

12 Arts and Culture

Introduction

The Arts and Culture Element recognizes the power of the arts to connect people, promote cultural inclusion and diversity, create civic pride and a sense of community, stimulate the local economy, and inspire the creative spirit of San Rafael residents. The arts are an essential part of San Rafael’s identity and make the city more interesting and livable. They help define and express who we are as a community. Art creates opportunities for dialogue and thought as well as a source of entertainment and beauty.

San Rafael’s breadth of artistic achievement encompasses many disciplines. The city is rich in music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, and history. Its cultural roots and the traditions of its residents are celebrated through festivals, food, and special events. The city is home to galleries, theaters, night clubs, museums, iconic architecture, and even the County Fair. San Rafael has a growing creative sector and draws creative people. It is a magnet for artists, attracting musicians, film makers, photographers, painters, and designers. It also attracts visitors who come to experience the arts in the city.

An important part of the Arts and Culture Element is celebrating San Rafael as a multi-cultural city and ensuring that City services are inclusive. Organizations such as the Multicultural Center of Marin and the Canal Alliance provide a vital bridge between residents and the City, empowering residents to express their cultural identities. San Rafael is an international city, with residents from countries around the world. Recognition of cultural legacies extends beyond artistic expression, and should also inform and guide economic development, housing, transportation, and social service initiatives.

One of the goals of this Element is to ensure that the arts remain a vital part of San Rafael’s economy and community fabric. There are significant challenges to this goal, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its ~~aftermath impacts on our ability to gather, as well as its longer-term effects on the economy~~. Non-profit arts organizations face tough competition for funding, threatening their long-term vitality. Housing and studio space in San Rafael remains prohibitively expensive for many artists.

Looking beyond the pandemic, San Rafael aspires to more strongly establish its role as an arts destination and a city that values creative enterprise. While the focus has historically been on Downtown San Rafael, culturally-related venues and activities should also enhance and benefit other areas such as Northgate and the Canal. Ultimately, the goal of this element is to sustain the arts as an integral part of life in San Rafael. This is an important part of realizing the General Plan 2040 vision of a “thriving city.”

Please see the Community Design and Preservation Element (Chapter 5) for policies on historic preservation and tribal cultural resources.

Photo Credit: Skip Moore



Local Arts and Cultural Assets

San Rafael enjoys many arts and cultural-related assets. These range from community events and festivals to historic resources, public art, educational programs, and visual and performing arts. There are opportunities for persons of all ages to perform or experience the arts in its many forms. The following provides an overview of some of San Rafael's arts and cultural assets—this is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory but rather a sampling of the diverse resources available.

Local Arts and Cultural Institutions

San Rafael has a range of community-based arts and cultural institutions, including Art Works Downtown, Youth in Arts, Marin Arts, the Marin Society of Artists, Artes LatinX Marin, the Multicultural Center of Marin, the California Film Institute, Belrose Performing Arts Center, Marin Dance Theatre, the Marin Symphony, Marin Shakespeare, DrawBridge, Marin Ballet, The Kanbar Center for Performing Arts (at the Osher Jewish Community Center), and the Mayflower Choral Society. These organizations generate substantial revenue for San Rafael's economy and provide opportunities for San Rafael residents to engage in the arts.

City of San Rafael

The City of San Rafael provides arts and cultural programming through its Library and Recreation Department. The City operates the Falkirk Cultural Center, which provides galleries and community arts programming in a historic estate setting. It also offers programs for children, older adults, and the community at large, including theater, ceramics, sculpting, painting, dance, and literature.

County of Marin

As the County seat, San Rafael benefits from the presence of a number of County-operated arts and cultural programs, facilities, and events. The County operates the Marin Center in partnership with the Marin Cultural Association. Facilities include the Marin Veterans Auditorium, with seating capacity of 2,000; the 315-seat Showcase Theater; meeting rooms; and a 22,500 square foot Exhibit Hall. The County also sponsors the yearly Marin County Fair, and sponsors art and music festivals and other events at Lagoon Park. Docent-led tours of the County of Marin Administration Building, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, attract visitors from around the world.

