



Design Principles + Guiding Policies

CHAPTER

3

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3.1 Design Principles and Guiding Policies

The eight design principles identified here and accompanying policies will guide future development in Downtown San Rafael. The intent is to address existing challenges and leverage development opportunities to realize the community's vision for Downtown's future.

Design Principles

The eight design principles respond to the existing challenges and opportunities identified in Chapter Two: Existing Conditions. The design principles aim to translate the community vision derived through sustained input from the San Rafael community, key stakeholders and City staff. They are intended to help create a Downtown that is memorable, pedestrian-oriented and well-connected, that enhances Downtown's unique built heritage, stimulates investment; and reinforces City goals.

Guiding policies and expected outcomes

The design principles are supported by policies to guide decision-making when evaluating actions and strategies for future development. These are intentionally succinct to be meaningful and easy to implement. Each set of guiding policies is accompanied by a list of "expected outcomes" that help to illustrate the future vision and enable the City to monitor the Plan's performance over time.

Principle

1 Strengthen Downtown's identity and sense of arrival by focusing development at key nodes and gateways.



Principle

5 Enable mixed-use development in Downtown to increase housing, strengthen local businesses, and diversify the economy.

Principle

2 Coordinate placemaking improvements to make Downtown interesting, safe, and inviting for everyone.

Principle

3 Provide a safe, well-connected transportation network for all modes, supported by a progressive parking strategy.

Principle

4 Establish a network of attractive and welcoming streets and civic spaces.



Principle

6 Reinforce Downtown's eclectic character with historic preservation and new context-sensitive development.

Principle

7 Develop growth and adaptation strategies to increase Downtown's resilience to climate change.

Principle

8 Promote housing access at all income levels and establish strategies to prevent homelessness, gentrification, and displacement.

Principle

1

Strengthen Downtown's identity and sense of arrival by focusing development at key nodes and gateways.

Figure 3.1 *The core of Downtown, centered around Fourth Street, is a regional destination for jobs, retail, culture, and recreation.*

Image source: City of San Rafael

Focused development at Downtown "gateways" such as the Transit Center and at other important nodes will catalyze growth and redevelopment, create a stronger sense of arrival, and reinforce Downtown's identity.

Downtown San Rafael has an established role within the region as a center for employment, culture and recreation. Existing Downtown assets and its strong economy make it an attractive destination for many potential employers, residents and visitors. This is likely to continue, and is reflected in the range of pipeline development projects, and the planned relocation of the Transit Center.

The Precise Plan is an opportunity to build on this momentum, and focus investment and new development at key Downtown locations that would strengthen its overall identity and the unique characteristics of its existing neighborhoods. This will create a Downtown experience that is distinct from other centers in the region.

A critical development opportunity is a new gateway node at the SMART Station and San Rafael Transit Center area. Market trends support new mixed-use development at this walkable, transit-served location, within easy reach of many community attractions, employment and recreation options.

A balance of residential and commercial uses, along with a new civic space, will create an active, safe, "24-hour" node that can direct the foot traffic and energy from the SMART station and Transit Center to the businesses and attractions in the heart of Downtown. A Transit Plaza as the new civic space will serve the high number of visitors in the area, and provide a valuable new amenity for Downtown users.



Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

1A. Consider Downtown to be composed of sub-areas, each with distinct attributes, and identify key nodes within each for focused investment and prioritized development.

1B. Set development standards to ensure that new development in Downtown is harmonious with the existing fabric, and enhances neighborhood character through architecture, landscape and streetscape design.

1C. Establish a sense of arrival into Downtown through “gateway features” at all entrances including landmark buildings, streetscape improvements, public art, etc.

1D. Prioritize a new gateway node at the SMART Station and Transit Center area, anchored by new mixed-use development with a new Transit Plaza to serve Downtown residents and visitors.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan’s implementation.

- Downtown has distinct neighborhoods or sub-areas and the identity of each is articulated through the built form, mix of uses, streetscapes, public art, signage, etc., as well as events and activities celebrating local culture and history.
- Within each sub-area, focused development at nodes creates centers of neighborhood activity, blending old and new.
- New development in Downtown is harmonious with the existing development, and enhances neighborhood character.
- Downtown has a clear sense of arrival, and its gateways are emphasized by new buildings, public realm improvements, signage, and public art.
- A new mixed-use node develops at the SMART Station and Transit Center area, providing new housing and uses, and anchored by a new well-designed and active civic space.



