for a premium on rents and sales prices.

Mix of Housing Types

Overall, Foster City has a good mix of housing types, with about 36 percent of the units being single family detached units, 21 percent single family attached, seven percent in structures of two to four units, and 36 percent in structures with five or more units.¹⁷ This is a more diverse mix than neighboring communities, allowing Foster City to accommodate a wide range of household types and facilitating housing for a diverse population. In this respect, it is a *strength*.

TABLE 3-14: HOUSING TYPES

	Single Family Detached	Single Family Attached	2-4 Units Multifamily	5+ Units Multifamily
Foster City	36%	21%	7%	36%
San Mateo	44%	10%	6%	40%
Belmont	59%	6%	2%	33%
San Carlos	70%	5%	4%	20%
Redwood City	48%	15%	6%	29%

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2008

Rental Housing

While rents in Foster City are generally among the highest in the County for various size units, a good portion of market rate rental housing is affordable to moderate income households.¹⁸ Being able to accommodate moderate income households can be considered a *strength*. However, rents are also subject to increases with relatively short notice when the rental market is under pressure; this long-term uncertainty for tenants is a *threat*.

TABLE 3-15: AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL RENTS

	Studio	Single Bedroom	Two Bedroom	Three Bedroom
Foster City	\$ 1,410	1,751	1,931	3,666
San Mateo	\$ 1,225	1,638	1,971	3,397
Belmont	\$ 1,104	1,393	1,653	2,080
Redwood City	\$ 869	1,558	1,876	3,451

Source: Foster City 2007-2014 Housing Element

¹⁷ Foster City 2007-2014 Housing Element

¹⁸ Foster City 2007-2014 Housing Element

Ownership Housing

Even with reduced prices for condominiums due to the market downturn, market rate for-sale housing is affordable only to above moderate income households. The median price for a single family home in Foster City in 2008 was \$1,079,000, and the median price for a common interest development in Foster City in 2008 was \$680,000.¹⁹ While high property values are a strength from an investment perspective, and by some a positive indicator of neighborhood quality, the relatively high costs represent a *weakness* in terms of a *range of housing choices at reasonable prices*.

TABLE 3-16: AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL SALES PRICES

	Single Family Homes	Condominium/ Townhomes
Foster City	\$ 1,079,000	680,000
San Mateo	\$ 800,000	480,500
Belmont	\$ 920,000	601,000
San Carlos	\$ 986,500	567,000
Redwood City	\$ 800,450	515,000

Source: Foster City 2007-2014 Housing Element

¹⁹ Foster City 2007-2014 Housing Element

Proximity to a Wide Range of Retail/Restaurant Services

Foster City was master-planned with neighborhood shopping centers interspersed through the community to serve local shopping and dining needs. The concept was to have stores and restaurants within close proximity (ideally, within walking distance) of each neighborhood.



Supermarkets and Convenience Markets

The number of supermarkets and convenience markets in Foster City per capita is the lowest among area communities.

TABLE 3-17: SUPERMARKETS AND CONVENIENCE MARKETS

	Supermarket Listings	Supermarkets per 1000 residents
Foster City	4	0.13
San Mateo	37	0.40
Belmont	6	0.24
San Carlos	4	0.14
Redwood City	29	0.41

Source: Valley Yellow Pages: Grocers & Markets – Retail category. Includes supermarkets and convenience markets.



Overall, Foster City supermarkets are contemporary, well maintained, and offer a variety of choices including specialized ethnic options. Given the decent number of markets and the variety of choices, they can be considered a *strength*.

Restaurants

While Foster City has numerous restaurants throughout town, it has the lowest number per capita compared to area communities. San Carlos has the most restaurants per capita in the area.



TABLE 3-18: RESTAURANT LISTINGS

	Restaurant Listings	Restaurants per 1000 residents
Foster City	30	0.97
San Mateo	180	1.97
Belmont	34	1.38
San Carlos	65	2.28
Redwood City	137	1.92

Source: Valley Yellow Pages Restaurants category.



Some restaurants are locally-oriented, while others are more regionally-oriented. Most Foster City restaurants are oriented either to the local resident population or to the local weekday employee population. When viewed from the perspective of dining opportunities within the incorporated limits of the City, the relatively low number of restaurants suggests a *weakness*.

However, within the local area beyond the Foster City limits, there is wide range of both locally- and regionally-oriented restaurants, including some notable fine dining choices in San Mateo and Burlingame. Compared to many residents living in adjacent cities, Foster City residents may actually be closer to more dining options. It can take less than ten minutes of driving time to reach downtown San Mateo, and about 15 minutes to get to restaurants in San Carlos. Foster City has had mixed success with regionally-oriented restaurants in the past, but given the convenient location and large weekday employment (including higher income professionals), there may additional *opportunities* for restaurants in Foster City.

