

# North San Rafael Neighborhoods

## Overview

North San Rafael includes neighborhoods on the west and east sides of US 101 north of Puerto Suello Hill. The area has a distinct character, history, and natural setting, creating a strong sense of local identity. North San Rafael includes the Las Gallinas Valley, a once tranquil rural area that was transformed at the end of World War II when Highway 101 became an interstate highway. Starting in the early 1950s, the pasture lands of the former Freitas family ranch were developed with suburban homes, shopping centers, churches, schools, and offices. As the area matured, apartments, condominiums, townhomes, and senior living developments made use of the remaining developable space.

In 2018, North San Rafael had a population of 30,200 residents. Of this total, 18,000 lived within the San Rafael City limits and 12,200 lived in the unincorporated San Rafael Planning Area. The unincorporated population includes roughly 7,000 residents in Marinwood-Lucas Valley, 4,800 residents in Santa Venetia, and 400 residents in Los Ranchitos. North San Rafael represents 40 percent of the San Rafael Planning Area's population and nearly half of its land area. It is the largest of the five sub-areas addressed in the Neighborhoods Element.

The area includes the Gallinas Creek watershed and most of the Miller Creek watershed. Elevation ranges from sea level along San Pablo Bay to nearly 1,900 feet at Big Rock Ridge, the highest point in the San Rafael Planning Area. Much of the area is protected open space as a result of bond measures approved by San Rafael voters in the early 1970s.

The community is renowned for its natural environment, thriving businesses, excellent schools, and mix of housing, including more than 1,700 modernist homes in Terra Linda, Lucas Valley, and Marinwood built by Joseph Eichler. While single family homes are predominant, 40 percent of the housing units in North San Rafael are multi-family or attached. Seventy percent of North San Rafael's housing units were built between 1940 and 1979. Most of the area was unincorporated at the time of its initial development and was annexed by San Rafael in the 1960s and early 1970s. Substantial areas remain unincorporated today and are within County Service Areas and various independent special districts.

North San Rafael contains several of the City's largest employers. Northgate Mall initially opened in the mid-1960s and continues to be the largest regional shopping center in Marin County. It forms the hub of a commercial district that includes smaller shopping centers, office buildings, hospitality uses, and services. The Marin County Civic Center—an internationally renowned architectural landmark as well as the seat of County government—is situated east of US 101 within this area.

The area also includes Northgate Industrial Park and a number of smaller business parks and commercial areas along Redwood Highway and Los Gamos Drive. There are also several small neighborhood shopping centers, medical and health care facilities, corporate offices, and schools. The area provides numerous recreational opportunities, including the Terra Linda Community Center and pool, the Marin YMCA, local parks and playgrounds, and a network of hiking and multi-use trails on hillside open space.

The Neighborhoods Element provides policy and program guidance for the following subareas within the City limits:

- North San Rafael Town Center (Northgate)
- Terra Linda (including Santa Margarita)
- Mont Marin/San Rafael Park
- Rafael Meadows/ Merrydale
- Northgate Business Park/ Los Gamos

- Civic Center
- Smith Ranch

These neighborhoods and business districts are interconnected. They share watersheds, road and transit networks, schools, economic activities, and recreational facilities. But each has a unique identity that merits special consideration in the General Plan.

At the end of this section, more generalized guidance is provided for three unincorporated subareas:

- Los Ranchitos
- Lucas Valley/ Marinwood
- Santa Venetia

Prior plans for North San Rafael include a community-driven “Vision” plan prepared in 1997. The Vision included a statement of community values; a vision statement (see text box); a series of concepts, goals, and actions; and an implementation strategy. The plan is built around concepts related to environmental protection, transportation, business vitality, new housing opportunities, improved community services, and beautification.

Among the important recommendations of this Plan was creation of a “North San Rafael Promenade” from the Terra Linda Recreation Center to the Civic Center, a concept that was further refined through a community planning effort in 2002. Several segments of the promenade have been completed, including a half-mile Class I bike lane along Las Gallinas Avenue between Northgate Drive and the south end of the Mall. The North San Rafael Vision also reimagined the Northgate commercial district as a “town center,” including design improvements and complementary uses such as offices and housing. Although the Vision Plan was prepared more than two decades ago, it continues to resonate as a statement of community values, issues, and aspirations. It should provide the starting point for an updated plan focused on those areas of North San Rafael with the greatest potential for change in the future.

In 2013, the City finalized and adopted a Station Area Plan for the Civic Center SMART station area (see text box on page 12). The focus of the Plan is on improving connections between the station and surrounding neighborhoods and business districts. Recommendations from the Station Area Plan are incorporated in the General Plan.

#### **Policy NSR-1: North San Rafael**

Maintain North San Rafael’s character as an attractive, suburban community with a strong sense of community identity and easy access to well-managed open space and parks, convenient shopping and services, and excellent schools. The City is committed to protecting and restoring North San Rafael’s natural environment, investing in transportation improvements that make it easier to get around, creating new gathering places and activity centers, sustaining business vitality, and creating new housing options that respond to community needs. Plans for North San Rafael should recognize that this is a distinct and unique part of San Rafael. Standards for density, design, traffic, and parking should be tailored to reflect local context. North San Rafael residents should have a voice at the citywide level and be directly involved in shaping decisions about the future of their community.



