



# LAND USE BACKGROUND REPORT

San Rafael General Plan 2040

## Abstract

This report summarizes land use conditions in San Rafael, California. It will be used to provide context and data in the San Rafael General Plan 2040 and its accompanying EIR

San Rafael Community Development Department

November 2019

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## Summary of Findings

The single largest category of land use in the San Rafael Planning Area is open space, representing 35% of the total land area. Another 10% of the Planning Area is agricultural. Residential uses comprise 26% of the Planning Area. Commercial and industrial uses together make up less than 5% and transportation rights-of-way and utilities make up 12%. The remaining 12% consists of various other uses, including public, institutional, and local park areas, among others. Approximately 43% of the Planning Area is unincorporated. Within the San Rafael city limits, open space comprises 26% of the area and residential uses comprise 31% of the area. There are more than 13,000 single family parcels in the City limits, representing most of the parcels in the Planning Area.

This report also evaluates the ratio of assessed improvement value to assessed land value on every parcel in the city ("I/L ratio"). A parcel with a low ratio is often indicative of "underutilization" as this suggests the value of the structure is relatively small compared to the value of the land beneath it. Underutilized sites have a higher likelihood of future reuse, particularly where they are commercially zoned. Based on the I/L analysis, such parcels are scattered across the city and are not concentrated in a single area. A majority of the parcels with low I/L ratios are single family homes, primarily because this is the most common land use in the city.

## Introduction

This report documents land use conditions in San Rafael, California. The report will be used as background information for the Land Use Element of the San Rafael 2040 General Plan, and as the basis for evaluating land use impacts in the General Plan EIR. The Land Use report describes the general arrangement and distribution of residential, commercial, industrial, public, open space, and other land uses in the city. It includes quantitative data on the acreage in various uses, the density and intensity of these uses, and parcel sizes and characteristics. The chapter also describes vacant and underutilized land in the City, and highlights projects in the City's development pipeline as of August 2019.<sup>1</sup>

## State and Regional Context

Located in the heart of the Bay Area, San Rafael is a highly desirable place to call home. The City is surrounded by major job centers and stunning natural beauty, while boasting a diverse economy with high quality education, open space, and cultural opportunities. To the west of San Rafael are iconic coastal destinations in Marin County like Point Reyes. San Francisco is located fewer than twenty miles

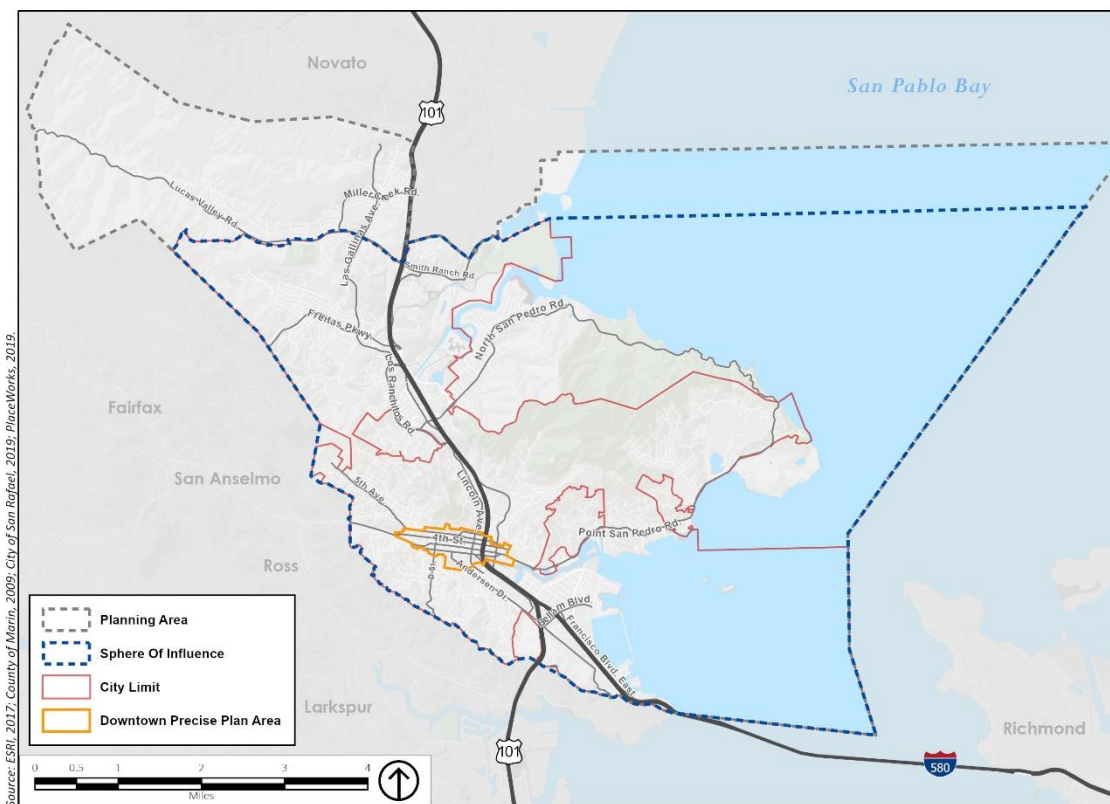
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<sup>1</sup> A more comprehensive assessment of residential development opportunities in San Rafael may be found in Appendix B-3: Sites Inventory and Capacity Analysis of the 2015-2023 Housing Element Background Report.

to the south, and California’s Wine Country begins just twenty miles north. To the East is the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, a major gateway providing trans-bay access to Contra Costa and Alameda Counties.