Apparel Listings

Apparel stores and outlets are more oriented to a regional market than supermarkets and restaurants. Therefore, apparel listings tend to be clustered in the regional commercial centers. With its regional shopping centers, San Mateo has the highest number of apparel listings per capita, closely followed by San Carlos. So although Foster City has very few apparel stores within its City limits (which could be considered a *weakness*), there are a wide range of choices in neighboring San Mateo. Compared to many residents living in San Mateo considering driving time and distance, Foster City residents are actually closer to shopping options such as Hillsdale Mall or Bridgepoint Shopping Center located in San Mateo. Given the regional nature of apparel stores and the concentration of establishments in neighboring communities, attracting more apparel stores does not appear to be a viable opportunity for Foster City.

TABLE 3-19: APPAREL OUTLETS

	Apparel Listings	Apparel Listings per 1000 residents
Foster City	2	0.06
San Mateo	27	0.30
Belmont	0	0.00
San Carlos	10	0.35
Redwood City	14	0.20

Source: Valley Yellow Pages Clothing Retail, Men's Furnishings and Clothing Retail, Women's Apparel Retail categories.



Retail Taxable Sales and Permits

Foster City and Belmont both have relatively modest retail taxable sales per capita and retail permits per capita compared to San Mateo, San Carlos, and Redwood City. Increasingly, the economics of retail relies on a regional draw from several communities, and San Mateo, San Carlos, and Redwood City each have distinct regional retail markets. Although the regional nature of retail is an explanation and constraint, from Foster City’s fiscal perspective this is a *weakness*. Fortunately, the City has other revenue sources that can compensate.

TABLE 3-20: RETAIL STORES TAXABLE SALES

	2009 Taxable Sales (in	Sales per capita
Foster City	\$ 205,027	\$ 6,740
San Mateo	\$ 1,118,849	\$ 11,591
Belmont	\$ 153,099	\$ 5,834
San Carlos	\$ 426,797	\$ 14,804
Redwood City	\$ 961,033	\$ 12,353

Source: Taxable Sales in California Annual Report (2009), California Board of Equalization; Population Estimates (2009), California Department of Finance, www.dof.ca.gov

TABLE 3-21: RETAIL STORES PERMITS

	Retail Permits	Retail Permits per 1000 residents
Foster City	364	11.97
San Mateo	1,993	20.65
Belmont	355	13.533
San Carlos	712	24.70
Redwood City	1,193	15.33

Source: Taxable Sales in California Annual Report (2009), California Board of Equalization; Population Estimates (2009), California Department of Finance, www.dof.ca.gov

Proximity to Recreational Opportunities/Public Parks/Open Space

Foster City was master-planned with neighborhood and community parks interspersed through the City to serve neighborhood and community needs. The concept was to always have a park within each neighborhood, or within close proximity. The result is one of the highest park acreages per capita in the area, approximately twice that of San Mateo and Belmont and exceeded only by San Carlos. A high ratio of parks and open space per capita allows Foster City residents and employees opportunities for recreation, adding to their quality of life, health and wellness. This is a *strength*.



TABLE 3-22: PARK ACREAGE

Park Area (excludes open space)

	Park Area (acres)	Acreage per 1000 residents
Foster City	103.00	3.34
San Mateo	192.00	2.10
Belmont	41.73	1.70
San Carlos	143.00	5.02
Redwood City	182.40	2.55

Sources: Foster City General Plan Parks and Open Space Element; San Mateo per City staff; Belmont per City staff; San Carlos per City of San Carlos website; Redwood City per City staff.



Proximity to Cultural, Artistic and Entertainment Opportunities

Cultural, artistic, and entertainment attractions tend to be regionally-oriented rather than locally-oriented. Foster City has a community theater (the Hillbarn Theater) and a theater company (Bay Area Educational Theater Company on Chess Drive), though it does not have movie theaters (which are particularly regional in nature). On a per-capita basis, this is a *strength*, with only Redwood City having more performing arts and more theaters per capita. So although Foster City having more performing arts and more theaters per capita. So although Foster City does not have a movie theater within the City limits (a *weakness*), there is a facility with twelve screens nearby in San Mateo, and an additional 20 screens in Redwood City.



