
The City of San Rafael General Plan 2020



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Introduction

San Rafael has a long history of city planning. The San Rafael Planning Commission was established in 1915, and the City's first zoning rules were adopted in the 1920s. Over the decades, the community planned and built neighborhoods, parks and community centers, and improvements to the highways and local streets. The result is a city in a lovely natural setting, complete with a thriving Downtown and many diverse neighborhoods, each with its own identity and character.



Planning is about change: What kind of city will the people who come after us live in? How can San Rafael become a better place? Since the 1960s, three General Plans have guided growth and change in San Rafael. This document replaces these earlier plans and provides guidance towards a horizon year of 2020.

What is a General Plan?

A general plan is the planning guideline for the future of a city. It contains goals, policies and programs describing the community's vision for economic viability, livable neighborhoods and environmental protection.

California State law requires that all cities and counties prepare and adopt general plans. These plans must be comprehensive, long-range and internally consistent. Every plan must address seven specific topics, or "elements." State law provides flexibility in how elements are organized and what additional topics may be included. The table shows the State-mandated elements and corresponding elements in San Rafael's plan. There are eight additional elements which have the same legal status as the mandatory elements. No one element, goal or policy supersedes any other.

State-Mandated Elements	San Rafael General Plan 2020 Elements
Land Use	Land Use, Community Design and Neighborhoods
Circulation	Circulation and Infrastructure
Housing	Housing
Open Space	Open Space, Parks and Recreation
Conservation	Conservation
Safety	Safety
Noise	Noise
	Governance and Community Involvement
	Economic Vitality
	Culture and Arts
	Air and Water Quality
	Sustainability

State law allows the City to plan for areas outside its jurisdiction if those areas are related directly to the City's planning needs. Consequently, the area covered by this Plan includes all properties within the City limits as well as unincorporated pockets and lands in Marin County. With exception of the Silveira Ranch and the St. Vincent's School for Boys, the Planning Area corresponds to San Rafael's "Sphere of Influence" (SOI) that has been established by agreement with Marin Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The City has requested LAFCO remove these two properties from San Rafael's SOI. When this revision is made in the SOI, the Planning Area will be the same as the SOI. The City and Marin County benefit from mutual cooperation in planning growth and change in the unincorporated areas within San Rafael's Sphere of Influence.

Creating the General Plan

Initial Outreach. Between January and August 1998, the Community Development Department held a series of outreach 'conversations' with 49 community groups and over 600 people. Participants were asked what issues need to be addressed in the General Plan update, how to publicize the work of the General Plan Steering Committee and how to involve the community in the project. Several preliminary themes emerged from the conversations: traffic, the high cost of housing, enthusiasm for the recent changes Downtown, and quality of life issues. The suggestions from the General Plan conversations were used to draft a work program for the Planning Commission and City Council.

Steering Committee Appointed. In May 2000, the City Council appointed a 19-member Steering Committee to "prepare a recommended General Plan for the City of San Rafael." As part of that charge, Council asked that *San Rafael General Plan 2000* be updated to reflect recent neighborhood plans and visions, and changed circumstances in the community. The members were appointed as representatives not of a particular interest or area, but as community members involved in a wide variety of activities throughout the city. Over the next three years, the Steering Committee held 39 meetings in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Planning Issues Identified. The Committee first prepared a *Report Card* on the accomplishments of *General Plan 2000* and reviewed trends occurring in the city and region. In the fall of 2000, Steering Committee members met with 42 community groups (717 people) to identify the most important planning issues in San Rafael. People were asked to rank 26 issues on how well the City was doing on each of the topics, and then to identify the top ten issues facing San Rafael today. While not a statistically accurate study, the results revealed that people felt San Rafael was doing very well with public safety; and that the top planning issues were traffic, education, housing needs, and the transportation system.

Visioning 2020. The Steering Committee next held three visioning sessions to discuss the future of San Rafael. Between September and November 2000, over 170 people attended a two-day Town Meeting, 25 youth attended a second visioning session at the MIYO Teen Center, and nearly 40 people participated in a visioning workshop held in Spanish at Bahia Vista School. Participants were asked questions like: What do we like most about this city? What do we want to change? What trends will affect San Rafael the most? What will our future transportation system look like? One of the strongest themes was the importance of inclusiveness and diversity in the broadest sense; maintaining a residential mixture of ages, backgrounds and a variety of buildings, businesses, housing, culture and recreation. The answers from the visioning sessions were used to draft a Vision Statement (page 15) outlining the City's aspirations for the future and to prepare a set of 36 draft General Plan goals.

Draft General Plan Policies. In December 2000, the City Council appointed 45 people representing a broad range of San Rafael’s different constituencies to assist the Steering Committee in preparing “citywide policy recommendations to implement the General Plan goals.” Four Task Groups were formed: Quality of Community Life, Getting Around Town, Economic Vitality, and Neighborhoods and Homes.