San Rafael’s population density within the City limits is 3,558 people per square mile or four people per acre. This is comparable to a number of other Bay Area cities, including Walnut Creek (3,553 persons per square mile) and Richmond (3,665 persons per square mile). San Rafael is somewhat less dense than Petaluma, Napa, and Santa Rosa (all have densities of about 4,300 persons per square mile) but denser than Novato (2,028 persons per square mile) and Mill Valley (3,003 persons per square mile).

The Figure below describes San Rafael’s administrative boundaries:



**Figure 1: Administrative Boundaries of San Rafael**

The Planning Area Boundary, shown in orange, is the area covered by the 2040 General Plan. As defined by state law, the Planning Area includes the city itself, plus unincorporated areas that may influence the city’s future. Properties within this boundary generally have a San Rafael mailing address, although a substantial portion of the area is outside the city limits. For example, the Planning Area includes the Marinwood/Lucas Valley area, which is unincorporated. The Planning Area contains a total of 34,550 acres, 44% of which is water (15,204 acres).

The Sphere of Influence, shown in blue, is a subset of the Planning Area. The sphere includes all land within the city limits, plus areas determined to be in the “probable physical boundaries and service area” of a local agency (in this case the City of San Rafael). Areas within a sphere of influence typically receive limited services from the city and may be considered for future annexation. At this time, there are no plans to annex areas in the San Rafael sphere. The sphere includes Santa Venetia, Los Ranchitos, Bayside Acres, Country Club, California Park, China Camp State Park, and the San Rafael Rock Quarry.

The San Rafael City Limits, shown with a red dashed line in Figure 1, contains 14,478<sup>2</sup> total acres total. Roughly a quarter of this area (3,775 acres or 26%) is water.

Table 1 summarizes acreage calculations for the Planning Area Boundary and for City Limits:

**Table 1: Land and Water Acreage: San Rafael (City) and Planning Area**

	<b>Planning Area (acres)</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>	<b>City Limits (acres)</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>
<b>Land Area</b>	19,345	56%	10,703	74%
<b>Water Area</b>	15,204	44%	3,775	26%
<b>Total Area</b>	34,549	100%	14,478	100.0%

*Source: San Rafael Community Development, 2019*

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<sup>2</sup> Due to ArcGIS rounding, this figure overestimates the total acreage within the San Rafael City Limit by 65 acres, which is measured officially at 14,412.8 acres (22.52 square miles).

## Existing Land Use Acreage Tabulation

Table 2 shows existing land use distribution in 2019. The same information is summarized graphically in Figure 2.