### ***Vision for North San Rafael***

The Vision Statement below was crafted in 1997 through a community-driven planning process. It remains a relevant and timely expression of local values and aspirations. Additional planning is needed to reflect today's economic, environmental and transportation challenges and determine how this vision can be realized.

*We are a balanced, vital and evolving community with a diverse population.*

*Our entire community is beautiful and well-maintained, with excellent, well-integrated architecture, abundant landscaping, and tree-lined streets. As we come home to our clean and friendly neighborhood, we pass through attractive, distinctive gateways. Getting around our community and out to surrounding areas is easy—whether by foot, bicycle, bus, rail or car.*

*Our business community continues to be healthy and innovative, supporting entrepreneurship. We are known for economic stability with a full range of employment opportunities. Various vibrant centers provide opportunities for us to meet, interact and reaffirm our sense of community. We enjoy gathering together at local shopping areas, restaurants, cultural attractions and plazas.*

*We offer a variety of housing options for our diverse and changing population. Our concern for residents of all ages is expressed in excellent schools, libraries, youth activities, senior services, entertainment, recreational and cultural opportunities.*

*We gracefully adapt to changing needs of residents and businesses while respecting our environment and quality of life. Neighborhoods and businesses work together. Through cooperation, we create a community everyone loves.*

## **NORTH SAN RAFAEL TOWN CENTER**

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The North San Rafael Town Center includes Northgate Mall, the Northgate One and Northgate Three shopping centers, and the commercial and institutional properties along Freitas Parkway, Las Gallinas Avenue, and Los Ranchitos Road. The area is developed with retail, service, automotive, and office uses but includes other uses including Mount Olivet Cemetery and the headquarters campus of Guide Dogs for the Blind. The north fork of Gallinas Creek flows along the northern edge of this area.

Primary access to the Town Center is via the Freitas Parkway interchange from US 101. The Merrydale Overcrossing and Freitas Parkway provide pedestrian, vehicle, and bike connections to the east side of 101, while a multi-use bike path along the SMART tracks and Los Ranchitos Road provides a connection to Downtown San Rafael. The Civic Center SMART station is located at the southeast corner of this area.

The Town Center is anchored by Northgate Mall, a 731,000 square foot regional shopping mall on a 44-acre site. For more than 55 years, the Mall has filled a unique retail niche in Marin County, complementing Downtown San Rafael and its neighborhood shopping centers and providing a location for community events and gatherings. In the 1980s, the Mall underwent several renovations, enclosing the central plaza and adding a theater complex and segment of the North San Rafael Promenade. Another major renovation took place in 2008.

Recent expansion of on-line shopping, competition from other centers, and changes in consumer preferences have led to declining vitality and the loss of several major tenants. The vision of Northgate as a community hub and gathering place is still widely embraced, but there are divergent views on what this ultimately means and how it should be achieved.

The Town Center has been the focus of several planning studies. In 1997, the North San Rafael Vision described it as a place where the values and history of the community would be expressed and supported, community identity would be strengthened, and neighborhood cohesion would be fostered. The area was envisioned as a gathering place with public art, a variety of unique shops, many places to eat, and a number of entertainment options. Northgate was described as a walkable destination that would change, expand, and evolve to become the heart of North San Rafael. It would feature a town square and a pedestrian-oriented environment.

The policies below carry forward still-relevant elements of the 1997 vision. It is anticipated that some (or all) of these policies may be amended or replaced following completion of a detailed plan for the Town Center area to be completed in the coming years. The plan must take a hard look at the outlook for retail and office uses in the coming decades, the need for housing (particularly affordable housing), changing modes and patterns of transportation, issues related to climate change and natural hazards, opportunities to restore creeks and natural systems, and the implications of the recent public health emergency on the design of public and private space. Continued community dialogue on these issues should guide decision-making as a new plan takes shape.

### **Policy NSR-2: North San Rafael Town Center**

Strengthen the role of the North San Rafael Town Center as an attractive, thriving heart for the North San Rafael community: a centerpiece of commerce and activity with diverse activities for persons of all ages. This should include revitalizing Northgate Mall and surrounding business areas by encouraging:

- a) A distinctive commercial niche consistent with the area's characteristics
- b) A variety of high-quality stores and services to foster local patronage
- c) Upgrading of anchor and specialty stores, including an additional high-quality retail anchor if needed for economic vitality, consistent with traffic circulation standards
- d) Nightlife activities, such as a late-night restaurant or coffee shops that harmonize with existing activities
- e) Expanding the Mall, including improving the mix of activities and upgrading the appearance of the buildings and landscaping

- f) Additional outdoor public places that support public gatherings
- g) Continued community services, including an expanded public library
- h) Completion of the North San Rafael Promenade through the site
- i) Allowing the addition of housing, including maximizing the potential for affordable housing.

