

San Rafael General Plan 2040

DRAFT for Public Review

October 2020



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

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This document includes Chapters 1-12 of Draft General Plan 2040. Chapters 13-14 will be added in late October.

- Chapters 1-9 will be considered by the Planning Commission on October 27, 2020.
- Chapters 10-14 will be considered by the Planning Commission on November 12, 2020.

A Program-Level Environmental Impact Report will be published in mid-November and the Plan and EIR will be considered concurrently through Spring 2021.

San Rafael General Plan 2040

Draft for Public Review



October 2020

For additional information on this project—or to provide comments, please contact:

Barry Miller, Consulting Project Manager

barry.miller@cityofsanrafael.org

415-485-3423

Acknowledgments

City Council

Gary Phillips, Mayor
Kate Colin, Vice Mayor
Maribeth Bushey
John Gamblin
Andrew Cuyugan McCullough

Planning Commission

Aldo Mercado, Chair
Berenice Davidson
Eli Hill
Mark Lubamersky
Jon Previtali
Samina Saude
Shingai Samudzi

General Plan Steering Committee

<i>Stephanie Plante, Chair</i>	
<i>Omar Carrera, Vice Chair</i>	
<i>DJ Allison</i>	<i>Jeff Jones</i>
<i>Don Blayney</i>	<i>Bonnie Marmor</i>
<i>Jenny Broering</i>	<i>Robert Miller</i>
<i>Maribeth Bushey</i>	<i>Drew Norton</i>
<i>Bill Carney</i>	<i>Kate Powers</i>
<i>Berenice Davidson</i>	<i>Jeff Rhoads</i>
<i>Richard Hall</i>	<i>Jackie Schmidt</i>
<i>Eric Holm</i>	<i>Roger Smith</i>
<i>Eleanor Huang</i>	<i>Sparkie Spaeth</i>
<i>Linda Jackson</i>	<i>Karen Strolia</i>
<i>Margaret Johnston</i>	<i>Cecilia Zamora</i>

Committee Alternates and Former Committee Members

<i>Salvador Avalos</i>	<i>Jed Greene</i>	<i>Alan Schaevitz</i>
<i>Laura Bertolli</i>	<i>Brad Honsberger</i>	<i>Kif Scheurer</i>
<i>Bella Bromberg (*)</i>	<i>Amy Likover</i>	<i>Jeff Schoppert</i>
<i>Hilda Castillo</i>	<i>Jack McGinn</i>	<i>Judy Schriebman</i>
<i>Kate Colin</i>	<i>Sara Matson</i>	<i>Eric Spielman (*)</i>
<i>Paula Doubleday</i>	<i>Larry Minikes</i>	<i>Leslie Simons</i>
<i>Cicily Emerson</i>	<i>Kati Miller</i>	<i>Stewart Summers</i>
<i>Jim Geraghty</i>	<i>Pamela Reaves (*)</i>	<i>Joanne Webster</i>
	<i>Samantha Sargent</i>	

() Former Committee Member*

Project Leadership Team

*Paul Jensen, AICP Community Development Director
Raffi Boloyan, Planning Manager
Barry Miller, FAICP, Consulting Project Manager*

Planning Department Support Team

*Anne Derrick, Administrative Assistant (former)
Allison Giffin, Planning Intern (former)
Alicia Guidice, AICP, Principal Planner
Ethan Guy, Professional Analyst
Renee Nickenig, Assistant Planner
Steve Stafford, Senior Planner*

City Advisory Team

Jim Schutz, City Manager
*Susan Andrade Wax, Library and Recreation Director
Henry Bankhead, Assistant Director, Libraries
Zak Baron, GIS Data Analyst
Diana Bishop, Police Chief
Cory Bytof, Sustainability Program Manager
Lauren Davini, Traffic Engineer
Rob Epstein, City Attorney
Lisa Goldfien, Assistant City Attorney
Bill Guerin, Public Works Director
Lindsay Lara, City Clerk
Sean Mooney, Civic Design Manager
Rafat Raie, Deputy Public Works Director, Transportation
Danielle O'Leary, Economic Development Director
Bob Sinnott, Deputy Fire Chief
Simon Vuong, Economic Development Coordinator
Rebecca Woodbury, Digital Service and Open Govt Director
Hunter Young, Assistant Public Works Director*

Consultants

*BAE Urban Economics, Economics and Real Estate
Communities in Collaboration, Public Engagement
Opticos Design, Community Design and Downtown Planning
Fehr and Peers, Transportation Planning
PlaceWorks, Environmental Impact Report and Plan Maps*

Photography

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Introduction and Framework

1 Introduction

2 Framework and Guiding Principles

1 Introduction

The General Plan provides a shared vision for San Rafael’s future, and a road map to make that vision a reality. It is rooted in a commitment by San Rafael residents and businesses to sustain the qualities that make San Rafael a great city today, and to pursue improvements that make the city more resilient, equitable, healthy, and attractive in the future. The Plan looks ahead 20 years to contemplate what kind of community we want to be. It provides the policies and actions to lead us there.

San Rafael has a long history of city planning. The San Rafael Planning Commission was established in 1915 and the City’s first zoning rules were adopted in the 1920s. Over the decades, the community has planned and built neighborhoods, commercial districts, parks, and community centers, as well as local streets and highways. Thousands of acres have been set aside as open space. The result is a livable, attractive city with a beloved Downtown, distinct neighborhoods, and protected natural resources.

Since the early 1960s, four general plans have guided San Rafael’s growth. The first plan was a reflection of its era, with visions of new freeways, bay fill, and large-scale suburban growth that would have transformed the city forever. By the early 1970s, the City’s plans reflected a new ecological sensibility and an awareness of the importance of growing in harmony with nature. San Rafael continued to evolve, but in a more incremental and intentional way. Since the 1980s, the focus has been on enhancing and improving previously developed areas, rather than expanding outward.

San Rafael is a mature city today, but it is also a growing city. It is located in one of the most prosperous regions of the country, in a County renowned for its physical beauty and quality of life. Good planning is essential to manage change while protecting the qualities that make San Rafael special. The General Plan provides a tool for balancing growth and conservation. It does this while striving to create a community where all residents, regardless of their income or cultural background, can benefit from the opportunities the future may bring.

What is a General Plan?

Every city and county in California is required to adopt a general plan for its future development.¹ The plan provides guidance for future growth and conservation and must meet specific Government Code requirements. By law, general plans must be comprehensive, long-range, and internally consistent. Plans must also address specific topics, referred to as “elements.” These are:

- Land Use
- Circulation
- Housing
- Open Space
- Conservation
- Safety
- Noise
- Environmental Justice²

¹ Government Code 65300 requires that every city and county “shall adopt a long-term general plan for the physical development of the city.”

² The Environmental Justice requirement became effective on January 1, 2018.

INTRODUCTION

State law provides flexibility in how the elements are organized what additional topics may be included. Cities and counties may adopt “optional” elements in addition to those mandated by the state. This allows each community to tailor their plans to address issues of local importance. Once an optional element is adopted, it carries the same legal weight as a mandatory element. No one element supersedes another.

San Rafael has adopted five optional elements in this General Plan and has expanded the scope of several of the State-mandated elements. The five optional elements are Community Design and Preservation, Neighborhoods, Community Facilities and Infrastructure, Arts and Culture, and Economic Vitality. The Conservation Element has been expanded to specifically address Climate Change, while the Safety Element includes a expanded discussion of sea level rise and resilience. The Open Space Element has been broadened to specifically address Parks and Recreation. The new State requirement for an Environmental Justice Element, is met through an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Element that looks more broadly at equity, health, and governance issues in the city. Equity is also a theme that runs through the entire General Plan.

The Government Code includes special requirements for local housing elements. These elements must be updated every eight years on a cycle set by the State legislature and are subject to certification by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. State law also requires that housing elements meet rigorous standards for data, analysis, and maps, and as a result they are much longer than the other Plan elements. For readability, housing policies and programs are included in the body of the General Plan, but the data, analysis and maps are in appendices.

The San Rafael Housing Element was not updated as part of General Plan 2040, since the existing element covers 2015-2023. A General Plan amendment will be required when the 2023-2031 Housing Element is prepared, likely at the end of 2022.



City, Sphere, and Planning Area: What's the Difference?

The General Plan references three different geographies:

- The **City of San Rafael**, which includes all properties within the City limits.
- The **Sphere of Influence**, a boundary established by the Marin Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to identify unincorporated areas that may receive certain services from the City of San Rafael. The Sphere includes the unincorporated neighborhoods of Bayside Acres, California Park, Country Club, and Santa Venetia, as well as China Camp State Park and the San Rafael Rock Quarry. While the City of San Rafael has no intention of annexing these areas at this time, the County has concluded that it may be efficient for San Rafael to provide certain services here.
- The **Planning Area**, which includes land beyond the sphere of influence that is generally associated with San Rafael. This area includes Lucas Valley and Marinwood as well as agricultural and ranch land to the northwest and northeast of the city. The developed portion of Lucas Valley and Marinwood are also considered to be within an “Urban Service Area,” meaning they receive services typically associated with urbanized areas even though they are outside San Rafael's Sphere of Influence.

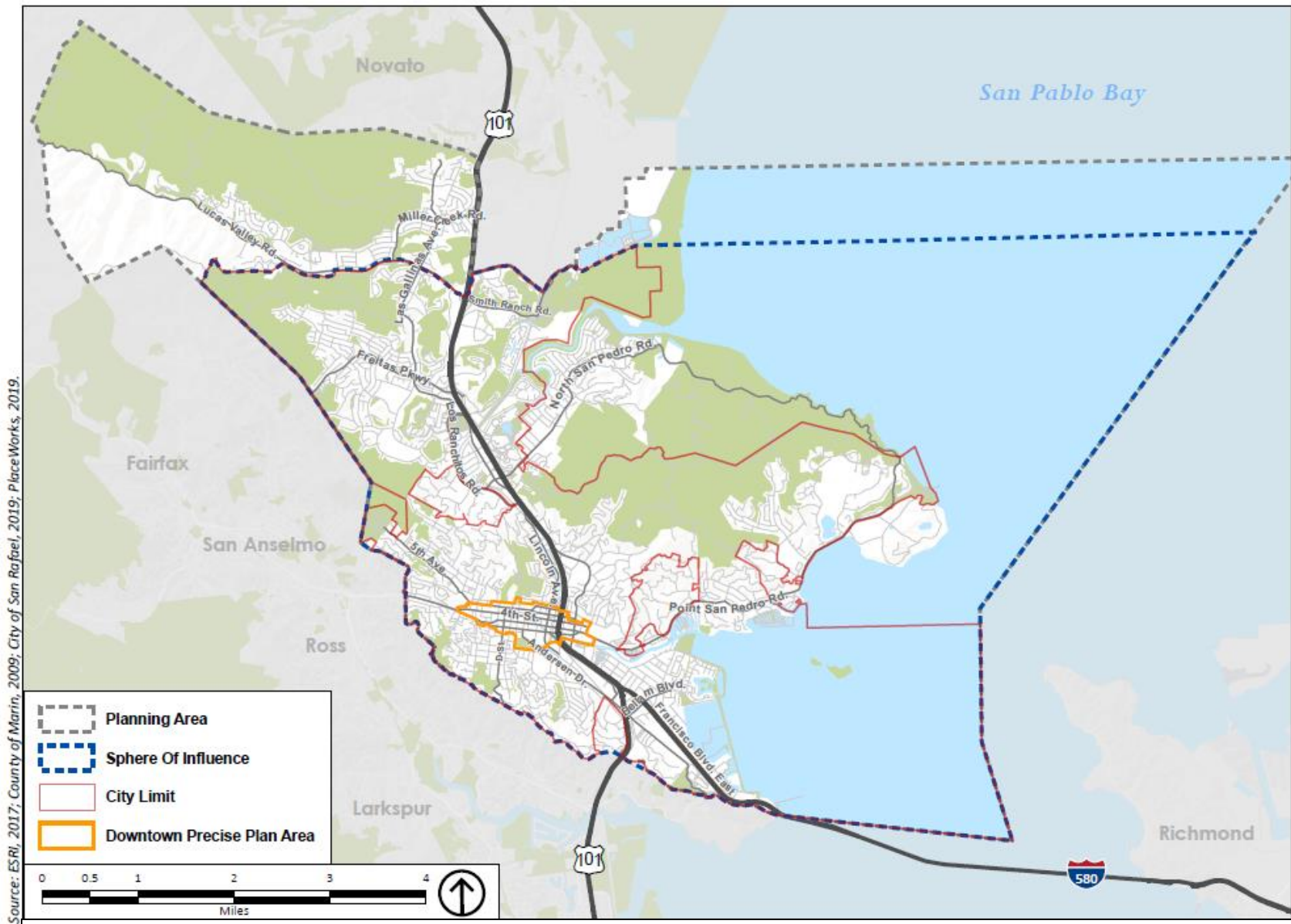
Geography	Area (square miles)		
	Land	Water	Total
City	16.7	5.9	22.6
Sphere of Influence	23.0	17.0	40.0
Planning Area	30.2	23.8	54.0

Source: City of San Rafael, 2020

As a “comprehensive” plan, the General Plan covers the entire City of San Rafael as well as areas outside the city limits that have a bearing on San Rafael's future. This includes San Rafael's “sphere of influence,” a legal boundary that covers unincorporated Marin County neighborhoods such as Santa Venetia, Los Ranchitos, and Country Club. It also includes several neighborhoods outside the sphere of influence that are closely associated with San Rafael, including Lucas Valley and Marinwood. The text box above explains the different geographies referenced by the Plan. Figure 1-1 shows the boundaries of these areas.

As a “long-range” plan, the General Plan looks ahead 20 years to 2040. This does not mean that the Plan is set in stone for the next 20 years. As explained later in this chapter, the Plan is designed to be periodically amended and updated. Major updates occur roughly every 15-20 years but can occur more frequently if needed. Amendments may occur throughout the planning period.

As an “internally consistent” plan, the policies and programs in each element rely on the same data and assumptions and support a shared set of guiding principles. California law requires that other local government programs are consistent with the General Plan. The City's zoning and subdivision regulations, its capital improvement program, its precise plans, its development agreements, its housing programs, and its economic development activities, should all further the achievement of General Plan goals. Where appropriate, this Plan provides guidance on how other City programs and activities should be changed or strengthened to best implement local policies and ensure internal consistency. It also identifies new ordinances and programs to be developed.



**Figure 1-1:
General Plan Boundaries**

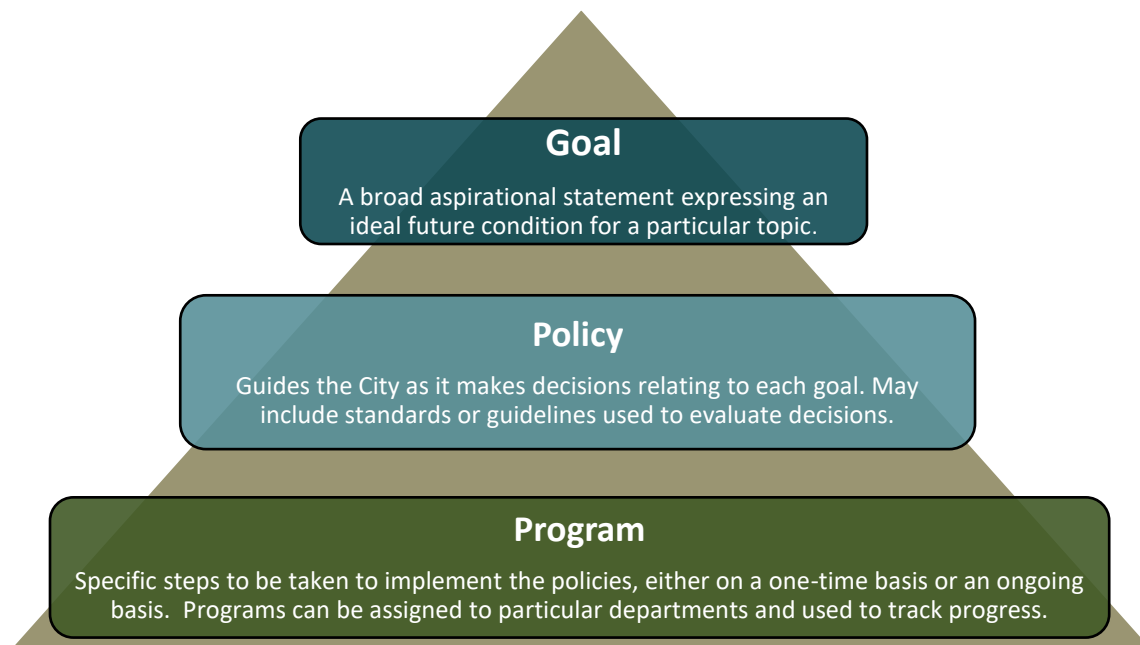
How to Use the General Plan

The General Plan is intended for use by all members of the community. Residents may consult the Plan to see what changes are planned in their neighborhoods and to become more familiar with how development applications are evaluated. Businesses may use the Plan to better understand the City's strategies for economic vitality and plans for growth and investment. City staff, Boards and Commissions, and the City Council use the General Plan to make important decisions about budgets, capital improvements, future development proposals, and local regulations. Other agencies, such as the school districts and local service providers, use the General Plan to inform their own long-range plans and programs.

The essence of the Plan lies in its goals, policies, and programs. These are declarative statements which set forth the City's approach to various issues. As shown in the diagram below, there is a hierarchy between these terms. Goals are broad aspirational statements. Policies are statements of principle or approach related to the goal. Programs are specific actions or procedures to carry out the policies. The sequence of goals, policies, and programs in each element do not indicate a particular priority, unless otherwise stated.

Policies typically start with a verb, which indicate whether they are mandatory or advisory (e.g., "Require" or "Encourage"). The use of advisory policies is important to maintain flexibility in the General Plan and balance competing objectives. General Plan policies must be internally consistent, but there may still be inherent tension between its statements. It is not the intent of the General Plan to predetermine every city decision, but rather to help guide the process. As appropriate, the Plan's policies include parameters for resolving potential conflicts. Ultimately, decisions must be made on a case by case basis.

The programs in the General Plan provide a "road map" for implementing the General Plan. An **Implementation Appendix** has been included in the Plan to recap all of the programs in the document and identify a responsible party, timeframe, and resources for each program. The Appendix can be used to track progress on the Plan and measure its outcomes. This is helpful for annual reporting and to update progress as programs are implemented. Updates to the Appendix may be made without a formal amendment to the General Plan.



Relationship to Other Plans and Programs

The General Plan provides a framework for other plans focused on particular topics or geographic areas within San Rafael. It captures the direction provided by these plans in broad terms through its policies and programs. Key topical plans integrated into the General Plan include the Climate Change Action Plan (2019), the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018), the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2018), the Parking and Wayfinding Study (2018), and the Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan (2019). Plans for various special districts and utilities also were consulted. Key geographic area plans include the station area plans for Civic Center and Downtown (2012), the Canalfront Design Plan and Guidelines (2009), the Downtown Precise Plan (discussed below), and neighborhood plans prepared over the last several decades. These plans are not part of the General Plan per se, but they have informed and shaped its policies.

Similarly, General Plan 2040 identifies specific topics and geographic areas where new plans will be needed in the future. For example, it recommends a Park and Open Space Master Plan, a Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan, additional social equity planning, and plans for the North San Rafael Town Center and the Southeast San Rafael / Canal area. As these plans are prepared, they should advance the guiding principles of the General Plan and help achieve its goals.

The link between the General Plan and Downtown Precise Plan is particularly important. The two plans were prepared concurrently and are intended to complement and support each other. The Precise Plan focuses on the part of San Rafael where the most substantial changes are planned over the next 20 years. It is cross-referenced throughout the General Plan and a summary of its recommendations is included in the Neighborhoods Element. The Precise Plan itself should be consulted as specific projects within the 265-acre Downtown boundary are proposed.

Finally, the General Plan is considered a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), since it accommodates growth and change and includes policies that may impact the environment. The General Plan EIR is considered a “Program EIR”—it evaluates the impacts of a particular pattern of development (e.g., a “program”) over a 20-year time horizon rather than the impacts of single project on a single site. This evaluation is based on the housing and employment forecasts for the next 20 years, the proposed land use map (and other plan maps), and the policies and programs in General Plan 2040. The EIR also evaluates the impacts of the Downtown Precise Plan.

Future projects that are consistent with the growth assumptions and land use designations in the General Plan/ Downtown Precise Plan may rely on the EIR for its analysis of impacts on specific topic areas. This is referred to as “tiering”. Tiering does not entirely relieve these projects of environmental review requirements, but it may streamline the process. Traffic studies, geologic studies, biological studies, and other analyses may still be required to evaluate more localized, site specific impacts.

The Update Process

The San Rafael General Plan Update is the product of a three-year process that engaged residents and businesses throughout the city. The City Council authorized the Plan Update in 2017, starting the process by retaining a project manager and approving a detailed work program for the project. One of the premises of the work program was that the basic content of General Plan 2020 should be carried forward. The prior Plan has worked well in guiding San Rafael’s growth and continues to represent the City’s values.



Planning in a Pandemic

As the 2040 General Plan Update entered its final phase, an aggressively contagious coronavirus infected millions of people across the globe. In mid-March 2020, the County of Marin and the State of California ordered non-essential businesses to close and issued a shelter-in-place order for residents. The months that followed saw a gradual re-opening of businesses and return to work for some residents, along with considerable uncertainty, economic disruption and loss of jobs, and a public health crisis unprecedented in the last century. Work on General Plan 2040 continued through this period, with meetings moved to virtual platforms and communication protocols adapting to a “new normal.”

The publication of this Plan comes at a time when the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ways we live, work, travel, and socialize are unknown. The immediate priority is to care for the sick, reduce infection rates, and address the devastating social and economic impacts of the virus. It will take many months and even years to fully comprehend and respond to this emergency.

The pandemic has upended our lives and accelerated some of the changes that are anticipated by this General Plan. More of us are working from home, shopping on-line, and reducing our driving. Unfortunately, the pandemic has also laid bare the inequities described in this Plan, with disproportionate impacts on lower-income essential workers and persons of color. As of August 1, 2020, Latino residents represented 16 percent of Marin County’s population and 76 percent of its COVID-19 cases.

The pandemic highlights the importance of a good long-range plan to guide us forward. The General Plan provides an expression of San Rafael’s underlying values, which remain unchanged despite the unexpected events of the last several months. The policies in this Plan provide a critical anchor for recovery and are intended to unify and align our community. The Plan provides important new direction on resilience, equity, housing, transportation, and our economy, making it more relevant than ever. New policies have been added to acknowledge the current crisis. More guidance will likely be needed as the situation evolves.

The General Plan reminds us that we must come together to create a more equitable and resilient future. It establishes the guidance to continue that journey.

In December 2017, the City Council appointed a 24-member Steering Committee, along with 22 Alternates, to guide the process. The Committee was intended as a “sounding board” that would consider new policies as they were developed. Members represented different stakeholder groups and were asked to periodically report back to these groups on the Plan’s progress.

The Committee convened 25 “official” meetings between January 2018 and June 2020. Each meeting was formally noticed, open to the public, and included time for public comment. The meetings included staff and guest presentations on multiple topics, followed by Committee discussions. Electronic polling devices were occasionally used to allow Committee members to vote on key policy choices.

In 2018, the Steering Committee developed Guiding Principles, reviewed existing conditions data, and discussed major growth and development issues. In 2019, the Committee reviewed “audits” of the existing General Plan and provided feedback to staff on new and revised policies, maps, and programs. In early 2020, the Committee provided feedback on working draft elements of the Plan as they were prepared.

Committee meetings were lively and passionate. The group represented a multitude of viewpoints and did not agree on every point. There were overarching concerns about the fiscal impacts of Plan policies and programs, the loss of local control related to recent State housing laws, and the best response to traffic congestion, affordable housing needs, wildfire hazards, and climate change. The General Plan reflects the diversity of views expressed by the Committee and highlights areas where more dialogue may be needed in the future.

As the General Plan got underway, the City of San Rafael applied for—and was awarded—a grant to prepare a “Precise Plan” for Downtown San Rafael. A Request for Proposals was issued in Summer 2018 and a consulting team was retained in December. At the same time, the City retained consultants for its transportation and economic analyses, and an environmental impact report covering both the General Plan and the Downtown Precise Plan. The General Plan 2040 Steering Committee was tasked with serving as the vetting body for the Precise Plan as well.

A comprehensive community engagement strategy was launched in Spring 2018 and continued through Plan adoption. This included a project website (www.sanrafael2040.org), with an interactive platform where registered users could weigh in on policy issues and options. More than 350 residents subscribed to the site and over 2500 comments were received. The project website was updated monthly and became a public repository for Plan documents, meeting agendas and minutes, and links to related topics, events, and studies.

A series of community workshops took place in October 2018 at the City’s community centers. About 100 residents participated, with real-time electronic polling used to solicit feedback. Pop-up workshops were held throughout 2018 and 2019, with booths at the San Rafael Downtown Farmers Market and the Downtown Art Walk. In May 2019, the City convened a Downtown Design Charrette, attracting several hundred people over a three-day period. Small group discussions and “focus groups” also took place.

Much of the engagement strategy involved direct outreach to community and neighborhood associations. The General Plan team appeared at the regular meetings of more than a dozen neighborhood groups, providing information about the project and responding to questions. Roughly 20 organizations completed surveys on local planning issues, providing valuable guidance as the Neighborhoods Element of the Plan was drafted. Numerous presentations were made to stakeholder groups (artists, environmental organizations, food security, business organizations, students, concerned resident groups, etc.) and other local agencies. The City also solicited input directly from residents, including a “Call for Amendments” to the General Plan in Spring 2019. Application forms were developed and provided to property owners and other parties seeking General Plan Map changes.



Community Engagement in General Plan 2040

The community engagement process included multiple formats. Clockwise from top left, (a) General Plan 2040 Steering Committee meeting in March 2018; (b) General Plan Public Workshop at the Terra Linda Recreation Center in October 2018; (c) Farmers Market Pop-Up workshop in Summer 2019; (d) Downtown Plan Design Charrette at Whistlestop, May 2019; (e) Steering Committee meeting via Zoom in June 2020; (f) Students from Laurel Dell Elementary redesign Fourth Street through a collaborative program hosted by Y-Plan and San Rafael Youth in Arts, Fall 2019.

City Boards and Commissions were kept apprised of the Plan and were also invited to participate. Several study sessions were convened with the Planning Commission, the Design Review Board, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, the Park and Recreation Commission, and the Citizens Advisory Committee on Economic Development and Affordable Housing. The City Council participated extensively, both through periodic progress briefings and through policy study sessions, particularly on transportation and housing issues. The Draft Land Use Map was vetted with the City Council and Planning Commission prior to its publication.

A focused engagement program was developed to involve Spanish-speaking residents in General Plan 2040. Nearly one in five San Rafael residents have limited English proficiency, with Spanish being the predominant other language spoken. Initial attempts to hold Spanish language workshops attracted few attendees, leading the City to initiate an education and outreach program in partnership with the Canal Alliance. A core group of a dozen stakeholders discussed Plan concepts and issues in Spanish and reached out to more than 140 Spanish-speaking community members to discuss the future of the city.

Finally, the community was engaged in the process through public hearings. Following release of the Plan, public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council were conducted. Opportunities to provide oral and written comments on the General Plan, Downtown Precise Plan, and EIR were provided and the documents were revised in response.

Summary of Plan Elements

The General Plan includes 15 chapters and several technical appendices. The first two chapters provide the context for the Plan:

1. **Introduction** describes the General Plan process and introduces the reader to the document.
2. **Framework and Guiding Principles** provides the context for the General Plan, including data on the city and a summary of the issues influencing San Rafael's future. The chapter includes guiding principles that underpin the entire Plan.

The remaining 13 chapters are the Plan's "elements." The elements are organized in four sections, as described below.

Our Built Environment addresses the built form of the city and strives to sustain and create great places.

3. The **Land Use Element** provides overall guidance on the use of land, including growth and development policies and policies for specific uses. This Element includes the San Rafael 2040 General Plan Map.
4. The **Neighborhoods Element** identifies five planning areas in San Rafael and includes more specific land use policies for each area. It applies citywide policies to specific places and neighborhoods in the community.
5. The **Community Design and Preservation Element** focuses on creating and maintaining a strong sense of place in San Rafael, and enhancing the appearance of streets, buildings, and public space. It also addresses the preservation of historic resources.

Our Natural Environment addresses protection of the natural environment, resilience to environmental hazards, and the impacts of climate change.

6. The **Conservation and Climate Change Element** addresses San Rafael's natural resources, including wetlands, creeks, hillsides, wildlife and plant life, minerals, air and water quality, and trees. It also includes policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address global climate change.
7. The **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element** guides planning for parks, delivery of recreational services, and management of natural open spaces in the city.
8. The **Safety and Resilience Element** addresses the potential for earthquakes, landslides, erosion, flooding, and wildfire, including policies to minimize future losses of life and property. The element also addresses sea level rise, emergency preparedness, and hazardous materials.
9. The **Noise Element** includes policies and programs to reduce the impacts of excessive noise in the community.

Connecting the City addresses the systems that connect us to one another, both physically and socially.

10. The **Mobility Element** covers transportation and circulation. It addresses all modes of travel in the city and provides guidance on issues such as parking, safety, and congestion management.
11. The **Community Services and Infrastructure Element** addresses services such as schools, libraries, police, fire, as well as infrastructure such as water, sewer, drainage, and telecommunication facilities.
12. The **Arts and Culture Element** recognizes the power of the arts to connect residents, improve social equity, grow the economy, and celebrate San Rafael's cultural diversity.

Opportunity for All strives for a more just city, where all residents have access to a good job, secure housing, quality services, and a healthy environment.

13. The **Economic Vitality Element** strives to maintain economic diversity and fiscal health, sustain San Rafael as a good place to do business, and improve work opportunities for local residents.
14. The **Equity Diversity and Inclusion Element** includes policies to reduce income inequality, increase housing security, ensure environmental justice, and provide a greater voice for lower income residents in local government.
15. The **Housing Element** address the provision of housing for all economic segments of the community, particularly lower income and special needs households. As noted earlier, the Housing Element included in this volume is the 2015-2023 Element. It will be replaced by an updated Housing Element before January 31, 2023.

Appendices are included to supplement the General Plan. They are not adopted as part of the Plan and may be modified without a formal General Plan Amendment. The Appendices include an Implementation Matrix covering all Plan actions, a sea level rise adaptation report, the Housing Element technical report, and other background data that is referenced in the body of the General Plan.

Implementing and Amending the Plan

The General Plan will be implemented collectively by the City Council, City Boards and Commissions, City staff, San Rafael residents, and local business owners. Decisions by the City Council and its representatives must be consistent with Plan goals and policies. Implementation takes place in many ways, including local zoning regulations, future plans and studies, municipal code changes, partnerships, budgets, capital improvement programming, annual work programs, and standard operating procedures, among others. Some of the programs listed in the General Plan are already in effect, but the Plan also proposes new programs and changes to existing programs. Because of resource limitations, some of these changes may take place sooner than others.

The Plan is intended to be a living document that changes as the community changes. Not every change can be anticipated. This is more evident now than at any point in our history, as technology and current events constantly reshape our lives. The City prepares an annual report on the General Plan for Planning Commission and City Council review. Amendments to the Plan may be recommended through this process. A more comprehensive review occurs roughly once every five years.

State General Plan Guidelines recommend that general plans be periodically updated to ensure that they remain relevant. Changes may also be required to respond to new State laws, new City plans and policies, physical and demographic changes, and unforeseen opportunities or challenges. Plan Amendments may also be proposed in response to private applications for specific properties or areas. Amendments may occur up to four times a year and require public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council. The amendment process is defined by City Resolution 8379 (1991).

2 Framework and Guiding Principles

The Framework and Guiding Principles chapter provides the context for the General Plan. It includes background information about San Rafael, forecasts for the future, and a set of guiding principles to achieve the vision of a thriving city.

The chapter begins with a description of San Rafael's relationship to the region around it. A brief history is provided, chronicling San Rafael's evolution from mission outpost to a modern, diverse city. The focus of this chapter is on the forces driving change in the city, including demographic shifts, social equity, real estate market dynamics, economic changes, mobility trends, climate change, technology, and fiscal constraints. This discussion provides the basis for the General Plan's Guiding Principles, an expression of San Rafael's values and aspirations for its future.

Regional Setting

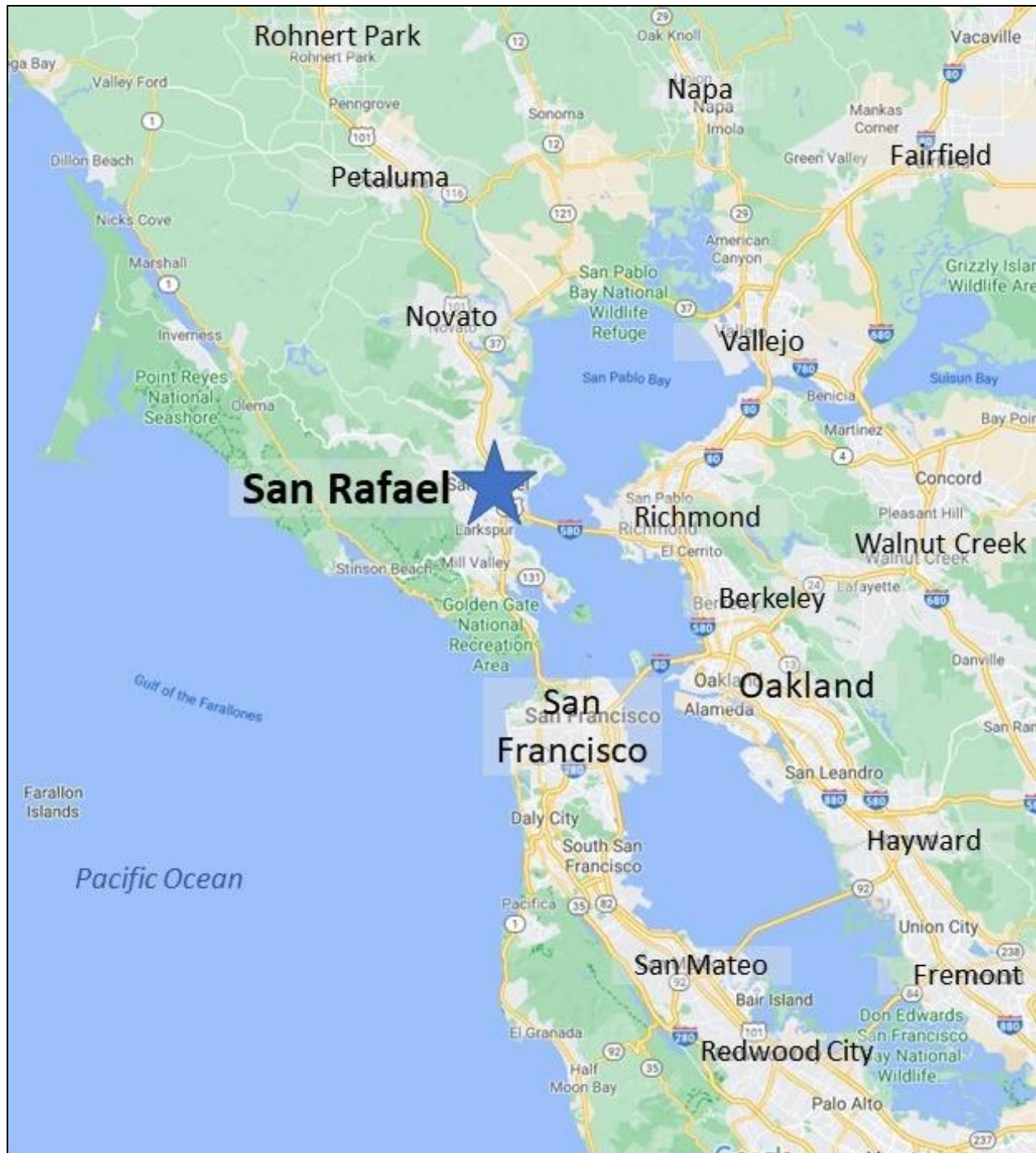
San Rafael is located in the east central part of Marin County, 18 miles north of Downtown San Francisco and 11 miles from the Golden Gate Bridge. The city is 38 miles south of Santa Rosa, 36 miles southwest of Napa, and 22 miles northwest of Oakland. The Pacific Ocean is approximately 10 miles to the southwest. Regional location is shown in Figure 2-1.

The city is bordered on the west by San Anselmo and Ross and on the south by Larkspur and the unincorporated communities of Kentfield and Greenbrae. Novato lies several miles to the north. The eastern edge of the city is formed by San Francisco and San Pablo Bays. The portion of San Francisco Bay south of the San Pedro Peninsula and west of the Marin Islands is commonly referred to as San Rafael Bay.

US Highway 101, a major freeway extending from Southern California to Washington State connects San Rafael to other cities in Marin County and the North Bay. Interstate 580, an auxiliary interstate connecting Marin County to the Central Valley, provides access to the East Bay. The western anchorage of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge is located in San Rafael. San Rafael is also home to two SMART rail stations and the largest regional bus transit center in Marin County.

The region surrounding San Rafael—the nine county San Francisco Bay Area—is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the United States. In 2019, its total population was 7.8 million people. San Rafael is part of what is commonly referred to as the “North Bay” sub-region, including the counties of Marin, Sonoma, Napa, and Solano. There are roughly 1.3 million people and 506,000 jobs in the sub-region, with Marin County accounting for about 20 percent of its population and 23 percent of its jobs.

San Rafael has been the largest city in Marin County since its incorporation and the County seat since 1851. Most of the County's population resides within 10 miles of San Rafael, contributing to the city's role as the center of Marin's economy. Marin County is renowned as a place of great physical beauty, mild weather, and a high standard of living. In 2019, Census data indicated that it was the fifth wealthiest county in the United States. However, the County is economically diverse and is home to people of all income groups. San Rafael is the most economically and ethnically diverse city in the County.



Map reprinted from Google Maps: 9/1/2020

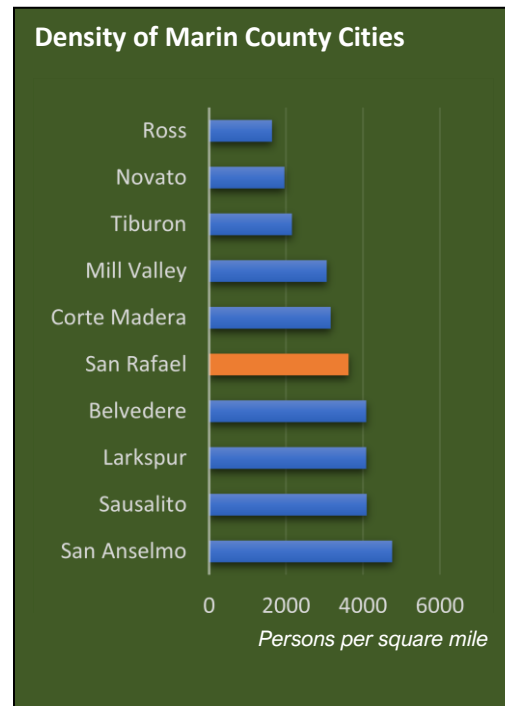
Figure 2-1

Regional Location



San Rafael's identity is shaped by its topography, particularly ridgelines and shoreline. Its southern edge is defined by Southern Heights and San Quentin Ridges. Its western edge follows the Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow Divide and its northern edge follows Big Rock Ridge. Within the city itself, an east-west ridge divides San Rafael into two areas of roughly equal size, joined by US 101 and Lincoln Avenue at Puerto Suello Hill. The area south of this divide is generally known as Central San Rafael while the area to the north is North San Rafael. Another distinct geographic feature is the San Pedro Peninsula, which extends about three miles east from Central San Rafael to Point San Pedro.

While San Rafael is the largest city in the county, its density is comparable to its neighbors (see chart at right). The average density is 3,625 persons per square mile. However, the city includes neighborhoods with densities ten times this average, as well as suburban density and rural residential areas.



Looking Back: Historical Context

San Rafael was first inhabited by the Coastal Miwok people, with a peak pre-European population of about 1,500. Settlements existed in what is now Downtown San Rafael (Nanaguani), Terra Linda (Ewu), and Marinwood (Shotomko-cha). The Miwok inhabited the area for thousands of years, developing a rich culture and complex language. They were sustained by abundant natural resources, including forests, creeks, marshland, and the Bay.

European settlement began in 1817 when Asistencia San Rafael Arcangel was established by Spanish Franciscan friars. Initially built as a sanitarium for Native Americans who had succumbed to European diseases, San Rafael Arcangel became the 20th of California's 21st missions in 1822. By the time the missions were secularized in 1833, the Miwok population had been severely reduced. San Rafael and its environs were partitioned into land grants, which eventually became ranches and farms.

San Rafael's designation as the county seat in 1851 established its early position as the center of Marin County and attracted much of the North Bay's early growth. This was accelerated by construction of a rail line from the city to the ferry depot at Point San Quentin in 1870 and other rail lines linking Marin County with points north. Increasing commerce, development, and population led San Rafael to incorporate in 1874. The city's population increased from 600 in 1870 to 2,276 in 1880.

The late 19th Century was a time of expansion for San Rafael, as the city became a resort for San Franciscans, as well as a commercial and administrative center. Picnic grounds, summer homes for the wealthy, and hotels proliferated over the following decades. Dominican College was established in 1890, further diversifying the city's economy and culture. By 1900, the population had reached 3,879. The City continued to grow at a moderate rate in the early 20th Century, with new neighborhoods developed on the fringes of Downtown.



Photo Credit: Marin History Museum

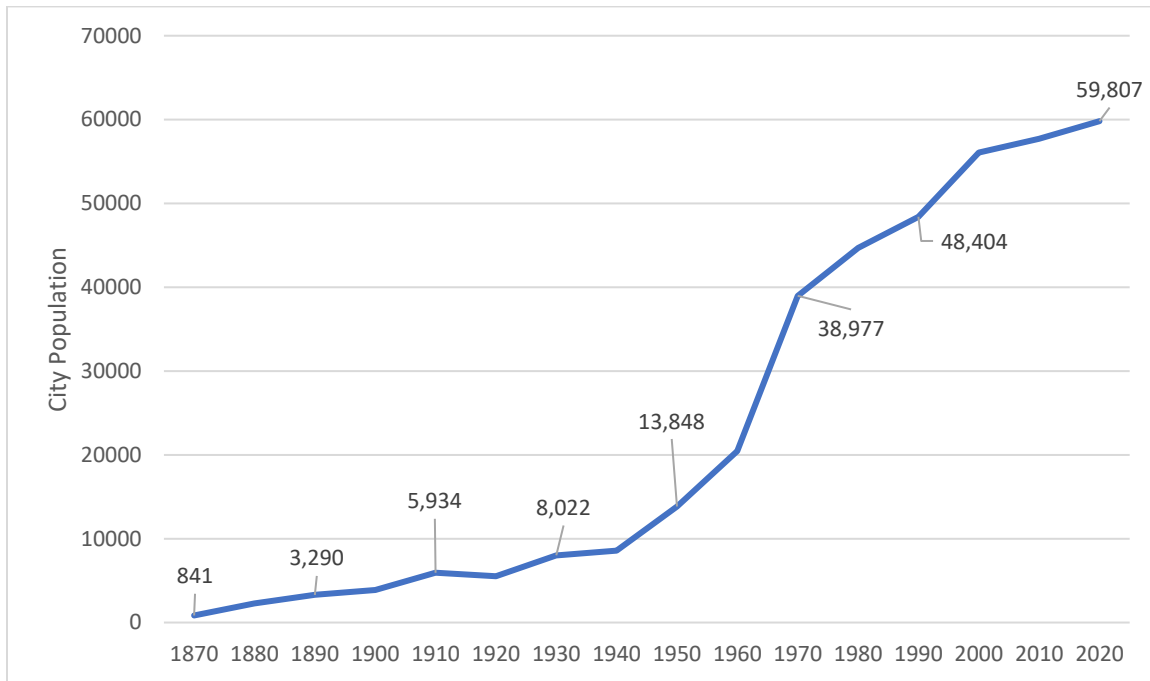
The opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937 heralded a growth boom in Marin County. Commercial train service to San Rafael ended in 1940, the same year the US 101 viaduct was completed over San Rafael Creek. San Rafael's population increased from 8,573 in 1940 to 38,977 in 1970. Population nearly doubled between 1960 and 1970 alone and jumped again in 1972 with the annexation of Terra Linda. Development during this period was auto-oriented and suburban in scale, with large subdivisions on the San Pedro Peninsula, in North San Rafael, and areas like Sun Valley. Northgate Mall was developed in the mid-1960s, creating a second major shopping district and regional destination.

During the 1970s and 80s, San Rafael saw a shift to multi-family housing types, with more apartments and planned unit developments. At the same time, the city's employment base increased substantially, with new office parks, light industrial uses, and retail centers. More than half of Marin County's employment growth during this period occurred in the San Rafael Planning Area, and San Rafael emerged as a major suburban job center. By 2020, the City had 1.8 jobs for every household, substantially above the regional average of 1.5.

Growth leveled off between 2000 and 2020 as the city's neighborhoods matured and developable land became scarce. The number of households in the city increased just 3.5 percent during this 20-year period, compared to 19.3 percent during the two prior decades. Commute patterns also changed. As housing costs increased, a larger number of those working in San Rafael began commuting from places further away, leading to increased congestion.

Chart 2-1 chronicles the City's population growth over the last 150 years.

Chart 2-1: San Rafael Population Growth, 1870-2020



Looking Forward: The Forces Driving Change

Demographics

San Rafael's future will be influenced by demographic changes, including the aging of the population and increasing racial and ethnic diversity. The median age in the city rose from 30.5 in 1970 to 41.0 in 2018. The percentage of residents over 65 rose from 9 percent to 19 percent during the same period.

Forecasts for the Bay Area anticipate a 137 percent increase in the number of residents over 65 between 2010 and 2040 (*Plan Bay Area*). Aging baby boomers will drive this trend, as seniors become the fastest growing segment of the population. The change will fuel the need for more senior housing and assisted living facilities, new transportation services, and increased health care services, as well as a growing demand for home retrofits allowing residents to age in place or share their homes with others.

San Rafael is also becoming more diverse. In 1980, just 5 percent of the city's population was Latino. By 2018, 31.4 percent of San Rafael residents were Latino. About 25 percent of the city's residents indicated they primarily spoke Spanish at home. Other racial and ethnic groups also represent a growing share of the population. Residents identifying as Black and Asian were 3 percent and 8 percent of San Rafael's population in 2018, respectively. The region as a whole is becoming more multi-cultural, with White Non-Latino residents projected to represent just 31 percent of the Bay Area's population by 2040. As Marin County's largest and most diverse city, San Rafael may continue to become more diverse in the future. This could mean more multi-generational households, more demand for multi-lingual services, and a continued focus on culturally competent governance and programming.



San Rafael has also experienced a decline in the number of residents in the 25 to 44 age cohort, who represented 33 percent of the population in 2000 and just 26 percent in 2018. At the same time, the number of children (persons under 18) in the city has increased 17 percent in the last 20 years, after declining through the 1980s and 90s. The increase has been accompanied by a growing number of English language learners in local schools.

As a result of these trends, there is likely strong demand for housing serving older adults and millennials, including homes in “urban” living environments like Downtown San Rafael. The city’s single family housing stock will continue to turn over as residents “age out” and younger families with children move to San Rafael. There is also a substantial need for affordable family-oriented housing, especially for larger households with children.

Income Inequality and Equity

San Rafael has always been an economically diverse city. The income distribution of its residents has become less balanced over time, with growing numbers of residents in poverty and growing numbers in high-income cohorts. In 2018, roughly 14 percent of the city’s residents lived below the federal poverty line, up from 10 percent in 2000. At the other end of the spectrum, the percentage of families with household incomes over \$200,000 increased from 15.7 percent in 2010 to 27.7 percent in 2018. The data suggests not only a declining “middle class” but a growing number of residents facing dire social and economic challenges. Disparities in income tend to translate into disparities in health care, education, mobility, and housing.

San Rafael's lower income residents are disproportionately Latino and young, with lower levels of educational attainment, higher rates of household overcrowding, and greater dependence on public transportation. They are also more vulnerable to eviction, illness, hunger, and the impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat and tidal flooding. Approximately 87 percent of San Rafael's Latino households are renters, compared to 40 percent among Non-Latino White households. Average household size for Latino families was 4.0, compared to 2.2 for White Non-Latino households. Nearly 50 percent of the housing units occupied by Latinos in San Rafael's meet the Census definition of overcrowding.

These disparities require a focus on equity in City plans and programs. General Plan 2040 includes an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Element but also aims to advance equity in all of its policies. Increasing opportunity for all residents is a guiding principle of this Plan. Future plans should likewise consider the potential for unintended impacts on lower income residents and non-English speaking residents and apply an "equity lens" to proposed recommendations.

Practically speaking, this means additional efforts to build affordable housing, improve educational quality, provide childcare and job training, upgrade transit service, enhance internet connectivity, and strengthen the health care and social safety nets. Many of these initiatives go well beyond the City's purview and will require coordinated efforts with other agencies and service providers. The City can contribute and lead the way through its approaches to climate action and resiliency, emergency preparedness, tenant protection and anti-displacement programs, transportation planning, capital improvement programming, and the planning and design of parks and public space.

High Land, Construction, and Housing Costs

Housing in San Rafael is expensive. Between 2012 and 2020, the median price of a home in the city rose from \$609,000 to \$1.1 million, an increase of almost 60 percent in just eight years. Buying a home is out of reach for most first-time buyers and younger families. Rental prices have also soared in recent years. The median rental price for a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment in San Rafael was \$1,904 in 2010. By 2019, it had increased to \$3,144, an increase of 65 percent. High rental prices have led to multiple households sharing a single apartment in many cases, or households leaving San Rafael altogether.

The dynamics of the housing market are further complicated by high land and construction costs, which make it difficult to build housing at competitive prices. In 2019, the International Construction Market Survey found that building costs in the San Francisco market were the highest in the world, surpassing New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and other historically high cost markets. Some of the costs are associated with regulatory requirements and permitting fees, but high labor and material costs are the most significant factor. The scarcity of developable sites results in high land costs, further driving up the cost of new development.

In 2019, the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee reported that the average cost to build an "affordable" housing unit in the Bay Area was \$664,000 per unit. This requires deep subsidies, tax credits, and other forms of financial assistance, particularly for units that are rent-restricted to low- and very low-income households. During the General Plan update, local developers frequently commented that new development didn't "pencil out," a phenomenon made worse by lengthy review times and uncertainties about project approval. Real estate studies prepared for the Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan confirmed these observations, concluding that the low return on investment for Downtown construction was a significant impediment to development.

For the past decade, these dynamics have led to housing production rates that failed to keep up with demand. In response, the State of California has approved legislation to streamline the review process for new housing, allow taller buildings, and limit the ability of local governments to deny new development proposals if they comply with basic zoning standards. These requirements are changing the way cities prepare their zoning regulations, with a focus on “objective standards” that specify exactly what is desired, thereby allowing projects to be approved more quickly.

Even with fewer regulatory barriers, the high cost of land and construction remain an obstacle to housing production. High costs also affect the viability of development in other sectors, including the office, retail, and industrial markets. One outcome will likely be a shift to less expensive building methods, such as modular construction, and the use of new and innovative building materials. Another outcome will be the repurposing and modernization of existing buildings, in lieu of new construction.

Reinventing Suburbia

The San Francisco Bay Area is experiencing a major shift in how and where it is growing. For most of the 20th Century, the region expanded outward through urbanization of farms and ranches. Much of San Rafael is a product of this era, with low-density subdivisions, auto-oriented shopping centers, and self-contained business parks. Even as recently as the 1990s, single family homes represented 65 percent of all housing construction in the region.

With few vacant sites remaining for new development, cities across the Bay Area must look inward and reinvent underutilized sites, infill properties, and Downtown areas. This trend is bolstered by land use and transportation strategies intended to reduce driving and related greenhouse gas emissions, and by State legislation directing local governments to plan for denser development. By the first decade of the 21st Century (2000-2010), 52 percent of the housing built in the Bay Area was multi-family.



This percentage is expected to significantly increase during the next 20 years. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) indicates that 78 percent of the region's new housing production and 62 percent of its job growth is expected to occur in designated "Priority Development Areas" (PDAs) located in each of the region's nine counties. New housing in these areas generally consists of apartments, condominiums, and townhomes. San Rafael's General Plan 2040 reflects this trend, with traditional single-family detached housing representing just 13 percent of the housing capacity identified during the next 20 years.

Whereas past multi-family projects were often two-story "garden" apartments on large landscaped sites, recent trends have favored denser infill development with urban amenities such as access to transit, shops, and services. Much of the planning focus during the last 20 years has been on creating great urban places close to transit, where housing, workplaces, entertainment, and shopping are all in close proximity. This provides the dual benefit of supporting Downtown businesses, adaptively reusing historic buildings, and creating more dynamic and walkable communities.

The long-term impacts of COVID-19 on this new growth paradigm remain to be seen. At the time that General Plan 2040 was published, enthusiasm about urban living was dampened by public health concerns. Transit is operating at greatly reduced levels, urban amenities are closed or operating in an altered state, and many households are placing a premium on private yards and personal space. This may result in design changes to future multi-family projects (such as private decks and patios, non-lobby access, etc.) but in the long run, a continued shift to denser housing is expected to continue. An exodus out of central cities like San Francisco may even result in higher demand for urban living environments in communities like San Rafael.

Economic Changes

San Rafael will continue to be shaped by global and national economic trends, including a shift in retail from brick and mortar storefronts to on-line sales, an increase in telecommuting and remote work, and the growth of new industries and work technologies. All of these changes have implications for land use, transportation, social equity, and economic vitality.

Economic forecasts suggest that the Bay Area will continue to be a global magnet for technology and information-driven industries in the coming decades. It will also experience continued growth in health care, education, leisure and hospitality, and professional services. More than a million new jobs are anticipated in the region between 2015 and 2040. Most of this growth will occur in the South Bay and in central cities like San Francisco and Oakland. However, San Rafael will remain the economic hub of Marin County, with about one-third of the county's jobs. The city will remain an attractive choice for mid-sized companies seeking a location near Silicon Valley/ San Francisco but close to the natural amenities of Marin County and the large North Bay labor pool.

Retail businesses employed approximately 5,000 people in San Rafael in 2018 and generated \$1.9 billion in taxable sales. The variety of locally available goods and services is an important part of the quality of life. The City of San Rafael itself is dependent on taxable sales as a source of revenue, particularly from auto sales, building and construction, and general consumer goods. Sales of consumer goods were already declining during the 2010s, due to on-line sales and changing consumer preferences. The 2020 pandemic accelerated the decline, wreaking havoc on the economy, people's lives, and City finances.

Looking forward, the City will need to rethink the future of retail in its different business districts, including Downtown, Northgate Mall, “big box” centers in southeast San Rafael, and smaller neighborhood shopping centers through the city. At least some centers will need to be reimagined, as there simply may not be enough demand to sustain traditional retail uses in all locations. As the text box below indicates, successful retail centers offer options such as entertainment, authenticity, and specialty shopping, providing a social experience as well as merchandise. Some retail centers may adapt by adding complementary uses such as housing. Others may move toward new formats and specialized markets, while some may close altogether.

Workplace trends will also shape San Rafael, including the growth of automation and increases in telecommuting. The former may result in a loss of lower wage jobs, while the latter may result in lower demand for traditional office space and increased demand for co-working and collaborative spaces, business services, and faster, more reliable communication infrastructure. While the pandemic has demonstrated that large-scale remote work is feasible, the expectation is that there will continue to be a need for physical spaces where ideas can be exchanged. Social spaces and local gathering spots will be increasingly important. New types of workplaces may emerge, particularly in locations with urban amenities like those offered in Downtown San Rafael, but even in light industrial and former retail buildings.

San Rafael is expected to continue its role as the County’s principal industrial center, given its location at the crossroads of US 101 and I-580 and the limited options for industrial uses elsewhere in the County. Given the lower cost of industrial sites and buildings, it will be important to conserve these properties from competing higher-value land uses, including housing. While a few sites near high-quality transit may merit consideration for other uses, most of the industrial land supply should be protected from uses that may conflict with industry or have a negative impact on industrial operations.

What’s Happening to our Shopping Centers?

Shopping centers have been part of San Rafael’s landscape for decades. They are more than just places to shop—they are where we meet our neighbors, bring our kids, see a movie, or have a meal. They are part of the fabric of our neighborhoods. But changes to retailing mean that some of these centers won’t survive another 20 years. Some may be replaced with new uses, and others will need to reinvent themselves.

What makes a successful shopping center? Increasingly, it’s about the experience the center provides for the customer. Is it fun? Are there places to meet family and friends? Special events? Great customer service? Comparison shopping options? Opportunities for savings? Shoppers want convenience, but they also want places to go. It will take vision, advocacy, partnerships, incentives, good design, and—in some cases—new housing, to keep our centers alive.



Transportation Innovations

The transportation industry is constantly evolving, creating the potential to reshape the way we travel and ultimately the ways we live and work. The last decade has seen the emergence of Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft, mass production of electric vehicles and installation of electric charging stations, and micro-mobility services such as e-scooters and electric bikes. The next two decades will be even more transformative as autonomous vehicles become more prevalent.

No one can predict with certainty how transportation innovation may ultimately reshape San Rafael. The City is still very dependent on private cars, with 64 percent of employed residents driving alone to work and 70 percent of all households owning two or more vehicles. Residents are not expected to suddenly abandon their cars and switch to new modes of travel. The philosophy taken in this Plan combines a “wait and see” approach, where our assumptions are periodically revisited, and a more proactive approach that expresses what we’d like mobility to look like in 20 years and about how we might get there.

Some of the major trends to watch include:

- A continued shift to electric vehicles and phase-out of fossil fuel powered vehicles—for buses and trains as well as private cars. This may ultimately mean fewer traditional gas stations and major changes to the auto sales and repair industries.
- Connected vehicles with technology that enable them to be “aware” of their surroundings, thereby transforming the way they maneuver. This offers a safer driving experience, less energy consumption, and smoother traffic flow.
- Improvements to autonomous vehicle (AV) technology resulting in more widespread use of AVs. Some sources indicate AVs may be the dominant form of travel by 2040, while other sources are more conservative. Conversion to AVs will likely begin with trucks, transit services, and other commercial vehicles.
- Continued innovation in parking design, including mechanical parking, and “smart” parking technology that allows City garages and curbside space to be used more efficiently
- New modes of travel serving “last mile” trips between transit stops (e.g., Downtown SMART and Transit Center) and nearby destinations. This could include electric or driverless shuttles, shared vehicles, scooters, electric bicycles, and other environmentally-friendly modes of travel.
- Drone delivery and other “contact-free” forms of package delivery
- More amenities for pedestrians and bicycles, making it easier to travel around the city without a car

“ We are looking ahead at a period of unprecedented changes. Some of these changes will be extensions of trends that have been emerging for some time, although many are just now coming into public consciousness. Other changes will be abrupt departures from the trends we are familiar with — transformative and structural changes, for which past practice provides little guidance. ”

-- MTC Regional Transportation Plan

While transportation in 2040 will be profoundly different than it is in 2020, there are still immediate needs associated with congestion, transit performance, and pedestrian and bicycle safety that will drive local decisions. In the coming years, San Rafael will participate in decisions around the redesign of the US 101 and I-580 interchange that can potentially reshape southeast San Rafael. The City is also grappling with congestion on Downtown streets and key arterials in North San Rafael. In the immediate future, it will also need to work with local transit providers to ensure that transit-dependent residents still have the option of riding the bus or train as systems recover from a pandemic that has curtailed service.



Photo Credit: KRON 4 News/ Twitter

Our Changing Climate

The warming of the earth by greenhouse gases has many repercussions for San Rafael. The City is becoming more vulnerable to extreme heat events and severe storms. Long-lasting droughts require changes to our water use habits and landscaping choices. Catastrophic wildfires are now an annual occurrence in the region, accompanied by unhealthy air from wildfire smoke even when those fires are hundreds of miles away. Rising sea levels are placing more low-lying areas at risk of tidal flooding. These changes are disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable members of our community, including seniors and lower income residents. They are affecting businesses as well as residents, creating the potential for major economic disruption in the future.

The General Plan seeks both to reduce San Rafael's contribution to climate change and to respond and adapt to its inevitable impacts. The former is achieved through policies to change how we generate and consume energy, travel around the city and region, construct buildings, dispose of waste, and manage natural resources. The latter is achieved through policies to make us more resilient, and to reduce the potential loss of life and property from climate-related hazards. Much of the City's future planning will need to focus on reducing risks from wildfire, adapting to rising tides, and helping vulnerable populations. The City is only one stakeholder in these efforts; state and federal partnerships will be needed, and private sector participation will be critical.

Aggressive targets have been set for greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction at the state level, including a 40 percent reduction of GHG emissions between 1990 and 2030 and an 80 percent reduction by 2050. These targets are driving changes to local land use and transportation plans intended to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels by making it easier to travel without a car. More fundamental changes will be needed to reduce the distances we travel each day and to change commute patterns.

Emerging Technology

Some of the impacts of technology have already been referenced in this chapter---autonomous cars, on-line shopping, and telecommuting, for example. More broadly, technology will continue to influence every aspect of our lives and reshape the ways we plan and build our cities. Digital tools are changing how buildings, roads, infrastructure, and energy systems are designed. The public and private sectors are creating “smart” cities through sensors, controls, and software. Artificial intelligence is allowing us to integrate information and analyze data more quickly, leading to more informed decision-making.

New technologies are also creating new ways of doing business and delivering services. The internet is being used to connect assets with people who want to use them, enabling the emergence of the “sharing” economy. The number of web-connected devices is increasing exponentially, potentially allowing greater efficiency and time savings.

Like other cities, San Rafael is exploring ways to employ technology to improve service delivery, environmental quality, resource management, energy use, traffic flow, and crime prevention, among other things. This raises important questions for our society, our economy, and local governance. Privacy, security, and ethical issues must be considered as data becomes more accessible and transparent. There is also the potential for greater divides between those with access to technology and those without.

One of the most important potential benefits of technology is the ability to make government more accessible. Communication is key and social media has transformed the City’s ability to reach its residents. New tools make it more convenient to participate and be heard. The City’s Community Engagement and Action Strategy will continue to be implemented so that participation is inclusive and easy.



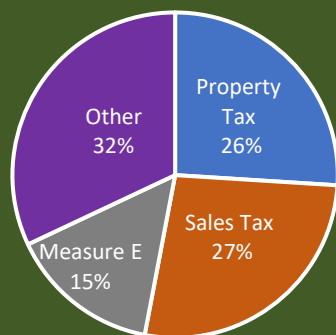
Fiscal Constraints

Municipal budget constraints have been informing decision-making as long as cities have existed. This is true now more than ever, as cities face large deficits at the same time they must implement state-mandated programs and respond to increased service demand. Cost-benefit analysis has become an important part of local budgeting and capital improvement programming. In San Rafael, budgeting is further informed by core goals established by the City Council, including neighborhood and economic vitality, quality of life, public safety, preserving public assets, and sustaining foundational services.

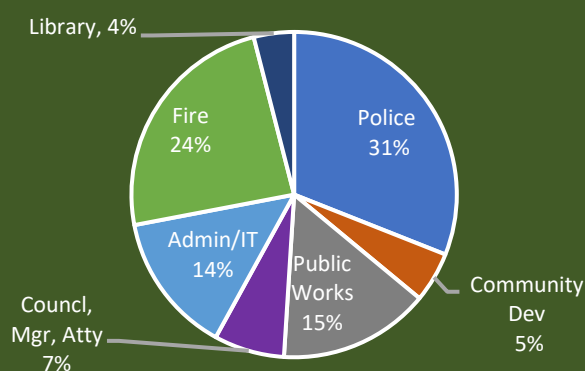
Financial constraints are particularly important in the context of the 2040 General Plan. The Plan is an important tool to attract and retain land uses that generate revenue, such as retail sales and property taxes. Its Land Use and Economic Vitality Elements acknowledge the importance of retaining uses like industry and offices, recognizing their fiscal benefits. It also recognizes the indirect fiscal benefits of other uses, like affordable housing (which supports the workforce) and cultural facilities (which make San Rafael a more interesting and dynamic place to live).

San Rafael General Fund Revenues and Expenses (2019-20)

Revenues



Expenses



The General Plan also includes hundreds of implementing actions. Some are already underway and represent the core services provided by City departments. Others will require an additional funding or revenue streams. The General Plan embraces the idea that new programs must be evaluated for their fiscal impact on the City, including secondary impacts on residents and businesses. The same is true for capital improvement projects, such as levee improvements, community centers, and parks. Cost-benefit analysis must consider the City's ability to pay for the improvements or services to be provided. It must also consider the social, environmental, and health benefits that may result.

The need to consider costs and benefits was one of the most frequently raised topics during General Plan Steering Committee meetings. It was often brought up in the context of bicycle lanes that would benefit a relatively small number of users, while adding to vehicle traffic delays for motorists. While social, health, and environmental benefits are hard to quantify, they are important considerations in such decisions. Some projects may have important long-term dividends (fewer injuries, reduced greenhouse gas emissions), while others may be difficult to justify given competing priorities and other tools available to achieve the same goals.

Ultimately, each program and each decision must be evaluated on its merits. The point is to recognize that, in an environment of limited resources, cost-benefit analysis must be part of the process. Fiscal responsibility is part of the foundation of this Plan. It is also integral to its implementation.

Forecasts for the Future

The 2040 General Plan and its accompanying Environmental Impact Report (EIR) are based on assumptions about population, housing, and employment growth in the San Rafael Planning Area over the 2020-2040 period. These assumptions are rooted in regional forecasts developed by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). The regional forecasts consider national economic and demographic trends, coupled with local data such as birth and death rates, interstate migration patterns, and international immigration. The ABAG forecasts are used by public agencies across the Bay Area for transportation planning, air quality planning, and local general plans, and by the private sector in market assessments and feasibility studies.

The ABAG projections in use at the time that General Plan 2040 was prepared were the Plan Bay Area 2040 forecasts.¹ These forecasts do not consider the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on regional growth, but do consider the cyclical nature of the regional economy. The Bay Area economy grew more rapidly than predicted during 2015-2020, and this growth was already expected to taper off in the coming years. Between 2015 and 2040, the ABAG forecasts indicate the Bay Area will add roughly two million more residents and one million more jobs.

At the local level, ABAG's projections for San Rafael indicate an additional 2,800 households in the city by 2040, and an additional 5,600 jobs. The forecasts have a 2010 start point, so some of this growth is already behind us.² The ABAG forecasts only include land within the San Rafael city limits and exclude the unincorporated San Rafael Planning Area, including communities such as Marinwood and Santa Venetia. Projections for unincorporated Marin County indicate several hundred more households and jobs in these areas, bringing the total for the San Rafael Planning Area to over 3,000 households and 5,900 jobs. Preliminary forecasts for 2050, which were being developed by ABAG at the time the General Plan was adopted, indicate ABAG will soon be increasing its household growth forecasts for Central Marin County but lowering its employment forecasts.

While the ABAG forecasts provide the starting point for the General Plan, other factors are also considered. For example, the City is required by State law to plan for its "fair share" of the region's housing needs. The "fair share" determination is made by ABAG every eight years through a process called the "Regional Housing Needs Allocation" (RHNA). Preliminary estimates indicate San Rafael's RHNA for 2023-2031 may be over 3,000 housing units. It is also important to plan for slightly more capacity than the forecasts suggest in order to allow for market flexibility.

Table 2-1 shows the growth forecasts for 2040. The table shows "baseline" (existing) estimates for 2020, "forecast" estimates for 2040, and the increment of growth over the 20-year period. The data is presented for housing units, households, and employment. The number of housing units slightly exceeds households, as roughly 3-5 percent of all housing units are vacant at any given time. The data is arranged to show the City of San Rafael in the upper rows and the entire Planning Area (including the unincorporated areas) in the lower rows.

¹ These projections were being extended to 2050 at about the same time the General Plan was adopted but had not yet been published for individual cities.

² State Department of Finance records indicate San Rafael added 390 households between 2010 and 2020, mostly through decreased vacancy rates rather than new construction. At least 1,000 new jobs were added during this period.

Table 2-1: General Plan 2040 Forecasts for San Rafael

	2020	2040	20-year increase
CITY OF SAN RAFAEL			
Housing Units	24,110	28,160	4,050
Households	22,960	26,820	3,860
Employment	42,050	46,100	4,050
SAN RAFAEL PLANNING AREA (City + Unincorporated Area)			
Housing Units	29,530	33,990	4,460
Households	28,130	32,380	4,250
Employment	44,200	48,315	4,115

Population forecasts are not shown in the table and will depend on trends in household size. Average household size in 2020 was 2.49, with 57,660 residents in households and another 2,140 in group quarters (nursing homes, dormitories, etc.). Total population was roughly 59,800. Another 14,500 residents reside in the unincorporated Planning Area for a total population of 74,300. The addition of 4,460 housing units would likely mean roughly 10,000 more residents in the Planning Area. This is a 15 percent increase compared to 2020. The number of jobs is projected to increase by about 10 percent.

About 20 percent of the projected housing unit growth shown in Table 2-1 and about one-quarter of the projected job growth is associated with projects that were approved but not yet complete at the time of General Plan adoption. There are more than 850 housing units in San Rafael’s development “pipeline,” including three assisted living projects with a total of 292 units.³ There are also several office and hotel projects underway or pending.

The balance of the City’s growth is projected to occur on vacant and underutilized sites across the city, particularly in Downtown San Rafael. Policies and maps in this General Plan direct development to Downtown for several reasons, including the area’s ability to accommodate higher densities, support transit, and reduce car-dependency and related greenhouse gas emissions. Downtown housing is also part of a broader strategy to revitalize the area, meet citywide needs for affordable housing, create a vibrant urban neighborhood, and reduce development pressure on mature San Rafael neighborhoods.

Roughly half of the housing and employment potential identified in the General Plan is associated with Downtown sites. Other areas with development potential include the North San Rafael Town Center (Northgate Mall) area and Southeast San Rafael/ Canal. The Land Use Element of the General Plan provides additional information on expected growth and development patterns, and the Housing Element includes more specific information on sites where housing could potentially be built.

It is important to keep in mind that the forecasts in this Plan are intended primarily as a benchmark for planning. They are not a guarantee that growth will occur, nor are they a mandate to build. Growth is ultimately a function of the economy, the local real estate market, and the collective decisions of those who own property in San Rafael. The forecasts do not assume that every property in the City will develop to its maximum capacity, nor do they assume that “built out” neighborhoods will never change. In the event that growth forecasts exceed the levels shown in Table 2-1, the General Plan will need to be amended, with the EIR updated to reflect the changes.

³ Includes the unincorporated area.

Guiding Principles

Figure 2-2 illustrates the guiding principles that underpin General Plan 2040. The principles express a vision of San Rafael as a **thriving city**.

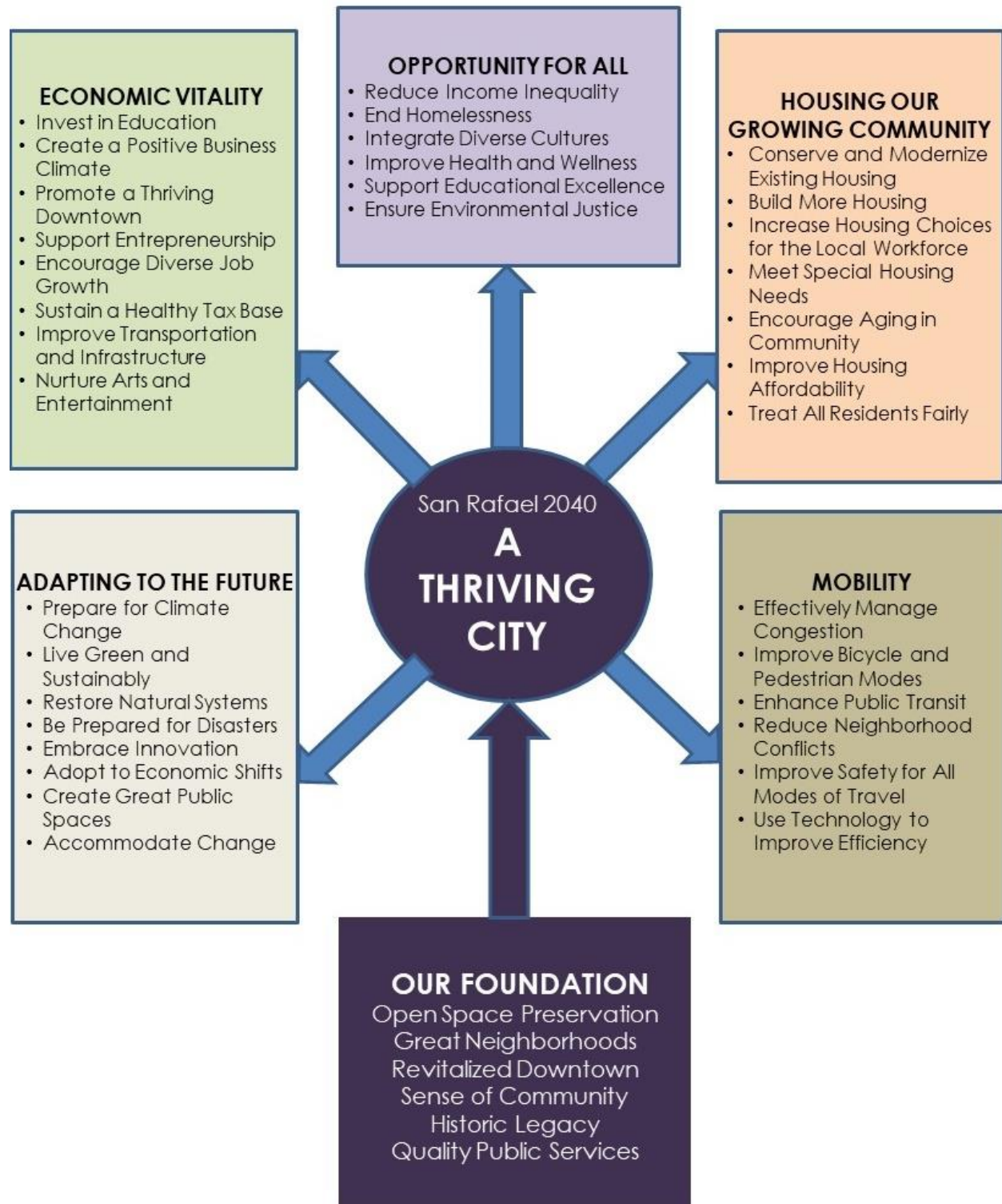
At the core of this vision is a commitment to conserving and strengthening the foundational assets that make San Rafael the place it is today – its neighborhoods, beautiful open spaces, Downtown, strong sense of community, historic legacy, and quality public services. There are five essential principles that flow from this foundation:

- Economic Vitality
- Opportunity for All
- Adapting to the Future
- Housing Our Growing Community
- Mobility

The brief statements under each of these headings in Figure 2-2 are intended to underpin the goals and policies of this General Plan. These are expressions of San Rafael's values and intentions for its future. They are applicable to the city as a whole, and to each of its neighborhoods and open spaces. The principles were developed collaboratively by the General Plan Steering Committee, with input from the community early in the Plan Update process.