TABLE 3-23: MOVIE THEATERS AND PERFORMING ARTS VENUES

	Theater Listings	Theaters per 1000 residents
Foster City	2	0.06
San Mateo	3	0.03
Belmont	0	0.00
San Carlos	1	0.04
Redwood City	5	0.07

Source: Valley Yellow Pages Halls, Auditoriums & Ballrooms, Movie Theaters, Theater Companies, and Dance Companies categories

Cultural and entertainment venues have been an interest of many in Foster City, and there appear to be *opportunities* to pursue further. The North Peninsula Jewish Center has proposed a Cultural Arts Center, and at various times cultural and entertainment facilities have been proposed as part of development of the City-Owned 15-Acres of Property Adjacent to the Foster City Government Center. The City also puts on annual events including a Chinese New Year Celebration, the Polynesian Festival, Fourth of July Celebration and the Art and Wine Festival. Developing cultural and entertainment venues is challenging but may continue to be an opportunity for the future.

Proximity to Religious Institutions

Foster City has religious institutions situated throughout the City. However, on a per capita basis it has relatively fewer religious institutions per capita than neighboring communities so this could be considered a relative *weakness, due to sheer numbers*. Redwood City has the most religious institutions per capita, while Belmont has the fewest. Foster City religious institutions represent a wide range of religious denominations, however, and given the ease in travelling within the City each institution would be relatively easily accessible to most residents.

TABLE 3-24: RELIGIOUS INSTITIONS

	Religious Institutions	Religious Institutions per 1000 residents
Foster City	7	0.23
San Mateo	68	0.74
Belmont	8	0.33
San Carlos	16	0.56
Redwood City	63	0.88

Source: City of Foster City Community Profile; Google Earth listings

Community Perception



To gain insight, a Quality of Life Indicators ranking exercise was performed by a series of focus groups for the General Plan Update and through an online survey. Participants in each focus group and in the survey were asked to score how well Foster City achieves each of the Quality of Life Indicators on a scale of 1-10, with a score of 1 indicating “Low/Poor,” 5 indicating “Average,” and 10 indicating High/Excellent. The survey was also available online for people who did not attend a focus group. In total, 281 people completed this exercise.²⁰ The intent was to compare community perceptions of the City’s strengths and weaknesses with the quantifiable data and professional assessment in this report, and in particular see where the community’s perceptions match the data and where there is disparity.

To provide context for the scores, the **highest** score, when averaged, was **9.17** (Focus group average score for “proximity to recreational opportunities/public parks/open space”). The **lowest** score was **6.46** (online survey average score for “a range of housing choices at reasonable prices”). All of the other indicator scores were between these high and low values.

Table 3-26 provides a summary of scores for the Quality of Life Indicators from each focus group and from the online survey.

TABLE 3-25: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS

	Businesses & Employers	Civic Groups & Religious Institutions	Environmental Sustainability & Transportation	General Topics	Parks & Recreation	Residents	Youth	Weighted Average	Online Survey
Safe neighborhoods and streets	9.00	8.00	9.00	7.67	9.71	8.86	9.00	8.94	8.99
Proximity to employment opportunities	8.60	6.50	8.40	7.00	7.43	7.14	7.17	7.60	7.71
Proximity to high-quality/high income employment opportunities	8.60	6.50	8.40	8.00	8.43	7.71	6.83	7.94	7.61
Part of a stable/growing local area	8.40	4.00	7.80	6.50	7.14	6.80	n/a	7.15	7.48
Safe and academically successful public schools	8.20	6.00	7.80	8.33	7.43	7.57	8.83	7.83	7.76
Proximity to good quality health care	8.60	8.00	8.20	7.33	7.43	8.00	n/a	7.95	7.70
Reasonable traffic and commute times	7.80	7.00	7.80	6.67	6.43	6.71	n/a	7.08	7.23
Functional city government that provides a wide range of good public services	9.00	10.00	8.20	9.00	8.86	7.43	8.67	8.52	7.56
Attractive setting/natural environment	9.20	n/a	9.00	9.67	9.57	8.86	8.83	9.15	8.64
Weather	n/a	n/a	8.20	9.00	8.29	8.14	7.83	8.23	7.98
A range of housing choices at reasonable prices	7.60	6.00	7.40	6.33	6.00	5.50	n/a	6.90	6.46
Proximity to a wide range of retail/restaurant services	6.80	5.50	7.80	6.33	8.29	6.71	7.33	7.23	6.75
Proximity to recreational opportunities/public parks/open space	n/a	9.50	9.40	9.33	9.86	7.86	9.50	9.17	8.69
Proximity to cultural, artistic and entertainment opportunities	6.40	5.50	8.20	6.33	7.43	7.43	7.33	7.22	7.11
Proximity to religious institutions	n/a	7.50	9.00	7.50	8.86	8.00	7.50	8.26	7.67

²⁰ 36 people participated attended in-person focus groups, 245 completed an on-line survey version of the focus group questions.

