

San Rafael General Plan 2040 Draft Land Use Categories

State law requires that every General Plan include a Land Use Map identifying the location and extent of land to be used for housing, business, industry, open space, public buildings, waste facilities, and other public and private uses by the Plan's horizon year. Future land use decisions must be consistent with this Map, and future zoning changes must support the Map designations. The San Rafael 2040 Land Use Map includes 20 categories, plus one overlay designation. Definitions of each category are provided below.

RESIDENTIAL CATEGORIES

Six residential designations appear on the General Plan Map. Five correspond to residential neighborhoods while the sixth applies to constrained, mostly undeveloped lands with limited development potential.

In all residentially designated areas, the following conditions apply:

1. Some of the categories on the General Plan Map have multiple corresponding zoning districts. The designation of an area with a particular category does not mean that the most intense zoning district consistent with that category is automatically permitted.
2. The maximum density stated in each case is subject to State density bonus laws. These laws allow a 35 percent increase in the number of permitted units for projects meeting specific criteria with respect to the inclusion of affordable housing units.
3. Pursuant to state law, accessory dwelling units may not be counted as a dwelling unit when calculating the number of units permitted on a property under the General Plan.
4. Other compatible uses, such as schools, child care centers, parks, and religious facilities, may also locate in areas with residential designations, subject to a Floor Area Ratio limit of 1.0. Use permit requirements may apply, and such projects must be consistent with General Plan policies.

Hillside Resource Residential (Maximum 0.5 units per net acre)

This designation is intended for privately owned land, typically with geologic or seismic constraints that limit development potential. Such areas are often located on steep hillsides that are visually significant and have been identified as having very limited potential through prior development proposals. Hillside Resource Residential Areas include single family homes on very large lots, as well as undeveloped properties. The density standard is applied on a site-by-site basis (e.g., a 10-acre parcel has a maximum potential of five units); however, this potential may be clustered at a greater density on one part of the property to maximize open space preservation.

Hillside Residential (0.5 to 2.2 units per net acre)

Hillside Residential areas are residential neighborhoods characterized by moderate to steep slopes, with lots that are generally larger than 20,000 square feet in area. These areas may have geologic and seismic constraints, local visual significance, and access constraints that limit their suitability for development at greater densities. Many of these areas are in unincorporated Marin County, within the San Rafael sphere of influence. Examples include the Country Club and Los Ranchitos neighborhoods.

Very Low Density Residential (0.5 to 2.2 units per net acre)

These areas are similar in density to Hillside Residential areas but are on flat or gently sloping terrain. Lots are generally larger than 20,000 square feet and are developed with single family detached homes. Subdivision potential is limited. Land with this designation is concentrated in the Dominican area and Peacock Gap.

Low Density Residential (2.2 to 8.7 units/net acre)

This designation permits detached single family homes and is characterized by lots of 5,000 to 20,000 square feet. This is the predominant residential land use category in San Rafael and includes most of the city's single family neighborhoods. Multiple zoning districts apply within Low Density Residential areas, distinguishing areas with different minimum lot sizes.

Medium Density Residential (8.7 to 21.8 units/net acre)

This designation applies to patio home and small lot subdivisions, townhomes, mobile home parks, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, attached units in planned developments, and areas characterized by a mix of single family homes and small multi-unit buildings. A variety of lot sizes may be present, but overall net densities may not exceed one unit per 2,000 square feet of lot area (21.8 units/acre). Many areas with this designation possess the qualities of single family neighborhoods, including landscaped yards, off-street parking, and low building heights.

High Density Residential (21.8 to 43.6 units/net acre)

This is the highest density category that applies in residential areas. Densities above this range are permitted in the Downtown Mixed Use area only. The designation applies to multi-family residential areas and includes a mix of housing types, including apartments, flats, condominiums, and townhomes. A variety of lot sizes may be present but overall net densities may not exceed one unit per 1,000 square feet of lot area (43.6 units per acre). On larger parcels with this designation, amenities such as swimming pools, community rooms, and common open space are often included.

MIXED USE CATEGORIES

There are five mixed use categories on the map. Each category allows a mix of residential and non-residential uses. Residential uses in these areas may be subject to specific requirements or findings related to compatibility with adjacent commercial uses and the City's desire to sustain retail, service, office, and similar economically-productive and revenue-generating uses in the future. Different zoning districts may be used in each category to differentiate the intensity or mix of activities allowed in a given area. The most intense zoning district deemed consistent with a given category is not automatically permitted.

As in residential areas, projects incorporating affordable housing are subject to a State density bonus allowance of up to 35 percent. Where density is regulated by Floor Area Ratio (FAR), an FAR bonus of up to 35 percent applies to projects incorporating affordable housing.¹ As prescribed by the Downtown Precise Plan, other projects providing community benefits also may be eligible for FAR and height bonuses. Other compatible uses, such as schools, child care centers, parks, and religious facilities, may locate in each designation, subject to specific requirements codified through zoning.

The allowable intensity of development is determined by density and floor area ratio (FAR) maximums. The FAR maximums exclude structured parking and other non-habitable floor area (unfinished basements, etc.) associated with the building.