Figure 2-2: General Plan 2040 Guiding Principles



Last page of previous chapter



Our Built Environment

3 Land Use

4 Neighborhoods

5 Community Design and Preservation

3 Land Use

The Land Use Element includes policies guiding the physical form of the city and provides direction on growth management, development, and land use compatibility. It includes the San Rafael Land Use Map, which shows the location and intensity of land uses envisioned for the future. The Element identifies those areas of the city where change will be encouraged as well as those areas where existing uses will be maintained and enhanced. The intent is to direct growth and reinvestment strategically, reinforcing San Rafael's best qualities while revitalizing areas in need of improvement.

Government Code Section 65302 (a) defines the requirements for the Land Use Element. State law requires that the Element designate the general distribution, location, and extent of land used for housing, business, industry, open space, recreational facilities, education, public buildings and lands, mineral extraction, and waste disposal. It must also contain standards for population density and building intensity. These standards must be coordinated with plans for transportation and infrastructure and must reflect environmental constraints such as sea level rise and wildfire hazards.

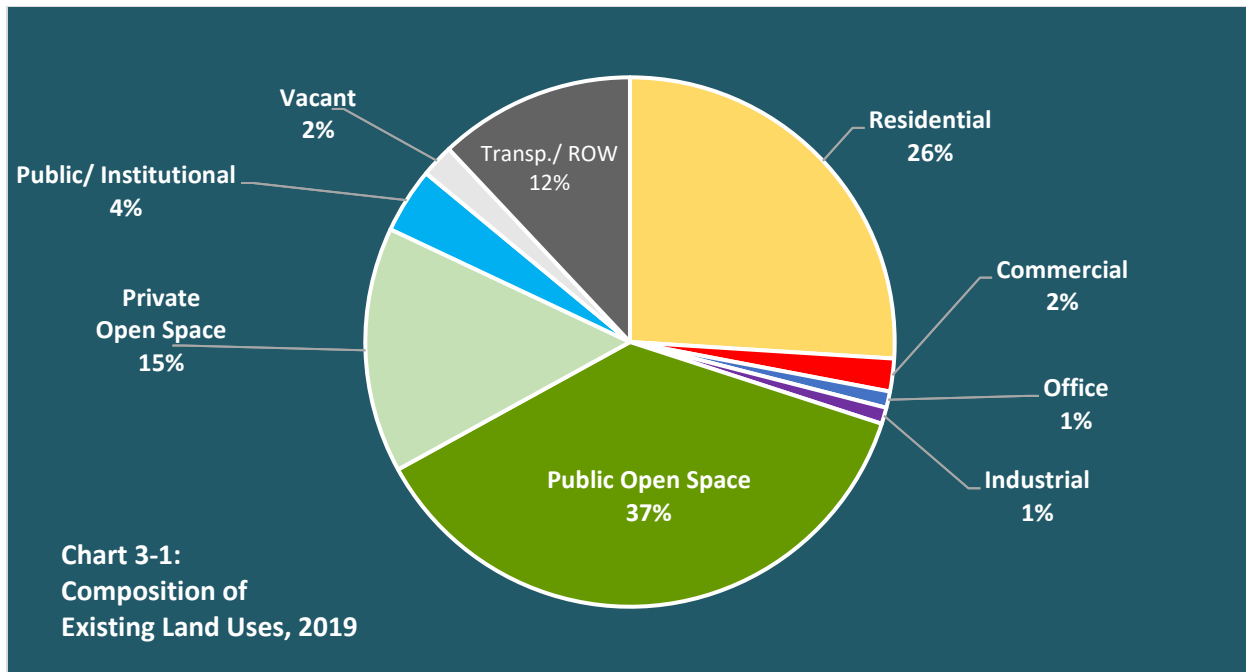
The Land Use Element is closely aligned with other elements of the General Plan. The Mobility Element has been calibrated with the Land Use Element to ensure that transportation capacity is adequate to support new development. At the same time, the Land Use Element shifts development patterns to make walking, bicycling, and transit use a more viable way to get around. The Land Use Element similarly aims to reduce the hazards identified in the Safety and Resilience Element, while preserving the natural resources addressed in the Conservation and Climate Change Element. It includes Map designations and policies to meet the housing needs identified in the Housing Element.

The Land Use Element guides future change to fit the desired character of San Rafael, preserve the city's historic qualities and natural environment, serve community needs, sustain the local economy, and enhance the quality of life. Its goals and policies provide the direction needed to strengthen San Rafael's sense of place and keep the city a place that feels like "home."

Land Use and the Quality of Life

San Rafael is a desirable place to live, work, or own a business in part due to the variety of land uses that can be found in the city. It offers older neighborhoods with traditional city blocks and mixed uses, as well as mid- to late- 20th Century suburban areas where residential and commercial uses have been separated. Its neighborhoods are complemented by multiple business districts, ranging from industrial areas to office parks to neighborhood shopping centers. Its developed areas are complemented by a network of open spaces, connecting the city to nature and making it more interesting and scenic. Past land use decisions have maintained a balance of uses that give the city a "hometown" quality and make San Rafael what it is today.





Profile of Existing Land Uses

Chart 3-1 shows existing land uses in San Rafael in 2019. The Planning Area includes 19,345 acres of land, or about 30 square miles. Roughly 52 percent of this acreage is open space. About two-thirds of the open space (7,100 acres) is public while about one-third (2,800 acres) is private, including ranchland, golf courses, cemeteries, quarries, and common areas within planned development. Residential uses represent 26 percent of the Planning Area acreage. This includes 4,200 acres of low density or single-family housing development, 400 acres of medium density housing development, and 400 acres of high-density housing development. Streets and other transportation and utility uses represent about 12 percent of the Planning Area. Commercial, office, and industrial uses represent less than five percent.

Within the San Rafael city limits, the percentage of open space is lower and the percentage of urbanized uses are higher. Even so, 36 percent of the land area within the city limits is open space. Residential uses represent 32 percent of the area within the city limits. Transportation and utilities represent 16 percent, while commercial and industrial uses are about eight percent. Only about three percent of the land within the city limits—or 290 acres—is vacant. Vacant land includes properties that are zoned for urban uses such as housing or industry but have minimal or no improvements.

Land Use Planning Concepts

The Land Use Element reflects the Guiding Principles of General Plan 2040 (see P. 2-18). It strategically directs San Rafael's growth to areas where it will strengthen the city, protect natural resources, reduce exposure to environmental hazards, support climate change initiatives, and conserve and strengthen existing neighborhoods. The land use goals and policies are underpinned by a basic belief that change is both inevitable and necessary, and should be harnessed to achieve the vision of a thriving city. Standing still is not an option for San Rafael. The City has always been the vanguard of change in Marin County, and will lead the way in the future. Several basic planning concepts inform this element.

Transit-Oriented Development

The 2040 Plan adapts the concept of “transit-oriented development” (or “TOD”) to the suburban context of San Rafael. This concept allows for higher residential densities and a greater variety of land uses (offices, housing, retail, services, etc.) in a limited number of geographic areas. By strategically directing future development to these areas, and siting different uses close together, more trips can be made through a short walk, bicycle ride, or bus ride instead of a car. TOD provides the additional advantage of creating more interesting and diverse places, with housing, restaurants, shopping, and workplaces in close proximity. Building at higher densities can use land more efficiently and make housing more affordable, accommodating smaller housing units and reducing the number of necessary parking spaces.

In the context of San Rafael, the TOD concept has been tailored to recognize the city’s evolution and current form. Even in TOD areas, it is expected that many residents will still own cars and drive to work. But driving becomes a choice for these residents, and not the only option available. Even a small decrease in auto dependency can help move the City toward its greenhouse gas reduction goals.

The focus is on Downtown San Rafael where a robust network of buses provides access to many destinations in Marin County as well as San Francisco and the East Bay, and the SMART train provides an option for those commuting from points north. A more limited version of TOD is envisioned at the Civic Center Station, particularly at and around Northgate Mall to the northwest of the Station. In southeast San Rafael, the transit network is less robust but there are still opportunities to develop housing and commercial uses that are less auto-dependent. There are also opportunities to improve transit and develop a more complete network of sidewalks and bike lanes, making it more practical to get around without a car.



What’s a “Vibrant” City, Anyway?

During General Plan community meetings, participants were asked to name the one word that best described their aspirations for Downtown. At each meeting, the most commonly mentioned word was “vibrant.” But what does that really mean?

While there is no common metric for vibrancy, the word conjures up images of energy and enthusiasm. A vibrant city is full of life. It has outdoor events like concerts and farmers markets, and a diverse range of restaurants and shops. There are few vacant storefronts. There are interesting buildings and architecture. There’s a strong sense of place that draws people back. There’s art, film, music, and other forms of culture. Most of all, there’s a strong sense of place that lifts the spirit and draws people back.

Resilience

The Land Use Element responds to the chronic risks that come from living with natural disasters, including wildfires, earthquakes, and floods. This requires more than just being prepared for emergencies. The Land Use Map itself responds to hazard levels in different parts of the city, limiting development in high fire-hazard areas and on steep landslide-prone hillsides. Policies in the General Plan require elevated foundations in low-lying areas, and flood-proofing buildings where sea level rise is an issue. The Land Use Map includes a sea level rise overlay area, providing a reminder of where extra steps may be necessary to ensure the safety of life and property.

Growth Management and Community Benefits

Policies in this Element carry forward the prior General Plan’s emphasis on growth management, particularly the idea that development should be permitted only when adequate transportation, infrastructure, and public services are available, or will be in place when the project is built. The concept has been updated to reflect current resource constraints, as well as the evolving notion of what constitutes an “adequate” level of service. There are locations in San Rafael—Downtown, for example—where “adequate” transportation may mean reliable transit and bike lanes, rather than free-flowing arterials. Growth management also means balancing job growth and housing growth and providing housing that meets the needs of the local workforce.

This Element also supports the idea that new development may receive incentives or bonuses if it provides “community benefits.” In other words, a project may be able to add housing units or floor space beyond what is allowed by zoning if it provides amenities like affordable housing, childcare, or community meeting space. In some cases, this may mean allowing a taller building, reduced setbacks, or other project features that make the project more viable. This approach to project entitlement has become more important since the dissolution of redevelopment agencies in California in 2012, as cities seek creative approaches to finance capital projects, build affordable housing, and provide other improvements that were formally funded through tax increments. State law already requires density bonuses for affordable housing; San Rafael has also developed policies that allow bonuses for other types of improvements.

Complete Community

The General Plan embraces the idea that San Rafael should remain a “complete community” that includes a diversity of land uses. The Plan includes strong policies to preserve industrial land, retain neighborhood centers, sustain employment districts, and provide a variety of neighborhood, community, and regional commercial uses. Similarly, the Plan recognizes the importance of providing diverse housing choices, including affordable housing and multi-family development as well as single family neighborhoods. Land use policies particularly support “missing middle” housing types such as duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes.

Another aspect of the complete community concept is that a full range services are available within a short distance from all residents. In Downtown San Rafael, this might mean a 15-minute walk. In Terra Linda, it might mean a 5-minute drive. Within that radius, one should be able to get to school, a park, a grocery store, and other facilities that provide basic daily needs. Having these services readily available can reduce social isolation and vehicle trip lengths while also promoting more equitable development patterns.

Sustaining a diverse mix of land uses means that policies addressing specific uses may be required. In some cases, the intent is to identify the uses to be attracted and strategies for sustaining them. In other cases, the policies may address compatibility issues, with the objective of ensuring that new uses fit in and enhance the community. Land use compatibility is one of the major purposes of the Land Use Element.

Accordingly, there are specific policies in this Element for hotels, self-storage facilities, childcare, mixed use development, short-term rentals, industry, wastewater plants, and other uses that one finds in a complete community.

Neighborhood Conservation

The Land Use Element recognizes that neighborhoods are the essence of San Rafael and the building blocks of the city. Focusing future growth Downtown, in the North San Rafael Town Center, and on underutilized commercial sites will relieve some of the pressure on our neighborhoods to accommodate San Rafael's future growth. For the most part, San Rafael neighborhoods will be conserved and enhanced. Compatible infill development will take place on vacant sites that have been skipped over in the past.

Neighborhood conservation does not mean that things will stay exactly as they are today. Residents may modernize their properties, add on to their homes, build accessory dwellings, or start a home business. This kind of reinvestment is both desired and encouraged, as neighborhoods continue to evolve and thrive.

Land Use Map

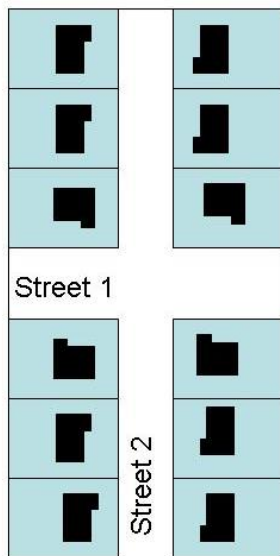
Figure 3-1 is the General Plan 2040 Land Use Map for San Rafael. It shows the pattern of uses envisioned in the horizon year of the Plan (e.g., 2040). Because San Rafael is a mature city, this pattern matches existing land uses in most locations. However, there are a number of areas where the Map allows different uses or more intense uses in the future, reflecting the policies that appear throughout this Plan. The Map identifies areas planned for residential, commercial, industrial, public, institutional, and open space uses, and includes a number of specialized categories.

Zoning maps are required to be "consistent" with General Plan Maps, but they do not need to match them exactly. A zoning map depicts what is allowed today, while a General Plan Map depicts the vision for 2040. Decision-makers may use the General Plan Map to evaluate requests for rezoning, and for coordinating infrastructure and capital improvement decisions with anticipated patterns of growth.

Early General Plans for San Rafael used a few simple categories to express the desired pattern of future growth. The 1963 Plan used five categories: residential, commercial, industrial, institutions, and park and open space. Each successive plan added more categories, reflecting a finer-grain map and greater direction on future land use and development. By General Plan 2020, there were 28 categories on the Map. General Plan 2040 carries most of those categories forward but consolidates Downtown categories and a few others. There are 19 categories shown on the Map.

Gross and Net Densities

- 12 Residential Parcels, 60' X 120' ea
- 50-foot street right-of-way



GROSS DENSITY = 4.4 UNITS/AC
NET DENSITY = 6 UNITS/AC

Prior General Plans for San Rafael used “gross” density to express residential development potential. Gross densities include streets, utilities, and easements and are usually used in communities with large single family subdivisions being developed on former open spaces.

General Plan 2040 shifts to “net” densities. This is a more appropriate metric in mature cities where streets are already in place and most development is expected to occur on infill sites. Net densities exclude streets and easements. As a rule of thumb, gross densities are typically 20 to 30 percent lower than net densities.

Density and Intensity Metrics

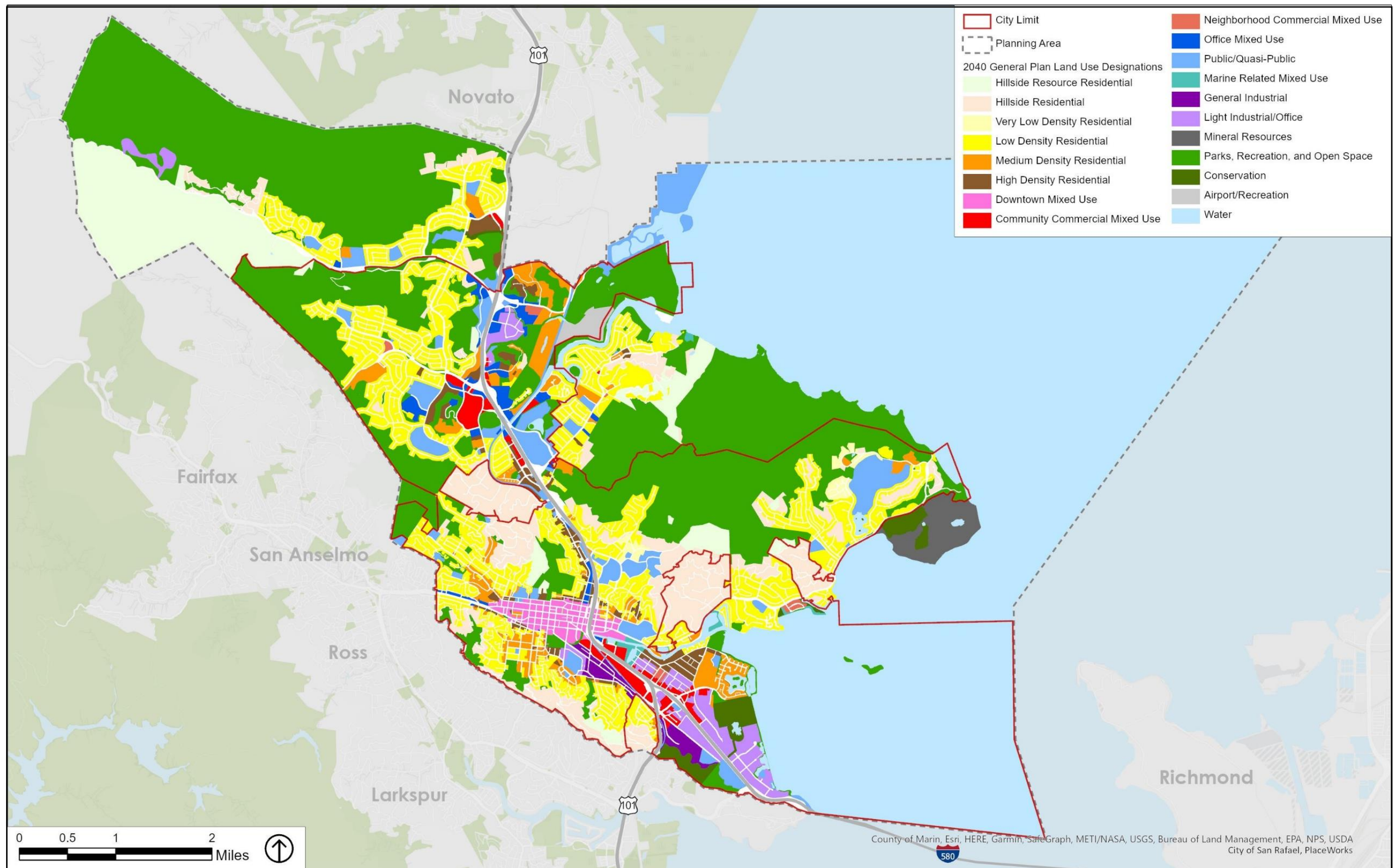
State law requires that the Land Use Element of the General Plan define the “*standards of population density and building intensity for the various districts and other territory covered by the Plan*” (Gov. Code § 65302(a)). Practically speaking, this means that multiple residential categories are shown on the map, each differentiated by the number of housing units allowed per acre (density). Commercial and industrial categories are differentiated by the types of uses present, along with a metric such as floor area that determines the maximum size of buildings.

Density is expressed as the number of housing units permitted on each *net* acre of land (this is also referred to as “net density.”) A net acre of land excludes public and private streets, easements, and areas that are considered “unbuildable” due to natural constraints such as wetlands and steep slopes. Areas that are used for facilities serving residents of the development (including recreational features such as swimming pools and private playgrounds) driveways and accessways, parking lots, and parcels developed with housing are considered “developable” and are included in net acreage and the net density calculation.

For non-residential uses, the amount of floor area that may be built on any given site is regulated by Floor Area Ratio, or FAR. This is the measurement of a building’s floor area relative to the size of the parcel on which it is located. FAR is expressed as a decimal number and is derived by dividing building area by lot area. A 10,000 parcel with a 5,000 square foot building would have an FAR of 0.5. While a maximum allowable FAR is included in the definitions for each of the commercial, industrial, and mixed use categories, this maximum is not permitted in all cases. There are maps in this Element that indicate where lower limits apply.

Mixed use buildings—in other words, those combining residential and commercial uses on the same property—are subject to special requirements. The residential portion of the building is subject to residential density standards, while the commercial portion is subject to FAR standards. This provides an incentive for mixed use projects on commercially zoned sites, as the total allowable floor area is greater when housing is included.

A different standard applies in Downtown San Rafael, where a “Downtown Mixed Use” General Plan designation applies. There are no limits on residential density in this designation, but a maximum allowable FAR of 4.0 applies. The FAR includes both non-residential *and residential* space, creating more flexibility for future development. The intensity of buildings is primarily determined by height limits, which vary across the Downtown area. In most cases, it would not be possible to achieve the maximum FAR of 4.0 due to lower height limits.



Residential Categories

There are six residential designations used on the General Plan Map. Five of these correspond to traditional residential neighborhoods while the sixth is applied to constrained, mostly undeveloped lands with very limited development potential. The color bands below correspond to the colors displayed on the map, and the “Google Earth” photos show typical areas with each designation.

In all residentially-designated areas, the following general conditions apply:

1. Some of the categories on the General Plan Map have multiple corresponding zoning districts. The designation of an area with a particular category does not mean that the most intense zoning district consistent with that category is automatically permitted.
2. The maximum density stated in each case is subject to State density bonus laws. These laws allow an increase in the number of permitted units for projects meeting specific criteria with respect to the inclusion of affordable housing units.
3. Pursuant to state law, accessory dwelling units do not count as a dwelling unit when calculating the number of units permitted on a property under the General Plan.
4. Other compatible uses, such as schools, childcare centers, parks, and religious facilities, may also locate in areas with this designation, subject to a Floor Area Ratio limit of 1.0.
5. To translate the density standard to a population standard (e.g., number of persons per acre), the unit/acre range should be multiplied by 2.5, which is the average number of persons per household in San Rafael.

Hillside Resource Residential (Maximum 0.5 units per net acre)

This designation is intended for privately owned land, typically with geologic or seismic constraints that limit development potential. Such areas are often located on steep hillsides that are visually significant and have been identified as having very limited potential through prior development proposals. Hillside Resource Residential Areas include single family homes on very large lots, as well as undeveloped properties.



Hillside Residential (0.5 to 2.2 units per net acre)

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



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

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





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

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



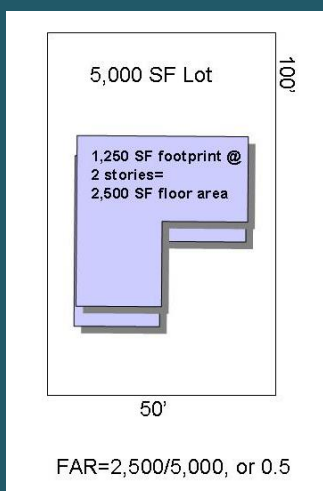
Medium Density Residential (8.7-21.8 units/net acre)

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



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

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



Understanding Floor Area Ratio

Floor area ratio refers to the ratio of building area to land area on any given site. For calculation purposes, building area excludes basements, garages, non-leasable covered atriums, and other non-habitable spaces. The example to the left shows a two-story building with 2,500 square feet of habitable space on a 5,000 square foot lot. The FAR is 0.5.

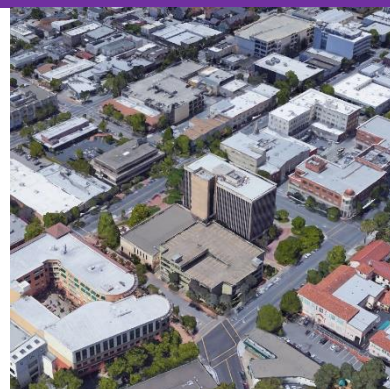
Each of the mixed use and industrial categories in the General Plan has a maximum FAR. These maximums are further limited by Figure 3-2, which establishes lower maximum FARs in some parts of the city.

Mixed Use Categories

There are five mixed use categories on the map. Each category allows both residential and non-residential uses. Residential uses may be subject to specific requirements related to compatibility with adjacent commercial uses and the City's desire to sustain retail, service, office, and similar economically-productive uses. Multiple zoning districts may be used in each category to differentiate the intensity or mix of activities allowed in given areas. The most intense zoning district deemed consistent with a given category is not automatically permitted. As in residential areas, projects incorporating affordable housing are subject to State density bonus allowances. Other compatible uses, such as schools, childcare centers, parks, and religious facilities, may locate in each designation, subject to specific requirements codified through zoning.

Downtown Mixed Use (Maximum FAR 4.0)

This category corresponds to properties in Downtown San Rafael. It includes the highest development intensities in the city, and contains a mix of housing, office, retail, service, and public land uses. Development in this area is guided by the Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan, which includes further detail on building form, development intensity, height, and allowable uses. The maximum FAR of 4.0 includes residential space as well as non-residential space but excludes space allowed through density bonuses. There is no residential density limit in the Downtown Mixed Use area. This allows for greater flexibility in terms of housing types, encourages smaller units, and maximizes housing opportunities. Height limits define the maximum building envelope on each site with this designation and may preclude the maximum FAR from being attained on sites outside the Downtown Core and Transit Village areas. Consistent with the General Plan and Downtown Precise Plan and EIR, the total number of net new residential units added within the Downtown Precise Plan boundary between 2020 and 2040 shall not exceed 2,200.



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

This category corresponds to general retail and service uses, restaurants, automobile sales and service uses, hotels/ motels, and other commercial activities. Offices are also permitted, except where specifically precluded by General Plan policies. Mixed use projects that combine housing and commercial uses are encouraged. Projects that are entirely residential are permitted, although limitations may apply in certain zoning districts to ensure that adequate land is provided for activities generating sales tax, jobs, and local service opportunities. Residential development is subject to a maximum net density of 43.6 units per acre. The FAR limit of 0.3 applies to non-residential square footage only, and excludes square footage associated with housing in mixed use projects. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figure 3-2 (Floor Area Ratio map).



Areas with this designation include the Northgate Town Center, Merrydale Road area, and portions of Francisco Boulevard East and West.

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



This category corresponds to neighborhood-serving retail and service uses such as pharmacies, supermarkets, and dry cleaners. Residential and ancillary office uses are allowed, subject to policies in the General Plan and zoning standards establishing the conditions for these uses. A maximum net density of 24.2 units per acre applies to projects that include residential uses. The FAR limit of 0.32 applies to non-residential square footage only, and excludes square footage associated with housing in mixed use projects. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figure 3-2 (Floor Area Ratio map). Areas with this designation include small neighborhood shopping centers, and pockets of local retailers, the Regency Theater, and the B Street corridor south of Downtown.

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



This category corresponds to areas where office is the prevailing land use. Typical activities include general offices, medical and professional offices, and administrative or headquarters offices. Different zoning districts have been developed to reflect the specific combinations of uses that are desired in each area. These include office-residential areas and office-retail areas, as well as a general office district. Residential uses are allowed in all of these areas, subject to specific zoning standards and permitting requirements as well as policies in the General Plan. A maximum net density of 43.6 units per acre applies to projects that include residential uses. The non-residential portion of such properties is subject to an FAR limit of 0.4. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figure 3-2 (Floor Area Ratio map).

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



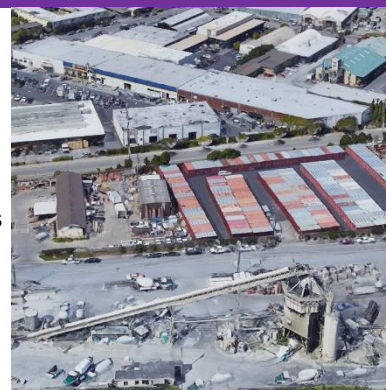
This category includes water dependent businesses such as boat building; boat repair, sales and service uses; and boat charter services. Other uses that draw people to the waterfront are allowed, including shopping centers, restaurants, hotels/ motels; retail and parks. Residential use and non-marine related offices are permitted in this category but may be subject to conditions to ensure they do not interfere with marine-related uses. Where residential uses are included, they are subject to a maximum density of 21.8 units per net acre. The non-residential square footage on any given site is subject to a FAR limit of 0.32. Lower FAR limits may apply on some parcels, as indicated on Figure 3-2 (Floor Area Ratio map).

Industrial Categories

There are two industrial categories on the General Plan Map. Residential uses are generally not permitted in these areas, so a density standard is not included.

General Industrial (Maximum FAR 0.33)

This is the broader of the two industrial categories, with a variety of production, distribution, and repair uses allowed. These areas play an essential role in the Marin County economy, create local jobs, and provide a high volume of tax revenue for San Rafael. General Industrial areas include activities such as manufacturing, storage and warehouse facilities, motor vehicle service and repair, contractor uses and yards, wholesalers, sand and gravel plants, solid waste management and recycling facilities, and trucking yards or terminals. Uses that are incidental or ancillary to these activities also may occur, including offices related to the primary use and employee-oriented retail uses. Given the potentially impactful nature of these uses, buffering and screening may be required to enhance public rights of way and ensure land use compatibility. A maximum FAR of 0.33 applies, although lower limits may apply on some parcels as indicated on Figure 3-2 (Floor Area Ratio map).



Light Industrial/Office (Maximum FAR 0.38)

Like the General Industrial areas, the Light Industrial/ Office (LI/O) areas are characterized by a variety of production, distribution, and repair activities. However, the range of industrial uses is more limited than in General Industrial areas, reflecting the design of these areas as business parks or their proximity to more sensitive uses such as housing. Typical uses include repair and servicing, “maker” activities (woodworking and carpentry shops, creative businesses, etc.), research and development, e-commerce activities, light manufacturing, and tech-related activities. On sites larger than 10 acres with this designation, and in buildings of 50,000 square feet or greater, region-serving specialty retail uses (including “big box” type uses) may be appropriate.



Other specialty retail uses may be allowed to occupy minor portions of the LI/O districts provided that intensity and traffic standards are met and the integrity of the district is not threatened. LI/O districts are subject to a maximum FAR of 0.38, although lower limits may apply on some parcels as indicated on Figure 3-2 (Floor Area Ratio map). Multiple zoning districts apply within LI/O areas. At least one of these districts, mapped in the Lindero Street/ Jordan Road area, allows live-work development.

Public and Open Space Categories

Public/ Quasi Public (Maximum FAR 1.0)



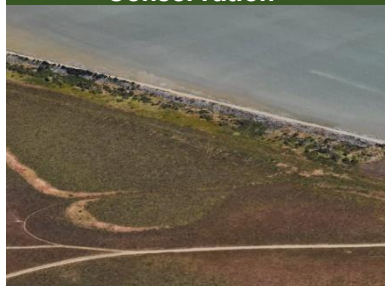
This designation denotes public schools, libraries, post offices, churches, public hospitals, and institutional facilities such as Dominican University and Marin Academy. It also is applied to major utility properties and public facilities. The maximum FAR is 1.0, although this level of intensity is not appropriate in all instances. Additionally, exemptions from development standards may be granted if findings are made that a higher FAR is necessary for public health or safety purposes. While housing is not envisioned on land with this designation, it may be acceptable in circumstances prescribed by the General Plan or zoning regulations. In such instances, net densities should be compatible with prevailing allowable densities in the vicinity and existing improved open space should be retained for public use where possible.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space



This designation denotes land which is used for parks, recreation, and open space (PROS), including City parks, County and State Parks, common open space within private development, cemeteries, and areas acquired for resource conservation, hazard reduction, and passive recreation such as hiking. Permitted uses include athletic fields, sports facilities, civic buildings with a primarily recreational or social function, and leisure-oriented uses such as picnic areas, boat slips, and tot lots. Land with this designation is further classified in the PROS Element of the General Plan as “improved” or “natural.”

Conservation



This designation denotes land which is to remain undeveloped due to high environmental sensitivity, exceptional visual resource value, or hazards such as wildfire, slope instability, and flooding, including inundation related to sea level rise. Areas with this designation include a combination of privately owned properties and areas owned by utilities and conservation groups. On private properties, this designation is generally applied to the portion of the site that has been determined to be undevelopable due to the factors listed above. The primary objective in Conservation areas is to manage and restore natural resources, and to minimize environmental hazards and associated threats to life and property. Where appropriate, compatible activities such as agriculture and recreation may be considered.

Mineral Resources (Maximum FAR 0.02)



This designation applies to quarry and brick yard uses which utilize mineral resources of regional significance. It applies only to the San Rafael Rock Quarry and McNear Brick and Block properties on the San Pedro Peninsula. Future activities on these lands are subject to further policy guidance as provided by the General Plan.

Miscellaneous Categories

Airport/Recreation

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



Water

This designation applies to the navigable waters of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, the San Rafael Canal, and associated marinas along the San Rafael shoreline. The designation provides an opportunity for a limited number of water dependent uses which require water access as a central element of their function and which contribute to the maritime character of the area. Live-aboards and other types of floating homes are allowed in this category, subject to permitting and water quality requirements.¹



Undesignated Areas

“Undesignated” areas include street rights-of-way and State property associated with US Highway 101 and Interstate 580. In the event that such land is leased or otherwise used for purposes other than transportation, the activities should be consistent with the General Plan designations on adjoining private properties.



Sea Level Rise Overlay

The General Plan includes a “Sea Level Rise Overlay” designation corresponding to the upper range of sea level rise determined to be possible by 2050 based on the BayWAVE model. Areas within this zone may be subject to policies, standards, and code requirements to reduce the potential for tidal flooding.



Table 3-1 shows the total acreage in each land use designation, broken down for the city limits and for the entire planning area.

¹ Because this is a non-residential land use category, a density range is not stated. In the event residential uses (e.g. floating homes) are proposed, they may not exceed the Medium Density Residential range.

Table 3-1: General Plan 2040 Land Use Acreage Totals

	City of San Rafael		San Rafael Planning Area	
	Acres	% of Total	Acres	% of Total
Residential Categories				
Hillside Resource	194	2.1%	1,475	8.3%
Hillside	642	6.9%	1,437	8.1%
Very Low Density	82	0.9%	82	0.5%
Low Density	2,149	23.3%	2,964	16.8%
Medium Density	527	5.7%	581	3.3%
High Density	240	2.6%	283	1.6%
Commercial and Mixed Use Categories				
Downtown	163	1.8%	163	0.9%
Community Commercial	193	2.1%	201	1.1%
Neighborhood Commercial	35	0.4%	36	0.2%
Office	185	2.0%	194	1.1%
Marine Related	39	0.4%	45	0.3%
Industrial Categories				
General Industrial	103	1.1%	103	0.6%
Light Industrial/ Office	316	3.4%	359	2.0%
Public/ Open Space Categories				
Public/Quasi-Public	676	7.3%	1,059	6.0%
Parks and Open Space	3,455	37.4%	8,111	45.9%
Conservation Areas	171	1.9%	248	1.4%
Mineral Resources	0	0	246	1.4%
Miscellaneous Categories				
Airport/ Recreation	68	0.7%	78	0.4%
TOTAL	9,238	100.0%	17,665	100.0%
Water	3,775	N/A	15,204	N/A
Undesignated	1,465	N/A	1,681	N/A
GRAND TOTAL	14,478		34,550	

Source: City of San Rafael, 2020

Note: Percentages exclude open water and "undesignated" land (rights-of-way, etc.)

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goal LU-1: Well-Managed Growth and Change

Grow and change in a way that serves community needs, improves fiscal stability, and enhances the quality of life.

San Rafael values its natural setting, heritage, and cultural diversity, as well as its role as the economic, civic, and entertainment center of Marin County. The City will maintain and improve the features that make it a desirable place today, while adapting to change so that it may become an even better place in the future. This will require embracing creativity and innovation, and fully engaging residents in land use decisions.

It is tremendously important to San Rafael residents that growth is well managed and harmonious with community needs. New development and other physical alterations must respect the character and scale of the city. Change and development should be accomplished in ways that enhance and blend with San Rafael's existing physical and social qualities. Development should respect the *physical* fabric of the city, while improving its *social* fabric through new housing and economic opportunities that reach all residents.

General Plan 2040 leaves in place most zoning standards but makes a few important changes. New Downtown zoning will enable higher densities and more housing without losing the area's hometown character. Northgate Mall and its environs will retain their General Plan Map designations, but policies are more emphatic about future changes that respond to retail trends, the desire for a North San Rafael Town Center, and the need for housing. Greater investment in the Canal area and Southeast San Rafael will improve living conditions for many residents, provide job opportunities, and create additional revenue, while responding to the challenges of rising sea level. Intentionally guiding growth allows areas needing improvement to be enhanced without intruding on neighborhood quality.



Policy LU-1.1: Balancing Growth with Infrastructure

Plan local circulation and infrastructure systems to provide capacity for development expected by 2040. The City's plans should reflect the goal of more sustainable transportation and infrastructure.

Program LU-1.1A: General Plan Evaluations. *Complete an evaluation of the General Plan at least once every five years. As part of this process, assess San Rafael's growth data and trends, population and employment forecasts, and progress toward meeting its housing, mobility, sustainability, and other goals. Recommend changes to policies, and adjustments to fees and capital improvement projects based on the findings.*

Policy LU-1.2: Development Timing

Allow new development only when adequate infrastructure is available, consistent with the following findings:

- a) The project is consistent with adopted Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) standards, as well as the requirements for Level of Service (LOS) specified in the Mobility Element.
- b) Planned circulation improvements necessary to meet City standards for the project have funding commitments and completed environmental review.
- c) Sewer, water, and other infrastructure improvements needed to serve the proposed development have been evaluated and confirmed to be in place or to be available to serve the development by the time it is constructed.
- d) The project has incorporated design and construction measures to adequately mitigate exposure to hazards, including flooding, sea level rise, and wildfire.

Program LU-1.2A: Development Review. *Implement Policy LU-1.2 through the development review and environmental review processes. The City may modify the requirements associated with this policy if it determines that its application as stated would preclude all economically viable use of a subject property.*

Policy LU-1.3: Land Use and Climate Change

Focus future housing and commercial development in areas where alternatives to driving are most viable and shorter trip lengths are possible, especially around transit stations, near services, and on sites with frequent bus service. This can reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with motor vehicle trips and support the City's climate action goals.

See the Mobility Element for additional policies and programs to reduce dependence on fossil fuel vehicles and encourage more active travel modes such as walking and cycling.

Program LU-1.3A: Benefits of Transit-Oriented Development. *Seek ways to objectively quantify, monitor, and promote the benefits of focusing new development around transit nodes and corridors and shifting trips from cars to active (non-car) transportation modes. Programmatic changes and recommendations should be supportable by objective data and quality of life measures. This should include data on modes of travel, trip origins and destinations, trip lengths, vehicle ownership, greenhouse gas emissions, and other metrics in areas that are well served by transit.*

Policy LU-1.4: Reasonable Interim use of Property

Allow a landowner reasonable interim use of property in areas where development is presently constrained by factors such as circulation system capacity, infrastructure, and natural hazards such as flooding.

Program LU-1.4A: Reasonable Interim Uses. *Ensure that zoning regulations include provisions for reasonable interim uses for properties where the highest and best use allowed by zoning is not presently attainable due to traffic capacity, infrastructure, natural hazards (including sea level rise), and other factors. Examples of reasonable interim uses include contractor's yards, modular or mobile uses, new car storage, parking, and outdoor recreation.*

Policy LU-1.5: Development Beyond the Urban Service Area

Retain undeveloped areas outside of San Rafael's Urban Service Area boundary but within its Planning Area in agricultural or open space uses.

Policy LU-1.6: Annexation

Prior to urban development, unincorporated areas that can be reasonably served through extension of existing City services should first be annexed. Annexation of already developed unincorporated land in the San Rafael Planning Area should be dependent on neighborhood interest, the cost/revenue implications of providing services and assuming liabilities for the area, and the availability of City services.

LAFCO in a Nutshell

All 58 counties in California have Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs). These commissions were created to discourage urban sprawl by regulating annexations and extensions of utilities and municipal services. The Marin County LAFCO coordinates changes to local government boundaries, including annexations and changes to local spheres of influence. It is also responsible for preparing Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs) of local agencies and services. LAFCO regulates cities and districts' ability to provide services outside of their boundaries by contract or agreement. Most LAFCOs are governed by a Commission comprised of city and county elected officials and special district representatives.

Program LU-1.6A: LAFCO. *Encourage LAFCO to adopt Urban Service Area and annexation policies for the San Rafael Planning Area that are consistent with General Plan policies.*

Policy LU-1.7: Land Use Planning in Surrounding Jurisdictions

Continue to work with the County of Marin and the cities of Larkspur, Novato, Ross, and San Anselmo to ensure that land use changes outside the San Rafael city limits will positively affect San Rafael.

Program LU-1.7A: Development Adjacent to San Rafael. *Work with the County, other jurisdictions, neighborhood groups, and residents to review applications for development in areas adjacent to San Rafael's city limits or within the Sphere of Influence.*

Policy LU-1.8: Density of Residential Development

Use the density ranges in the Land Use Element to determine the number of housing units allowed on properties within the Planning Area.² The following provisions apply:

- a) The density “range” includes a maximum and minimum. A given General Plan designation may have multiple corresponding zoning districts, including at least one district in which the maximum density may be achieved. Other zoning districts may have maximum densities that are less than the maximum indicated by the General Plan.
- b) Calculation of allowable units shall be rounded to the nearest whole number. Where the number is less than 0.5, it shall be rounded down. Where the number is 0.5 or greater, it may be rounded up.
- c) The number of units permitted on a given parcel may be affected by site resources and constraints, potentially hazardous conditions, climate-related factors (sea level rise, fire hazards, etc.), traffic and access (including wildfire evacuation constraints), the adequacy of infrastructure, City design policies, and prevailing densities in adjacent areas.
- d) The maximum net density shown on the General Plan excludes density bonuses that may be provided for affordable housing or other community benefits, in accordance with State law and local policies.
- e) As required by State law, an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) or junior ADU shall not be counted as a dwelling unit for the purposes of calculating net density.
- f) Areas in the “Downtown” General Plan category shall be exempt from the requirements of this policy and are instead subject to standards defined by the Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan.

Program LU-1.8A: Codifying Residential Density Limits. *Implement General Plan densities by setting allowable lot sizes and densities in the zoning ordinance and by including height limits and an area-wide dwelling unit “cap” in the Downtown Precise Plan (see text box).*

Program LU-1.8B: Minimum Densities. *The net density of new development shall be no less than the lower end of the density range specified by the General Plan for that property. Exceptions may be made on parcels smaller than 10,000 square feet, where the application of minimum densities may be infeasible.*

Program LU-1.8C: Small Multi-Family Lots. *Amend Section 14.16.300 of the Zoning Regulations to allow more than one housing unit per lot on lots that are smaller than 5,000 square feet, provided the density is consistent with the General Plan (these lots are currently limited to one unit each, unless located Downtown).*

Policy LU-1.9: Clustering

Allow clustering of development as a way to conserve environmentally sensitive or hazardous portions of a site (such as unstable slopes or flood plains). In such instances, the density calculation shall be made based on the area of the entire site (minus streets and easements), with the resulting number of units transferred to the less sensitive areas. The result would be a denser housing product on a portion of the site, with the balance conserved as open space.

² See page 3-6 for explanation of net density.

Downtown Housing Assumptions

The Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan identified the potential for 2,200 new housing units on scattered sites located throughout the Downtown area. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan and Downtown Precise Plan are based on this quantity of housing within the Downtown area. In the event the number of new Downtown units exceeds 2,200, an amendment to the Precise Plan and EIR will be required.

Rather than establishing a strict density limit for each Downtown site, the Precise Plan uses height limits and a Form-Based Code to regulate development. This provides more flexibility and allows housing to be more responsive to market demand. It makes it easier to provide smaller and more affordable units, as well as market-rate units and units for larger households. Design standards for Downtown are responsive to new state housing laws while respecting the character and historic context of the area.

Policy LU-1.10: Intensity of Non-Residential Development

Use the Floor Area Ratio limits on Figure 3-2 to determine the square footage of building space allowed on properties with non-residential General Plan designations. The following provisions apply:

- As with density, FAR is calculated on a “net” basis, and is based on the area of each parcel excluding streets and easements.
- The maximum FAR stated by the General Plan is not guaranteed. The square footage permitted on a given parcel may be affected by site resources and constraints, potentially hazardous conditions, climate-related factors (sea level rise, fire hazards, etc.), traffic and access (including wildfire evacuation constraints), the adequacy of infrastructure, and City design policies.
- The maximum FARs shown in Figure 3-2 exclude any residential development on the property. In the event that residential uses or mixed use projects are proposed on these sites, the maximum area is the sum of the FAR allowance plus the residential density allowance for the property. This Clause does not apply to Downtown San Rafael, which is regulated by the Downtown Precise Plan.

Program LU-1.10A: Codifying General Plan Floor Area Ratio Limits. Implement General Plan floor area ratio (FAR) limits by setting appropriate FAR limits in the zoning ordinance.

Policy LU-1.11: Replacement of Uses in Non-conforming Buildings

Where an existing building is larger than the FAR limit and no intensification or change of use is proposed, allow the property to be reused or redeveloped at the same size as the existing building, provided that the parking and design review requirements in effect at the time of the new application can be met.

Policy LU-1.12: Transfer of Development Rights

Allow transfer of development rights (TDR) or density/ FAR from one property to another in cases where:

- Special circumstances (e.g., historic preservation, wetlands protection, sea level rise) are found to exist, potentially causing significant environmental impacts if the transfer was not allowed; or
- A significant public benefit would be provided as a result of the transfer.

In such cases, the TDR should be consistent with the goals and policies of General Plan 2040 and should comply with zoning and design parameters to the greatest extent feasible, except that maximum FARs, densities, or heights may be exceeded on the receiving property.

Program LU-1.12A: Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program. Evaluate opportunities for TDR as a response to issues such as sea level rise and wildfire hazards. This evaluation also should address how TDRs are conveyed and recorded.

TDR Explained

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a zoning technique that conserves land, historic properties, or other constrained sites by redirecting the development that could otherwise occur on the land to another property that is more suitable for development. The development rights are “transferred” to a “receiving site” that is given a height bonus or allowance for greater density. A conservation easement or covenant is then placed on the “sending” site.





Policy LU-1.13: Increases in Floor Area Ratio

Consider allowing floor area ratios (FAR) bonuses that exceed the levels permitted by Figure 3-2 through the Planned Development (PD) zoning process for projects that meet all three of the following criteria:

- a) The higher FAR is necessary to facilitate redevelopment with improved parking, access, landscaping, building design, and economically productive uses.
- b) The project will provide significant community benefits, such as affordable housing.
- c) The project is consistent with policies in the General Plan related to transportation capacity, infrastructure, sea level rise, greenhouse gas reduction, and other factors related to the safety of future occupants and quality of life in the City.

Policy LU-1.14: FAR Exemptions

Provide the following exemptions from FAR requirements:

- a) Hotels and motels.
- b) Any portion of a building or development project devoted to childcare or senior care may be subtracted from the total building area when calculating that building's FAR.

Policy LU-1.15: Planned Development Zoning

Encourage the use of Planned Development (PD) zoning for development on parcels greater than five acres when the application of traditional zoning standards would make it more difficult to achieve General Plan goals. The PD zoning designation allows flexible design standards that are more responsive to site conditions.

Hillside Areas
 Undeveloped commercial or industrial properties shall be limited to the following development intensities based on slope:

Portions with less than 5% slope	100% of applicable FAR
Portions with 5-15% slope	50-75% of applicable FAR
Portions with slope over 15%	0.01 FAR

Clustering is encouraged and may be required to avoid sensitive areas.

City Limit
 Downtown Precise Plan Area
 Sphere Of Influence
 Planning Area

FAR

0.02
 0.3
 0.32
 0.4

Area 1 (see notes)
 Area 2 (see notes)



Downtown Precise Plan Area subject to 4.0 FAR, inclusive of residential uses. See Downtown Precise Plan for further detail.

Area 1		
Use		FAR
General / Neighborhood Commercial		
	Commercial Sales of Bulk Items and Specialty Retail	.32
	General Retail and Service	.21
Office		.26
Light Industrial/ Office		
% Light Industrial	% Office	FAR
75-100%	0-25%	.38
50-75%	25-50%	.30
25-50%	50-75%	.28
0-25%	75-100%	.26

Area 2	
Use	FAR
General / Neighborhood Commercial	
Commercial Sales of Bulk Items and Specialty Retail	.26
General Retail/ Service	.18
Office	.22
Light Ind. / Office and Ind.	.33

Source: City of San Rafael, 2019; County of Marin, 2009; ESRI, 2017; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 3-2:
Floor Area Ratio (FAR) Limits

Program LU1.15A: Planned Development Zoning. Continue to maintain Planned Development (PD) zoning districts.

Policy LU-1.16: School Site Reuse or Redevelopment

In the event a school site is made available for reuse, work with the School District and surrounding community to determine the desired uses. Given the public ownership of the land, uses that provide a public benefit should receive priority. This includes affordable housing, childcare facilities, neighborhood parkland, and facilities that accommodate public and quasi-public uses, such as adult day care, education, recreation, arts and cultural programs.

Program LU-1.16A: Zoning for School Sites. Continue to implement school site reuse and redevelopment through zoning regulations and the development review process.

See also Program PROS-1.3B on the retention of former school recreation areas

Policy LU-1.17: Building Heights

Use General Plan Figure 3-3 as the basis for determining “baseline” maximum building heights in San Rafael. Maximum heights should continue to be codified through zoning and any applicable Specific Plans or Precise Plans. In addition, the following specific provisions related to building heights shall apply:

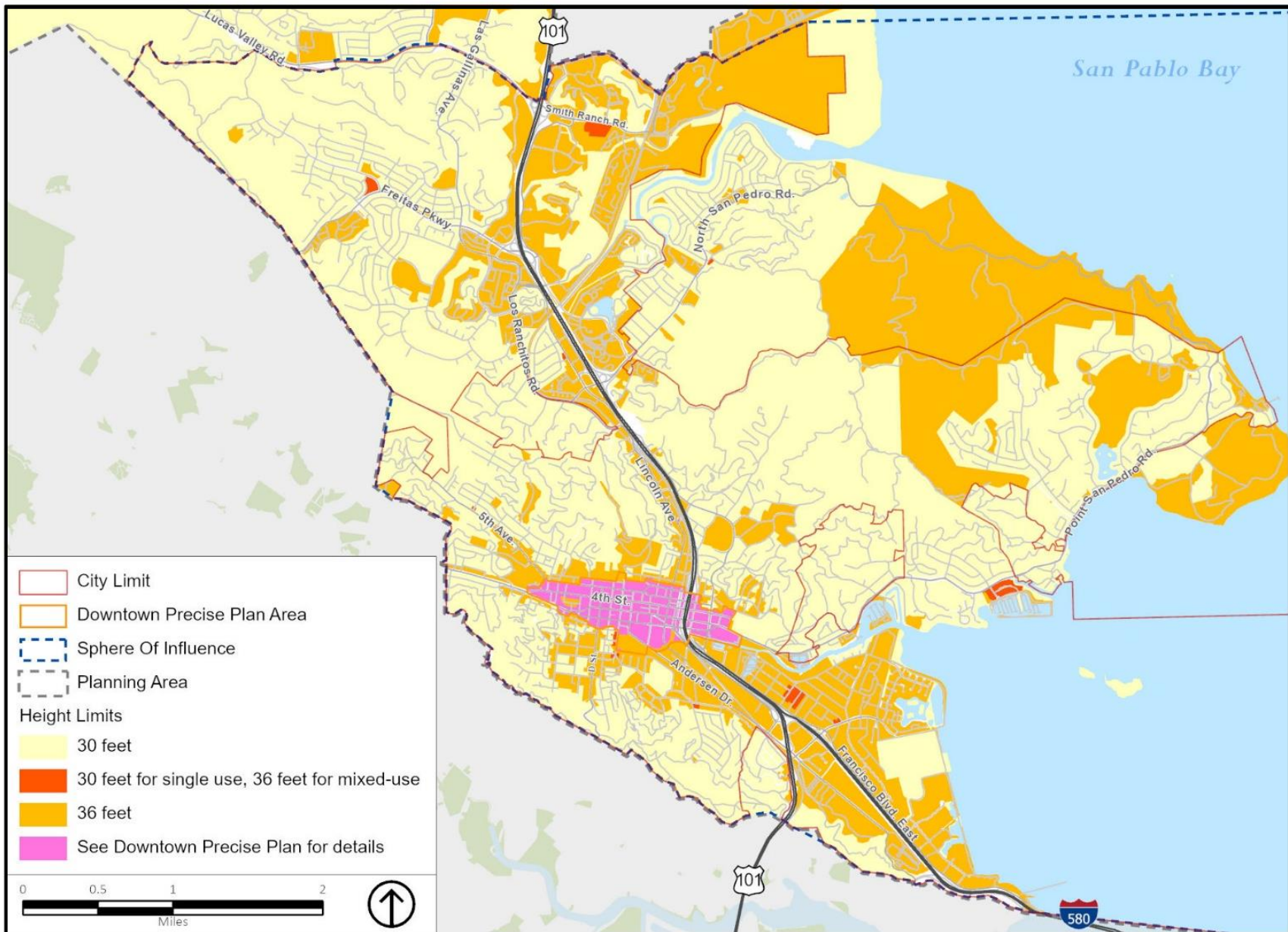
- a) Height of buildings existing or approved as of January 1, 1987 shall be considered as conforming to zoning standards.
- b) Hotels outside of the Downtown Precise Plan boundary have a 54-foot height limit. Within Downtown, the height provisions of the Downtown Precise Plan apply.
- c) As provided for by Policy LU-1.18, “baseline” building heights are subject to height bonuses where specific community benefits are provided, where a Variance or zoning exception is granted, or where a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is being implemented.
- d) Heights may be increased by up to six (6) feet above the baseline building heights as necessary to mitigate the exposure of properties to sea level rise and other flooding hazards (e.g., raising the first floor of habitable floor space above anticipated tidal flood elevations).

Policy LU-1.18: Height Bonuses

Allow the granting of height bonuses for development that provides one or more of the amenities listed in Table 3-2, provided that the building’s design is consistent with applicable design guidelines and standards. No more than one height bonus may be granted on each site.

Use permit requirements for height bonuses are shown in Table 3-2. The bonuses are intended to support State and local affordable housing density bonus programs; in other words, State bonuses are included in these limits and are not intended to be added on top of them.

See also Policy CDP-1.5 on views



Source: City of San Rafael, 2019; County of Marin, 2009; ESRI, 2017; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 3-3:

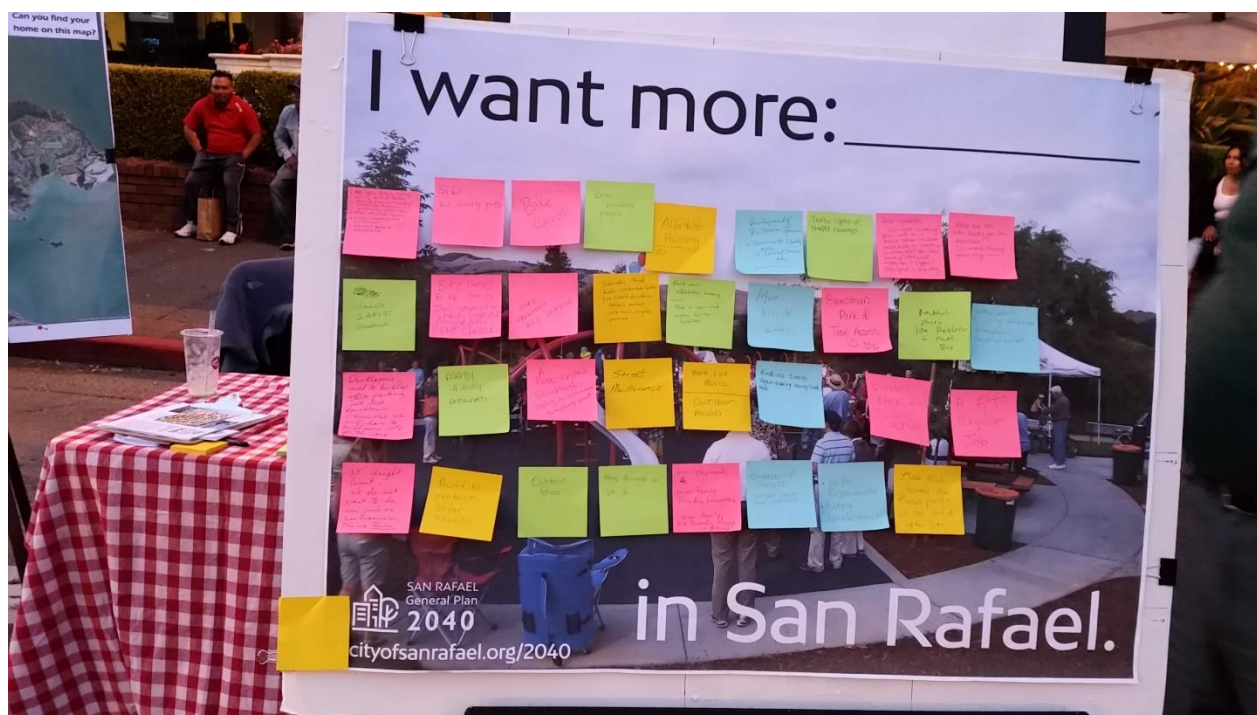
Height Limits

Table 3-2: Height Bonuses

Location	Maximum Height Bonus	Use Permit Required (PC Hearing)	Amenities (may provide one or more of the following)
Downtown San Rafael	As determined by the Downtown Precise Plan		
Lincoln Avenue from Hammondale to Mission	12 feet	Yes	20% or greater affordable housing units
Marin Square	24 feet	Yes	
North San Rafael Town Center (including Northgate Mall)	24 feet	Yes	
All sites where multi-family housing is permitted	24 feet (*)	No	100% affordable housing
	12 feet (*)	Yes	50% or greater affordable housing, up to 100%
Sea Level Rise Overlay area	6 feet	Yes	Base elevation raised or used as non-habitable space to mitigate flood hazards

(*) Bonuses are not additive, i.e., a project that uses this bonus would not also be eligible for the bonuses listed above. Projects using state-mandated height bonuses for housing development are also not eligible to add the bonuses listed in this table.

Include Inset map of Downtown heights in this space



Goal LU-2: A Complete Community

San Rafael is a complete community, with balanced and diverse land uses.

San Rafael reflects a mosaic of land use patterns that have changed over time and will continue to evolve in the future. Our desire to maintain existing land use patterns must be balanced with the development necessary to provide jobs, meet housing needs, respond to the challenges of a changing economy, and sustain an evolving, vital community. We continue to value and cherish our diverse neighborhoods, while making them more resilient and adapting to changing conditions.

San Rafael's high quality cultural, business, entertainment, and educational resources directly benefit the city's residents and draw businesses, customers, visitors, and students from beyond the city limits, to the benefit of the entire community. These resources not only culturally enrich San Rafael residents, they enhance the city's regional position, improve the business climate, and provide revenue for City services and infrastructure.

To maintain our unique character and quality of life, the City must strive to maintain its cultural, social, and economic diversity. Steps must be taken to maintain an adequate supply of decent, affordable housing, a range of jobs, and a variety of local goods and services. The policies below focus on the non-residential land uses that make San Rafael a "complete community" with a balanced, diverse mix of uses.

Policy LU-2.1: Land Use Map and Categories

Use the General Plan Map as the framework for future land use decisions (see Figure 3-1). The Map displays the distribution of different land use categories in the San Rafael Planning Area. Each category is associated with a particular set of uses and densities/ intensity standards. All proposed projects must meet these standards, as well as other applicable standards established by the City's zoning regulations. Some uses in each category are "conditional," meaning they are allowed only in limited areas or may be subject to specific conditions

Program LU-2.1A: Zoning Ordinance Amendments. *Revise the zoning ordinance, including the zoning map, to implement General Plan land use designations and policies, incorporate provisions from other recently adopted City plans and programs, and ensure that all provisions are consistent with state law. This should include creation of a new overlay district corresponding to areas expected to be affected by sea level rise (see Program S-3.1C).*

Program LU-2.1B: Subdivision Ordinance Amendments. *Revise the subdivision ordinance where necessary for conformance with General Plan land use designations and policies. Provisions for the enforcement of conditions of subdivision map approval should be included in the Ordinance.*

See also Program LU-2.4A on Industrial Zoning standards

Policy LU-2.2: Mixed Use Development

Encourage mixed-use development (combining housing and commercial uses) in Downtown San Rafael and on commercially designated properties elsewhere in the city. Mixed-use development should enhance its surroundings and be compatible with adjacent properties.

Innovation Districts

The concept behind an Innovation District is to identify a specific geographic area where land use, and zoning standards can be relaxed in order to accommodate innovative activities and building types that might be difficult to achieve elsewhere. New zoning standards are combined with economic development incentives to support private investment. Innovation Districts are often cited on underutilized industrial land, providing opportunities for new industry, but expanding the array of possible uses to specifically encourage technology, arts-related uses, craft and maker spaces, live-work housing, co-working spaces, and similar creative uses.

Program LU-2.2A: Development Review. *Use the development review process to evaluate the compatibility of residential uses in commercial areas.*

Program LU-2.2B: Innovation Districts. *Evaluate creation of an overlay zone or "innovation" district (see text box) to be applied to a limited number of Light Industrial-Office (LI-O) properties located near Downtown (including the existing Lindero Mixed Use District) and/or Northgate Industrial Park. In addition to allowing a wide range of employment uses, multi-family residential and live-work uses could also be allowed in these areas, subject to performance standards, use permit requirements, and a finding that there will be no net loss of industrial floor space. The area covered by such a zone would be strictly limited in order to preserve the supply of land needed for local and region-serving businesses, minimize potential conflicts between adjacent uses, and avoid impediments to established businesses.*

Policy LU-2.3: Neighborhood-Serving Commercial Uses

Encourage the retention and improvement of neighborhood-serving retail stores and services. In the event such spaces become vacant, consider other activities that reinforce their role as neighborhood centers. Neighborhood-serving commercial areas should reinforce the city's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion by providing walkable, bikeable services and shopping close to residents.

Program LU-2.3A: Neighborhood Centers. Use the development review process to evaluate future proposals for existing neighborhood commercial centers, including the addition of new uses such as housing. Neighbors should be involved early in the development review process.

Program LU-2.3B: Revitalization Incentives. Develop zoning and economic development incentives that keep local neighborhood centers viable, such as allowing additional floor area and housing units when neighborhood-serving uses are included or retained.

See the Neighborhoods Element for policies related to specific centers. See the Economic Vitality Element for policies on retail retention and incentives.

Policy LU-2.4: Production, Distribution, and Repair (PDR) Services

Maintain the availability of sites for PDR businesses and recognize the value of these businesses to San Rafael's economy and residents.

Program LU-2.4A: Industrial Zoning. Periodically evaluate zoning standards for Light Industrial-Office and General Industrial areas in response to business and economic trends, market demand, changes in technology and the transportation sector, greenhouse gas reduction goals, and climate-related hazards such as sea level rise.

Did You Know?

San Rafael had 4,207,520 square feet of industrial/ flex floor space in 2019, representing 51 percent of Marin County's total

-- CoStar, BAE, 2019.

Policy LU-2.5: Limited Retail and Service Uses in Industrial and Office Areas

Allow limited retail and service uses that cater to area businesses and workers within industrial/office and industrial areas. Such uses create amenities for the local workforce and reduce vehicle miles traveled.

Program LU-2.5A: Industrial Zoning Standards for Ancillary Retail and Service Uses. Continue to provide opportunities for small local-serving retail and service businesses in industrial zoning districts.

Policy LU-2.6: Lot Consolidation

Encourage the consolidation of small (<6,000 SF) lots zoned for higher density residential, commercial, and mixed uses in order to create more viable development sites. Lot consolidation can provide greater flexibility in site planning, make it easier to meet parking and access requirements, and enable building sizes and dimensions that are more economically viable.

Program LU-2.6A: Lot Consolidation Incentives. Continue to encourage small lot consolidation through zoning regulations. Incentives such as height and floor area bonuses and reduced parking should be considered.

Policy LU-2.7: Child Care Facilities

Encourage the development of new child care facilities and the retention of existing child care facilities to meet neighborhood and citywide needs. Work with the school districts to encourage child care and early childhood education programs at schools, recognizing their suitability for such uses and convenient locations in residential neighborhoods.

Program LU-2.7A: Large and Small Family Child Care Regulations. *Ensure that regulations for large and small family child care facilities comply with all applicable State laws. To the extent permitted by law, the siting and operation of larger facilities in single family neighborhoods should mitigate the potential for off-site impacts (parking, noise, etc.).*

Program LU-2.7B: Fees for Child Care Programs. *Where feasible, consider waiving application, permit, and traffic mitigation impact fees for child care uses.*

See also Policy LU-1.13 on FAR exemptions for child care. See Policy PROS-2.4 and Policy EDI-5.1 for additional guidance on child care.

Policy LU-2.8: Senior and Disabled Care Facilities

Accommodate facilities and services to meet the needs of older and disabled residents, including senior housing, assisted living, and convalescent care facilities; and facilities providing adult day care and social services, and health care for older adults and people with disabilities.

See Goal EDI-6 for additional policies and programs addressing the needs of older adults

Policy LU-2.9: Hotels, Motels, and Inns

Encourage redevelopment and upgrading of existing hotels and motels. These uses are desired because they are a source of jobs and tax revenue, help sustain local businesses, and provide lodging for visitors, tourists, and business travelers. Hotels, motels, and inns should be allowed with a Use Permit in most commercial, multi-family, and industrial zoning districts. Bed and breakfasts should be allowed with a Use Permit in High Density, Medium Density, and Large Lot Residential zoning districts. As noted in Policies LU-1.13 and 1.16, hotels are exempt from floor area ratio requirements and are subject to a 54-foot height limit outside of Downtown. The City Council may also grant Zoning Exceptions and Variances for projects that provide significant community benefits and are consistent with City design policies and guidelines.

Program LU-2.9A: Motel Conversions *In cases where an existing motel is no longer viable for that purpose, encourage conversion to multi-family residential use, including affordable housing.*



Program LU-2.10: Short-Term Rentals

Permit short-term rentals, subject to registration and licensing requirements, payment of transient occupancy taxes, and standards for eligibility, parking, number of guests, and other factors deemed necessary to ensure neighborhood compatibility and limit adverse impacts on the rental housing supply.

Program LU-2.10A: Monitoring Program. *Monitor the effectiveness of short-term rental regulations and refine these regulations as needed to address issues and concerns.*

Policy LU-2.11: Mini-Storage Facilities

Allow mini-storage (“self-storage”) in light industrial/ office and light industrial districts. For lots facing Highways 101 or 580 or the Bay, the mini-storage use may not be located along the street or bay frontages. New ministorage may be permitted with a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of up to 1.0 if the following findings can be made:

- a) The facility is needed in the community.
- b) The project is compatible with surrounding uses.
- c) The project is designed so that it cannot be converted to other, more intensive uses – or includes approval conditions which limit and mitigate off-site impacts in the of future event conversion.
- d) The location is appropriate for this type of use.

Mini-storage is not permitted in other districts, except that it may be considered in existing commercial buildings if not located along the street frontage.

Policy LU-2.12: Innovative Housing Types

Encourage non-traditional and innovative forms of housing that respond to local housing needs, changing demographics, high housing costs, and sustainability goals.

Program LU-2.12A: Live-Work Regulations. *Revise zoning regulations for live/work uses to make this a more viable housing type and facilitate its development.*

Program LU-2.12B: Alternative Housing Types. *Explore regulatory and cost barriers and potential opportunities for innovative housing types such as co-housing, tiny homes, micro units, modular and movable construction, mobile homes, and other forms of habitation which may be easier and less expensive to build than traditional housing. Consider zoning and building code changes to support the conversion of existing underutilized buildings to these uses in commercial and mixed use areas.*

Program LU-2.12C: Floating Homes. *Consider changes to the Municipal Code, including zoning regulations, that support houseboats, live-aboards, and other types of floating homes in areas designated as “Water” on the General Plan Map.*

Program LU-2.12D: Accessory Dwelling Units. *Continue to support the conversion of underutilized residential space into accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units (JADUs), as well as the development of new ADUs and JADUs in residential areas.*

Policy LU-2.13: Odor Impacts

Consider odor impacts when evaluating land uses and development projects near wastewater treatment plants, treatment plant expansion projects, waste transfer stations, and other odor potential sources.

Program LU-2.13A: Evaluation of Odor Impacts. *Evaluate odor impacts as part of development review.*

Goal LU-3: Distinctive Neighborhoods

Create and sustain neighborhoods of integrity and distinctive character.

San Rafael is Marin's hometown. It is a city of livable neighborhoods that support each other and provide a network of parks, natural amenities, gathering places and services. The unique identity, distinctive design, and upkeep of each neighborhood will continue to be a source of pride.

Each of San Rafael's neighborhoods is unique in its character, design, and physical amenities, and each contributes to the diversity and vitality of the city. This uniqueness should be celebrated and opportunities to enhance neighborhood quality should be taken when possible. Only through active participation among residents, property owners, and the City can effective neighborhood planning occur and common issues be addressed.

Policy LU-3.1: Area Plans

Encourage the preparation of plans for areas of San Rafael with unique local issues or significant potential for future change. The purpose of such plans is to provide more specific and detailed direction on long-range planning, zoning, and site-specific development issues than can be provided by the General Plan.

Program LU-3.1A: Area Planning Process. *Engage neighborhood associations, community groups, residents, businesses, and service providers in the development of area plans, including neighborhood plans. A priority should be placed on plans for the North San Rafael "Town Center" area and the Canal neighborhood.*

See the Neighborhoods Element for additional policies and programs relating to area plans



Policy LU-3.2: New Development in Residential Neighborhoods

Preserve, enhance, and maintain the residential character of neighborhoods to keep them safe, desirable places to live. New development should:

- Enhance neighborhood image and design quality
- Incorporate sensitive transitions in height and setbacks from adjacent properties
- Preserve historic, unique, and architecturally significant structures
- Respect and enhance natural features and terrain
- Reduce exposure to hazards
- Include amenities such as sidewalks, pathways, trees, and other landscape improvements
- Maintain or enhance infrastructure service levels
- Meet expected parking demand
- Minimize reduction of views, privacy, and solar access

While these principles are fundamental, they do not preclude neighborhood change. Neighborhoods are dynamic places, and should adapt to changing tastes, styles, technology, and needs as they evolve.

Program LU-3.2A: Zoning Ordinance. Periodically update the zoning ordinance to address neighborhood issues and concerns.

Policy LU-3.3: Housing Mix

Encourage a diverse mix of housing choices in terms of affordability, unit type, and size, including opportunities for both renters and owners.

Policy LU-3.4: Property Maintenance

Require owners to maintain their properties in good condition and appearance and to eliminate unsafe and unhealthy conditions.

Program LU-3.4A: Code Enforcement. Maintain an effective Code Enforcement program that engages with neighborhoods and business groups and works in partnerships with appropriate City staff to address nuisances, mitigate problems with vacant and blighted properties, and correct zoning code violations.

Program LU-3.4B: Conditions of Approval. Use the development review process to establish conditions of approval, including maintenance of landscaping and other improvements. Use building inspection and code enforcement processes to ensure that these conditions and other mitigation or monitoring responsibilities are carried out.

Program LU-3.4C: Community Appearance. Continue and enhance programs to abate illegal dumping and remove graffiti.

See also Policy EDI-4.2 on maintenance of streets and public space and Policy EDI-3.5 on property maintenance

Policy LU-3.5: Neighborhood Identity

Enhance neighborhood identity and sense of community by retaining and creating gateways, landscape features, and other improvements that help define neighborhood entries and focal points.

See the Community Design Element for additional policies on neighborhood gateways and landscaping

Policy LU-3.6: Transitions Between Uses

Maintain buffers between residential uses and adjacent commercial and institutional uses. Parking lots, loading areas, trash facilities, and similar activities associated with non-residential uses should be appropriately screened.

Program LU-3.6A: Parking Lot Design. *Maintain design guidelines for parking lots that address landscaping, buffering, environmental quality, and neighborhood compatibility. Parking lots should not be the dominant visual feature from the street frontage.*

Policy LU-3.7: On-Street Parking

Manage on-street parking in a way that meets resident and business needs, reduces nuisances, and minimizes potential conflicts with emergency vehicles.

Program LU-3.7A: Neighborhood Parking Measures. *In neighborhoods with excessive on-street parking demand:*

- a) *Work with property owners to add off-street parking and allow shared parking during off-peak hours.*
- b) *Where feasible, require additional off-street parking as a condition of approval for expansion or remodels.*
- c) *Update permit parking programs and on-street parking time limits to improve their effectiveness.*

Program LU-3.7B: Parking Regulations. *Periodically evaluate and amend parking regulations to respond to new technologies and trends in car ownership and design, while still ensuring adequate on-site parking.*

See Goal M-7 (Mobility Element) for additional policies and programs on parking, including amendments to parking standards.

Policy LU-3.8: Nuisance Vehicles

Minimize the number of abandoned and non-functioning vehicles on City streets.

Program LU-3.8A: Abandoned Vehicle Program. *Continue the abandoned vehicle abatement program.*

Program LU-3.8B: Vehicles as Residences. *Continue the prohibition on the overnight residential use of vehicles in the public right of way.*



Policy LU-3.9: Neighborhood Centers

Support the vitality of attractive, viable neighborhood centers and assist these centers as they adapt to changing economic conditions and community needs. Existing neighborhood centers should be retained unless it can be clearly demonstrated that they are not economically viable or useful to the neighborhood. Where commercial uses are no longer feasible, other uses that are compatible with the neighborhood such as housing and local services should be accommodated.

Program LU-3.9A: Neighborhood Serving Uses. Prioritize neighborhood serving uses and places that support neighborhood interaction on small commercial sites in residential areas. Examples of such uses are cafes, neighborhood markets, restaurants, drug stores, local medical and health care services, farmers markets, child care facilities, public facilities, and similar activities that meet the day to day needs of local residents. Maintaining these uses near residents can potentially help reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and encourage walkable neighborhoods.

Program LU-3.9B: Housing in Neighborhood Commercial Centers. *In the event housing is proposed on neighborhood commercial sites, encourage the integration of neighborhood-oriented commercial or service uses on the ground floor or a portion of the site.*

Policy LU-3.10: Relationships with Local Institutions

Support collaborations and partnerships among neighborhoods, schools, religious uses, and other institutions to enhance mutual understanding and resolve operational issues such as parking, noise, traffic, and privacy.