Safe Neighborhoods and Streets

As noted earlier, Foster City has a reputation for being a safe community with a low crime rate. This is reflected in the survey scoring: on a scale of 1-10, the focus groups' average score for Safe Neighborhoods and Streets was 8.94, and online respondents had an average score of 8.99. For the online respondents, this was the highest scoring quality of life indicator, and the third highest ranked for the focus groups. The community perception of low crime is consistent with the data.

Proximity to Employment Opportunities

As noted previously, the Peninsula functions as an employment region. When seeking a job, individuals will typically look throughout the entire Peninsula rather than within one specific jurisdiction.

The focus groups' average score for Proximity to Employment Opportunities was 7.60, and online respondents had an average score of 7.71. These scores are relatively high compared to other indicators, reflecting a sense that proximity to employment opportunities is quite good despite the challenges of the economic downturn.

Proximity to High-Quality/High Income Employment Opportunities

Foster City has a reputation for high quality employers, including some prominent financial and biotech firms. Foster City is also part of a region known nationally (in fact, internationally) for its concentration of high skill employment. With that context, the focus groups' average score for Proximity to High Quality/High Income Employment Opportunities was 7.94, and online respondents had an average score of 7.61. These scores are slightly higher than the scores for Proximity to Employment Opportunities, indicating a perception that Foster City is slightly stronger in proximity to high quality/high income employment than it is more general employment.

Part of a Stable/Growing Local Economy

Given the economic downturn, one might anticipate a pessimistic view of the local economy. However, overall the community's perception was fairly high: the focus groups' average score for Part of a Stable/Growing Local Economy was 7.15, and online respondents had an average score of 7.48. However, the score was as low as 4.00 for one of the focus groups, reflecting that some members of the community remain concerned about the economy in general. The relatively low office vacancy rates in Foster City compared to neighboring communities and Foster City's relatively low unemployment rate may be factors in the generally favorable assessment for this indicator.

Safe and Academically Successful Public Schools

The Academic Performance Index (API) of Foster City public elementary and middle schools is higher than other schools in the San Mateo-Foster City School District, as well as neighboring communities and the State as a whole. Although API numbers specific to Foster City high school attendees are not available, the numbers for the San Mateo Union High School District are higher than both the neighboring Sequoia Union High School District (which includes students in Belmont, San Carlos, Redwood City and other communities, as well as the State as a whole. Community perception is consistent with this data, with the focus groups' average score for Safe and Academically Successful Public Schools 7.83, and the online respondents with an average score of 7.70. While some community members have expressed concern over school crowding and the possible need for another elementary school, there appears to be an overall understanding that school quality is good.

Proximity to Good Quality Health Care

Although Foster City has fewer medical providers per capita than most neighboring communities, health care is more regional in nature and people expect to travel some distance to reach facilities. The Mid-Peninsula and San Mateo County overall are well served with medical facilities.

The focus groups' average score for Proximity to Good Quality Health Care was 7.95, and online respondents had an average score of 7.70. These scores suggest that community perception is that Foster City has reasonably good proximity to quality health care, despite the fact that there are relatively fewer medical facilities within the City limits compared to neighboring communities. Most likely Foster City residents understand the regional nature of health care, and that while there are relatively fewer facilities within the City limits, they are reasonably close to facilities in neighboring communities.

Reasonable Traffic and Commute Times

By objective measures, Foster City has reasonable traffic and commute times compared to neighboring communities. However, traffic was frequently mentioned as a concern in both the focus groups and online survey. The focus groups' average score for Reasonable Traffic and Commute Times was 7.08, and online respondents had an average score of 7.23.

While these scores are still fairly high on a scale of 1-10, they are among the lowest scores compared to other quality of life indicators. This indicates that Foster City residents are less satisfied with traffic and commute times *compared to* other aspects of the community. Traffic and commute times appear to be a frustration for community members, but not so critical to warrant a lower survey score.

Functional City Government That Provides a Wide Range of Good Public Services

In focus group meetings, individuals generally gave high marks to the City's municipal government and programs. The focus groups' average score for Functional City Government that provides a Wide Range of Good Public Services was 8.52. The online respondents were a bit more critical, with an average score of 7.45. This is the only instance where there is a noticeable difference between the scores from the focus groups and those of the online respondents.