The scale of any improvements or expansion should be compatible with the surrounding community and should not exceed infrastructure capacity. Promenade improvements described in the *North San Rafael Promenade Conceptual Plan (2002)* should be included in any substantial rehabilitation or expansion of the Mall.

**Program NSR-2A: North San Rafael Town Center Plan.** Pursue funding to prepare a more detailed plan for the North San Rafael Town Center area (such as a precise plan or a specific plan), including Northgate Mall and commercial properties in the vicinity. The plan should include a community-driven process that fully engages property owners, business owners, community residents, and government agencies. It should update the 1997 vision and identify strategies to strengthen the Town Center as a community gathering place, while recognizing market conditions, retail and office trends, housing needs, and transportation and infrastructure capacity.

See also Policy LU-3.1A on the need for an area plan

**Program NSR-2B: Outdoor Gathering Places.** Include outdoor public places that support community activities and entertainment such as a public plaza for periodic arts and cultural events, outdoor cafes with music, restaurants with sidewalk or patio dining, children’s play areas, and other uses that provide outdoor seating. Design of retail spaces should be flexible enough to support these types of activities in the future.

**Program NSR-2C: Incentives.** Provide development incentives to attract desired uses to the Town Center, including retail, office, housing, and community services. Allow a height bonus of two stories (24 feet) for affordable housing. Percentage targets for housing affordability should be set during the Town Center planning process.

**Program NSR-2D: Farmers Market.** Consider a partnership with the Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM) to bring the Farmers Market to the Town Center as a permanent feature.

**Policy NSR-3: Design Excellence**

Encourage harmonious and aesthetically pleasing design for new and existing development in the Town Center area, including upgrading of landscaping, signage, and building design, as well as improved maintenance. Uses on the perimeter of the area should “step down” in height and intensity along edges where the Town Center adjoins lower-density residential uses.

**Program NSR-3A. Pedestrian-Friendly Design.** Provide design guidance through the Town Center planning process. One of the objectives of this process should be to give the area a stronger pedestrian feel and improve its walkability, including landscaped walkways and improved connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods.

**Policy NSR-4: Transportation Safety and Accessibility**

Improve access and bicycle/pedestrian connections between Northgate One, the Mall at Northgate, Northgate Three, and the Civic Center SMART station.

**Program NSR-4A: Promenade and Other Improvements.** Use the development review and capital improvement program process to complete the North San Rafael Promenade through the Town Center. Considerations include:

- a) *Routing of the Promenade to include safer crossings from the Civic Center and along Freitas Parkway. Consistent with the 2013 Station Area Plan, this also includes long-term improvements along Merrydale (on the east side of Mt. Olivet Cemetery) and through the Northgate III site in the event that site is redeveloped.*
- b) *Implementing Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2018) improvements through the Town Center area, including increased availability of bicycle racks*
- c) *Increasing public transit to and from the Town Center and making it safer and easier to access bus stops. This includes possible shuttle service to Civic Center station.*
- d) *Implementing traffic calming on parking lot access roads, and redesigning traffic flow to minimize conflict between vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians*
- e) *Designing any new parking structures to provide safe pedestrian access and reduced traffic conflicts.*

**Program NSR-4B: Improved Entrance to the Mall.** *Support redesign of intersections along Las Gallinas, Northgate Drive, Del Presidio, and Merrydale to improve traffic flow and improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Support realignment of driveways along Las Gallinas to form safer intersections and pedestrian crossings.*

## **TERRA LINDA**

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Terra Linda extends west and northwest from the Northgate Town Center. It is one of the larger neighborhoods in San Rafael and is developed primarily with single family homes. Condominiums and apartments are located at the end of Freitas Parkway, along Los Gamos Road, above Northgate Drive, and along Nova Albion Way. Architectural styles vary throughout the neighborhood, but most homes are single-story Eichler, Kenney, Alliance, or ranch-style homes built in the 1950s and 1960s. Several senior residential and assisted living facilities are located in Terra Linda, including Villa Marin, Maria B Freitas, Golden Home, Nazareth House, and Alma Via. There are also a number of churches, child care facilities, and group homes in the community.

Two public schools – Vallecito Elementary and Terra Linda High School – are located in the area, as is the headquarters of the Miller Creek School District and the Terra Linda Community Garden. The area also includes two private schools—St. Isabella and Mark Day. The Kaiser San Rafael Medical Center, Marin Health Surgery Center, and Terra Linda Shopping Center are also located in the neighborhood. The area includes the Terra Linda Recreation Center and Pool, Freitas Park, Oleander Park, Santa Margarita Park, and Hoffman Field, as well as small green spaces along Freitas Parkway. The Terra Linda/ Sleepy Hollow Open Space preserve flanks the western edge of the neighborhood, providing a community separator between San Rafael, San Anselmo, and Lucas Valley.

