

REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Parks and Recreation Element Policies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff has prepared Draft Parks and Recreation policies for the 2040 General Plan. The policies incorporate feedback from City staff and the General Plan Steering Committee, as well as an “audit” of the policies in the prior (2020) General Plan. The new Parks and Recreation Element is somewhat shorter and more generalized than the existing plan, while covering several topics not addressed by the 2020 Plan. Detailed planning for the City’s park system is presumed to occur through a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that will be prepared after the General Plan is adopted.

The proposed 2040 policies are included in this staff report. Attachment A compares the 2040 policies with the 2020 policies in two side-by-side columns, with a third column provided for Steering Committee comments.

REPORT

Background

Parks and Recreation is considered an “optional” element of the General Plan. However, the City has had a Parks and Recreation Element in its Plan for the last four decades, recognizing the importance of parks to the quality of life in the City. The Element addresses the need for parkland, recreational facilities, park maintenance and operations support, and recreation programming.

General Plan 2000 (adopted in 1988) included a brief set of high-level policies on parks and recreation. These policies were significantly expanded in General Plan 2020 (adopted in 2004), with specific improvement recommendations for each park. The proposed 2040 Draft policies return to a higher-level set of policies, without recommendations for individual parks. The 2040 Plan calls for the City to prepare a Parks Master Plan following adoption of the General Plan. The Parks Master Plan will include a detailed assessment of existing facilities, an analysis and survey of local recreational needs, and site-by-site recommendations for each park, as well as recommendations for systemwide improvements. The Master Plan will also include recommendations for maintenance, operations, programming, funding, and partnerships with other service providers. The 2040 General Plan provides foundational policies on these topics but does not include prescriptive details.

Several Steering Committee members submitted written comments on the Parks and Recreation policy audit provided in Spring 2019. These comments were incorporated in revisions to existing policies. Staff also considered guidance from the State Office of Planning and Research, as well as input from the Community Services Director, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the general public. A “best practices” review of about a dozen recent general plans was conducted to review how other California cities handled parks and recreation issues in their plans, and what topics were typically addressed in the general plan vs a parks master plan. City staff also completed an “Existing Conditions Report” on parks and recreation, which includes a current inventory of parkland and recreational facilities in the city.

Policies

The proposed Parks and Recreation Element goals, policies, and programs are included on the following pages. There are two goals: the first addresses parks, while the second addresses recreational operations and programming. A summary of the policies is presented below:

Park Goal

- Policy 1.1 establishes a classification system for parks, much as the 2020 Plan did. It also calls for a Parks Master Plan.
- Policy 1.2 establishes a park per capita acreage standard of 4.5 acres per 1,000 residents, which is based on the existing ratio as of 2020. This is an increase over the current standard of 3 acres per 1,000. This policy calls for continued collection of park impact fees for new development, with an exemption for rental housing.
- Policy 1.3 calls for a more even distribution of parks, recognizing that some neighborhoods are not as well served as others. The Element does not identify specific sites for new parks, but does suggest that parks be strongly considered on the open space portions of school sites, in the event any schools are closed in the future.
- Policy 1.4 addresses park design.
- Policy 1.5 addresses the image of the park system, including consistent, attractive signage and branding.
- Policy 1.6 addresses park improvements. Whereas the 2020 Plan included a long list of improvements desired in each park, the 2040 Plan presumes this will be determined through a Parks Master Plan.
- Policy 1.7 recommends all-weather field design.
- Policy 1.8 encourages linear parks and trails along features such as creeks and the shoreline.
- Policy 1.9 addresses the role of passive open space in the park system.
- Policy 1.10 recognizes the link between parks and historic preservation, including the preservation of historic homes and buildings as recreational and cultural facilities.
- Policy 1.11 addresses urban parks and plazas.
- Policy 1.12 calls for joint use agreements with the Schools to facilitate public access to school facilities when school is not in session.
- Policy 1.13 addresses the incorporation of recreational facilities in development projects, including rooftop open space.

- Policy 1.14 supports commercial recreation enterprises that complement public facilities (swim clubs, tennis clubs, marinas, etc.).
- Policy 1.15 calls for a high level of park maintenance.
- Policy 1.16 addresses the funding of park improvement and maintenance.
- Policy 1.17 addresses sustainability and the role of parks in the City's greenhouse gas reduction and climate adaptation efforts.