Figure 3.2 Downtown neighborhoods are varied in built character, activities, and role.

Principle

2

Coordinate placemaking improvements to make Downtown interesting, safe, and inviting for everyone.

Figure 3.3 *Downtown Petaluma offers an example of the successful revitalization of a historic downtown that offers a unique visitor experience.*

Image source: Downtown Petaluma Association

Downtown will become a destination of choice for both the City and the region, providing an experience that is memorable and authentic.

Placemaking can be used as an economic development tool and provide a multi-faceted approach to improve and maintain places within Downtown, capitalizing on its existing assets.

A coordinated Downtown placemaking strategy will ensure that the planning and implementation of design improvements across Downtown is done in a cohesive and efficient manner, and with sufficient thought to future upkeep and maintenance. It will strengthen identity and wayfinding, and provide a framework for implementation.

The City can play a leadership role in guiding Downtown's transformation by managing key placemaking efforts, attracting new investment, exploring funding options, and establishing

innovative partnerships with private entities for implementation and management.

A form-based zoning code for Downtown tied to the long-term vision will ensure greater clarity and predictability and attract new investment. It will garner community support for placemaking efforts, and enable the City to prioritize strategic catalyst projects.

Downtown needs to create a welcoming "first impression" to maintain its long-term vitality. Critical to this is the maintenance and upkeep of its physical spaces, as well as a sensitive and thoughtful approach to resolve issues such as homelessness to provide a safe, inclusive Downtown experience.



Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

- 2A.** Develop a Downtown Placemaking Strategy to coordinate revitalization efforts to strengthen the "Downtown brand".
- 2B.** Initiate catalyst projects at key nodes, use quick-build, low-cost techniques and explore innovative short-term uses for vacant and underutilized sites to spur investment and build community support for improvements.
- 2C.** Create greater awareness of community assets and landmarks, and build upon the Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Strategy to orient and direct visitors.
- 2D.** Publicize Downtown improvement efforts, involving local stakeholders such as Business Improvement Districts, Neighborhood Associations and other groups.
- 2E.** Maintain existing and explore new opportunities for public-private partnerships to fund, construct and maintain planned Downtown improvements.
- 2F.** Continue existing efforts and explore new "best practice" strategies to address homelessness in a holistic manner. Initiate public education programs to build support for evidence-based, long-term solutions.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown transformations are coordinated and managed by a Placemaking Strategy that structures the planning, design and maintenance of improvements.
- Downtown is perceived to be a safe, vibrant, "24-hour" destination, and sees an increase in the number of its residents and visitors; benefiting Downtown businesses.
- Cohesive signage, public art, lighting, and street furniture improvements help in wayfinding and orientation, and there is increased awareness of Downtown's history, institutions and neighborhood assets.
- The City takes a leadership role in Downtown revitalization with catalyst projects, guided by the Plan vision and form-based standards.
- Tactical urbanism and temporary uses are used to truth-test designs and activate underutilized sites.
- The City implements comprehensive strategies to support its unsheltered population, thus enabling its civic spaces to be better used by everyone.



Figure 3.4 Downtown Healdsburg is a popular North California destination that uses consistent signage and street furniture as part of its placemaking efforts.
Image source: www.sonoma.com

Principle

3

Provide a safe, well-connected transportation network for all modes, supported by a progressive parking strategy.

Figure 3.5 Protected bicycle lanes in a busy downtown setting can greatly promote bicycle usage, accommodating additional users without creating congestion and parking issues.

Image source: www.metaefficient.com

Downtown will have a transportation network that improves multimodal connectivity and safety, is designed for the future of mobility, and is forward-thinking in accommodating parking needs.

Downtown's transportation network will promote safety for all transportation modes, with a focus on improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly at key intersections prone to accidents.

In order to develop a network that is truly multimodal - in other words, accommodate a diverse set of transportation needs on existing streets - the network needs to consider prioritizing certain streets for specific travel modes, while allowing other modes to also share the right-of-way. This will create connected priority networks for auto, bicycle and pedestrian traffic that will allow for safer, more efficient circulation and access.

Technology can play a major role in making Downtown safer and easier to navigate for all users. For example, user-activated pedestrian crossing signals will promote safety, and traffic

signal progression can lead to smoother traffic flow while lowering travel speeds. Digital wayfinding and parking signage can allow Downtown users to reach their destinations faster, and be used to clearly communicate information such as parking availability, street closures, special events, etc.