Terra Linda is traversed by the north branch of Gallinas Creek, which is channelized in the center of Freitas Parkway east of Del Ganado Road. A northern tributary to the creek is likewise channelized in the median of Del Ganado from Freitas Parkway to just west of Las Ovejas Avenue. Plans to restore Gallinas Creek have been developed, with the goal of creating a more attractive and natural appearance. This improvement will create a real, visible, and beneficial linkage between upstream ridges, the Town Center, and the marshes and baylands on the eastern edge of North San Rafael. Funding for Gallinas Creek restoration is needed and should be a priority (see also Program C-1.9C). Together with the North San Rafael Promenade, creek restoration would create a neighborhood amenity that would help decrease car traffic, enhance the environment, and proactively address global climate change.

Freitas Parkway provides the primary access to Terra Linda, with most traffic to and from the neighborhood passing through the Northgate/Town Center area. Other major neighborhood thoroughfares include Las Gallinas Avenue/ Los Ranchitos Road and Northgate Drive. A number of bus lines serve the area, providing access to the Mall, the Civic Center SMART station, and Downtown San Rafael. Bike lanes, sidewalks, and linear green spaces along Freitas Parkway comprise a segment of the

North San Rafael Promenade, but the ultimate vision of a continuous green space from the Recreation Center to the Civic Center has yet to be realized.

Terra Linda is mostly built out, with limited opportunities for new development. There is growing appreciation of the neighborhood's 900 Eichler homes as a cultural resource to be cherished today and in the future. Likewise, the neighborhood has 200 modernist Alliance homes built in the mid-1950s. Some of the neighborhood's older commercial properties, such as the Terra Linda Shopping Center, are in need of revitalization and could be potentially be augmented with housing or other complementary uses. The neighborhood has a growing population of older adults, increasing needs related to the Terra Linda Community Center, and ongoing issues related to access and congestion, especially along Freitas Parkway and in the Town Center vicinity.

The policies below are intended to guide future planning and development activities:

**Policy NSR-5: Eichler and Alliance Homes.**

Preserve the design character of Eichler and Alliance homes.

***Program NSR-5A: Eichler-Alliance Overlay.** Continue to enforce provisions of the Eichler-Alliance Overlay District, including height limits and design review requirements for most roof modifications. Consider preparation of design guidelines to preserve the characteristic features of Eichler Homes.*

**Policy NSR-6: Terra Linda Shopping Center**

Encourage improvements to Terra Linda Shopping Center. Incorporate improvements for the North San Rafael Promenade into shopping center upgrade.

***Program NSR-6A: Shopping Center Improvements.** Work with the property owners, tenants, and neighborhood residents to achieve the following objectives:*

- a) Retention of popular local businesses, such as Scotty's Market*
- b) A pedestrian-oriented plaza with shade trees, outdoor seating, and outdoor dining*
- c) Coordinated, refreshed entry signage at Freitas and Del Ganado*
- d) A limited amount of housing, including smaller and affordable units that would provide opportunities for seniors and local employees while not intruding on the surrounding lower density neighborhood.*

**Policy NSR-7: Terra Linda Community Improvements**

Invest in upgraded community facilities in Terra Linda, including places for youth, families, and older adults to gather and explore their interests.

***Program NSR-7A: Community Improvements.** Consider the following improvements in the Terra Linda area:*

- a) Modernization of the Terra Linda Community Center to meet current and future needs*
- b) Additional recreation facilities for youth, such as a teen center or skate park*
- c) Upgraded pocket parks along Freitas Parkway (Arbor, Munson, and Hillview)*
- d) Retention of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, including improvements to address traffic and parking*
- e) Implementation of North San Rafael Promenade improvements, especially between the Community Center and Freitas Parkway.*

*See also Policy NSR-2 on the Northgate Branch Library*

**Policy NSR-7: Community Beautification and Environmental Restoration**

Continue efforts to beautify Terra Linda and restore its natural environment.

**Program NSR-7A: Beautification and Restoration Projects.** Pursue the following beautification and restoration projects in Terra Linda:

- a) Undergrounding of utilities along Freitas Parkway
- b) Additional landscaping and street trees
- c) Improvements to the Santa Margarita Creek in the Del Ganado Road median, including tree planting to lower water temperatures and protect water quality
- d) Restoration of Las Gallinas Creek in the Freitas Parkway median
- e) Daylighting of creeks and drainageways in other locations where feasible.

*Creek restoration projects should be designed to stabilize creek beds, improve riparian habitat and water quality, maintain storm drainage capabilities, and avoid flooding. Opportunities to combine creek restoration, utility, and promenade projects for funding purposes are strongly encouraged, and may make projects more competitive in the grant application process.*

### **MONT MARIN/SAN RAFAEL PARK**

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Mont Marin/San Rafael Park is a suburban neighborhood of approximately 550 homes located between Terra Linda and Marinwood. The neighborhood consists almost entirely of single family residential uses and was developed during the mid-1960s and 1970s. Most of the homes are owner-occupied. Topography is rolling to hilly, and many of the homes feature picturesque views and sloped yards. The neighborhood enjoys easy access to public open space and trails, including Jerry Russom Memorial Park along its western boundary. A significant open space ridge forms the eastern boundary of the neighborhood.