Attractive Setting/Natural Environment

Attractive setting and natural environment is highly subjective, but in focus groups individuals gave it higher marks than any other Quality of Life indicator with an average score of 9.15. Respondents to the online survey also frequently cited the attractive setting as a factor that attracted them to move to Foster City, and frequently ranked it as one of the City's greatest assets with an average score of 8.64. From community members these are among the highest scores of all quality of life indicators.

Weather

Weather is another subjective indicator, but community members expressed a generally favorable view. The focus groups' average score was 8.23, and online respondents had an average score of 7.98.

A Range of Housing Choices at Reasonable Prices

Although Foster City offers a wide range of housing choices, it has the highest average rents and sales prices in the area. Given the high costs, it should not be surprising that it is a concern of community members. The focus groups' average score for A Range of Housing Choices at Reasonable Prices was 6.90, and online respondents had an average score of 6.46. Focus group and survey comments also indicate that people understand that the high housing costs is a regional issue, but it remains a concern of community members nevertheless.

Proximity to a Wide Range of Retail/Restaurant Services

While Foster City has numerous restaurants throughout town, it has the lowest number per capita compared to area communities. In focus groups and the online survey, respondents often expressed a desire for a greater number and range of choices within the City. Retail is regional in nature, and neighboring San Mateo overshadows Foster City with its two large regional shopping centers.

The focus groups' average score for Proximity to a Wide Range of Retail/Restaurant Services was 7.23, and online respondents had an average score of 6.75. These are among the lowest scores of all quality of life indicators for both the focus groups and online respondents. Focus group and online comments indicate community perception that shopping and dining options in Foster City are relatively weak. However, in focus group conversations participants acknowledged that there is a wide range of choices in San Mateo and the larger area.

Proximity to Recreational Opportunities/Public Parks/Open Space

The focus groups' scored Proximity to Recreational Opportunities / Public Parks / Open Space the highest of all quality of life indicators with an average score of 9.17. Online respondents had an average score of 8.69, second only to Safe Neighborhoods and Streets. Participants in both the focus groups and online survey frequently cited parks and recreation opportunities as a factor that attracted them to move to Foster City, and frequently ranked it as one of the City's greatest assets.

Proximity to Cultural, Artistic and Entertainment Opportunities

Cultural, artistic, and entertainment attractions tend to be regionally-oriented rather than locally-oriented. Foster City has a community theater and a theater company, which is notable for a city of its size. While there had once been a small movie theater at Edgewater Place, there are no longer movie theaters within the city limits.

The focus groups' average score for Proximity to Cultural, Artistic and Entertainment Opportunities was 7.22, and online respondents had an average score of 7.11. These are among the lower scores for both groups among the quality of life indicators, though not the lowest. The low scores may be on account that programming at the Hillbarn theater is seasonal with a few productions each year, as opposed to a movie theater with multiple screens and continuously changing programming. The nearest movie theater is approximately four miles away in downtown San Mateo, so although there is not a theater within the City limits there is a venue close by.

Proximity to Religious Institutions

Foster City has religious institutions situated throughout the City. However, on a per capita basis it has relatively fewer religious institutions per capita than neighboring communities.

The focus groups' average score for Proximity to Religious Institutions was 8.26, and online respondents had an average score of 7.67. For focus group participants, this was a relatively high ranking (ranked 5th out of 15 total rankings) despite the data, while for online survey participants the ranking was further towards the bottom of the range (ranked 10th out of 15 total).

Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations in this section are drawn from the Quality of Life Indicators discussion as well as community input from the focus groups and online survey. Recommendations also build upon the Trends Analysis background report prepared prior to this SWOT Analysis background report.

Strengths

As described in the Quality of Life Indicators discussion, Foster City has recognized strengths in:

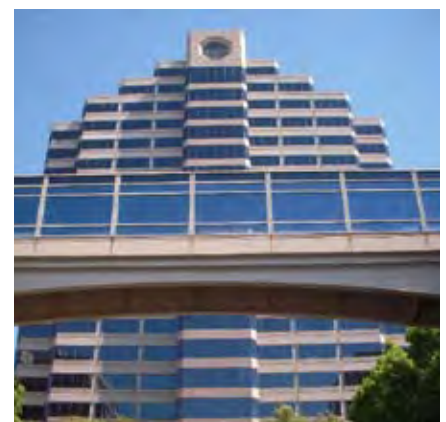
- Safe neighborhoods and streets
- Proximity to employment opportunities
- Part of a stable/growing local economy
- Academically successful public schools
- Proximity to quality health care
- Reasonable traffic and commute times
- Functional City government that provides a wide range of good public services
- Attractive setting
- Parks and recreational opportunities