Downtown San Rafael (Maximum FAR 2.0)

This category corresponds to properties in Downtown San Rafael. It includes the highest development densities and intensities in the city, and contains a mix of housing, office, retail, service, and public land uses. Development in this area is guided by the Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan, which identifies a series of Downtown subareas, each with its own set of development standards and land use guidelines. The maximum FAR of 2.0 applies only where shown in the Downtown Precise Plan; lower FAR limits apply on most parcels within the Precise Plan boundaries. In addition, some of the zoning districts within the Downtown Mixed Use designation (characterized by existing residential uses) may be subject to maximum density standards rather than FAR standards. Properties with this designation may also be subject to *minimum* FAR and density requirements, to ensure that land is used efficiently and that the City's housing and economic development goals may be achieved.

¹ On a parcel where the maximum FAR of 2.0 is permitted, the 35% density bonus for affordable housing would translate to an allowable FAR of 2.7. A density requirement would not apply, so the number of potential units would depend on unit size. A one-acre parcel developed at an FAR of 2.7 could accommodate 117,612 square feet of floor space. At 800 square feet per unit, this would be 147 units. At 1,500 square feet per unit, this would be 78 units. Height limits would still apply, with bonus height available as prescribed by the General Plan.

Community Commercial Mixed Use (21.8-43.6 units/net acre; maximum FAR 0.3)

This category corresponds to general retail and service uses, restaurants, automobile sales and service uses, hotels/ motels. Offices are also permitted, subject to General Plan policies regarding priority uses in specific areas. Housing is also permitted, ideally as an ancillary use to commercial uses and other activities generating sales tax, jobs, and local service opportunities. Residential development is subject to a maximum net density of 43.6 units per acre, as well as General Plan policies that may further guide the use of key opportunity sites or corridors. The FAR limit of 0.3 applies to non-residential uses only, and excludes square footage associated with housing in mixed use projects. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figures # and # (Floor Area Ratio maps). Areas with this designation include the Northgate Town Center, Merrydale Road, and portions of Francisco Boulevard East and West.

Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use (8.7 to 24.2 units/net acre; maximum FAR 0.32)

This category corresponds to neighborhood-serving retail and service uses such as pharmacies, supermarkets, and dry cleaners. Residential and ancillary office uses are allowed, subject to policies in the General Plan and zoning standards establishing the conditions for non-retail and service uses. A maximum net density of 24.2 units per acre applies to projects that include residential uses. The FAR limit of 0.32 applies to non-residential uses only, and excludes square footage associated with housing in mixed use projects. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figures # and # (Floor Area Ratio maps). Areas with this designation include small neighborhood shopping centers such as the Terra Linda Shopping Center (Scotty's Market) and Andy's Market at Loch Lomond Marina.

Office Mixed Use (21.8-43.6 units/net acre; maximum FAR 0.40)

This category corresponds to areas where office is the prevailing use but where other uses also may be present. Predominant uses include general offices, medical and professional offices, and administrative or headquarters offices. Different zoning districts have been developed to reflect the specific combinations of uses that are present or desired in each area. These include office-residential areas and office-retail areas, as well as a general office district. Residential uses are allowed in all of these areas, subject to specific zoning standards and permitting requirements as well as policies in the General Plan. A maximum net density of 43.6 units per acre applies to projects that include residential uses. The non-residential portion of such properties is subject to an FAR limit of 0.4. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figures # and # (Floor Area Ratio maps).

Marine Related Mixed Use (8.7 to 21.8 units/net acre; maximum FAR 0.32)

This category includes water dependent businesses such as boat building; boat repair, sales and service uses; and boat charter services. Other uses that draw people to the waterfront are allowed, including shopping centers, restaurants, hotels/ motels; retail and parks. Residential use and non-marine related office is allowed on the second floor and above. Where residential uses are included, they are subject to a maximum density of 21.8 units per net acre. The non-residential area on any given site is subject to a

FAR limit of 0.32. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figures # and # (Floor Area Ratio maps).

PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND REPAIR (PDR) CATEGORIES

There are two PDR categories on the General Plan Map. These were referred to as “industrial” areas in prior General Plans. In today’s economy, they are associated with many diverse uses, including offices, technology, auto sales and repair, warehousing, manufacturing, artisan production and creative space, construction, and services. Residential uses are generally not permitted in these areas, so a density standard is not included. Where consistent with General Plan policies and zoning regulations, a limited amount of live-work or work-live uses may be acceptable in these areas; in such cases, these activities are subject to FAR standards rather than density standards.

General Production, Distribution, and Repair (Maximum FAR 0.33)

This is the broader of the two PDR categories, allowing for larger-scale uses and activities. These areas play an essential role in the Marin County economy, create local jobs, and provide a high volume of tax revenue for San Rafael. General PDR areas include activities such as manufacturing, storage and warehouse facilities, motor vehicle service and repair, contractor uses and yards, wholesalers, sand and gravel plants, solid waste management and recycling facilities, and trucking yards or terminals. Uses that are incidental or ancillary to these activities also may occur, including offices related to the primary use and employee-serving retail uses. Given the potentially impactful nature of these uses, buffering and screening may be required to enhance public rights of way and ensure land use compatibility. A maximum FAR of 0.33 applies, although lower limits may apply on some parcels as indicated on Figures # and # (Floor Area Ratio maps).