Program LU-3.10A: Community Partnerships. *Encourage the establishment of local committees to resolve conflicts and improve relationships between neighborhoods and local institutions. Public-private partnerships with local institutions should be encouraged as a way to generate community benefits and improvements.*

Policy LU-3.11: Neighborhood Pride

Promote events and activities that support neighborhood pride, create a sense of community, and build connections between residents. These events and activities could include block parties, festivals, parades, picnics, concerts, and similar activities that bring residents together. City parks should include areas where such activities can be hosted, in a manner respectful of nearby residents.

Program LU-3.11A: Neighborhood Websites. *Support the development of neighborhood websites and provide links to these sites on the City's website.*

4 Neighborhoods

San Rafael is a city of neighborhoods. Surrounded by great natural beauty, the city's neighborhoods form a quilt of homes, shops, schools, and open spaces that collectively define San Rafael's overall character. Neighborhoods provide the basic social units and physical building blocks of the city and create a sense of pride and belonging for their residents. The policies in this section extend this legacy by applying citywide policies at the neighborhood level. They encourage diverse and well-maintained housing, safe and efficient streets, well-managed services and public facilities, protected natural resources, protection from environmental hazards, and improved access to all the amenities San Rafael has to offer.

The City of San Rafael has been planning for its neighborhoods since the 1970s. Between 1979 and 1997, the City prepared plans for Gerstle Park (1979), Sun Valley/Fairhills (1980), Peacock Gap (1980), Northgate Activity Center (1982), East San Rafael (1991), Downtown (1993), Montecito/ Happy Valley (1996), Canal (1996), and North San Rafael (1997). Beginning in the early 2000s, the focus of neighborhood planning shifted to areas with the greatest potential for future change. A design plan was prepared for the Canal waterfront in 2009. Station Area Plans were prepared for the Downtown SMART station and Civic Center SMART station in 2011-12. Looking to the future, the highest priorities for neighborhood planning are the areas around Northgate Mall and the Southeast San Rafael/ Canal District.

The Neighborhoods Element recognizes that although San Rafael is one city, it is comprised of smaller communities with distinct landscapes, issues, and opportunities. The Element provides a tool to express citywide policies at a more fine-grained level. It also provides a means of incorporating prior neighborhood plans and place-specific recommendations into the General Plan. The Element helps ensure internal consistency among neighborhood policies by relating these policies to the broader vision for the city as a whole.

Another important aspect of the Neighborhoods Element is that it gives voice to the organizations that represent San Rafael's neighborhoods. Most of the policies in this Element were crafted with direct input from the city's neighborhood associations and advocacy groups. As part of the General Plan Update process, these organizations were surveyed and asked to express their priorities, issues, and future aspirations. Each organization had an opportunity to review the prior General Plan text for their neighborhood and offer suggested edits and new content.

The City of San Rafael has had a long-standing commitment to working with its neighborhoods to protect and conserve their best qualities. This does not mean that neighborhoods will not change in the future. Neighborhoods are dynamic, evolving places. New housing can be harmoniously integrated, and change can make neighborhoods more attractive and livable. In most neighborhoods, only a small amount of change is expected. In others, more substantial changes may take place. The livability of San Rafael depends on the collective vitality and success of all of its neighborhoods.

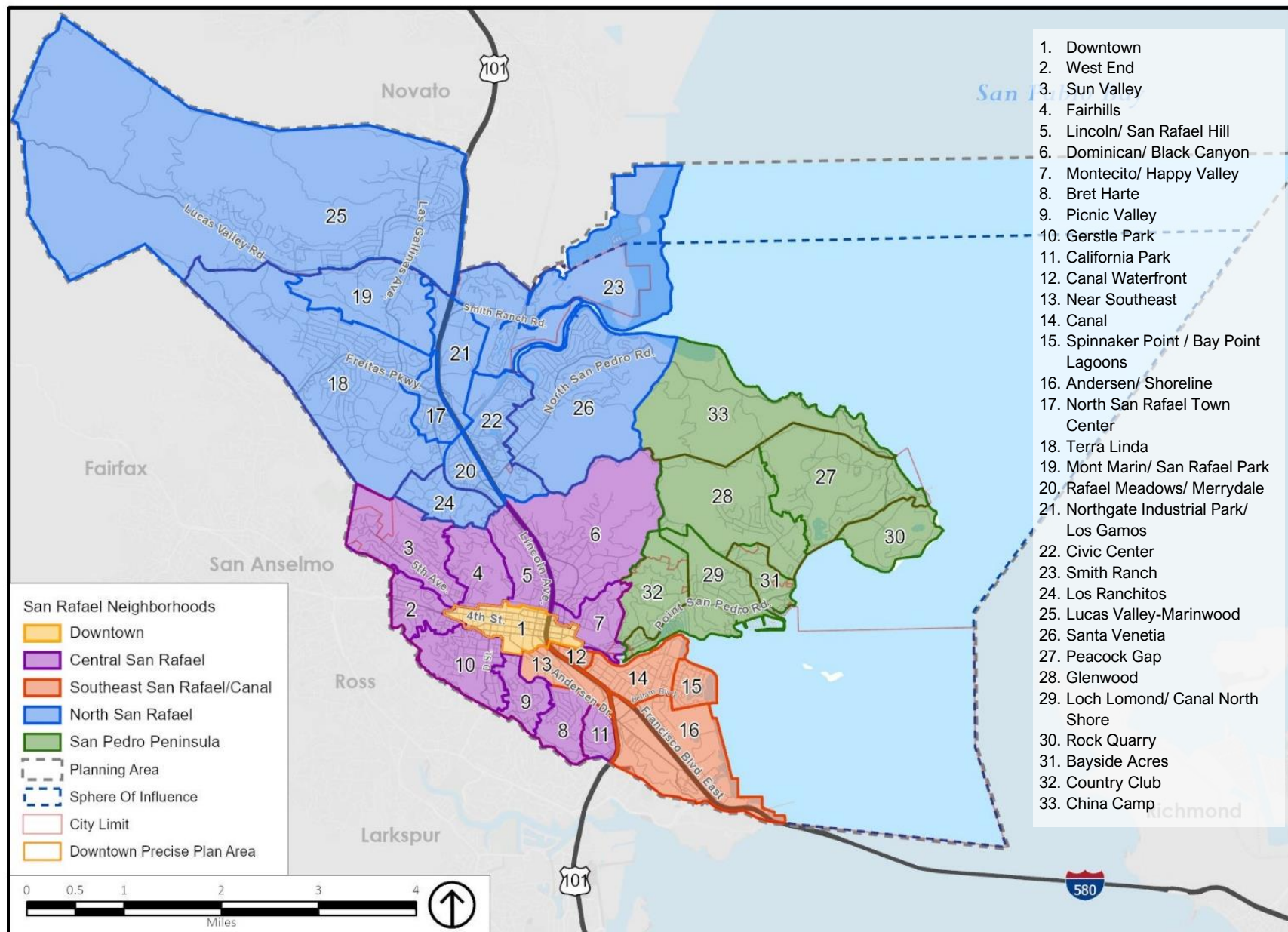
This chapter organizes the city into five planning areas, as shown on Figure 4-1 and listed below:

- Downtown
- Central San Rafael
- North San Rafael
- Southeast San Rafael/ Canal
- San Pedro Peninsula



A brief narrative is provided for each area, followed by one or more policies. This is followed by a profile of each neighborhood within the planning area, with policies and programs included as appropriate. At the end of each section, the text provides broad direction for unincorporated parts of the Planning Area. While the unincorporated areas are outside the city limits, they rely on San Rafael for goods and services and can impact the quality of life in the city.

More than 30 distinct neighborhoods are addressed. The policies reflect issues of interest to their residents and businesses and in some cases provide guidance on individual large sites. Where topics are not specifically addressed, citywide policies apply. In a few cases, such as Downtown, other plans are referenced as a source for more detailed guidance. The General Plan provides a framework for these plans and ensures that they pursue shared forecasts and goals.



Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 4-1:

Planning Areas and Neighborhoods



DOWNTOWN

Downtown is the cultural, economic, civic, and historic heart of San Rafael. It is a lively and authentic place that blends “urban” and “small town” qualities. It provides an array of employment, shopping, services, entertainment, and housing choices in a walkable, picturesque setting. Downtown’s architectural heritage and traditional scale make it a place for events and celebrations that attract the entire community. It is a cherished part of the city that belongs to everyone in San Rafael.

The Downtown Planning Area extends roughly 1.5 miles from east to west and one-half mile from north to south. Its edges are defined by the Second/Fourth Street “gateway” on the west and San Rafael High School on the east, and by Mission Avenue on the north and San Rafael/Mahon Creek and First Street on the south. Geographically, this is a small part of San Rafael, but it is an essential hub of economic and social activity. Downtown has approximately 2,300 residents and 9,000 jobs. It includes 1.5 million square feet of office space and 1.7 million square feet of retail space. It also includes one of San Rafael’s two SMART rail stations and is home to the San Rafael Transit Center, one of the largest transit hubs in the North Bay.

Much of San Rafael’s long-range planning over the last three decades has focused on making Downtown a more dynamic and successful mixed use neighborhood. A long-range Vision for the area was adopted in 1993, resulting in new planning policies and zoning districts that shaped Downtown growth for over 25 years. In 2012, the City completed a Station Area Plan for the area around the SMART rail station. A new Downtown Precise Plan was prepared concurrently with General Plan 2040, building on the principles of prior plans while updating the vision for Downtown’s future and providing new zoning standards. Key recommendations of that Plan are incorporated in the Neighborhoods Element.

The 2040 General Plan continues to focus San Rafael’s growth in the Downtown area. Between 2020 and 2040, roughly half of the City’s housing and job growth is projected to occur within its boundaries. The number of housing units Downtown will more than double, while the number of jobs will increase by over 20 percent. The impacts of this growth will be transformative. Attractive mid-rise buildings will bring new life to the area, creating housing opportunities for residents of all incomes and modern space for business expansion. Improved parks, plazas, streets, and public spaces will make Downtown a place where people want to be.

Achieving the 2040 vision for Downtown will require creative implementation strategies. The 1993 Vision was not fully realized, in part because of obstacles to revitalization that persist today. This includes a pattern of small, individually-owned parcels that are difficult to assemble into larger, more viable development sites. Downtown must also compete with suburban shopping centers and newer office parks with modern space and easy parking. It is further challenged by changes in retail shopping patterns and high land and construction costs. A combination of public improvements, economic and regulatory incentives, and public-private partnerships are included in the Precise Plan to address these challenges.

New higher-density housing is an important part of the Downtown vision and helps achieve multiple goals. It addresses the region’s critical housing shortage and accommodates local housing needs. It reduces future greenhouse gas emissions through transit-oriented growth, creating a neighborhood where services are easily accessible and residents can be less dependent on their cars. It will help keep the Fourth Street shopping district “alive after five,” with an expanded customer base for local businesses. Height incentives are provided for projects that include affordable units and other community benefits such as child care facilities. New programs are proposed to avoid the displacement of lower-income Downtown residents and help small businesses succeed.

General policies and programs for Downtown are presented below. This is followed by a discussion of Downtown sub-areas, or districts. The Precise Plan should be consulted for more specific guidance.

Policy NH-1.1: A Thriving Downtown

Sustain and improve Downtown San Rafael as a safe, attractive, convenient, well-maintained place to visit, shop, recreate, work, and live.

Program NH-1.1A: Downtown Precise Plan and Form-Based Code. *Implement the Downtown Precise Plan and Form Based Code to strengthen the identity of Downtown districts and guide new development and investment.*

Program NH-1.1B: Quality Downtown Services. *Support the Downtown BID, the Chamber of Commerce, and other organizations in efforts to maintain the quality of Downtown as a great place to do business. Encourage investment in services and amenities that project a positive image of Downtown and make it a destination of choice within Marin County.*

Program NH-1.1C: Capital Improvements. *Incorporate projects and programs identified in the Downtown Precise Plan into the City’s Capital Improvement Program and operating budget. Explore potential funding sources for capital projects, including grants that recognize the benefits of accommodating sustainable growth and responding to climate change. Maintain existing facilities, such as lighting and landscaping, so that Downtown remains an attractive place to visit.*

Program NH-1.1D: Downtown Public Safety. *Continue public safety, maintenance, and social service initiatives that keep Downtown safe and address the needs of Downtown businesses, visitors, and residents of all incomes.*



Downtown's Form Based Code

The Downtown Precise Plan includes a Form-Based Code, which replaces conventional use-based zoning regulations for properties within the area. The Form Based Code establishes new districts and design-oriented standards that maintain the historic scale of Downtown, and encourage more attractive streets and public spaces. The Code provides greater flexibility for land use but is more prescriptive in terms of the character of new buildings, their transitions to established neighborhoods, and the City's expectations for key opportunity sites. By providing clear guidance and predictable outcomes for these sites, the Form-Based Code is intended to streamline the approval process when projects are proposed.

Policy NH-1.2: Economic Success

Encourage the success of Downtown businesses by limiting regulatory barriers, encouraging private investment, and making Downtown an inviting place for new and established businesses, customers, and patrons. Local regulations and programs should recognize the importance of being responsive to market changes and should help business weather economic downturns.

Program NH-1.2A: Adapting to Changes in Retail. Work with the owners and tenants of ground floor spaces, especially along Fourth Street, to respond to changes in the demand for retail space. Ensure that zoning and building regulations are flexible so that these spaces remain usable and can support active uses.

See the Economic Vitality Element for economic development programs and Chapter 8 of the Downtown Precise Plan for additional implementation measures.

Policy NH-1.3: Downtown Housing

Support Downtown’s continued growth as a mixed-use neighborhood and quality residential environment. New housing should include a mix of affordable and market-rate units, including expanded resources for unsheltered persons and extremely low-income households. Housing should take advantage of Downtown’s amenities and views and contribute to its character as a dynamic neighborhood.

Program NH-1.3A: Development Incentives. *Implement and expand incentives for the private sector to provide more affordable housing, community amenities and public space. These incentives should substantially increase the stock of units that are permanently affordable.*

Policy NH-1.4: Preventing Displacement

Existing housing should be preserved and upgraded while preventing the displacement of Downtown’s lower income residents and persons with special housing needs.

Program NH-1.4A: Supportive Housing. *Work with local social service and non-profit organizations to address the needs of unsheltered residents in Downtown, including the provision of additional permanent supportive housing.*

See the Downtown Precise Plan for Anti-displacement strategies, including measures to protect tenants.

Policy NH-1.5: Downtown Employment

Continue to attract a diverse set of employers to create a more resilient and robust Downtown economy. Downtown San Rafael should be promoted as a convenient and attractive office and retail location, with a mix of large and small businesses. Retention of small and locally owned businesses is strongly encouraged to retain Downtown’s character and legacy.

Policy NH-1.6: Public Realm

Improve the quality and usefulness of public space Downtown, including streets, sidewalks, alleys, plazas, parks, and other civic spaces. Public investments in these spaces should be directed in a way that supports Downtown development. Downtown public space should be safe, comfortable, and well-maintained.

Program NH-1.6A: Court Street Plaza. *Enhance the Court Street Plaza and adjacent area of 4th Street as a public gathering space. Implement pilot programs that reimagine this part of Fourth Street as a “shared street” that functions as civic space and accommodates multiple travel modes.*

Program NH-1.6B: Transit Gateway Improvements. *Create a new public space adjacent to the SMART station that would provide an amenity for Downtown residents, workers, visitors, and transit passengers. The space should create a welcoming “first impression” of Downtown. Provisions for ongoing programming, maintenance, and safety should be developed prior to construction.*

Program NH-1.6C: Pocket Parks and Private Plazas. *Use incentives such as additional building height to create accessible outdoor spaces such as plazas and paseos in new development.*

Program NH-1.6D: Downtown Alleys. *Activate key Downtown alleys as public spaces.*

See Downtown Precise Plan Chapter 8 for a list of proposed public realm improvements

Policy NH-1.7: Context-Sensitive Design

Ensure that new construction and redevelopment is sensitive to Downtown's existing context, with thoughtful transitions to established neighborhoods and retention of important historic buildings and building elements. As Downtown grows, it should retain its sense of history and authenticity.

Program NH-1.7A: Downtown Form Based Code. Adopt and maintain a Form Based Code that provides greater predictability in what will be built and emphasizes pedestrian-friendly design. Development standards should reinforce the unique character of Downtown while allowing its built form to evolve and improve. The Code should allow for a streamlined permitting and approval process, increased certainty for developers, and more predictable outcomes for the community as new projects are proposed.

See the Community Design and Preservation Element for additional policies and programs on designing buildings to complement and enhance Downtown's character and create a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Policy NH-1.8: Historic Resources

Enrich Downtown's identity by encouraging historic preservation and ensuring that development is sensitive to historic context. Renovation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings is strongly encouraged.

Program NH-1.8A: Context Sensitive Design. Implement Form Based Code provisions to ensure that new development adjacent to historic resources or within historic districts is sympathetic to the scale and character of older buildings.

Program NH-1.8B: Historic Districts. Consider the use of historic districts to conserve the character of parts of Downtown with high concentrations of important older buildings. These districts should continue to accommodate infill development on vacant and underutilized sites, but should provide incentives for preservation and adaptive reuse, including tax benefits and transfer of development rights.

Program NH-1.8C: Addressing Functional Obsolescence. Work with property owners to modernize functionally obsolete spaces in older buildings. Seek solutions which allow updating and alteration of interior spaces without losing the historic integrity of the building exterior.

Program NH-1.8D: Historic Inventory. Regularly update the inventory of historic and cultural resources in Downtown.

See Community Design and Preservation Element Goal 5 for additional guidance



Policy NH-1.9: Downtown Arts

Promote Downtown as the cultural and entertainment center of San Rafael and Marin County. Recognize the potential for the arts to be an economic engine and stimulate other Downtown business opportunities.

See the Arts and Culture Element for implementation programs, including maintaining Downtown's designation as a Cultural Arts District and promotion of special events and activities

Policy NH-1.10: Downtown Circulation

Provide a safe, well-connected transportation network that efficiently serves all modes of travel. This network should promote safety for all travelers and create a street network that is safer and more comfortable for pedestrians.

Program NH-1.10A: Multi-Modal Improvements. *Implement the improvements in the Downtown Precise Plan to improve the safety and comfort of all travel modes in Downtown, particularly pedestrians and bicycles. This includes additional bike routes and lanes; safer pedestrian crossings; wider sidewalks in some locations; street trees and landscaping; converting B, C, and D Streets to two-way traffic; and creating a "north/south greenway" for bicycles and pedestrians along the Tamalpais Avenue corridor.*

Program NH-1.10B: Evolving Mobility Needs. *Design Downtown streets so that they can adapt to changing transportation trends such as ride-hailing and micro-mobility (electric bikes and scooters), changing parking demand, and changes in technology, including autonomous vehicles. Technology should also be used to make Downtown safer and easier to navigate for all users, for example, with the use of pedestrian-activated crossing signals, timed traffic signals, and digital information on parking.*

Program NH-1.10C: Wayfinding. *Build upon ongoing efforts to implement a clear wayfinding strategy to orient transit passengers, motorists exiting Highway 101, and other visitors to Downtown. Use consistent signage and streetscape elements to enable visitors to navigate Downtown easily.*

Creating a Balanced Transportation System

The Downtown Precise Plan identifies priority travel modes on each major street in the Downtown area. This affects how these streets will be planned and managed in the future. For example, Fourth Street has been identified as a pedestrian and bicycle priority street, meaning that improvements will tend to favor pedestrian and bicycle movements even if the outcome may be less convenient for motorists. Second and Third Streets are recognized as streets where auto volumes are very high and will remain high in the future. The design of these streets will continue to accommodate regional automobile traffic, even as pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements are made. The priority street designations will help guide the location of new bike lanes and paths, and new pedestrian paseos and other areas where walking will be the dominant mode of travel.



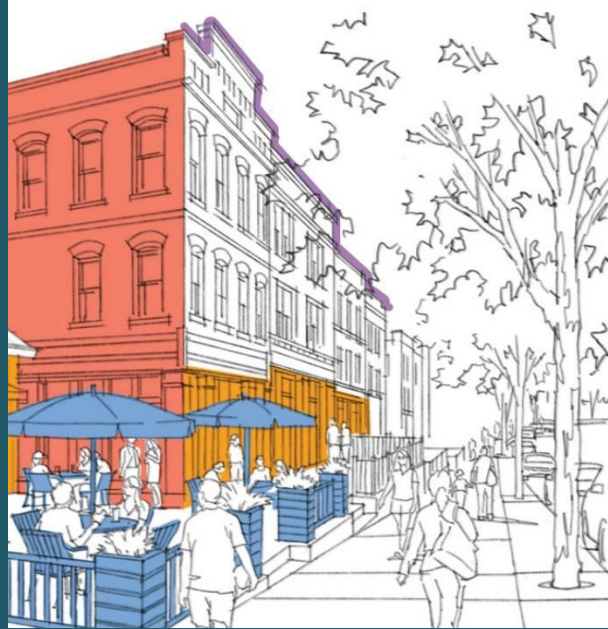
Downtown Precise Plan Expected Outcomes

The Downtown Precise Plan identifies specific outcomes that can result from the implementation of its policies, programs, and development standards. The expected outcomes below provide an aspirational vision of Downtown in the Year 2040, after 20 years of Plan implementation.

Downtown is popular! It is widely regarded as the place for people from all parts of San Rafael to meet. It has a well-crafted program of events, activities, and new gathering places. The additional foot traffic and increased number visitors benefit Downtown businesses. More than ever before, Fourth Street is the “Main Street” of Marin County, and the place to go for shopping, socializing and recreation.

Downtown is composed of districts that each have a unique role and identity. This identity is reflected in architecture, scale, activities, signage, and streetscape design. Each district has centers of activity that showcase its unique features, along with regular events that draw people together. Each neighborhood is a beautiful place to stroll, where the built environment is softened by landscaping and trees, and enlivened with public art.

Downtown’s population has more than doubled, with more than 5,000 residents calling it home. There are attractive new office buildings, entertainment options, cultural venues, and cool places to go. Downtown has attracted a variety of new employers, creating a diversified economy that is resilient to change. Infill development has made Downtown more walkable, interesting, and inviting.



San Rafael has a low “skyline” highlighted by a few well-designed mid-rise buildings, interesting rooflines, and familiar landmarks like the Mission San Rafael Arcangel. Building heights step down along the edges of Downtown, creating a harmonious transition to nearby neighborhoods.

The Transit Center and SMART station area are transformed into a hub of activity, with new housing, office space, and services. Consistent signage, lighting, and street furniture help in wayfinding and orientation for visitors. A new public space provides a pleasant gateway for arriving and departing passengers as well as area residents and workers. Public art enlivens the space, which is further activated by programmed events.



Downtown streets are safe places to walk or ride a bike. Fourth Street is a place where bicycles and pedestrians co-exist with slow moving vehicles—including new self-driving cars! The street itself is occasionally closed to vehicles for events, activities, and community gatherings. Elsewhere in Downtown, new bike lanes and paths make it easier to get around without a car. For those who drive, new programs encourage a "park once and walk" approach that uses the existing parking supply more efficiently.

Downtown has a variety of housing types, including market rate rental and ownership units, "missing middle" units that are affordable by design, and units that are specifically reserved for lower income and special needs households. Effective strategies to avoid displacement are in place, and people of all incomes feel secure that they can remain in San Rafael.

Historic resources are conserved and adapted to modern uses. New buildings complement older buildings, with setbacks, height, and massing that respect historic patterns of development. Building markers, plaques, walking tours, and educational programs have raised awareness of the City's history and made Downtown a destination for visitors as well as residents.

Downtown has a variety of gathering places, recreation areas, natural areas, and places to relax and enjoy the view and sunshine. Court Street Plaza is expanded and reimagined, while other small open spaces along Fourth Street provide places to sit, dine, or play. Boyd Park and Albert Park are better connected to Downtown and are more widely enjoyed and appreciated as open spaces.

Green infrastructure has been incorporated into streets and public spaces, reducing stormwater runoff to creeks and the Bay, and creating a healthier environment. The San Rafael Canal is cleaner and has become a more visible and well-used amenity, with a paseo along its banks.

Restored creeks and wetlands reduce localized flooding while providing an open space amenity and improving wildlife habitat. New development near San Rafael, Irwin, and Mahon Creeks includes design features to reduce flood risks.

The entitlement and development process for Downtown projects is simple, transparent, timely, and cost-effective. Public-private partnerships and development incentives promote affordable housing and other community benefits. New incentive programs have facilitated the assembly of small parcels into larger sites, making development more feasible and attracting new investment.



DOWNTOWN

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Policy NH-1.11: Parking

Pursue creative solutions to meeting Downtown parking needs without losing the sense of the area as a pedestrian-oriented district. These solutions should include better management of the existing parking supply, additional private parking (including spaces available for public use) in high-demand areas such as the transit center vicinity, more efficiently designed parking structures, and improved signage and visibility of public parking facilities.

See the Mobility Element for programs to improve parking management and meet parking needs more efficiently, including programs tailored to Downtown San Rafael

Policy NH-1.12: Hazard Resilience

Develop Downtown development and adaptation strategies that improve resilience to sea level rise, wildfire, and other natural hazards.

Program NH-1.12A: Sea Level Rise Adaptation. *Develop a comprehensive set of sea level rise adaptation strategies for future development that draw from citywide and regional strategies. These strategies could include tidal gates, levee improvements, wetland restoration, and elevation requirements for new buildings.*

See the Safety and Resilience Element for additional flood protection and wildfire prevention measures



Downtown Districts

The Downtown Precise Plan organizes Downtown into four districts (see Figure 4-2). The highest densities and building heights are planned for a “Transit Village” district located in the area near the SMART station and the relocated San Rafael Transit Center. West of this area, the “Downtown Core” district will be strengthened as a walkable mixed use neighborhood, with pedestrian activity focused on Fourth Street. West of E Street, building heights and densities step down in scale to the West End Village district. On the east side of Highway 101, the Montecito Commercial district provides a transition between Downtown and the residential areas further east, with new housing and commercial development on infill sites and improved access to the San Rafael Canal.

Table 4-1 indicates the 20-year buildout projections for each of the four Districts and for Downtown as a whole. As the table indicates, these projections anticipate 2,200 new housing units and roughly 2,020 new jobs (about 700,000 square feet of commercial space). This includes projects that were approved or under construction at the time of General Plan adoption, including about 330 housing units, 280,000 square feet of commercial space, and a 140-room hotel.

The remaining development potential is associated with “opportunity sites” in each area. These sites were identified based on their size and physical characteristics, the value of improvements relative to land, and existing uses. The Precise Plan does not mandate that these sites are developed, nor does it limit development to these sites only. The actual pattern of development that occurs over the next 20 years will depend on the decisions of many private property owners and market conditions.

The illustrative renderings in the Precise Plan show one possible scenario and were used to develop order of magnitude estimates of what might be expected in each of the four districts. Table 4-1 effectively establishes a 20-year “floating cap” that may be used throughout the Downtown Plan area. Exceeding the total buildout projections shown in Table 4-1 would require a General Plan Amendment and additional environmental review; however, development potential may be transferred from one sub-district to another without an Amendment.¹

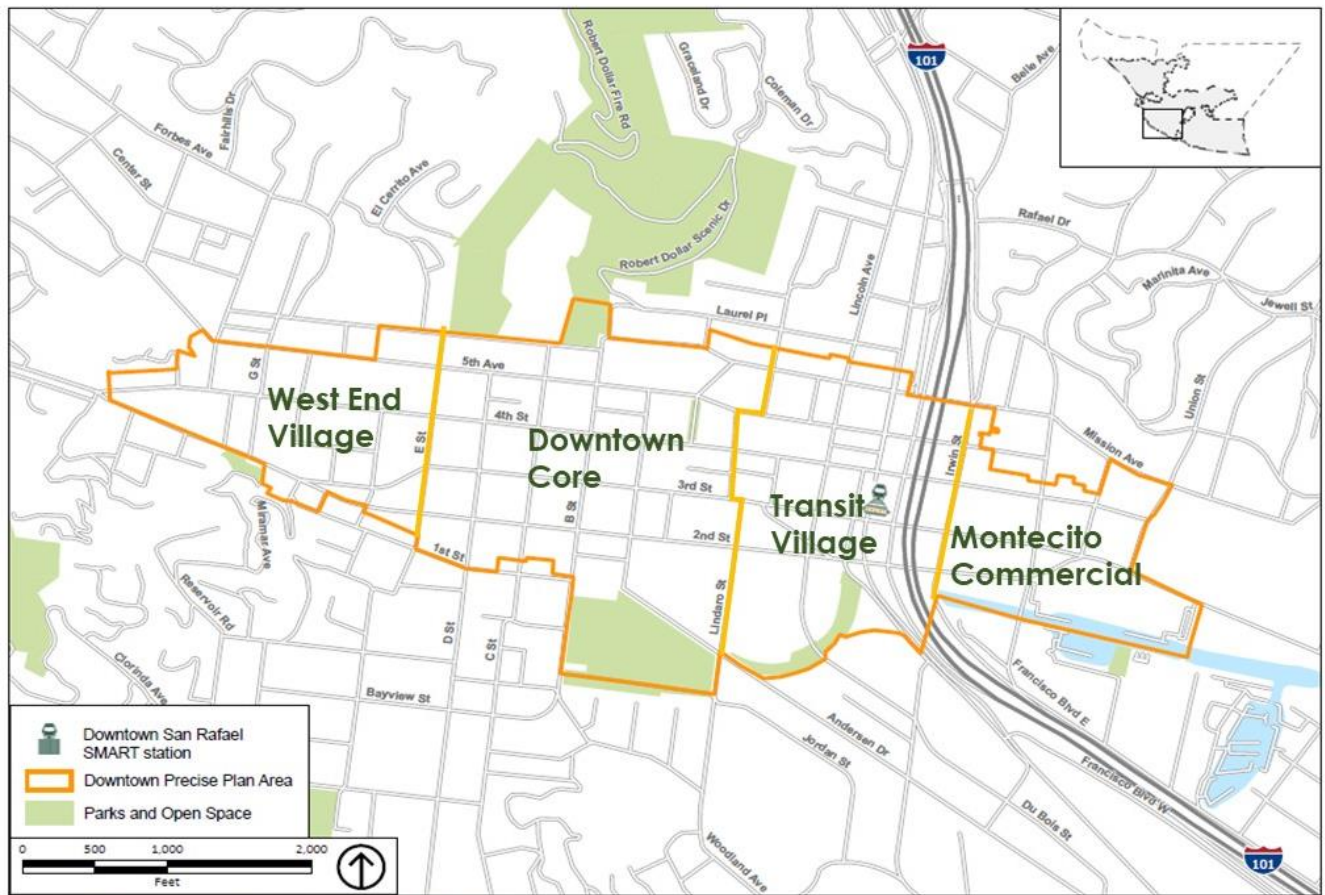
Table 4-1: Downtown Precise Plan Development Caps (for environmental review purposes) (*)

Downtown		
Development Type	Projected New Development, 2020-2040	
Residential	2,200,000 SF	2,200 units
Non-Residential	700,000 SF	2,020 jobs
Development Potential Estimates by District		
Downtown District	Residential	Non-Residential
Transit Village District	830 units	640 jobs
Downtown Core	620 units	1,040 jobs
West End Village	360 units	200 jobs
Montecito Commercial District	390 units	140 jobs
Total	2,200 units	2,020 jobs

(*) includes projects approved but not yet completed in 2020

¹ Transferring development potential from the “Residential” to “Non-Residential” category may also be possible without a General Plan Amendment, especially at the District level. However, this would require an evaluation to ensure that the transfer is consistent with the broader goals and policies of the General Plan, which include developing a substantial amount of new Downtown housing.

Figure 4-2: Downtown Districts



Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

A profile of the four districts is provided below. The Downtown Precise Plan should be consulted for further information on each district.

TRANSIT VILLAGE

The Transit Village District serves as the principal gateway to Downtown San Rafael for motorists and transit users. It includes the US 101 freeway on- and off-ramps, the SMART station, and the San Rafael Transit Center. The area includes the San Rafael Corporate Center (south of Second Street), pedestrian-oriented retail uses along Fourth Street and Lincoln Avenue, and a mixed residential and office district along Fifth Avenue and Mission Avenue.

The Corporate Center is a legacy of the 1993 Downtown Vision, which reimagined this former industrial area as a successful office district. The area north of Second Street is less cohesive. While it has excellent access to Downtown amenities, it lacks a strong image, quality outdoor public space, and destinations that generate active street life. The Precise Plan envisions this area as a more dynamic district with new housing, offices, and public space, including a “greenway” along Tamalpais Street connecting the Mahon Creek Trail and the bike path over Puerto Suello Hill.



DOWNTOWN CORE

The Downtown Core is the heart of the Precise Plan Area. It includes the most active section of the Fourth Street shopping district, as well as iconic local buildings like the Rafael Theater and Mission San Rafael Arcangel. The Downtown Core is also home to specialty stores, restaurants, art galleries, cultural institutions, and City (Court Street) Plaza. The area includes a substantial concentration of office space, and a growing number of multi-family housing units. It is also home to City Hall, the Public Library, the San Rafael Community Center, and the Public Safety Center.

Much of Fourth Street has retained its historic character. The scale of the built environment makes this an attractive destination, and provides a memorable “downtown experience.” This is particularly true along Fourth Street and along parts of A and B Streets. Second and Third Streets are less inviting due to their high traffic volumes, but there are still opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle crossings. This is important to connect Downtown to Albert Park and the Gerstle Park neighborhood, while also providing better access from those areas to Boyd Park and neighborhoods to the north.

The vision for the Downtown Core includes a substantial amount of new housing as well as new office space, civic uses, and other commercial activities. As the demand for retail space changes, some of the existing ground floor spaces may need to be adapted to new uses. The Precise Plan proposes a historic district in the core area around Fourth and A Streets, providing potential incentives for adaptive reuse while ensuring that new infill development will respect historic context.

WEST END VILLAGE

The West End Village District includes the portion of Downtown west of E Street. It has an eclectic feel, with a mix of traditional “small town” and mid-20th Century “suburban” building forms along Fourth Street, as well as residential development from different eras in San Rafael’s history. The area provides a transition between the Downtown Core and the low-density neighborhoods on Downtown’s perimeter. It is a unique, friendly, desirable place to live and shop, with one-of-a-kind businesses that meet the needs of surrounding neighborhoods.

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The quality of the streetscape in the West End Village varies. Some blocks provide pleasant settings for walking and interesting storefronts, while other blocks face large surface parking lots, with buildings oriented away from the street. The larger sites provide opportunities for new housing, office, retail, and mixed use projects. Where such developments occur, it will be important to preserve the scale and character of adjacent residential districts, especially for projects adjacent to Latham Street and Fifth Avenue.

MONTECITO COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

The Montecito Commercial District is located on the east end of Downtown, between Irwin Street and the Montecito-Happy Valley neighborhood. San Rafael High School abuts the eastern edge of this area and the San Rafael Canal forms the southern edge. This is primarily a retail/ service district. There are three supermarkets, several shopping centers, and a number of office buildings within its boundaries. The southern edge of the area is almost entirely commercial, while the northern area has a finer-grained character with mixed residential and commercial uses.

The Downtown Precise Plan anticipates infill development on a number of underutilized commercial parcels, especially along the Second and Third Street corridors. Some of these parcels contain one-story commercial buildings surrounded by large parking lots. The Downtown Precise Plan and Form Based Code support their redevelopment over time with multi-story buildings that include ground floor commercial uses, upper story housing, and structured parking. Better connections for pedestrians and bicycles will be an important part of this vision, especially along Second and Third Streets and Grand Avenue. More active ground floor uses along this segment of Fourth Street are also envisioned.

The Montecito Commercial District is also where Downtown San Rafael meets the waterfront. Access to the San Rafael Canal is currently limited to a service drive behind the Montecito Shopping Center. The Center itself faces a large surface parking lot along Third Street and turns its back to the water. The Precise Plan recognizes the opportunity to someday redevelop this site with a water-oriented project with housing, shopping, and a waterfront paseo. Buildout of the site is not included in the Downtown growth forecasts but could be considered as part of future planning process.

CENTRAL SAN RAFAEL

The neighborhoods of Central San Rafael form a crescent around Downtown, extending up the slopes of hills and valleys in the San Rafael Creek watershed. These neighborhoods include some of the City’s oldest residential areas, beloved parks and community facilities, and historic institutions such as Dominican University. A few Central San Rafael neighborhoods feature distinct architectural styles and lot patterns, but most are eclectic, giving this part of the City a “hometown” feel that is cherished by residents. The area’s character is further enhanced by its picturesque natural setting, including a mature urban forest and views of Mount Tamalpais, San Francisco Bay, and Downtown San Rafael.

Ten individual neighborhoods are profiled below. Some represent a mosaic of smaller neighborhoods and subdivisions that share common natural features, issues, and goals. Over the years, Central San Rafael neighborhoods have formed associations and organizations that advocate on the community’s behalf. Many neighborhoods have organized programs related to emergency preparedness, neighborhood beautification, and traffic safety. These associations also work closely with the City on planning and development issues, both individually and collectively through the Federation of San Rafael Neighborhoods.

Central San Rafael neighborhoods are identified in Figure NH-1. Collectively these neighborhoods cover roughly 4.5 square miles, or about 25 percent of the City’s land area. They are home to 20,000 residents, or about one-third of the City’s population. The neighborhoods are mostly comprised of single family homes but include a variety of housing types, ranging from rural estates to high-density apartments and condominiums. The area relies on Downtown (including the Montecito Commercial area) and Southeast San Rafael for most of its commercial services. However, it includes shopping and business districts along the Miracle Mile and Lincoln Avenue, as well as long-established neighborhood businesses.

For the purposes of this Element, neighborhood policies are presented clockwise in the following sequence:

- West End
- Sun Valley
- Fair Hills
- Lincoln / San Rafael Hill
- Dominican / Black Canyon
- Montecito/ Happy Valley
- Bret Harte
- Picnic Valley
- Gerstle Park

The final section addresses *unincorporated* Central San Rafael, including California Park.

DOWNTOWN

CENTRAL SAN RAFAEL

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WEST END

The West End neighborhood is located between Downtown San Rafael and San Anselmo. It includes Fourth Street's "Miracle Mile" and extends up the hills on both sides of Fourth to the ridgetops. The neighborhood consists primarily of single family homes, along with several apartment buildings. West-enders take pride in being a friendly neighborhood, with social events that encourage neighborhood unity. The neighborhood includes smaller subareas created by historic development patterns and topography, such as the tree-lined walkable Greenfield Avenue, the Spanish Mediterranean homes on Santa Margarita Drive, and hillside homes shaded by redwoods.

West End residents enjoy their proximity to Downtown, its walkable streets, and the neighborhood's comfortable small-town feel. The neighborhood has its own identity, distinct from Downtown San Rafael and the West End Village area, a separate neighborhood located to the east. Residents seek to maintain the established scale of the West End, with smaller buildings and local-serving stores along Fourth Street, generous front yards along residential streets, and tree planting that enhances neighborhood character. The community has also expressed a desire for pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements such as wider sidewalks, closing gaps in the sidewalk network, more clearly marked crosswalks, and pedestrian pathways and easements that make the neighborhood more walkable. Other priorities include maintenance of medians along the Miracle Mile, additional tree planting, and tree protection when new development takes place.

Development potential in the West End is limited, but there are a number of opportunity sites along Fourth Street and West End Avenue where older non-residential uses could be replaced over time. There are also a few undeveloped hillside properties on the neighborhood's southern slopes. The scale of future projects along Fourth Street constrained by heavy and fast-moving traffic and limited ingress and egress to Fourth Street. Where commercial or mixed development does occur, neighborhood-serving uses (rather than regional or "drive-thru" type uses) would be most appropriate on the ground level. Design should avoid "strip mall" style buildings and instead feature pedestrian-friendly features. A limited amount of housing in mixed use projects also would be desirable here.

Policy NH-2.1: Miracle Mile Land Uses

Retain the Miracle Mile as a vital neighborhood commercial district. Improve the area's appearance, parking, landscaping, and vehicular access from side streets. New development or redevelopment should be of a scale and intensity consistent with existing development.

Program NH-2.1A: Neighborhood Plan. *In the event that significant changes to currently allowable land uses or densities are proposed in the future, develop a neighborhood/ corridor plan for the Miracle Mile.*

Policy NH-2.2: Miracle Mile Circulation

Improve circulation, provisions for cross-traffic and "U-turn" movements, bicycle and pedestrian safety, and traffic controls along Fourth Street, especially at intersections with side-streets.

Program NH-2.2A: Ross Valley Intersection. *Consider reconfiguring the traffic signal at Ross Valley Drive and Fourth Street to incorporate Santa Margarita Drive, thereby improving safety.*

Policy NH-2.3: Noise Abatement

Consider the benefits and practicality of noise abatement techniques when designing or implementing capital improvements or approving new development along the Miracle Mile and adjacent Second/Third Street corridors.

Program NH-2.3A: Noise Improvements. Use the capital improvement program and development review process to consider noise abatement techniques for the Miracle Mile and adjacent thoroughfares, including the use of attractive fencing, trees and landscaping, and sound-absorbing pavement.

Policy NH-2.4: Development of Remaining Vacant Residential Lots

Ensure adequate provisions for emergency vehicle access and water supply prior to constructing additional homes on vacant lots in the West End, especially on narrow and substandard streets and in hillside areas.

SUN VALLEY

Sun Valley extends along the floor and slopes of a box valley extending to the northwest of Downtown San Rafael. It is a beautiful neighborhood with a proud past and a shared vision for its future. The oldest area of the neighborhood was subdivided between 1882 and 1916. The Sun Valley subdivision was built after World War II. Rafael Highlands and Racquet Club were built in the 1960s and 70s, while Grove Hill and Shannon Lane were built in the 1980s. More recent development has consisted of small infill development and individual homes.

The neighborhood primarily consists of residential and open space uses. There are a few non-residential uses along Fifth Avenue, including the historic copper-domed San Rafael Improvement Club, West End Nursery, Andy's Market, Sun Valley School, and Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery. Sun Valley is also home to Rotary Manor, an affordable senior housing complex. There are a number of small apartments, triplexes, and duplexes, but most of the community's homes are single family residences.

A major topographic feature of the neighborhood is Sun Valley Slope, which serves not only as a wildlife corridor but also as the neighborhood's largest open space. It provides a hiking connection to Terra Linda, San Anselmo, and the Terra Linda/ Sleepy Hollow Open Space Preserve. The Slope was purchased in 1985 through the combined efforts of local residents, the City of San Rafael, the County Open Space District, and the Marin Trust for Public Land. Mahon Creek also has its headwaters in Sun Valley, meandering through open space and backyards along its upper reaches before entering an underground culvert.

A Neighborhood Plan for Sun Valley was adopted in 1980, in part to establish development standards for 170 acres of undeveloped land. In 2020, the only significant undeveloped parcels remaining are the Camgros and Duca properties, comprising about 5.5 acres. These parcels are the last vestiges of the area's agricultural past and remain in unincorporated Marin County.

As part of General Plan 2040, Sun Valley residents outlined a vision for their neighborhood that included goals for 2040 (see text box). Sun Valley seeks to retain its character as a residential neighborhood with diverse housing choices, beautiful open spaces, and a strong appreciation for its history. The neighborhood has also expressed a commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, promoting renewable energy, encouraging native landscaping, and encouraging more sustainable transportation modes. Sun Valley strives to retain existing gathering places and neighborhood businesses, while creating a new community center for education, emergency preparedness, culture, and environmental understanding.

Policy NH-2.5: Sun Valley Neighborhood

Maintain the scale, diversity, and small-town character of Sun Valley, including its affordable housing stock and scenic open spaces. Housing shall continue to be the dominant land use in the neighborhood.

DOWNTOWN

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Sun Valley Speaks

As part of General Plan 2040, a group of about 20 Sun Valley residents gathered to share their vision for the neighborhood's future. Working in collaboration with the Sun Valley Neighborhood Association, they presented the following goals for 2040 to the City, with the overarching goal of adapting to the global climate crisis:

- Develop a local, self-sustaining source of electrical energy
- Underground electrical lines and fiber optic internet
- Develop environmental health and safety policies regarding any new technology that seeks to use neighborhood airwaves
- Build new/renewed multi-use sidewalks
- Develop new designs for traffic flow, for daily life and emergencies
- Develop policies for new and renovated homes and businesses
- Develop collaboration among neighborhood, city, school, and business
- Develop a robust neighborhood center
- Involve a significant majority of stakeholders when alternative land uses are proposed
- Maintain an active neighborhood association

Sun Valley residents developed more prescriptive goals and policies for housing, environment, development, circulation, economy, culture, design, and emergency preparedness. Some of these goals are captured in the policies in this Element and others are reflected in citywide policies elsewhere in the General Plan.

Program NH-2.5A: Neighborhood-Serving Commercial Uses.

Encourage retention of existing neighborhood commercial uses. Allow new commercial uses only if they benefit the neighborhood, will not impair its residential character or impact health and safety, and have been vetted through a community process.

Policy NH-2.6: Neighborhood Sustainability

Adapt existing buildings, energy, and transportation systems to reduce the neighborhood's carbon footprint, improve energy self-sufficiency, phase out gas-powered utilities and vehicles, reduce overhead wires and service lines, increase awareness of natural systems, and improve environmental health.

Policy NH-2.7: Natural Features

Conserve Sun Valley's natural environment, including clean-up and maintenance of Mahon Creek.

Policy NH-2.8: Sun Valley Development

Ensure that new development and significant remodels retain neighborhood character, especially in areas of smaller or historic homes. Development should support the City's sustainability and wildfire prevention goals.

Program NH-2.8A: Camgros/ Duca Properties.

Ensure that any future use on these properties supports and sustains neighborhood character. The neighborhood has expressed that it supports acquisition of these sites for a neighborhood/ community cultural center, or dedication of land for such a site in future development. Such a center could also provide for outdoor education, emergency

response and training, community functions, and delivery of local services. The potential for housing on this site also must be recognized. In the event residential development is pursued, clustering of the allowable units should be encouraged to preserve open space areas. Development should comply with the City's Hillside Guidelines and should establish a wildlife corridor and protected riparian area along a restored Mahon Creek.

Policy NH-2.9: Sun Valley Circulation

Improve circulation for all modes of travel in Sun Valley, with an emphasis on improvements for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. This should include provisions for safer sidewalks and footpaths, new bike routes, public transit, and traffic flow improvements along Fifth Avenue.

Program NH-2.9A: Neighborhood Circulation Concepts. Pursue the following circulation improvements in the Sun Valley Neighborhood:

- a) Potential roundabouts at Fifth/ California and Fifth at Happy Lane or River Oaks (would require additional right-of-way).
- b) Removal of hazardous crosswalk at Fifth Avenue and I Street.
- c) Completion of sidewalks along both sides of Fifth Avenue, and removal of sidewalk hazards.
- d) Designation of alternate evacuation routes in the event Fifth Avenue is blocked.
- e) Potential bike route along Center Avenue.
- f) A new sidewalk on California Street from Fifth to Windsor.
- g) New trails through neighborhood open spaces and connecting to the West End neighborhood.
- h) Consideration of shuttle or jitney service from Downtown along Fifth Avenue.
- i) Alternatives to meeting neighborhood parking needs.

Policy NH-2.10: Sun Valley Gathering Places

Sustain existing neighborhood gathering places in Sun Valley. Pursue opportunities to create new places where Sun Valley residents can meet, learn, play, and build a stronger sense of community.

Program NH-2.10A: Community Center. Consider the feasibility of a community cultural and environmental center in the Sun Valley area. In addition, strengthen the function of Sun Valley School and Sun Valley Park as neighborhood gathering places. This includes continued agreements with the School for access to the school yard after hours as well as access to the Dan Abraham Trail. These agreements could be expanded to allow for community meetings, emergency response, and other activities on school property.

FAIRHILLS

The Fairhills neighborhood is located northwest of Downtown San Rafael. The neighborhood combines easy access to Downtown with a picturesque natural setting and some of San Rafael's most distinctive homes. The southern part of the neighborhood includes gracious Victorians and craftsman bungalows over a century old. The northern part of the neighborhood includes larger lots, winding streets, and newer hillside homes, many with panoramic views. No two homes are the same and there is much architectural diversity. The Fairhills Neighborhood Association represents about 180 homes in this area.

Most of Fairhills is single family residential, with the exception of lower Forbes Avenue, which includes a few duplex and triplex buildings. Other features of the neighborhood include the former Red Rock Quarry, a visually significant topographic feature that has been developed with single family homes. For planning purposes, the neighborhood boundaries include Marin Academy, the Falkirk Cultural Center, and the Elks Lodge, all on the north side of Mission Avenue.

Fairhills abuts Boyd Park and Mountain Park, two large public open spaces. Wildfires have originated in this area in recent years, creating an ongoing concern for residents. The community is actively involved in fire prevention and seeks continued vegetation management and restrictions on open fire sources. Fairhills residents also support continued investment in the community's older homes. Some of the original homes from the 1940s and 50s are dated, and owners are likely to modernize or replace them in the coming decades. Residents generally support construction that is compatible with the neighborhood, conforms to Hillside Design Guidelines, and addresses parking and other issues.

Policy NH-2.11: Fairhills Neighborhood

Retain the character of Fairhills as a scenic hillside neighborhood. Development and remodeling should respect and enhance the character of the neighborhood and maintain those homes with historic value. Continued efforts should be made to reduce fire hazards and ensure adequate emergency access.

Program NH-2.11A: Hillside Construction. *Ensure that hillside areas are protected by continuing to apply the Hillside Design Guidelines for new construction and major remodels. The siting, height, and design of new or expanded structures should be carefully evaluated to ensure adequate emergency vehicle access, slope and foundation stability, adequate surface and sub-surface drainage, and erosion control. Buildings that are out of scale, damage the natural landscape, cause excessive tree loss or habitat destruction, or obstruct scenic vistas from public vantage points, should be discouraged.*

LINCOLN / SAN RAFAEL HILL

Lincoln/ San Rafael Hill extends north from Downtown San Rafael along the west side of Highway 101. Lincoln Avenue forms the spine of neighborhood, running parallel to the freeway between Downtown and the other side of Puerto Suello Hill where it becomes Los Ranchitos Road. This is one of the oldest neighborhoods in San Rafael, although development has occurred gradually and organically. Lincoln Avenue itself is eclectic, with single family homes, apartments, offices, motels, social services, churches, and other small businesses and commercial services. Some of the offices are in converted single family homes; others are in more traditional office buildings.

Away from Lincoln Avenue, the neighborhood primarily consists of single-family homes, including a mix of older cottages, mid-century homes, and more contemporary construction. The narrow, winding streets and hilly terrain afford panoramic views and create a strong sense of neighborhood character. Closer to Downtown, there are charming smaller apartment buildings along Laurel Place and nearby side streets. Boyd Park and Mountain Park form the western edge of the neighborhood. The threat of wildfire has been an ongoing concern.

In addition to fire safety, planning issues in the neighborhood include traffic congestion and pavement maintenance along Lincoln, traffic speed and safety, parking on hillside streets and limited parking along Lincoln Avenue. There are a number of development opportunities along Lincoln Avenue, particularly on older commercial sites where existing uses may no longer be economically viable. If these sites are redeveloped, the neighborhood seeks to retain the existing three-story height profile and avoid the "canyon" effect of having taller buildings on both sides of the street. Residents also seek a small neighborhood park, as there are no improved park areas in the vicinity.

Elsewhere in the neighborhood, there are vacant lots on some of the hillside streets west of Lincoln (Fair Drive, Chula Vista Drive, etc.). These areas should develop in a way that protects natural resources, reduces hazards, and respects the scale and character of nearby homes.



Policy NH-2.12: Lincoln/ San Rafael Hill

Maintain low-density development in the hillside areas above Lincoln Avenue, consistent with existing densities and with access, fire hazard, and environmental constraints. Ensure that residents of the areas above Lincoln Avenue are engaged in plans for development along Lincoln itself.

Policy NH-2.13: Lincoln Avenue Corridor

Allow higher density residential development along Lincoln Avenue between Hammondale Court and Mission Avenue, recognizing the availability of public transit along this corridor and the established pattern of development. Where development occurs, landscaped setbacks and tree planting should be required to visually reduce the “wall effect” along Lincoln Avenue. Underground parking should be encouraged to reduce overall building height and mass. Consolidation of smaller lots into larger parcels should be encouraged, in order to create more viable development sites, meet parking needs, and minimize the number of ingress/egress points to Lincoln Avenue.

Program NH-2.13A: Lincoln Avenue Development Standards. Maintain development standards that preserve the character of Lincoln Avenue, including:

- a) 36-foot (three story) height limit²
- b) 15' front yard setbacks
- c) Continued allowances for multi-family residential and office uses. This includes continued a prohibition on the conversion of existing residential space to office use unless replacement residential units are provided.
- d) Prohibition of most new retail uses (while allowing existing uses to continue)
- e) Requirements to mitigate noise impacts from SMART, the freeway, and Lincoln Avenue traffic, where appropriate.

² Subject to density bonuses for affordable housing

Program NH-2.13B: Lincoln / San Rafael Hill Park. Pursue opportunities to develop a small neighborhood park in the northern part of the Lincoln/ San Rafael neighborhood.

DOMINICAN/ BLACK CANYON

Located in the geographic center of San Rafael, Dominican/ Black Canyon is a pleasant residential neighborhood with a wealth of history and outdoor beauty. The centerpiece of the neighborhood is Dominican University, an historic California institution. Single family homes, a number of which were built in the late 19th and early 20th Century, surround the campus. The neighborhood has a parklike character, created by large and abundant trees, landscaped yards, and attractive architecture. The Dominican area also includes duplexes, a few condominiums, Coleman Elementary School, the Marin Tennis Club, and Marin Ballet. Black Canyon lies just north of the University, with Mountain View Avenue extending up the valley floor.

The neighborhood is bordered by Highway 101 on the west, and large hillside open space areas on the north and east, including Barbier Memorial Park/ Gold Hill. Hillside trails provide spectacular views of San Rafael and the surrounding area. Creeks originating in the open spaces flow through the residential areas and the Dominican campus, with riparian areas providing natural habitat.

The Convent of Dominican Sisters has been a presence in the community since 1889. In 1915, the Sisters opened a junior college, which soon became the four-year institution known as Dominican College. The college expanded through the 1920s, adding academic buildings and residence halls, and purchasing Forest Meadows for athletics. Another wave of expansion occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s with new properties acquired and new buildings added. In 2000, Dominican College became Dominican University of California. Today, Dominican has more than 1,700 students on its 80-acre campus.



In 1998, the City approved a Master Use Permit and Campus Plan for Dominican’s development, including a four-phase expansion. Projects completed under this Permit included the 29,000 square foot (SF) recreational facility and pool at Forest Meadows, a 35,000 SF science building, a 9,000 SF chapel, a 40,000 SF residence hall, and a soccer field and amphitheater expansion. Parking and landscaping improvements were included with each phase. The Master Use Permit was amended in 2008-2010 to allow conversion of Magnolia House to academic use, renovations to the Edgehill Mansion, historic landmarking of both buildings, and addition of an 18.7-acre forested hillside to the Campus Plan area. Improvements called for by the Master Use Permit have largely been completed. Further improvements on the University’s properties are possible and should be closely coordinated with the neighborhood.

Beyond the University properties, development potential in Dominican-Black Canyon is limited. New residential development may occur on the remaining vacant lots, and through limited subdivision of several large private properties. There may also be opportunities for further open space acquisition. Longstanding priorities for residents include developing a neighborhood park and playground, reducing the impacts of freeway noise, and minimizing the impact of the university on surrounding residential areas. The neighborhood is also concerned about reducing wildfire and landslide hazards and is working to improve emergency preparedness and response.

Policy NH-2.14: Dominican University

Sustain Dominican University as a valued community institution and contributor to San Rafael’s economy and culture. University operations and events should be compatible with surrounding residential areas, and the impacts of facilities, activities, and events on the neighborhood should be minimized. Continue to foster a cooperative relationship between the University’s students, faculty, visitors, and residents.

Program NH-2.14A: University-Neighborhood Coordination. *Maintain on-going coordination between Dominican University, the Dominican-Black Canyon Neighborhood Association, the City of San Rafael, and campus neighbors to address concerns such as traffic, parking, noise, and vegetation management in the University area. In the event future development or campus expansion is proposed, amendments to the Master Use Permit shall be required. Creation of neighborhood advisory committees to advise and collaborate on proposed development projects and address issues of concern is strongly encouraged.*

Program NH-2.14B: Dominican Hillside Parcels. *Work with Dominican University and neighborhood residents to plan for the undeveloped hillside parcels located east of Deer Park Avenue and south of Gold Hill Grade. Much of the property is steep and heavily wooded. Other portions have the potential for housing, including student housing and faculty/ staff housing, which is a significant local and community need. In the event housing is pursued, the permitted density should reflect site constraints. Development should conform to the City’s Hillside Design Guidelines and include provisions for substantial open space. The neighborhood should be involved in the planning and review process, which would include an amendment to the Master Use Permit and the PD-district zoning.*

Policy NH-2.15: Dominican/Black Canyon Area Resources and Hazards

Proactively work to conserve and restore natural resources and reduce environmental hazards in the Dominican/ Black Canyon area, including wildfire, landslide, and noise hazards.

Program NH-2.15A: Emergency Preparedness. *Continue collaborative efforts to improve emergency preparedness, including vegetation management on public open space and private property, evacuation and emergency response, and community awareness and training.*

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Program NH-2.15B: Noise Reduction. Continue to work with Caltrans to reduce freeway noise in the Dominican-Black Canyon area. This should include maintenance of landscaping along the freeway sound wall, noise-reducing pavement, and other sound absorption technologies.

Program NH-2.15C: Open Space Dedication. Consider offers to dedicate vacant sites, including the 17.9-acre parcel at the end of Dominican Drive (also with frontage on Glen Park Avenue), as public open space. If City ownership is infeasible, consider dedication to Marin County Parks.

MONTECITO

Montecito/ Happy Valley is nestled in two valleys located north of the San Rafael Canal and northeast of Downtown. It is one of San Rafael's oldest and well-established neighborhoods and features a beautiful natural setting, mature street trees, a convenient location, and a diverse mix of housing types and uses. Housing ranges from elegant historic homes and smaller bungalows to multi-family complexes, condominiums, and a retirement community. Residents enjoy easy access to Downtown, shopping centers and services, Highway 101, and public transportation.

A neighborhood plan for Montecito-Happy Valley was adopted in 1996. The plan reduced development potential in the neighborhood, primarily by reducing the extent of multi-family zoning in areas developed with single family homes. The vision expressed in the neighborhood plan is to maintain Montecito-Happy Valley as a beautiful, desirable place with diverse architecture, pleasant shaded streets, community gathering places, and a variety of uses within walking distance. This continues to be the vision today. Area residents will continue to work together to keep the neighborhood secure, clean, safe, and attractive, and to celebrate Montecito's success as a strong and diverse community.

While the residential portion of Montecito-Happy Valley is mostly built out, the adjacent commercial district functions as the east end of Downtown San Rafael and will evolve as a mixed-use neighborhood in the coming decades. New development in this area has the potential to make Downtown's east end more attractive and walkable. However, the area is heavily congested, has limited street parking, and provides essential services such as grocery stores to much of Central San Rafael and the San Pedro Peninsula. As development occurs, it will be essential to address traffic impacts, keep the streets safe for pedestrians and bicyclists, maintain important neighborhood-serving uses, and ensure that the scale of new projects is compatible with the residential heart of the neighborhood.

San Rafael High School has been a continuous presence in Montecito-Happy Valley since 1924. In addition to classroom buildings, the 32-acre campus includes Madrone Continuation High School, several athletic fields, a recently refurbished track and football field, a pool and gymnasium complex, parking, and the School District corporation yard on Union Street. A long-standing planning concept has been to relocate the corporation yard and repurpose the land for affordable housing and/or a neighborhood park. Montecito currently lacks a park, despite having a large number of apartment dwellers with limited options for outdoor play and relaxation. This concept remains valid and should be pursued with the School District.

Policy NH-2.16: Montecito Residential Densities

Preserve the existing mix of single family, duplex, medium-, and high-density housing in Montecito-Happy Valley's residential areas.

Policy NH-2.17: High School Campus Plans

Facilitate communication between San Rafael City Schools and the neighborhood on issues related to traffic, parking, noise, operations, and development on the high school campus.

Program NH-2.17A: Corporation Yard Reuse. Encourage relocation of the bus/ maintenance yard located on the northwest corner of the high school campus (Union and Mission), thereby allowing for development of:

- a) *Affordable multi-family housing. To the extent feasible, housing on the site should serve older adults and/or School District staff. Any development on this site should maintain, enhance, and protect the view corridor down Fourth Street to the High School's west portico.*
- b) *Montecito Neighborhood Park. A small neighborhood park and children's playground should be included in any plans to repurpose school property. In the event a park is infeasible on the Union and Mission site, consider other locations on the campus where such a facility is possible, including a joint use park on the field east of the corporation yard.*

If any part of the high school campus is closed or sold before the horizon of the General Plan, a priority should be placed on developing affordable housing or neighborhood parkland.

Program NH-2.17B: Joint Use. Work with San Rafael City Schools to accommodate greater public access to open space and athletic fields at the High School during hours when school is not in session.

Program NH-2.17C: School-Related Traffic. Work with San Rafael City Schools to improve the safety and effectiveness of drop-off areas at San Rafael High School. Encourage continued communication and cooperation to address access and scheduling improvements.

Policy NH-2.18: Architecture

Maintain a mix of architecture styles in the Montecito/ Happy Valley Neighborhood, compatible with the character of the area's attractive older buildings. Newer buildings should be well designed, blend well with existing homes and provide a pedestrian-friendly street front.

See also Program CDP-5.2B (Community Design and Preservation Element) identifying Montecito/ Happy Valley as one of several priority areas for a historic resource inventory update.

Policy NH-2.19: Traffic Circulation

Continue to develop solutions to neighborhood traffic congestion and safety. Local residential streets should be designed for low volumes with appropriate traffic control. Continued efforts should be made to improve circulation on streets in the adjacent commercial area and to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety through this area.



Program NH-2.19A: Access to Downtown. Provide safe access from the Montecito-Happy Valley area to Fourth Street, the Montecito Shopping Center, the Canal waterfront, and the transit center area. Streetscape improvements in the eastern end of Downtown should create an inviting, comfortable environment for walking.

Program NH-2.19B: Pedestrian Improvements. Improve the safety and condition of neighborhood sidewalks, including improvements to crosswalks, posting of speed limits, and improvements to pedestrian paths and rights-of-way. Work with the neighborhood to gather information on sidewalks and paths needing improvement.

Policy NH-2.20: Parking

Provide street parking that is convenient and does not dominate the neighborhood. New residential development should provide attractive and adequate off-street parking.

Program NH-2.20A: Parking Improvements. Continue to explore practical and cost-effective solutions to manage parking in the Montecito area. These measures could include residential permit parking, time limits on parking on specific high-demand streets, working with apartment owners to restore parking spaces being used for storage, working with property owners to add on-site parking where feasible, and posting no parking signs on narrow streets with access constraints for emergency vehicles.

Policy NH-2.21: Downtown Transition Areas

Ensure that future development in the Montecito commercial area respects the context, scale, and character of development in the adjacent residential neighborhood. Building height and mass along the north and east edges of Downtown should step down in order to minimize impacts on neighborhood character and well-being.

Program NH-2.21A: Reuse of Commercial Properties. Actively solicit input from Montecito-Happy Valley residents on plans for the reuse, redevelopment, and improvement of properties in the commercial area between US 101 and San Rafael High School, including the Montecito Shopping Center.

BRET HARTE

The Bret Harte neighborhood rises from Woodland Avenue to the crest of Southern Heights Ridge southeast of Downtown San Rafael. Once a dairy farm, the neighborhood was mostly developed in the 1940s. Land use in the neighborhood is primarily residential, with high density apartments along Woodland Avenue, single family homes in the heart of the neighborhood and large lot “view” homes on the top of the ridge. The neighborhood also includes significant public open space areas on its steeper slopes. Bret Harte Park is a central fixture of the neighborhood and the setting for many community events and activities.

The neighborhood has an active community association—the Bret Harte Community Association—that organizes multiple events each year designed to strengthen relationships between neighbors. While the neighborhood is small, it is close knit, with many long-time residents. Residents appreciate its affordability to young couples and families, central location, easy freeway and transit access, and sense of community.



Bret Harte Speaks

As part of General Plan 2040, the Bret Harte Community Association conducted a neighborhood survey and invited residents to share their ideas for the area's future. Residents were asked:

As you visualize your neighborhood in 20 years, what major changes or improvements would you like to see?

Some of the responses are listed below:

- "I would like to see the park maintained and more play structures"
- "Better access to downtown on foot"
- "More flood control in the lower areas of the neighborhood"
- "Use parking permits so only residents can park on the neighborhood streets"
- "Improvement of drainage and sidewalks"
- "The SMART train being elevated above downtown intersections"
- "Would love all power lines to be underground"
- "Keep it clean, continue with events, no major changes"
- "More differentiation between residential and nearby commercial areas"
- "Speed bumps on upper Irwin above Bret Harte Park"
- "Would love the hill in the park to be landscaped to stop erosion"
- "A local shopping area with cafes / restaurants"
- "Rehab some of the surrounding light-industrial zone into retail for walkable services (grocery, drug store, etc)"
- "Upgrades to Woodland and Lovell area, especially upgraded sidewalks"
- "Attractive 'Welcome to Bret Harte' signs at end of DuBois and Irwin Streets--could be colorful mosaic tiles created by neighborhood kids"
- "Increased attention to potential slide areas and more proactive slide prevention"
- "I hope it doesn't change too much!"

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Access to the Bret Harte neighborhood relies on often-congested interchanges along US 101 and I-580, and arterial streets passing through an industrial area. The SMART train extension to Larkspur has also impacted the neighborhood. Monitoring traffic along Woodland, Anderson, and varying cross-streets is important, and making adjustments to lessen impacts is a high priority. Bret Harte residents also are concerned about wildfire hazards, including hazards associated with unauthorized encampments on the wooded hillsides around the community.

Looking to 2040, new development in the neighborhood is expected to be limited to accessory dwelling units (ADUs), the expansion of existing smaller homes, and a handful of remaining vacant residentially zoned parcels. The neighborhood's hillsides should be protected as open space to the extent feasible. Parking should be carefully managed, as the Bret Harte area is impacted by employee parking from nearby industrial areas and parking from a growing number of ADUs. Maintenance of local access roads, including Irwin, Dubois, and Rose Streets, should continue to be a priority. Pedestrian safety improvements also are desired, particularly for students walking to nearby Davidson and Laurel Dell schools.

Bret Harte residents also seek proactive strategies to reduce the impacts of climate change on the neighborhood. Maintenance and improvement of gutters, culverts, and storm drains will be important to reduce flooding. Landslides from the open space above Irwin Street have caused significant damage to the area above Glenaire Drive in the past and continue to pose a risk. Aggressive vegetation management is needed to reduce the risk of wildfire, and emergency preparedness for local residents remains essential. Aging power lines represent another risk, given the abundance of street trees and high winds.

Policy NH-2.22: Bret Harte Neighborhood

Maintain Bret Harte as a great neighborhood, with continued efforts to reduce hazards, preserve open space, enhance public facilities and infrastructure, and encourage reinvestment in the existing housing stock.

Program NH-2.22A: Bret Harte Neighborhood Priorities. Recognize the following neighborhood priorities in planning and development decisions for the Bret Harte area:

- a) Maintain strict limits on hillside development. Existing hillside open spaces should be reinforced and proactively managed to prevent future landslides.
- b) Encourage safety improvements to infrastructure, including undergrounding power lines and monitoring aging gas lines through residential yards.
- c) Improve bicycle and pedestrian access along Woodland Avenue, providing safer routes to school, and better access to Downtown San Rafael.
- d) Improve neighborhood aesthetics and landscaping, particularly at the neighborhood gateways at DuBois and Irwin Streets. Additional trees should be planted throughout the area, and existing trees should be maintained.
- e) Continue improvements to Bret Harte Park, including hillside landscaping to prevent erosion, community art projects, shade tree maintenance, completion of restroom improvements, and replacement of the water tank while preserving the historic wooden structure that surrounds it.
- f) Expand emergency preparedness activities, particularly for older adults.
- g) Encourage renovation of the Bret Harte Shopping Center.
- h) Monitor and discourage homeless encampments in the open space below Southern Heights Ridge.

PICNIC VALLEY

The Picnic Valley neighborhood is located south of Downtown San Rafael and includes the area between Davidson Middle School and the top of Southern Heights Ridge. The neighborhood takes its name from the Laurel Grove Picnic Grounds, the site of civic events and celebrations during San Rafael's early days. Picnic Valley is characterized by steep wooded hillsides traversed by winding, narrow streets and footpaths. Housing includes a mix of older bungalows and cottages, mid-century hillside homes, and modern homes, many with panoramic views. There are a number of apartment and condominium complexes in the Davidson School area and a few duplexes in the hillside areas. The neighborhood includes Laurel Dell Elementary School.

Picnic Valley is a mostly built out neighborhood with only a few vacant sites. There are a number of development and redevelopment opportunities in the lower part of the neighborhood near Davidson School. The upper hillsides are constrained by limited access, narrow roads, and steep slopes. The neighborhood seeks continued improvement of older non-conforming streets such as Bungalow Avenue, and enforcement of parking regulations to ensure safety and emergency vehicle access.

GERSTLE PARK

Gerstle Park is located south and southwest of Downtown. The area developed in the late 1800s as one of San Rafael's first residential neighborhoods. Some of the earliest residences were summer homes for wealthy San Franciscans. The early 1900s saw the development of craftsman bungalows, many of which survive today. The flatter portions of the neighborhood are on the southern flank of Downtown and were zoned to allow apartments during an era when San Rafael was growing rapidly. Today these areas include a mix of single-family homes, apartments, and small offices, sometimes side by side. Most of the apartments were built in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. A Gerstle Park Neighborhood Plan was adopted in 1980.

Today, Gerstle Park retains its charm and takes pride in its historic housing stock, walkable scale, mature street trees, and well-kept properties. It is a quintessential hometown neighborhood, with many longtime residents and a strong sense of community. The area retains one of the largest concentrations of Victorian and early 20th Century architecture in Marin County. It also includes Gerstle Park itself, a six-acre estate and community park donated to the City by the Gerstle family in 1930. Short Elementary School is also located in the neighborhood.

As a mature, mostly built out community, the priority in Gerstle Park is maintaining and enhancing local streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure; supporting investment in the existing housing stock; and managing neighborhood traffic and parking. The neighborhood abuts the busy Second/Third Street corridor and is bisected by D Street/ Wolfe Grade. Continued efforts are needed to reduce cut-through traffic and speeding, beautify local streets, and address parking issues on neighborhood streets. Opportunities to refurbish and improve older apartment buildings so they are more compatible with neighborhood character are encouraged. Historic preservation should continue to be strongly supported. As in all parts of San Rafael, fire safety and emergency preparedness are essential.

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Policy NH-2.23: Gerstle Park

Preserve and enhance the residential and historic character of the Gerstle Park neighborhood by:

- Protecting the mixed-density residential area, strictly limiting rezoning to higher densities.
- Prohibiting additional non-residential development in Gerstle Park except as already allowed in zoning regulations.
- Protecting hillside ridges and the visual backdrop of the ridges on the edges of the neighborhood.
- Preserving and enhancing the distinctive design character of the neighborhood, including historic design features. New development or significant remodels should enhance and respect the architectural character of the neighborhood.
- Requiring that adjacent Downtown land use designations and developments are compatible with and do not negatively affect the neighborhood, and that sensitive transitions occur where Downtown development abuts neighborhood residences.

Program NH-2.23A: Short School. *Coordinate with San Rafael City Schools on the future of Short Elementary School. Uses should be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood and sensitive to potential impacts on parking, traffic, noise, and similar factors.*

See also Program CDP-5.2B (Community Design and Preservation) identifying Gerstle Park as one of several priority areas for a historic resource inventory update.

Policy NH-2.24: Natural Features

Protect and enhance important natural features in the Gerstle Park area, including Mahon/ San Rafael Creek, mature street trees, and community open spaces, hillsides, and woodlands.

Policy NH-2.25: Pedestrian Linkages and Landscaping

Improve bicycle and pedestrian linkages and landscape treatment of major gateways from Downtown.

Program NH-2.25A: Gateway Improvements. Provide landscaping improvements along B, C, and D Streets.

UNINCORPORATED NEIGHBORHOODS

The only unincorporated neighborhood in Central San Rafael is California Park, which is located between the Bret Harte neighborhood and the 101 Freeway just north of the Larkspur city limits. A small portion of the Sun Valley area is also unincorporated and is addressed in the Sun Valley section of this chapter.

CALIFORNIA PARK

The California Park neighborhood encompasses 103 acres in the southeast part of Central San Rafael. This is a single-family residential neighborhood with a handful of multi-family properties and a Montessori School. The neighborhood is situated on a bowl-shaped hillside surrounding a flat low-lying area along Auburn Street. The low-lying area, known as the Scheutzen Park subdivision, consists of over 200 antiquated 25' x 100' vacant lots, most of which have been consolidated into larger parcels. The Scheutzen Park area has a number of environmental constraints, including wetlands and flood hazards.

Residents of California Park value the small-town neighborly feel of their community, and its central, convenient location. Their vision for the community's future includes conservation of the Scheutzen Park wetlands and the neighborhood's hillside open spaces. Any development on the Scheutzen site should be clustered on upland areas so that the wetlands can be protected and enhanced. Residents seek to preserve the neighborhood's natural, informal feel while improving older properties, reducing nuisances and illegal dumping, and creating safer conditions for pedestrians.



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The Southeast San Rafael/ Canal area encompasses about two square miles between Downtown San Rafael and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. It includes San Rafael's largest employment district and most of its industrial land, its highest-density residential neighborhood, some of its largest sales tax generators, and essential utility and transportation infrastructure. The area is home to about 20 percent of San Rafael's population and includes the vibrant and multi-cultural Canal neighborhood. Southeast San Rafael also includes abundant natural resources, including wetlands, several miles of shoreline, and wooded hillsides.

The Southeast area presents unique opportunities. The area is centrally located, with direct access to Highway 101, Interstate 580, and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. It is the economic engine of San Rafael, generating nearly two-thirds of San Rafael's sales tax revenue and employing more than 12,000 people. It fills a critical niche in the Marin County economy, providing space for auto sales and repair, building services and construction, home furnishings, and essential light industrial activities. The Canal area of Southeast San Rafael provides an important lower-income housing resource for San Rafael and Marin County and is home to a workforce that provides the foundation of the local economy.