In planning for the future, street design needs to be flexible, allowing them to adapt to emerging trends and technology such as ride-hailing, micromobility such as scooters, and autonomous vehicles. Sustainability and green infrastructure should also be key considerations when considering upgrades.

Streets are social places, and it is important for them to feel genuinely accessible and usable by everyone. Universal Design features should be incorporated whenever possible in street furniture, signage, and the pedestrian realm.



Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

- 3A.** Create a layered circulation network with priority streets that serve all travel modes with greater efficiency and safety.
- 3B.** Provide a high degree of connectivity within Downtown, giving users the choice of multiple routes to reach their destinations.
- 3C.** Enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to improve connectivity within Downtown and to other parts of San Rafael.
- 3D.** Improve curbside management to meet evolving needs for parking, delivery, ridesharing, and new modes of travel.
- 3E.** Optimize the use of Downtown's existing parking supply and promote a "park once and walk" strategy.
- 3F.** Examine and improve the functioning of the existing Downtown Parking District to better serve Downtown needs.
- 3G.** Recognize the role of streets as civic spaces that help shape urban environments.
- 3H.** Consider environmental, social, and economic issues in the design of streets.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown has a clear hierarchy of vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle-priority streets, reflected in more efficient circulation and reduced traffic collisions.
- The modal share of pedestrians and bicyclists increases across all Downtown streets, including users of all ages.
- Design improvements allow flexible use of the same space for different functions such as parking, servicing, etc. at different times.
- Streets are adaptable to new technology and new travel modes, and incorporate green infrastructure when feasible.
- Downtown's existing parking supply and facilities are used more efficiently, and its Parking District is enhanced.
- Streets are used as civic spaces, and as venues for community gatherings, events, and activities.
- Streetscape improvements increase access and comfort for users of all ages and abilities, and incorporate Universal Design features when feasible.



Figure 3.6 (Above) Pedestrian-oriented street design plays a critical role in increased foot traffic that directly benefits the local economy.

Figure 3.7 (Below) Low-cost pilot projects are an effective strategy to test out design concepts and to gain community support without incurring significant capital costs. In many cases, low-cost techniques such as paint, movable bollards, or even sturdy planters as shown in this example can be effective in creating a separated bikeway.

Principle

4

Establish a network of attractive and welcoming streets and civic spaces.

A well-designed and inclusive public realm that connects key Downtown destinations will encourage walking and bicycling, enhance community interaction and provide opportunities for adapting to climate change.

The public realm serves as a backdrop for community life. In most downtowns, the public realm - including streets, plazas, parks, alleys and pedestrian passages - is the largest contiguous civic space, and should work as a network of "outdoor rooms" where people interact. A well-designed and inclusive public realm is one which all residents and visitors can visit and enjoy freely and comfortably, that feels safe at all times, and one that encourages day-to-day, spontaneous interaction. It can promote an active lifestyle, improve public health, and create safer, more close-knit communities.

Downtown San Rafael has the opportunity to create an exemplary public realm network, since its streets and civic spaces are human-scaled and walkable, and Downtown is an established center for shopping and recreation. San Rafael's mild climate supports outdoor activities and recreation, and it is regionally recognized for its association with music and the arts, as well as the "farm-to-table" movement. With improved connectivity and a consistent high quality of pedestrian facilities, Downtown can greatly enhance its role as a favored destination for the City and the region.

Downtown's main civic space, Courthouse Square, and its "main street", Fourth Street, can become the focus of pedestrian and bicycle improvements and additional programming. The Precise Plan is an opportunity to strengthen existing and create new civic spaces at key

locations, develop new programming, and set in place public-private partnerships for their maintenance and upkeep. It is also an opportunity to better integrate existing natural assets such as San Rafael Canal and Mahon and Irwin Creeks into the public realm network.