Limited Production, Distribution, Repair, and Office (Maximum FAR 0.38)

Like the General PDR areas, the Limited PDR and Office areas are characterized by a variety of activities that are essential to the local and countywide economies. However, the range of industrial and heavy commercial uses is more limited than in General Industrial areas, reflecting the design of these areas as business parks or their proximity to more sensitive uses such as housing. Emission of noise, fumes, smoke, and other forms of pollution is strictly limited. Typical uses may include repair and servicing, “maker” activities (woodworking and carpentry shops, creative businesses, etc.), research and development, e-commerce activities, light manufacturing, and tech-related activities and facilities. Innovation-based businesses and other activities that align with the City’s economic development goals are particularly encouraged. On sites larger than 10 acres with this designation, and in buildings of 50,000 square feet or greater, region-serving specialty retail uses (including “big box” type uses) may be appropriate. Other specialty retail uses may be allowed to occupy minor portions of the Innovation / Office districts provided that intensity and traffic standards are met and the integrity of the district is not

threatened. Innovation / Office districts are subject to a maximum FAR of 0.38, although lower limits may apply on some parcels as indicated on Figures # and # (Floor Area Ratio maps).

PUBLIC, OPEN SPACE, AND MISCELLANEOUS CATEGORIES

Public/ Quasi Public (Maximum FAR 1.0)

This designation denotes public schools, libraries, post offices, large churches, public hospitals, and institutional facilities such as Dominican University and Marin Academy. It also is applied to major utility properties, waste facilities, and public facilities such as the Marin County Civic Center. The maximum FAR is 1.0, although this level of intensity is not appropriate in all instances. Additionally, exemptions from development standards may be granted if findings are made that a higher FAR is necessary for public health or safety purposes. While housing is not envisioned on land with this designation, it may be acceptable in circumstances prescribed by the General Plan or zoning regulations. In such instances, net densities may not exceed 43.6 units per acre.

Mineral Resources (Maximum FAR 0.02)

This designation applies to quarry and brick yard uses which utilize mineral resources of regional significance. It applies only to the San Rafael Rock Quarry and McNear Brick and Block properties on the San Pedro Peninsula. Future activities on these lands are subject to further policy guidance as provided by the General Plan. Any future development on this site that is unrelated to mineral resource management and extraction activities shall require a General Plan Amendment.

Parks and Recreation

This designation denotes land which is used for active recreational purposes, including neighborhood and community parks and recreational amenities at County and state-operated park facilities (such as the McInnis Park Golf Center and China Camp picnic areas). Permitted uses include athletic fields and sports facilities, civic buildings with a primarily recreational or social function, and leisure-oriented uses such as picnic areas, boat slips, and tot lots.

Conservation

This designation is used on land in private ownership that will remain largely undeveloped in the future due to high environmental sensitivity, exceptional visual resource value, or hazards such as wildfire, slope instability, and flooding. The primary objective in areas with this designation is to manage and restore natural resources, and to minimize environmental hazards and associated threats to life and property. Where appropriate, activities such as grazing, recreation, and food production also may be considered. A limited amount of development potential may exist on such properties, subject to site-specific policies and direction provided by the General Plan.

Open Space

This designation applies to land owned by public agencies and/or non-profit entities that is managed as permanent open space for recreation, resource management, agriculture, watershed protection, and hazard reduction. It includes lands owned and managed by the Marin Open Space District, the State of California, and the City of San Rafael, as well as cemeteries and land owned by other special districts. It is distinguished from the “Parks and Recreation” category by the passive nature of the activities it supports and its higher environmental sensitivity, and from the “Conservation” category by public ownership of the land and absence of development potential.

Airport/Recreation

This designation applies to the San Rafael Airport. Land uses are governed by a covenant agreed to by the City, Marin County, and the property owner. The agreement recognizes the unique and valuable recreational and environmental characteristics of the airport site and identifies a limited range of uses including airport and ancillary airport services, light industry, utilities, and private and public recreation.

Water

This designation applies to the navigable waters of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, the San Rafael Canal, and associated marinas along the San Rafael shoreline. The designation provides an opportunity for a limited number of water dependent uses which require water access as a central element of their function and which contribute to the maritime character of the area.

OVERLAY CATEGORIES

Sea Level Rise Area of Concern ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■

This designation is used in tandem with the land use categories listed above. It identifies the outer edge of the area that has the long-term potential to be impacted by sea level rise, based on data from County, State, and Federal sources. Properties between this boundary and the shoreline may be subject to additional development standards and policies to minimize the long-term potential for flooding and associated life and property risks. Future adaptation studies may result in additional requirements for properties within this boundary, as well as modifications to the boundary itself.