Some of San Rafael's greatest challenges are also evident here, including vulnerability to sea level rise and traffic congestion. And the Canal community, while dynamic and vital, experiences unacceptable rates of poverty, as well as overcrowded and unaffordable housing conditions. The General Plan's focus on climate change, equity, and resilience is intended to address these challenges and provide a safe, secure future for those who live and work in Southeast San Rafael.

The Southeast San Rafael/ Canal section of the Neighborhoods Element is organized into the following five sections corresponding to different geographic subareas:

- Canal Waterfront
- Near Southeast (Francisco Blvd West)
- Canal District
- Spinnaker Point/ Baypoint Lagoons
- Shoreline/ Andersen East

This subarea also includes the Marin Islands, two small islands and submerged tidelands that are part of a National Wildlife Refuge located in San Rafael Bay. The islands will remain uninhabited through the horizon of this Plan and will continue to be protected and enhanced as a wildlife habitat area.

The following guiding policy applies to the entire Southeast area. More place-specific policies following on the next pages:

Policy NH-3.1: Southeast San Rafael/ Canal

Strengthen Southeast San Rafael/ Canal as a local and regional employment center and a community of diverse, resilient neighborhoods.

Program NH-3.1A: Southeast San Rafael Community Plan. Prepare a Plan for the Southeast San Rafael area, including its business districts and the Canal neighborhood. The Plan should be comprehensive in scope, covering land use, transportation, housing, public safety, conservation, sea level adaptation, and economic vitality issues. The Plan should be based on an inclusive public process that gives voice to Canal residents and Southeast San Rafael businesses. The type of Plan to be prepared (Precise Plan, Specific Plan, etc.) will be determined based on available resources and project objectives.

CANAL WATERFRONT

Policies in this section apply to both sides of the San Rafael Canal between Highway 101 and the mouth of the Canal at Pickleweed Park. While the Canal waterfront is not a neighborhood per se, it is a unique natural feature that has been the focus of past plans. The Canal provides a connecting seam that joins four of the five planning areas that comprise San Rafael.

A Canalfont Conceptual Design Plan for the Canal waterfront was completed in 2009, accompanied by Design Guidelines. Some of the Plan's recommendations, such as the Grand Avenue pedestrian/bicycle bridge and Beach Park improvements, have been implemented. The longer-term vision of a shoreline paseo and a new pedestrian/bicycle crossing east of Grand Avenue has yet to be fulfilled. Public access to the canal waterway remains limited.

Existing uses along the San Rafael Canal include shopping centers, offices, apartments and condominiums, single family homes, marinas, restaurants, boat repair and storage, parks, and open space. There continue to be opportunities to improve pedestrian access, especially through redevelopment of shoreline properties and improvements between Grand Avenue and Harbor Street. Water-oriented businesses are encouraged, including mixed use development with activities such as restaurants on the ground floor and housing above. A public promenade along either side of the channel in this area remains a desired outcome. A shorter-term objective may be a waterfront trail along the south side of Canal between Grand Avenue and Beach Park.

Dredging of the Canal is needed both to maintain its navigability and to address water quality and flooding hazards. The Army Corps of Engineers allocated funds for a dredging plan in 2020. This work should be linked to ongoing efforts related to sea level rise and resiliency planning.

Policy NH-3.2: San Rafael Canal

Promote the San Rafael Canal as a community-wide asset for public and marine-related uses. Public access and views of the water should be improved, and sensitive wildlife habitat should be protected.

Program NH-3.2A: Design Plan and Vision for the Canalfont. Continue implementation of the Canalfont Conceptual Design Plan, including circulation and access improvements and development of a waterfront paseo. (see text box on page 3).

Policy NH-3.3: Canal Maintenance

Ensure the long-term maintenance of the Canal as a navigable waterway, including regular dredging. Encourage the maintenance of docks, along with litter removal and water quality improvements.

Program NH-3.3A: Canal Dredging. Support efforts to dredge the San Rafael Canal to ensure its continued navigability, effectiveness for flood control and sea level rise resilience, and value as natural habitat and a recreational resource. Pursue a reliable ongoing funding source for dredging and channel maintenance, potentially including a maintenance assessment district and federal funding.

See also Policy CSI-1.11 in the Community Services and Infrastructure Element



Canalfront Conceptual Design Plan

In December 2009, the City completed a Conceptual Design Plan for the San Rafael Canal, along with Design Guidelines for Canalfront properties. The Plan recognizes the Canal as a defining feature of San Rafael that provides recreational, aesthetic, and environmental benefits. Among the recommendations are development of a waterfront paseo from Downtown to Pickleweed Park on the south bank, and along the Montecito waterfront on the north bank. The Plan envisions a thriving maritime presence, with sailing, boating, rafting, kayaking, and fishing. Habitat for birds and plants is restored, creating a healthier ecosystem.

The Design Plan includes recommendations for four waterfront subareas based on the vision of a more accessible, environmentally healthy, economically active, and resilient waterfront:

- In the **Transit Center** area, the Plan proposes public art, water quality and habitat improvements, and a safer pedestrian and bicycle connection under Highway 101 to connect to the Mahon Creek path
- In the **West Canal** area between Highway 101 and the San Rafael Yacht Harbor, the Plan proposes new water-facing mixed-use development on underutilized sites, with new waterfront access points.
- In the **Canal Street** area from the Yacht Harbor to Pickleweed Park, the Plan proposes a bike lane along Canal Street. A shoreline walkway also is proposed, but is constrained by existing development patterns.
- In the **Pickleweed Park** area, the Plan recommends bike route improvements, a new non-motorized boat launch, new seating areas, and wetland restoration with interpretive signage.

The Plan includes an implementation program identifying priority actions and responsible parties. A companion document provides design guidelines for future development along the Canal, including new spaces accessible to the public. Collectively, these actions will raise the profile of the Canal and help make it an inviting, safe, and interesting destination that welcomes everyone who lives and works in San Rafael.

Policy NH-3.4: Canal Waterfront Land Uses

Promote and protect water-oriented uses between Grand Avenue and Harbor Street, including uses that serve the recreational and live-aboard boating community. Other commercial uses that encourage pedestrian traffic such as restaurant and retail uses should be permitted. Residential and office uses are allowed in this area, subject to conditions to ensure they are compatible with nearby uses. Opportunities for innovative water-dependent housing types such as floating homes and houseboats also should be considered. East of Harbor Street, residential uses should be retained on both sides of the channel.

Program NH-3.4A: Zoning. *Maintain zoning provisions to protect and incentivize water-oriented uses. Amend zoning as needed to permit floating homes and other water-dependent housing.*

Program NH-3.4B: State Lands Commission Title Claims. *To assist in redevelopment, resolve public trust title land claims that enable the City to convey or exchange certain filled lands which are found to be no longer necessary for use as harbors, commerce, navigation, fisheries, or appurtenances, consistent with State law.*

Policy NH-3.5: Waterfront Design

Require new buildings along the Canal waterfront to provide public views of the water and accommodate public access to the shoreline. Design factors important in reviewing specific development proposals include pedestrian access, waterfront setbacks, view protection and enhancement, habitat protection, architectural design quality, and landscaping.

Program NH-3.5A: Canalfront Design Guidelines. *Use the development review process to implement the 2009 Design Guidelines for the Canal Waterfront, including requirements for a 25' waterside setback for new buildings and a 10' paseo along the waterfront. Amenities such as seating, lighting, and bike racks should be provided along the shoreline. The Design Guidelines include provisions for building materials, architecture, lighting, signage, views, public open space, landscaping, street furniture, streets and sidewalks, and sustainability.*



Policy NH-3.6: Public Access

Increase and improve public access to the Canal through the creation of waterfront promenades, a potential new pedestrian bridge east of Grand Avenue, additional access points within new development, and waterside access for boats.

Program NH-3.6A: Circulation Improvements. Continue to seek funding opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle enhancements along the Canal and include such projects in the Capital Improvement Program as funding becomes available. In addition, explore the feasibility of future water taxi service between the Downtown/ Transit Center area and points along the Canal and shoreline.

Program NH-3.6B: Water Access. As outlined in the Canalfront Design Guidelines, provide public access for boat docks and kayak launches in new development where feasible. Waterside access for boats should be encouraged in new commercial development along the Canal.

Policy NH-3.7: Recreational Boat Facilities

Maintain existing recreational boat launch facilities along the Canal unless the demand for such facilities no longer exists or adequate substitute space can be provided. Encourage the addition of boat launch facilities, boat trailer parking, and sewage pump out facilities where appropriate.

Program NH-3.7A: Public Boat Launching Facilities. Promote the addition of public boat launching facilities for small non-motorized watercraft such as kayaks at Beach Park and the Montecito Shopping Center.

Program NH-3.7B: Boating Sanitation and Dock Safety. Implement the Vessel Sanitation and Dock Safety provisions of the San Rafael Municipal Code (Chapter 17.40) to protect water quality, ensure adequate equipment for boat sanitation and sewage pump-out facilities.

See also Conservation/ Climate Change Element Policy C-3.6 and Programs C-3.6A, -B, and C-3.6B on canal water quality, sanitation, and sewage pump out facilities.

Policy NH-3.8: Flood Control Improvements

Coordinate development and redevelopment of uses along the Canal with a comprehensive strategy to reduce flood hazards, adapt to sea level rise and create a more resilient shoreline. This should include improvements to levees and sea walls, pump stations, and storm drainage infrastructure.

Program NH-3.8A: Pump Station Improvements. Improve the appearance or relocate the City's Pump Station at 569 East Francisco Boulevard (near the San Rafael Yacht Harbor).

See also Policies S-3.1 through S-3.9 in the Safety and Resilience Element on Sea Level Rise.

NEAR SOUTHEAST

Near Southeast covers the 160-acre area bounded by Lindaro Street, Mahon Creek, Highway 101, and Woodland Avenue. The area is bisected by Andersen Drive and the SMART rail tracks and includes Francisco Boulevard West, Dubois Street/ Lincoln Avenue, Rice Drive, and Jordan Street. Near Southeast includes a mix of heavy industrial uses such as the Shamrock Materials concrete plant, along with large format retailers and auto dealerships, auto body and repair shops, and numerous light industrial, production, distribution, and repair (PDR) activities. The area provides roughly 2,800 jobs, including many in the retail sector and the building, auto, and construction trades.

Retention of industrial and PDR activities in this area has been and will continue to be an important planning issue. This is the oldest industrial area in the city and there are very few options for businesses to relocate if they are displaced. Allowances for housing have been made along the northern edge of this area, which is adjacent to Downtown San Rafael and a short walk from the transit center. The Lindaro area (along Lindaro and Jordan Streets, adjacent to Downtown) has a mixed-use zoning designation that encourages live-work and office uses. Multi-family housing is also allowed in, and limited to, the commercial area along Francisco Boulevard West. Industrial and light industrial uses should be retained elsewhere.

Policy NH-3.9: Near Southeast Land Uses

Protect industrial and commercial uses located in the Near Southeast area due to the area's central location and the lack of alternate locations for these uses. Sites for industries that are important to San Rafael's economy and needed for the convenience of its residents and businesses (such as those serving the building and construction trades) should be protected and maintained.

Program NH-3.9A: Consideration of General Plan Amendments. *Retain the existing Industrial and Light Industrial zoning in the Andersen-Woodland corridor in order to preserve the much-needed industrial base serving both San Rafael and Marin County. In the event General Plan amendments and rezoning are proposed, a comprehensive assessment of impacts on local businesses, relocation options, land use compatibility, and fiscal conditions should be required.*

Program NH-3.9B: Industrial Area Design Improvements. *Upgrade the condition and appearance of properties as redevelopment or remodeling occurs. When new development and remodels are proposed, consider visual and view impacts on the Bret Harte and Picnic Valley neighborhoods, Highway 101, and adjacent transportation routes. As necessary, apply requirements to screen outdoor storage areas and rooftop mechanical equipment.*

Program NH-3.9C: Woodland Avenue. *Create a more compatible transition between industrial and residential properties along Woodland Avenue. New or redeveloping industrial properties should minimize the potential for adverse impacts to nearby residential uses. Similarly, new housing on residentially zoned sites should minimize the potential for negative impacts on industrial uses and business operations.*

Program NH-3.9D: Andersen Drive. *Continue to minimize vehicular access points onto Andersen Drive to maintain maximum traffic flow.*

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Policy NH-3.10: Highway 101 Frontage

Encourage the use of properties facing Highway 101 with uses that take advantage of their freeway visibility. Appropriate uses include automobile sales, bulk retail sales, region-serving retail uses, hotels, and similar uses. Other uses that generate economic and sales tax benefits should also be permitted, particularly as market conditions evolve. Heavier manufacturing and storage uses should be discouraged along the freeway. Offices are an acceptable land use and are particularly encouraged on parcels within ½ mile of the SMART station.

Program NH-3.10A: Francisco Boulevard West Zoning. Maintain zoning regulations for the Francisco Boulevard West corridor that capitalize on the area's freeway frontage. Zoning should be periodically updated to respond to economic and market changes. As the retail environment changes, other uses with positive fiscal benefits should be permitted and encouraged.

Program NH-3.10B: Property Assembly. For properties along Francisco Boulevard West and adjacent side streets where significant redevelopment and upgrading is needed, facilitate cooperative efforts among property owners to assemble and redevelop individual parcels.

Program NH-3.10C: Andersen/ Francisco Boulevard West. Facilitate improvement of the older commercial centers around the intersection of Andersen Drive, Francisco Blvd. West, and the southbound Highway 101 on- and off-ramps (Graham and Rice Centers). This could include assistance with lot assembly, substantial upgrading of the properties, and redevelopment with desired uses.

Policy NH-3.11: Lindaro Mixed Use

Encourage improvements to the industrial area around Davidson Middle School, including Jordan and Lindaro Streets and Lovell Avenue. Live-work uses should be permitted in this area.

Program NH-3.11A: Lindaro Mixed Use Zoning. Maintain the Lindaro Mixed Use Zoning district. Consider potential expansion of this district to the north side of Andersen and west of Irwin Street, extending to Mahon Creek, along with its rebranding as an "Innovation District" that capitalizes on its proximity to Downtown San Rafael and the transit center area.



CANAL DISTRICT

The Canal District (“the Canal”) encompasses the residential and commercial area south of the San Rafael Canal, east of Highway 101, north of the Bellam corridor, and west of Spinnaker Point /Baypoint Lagoons. The Canal includes the highest-density residential neighborhood in San Rafael, as well as Pickleweed Park, the Albert J. Boro Community Center, and Bahia Vista School. The southern part of the neighborhood includes a mix of local-serving commercial uses, office buildings, auto repair and sales businesses, and miscellaneous commercial and industrial services.

The Canal District is roughly 230 acres and is home to 12,000 residents, which is equivalent to a population density of 33,000 persons per square mile. This exceeds the population density of San Francisco’s Mission District and Russian Hill neighborhoods and is approximately four times greater than the population density of Los Angeles. Roughly one in five San Rafael residents lives in the Canal, but the neighborhood represents just two percent of the City’s land area. A majority of the housing consists of two- and three-story apartment complexes built in the 1960s and 70s.

During the 1980s, the Canal became a gateway community for Vietnamese immigrants. Today, the Canal is home to the largest Latino community in Marin County, with Latinos representing 88 percent of the neighborhood’s residents. Over 4,000 residents are Guatemalan, making San Rafael the 10th largest Guatemalan community in the United States. While the Canal has a large immigrant population, Census data indicates that 77 percent of its residents emigrated to the United States more than 10 years ago and 53 percent live in the same residence today they did a decade ago. More than 82 percent of employed Canal workers commute to jobs within Marin County. The Canal labor force is the bedrock of the Marin County economy.



Voces Del Canal

“Ten years from today, we envision the Canal as a safe, clean, and healthy community where families and children can walk and play freely. Families will live in safe and better housing conditions. Our children will have access to resources and a quality education that supports their pathway to higher education. Our cultural values and ethnic heritage will be respected, and families will be treated as equal partners working together with local agencies, police, schools, and community institutions to develop joint solutions. Our community of resilience will empower families to fulfill their full potential and live a safe, healthy, thriving quality of life.”

This vision statement was developed by Canal residents in 2014 as part of *Voces del Canal*, a community driven process aimed at empowering local residents. *Voces* enabled 678 Canal residents to share their personal stories, opinions, and visions for a stronger, safer neighborhood. Public safety, including crime prevention and improved relationships with law enforcement, was identified as the top neighborhood priority. Another high priority was more support for youth and families, including additional investment in schools and after-school programs for children. Participants also identified the need for more collaboration between residents, service providers, and the City.

Community engagement conducted through General Plan 2040 shows these priorities should continue to shape local policy and community investment decisions. Recent designation of the Canal as a Priority Development Area creates an opportunity to build new partnerships and continue the dialogue about how to create a more equitable and prosperous neighborhood.

This is a community rich in cultural traditions, strong networks, and a determination towards economic self-sufficiency. It is also a community that faces immense social and economic challenges. Despite relatively high employment rates, nearly one-third of Canal residents live below the federal poverty line. More than two-thirds of all occupied housing units meet the Census definition of “overcrowded.”³ Housing has become increasingly unaffordable for many residents, creating a high risk of displacement with few options for relocation. These challenges are complicated by the community’s vulnerability to sea level rise and flooding. The entire neighborhood is less than 10 feet above sea level.

The vision for the Canal is to increase community stability by improving access to quality housing, education, employment, health care, recreation, and services. This will require sustained investment in parks, public facilities, infrastructure, roads, transit, and flood control systems. Opportunities to convert existing market-rate housing to affordable units should be encouraged, with steps taken to reduce displacement. The Equity and Inclusion Element of General Plan 2040 addresses these issues at a citywide level, but in the Canal, they are essential to community survival.

The southern part of the Canal District includes a grid of streets facing Francisco Boulevard East. The area along Medway Road and Vivian Street is the commercial heart of the neighborhood, but it lacks cohesion, landscaping, lighting, and other amenities that create the sense of a neighborhood center. Many of the structures are inexpensive post-war metal buildings. The area could be reimaged with gathering places, pedestrian spaces, and safer connections to nearby residential areas. New models for community engagement will be needed to design and create a place that truly meets community needs. Care must be taken to keep rents affordable and not displace cost-sensitive service uses and small businesses.

Adjacent to the Medway district on the east and west, the mix of commercial, service, and light industrial businesses should be retained. There are opportunities for new housing in the Medway area and along Bellam Boulevard, but most of the business district should retain its Industrial/Office zoning. Francisco Boulevard East should be improved as a neighborhood gateway, with better sidewalks, signage, landscaping, and lighting. The Canal neighborhood is somewhat isolated from Downtown and the rest of the city and should be better connected by transit, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes.

Policy NH-3.12: Canal Housing Needs

Recognize the urgent need for more affordable housing, greater housing stability, and effective anti-displacement measures in the Canal neighborhood. Support the acquisition, rehabilitation, and conversion of existing market-rate housing to affordable housing, as well as the development of new affordable housing projects on underutilized sites within the community. New housing should be designed and constructed to respond to anticipated sea level rise and other environmental hazards.

Program NH-3.12A: Increasing the Affordable Housing Supply. Use the upcoming San Rafael Housing Element and Southeast San Rafael Precise Plan processes to identify specific programs addressing local housing needs.

Policy NH-3.13: Canal Public Safety

Work with the Canal community to identify and respond to public safety needs. This should include capital improvements such as improved street lighting, repaired sidewalks, a police sub-station, and better relationships between residents, businesses, and law enforcement.

³ 2018 Census data indicated that 1,246 of the 1,813 households in Census Tract 1122.01 had more than one person per room, the federal threshold for overcrowding.

Program NH-3.13A: Police Substation. Pursue development of a police substation to provide faster, more effective service to the Canal area and Southeast San Rafael.

Policy NH-3.14: Public Facilities

Prioritize citywide public facility investment in the Canal neighborhood, recognizing the greater needs for parks, child care, libraries, public safety, schools, employment development, and social services in the community; its vulnerability to hazards, public health emergencies, and economic stress; and its high concentration of children and very low income and immigrant households.

Program NH-3.14A: Bellam/Windward Park. Pursue development of a neighborhood park on publicly owned land at the southeast corner of Bellam Boulevard and Windward Way, or on an equivalent publicly-owned property in this area.

Program NH-3.14B: Community Meeting Space. Meet the need for affordable meeting and activity space, both at the Albert Boro Community Center and through the development of additional community facilities in new development. Incentives and density bonuses should be provided for private/non-profit development that sets aside space for neighborhood-based activities such as child care, education, and job training.

See the Equity and Inclusion Element for programs on public facility and infrastructure investment in the Canal. The Precise Plan for Southeast San Rafael should further address these needs.



Policy NH-3.15: Parking and Transportation

Improve parking and transportation management in the Canal area. Access improvements are needed, given the limited capacity of Bellam Boulevard and Francisco Boulevard East, their vulnerability to flooding, and the configuration of the I-580/ US 101 interchange.

Program NH-3.15A: Canal Parking Management. Continue to implement measures to manage parking in the Canal, including time-limited parking and enforcement of parking rules. Consider additional measures to balance supply and demand, including shared parking with private businesses, increasing supply, and improving other transportation modes, such as transit and bicycling.

Program NH-3.15B: Community Based Transportation Plan (CBTP) Update. Update the Canal CBTP to reflect progress made since completion of the 2006 Plan and address current transportation issues.

See also Policy NH-3.22 on the I-580/US 101 interchange.

Policy NH-3.16: Local Business Support

Create additional opportunities for local entrepreneurs and neighborhood-serving businesses in the commercial and industrial districts adjacent to the Canal neighborhood.

Program NH-3.16A: Core Canal Industrial-Office (CCI/O) District. Amend the Core Canal Industrial-Office zoning district to provide more flexibility for neighborhood businesses that are compatible with the existing mix of commercial and industrial activities in this zone. Housing should not be permitted in the CCI/O district.

Policy NH-3.17: Medway Commercial District

Improve the Medway-Vivian Commercial District so that it functions as a town center for the Canal area, including:

- Additional community gathering places and civic space.
- Street trees, landscaping, and better pedestrian connections through the Medway/Vivian block.
- Broader shopping choices and services for the Canal neighborhood.
- Additional social services, such as childcare and health care.
- Housing, especially affordable units for families.
- Upgrading of existing business areas.
- Additional off-street parking.

Program NH-3.17A: Public Plaza. Encourage the creation of a public plaza to serve the Canal community. If a site cannot be identified in the Medway-Vivian area, pursue acquisition and improvement of another site nearby. The plaza should be planned and programmed by and for the Canal community, using the Precise Plan process as a starting point.

Policy NH-3.18: Education

Support efforts of the School District to provide all Canal children with access to quality education, including access to safe, modern school facilities. Work with San Rafael City Schools to address the transportation needs of students traveling to and from school.

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Policy NH-3.19: Libraries and Community Programs

Continue to invest in and expand library facilities at the Albert J Boro Community Center. Support continuing programs at this facility and at other facilities serving the Canal community, including bilingual and ESL classes, pre-school, and after school programs.

Program NH-3.19A: Youth and Family Services. *Prioritize additional programs for youth and families in the Canal area, including child care and more activities for young people.*

Policy NH-3.20: Neighborhood Appearance

Improve the physical appearance of the Canal neighborhood, including the addition of greenery and green space, street trees and landscaping, maintenance of buildings and property, enforcement of illegal dumping regulations, abatement of code violations, and more regular street cleaning.

**SPINNAKER POINT/ BAYPOINT LAGOONS**

Spinnaker Point and Baypoint Lagoons are two adjacent master-planned communities developed in the late 1980s/ early 1990s near the mouth of San Rafael Creek. Collectively, the communities include about 450 homes and have a population of about 1,100 people. Both communities feature amenities such as on-site recreation facilities for residents, walking paths, and greenbelts. The neighborhoods adjoin a lagoon and wetland area that includes nesting islands for migratory birds. Beyond the lagoon, the Bay Trail runs along the shoreline levee, connecting Pickleweed Park on the west to Jean Starkweather Shoreline Park on the south. Spinnaker/Baypoint also borders the Canal neighborhood on the west.

Residents of Spinnaker Point/Baypoint Lagoons enjoy waterfront access and views, pleasant and well-maintained neighborhood character, and a convenient location that is central to commute routes and services. The community faces a number of challenges, including threats from sea level rise, spillover parking from the adjacent Canal area, and dry season water quality/ odor problems for the portion of the lagoon adjacent to the levee. Ongoing efforts to improve community resilience, remediate odor issues, and reduce flood hazards are needed.

Policy NH-3.21: Spinnaker Point/ Baypoint Lagoons

Maintain the safety, security, and appeal of Spinnaker Point/Baypoint Lagoons. Plans for Southeast San Rafael and the Canal area should acknowledge and conserve the unique characteristics of this area.

Program NH-3.21A: Sea Level Rise Adaptation. *Engage the Spinnaker Point/ Baypoint Lagoons community in sea level rise adaptation, odor mitigation, and flood control efforts.*

Program NH-3.21B: Parking Spillover. *Continue efforts to manage parking on neighborhood streets. Ensure that new development in the vicinity of Spinnaker/Baypoint includes provisions to meet parking demand without worsening existing shortages (see also Program SE-15A).*

SHORELINE/ ANDERSEN EAST

This is the largest business district in San Rafael, encompassing about 675 acres in the southeast corner of the city. It extends from the 101/ 580 interchange to the south and east and includes a diverse mix of commercial, industrial, and utility land uses. The area is bisected by Interstate 580. On the north/ east side of I-580, it includes the Kerner/ Irene “Loop,” the Canalways property, Shoreline Center, and a number of business parks and light industrial uses along Kerner and Francisco Boulevard East. On the south/ west side of I-580, it includes retail uses and building suppliers, as well as large-scale utility uses such as the PG&E Service Center, Central Marin Sanitation Agency’s wastewater treatment plant, Marin Sanitary’s Resource Recovery Center, and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District maintenance yard. In total, there are about 6,600 jobs within the Shoreline/ Andersen East area.

Shoreline/ Andersen East has significant potential for growth and development in the next 20 years. The area is centrally located in Marin County and is Marin’s gateway to and from the East Bay. It has a number of large vacant and/or underutilized sites, and a substantial inventory of high-quality office /flex space. Challenges in this area include peak hour traffic congestion, flood hazards, and seismic hazards.

Improvement plans for the 101/580 interchange will have a major impact on this area, particularly around Bellam Boulevard. Current plans call for a direct ramp from northbound 101 to eastbound 580, allowing access to the Richmond Bridge without using surface streets. Several alignments and designs are under consideration. The project presents opportunities to improve local access to Southeast San Rafael, including bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements. Historically, the City has also planned to improve connections between the north and south sides of I-580 in this area through a potential future crossing at Irene Street or Shoreline Parkway.

While the Shoreline/ Far Southeast area is mostly urbanized, it also has outstanding natural features. The area includes a two-mile long shoreline park and trail as well as wetlands that provide habitat for shorebirds and other wildlife. The area also includes the north slope of San Quentin Ridge. This hillside provides an open space separator between San Rafael and Larkspur/ San Quentin and is one of the city’s defining visual features.



Policy NH-3.22: Highway 101/ I-580 Interchange

Improve the US 101/ I-580 interchange to alleviate freeway and local street congestion and improve local access to and from Southeast San Rafael.

Program NH-3.22A: Interchange Improvement Process. *Ensure local participation and advocacy in planning, design, and environmental review for the 101/580 interchange. The project should include mitigation measures that facilitate local access and circulation in Southeast San Rafael, and benefit all modes of travel, including bicycles, pedestrians, and transit. Expansion of the project scope should be considered so it includes the segment of I-580 between US 101 and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge as well as safety and functional requirements to improve access to Bellam Boulevard and other major thoroughfares in Southeast San Rafael.*

Policy NH-3.23: Marin Square/ Gary Place

Encourage reinvestment in the Marin Square/ Gary Place area, either through redevelopment of the 13-acre area or improvement of existing uses so they function cohesively. Redevelopment of the site should permit retail, high-density residential, hotel, office, and other compatible uses.

Policy NH-3.24: Canalways (see also text box, page 4-49)

Recognize the potential for the Canalways site to achieve multiple goals, including habitat conservation, wetland restoration, sea level rise adaptation, and provision of affordable housing, along with creation of additional jobs, economic activity, and tax revenue. The City supports a plan for the site that balances conservation and development objectives. Development should be economically viable for the site's owners, beneficial for the surrounding community, and responsive to the site's environmental resources and hazards. In general, development should be located in upland areas that are not critical habitat for endangered species.



Spotlight on Canalways

The 85-acre Canalways site is one of the largest privately-owned properties in San Rafael. The property includes a diked salt marsh, with approximately 1,500 feet of frontage along San Rafael Bay. In the early 1980s, the site was proposed for 350 homes and 250,000 square feet of office space, with canals connecting to the Bay. Although an EIR for the project was certified by the City in 1984, development did not proceed due to costly mitigation requirements and community opposition.

The developable area of the site was reduced in subsequent San Rafael General Plans and a wetlands overlay zone was adopted. An extension of Kerner Boulevard will be required when the site is developed, connecting two “stubs” on either side of the property. The developable area is currently designated for light industrial/office uses. The remainder of the site is designated “Conservation.”

The last detailed biological resource inventory for Canalways was done over 30 years ago. At that time, much of the site was determined to be seasonal wetlands. Site conditions have changed since then. Invasive plants have encroached onto much of the property. The condition of the levee has deteriorated, while concerns about sea level rise and flooding have increased. The site has become a magnet for unsheltered residents, some of whom camp on the property.

The City supports a balanced plan for Canalways that protects and restores environmental resources while accommodating a mix of new uses. The first step in this process should be an updated biological assessment and delineation of wetlands, providing a baseline for future site planning and sea level rise adaptation strategies. A General Plan Amendment could be considered in the future to allow additional uses, potentially including housing in the northwest part of the site. Revenue generated by new development can help offset the cost of infrastructure improvements needed to make Southeast San Rafael more resilient. The development itself can potentially provide parks, services, jobs, and housing to an area with significant unmet needs.

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Program NH-3.24A: Canalways Conservation and Development Plan. Encourage preparation of a Canalways Conservation and Development Plan by the landowners. Such a Plan could become the basis for a future General Plan Amendment to allow a larger development footprint than is shown on the General Plan 2040 Land Use Map, and to permit additional land uses. The first step of this process should be a biological assessment and updated delineation of wetlands. This can shape the development plan and provide the basis for mitigation measures in the event these resources will be impacted by the site's development.

Policy NH-3.25: Windward Way

Encourage medium-density residential uses on the privately-owned 2.3-acre parcel located on the east side of Windward Way (APN 009-330-01). Development may be clustered on the site to retain views and respond to site constraints, including transmission lines. Compatible office or light industrial uses are permitted on the west side of Windward Way, consistent with zoning.

Policy NH-3.26: Shoreline Center

Support development of the few vacant and underutilized sites remaining in the Shoreline Center with light industrial/office, specialty retail, region-serving retail, hotel, R&D, biotech, and similar uses that generate jobs and revenue. Land use changes to permit other uses, including housing, could be considered through a future planning process, subject to environmental analysis and a program to mitigate potential conflicts or constraints.

Policy NH-3.27: San Quentin Ridge

Preserve San Quentin Ridge as open space due to its visual significance, importance as a community separator, slope stability problems, and habitat value. Any development permitted in this area should be on the lower, less steep portion of the hillside.

Policy NH-3.28: Adaptation

Prioritize the southeast waterfront (including the Canal shoreline) for sea level rise adaptation programs, including repair and replacement of levees, and measures to improve natural resilience such as horizontal levees and restored coastal features. Public shoreline access should be maintained throughout this area.

See the Safety and Resilience Element for a discussion of sea level rise adaptation programs



NORTH SAN RAFAEL

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.

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North San Rafael contains several of the City’s largest employers. Northgate Mall initially opened in the mid-1960s and continues to be one of the largest regional shopping centers in Marin County. It forms the hub of a commercial district that includes smaller shopping centers (Northgate One and Northgate Three), 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 and is another major employer. Kaiser Medical Center and associated medical facilities constitute a third employment center in Terra Linda.

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 Marinwood Community Center, the Marin YMCA and JCC, 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 and southern Los Gamos Drive)
- Mont Marin/San Rafael Park
- Rafael Meadows/ Merrydale
- Northgate Business Park/ Los Gamos
- Civic Center
- Smith Ranch (including Contempo Marin/ Deer Park)

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. One of the objectives of the Promenade was to connect upstream and downstream communities bisected by Highway 101. Several segments 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.



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.

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In 2013, the City finalized 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 NH-4.1: 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 multi-modal 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 diverse 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.

NORTH SAN RAFAEL TOWN CENTER

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 in a trapezoidal channel, while the south fork flows near the SMART station on the southern edge.

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. Portions of the North San Rafael Promenade pedestrian and bike path also pass through the area, although most of this planned greenway remains unbuilt. The Civic Center SMART station is located at the southeast corner of this area.

The Town Center is anchored by Northgate Mall, a 775,000 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 Promenade. Another renovation took place in 2008.

Recent expansion of on-line shopping, rising rents, 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 Promenade, featuring a beautiful walkway and bikeway along a restored Gallinas Creek, is central to the Town Center concept.



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The policies below carry forward still-relevant elements of the 1997 vision. While the Vision's goals remain, 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 NH-4.2: 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: an economically viable 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 distinctive and vibrant mix of uses, consistent with the area's characteristics
- A variety of high-quality stores, entertainment uses, and services to foster local patronage and adapt to the ongoing evolution of retail and commercial activities

- 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 and public art
- g) Continued community services, which may include 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
- j) Preserving and strengthening Northgate Mall as a significant tax revenue generator for the City.

The scale of any improvements should be compatible with the surrounding community and should not exceed infrastructure capacity. New or expanded structures should demonstrate how views, sightlines, visual integrity, and character will be impacted and addressed. Promenade improvements described in the *North San Rafael Promenade Conceptual Plan (2002)* should be included in any substantial rehabilitation or expansion of the Mall. Opportunities to include green infrastructure and low impact development (LID) methods also should be pursued.

Program NH-4.2A: 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, transportation and infrastructure capacity, and the potential for off-site impacts.

See also Program LU-3.1A on the North San Rafael Town Center Community Plan, as well as policies in the Land Use, Community Design, and Noise Elements on land use compatibility.

Program NH-4.2B: 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, teen-centered spaces, 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 NH-4.2C: 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 and should be the focus of a community discussion about new approaches to meeting the housing needs for persons of all incomes.

Program NH-4.2D: 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, as feasible.

Policy NH-4.3: Design Excellence

Encourage harmonious and aesthetically pleasing design for new and existing development in the Town Center area, including upgrading of landscaping, signage, lighting, and building design. 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 NH-4.3A. 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 NH-4.4: Transportation Safety and Accessibility

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

Program NH-4.4A: 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 and more recent community input, 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 NH-4.4B: 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.

See also Mobility Element Policy M-2.5 on Level of Service standards for road segments and intersections in the North San Rafael Town Center vicinity, including requirements for traffic studies. The standards reflect anticipated future traffic volumes and will provide the basis for future improvements to ensure safe and adequate access.

TERRA LINDA

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, Drake Terrace, 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 three private schools—St. Isabella, Mark Day, and Montessori de Terra Linda. The Kaiser San Rafael Medical Center, Marin Health Surgery Center, and Terra Linda Shopping Center (Scotty's Market) 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. Santa Margarita Creek, a northern tributary, 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 restoring ecological and hydrologic functions. This could include moving traffic to one side of the roadbed and reducing the road width, thus creating a larger footprint for the creek, a more attractive and natural appearance, and a new tree-lined trail and bike path. 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, Nova Albion Way, Montecillo Road, and Northgate Drive. Two hourly bus lines serve the area, and another runs weekdays every half-hour, 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 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 hundreds of similarly modernist Alliance, Kenney, and other ranch-style homes built in the mid-1950s and 60s in planned neighborhoods with curved residential streets. Some of the neighborhood's older commercial properties, such as the Terra Linda Shopping Center, are in need of revitalization and could 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 NH-4.5: Eichler and Alliance Homes.

Preserve the design character of the neighborhood's iconic Eichler, Alliance, Kenney, and other single-story mid-century modern homes.

Program NH-4.5A: 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 these homes, and possible expansion of the Overlay District to include additional homes with similar features



Policy NH-4.6: Terra Linda Shopping Center

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

Program NH-4.6A: 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 NH-4.7: 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 NH-4.7A: 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), linked to a broader effort to restore Gallinas Creek (see next policy)*
- 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 to encourage access by foot and bike*
- f) *Improved pedestrian walkways connecting Terra Linda streets.*

See also Policy NSR-2 on the Northgate Branch Library

Policy NH-4.8: Community Beautification and Environmental Restoration

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

Program NH-4.8A: 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*
- e) *Daylighting of creeks and drainageways in other locations wherever feasible.*

Creek restoration projects should be designed to restore a more natural hydrologic flow, stabilize creek beds, increase stormwater absorption, 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 will make projects more competitive in the grant application process.

MONT MARIN/SAN RAFAEL PARK

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

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.

The SMART Civic Center station serves this area, as well as the larger Civic Center employment center. 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 South Fork of Gallinas Creek flows underground on the northern edge of this area--new development on Merrydale Road is required to pump water during the rainy season and may be further impacted by future sea level rise.

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. Residential development in this area also should consider health impacts related to its proximity to US 101.

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 NH-4.9: 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 NH-4.10: 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 NH-4.10A: 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, water, and sewer capacity and emergency vehicle access constraints and be compatible with neighborhood character.

Program NH-4.10B: 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 NH-4.10C: Merrydale / Southbound 101 Improvements. Consistent with the Station Area Plan, pursue improvements to the Southbound 101 on and off ramps at Merrydale.



NORTHGATE BUSINESS PARK / LOS GAMOS

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. The wetland includes sensitive natural habitat for several endangered species but is adversely impacted by trash dumping and urban encroachment.

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 Sheriff'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. A deed restriction prevents the barrier between north and south Los Gamos from being opened as a through-street.

Policy NH-4.11: 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 NH-4.11A: 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 NH-4.11B: Access to Civic Center Station. *Improve access to the Civic Center SMART station from this area, potentially including shuttle service along Redwood Highway and additional pathways as recommended by the 2013 Station Area Plan.*

See also Program NH-4.18A on Gallinas Creek and marsh protection in this area

Policy NH-4.12: Redwood Highway Improvements

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

Program NH-4.12A: 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 NH-4.12B: Pedestrian Safety. *Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along Redwood Highway with improved sidewalks, bike amenities, and landscaping.*

Policy NH-4.13: 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

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. Dedicated station parking has not been provided, and the issue of passenger parking encroaching into neighborhoods 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. It also includes the manmade Civic Center Lagoon. These resources should be protected and conserved in the future, with public viewing areas where appropriate. Much of the area around the Civic Center is close to sea level and will be subject to more frequent tidal flooding due to climate change.

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 NH-4.14: Design Considerations for the Civic Center Vicinity

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:

- Implement those recommendations in the Civic Center Station Area Plan (2013) that were formally adopted by the City
- Require urban design analysis to ensure compatibility of materials, color and building masses with the Civic Center
- Require functional inter-connection with the Civic Center
- Design should complement Civic Center architecture rather than compete with it
- Site design should retain vistas to Mt. Tamalpais and screen the maintenance yard from view from Highway 101.
- 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 and restoration of surface water quality in the Civic Center Lagoon
- 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 NH-4.14A: 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 NH-4.15: 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 NH-4.15B: Station Area Plan. Implement the recommendations prescribed in the Civic Center Station Area Plan (See text box). Continue to evaluate parking needs and develop plans to avoid adverse effects of parking on neighborhoods.

Policy NH-4.16: 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.

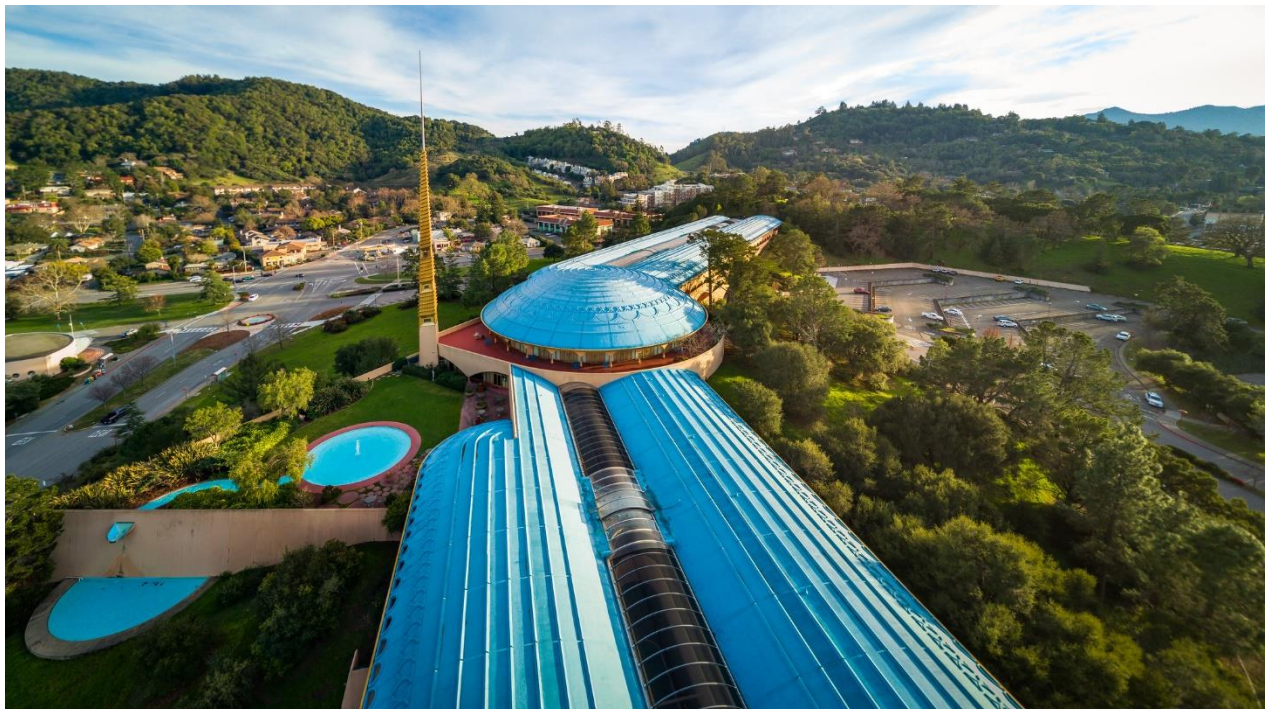


Photo Credit: Jeff Boyd

DOWNTOWN

CENTRAL SAN RAFAEL

SOUTHEAST/ CANAL

NORTH SAN RAFAEL

SAN PEDRO PENINSULA



Civic Center Station Area Plan

The City completed 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 NH-4.16A: 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, consistent with community input
- 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 while protecting creek and marsh habitat
- 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

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. The Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District lies at the end of Smith Ranch Road on County property.

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, and the Las Gallinas Valley wastewater treatment plant. The surrounding area includes wetlands and riparian corridors, both of which provide important habitat for plants and wildlife, including federally listed threatened and endangered species.

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.

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Policy NH-4.17: 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, as well as its vulnerability to sea level rise. 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 restored wetlands.

Program NH-4.17A. San Rafael Airport. *As needed, require improvements consistent with this policy through the development review process.*

Policy NH-4.18: Habitat Enhancement.

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

Program NH-4.18A. Wetland Management. *Support efforts to:*

- a) *Conserve and enhance the McInnis Marsh wetlands, including sea level rise adaptation projects*
- b) *Maintain Smith Ranch Pond, including removal of exotic plants, habitat enhancement, and potentially adding a public observation area*
- c) *Restore and enhance the North and South Forks of Gallinas Creek, including the marshland area south of Contempo Marin and east of Northgate Business Park.*
- d) *Monitor for presence of Ridgway’s Rail along the North Fork.*

UNINCORPORATED NEIGHBORHOODS

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. Adjacent City and County open spaces provide an important community separator as well as ephemeral creeks that feed into the South Fork of Gallinas Creek.

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, as well as two heavily used community pools and the Marinwood and Lucas Valley community centers.

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. Any future activity on this property must consider the potential for downstream impacts on Miller Creek, including impacts to threatened species. Creek restoration programs in the upper watershed area should be strongly supported.

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

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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. However, the area also includes condominiums and apartments, including affordable and senior housing developments. It also includes several small commercial areas, the Jewish Community Center, several community churches, Venetia Valley (K-8) school, a private high 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. Future development must address ingress and egress along North San Pedro Road, which is often very congested during peak hours.



Photo Credit: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8818432>

SAN PEDRO PENINSULA

The San Pedro Peninsula is a beautiful part of San Rafael combining residential neighborhoods, marinas, local retail uses, an active rock quarry, wetlands, and large hillside open spaces. It is also one of San Rafael's defining geographic features, extending roughly three miles eastward along the spine of San Pedro Ridge to form the divide between San Pablo Bay to the north and San Francisco Bay to the south. Today the Peninsula is home to roughly 6,500 residents, most along its southern shore. The northern shore is largely contained within China Camp State Park and Santa Venetia (both unincorporated).⁴

Neighborhoods on the San Pedro Peninsula are connected by Point San Pedro Road, the sole arterial street providing local access to Highway 101 and Downtown San Rafael. Point San Pedro Road also serves as the access route to the San Rafael Rock Quarry. The Point San Pedro Road Coalition, a non-profit organization representing the interests of residents and homeowner associations along the Point San Pedro Road corridor, was formed in 1999 to represent the community on matters related to the Quarry and associated transportation issues. Over the past two decades, the Coalition's role has expanded to include advocacy and education on environmental, land use, emergency preparedness, and other issues.

The San Pedro Peninsula has played an important role in San Rafael history. When George and John McNear purchased the land in 1869, they envisioned a shipping terminal and railroad there. Ultimately, the McNears developed a brickyard, quarry, beach resort, and dairy. Suburban development started with the Marin Golf and Country Club (1908) and Bayside Acres (1911). The country club closed in 1939 and was redeveloped as the Country Club neighborhood beginning in 1948. Most of the peninsula was developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with Loch Lomond starting construction in 1956, Glenwood in 1957 and Peacock Gap in 1959. The northern side of the peninsula has its own legacy, described later in this chapter (see China Camp State Park, page 9).



Photo Credit: Yvonne Hunter

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⁴ Santa Venetia is addressed in the North San Rafael section of this Element.

General Plan 2040 does not envision major changes on the San Pedro Peninsula during the time horizon of this Plan. A strong focus should be placed on emergency preparedness, adaptation to sea level rise, and wildfire prevention. As noted in the text on pages 7-8, the Quarry presents long-term opportunities for reuse. However, General Plan 2040 assumes continuation of existing uses and activities for the foreseeable future. Ongoing dialogue between the Quarry operators and neighbors is important to ensure that Quarry operations remain compatible with permit conditions and neighborhood well-being.

The neighborhood discussions below cover the following sub-areas:

- Peacock Gap
- Glenwood
- Loch Lomond / Canal North Shore

The final part of this section addresses unincorporated areas, including:

- San Rafael Rock Quarry
- Country Club
- Bayside Acres
- China Camp

The following overarching policies apply to the entire peninsula:

Policy NH-5.1: San Pedro Peninsula

Maintain the San Pedro Peninsula as an attractive, residential area with scenic waterfront and open space amenities, quality community services and facilities, protected environmental resources, and continued improvements to public safety and emergency preparedness. Work with Marin County to address issues of mutual concern to the City, County, and residents of incorporated and unincorporated areas, including flooding, speed enforcement, and sidewalk and median maintenance on Point San Pedro Road.

Program NH-5.1A: Hazard Mitigation. Implement programs to improve the resilience of the San Pedro Peninsula to natural hazards, including:

- a) Reinforcing the shoreline to reduce flooding and sea level rise hazards and explore other mitigations.
- b) Managing wildfire hazards, particularly through vegetation management on hillside open space, replacement of hazardous trees with native species when possible, and coordination with the State and other open space stewards to reduce hazards in China Camp State Park and McNears Beach.
- c) Working with utility operators to ensure a reliable power supply and telecommunication services at all times (i.e., before, during, and after an emergency).
- d) Continuing emergency preparedness efforts, including evacuation procedures and identification of short-term and longer-term shelter locations, medical services, and supplies.
- e) Identification of alternate emergency evacuation routes via China Camp and North San Pedro Road.
- f) Support for micro-grids to improve the reliability and sustainability of electrical service and minimize the impacts of outages.
- g) Innovative solutions to flooding and sea level rise, such as creation of artificial beaches, reworking rip rap to attenuate wave energy, and improving the promenade west of the McNear Brickyard, among others.

Program NH-5.1B: Community Center. Explore opportunities to create a public community center that can serve as a location for programs, recreational services, community events, and emergency preparedness/response. This should include opportunities created at such time that the San Rafael Rock Quarry/McNear Brickyard ceases operations and is planned for reuse.

Program NH-5.1C: Wetlands. Explore forward-thinking and sustainable ways to maintain and improve the vitality of the wetlands along the Peninsula shoreline. Work cooperatively with the County to manage wetlands in the unincorporated area.

Policy NH-5.2: Point San Pedro Road

Maintain Point San Pedro Road as a safe, attractive, well-maintained transportation route serving San Pedro Peninsula neighborhoods.

Program NH-5.2A: Point San Pedro Road Improvements. Continue efforts to maintain Point San Pedro Road as a vital community lifeline. This should include long-term plans to raise the road elevation and increase the height of the rock wall along the shoreline. It should also include maintaining traffic capacity and flow, exploring opportunities for public transit, reducing vehicle noise through special pavement, providing safer conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, ensuring emergency vehicle access, and maintaining the median and roadside areas.

PEACOCK GAP⁵

The Peacock Gap neighborhood is developed with single family homes, townhomes, and the Peacock Gap Golf Club. The Golf Club, which is privately owned but open to the public, includes an 18-hole golf course, driving range, clubhouse, restaurant and pro shop. The neighborhood includes two City parks (Peacock and Riviera) as well as San Rafael Fire Station 55. The hills above the neighborhood provide a scenic visual backdrop as well as trail access to China Camp State Park. The community has recreational access to San Pablo Bay at McNears Beach and also includes Peacock Gap Lagoon, an aquatic area with native and migratory waterfowl.

Peacock Gap was initially developed as a master planned community. There is a distinct and open feel to the neighborhood that residents have worked hard to maintain. Other subdivisions in the vicinity, including Marin Bay Park, Chapel Cove, and Ridge of San Rafael, have similar characteristics, creating a cohesive quality that is valued by residents.

Other than upgrades by individual homeowners, little change is expected in the residential portion of the neighborhood over the next 20 years. Emergency preparedness remains a priority. Peacock Gap is vulnerable to wildfire and flooding, and lower portions of the neighborhood and lagoon area will be more susceptible to sea level rise in the future. Residents have also expressed a need for park maintenance and reinvestment, improved utility reliability, water quality improvements at the Lagoon, and improved vegetation management and hazard reduction. The future of the San Rafael Rock Quarry and McNear Brickworks, located just south of Peacock Gap at Point San Pedro, is of critical importance to the neighborhood. Residents should be closely involved in future planning activities (see pages 4-77 to -79).

⁵ (see “Unincorporated Neighborhoods” section for Rock Quarry Discussion)



Policy NH-5.3: Maintenance of Public Facilities and Infrastructure

Maintain and enhance City infrastructure and public facilities serving the Peacock Gap neighborhood.

Program NH-5.3A: Environmental Quality Improvements. *Ensure that City properties and infrastructure are maintained in a way that protects environmental quality, reduces hazards, and protects the quality of life. This should include maintenance of stormwater pumps at Riviera Drive and Point San Pedro Road, implementing best practices for reducing siltation and improving water quality in the Peacock Gap Lagoon, renovating and maintaining Peacock and Riviera Parks, and continuing efforts to improve roads and other infrastructure.*

GLENWOOD

Glenwood is a neighborhood of approximately 650 single family homes located along on the southern slopes and valleys of San Pedro Ridge. The neighborhood was developed in the late 1950s and 1960s on land surrounding the Erskine B. McNear house, a 1906 mansion that is now a National Register Historic Landmark. The neighborhood includes a mix of architectural styles, but is fairly consistent in scale, lot size, and character. Larger lots and a few newer custom homes are located in the hillier portions of the neighborhood. Knight Drive serves as the primary access road to the neighborhood.

Although Glenwood is mostly residential, it includes Glenwood Elementary School, Church of the Redeemer, and Victor Jones Park, all of which are important neighborhood gathering places. The neighborhood also includes an open space reserve, with trail connections to China Camp State Park and other open spaces. The neighborhood is actively working to address wildfire prevention and disaster preparedness. Tidal flooding is a growing concern in lower elevation areas, exacerbated by sea level rise. Glenwood residents also seek improvements to Victor Jones Park and better use of the school for community activities.

LOCH LOMOND/ CANAL NORTH SHORE

The Loch Lomond area includes several neighborhoods along Point San Pedro Road between Country Club and Bayside Acres, including Loch Lomond, Loch Lomond Highlands, The Village at Loch Lomond Marina (including The Strand), and Villa Real. This area also includes adjacent smaller subdivisions on the north shore of the San Rafael Canal such as Harbor Estates, Marina Vista, Porto Bello, Royal Court, San Pedro Cove, and Seastrand. While each neighborhood has its own identity, they share common issues and objectives shaped by their proximity to the shoreline and hillside open spaces.

The neighborhood is home to the 131-acre Loch Lomond Marina, one of the largest marinas in the North Bay. There are 517 berths, including 52 approved for “live-aboards.” Initially established in the early 1950s, the Marina has been extensively renovated, including new docks, a public launch ramp, and a new boardwalk and green along the water’s edge. The newly reinforced breakwater offers pedestrian access along the shoreline and striking views of the Bay, the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, Mt. Tamalpais, and the Marin Islands. Restoration of seasonal wetlands on the site has recently been completed, with fencing to ensure protection of wildlife.

In 2007, the City approved a development plan for the area between the Marina and Point San Pedro Road. Construction on The Village at Loch Lomond Marina began in 2013. The neighborhood will ultimately have 81 residential units, including detached residences, cottages, and townhomes, as well as condominiums in a mixed-use building to be developed on Loch Lomond Drive. Andy’s Market has been rebuilt as a full-service grocery store and re-opened in 2017. The Village project includes numerous publicly accessible recreation amenities, all of which were privately constructed. These are maintained through a Community Facilities District (CFD), with an annual assessment levied on property owners within the boundaries.



The Point San Pedro Road Median: The Power of Partnerships

The Point San Pedro Road Median Assessment District is a testament to the community spirit and creative energy of San Pedro Peninsula residents. In the early 2010s, funding to maintain the medians had evaporated due to the Great Recession, prompting property owners to organize, fund raise, and eventually vote to establish a 20-year special assessment to cover these costs. The Assessment District was created in 2011 and established a reliable funding source to plant and maintain 4.5 miles of roadway median along the length of peninsula.

Through a unique partnership with the City’s Department of Public Works, more than 245 new trees and thousands of shrubs were planted and aging irrigation systems were replaced. The special district helped finance the project and established a stable funding source for ongoing operations and maintenance.

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Beyond Loch Lomond Marina, there are few opportunities for development in the neighborhood. The area is mostly built out and its vacant sites are constrained by steep slopes, flooding, and access. Ongoing efforts should be made to maintain infrastructure and roads, reduce fire hazards, address sea level rise, and ensure the compatibility of new construction with existing development. The community is also interested in working with San Rafael City Schools to address construction, traffic congestion, safety, and drainage issues at San Pedro Elementary School.

Policy NH-5.4: Loch Lomond Marina

Maintain and enhance the Loch Lomond Marina and adjacent properties as a community asset, new neighborhood and commercial center, and gathering place and recreational amenity for the San Pedro Peninsula. Conditions of approval and provisions of the amended Master Plan for the Village at Loch Lomond Marina shall be honored as work on the project continues.

Program NH-5.4A: Completion of Village Improvements. Pursue timely completion of the Village at Loch Lomond Marina project consistent with approved plans, as amended. This should include:

- Completion of the remaining residential units and mixed-use building.
- Construction of the Harbormasters office, boat repair facility, fuel storage and pumping facility/fuel dock, and reskinning of the yacht club building.
- Completion of recreational improvements, including a kayak dock and launch ramp and public access improvements in the center plaza.
- Flood-related repair work to previously completed areas and further measures to reduce flooding during peak storm events and king tides.
- Completion of the pedestrian access path.
- Off-site road and utility improvements along Point San Pedro Road.
- Installation of a bird viewing area and interpretive signage.



Program NH-5.4B: Parking and Traffic Studies. Consistent with the conditions of approval, monitor traffic and parking conditions at Loch Lomond Marina. A traffic and parking study should be done within one year of completion of the project as required under the permits to determine the need to retain areas currently reserved for future parking.

Program NH-5.4C: Common Area Maintenance. Continue to maintain publicly-accessible parks, shoreline areas, and a marina green through a community facilities (Mello-Roos) district.

Program NH-5.4D: Community Engagement. Continue to engage the community, including representatives of nearby homeowner and neighborhood associations, in the review of progress and resolution of issues related to the Village development and Marina operations.

Program NH-5.4E: Coordination with Regulatory Agencies. Continue coordination of project-related activities with natural resource agencies, including the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and other agencies with responsibility for the Bay and wetland areas.

Policy NH-5.5: Loch Lomond Area and Canal North Shore Neighborhoods

Sustain the Loch Lomond and Canal North Shore areas as safe and attractive parts of San Rafael featuring waterfront and hillside neighborhoods, accessible open space and shoreline areas, and well-managed roads, infrastructure and public facilities.

Program NH-5.5A: Disaster Preparedness. Continue efforts to improve disaster preparedness and reduce hazards, including a fire break along the ridgeline above Loch Lomond Highlands, continued maintenance of storm drainage facilities, and adaptation to sea level rise along San Rafael Bay and the San Rafael Creek shoreline.

UNINCORPORATED NEIGHBORHOODS

While much of the San Pedro Peninsula was annexed to San Rafael as it was developed, several of the older neighborhoods—and the San Rafael Rock Quarry—remain unincorporated. Bayside Acres and Country Club are County “islands” surrounded by the City of San Rafael. Large-scale annexation of these areas is not anticipated, although individual properties or groups of properties could potentially be annexed with property owner support. The unincorporated areas also participate in the Special Tax District funding the upgrade and maintenance of the medians on the roadway and have a vested interest in their upkeep.

SAN RAFAEL ROCK QUARRY AND MCNEAR BRICKYARD

The San Rafael Rock Quarry and McNear Brickworks remain operational and continue to mine, manufacture, and transport aggregate, asphalt, brick, and construction materials via truck and barge to points throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento River Delta, and beyond. The Rock Quarry provides vital infrastructure for the region. An Amended Reclamation Plan for the Quarry was approved by the County in 2010 after considerable public input. The 2010 Plan calls for the property to be reclaimed in phases parallel to the completion of mining operations and envisions its future redevelopment with a harbor and marina along with commercial, residential, neighborhood commercial, administrative/professional, and open space uses.



Photo Credit: Walter Siegmund, 2009. PointSanPedro 07798

The operator of the Quarry has submitted an application to extend its Reclamation Plan and operations through 2044 to allow access to rock reserves remaining under the existing Quarry entitlements. This application has yet to undergo environmental review and approval by the County. The timing for future activities, including phasing of reclamation, will be assessed as part of the County review process. In 2004, the Quarry was found by a court to have vested (“grandfathered”) rights to mine, subject to limits imposed by its operating permit.

Although the Quarry has applied to extend operations beyond the horizon year of this General Plan, it could potentially cease operation before 2040. Therefore, issues related its future use and development are addressed in the policies below. The City will also take an active role in environmental review and restoration plans related to the Quarry and will engage the Quarry operators in emergency preparedness planning and long-range planning for public access. A planning process for the post-reclamation use of the site should commence as soon as practical and well before operations conclude.

Policy NH-5.6: San Rafael Rock Quarry Operations

Continue to work with the County of Marin, the Quarry operator, and area residents to address community concerns and minimize impacts of Quarry operations on surrounding residents, including noise, air quality, vibration, street maintenance, and truck traffic.

Program NH-5.6A: Quarry Impacts. Seek ongoing input into County code enforcement activities, land use entitlements, and negotiations with Quarry operator that might reduce impacts on City infrastructure or properties in the City of San Rafael. The City will urge the County to require Best Management Practices for Quarry operations, including air quality testing, water quality monitoring and improvements, and runoff controls that reflect the latest technology and scientific methods. The City will further promote joint City-County and

Quarry operator efforts to address flooding and sea level rise, pedestrian and bicycle safety, wetlands restoration, and noise mitigation.

Program SPP-6B: Environmental Review. *If and when the Quarry applies for modifications to its existing Operating Permit, participate in discussions to ensure that:*

- a) Potential environmental impacts and hazards are minimized.*
- b) Public health, safety and quality of life are protected.*
- c) Traffic and noise impacts are addressed, particularly impacts on Point San Pedro Road.*
- d) Future costs associated with reclamation, such as long-term environmental restoration and infrastructure repair, are objectively evaluated and considered in decisions about future Quarry operations.*
- e) Collaborate with residents to ensure that any modifications to the existing Operating Permit remain within the restrictions imposed by existing and future court orders.*

Policy SPP-7: San Rafael Rock Quarry and McNear Brickworks Long-Term Plans

If operations cease during the timeframe of this Plan, consider annexation and redevelopment of the San Rafael Rock Quarry and McNear Brickworks, taking into account the following:

- a) Consider the County's Amended Reclamation Plan, as it may be further amended in the future, in land use decisions. The current Reclamation Plan supports a mixture of single family residences, townhomes, and condominium units; a marina; commercial, recreational, hospitality, and other neighborhood-serving uses; and open space. A revised Reclamation Plan is anticipated during the timeframe of this General Plan and could alter the planned post-mining uses. Specific future uses would be determined through a separate entitlement process that would potentially include annexation into the City.
- b) Consider redevelopment of the site to the extent that traffic capacity is available and the project can meet the City's transportation standards, including performance of intersections between the site and US 101. Alternative modes of transportation may be considered to facilitate compliance with City standards. Water transit (including water taxis and potential ferry service) should be considered in any phase of the project and factored into the transportation analysis.
- c) If needed for traffic capacity and to the extent consistent with City traffic standards, Point San Pedro Road should be expanded to four lanes east of Riviera Drive, including traffic calming measures and bicycle lanes consistent with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.
- d) Create a public use park band along the existing shoreline averaging at least 100 feet in width linking McNears Beach with the public walkway along Point San Pedro Road, as approved by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission.
- e) Consider opportunities for multi-use community facilities serving residents of the San Pedro Peninsula and beyond, such as a center for the arts, education, and the environment.
- f) Protect and enhance the freshwater marsh and ponds, taking sea level rise impacts into consideration. Consider restoring the saltwater marsh to tidal action.
- g) Preserve and gradually restore tree species native to the site's woodland areas.
- h) Incorporate some of the historic brickworks into the project's design.
- i) Consider redevelopment of the site in phases as reclamation is completed in specific areas. The McNear Brickyard would likely be the first phase and would require a site access road from Point San Pedro Road that is separate from the road accessing the mining and asphalt operations. Phased redevelopment would require amendments to the existing Quarry entitlements to be approved by the County in coordination with the property owner.

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Program SPP-7A: Quarry Planning. Participate, through the County of Marin, in any revisions to the San Rafael Rock Quarry Reclamation Plan, which should form the basis for decisions about future land uses and possible annexation.

Program SPP-7B: Shoreline Use. Use the development review process to establish a bay frontage linear park that connects McNear Beach to the existing shoreline walkway along Point San Pedro Road. The park should incorporate sea level rise adaptation measures.

BAYSIDE ACRES

Bayside Acres is one of the oldest neighborhoods on the peninsula. It includes about 100 homes on the inland (hill) side of Point San Pedro Road and 65 homes on the bay side. Homes on the hill side have a semi-rural quality and are located on larger lots accessed by narrow winding streets. Homes on the bay side are on smaller lots, many with waterfront access. This area includes Chicken Point, which was once a small island surrounded by marshes. Saltwater marshland remains along Beach Drive today.

No land use changes are envisioned in Bayside Acres during the timeframe of General Plan 2040. The City will work with the County and neighborhood residents to address local issues, including sea level rise adaptation and wildfire hazard reduction. The community has expressed interest in installing a back-up generator at the Beach Drive pump station, reducing sedimentation of the inlet between Bayside Acres and Loch Lomond Marina, and continuing efforts to mitigate noise and traffic from the Rock Quarry.

COUNTRY CLUB

Country Club is the largest of the unincorporated pockets surrounded by the City of San Rafael, encompassing roughly 300 acres. While most of the neighborhood consists of larger lots on hillside sites, the area also includes a portion of the Lowrie's Yacht Harbor and nearby suburban development closer to Point San Pedro Road. Almost all of the lots in the community are developed. No land use changes are anticipated during the timeframe of General Plan 2040. Residents share the same concerns as those in nearby City neighborhoods regarding wildfire and landslide hazards, sea level rise and flooding, and traffic congestion along Point San Pedro as it transitions to Third Street.



CHINA CAMP STATE PARK

China Camp State Park includes 1,640 acres along the northern shore of the San Pedro Peninsula, extending up to and over San Pedro Ridge. The park has important cultural resources, including a former Chinese-American fishing village and prehistoric shell midden. In the late 1800s, the village housed nearly 500 people and was a refuge for Chinese residents facing discrimination elsewhere. The village was largely abandoned before the Second World War and by the 1960s, the area was under consideration for a massive real estate development. Following a locally driven effort to acquire the land as open space, the state park was created in 1976.

Today, China Camp includes hiking, biking, and equestrian trails, a campground, picnic areas, and scenic vistas of the Bay and hillsides. The park continues to operate under a Master Plan prepared in 1979. More recent plans have focused on estuarine marshland restoration and sea level rise adaptation.

China Camp was almost closed in 2011 due to the State budget deficit. An agreement was reached to jointly fund operations by the California State Parks Department and the Marin State Park Association. A revised agreement in 2013 transferred most management responsibilities to the non-profit Friends of China Camp.

The shoreline road through China Camp provides the only recreational access to the park and serves as a critical local and regional emergency access corridor. Adapting this road for sea level rise resiliency, marsh ecological integrity, public use, and public safety is critical. Continued maintenance of China Camp State Park is essential. Vegetation management is especially important to reduce fire hazards to nearby developed neighborhoods. The park will remain a recreational resource for San Rafael residents and an important natural and scenic area. Opportunities for trail connections to link the park to San Pedro Open Space, Harry Barbier Memorial Park, and newly acquired open spaces at Bucks Landing and Heron Hill, are strongly encouraged.

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5 Community Design and Preservation

Introduction

The Community Design and Preservation Element of the General Plan analyzes the key characteristics that contribute to San Rafael's identity and image. It provides goals, policies and programs that will guide the City's built form over the next 20 years, positively reinforcing its visual character and relationship to its natural setting and cultural context. The Element also addresses the preservation of San Rafael's historic resources, which are an essential part of its identity and image.

Community Design addresses the desire to create a coherent community image and civic identity. It is aimed at managing future growth to create a beautiful and well-designed city that provides a high quality of life for current residents and future generations. It addresses the relationship between the City's built environment with its natural setting as well as its cultural roots. Over the next 20 years, San Rafael's physical environment will continue to evolve.

Some places within San Rafael may experience transformative physical change, while other places will undergo more gradual evolution. The policies in this Element coordinate these changes so that they are intentional, targeted, and positive.

San Rafael will need to respond to new and continued needs for employment, housing, and public space. Community Design policies can ensure that the new development supports other community goals by creating more distinct and memorable places, balancing the preservation of treasured historic and cultural assets, and utilizing design standards and guidelines to shape the form of new and altered buildings.

In addition to visual character and image, the design of the city has important implications for adapting to climate change, reducing carbon emissions, improving public health, and promoting social equity. For example, community design policies can help San Rafael respond to risks from natural hazards such as wildfire with adaptations that ensure public safety while preserving the intimate relationship San Rafael has with its natural setting. Design policies can also support conservation goals such as increased use of renewable energy, more efficient use of water, and more sustainable building construction practices.



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Organization and Relationship to Other General Plan Elements, Design Standards and Guidelines

The Community Design and Preservation Element begins with a discussion of key characteristics that define the City's visual character, followed by goals, policies and programs that address how this character will be maintained and enhanced in the future. This Element has topics that are related to and overlap with topics in other elements of the General Plan. These are indicated in the table below and should be referenced when making policy decisions:

Table 5-1: Community Design in Other Plan Elements

Community Design Topic	Other General Plan Elements Where Topic is Covered
Single-family home design	Neighborhoods Element
Scale transitions	Neighborhoods Element, Land Use Element
Building elements	Neighborhoods Element
Public art	Arts and Culture Element
Shoreline access and setbacks for creeks and wetlands	Conservation/ Climate Change Element
Water efficiency	Conservation/ Climate Change Element
Dark skies	Conservation/ Climate Change Element
Utility undergrounding	Community Services and Infrastructure Element
Coordination with PG&E on tree maintenance and safety	Community Services and Infrastructure Element
Visual impacts of utility improvements	Community Services and Infrastructure Element

The Community Design policies provide the framework and policy foundation for more prescriptive design standards and guidelines administered by the City of San Rafael through development review. This is best exemplified in Downtown San Rafael, where the Downtown Precise Plan establishes a Form Based Code that reflects the goals and policies of this Element. The Downtown Code has form-based regulatory standards for six mixed-use zones, building on General Plan policies and prior efforts such as the 2017 Downtown "Good Design" Guidelines. A similar approach can be taken at the North San Rafael Town Center, where design standards will be needed to guide future redevelopment and infill at Northgate Mall and surrounding properties. In southeast San Rafael and the Canal area, future design standards will likewise be shaped by this Element but must further consider the sea level rise adaptation principles in the Safety and Resilience Element. Future design guidelines and standards should use the Community Design and Preservation Element as a foundation but should recognize that other factors must be considered to reflect the context of each location.

Existing Characteristics

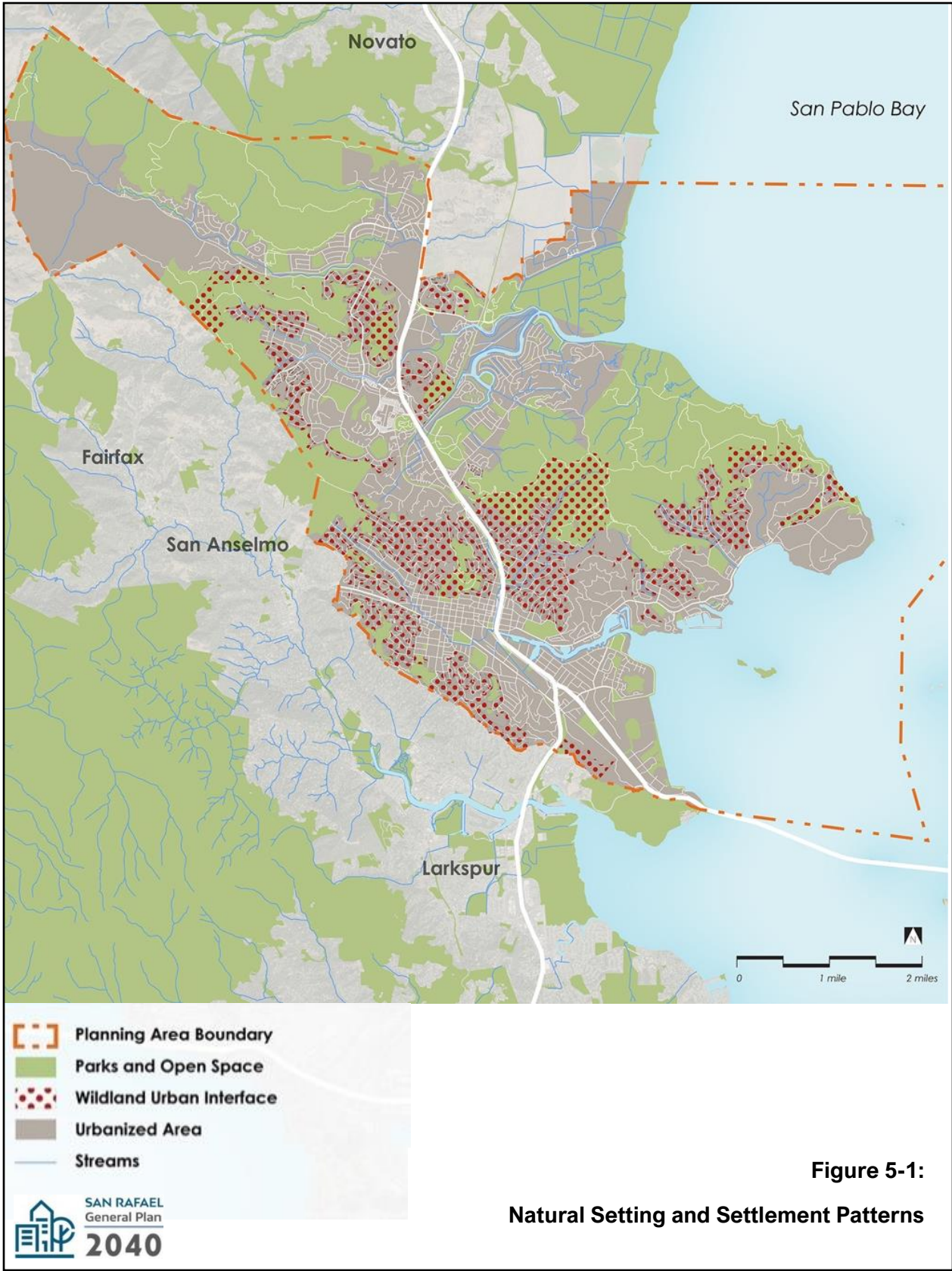
This section identifies the key attributes of community design in San Rafael. These provide the direction for the goals, policies and programs discussed in the next section.

Natural Setting

San Rafael is located in an area of spectacular natural beauty shaped by the Bay and Canal, the hilly terrain, numerous creeks, and ridges. Open space is the single largest land use in the San Rafael Planning Area, and easy access to a wide variety of open spaces improves the quality of life for San Rafael residents. The image of the city is largely defined by a particular combination of natural features, buildings, roads, and infrastructure that is unique to San Rafael. As shown in Figures 5-1 and 5-2, historic settlement patterns in San Rafael reflect this relationship. The most urbanized uses are located on plains and valley floors, separated by hillside neighborhoods and open spaces. Future development should recognize and reinforce this unique natural and built setting.