In addition, the Trends Analysis background report identified strengths that the General Plan could build upon such as:

- **Smart Growth** – As a master-planned community, Foster City has been a pioneer of the “smart growth” concept. Continuing well thought-out development that provides connections to services should be a goal of the City.
- **Employer Shuttles** – The ALLIANCE shuttle program sponsored by employers is an existing asset that could be expanded to serve further employment growth in the future.
- **Complete Streets** – Foster City’s circulation system has been designed to accommodate the range of transportation “modes”: automobiles, bicycles, pedestrians, and transit. The existing General Plan includes a number of goals and programs to support the range of modes.

In the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element of the General Plan, the City may consider new goals and policies that respond to strengths identified in this paper and the Trends Analysis such as:

- **Promote ease of doing business; City government has clear procedures and permitting processes.** Policies could emphasize these qualities of City government as assets to the community and business climate, with consideration given to identifying opportunities for further refinements to build on this strength.





- **Develop policies that encourage the redevelopment of school sites to accommodate demand.** Policies can recognize the academic success of Foster City schools and their role in Foster City being an attractive choice for families. Expansion of an existing school, or redevelopment at higher student densities in multi-story buildings, is important for maintaining the success with rising enrollments.
- **Explore creative solutions to future transportation needs.** While current traffic and commute times are good overall, goals and policies can explore transportation options for the future such as additional employer shuttles as an integral component of employment growth, and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) to connect Foster City to rail lines.
- **Maintain and enhance the parks and recreation offerings.** Policies can continue to emphasize parks and recreation as a top City priority.
- **Master planned aspect of the community and Smart Growth.** Policies can emphasize promoting the master planned aspect of the community as an asset for attracting businesses and residents alike, and for pursuing Smart Growth objectives in future land use and circulation decisions.
- **Destinations within walking distance such as religious institutions, parks and open space, and shops.** Policies can emphasize the importance of maintaining a base level of viable neighborhood-serving uses or attractions at shopping centers or in redeveloped areas.
- **Large number of home-based businesses.** Policies can not only address the compatibility of Home Occupations (Policy LUC-49) but also reinforce the positive aspects such as additional daytime population patronizing local businesses, and additional tax revenues spent on business expenses within the City.
- **Diverse, multicultural population.** Policies can recognize the legacy of Foster City as an open community from its inception, and promote further multicultural understanding through events such as a cultural fair, movie nights/movies in the park, etc., or adding cultural elements to existing events such as the Art and Wine Festival/City Birthday.

Weaknesses

As described in the Quality of Life Indicators discussion, Foster City has issues with:

- High cost of housing.
- Less range of retail and restaurants compared to neighboring communities.
- Fewer cultural, artistic, and entertainment opportunities than neighboring communities.
- Schools perform well but some are crowded.

In addition, the Trends Analysis identified potential weaknesses that the General Plan could build upon such as:

- **Senior Housing** – The senior-aged population is growing, but there may not be sufficient housing provisions to accommodate future needs.
- **Renovations and Additions** – Many homeowners are looking to expand their homes, but expansion opportunities are limited on some lots. Second-story additions can have potential conflicts with existing neighborhood character.
- **Transportation** – Foster City is not situated along regional rail lines and the bus transit network is not strong, so opportunities for transit-oriented development are limited.

In the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element of the General Plan, the City may consider new goals and policies that respond to potential weaknesses identified in this paper and the Trends Analysis such as:

- **Isolated location makes it difficult for viable retail opportunities.** Policies could consider promotion of retail through coordinated advertising campaigns and wayfinding signage programs.
- **Enhance existing retail centers.** Policies can support and give direction to the potential reconfiguration or redevelopment of Charter Square or other centers to have better visibility for retail.
- **Need for additional senior housing/senior housing options.** Policies can continue to encourage senior housing through incentives. Policies and programs could also help initiate age-in-place programs as an additional choice for seniors.
- **Transit requires creative solutions.** As noted above in “strengths,” creative solutions to future transportation needs need to be explored to compensate for Foster City not being located along regional transit lines.
- **City process is difficult for some applicants.** While some businesses and residents laud the City for its processes, others find some processes difficult. This includes homeowners seeking to renovate their homes. Policies could consider identifying opportunities for further refinements to address the needs of those who have more difficulty with completing current processes.
- **School crowding.** While many of the decisions related to schools are under the auspices of the San Mateo / Foster City School District rather than the City, the General Plan could establish or refine policies related to land designated for schools. Policy LUC-64 (City Services and Buildings) should be revised to reflect the City Council policy action that the 15 acres adjacent to City Hall will not be set aside for

future school facilities. However, new policies in the General Plan could promote higher density student populations or multiple school uses on existing sites, to encourage the school districts to expand or redevelop existing school sites.