During the winter and spring of 2001, the Task Groups reviewed a *Background Report*, a resource of essential information about San Rafael’s environmental, economic and social conditions, toured the city to see areas of specific interest to their topic, and wrote draft policies. In May, 2001, the Task Groups hosted an Open House so that community could review and comment on the draft policy directions being developed. An estimated 150 individuals from throughout San Rafael participated in the event. The Task Groups met for 23 sessions, and presented their recommendations to the Steering Committee and City Council in June 2001.

Land Use Changes. The Committee next turned its focus to land use and traffic modeling. In January 2002 the committee hosted a Community Design Charrette to obtain information and ideas from the community regarding future development and change in San Rafael. (A charrette is a short, intensive planning and design process.) Over two days, six potential ‘change’ areas, the Canalfront, Loch Lomond, Marin Square, Medway, Northgate, and Woodland Avenue, were studied in depth by teams of community members and volunteer architects. Over 100 community members and 48 volunteer architects participated in the charrette. Mixed-use, live/work and affordable housing emerged as a major land use in all six areas.

Writing the Draft Plan. Over the next year and a half, the Steering Committee tested future land use scenarios for traffic congestion, evaluated housing opportunity sites, drafted fifteen General Plan elements, and met with community groups. The Steering Committee worked in three subcommittees.

During Spring 2002, 18 community groups, consisting of 214 people, helped to evaluate the housing potential of various sites; their feedback was used to prepare a final ‘housing sites’ list for the Housing Element.

- The draft Housing Element was reviewed at a community workshop in October 2002. Over 100 people attended, over half from one neighborhood concerned about the identification of a school as a potential housing site.
- In May 2003, about 40 people attended a workshop to review results from the General Plan traffic modeling.
- During Spring 2003, 15 “loop out” meetings with over 280 people were conducted to give community groups an overview of the emerging General Plan 2020 recommendations.

In June 2003, the Steering Committee held a Community Open House on the draft General Plan. Approximately 150 people came to the Open House to discuss the issues facing San Rafael and strategies that were being recommended in the General Plan. There were several opportunities for participants to share their views, including posting their written comments on station display panels and attending discussion groups. In August 2003, the Steering Committee presented its recommended General Plan to the City Council.



In addition to hosting community meetings and speaking with civic and neighborhood groups, the Steering Committee publicized its work through San Rafael 's *City Focus* newsletters, and a website that included information about meetings, draft documents and ways to provide input.

General Plan Themes

As the policies and programs evolved into the General Plan, the following themes emerged:



Keep San Rafael's 'hometown' character – San Rafael is a place unlike any other, mixing the old and new while retaining a sense of history, providing a comfortable sense of belonging to a special place.



Foster San Rafael's accessible and responsive government – San Rafael has an involved and committed citizenry dedicated to seeking solutions and improvement.



Improve the appearance of the neighborhoods – San Rafael is a city of neighborhoods both residential and commercial, and new, attractive and graceful buildings that complement and enhance existing neighborhoods.



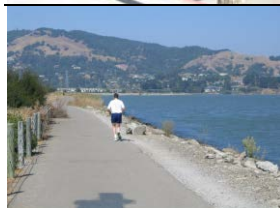
Sustain the diversity of the local economy – The strength of San Rafael's local economy is its central location as a full service city with a wide range of goods, services, jobs and housing opportunities.



Increase the housing supply – New homes add to the vitality of San Rafael, retain diversity, provide housing for people who work here, reduce traffic, and can best be provided in mixed use commercial and infill areas.



Manage the traffic – San Rafael maximizes opportunities to improve traffic flow and increase opportunities for walking, biking and using transit.



Treasure the open spaces – Over the years, San Rafael residents have purchased and dedicated natural areas to save them as open space, resulting in surrounding hills that will remain natural backdrops to the community.

How the Plan is Organized

The San Rafael General Plan 2020 is organized into four sections:

- Our Use of Land**
 - Land Use
 - Housing
 - Neighborhoods
 - Community Design

- Our Foundation**
 - Economic Vitality
 - Circulation
 - Infrastructure
 - Governance
 - Sustainability

- Our Quality of Life**
 - Culture and Arts
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Safety
 - Noise

- Our Natural Resources**
 - Open Space
 - Conservation
 - Air and Water Quality

Each element contains background information, and the following:

Goals: descriptions of what San Rafael wants to achieve – the end state.

Policies: specific or general statements of principle, positions or approaches on a particular issue or subject. “Must” or “shall” indicates mandatory requirements, and “should” or “may” indicates case-by-case flexibility, although parameters can be set for such statements.

Programs: actions, procedures, or activities by the City of San Rafael to achieve a specific policy and/or goal.

Responsibility: Responsible City departments. In the case of collaborations, the first department listed is the lead.

Timeframe: Ongoing – Current program.
Short Term – Implementation within five years after adoption
Long Term – Implementation within six to twenty years after adoption
Housing Element programs may have a specific date, consistent with State law.