The prevalence of open space throughout the city also increases the risks from natural hazards such as wildfire. As shown in Figure 5-1, a significant portion of the city lies in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area and is vulnerable to wildfires. This is projected to intensify in the coming years as a result of climate change, including increased periods of drought and more intense heat. While design standards are usually associated with aesthetics, they also play an essential role in mitigating wildfire risk.





Views and Gateways

San Rafael's topography and location next to the Bay provide spectacular views of the hills and ridgelines to the west and the Bay to the east. These views not only include prominent natural features such as Mt Tamalpais and the Marin Islands, but also of prominent buildings and historic landmarks, such as St. Raphael church, the Marin Civic Center, and others. Figure 5-2 highlights some of the most important view corridors in the city. As an integral part of the city's identity, these corridors should be considered and highlighted in future development.

Also shown in Figure 5-2 are the prominent "gateways" to the city. Highway 101 functions as the city's north-south circulation spine and offers a series of such gateway experiences. I-580 is a particularly important gateway from the east, accented by the dramatic views from the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. Third and Fourth Street also function as important gateway streets, as do Freitas Parkway, Lucas Valley Road, and North San Pedro Road. Each of these roads provides vistas and specific horizon points of interest where topography, open space, buildings, landscaping, and signage are noticeable to the visitor. Like the view corridors, these gateways help define the image of the city and should be designed to enhance the sense of arrival and create a welcoming experience.

Waterfront Identity

San Rafael's natural assets include its waterfront, which defines the eastern edge of the city. The waterfront consists of beaches, marinas, parks, trails, wetlands and marshes. Some are regional attractions such as China Camp State Park and the Jean Starkweather Shoreline Park Trail. The waterfront provides the setting for a variety of recreation activities for the city and the region. One of the most important components of San Rafael's waterfront is the Bay Trail, a 500-mile planned trail network linking all nine Bay Area counties, of which approximately 350 miles have been constructed. Parts of the Bay Trail within San Rafael's boundaries are in place, and other sections still need to be completed.

Like most waterfront cities in the Bay Area, San Rafael is affected by tidal action. Parts of the city are prone to flooding during periods of heavy rainfall, particularly when excessive or prolonged rainfall coincides with high tides or King Tides. Affected areas include several communities along the San Rafael Canal, parts of Downtown, and the Canal neighborhood. Flooding is expected to intensify in the coming decades as a result of sea-level rise. As shown in Figure 5-3, several parts of the city will be impacted by sea level rise. Future development will need to consider strategies for adaptation and resilience.



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

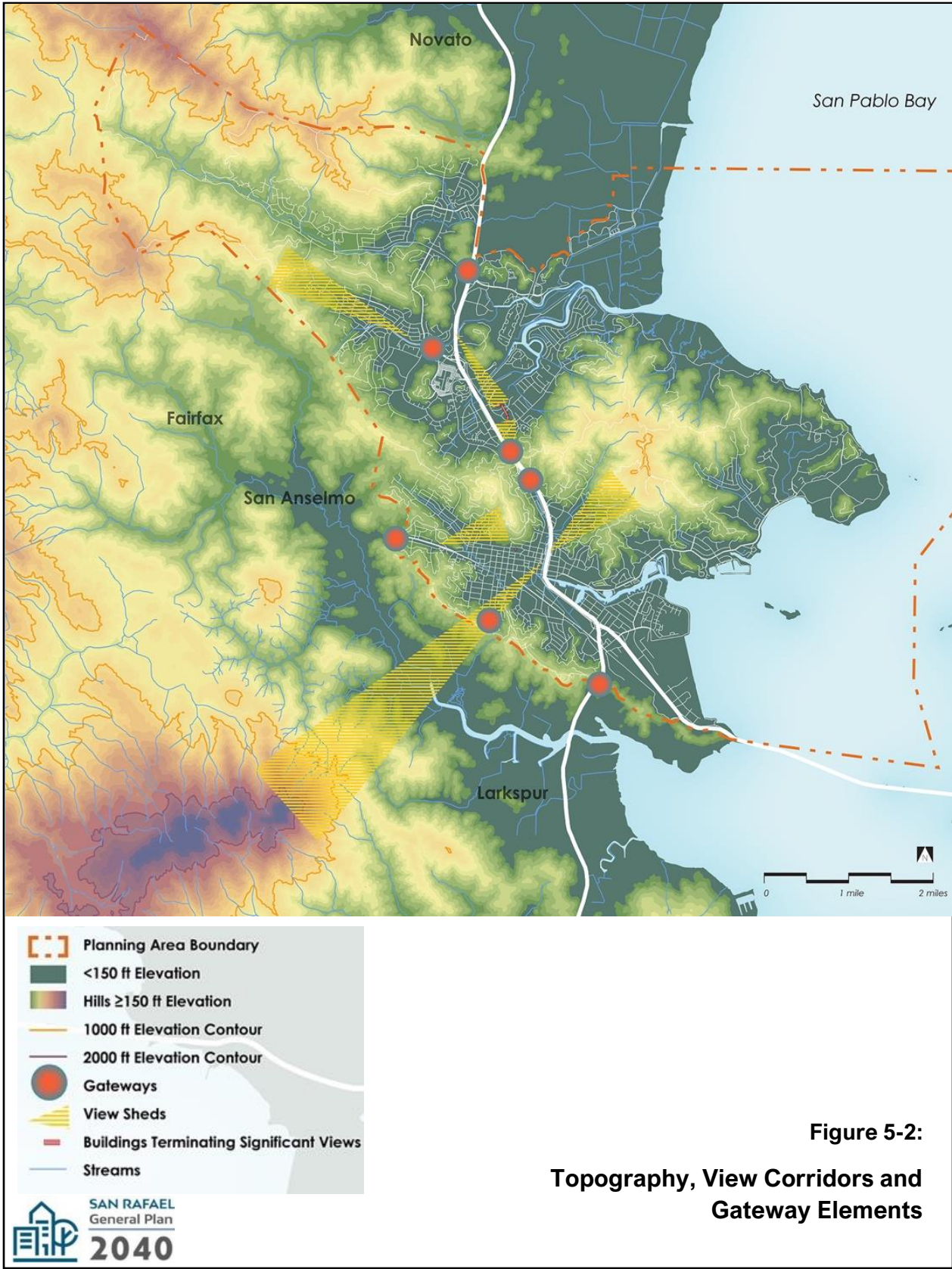


Figure 5-2:
Topography, View Corridors and
Gateway Elements



Figure 5-3:

The San Rafael Waterfront



Photo Credit: Jungyul Kim

Neighborhoods

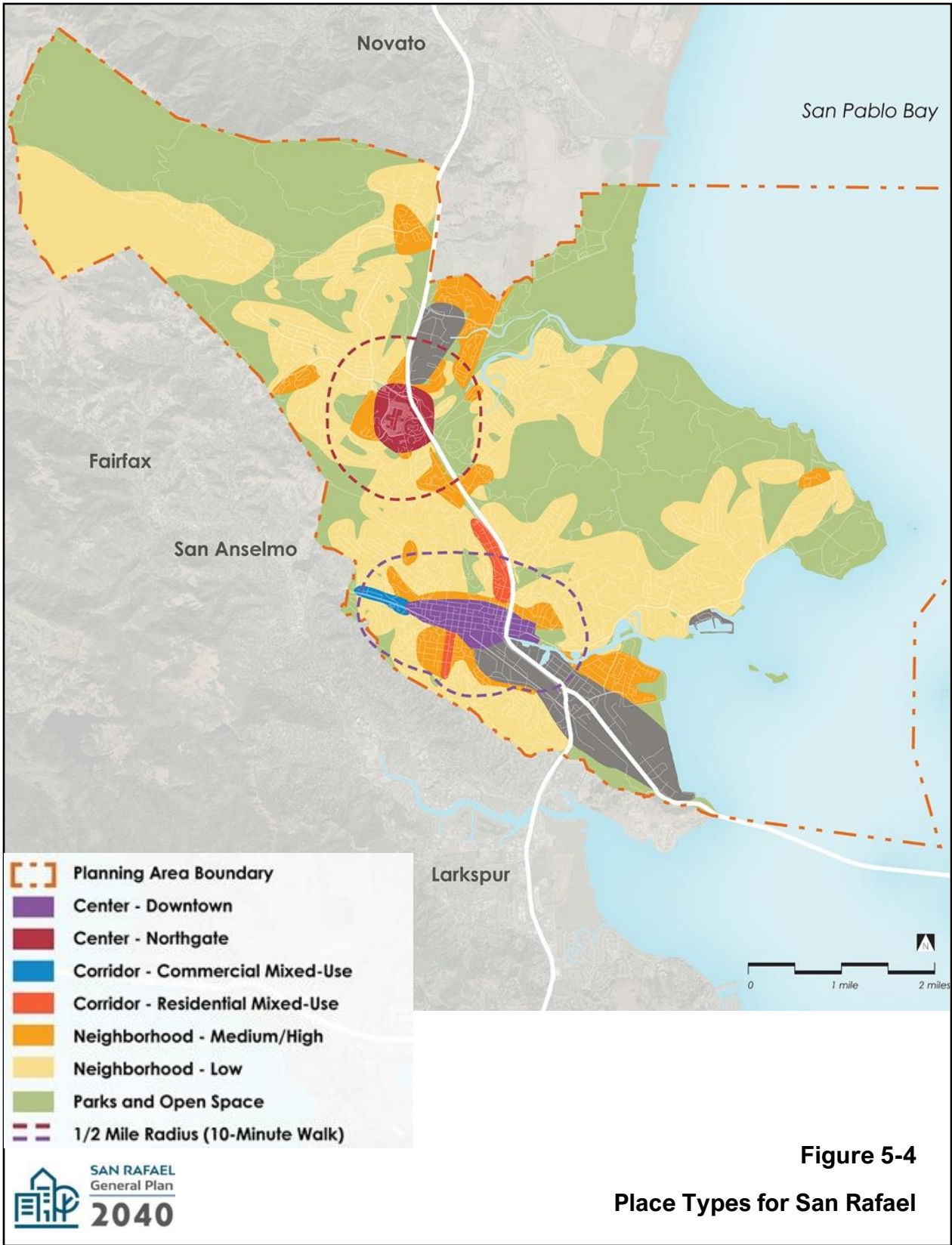
Apart from its natural setting, San Rafael's identity is shaped and enhanced by its neighborhoods (see Figure 4-1). These neighborhoods vary in built character and composition, and in their intensity and mix of uses. Some are completely residential while others have a mix of residential and commercial uses. Some are suburban, some are semi-rural, and some have a more traditional pre-automobile era form. The neighborhoods highlight the history and stages of San Rafael's development, as well as its many cultural influences.

This diversity in San Rafael's neighborhoods contributes to the overall identity of the city and its sense of place. As San Rafael evolves, it should preserve this identity. It should also enhance identity in areas that either lack a strong sense of place today or are missing the features generally associated with a quality neighborhood. In North San Rafael, this includes transformation of Northgate Mall to a "Town Center" that includes housing, public space, and gathering places, as well as retail and office uses. In the Canal area, this includes new street trees, parks and outdoor gathering places, and better-maintained sidewalks and infrastructure.

Place Types

The interplay of San Rafael's built and natural assets create a mosaic of distinct place types. A place type reflects the physical and social characteristics of a place, including related attributes such as the built form (scale and form of its buildings), transportation networks, intensity and mix of uses, etc. By grouping similar places together, place types are an effective tool for envisioning citywide growth and determining the degree of change needed for different areas.

Place types can be walkable, auto-oriented, or transitional in character (i.e., they form a transition or buffer between different areas). As shown in Figure 5-4, place types in San Rafael can be roughly characterized as centers, corridors, neighborhoods, and open spaces. There are also special use districts such as the auto-oriented uses along Highways 101 and 580, and the employment districts of southeast San Rafael and the Northgate Industrial Park. Community design policies and design guidance for different place types can be an effective planning tool to preserve the integrity and character of individual areas, while improving the efficiency of City service delivery and transportation and reducing conflicts between incompatible uses.



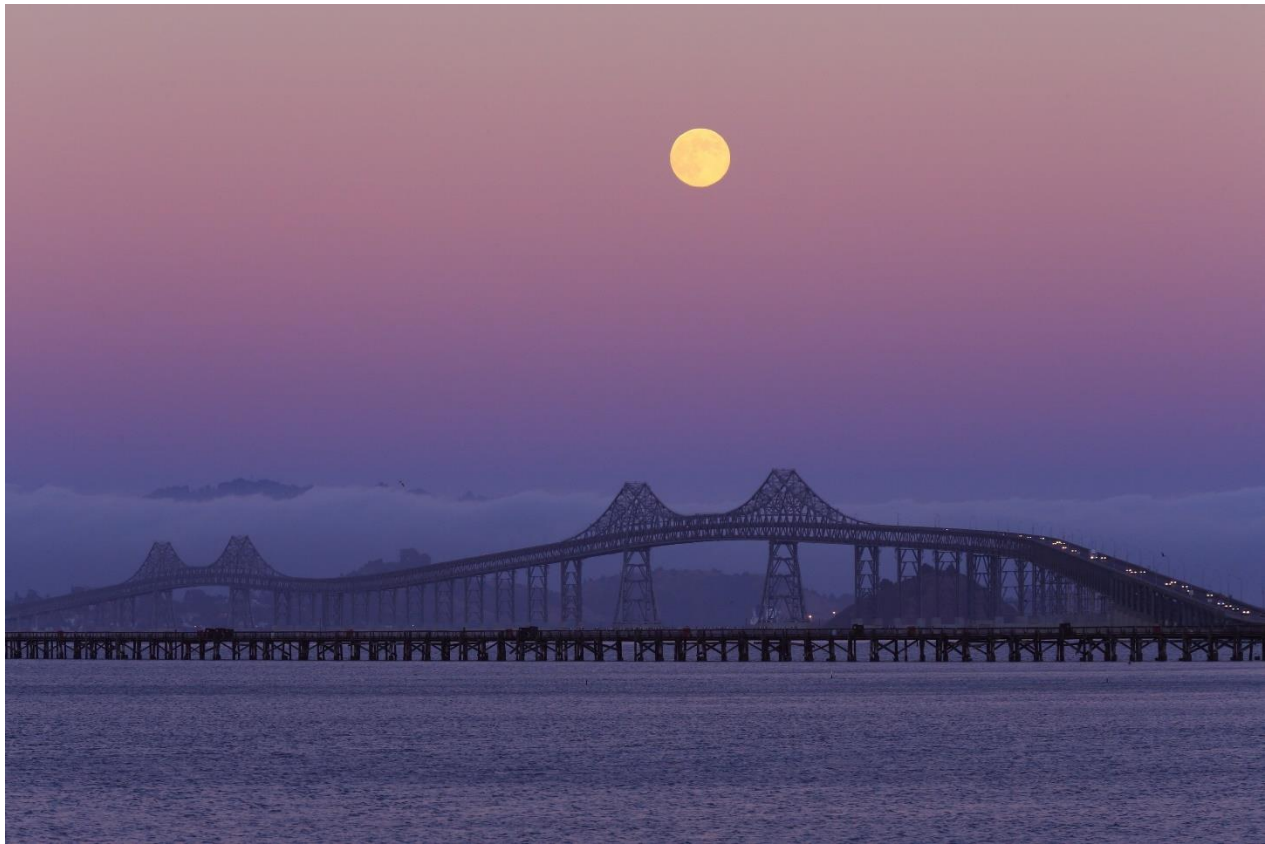


Photo Credit: Florian Kainz

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goal CDP-1: A Beautiful City

Preserve and strengthen San Rafael's natural and built features to enhance the appearance and livability of the City.

The interplay between San Rafael's built environment and natural context contributes to the city's strong sense of place and identity. The hills, ridgelines, and bays, as well as views to Mount Tamalpais, imprint the natural environment into the image of the city. Looking forward, San Rafael will remain an attractive, interesting, and well-designed city. It respects its natural landscape and waterfront, preserves its legacy of historic buildings, and values its diverse design qualities. San Rafael's distinct features will be protected and enhanced, connecting residents to nature, history, and home.

Policies throughout the General Plan protect the natural features that define San Rafael, including hillsides, ridgelines, wetlands, creeks, trees, and open water. In some instances, development can enhance these features—for example, through creek restoration and shoreline access improvements. In other instances, development can frame or accent views of character-defining features like Mt. Tamalpais. New buildings and landscaping should complement the City's natural form. In effect, buildings function as an element of the City's topography, providing variation and relief. Distinctive structures can serve as visual landmarks, providing orientation and a stronger sense of identity.

Policy CDP-1.1: City Image

Reinforce San Rafael's image by respecting the city's natural features, protecting its historic resources, and strengthening its focal points, gateways, corridors, and neighborhoods.

Policy CDP-1.2: Natural Features

Recognize and protect the key natural features that shape San Rafael's identity, including the Bay, local hills and ridgelines, creeks and wetlands, tree cover, and views of Mt. Tamalpais and other natural landmarks. Height limits and other building standards should respect San Rafael's natural topography and reinforce its sense of place, including the character and boundaries of individual neighborhoods.

Policy CDP-1.3: Hillside Protection

Protect the visual integrity and character of San Rafael's hillsides and ridgelines.

Program CDP-1.3A: Hillside Design Guidelines. Continue to implement hillside design guidelines through the design review process, as well as larger lot size requirements for hillside areas where there are access limitations or natural hazards. Update the design guidelines as needed.

See the Conservation/Climate; Safety/Resilience; and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Elements for additional policies on hillside management, landslide hazard reduction, wildfire prevention, and related topics.

Policy CDP-1.4: Waterfront Identity

Strengthen San Rafael's identity as a waterfront city, providing improved visual and physical access to San Pablo Bay, San Rafael Bay, and the San Rafael Canal.

Program CDP-1.4A: Canalfront Design Plan. Implement the Canalfront Conceptual Design Plan (2009) recommendations. Development near the shoreline should maximize views to the water and public access to the shoreline.

Program CDP-1.4B: Canal Promenade. Pursue development of a continuous pathway or promenade along the Canal waterfront.

See the Conservation/Climate Element for policies on shoreline access, creek and wetland setbacks, and climate adaptation.

Policy CDP-1.5: Views

Respect and enhance to the greatest extent possible, views to the Bay and its islands; wetlands, marinas, and canal waterfront; hillsides and ridgelines; Mt. Tamalpais; Marin Civic Center; and St. Raphael's bell tower; as seen from streets, parks, and public pathways.

Program CDP-1.5A: Evaluating View Impacts. Consider the impact of proposed development on views, especially views of Mt. Tamalpais and nearby ridgelines. Where feasible, new development should frame views of ridges and mountains and minimize reduction of views, privacy, and solar access.

Program CDP-1.5B: Guidance on View Protection. *Establish clearer, more objective City guidelines and standards on view protection, privacy, and solar access for new development, additions, and alterations.*

Program CDP-1.5C: Downtown Height Profile. *Develop zoning and design tools that encourage both continuity and variation in building heights, along with improved solar access and interesting roof elements such as domes, cupolas, and corner towers. Views of Downtown should be accented by memorable building elements, rather than a flat profile of buildings of uniform height.*

See also Conservation/Climate Program C-4.5B on solar access

Goal CDP-2: A Sense of Place

Strengthen San Rafael's sense of place.

San Rafael is a collage of uniquely identifiable places—a walkable downtown bustling with shops and restaurants, active and connected neighborhoods, a regional mall, business parks, industrial areas, and more. These different places are stitched together by streets and open spaces, creating a citywide identity unlike anyplace else in Marin County. Design decisions should reinforce the city's identity, protecting qualities that are valued while recognizing opportunities for improvement and positive change.

As observed in Goal CDP-1, San Rafael's natural features create a strong sense of local identity. However, the city as a whole is eclectic. There is no single defining architectural style, nor is there a single land use or development form that represents the entire city. San Rafael is comprised of different neighborhoods, districts, and centers, each one unique. There is a synergy between these areas that makes the City work and creates its overall sense of place.

Older neighborhoods like Montecito and Gerstle Park are remembered for their bungalows and Victorian homes and their traditional scale. Terra Linda is remembered for low-slung mid-Century homes and curvilinear streets. Some areas are defined by their proximity to water, others by panoramic views and steep, wooded slopes. Likewise, the City's business districts include a traditional Downtown, a suburban Mall, post-war industrial areas, landscaped office parks, and big box stores, among others.

The “place types” on Figure 5-3 provide a framework for thinking about the design of the City and its neighborhoods, corridors, and districts. In most areas, the form of the city will not change. Design changes and infill development in these areas can create a stronger sense of place by respecting the scale of existing development and closing gaps in the fabric of each neighborhood. In a few areas—namely Downtown, the North San Rafael Town Center, and Southeast San Rafael—more transformative changes will occur.

Gateways are particularly important in establishing San Rafael's image. These may be points of entry into the city, or into districts of the city such as Downtown or Terra Linda. In addition to marking the boundary or edge, a gateway is also a chance to express the identity of a community through art, landscape, signage. It can also communicate a sense of pride, history, culture, and even values. San Rafael's gateways include not only include freeways, freeway exits, and major thoroughfares, but also the SMART stations and Transit Center.



Policy CDP-2.1: Neighborhoods, Districts, and Centers

Strengthen San Rafael's identity as a community of unique centers, neighborhoods, corridors, and districts. Design decisions should maintain Downtown as a historic, walkable center; preserve the integrity and character of residential neighborhoods; and improve the appearance and function of, mixed use districts such as the North San Rafael Town Center.

Program CDP-2.1A: Place Types. Identify “place types” in the City that establish defining characteristics and provide the basis for objective design standards. Design standards for each place type should support housing production and commercial development that is consistent and compatible with each neighborhood or employment district (see Figure 5-4).

Program CDP-2.1B: Design Guidance. Use precise plans, specific plans, and similar tools to establish a design vision for different parts of the city, and to identify desired improvements.

See also Policy NH-4.# on the vision for the North San Rafael Town Center

Policy CDP-2.2: Downtown Urban Design

Enhance the design qualities that make Downtown San Rafael a unique and special place, including its traditional street grid, street trees, walkable scale, historic building stock, and varied architecture.

Program CDP-2.2A: Downtown Precise Plan. Implement the design recommendations and standards of the Downtown Precise Plan, including public improvements.

Policy CDP-2.3: Neighborhood Identity and Character

Recognize, preserve, and enhance the positive qualities that shape neighborhood identity. Development standards should respect neighborhood context and scale and preserve design elements that contribute to neighborhood livability. Standards should also provide the flexibility for innovative design and new types of construction. Code enforcement and City programs should maintain community standards and the integrity of buildings and landscapes.

Program CDP-2.3A: Code Enforcement. *Maintain code enforcement and nuisance abatement programs to address litter, illegal dumping, unlawful storage, and property maintenance issues.*

Program CDP-2.3B: Educational Materials. *Continue to provide programs and educational materials to inform property owners about property maintenance requirements, and sanitation, health, and safety standards.*

See the Housing Element for policies on residential rehabilitation loans and other issues related to maintenance and repair of the housing stock. See also Program LU-2.12 and Policy H-16 on ADUs, including best practices for integrating ADUs into the fabric of existing homes and neighborhoods. See Policy EDI-3.5 on property maintenance.

Policy CDP-2.4: Corridors

Improve the function and appearance of San Rafael's major transportation corridors and enhance their role in shaping the city's character.

Program CDP-2.4A: Streetscape Guidelines. *Develop general streetscape guidelines for residential arterials, auto-oriented commercial streets, pedestrian streets, and other types of streets in the city. Include site-specific recommendations for individual corridors when needed. Streetscape guidelines should support climate change and "complete streets" goals as well as aesthetic goals.*

Program CDP-2.4B: Right-of-Way Landscaping. *Encourage Caltrans to install and maintain landscaping along Highway 101 and Interstate 580.*

Program CDP-2.4C: Highway 101 Crossings. *Promote public art, restoration of Irwin Creek, better lighting, and other improvements beneath the Downtown Highway 101 viaduct to better connect the east and west sides of the freeway and make the area more hospitable to pedestrians and cyclists. Consider similar improvements in North San Rafael as part of the future PDA planning process, including the Merrydale Promenade connector near the Civic Center Station.*

Policy CDP-2.5: Commercial and Industrial Districts

Recognize and preserve the design elements that contribute to the economic vitality, functionality, and visual quality of San Rafael's commercial and industrial districts. Where feasible, improve the appearance of these areas by making them more walkable, attractive, and visually compatible with the neighborhoods around them.

Program CDP-2.5A: Commercial and Industrial Beautification. *Where feasible, develop and implement urban design improvements such as street trees, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and signage, in commercial and industrial areas through the development review process, capital improvement program, and similar means.*

Policy CDP-2.6: Gateways

Provide distinctive, attractively designed gateways into the City and its major districts. Gateways should optimally convey a sense of arrival, reinforce a positive image of the City, and help define a unique identity for individual districts.

Program CDP-2.6A: Gateway Improvements. Evaluate each gateway shown on Exhibit 5-2 to develop recommendations for architecture, landscape design, public art, and signage. Prioritize the recommendations and include appropriate improvements in the City's Capital Improvements Program.

Program CDP-2.6B: Neighborhood and District Gateways. Support landscaping, signage, and design improvements at neighborhood and business district entry points. Evaluate opportunities for gateway improvements in private development where appropriate.

See the Arts and Culture Element for policies on public art

San Rafael's Corridors and Gateways

San Rafael's transportation corridors include regional freeways like US 101 and I-580, and local arterials like Freitas Parkway, Pt. San Pedro Road, Lincoln Avenue, Redwood Highway, Bellam Boulevard, and 2nd/3rd Streets, and the Miracle Mile. The corridors shape impressions of the city and establish San Rafael's aesthetic values. A well-designed corridor should be inviting, attractive, and should appear visually organized. This can be achieved through public improvements such as street trees and lighting, and through the design of buildings, landscaping, and signs along the corridor.

Gateways are the entry points to the city or a specific area. A gateway might be defined with a subtle change in landscaping or a natural feature such as a hill which provides a vantage point. A gateway could also be a noticeable change in land use or a boundary marker. The City has invested in signage, landscaping, and art at key gateways, welcoming visitors and shaping San Rafael's identity.



Goal CDP-3: Attractive Streets and Public Spaces

Create streets, public spaces, and civic buildings that add value to private property, promote environmental sustainability, and contribute to San Rafael's visual quality and identity.

A well-designed public realm contributes to the city's vitality and helps achieve its sustainability, livability, and climate action goals. Streets, parks, plazas, and civic buildings are designed and maintained to convey civic pride. They provide common ground that connects and unites the community.

San Rafael's identity is also created by its public spaces, including parks, plazas, streets, highways, and civic buildings. These areas are collectively referred to as the "public realm." They represent a substantial amount of the city's land area and present the greatest opportunity for the City itself to shape perceptions of San Rafael and its aesthetic qualities. The policies under Goal CDP-3 aim to improve the public realm, thereby imparting a positive impression of San Rafael and a more attractive city for residents and businesses. These policies serve a dual purpose, as they also advance other City goals such as sustainability, fire prevention, and greenhouse gas reduction.

The public realm serves other purposes that contribute to the quality of life in San Rafael. Public space provides common ground for community gatherings, recreation, art, performance, and civic events. Street rights-of-way provide space for lighting, landscaping, street trees, and drainage facilities, serving functional as well as aesthetic purposes. Over the years, the City of San Rafael has developed guidelines and standards for streets and public space that balance multiple goals and coordinate public and private efforts to keep the city livable.

Policy CDP-3.1: Plazas and Active Public Spaces

Encourage the integration of public space—or private space that is available for public use—in larger-scale commercial, civic, and mixed use development. Such spaces should be designed and operated so that they can be easily maintained, remain safe and attractive, and contribute positively to the community.

Program CDP-3.1A: Activation of Public Space. *Encourage activities such as farmers markets and performances in public spaces to enhance their usefulness and role as community gathering space.*

Program CDP-3.1B: Solar Access for Public Space. *Explore potential sun and shading standards for select public and quasi-public spaces.*

Program CDP-3.1C: Universal Design. *Incorporate the concept of universal design in the design of public space, so that persons of all physical abilities can safely and comfortably use city streets and civic places.*

Program CDP-3.1D: Alleys. *Improve Downtown alleys so they become more functional, economically productive and activated public spaces.*

Program CDP-3.1E: North San Rafael Improvements. *Encourage and incentivize the development of public art, publicly accessible plazas, and other activated spaces in new and redeveloped projects in North San Rafael, especially in the Northgate Mall/ North San Rafael Town Center area.*



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

Policy CDP-3.2: Street Furnishings

Use street furniture and pavement materials to create a more attractive city, particularly in commercial districts. Seating, trash receptacles, streetlights, art, and other street furnishings should be compatible with--and strengthen--the identity of San Rafael's business districts and neighborhoods while supporting "green streets" and low impact development principles.

Program CDP-3.2A: Right-of-Way Encroachments. Continue to refine City standards for encroachments into the public right of way for features such as sidewalk dining, parklets, awnings, and temporary signage.

Program CDP-3.2B: Arts Partnerships. Explore opportunities to engage the local arts community in the design of public realm improvements, including public art, painting of utility boxes, murals, and similar improvements.

See the Arts and Culture Element for public art policies and the Community Services and Infrastructure Element for Green Streets policies

Policy CDP-3.3: Landscape Design in Public Rights-of-Way

Use landscape design in public rights-of-way to soften the built environment, showcase San Rafael's natural environment, and advance City goals related to walkability, climate change, conservation, and hazard reduction. Landscaping should control heat build-up from pavement, provide shade, reduce air pollution, and improve visual quality.

See the Community Services and Infrastructure Element for policies on Utility Undergrounding

Policy CDP-3.4: Landscape Maintenance

Prioritize landscape maintenance along the City's most heavily traveled roadways and gateways. Control costs by using low-maintenance materials, removing litter, and avoiding deferred maintenance. Operational practices should support the City's commitment to water conservation, fire prevention, and reduced use of toxic materials.

Program CDP-3.4A: Landscape Stewardship. *Encourage partnerships with neighborhoods and civic organizations to maintain and improve the City's landscaped areas.*

Policy CDP-3.5: Street Trees

Encourage the planting and maintenance of street trees to reduce urban heat island effects, sequester carbon, improve air quality, absorb runoff and wind, define neighborhoods, and improve the appearance and character of City streets.

Program CDP-3.5A: Street Tree Master Plan. *Develop a comprehensive citywide Street Tree Master Plan. The Plan should address street tree planting, species selection, maintenance, replacement, diversification, wood utilization, and tree waste recycling and should ensure that trees are appropriate for the planting areas where they are located.*

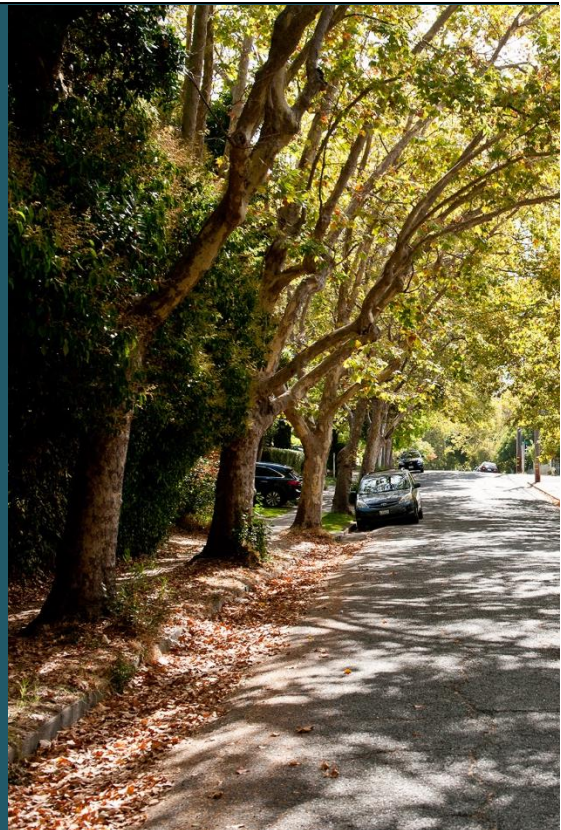
Program CDP-3.5B: Street Tree Inventory. *Create an inventory of City street trees, using volunteers to the greatest extent feasible.*

San Rafael is a Tree City!

San Rafael is one of 3,400 communities around the United States that has been formally designated a "Tree City USA" – for 36 consecutive years! Maintaining this designation is based on specific criteria relating to urban forestry management.

Trees provide enormous benefits in San Rafael. Their environmental benefits include stormwater reduction, air quality improvements, carbon sequestration, and habitat for birds and other wildlife. Trees also provide shade and cooling, reducing energy bills and making it more comfortable to walk or cycle.

Trees enhance the character of commercial districts and can attract shoppers. They also add value to residential neighborhoods. Trees absorb noise and provide a buffer from wind. Trees also provide social and psychological benefits. They reduce stress, have a calming effect, and make San Rafael a more livable city!



Program CDP-3.5C: Street Trees for New Development. *Require street trees in new developments and major property upgrades.*

See the Community Services and Infrastructure Element for policies and programs regarding coordination with PG&E on tree maintenance and safety and Policy C-1.16 on urban forestry.

Program CDP-3.5D: Street Tree Maintenance. *Support the long-term health of San Rafael's urban forest through timely, quality street tree maintenance. Seek diversified funding sources for maintenance and replacement.*

Policy CDP-3.6: Tree Replacement

Discourage the removal of healthy trees. Support replacement when trees are removed due to health, safety, or maintenance cost reasons.

Program CDP-3.6A: Mitigation for Tree Removal. *Continue to implement mitigation requirements for tree removal in new development. When necessary, this could include planting of trees in locations other than the project site. Tree replacement value should be based on mass rather than a numeric ratio score.*

Program CDP-3.6B: Tree Replacement Due to Sidewalk Damage. *Consider replacing trees that have root systems that cause sustained damage to pavement and sidewalks.*

Policy CDP-3.7: Wayfinding and Directional Signage

Encourage the use of consistent graphic conventions and logos for City signs, including gateway signs and wayfinding signs.

Program CDP-3.7A: Downtown Wayfinding. *Implement the signage recommendations in the 2018 Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study to direct people to cultural resources, public facilities, parks, shopping areas, parking, and key destinations. Consider wayfinding signage in other parts of the City, such as Northgate, the Point San Pedro area, and the Canal.*

Program CDP-3.7B: Interpretive Signage. *Encourage the use of interpretive signage to provide information about local history, the natural environment, and cultural resources.*

Policy CDP-3.8: Greenways

Encourage the development of “greenways” such as the North San Rafael Promenade and the Tamalpais Greenway that improve connectivity, link neighborhoods, restore creeks, and enhance the appearance of the city.

See the Community Services and Infrastructure Element for policies on the visual impacts of utility improvements and the Neighborhoods Element (North San Rafael section) for discussion of the Promenade.

Goal CDP-4: Quality Construction and Design

Encourage quality construction and design that enhances San Rafael's character and creates places of lasting value.

San Rafael has many examples of fine architecture and a few exceptionally memorable buildings. The City embraces creative and distinctive design, while ensuring that the scale, height, and massing of new development respects the surrounding context.

This section of the Community Design and Preservation Element addresses the importance of good design to the city. As buildings and landscapes are constructed and altered, their design quality can determine whether they improve or detract from the quality of life in San Rafael. In most neighborhoods, design guidelines should provide a framework of principles without mandating a specific style or genre. In areas where a specific style is prevalent, guidelines can reinforce that style. In some cases, design *standards* may be used instead of *guidelines* to provide a clearer sense of the City's expectations and improve the predictability of the development process. Even in these instances, standards should support creative architecture and design.

Policy CDP-4.1: Design Guidelines and Standards

Use design guidelines and standards to strengthen the visual and functional qualities of San Rafael's neighborhoods, districts, and centers. Guidelines and standards should ensure that new construction, additions, and alterations are compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods while still allowing for innovative, affordable design.

Program CDP-4.1A: Design Guidelines. *Maintain design guidelines for residential, non-residential, and mixed use construction. Guidelines should define the elements of good design (see text box on Page 5-22) and encourage compatible building patterns, scale, mass, and transitions between areas. Design guidelines should be periodically updated to respond to construction trends, neighborhood feedback, and changes in the way people live, work, and travel.*

Program CDP-4.1B: Objective Design and Development Standards. *Develop and maintain objective (measurable) design standards for new higher density and mixed use housing that meet the requirements of State law and support new housing construction. These standards would be used in lieu of those referenced in Program CDP-4.1A and apply only to proposals for multi-family and mixed use housing meeting specific State-adopted criteria. (see text box on Page 5-21)*

Program CDP-4.1C: Form-Based Codes. *Encourage the use of form-based codes (FBCs) as an alternative to design guidelines and zoning standards in specific districts of the City such as Downtown. The FBC integrates design and regulatory controls to improve design quality and enhance public space.*

See the Safety and Resilience Element for policies on fire-safe design and construction

Policy CDP-4.2: Public Involvement in Design Review

Provide for public involvement in design review through effective noticing, adequate comment timelines, and clear project review opportunities, while still achieving development streamlining objectives.

Program CDP-4.2A: Improving Design Review Efficiency. Continue to improve the design review process by:

- Engaging stakeholders and the developer early so that issues can be worked out before initial submittal
- Clarifying requirements for initial submittals to improve their quality
- Adjusting notification procedures to encourage earlier and broader participation
- Changing the project review sequence so that Planning Commission feedback is solicited before the Design Review Board
- Periodically evaluating and updating the guidelines, including thresholds for design review.

Program CDP-4.2B: Community Discussions of Good Design. Continue to engage the community in discussions to define “good design” and strategies to improve architecture and public space.

Policy CDP-4.3: Creative Architecture and Design

Encourage creative architecture while respecting the context of each site.

Program CDP-4.3 A: Reinforcing Design Context. Ensure that design guidelines recognize the distinct characteristics of San Rafael neighborhoods. Guidelines should ensure that new development respects the character-defining elements of neighborhoods, including height, scale, materials, and setbacks.

Program CDP-4.3B: Successful Design Portfolio. Establish a portfolio of existing buildings and projects illustrating successful design and make it available on the City’s website.

Program CDP-4.3C: Exceptions. Allow variation from design guidelines and standards for exceptional buildings that contribute public benefits and make a significant contribution to their surroundings.

See also Housing Policy H-2

Objective Design Standards

For many years, cities and counties have relied on discretionary review process when considering most multi-family development projects. Projects were often approved, denied, or re-designed based on subjective criteria, such as whether they “reflected the look and feel” of the community. California’s housing shortage has been attributed at least in part to vague criteria that create lengthy approval processes and add to the cost of construction. Recent state housing laws now require “objective standards” for new multi-family development, as well as streamlined review and approval processes for projects that meet certain criteria. Senate Bill 35 defined objective standards as “standards that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant and the public official prior to submittal.”



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson



Principles of Good Design

In November 2017, the City created a working group of local architects to develop “criteria for good design” in Downtown San Rafael. The group delivered their recommendations to the City Council in February 2018. The recommendations were specifically focused on pedestrian-oriented streets in settings such as Downtown San Rafael, but they are transferable to other locations in the city where pedestrian-oriented development will be encouraged in the future. The principles shown below can also apply to the North San Rafael Town Center, the Medway commercial district, and other areas where a more walkable environment is desired.

Design principles for new construction and renovation projects include:

- Use higher ground floor ceiling heights to support more active and interesting spaces at street level
- Relate the design of the building facade, including aspects such as cornice lines, windows, and door placement, to the facade elements of nearby buildings
- Avoid long, monotonous walls without windows
- Articulate buildings into smaller components to reduce their perceived mass
- Encourage continuity of design, materials, color, form, and architectural details
- Allow variable setbacks to create space for pedestrian amenities and landscaping.
- Incorporate pedestrian-scale signage that is complementary to the building design
- Screen mechanical equipment
- Use large display windows on the ground floor to create visual interest for pedestrians

Policy CDP-4.4: Single Family Home Design

Encourage the design of new homes, additions, and alterations that integrate well with their surroundings and support the livability of neighborhoods. Residential additions and alterations should respect the proportions, styles, and materials of the house and adjacent properties.

See also Housing Program H-2A

Policy CDP-4.5: Higher Density Design

Encourage high-quality architecture and landscape design in new higher-density housing and mixed use projects. Such projects should be designed to be compatible with nearby buildings and respect the character-defining features of the surrounding neighborhood or district.

See Programs CDP-4.1A through C on design guidelines and standards. See the Land Use and Mobility Elements for policies on parking in higher-density housing areas.

Policy CDP-4.6: Open Space in Multi-Family Housing

Require private outdoor areas such as decks and patios, as well as common open space areas, in new multi-family development and mixed use housing. Common open space may include recreation facilities, gathering places, and site amenities such as picnic and play areas.

Program CDP-4.6A: On-Site Recreational Areas. *Continue requirements for on-site recreational areas as specified in the zoning ordinance.*

Policy CDP-4.7: Larger-Scale Buildings

Design larger scale buildings to reduce their perceived mass. Encourage the incorporation of architectural elements such as towers, arcades, courtyards, and awnings to create visual interest, provide protection from the elements, and enhance orientation.

Program CDP-4.7A: Signature Buildings. *Allow for “signature” buildings that create a positive impression of San Rafael. Memorable, innovative architecture should be encouraged through the placement of building forms and features, selection of materials, and unique treatment of corner sites, and similar measures. Innovative climate-adaptive measures such as vertical gardens, roof-gardens, living building design and onsite water reuse also should be encouraged.*

Policy CDP-4.8: Scale Transitions

Require sensitive scale and height transitions between larger and smaller structures. In areas where taller buildings are allowed, they should be designed to minimize shadows, loss of privacy, and dramatic contrasts with adjacent low-scale structures. Exceptions may be made where taller buildings are also permitted on the adjoining site.

Program CDP-4.8A: Building Stepbacks. *Use tools such as stepbacks and daylight planes to improve height transitions where taller buildings are constructed near lower-scale buildings. The perceived height and bulk of new buildings can be reduced through measures such as stepping back the upper floors, articulating the building elevation, and using varied exterior building materials and colors.*

Policy CDP-4.9: Parking and Driveways

Encourage parking and circulation design that supports pedestrian movement and ensures the safety of all travelers, including locating parking to the side or rear of buildings, limiting driveway cuts and widths, , and minimizing large expanses of pavement. Parking should be screened from the street by landscaping and should provide easy access to building entrances.

Policy CDP-4.10: Landscape Design

Encourage privately owned and maintained landscaping that contributes to neighborhood quality, complements building forms and materials, improves stormwater management and drainage, and enhances the streetscape. Natural elements such as plants should be an integral part of site development and should enhance the built environment.

Program CDP-4.10A: Zoning Regulations. Periodically evaluate the landscape provisions in the Zoning Ordinance to respond to climate change, hazards, water availability, shading needs, and other issues. Zoning should support the City's goal of having a strongly landscaped character.

See the Conservation Element for additional policies on water-efficiency and the use of trees and native plants for urban cooling and habitat enhancement.

Program CDP-4.10B: Industrial Landscape Design. Ensure that landscape guidelines for new industrial and general commercial development provide effective buffering, while also supporting water conservation, water quality, and fire hazard reduction goals.

Program CDP-4.10C: Parking Lot Landscaping Requirements. Review City standards for parking lot landscaping to ensure that they adequately address visual screening, environmental quality, and climate-related issues.. Standards should allow for solar shade structures within parking areas.

See the Conservation/Climate Element for landscape policies related to urban runoff and water quality

Policy CDP-4.11: Lighting

Encourage lighting for safety and security while preventing excessive light spillover and glare. Lighting should complement building and landscape design.

See Conservation/Climate Element Policy C-1.19 for additional guidance on dark skies.

Program CDP-4.11A: Lighting Plans. Continue to require lighting plans for projects proposing exterior lighting. The design review process should be used to evaluate lighting for safety, consistency with dark sky objectives, and potential mitigation to reduce negative impacts on nearby properties.

Policy CDP-4.12: Commercial Signage

Encourage commercial signage that provides the visual identification necessary for business success, while enhancing the building, streetscape, and surrounding area.

Program CDP-4.12A: Sign Regulations. Periodically update the City's sign regulations to reflect new technologies, materials, and design trends, and to ensure that regulations comply with all applicable state and federal laws.



Photo Credit: Matthew X Kiernan Big Apple Images

Goal CDP-5: Protected Cultural Heritage

Protect and maintain San Rafael's historic and archaeological resources as visible reminders of the city's cultural heritage.

As a mission city established over 200 years ago, San Rafael values its history and the people, places, and buildings that have shaped it. Preservation can provide a strong sense of place and civic identity, bolster the City's economy, and support the City's sustainability goals.

Historic Resources

Historic buildings and sites are an important part of San Rafael's identity and add to the character of the city. As the oldest city in Marin County, historic resources provide an essential link to the city's identity. The City has adopted regulations to protect specific properties that have been designated as local landmarks. Additional efforts are needed to encourage and incentivize the adaptive reuse of older buildings, raise awareness of San Rafael history, and update historic resource inventories.

In 1986, the City completed the *San Rafael Historical/Architectural Survey* identifying and rating the architectural and historical significance of selected buildings and areas. Approximately 300 structures were evaluated and listed using methods established by the California Office of Historic Preservation. Fifteen of these sites—plus a historic sign—have been formally designated as local historic landmarks (see Figure 5-5). There are also three locally designated historic districts, including the Victorian Village (1623-27 Fifth Avenue) and French Quarter (901-911 Irwin Street) in the Downtown area, and 1811-1817 Grand Avenue, north of Downtown.

Several additional sites have not been formally listed by the City of San Rafael but are on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Marin County Civic Center. There are also National Register sites outside the City and in the San Rafael Planning Area, including China Camp, the Miller Creek School Indian Mound, and the Dixie Schoolhouse. Within the city itself, high concentrations of older buildings exist in Downtown, Gerstle Park, Montecito-Happy Valley, and Dominican.

In 2019, as part of the Downtown Precise Plan effort, an updated Historical/ Architectural Survey was completed for the Downtown area. Another 36 individual historic resources were identified and two areas were identified as meeting State historic district criteria. The Downtown Precise Plan includes recommendations to conserve these resources while enhancing their economic potential and contribution to Downtown's authenticity. Historic preservation is not just about saving old buildings—it is also an important economic development strategy and a way to attract visitors, build civic pride, and celebrate the city's legacy.

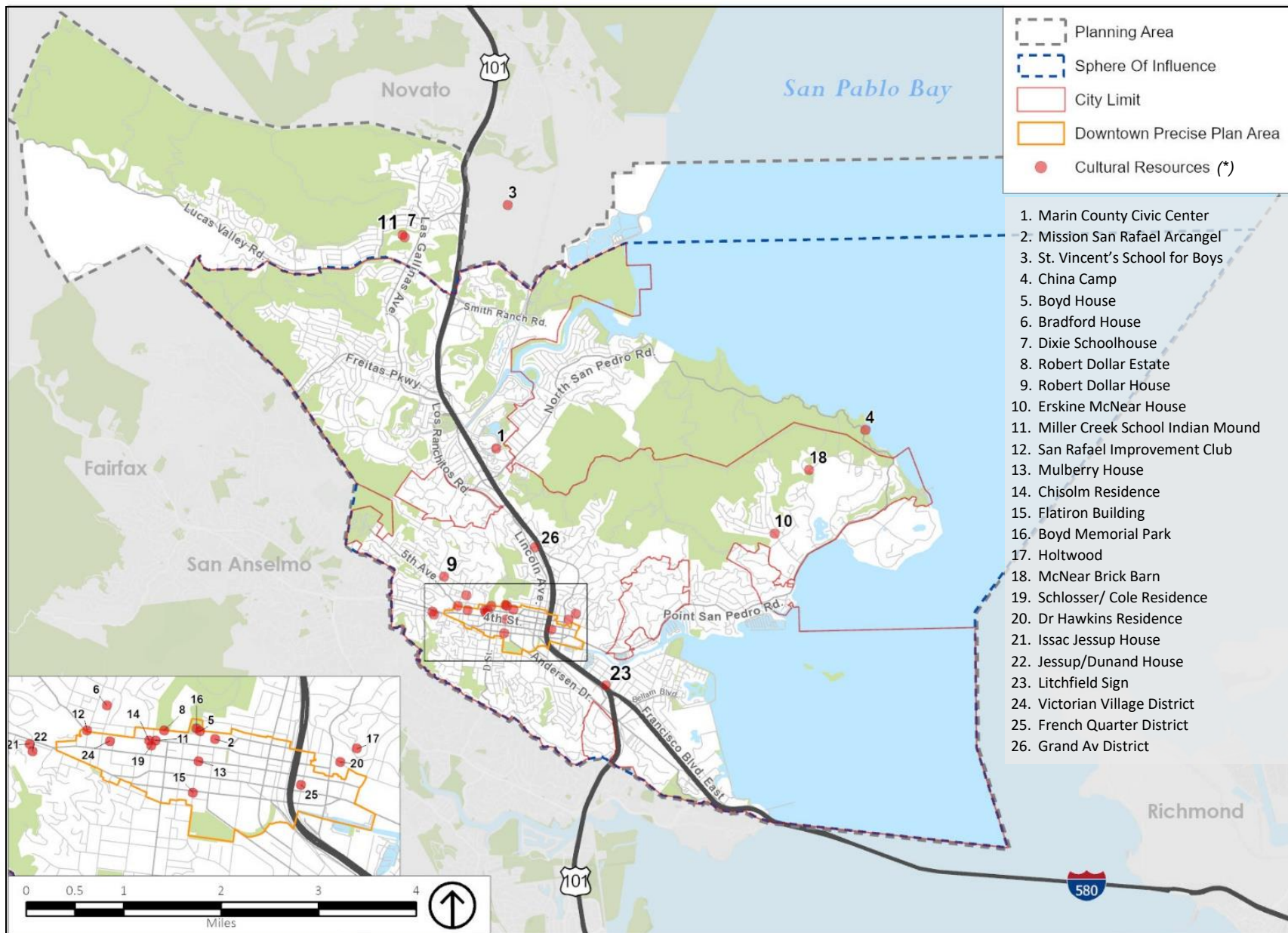
City policy has been to protect and build upon San Rafael's historic character. The City adopted a Historic Preservation Ordinance in 1978, establishing guidelines for remodeling or demolishing locally designated historic buildings and structures within locally designated districts. The ordinance is implemented by the Design Review Board and Planning Commission. In addition, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) typically requires that demolition of a historic resource or significant modifications to the exterior that reduce historic value is preceded by preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Changes to historic resources usually require evaluation by a qualified architectural historian.

The number of eligible historic resources in San Rafael has grown substantially since the 1986 survey. Structures are deemed potentially worthy of preservation when they become 50 years old or greater, meaning that buildings constructed between 1936 and 1970 were largely excluded from earlier inventories. Given that this was the period of San Rafael's most rapid growth, there are likely many uncatalogued resources. There are also many structures built before 1936 that may also warrant further study. The policies below include a recommendation to expand the City's historic resources inventory and better define San Rafael's historic context, ensuring that these resources are well managed in the future.

Archaeological Resources

"Archaeological resources" are the material remains of past human life and behavior. They include the deposits and remains left by local Native Americans and other early inhabitants. These sites are primarily located at the base of the hills on the perimeter of the San Pedro Peninsula and in the Miller Creek area of unincorporated North San Rafael. A portion of the Miller Creek School site served as a central village in the Gallinas Valley for at least 3,000 years.

The City of San Rafael protects known archeological resources to the maximum extent feasible. The Community Development Department maintains an archaeological sensitivity database based on parcels and proximity to potentially sensitive sites. Data includes parcels that have been examined for archaeological remains, known archaeological sites, National, State, and local landmark locations, recognized historic building locations, and the archaeological sensitivity zones established by the data. If an archeological site is uncovered during construction, activity is halted and an examination is made by a qualified archeologist in consultation with Native American organizations. Work can resume when appropriate mitigation measures are implemented. The City has adopted an Ordinance with procedures and requirements for archaeological resource protection.



Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019, Tom Origer and Associates, 2020

(*) Map shows resources that have been formally listed by the City of San Rafael or are on State/Federal registers. Additional sites and structures may be eligible for landmark status but have not been formally listed.

Figure 5-5
Historic Resources

Policy CDP-5.1 Historic Buildings and Areas

Preserve buildings and areas with special and recognized historic, architectural or aesthetic value, including but not limited to those on the San Rafael Historical/ Architectural Survey. New development and redevelopment should respect architecturally and historically significant buildings and areas.

Program CDP-5.1A: Preservation Ordinance. *Continue to implement the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance. The Ordinance should be reviewed at least once every 10 years to ensure that its criteria, classifications, and procedures provide the most effective measures to assess proposed changes to historic properties and are consistent with Secretary of the Interior standards.*

Program CDP-5.1B: Oversight Responsibilities. *Create a more formal means of oversight for review of planning and building applications affecting historic resources. This could include a contract with an architectural historian, or an advisory committee convened as needed to advise the Planning Commission and Design Review Board on matters and policies related to preservation or the modification of historic structures. If an oversight body is created, it should represent diverse perspectives and interests.*

Policy CDP-5.2 Inventorying Historic Resources

Maintain and periodically update inventories of local historic resources, using methods that are consistent with state and federal criteria, reflect local values, and do not unreasonably constrain property rights and interests. Historic resources may include sites associated with important historic events or people, archaeological resources, and landscape elements, in addition to older buildings.

Program CDP-5.2A: Context Statement. *Prepare a citywide historic context statement to provide the framework for evaluating a property's historic significance and integrity.*

Program CDP-5.2B: Inventory Update. *Continue to update the City's Historical/ Architecture Survey, which is an inventory of buildings of architectural value, historic buildings and/or districts and historic elements such as signs, monuments, and gates. A priority should be placed on neighborhoods with large concentrations of older structures, as well as areas most likely to experience development pressure in the future. [Inset: Historic Surveys Over the Years]*

Program CDP-5.2C: Criteria for Designation. *Review and adjust the criteria for designation of historic resources so they align with those of state and federal preservation agencies.*

Program CDP-5.2D: Additional Landmarking. *Based on updated historic preservation data, identify additional structures or sites for local and/or state landmark status and/or potential nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.*

Policy CDP-5.3: Districts

Encourage the formation of historic or architectural conservation districts in areas where important historic resources are concentrated and where there is property owner and community support for such designations. Such districts should provide for preservation, restoration, and greater awareness of the resources they contain, while providing financial and property tax incentives for property owners.

Program CDP-5.3A: Downtown Districts. *Consider the designation of an additional historic district in Downtown San Rafael based on the 2019 Downtown Precise Plan field survey of Downtown properties.*

Program CDP-5.3B: Conservation Districts.

Consider the use of Conservation Districts as an alternative to historic districts or the designation of individual landmarks (see text box).

Program CDP-5.3C: Eichler Neighborhoods.

Recognize the Eichler subdivisions of North San Rafael as a defining part of San Rafael's architectural heritage. Continue to take steps to preserve the characteristic features of Eichler homes and neighborhoods, including height and roofline modifications.

Policy CDP-5.4: Preservation Incentives

Create innovative incentives that encourage stewardship of San Rafael's historic resources. Incentives should be enacted before (or concurrently with) placing additional restrictions on historic properties, to ensure that preservation makes economic sense.

Program CDP-5.4A: Zoning and Development Incentives.

Support the use of transfer of development rights and façade easements to encourage preservation of historic buildings.

Program CDP-5.4B: Local Financial Incentives.

Pursue development of a local Mills Act program to allow contracts with the owners of historic properties meeting criteria to be defined by the City. The contracts allow for reduced property taxes in exchange for an agreement to maintain the historic integrity and visibility of the structure. In addition, enact reductions or waivers of local permitting fees for qualifying historic preservation projects.

Program CDP-5.4C: Non-Local Financial Incentives

Support financial assistance for preservation through state and federal grants and loans, tax credits, National Trust Preservation funds, the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, and similar programs.

Policy CDP-5.5: Adaptive Reuse

Encourage the adaptation and reuse of historic and older buildings as a way to preserve San Rafael's heritage, especially where the original use of the building is no longer viable.

Program CDP-5.5A: California Historic Building Code. Use the State historic building code to relieve historic buildings from modern code requirements, thus making it easier to reuse the building. Explore other incentivizes or code changes that allow interior spaces in older buildings to be more easily and affordably updated.



Photo Credit: Matthew X Kiernan Big Apple Images

Conservation Districts

Conservation Districts generally cover larger areas than historic districts but have less intensive oversight. Properties in such districts are identified as contributing or non-contributing, depending on the characteristics and context of the area. Contributing properties would be subject to additional consideration when alterations, additions, or demolition is proposed. Although no Conservation Districts are proposed in General Plan 2040, this is a tool that could be considered in the future to conserve areas with large numbers of older structures.

Photo Credit: Matthew X Kiernan Big Apple Images



Is it “Historic”---or Just Old?

Not every old building is considered “historic”. State and federal standards establish specific criteria for historic buildings. At least one of the following characteristics must apply:

- It is associated with significant events in history.
- It is associated with the lives of people significant to the past
- It embodies distinctive characteristics, construction techniques, or other factors that make it a unique structure with historical value.
- It yields important information about a certain time period.

The Falkirk Mansion, pictured above, does indeed meet these criteria and has been designated as a historic resource by the City. It is also on the National Register of Historic Places.

Program CDP-5.5B: Zoning. Investigate zoning exceptions for historic structures, such as reduced on-site parking, setback, and driveway width requirements. The range of permitted or conditionally permitted uses in historic structures should be expanded to make them more viable for reuse.

Policy CDP-5.6: Protecting the Integrity of Historic Properties

Ensure that modifications to designated historic properties, including additions, alterations, and new structures, are visually compatible with the property’s contributing features, as defined by the San Rafael Municipal Code.

Program CD-5.6A: Certificates of Appropriateness. Continue existing requirements for “Certificates of Appropriateness” (COA) for alterations to designated historic resources. Criteria for COAs should be consistent with State and federal standards.

Program CDP-5.6B: Design Guidelines. Address historic preservation in the City’s design guidelines, including successful examples of (a) adaptive reuse, alterations, and other changes; and (b) new infill development in the context of an older neighborhood, including examples of contemporary architecture. Infill development in older areas does not need to mimic historic development but should acknowledge and respect its context.

Program CDP-5.6C: Landscapes and Natural Features. Consider landscapes, gardens, mature trees, and natural features as contextually relevant when defining historic value. Encourage the preservation of such features when they are determined to be significant.

Policy CDP-5.7: Maintenance of Historic Properties

Strongly support the maintenance of historic properties and avoid their deterioration to the point where rehabilitation is no longer feasible (e.g., “demolition by neglect”).

Program CDP-5.7A: Incentives. Support property owner efforts to maintain and restore historic properties through fee reductions, tax credits, and Code exceptions.

Policy CDP-5.8: Preservation Advocacy

Encourage local preservation efforts by community organizations. Provide technical support to such groups and encourage their participation in City-sponsored preservation activities.

Program CDP-5.8A: Public Recognition. Support programs that publicly recognize property owners who have done an exceptional job preserving an historic property

Program CDP-5.8B: Volunteers. Engage volunteers in historic surveys and similar activities to the greatest extent feasible, with professional assistance as needed.

Program CDP-5.8C: Public Events and Social Media. Encourage organizations such as the Marin History Museum and San Rafael Heritage to produce events, publications, social media, and exhibits about the historic resources that exist in San Rafael.

Policy CDP-5.9: Preservation Education

Encourage historic preservation activities and programs that heighten awareness of historic resources and the ways that architecture and landscape define the city’s character.

Program CDP-5.9A: Preservation Reference Materials. Support the efforts of local organizations to maintain and expand collections of historic photographs, artifacts, books, media, oral histories, and other resources, and to make these materials available through on-line archives.

Program CDP-5.9B: Plaques and Markers. Support efforts to install plaques and markers recognizing historic locations and the locations of important historic events in San Rafael.

Program CDP-5.9C: School Programs. Support local school efforts to incorporate San Rafael history lessons, events, and field trips into their curriculum and programs.

Policy CDP-5.10: Economic Benefits of Preservation

Leverage San Rafael’s historic resources to create jobs, attract visitors, and generate local revenue. Recognize the value of preservation in placemaking, including branding and marketing areas such as Downtown San Rafael.

Program CDP-5.10A: Walking Tours, Trails, and Historic Festivals. Encourage walking tours, historic trails, mobile apps, and history fairs and programs that attract visitors. Partner with the Marin Convention and Visitors Bureau and other organizations to promote events celebrating San Rafael history.

Program CDP-5.10B: Marin County Civic Center. Work with the County of Marin to encourage and support preservation of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Civic Center complex and grounds as a nationally important historic architectural site and major destination for regional, national, and international visitors.

Program CDP-5.10C: Mission San Rafael. Promote San Rafael's historic origin as a "mission city," and Mission San Rafael Arcangel as a destination of historic interest.

See also Policy EV-3.3 on authenticity as an economic development strategy

Policy CDP-5.11: Sustainability

Recognize the potential sustainability benefits of historic preservation, including reduced resource consumption, reduced landfilled waste, reduced energy use, and the need for fewer raw materials.

Program CDP-5.11A: Energy Retrofits. Encourage the use of energy efficiency incentives to assist in the rehabilitation of older buildings.

Photo Credit: Scott Stewart-Johnson



Remembering China Camp

One of San Rafael's most important historic resources is China Camp, located on the north shore of the San Pedro Peninsula. A Chinese shrimp-fishing village, home to more than 500 Chinese immigrants, thrived on the site in the 1880s. Some of the original structures, including this shrimp-drying room, remain today and provide an important reminder of the many cultures that have San Rafael's heritage.

Policy CDP-5.12: Inclusive Approach to Preservation

Ensure that preservation efforts are culturally inclusive and recognize the contributions of all racial and ethnic communities to the City's history and development. Sites and structures that are culturally important to specific ethnic communities, including those associated with events and people, should be part of local preservation efforts.

Program CDP-5.12A: Community Heritage Programming. *Engage representatives of the different ethnic communities, as well as preservation organizations and San Rafael schools, universities, and colleges to document and preserve the history of each community in San Rafael, including sites and structures of historic importance. Support educational curriculum that raises awareness of the City's cultural heritage and includes non-Eurocentric perspectives.*

Policy CDP-5.13: Protection of Archaeological Resources.

Protect significant archaeological resources by:

- a) Consulting the City's archaeological resource data base prior to issuing demolition or construction permits in known sensitive areas.
- b) Providing information and direction to property owners to make them aware of these resources and the procedures to be followed if they are discovered on-site.
- c) Identifying, when possible, archaeological resources and potential impacts on such resources.
- d) Implementing measures to preserve and protect archaeological resources, including fines and penalties for violations.

Program CDP-5.13A: Archeological Resources Ordinance. *Continue to implement the existing Archeological Resources Ordinance and the City's Archaeological Resources data base.*

Policy CDP-5.14: Tribal Cultural Resources

Coordinate with representatives of the Native American community to protect historic Native American resources and raise awareness of San Rafael's Native American heritage .

Program CDP-5.14A: AB 52 Compliance. *Implement the requirements of Assembly Bill 52 by providing opportunities for meaningful input from Native American representatives in the development review process.*

Program CDP-5.14B: Protection of Tribal Resources. *Incorporate standard approval conditions in future development projects that ensure that Native American resources are protected during construction. In the event tribal resources are discovered, earth-disturbing work must be temporarily suspended pending evaluation by a qualified archaeologist and an appropriate Native American representative. Where appropriate, a mitigation plan shall be developed in accordance with state guidelines and tribal input.*



Our Natural Environment

6 Conservation and Climate Change

7 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

8 Safety

9 Noise

6 Conservation and Climate Change

Introduction

The Conservation and Climate Change Element addresses the management of San Rafael's natural resources, including soil, minerals, water, air, vegetation, and wildlife. It identifies environmentally sensitive areas in the city and includes policies for their long-term protection. This Element also addresses the steps the City will take to address global climate change. Policies in this Element are supplemented by the San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan, which prescribes more specific actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While climate action is a theme that underpins the entire General Plan, it is especially relevant to this Element.

The City recognizes that the well-being of its human and natural communities are inseparable. Natural communities must be conserved for their ecological value and capacity to support life. Conservation is also essential to San Rafael's economy and the health and safety of its residents. This Element includes policies to protect the quality of our air, conserve water and improve water quality, and use energy more efficiently, including a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. The Element recognizes the importance of living more sustainably, replacing the resources we use and changing past behaviors to better recognize the cycle of life.

This Element is organized around five broad goals:

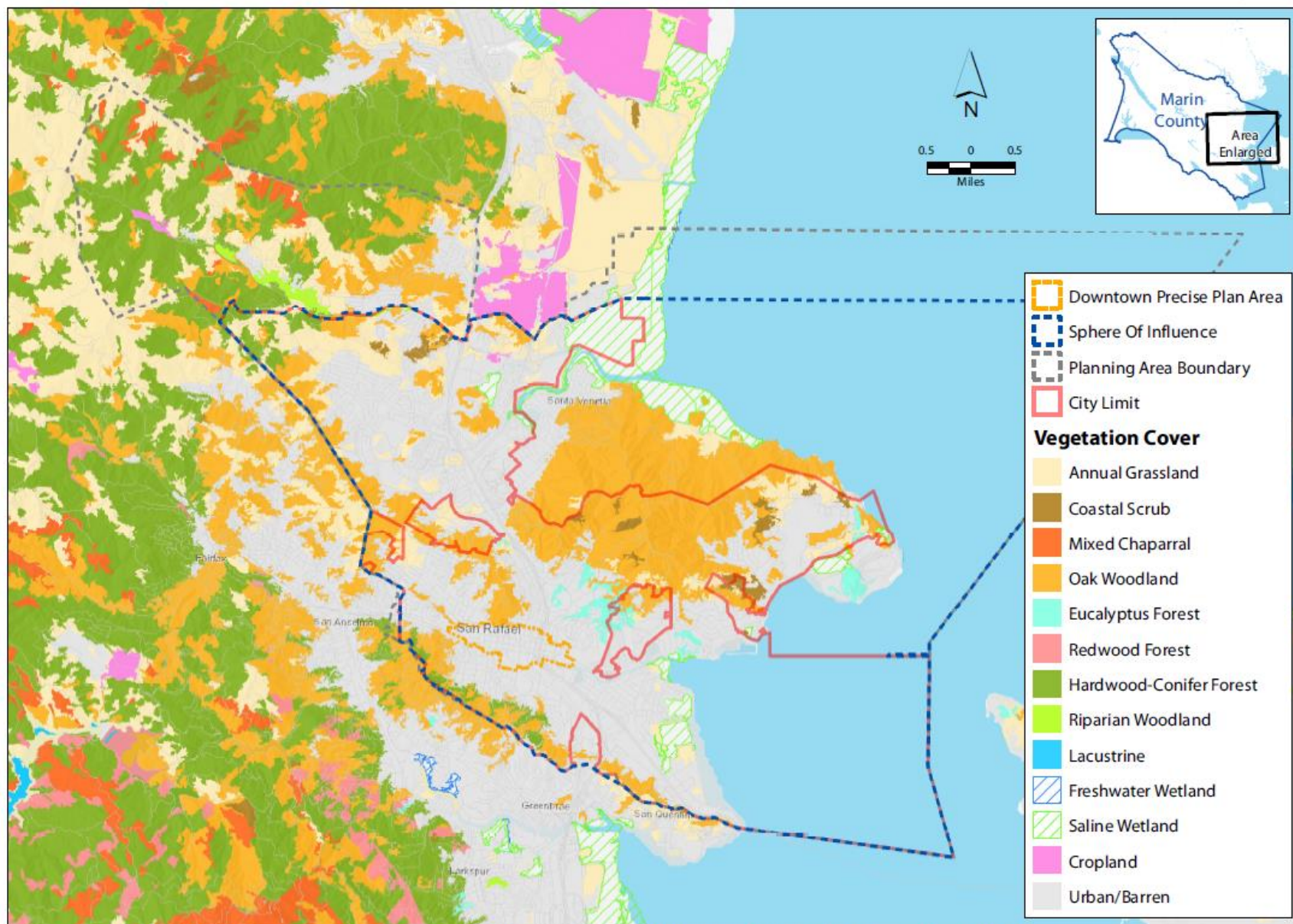
- C-1: Supporting Our Natural Communities
- C-2: Clean Air
- C-3: Clean Water
- C-4: Sustainable Energy Management
- C-5: Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions

As appropriate, narrative text and maps have been included along with the policies and programs to provide context and a better understanding of conditions and issues.

San Rafael's Natural Communities

The San Rafael Planning Area contains a mosaic of urbanized and undeveloped land. Urban uses occupy most of the valleys and some of the former marshlands that once bordered San Francisco Bay. Undeveloped lands primarily consist of woodlands and grasslands, traversed by riparian areas along creeks and drainageways. Marshlands remain along the shoreline of San Pablo Bay and the lower reaches of San Rafael, Gallinas, and Miller Creeks.

Figure 6-1 shows the different vegetative cover types in the Planning Area, based on data from the U.S. Forest Service. This information is also summarized in Table 6-1. Although native vegetation has been substantially altered, the presence of large undeveloped areas and shoreline marshes allow for a diverse range of plant and animal life. Major habitats found in the Planning Area are summarized below.



SOURCES: EVEG from USFS showing CALVEG CWHRTYPE (aggregated); accessed on April 23, 2019; USGS base map by ESRI and NGS. Map produced by www.digitalmappingsolutions.com on 9/5/2019.

Figure 6-1:
Vegetative Cover

Urban Development and Ornamental Landscaping

Urban development occupies 38 percent of the land cover in the San Rafael Planning Area. Most plants in these areas are non-native ornamentals and ground covers, as well as scattered native trees such as coast live oak, valley oak, bay laurel, and coast redwood. Non-native trees such as Monterey pine, American elm, and Eucalyptus occur throughout these areas. Some of the non-native species are considered highly invasive because of their ability to spread and eventually dominate natural areas if left unmanaged.

The diversity of urban wildlife depends on the extent and type of landscaping and open space, as well as the proximity to natural habitat. Trees and shrubs used for landscaping provide nest sites and cover for wildlife adapted to developed areas. In San Rafael, numerous native bird species inhabit urban areas, along with mammals such as deer, racoon, skunk, and coyote.

Forest and Woodlands

Forest and woodlands also occupy 38 percent of the San Rafael Planning Area. This is the dominant cover on San Pedro Mountain and along Southern Heights Ridge. These areas include oak woodland, coniferous forest, and montane forest. Dominant species include coast live oak, California bay laurel, coast redwood, Douglas fir, tan oak, and black oak. Understory varies depending on the amount of sunlight, but may include various ferns, poison oak, sorrel, and other herbaceous species. Highly invasive broom has spread through much of the understory, inhibiting foraging opportunities for wildlife and displacing native shrub and groundcover species. Residential uses are interspersed in some of the woodland areas.

The mature forests and woodlands in the San Rafael Planning Area provide nesting and foraging opportunities for numerous species of birds. They also provide essential food resources for eastern fox squirrels, native grey squirrels, acorn woodpeckers, scrub jay, and other birds. Forests and woodlands are an important habitat type due to their relatively high wildlife habitat value. They continue to be threatened by Sudden Oak Death (SOD), exacerbating fire hazards and altering habitat for woodland species.

Grasslands

Grasslands occupy about 14 percent of the Planning Area, including parts of Big Rock Ridge in Lucas Valley, the margins of Santa Margarita Valley, the lower Gallinas Valley, and many hillside slopes. These areas are generally comprised of introduced grasses and broadleaf species, as grazing has eliminated most of the native grasslands. Remnant native grasslands may still occur in some locations, where their protection is considered a high priority.

Grasslands support a variety of mammals, birds, and reptiles, and provide foraging habitat for raptors. Common species include western fence lizard, gopher snake, grey fox, coyote, striped skunk, gopher snake, and ground squirrel. The rodent, bird, and reptile populations provide foraging opportunities for avian predators such as owls and red-tailed hawks. Many species use the

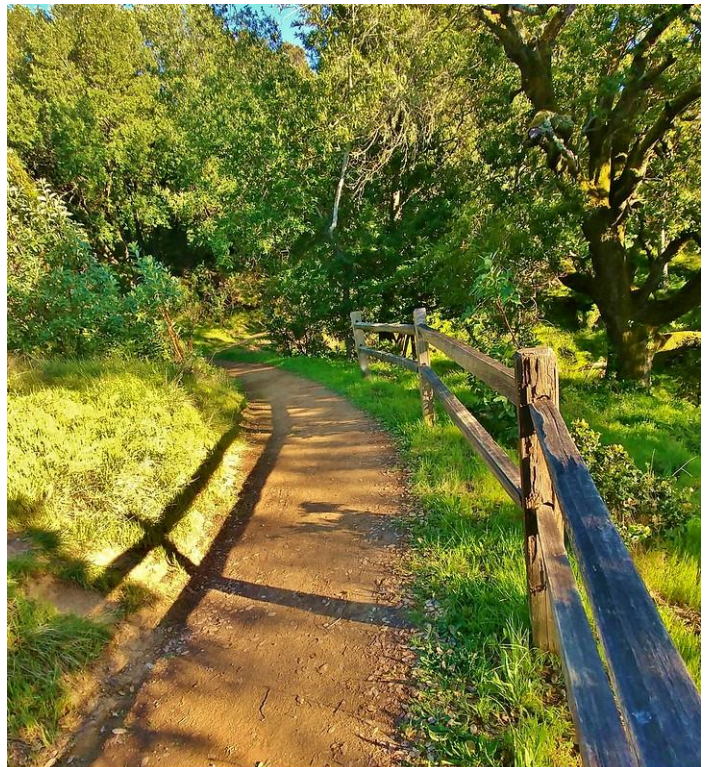


Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

grassland for only part of their habitat requirements, foraging in these areas and seeking cover in nearby tree and scrub areas.

Riparian Woodland and Scrub

Riparian vegetation occurs along Miller Creek, San Rafael Creek, and segments of Gallinas Creek and other drainageways. These areas represent just 107 acres of the Planning Area, but their linear nature and access to water make them particularly important. Dominant cover includes willows, valley oak, coast live oak, buckeye, and bay laurel. Highly invasive understory species have become problematic in these areas, outcompeting and replacing native shrubs and groundcover and threatening their habitat value.

Creek channels serve as movement corridors for many species, which benefit from the protective cover. Common species include black-tailed deer, black-tailed jackrabbit, brush rabbit, and red and grey fox, among others.

Freshwater/Brackish Marsh

Freshwater and brackish marsh occurs along waterbodies and on the edges of tidally-influenced reaches of San Rafael Creek, Gallinas Creek, Miller Creek and tributary drainages. The brackish marshes transition into coastal salt marsh at the mouth of creeks and fringe of the Bay. Dominant plant types vary with salinity, with pickleweed, saltgrass, and bulrush in the brackish areas near the Bay.