Educational Institutions

Arts education and instruction is offered through local public and private schools throughout San Rafael. Arts are a vital part of the educational experience for San Rafael students and provide positive benefits such as self-esteem, critical thinking development, and motivation. The arts can also reach children who are at risk of dropping out by providing a form of creative expression. San Rafael and Terra Linda High Schools both have theaters for live performances, as does Marin Academy and the JCC. San Rafael is also home to Dominican University, with renowned arts and music programs, including exhibitions, concerts, lectures, and performances. Dominican provides degree programs in creative writing, arts management, graphic design, visual studies, literary and intercultural studies, and performing arts and social change.



Special Events and Festivals

Thousands of visitors are drawn to special events and festivals that take place in San Rafael, including the May Madness Downtown Classic Car Parade, the Annual Holiday Lighted Boat Parade, the Sunset Criterium Bicycle Race, the Food and Wine festival, the Mill Valley Film Festival (which includes screenings at the Rafael Theater), the Marin County Fair, Cinco de Mayo, Dia de Los Muertos, and numerous special holiday events. There are also Farmers Markets in Downtown San Rafael and at the Civic Center, and a Second Friday Downtown ArtWalk featuring open studios and exhibits.



Museums

San Rafael is home to several niche museums, with specialty collections ranging from classic cars to political art. The Mission San Rafael/St. Raphael's Church is a local landmark, with historic exhibits and a gift shop on-site. The Planning Area is also home to China Camp State Park, with interpretive displays and historic structures that tell an important story about Marin County's early history.

Literary Scene

San Rafael has a vibrant literary scene. There are several groups that teach and support local writers. The Falkirk Cultural Center, San Rafael Public Library, local bookstores, and Marin Civic Center provide resources for research and education.

Arts and Entertainment Venues

San Rafael is home to numerous night clubs, performance and concert venues, and private galleries. Establishments like Terrapin Crossroads and George's Night Club are well-known Marin County institutions. There are also numerous businesses offering private instruction in dance, music, and the visual arts. San Rafael is also home to several recording studios, and businesses serving the film industry and other media enterprises. The city has been a popular movie and television filming location and was the home of Lucasfilm's Industrial Light and Magic until 2005. There are also several cinemas in the city.

San Rafael's arts and entertainment businesses and venues provide entertainment, sustain local artists and entertainers, attract visitors, help support local restaurants and other small businesses, and enrich the cultural life of the city.

Public Art and Architecture

Collaborative efforts to develop public art are important to the City. New public facilities frequently include dedicated space for public art. Public processes and partnerships between the City and local artists have been developed to provide opportunities for art installations in public places. Public art can provide an opportunity for meaningful community involvement in urban design, cross-cultural conversations, and an enhanced built environment. Public art can also accentuate city and neighborhood gateways and create a stronger sense of place. Art and creative placemaking can increase the affection residents feel for their neighborhoods and city, creating long-term civic and economic benefits.

Architecture is also a cultural resource in San Rafael. General Plan 2040 includes a Community Design and Preservation Element, with a Goal (CDP-5) focused on historic preservation and protection of local tribal resources. The city's older buildings distinguish San Rafael from other communities and provide an inspirational setting in which the arts can thrive.



Photo Credit: Skip Moore

Arts and the Local Economy

Arts-related businesses and activities employ a substantial number of San Rafael residents and are an important part of the local economy. These activities play a role in revitalization and economic development efforts, particularly in Downtown San Rafael and the city's commercial districts. A thriving arts scene provides secondary benefits for other sectors of the economy, including hospitality, retail, food and beverage establishments, and creative industries. It also makes San Rafael a more attractive choice for larger employers, who regard a vibrant local arts scene as an important amenity.

Arts establishments are also potential tenants for vacant retail spaces, particularly in historic settings like Downtown San Rafael. Some of these vacant spaces also may have the potential for live-work or production space. Arts and cultural jobs are expected to grow in the future, creating employment opportunities and the potential for niche markets that build on San Rafael's diversity and multi-cultural population.

As home to Marin County's largest Spanish-speaking community, San Rafael has a thriving Latino arts presence that can become stronger and more visible in the future. Creation of new cultural districts and arts-related activity hubs can catalyze private investment and enliven the city. Culturally relevant arts programming, projects, and businesses can make San Rafael a more important cultural arts destination while also breaking down cultural barriers.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) provides statistical data on the contribution of the arts and the creative workforce to national economy. Among their findings:

- Arts and cultural production represented 4.5 percent of the United States gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017---more than the construction, transportation, travel and tourism and agricultural industries. In California, the share is 8.2 percent of the gross State product.