Resources: Potential sources of funding. Program implementation depends on the availability of funding and City Council priorities, and may be rely on partnerships and contributions. Resources listed in the programs are not intended to be exclusive. Types of resources include:

- Assessment District
- Bonds
- Capital Improvements Program
- Concessionaries
- Contributions and donations
- Dedications
- Fees, i.e. mitigation fees, park in lieu fees
- Fines
- General Fund
- Grants, i.e. State and Federal grants, Community Development Block Grants
- Joint Powers Agreement
- Parking Services Fund
- Partnerships
- Property Owners
- Redevelopment Funds
- Staff Time
- State Lands Mitigation Funds
- Tax, i.e., gas tax, stormwater tax, sales tax
- Utility Funds
- Volunteers

Implementing the General Plan

General Plan 2020 is the official policy framework for guiding decisions affecting the future of San Rafael. The City Council, City Boards and Commissions, City staff and San Rafael residents and business owners will implement the General Plan. Plan policies will be carried out through the adoption and revision of ordinances and City programs, through annual budgeting and capital improvement programming, through the participation of residents and community groups, and through decisions on development proposals.

The Plan is intended to be a living document that changes as the community changes. It is general and flexible enough to allow for future change, but specific enough to inform residents and decision-makers of the City's policies on the future use of individual properties. Many times the implementation of a policy is handled on a case-by-case basis to provide flexibility in responding to unique site or project circumstances. Decisions by the City Council and its advisory Boards and Commissions should be consistent with the goals and policies of this Plan. City staff uses the General Plan to guide planning actions, seek funding, and administer and regulate land use and development activity. The City also uses the General Plan as the basis for reviewing and recommending on projects in San Rafael's Sphere of Influence. While the School Districts, and State and County Agencies are not legally obligated to comply with the Plan, mutual cooperation benefits the residents and businesses of the community.

The organization of the elements, goals, policies and programs do not indicate a priority, unless otherwise stated. Given the broad scope of the General Plan, inherent tensions exist between Plan goals and policies that must be balanced against one another through the decision-making process on particular development and land use decisions. It is not the intent of the General Plan to predetermine these decisions, but rather to help guide the decision-making process.

Beyond the plan itself, there are other means of implementing its overall direction. The Zoning Ordinance constitutes the most specific form of land use regulation. Many changes to the Zoning Ordinance are a result of General Plan policies. Some proposed zoning changes are complex and require further study. Neighborhood plans are recommended to provide more specific direction for the future of certain areas in the community. The Capital Improvement Program is a critical component for prioritizing the many physical improvements listed in the Plan. Finally, City departments use the plan as guidance in setting work programs and to apply for grant funding for specific projects.

Most of the programs are the continuation of programs already in effect, but new programs are also proposed. Some will require a significant amount of public and private money to carry out. Others require partnerships and cooperation with other organizations and agencies.

Reviewing and Amending the Plan

To ensure that the Plan remains up to date and reflective of current city policy, and consistent with State law, implementation of the General Plan will be reviewed annually by the Planning Commission, which will recommend to the City Council any modifications that it considers necessary.

The process of growth and change is dynamic and unpredictable. For these reasons, continued monitoring of the impacts of the Plan and the assumptions upon which it is based are necessary. The Plan will be comprehensively reexamined and refined as part of a five-year review.

The procedure to amend *San Rafael General Plan 2020* is set forth in Resolution No. 8379 (1991). General Plan Amendments may occur up to four times a year, and require public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council.

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Vision

In 2020...

Life in San Rafael is cause for celebration.

We revere our natural setting, bathed in a Mediterranean climate, nestled in grassy wooded hills, with shoreline vistas and wetlands rich with wildlife and vegetation.

We are enriched by our diversity. Our community includes a broad mix of individuals, families and business enterprises of various racial, cultural and economic backgrounds. We are a vibrant community of consensus builders, with innovative leaders and active and informed residents. Our distinctive neighborhoods provide housing for people at all stages of life, at all income levels.

We honor our historic roots as a Mission City, one of the oldest in California. We have restored and maintained landmarks, including the Frank Lloyd Wright - designed Marin Civic Center, Falkirk Cultural Center, the Boyd Gate House and the Rafael Film Center.

San Rafael's healthy economy is a product of our commitment to business vitality across a broad spectrum of enterprise. Our vigorous economy plays a key role in providing jobs, housing, safe and attractive neighborhoods and a well-maintained infrastructure.

San Rafael is a gathering place with exciting events offering a wide selection of cultural and entertainment venues and excellent restaurants. Our inspirational setting, cultural diversity, and community prosperity set the stage for a thriving arts community.

We have great schools and teachers. We are dedicated to providing a quality education for our children and ongoing educational opportunities for all.

Our role as the economic, cultural, political, and social services center of Marin County is enhanced by excellent transportation. Our efficient system accommodates vehicles while encouraging walking and biking as safe, appealing and practical alternatives.

Small wonder that we are wont to exclaim: "We are living well in San Rafael."



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