

## THE FAIRGROUNDS & PETALUMA



### INTRODUCTION

**THE SONOMA-MARIN FAIRGROUNDS IS A SPECIAL PLACE - AND IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR COMMUNITY AS WELL AS OUR LOCAL HISTORY.**

#### IT SERVES AS:

- A community gathering and celebration space
- Support for our agricultural heritage, education, and industry
- A place to help those in-need during emergencies
- The home of the annual 5-day Sonoma-Marin Fair

For about 75 years, the City of Petaluma has leased the approximately 55-acre property to the 4th District Agricultural Association (4th DAA), who has managed the property and determined its use.

**NOW IS THE TIME FOR US, AS A COMMUNITY, TO START ENVISIONING THE FUTURE USE OF THIS ICONIC PETALUMA PROPERTY.**

#### THIS TIMING IS CRITICAL BECAUSE:

- The current lease will expire December 31, 2023
- Petaluma's General Plan Update effort that is currently taking place and could impact the Fairgrounds property.

As the Fairgrounds Visioning process unfolds, we must think comprehensively about how the Fairgrounds property can fit into and complement our community's broader goals and values while retaining our annual fair event and other agricultural activities that are at the heart of Petaluma's past and future.

#### BUT FIRST, WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING ON THE PROPERTY.

The summary below is meant to review what we know about the fairgrounds. Many of the sections refer to larger documents that you can reference if you'd like to learn more. Our goal is to get you started by giving you background and context of how the fairgrounds and its current uses came to be. We hope that this will serve as a launching pad for your ideas for the future of our fairgrounds.



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## FAIRGROUNDS FACTS

- The fairgrounds is an approximately 55-acre parcel located in the heart of Petaluma.
- The City purchased the property in 1911 using the proceeds of a voter-approved \$20,000 bond issuance.
- The City acquired the property for park use. City records indicate that from 1911, when the property was acquired, until about 1936 the property was known as Kenilworth Park and included a horse track, campground, picnic area, and playground.
- It appears that the Sonoma-Marin Fair relocated to the current site from its prior location at Fair Street (where Petaluma High School is located) in around 1936. The first reference staff have located to a lease between the 4th Agricultural Association (4th DAA) at the current Fairgrounds site refers to a lease that commenced on December 1, 1947.
- The current Fairgrounds site appears to have been leased to the 4th DAA for \$1 a year by the City of Petaluma since 1947. The rent paid to the City for the property has been \$1 a year under the current lease since 1973. Under this lease, the DAA is responsible for the maintenance, management, and operations, and determines the uses of this property.
- The existing lease will expire December 31, 2023.
- During this 50-year lease, our community has not had the opportunity to weigh in on the uses/offerings/future of this city-owned property. The 4th DAA has controlled the Fairgrounds property under the current lease with much of the same control the 4th DAA would have if it owned the property outright.
- With the expiration of the lease next year, this is a good time to engage our community to envision a future for the Fairgrounds property that serves the needs of all Petalumans.

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## THE BIGGER PETALUMA PICTURE

- The Petaluma General Plan and Implementing Zoning Ordinance regulates land use and zoning rules city-wide and specifies the ways in which people can use and develop properties.
- The Fairgrounds current permitted uses are prescribed in the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. These documents also discuss potential future uses of the property.
- The Fairgrounds visioning process can inform, and potentially change, the way the present and future Fairgrounds uses addressed in these documents and guide the future uses of the property.
- By participating in the Petaluma Fairgrounds Advisory Panel, you are playing an important role in shaping the future of the Fairgrounds!

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## CURRENT FAIRGROUNDS USES

- The Fairgrounds hosts events throughout the year such as the Sonoma-Marín Fair, the annual 4th of July fireworks show, and private gatherings such as weddings, quinceañeras, and parties, and provides emergency and disaster shelter and services for people and animals, staging areas for first responders, and more.
- Nearly a dozen businesses and organizations currently offer year-round services at the Fairgrounds property, including Live Oak Charter School, El Roy's Express Mex, and Play Dog Play.
- Over the past several years, both the City and the 4th DAA have studied and reported about how the Fairgrounds is used, how the 5-day fair event operates, and what economic impacts it has. Visit [cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources](http://cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources) to review them.



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## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE PROPERTY TODAY

The lease between the 4th DAA and the City sets the terms for how the property is developed, maintained, and used during the term of the lease, and gives the 4th DAA extensive control of the property. In 2016, the City commissioned a study to better understand how the 4th DAA was using the property and how the annual fair event was financed. This helps us understand how we might support the annual fair event while considering other ways to use the property.

- The property is currently only accessible by invitation, contract, or lease with the 4th DAA. People are also able to access the property as customers of businesses that sublease space from the DAA.
- According to the terms of the current lease, unlike most other property in the City, the City is not involved in how the property is used – the uses are determined by the 4th DAA as the leaseholder.
- Many of the current uses would not be allowed under current City rules. For instance, the speedway would require special approvals to address neighborhood impacts, like noise and air quality impacts, and potential contamination.
- The City funded an assessment of the fair operations and possible uses for the fairgrounds that was completed in 2016. According to the assessment, the property generates approximately \$700,000 / year which is used for fair operations and is not shared directly with Petaluma taxpayers. The assessment also roughly estimated the property value at that time to range from \$13 million to \$36 million.
- At the time the research was done for the City sponsored assessment, the Annual Fair used approximately 41.2-acres to host the Annual Fair (16.2 of the 41.2 acres for parking)
- According to the Sonoma Marin Fairgrounds and Event Center Assessment Report, a modified fair could operate on a smaller or temporary footprint if redesigned.