- Performing arts companies and independent artists, writers, and entertainers added a combined total of **\$52.2 billion** to the U.S. economy in 2017.
- America’s nonprofit arts industry generates **\$166.3 billion in economic activity** every year, resulting in **\$27.5 billion** in federal, state and local tax revenues.
- Artists are highly entrepreneurial and are 3.6 times more likely than the total US workforce to be self-employed (*National Endowment for the Arts*).
- Artists are highly educated—63 percent hold bachelor’s degrees or higher levels of education, compared to 36 percent for the workforce as a whole (*National Endowment for the Arts*)

Creative places are innovative places. Arts districts provide an economic driver and can stimulate tourism, historic preservation, and private investment.

Downtown San Rafael Arts District

In 2017, Downtown San Rafael was selected as one of 14 places in California to receive a California Cultural District designation by the California Arts Council. The Cultural Districts program leverages the state’s artistic and cultural assets in order to increase the visibility of local artists and support community participation in arts and culture. The Downtown San Rafael Arts District partners with local arts leaders, businesses, City officials, and community members to create a vibrant and engaging environment that promotes well-being, equity, and inclusivity through the arts.

The Cultural District designation recognizes the high concentration of arts and cultural enterprises in Downtown San Rafael, as well as the potential for the arts to generate business traffic and tourism, create opportunities for youth, and foster a dialogue on social and economic issues in the community. The benefits of the designation include technical assistance, peer to peer learning and exchanges, access to resources, tax incentives, regulatory assistance, branding and promotional materials, and a five-year monetary stipend.



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson



Engaging Youth in Planning through Art

City planning can be an abstract concept for kids, but ultimately, it comes down to a single question – how can we make San Rafael a great place for everyone? That was the question asked by Youth in Arts and Y-PLAN during General Plan 2040 as they sought to engage San Rafael elementary school students in a discussion of the city’s future. Through a combination of art, short essays, and three-dimensional models, San Rafael students provided a unique lens into their priorities for San Rafael in 2040.

Y-PLAN is an initiative of the Center for Cities and Schools at UC Berkeley designed to empower young people to tackle real-world problems in their communities. Youth in Arts is a San Rafael based organization dedicated to building visual and performing arts skills among youth, and advocating for equitable, inclusive arts education. The General Plan provided an opportunity for the two organizations to collaborate, sparking the imagination and curiosity of students about the ways their community might grow and change in the next 20 years.

The City’s General Plan team participated in two rounds of youth engagement with Y-PLAN and Youth in Arts over a two-year period. During the first round, students in Grades 4 and 5 developed proposals for responding to sea level rise, and presented ideas for making the city safer, easier to get around, better connected with nature, and more colorful. They provided ideas for new gateways and solutions to homelessness and expressed hope that San Rafael would be a city for people of all ages. Students delivered their recommendations in a presentation to the General Plan Steering Committee, which was enthusiastically received.

During the second round, students in Grade 3 took on the challenge of redesigning Fourth Street. They reminded their audience that they would be 30 years old in 2040, and might be leaders, activists, and artists in their community. Their vision for Fourth Street was that it be “welcoming, colorful, safe, and fun for people of all ages.” Their final recommendations included better public transit, more trees, and nicer gathering places. The students constructed creative models of Fourth Street, inspiring the adults to think big and be bold.



Goal AC-1: Arts and Culture that Enrich Community Life

Recognize the potential for the arts to enrich and inspire residents, build a sense of community, bridge differences and forge unity, attract visitors, revitalize the city, and provide economic benefit.

Arts and culture are integral parts of San Rafael's quality of life and civic identity. Art connects us, expands our awareness of the world, and makes us stronger as a community. San Rafael has a thriving arts, cultural, and literary scene, with programs, performances, events and venues that serve a diverse and engaged population.

Policy AC-1.1: Cultural Center of Marin

Continue to promote San Rafael as the hub of arts and culture in Marin County.

Program AC-1.1B: Arts Facilities. Support and encourage efforts to improve and sustain local arts facilities, including those operated by government, non-profits, and other organizations, and recognize their role in making San Rafael a regional arts hub.