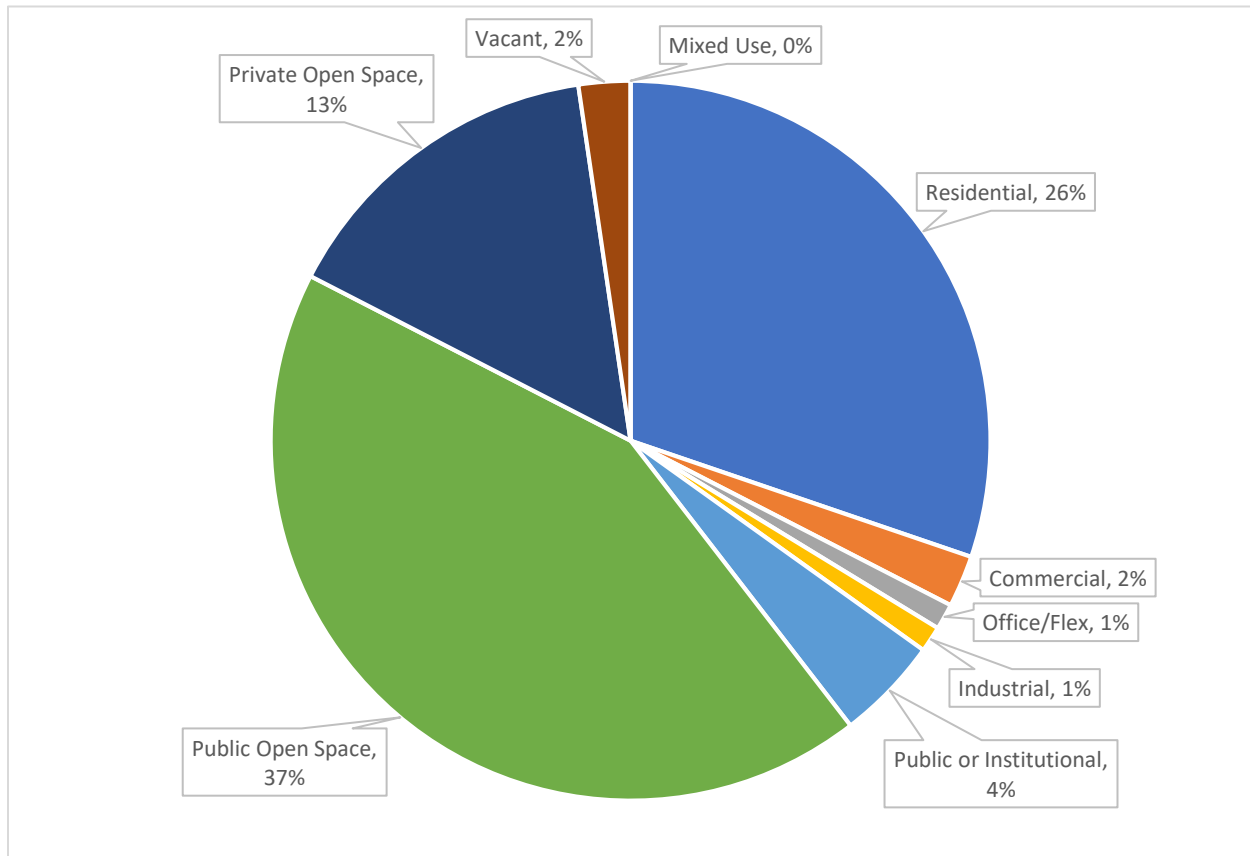


Figure 2: Percent of Acres in Planning Area by Land Use, 2019

**Table 2: Existing Land Use Acreage in San Rafael, 2019\***

<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Area within City Limits only</b>	<b>% of acres</b>	<b>Area within Planning Area Boundary</b>	<b>% of acres</b>
Hillside Residential	617	5.8%	1,299	6.7%
Single Family Detached Residential	2,101	19.6%	2,895	15.0%
Single Family Attached Residential	251	2.3%	322	1.7%
Mobile Homes	65	0.6%	65	0.3%
Multi-Family Residential	412	3.9%	437	2.3%
Office	180	1.7%	188	1.0%
Office/Flex	79	0.7%	79	0.4%
Vacant	291	2.7%	466	2.4%
General Commercial	374	3.5%	380	2.0%
Neighborhood Commercial	12	0.1%	16	0.08%
Downtown/Mixed Use	16	0.2%	17	0.09%
Marine-Related	57	0.5%	65	0.3%
Light Industrial	125	1.2%	125	0.6%
General Industrial	20	0.2%	20	0.1%
Public	329	3.1%	440	2.3%
Park	355	3.3%	379	2.0%
Mineral Resources	0	0.0%	316	1.6%
Agriculture/Rangeland	0	0.0%	1,888	9.8%
Golf Course/Cemetery	207	1.9%	207	1.1%
Planned Development Common Area	372	3.5%	407	2.1%
Public Open Space/Resource Conservation	2,875	26.9%	6,753	34.9%
Utility/Airport/Transportation	356	3.1%	623	3.2%
Institutional	210	2.0%	251	1.3%
Right of Way	1,418	12.9%	1,706	8.8%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,703</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>19,345</b>	<b>100%</b>

(\*) Excludes water

Source: San Rafael Community Development, 2019

## Overview of Land Use Pattern

San Rafael is the county seat and Marin’s most populous city. Although San Rafael can be characterized as primarily suburban and residential community, it is also a major regional commercial and employment center, meeting the County’s demand for industrial-commercial services like flooring, wholesale goods, and auto dealerships. It is also a major center of retail and entertainment uses, including commercial shops and restaurants like those lining 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Downtown and those at Northgate Mall.

Open space is the single largest land use in San Rafael. Single family housing is second in terms of total acreage and is the largest category in terms of developed land. When similar land uses are aggregated, open space continues to be the dominant category. The combined total of public open space, planned development common area, golf courses/cemeteries, agriculture, and parks is over 7,700 acres, representing 40% of the Planning Area. The combined total of hillside residential, single family attached and detached, mobile homes, and multi-family is just over 5,000 acres, or 26% of the Planning Area.

**Characteristics of San Rafael’s Residential Land Uses**

Single family detached homes are the largest category of developed land uses, with 2,894 acres (15% of total) and approximately 13,000 parcels in the Planning Area Boundary. Table 3 shows the distribution of lot sizes for single family residences (SFRs) in San Rafael, based on data available from the Marin County Tax Assessor:

**Table 3: Distribution of Lot Sizes for Single Family Detached Homes**

LOT SIZE	NUMBER OF LOTS	PERCENT OF TOTAL PARCELS	TOTAL LAND AREA (ACRES)	PERCENT OF TOTAL SFR ACREAGE
Smaller than 5,000 SF**	1,100	8%	97.0	3%
5,000-7,499 SF	3,756	29%	556.9	20%
7,500-9,999 SF	4,376	34%	848.0	29%
10,000-14,999 SF	2,481	19%	675.0	23%
15,000-19,999 SF	632	5%	245.4	8%
20,000-43,559 SF	529	4%	317.6	11%
Over 43,560 SF (1 acre or larger)	94	1%	154.4	5%
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>12,968</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,894.3</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: San Rafael Community Development, 2019

(\*) Excludes lots counted in Table 2 as “Hillside Residential.” Hillside Residential lots are often larger than one acre and are in hillside and unincorporated locations rather than in traditional subdivisions.