*Source: Sonoma Marin Fairgrounds and Event Center Assessment Report  
[cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources](http://cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources)*

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## WHAT THE COMMUNITY HAS SAID ABOUT THE PROPERTY IN EXISTING PLANS

While we are looking toward the future, it may be helpful to consider how the community has envisioned the fairgrounds in the past. Below are some key points identified in the existing 2025 General Plan and the Implementing Zoning Ordinance.

The portion of the Fairgrounds facing Washington St. could benefit the community by providing a public, pedestrian, and active face along the street that would invite the community into the property and create a pleasant experience along Washington St.

- The Fairgrounds should provide civic and ceremonial spaces.
- Year around access to, and recreational uses of, the property should be explored.
- The property should accommodate a 20-acre park.
- The property could benefit from a mix of uses that could include a combination of commercial and residential uses. The portion of the property facing Washington St. is zoned MU1B, a mixed use designation that applies to larger parcels located primarily along major roadways that are intended for pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development with ground-floor retail or office uses.
- The remaining, larger portion of the property is zoned CF which means it is intended to be used for Civic Facilities including public utility facilities, government offices, community service uses, and schools.

*Source: Petaluma General Plan 2025; Implementing Zoning Ordinance  
[cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources](http://cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources)*

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## WHAT WE ARE CURRENTLY STUDYING

When we look at how we can use a property, we first need to understand what exists on the property today that might affect future options. For instance, when considering the buildings, we need to know the current conditions to ensure safety, reliability, and usability. We also need to know if there are any environmental concerns, such as if the soil has any contamination. As part of the City's ongoing Fiscal and Organizational Sustainability efforts, we are assessing how our facilities, real estate, and infrastructure support the efficacy, efficiency, and quality of services we provide. The study will be looking at all City owned facilities, real estate, and infrastructure to determine how the City can best serve the community with its resources.

- We have begun studying and analyzing the following draft analyses and data and will release this information publicly and share it with the City Council and the community once the drafts are finalized.
- An Environmental Contamination Evaluation and a Soil, Soil Vapor, and Groundwater Management Plan will study the condition of the soil and the water beneath. If any contamination is found, we would have to plan for addressing the contamination.
- A Building Conditions Assessment that will provide information about the age and condition of the buildings on the property.
- An Historic Resource Evaluation that will assess the property's history to determine if any buildings are eligible for preservation as historic resources due to their history and historic value.
- Public Safety (Fire, PD) organizational and operational audits, which include assessing the City's public safety facilities, infrastructure, and staffing needs.

*Sources: The documents will be posted as they are finalized. [cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources](http://cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsresources)*

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## WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN & HOW DOES IT IMPACT THE FAIRGROUNDS?

- The General Plan is a high-level document that provides a blueprint for how we can grow in Petaluma. It envisions where we will live, how we will travel, where we will work, go to school, play and recreate, and where we will shop. We are currently in the process of updating our General Plan which will create a road map to shape the future of our city for the next 20 – 30 years.
- A required part of every General Plan (and General Plan Update) is a Housing Element in which the City identifies sites that can be developed for housing. The State requires the City to build a certain amount of housing units, across all income levels, and can penalize the City for not meeting this requirement. At this time, the City is not considering housing development for the Fairgrounds site.
- The Fairgrounds visioning process and associated engagement will inform the General Plan Update's land use designations, environmental review, and policy direction so that the General Plan will support and facilitate the community's vision for this beloved property.
- As we look forward, it is important to understand how the City has envisioned the use of the Fairgrounds (see below). These envisioned uses may shift as we complete the General Plan Update process.

*Source: Petaluma General Plan 2025 [www.planpetaluma.org](http://www.planpetaluma.org)*

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## WHAT COULD THE FAIRGROUNDS PROPERTY INCLUDE?

In addition to hosting the annual fair, the Fairgrounds property has many options for the future. It could be a place for:

- a park
- a community center
- city facilities
- sheltering during emergencies
- affordable housing
- schools
- meetings and events
- showcasing our agricultural heritage
- sports and recreation
- And many more!

## HOW THE CITY IS GATHERING CITY-WIDE INPUT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE FAIRGROUNDS

The City will hold a community workshop in June and collect ongoing feedback through a digital story board project and a survey. The work will be presented to the Panel if desired and ultimately to the City Council for review along with the Panel's recommendations.

## TIMELINE

- **APRIL**
  - Kickoff
  - Petaluma Fairgrounds Advisory Panel Selection
- **MAY**
  - Community Input Survey
  - Panel Meetings
- **JUNE**
  - Digital Storytelling Exhibit Opens
  - Community Workshop
  - Panel Meetings
- **JULY**
  - Panel Meetings
  - Community Input Summary
- **AUGUST**
  - Present community input to 4th DAA and City Council
- **SEPTEMBER**
  - City Council to consider feedback and provide direction on next steps

## TO LEARN HOW SOME OTHER COMMUNITIES AROUND THE NATION HAVE RE-ENVISIONED SIMILAR PROPERTIES,

PLEASE VISIT [CITYOFPETALUMA.ORG/FAIRGROUNDSRESOURCES](http://CITYOFPETALUMA.ORG/FAIRGROUNDSRESOURCES) WHERE WE SHARE EXAMPLES FROM THE FOLLOWING CITIES:

### IN CALIFORNIA:

- Solano County Fairgrounds
- Santa Clara County Fairgrounds
- San Joaquin County Fairgrounds

### AROUND THE COUNTRY:

- Adams County (Denver) Fairgrounds
- Nashville, TN Fairgrounds
- Memphis, TN Fairgrounds
- Dayton, OH Fairgrounds
- Boulder County Fairgrounds