Figure 3.8 *The Italian Street Painting Festival on Fourth Street is part of Downtown's cultural legacy.*

Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

- 4A.** Improve existing civic spaces such as Courthouse Square, Boyd Park, and Albert Park through design improvements and programming.
- 4B.** Create new civic spaces as feasible, focusing on Fourth Street, and use underutilized and vacant City-owned parcels to create short-term civic spaces.
- 4C.** Incentivize private developers to provide and maintain new publicly accessible spaces.
- 4D.** Improve access to the San Rafael Canal waterfront and Downtown creeks.
- 4E.** Employ "best practices" design and community surveillance strategies to ensure that civic spaces are well-maintained, safe, and accessible for people of all ages and abilities.
- 4F.** Support existing Downtown activities and events and introduce new ones to attract residents and visitors.
- 4G.** Include public art and signage in civic spaces and streetscapes to strengthen identity, improve wayfinding, and highlight community landmarks. Develop incentives for public art as part of private development.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown has a cohesive network of well-designed streets, plazas and pocket parks, with pedestrian facilities such as seating, lighting, amenities and wayfinding features.
- Downtown has new civic spaces such as a plaza at the SMART station, a pocket park, as well as enhanced access to Downtown creeks and San Rafael Canal.
- The Downtown Form-Based Code guides the provision of civic spaces in new Downtown developments.
- Downtown's civic spaces are active and well-used by residents, workers, and visitors; and have a well-crafted program of events, activities, and new uses.
- Improved facilities attract pedestrians from adjacent neighborhoods, the Lindero office district, and the Montecito Commercial area to the heart of Downtown.
- Increased pedestrian activity and foot traffic benefits Downtown businesses, and Fourth Street is further enhanced as a "main street" for shopping, socializing and recreation.
- The public realm is designed to be inclusive and welcoming for all ages and abilities.



Figure 3.9 (Above) Well-designed civic spaces encourage outdoor activities and a healthier lifestyle for the community, as in Pearl Street, Boulder, CO. Image source: www.flickr.com

Figure 3.10 (Below) Streets can be civic spaces and be used for community events such as farmer's markets, as in the case of Fourth Street in San Rafael.

Goal

5

Enable mixed-use development in Downtown to increase housing, strengthen local businesses, and diversify the economy.

Figure 3.11 Street life and urban form

Fundamental to a successful downtown is creating an attractive place where people want to be.

Downtown will have a development program that capitalizes on its existing assets and meets community goals, and helps its evolution from primarily a commercial district to a thriving, mixed-use center.

Downtown San Rafael's location and ease of regional access, walkable scale and strong economic base positions it well to support a diversified development program that can sustain economic growth for the next 20 years, provide a high quality of life for its residents, and meet City and community goals.

For long-term economic resilience, Downtown needs to transform from a commercial destination to a mixed-use center. Adding more housing will strengthen and diversify its economic base, in addition to improving vitality and safety. Greater variety in retail and office uses, as well as flexibility in design will add resilience in weathering economic downturns and adapting to changing market preferences, particularly in the retail sector.

Adding new uses should be balanced with protecting local businesses and cherished community establishments for Downtown to remain authentic and true to its roots. Similarly, new housing should include both market-rate and affordable types to serve diverse needs and promote equity.

The Precise Plan is accompanied by a new form-based zoning code for Downtown that will enable mixed-use development and attract investment. It provides clear guidance about the desired built environment in different parts of Downtown, encourages innovation, allows design flexibility, and helps to streamline the permitting and approval process. This in turn will increase certainty for developers, and build community support for new projects.



Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

- 5A.** Create a true mixed-use Downtown that is "alive after five", with a balanced mix of housing, employment, retail, civic, and community uses.
- 5B.** Employ the Downtown Form-Based Code to clarify expectations for new development, and streamline the approval and entitlement process.
- 5C.** Continue to attract a diverse set of employers and broaden the range of uses and activities in Downtown, to promote economic resiliency.
- 5D.** Encourage innovation in building design and uses, such as "flex" ground floor spaces to adapt to new retail and office market trends.
- 5E.** Explore strategies such as lot consolidation and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) where appropriate to make redevelopment economically feasible.
- 5F.** Retain existing and attract new small and locally-owned businesses that reinforce Downtown as a unique place.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown enhances its reputation as a regional mixed-use destination of choice for housing, employment, shopping and entertainment.
- The entitlement and development process for Downtown projects is simple, transparent, timely, and cost-effective.
- The City plays a leadership role in guiding Downtown development, through strategic projects and improvements.
- Downtown attracts investment from a variety of sectors, creating a diversified economy that is more recession-proof.
- New development in Downtown is innovative and flexible in its design, proving more adaptable to changing market preferences.
- Downtown retains its authentic character through active steps to prevent the loss of local businesses and institutions.



Figure 3.12 (Above) A mixed-use downtown is economically more resilient and promotes social equity.