Photo Credit: Frank Johnson



These areas have high importance to wildlife and provide a source of drinking water and protective cover. They also serve as nesting areas and movement corridors. Numerous bird species are present, including shorebirds such as egrets and great blue herons. There are also predators such as raccoon, skunk, and coyote. Marsh areas also include aquatic life such as frogs, toads, turtles and fish.

Coastal Salt Marsh, Mudflats and Open Water

Tidal marsh is a highly productive plant community consisting of salt-tolerant plants with moderate to dense cover. Plants at a given location vary depending on their tolerance to inundation and salinity. Lower elevation areas contain pickleweed and saltgrass, while elevated benches contain cordgrass, alkali heath, and gumplant. The coastal salt marsh habitat often occurs adjacent to tidal mudflats that are devoid of vegetation. In San Rafael, coastal marsh occurs near the mouth of Gallinas Creek and the mouth of San Rafael Creek (Tiscornia Marsh).

Tidal marsh, mudflat and open water habitats support a variety of wildlife species specifically adapted to salt-tolerant vegetation and tidal regimes. A majority of the special status species known or expected to occur in the region occur within these areas, including California Ridgway's rail, California black rail, and salt marsh harvest mouse. Tidal marshes also provide foraging habitat for special-status raptors such as white-tailed kite and marsh hawk. The mudflats support a diverse assemblage of benthic macro-invertebrates which in turn attracts large numbers of migrating and wintering shorebirds. These species forage on mudflats as they are exposed by receding tides, often concentrating at the water's edge. Wading birds and ducks also forage in these areas. At high tide, tidal channels also provide important habitat for fish and other aquatic species.

Other Vegetative Cover Types

A number of native and non-native vegetative cover types occur along the margins of the San Rafael Planning Area. Chaparral occupies an estimated 233 acres, primarily in the upper Lucas Valley watershed. Coyote brush and other coastal scrub areas occupy an estimated 195 acres. Stands of non-native eucalyptus occupy an estimated 230 acres and are dominated by blue gum, with a sparse understory of non-native grasses. Colonies of monarch butterfly are known to overwinter in some of these stands, with at least two colonies reported in China Camp State Park. The Planning Area also includes rock outcrops, which provide a unique habitat for wildlife.

Table 6-1: Vegetative Cover in the San Rafael Planning Area

Vegetation Cover/ Habitat Type	San Rafael Sphere of Influence		San Rafael Planning Area	
	Acres	% of Total	Acres	% of Total
Annual grassland	1,323.9	9.0%	2,773.2	13.9%
Coastal scrub	195.5	1.3%	195.5	1.0%
Mixed chaparral	0	0.0%	232.9	1.2%
Oak woodland	4,462.8	30.5%	5,302.4	26.6%
Hardwood-conifer forest	268.0	1.8%	2,295.6	11.5%
Riparian woodland	12.3	0.1%	107.1	0.5%
Lacustrine	0.5	0.0%	0.5	0.0%
Freshwater marsh	0	0.0%	5.1	0.0%
Saline marsh	1060.3	7.2%	1,196.5	6.0%
Eucalyptus	230.8	1.6%	230.8	1.2%
Cropland	12.4	0.1%	40.2	0.2%
Urban/Barren	7,078.8	48.3%	7,548.4	37.9%
TOTAL	14,645.3	100.0%	19,928.3	100.0%

• - Landcover types occupy an estimated 14,645.3 acres of the 26,193 acres of the SOI and 19,928 acres of the 34,586 acres of the Planning Area, with the remaining acreages being unvegetated open waters of the bay.
Source: CALVEG GIS data, USDA Forest Service, 2019.

Goal C-1: Supporting Our Natural Communities

Protect, restore, and enhance San Rafael's environment and natural communities.

San Rafael is defined by natural features such as hillsides, ridgelines, creeks, shorelines, and open water. It includes diverse ecosystems such as woodlands, grasslands, chaparral, wetlands, and riparian areas. These areas provide habitat for interconnected communities of plants and animals, some of which are threatened and endangered. The City is committed to the wellbeing and careful management of its environment. Natural communities must be protected, supported, and sustained into the future.

Protection, restoration and enhancement of damaged habitats is important for the continued health of San Rafael's environment. The City will continue its efforts to manage undesirable invasive species and encourage landscaping with native species and other plants that are compatible with California's dry summer climate. It also encourages protection of creeks, drainageways, and wetlands, recognizing not only the intrinsic value of these areas as natural habitat but also their role in mitigating climate change impacts. The policies and programs below address wetlands, creeks and watersheds, hillsides, plant and animal life, trees, invasive species control, mineral resources, and light pollution.

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas that are periodically or permanently inundated by surface or ground water, and that support vegetation adapted to life in saturated soil. In the San Rafael area, they are typically found near the Bay and along the tidal sections of local creeks. Wetlands are recognized as important features on a regional and national level due to their high value to fish and wildlife, use as storage areas for storm and floodwaters, and groundwater recharge, filtration, and purification functions. They are also fragile natural resources and are susceptible to flooding, erosion, soil-bearing capacity limitations and other hazards.

For many years, wetlands around San Francisco Bay were compromised by landfill, urban development, and agriculture, greatly diminishing their extent. Today they are protected by state and federal laws, and subject to technical standards to confirm their presence or absence on individual sites.

Policy C-1.1: Wetlands Preservation

Require appropriate public and private wetlands preservation, restoration and/or rehabilitation through the regulatory process. Support and promote acquisition of fee title and/or easements from willing property owners.

Program C-1.1A: Wetlands Overlay District. Continue to implement wetlands policy through a Wetlands Overlay zoning district that is based on wetland delineations consistent with US Army Corps of Engineers criteria.

Program C-1.1B: Tiscornia Marsh Restoration. Support restoration plans for Tiscornia Marsh adjacent to Pickleweed Park in the Canal neighborhood. The project will raise and improve a degraded levee to stabilize and potentially restore an eroding tidal marsh, reducing the community's vulnerability to rising tides and flooding.

Tiscornia Marsh Restoration

The 20-acre Tiscornia Marsh is located at the mouth of the San Rafael Canal. A recently funded restoration and sea level rise adaptation project will use dredged sediment to create new habitat and improve an adjacent levee. The project will reopen a diked marsh to tidal action, while also protecting the nearby Canal neighborhood from tidal flooding. Grant funds for the project come from Measure AA, a parcel tax that generates about \$25 million a year to protect and restore San Francisco Bay.



Program C-1.1C: McInnis Marsh Restoration. Support restoration plans for McInnis Marsh, providing improved habitat for protected species, flood protection for McInnis Park golf course, and improved trail connections along the San Pablo Bay Shoreline.

Policy C-1.2: Wetlands and Sea Level Rise

Optimize the role of wetlands in buffering the San Rafael shoreline against the future impacts of sea level rise.

See also Program S-3.6A for a discussion of the sea level rise benefits of horizontal levees

Policy C-1.3: Wetland Protection and Mitigation

In order to protect and preserve valued wetlands, loss of wetlands due to filling shall be avoided, unless it is not possible or practical. Compensatory mitigation for the loss of wetlands shall be required in the event that preservation is not possible or practical due to conditions such as the location, configuration, and size of the wetland.

Program C-1.3A: Compensatory Mitigation Requirements. For permanently impacted wetlands, lost wetland area shall be replaced on-site and in-kind at a minimum ratio of 2:1 (e.g., 2 acres for each acre lost). If on-site mitigation is not possible or practical, off-site mitigation shall be required, preferably in the same drainage basin or a nearby Marin watershed if the same basin is not available, at a minimum replacement ratio of 3:1. Temporarily impacted wetlands may be restored and revegetated to pre-project conditions.

Program C-1.3B: Conditions for Mitigation Waivers. The City may waive the compensatory mitigation requirement on a case by case basis for wetlands restoration projects and for fill of wetlands that are less than 0.1 acres in size, provided that all of the following conditions are met: (1) the wetland is isolated (e.g., it is not within, part of, or directly connected or hydrologically linked by natural flow to a creek, drainageway, wetland, or submerged tidelands); (2) it is demonstrated by an

independent wetland expert that preservation would not result in a functioning, biological resource; (3) the City has determined that filling would result in a more appropriate and desirable site plan for the project; and (4) the City verifies that applicants have received all required permits and complied with all other mitigation requirements from resource agencies with wetland oversight.¹

Program C-1.3C: Revision of Mitigation and Waiver Requirements. *Consider revisions to mitigation requirements and waiver conditions that reflect best practices, sea level rise adaptation needs, and consistency with the requirements used by state and federal agencies and other Bay Area jurisdictions.*

Policy C-1.4: Wetland Creation

Require that any wetlands created to mitigate losses as described in Policy C-1.3 are similar in habitat type and at least equal in functional quality to the wetlands being filled.

Program C-1.4A: Wetland Plans and Monitoring. *Wetland plans shall be prepared by a qualified wetland restoration ecologist in consultation with appropriate federal and state resource agencies. Such plans shall require annual monitoring for a specified period of time to determine mitigation success. Contingency measures to deal with the potential for lack of success should be included in the plan.*

Program C-1.4B: Timing of Wetlands Creation. *Restoration or creation of wetlands should be completed prior to construction of the development. Where construction activities would adversely impact wetland restoration or creation, the restoration or creation may be completed after construction of the development, as determined through development review.*

Program C-1.4C: Mitigation Banking. *Support the creation of wetland mitigation banking sites within the City. This would allow the collection of mitigation fees from multiple projects to be combined to construct or restore larger, more viable wetlands in designated locations rather than constructing small compensatory wetlands on or near each development site. This could include an inventory of priority restoration areas for future projects that may require compensatory off-site mitigation.*

Policy C-1.5: Wetland Setbacks

Maintain a minimum 50-foot development-free setback from wetlands, including, but not limited to, paving or structures. Setbacks of greater than 50 feet may be required on lots of two or more acres as determined through development review. The City may waive this requirement for minor encroachments if it can be demonstrated that the proposed setback adequately protects the functions of the wetland to the maximum extent feasible and will not cause cumulative impacts on functioning wetlands.

See Goal S-3 (and associated policies and programs) in the Safety and Resilience Element regarding sea level rise

¹ US Army Corps of Engineers and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Watersheds and Creeks

The San Rafael Planning Area includes parts of approximately nine watersheds, as shown in Figure 6-2. The largest watersheds are:

- Gallinas Creek.** The Gallinas Creek Watershed encompasses 5.6 square miles and includes two drainage areas—the North Fork and the South Fork. The north fork is the larger of the two and flows from Terra Linda to the South Gallinas Slough near McInnis Park. The South Fork originates in the Los Ranchitos area and San Pedro Ridge and flows through the Civic Center and Santa Venetia areas into the Gallinas Slough. The creek is tidally influenced and partially channelized east of Highway 101.
- San Rafael Creek.** The San Rafael Creek Watershed is located in the southern part of the city and encompasses 11 square miles. The creek originates in the hills above Tamalpais Cemetery and flows through Sun Valley and highly urbanized neighborhoods towards the San Rafael Canal. It enters San Rafael Bay in the vicinity of Pickleweed Park.
- Miller Creek.** The Miller Creek Watershed is located on the northern edge of the Planning Area. It encompasses 12 square miles and flows eastward from the west end of Lucas Valley to the baylands northeast of McInnis Park. The lower watershed flows through narrow, leveed channels into San Pablo Bay.

The three creeks are fed by numerous tributaries, some of which flow within their natural banks and others of which have been routed into culverts, trapezoidal channels, or other modified drainageways. The condition of these creeks and drainageways varies greatly; some support riparian vegetation and wildlife; others are urbanized or even invisible.

San Rafael's creeks are vital to creek health, water infiltration, stormwater pollution attenuation, habitat for wildlife and are to be protected and enhanced. Their restoration can enhance wildlife habitat, reduce flooding, and support the City's sustainability and climate action programs.

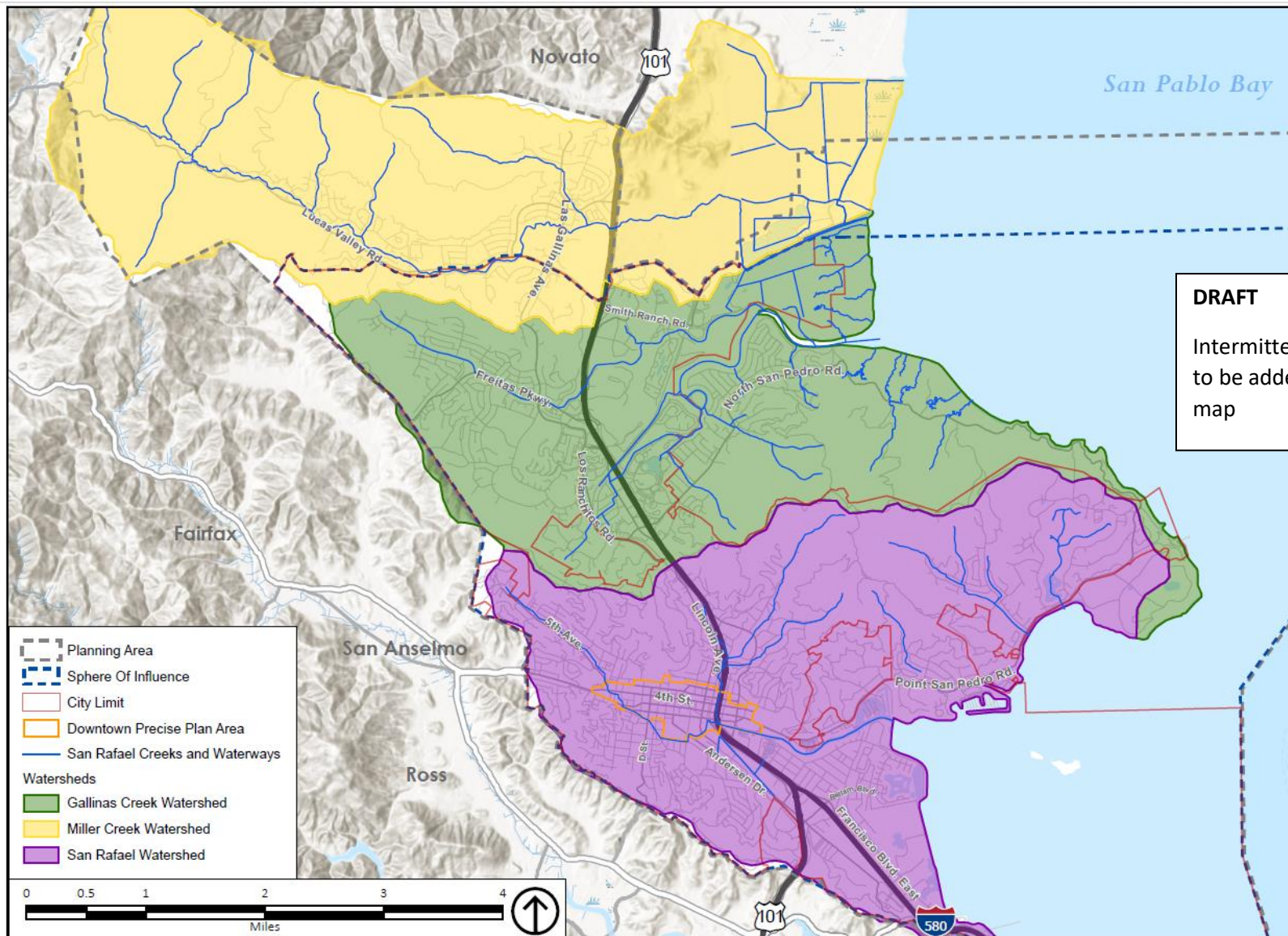


Perennial, Intermittent, or Ephemeral?

Figure 6-2 shows perennial and intermittent streams in the San Rafael Planning Area using data from the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD). **Perennial streams** are well-defined channels that contain water year-round. Generally, there is continuous flow of water, provided in part by groundwater. An **intermittent stream** also flows in a well-defined channel but only contains water for part of the year. The flow is heavily influenced by stormwater runoff. Santa Margarita Creek, pictured above, is considered an intermittent stream by the NHD. (*)

Ephemeral streams flow only during rain events in a typical year. The streambeds are located above the water table and are not fed by groundwater. Runoff from rainfall is the primary water source. Ephemeral streams are too numerous to show on Figure 6-2 but may be viewed using MarinMaps GIS. Vegetation along these watercourses can help reduce erosion, provide shade, and contribute to groundwater recharge.

(*) According to the USGS, the terms “stream” and “creek” are interchangeable. The term “drainageway” is used to define open swales or localized depressions that lack defined banks and transport stormwater to creeks, wetlands, or waterbodies such as the Bay; as well as man-made ditches or channels that drain developed properties.



Source: ESRI 2017, County of Marin, City of San Rafael, 2019

Figure 6-2:
Perennial and Intermittent Creeks

Policy C-1.6: Creek Protection

Protect and conserve creeks as an important part of San Rafael's identity, natural environment, and green infrastructure. Except for specific access points approved per Policy C-1.7 (Public Access to Creeks), development-free setbacks shall be required along perennial and intermittent creeks (as shown on Figure 6-2) to help maintain their function and habitat value. Appropriate erosion control and habitat restoration measures are encouraged within the setbacks, and roadway crossings are permitted.

Program C-1.6A: Creek and Drainageway Setbacks: *Maintain the following setback requirements in the Municipal Code:*

- (a) *A minimum 25-foot development-free setback shall be maintained from the top of creek banks for all new development (including but not limited to paving and structures), except for Miller Creek and its tributaries, where a minimum 50-foot setback shall be maintained. Setbacks up to 100 feet may be required in development projects larger than two acres where development review determines that a wider setback is needed to maintain habitat values, and in areas where high-quality riparian habitat exists. The City may waive the setback requirement for minor encroachments if it can be demonstrated that the proposed setback adequately protects the functions of the creek to the maximum extent feasible and the results are acceptable to appropriate regulatory agencies.*
- (b) *Drainageway Setbacks: Drainageway setbacks shall be established through individual development review, taking into account existing habitat function and values.*

Program C-1.6B: Municipal Code Compliance. *Ensure that the San Rafael Municipal Code is consistent with local, state, and federal regulatory agency requirements for erosion control and natural resource management and is amended as needed when these regulations change. Local public works activities shall comply with the Municipal Code.*

Program C-1.6C: Creek and Drainageway Mapping. *Work collaboratively with local environmental organizations and institutions to prepare updated maps of creeks and drainageways and to evaluate the potential for restoration.*

Policy C-1.7: Public Access to Creeks

Provide pedestrian access to creeks and along creeks where such access will not adversely affect habitat values.

Program C-1.7A: Creek Access on Public Land. *Proactively identify and create access points to creeks on public lands.*

Program C-1.7B: Public Access in Development Along Creeks. *Use the development review process to identify and secure areas appropriate for creek access.*

Policy C-1.8: Creek Education and Awareness

Increase awareness of San Rafael's creeks and their role as green infrastructure supporting local climate resilience and flood protection initiatives.

Program C-1.8A: Publicity. *Use the City's website to publicize information about creek and waterway protection and access. Where appropriate, partner with local schools, conservation and environmental groups, business organizations, and others to increase awareness of the City's creeks and waterways.*

Program C-1.8B: Creek Signage. *Develop attractive signage and/or educational displays identifying local creeks, describing native habitat and history, and reminding visitors of what they can do to protect water quality.*

See also Policy PROS-3.10 on environmental education and Program C-3.6A on removal of plastics from creeks, marshes, and the Bay

Policy C-1.9: Enhancement of Creeks and Drainageways

Conserve or improve the habitat value and hydrologic function of creeks and drainageways so they may serve as wildlife corridors and green infrastructure to improve stormwater management, reduce flooding, and sequester carbon. Require creek enhancement and associated riparian habitat restoration/ creation for projects adjacent to creeks to reduce erosion, maintain storm flows, improve water quality, and improve habitat value where feasible.

Program C-1.9A: Watercourse Protection Regulations. *Maintain watercourse protection regulations in the San Rafael Municipal Code. These regulations should be periodically revisited to ensure that they adequately protect creeks and drainageways. Consider specific measures or guidelines to mitigate the destruction or damage of riparian habitat from roads, development, and other encroachments.*

Program C-1.9B: Creek Restoration. *Encourage and support efforts by neighborhood associations, environmental organizations, and other interested groups to fund creek enhancement, restoration, and daylighting projects, as well as creek clean-ups and ongoing maintenance programs.*

Program C-1.9C: Upper Gallinas Watershed Restoration. *Support implementation of creek restoration projects in the Upper Gallinas Creek Watershed, consistent with the Restoration Opportunities Report prepared in December 2016. It remains a priority of the City to restore the creek by removing the concrete channel, creating a walkway/ bikeway alongside, and planting native trees to provide shade and filter runoff. Pursue grants and other funds, including capital improvement projects and general operating funds, to restore natural creek conditions and native vegetation.*

Program C-1.9D: Restoration of San Rafael, Mahon, and Irwin Creeks. *Pursue opportunities for creek restoration and beautification along San Rafael, Mahon, and Irwin Creeks, building on past efforts supporting biological and ecological restoration, education, and water quality improvements along these waterways.*

See Goal C-3 for additional policies on water quality



Hillsides

Elevation in the Planning Area ranges from sea level to 1,800 feet. Much of the Planning Area consists of steep hillsides. Hillsides have important scenic value and shape the City's identity. There are also landslide and erosion hazards associated with building on steep slopes. The City has adopted a hillside development overlay zoning district to identify hillside areas, and applies special standards and design guidelines in these areas.

Policy C-1.10: Hillside Preservation

Encourage preservation of hillsides, ridgelines, and other open areas that serve as habitat and erosion protection as well as visual backdrops to urban areas.

See the Safety and Resilience Element for policies addressing protection of steep slopes and wildfire prevention and protection actions on hillsides. See the Community Design Element for policies on hillside and ridgeline protection.

Program C-1.10A: Hillside Management and Design Guidelines. *Continue to implement Hillside Design Guidelines as well as management practices that promote ecological health, hazard reduction, and climate change mitigation.*

Plant and Animal Life

Vegetation, fish, and wildlife habitat are essential to San Rafael. As our climate changes and natural hazards increase, the need for preserving the diversity of our plant and animal species becomes even more important. For threatened and endangered species, habitat protection is also required by state and federal law. The City recognizes the need to protect native plants and animals and their habitats before their populations are so low that they must be listed as threatened or endangered. Habitat protection and restoration is also a reflection of San Rafael's ecological, aesthetic and cultural values.

A number of plant and animal species in the San Rafael Planning Area have been designated as "special status species." They are legally protected under the State and/or federal Endangered Species Acts or other regulations that provide special consideration. Research performed as part of San Rafael General Plan 2040 indicated 43 special status plant species and 60 special status animal species that are known to occur or that potentially occur in San Rafael. The text box on Page 6-16 identifies some of the more familiar species but is not an exhaustive list. Many of the species are associated with wetland areas near the Bay or with protected open spaces on the fringes of the Planning Area. The General Plan EIR should be consulted for more comprehensive information on this topic.

Figure 6-3 provides general information about the location of special status species in the Planning Area.

Policy C-1.11: Wildlife Corridors

Preserve and protect areas that function as wildlife corridors, particularly those areas that provide connections permitting wildlife movement between larger natural areas.

Program C-1.11A: Mapping of Wildlife Corridors. Support mapping of wildlife corridors in the Planning Area. Use this data to determine where conservation easements may be appropriate in the event properties within these corridors are subdivided, or when other opportunities arise for securing such easements.

Policy C-1.12: Native or Sensitive Habitats

Protect habitats that are sensitive, rare, declining, unique, or represent a valuable biological resource. Potential impacts to such habitats should be minimized through compliance with applicable laws and regulations, including biological resource surveys, reduction of noise and light impacts, restricted use of toxic pesticides, pollution and trash control, and similar measures.

Program C-1.12A: Non-Native Predators. Support efforts by non-profit conservation groups, state and federal agencies, the Marin Humane Society and other organizations to reduce conflicts between human settlement and native wildlife. This includes protecting the habitat of birds and small mammals from non-native predators and restricting the use of pesticides.

Program C-1.12B: Oak Savanna and Oak Woodland Habitat Protection. Require proposed developments with the potential to impact oak savanna/woodland habitat to either avoid, minimize, or compensate for the loss of such habitat. Avoidance is the preferred measure where feasible. If habitat loss is deemed unavoidable, require that direct and indirect impacts be mitigated through habitat restoration, creation, or enhancement. Mitigation requirements should be based on vegetative mass rather than the number of impacted trees.

See also Policy C-3.6 on the conservation of nearshore waters, including the Canal and San Francisco Bay.

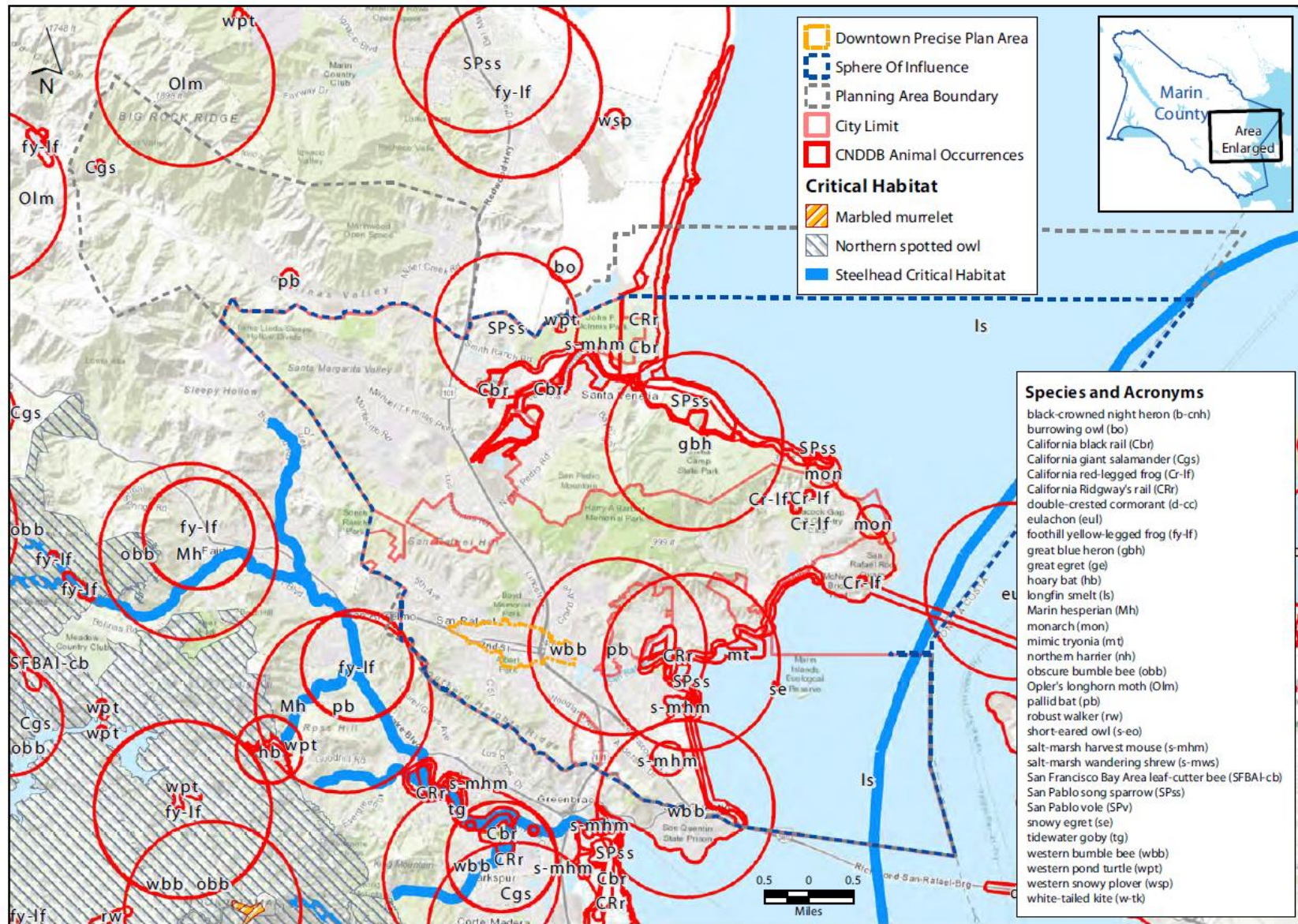


Figure 6-3:

Special Status Species

Special Status Species in the Planning Area

The list below profiles some of the better-known Special Status Species in the San Rafael Planning Area. The General Plan EIR should be consulted for a more comprehensive list.

- **Steelhead–Central California Coast** (Federally Threatened). Steelhead, a type of rainbow trout, migrate from the ocean to freshwater streams to spawn. Miller Creek is known to support a resident steelhead population. The species may be threatened by high water temperature, low rates of streamflow, low levels of dissolved oxygen, low sediment input, and stream obstructions.
- **California Red-Legged Frog** (Federally Threatened). This species occurs in and along freshwater marshes, streams, ponds, and other semi-permanent water sources. Its decline has been attributed to habitat loss and predation. Occurrences have been reported from the Peacock Gap and San Rafael Point in the eastern portion of the Planning Area. Suitable habitat remains in other locations.
- **Western Pond Turtle** (California Species of Special Concern). Western pond turtles occur in a variety of aquatic habitats, including ponds, lakes, marshes, rivers, streams, and canals with aquatic vegetation. This species has been observed at McInnis Park in the northeastern portion of the Planning Area. Other freshwater bodies and streams with deep pools may provide suitable habitat.
- **Northern Spotted Owl** (Federally and State Threatened). Northern spotted owl typically occurs in forest and dense woodland habitat. It typically nests on platforms in large trees and will use abandoned stick nests of other bird species. There are three locations where nests have been observed within or at the boundary of the Planning Area.
- **White-tailed Kite** (California Fully Protected Species). Most white-tailed kites in California occur west of the Sierra Nevada in low-lands and foothills. This species tends to nest in solitary trees and large shrubs located near suitable foraging habitat, such as the grasslands and tidal marshes.
- **Northern Harrier** (California Species of Special Concern). This species is widespread in Northern California and is found in freshwater wetlands, saltmarshes, grasslands, and agricultural fields. Suitable foraging habitat for northern harriers exists in San Rafael's grasslands and tidal marshes.
- **California Black Rail** (Federally Threatened; California Fully Protected Species). In the Bay Area, California black rails primarily inhabit pickleweed marsh areas, but they may also occupy higher marshland zones. California black rails have been detected along Gallinas Creek and the coastal salt marsh habitat in the northeastern portion of the Planning Area.
- **California Ridgway's Rail** (Federally and State Endangered; California Fully Protected Species). This species prefers tidal salt marshes dominated by pickleweed and cordgrass but may also occur in higher marsh areas. California Ridgway's rails have been identified in the tidal marsh along the mouths of Gallinas Creek and San Rafael Creek and may also be present in other tidal marsh areas.
- **Samuels (San Pablo) Song Sparrow** (California Species of Special Concern). This subspecies of sparrow is restricted to the tidal marshes and adjacent uplands around San Pablo Bay. Suitable habitat includes the coastal salt marsh habitats near the mouths of Gallinas and San Rafael Creeks and other stands of tidal marsh and adjacent uplands.
- **Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse** (Federally and State Endangered; California Fully Protected Species). This species is endemic to the tidal salt marshes of San Francisco Bay, primarily in marshes dominated by pickleweed. The mouse has been detected in the coastal salt marshes near the mouth of San Rafael and Gallinas Creeks and in the coastal salt marsh north of McInnis Park.



"Ridgway's Rail" Photo Credit: Bud Gora

Policy C-1.13: Special Status Species

Conserve and protect special status plants and animals, including those listed by State or federal agencies as threatened and/or endangered, those considered to be candidate species for listing by state and federal agencies, and other species that have been assigned special status by the California Native Plant Society and the California Fish and Game Code.

Program C-1.13A: List of Species. Maintain current California Natural Diversity Database digital (GIS) maps and data tables listing threatened, endangered, and special status species in the San Rafael Planning Area.

Program C-1.13B: Surveys. Require that sites be surveyed for the presence or absence of special status species prior to development approval. Such surveys must occur prior to development-related vegetation removal.

Program C-1.13C: Mitigating Impacts on Special Status Species. Require that potential unavoidable impacts to special status species are minimized through design, construction, and project operations. If such measures cannot adequately mitigate impacts, require measures such as on-site set asides, off-site acquisitions (conservation easements, deed restrictions, etc.), and specific restoration efforts that benefit the listed species being impacted.

Program C-1.13D: Steelhead Habitat. Support efforts to restore, preserve or enhance Central California Coast Steelhead habitat in Miller Creek and other creeks.

Policy C-1.14: Control of Invasive Plants

Remove and control undesirable non-native plant species from City-owned open space and road rights-of-way and encourage the removal and control of these species from non-City owned ecologically sensitive or fire-prone areas.

Program C-1.14A: Identification of Desirable and Undesirable Species. Use California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) guidance for desirable and invasive plants in the development review, design review, and public lands management processes. This guidance should ensure that noxious plants are not planted in new development, on rights of way, and on public land; help inform revegetation and replanting programs; and support the management of existing vegetation.

Program C-1.14B: Integrated Pest Management Policy. Maintain and periodically update an Integrated Pest Management Policy (IPMP) that minimizes the application of pesticides in the city and encourages non-toxic methods to control vegetation such as properly timed goat grazing. The IPMP should be modified as needed to reflect changes in regional stormwater control requirements, data on pesticide toxicity, and the feasibility of new and less toxic methods for controlling invasive plants. Changes to the IPMP should be made through a transparent public process and should ensure that the use of any chemicals of concern is publicly noticed.

Program C-1.14C: Removal of Invasive Species. Support partnerships and multi-jurisdictional efforts to remove invasive plant species, reduce fire hazards, and improve habitat on public properties. Use volunteers and non-profit organizations to assist in such efforts and consult with the California Native Plant Society and similar organizations to optimize results, avoid the removal of desirable plants, and replant with appropriate plants before invasive species return. Funding from sources such as Measure A, state and regional wildfire prevention funds, utility funds, and other conservation program funds should be pursued to support these efforts.

[insert text box on Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority public education program on ecologically sound vegetation management—per Bill Carney comments]

Program C-1.14D: Wildfire Action Plan Implementation. Implement the provisions of San Rafael's Wildfire Action Plan (2020) relating to the control of invasive plants, including further limiting the sale or planting of highly flammable non-native plants in the city, supporting volunteer activities to remove Scotch and French broom, revising standards for Eucalyptus, providing fuel breaks on public property, and educating the public on fire-safe landscaping.

Policy C-1.15: Landscaping with Appropriate Naturalized Plant Species

Encourage landscaping with native and compatible non-native plant species that are appropriate for the dry summer climate of the Bay Area, with an emphasis on species determined to be drought-resistant. Diversity of plant species is a priority for habitat resilience.

Program C-1.15A: Education on Desirable Plant Species. Leverage the educational and website materials on "water-wise" plants developed by the Marin Municipal Water District and fire-prone plants from FireSafe Marin as resources for San Rafael property owners. The City should also create Resilient Landscape Templates (RLTs) that offer suggestions for homeowners to achieve beautiful, fire-resistant, drought tolerant landscaping.

Policy C-1.16: Urban Forestry

Protect, maintain, and expand San Rafael's tree canopy. Trees create shade, reduce energy costs, absorb runoff, support wildlife, create natural beauty, and absorb carbon, making them an essential and valued part of the city's landscape and strategy to address global climate change. Tree planting and preservation should be coordinated with programs to reduce fire hazards and ensure public safety, resulting in a community that is both green and fire-safe.

Program C-1.16A: Increasing the Tree Canopy. Implement measures to increase the tree canopy, as outlined in the City's Climate Change Action Plan. These measures include:

- a) tree planting on city-owned land
- b) reviewing parking lot landscaping standards to maximize tree cover
- c) minimizing tree removal
- d) controlling invasive species that threaten the health of the urban forest
- e) integrating trees and natural features into the design of development projects
- f) encouraging trees on private property
- g) increasing the diversity of trees to increase habitat value and resilience.

Program C-1.16B: Tree City USA. Maintain San Rafael's status as a "Tree City USA" community by following best practices in urban forestry management and regularly applying for recertification.

Program C-1.16C: Tree Preservation. Consider ordinances and standards that limit the removal of trees of a certain size and require replacement when trees must be removed.

See Program CDP-3.5A for additional guidance on street trees, including a proposed Street Tree Master Plan

Policy C-1.17: Tree Management

Encourage the preservation of healthy, mature trees when development and/or construction is proposed. Site plans should indicate the location of existing trees and include measures to protect them where feasible.



Mineral Resources

The San Rafael Rock Quarry is the only mineral resource located in the San Rafael Area identified as having local, regional, or State significance by the California Division of Mines and Geology. The quarry has been in operation for over 100 years and is in the process of applying to extend its operating permit through 2044. Additional policies on Quarry operations and potential future uses may be found in the Neighborhoods Element at Policy NH-5.6.

Policy C-1.18: Mineral Resource Management

Work with the County of Marin to permit the continued use of property in the San Rafael sphere of influence for mineral resource extraction, subject to permitting procedures and mitigation requirements that reduce potential adverse impacts on the natural environment and surrounding uses.

Dark Skies

The intent of the dark sky policy below is to reduce light pollution and ensure that the potential adverse effects of lighting on night skies is considered in the future. The excessive or inappropriate use of artificial light can have serious environmental consequences for humans, wildlife, and our climate.

Policy C-1.19: Light Pollution

Reduce light pollution and other adverse effects associated with night lighting from streets and urban uses.

Program C-1.19A: Dark Sky Ordinance. *Adopt a dark sky ordinance, including lighting standards and enforcement provisions that reduce light pollution. In the interim, refer to guidelines from the International Dark Sky Association during the review of major projects involving night lighting.*

See also Goal CDP-1 for additional policies on protecting natural features, hillsides, ridgelines, and bayfront areas, and the visual quality of San Rafael's environment and landscapes.



Photo Credit: Florian Kainz (Sept 9, 2020)

Air Quality

Goal C-2: Clean Air

Reduce air pollution to improve environmental quality and protect public health.

San Rafael will work collaboratively with jurisdictions throughout the Bay Area to achieve and maintain state and federal clean air standards. While air quality is a regional issue, the City will do its part to reduce air pollution at the local level and create a healthful environment for all San Rafael residents.

San Rafael is part of an air basin that surrounds San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, touching all nine Bay Area counties. Air quality in the region is influenced by topography, meteorology, and climate, as well as the presence of local pollution sources. In San Rafael, the city's proximity to the Golden Gate moderates the climate and air quality. During warm weather, the daytime flow of marine air is sometimes capped by a dome of warm air that acts as a lid over the region. The result can be unhealthy levels of smog. A different type of inversion occurs in the winter as cool air pools in low elevations while the air aloft remains warm. During recent years, late summer/ early fall wildfire smoke has been a serious and persistent air quality issue throughout the region.

Air quality is subject to standards aimed at protecting public health and reducing the economic and environmental costs of air pollution. The federal Clean Air Act established maximum safe concentrations for common pollutants such as carbon monoxide (CO), ozone (O₃), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), lead (Pb), and suspended particulate matter (PM). The text box on the next page provides an overview of these pollutants. In California, air quality is also subject to the California Clean Air Act and the oversight of the California Air Resources Board. The State rules are generally more stringent than national rules and include guidelines for locating sensitive uses near pollutant sources such as freeways.

Most of the responsibility for regulating emissions has been delegated to regional air districts. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) regulates both stationary sources such as smokestacks and indirect sources such as traffic from new development. BAAQMD also is responsible for air quality monitoring and enforcement.

Air basins that are not in compliance with State and federal standards are classified as “non-attainment” areas for those pollutants and are required to adopt Air Quality Management Plans (AQMP). These plans typically focus on reducing emissions from transportation, which is the biggest source of air pollution in the Bay Area. Internal combustion engines contribute carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, and hydrocarbons, affecting both our air and our water.

The Bay Area is considered to be a nonattainment area for State and federal ozone (O₃) standards, State and federal PM_{2.5} standards, and the State coarse particulate (PM₁₀) standard. The 2017 Clean Air Plan provides the framework for specific programs to comply with the established standards. It includes strategies to reduce ozone, particulates, and toxic air contaminants, including emission control measures.

BAAQMD maintains 24 permanent monitoring stations around the Bay Area. One of these stations is in San Rafael, allowing existing and historical local air quality levels to be well documented. The data show violations of the State and federal ozone standards and federal fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) standard.

Major Air Pollutants of Concern

- **Ozone** is formed by photochemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen and reactive organic gases. It is a pungent, colorless gas that typically peaks in the summer and early fall months. Elevated ozone concentrations result in reduced lung function, with particularly acute risks for the elderly, children, and those with respiratory conditions.
- **Carbon monoxide (CO)** is formed by the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, with motor vehicles accounting for nearly all emissions. It is a colorless, odorless gas that can cause dizziness, fatigue, and impairments to the central nervous system. It can be fatal at high levels of exposure.
- **Nitrogen dioxide** is a reddish-brown gas formed from fuel combustion under high temperature or pressure. It is a component of smog and contributes to pollution problems such as poor visibility, decreased lung function, and acid rain.
- **Sulfur dioxide** is a colorless, irritating gas formed primarily from incomplete combustion of fuels containing sulfur. It irritates the respiratory tract, and can injure lung tissue when combined with fine particulate matter.
- **Particulate matter** is the term used for a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air. Particles up to 10 microns in diameter are referred to as PM₁₀, while fine particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter are called PM_{2.5}. Particulates can be directly emitted through fuel combustion, or they may be formed by blowing soil, smoke, chemical reactions, deteriorating tires, and other sources. Particulates can transport carcinogens and other toxic compounds, reduce lung function and aggravate respiratory and cardio-vascular diseases.
- **Toxic Air Contaminants (TACs)** refer to a group of pollutants that are harmful in small quantities, such as benzene, formaldehyde, and hydrogen sulfide. Because diesel fuel engines are a potential source, new development near freeways may require filtration systems to reduce potential exposure.

One approach to reducing air pollution is to shift to cleaner fuels and more fuel-efficient vehicles. A complementary approach is to encourage land use and transportation patterns that are less dependent on automobiles. Adopting policies that enable residents to live closer to work—or work closer to home—can reduce total vehicle miles traveled, which can also have a positive air quality impact. Air quality strategies also address other potential sources of pollution, including construction and demolition activities, quarry operations, and the use of paints and solvents.

Policy C-2.1: State and Federal Air Quality Standards

Continue to comply with state and federal air quality standards.

Program C-2.1A: Cooperation with Other Agencies. *Work with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and other agencies to ensure compliance with air quality regulations and proactively address air quality issues.*

Policy C-2.2: Land Use Compatibility and Building Standards

Consider air quality conditions and the potential for adverse health impacts when making land use and development decisions. Buffering, landscaping, setback standards, filters, insulation and sealing, home HVAC measures, and similar measures should be used to minimize future health hazards.

Program C-2.2A: Protection of Sensitive Receptors. *Use the development review process to require adequate buffering when a sensitive receptor (a use with occupants sensitive to the effects of air pollutants, such as children and the elderly) is proposed near an existing source of toxic contaminants or odors. For proposed sensitive receptors within 500 feet of Highway 101 or Interstate 580, an analysis of mobile source toxic air contaminant health risks should be performed. The analysis should evaluate the adequacy of the setback from the highway and, if necessary, identify design mitigation measures and building standards to reduce health risks to acceptable levels. Mitigation standards and requirements should be periodically updated as air quality conditions and pollution control technology change.*

Program C-2.2B: New Sources of Air Pollution. *Use the development review process to ensure that potential new local sources of air pollution or odors provide adequate buffering and other measures necessary to comply with health standards.*

See also Goal EDI-2 for additional policies and programs on reducing air pollution exposure. See the Noise Element for additional policies on reducing exposure to transportation noise sources.

Policy C-2.3: Improving Air Quality Through Land Use and Transportation Choices

Recognize the air quality benefits of reducing dependency on gasoline-powered vehicles. Implement land use and transportation policies, supportable by objective data, to reduce the number and length of car trips, improve alternatives to driving, and support the shift to electric and cleaner-fuel vehicles.

Program C-2.3A: Air Pollution Reduction Measures. *Implement air pollution reduction measures as recommended by BAAQMD's Clean Air Plan and supporting documents to address local sources of air pollution in community planning. This should include Transportation Control Measures (TCM) and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs to reduce emissions associated with diesel and gasoline-powered vehicles.*

See the Mobility Element for additional policies and programs to reduce emissions

Photo Credit: Florian Kainz



Wildfire Smoke

As California experiences more frequent and catastrophic wildfires, wildfire smoke has become an ongoing health threat. The principal hazard is inhalation of particulate matter. Effects can range from eye and respiratory tract irritation to more serious effects, including reduced lung function, pulmonary inflammation, bronchitis, exacerbation of asthma and other lung diseases, cardiovascular events, and even premature death. Strategies to reduce exposure involve staying indoors, limiting physical activity, and using air filtration systems. Not all households have the resources to shelter in place, making it important to also have “clean air” shelters that provide relief.

Policy C-2.4: Particulate Matter Pollution Reduction

Promote the reduction of particulate matter from roads, parking lots, construction sites, agricultural lands, wildfires, and other sources.

Program C-2.4A: Particulate Matter Exposure. Through development review, require that Best Available Control Technology (BACT) measures (such as setbacks, landscaping, paving, soil and dust management, and parking lot street sweeping) are used to protect sensitive receptors from particulate matter. This should include control of construction-related dust and truck emissions as well as long-term impacts associated with project operations. Where appropriate, health risk assessments may be required to evaluate risks and determine appropriate mitigation measures.

Program C-2.4B: Wildfire Smoke. Support efforts to reduce health hazards from wildfire smoke, such as limits on outdoor activities, access to respirators and air filtration systems, access to clean air refuge centers, and public education.

Program C-2.4C: Wood-Burning Stoves and Fireplaces. Regulate wood-burning stoves and fireplaces to reduce particulate pollution.

See also Policy C-1.16 regarding the role of trees in enhancing air quality and promoting health

Policy C-2.5: Indoor Air Pollutants

Reduce exposure to indoor air pollutants such as mold, lead, and asbestos through the application of state building standards, code enforcement activities, education, and remediation measures.

Policy C-2.6: Education and Outreach

Support public education regarding air pollution prevention and mitigation.

Program C-2.6A: Air Quality Education Programs. Actively participate in the air quality education programs of the BAAQMD. Use social media and other means of outreach to alert residents of Spare the Air days and associated recommendations.

Program C-2.6B: Equipment and Generators. Encourage the use of non-gasoline powered leaf blowers and other yard maintenance equipment, as well as clean-powered generators.

See also Policy LU-1.3 on transit-oriented development

Water Quality

Goal C-3: Clean Water

Improve water quality by reducing pollution from urban runoff and other sources, restoring creeks and natural hydrologic features, and conserving water resources.

Water is vital to sustain life. San Rafael will preserve the quality of its surface and groundwater resources by managing urban runoff, implementing pollution controls, supporting public education and awareness, and working with partner agencies to meet state and federal water quality standards. The City will also actively work to reduce overall water demand, particularly as the region is challenged by drought and the impacts of climate change.

Water has always been a precious resource in California. It must be conserved to meet day-to-day needs, and it must be carefully managed to reduce water pollution and sustain life and environmental health.

Potable water, or drinking water, is provided by the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD). MMWD relies on sources within Marin County and water imported from the Russian River for domestic and commercial consumption, as well as for fire protection and irrigation of landscaping. Reuse and conservation of water helps provide a reliable source and reduces the need and cost of securing out-of-area supplies. Examples of conservation measures include low-flow toilets and showerheads, irrigation system timers and monitors, and water-efficient dishwashers and washing machines. Wastewater also can be recycled or “reclaimed” for use in irrigation, car washes, industry, and even domestic consumption.

Climate change makes it more imperative than ever to conserve water and explore more sustainable water sources. In 2011, San Rafael adopted water-efficient landscaping standards, with enforcement and monitoring responsibilities assigned to MMWD. MMWD also provides education and programming to encourage more efficient water use and reduce waste. This includes support for rainwater collection systems and allowances for graywater systems that recapture water from sinks, showers, tubs, and washing machines for other uses.

Effective water management also requires consideration of our groundwater basins. Groundwater use is currently limited to small domestic wells. While groundwater is not currently or planned to be used for municipal supply, it remains important to monitor and protect this resource. Groundwater is susceptible to saltwater intrusion, contamination from leaking underground tanks, and other hazards that could potentially impact surface waters.

Most of the water-related policies and programs below focus on reducing pollution from “non-point” sources of pollution, sometimes referred to as urban runoff. While “point” sources of pollution such as wastewater treatment plants have been regulated for many decades, “non-point” sources are more diffuse and require special measures. Rainfall can transport oil and grease from parking lots into local streams, pesticides and animal waste from our yards into storm drains, and roadside trash into the Bay. These materials can obstruct water flow, raise water temperatures, and kill aquatic species.

The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board has identified San Rafael Creek as an impaired waterway due to Diazinon (an insecticide). San Francisco Bay has also been impaired by a number of chemicals and compounds, including mercury and PCBs. Once a waterbody is listed as impaired, states are required to develop thresholds for the pollutants causing impairment, as well as plans for restoring acceptable water quality standards.

San Rafael is a member of the Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (MCSTOPPP), which was created in 1993 to prevent stormwater pollution, protect water quality in creeks and wetlands, preserve the beneficial uses of local waterways, and support compliance with state and federal water quality regulations. Their programs encourage education, monitoring, local permitting (including erosion and sediment control plans), and elimination of illegal discharges. At the local level, the City supports best practices to reduce water pollution, including on-site retention of stormwater, bio-retention facilities, permeable pavement use, local creek clean-up programs, street sweeping, and similar measures.

Policy C-3.1: Water Quality Standards

Continue to comply with local, state and federal water quality standards.

Program C-3.2A: Interagency Coordination. *Coordinate with the local, state, and federal agencies responsible for permitting discharges to San Rafael's creeks and surface waters, monitoring water quality, and enforcing adopted water quality standards and laws.*

See also Policy CSI-4.9 on wastewater treatment

Policy C-3.2: Reduce Pollution from Urban Runoff

Require Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce pollutants discharged to storm drains and waterways. Typical BMPs include reducing impervious surface coverage, requiring site plans that minimize grading and disturbance of creeks and natural drainage patterns, and using vegetation and bioswales to absorb and filter runoff.

Program C-3.2A: Countywide Stormwater Program. *Continue to participate in the countywide stormwater pollution prevention program and comply with its performance standards.*

Program C-3.2B: Reducing Pollutants in Runoff. *Continue to reduce the discharge of harmful materials to the storm drainage system through inspections, enforcement programs, reduced use of toxic materials, and public education.*

Program C-3.2C: Construction Impacts. *Continue to incorporate measures for stormwater runoff control, management, and inspections in construction projects and require contractors to comply with accepted pollution prevention planning practices. Provisions for post-construction stormwater management also should be included.*

Program C-3.2D: System Improvements. *Improve storm drainage performance through regular maintenance and clean-out of catch basins, a City street sweeping program, and prioritizing Trash Reduction Implementation Plan measures, including installation of trash capture devices, . When existing drainage lines are replaced, design changes should be made as needed to increase capacity to handle intensifying storms and expected sea level rise impacts.*

Program C-3.2E: Pesticide and Fertilizer Management. *On City property, reduce or eliminate the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers. Ensure that the application of pesticides follows all applicable rules and regulations and is performed through a transparent process in which the public receives early notification.*

See also Program C-1.14B on Integrated Pest Management

Program C-3.2F: Monitoring. Support ongoing water quality testing in San Rafael's creeks and waterways to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and determine where additional pollution control measures may be needed.

Policy C-3.3: Low Impact Development

Encourage construction and design methods that retain stormwater on-site and reduce runoff to storm drains and creeks.

Program C-3.3A: Development Review. Provide guidance to developers, contractors and builders on the use of rain gardens, bioswales and bioretention facilities, permeable pavers, grass parking lots, and other measures to absorb stormwater and reduce runoff rates and volumes.

Program C-3.3B: Non-Traditional Gardens. Evaluate best practices in the use of roof gardens, vertical gardens/ green walls, pollinator gardens and other measures that increase the City's capacity to sequester carbon, plant trees, and enhance environmental quality. Encourage the incorporation of such features in new development.

See also Safety and Resilience Element Program S-1.9C on erosion control

Policy C-3.4: Green Streets

Design streets and infrastructure so they are more compatible with the natural environment, mitigate urban heat island effects, and have fewer negative impacts on air and water quality, flooding, climate, and natural habitat.

Program C-3.4A: Green Streets Planning. Develop a Green Streets Plan that includes policy guidance, tools, analytics, and funding mechanisms to create more sustainably designed street and storm drainage systems. Street and drainage system improvements should support City conservation and climate change goals.

Program C-3.4B: Funding. Identify and apply for grants and federal, state, and regional funds to upgrade stormwater facilities, rehabilitate roads, and implement other Green Streets initiatives.

See the Infrastructure Element for additional policies and programs on green infrastructure



Reducing Trash in Our Waterways

San Rafael is implementing a number of programs to reduce trash in local waterways. These include the state-mandated ban on single use (plastic) bags and a local ban on Styrofoam containers for retail food vendors. In 2017, the City launched "Ask First," a pilot program designed to reduce unnecessary waste restaurants. Participating businesses simply ask customers if they would like utensils and napkins before including them with an order.

Policy C-3.5: Groundwater Protection

Protect San Rafael's groundwater from the adverse effects of urban uses and impacts from sea level rise. Encourage opportunities for groundwater recharge to reduce subsidence and water loss, and support water-dependent ecosystems.

Program C-3.5A: Underground Tank Remediation

Continue efforts to remediate underground storage tanks and related groundwater hazards. Avoid siting new tanks in areas where they may pose hazards, including areas prone to sea level rise.

Policy C-3.6: Nearshore Waters

Ensure the protection of Canal and Bay water quality from the potential adverse effects of boats, live-aboards, harbors, and other marine facilities and activities.

Program C-3.6A: Water Quality Improvements. *Collaborate with the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards, and other agencies to support water quality improvement efforts and the removal of plastics and other trash from the Canal and Bay. Seek funding from organizations such as the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority for projects that reduce urban runoff.*

Program C-3.6B Boat Sanitation and Enforcement. *Require consistent enforcement and inspection of sanitation facilities in boats berthed in the San Rafael Canal and elsewhere in Bay waters within the City limits.*

Program C-3.6C: Sewage Pump Out Facilities. *Support marina owners in providing on-site sewage pump-out facilities. Require marinas to install such facilities when improvements are made.*

Program C-3.6D: Education of Boaters. *Educate boaters about good sanitation practices and measures to reduce invasive species with the potential to harm marine and freshwater life.*

Policy C-3.7: Education and Outreach

Promote greater public awareness of the causes and effects of water pollution and how to reduce it.

Program C-3.7A: Stenciling of Storm Drains. *Continue to stencil storm drains and use other forms of signage and art so that people understand the consequences of pollutant runoff and its impacts on the Bay.*

Program C-3.7B Outreach. *Support and participate in efforts by the Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program to raise awareness of the effects of water pollution and ways the public can help improve water quality.*

Program C-3.8A: Water Conservation Programs. Work with Marin Municipal Water District and other organizations to promote water conservation programs and incentives and ensure compliance with state and MMWD regulations, including the provisions of the Urban Water Management Plan (see Policy CSI-4.8 for additional guidance).

Program C-3.8B: Public Education. Continue and expand programs to educate residents and businesses about the benefits of water conservation and requirements for plumbing fixtures and landscaping.

Program C-3.8C: Reclaimed Water Use. Support the extension of recycled water distribution infrastructure by Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary and MMWD, along with programs to make the use of recycled water more feasible (see Policy CSI-4.12 for additional guidance).

Program C-3.8D: Graywater and Rainwater. Encourage the installation of graywater and rainwater collection systems. Explore revisions to building codes that would facilitate such projects where obstacles currently exist.

Program C-3.8E: Reducing Municipal Water Use. Reduce water use for municipal operations through water-efficient landscaping, maintenance of irrigation equipment, replacement of inefficient plumbing fixtures, and using recycled water where available and practical.

Policy C-3.9: Water-Efficient Landscaping

Encourage the use of vegetation and water-efficient landscaping that is naturalized to the San Francisco Bay region and compatible with fire-prevention and climate resilience goals.

Program C-3.9A: Demonstration Gardens. Maintain the Falkirk demonstration gardens illustrating xeriscaping principles and drought-tolerant plant materials.

See also Policy C-1.15 on landscaping



Falkirk Demonstration Garden, San Rafael

Climate Change

The global mean temperature of our planet is warming at a rate that cannot be explained by natural causes alone. Human activities—especially deforestation and fossil fuel combustion—are directly altering the chemical composition of the atmosphere. In the past, gradual changes in temperature changed the distribution of species over long periods of time. These changes have accelerated to the point that they are occurring not in geologic time frames but in a human lifetime.

In California, statewide average temperatures have increased by 2 degrees since the early 20th Century. The state has seen warmer winters and springs, decreases in mountain snow accumulations, earlier snowmelt, earlier spring flower blooms, and less precipitation overall. By 2100, average temperatures could increase by up to 8.8 degrees depending on greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies.

The environmental consequences of a warming planet will depend on the way we respond in the coming decades. Even if immediate actions are taken, some impacts are now considered unavoidable. Among them are a continued decline in water resources, higher wildfire risks, increased sea level rise, more extreme heat events and more severe storms. These changes could affect food production, energy pricing and demand, public health, and the future of many cities and towns.

In the context of the General Plan, climate-related policies fall into two general categories: mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation policies address the root causes of climate change. These policies focus on the ways San Rafael can reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which are the pollutants that cause climate change. Adaptation policies address the effects of climate change. These policies focus on ways to make the city more resilient and better prepared to address sea level rise, wildfires, and other impacts. Adaptation policies are principally in the Safety and Resilience Element, but also appear in other elements such as Land Use and Mobility.

Climate Change and Sustainability

Climate change policies are closely aligned with the concept of sustainability. The former is focused on reducing greenhouse gases, while the latter is focused on providing stewardship of shared natural resources. Sustainability is defined as meeting the community's present needs without compromising its ability to do the same for future generations. It is based on three foundational pillars:

- Living harmoniously with the environment—protecting, restoring, managing, and conserving our land, water, air, and biological resources.
- An economy that meets the needs of its residents, with environmentally responsible businesses that have local roots, give back to their communities, and create value for everyone
- Achieving social equity by providing access to services, transportation, education, jobs, housing, and recreation to all residents, creating a just and fair society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

Strategies to live and grow more sustainability are complementary with those addressing climate. Both strive to conserve non-renewable resources and reduce waste. Both involve a decision-making process that looks at the long-term consequences of our actions. Both recognize that living in harmony with the environment also has social and economic dimensions. For example, a healthy economy may provide many jobs, but jobs filled by employees who commute to work alone from outlying areas creates negative consequences for the environment and society in the form of increased fuel consumption, traffic congestion, and degradation of air quality.

Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP)

In 2006, California legislators signed into law AB32 and SB375, complementary plans to reduce GHG emissions to 1990 levels from ‘business-as-usual’ levels by 2020, a roughly 30% overall reduction. These targets are supplemented by Executive Orders from the Governor’s Office in 2005 and 2015, including reducing GHG emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050 (S-3-05) and 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 (B-30-15).

Recognizing the magnitude of these goals and the importance of local action to achieve them, the City of San Rafael began studying GHG emission sources in 2008. Three major GHG contributors were identified—transportation, buildings, and waste disposal. In 2009, the City adopted its first Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP). It included the ambitious target of reducing GHG emissions 25% from 2005 levels by 2020, exceeding the target set by the state. San Rafael met this target and implemented 40 of the 48 measures in the 2009 CCAP.

The CCAP was updated in 2019 to move the horizon to 2030 and update targets for the coming decade. The Plan includes a variety of regulatory, incentive-based, and voluntary strategies, some of which are already in place and others of which are new. State actions—particularly light and heavy-duty vehicle regulations and new energy-efficiency construction standards—will have a substantial impact on future emissions. Local strategies will supplement these actions, resulting in a preliminary estimate of a 42 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 relative to a 1990 baseline. Local actions represent more than half of the anticipated reduction.

Implementing the CCAP is a dynamic process, involving regular monitoring, objective review, community input, and collaboration. The City has developed a set of indicators that can be tracked year over year to determine how successful its efforts are. The use of easily understood, realistic, measurable indicators is essential to ensure that climate-related programs are achieving their intended outcomes, and to make adjustments over time. The 2019 CCAP includes estimates of the metric tons of greenhouse gases that will be removed from the atmosphere if each measure in the Plan is carried out. As indicated in Table 6-2, local strategies are organized in eight categories, which collectively will reduce emissions by nearly 100,000 metric tons of greenhouse gases a year by 2030.

Drawdown: Marin is a countywide community campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for climate change impacts. The effort is aligned with Project Drawdown, a global research organization that identifies reviews, and analyzes the most viable solutions to climate change. Drawdown: Marin is working to reduce—or “draw down”—carbon emissions by designing and implementing solutions in six focus areas:

- Renewable Energy
- Transportation
- Buildings + Infrastructure
- Carbon Sequestration
- Local Food + Food Waste
- Climate Resilient Communities

A Drawdown: Marin Strategic Plan includes 29 local climate change solutions, including seven identified for immediate implementation. These include a campaign promoting zero-emission vehicles, development of community resilience hubs in the Canal area, a Resilient Neighborhoods program, and others.



Table 6-2: Impact of Local Emission Reduction Strategies

Strategy Category	GHG Reductions by 2030 (MTCO ₂ e)*	% of Reductions
Low Carbon Transportation	37,030	38%
Energy Efficiency	18,280	19%
Renewable Energy	31,925	33%
Waste Reduction	10,025	10%
Water Conservation	830	1%
Sequestration and Adaptation	n/a	n/a
Community Engagement	n/a	n/a
Implementation and Monitoring	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	98,085	100.0%

* - Metric Tons of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent. This is used to measure the amount of GHGs in terms an equivalent amount of CO₂ that would cause the same amount of warming.

Source: 2019 Climate Change Action Plan, City of San Rafael

Policies under Goals C-4 and C-5 address different aspects of San Rafael’s Climate Action strategy. Goal C-4 specifically relates to energy conservation and the use of renewable energy resources. Energy-related measures account for roughly half of the emission reduction to be accomplished through local climate action strategies. Goal C-4 also considers the other environmental benefits associated with reduced dependence on fossil fuels, and the potential economic and social benefits to residents and businesses.

Goal C-5 looks more broadly at climate action planning in San Rafael, providing a framework for implementation of the CCAP.



Photo Credit: Fabrice Florin

Goal C-4: Sustainable Energy Management

Use energy in a way that protects the environment, addresses climate change, and conserves natural resources.

San Rafael will use energy resources sustainably by shifting to renewable energy sources and reducing demand. Energy will also be conserved through the ways we live, work, build, and travel.

Even before the link to climate change was widely recognized, San Rafael encouraged more efficient use of energy resources. Fossil fuels like oil and gas are a finite resource, and their extraction, transport, and combustion has had significant impacts on our environment. Energy shortages in the 1970s and 80s impacted the national and global economies and changed the way we view transportation, construction, heating, and cooling. Energy reliability continues to be an issue today, as we face power shutoffs, rolling blackouts, and unpredictable fuel costs. There continues to be a need for greater energy independence and self-sufficiency.

Increasing the efficiency of buildings is often the most cost-effective and practical approach to conserving energy and reducing related emissions. Basic upgrades such as adding insulation and sealing heating ducts can reduce energy consumption by 20 percent. A variety of measures such as high-efficiency heating and air conditioning, replacing windows and light bulbs, programmable timers, and many more, are available. The City participates in programs that help lower income households cover these costs, since they may be expensive.

In new construction, a variety of building code requirements, generally referred to as “green building” measures, result in increased energy efficiency (see text box on Title 24). The State’s goals are to have all new residential construction be “zero net” electricity by 2020, with non-residential construction following by 2030. A zero net energy building consumes no more energy than what is generated on-site, or off-site from renewable sources.

Like most of California, San Rafael is moving toward renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, geothermal, and hydroelectric power. Solar energy is viable on most building rooftops in the city and could conceivably generate enough electricity to power the entire city. The Climate Change Action Plan projects that 24 percent of San Rafael’s electricity can come from local solar energy systems by 2030, up from about four percent today. Renewable energy can also be purchased through MCE Clean Energy and PG&E, both of which are working toward fully renewable portfolios.

Policy C-4.1: Renewable Energy

Support increased use of renewable energy and remove obstacles to its use.

Program C-4.1A: Marin Clean Energy Targets. Support Marin Clean Energy (MCE) efforts to reach the goal of providing energy that is 100 percent GHG free by 2025.

Program C-4.1B: PACE Financing. Participate in a Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing program to fund installation of renewable energy systems, energy efficiency upgrades to existing buildings, and other improvements such as electric vehicle chargers and battery storage. Consider other funding sources to improve local energy generation and storage.

Program C-4.1C: Regulatory Barriers. Continue efforts to remove regulatory barriers and provide creative incentives for solar energy installations, such as rooftop solar systems and parking lot canopies. The installation of renewable energy systems that are consistent with the Climate Change Action Plan should be encouraged and accelerated.



Title 24

In 1978, California adopted new energy efficiency standards commonly referred to as Title 24. The standards are periodically updated to incorporate new energy efficiency technologies and methods. As a result of Title 24 standards, homes built within the last decade are 4.5 times more energy efficient per square foot than homes built prior to 1960. Census data indicates that 60 percent of San Rafael's housing units were constructed prior to 1970. Many of these buildings have inefficient heating, ventilation, cooling, and lighting systems. A high level of energy savings will be achieved in the future through retrofit and energy efficiency projects.

Program C-4.1D: Reducing Natural Gas Use. Promote electrification of building systems and appliances in new buildings and those that currently use natural gas.

Program C-4.1E: Municipal Buildings. Wherever feasible, incorporate renewable energy technology such as solar, cogeneration, and fuel cells, in the construction or retrofitting of City facilities. Continue use of MCE Deep Green (100% renewable) power.

Policy C-4.2: Energy Conservation

Support construction methods, building materials, and home improvements that improve energy efficiency in existing and new construction.

Program C-4.2A: Energy Efficiency Outreach. Continue to inform businesses and residents of programs and rebates to conserve energy and weatherize their homes.

Program C-4.2B: Green Building Standards. Implement State green building and energy efficiency standards for remodeling projects and new construction. Consider additional measures to incentivize green building practices, low carbon concrete, and sustainable design.

Program C-4.2C: Energy Efficiency Incentives. Provide financial incentives, technical assistance, streamlined permitting processes, and partnerships to encourage energy-efficiency upgrades in new and existing buildings. Typical improvements include the use of energy-efficient windows, lighting, and appliances, induction and convection cooking, insulation of roofs and exterior walls, higher-efficiency heating and air conditioning (including electrical heat pump systems), and other projects that lower electricity and natural gas consumption.

Program C-4.2D: Time-of-Sale Energy Audits. Consider requiring energy audits for residential and commercial buildings prior to property sales, including identification of cost savings from energy efficiency measures and potential rebates and financing options. An energy audit is a property inspection that identifies opportunities to improve energy efficiency.

Program C-4.2E: Cool Roofs and Pavement. Encourage the use of materials that minimize heat gain on outdoor surfaces such as parking lots, roadways, roofs and sidewalks.

Policy C-4.3: Managing Energy Demand

Reduce peak demands on the electric power grid through development of local sources, use of battery storage, deployment of “smart” energy and grid systems that use technology to manage energy more efficiently, and public education.

Program C-4.3A: Innovative Technologies. *Apply innovative technologies such as micro-grids, battery storage, and demand response programs that improve the electric grid’s resilience and meet demand during high use periods. Encourage emergency battery back-up for power outages in lieu of generators.*

See also Policy CSI-4.13 on energy infrastructure

Policy C-4.4: Sustainable Building Materials

Encourage the use of building materials that reduce environmental impacts and the consumption of non-renewable resources.

Program C-4.4A: Use of Alternative Building Materials. *Evaluate opportunities to amend the City’s building codes and zoning ordinances to allow the use of acceptable resource-efficient alternative building materials and methods.*

Policy C-4.5: Resource Efficiency in Site Development

Encourage site planning and development practices that reduce energy demand and incorporate resource- and energy-efficient infrastructure.

Program C-4.5A: Solar Site Planning. *Use the development review process to:*

- a) *Encourage opportunities for passive solar building design and the use of photo-voltaic materials and devices.*
- b) *Review proposed site design for energy efficiency, such as shading of parking lots and summertime shading of south-facing windows.*

Program C-4.5B: Solar Access Ordinance. *Consider developing a solar access ordinance to protect solar access rights and prevent restrictions on solar energy systems. The ordinance should address potential impacts related to development or modification of existing structures on neighboring properties.*

“Micro-Grids” in a Nutshell

A microgrid is a self-sufficient energy system that serves a discrete geographic footprint, such as a college campus, hospital complex, business center, or neighborhood (MicrogridKnowledge.com). Within each microgrid are one or more kinds of distributed energy, such as solar panels or wind turbines, that produce power. Many newer microgrids include energy storage, typically from batteries. A microgrid has three defining characteristics. First, it is local---it generates power close to those who use it. Second, it is independent. A microgrid can disconnect from “the grid” and operate on its own if it needs to. Third, a microgrid is intelligent. Its generators, batteries, and building systems are computer-managed with a high degree of sophistication. Microgrids have been around for decades, but their numbers are growing fast. The pace of installation is expected to grow dramatically as distributed energy prices drop and disruption of the power grid becomes a greater concern.

Goal C-5: Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Achieve a 40 percent reduction in 1990 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2030 and a 60 percent reduction by 2040.

The City of San Rafael will implement the measures outlined in this General Plan and in its Climate Change Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which are the leading cause of global climate change. The City will also work to achieve the longer-term State goal of achieving an 80 percent reduction in 1990 GHGs by 2050, pursuing more aggressive measures as they become technologically and financially viable.

In 2019, the equivalent of 598,500 metric tons of carbon dioxide was emitted to the atmosphere from activities in the San Rafael Planning Area. Chart 6.1 indicates the sources of these emissions. Transportation represented about 71 percent of the total, while natural gas and electric use represented 24 percent. Much of the decline achieved in the last decade has been in the energy sector, thanks to energy efficiency measures and the growing use of renewables. Declines in the transportation sector have been harder to achieve, in part due to continued long commutes and traffic congestion.

Reducing the share of emissions from transportation will require more than just switching to electric vehicles. It will require land use and housing strategies that enable people to live closer to work, along with transportation strategies that provide viable alternatives to driving. Much of General Plan 2040 is focused on this outcome.

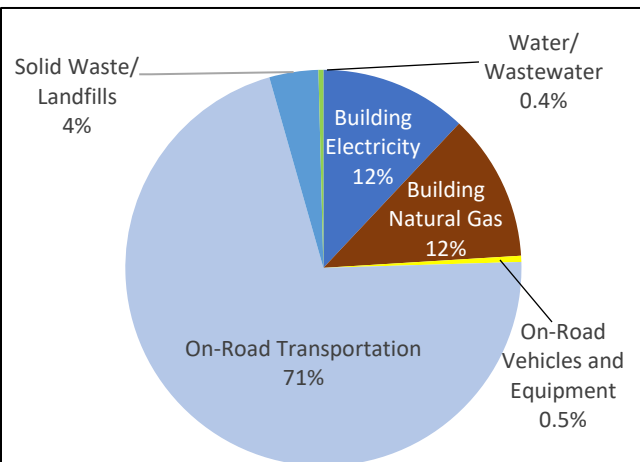
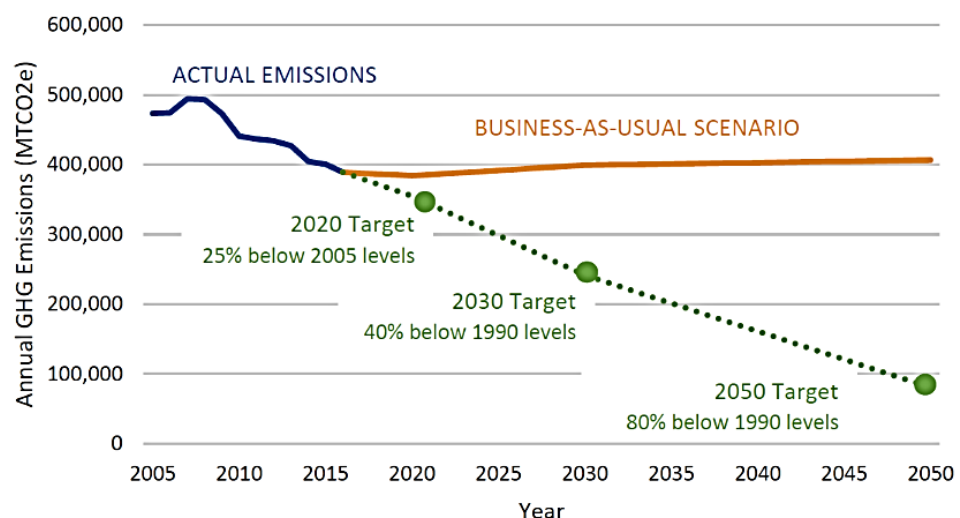


Chart 6-1: Sources of GHG Emissions in San Rafael, 2019

**Chart 6-2:
Emission
Trends,
Forecasts, and
Targets**

Source: San Rafael
Climate Change
Action Plan, 2019



The Climate Change “Crosswalk” on the next page provides a guide to climate policies integrated throughout the Plan. The most impactful policies are those in the Land Use and Mobility Elements, particularly those dealing with clean fuels, transit improvements, transit-oriented development, and active transportation (e.g., bicycle and pedestrian improvements). The policies below focus more specifically on implementation of the Climate Action Plan, including climate advocacy, municipal programs to reduce emissions, and public education.

Policy C-5.1: Climate Change Action Plan

Maintain and periodically update a Climate Change Action Plan that includes programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and metrics for monitoring success.

Program C-5.1A: Progress Reports. *Prepare annual Climate Change Action Plan progress reports, including a list of priority actions. Local climate goals should align with regional goals, including those set through Drawdown Marin.*

Program C-5.1B: Quarterly Forum. *Continue to hold the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) Quarterly Forum, which provides oversight on the implementation progress of sustainability and GHG reduction programs.*

Program C-5.1C: Funding. *Identify funding sources for recommended actions, and pursue local, regional, state, and federal grants. Investigate creation of a local carbon fund or other permanent source of revenue.*

Policy C-5.2: Consider Climate Change Impacts

Ensure that decisions regarding future development, capital projects, and resource management are consistent with San Rafael’s Climate Change Action Plan and other climate goals, including greenhouse gas reduction and adaptation.