(\*\*) Roughly 56 small unbuildable slivers of property have been excluded from this count



The median single family lot size in the Planning Area is 8,007 square feet. In other words, half the single family lots in San Rafael are above this size and half are below. Nearly two-thirds of the single family parcels in the Planning Area are between 5,000 and 10,000 square feet. The data is typical of a suburban community and reflects the fact that most of San Rafael was subdivided in the 1950-1980 period. Neighborhoods like Terra Linda and Santa Margarita exemplify the development trends of this era, with thousands of similarly sized lots on curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs. San Rafael also includes a number of larger lot subdivisions, with about 5% of the single family homes (representing 16% of the residential area) on lots of 20,000 square feet or more. Table 3 excludes "Hillside Residential" areas, many of which are primarily comprised of lots larger than 20,000 square feet.

Single family homes in San Rafael are distributed throughout the entire City, except in the Southeast area. Multi-family residential and attached single family homes and "patio" style homes are predominant in the Southeast area, including the Canal neighborhood, Bahia Vista, Spinnaker Point and Baypoint Lagoon. On the edges of Downtown and in the Gerstle Park neighborhood, single family homes are integrated with multifamily structures, particularly smaller multi-unit buildings and flats. Much of this construction pre-dates World War II, before modern zoning rules were in place. Other mixed density neighborhoods include the West End, Sun Valley, Montecito, and Lincoln/ San Rafael Hill.

As Table 2 indicates, approximately 1,300 acres of the residential acreage in the Planning Area has been categorized as "Hillside Residential." Hillside Residential is also a zoning district and General Plan designation. It is applied mainly in the unincorporated areas to acknowledge residential areas that are semi-rural in character, often with narrow or steep streets, sloped lots, and a lack of curb and gutter. The Hillside Residential Overlay district is codified in Chapter 14.12 of the San Rafael Municipal Code, and was expressly created to "preserve or protect unique or special natural features of the site, such as landforms, rock outcroppings, mature trees and vegetation, drainage courses, hilltops and ridgelines," and to "minimize the removal of natural vegetation." For the purposes of the existing land use inventory, the "Hillside Residential" category includes most of these lots, as well as other areas in San Rafael that are developed at very low densities. Much of this acreage occurs in the Country Club, Bayside Acres, and Los Ranchitos Neighborhoods, but substantial Hillside Residential acreage is also present within the city in places like Fairhills, Southern Heights, and Peacock Gap.

There are 437 acres of multi-family development in the San Rafael Planning Area, including 425 acres within the city limits. This acreage supports roughly 9,000 housing units, resulting in an average density of about 20 units per acre. Larger multifamily complexes (20+ units) are concentrated in the Canal neighborhood, with a handful in North San Rafael (especially along Nova Albion and Merrydale). There are also a number of large "master planned" multi-family complexes in North San Rafael in the Smith Ranch area, near Northgate (Villa Marin), and south of the Northgate Business Park. Multi-family uses also occur in Gerstle Park, on the northern and western edges of Downtown, and in Downtown itself. Downtown housing includes some units integrated in mixed use structures with commercial uses at the front or on the ground floor.

Mobile homes are concentrated in two parks: the Contempo Mobile Home Park in North San Rafael and in the R.V. Park of San Rafael, located on Francisco Boulevard West in the southern part of the city.

### ***Characteristics of San Rafael's Commercial and Office Uses***

San Rafael contains almost 600 commercial parcels including those that are mixed use. These parcels constitute roughly 2% of the San Rafael Planning Area acreage and 3.5% of the land within the City limits. Most of San Rafael's general commercial properties are Downtown or in the Southeast part of the City flanking Highways 101 and 580. In the Downtown and West End area, general commercial structures are typically smaller-scale. The east end of Downtown contains the larger and more recently developed Montecito Plaza Shopping Center as well as nearby grocery stores and retail uses. The Southeast area of the City running along either side of Highways 101 and 580 contain larger footprint commercial uses like shopping plazas (including Marin Square) and big-box stores like Target and Home Depot. This area also contains a large number of auto dealerships.

The primary concentration of commercial uses in North San Rafael is around Northgate Mall, including the Mall and the Northgate One and Three shopping centers. There are also commercial uses along Redwood Highway (east side of Highway 101) and Merrydale (west of Highway 101) and in the Northgate Business Park.