Opportunities

The Quality of Life Indicators suggests a number of potential opportunities for Foster City including:

- Health and education sector jobs: additional medical and research facilities
- Weather: wind activities such as wind surfing and small scale energy production
- Office and R&D space: new office campuses or expanded uses
- Cultural and entertainment choices: cultural arts center
- Parks and recreation opportunities: unique new parks, concessions



In addition, the Trends Analysis background report identified potential opportunities that the General Plan could build upon such as:

- **Senior Age-in-Place Programs** – Opportunities to create a service networks that allows seniors to remain in their homes as they age.
- **Retail Trends** – Reconfiguring obsolete retail centers to provide visibility to tenants and a “sense of place.”
- **Business Incubators and Virtual Offices** – Facilitating the growth of new business and employment sectors.



In the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element of the General Plan, the City may consider new goals and policies that respond to potential opportunities identified in this paper and the Trends Analysis such as:

- **Business incubator space and/or programs; virtual offices to support smaller businesses.** Policies could encourage the formation of incubator programs and/or virtual offices either through direct City action, or through incentives and promotion by other organizations.
- **Reconfigure existing shopping centers. Consider mixed use with affordable housing. Focus neighborhood shopping centers on services rather than retail.** Goals and policies can continue to encourage mixed use development (Goal LUC-H, Policy LUC-18). Perhaps also a policy to re-evaluate restrictions on the amount and type of retail and services permitted in shopping centers. Each center has its own program and list of allowed/not allowed uses. Some of them were established to encourage retail over services or not duplicate services already provided elsewhere.

- **Programs to promote sustainability in private improvements, such as re-roofing, solar, etc. Encourage the use of technology to improve sustainability, e.g., irrigation controls coordinated with the weather.** Policies can call for creating options and criteria for design review that allows for new materials and technologies.
- **Encourage residents and workers to spend money in Foster City.** A policy could encourage the creation of an informational directory or website, together with a “Buy Foster City” publicity campaign. In addition, although the City is not involved in selecting tenants for commercial centers, a policy or program could facilitate a market study to identify types of businesses that are likely to be supported by business employees and residents. The market study could be helpful to commercial center owners, or to prospective businesses looking to tailor their business to customer demand.
- **City can show leadership in solar use and sustainability in public buildings.** Finances allowing, the City could have a policy that requires public building projects to showcase resource conservation technology.
- **Seniors “virtual village” program for seniors to age in place. Ideally a senior virtual village needs to be organized and run by the users themselves.** However, City policy could encourage the creation of a senior virtual village or other support system, and the City could facilitate organizational meetings to get the program initiated.
- **Destination Park project.** General Plan policy could describe and identify provisions for the Destination Park concept on Beach Park Boulevard.
- **Werder Pier site (but not the pier itself) to redevelop as a park, including a structure for concessions.** Policies and action programs could facilitate the acquisition of the Werder Pier site for park use. Policies could encourage concessions at the Werder Pier park and other parks.
- **Specific Plan or Precise Plan that includes multiple properties and potential projects so that each individual project could have more simplified environmental review.** Policies could consolidate potential redevelopment properties into plan areas with a program environmental review, allowing tiering of environmental review for individual development projects.
- **Live/work or loft housing units.** Policies could encourage a range of housing units, including some less conventional choices such as live/work units or lofts.



- **Cultural and entertainment.** The North Peninsula Jewish Center has proposed a Cultural Arts Center, and at various times cultural and entertainment facilities have been proposed as part of development of the City-Owned 15-Acres of Property Adjacent to the Foster City Government Center. Developing cultural and entertainment venues is challenging but may continue to be an opportunity for the future.
- **Wind Opportunities.** Sailing and windsurfing are existing recreational activities that take advantage of brisk afternoon winds. Policies can encourage other positive responses to wind conditions, possibly including small-scale power generation.