Policy C-5.3: Advocacy

Support and advocate for state and federal legislation and initiatives to reduce GHG emissions.

Program C-5.3A: Local Government Agency Involvement. *Continue to provide a leadership role with other local governmental agencies to share best practices and successes.*

Program C-5.3B: State and Federal Action. *Recommend and support State and federal actions to update renewable energy portfolio standards, amend state building codes, and modify motor vehicle standards to reduce GHG emissions and achieve climate goals.*

Program C-5.3C: Regional Collaboration. *Participate in regional collaborations among public agencies to enact and support new programs or shared improvements which promote or utilize renewable energy sources or reduce energy demand.*

Climate Change Crosswalk

Effectively responding to climate change is a guiding principle of General Plan 2040. The policies and programs under Goal C-5 focus on how climate change can be operationalized as part of City decisions. Other parts of the General Plan address ways the City will address climate change through its land use, transportation, housing, safety, infrastructure, and economic development choices. A summary of climate-related policies in General Plan 2040 is provided below:

Land Use Element

The General Plan Land Use Map places higher density uses near transit stations and in areas that are less auto-dependent. This is supported by Policy LU-1.3, which strives to reduce GHG emissions through the way we design and locate new housing, offices, public buildings, and other uses. Policies also encourage walkable neighborhoods close to retail and services.

Mobility Element

Because transportation is the leading source of GHG emissions in San Rafael, many of the climate-related measures in this Plan appear in the Mobility Element. Goal M-3 includes a series of policies to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by encouraging carpooling, working from home, flextime, micro-mobility (e-bikes, e-scooters), and similar strategies. Policies support a continued shift to cleaner fuel vehicles and more electric charging stations. Goal M-4 supports a more robust public transit system, to make it easier to travel without a car. Goal M-6 supports pedestrian and bicycle improvements, making it safer and easier to walk or cycle around the city. Collectively, these programs will have the greatest measurable impacts on moving the City toward its GHG reduction targets.

Housing Element

The Housing Element supports energy conservation and green building programs, as well as a shift to renewable energy sources and compact homes in walkable neighborhoods.

Safety and Resilience Element

The Safety and Resilience Element focuses on adaptation to climate change, especially sea level rise and increased fire hazards.

Infrastructure Element

Solid waste management policies address the greenhouse gases generated by landfilled waste, while also promoting reduced natural resource depletion through recycling. Policies also support greener infrastructure, sewage treatment facilities that promote resource reuse, energy micro-grids, reduced emissions associated with water delivery and wastewater collection and treatment, and increased carbon sequestration in the design of streets and drainage systems.

Other Elements

Other policies supporting climate change goals include

- Policy CD-3.5 recognizes the role of street trees and landscaping in absorbing and sequestering carbon
- Policy EV-1.8, which supports more sustainable business practices and growth in “green” jobs and green business practices
- Policy PROS-1.3, which recognizes the importance of open space in sequestering carbon
- Policy EDI-2.8, which supports local food production and urban agriculture (reducing food transportation)
- Policy EDI-2.9, which recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on lower income households.



Photo Credit: Fabrice Florin

Policy C-5.4: Municipal Programs

Implement and publicize municipal programs to demonstrate the City's commitment to sustainability efforts and reducing greenhouse gases.

Program C-5.4A: Low Carbon Municipal Vehicles. As finances allow, continue to shift the City's vehicle fleet to zero emission vehicles and use low carbon fuels as an interim measure until gasoline-powered vehicles are replaced.

Program C-5.4B: Advancing GHG and Sustainability Efforts. Monitor best practices in sustainability and the transition to GHG-free energy sources and evaluate the feasibility of applying such measures at the local level.

Policy C-5.5: Carbon Sequestration

Enhance the ability of the City's natural and built environment to sequester (absorb and store) carbon emissions.

See Policy C-1.16 on urban forestry and Policies C-4.2 and C-4.4 (green building) for programs

Policy C-5.6: Unintended Consequences

Ensure that climate action measures minimize the potential for unintended consequences, particularly impacts that disproportionately impact lower income communities or drive up the cost of doing business in San Rafael. The City should ensure that the social and financial cost of its regulations are in balance with the benefits, and also consider the ultimate costs of failing to act.

The City is committed to balancing climate-related goals with the goal of being an equitable, just city that strives for a more prosperous future for all residents. It is committed to measures that do not deter innovation or place a disproportionate burden on small local businesses. Finally, it is committed to solutions which maximize GHG reduction benefits relative to cost, and decision-making informed by a careful analysis of financial feasibility.

See the EDI Element for additional policy guidance on achieving equitable outcomes as policies and programs are implemented

Policy C-5.7: Climate Change Education

Continue community education and engagement in climate and sustainability efforts.

Program C-5.7A: Public Outreach Campaign. *As recommended by the Climate Change Action Plan, implement a communitywide public outreach and behavior change campaign to engage residents, businesses, and consumers around the impacts of climate change and the ways individuals and organizations can reduce their GHG emissions and create a more sustainable, resilient, and healthier community.*

Program C-5.7B: Resilient Neighborhoods. *Continue participating in the Resilient Neighborhoods program and expand the program to include local businesses (see text box).*

Program C-5.7C: Financial Incentives. *Continue to raise awareness of savings, rebates and other financial incentives to conserve and recycle.*

Program C-5.7D: Promote Sustainability Efforts. *Promote sustainability and climate change awareness through education, publications, the City's website, community organizations, and special events such as Earth Day and an annual Green Festival.*

Photo Credit: Sustainable Marin



Resilient Neighborhoods

The purpose of the Resilient Neighborhoods program is to motivate community members to live more sustainably and prepare for climate impacts. The program helps residents reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their homes, businesses, travel modes, and other activities. Participants take part in an initial workshop and then meet several times to learn how they can reduce their carbon footprints.

As of May 2020, there were 453 San Rafael residents (representing 174 households) participating in Resilient Neighborhoods Climate Action Teams. Collectively, their efforts resulted in a reduction of more than 2.14 million pounds of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere!

7 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Introduction

Parks and open space are essential to the quality of life in San Rafael. Open space defines neighborhood edges, provides a necessary complement to the built environment, and adds beauty to the city. It provides vital recreational amenities and sustains plant and animal life. It is intrinsically valuable for mental health and contributes to the spiritual wellness of the city's residents. Open space is celebrated as one of San Rafael's greatest assets and is a visible reminder of the efforts of multiple generations to conserve and protect the environment.

Open space also supports a multi-layered park system comprised of City, County, and State facilities. These facilities range from playgrounds, ballfields, and community centers to hiking trails, beaches, and historic sites. The City's parks accommodate recreational programs that help create a sense of community, enabling residents to learn, stay healthy, have fun, connect, and fulfill their creative potential.

Public open space is the single largest land use in San Rafael, representing nearly 40 percent of the City's land area. As noted in the Chapter 6 (Conservation and Climate Change), these areas support biological resources, sequester carbon, and help the City maintain its air and water quality. And as noted in Chapter 8 (Safety and Resilience Element), most of the City's open space is susceptible to wildfire and can contribute to natural hazards when not properly maintained. The General Plan provides a starting point for open space policy, but more detailed management prescriptions are needed for individual properties and the specific activities that open space supports. An important function of this Element is to outline future steps that must be taken to ensure that our open spaces remain essential assets and do not become liabilities.

The 2020 global pandemic has highlighted the value of parks to San Rafael. Many of us have looked for connections to nature, places to play or exercise, and space to safely gather. Parks have become our collective backyard, particularly for residents living in multi-family housing. While the pandemic has reinforced the essential nature of parks, it has also made it evident that parks are not evenly distributed, and that needs are greater in lower income neighborhoods.

Interagency coordination is a critical part of park and open space management in San Rafael. As noted above, the City is one of several service providers. Others include the County of Marin/ Marin Open Space District, the State of California, the Marinwood Community Service District, San Rafael City Schools, and the Miller Creek School District. Public park services are further supplemented by private facilities such as swim and racquet clubs, the YMCA and Osher JCC, private golf courses, and community-run pools and play areas. Long-range planning for parks and open spaces must recognize the relationship between different open space stewards, and the role that each property plays in the overall network.

Legal Foundation for the Open Space Element

State law requires local general plans to recognize four types of open space:

- **Open Space for Recreation.** This category includes the local park system, as well as school athletic facilities, golf courses, and other outdoor spaces that are primarily used for recreation. This is covered by Goal PROS-1, while programming of these facilities is covered by Goal PROS-2.
- **Open Space for the Protection of Natural Resources.** This is the primary focus of the Conservation and Climate Change Element (Chapter 6), although Goal PROS-3 addresses the connection between open space and natural areas such as wetlands and hillsides.
- **Open Space for the Managed Production of Resources.** This acknowledges the role of open space in food production, as well as timber and mineral extraction. Policies for urban agriculture and community gardening are included in the General Plan.
- **Open Space for Public Health and Safety.** This includes areas where urban uses could create a potential hazard due to the potential for fire, landslides, flooding, and other natural hazards. Many of these areas are retained as open space to mitigate the potential for loss of life and property. This is addressed in Goal PROS-3, and throughout Chapter 8 (Safety and Resilience Element).



Park Classification

The 2040 General Plan introduces a classification system for San Rafael's parks. The intent of this system is to ensure the efficient and equitable allocation of resources and guide long-range planning decisions. The classifications are based on categories used by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and are as follows:

- **Region-Serving Parks** draw visitors from throughout Marin County and the Bay Area. There are three region-serving parks in San Rafael: McInnis Park and Golf Center (County of Marin), McNears Beach (County of Marin), and China Camp State Park (State of California). Most of the acreage in these parks is unimproved open space but each park also includes active recreational areas and amenities that serve a regional market.
- **Community Parks** primarily serve residents from San Rafael and attract users from multiple neighborhoods. They are typically 10 acres or larger and include a variety of facilities such as recreation centers, swimming pools, tennis courts, restrooms, and multi-use athletic fields. There are three community parks in the city limits (Albert Park, Pickleweed Park, and Terra Linda Recreation Area) and one in the unincorporated area (Marinwood Park). For analysis purposes, the service area radius for a community park is approximately one mile and the service area population is 10,000 to 20,000 residents.¹
- **Neighborhood Parks** serve a more limited geographic area than community parks. They are within walking distance of many users, with a service area radius of one-half mile and a service area population of 2,000 to 5,000 residents. Neighborhood parks are typically between one and ten acres in size and include a range of facilities such as softball fields, playgrounds and tot lots, lawn areas, picnic areas, and basketball courts. Examples include Santa Margarita Park and Sun Valley Park.
- **Pocket Parks** are less than an acre in size and draw from a smaller service area than neighborhood parks, such as a quarter-mile radius. Facilities in these parks are usually limited to children's play structures, lawn areas, and places to sit or enjoy nature. Examples include Riviera Park in Peacock Gap and Oliver Hartzel Park on Golden Hinde Boulevard. A few pocket parks have no facilities and were designed as landscaped open spaces along major roads.
- **Special Use Parks** include parks that serve a unique purpose or activity. These include shoreline trails (such as Starkweather Park along the Bay), the "Field of Dogs" County Dog Park, and the historic homes at Boyd Park and the Falkirk Mansion. These parks play an important role in meeting community-wide cultural and recreational needs or showcasing special community features.

In addition to the categories listed above, **public schools** include open spaces that are owned and operated by San Rafael City Schools and the Miller Creek School District. Although there are limitations on access, the school campuses satisfy a portion of the City's recreational needs by providing additional sports fields, hard court areas, playgrounds, and other facilities.

Figure 7-1 shows the City's park system, exclusive of open space lands, which are mapped on Figure 7-2 later in this chapter. Although undeveloped open space (sometimes called "passive open space") supports important recreational activities, the metrics for evaluating service levels and gaps are based on improved open space (e.g., "active open space"). Typical improvements in City parks include sports fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, tennis courts, running tracks, recreation centers, restrooms, lawns, gardens, swimming pools, and basketball courts.

¹ Terra Linda Recreation Area is counted as a Community Park because it includes a recreation center, swimming pool, and other community-serving facilities, and because of its long-standing role as a community gathering place for North San Rafael. However, at 2.9 acres, the park falls short of the acreage requirement for a Community Park.

Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

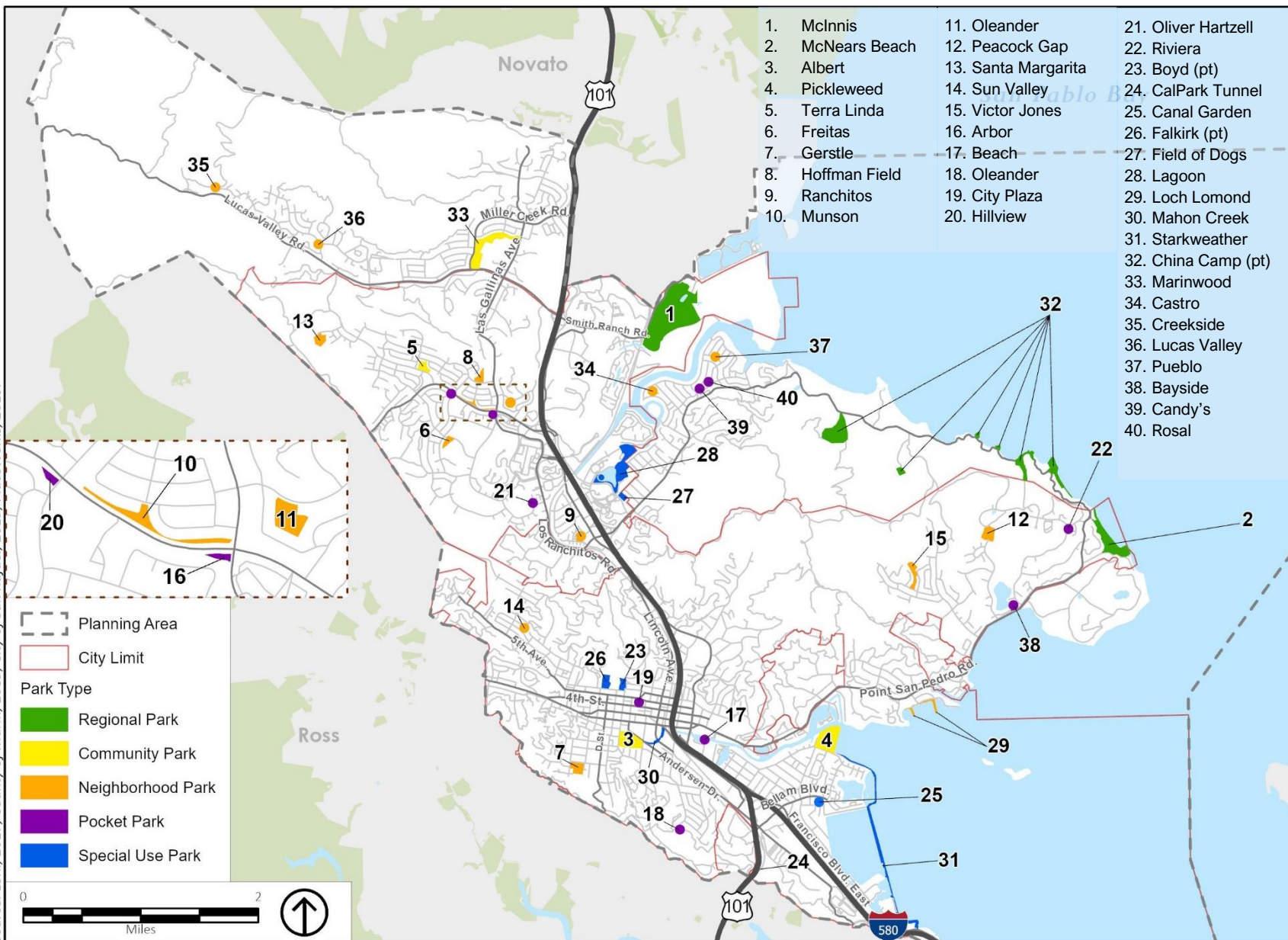


Figure 7-1:
San Rafael Parks

Table 7-1 shows the parks in each category, including their acreage (exclusive of unimproved open space). The table is organized to show parks within the City limits in the first three columns and parks in the unincorporated area in the next columns. Table 7-2 shows school facilities, with the acreage reflecting only the portion of each campus dedicated to recreation and sports activities. Table 7-3, which appears later in this Element (see P. 7-20) shows the additional acreage associated with unimproved open space.

Table 7-1: San Rafael Improved Parkland Acreage Totals (*)

City of San Rafael			Unincorporated Planning Area		
Park Type/ Name	Operator	Acres	Park Type/ Name	Operator	Acres
Region-Serving Parks					
McInnis Park (part)	County	72.50	China Camp (part)	State	30.00
McNears Beach	County	19.00			
TOTAL		91.50			30.00
Community Parks					
Albert	City	13.34	Marinwood	Marinwood CSD	14.12
Pickleweed	City	17.60			
Terra Linda	City	2.87			
TOTAL		33.91			14.12
Neighborhood Parks					
Freitas	City	2.69	Castro	County CSA 18	1.48
Gerstle	City	6.00	Creekside	Marinwood CSD	1.22
Hoffman Field	City	3.80	Lucas Valley	Lucas Valley HOA	1.52
Los Ranchitos	City	3.00	Pueblo	County CSA 18	1.07
Munson	City	1.46			
Oleander	City	2.28			
Peacock Gap	City	4.14			
Santa Margarita	City	5.00			
Sun Valley	City	2.20			
Victor Jones	City	5.96			
TOTAL		36.53			5.29
Pocket Parks					
Arbor	City	0.30	Bayside	County	.72
Beach	City	0.44	Candy's	County CSA 18	.14
Bret Harte	City	0.46	Rosal	County CSA 18	.74
City Plaza	City	0.32			
Hillview	City	0.26			
Oliver Hartzell	City	0.54			
Riviera	City	0.27			
TOTAL		2.59			1.60

Table 7-1, continued

City of San Rafael			Unincorporated Planning Area		
Park Type/ Name	Operator	Acres	Park Type/ Name	Operator	Acres
Special Use Parks					
Boyd (part)	City	1.75	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cal Park Pathway	County	0			
Canal Community Garden	San Rafael Sanit. District	0.35			
Falkirk (part)	City	3.60			
Field of Dogs	County	0.71			
Lagoon	County	10.00			
Loch Lomond	City	3.00			
Mahon Creek	City	2.54			
Jean Starkweather	City	21.30			
TOTAL		43.25			0
GRAND TOTAL		207.78			51.01

(*) Table excludes unimproved open space

Source: City of San Rafael, 2020

Table 7-2: Improved Open Space on Public School Properties

City of San Rafael			Unincorporated Planning Area		
School	Operator	Acres	School	Operator	Acres
Bahia Vista	SR City Schools	1.62	Gallinas Children's Ctr	Miller Creek SD	1.94
Coleman	SR City Schools	0.93	Lucas Valley	Miller Creek SD	3.57
Davidson	SR City Schools	7.20	Mary Silveira	Miller Creek SD	3.83
Miller Creek District Offices	Miller Creek SD	3.85	Miller Creek Middle	Miller Creek SD	4.41
Glenwood	SR City Schools	4.26	Venetia Valley	Miller Creek SD	3.10
Laurel Dell	SR City Schools	0.37	Waldorf	Miller Creek SD	3.65
Mark Day	Miller Creek SD	3.82			
San Pedro	SR City Schools	1.88			
San Rafael High	SR City Schools	15.92			
Short	SR City Schools	0.32			
Sun Valley	SR City Schools	1.46			
Terra Linda High	SR City Schools	16.6			
Vallecito	Miller Creek SD	15.9			
TOTAL		74.13			20.50

Source: City of San Rafael, 2020



Service Area Standards and Gaps

One measure of the adequacy of a city's park system is the number of acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Many California cities have adopted a standard of 3 to 5 acres of improved open space per 1,000 residents. School open space may be included in this standard, but it is typically "discounted" to reflect the fact that it is not available for public use when school is in session.

Based on Tables 7-1 and 7-2, and counting school open space at only 50 percent, there are approximately 306 acres of improved parkland in the San Rafael Planning Area. This acreage serves 73,300 residents, meaning there are currently 4.17 acres per 1,000 residents. General Plan 2040 proposes a standard of 4 acres per 1,000 residents moving forward. The Quimby Act (see P 7-12) allows the City to require parkland dedication in new residential subdivisions at this ratio, or to pay an equivalent ("in-lieu") fee in order to maintain this standard as the city grows. The addition of roughly 10,000 residents, as anticipated by General Plan 2040, would require another 40 acres of improved parkland.

The per capita standard is one of several metrics used for park planning. Another relates to the distance a resident has to travel to reach their nearest park. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has calculated that 81 percent of San Rafael residents have a park within 10 minutes of their home—19 percent do not. Areas that do not meet the 10-minute standard include Montecito and Dominican, the West End and Fairhills neighborhoods, Lincoln/ San Rafael Hill, Contempo/ Deer Park, and the Northbridge/ Marin Lagoon area.

Even if acreage and proximity standards are met, parks may not completely meet local needs. The physical condition and range of facilities in each park varies greatly---and some parts of the city have much higher needs than others. For example, the Canal neighborhood consists almost entirely of multi-family housing without backyards. Many residents are young children, there are few places to play, and families may lack the resources to pay for private recreation. While Pickleweed Park is large and a short walk away for many families, it is usually crowded with visitors. There is a need for additional neighborhood open space in the Canal, as well as a need for maintenance and replacement of well-used and well-worn facilities. As San Rafael evaluates its park needs, it should consider new ways of determining where shortfalls may exist, as well as new solutions for closing the gaps.

Goal PROS-1: Quality Parks for All to Enjoy

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.

The City of San Rafael faces the challenge of adapting and improving its parks to meet the changing needs and priorities of the community. Well-planned, maintained parks can transform neighborhoods and provide positive experiences for children and families. But these outcomes require action, and new approaches to funding, operating, and programming.

One of the most important recommendations of this Element is to adopt a Parks Master Plan. San Rafael has never had one, and as a result lacks a strategic framework for long-term decisions around acquisition, land management, facilities, programs, maintenance, and financing. The Master Plan will also provide an opportunity for San Rafael residents from all parts of the City to articulate their needs and aspirations for the park system. It will also provide a platform for collaboration with other service providers and stewards, and partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors to fill unmet needs in the city.

Policy PROS-1.1: Park Classification

Maintain a system of community, neighborhood, pocket, and special use parks (see Page 7-3). These parks should be complemented by larger region-serving parks and open spaces, and by school recreation areas.

Program PROS-1.1A: Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Prepare a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, including citywide recommendations for park management, operations, facility development, potential acquisition, 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.

See also Action PROS-3.3A on an Open Space Management Plan

Policy PROS-1.2: Per Capita Acreage Standard

Maintain a citywide standard of 4.0 acres of improved 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 general standard of 4.0 acres of improved parkland per 1,000. Adjust the formulas for dedication of land to reflect this standard.

Program PROS-1.2B: Park In Lieu Fees. Periodically adjust park in-lieu fees to reflect the prevailing costs of land and facilities. Any increases to existing fees should be developed through a public process in which potential cost impacts on development feasibility are disclosed and measures to offset impacts on housing costs are considered.

Program PROS-1.2C: Exemptions. To reduce further increases in housing costs, exempt accessory dwelling units and affordable housing units from park in-lieu and dedication requirements. Consider eliminating the existing exemption for market-rate rental housing or adopting a modified fee schedule which considers factors such as unit size and total project size.

Policy PROS 1.3: Distribution of Parks

Strive for a balanced distribution of neighborhood and community parks across the city. When planning new parks, prioritize areas that lack existing parkland or outdoor space, and have higher needs due to higher housing densities and social and economic conditions.

Program PROS-1.3A: New Parks. Develop additional parks and playgrounds 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. (see also Policy LU-1.16 on school site reuse)

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

Policy PROS 1.4 Park Design

Design parks so that they are comfortable, attractive, inviting, and easily maintained. 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 Park and Recreation Commission, and the Planning Commission when preparing and reviewing park master plans and designing park improvements.

Program PROS 1.4B: Community Engagement. Engage the community in park planning and facility development, including all groups and individuals who would be affected by such improvements.



Photo Credit: San Rafael Girls Softball, 2017

Naylor Act

The Naylor Act allows other agencies of government (defined in Education Code Section 17489) to acquire surplus school grounds and keep them available for playground, playing field or other outdoor recreational and open space purposes. Pursuant to the Act, the City can acquire up to 30% of the surplus property for 25% of its fair market value. Bernard Hoffman Park in North San Rafael was acquired by the City through Naylor Act provisions. In 2014, the Act was amended to allow School Districts to also sell the sites to charter schools and other government agencies. Appendix G includes a list of local Naylor Act priorities.

Policy PROS-1.5: Park Image and Identity

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

Program PROS-1.5A: Branding and Signage. *Develop and implement consistent branding, wayfinding, and interpretive signage for San Rafael's parks that identify park and open space properties and help the public locate, navigate, and understand 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 and Recreation Master Plan. Recreational facility needs should be periodically reevaluated in response to trends, demographics, and changing conditions.*

Program PROS-1.6B Park Improvements. *As part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, prepare plans to improve neighborhood and community park facilities. Seek funding to implement these plans.*

Policy PROS-1.7: Athletic Field Design

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

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

Photo Credit: Frank Johnson



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, parks, and open spaces.

See Action PROS-3.8A on a Trails Master Plan

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, birdwatching, and picnicking, should be encouraged in these areas where consistent with habitat protection and hazard reduction goals.

See Action PROS-3.3A on an Open Space Management Plan and Action PROS-3.7 on coordinated open space planning.

Policy PROS-1.10: Historic Preservation and Parks

Incorporate historic and cultural resources into the City park system, including publicly-owned historic homes and the grounds around them. Where public operation of such properties is infeasible, encourage their management, operation, and programming by non-profit organizations.

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 park users, businesses, residents, and social service providers in the design and management of urban parks to safely accommodate all users, provide universal access, and minimize conflicts.*

Program PROS-1.11B: Activating Public Space. *Work with cafes, restaurants, and other businesses to activate and maintain urban parks and plazas. This can provide 'eyes on the space,' create a sense of ownership, and facilitate economic vitality by providing space for outdoor dining and vending.*

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 are 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 San Rafael City Schools and the Miller Creek School District to formalize joint use agreements for parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and other school facilities.*

See also Program CSI-2.A on joint use agreements



Quimby Act

Section 66477 of the California Government Code provides local jurisdictions with the authority to acquire parkland in association with new residential subdivisions. Commonly referred to as the Quimby Act, this provision allows a city, by ordinance, to require the dedication of land, payment of an in-lieu fee, or combination of both, for park and recreational purposes as a condition of approval. Funds may also be used to rehabilitate existing park facilities.

Policy PROS-1.13: Recreational Facilities in Development Projects

Encourage, and where appropriate require, 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 for residents 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 complementary 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 and open spaces 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. Funding mechanisms for maintenance should be identified for every capital project.

Program PROS-1.15B: Park Stewardship. Encourage "adopt a park" programs and other stewardship initiatives that engage volunteers in park clean-up, maintenance, invasive plant removal, and other improvements. Explore agreements with the Downtown Streets Team and similar organizations to maintain park and open space areas.

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: Naming Rights and Sponsorships. *Explore opportunities to generate revenue through naming rights, sponsorships, and charitable giving.*

Program PROS-1.6C: 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: Public-Private Partnerships

Consider the use of public-private partnerships to rehabilitate, activate, and expand parks and community facility space. Where appropriate and consistent with the community’s vision, this could include more intensive and varied uses of parkland, provided that the integrity of the open space is retained.

Policy PROS-1.18 Sustainable Park Operations

Encourage sustainable park management and operations that enhance the role of parks as green infrastructure and part of the City’s climate resilience strategy. Parks should be managed to enhance their value as biological resources, natural habitat, and part of San Rafael’s urban forest.



Photo Credit (Terrapin Crossings): Frank Johnson

Paying for Parks

Park improvements and maintenance are funded through multiple sources. These include Measure A, a countywide one-quarter cent sales tax passed in 2012. The Measure has a nine-year term and is used to care for existing parks and open spaces, restore and protect farmland, and support regional and community parks. About 15% of the revenue stream is directed to Marin County’s cities.

Some of the City’s General Fund is set aside in a Building Maintenance account, which supports parks and City buildings. The City’s budget includes a bedroom tax fund, with money for park maintenance and development, as well as a park capital projects fund. State gas tax revenues provide a supplemental funding source, although these funds are primarily intended for transportation. The City also collects park in-lieu fees from development.

San Rafael City periodically considers more reliable long-term sources for capital projects, including bond financing, grant funding, voter-approved taxes, and public-private partnerships, such as the unique arrangement between the City and Terrapin Crossroads at Beach Park. The park remains in public ownership, although it was leased to a restaurant/ entertainment venue in exchange for \$100,000 in improvements and ongoing programming for community events, as well as activities such as bocce, volleyball, and a children’s play area.

Program PROS-1.18A: 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 and construction of park facilities and grounds. Where feasible, parks should also support the City's wildfire prevention and sea level rise adaptation strategies, and be designed to maximize accessibility by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.*

See the Safety and Resilience Element for policies on parks and sea level rise adaptation. See the Conservation/ Climate Change Element for policies on landscaping and habitat restoration in parks and open spaces.

Preliminary Priorities

A complete assessment of neighborhood and community park improvement needs should be included in the Parks Master Plan. In the interim, the findings in the two text boxes below may be used. These findings reflect community input on park-related issues over the last two decades. The public has expressed strong demand for new sports fields, a community pool south of Puerto Suello Hill, and upgrades and new facilities in existing parks. There is also a need for more formalized joint use agreements for school recreation areas.

In addition to the priorities listed below, there are several capital improvement projects already programmed for City parks, along with unfunded capital projects to be added in future funding cycles. Currently funded projects include ADA compliance upgrades, HVAC replacement, restroom repairs, playground upgrades, tennis court resurfacing, and other improvements at various parks. Unfunded projects include turf replacement in Pickleweed Park, updating the Terra Linda Community Center, improvements to Starkweather Shoreline Park, and other miscellaneous replacement and repair projects.

Potential Community and Neighborhood Park Improvements

- Update (or prepare) site master plans for all neighborhood and community parks.
- **Albert Park/ San Rafael Community Center.** Continue park revitalization consistent with recent efforts—explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to refurbish existing community center and athletic fields, develop new Main Library, develop new recreational facilities, and improve habitat and bike/ ped facilities along Mahon Creek.
- **Terra Linda Park/ Community Center.** Refurbish community center.
- **Pickleweed Park/ Al Boro Community Center.** Improve branch library, refurbish fields, shoreline path improvements, sea level rise adaptation strategies.
- **Boyd Park.** Pursue new uses for Boyd House and park/ trail improvements on site and continuing up San Rafael Hill.
- **Starkweather Shoreline Park.** Continue to expand and improve shoreline path network and implement interpretative signage plans.
- Complete **North San Rafael promenade** improvements, including plans for Munson Park and restoration of Gallinas Creek.
- Improve access from **Gerstle Park, Bret Harte Park, Russom Park** and other parks adjacent to open space areas for hiking.
- Consider additional opportunities for a public pool south of Puerto Suello Hill.
- Extensions of trail network, consistent with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, including a continuous north-south greenway.



Potential Locations for New Parks

For nearly two decades, the areas identified below have been identified as having either the potential for new parks or the need for new parks based on their distance from existing parks and demographic characteristics.

- **Canal Neighborhood.** The City-owned site at the southeast corner of Bellam Boulevard and Windward Way has the potential to support a neighborhood park, as well as non-recreational uses and private development. The site is adjacent to the Canal neighborhood, an area with high recreational demand, high densities, and significant unmet needs for parks and recreation. Other sites in the Canal area also should receive high priority, given the neighborhood's high densities and large population of youth and young children.
- **Montecito/ Happy Valley.** Montecito/Happy Valley lacks a neighborhood park. San Rafael City Schools operates two high school campuses and a corporation yard at the southern edge of the neighborhood, presenting the potential for a neighborhood park on school district property or joint use agreements to improve neighborhood access to school open space and recreational facilities.
- **Dominican.** There may be opportunities to partner with Dominican University to provide a small park serving the Dominican/Black Canyon area, which currently lacks a neighborhood park.
- **Lincoln / San Rafael Hill** lacks a neighborhood park facility.

The list above should be updated through a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, as recommended by General Plan 2040.



Goal PROS-2: Excellence in Recreational Programming

Provide accessible, affordable recreation programming that is responsive to public needs, activates parks for safe and inclusive community use, and promotes fitness, health, knowledge, and cultural understanding.

San Rafael provides quality programming for residents of all ages, building a sense of community and providing opportunities for sports, leisure, and personal growth.

Recreational services are provided to San Rafael residents by the City's Library and Recreation Department. The Department's role is to promote health and wellness, increase cultural unity, and facilitate community interaction and personal development. The Department has a Recreational Services and Child Care Division that provides classes and programs, manages facilities and rentals, and operates the Falkirk Cultural Center. A separate Division manages the library and arts programs. The Library and Recreation Department also provides staff support to the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Pickleweed Advisory Board, and special focus committees.

A full array of recreational programs is offered, including those targeted to specific age groups such as older adults, preschoolers, and youth, and those oriented around specific activities such as aquatics. Classes and programs include arts and crafts, athletics, computers, dance, fitness, games, language, martial arts, music, personal growth, and theater. Athletic programs include soccer, pickleball, bocce, basketball, and volleyball, among others.

The Department offers state-licensed year-round child care to children in Kindergarten through 5th grade, operating programs from elementary schools. It also offers exercise, bingo, and other programs for seniors at the three community centers. The City also organizes and hosts special events throughout the year, oversees two community gardens, and manages facility rentals.

Policy PROS-2.1: Meeting Diverse Needs

Ensure that recreational programs and facilities meet the needs of all San Rafael residents, but most 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 and inclusive 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: Program Evaluations. *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 multiple languages to evaluate recreational needs in neighborhoods and the City as a whole (see also Program EDI-1.3B on multi-lingual, culturally competent surveys).*

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 where appropriate.

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: Social Services

Enhance, and where feasible expand, 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 to reduce fees for non-profit organizations and 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

See also Policies LU-3.11 and AC-1.7 and Program EV-2.5C on special events

Policy PROS-2.8: Community Gardens

Continue to support and maintain community gardens and look for ways to sustain such gardens such as providing recycled water, compost, tools, and storage sheds.

Policy PROS-2.9: Environmental Education

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

See also Conservation Element Policies 1.8, 2.6, 3.7, and 5.7 for additional guidance on environmental education

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.*

See also Policies S-6.4 and CSI-4.13 on emergency preparedness and energy reliability



Open Space

Marin County has a long legacy of open space preservation. Early efforts focused on saving beloved landmarks such as Mt. Tamalpais, Point Reyes, the Marin Headlands, and Richardson Bay. In 1972, voters approved the Marin Open Space District as a way to preserve about 25,000 acres from development. Much of this acreage was located in the San Rafael Planning Area, including the Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow Open Space and San Pedro Mountain. Similarly, China Camp State Park was initially acquired by a non-profit foundation and then by the State of California in the mid-1970s to preclude development of the north shore of the San Pedro Peninsula with thousands of homes. The City of San Rafael itself has acquired open space—or accepted open space acquired by non-profits or donated by others.

A few open space sites remain for potential acquisition—these are listed in Appendix H. Over the last two decades, priorities have shifted from land acquisition to stewardship and management. Most larger and once-vulnerable properties in the San Rafael area are now public land or are zoned in a way that ensures very low densities, scenic easements, or long-term use for agriculture or ranching. The challenge today is how to care for a substantial inventory of public open space and how to coordinate the efforts of the multiple agencies who own and manage the land. Long-range planning is needed to balance recreation, conservation, and hazard mitigation activities. More reliable sources of long-term funding are also needed.

Table 7-3 provides an inventory of the larger open spaces in the San Rafael Planning Area. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a summary of the most substantial landholdings. These areas are shown graphically on Figure 7-2.

Table 7-3: Major Open Spaces in the San Rafael Planning Area

Incorporated Area			Unincorporated Planning Area		
Name	Operator	Acres	Name	Operator	Acres
Bay Way	City	6.4	China Camp	State	850.0
Boyd Park (upper part)	City	16.0	Grasshopper Hill	Marinwood	13.7
China Camp	State	440.3	Heron Hill-Bucks Landing	Marin OS	39.6
Deer Valley	City	43.0	Lucas Valley	Marin OS	1,229.0
Falkirk (upper part)	City	7.5	Lucas Valley East Unit	Marin OS	46.0
Gallinas Creek	State	30.0	Lucas Valley HOA	LV CSD	385.0
Glenwood	City	56.3	Marinwood CSA	Marinwood	758.0
Harry Barbier Memorial	City	582.0	Oakview (Daphne)	Marin OS	69.9
Hartzell	City	18.1	San Pedro Mountain	Marin OS	373.0
Hillside Avenue	City	8.0	Santa Margarita Island	Marin OS	4.6
Jerry Russom	City	7.0	Santa Venetia Marsh	Marin OS	32.7
Mont Marin	City/County	68.0			
Mountain	City/County	51.4			
Picnic Hill-Bret Harte	City	13.2			
Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow	Marin OS	1,172.0			
Upper Gerstle Park	City/County	22.0			
Upper Toyon	City	30.3			
TOTAL		2,571.5			3,801.5

Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

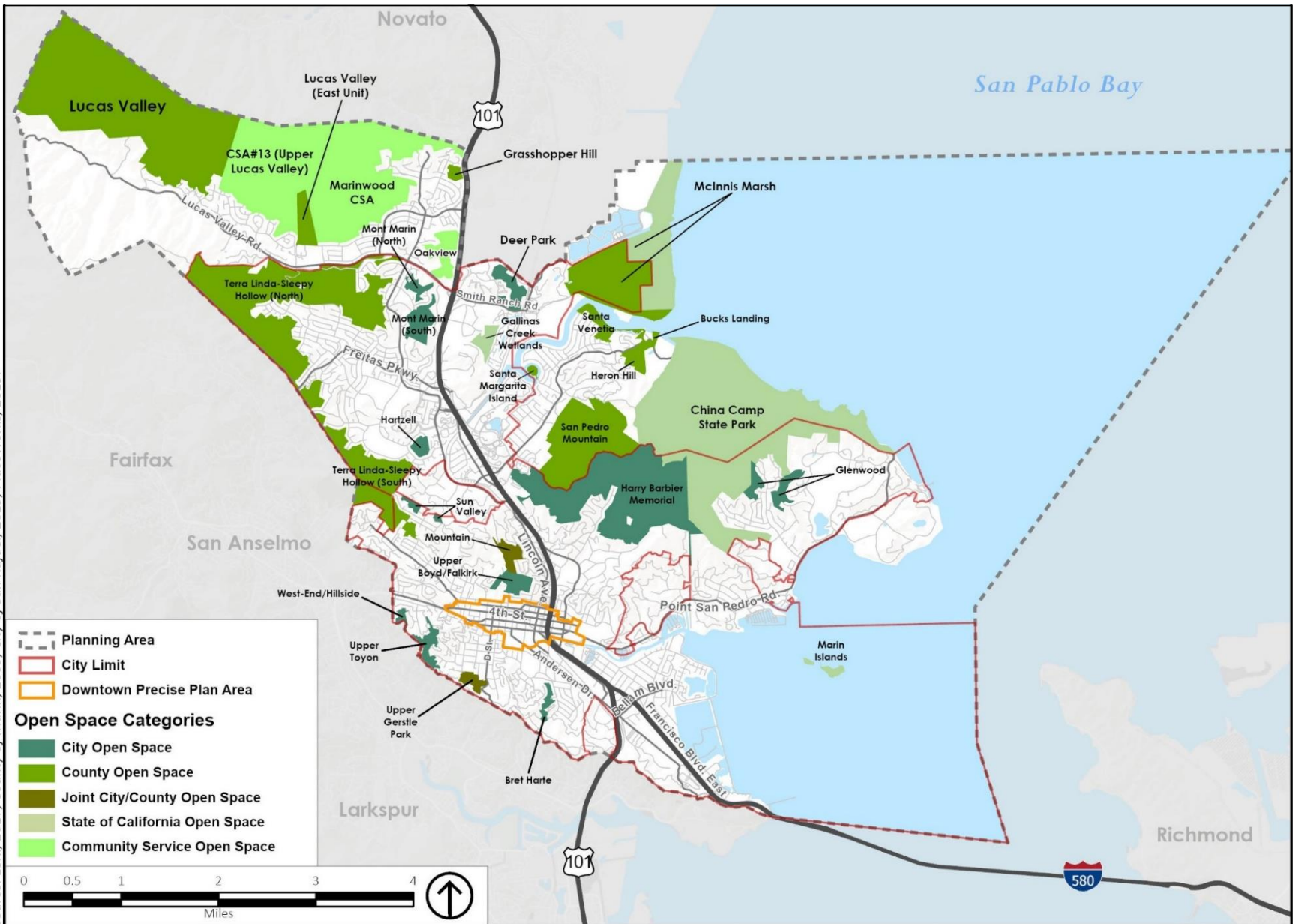


Figure 7-2:
Major Open Spaces

Goal PROS-3: Protected, Well Managed Open Space

Manage San Rafael's open spaces for all to enjoy.

Preservation of open space and the natural environment have been priorities for San Rafael residents for many years. Open space should be carefully managed to conserve and enhance its intrinsic value for recreation, habitat, hazard mitigation, climate change resilience, scenic beauty, and community character. Whenever possible, the natural terrain and vegetation of the community should be preserved, maintained, and enhanced.

Policies and programs under Goal PROS-3 recommend measures to improve open space management so that these properties may continue to enhance the quality of life in San Rafael.

Policy PROS-3.1: Open Space Frame

Retain and protect San Rafael's open space frame, including open space on the city's perimeter and the network of open spaces that define and connect the City's neighborhoods. Open space should be recognized as essential to wildlife, environmental and human health, psychological well-being, and as a natural means of separating communities, preventing sprawl, and providing visual relief.

Program PROS-3.1A: Criteria for Open Space Protection. Use the following criteria for identifying and prioritizing open space parcels for future protection (the criteria are not listed in any particular order):

- a) Environmental health and safety issues and potential geologic and seismic hazards.
- b) Aesthetics (visual backdrop or edge, unique site features, shoreline, ridgelines).
- c) Wildlife resource value (wetlands, creeks and riparian areas, wildlife habitat and movement corridors, and habitat for special status species).
- d) Ability to sequester carbon and mitigate potential climate-related impacts, including reduction of wildfire hazard, drought resilience, protection from sea-level rise.
- e) Importance to the community as a whole and/or adjoining neighborhoods.
- f) Merits of alternative uses.
- g) Ability to connect existing open spaces.
- h) Potential for recreational uses and/or environmental education, especially for economically disadvantaged communities.
- i) Availability of outside (non-City) financial assistance.
- j) Potential maintenance and management costs and liability exposure for the City.
- k) Feasibility of protection through zoning, easements, development agreements, and other tools rather than through acquisition.



Program PROS-3.1B: Open Space

Opportunities in New Development. Pursue opportunities to expand the City's open space network when new development is proposed. This can be achieved through such strategies as clustering development, providing buffers and fuel breaks along site perimeters, dedicating on-site parkland, and mitigating project impacts through wetlands restoration or other measures. When potential open space is not contiguous to existing public open space, the preference is to retain it in private ownership. Maintenance agreements for such areas should include a permanent funding mechanism for maintenance and rehabilitation, follow sound ecological principles, and be enforceable by the City in the future.

Program PROS-3.1C: Priority Conservation Areas. Explore the feasibility of Priority Conservation Areas (PCA) designations for large areas of contiguous private open space in the San Rafael Planning Area. The PCA designation recognizes the significance of these areas as open space and provides support for their long-term conservation. Owner consent shall be obtained before an application for a PCA is submitted to ABAG.

Program PROS-3.1D: Aquatic Open Space. Consider formal designation of a San Rafael Bay Aquatic Open Space in the waters off the city's shoreline. Compatible conservation and recreational uses such as fishing, kayaking, and paddle boarding should be encouraged in this area.



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

Priority Conservation Areas

Priority Conservation Areas, or PCAs, are regionally significant open spaces that are widely recognized as warranting long-term protection. These are typically lands that are threatened by urban development or subject to other pressures (such as sea level rise) that make them vulnerable. The designation has been developed by ABAG to provide an incentive for protecting these areas. Only cities, counties, and park/ open space districts are eligible to apply for a PCA designation. Once a designation is made, grants are available to implement conservation initiatives.

Policy PROS-3.2: Balancing the Uses of Open Space

Protect and preserve the natural resource value of open space while permitting compatible recreational and educational uses. Open space areas should be maintained in a natural state and regarded as a resource for enjoyment by all residents of San Rafael. Recreational and educational uses, where permitted, should be limited to activities with minimal impacts on the environment and locations where such activities will not create hazards or have adverse effects on sensitive natural resources.

Program PROS-3.2A: Management Prescriptions. Develop management prescriptions for different types of open space that recognize their capacity for improvements, access limitations, natural hazard levels, biological resources, and other physical characteristics (Note: this should be done as part of Program PROS-3.3A, listed below).

Policy PROS-3.3: Open Space Management

Maintain and manage City-owned open space lands to reduce natural hazards and wildfire risks, enhance recreational opportunities, maximize ecological value, support climate resilience, and preserve aesthetics. Work with other public open space owners to support similar objectives on their properties within the San Rafael Planning Area. It is recognized that these objectives may conflict as management decisions are made; solutions should strive for balance and reflect objective data, wildfire science, and community input.

Program PROS-3.3A: Open Space Management Plan. *Work collaboratively with residents, environmental organizations, fire departments, and land management agencies such as Marin Municipal Water District, Marin County Parks and Open Space District, and California State Parks to develop an Open Space Management Plan. The Plan should address appropriate uses of open space in the Planning Area, along with provisions for ongoing maintenance and improvement. It should include six areas of focus:*

- a) *Recreation, including appropriate access points, parking and staging areas, wayfinding and interpretive signage, existing and future trail alignments, and guidelines for the location of amenities such as picnic tables and benches.*
- b) *Habitat Protection, including enhancing natural habitats, mitigating the impacts of human activities and climate change on plant and animal life, and preserving natural ecological functions.*
- c) *Hazard reduction, in accordance with ecologically sound practices and wildfire science, including removal of highly flammable invasive species, emergency access, and erosion control. This should be closely coordinated with ongoing efforts by the San Rafael and Marin County Fire Departments, Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority, CalFIRE, and non-profit organizations such as FireSafe Marin.*
- d) *Green infrastructure, including the capacity of open space areas to sequester carbon, absorb runoff, maintain water quality, mitigate climate change impacts, protect and enhance native biodiversity, and improve resilience.*
- e) *Public education, including interpretive facilities*
- f) *Funding, including operating costs and capital projects, and options for covering those costs such as assessment districts, interagency agreements, volunteer programs, and private funding, in addition to City funds.*

Policy PROS-3.4: Open Space Impediments

Address activities that impair the value of open space or create hazardous conditions on open space, including illegal camping and campfires, erosion and landslides, plant pathogens or diseases, invasive plants and animals, disruption of special status species, and unauthorized activities that can cause environmental harm.

Program PROS-3.4A: Diseased Vegetation. *Work with resource agency experts to address tree pathogens and to remove hazardous vegetation and harmful invasive plants.*

Program PROS-3.4B: Illegal Encampments. *Continue to work with private and public property owners to identify and remove illegal encampments in open space areas. Provide a clear method for the public to report encampments when they are observed and work with Marin County Health and Human Services to help those in encampments find housing.*

Policy PROS-3.5: Private Open Space

Ensure the long-term stewardship of privately-owned open space in a manner that conserves natural resource and aesthetic values, sustains wildlife, and reduces hazards to life and property. Opportunities to better integrate common open space in private development with public open space space (via trails, etc.) should be encouraged.

Program PROS-3.5A: Appropriate Use of Private Open Space. *When land is set aside as permanent open space in a private development or is dedicated to a public agency as open space, specify enforceable use limitations such as restrictions on structures, plant materials, and fences.*

Policy PROS-3.6: Access to Open Space

Encourage public access to open space areas in the design of development on adjacent sites and in existing developed areas. Access should be secured as part of subdivision approval and through coordination with affected property owners. Access paths should be designed to minimize neighborhood and user conflicts and avoid conflicts with sensitive wildlife habitat.

Program PROS-3.6A: Access Points. *Use the development review process to identify open space access points and required features such as signage, trailheads, and parking.*



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

Policy PROS-3.7: Coordinated Open Space Planning

Coordinate the planning and management of San Rafael's open space system with adjacent cities, Marin County, the State of California, and regional and private open space systems.

Program PROS-3.7A: Coordination with Other Jurisdictions. *Continue to work with the public agencies managing open space within the San Rafael Planning Area to coordinate and implement City and County wildfire action plans, habitat conservation programs, and recreation improvements.*

Policy PROS-3.8: Trails

Encourage the development and maintenance of trails within and between open space areas. Trails should be designed and maintained in an environmentally sensitive manner and should provide safe and secure routes for a variety of users.

Program PROS-3.8A: Citywide Trails Map. *Develop—or assist volunteers with developing—a citywide trail map, building on work that has already been done by local advocacy groups.*

Program PROS-3.8B: Trails Master Plan. *Pursue grant funding and develop a Trails Master Plan, including provisions to improve access and signage to park and open space areas from San Rafael neighborhoods and balance the needs of different trail user groups. The Master Plan should include recommendations for new and enhanced trails, minimizing wildlife and habitat impacts, use guidelines for a variety of users, signage, surface materials, maintenance, compliance with trail rules, and staging areas. 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. San Rafael's network of neighborhood paths, stairways, and mid-block walkways also should be included.*

Policy PROS-3.9: Utilities in Open Space

Discourage large-scale utility infrastructure such as electric transmission lines, large wind turbines, and cellular phone towers in local open space areas. Where such facilities already exist, or where there are no other siting options, utilities should be located and designed to minimize harm to avian life and the area's environmental and visual quality.

Policy PROS-3.10: Public Education

Provide education programs to residents about the importance of open space to wildlife, wildfire prevention, watershed protection and water quality, climate resilience and carbon sequestration, habitat conservation, and human well-being.

Program PROS-3.10A: Public Education. *Continue outreach and public education on open space management, including wildfire prevention, stormwater management requirements, predatory animal control, climate change, and coordination between public and private property owners. Also, conduct periodic user surveys to better understand the needs and interests of open space visitors and determine which areas may require further attention.*

Program PROS-3.10B: Interpretive Facilities. *Encourage the development of interpretive trails, nature centers, signage, and similar features that educate San Rafael youth and adults about the natural environment, best practices in conservation, and the value of open space. This should include information about the historic value of open space, including past uses of individual sites (such as mining, logging, military defense, farming, and hunting).*

8 Safety and Resilience

Introduction

The Safety and Resilience Element addresses the protection of life and property from natural hazards, including earthquakes, landslides, wildfire, and flooding. It also addresses human-caused hazards including those related to hazardous materials use, storage, transport, and disposal. The Element particularly focuses on hazards that may be exacerbated by climate change, including extreme heat events, increasing wildfire frequency, more severe storms, drought, and sea level rise. This Element also addresses emergency preparedness.

An overarching goal of this Element is to reduce the economic and social dislocation associated with environmental hazards. While it would be impossible to remove all risks entirely, there are steps the City can take to reduce losses and make more informed decisions about land use and development. This is especially important for San Rafael's most vulnerable populations, who may find themselves in harm's way without the resources to prepare, respond, and recover. Land use planning, site design, architecture and construction decisions can significantly reduce potential hazard levels and can also facilitate recovery after a disaster.

The Safety Element has been a mandated part of the general plan in California since the 1960s. The specific requirements for the Element have evolved over time to integrate adaptation to climate change and social equity considerations, and to align the General Plan with the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). Since 2000, cities have been required to have an LHMP in order to qualify for disaster-related federal funds. In 2006, California passed AB 2140, which encourages local governments to integrate or incorporate the LHMP into the Safety Element of the General Plan. While San Rafael's LHMP stands on its own as an adopted City document, its policy recommendations are incorporated into this Element and inform other elements of the General Plan.

As the title of this Element implies, the concept of "resilience" is embedded in the goals, policies and programs. In the context of the General Plan, resilience is defined as the ability of communities to maintain their quality of life and adapt amidst changing conditions and challenges—including natural disasters, climate change, and public health emergencies. The Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative defines urban resilience as "the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience."

San Rafael is committed to becoming more resilient through partnerships with its residents and businesses, collaborations with other agencies, its own operations, and long-range planning.

“ Resilience is the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience. ”

*-- Rockefeller Foundation,
100 Resilient Cities Initiative*

Goal S-1: A Safer, More Resilient City

Minimize San Rafael's vulnerability to the impacts of environmental hazards and public health emergencies.

San Rafael is susceptible to earthquakes, wildfires, landslides, floods, extreme heat, and other hazards, many of them intensified by a changing climate. The City will reduce the potential for damage and losses to property, health and human life, the economy, and the environment. It will also effectively respond to public health emergencies by minimizing disruption of critical services and providing effective communication and response.

The City of San Rafael is committed to proactively reducing risks and expenses from natural disasters through hazard mitigation planning. A Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) was adopted in November 2017. In July 2019, the City adopted the Marin County Multi-Jurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, which complements the City's Plan with additional programs covering a broader geographic area and wider range of hazards. Table 8-1 summarizes hazards in the Planning Area and the likelihood and extent of their impacts.

Policies under Goal S-1 express the City's commitment to maintaining an LHMP, integrating hazard data in land use planning decisions, and reducing the potential for damage to critical public facilities. The policies also address civic resilience in the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and recognize the importance of incorporating public health emergencies in hazard mitigation planning.



Table 8-1: San Rafael Hazard Identification Assessment

Hazard	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Magnitude/Severity	Significance	Climate Change Impacts
Climate Change	Extensive	Highly Likely	Limited	Medium	N/A
Coastal Flooding/ Sea Level Rise	Significant	Likely	Critical	Medium	High
Dam Failure	Limited	Unlikely	Negligible	Low	Medium
Drought/ Water Shortage	Extensive	Likely	Critical	Medium	High
Earthquake	Extensive	Occasional/ Likely	Catastrophic	High	Low
Earthquake Liquefaction	Limited	Occasional/ Likely	Catastrophic	High	Low
Extreme Heat	Extensive	Highly Likely	Critical	Medium	High
Flood (100/500 yr)	Significant	Occasional/ Unlikely	Critical	High	High
Flood: Localized/ Stormwater	Extensive	Highly Likely	Limited	Medium	High
Landslides/ Mudslides/ Erosion	Significant	Likely	Limited	Medium	Medium
Levee Failure	Significant	Occasional	Limited	Medium	High
Severe Storms	Extensive	Highly Likely	Critical	Medium	Medium
Tsunami	Limited	Unlikely	Limited	Medium	High
Wildfire	Significant	Likely	Catastrophic	High	Medium
KEY TO TERMS USED IN TABLE: Geographic Extent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited: Less than 10% of City Significant: 10-50% of City Extensive: 50-100% of City Probability of Future Occurrences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly Likely: Near 100% chance of occurrence in next year, or happens every year. Likely: Between 10 and 100% chance of occurrence in next year, or has a recurrence interval of 10 years or less. Occasional: Between 1 and 10% chance of occurrence in the next year, or has a recurrence interval of 11 to 100 years. Unlikely: Less than 1% chance of occurrence in next 100 years, or has a recurrence interval of greater than every 100 years 			Magnitude/Severity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catastrophic—More than 50 percent of property severely damaged; shutdown of facilities for more than 30 days; and/or multiple deaths Critical—25-50 percent of property severely damaged; shutdown of facilities for at least two weeks; and/or injuries and/or illnesses result in permanent disability Limited—10-25 percent of property severely damaged, shutdown of facilities for more than a week; and/or injuries/illnesses treatable do not result in permanent disability Negligible—Less than 10 percent of property severely damaged, shutdown of facilities and services for less than 24 hours; and/or injuries/illnesses treatable with first aid Significance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low: minimal potential impact Medium: moderate potential impact High: widespread potential impact Climate Change Impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low: Climate change is not likely to increase probability Medium: Climate change is likely to increase probability High: Climate change is very likely to increase probability. 		

Source: City of San Rafael LHMP, 2017

Policy S-1.1: Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP)

The San Rafael LHMP is adopted by reference into the General Plan.¹ Policies and actions throughout the General Plan shall be consistent with the LHMP and support its goals and objectives.

Program S-1.1A: LHMP Mitigation Action Plan. *Implement the Mitigation Action Plan in the LHMP. The City will consider opportunities to advance each action through operating procedures, development approvals, budgets, public education, and capital improvement projects.*

Program S-1.1B: Mitigation Program Funding. *Develop an overall funding strategy to prioritize and pursue mitigation projects, including identification and tracking of grants and regular coordination with FEMA and State hazard mitigation agencies.*

Program S-1.1C: LHMP Updates. *Periodically update the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan to reflect new data, technology, available resources, partnership opportunities, and state and federal requirements.*

Policy S-1.2: Location of Future Development

Permit development only in those areas where potential danger to the health, safety, and welfare of the community can be adequately mitigated. Land uses and densities should take environmental hazards such as earthquakes, flooding, sea level rise, and wildfires into consideration.

Program S-1.2A: Entitlement Process. *Use the entitlement process to evaluate the potential for hazards and to require appropriate mitigation measures and approval conditions.*

Program S-1.2B: Use of Hazard Maps in Development Review
Review slope stability, seismic, flood hazard, sea level rise, wildfire, and other environmental hazard maps when development is proposed. Require appropriate studies and actions to ensure that hazards are identified and mitigated.

See also Policy LU-1.8 on clustering. See the Conservation/ Climate Change Element for policies relating to air quality and development suitability.

Policy S-1.3: Location of Public Improvements

Avoid locating public improvements and utilities in areas with high hazard levels. When there are no feasible alternatives, require effective mitigation measures to reduce the potential for damage.

Program S-1.3A: Critical Facilities in Vulnerable Areas. *Prepare a Public Facility Vulnerability Assessment to identify City buildings and other infrastructure that are susceptible to environmental hazards. Measures should be taken to avoid extraordinary maintenance and operating expenses associated with hazardous conditions and minimize damage potential and interruption of service following a disaster.*

¹ The LHMP was adopted on November 20, 2017. This policy applies to that document, including any subsequent amendments.

Policy S-1.4: Public Health Emergencies

Minimize the impact of public health emergencies, including pandemics, through effective planning, response, and recovery. The City will work with the County of Marin and other public and private partners to contain and control disease outbreaks, limit the number of illnesses and deaths, preserve the continuity of critical government functions, minimize social disruption, and reduce economic loss.

Program S-1.4A: LHMP Amendments. Amend local emergency preparedness documents as needed to address public health emergencies, including communication protocol, emergency operating procedures, and provisions for sheltering-in-place.

Program S-1.4B: Pandemic Response and Recovery. Monitor and update data to support response and recovery to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Such data should consider immediate and long-term impacts on housing, jobs, equity, local retail, parks and open spaces, health care, social services, the environment, demand for City services, and other variables that shape the safety and well-being of San Rafael residents and employers. As needed, amend policies and ordinances to address pandemic impacts and facilitate recovery and resilience to future public health emergencies.

Geologic Hazards

Goal S-2: Resilience to Geologic Hazards

Minimize potential risks associated with geologic hazards, including earthquake-induced ground shaking and liquefaction, landslides, erosion, sedimentation, and settlement.

Development proposed within geologic hazard areas shall not be endangered by, nor contribute to, hazardous conditions on- or off-site. New development should only be approved in areas of identified geologic hazard if the hazard can be appropriately mitigated.

Geologic hazards in the San Rafael Planning Area include earthquakes, landslides, mudslides, subsidence, and expansive soil. Earthquakes can produce severe ground shaking, ground rupture, liquefaction, lurching, and other forms of ground failure. All of these hazards have the potential to damage or destroy structures, streets, and utilities. The potential for hazards can be reduced through engineering and special construction methods. In some cases, engineering solutions are not feasible and avoidance of the hazard may be the best way to ensure public health and safety.

Long term costs to the City, such as maintenance, liability exposure and emergency services, are potentially greater where high hazards exist. Moreover, certain land uses (such as schools, hospitals, and fire stations) may not be appropriate and are not permitted in areas with very high geologic hazard levels.

Earthquakes

The diagram on the next page shows the primary earthquake faults in the San Rafael Planning Area. San Rafael is approximately nine miles east of the San Andreas Fault and eight miles west of the Hayward Fault. Other faults in the vicinity include Rodgers Creek Fault in Sonoma County and the San Gregorio Fault on the western edge of San Mateo County. While there are no active faults within San Rafael itself, an earthquake on any of the regional faults could cause significant damage in the city. Impacts will vary depending on the proximity, magnitude, depth and intensity of the event.



Source: UC Berkeley Seismology Lab

Additionally, the performance of structures during an earthquake varies depending on the type of construction and the characteristics of the underlying soils. In general, wood frame structures perform well, especially when their foundations are properly designed and anchored. At one time, San Rafael had a large number of unreinforced masonry buildings (URMs). These have generally been upgraded to meet current Building Code requirements. A current priority is the upgrading of “soft-story” buildings (see text box).

The US Geological Survey has estimated that there is a 62 percent probability of a magnitude 6.7 earthquake or greater in the Bay Area by 2032. The risk is 27 percent for the Hayward Fault and 21 percent for the San Andreas Fault. Figure 8-1 shows the projected ground shaking that would result in San Rafael in the event of a 7.8 magnitude earthquake on the San Andreas Fault. Most of the city would experience “strong” shaking, and areas near the shoreline would experience “very strong” shaking. Some of the shoreline areas could be subject to liquefaction, which occurs when ground shaking transforms solid material into a fluid state.

Landslides

Landslides are gravity-driven movements of earth materials that can include rock, soil, unconsolidated sediment, or combinations of such materials. Landslides may move rapidly or they may creep slowly for long periods of time. Some of the factors that contribute to landslide potential include slope steepness, underlying soil types, water content, vegetation coverage, and prior alteration by construction. Rain events can exacerbate these conditions.

Much of San Rafael is hilly, with slopes on many parcels exceeding 30 percent. A number of landslides have occurred in the city, generally associated with winter storms. As noted in the text box on the facing page, site-specific geotechnical investigations may be required by the City to determine the potential for landslides at any given site. The City has also adopted a Hillside Development Overlay District to minimize hazards associated with development on steep or unstable slopes.



Retrofitting Soft Story Buildings

San Rafael includes a number of “soft-story” office buildings and multi-family apartments. Most of these buildings were constructed in the 1950s and 60s with “tuck under” parking on the ground floor and one to two stories of habitable space above. The design of these structures, with large openings, few internal walls on the ground floor, and slender columns supporting the weight of the upper floors, can result in inadequate lateral support during an earthquake. Installation of shear walls and bracing can improve the stability of such structures.

Policy S-2.1: Seismic Safety of New Buildings

Design and construct all new buildings to resist stresses produced by earthquakes. The minimum level of seismic design shall be in accordance with the most recently adopted building code as required by State law.

Program S-2.1A: Seismic Design. *Adopt and enforce State building codes which ensure that new or altered structures meet the minimum seismic standards set by State law. State codes may be amended as needed to reflect local conditions.*

Program S-2.1B: Geotechnical Review. *Continue to require geotechnical studies and peer review for proposed development as set forth in the City's Geotechnical Review Matrix (See Appendix F and text box at right). Such studies should determine the extent of geotechnical hazards, optimum design for structures and the suitability of proposed development for its location, the need for special structural requirements, and measures to mitigate any identified hazards. Review and update the Matrix to ensure that it supports and implements the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, reflects current practices and is internally consistent, and potentially remove the procedures from the General Plan and instead adopt them as part of the Zoning Ordinance or through a separate resolution.*

Program S-2.1C: Earthquake Hazard Study. *As recommended by the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, complete an Earthquake Hazard Study that examines geologic hazards in the city.*

Policy S-2.2: Minimize the Potential Effects of Landslides.

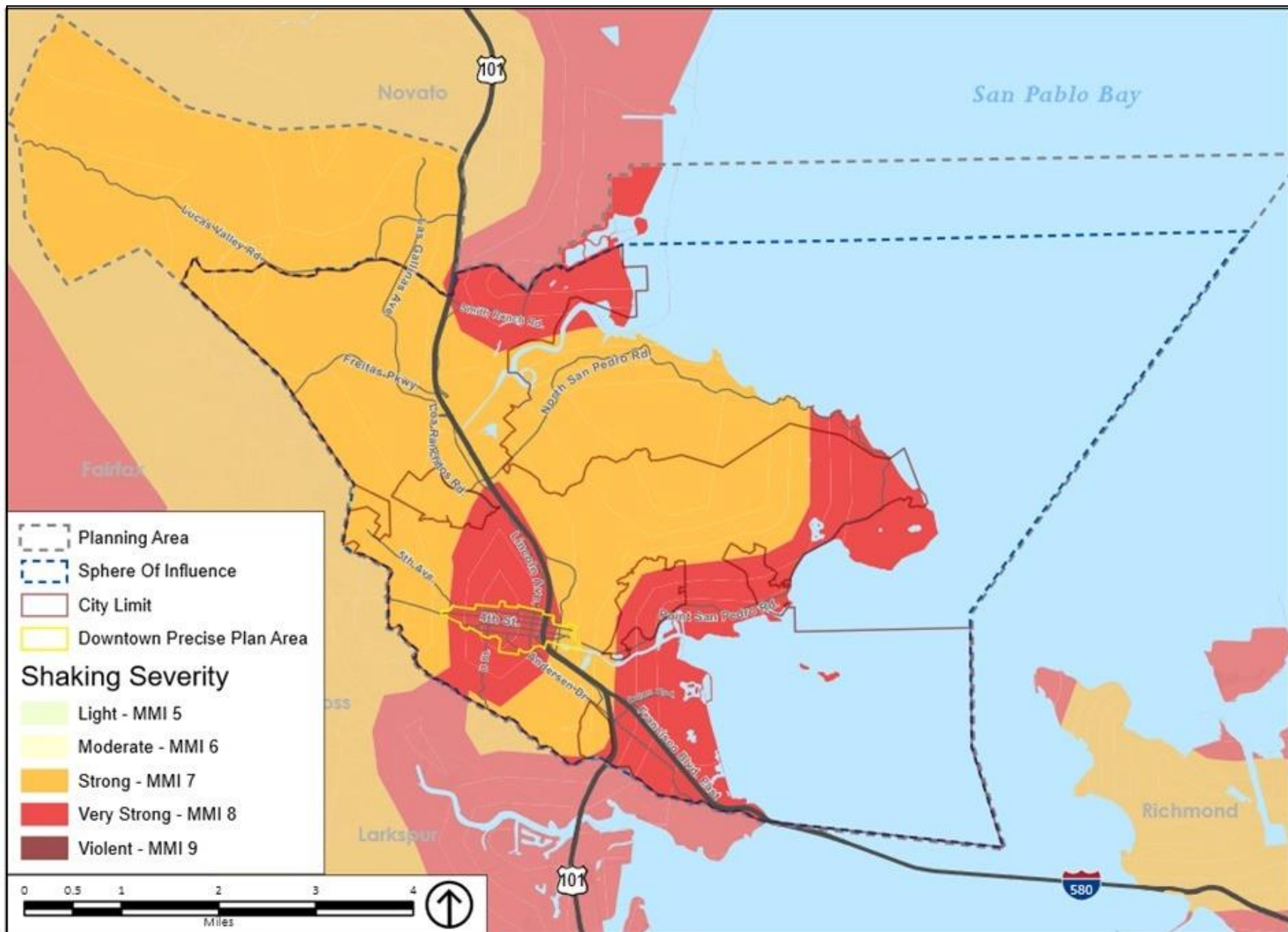
Development proposed in areas with existing or potential landslides (as identified by a registered geologist or geotechnical engineer) shall not be endangered by, or contribute to, hazardous conditions on a site or adjoining properties. The City will only approve new development in areas of identified landslide hazard if the hazard can be appropriately mitigated, including erosion control and replacement of vegetation.

Program S-2.2A: Landslide Mitigation and Repair Projects. *Undertake landslide hazard mitigation and repair projects, as outlined in the LHMP. These projects include a landslide identification and management program, repair of the Fairhills Drive landslide, and repair of the Bret Harte sewer easement.*



Geotechnical Study Requirements in San Rafael

Appendix F of the General Plan identifies the requirements for geotechnical hazard studies for new construction in San Rafael. The requirements vary depending on the underlying geology of the area and the slope of the site. The US Geologic Survey has identified 16 different geologic units in San Rafael, shown in Figure F-1 (see Appendix F). These can be generally grouped into four categories, including bedrock, colluvium, alluvium, and bay mud. Different structural requirements are associated with each area, reflecting soil strength and seismic stability.



Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 8-1:
Ground Shaking Potential



Policy S-2.3: Seismic Safety of Existing Buildings

Encourage the rehabilitation or elimination of structures susceptible to collapse or failure in an earthquake. Historic buildings shall be treated in accordance with the Historic Preservation Ordinance and Historic Building Code (see also *Program CDP-5.5A*).

Program S-2.3A: Seismic Safety Building Reinforcement. Enforce State and local requirements for reinforcement of existing buildings, including the City's remaining unreinforced masonry (URM) buildings.

Program S-2.3B: Soft-Story Building Mitigation Plan. Complete a citywide assessment of soft-story buildings and develop a mitigation strategy and cost-benefit analysis to modify these structures to reduce their potential to collapse during an earthquake.

Policy S-2.4: Post-Earthquake Inspections

Require post-earthquake inspections of critical facilities and other impacted buildings and restrict entry into compromised structures as appropriate. Following a major earthquake, inspections shall be conducted as necessary in conjunction with other non-city public agencies and private parties to ensure the structural integrity of water storage facilities, storm drainage structures, sewer lines and treatment facilities, transmission and telecommunication facilities, major roadways, bridges, elevated freeways, levees, canal banks, and other important utilities and essential facilities.

Program S-2.4A: Inspection List. Develop and maintain a list of facilities that would be inspected after a major earthquake, including City-owned essential or hazardous facilities. Facilities on the list should be prioritized for inspection-scheduling purposes.

Policy S-2.5: Erosion Control

Require appropriate control measures in areas susceptible to erosion, in conjunction with proposed development. Erosion control measures should incorporate best management practices (BMPs) and should be coordinated with requirements for on-site water retention, water quality improvements, and runoff control.

Program S-2.5A: Erosion and Sediment Control Plans. *Require Erosion and Sediment Control Plans (ESCPs) for projects meeting the criteria defined by the Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program, including those requiring grading permits and those with the potential for significant erosion and sediment discharges. Projects that disturb more than one acre of soil must prepare a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, pursuant to State law.*

Program S-2.5B: Grading During the Wet Season. *Avoid grading during the wet season due to soil instability and sedimentation risks. Require that development projects implement erosion and/or sediment control measures and runoff discharge measures based on their potential to impact storm drains, drainageways, and creeks.*

Program S-2.5C: Sediment Use. *Explore the use of sediment from human activities such as dredging and natural processes such as erosion for wetlands restoration and shoreline resiliency projects.*

Policy S-2.6: Septic Systems

Discourage the use of septic systems within San Rafael's Planning Area. If no other alternatives exist, then soil tests shall be required to determine if soils are suitable for a septic system or other innovative means of onsite wastewater disposal. In hillside areas, an evaluation of the impact of additional water from a septic system on hillside stability shall be required. New or improved septic systems shall be designed by a registered civil engineer that specializes in septic design.

Flooding and Sea Level Rise

Goal S-3: Resilience to Flooding and Sea Level Rise

Recognize, plan for, and successfully adapt to the anticipated effects of increased flooding and sea level rise.

San Rafael's land use patterns, transportation system, and infrastructure should be planned to anticipate the impacts of extreme weather events and global climate change, including sea level rise, rising groundwater, and potential flooding. A range of measures will be used to mitigate flood hazards along drainageways and creeks and improve resilience and flood protection in low-lying areas.

Flooding in San Rafael may occur as a result of heavy rain, blocked storm drains, rising groundwater, or bay waters coming on shore (tidal flooding). Tidal flooding includes storm surges, tsunamis, king tides, and other seismic or weather-related events, as well as longer-term impacts associated with rising sea levels and ground subsidence. Because much of coastal San Rafael sits only a few feet above sea level, it is particularly vulnerable to tidal flooding. Climate change will exacerbate this hazard in the future, making it essential to develop effective long-term strategies to reduce potential losses.

Flood-prone areas are shown in Figure 8-2. The map depicts the 100-year flood plain, a designation developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that is used for flood insurance purposes. The 100-year flood plain has a one percent chance of flooding in any given year. Areas in the flood plain include all of the Canal neighborhood, much of southeast San Rafael, Santa Venetia, Contempo Mobile Home Park, and the north shore of San Rafael Bay. Many of these areas were initially tidal flats and marshes that were filled for development in the early and mid-20th Century.

Flood control measures, including stormwater pumping stations, have been developed to reduce the potential for flooding and remove stormwater during flood events. Much of the shoreline and creek outlets are protected by levees, although the condition of these levees varies and some areas remain unprotected (see Figure 8-2). The Marin County Flood Control and Water Conservation District also maintains infrastructure to reduce the risk of flooding in susceptible areas. Certain areas within the County – including Rafael Meadows and Santa Venetia – have been designated as zones where specific flood control activities are required.

San Rafael has adopted Municipal Code provisions addressing flooding. Title 18 aims to minimize public and private losses due to flooding. This is accomplished by restricting or prohibiting uses that may worsen flood hazards, requiring uses in flood prone areas to be protected against flood damage, controlling changes to flood plains and stream channels, regulating dredging and filling, and preventing diversion of flood waters. Although development is generally allowed in flood-prone areas, new habitable space must be elevated above the 100-year flood elevation. Hydraulic studies may be required to ensure that development does not cause a rise in the base flood elevation.