San Rafael also contains roughly 16 acres of neighborhood commercial use, on 38 parcels. These are typically small grocery stores, shopping centers (such as the Terra Linda Center), or business clusters in otherwise residential neighborhoods that primarily serve residents within walking or short driving distance (such as Andy's Market in Loch Lomond and Sun Valley). There is also 65 acres of marine commercial land use in the Planning Area, mostly associated with marinas and boat yards along the San Rafael Canal.

Office and office-flex uses represent 1.4% of the Planning Area acreage and 2.3% of the acreage within the City limits. Office-flex is distinguished from Office in that it typically consists of one-story "tilt-up" type buildings that may also serve as light industrial, warehouse, or research and development space. Office buildings, by contrast, include corporate offices, banks, medical offices, real estate offices, and conventional office buildings with a variety of mostly local tenants (professional services, finance, legal, consulting, etc.).

### ***Characteristics of San Rafael's Industrial Uses***

Industrial uses constitute about 0.9% of San Rafael's Planning Area acreage and 1.3% of the land area within the city limits. The majority of San Rafael's industrial uses are light industrial, including auto-repair, warehouses, and wholesalers. Roughly 125 acres are devoted to light industrial uses, while general industrial uses, like lumber yards and manufacturing, constitute just 20 acres in the City. Both general and light industrial uses are concentrated in the Southeast portion of the City along Andersen

Drive, Francisco Boulevard East, and Kerner Boulevard. Light industrial uses also are present in the Northgate Business Park in North San Rafael.

### ***Characteristics of San Rafael's Park and Open Space Land Uses***

As noted earlier, open space/resource conservation (OS/RC) contains the largest acreage of any category in the San Rafael Planning Area. OS/RC-designated land is comprised mostly of hillsides with natural vegetation, including open space areas with public trails. There are more than 2,800 acres of OS/RC in the San Rafael City Limits, representing 26% of total land area. In the San Rafael Planning Area, there are 6,753 acres of OS/RC, representing 35% of total land area. A majority of the OS/RC acreage is in the unincorporated Planning Area, including China Camp State Park, and the Marin Open Space District lands north and west of Terra Linda. While OS/RC constitutes a relatively large portion of San Rafael's land area, it makes up comparatively fewer parcels, because open space parcels tend to be very large. Respectively, 190 parcels and 319 parcels are dedicated to OS/RC within the City Limits and the Planning Area (1.4% and 1.3% of total parcels within these boundaries).

The unincorporated Planning Area also includes almost 2,000 acres of agricultural land. This acreage differs from "open space" in that it is privately owned, but its character is similar to the OS/RC areas. Most of the agricultural acreage is in Lucas Valley, and consists of hillside grazing land. Agricultural acreage also has been identified on privately-owned land in the China Camp area east of Santa Venetia.

For the purposes of the land use inventory, the "parks" category refers to improved open space areas, including traditional community and neighborhood parks as well as the developed portion of County and State parks. These areas differ from OS/RC areas in that they include improvements like lawns, play structures, athletic fields, and tennis courts. San Rafael's parks include City-operated facilities like Pickleweed Park and Albert Park, County facilities such as McInnis Golf Course and McNears Beach, and State facilities like the China Camp camping and picnic areas. These areas constitute 3.2% of the land area within City Limits and 2% of the land area within the Planning Area.

### ***Character of San Rafael's Public and Institutional Land Uses***

Public uses constitute 3% of the land area within the City Limits, 2.3% of the land area within the Planning Area, and just 1.3% of all parcels in the Planning Area. Much of the acreage is associated with schools, including San Rafael and Terra Linda High Schools, Davidson and Miller Creek Middle Schools, and various elementary schools. Other public facilities include City Hall, libraries, post offices, fire stations, and the Public Works corporation yard. Since San Rafael is the County seat, there is also a substantial presence of County-owned land, including the Marin Civic Center, County Fairgrounds, and County offices along Los Gamos Road.

Institutional acreage represents 1.9% of the area within the City Limits and 1.3% of the Planning Area. This includes Dominican University, Marin Academy, the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, and various community-oriented uses such as the Jewish Community Center, the Elks Lodge, and religious facilities.

### ***Characteristics of San Rafael's Utility, Airport and Transportation Land Uses***

This land use category covers a wide range of uses, from electric substations and water tanks to large sanitation and wastewater treatment facilities. It also includes the San Rafael Airport and public parking lots. These uses constitute roughly 2% of San Rafael's land area, and 1.3% of its parcels. The largest concentration of these uses is along Andersen Drive, including a wastewater treatment plant, solid waste recycling center and transfer station, PG&E service center, and GGBTD bus yard. Another large area of utility uses is located at the east end of Smith Ranch Road, north of McInnis Park in the unincorporated area.

Right-of-Way (e.g. streets and roadways) are counted separately in Table 2. They constitute roughly 13% of the area within the City Limits, and 9% of land area within the San Rafael Planning Area. When open space is eliminated from the total, rights-of-way represent 20 percent of the urbanized land area in San Rafael. This provides a useful benchmark when differentiating between gross acreage, which includes streets, and net acreage, which excludes streets.