Mont Marin/ San Rafael Park is essentially built out, with little change expected. The neighborhood continues to be a prime location for families with young children and those who value the proximity to open space, Highway 101, and nearby shopping. While the neighborhood lacks a defining public facility or “center,” it is anticipated that Mont Marin San Rafael Park will continue to establish its identity as a desirable and tight-knit community over the next 20 years.

### **RAFAEL MEADOWS/ MERRYDALE**

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Rafael Meadows is a predominantly residential area located southeast of the North San Rafael Town Center. The heart of the community is a single family neighborhood comprised of about 200 homes built in the early 1950s, bounded by the SMART tracks on the west and north and Merrydale Road on the east. Just south of the Meadows is Redwood Village, a newer 133-home community built on a former PG&E storage site. Redwood Village includes 3-acre Los Ranchitos Park, with a walking path, restrooms, and picnic areas. Merrydale Road and Redwood Highway form the eastern edge of the neighborhood, providing a buffer between the lower density areas and the 101 Freeway. These two streets run parallel to Highway 101 and includes a mix of apartments, condominiums senior housing, restaurants, a small grocery store, self-storage facilities, and various small businesses.

With the opening of SMART in 2017, the Rafael Meadows area is now walking distance from the Civic Center station. Pedestrian and bicycle access is provided via a new multi-use path that runs along the SMART tracks, including a non-vehicular crossing at Walter Place. The path also serves Redwood Village and the unincorporated Los Ranchitos area to the southwest.

The presence of SMART creates an opportunity for a limited amount of transit-oriented development adjacent to the station, particularly along Merrydale Road. A 48-unit townhome development was recently approved near the station and an 89-unit assisted living facility is under construction. Other opportunity sites have been identified, including self-storage facilities adjacent to the station. Densities and heights in



this area must be compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhoods and should recognize the suburban context.

Residents of the Rafael Meadows and Redwood Village neighborhoods are concerned about increasing traffic associated with development along Merrydale and elsewhere near the North San Rafael Town Center. Both neighborhoods enjoy low traffic volumes and safe walking and cycling conditions on their local streets. Because Merrydale and Redwood Highway are effectively “dead ends,” there are limited ingress and egress points for emergency vehicles. There is also a need to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the station area, and to provide a vehicle “turn-around” for passenger pick-up and drop-off at the ends of Merrydale.

**Policy NSR-8: Neighborhood Character**

Strengthen Rafael Meadows and Redwood Village as attractive low to moderate density neighborhoods. Improve connectivity between these neighborhoods and nearby amenities, such as the Civic Center SMART station, the Marin Civic Center, and the North San Rafael Town Center, particularly for local pedestrians and cyclists.

**Policy NSR-9: Merrydale Area**

Encourage attractive, productive land uses along Merrydale Road and Redwood Highway, including housing, commercial, and office uses near the Civic Center SMART station. Any development in this area should have a cohesive and positive impact on North San Rafael, maintain local quality of life, and be compatible with adjacent lower density residential uses.

***Program NSR-9A: Station Area Plan Implementation.** Consider additional development opportunities along Merrydale Road consistent with the land use recommendations of the Civic Center Station Area Plan (2012). Existing height limits should be maintained at currently allowed levels. Any project in this vicinity should reflect traffic capacity and emergency vehicle access constraints and be compatible with neighborhood character.*

***Program NSR-9B: Pedestrian and Bicycle Access to the Station.** Develop an ADA compatible path on the south side of the SMART rail line to connect Merrydale Road with Civic Center Drive (east of 101). Implement other access and circulation recommendations as called for by the Civic Center Station Area Plan (2013) to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the station and nearby destinations, including a safe pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the tracks between the north and south segments of Merrydale.*

***Program NSR-9C: Merrydale / Southbound 101 Signalization.** Consistent with the Station Area Plan, pursue signalization of the Southbound 101 on and off ramps at Merrydale.*

**NORTHGATE BUSINESS PARK / LOS GAMOS**

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Northgate Business Park/Los Gamos includes the business and industrial park area generally located east of Highway 101 from the Merrydale overcrossing north to Smith Ranch Road. It also includes the area along Los Gamos Drive west of 101 from Lucas Valley Road south to the road barrier. This is primarily an employment district, although there are residential areas accessed from Professional Center Parkway in the hills east of Redwood Highway. The North Fork of Gallinas Creek crosses this area, transitioning to a tidal wetland on its eastern edge.

In 2015, there were approximately 5,800 persons employed in this area, making it one of the largest and most important business districts in San Rafael. The area along Redwood Highway and adjacent streets such as Mitchell Boulevard and Paul Drive include a mix of office and industrial uses, providing spaces suited to small businesses, distributors and light manufacturers, contractors and building suppliers, start-up companies, and others. The area includes projects like The Vineyard, a 130,000 square office

condominium complex on the site of the former Fairchild Semiconductor site. A number of parcels in this area are underutilized, creating opportunities for new employment uses, and in some instances housing.