Recreation Goal

- Policy 2.1 calls for a diverse range of programs to meet the recreational needs of San Rafael residents.
- Policy 2.2 ensures that recreational programs evolve in response to demographics, recreation trends, and user preferences.
- Policy 2.3 recommends coordinated programming between the City and other recreation service providers to avoid redundancy.
- Policy 2.4 supports the continued delivery of child care and services for older adults through the City's community centers and schools.
- Policy 2.5 recognizes the link between recreation and community health and wellness.
- Policy 2.6 addresses partnerships with local artists, fitness and sports advocates, and creative professionals in delivering recreation services.
- Policy 2.7 supports community events.
- Policy 2.8 carries forward language on community gardens.
- Policy 2.9 addresses environmental education and programming.
- Policy 2.10 recognizes the role of community centers in resiliency planning and community support.

SAN RAFAEL GENERAL PLAN 2040

DRAFT PARKS AND RECREATION ELEMENT POLICIES

GOAL PROS-1: PARKS FOR ALL

Sustain high quality parks that meet the recreational needs of all those who live and work in San Rafael. San Rafael recognizes the essential nature of parks and recreation to its residents. Parks support health and wellness, protect the environment, add beauty to San Rafael neighborhoods, and are integral to life in the city. They should be maintained for all to enjoy.

Policy PROS-1.1: Park Classification

Maintain a system of community, neighborhood, pocket, and special use parks. These parks should be complemented by larger region-serving parks and open spaces, and by school recreation areas.

Program PROS-1.1A: Parks Master Plan. Prepare a Parks Master Plan, including citywide recommendations for park management, operations, facility development, and recreation service delivery, as well as recommendations for each City-owned park.

Program PROS 1.1B: Capital Improvement Program. Use the Capital Improvement Program to identify funding sources and timing of parks and recreation capital projects.

Policy PROS-1.2: Per Capita Acreage Standard

Maintain a standard of 4.5 acres of active park and recreation land per 1,000 residents.

Program PROS-1.2A: Municipal Code Amendment. Modify Chapter 15.09 of the Municipal Code to establish a parkland dedication requirement of 4.5 acres per 1,000, which will help the City sustain its current ratio.

Program PROS-1.2B: Park In Lieu Fees. Periodically adjust park in-lieu fees to reflect the cost of land and facilities. To reduce further increases in housing costs, maintain the park in-lieu fee exemption and dedication requirement for rental housing.

Policy PROS 1.3: Distribution of Parks

Strive for a balanced distribution of neighborhood and community parks across the city. When planning new parks, a priority should be placed on areas which are more than a 15-minute walk from the nearest park, or where park needs are unusually high due to higher housing densities and social and economic conditions.

Program PROS-1.3A: New Parks. Develop additional parks in areas with unmet needs and in areas experiencing growth. Opportunities to create new parks within new development and on underutilized public land should be pursued.

Program PROS-1.3B: Parks on Former School Sites. Work with San Rafael City Schools and the Miller Creek School District to identify ways to acquire on-site recreational facilities in the event that school properties are closed, leased, or offered for sale.

Program PROS-1.3C: Adaptation Projects. Incorporate shoreline access and new recreational amenities in sea level rise adaptation projects where feasible.

See the Land Use Element for policies about density on former school sites.

PROS 1.4 Park Design

Design parks so that they are comfortable, attractive, inviting spaces. Park design should balance recreation, environmental, safety, and aesthetic considerations while avoiding conflicts with surrounding neighborhoods.

Program PROS 1.4A: Park Plan Review. Work with qualified landscape architects, the Design Review Board, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Planning Commission when preparing and reviewing park master plans and designing park improvements. Park projects should receive a level of design review similar to that required for private recreational facilities.

Program PROS 1.4B: Community Engagement. Engage the community in park planning and facility development. To ensure balance, comments should be solicited from non-advocates as well as advocates, including groups and individuals who would be affected by such improvements.

Policy PROS-1.5: Park Image

Create a positive image of the City's park system.

Program PROS-1.5A: Branding and Signage. Develop and implement consistent branding, signage, and wayfinding programs for San Rafael's parks that identify park properties and help the public locate parks and navigate around them. Park signage should be attractive, durable, and contribute to civic pride and identity.

Policy PROS-1.6: Park Improvements

Regularly upgrade and modernize San Rafael's parks to meet the recreational needs of the community and replace aging or deficient facilities.

Program PROS-1.6A: Needs Assessment. Conduct a needs assessment as part of a Parks Master Plan. Recreational facility needs should be periodically reevaluated in response to trends, demographics, and changing conditions.