### ***Characteristics of San Rafael's Vacant Land***

San Rafael's vacant land may be broadly divided into two categories: developable acreage and minimally developable acreage. The former includes vacant sites which clearly have the capacity to support new development. The latter include vacant sites with severe development constraints, such as steep slopes, landslide potential, flooding, and high fire hazards. This includes undeveloped hillside parcels adjacent to China Camp State Park and various public open space lands; although zoning typically would allow a single home to be built on such sites, the potential for subdivision is very limited.

There are 273 parcels categorized as vacant in the land use inventory. These parcels represent 2.6% of the acreage within the City Limits and 2.4% of the acreage in the Planning Area.

## **Development Potential**

Development potential in San Rafael exists on both vacant and non-vacant land. Since less than 3% of San Rafael's land is vacant (much of which some is non-developable), most of the City's future development will likely take place on sites that are not currently categorized as vacant. Of non-vacant parcels, properties most likely to redevelop are referred to as "underutilized" because they are developed below the intensity allowed by their zoning designation, and/or have marginal structures or improvements that are worth much less than the land they occupy. Underutilized sites may also include unused portions of large, otherwise developed parcels that could be subdivided to create new developable parcels.

The subsections below describe several key development opportunity sites. For a detailed comprehensive inventory of all development capacity in San Rafael, see [Appendix B-3: Sites Inventory and Capacity Analysis](#) in the 2015-2023 Housing Element Background Report.

### ***Downtown SMART Station Environs***

Downtown San Rafael has been the focus of much of the City’s planning activity over the last 25 years. More recently, the construction of SMART Rail has catalyzed several projects and created new opportunities. The confluence of other transit services (including Golden Gate Transit, Marin Transit, Airporter, and paratransit), as well as auto, pedestrian, and bicycle access, makes this area the crossroads of San Rafael and a logical location for new transit-oriented development.

The SMART extension to Larkspur is necessitating the relocation of the Bettini Transit Center. Three relocation sites are under consideration within a three-block area, including a site between 4<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue under the Highway 101 viaduct. Relocation of the Transit Center will create a development opportunity on the vacated site on Hetherton between Second and Third Streets.

West of the SMART station, the former Salude restaurant site (now a parking lot) presents an opportunity for redevelopment. East of the station, a two-story Citibank branch bank presents another opportunity. North of the station, parcels include a mix of small vacant lots and older one and two-story commercial structures, most of which are developed well below the heights and intensities permitted by zoning. Other opportunity sites in this vicinity include a recently approved 120-unit apartment development at 703 Third Street (Seagate), and the Whistlestop building, which will be vacated following construction of a multi-use senior complex a few blocks away (see next page). Adaptive reuse of this building for retail, civic, or other activities could be considered.

Additional opportunities are available on blocks further away from the station. The Downtown Station Area Plan (adopted in 2012) envisioned additional development on properties within one-half mile of the station. This area is coterminous with a “Priority Development Area” (PDA), a regional designation that acknowledges the potential of this area for future housing and employment growth. The PDA designation is tied to funding eligibility for a wide range of multi-modal transportation improvements.

Several projects are pending in this area, including an assisted living facility at Lincoln and Mission and a 44-unit development at 3<sup>rd</sup> and B Streets. A mixed use (residential and retail) project is also being contemplated at 1001 Fourth Street, the site of a former department store. A PDA Assessment Study completed by ABAG/MTC in 2015 identified the capacity for as many as 2,800 new units in the 500-acre PDA area. Additional capacity exists along 4<sup>th</sup> Street in the West End Village, which is beyond the PDA boundary.

Other recommendations of the Station Area Plan include:

- *Expanding the 4<sup>th</sup> Street retail core to the areas east and southeast of the station*

- *Creating new high quality outdoor public spaces*
- *Encouraging new mixed use development with green building standards*
- *Incentives to encourage housing development such as height and density bonuses for affordable housing, reduction of parking requirements, and more flexible zoning*
- *Updating the City's historic resources inventory, and preserving key buildings to provide a stronger sense of place and connection to San Rafael's past*

***BioMarin/WhistleStop:***

BioMarin is a pharmaceutical company that currently owns the 15-acre San Rafael Corporate Center campus along 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Lindero Street, and Andersen Drive. The company acquired a 3-acre former PG&E substation near the Corporate Center, where it is planning to construct two four-story office and research/lab buildings totaling 207,000 square feet. Roughly 15,000 square feet of the site is being donated to Whistlestop, a nearby non-profit organization serving seniors. This portion of the site will feature a six story building with 66 low-income senior housing units (plus one unit for the building manager) and an “active aging center” on the first two floors, with recreational programming, physical therapy and other health services. The active aging center will replace the current Whistlestop location adjacent to the SMART train station.

***Civic Center SMART Station environs***

The Civic Center SMART station is one of two rail transit stations in San Rafael. Although most properties near the station are already developed or publicly owned, some have the capacity for additional development. A station area planning process took place in 2011-2013, including specific recommendations for land use and transportation improvements. The station area had been designated as a Priority Development Area (PDA) but this designation was rescinded by the City Council in 2013.