The area along Los Gamos Road includes the County Emergency Operations Facility (including the Sherriff's Office), the Marin YMCA, and a recently approved medical office conversion. A residential project is under consideration on a vacant, privately-owned 11-acre hillside parcel at the south end of Los Gamos Drive. A prominent open space ridgeline provides a natural separator between this area and the Mont Marin/ San Rafael Park neighborhood to the west.

**Policy NSR-10: Northgate Business Park**

Protect and maintain existing industrial uses and industrial sites that are important to San Rafael's economy and needed for the convenience of its residents and businesses. Allow uses such as delis and copy shops that serve businesses and employees in the area.

***Program NSR-10A: Zoning.** Ensure that zoning for the Northgate Business/Industrial Park area protects the viability of industrial uses while adapting to new uses and trends in production, distribution, repair, and sales. Parcels with "Office" zoning along Redwood Highway may be considered for other uses, including live-work and multi-family housing, provided these uses are compatible with adjacent activities.*

***Program NSR-10B: Access to Civic Center Station.** Improve access to the Civic Center SMART station from this area, potentially including shuttle service along Redwood Highway as recommended by the 2013 Station Area Plan.*

**Policy NSR-11: Redwood Highway Improvements**

Upgrade and unify the architecture, signage, and landscaping along Redwood Highway between Freitas Parkway and Smith Ranch Road.

***Program NSR-11A: Design and Landscaping.** Upgrade building design and landscaping through new construction and remodeling projects, particularly along Redwood Highway. Evaluate the design of projects, including views from Highway 101, with particular attention paid to rooftop equipment and screening of mechanical equipment.*

***Program NSR-11B: Pedestrian Safety.** Improve pedestrian safety along Redwood Highway with improved sidewalks and parking lot landscaping.*

**Policy NSR-12: West of Los Gamos Drive**

Require any development on the steep, highly visible parcels south and west of the YMCA to be clustered to retain community-wide visible hillside resources.

**CIVIC CENTER**

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The Civic Center neighborhood includes land east of Highway 101 and south of the Merrydale overcrossing, extending to the crest of Puerto Suello Hill. It is home to the historic 81-acre Marin County Civic Center complex designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, including the iconic main building (Administration and the Hall of Justice), Lagoon Park, and surrounding buildings such as the post office, Veterans Memorial Auditorium, and exhibit hall. The Marin County Farmers Market and Marin County Fair are also held on Civic Center grounds. The surrounding neighborhood is developed with single-family homes, condominiums, apartments, offices and commercial uses, a hotel, a dog park, and a newly reconstructed fire station.

In 2017, SMART rail service was initiated to the Civic Center station, located underneath Highway 101 on the northwest edge of this area. A number of related transportation improvements have been completed, including a roundabout at Civic Center Drive and Memorial Drive, and new sidewalks and pathways. One

of the primary objectives of the Station Area Plan was to address parking, as there was concern that passenger parking would encroach into neighborhoods. This continues to be a concern today.

The Civic Center Area includes important natural resources, including the South Fork of Gallinas Creek, riparian areas along the creek, and a salt marsh along the northern and eastern edge. These resources should be protected and conserved in the future, with public viewing areas where appropriate.

While earlier plans for the Civic Center complex considered the potential for housing, this is not envisioned either at the Civic Center or on nearby sites on the east side of the freeway. The County has adopted Design Guidelines (2005) to ensure that modernization of Civic Center facilities and any County facilities on the site are consistent with its historic character.

**Policy NSR-13: Design Considerations for Development in the Vicinity of the Civic Center**

Maintain the Marin County Civic Center as a significant visual and cultural resource. Modernization and any additional development in the vicinity should enhance this resource, be consistent with the Marin County Civic Center Master Design Guidelines (2005), and adhere to the following principles:

- a) Implement the recommendations identified in the Civic Center Station Area Plan (2013)
- b) Require urban design analysis to ensure compatibility of materials, color and building masses with the Civic Center
- c) Require functional inter-connection with the Civic Center
- d) Design should complement Civic Center architecture rather than compete with it
- e) Site design should retain vistas where feasible to Mt. Tamalpais.
- f) Historic structures should be retained
- g) Any changes in low-lying areas should consider risks associated with sea level rise, and evaluate opportunities to improve environmental quality, including restoration of the South Fork of Gallinas Creek
- h) Enhance the Civic Center Drive area with safe and pleasant walkways, including completion of a sidewalk on the west side of Civic Center Drive
- i) Support renovations and additions to cultural and entertainment facilities

***Program NSR-13A: Civic Center Design.** Monitor, review and comment on County development at and around the Civic Center. Encourage the County to go through a design review process and involve the North San Rafael community in the evaluation and review of proposed changes at the Civic Center. Request that the County provide sufficient opportunity for review of major development proposals at the Civic Center by the Design Review Board, Planning Commission and City Council.*

**Policy NSR-14: Civic Center SMART Station**

Continue to improve connections from the SMART station to surrounding neighborhoods and workplaces, manage impacts of the station on parking and circulation, and consider opportunities for transit-oriented development in the station vicinity.