Threats

The Quality of Life Indicators suggests some potential threats for Foster City including:

- Total number of jobs per capita
- Reasonable traffic and commute times
- Rental housing costs

In addition, the Trends Analysis identified potential threats that the General Plan could respond to such as:

- **Retail Trends** – Changes in retailing are causing some existing Foster City shopping centers to struggle.
- **Transportation** – Foster City’s roadway system is close to capacity at peak hours, which threatens employment growth in the future. The *Foster City Multi-Project Traffic Analysis* (December 2008) identifies eight recommended improvement / mitigation measures to accommodate existing conditions, and four additional measures to accommodate potential future projects.²¹ Each of the proposed improvements is currently being designed and the City of Foster City Department of Public Works staff is working with CalTrans to obtain approval of improvements to the ramps and traffic lanes on State Route 92.²²

In the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element of the General Plan, the City may consider new goals and policies that respond to potential threats identified in this paper and the Trends Analysis such as:

- **The structural deficits that the City is facing pose serious financial challenges.** Policies should provide guidance for evaluating trade-offs between City program costs and benefits. (This topic is investigated in greater detail in the *General Plan Land Use and Circulation Element Future Land Use Planning and Economic Development Issues and Constraints background report*.)

²¹ Foster City Multi-Project Traffic Analysis (December, 2008), Table 26A.

²² Engineering Feasibility Study (May 2009)

- **State-related financing decisions can impact the quality of life in Foster City. The Governor has discussed no longer allowing Redevelopment Agencies (RDA's), which could impact the City's resources.** This issue is ongoing, but policies can be in place to protect City assets or promote revenue enhancing projects.
- **Some employers seem to be seeking locations with better transit access.** Some participants in the Businesses and Employers Focus Group commented that some some employers seek locations with access to transit. Policies can outline opportunities to improve transit and access to regional transit. Policies can also outline a campaign that highlights the positive aspects of Foster City as a business location to potentially counter concerns of transit access.
- **Employees from outside Foster City are commuting from longer distances.** Policies that encourage a range of housing options and including affordable housing can allow employees to live closer to their jobs.
- **Some of the shopping centers are not attractive and need to be reconfigured/remodeled.** Goals and policies can continue to encourage mixed use development (Goal LUC-H, Policy LUC-18). Additional polices could outline in greater detail a desired approach for mixed use redevelopment of neighborhood shopping centers.
- **Bus service is very limited and may be cut further.** Policy LUC-54 calls for coordination with SamTrans to improve the transportation system.



Using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis in the General Plan Update

The Quality of Life Indicators can be measured on a regular basis to gauge how strongly Foster City performs in respect to a range of quality of life measures over time. General Plan goals, policies, and programs can promote and reinforce strengths, address and seek improvement of weaknesses, prioritize and encourage opportunities, and take proactive measures to limit threats.



The community involvement process engaged for the SWOT analysis has produced a substantial number of potential policies for the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element. While there has been a wide range of thoughtful insight and creative ideas, there is a need to identify the most promising (and pressing) issues to guide the prioritization of policies and programs to make best use of available resources. Decision-makers should engage in prioritization exercises to achieve a consensus on which of the many potential policy options should be investigated further, and ultimately included in the updated Land Use and Circulation Element for use as the official long-range planning policy.

SWOT Source List

Focus groups

M-Group conducted seven focus groups with a range of community groups and representatives to gain background and insight into near- and long-term Foster City planning issues. M-Group met with the Planning Commission on August 31, 2010 to review the list of focus groups and the questions to ask each group. The focus groups included:

- Youth – October 20, 2010
- Civic Clubs and Religious Institutions – October 26, 2010
- Environmental Sustainability and Transportation – October 28, 2010
- General Topic Group – November 9, 2010
- Residents – November 3, 2010
- Businesses and Employers – November 9, 2010
- Parks & Recreation – January 5, 2011

36 people participated attended in-person focus groups, 245 completed an on-line survey version of the focus group questions.

Data Sources

- Building Momentum - Projections and Priorities 2009, ABAG
- California Attorney General's Office; www.ag.ca.gov
- California Department of Education; www.api.cde.ca.gov
- California Employment Development Department
- City of Foster City "Mid-Year Financial Review for FY 2010-2011" City Council staff report, January 31, 2011
- Foster City 2007-2014 Housing Element
- Foster City Multi-Project Traffic Analysis – Final Report, December 2008.
- Foster City Engineering Feasibility Study – Final Report, May 2009
- San Francisco Peninsula Research & Forecast Report, Colliers International, Q3 2010
- Silicon Valley Mercury News 2010 Public Employee Salaries listings
- U.S. Census 2000; American Community Survey 2006-2008.
- Valley Yellow Pages*

* Through the progression of the General Plan Update, as more reliable data becomes available, this source will be replaced.