Program PROS-1.6B Park Improvements. Prepare plans to improve neighborhood and community park facilities and seek funding to implement these plans.

Policy PROS-1.7: Field Design

Encourage athletic field design which maximizes versatility and the ability to use fields year-round.

Program PROS-1.7A: Field Improvements. Evaluate local athletic fields as part of a Parks Master Plan. Develop design and capital facility recommendations for fields based on the findings.

Policy PROS-1.8: Linear Parks and Trails

Encourage linear parks and trails along the Bay shoreline, the San Rafael Canal, local creeks, and transportation corridors such as the SMART right-of-way. Where feasible, spur trails should connect linear parks to nearby neighborhoods.

***Program PROS-1.8A: Trails Master Plan.** Pursue grant funding for a Trails Master Plan, including provisions to improve access and signage to park and open space areas from San Rafael neighborhoods. The Plan should incorporate the “greenway” improvements from the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, as well as plans for the Bay Trail, Canal walkway, North San Rafael promenade, and “water” trails for kayaks in San Francisco Bay.*

Policy PROS-1.9: Role of Open Space

Recognize San Rafael’s open space network as an essential component of the park system, including its potential to provide for hiking, picnicking, wildlife observation, environmental education, and enjoyment of nature. Passive recreational activities such as hiking and picnicking, should be encouraged in these areas where consistent with habitat protection and hazard reduction goals.

***Program PROS-1.9A: Coordination with Open Space Managers.** Work with the County of Marin/ Marin Open Space District and the State of California to encourage local use of their parks and open space areas within San Rafael. As needed, meet with County and State Park service providers to discuss issues of mutual interest, review plans and programs, and consider opportunities for joint projects and better connections between City, County, and State parks.*

Policy PROS 1.10: Historic Preservation and Parks

Incorporate important historic and cultural resources into the City park system, including historic homes and the grounds around them. The use of such spaces for cultural and recreational programming is strongly encouraged.

Policy PROS 1.11: Urban Parks and Plazas

Encourage the creation of small gathering places open to the public in Downtown San Rafael and other business districts, including plazas, green spaces, activated alleys, and similar features.

***Program PROS 1.11A: Design for All Users.** Engage social service providers, including organizations serving unsheltered residents, in the design and management of urban open space to safely accommodate all users and minimize conflicts in the use of such spaces.*

Policy PROS 1.12: Joint Use

Encourage formal agreements with the School Districts that allow for the joint development, maintenance and use of school facilities for recreational use when schools is not in session. Agreements should also address access to school parking lots for sporting events and other measures to minimize the impacts of joint use on nearby neighborhoods.

***Program PROS-1.12A: Joint Use Agreements.** Work with SRCS and MCSD to formalize joint use agreements for parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and other school facilities.*

Policy PROS 1.13: Recreational Facilities in Development Projects

Encourage the construction of on-site recreational facilities in multi-family, mixed use, and office projects to supplement the facilities available in City parks.

Program PROS-1.13A: Onsite Recreation Facilities. Continue to implement zoning regulations that require appropriate recreational facilities in new development.

Program PROS-1.13B: Rooftop Open Space. Encourage the development of rooftop open space in higher density residential, mixed use, and commercial projects. Such spaces should be designed to minimize the potential for noise, privacy, and light impacts on nearby properties.

Policy PROS 1.14: Commercial Recreation

Encourage private sector development of recreational facilities to serve community needs, such as commercial recreation and athletic field facilities, swim clubs, tennis clubs, marinas, and gyms and health clubs.

Program PROS-1.14A: Commercial Recreation. Consider amending the zoning ordinance to allow a floor area ratio exemption for on-site recreational facilities open to the public.

Policy PROS-1.15: Park Maintenance

Provide a high level of maintenance that allows San Rafael's parks to fully meet recreational needs and serve as valued community assets.

Program PROS-1.15A: Cost Considerations in New Projects. Consider maintenance and long-term operating costs when developing any new facility or modernizing an existing facility. Sustainable funding mechanisms for maintenance should be identified for every capital project.

Program PROS-1.15B: Park Stewardship. Consider "adopt a park" programs and other stewardship initiatives that engage volunteers in park clean-up and maintenance.

Policy PROS 1.16: Funding

Pursue diverse funding sources for park improvement and maintenance.