***Program NSR-13B: Station Area Plan.** Implement the recommendations prescribed in the Civic Center Station Area Plan (See text box).*

**Policy NSR-15: Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Transit Connections**

Provide pedestrian, bicycle, and transit improvements that better connect the Civic Center to the North San Rafael Town Center, the Northgate Business Park and McInnis Park areas, and Central San Rafael.



### **Civic Center Station Area Plan (text box)**

The City adopted the Civic Center Station Area Plan in 2013 following a two-year public process. The Plan's objective was to develop a community vision for area around the SMART station, building on previous plans and maximizing the benefits of the new station for surrounding neighborhoods. Much of the Plan's focus is on improving access to the station for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users and leveraging the rail station for housing and economic development. An important outcome of the planning process was a priority on preserving the character of surrounding neighborhoods, managing parking at the station, and protecting nearby creeks and wetlands.

The Plan includes the following recommendations:

- Provide wider sidewalks, improved bicycle facilities, streetscape improvements, and directional signage on the major streets in the station vicinity
- Complete the Promenade from Las Gallinas Avenue to North San Pedro Road along Merrydale (e.g., through Northgate Three, along the Merrydale edge of Mt. Olivet Cemetery, along the SMART tracks, and then south along Civic Center Drive)
- Maintain and improve the Walter Place crossing (from Los Ranchitos Road to Rafael Meadows)
- Provide a pedestrian/ bicycle link across the SMART tracks between the northern and southern segments of Merrydale Road and add bike parking at the station
- Support SMART's proposal for two shuttle "loop" routes from the station—one serving the Mall area, Kaiser, and the Civic Center, and the other serving Redwood Highway / Regency Center
- Construct a bus transfer point adjacent to the station
- Construct vehicle turn-arounds at the ends of Merrydale on both sides of the tracks
- Implement traffic flow and safety improvements along Las Gallinas Avenue, at the Freitas / 101 interchange, and the Merrydale/southbound 101 on-off ramps
- Consider residential permit parking and time limits to reduce encroachment into neighborhoods
- Protect single family neighborhoods and focus new residential uses and limited retail uses on sites closest to the station
- Develop design guidelines for Northgate, and the Redwood Highway/ East of 101 area
- Restore natural resources, including wetlands, creeks, and hillsides
- Maintain existing height limits along Merrydale and Redwood Highway, and study potential increases in height at Northgate

These recommendations are reflected in the text of this Element and on the General Plan Map.

**Program NSR-15A: Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements.** Pursue improvements consistent with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and the North San Rafael Vision Promenade Plan to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety, including:

- a) Completion of the southern segment of the North San Rafael Promenade to Civic Center Drive
- b) Lighting and sidewalks on both sides of Civic Center Drive between the Civic Center and the Merrydale overcrossing
- c) Extension of the McInnis Parkway sidepath across the south fork of Gallinas Creek, providing a trail connection to McInnis Park in the SMART right-of-way
- d) Bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements on North San Pedro Road between Los Ranchitos Road and Civic Center Drive
- e) Working with Golden Gate Transit to provide for safer bus pad locations and design along Highway 101.

## **SMITH RANCH**

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The Smith Ranch neighborhood is located along both sides of Smith Ranch Road east of Highway 101, extending to John F. McInnis County Park. The sub-area extends beyond the City limits and includes large wetland areas at the mouth of Miller Creek and Gallinas Creek. The St. Vincent's/Silveira properties abut this area on the north.

Smith Ranch is a newer part of San Rafael, with much of the development dating from the 1970s and 80s. On the south side of Smith Ranch Road, the neighborhood includes the Regency Center office complex and cinema, Captain's Cove Townhomes, and the Contempo Mobile Home Park, with nearly 400 units. On the north side of Smith Ranch Road, there are a number of master planned residential and commercial projects, including office buildings, a small shopping center, and apartments and townhomes on hillside sites. The area includes a nursing home and senior residential project.

This area includes the 119.5-acre San Rafael Airport, Marin County's only privately owned executive airport, located between the North and South forks of Gallinas Creek south of McInnis Park. Flights are limited to aircraft based at the airport. Commercial flight activity, flight training, and helicopters are prohibited. An 85,000 square foot community sports center is under construction at the site.

North of the airport, McInnis Park includes softball and soccer fields, tennis courts, a golf driving range and 9-hole course, a clubhouse and restaurant, a canoe launch, batting cages, a skate park, and nature trails. There are a number of public and institutional uses north of the park, including a residential treatment facility, the Las Gallinas Valley wastewater treatment plant, and the MMWD reclamation plant. The surrounding area includes wetlands and riparian corridors, both of which provide important habitat for plants and wildlife.

While there may be infill opportunities on County-owned land and potential redevelopment opportunities on older commercial sites, the neighborhood is essentially built out. Continued wetland restoration and adaptation projects are encouraged, as the eastern part of this area will be increasingly affected by sea level rise in the coming decades.

## **Policy NSR-16: San Rafael Airport.**

Retain an "Airport/Recreation" General Plan designation for the San Rafael Airport that is consistent with the land use covenant agreed to by the City, the County, and the property owner. Recognize the unique and valuable recreational and environmental characteristics of the site. The following uses are allowed:

- Uses consistent with the Master Use Permit as amended through the time of General Plan adoption, including the airport and ancillary airport services and light industrial uses.