Program AC-1.2A: Falkirk Cultural Center. Promote the Falkirk Cultural Center as a venue to support and foster the arts and celebrate local culture. Seek funding to rehabilitate and improve the mansion and sustain programs through income-producing activities.

Program AC-1.1C: Arts and Culture Master Plan. Build on the work done by the County of Marin and San Rafael-based arts organizations to create a San Rafael Arts and Culture Master Plan. All segments of the community, including residents and workers, should be encouraged to participate in this process. The Plan should promote participation of the arts community in civic life, enhance arts programming, promote cultural inclusion, and maximize opportunities for arts events. Potential funding sources for a Master Plan and its implementation should be explored. As part of this process, options for ongoing leadership and arts advocacy should be considered, potentially including an Arts Council, Commission, or similar organization.

Policy AC-1.2: Arts Programming

Encourage and support an array of cultural arts programs and activities addressing the needs and interests of the whole community.

Program AC-1.2A: City Activities. Continue to provide City-sponsored arts classes and cultural activities, including arts programs at San Rafael's community centers. Programs should be equitably distributed around the city so that they can be accessed by all residents.

Program AC-1.2B: Programs for Diverse Populations. Encourage additional inclusive arts programming for the general public, including persons of all socio-economic means, ages, ethnicities, genders, and abilities. Special emphasis should be placed on programs for youth, children, and older adults.

Program AC-1.2C: Advocacy for Arts Programming. Advocate for continued arts programming in public schools and other venues.

Program AC-1.2D: Public Information. Work with local arts organizations to improve public awareness of local venues, galleries, exhibits, events, performances, and opportunities to participate in arts and cultural events in the city. Provide links to such information on the City's website and strengthen the website as a resource for the arts community.

Policy AC-1.3: Partnerships

Promote and strengthen partnerships and collaborative arts programming with local artists, schools and institutions of higher learning, community-based organizations, the County of Marin, the private sector, and non-profit arts organizations.

Program AC-1.3A: Venues. Encourage arts groups, schools, and businesses to conduct programs in City venues. Seek opportunities for the City to use County, institutional, and private space for its arts activities.

Policy AC-1.4: Inclusive Activities

Encourage activities, entertainment and events that reflect San Rafael's diverse cultural heritage and population. Programming should be inclusive of all ages, ethnicities, genders, abilities, and socio-economic groups. Participation in the arts should be supported as a way to promote intercultural understanding, and to bridge differences and forge unity. All residents should have access to arts and cultural activities.

Program AC-1.4A: Equitable Programming. Improve cultural equity and access to arts programming among lower income and non-English speaking residents (for example, through new partnerships, training, outreach strategies, multi-lingual initiatives, and reduced fees for qualifying residents).



Policy AC-1.5: Public Art

Promote a stimulating and engaging environment through the greater display of public art, including both temporary and permanent works. Locations throughout the city should be considered.

Program AC-1.5A: Art in Public Places. Evaluate the feasibility of an Art in Public Places Ordinance (or “percent for art” program) that would establish a funding source and/or mechanism for increasing public art. Strive for solutions that maximize flexibility in the way funds are collected and used.

Program AC-1.5B: Community-Based Outdoor Art Installations. Support participatory public art projects that engage the community, such as murals, 3D art, and street painting. Such projects should foster a greater understanding of local cultures, arts, and history and provide an opportunity to express neighborhood identity.

Photo Credit: Matthew X Kiernan, Big Apple Media



Falkirk Cultural Center

Falkirk Cultural Center is a beautiful historic estate owned and operated by the City of San Rafael. The Center has served San Rafael and the surrounding area as an arts and cultural center since 1974. Falkirk includes art galleries with rotating exhibits showcasing the work of local artists, as well as gardens, spaces available for public rental, and seasonal displays and celebrations. The Cultural Affairs Service League (CASL) continues to offer support and volunteer assistance for events, fundraising, and cultural advocacy at the facility.

Policy AC-1.6: Space for the Arts

Encourage and promote the creation of public and private arts and cultural space in the city, such as galleries, theaters, indoor and outdoor performance spaces, music venues, and cultural centers.

Program AC-1.6A: Art as a Community Benefit. Recognize space for the arts as a community benefit in municipal code and density bonus programs. Expand incentives for incorporating arts space and arts features in new projects and in vacant and underutilized space.