Sea Level Rise

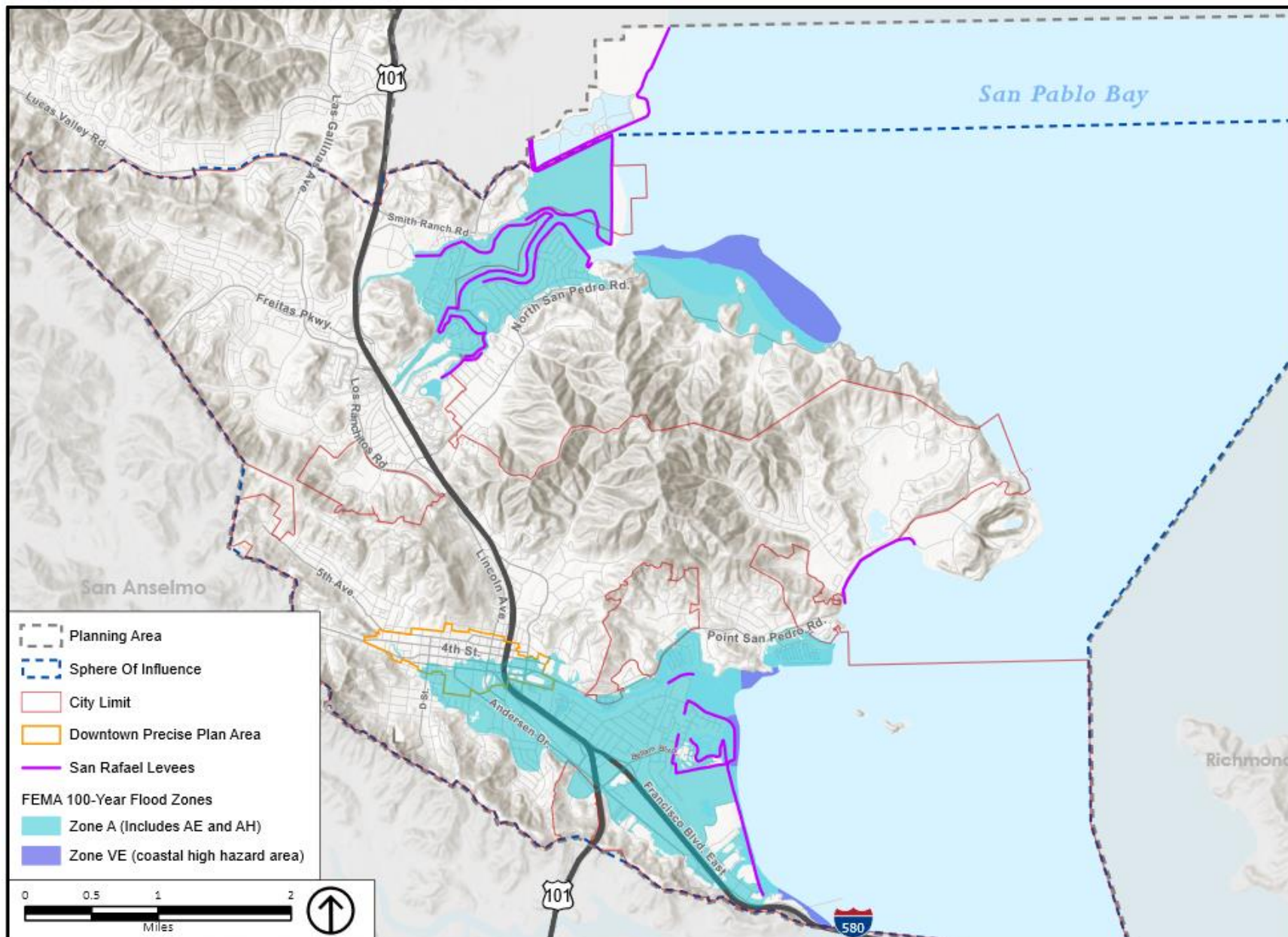
Sea level rise is a growing threat to San Rafael. Globally, sea levels have risen an average of eight inches in the last century and are projected to rise an additional seven to 24 inches by 2050. By 2100, sea level may be more than 55 inches above its current level. When combined with tidal surges from storm events, this has the potential to significantly impact neighborhoods along the shoreline and the San Rafael Canal. Among the most at-risk areas is the Canal neighborhood, home to nearly 12,000 residents many of whom are low income renters. At-risk areas also include many of the City’s employers, as well as critical transportation infrastructure, utilities, civic buildings, and wastewater treatment facilities.

Given the varying conditions and multiple uses along the San Rafael shoreline, a broad range of adaptation strategies will need to be considered. These include retreat, armoring or hardening the shoreline, elevating buildings and infrastructure, and nature-based improvements that slow wave action and restore or enhance natural systems. More detailed plans will be needed to identify these improvements, and new funding sources will be required to carry them out.

General Plan 2040 includes two appendices specifically focused on sea level rise hazards:

- **Appendix D** is a Flood Risk and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report. This report has been prepared by the City of San Rafael to set the stage for a detailed adaptation plan. It summarizes existing data and recent studies on sea level rise and provides a menu of strategies for further consideration.
- **Appendix E** is a Sea Level Rise Adaptation Technical Guidance Study. The Appendix E report was commissioned by the Department of Public Works in order to refine flood hazard mapping and vulnerability assessments for the San Rafael shoreline and evaluate the costs and benefits of different adaptation measures in each area.

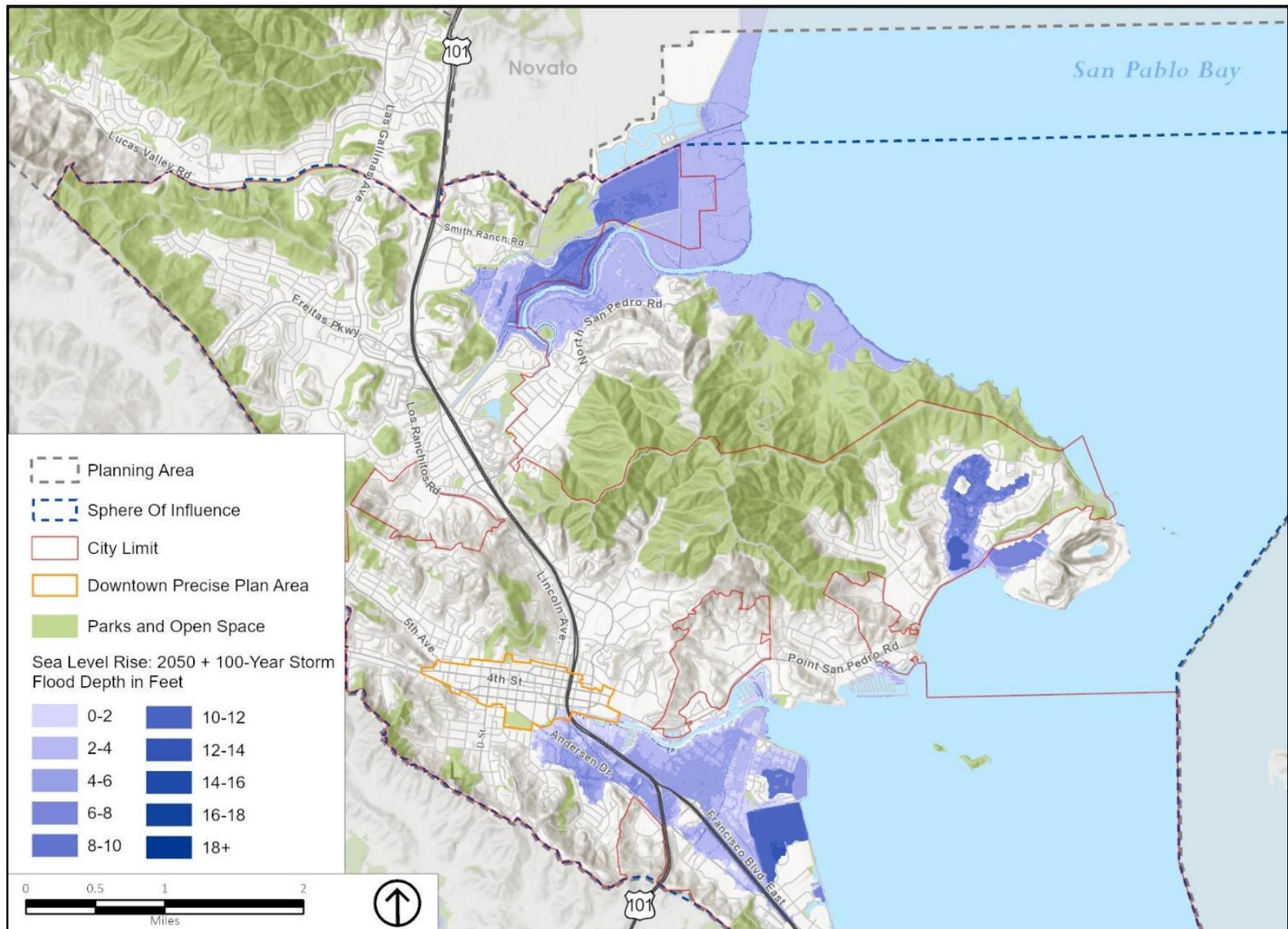
Figure 8-3 provides a “Sea Level Prediction Map” for San Rafael, identifying areas that would be flooded in the event of a 100-year storm combined with sea level rise by 2050. The outer boundary of this map also appears on the General Plan Land Use Map as a “Sea Level Rise Overlay Zone.” The policies below include provisions to reduce potential losses and focus adaptation strategies in this area.



Source: City of San Rafael, 2019; County of Marin, 2009; ESRI, 2017; FEMA, 2016; National Levee Database, 2020; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 8-2:

Flood Hazard Areas



Source: City of San Rafael, 2019; CoSMoS, 2016; County of Marin, 2009; ESRI, 2017; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 8-3:



Note: This map depicts projected flood depths in the Year 2050 resulting from a 100-year storm combined with projected sea level rise increases.

Sea Level Rise Prediction Map

Policy S-3.1: Sea Level Rise Prediction Map

Utilize Figure 8-3 (Sea Level Rise Prediction Map) to address flooding and sea level rise hazards. The figure should be used to:

- maximize public awareness and disclosure to property owners and the public.
- assess and address impacts to future development.
- establish a zoning “overlay zone” and building code requirements for future planning and adaptation.
- plan opportunity areas for adaptation.
- inform funding and financing decisions about short-term and long-term adaptation projects.

Program S-3.1A: Incorporate into City GIS. *Incorporate the Sea Level Rise Prediction Map into the City’s Geographic Information System (GIS) map and utilize GIS as a publicly accessible tool for tracking flooding and sea level rise hazards.*

Program S-3.1B: Periodic Update of Sea Level Rise Prediction Map. *Review sea level rise data at least once every five (5) years to determine the need for Map updates.*

Program S-3.1C: Sea Level Rise Overlay Zone. *Adopt an “overlay zone” on the City Zoning Map incorporating the Sea Level Rise Projection Map. The “overlay zone” shall include land use regulations for site planning and a minimum construction elevation that reflects flooding and sea level rise data.*

Policy S-3.2: Data Consistency

Ensure that the information and data related to increased flooding and sea level rise is current and consistent with the information and data utilized by the County of Marin.

Program S-3.2A: Coordination with County of Marin. *Coordinate with the County of Marin on updating data related to increased flooding and sea level rise. Utilize the County of Marin Bay Waterfront Adaptation & Vulnerability Evaluation (BayWAVE) as the basis for all City-prepared documents and plans addressing and adapting to increased flooding and sea level rise.*



Policy S-3.3: Awareness and Disclosure

Maximize awareness and disclosure by providing information to property owners and the public on areas subject to increased flooding and sea level rise vulnerability.

Program S-3.3A. Residential Building Resale (RBR) Reports. *Revise the RBR Report template to include a disclosure of potential property risk due to increased tidal flooding and sea level rise. Utilize the Sea Level Rise Prediction Map for confirming property vulnerability. Work with realtors and property owners to implement this requirement.*

Policy S-3.4: Mitigating Flooding and Sea Level Rise Impacts

Consider and address increased flooding and sea level rise impacts in vulnerable areas (see Figure 8-3) in development and capital projects, including resiliency planning for transportation and infrastructure systems.

Program S-3.4A: Development Projects. *Where appropriate, require new development, redevelopment projects, and substantial additions to existing development to consider and address increased flooding and sea level rise impact, and to integrate resilience and adaptation measures into project design.*

Program S-3.4B: Capital Projects and Roadways. *Prepare a guidance document to address increased flooding, sea level rise impacts, and adaptation measures into the City's capital projects and planning process. This should include strategies to identify and evaluate the costs, benefits and potential revenue sources for elevating or redesigning low-lying roadways and critical infrastructure. If the life of a public improvement in a vulnerable area extends beyond 2050, adaptation measures should be incorporated.*

Program S-3.4C. Coordination with Utilities and Services. *Coordinate with the utilities and services that have infrastructure and facilities in vulnerable areas (for example: wastewater treatment plants) to ensure that sea level rise information and goals are consistent with the City's goals, and that infrastructure/utilities projects address and plan for increased flooding and sea level rise.*

See also Policies CSI-4.6 and M-2.11 addressing sea level rise impacts on infrastructure and transportation



BayWAVE

Marin Bay Waterfront Adaptation & Vulnerability Evaluation (BayWAVE) was a multi-jurisdictional effort organized by the County of Marin in 2017. Its goal was to increase awareness and preparation for sea level rise in the County, focusing on the communities along the eastern Marin County shoreline between the Golden Gate and Novato.

BayWAVE tested six different scenarios for sea level rise, ranging from a 10-inch rise to a 60-inch rise plus a 100-year storm surge. The scenarios represent short, medium, and long-term projections, with vulnerable areas identified using a computer model. Each scenario resulted in a different projected impact in terms of the affected buildings, roads, utilities, natural resources, and other assets.

San Rafael uses BayWAVE as a foundation for sea level rise planning and adaptation, and uses the same model and scenarios in its own long-range planning.



Policy S-3.5: Minimum Elevations

For properties in vulnerable areas, ensure that new development, redevelopment, and substantial additions to existing development meets a minimum required construction elevation. Minimum elevations and other architectural design strategies should provide protection from the potential impacts of a 100-year flood (a flood with a one percent chance of occurring in any given year), the potential for increased flooding due to sea level rise, and the ultimate settlement of the site due to consolidation of bay mud from existing and new loads and other causes.

Program S-3.5A: Code Amendments for Floor Elevation. Update and adopt zoning, building and public works code requirements to establish and mandate a minimum finished floor elevation for new development, redevelopment and substantial additions to existing development. Consider adopting a minimum, finished floor elevation requirement of +3 feet above the FEMA 100-year flood elevation requirement.²

Program S-3.5B: Ground Elevation Surveys. Perform periodic ground elevation surveys in the Sea Level Rise vulnerability zone. The result of the surveys should be considered when developing projects to reduce coastal flooding potential.

Program S-3.5C: Title 18 Flood Protection Standards. Evaluate and revise Title 18 of the Municipal Code (Protection of Flood Hazard Areas) to address anticipated sea level rise, increases in rainfall intensities, and any changes related to Federal or regional flood reduction criteria.

Program S-3.5D: National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Continue to comply with the federal NFIP by maintaining a flood management program and flood plain management regulations. In addition, develop and periodically update a Community Rating System (CRS) to notify residents of the hazards of living in a flood area, thereby reducing local flood insurance rates.

² The + 3 feet requirement has been used in several other bayfront communities.

Policy S-3.6: Resilience to Tidal Flooding

Improve San Rafael's resilience to coastal flooding and sea level rise through a combination of structural measures and adaptation strategies.

Program S-3.6A: Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan. Prepare and adopt an adaptation plan addressing increased flooding and sea level rise. The adaptation plan shall include the following components:

- a) Sea Level Rise Projection Map, to be used as the basis for adaptation planning.
- b) Coordination with local, county, state, regional and federal agencies with bay and shoreline oversight, major property owners, and owners of critical infrastructure and facilities in the preparation of the adaptation plan.
- c) An outreach plan to major stakeholders and all property owners within the vulnerable areas.
- d) An inventory of potential areas and sites suitable for mid- to large-scale adaptation projects (see Appendices D and E for more information)
- e) A menu of adaptation measures and approaches that could include but not be limited to:
 - o Managed retreat, especially on low-lying, undeveloped and underdeveloped sites; in areas that are permanent open space; and in areas that are environmentally constrained. Transfer of development rights from such areas should be encouraged.
 - o Innovative green shoreline protection and nature-based adaptation measures such as wetlands and habitat restoration, and horizontal levees where most practical and feasible.
 - o Hard line armoring measures (sea walls, levees, breakwater, locks, etc.) in densely developed areas to minimize the potential for displacement of permanent residents and businesses.
 - o Elevating areas, structures, and infrastructure to reduce risks.
- f) The appropriate timing and "phasing" of adaptation planning and implementation.
- g) Potential financing tools and opportunities.
- h) Coordination or incorporation into the San Rafael Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Program S-3.6B: Partnerships. Foster, facilitate and coordinate partnerships with the County of Marin, other effected agencies and utilities, property owners, and neighborhood groups/organizations on planning for and implementing adaptation projects.

Program S-3.6C: Countywide Agency/Joint Powers Authority. Work with the County of Marin to facilitate the formation of a centralized countywide agency or joint powers authority to oversee adaptation planning, financing and implementation.

Horizontal Levees

A horizontal levee consists of a levee with a wide expanse of natural habitat, such as a salt marsh, between the levee and open water. By moving the hardened structure away from the water's edge, the marshes provide a natural buffer that absorbs wave action and reduces the impacts of storm surge and wave action. As a result, the levee may be reduced in size compared to unbuffered levees, which reduces their overall cost. This approach also creates habitat restoration and recreational opportunities.



Photo Credit: Save the Bay

Policy S-3.7: Shoreline Levees

Improve and expand San Rafael's shoreline levee system. When private properties are developed or redeveloped, require levee upgrading as appropriate, based on anticipated high tide and flood conditions.

Program S-3.7A: Levee Improvement Plans. *Assess existing levees, berms, and flood control systems to identify reaches with the greatest vulnerability. Develop improvement plans based on existing conditions and projected needs, as documented in adaptation plans. This should include improvement studies for the Spinnaker Point levee, as recommended by the LHMP, and the Canalways levee along San Rafael Bay.*

Program S-3.7B: Financing Levee Improvements. *Coordinate with property owners; residents and businesses; federal, state, and regional agencies; utilities; and other stakeholders to evaluate potential methods of improving levees and funding ongoing levee maintenance, including assessment or maintenance districts. The cost and fiscal impacts of levee improvements should be evaluated against potential benefits and costs and consequences of inaction.*

Policy S-3.8: Storm Drainage Improvements

Require new development to mitigate potential increases in runoff through a combination of measures, including improvement of local storm drainage facilities. Other measures, such as the use of porous pavement, bioswales, and "green infrastructure" should be encouraged.

Program S-3.8A: Storm Drainage Improvements. *Consistent with Countywide and regional stormwater management programs, require new development with the potential to impact storm drainage facilities to complete hydrologic studies that evaluate storm drainage capacity, identify improvements needed to handle a 100-year storm, and determine the funding needed to complete those improvements.*

Program S-3.8B: Green Infrastructure Guidelines. *Evaluate potential measures to more sustainably manage stormwater, erosion, and improve water quality associated with urban runoff. This includes improvements such as rain gardens and permeable pavement, which attenuate flooding downstream and provide ecological benefits.*

See also Goal C-3 and Policy CSI-4.10 for related policies and programs on water quality and storm drainage

Policy S-3.9: Flood Control Improvements Funding

Pursue financing and funding opportunities to fund short-term and long-term flood control and adaptation projects. Funding tools and opportunities would include, among others tax or bond measures, assessment districts, geologic hazard abatement districts and grants. The City will also support legislation that provides regional, state, and federal funding for these projects, and will pursue such funding as it becomes available.

Program S-3.9A: Incremental Flood Control Improvements. *Where needed and possible, new development/ redevelopment projects shall include measures to improve area flood protection. Such measures would be identified and required through the development review process.*

Program S-3.9B: Flood Hazard Mitigation Projects. *Undertake flood hazard mitigation projects as outlined in the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, including sewer relocation and replacement, pump station rehabilitation, corrugated metal pipe replacement, and improvements to flood-prone streets such as Beach Drive.*

Program S-3.9C: Restoration and Dredging Projects. *Implement restoration and dredging projects that will increase stormwater drainage capacity and reduce flood hazards. As noted in the LHMP, this could include restoration of the Freitas Parkway flood channel and dredging of Gallinas Creek and the San Rafael Canal.*

See also Policy CSI-4.11 on canal dredging and Program S-2.5C on sediment use.

Policies to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change are included in other parts of the General Plan, especially the Conservation/ Climate Change Element and the Mobility Element.

Wildfire

Goal S-4: A Fire-Safe Community

Minimize injury, loss of life, and damage to property resulting from wildland fire hazards.

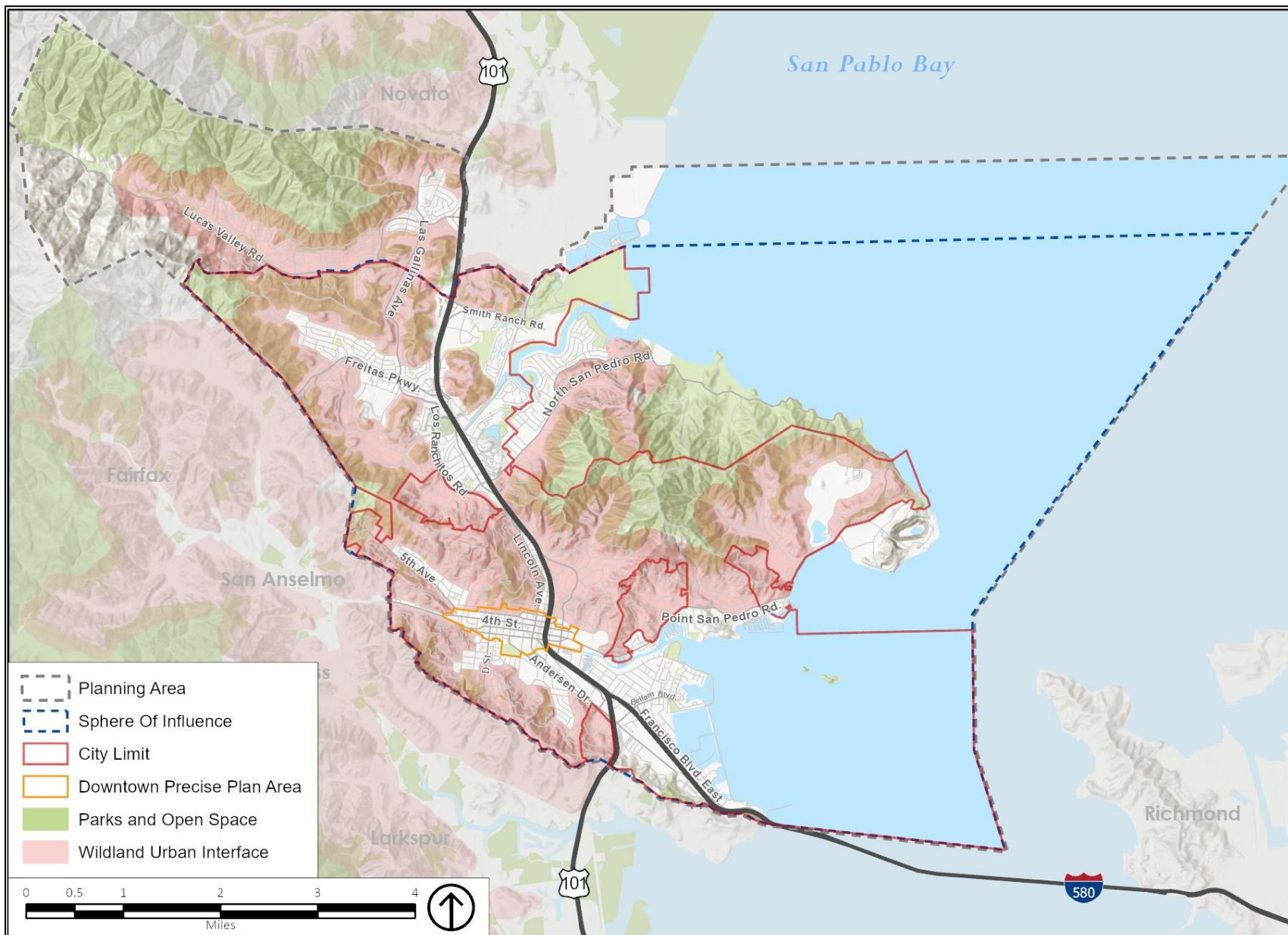
The City will continue to implement fire prevention and preparedness measures that reduce fuel loads and require development to be located, designed and constructed to minimize fire-related risks.

Wildfires are a significant concern in San Rafael. Hazard levels have increased in recent years due to drought, accumulating volumes of dense and flammable vegetation, and increased development in fire-prone areas. The threat is exacerbated by climate change, including extreme heat events, low moisture conditions, and reduced winter precipitation. There are also a larger number of people living in fire-prone areas than ever before. While wildfires were once a seasonal event, they now occur year-round. Wildfires not only threaten our open spaces and “wildland-urban interface” (WUI) areas, they can also threaten urban neighborhoods and business districts. Fires can cause injuries and death, destroy critical infrastructure, and inflict social and economic damage on communities.

Much of San Rafael’s wildfire prevention focus is in the WUI areas. These are shown on Figure 8-4 and encompass 6,000 acres of the San Rafael Planning Area. Structures in and around the WUI are at a higher risk for fire exposure and have a greater need for vegetation management and fuel reduction. Fire can spread rapidly in these areas through structures and vegetation or by ember dispersion. Property owners within the WUI have a responsibility to maintain defensible space around their homes and comply with applicable codes and ordinances.

There are a number of secondary hazards associated with wildfire. For example, smoke can also be a severe health hazard. There may also be landslides, debris flows, erosion, and other issues that can occur due to vegetation loss after a major fire.

Approximately 17 percent of San Rafael’s land area is considered to be a “High Fire Hazard Severity Zone,” and another 25 percent is considered to be a “Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zone.” The greatest hazards tend to be associated with steeply sloping open space and areas, including San Pedro Mountain, Black Canyon, Southern Heights Ridge, San Rafael Hill, and the Terra Linda and Sleepy Hollow Open Space areas. The city has experienced a number of wildfires in the past, including fires on San Rafael Hill in 2000, 2001, and 2018.



Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

Figure 8-4:
Wildland Urban Interface Areas



Photo Credit: Florian Kainz

Policy S-4.1: Wildfire Hazards

Continue vegetation management and maintenance programs to reduce the destructive potential of wildfires.

Program S-4.1A: Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan. *Implement the Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan (August 2020) in a manner consistent with the direction provided by the San Rafael City Council.*

Program S-4.1B: Fire Hazard Maps. *Maintain maps identifying potential fire hazard areas in San Rafael. Use these maps for vegetation management and planning purposes.*

Program S-4.1C: Fire Protection Ordinance. *Continue to implement Municipal Code standards to reduce fire hazards in areas, including vegetation management requirements and the designation of a Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Zone. Periodically update these standards and the WUI map to implement Wildfire Action Plan measures and other programs to further reduce wildfire risks.*

Program S-4.1D: Wildfire Fuel Breaks. *Where necessary, create new fuel interruption zones in Wildland Urban Interface areas and maintain and expand zones that are already in place. Highly flammable exotic vegetation should be strategically removed in these areas to slow the spread of wildfire and reduce threats to homes.*

Program S-4.1E: Goat Grazing. *Continue the use of goat grazing on lands where native vegetation will not be harmed through cooperative relationships with contractors and public agencies.*

Program S-4.1F: Encampment-Related Hazards. *Work collaboratively with service providers for homeless residents and other partners to reduce fire hazards associated with illegal encampments and campfires. Consider partnerships to employ unsheltered residents in vegetation management work.*



Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan

The City of San Rafael adopted a Wildfire Prevention and Action Plan in March 2019(*). The Plan recommended changes to the Municipal Code, specific projects, and a series of programs designed to reduce wildfire risks. The Plan contains 38 objectives, followed by a proposed action to be taken to meet each objective.

Adoption of the Plan set the stage for a number of Municipal Code changes, including Fire and Building Code updates, citywide standards for defensible space, and new vegetation management requirements. It also includes requirements for fuel reduction on public and private property, new outreach and education programs, additional staff, new evacuation and notification provisions, and maintenance and vegetation clearing of fire roads. Among the objectives of the Plan are eliminating fire hazards associated with shake and wooden roofs, expanding goat grazing, reducing hazards associated with homeless encampments, increasing emergency alert capability, and creating new templates for resilient landscaping. An Advisory Committee has been created to oversee Plan implementation.

(*) A re-organized version of the Plan was produced in October 2019 and accepted in early 2020.

Program 4.1G: Open Space and Forestry Management. Develop science-based open space and forest management plans to reduce fuel loads, maintain fuel breaks, replace highly flammable species with native species, and increase the health and carbon sequestration potential of open space lands.

See the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element for additional policies and programs on open space management.

Policy S-4.2: Fire Resilience in Developed Areas

Improve the resilience of neighborhoods and business districts to wildfire hazards.

Program S-4.2A: Reduction of Structure Hazards. Implement measures to reduce wildfire hazards to existing structures, including fire-resistant landscaping and building materials, protected vents and gutters, phasing out wood shake roofs, vegetation management around structures, limits on highly flammable plant materials, restricted parking on narrow streets, and enforcement and abatement programs. Focus on measures that provide the greatest fire safety benefits relative to their costs to the City and private sector.

Program S-4.2B: Tree Maintenance. Undertake a tree safety maintenance program to maintain the health and safety of trees along public roadways and minimize safety impacts from trees falling in road rights of way.

See the Conservation Element and Community Design Element for additional policies on trees

Program S-4.2C: Public Education on Fire Resilience and Response. Improve public education and awareness about fire-safe structures and landscaping. This should include demonstration projects that help property owners understand what species to remove and what to plant, and how to make their homes more fire-resistant. Education programs also should address actions to be taken in the event a fire is approaching, including warnings, evacuation routes, shelters, and provisions for “go bags” and personal safety.



Photo Credit: The Photos50 Project

Policy S-4.3: New Development in Fire Hazard Areas

Design new development to minimize fire hazards. Densities, land uses, and site plans should reflect the level of wildfire risk and evacuation capacity at a given location.

Program S-4.3A: Fire Hazard Mitigation in New Development. Through the development review process, require appropriate mitigation measures such as fire preventive site design, landscaping and building materials, and the use of fire suppression techniques such as interior and exterior sprinklers. Before adopting new Code standards and requirements, consider and disclose their potential costs to applicants relative to the benefits they may provide. .

Program S-4.3B: Development Review for Emergency Response. Review development applications in fire prone areas to ensure adequate emergency vehicle access, and adequate water pressure and supply for fire-fighting purposes (see also Goal CSI-4).

Program S-4.3C: Wildfire Prevention Funding. Develop new partnerships, revenue opportunities, and funding avenues for wildfire prevention and hazard abatement.

Hazardous Materials

Goal S-5: Protection from Hazardous Materials

Protect those who live, work, and visit San Rafael from risks associated with hazardous materials.

Threats to human health will be minimized through proper hazardous materials use, storage, transport, disposal, and planning.

Hazardous materials include substances that are flammable, corrosive, explosive, radioactive, infectious, thermally unstable, and poisonous. Although these substances are usually associated with industrial land uses, they can also be found at gas stations, dry cleaners, medical offices, public buildings, retail stores, and other businesses. Hazardous materials are also used by most households, in the form of cleaning solvents, paint, motor oil, pesticides, and common household chemicals.

The proper management of hazardous materials is an important health and safety issue. The improper use, storage, transfer, and disposal of these materials has the potential to contaminate the environment. Federal and state programs have been developed to reduce health risks, and to investigate and remediate hazards when they occur. In California, the State's Environmental Protection Agency works with the State Water Resources Control Board, the Department of Toxic Substance Control, Caltrans, and the California Division of Occupational Health and Safety (Cal/OSHA) to regulate hazardous materials activities. Regional agencies such as the Bay Air Quality Management District and the Regional Water Quality Control Board are also engaged in carrying out hazardous materials laws.

The City of San Rafael supports hazardous materials management and incident response through its Fire Department, Building Department, and various provisions of the Municipal Code. Much of the responsibility for administration and enforcement is delegated to the Marin County Department of Public Works (see text box on the Certified Unified Program Agency). The State of California has developed data bases inventorying the location of hazardous materials in San Rafael, including sites requiring remediation. Collectively, these data bases include 173 sites in the San Rafael Planning Area, including 134 requiring no further action and 39 requiring remediation. The level of remediation varies in part on the types of activities that will be allowed on the site in the future.

Programs and facilities have also been developed to manage household hazard waste. The City of San Rafael and Zero Waste Marin have cooperatively sponsored a household hazardous waste collection facility on Jacoby Street since 1993. The facility is operated by the Marin Recycling & Resource Recovery Association, with the San Rafael Fire Department managing the waste that is generated. Collected materials include paint and paint-related products, e-waste, batteries, motor oil, light bulbs, cleaning and gardening products, and other flammable or poisonous products. Roughly 25,000 households in Marin County use the facility each year.

Policy S-5.1: Hazardous Waste Management

Support State, regional, countywide and local programs to responsibly manage hazardous waste consistent with protection of public health, welfare, safety and the environment.

Policy S-5.2: Hazardous Materials Storage, Use and Disposal

Enforce regulations regarding proper storage, labeling, use and disposal of hazardous materials to prevent leakage, potential explosions, fires, or the escape of harmful gases, and to prevent individually innocuous materials from combining to form hazardous substances, especially at the time of disposal.

Program S-5.2A: CUPA Program.

Continue to participate in the Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA) program. The CUPA's responsibilities shall include overseeing the investigation and closure of contaminated underground storage tank sites.

Policy S-5.3: Protection of Sensitive Uses

Provide safe distances between areas where hazardous materials are handled or stored and sensitive land uses such as schools, public facilities, and residences. When the location of public improvements in such areas cannot feasibly be avoided, effective mitigation measures will be implemented.

Program S-5.3A: Inventory of Existing Hazards. *Work with State and County GIS data to identify existing hazardous materials permit holders near schools, evaluate relative risk levels, and determine actions in the event of an accidental release. This data should be used to evaluate risk levels and develop measures to ensure the safety of students and school staff where necessary.*

Program S-5.3B: Reducing Hazards Near Schools. *Consistent with CEQA and the California Public Resource Code 21151.4, limit activities with the potential to release hazardous materials within one-quarter mile of schools.*



CUPA in a Nutshell

Many of the routine requirements for hazardous waste and hazardous materials management in California have been bundled into what is referred to as the “Unified Program.” The Program ensures consistency across the state with respect to administration, permitting, inspection, and enforcement of hazardous materials rules. There are 83 agencies in the state that have been designed “Certified Unified Program Agencies” (or CUPAs). In San Rafael, this responsibility has been assigned to the Marin County Department of Public Works Waste Management Division (WMD).

WMD regulates and inspects approximately 850 business in Marin County that are required to comply with CUPA requirements, including preparation of hazardous materials business plans. They also issue permits for the operation of underground and above ground storage tanks storing substances such as gasoline. WMD also administers the California Office of Emergency Services Accidental Release Prevention Program and Cal EPA’s Hazardous Waste Tiered Permitting Program. Facilities that generate hazardous waste must register with WMD and submit regular reports to verify their compliance with basic regulations.

Policy S-5.4: Development on Formerly Contaminated Sites

Ensure that the necessary steps are taken to clean up residual hazardous materials on any contaminated sites proposed for redevelopment or reuse. Properties that were previously used for auto service, industrial operations, agriculture, or other land uses that may have involved hazardous materials should be evaluated for the presence of toxic or hazardous materials in the event they are proposed for redevelopment with a sensitive land use.

Program S-5.4A: Use of Environmental Databases in Development Review. *When development is proposed, use environmental and hazardous materials data bases (such as the State GeoTracker data base) to determine whether the site is contaminated as a result of past activity. As appropriate, require studies and measures to identify and mitigate identified hazards.*

Program S-5.4B: Hazardous Soils Clean-Up. *Work with appropriate agencies to require remediation and clean-up prior to development of sites where hazardous materials have impacted soil or groundwater. The required level of remediation and clean-up shall be determined by the Certified Unified Program Agency (see Program S-3.2A) based on the intended use of the site and health risk to the public.*

Policy S-5.5: Transportation of Hazardous Materials

Enforce Federal, State and Local requirements and standards regarding the transportation of hazardous materials. As appropriate, support legislation that strengthens these requirements.

Program S-5.5A: Safe Transport of Hazardous Materials. *Support California Highway Patrol's efforts to ensure the safe transport of hazardous materials.*

Program S-5.5B: Pipeline Safety. *Coordinate with regulatory agencies and utilities to ensure the safety of all fuel pipelines and ensure that maintenance and operating conditions are fully compliant with all state and federal safety regulations.*

Policy S-5.6: Hazardous Building Materials

Reduce the presence of hazardous building materials by implementing programs to mitigate lead, friable asbestos, and other hazardous materials where they exist today and by limiting the use of hazardous building materials in new construction. If such materials are disturbed during building renovation or demolition, they must be handled and disposed in a manner that protects human health and the environment.

Policy S-5.7: Household Hazardous Waste

Promote education about the safe disposal of household hazardous waste, such as motor oil and batteries, including the location of designated household hazardous waste disposal sites.

Hazardous Building Materials

Hazardous building materials are commonly found in older structures and may require special handling during demolition and renovation. Asbestos may be contained in thermal insulation, asphalt shingles, and vinyl floors installed prior to 1981, while lead compounds may be present in paints. Both lead and asbestos are known carcinogens, and measures are required to avoid the risk of inhalation when they are handled. Other items, such as electrical transformers and fluorescent light bulbs, may also contain hazardous materials. Federal, state, and local regulations have been developed to reduce risks and ensure proper disposal.



Emergency Preparedness

Goal S-6: Emergency Preparedness

Improve disaster preparedness, resiliency, response, and recovery.

The City should enhance public outreach, awareness, education, and preparedness for all hazards to minimize losses.

Emergency preparedness is an essential part of being a more resilient city. The City of San Rafael administers programs to help residents prepare for disasters and ensure that the City itself can effectively respond to—and recover from—natural and human-caused disasters. These programs begin with basic preventive measures such as vegetation management around homes, seismic reinforcement of older structures, and flood proofing of vulnerable infrastructure. They also include community emergency response training, drills and exercises, and education about how to stay safe when disaster strikes. It is also critical to have plans in place for evacuation, shelter, food, medical care, counseling, and other needs that occur during and after an emergency.

Most of San Rafael's emergency preparedness programs are administered through the Fire Department and the City's Office of Emergency Services. The City has an Emergency Preparedness Plan, which aims to prepare both the City and its residents for possible emergencies. San Rafael also works collaboratively with the Marin County Sheriff's Office and County Office of Emergency Services, which coordinates the activities of local jurisdictions and operates a countywide Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during a major emergency or disaster.

Policy S-6.1: Disaster Preparedness Planning

Conduct disaster prevention and preparedness planning in cooperation with other public agencies and public interest organizations.

Program S-6.1A: Mutual Aid Agreements. Continue, and where feasible expand, mutual aid agreements that augment public safety personnel in times of emergency.

Program S-6.1B: Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). Maintain a SEMS-based emergency plan that provides direction and identifies responsibilities after a disaster. Continue to train all City employees and officials in SEMS procedures.

Program S-6.1C: Emergency Preparedness Plan. Update and publicize the City's emergency preparedness plan in conformance with State guidelines, including information on evacuation routes and shelter locations. The City's Emergency Operations Center Handbook also should be updated.

Program S-6.1D: Urban Search and Rescue Techniques. Continue to ensure that Urban Search and Rescue techniques remain current. Provide opportunities for trained volunteers to participate as appropriate.

Policy S-6.2: Neighborhood Disaster Preparedness Programs

Encourage educational outreach to promote awareness and readiness among residents regarding disaster preparedness. Outreach and education should be targeted for each hazard type and risk area, including climate-related incidents. Community involvement is an essential part of resilience and recovery, and residents play an important role in disaster response.

Program S-6.2A: Educational and Training Programs. Support educational and training programs through the Police and Fire Departments and community-based organizations. These Programs include Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Citizens Police Academy, Neighborhood Response Groups (NRGs), and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) among others. Neighborhood teams should supplement City resources during emergency situations and can assist in disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts.

Program S-6.2B: Neighborhood Disaster Plans. Provide technical assistance as needed to develop and update neighborhood disaster plans.

Program S-6.2C: Website Improvements. Regularly update the Fire Department's website and social media presence to provide information on disaster preparedness, resources, and links to other sites. Include printed information in City publications such as the Recreation Activities guide.

Program S-6.2D: Outreach to Vulnerable Populations. Identify vulnerable populations (such as non-English speaking residents, frail older adults, young children, and persons with disabilities) that may need assistance in times of disaster. Develop outreach programs that are geared toward these populations, including multi-lingual communications.

Program S-6.2E: Disaster Management Drills. Conduct emergency response drills to test the effectiveness of local procedures, including evacuation and emergency shelter drills in neighborhoods prone to flooding and wildfire.

See also Policies EDI-2.10 and EDI-6.5 on increasing resilience among disadvantaged communities and older adults. See Program EV-1.10A on the role of the business community in emergency preparedness.



CERT Training

One of the most important emergency preparedness resources for residents is the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program. CERT is sponsored by the San Rafael Fire Department and includes a training program that familiarizes residents with the basics. Participants learn to:

- Size up the situation in their immediate area
- Reduce immediate dangers by turning off utilities, suppressing small fires, and evacuating hazardous areas
- Performing immediate medical triage and basic treatment of injuries
- Assessing structural integrity and performing light search and rescue
- Collecting and recording vital information to professional responders on damage, victims, and resources needed
- Providing leadership to untrained volunteers.

The City encourages all residents to participate in CERT training. A steering committee provides ongoing guidance and assists in specific projects, events, and meetings.

Policy S-6.3: Improving Evacuation Capacity

Improve local evacuation capacity by identifying and improving escape routes for areas with unique hazards or at-risk populations and identifying safe assembly locations for evacuees.

Program S-6.3A: Evacuation-Related Capital Projects. Identify key capital improvements needed to facilitate the orderly evacuation of at-risk areas and the ability of designated assembly points to handle evacuees.

Policy S-6.4: Emergency Operations Centers

Maintain a centralized Emergency Operation Center to coordinate emergency responses to emergencies, complemented by other locations in the city that provide for emergency evacuation and service delivery following a major disaster.

Program S-6.4A: Evacuation Shelters. Identify locations of evacuation shelters and provide the necessary training and supplies so that these centers can function effectively during and after a disaster. This should include refuge centers for extreme heat events, power failures, and air quality emergencies.

Policy S-6.5: Post-Disaster Recovery Planning

Incorporate post-disaster recovery planning in the City's emergency management programs. Recovery planning should include measures to mitigate the potential for further damage.

Program S-6.5A: Essential Services Following Disasters. Make provisions to continue essential emergency public services during and after natural disasters and other catastrophes.

Program S-6.5B: Employee Transportation. To ensure adequate safety personnel in an emergency, explore ways to transport first responders from outlying areas when damaged infrastructure prevents them from driving to San Rafael.

Program S-6.5C: Incentives for Disaster Response and Essential Worker Personnel. Support state legislation and City initiatives that would provide incentives for staff with roles in disaster response to live in San Rafael, so they may be readily available if a disaster should occur.

Program S-6.5D: Rapid Reconstruction Ordinances. Explore model ordinances and best practices to facilitate rapid reconstruction and recovery, including issues such as temporary housing and modular construction. Reconstruction should achieve code compliance, while advancing green building practices where feasible.

Policy S-6.6: Effective Communication Systems

Ensure that all City agencies with a role in emergency response are provided with effective, reliable and robust emergency communications systems and equipment. The systems and equipment should have adequate capacity and redundancy to ensure these agencies can accomplish their missions. Consideration should also be given to the communications needs of the County of Marin and other agencies that may be required to supply mutual aid to or from other jurisdictions.

Program S-6.6A: Involvement with Marin Emergency Radio Authority. Maintain active involvement with Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA) and pursue installation and activation of the MERA radio system.

Program S-6.6B: Emergency Alert Systems. Use emergency alerts, electronic message boards, and other notification systems to warn resident of an active threat such as a flood or wildfire. The use of emergency warning sirens and other types of mass notification alerts also should be considered.

Policy S-6.7: Emergency Connectors

Pursue the development of road connections for emergency vehicles only to improve access within San Rafael and between San Rafael and adjacent communities.

Program S-6.7A: Emergency Connectors. Maintain the following existing access routes for emergency vehicles:

- a) the existing connection between Freitas Parkway and Fawn Drive.
- b) the all-weather connections between Freitas and Fawn and between Ridgewood and Fawn.
- c) The connection between Del Ganado and Butterfield Road in Sleepy Hollow.
- d) The private portion of Sienna Way in the Dominican area.
- e) The access drive between Peacock and Biscayne.

Consider the need for additional emergency connectors, including the costs, effectiveness, impacts, and potential to use such routes for evacuation in the event of a wildfire.

Program S-6.7B: Obstruction of Evacuation Routes. Reduce obstacles for emergency vehicles and evacuation routes, including parked cars that constrict emergency vehicle passage.



Program S-6.7C: SMART Crossing. Work with SMART to explore the feasibility of an emergency vehicle rail and pedestrian/bicycle crossing at Merrydale Drive (see also Policy NH-4.10).

See the Mobility Element for policies to limit constriction of emergency access routes in future road design.

Policy S-6.8: Design of Public Safety Facilities and Utilities

Ensure that public safety facilities, critical utilities, and telecommunication facilities are designed and constructed to deliver necessary services with minimal interruption in times of disaster.

Program S-4.9A: Facility Evaluations. Regularly evaluate the need to upgrade essential public safety facilities, equipment, and technology, and identify funding mechanisms to meet these needs.

Program S-4.9B: Energy Storage Plan. Develop an Energy Storage Plan, including microgrids and expanded battery capacity, to improve reliability of the power system following a major disaster (see also Policy CSI-4.13 on energy reliability).

Policy S-6.9: Use of Technology

Leverage new technologies to reduce losses and save lives following a disaster. Implement improvements such as traffic signal pre-emption for first responders to facilitate response and recovery time.

9 Noise

Introduction

Noise is part of everyday life in a community. In San Rafael, the City's location in a major metropolitan area makes it susceptible to noise conflicts. Each day, hundreds of thousands of cars pass through the city on US 101 and I-580, and on local surface streets. The SMART train passes through town, while trucks and buses crisscross the city. Large and small planes pass over throughout the day and evening. Even in residential neighborhoods, noise sources such as leaf blowers, car alarms, construction equipment, and barking dogs are present and may be a source of annoyance.

Noise has the potential to impact human health and well-being. It can interfere with communication, work, rest, recreation, and sleep, and can have both physiological and psychological effects. Maintaining "peace and quiet" is a basic part of protecting the quality of life. As such, the Noise Element is one of the mandatory elements of the General Plan.

Standards have been developed by the City of San Rafael to curb noise impacts from existing sources and prevent adverse effects from potential new sources. The Noise Element provides the framework for these standards. Local standards are reinforced by State and federal regulations that protect the public from the harmful effects of noise.



The Measurement of Noise

Measuring noise takes three factors into consideration: (1) the magnitude of the sound; (2) the frequency of the sound; and (3) the variation in sound level over time. Noise levels are usually expressed with an indication of the length of the measurement period. For longer periods, the measurement reflects the average level over the period, accounting for the variations in noise that occur over time. A single measure called the “equivalent sound level” or L_{eq} is used to describe average noise over a specified time period.

Sound is typically measured using decibels (dB). A measurement of 10 dB would be considered the lowest threshold of hearing, while 120 dB is extremely loud. Decibels are expressed on a logarithmic scale. In other words, a reading of 50 dB is 10 times louder than 40 dB and 100 times louder than 30 dB. Noise measurements are taken on an “A-weighted” scale (expressed as “dBA”) that filters out very low and very high frequencies.

Noise measurements also consider the greater sensitivity of people to noise at night. The term “Community Noise Equivalent Level” or CNEL describes the average noise over a 24-hour period, with a penalty of 5 dB added to sound levels between 7 PM and 10 PM, and a penalty of 10 dB added to sound levels between 10 PM and 7 AM. The term L_{dn} (day-night level) is similar, but excludes the 7 PM to 10 PM adjustment.

The term “ambient noise” describes the composite noise from all sources at a given location. The US Environmental Protection Agency suggests that ideally, outdoor ambient noise levels be no greater than 60 dB L_{dn} in residential areas. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development has a minimum outdoor noise standard of 65 dB L_{dn} for residential uses. Where housing is located in areas with ambient noise that exceeds this level, special insulating measures are usually required to reduce interior noise.

Understanding Noise and Noise Standards

The text box above provides a basic primer on how noise is measured. The standard unit of measurement of the loudness of sound is the A-weighted decibel (dBA). Changes of less than 1 dBA are usually indiscernible. Changes of 1 to 3 dBA are detectable under quiet indoor conditions. A 3 dBA change in noise levels is considered the minimum change that is detectable in an outdoor environment. A change of 5 dBA is readily discernable to most people in an outdoor environment.

Table 9-1 indicates the noise levels associated with various sources. Outdoor noise levels in a suburban setting are typically 40 to 70 dBA, although even noise levels of 40-45 dBA can interrupt sleep. Prolonged noise exposure in excess of 75 dBA may affect blood pressure, heart functions, and the nervous system. Physical damage to human hearing may occur from prolonged exposure to noise levels higher than 85 dBA. Extended noise exposure above 90 dBA can result in permanent hearing loss.

Studies have found that work performance can be affected at noise levels of 65 dBA and above. Noise can make it difficult to think and perform complex tasks. Intermittent noise can be particularly distracting. Some individuals may be more sensitive to noise than others. Standards usually address the needs of the general population and recognize that individual responses vary considerably.

Table 9-1: Typical Sound Levels in an Urban Environment

Perceived Sound Level	Sound Level (dB)	Examples
Painfully Loud	160	Fireworks at 3 feet
	150	Jet takeoff
	140	Threshold of pain
Uncomfortably Loud	130	Power drill
	120	Thunder
	110	Auto horn at 3 feet, Rock band
Very Loud	100	Snowmobile, Pile driver
	90	Diesel truck, lawn mower at 3 feet
	80	Garbage disposal, Siren at 100'
Moderately Loud	70	Vacuum cleaner, leaf blower at 50'
	60	Ordinary conversation
	50	Average home, light traffic
Quiet	40	Library
	30	Quiet conversation
Very Quiet	20	Soft whisper
	10	Rustling leaves
Barely Audible	0	Threshold of hearing

Source: California Air Resources Board

State and federal agencies have developed standards for noise. Both the State of California and the federal government have set 65 dBA L_{dn} as the desirable maximum exterior standard for residential uses. Standard residential construction typically provides at least 20 dBA of noise attenuation (with windows closed), resulting in interior noise levels of 45 dBA or less. The 45 dBA standard for interior noise has been incorporated into Title 24 of the California Building Code, where it applies to all habitable rooms.

The San Rafael Municipal Code likewise addresses noise levels. Chapter 8.13 of the Code sets limits on noise for daytime and nighttime hours. The Code establishes different levels for residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed use areas, as well as different standards for intermittent noise and continuous noise. The Municipal Code also regulates construction noise.

The State of California has developed noise compatibility guidelines for use by local governments. The guidelines indicate the types of uses that are acceptable in a given location based on the ambient noise levels at that location. The guidelines are structured to reflect the sensitivity of different land uses to noise. For example, schools, hospitals, and housing are considered “sensitive receptors” and require a quieter environment than warehouses and manufacturing.

Table 8-2 presents the noise compatibility guidelines for San Rafael, which have been adapted from the State guidelines. The table indicates the exterior noise levels that should be considered *normally acceptable*, *conditionally acceptable*, *normally unacceptable*, and *clearly unacceptable* for major categories of land uses. Where exterior noise levels fall within the “conditionally acceptable” or “normally unacceptable” ranges, acoustical studies are typically required before those land uses are approved.

The designation of an area as “normally unacceptable” for a particular use does not mean the use is prohibited. Rather, it means that this is not an optimal environment for the use and attenuation will be required to address noise issues. This would apply to future residential uses around the Downtown SMART station and San Rafael Transit Center, where ambient noise levels exceed 70 dB L_{dn}. Such uses would likely be required to incorporate extensive sound proofing to achieve the required interior noise level of 45 dBA.

The Noise Environment in San Rafael

Noise measurements were taken in May 2019 to provide a baseline for the noise policies in the 2040 General Plan and to determine where ambient noise levels may exceed the compatibility standards. There were 22 short-term (15-minute) measurements during the morning and evening rush hours and 10 long-term measurements taken over a 48-hour period. The locations of the noise measurements, as well as the data collected, are shown in General Plan Appendix I.

During the monitoring period, noise levels at the long-term monitoring locations ranged from 47 to 74 dBA L_{dn}. Residential areas generally had noise levels of 60 dBA L_{dn} or below. The highest noise levels were in Downtown San Rafael and were just over 70 dBA L_{dn}. For the short-term noise measurements, noise levels were highest in Downtown San Rafael and along major thoroughfares with high traffic volumes.

Traffic Noise

Traffic is the primary noise source in San Rafael. In general, higher ambient noise levels are associated with proximity to US 101 and I-580. Sound walls have been installed by Caltrans to reduce effects on adjacent residential areas. The aesthetic impacts of a sound wall can be controversial and there may be concerns about the displacement of sound to other locations. Other approaches to reducing traffic noise include the use of rubberized asphalt and specialized paving materials. Changes in motor vehicle design, including increased use of electric cars, may reduce traffic noise in the future.

Stationary Noise

Most urban land uses generate some degree of noise. Industrial and commercial uses generate noise from heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, as well as machinery, compressors, chillers, boilers, loading dock activities, and various processes. Some of these systems may run 24 hours a day, while others may be intermittent. Nightclubs, outdoor dining areas, gas stations, car washes, fire stations, drive-throughs, school playgrounds, and athletic and music events all generate noise. Even residential uses generate noise through landscaping, maintenance, air conditioning systems, swimming pool and hot tub pumps, generators, and domestic activities.

For certain businesses, conditional use permits may be used to establish hours of operation or limits on activities to reduce the potential for noise conflicts. Various Code requirements may be applied to identify noise muffling and buffering requirements and establish measurable noise thresholds for activities.

Table 9-2: Noise Compatibility Guidelines for San Rafael¹

Land Uses	Interior CNEL or L _{dn} (dBA)	Exterior Noise Exposure, CNEL or L _{dn} (dBA)					
		55	60	65	70	75	80
Residential-Low Density Single-Family, Duplex, Mobile Homes	45*	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Purple	Purple
Residential-Multiple Family	45*	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Purple	Purple
Transient Lodging, Motels, Hotels	45*	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Purple
Schools, Libraries, Churches, Hospitals, Nursing Homes	45*	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Purple
Auditoriums, Concert Halls, Amphitheaters	--	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Red
Sports Arena, Outdoor Spectator Sports	--	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Playgrounds, Neighborhood Parks	--	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Golf Courses, Riding Stables, Water Recreation, Cemeteries	--	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Office Buildings, Businesses, Commercial and Professional	50	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Industrial, Manufacturing, Utilities, Agricultural	--	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red



Normally Acceptable:

Specified land use is satisfactory based upon the assumption that any buildings involved are of normal conventional construction, without any special noise insulation requirements.



Normally Unacceptable:

New construction or development should generally be discouraged. If new construction does proceed, a detailed analysis of the noise reduction requirements must be made and needed noise insulation features included in the design.



Conditionally Acceptable:

New construction or development should be undertaken only after a detailed analysis of the noise reduction requirements is made and the needed noise insulation features are included in the design. Conventional construction, but with closed windows and fresh air supply systems or air conditioning will normally suffice.



Clearly Unacceptable:

New construction or development generally should not be undertaken.

* Noise level requirement with closed windows, mechanical ventilation, or other means of ventilation shall be provided per Chapter 12 Section 1205 of the Building Code.

¹ The standards are derived from the 2017 General Plan Guidelines prepared by the State Office of Planning and Research (OPR).

Construction Noise

Construction noise occurs throughout San Rafael. Although it is temporary and intermittent, such noise can be particularly intrusive because of its very high output and repetitive nature. At a distance of 50 feet, a jackhammer may generate noise levels exceeding 88 dBA. The San Rafael Municipal Code includes exemptions for construction during business hours but does not allow construction on Sundays and federal holidays. It further establishes that construction noise levels may not exceed 90 dBA L_{max} at the property line at any time. Larger projects may be subject to specific requirements to avoid potential conflicts.

Aircraft Noise

Aircraft noise can occasionally be an issue in San Rafael due to aircraft passing overhead and planes taking off and landing at San Rafael Airport, a small private airport in the Smith Ranch area. The City is also home to a private heliport, located in southeast San Rafael near Point San Quentin. Aircraft noise is regulated by Federal Aviation Administration standards and by the California Code of Regulations. The State Code limits noise-sensitive land uses such as housing in areas where aircraft exterior noise levels exceed 65 dBA CNEL. As the maps in Appendix I indicate, noise levels are below this level at San Rafael Airport and are expected to remain below this level in the future. The heliport is located in a developed industrial area and does not impact noise-sensitive land uses.

Rail Noise

Sonoma Marin Area Rapid Transit (SMART) is the only source of rail noise in San Rafael. A Quiet Zone has been established in Marin County; this eliminates the requirement that trains sound their horns at all grade crossings. Noise monitoring completed for the General Plan in 2019 indicated that the trains did not generate substantial ambient noise relative to other activities in the Planning Area, such as highways.

Photo Credit: Frank Johnson





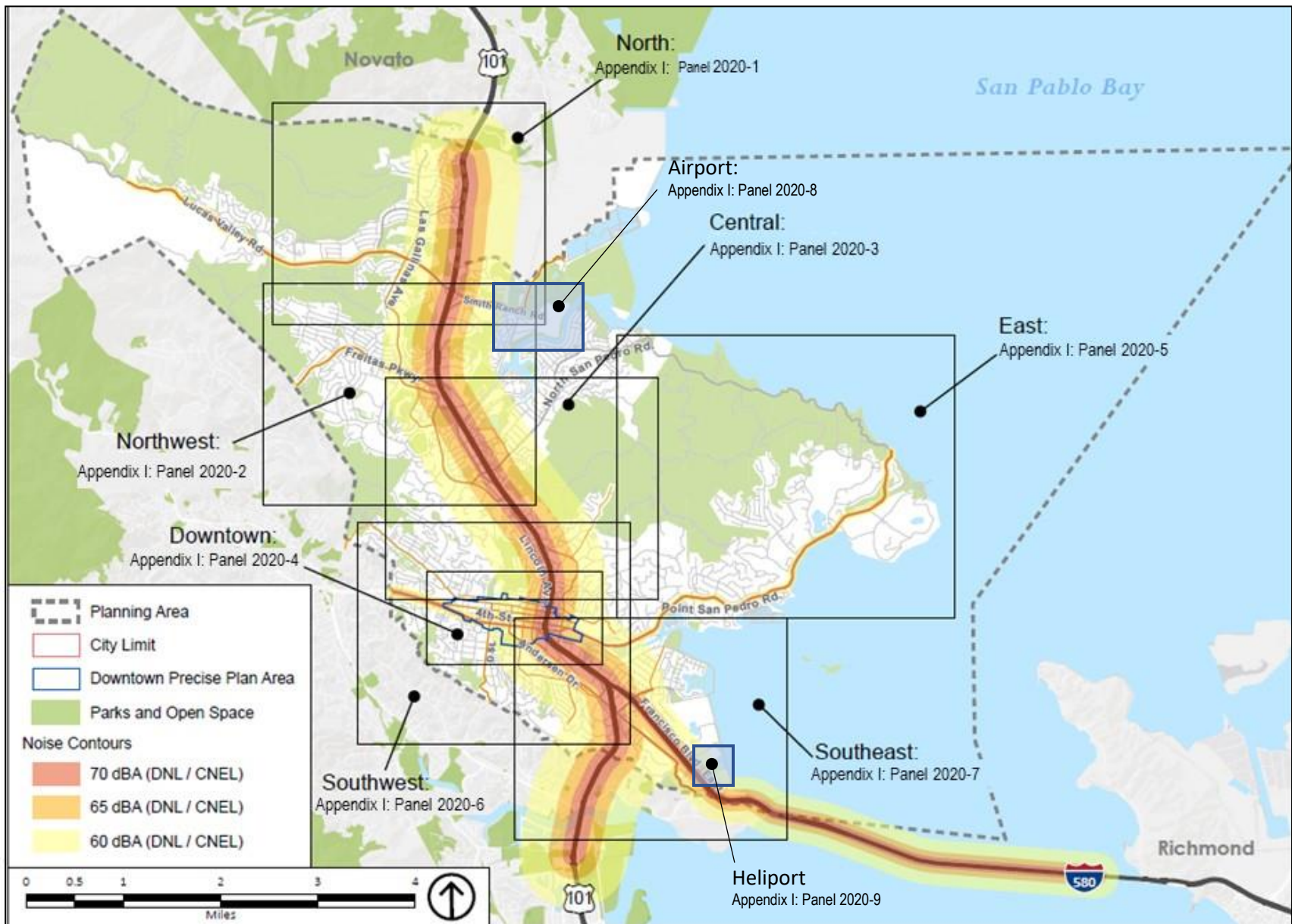
2020 and 2040 Noise Contour Diagrams

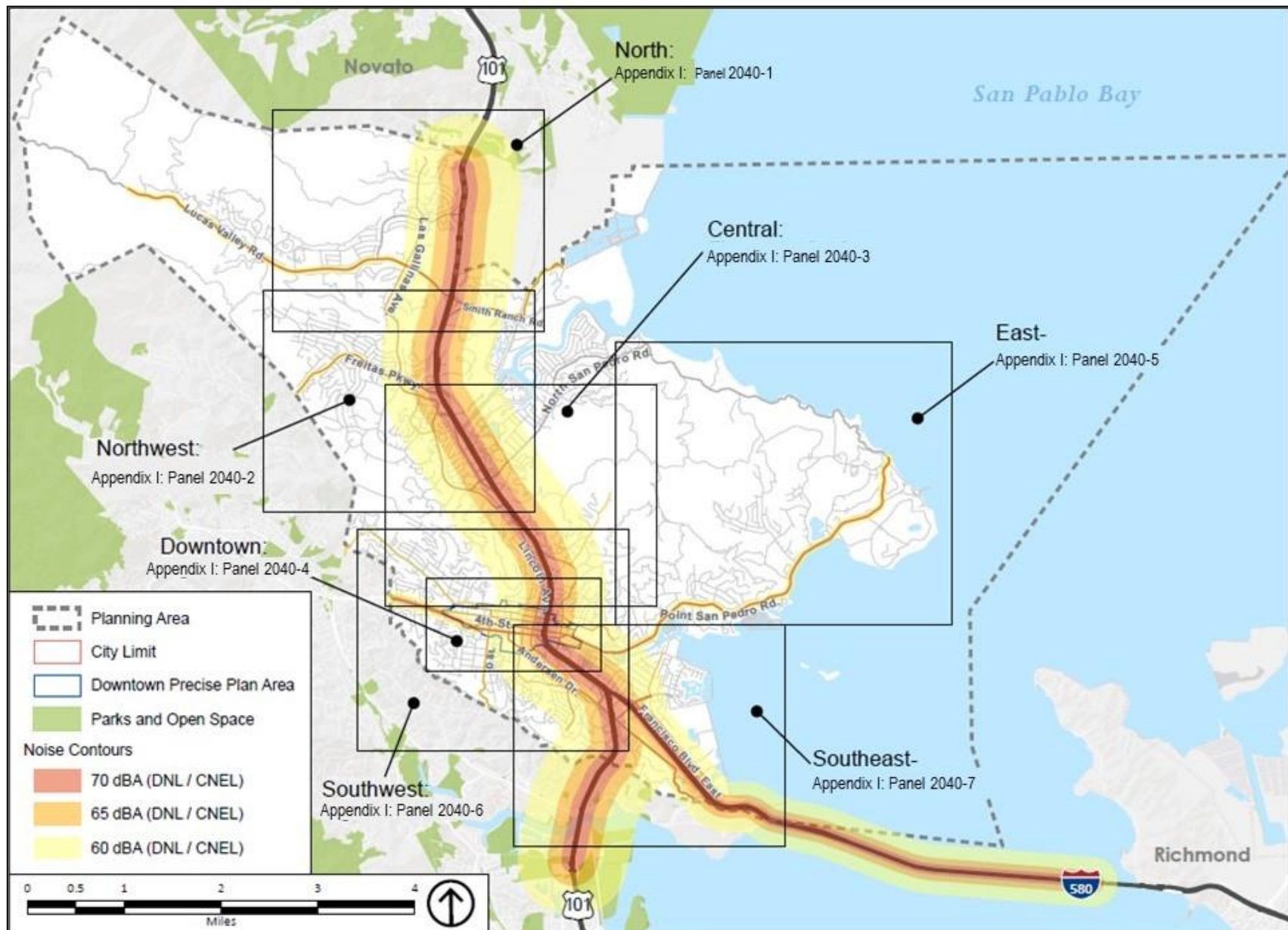
Transportation-related noise conditions across San Rafael have been estimated using a computer model developed by the Federal Highway Administration. The model considers traffic volumes, vehicle speed, and roadway geometry to determine the likely noise levels at various distances from freeways and major thoroughfares. The outcome is expressed using a contour diagram showing the expected ambient daily noise levels in 5 decibel interval bands.

Figure 9-2 shows 2020 noise contours using traffic data collected in 2019. Because of the map scale, areas along the freeways are shown at a finer level of detail in seven “panels” (inset maps) in Appendix I of General Plan 2040. Two additional inset maps are included for San Rafael Airport and the heliport near the east end of Kerner Boulevard. Figure 9-3 shows projected noise levels for 2040, using the traffic forecasts from the Mobility Element of the General Plan. Like the 2020 Map, there are panel maps in Appendix I that display the data at a finer scale.

There are only minor differences between the 2020 and 2040 maps. At most locations near the freeways, daily traffic noise levels are projected to increase by less than one decibel. Noise associated with increased traffic along surface streets increases by zero to 2.5 decibels over the 20-year period. These are cumulative measurements that consider increased regional traffic volumes as well as the sum of traffic from all development that may added in San Rafael during the 20-year planning horizon.

The 2040 diagram does not consider potential reductions in noise that may occur due to changes in road design and vehicle technology between now and 2040. It is possible that a shift to electric vehicles or the introduction of new road surface materials could lead to substantially quieter conditions by 2040. Nonetheless the contour diagrams provide a good indication of where additional sound proofing may be required in response to current ambient noise conditions, especially along the US 101 corridor and in Downtown San Rafael.





Source: ESRI, 2017; County of Marin, 2009; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks, 2019.

See Appendix I for inset maps of the seven subareas shown above

Figure 9-3:
2040 Noise Contours

Goal N-1: Acceptable Noise Levels

Protect the public from excessive unnecessary, and unreasonable noise.

Excessive noise is a concern for many residents of San Rafael. This concern can be addressed through the implementation of standards to protect public health and reduce noise conflicts in the community, including the Noise Ordinance.

The General Plan seeks to limit the impacts of noise on residents and employees in several ways. First, the Plan contains standards to determine the suitability of new land uses depending on ambient noise levels in the area. Second, policies limit the extent of new noise sources that might impact “sensitive” uses such as schools and homes. Third, the Plan calls for continued implementation of the City’s Noise Ordinance, to limit “nuisance noise” and other common sources. Finally, the Plan identifies different ways that noise can be mitigated, including construction methods, site planning, and barriers (sound walls, berms, etc.).

Policy N-1: Land Use Compatibility Standards for Noise

Protect people from excessive noise by applying noise standards in land use decisions. The Land Use Compatibility standards in Table 9-2 are adopted by reference as part of this General Plan and shall be applied in the determination of appropriate land uses in different ambient noise environments.

Program N-1A: Residential Noise Standards. *As shown in Table 9-2, maintain a maximum noise standard for backyards, decks, and common / usable outdoor areas of 60 L_{dn} dB for single family homes and 65 L_{dn} dB for multi-family and mixed use areas. As required by Title 24 insulation requirements, interior noise levels shall not exceed 45 L_{dn} in all habitable rooms in residential units.*

Policy N-2: Maintaining Acceptable Noise Levels

Use the following performance standards to maintain an acceptable noise environment in San Rafael:

- New development shall not increase noise levels by more than 3 dB L_{dn} in a residential area, or by more than 5 dB L_{dn} in a non-residential area.
- New development shall not cause noise levels to increase above the “normally acceptable” levels shown in Table 9-2.
- For larger projects, the noise levels in (a) and (b) should include any noise that would be generated by additional traffic associated with the new development.
- Projects that exceed the thresholds above may be permitted if an acoustical study determines that there are mitigating circumstances (such as higher existing noise levels) and nearby uses will not be adversely affected.

Program N-2A: Acoustical Study Requirements. *Require acoustical studies for new single family residential projects within the projected 60 dB L_{dn} noise contour and for multi-family or mixed use projects within the projected 65 dB L_{dn} contour (see Figure 9-3). The studies should include projected noise from additional traffic, noise associated with the project itself, and cumulative noise resulting from other approved projects. Mitigation measures should be identified to ensure that noise levels remain at acceptable levels.*



Program N-2B: Approval Conditions. Establish conditions of approval for activities with the potential to create significant noise conflicts and enforce these conditions once projects become operational.

Policy N-3: Reducing Noise Through Planning and Design

Use a range of design, construction, site planning, and operational measures to reduce potential noise impacts.

Program N-3A: Site Planning. Where appropriate, require site planning methods that minimize potential noise impacts. By taking advantage of terrain and site dimensions, it may be possible to arrange buildings, parking, and other uses to reduce and possibly eliminate noise conflicts. Site planning techniques include:

- (a) Maximizing the distance between potential noise sources and the receiver.
- (b) Placing non-sensitive uses such as parking lots, maintenance facilities, and utility areas between the source and receiver.
- (c) Using non-sensitive uses such as garages to shield noise sensitive areas.
- (d) Orienting buildings to shield outdoor spaces from noise sources.
- (e) Incorporating landscaping and berms to absorb sound.

Program N-3B: Architectural Design. Where appropriate, reduce the potential for noise conflicts through the location of noise-sensitive spaces. Bedrooms, for example, should be placed away from freeways. Mechanical and motorized equipment (such as air conditioning units) should be located away from noise-sensitive rooms. Interior courtyards with water features can mask ambient noise and provide more comfortable outdoor spaces.

Program N-3C: Noise Barriers. Where appropriate, use absorptive noise barriers to reduce noise levels from ground transportation and industrial noise sources. A barrier should provide at least L_{dn} 5 dB of noise reduction to achieve a noticeable change in noise levels.

Program N-3D: Noise Reduction through Construction Materials. Where appropriate, reduce noise in interior spaces through insulation and the choice of materials for walls, roofs, ceilings, doors, windows, and other construction materials.

Policy N-4: Sound Walls

Discourage the use of sound walls when other effective noise reduction measures are available. Vegetation, berms, and the mitigation measures in Policy N-3 are the preferred methods of absorbing sound along roads, rail, and other transportation features. Where there are no other feasible options (for example, along many sections of US Highway 101), the City will review and comment on sound wall design. Sound walls should be aesthetically pleasing, regularly maintained, and designed to minimize the potential displacement of sound.

Policy N-5: Mixed Use

Mitigate the potential for noise-related conflicts in mixed use development combining residential and non-residential uses.

Program N-5A: Disclosure Agreements. Where appropriate, require disclosure agreements for residents in mixed use projects advising of potential noise impacts from nearby commercial enterprises, such as restaurants and entertainment venues.

Policy N-6: Traffic Noise

Minimize traffic noise through land use policies, law enforcement, street design and improvements, and site planning and landscaping.

Program N-6A: Interagency Coordination. Work with Caltrans, Marin County, the Transportation Authority of Marin, and other agencies to achieve noise reduction along freeways and major arterials in San Rafael. This shall include noise mitigation measures in any redesign plan for the I-580/US 101 interchange.

Program N-6B: California Vehicle Code. Enforce applicable sections of the California Vehicle Code relating to noise.

Program N-6C: Paving and Transit Improvements. Pursue cost-effective paving technologies to minimize traffic noise and support the use of quieter buses and other mass transit vehicles. Noise reduction should be considered an important benefit as the City and its transit service providers transition to electric vehicles.

Policy N-7: Aviation-Related Noise

To the extent allowed by federal and state law, ensure that the noise impacts of any changes in facilities or operations are considered when granting or modifying use permits at the San Rafael Airport in North San Rafael and the heliport in East San Rafael (see Noise Contours for San Rafael Airport and Heliport in Appendix I). (See also Program M-1.4B on drones).

Policy N-8: Train Noise

Work with Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) to minimize noise and vibration associated with train service and to reduce the potential for impacts on nearby residences.

Program N-8A: Quiet Zones. *Maintain the Marin County designated “Quiet Zone” along the rail line. The Zone ensures that train horns are not sounded except when trains are leaving the station, or if there is an emergency.*

Policy N-9: Maintaining Peace and Quiet

Minimize noise conflicts resulting from everyday activities such as construction, sirens, yard equipment, business operations, night-time sporting events, and domestic activities.

Program N-9A: Noise Ordinance. *Maintain and enforce the noise ordinance, which addresses common noise sources such as amplified music, mechanical equipment use, and construction. Updates to the ordinance should be periodically considered in response to new issues (for example, allowing portable generators during power outages).*

Program N-9B: Construction Noise. *Use the environmental review process to identify measures to reduce the exposure of neighboring properties to excessive noise levels from construction activity.*

Program N-9C: Noise Specifications. *Include noise specifications in requests for equipment information and bids for new City equipment and consider this information as part of evaluation of the bids.*

Policy N-10: City-County Coordination

Coordinate with the County of Marin to consider and mitigate noise impacts when activities in one jurisdiction may affect the other.

Program N-10E: San Rafael Rock Quarry. *Seek to minimize noise impacts of the quarry and brickyard operations through cooperative efforts with the County of Marin through its code enforcement and land use entitlement processes.*



Quiet Zones

The San Rafael City Council has established a Quiet Zone for SMART rail trains passing through the city. The Quiet Zone designation means that a train operator is not required to blow the train horn as it approaches a vehicular or pedestrian crossing unless there is a hazard on the track.

Photo Credit: Owen Iverson



Vibration

Like noise, vibration is transmitted in waves—in this case, through earth or solid objects. Vibration is typically felt rather than heard. It may be natural or human-caused. Common sources include heavy trucks, buses, and construction activities such as pile driving. Quarrying also may have vibration impacts. At high levels, vibration can be perceived as unpleasant or annoying. It can also cause structural damage, such as cracked plaster.

Policy N-11: Vibration

Ensure that the potential for vibration is addressed when transportation, construction, and non-residential projects are proposed, and that measures are taken to mitigate potential impacts.

Program N-11A: Vibration-Related Conditions of Approval. *Adopt Standard conditions of approval to reduce the potential for vibration-related construction impacts for development projects near sensitive uses such as housing and schools. Vibration impacts shall be considered as part of project level environmental evaluation and approval for individual future projects.*