Program PROS-1.16A: Park Funding Strategy. Seek new and ongoing sources of funds for park development and maintenance, including grants, foundations, bonds, taxes and assessment districts, impact fees, contributions from "Friends" organizations, renewal of Measure A, private donations and land dedications, public/private joint ventures, the Capital Improvement Program, and all other available means.

Program PROS-1.16B: Partnerships. Encourage partnerships with neighborhood organizations and residents in projects to improve existing parks.

Program PROS-1.16C: Naming Rights and Gifts in Place. Explore opportunities to generate revenue through naming rights, sponsorships, and gifts-in-place.

Program PROS-1.6D: Sale, Lease, or Contractual Agreements. *In the event City-owned park or open space land is sold or leased in the future, require that the proceeds are appropriately used to support park improvements, maintenance, or operating costs.*

Policy PROS-1.17 Sustainable Park Operations

Encourage sustainable park management and operations that enhances the role of parks as green infrastructure and part of the City's climate resilience strategy.

Program PROS-1.17A: Sustainable Design. *Incorporate sustainability principles such as reduced water and energy, use of recycled and non-toxic materials, stormwater capture, and carbon sequestration, in the design of park facilities and grounds. Parks should also support the City's wildfire prevention and sea level rise adaptation strategies, and be designed to maximize their accessibility by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.*

Program PROS-1.17B: Climate Adaptation. *Address potential design changes to local parks in the City's sea level rise and climate adaptation strategies.*

See also Conservation Policy ### on integrated pest management

GOAL PROS-2: EXCELLENCE IN RECREATION PROGRAMMING

Provide accessible, affordable recreational programming that is responsive to public needs and promotes fitness, health, knowledge, cultural understanding, and personal growth.

Policy PROS-2.1: Meeting Diverse Needs. Ensure that recreational programs and facilities meet the needs of all San Rafael residents, particularly young children, youth, and older adults.

Program PROS-2.1A: Age-Specific Programs. *Provide facilities and programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of children, teens, and older adults, as well as those designed for intergenerational participants.*

Program PROS-2.1B: Cultural Competency. *Provide culturally competent programming that reflects the diversity of San Rafael's population.*

Policy PROS-2.2: Responding to Changing Community Needs. Continually adapt recreational programs to meet changing community needs and interests.

Program PROS-2.2A: Recreational Programs. *Monitor and evaluate participation in the City's recreational programs and use this information when developing new programs.*

Program PROS-2.2B: Surveys. *Conduct periodic surveys in English and Spanish to evaluate recreational needs in neighborhoods and the City as a whole.*

Policy PROS-2.3: Coordinated Programming

Work with local public schools, the County of Marin, sports leagues and athletic associations, community service organizations, and other agencies to provide complementary and mutually supportive programming. Joint ventures with other service providers should be encouraged.

Program PROS-2.3A: Summer Programs. Provide increased programming during periods when children are out of school, including summer youth programs at locations convenient to each neighborhood.

Policy PROS-2.4: Services for Young Children and Older Adults

Continue to provide child care and social services for older adults through the City’s parks, schools, and community centers.

Program PROS-2.4A: Operating Hours. Maintain operating hours that meet public needs and accommodate activities such as child care and after school care.

Policy PROS-2.5: Recreation and Health

Provide programs and activities that contribute to physical and mental health, personal growth, and the leisure time needs of San Rafael residents.

Policy PROS-2.6: Local Partners

Engage local artists, athletes, craftspeople, health and fitness workers, creative professionals, and others in the delivery of recreational classes and programs.

Program PROS-2.6A: User Fees. Recover a portion of recreational program costs through user fees, facility rentals, and other direct charges for public use. Provisions for reduced fees for low income and special needs patrons should be included.

Policy PROS-2.7: Community Events

Encourage special events, festivals, street fairs, and community programs that build civic unity and bring residents of different backgrounds together.

Policy PROS-2.8: Community Gardens

Continue to support and maintain community gardens and look for ways to sustain such gardens as food sources.

Policy PROS-2.9: Environmental Education

Pursue opportunities for environmental education in the parks, including classes and programs, interpretive trails and boardwalks, and plaques and markers that raise awareness of nature and climate change.

Policy PROS-2.10: Community Centers

Recognize the role of parks and community centers in supporting community resilience and emergency preparedness.

Program PROS-2.10A: Back-Up Power. Maintain back-up power sources at the City’s community centers so they remain operational during power outages. Community centers should serve as community gathering places in the event of an emergency or disaster.