The Station Area Plan envisions small-scale changes that are limited in scope, rather than large-scale redevelopment of this area. It emphasizes that single family homes should remain unimpacted by new development, and that new development should be consistent with existing character and scale. It also recognizes that many uses near the station, such as Mt. Olivet Cemetery and the Guide Dogs for the Blind Campus, are unlikely to redevelop. The Plan emphasizes protection of viewsheds, creeks, and wetlands in the area.

One of the areas with development potential is Merrydale Road, immediately southwest of the station site. A 44-unit townhome project has been proposed on a 2.5-acre site at 350 Merrydale Road. An 89-unit senior living development has been approved a block away at 3773 Redwood Highway. Additional opportunities exist on other older commercial sites in this area, west of Highway 101. Development potential on the east side of Highway 101 is more limited, particularly since the Marin Farmers Market has secured funding to remain on a site that was previously considered for housing.

### ***Northgate Mall***

Northgate Mall has been the gateway to Terra Linda and the major commercial hub of North San Rafael since the mid-1960s. The Mall initially had an open air design and was enclosed in 1987 as part of a major renovation. It is bordered on the north and east by other retail shopping centers, including Northgate One and Northgate Three. The Northgate Mall site is approximately 45 acres, while Northgate One and Three are roughly 10 acres each. The Mall has a General Plan and zoning designation of General Commercial. Residential uses are allowed in this category with a use permit. The site is subject to a non-residential floor area ratio (FAR) requirement of 0.32, although the existing buildings have a FAR of 0.40.

From an economic perspective, the Mall is an underutilized site. The assessed value of the land is 63 percent higher than the assessed value of the improvements on the property. Several of the major department stores were shuttered in the early 2000s, although these spaces have been re-tenanted. A proposal to replace the former Sears store with a two-level Costco is currently under consideration by the City.

The 2020 General Plan envisioned the gradual transformation of the Mall into a Town Center, including public space, amenities (such as a promenade), and new housing to complement the retail space. The 2040 Plan Update provides an opportunity to confirm whether this mix of uses still reflects the community's vision.

### ***Los Gamos Corridor***

Los Gamos Road extends from Lucas Valley Road southward along the west side of US Highway 101. Through-traffic to Freitas Parkway is not permitted. Several large office buildings are located along the east side of Los Gamos. One of these buildings—1650 Los Gamos—is being converted from general office to medical offices, including a new parking garage. Privately owned property on the west side of Los Gamos includes a 10-acre privately owned parcel near the south end of the street. The average slope on this site is 35 percent. Due to access and slope limitations, the site has a General Plan designation of Hillside Residential and a zoning designation of PD-Hillside Overlay, which allows roughly five units on the property. The property owner has prepared concept plans showing a higher density housing product, which would require a General Plan Amendment. A formal application for the site has not been submitted.

### ***Canalways***

Canalways is an approximately 85-acre privately-owned site, adjoined by a roughly 23-acre City-owned ponding area. A few developable properties abut the site, including parcels along Windward Way to the northwest. The Canalways site is zoned PD-WO (Planned Development-Wetland Overlay) and has a split General Plan designation. Roughly 10-15 acres are designated Light Industrial Office and the remainder of the site is designated Conservation. General Plan 2020 calls for dedication of a Kerner Boulevard

extension through the site, connecting the current “dead ends” east of Bellam Boulevard and west of Shoreline Parkway.

Canalways has a number of site constraints that have inhibited its development. Most of the site is only a few feet above sea level. The extent and quality of wetlands on the property has not been comprehensively documented in more than 30 years. Updated field data is needed to evaluate biological resources and hydrology on the site. This will inform future decisions about developable acreage and the mitigation measures that would be required if and when development occurs.

### ***Marin Square***

The Marin Square site includes a community shopping center and several adjacent light industrial parcels along Gary Place. The site is approximately 11.3 acres. The shopping center was a drive-in movie theater prior to its development as a shopping center in the 1970s. It is currently anchored by Ross and Payless shoes, complemented by smaller tenants. A large number of storefronts are vacant. Assessed land value on this property is more than 10 times the assessed value of the improvements.

General Plan 2020 envisioned the redevelopment of this property with mixed uses, including housing over ground floor retail, and potentially a hotel. At one time, the site was considered for a potential medical campus. More recently, the site was purchased by a commercial developer who intends to update the existing buildings and bring in new commercial tenants. There are also plans to redevelop some of the light industrial buildings into smaller commercial/retail uses. Longer term plans for the rear portion of the site are still undefined.

### ***Rock Quarry***

The San Rafael Rock Quarry encompasses 295 acres at the eastern end of the San Pedro Peninsula. The quarry is unincorporated and is currently governed by the County of Marin. Annexation to the City of San Rafael would be required for any reuse that includes significant development. The Quarry has a pending application to Marin County to extend operation through 2044. A General Plan Amendment would be required in the event of the owner/operator closes the quarry and pursues a new use prior to that year. Traffic impacts on San Pedro Road are a critical consideration, as this is the only means of road access to the site. Other important considerations include impacts on adjacent single family residential uses, sea level rise forecasts, and compatibility with nearby recreational uses, such as McNears Beach.