- Private and public recreational uses, as specified in the 2014 Master Use Permit.
- Public utility uses as approved by the appropriate government agencies, including flood control, sanitary sewer, gas, and electric, and public safety facilities.
- Open space including wetlands.

**Program NH-149a. San Rafael Airport.** *As needed, require improvements consistent with this policy through the development review process.*

**Policy NSR-17: Habitat Enhancement.**

Enhance the habitat values of the Smith Ranch area, including Smith Ranch Pond and McInnis Marsh.

**Program NH-17A. Wetland Management.** *Support efforts to:*

- Conserve and enhance the McInnis Marsh wetlands, including sea level rise adaptation projects*
- Maintain Smith Ranch Pond, including removal of exotic plants, habitat enhancement, and potentially a public observation area*
- Restore and enhance the North and South Forks of Gallinas Creek.*

**UNINCORPORATED NEIGHBORHOODS**

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Residents of unincorporated North San Rafael enjoy their ties to open space, creeks, and local community associations and institutions. However, these areas are directly affected by decisions made within San Rafael, just as the City is affected by decisions made by the County. There is a need for both jurisdictions to work together and integrate their planning in a way that enhances North San Rafael, while supporting the needs and desires of local residents.

**LOS RANCHITOS**

The unincorporated Los Ranchitos area is an approximately 230-acre rural neighborhood surrounded on all sides by the City of San Rafael. There are roughly 170 homes, most on lots of one acre or more. The Los Ranchitos Improvement Association has represented the neighborhood since 1952.

Los Ranchitos is subject to County agricultural zoning, with a one-acre minimum lot size and allowances for horses and other livestock. The area has very little potential for change and wishes to retain the elements that contribute to its rural quality, such as the absence of sidewalks and street lighting. It is expected that this area will remain unincorporated for the duration of the planning period.

**LUCAS VALLEY-MARINWOOD**

The Lucas Valley and Marinwood neighborhoods extend west from Highway 101 just north of the San Rafael city limits. Recent census data indicates the community has 2,450 housing units, 96 percent of which are single family homes or townhomes. Both Lucas Valley and Marinwood are outside the San Rafael sphere of influence as well as the city limits. The Marinwood Community Services District provides fire protection, parks and open space, street lighting, and recreation services to most of the area. A portion of the area receives park and recreation services through the Lucas Valley HOA and structural fire protection through County Service Area 13.

Lucas Valley-Marinwood is the largest unincorporated community in the San Rafael Planning Area. The neighborhoods were mostly developed in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, with newer housing on the western edge of the valley. The area includes Mary Silveira and Lucas Valley Elementary Schools and Miller Creek Middle School. It includes a private school (Waldorf), a number of County-operated facilities, and a small commercial area on Marinwood Avenue at Miller Creek Road. A number of neighborhood and community parks are located in the area.

More than half of the Lucas Valley-Marinwood sub-area is hillside open space. This includes public open space preserves, lands managed by the Marinwood CSD and the Lucas Valley HOA, and several private ranches zoned for agricultural uses. The western edge of the area includes Grady Ranch, which at one time was proposed for a 270,000 square foot Lucasfilm production studio. While plans for the studio were dropped in 2012, the City will continue to coordinate closely with the County in the event the status of this property changes.

Minimal change is anticipated in Lucas Valley-Marinwood in the coming years. The County has approved development of an assisted living facility and 28-lot subdivision on the former Daphne (now "Oakview") property, located at the northwest corner of 101 and Lucas Valley Road. The project includes freeway ramp improvements and a 70-acre open space dedication. Redevelopment of the Marinwood Shopping Center is also under consideration.

### *SANTA VENETIA*

Santa Venetia was initially conceived as a "mini-Venice" in the early 1900s, with waterfront lots along man-made canals. Most of the lots remained vacant until after World War II, when the community developed rapidly. Today Santa Venetia includes approximately 1,700 housing units, most of which are single family homes. The area also includes condominiums and apartments, several small commercial areas, the Jewish Community Center, Venetia Valley (K-8) school, the Old Gallinas Children's Center, and the now vacant McPhail Elementary School campus.

While much of the neighborhood is located on flat, low-lying terrain, this sub-area also includes large hillside open space areas, and a few developable sites on higher ground. Santa Venetia is also the northern gateway to China Camp State Park. The sub-area includes several open space preserves, including Santa Margarita Island, Santa Venetia Marsh, and San Pedro Ridge. More recent open space acquisitions in this area include Buck's Landing and Heron Hill.

In 2017, the County of Marin prepared a Community Plan for Santa Venetia. The Plan includes goals and policies for protecting natural resources, managing environmental hazards, and planning for land use, parks and open space, and transportation. Much of the emphasis is on conserving and restoring natural resources, responding to flooding and sea level rise hazards, and managing growth on the few remaining developable sites in the community. The City of San Rafael will work closely with the County as this Plan is implemented.