Program AC-1.6B: Reducing Barriers. Amend municipal codes or adopt new policies as needed to facilitate the temporary or interim use of vacant commercial or lobby space for art exhibits, display space, and “pop up” arts and cultural activities.

Program AC-1.6C: Central Performance Spaces. Prioritize creation of central outdoor spaces suitable for community-wide events and performances in Downtown San Rafael, the Canal neighborhood, and in the North San Rafael Town Center (for example, at Northgate Mall). Provide the necessary infrastructure (electric power, etc.) for these spaces to serve their intended purpose.

Policy AC-1.7: Event Participation

Encourage public and private participation in support of arts and cultural events, including neighborhood fairs and gatherings.

Program AC-1.7A: Sponsorship of Events. Support special events that provide quality arts, cultural, and enrichment activities in locations throughout the community.

Program AC-1.7B: Art and Technology. Support an expanded and more vibrant arts and cultural presence through technology, including the potential for “virtual” events and media that reach larger, more diverse audiences.

See also Policy LU-3.11 and Program EV-2.5C on special events

Policy AC-1.8: Arts and the Local Economy

Recognize the value of the arts to the economy of the city, and the role of the arts in community revitalization.

Program AC-1.8A: Arts District. Leverage the Downtown San Rafael Arts District designation to encourage, promote, and support arts activities, attract visitors and business patrons, promote equity and inclusivity, and create a more welcoming and exciting downtown environment. Encourage multi-disciplinary art activities and events that showcase local talent and provide opportunities for all residents to experience the arts. Regularly renew the Arts District designation to sustain arts and cultural opportunities.

Program AC-1.8B: Cultural Tourism. Promote cultural tourism (for example, visits to the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Civic Center or the Mission San Rafael Arcangel) as a way to support and sustain the local arts community and hospitality industry. Partnerships with the Marin Convention and Visitors Bureau should be encouraged.



Photo Credit: Frank Johnson

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Art Works Downtown

Art Works Downtown (AWD) was founded in 1996 to enrich the San Rafael community by encouraging artistic activities, educating the public, increasing appreciation of art, and strengthening the relationship between artists, arts organizations, and the larger community. AWD is located in a 40,000 square foot historic building on Fourth Street. Through the dedication and vision of its founders and a creative partnership with the City of San Rafael and Marin Community Foundation, the building was purchased in 1999 and converted into 17 affordable apartments on the upper floor and 32 artist's studios at the street and lower levels. The complex provides a unique opportunity for artists to live, work, create, and exhibit in the same building. Two decades later, Art Works is the anchor of a burgeoning Arts District and is a model for other communities.

Policy AC-1.9: Arts-Supportive Environment

Create an environment that is supportive to arts professionals.

Program AC-1.9A: Communication.

Support ongoing communication with and among local arts organizations to address and resolve issues of concern, including pandemic recovery.

Program AC-1.9B: Engagement in Community Actions.

Recognize the arts community as important stakeholders in local community actions and economic development strategies. Support artist engagement in planning and governance.

Program AC-1.9C: Showcasing Local Artists. Consider artist in residence programs, poet laureates, City-sponsored lunch concerts and similar events showcasing the work of local artists and performers.

Program AC-1.9D: Reducing Costs.

Explore opportunities to create more affordable space for artistic production, including live-work and studio spaces, public cultural facilities, and affordable performance space. Remove barriers to reusing vacant or underutilized commercial space for this purpose.

Program AC-1.9E: Volunteers. Provide opportunities for volunteers in art, cultural, and literary events.

Policy AC-1.10: Funding

Establish a broad range of public and private funding sources to support arts and cultural programs and activities.

Program AC-1.10A: Non-Profit, Private and Community Efforts. Support the efforts of non-profit, private, and community organizations to apply for grants, raise funds, develop arts endowments, and promote community and business investment in art, cultural, and literary activities. This support could include funding, volunteers, staffing, coordination, providing space and materials, and similar collaborative efforts.

Program AC-1.10B: New Funding Sources. Explore potential new funding sources or funding relief mechanisms such as set-asides from transient occupancy taxes, sales taxes, or parking revenues; tax credits and property tax abatements; and corporate and foundation support.