### ***Scattered Infill***

As mentioned previously, there are 273 parcels categorized as “vacant” in San Rafael, although many are Hillside Residential parcels with limited potential. As shown in Table 3, there are also at least 3,684 single family residential parcels that are over 10,000 square feet. Some of these parcels are in zoning districts where lot splits could occur, and a few are large enough to support multiple new parcels.



In 2019, City Staff used Marin County Tax Assessor data to map the ratio of improvement value (the value of buildings and other infrastructure) over land value for every parcel in San Rafael (“I/L ratio”). This ratio provides an indicator of redevelopment potential: the more valuable the land relative to the improvements, the more likely the parcel is to redevelop. Parcels with an I/L ratio of less than one are the most likely to redevelop. Results of this mapping exercise indicate that sites with this characteristic are scattered throughout the City. No specific area of San Rafael has a concentration of parcels with low improvement/land value ratios. Table 4 summarizes the I/L ratio for all parcels in the Planning Area.

**Table 4: I/L Ratio for Parcels in San Rafael Planning Area**

IMPROVEMENT/LAND RATIO	NUMBER OF LOTS	PERCENT OF TOTAL PARCELS
Null Ratio(*)	898	4.7%
0	901	4.7%
0.01 to 0.24	191	1.0%
0.25 to 0.49	1,326	6.9%
0.50 to 0.74	3,551	18.5%
0.75 to 1.49	5,812	30.2%
1.50 to 4.99	6,188	32.2%
5.0 to 9.99	312	1.6%
>10.0	51	0.3%
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>19,230</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: San Rafael Community Development, 2019

(\*) No land value provided by assessor; typically connotes public property.

The median improvement/land value ratio is 1.1, with a maximum of 41.5. Parcels with null I/L ratios are those where a land value is not provided by the assessor. These 898 parcels are comprised mostly of parks and open space, any publicly owned land (like the Marin Civic Center and City Hall), public parking lots, transportation rights-of-ways (like SMART), and utilities. Contempo Mobile Home park is also included in this category.

Approximately 901 parcels in San Rafael’s Planning Area have an improvement value/land value ratio of zero, which usually indicates vacant land, parking lots, or private open space. Approximately 1,517 parcels have an improvement/land value ratio greater than zero and less than 0.5, and 9,223 parcels, (or 48%) have a ratio of less than 1 (including those with zero values and those with null values). Many of

these are owner-occupied single family residences, which are less likely to re-develop than properties with other uses, like commercial or industrial properties (whose primary purpose is to generate value). Figures 4A-D at the end of this chapter illustrate I/L ratio in various subareas of San Rafael.

The greatest potential for new development within established single family neighborhoods is likely through the addition of second “Accessory Dwelling Units” or ADUs. The most recent Housing Element, adopted in January 2015, notes that of the 74 secondary dwelling units that have been approved during the prior 14 years, the overwhelming majority have been studio or one-bedroom units, and that half of them are affordable to very low and low income households. Encouraging second units has thus been identified as a promising avenue by which to increase the production of low and very low-income units particularly for households of one or two people.

In addition to encouraging additional units on single family lots, the City has identified several policies to encourage housing development through scattered infill, like zoning for mixed uses (H-14c) and actively evaluating the feasibility of air-rights development above uses like public surface parking lots or commercial uses downtown (H-14D).

#### *Summary of Upcoming Housing Development*

Table 5 summarizes housing development pipeline projects as of August 2019.

**Table 5: Housing Development Pipeline Projects as of August 2019**

<b>Project Area</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Housing Units</b>	<b>Status</b>
190 Mill Street	Emergency shelter plus 32 residential units	32	Under review
The Village at Loch Lomond Marina	Mix of single family, townhouses, and condominiums	81	Under construction
1628 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	Residential apartments	8	Approved
900 Mission Street	Aegis assisted living and memory care	88	Approved
21 G Street	Residential townhomes	8	Under construction
809 B Street	Residential apartments	41	Approved
1001 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	Potential mixed use project	N/A	Under consideration
999 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street	Senior low-income apartments	67	Under review
703-723 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street	Residential apartments	120	Approved
Northgate Walk at Four Points Sheraton	Condominiums on an underutilized portion of an active hotel	136	Approved
3833 Redwood Highway/350 Merrydale Road.	Market rate townhouses plus 20% BMR and 18 ADUs	44	Under review
Oakmont: 3773 Redwood Highway	Senior assisted living and memory care	89	Under construction
Fair Drive/Coleman Drive	Single family residences-recorded lots	25	Under construction
Daphne Property Development in Marinwood (unincorporated)	Single family residences	28	Approved
Venture Senior Living (unincorporated)	Independent and assisted senior housing plus 5 affordable employee units	131	Approved
<b>Total</b>		<b>898</b>	

## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Improvement/Land Value Ratio Maps**