Figure 3.13 (Below) Local businesses provide authentic character and identity to Downtown San Rafael, and should be protected from getting priced out by new development.

Principle

6

Reinforce Downtown's eclectic character with historic preservation and new context-sensitive development.

Downtown will strengthen its sense of place by celebrating its historic and cultural resources, and ensuring that new development complements and enhances Downtown's built heritage.

Historic buildings help establish a deeper connection with the historic and cultural legacy of a place. Downtown San Rafael's built heritage includes a number of landmark buildings, several of them recognized in the National Register of Historic Places. Apart from individual buildings, there are several parts of Downtown where the built fabric has not been altered significantly, and these areas lend authenticity to Downtown's historic character.

Beyond the preservation of historic and cultural landmarks, the Plan encourages the rehabilitation and adaptive use of older and historic buildings in Downtown, both to continue their role as San Rafael's living heritage and also because reuse is often more sustainable than new construction.

As part of the Precise Plan process, the survey of historic properties in Downtown has been updated to clarify the historic status of Downtown buildings, and to ensure that important assets are appropriately preserved.

New development in Downtown should be sensitive to the form and scale of the existing fabric, while further enhancing Downtown's eclectic and varied built character. The new Form-Based Code for Downtown provides guidance for new development to meet this objective.



Figure 3.14 *Renovation and adaptive use of historic buildings is sustainable and preserves a sense of history.*

Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

- 6A.** Protect historic and cultural landmarks and celebrate them in the design of the built form and public realm.
- 6B.** Use appropriate historic preservation tools to safeguard the built character of historic resources while accommodating sensitive modifications and additions as needed.
- 6C.** Maintain and regularly update the inventory of notable historic and cultural resources in Downtown.
- 6D.** Employ the Form-Based Code to guide the physical form of new development on sites adjacent to Downtown's historic resources.
- 6E.** Utilize preservation and adaptive use strategies, and incentivize private developers to reinvest in existing buildings and redevelop sites with historic or cultural resources.
- 6F.** Plan activities and events focused on raising awareness about Downtown's history and cultural heritage.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Existing historic and cultural resources in Downtown are highlighted as landmarks and points of interest.
- Redevelopment in Downtown includes renovation and adaptive use of historic structures where appropriate.
- Downtown maintains the integrity of the historic and cultural context, beyond the preservation of individual structures.
- New development is sensitive to the existing context, with appropriate modifications in building massing.
- Historic structures are maintained and enhanced through both public and private sector efforts.
- Education programs and activities such as walking tours create greater awareness of San Rafael's built heritage.



Figure 3.15 (Above) Existing historic and cultural resources in Downtown, such as the Boyd Gatehouse should be maintained and celebrated.

Figure 3.16 (Below) Downtown cultural icons such as the Mission San Rafael Arcángel are important connections to the City's past.

Principle

7

Develop growth and adaptation strategies to increase Downtown's resilience to climate change

Downtown will develop strategies to adapt and be resilient to the reality of climate change, in particular sea-level rise and wildfire.

Low-lying areas of Downtown, such as along San Rafael Canal and Irwin Creek, experience regular flooding during inclement weather, particularly when heavy rainfall coincides with high and king tides. This scenario is likely to worsen as sea levels rise and storms become more frequent because of climate change. The Montecito Commercial area, in particular, will face sea-level rise ranging from 10 to 60 inches by 2050¹. Other parts of Downtown including the SMART station area, highways, schools and residential areas will be susceptible to storm surges, tidal flooding, and rising ground water levels.

In 2019, the City adopted the San Rafael Climate Action Plan 2030 (CCAP 2030) that addresses climate change and sea-level rise. The General Plan 2040 includes policies and programs to plan ahead for potential increases in flooding and sea-level rise. The General Plan 2040 also includes an adaptation report, which suggests adaptation strategies for specific areas of the City, including Downtown.

San Rafael's location also makes it is vulnerable to wildfire, the intensity and frequency of which is anticipated to increase due to climate change. In 2019, the City adopted a Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan with a comprehensive set of 37 objectives and actions to reduce wildfire risk that would apply city-wide, instead of only within the Wildland Urban

Interface, and corresponding changes to the municipal code.

A comprehensive set of adaptation strategies should be compiled for future Downtown development, that draws from the recommendations of the numerous plans, studies and similar resources at the City, County and State level. This will streamline implementation and enable San Rafael and its Downtown to continue to thrive in the coming decades.

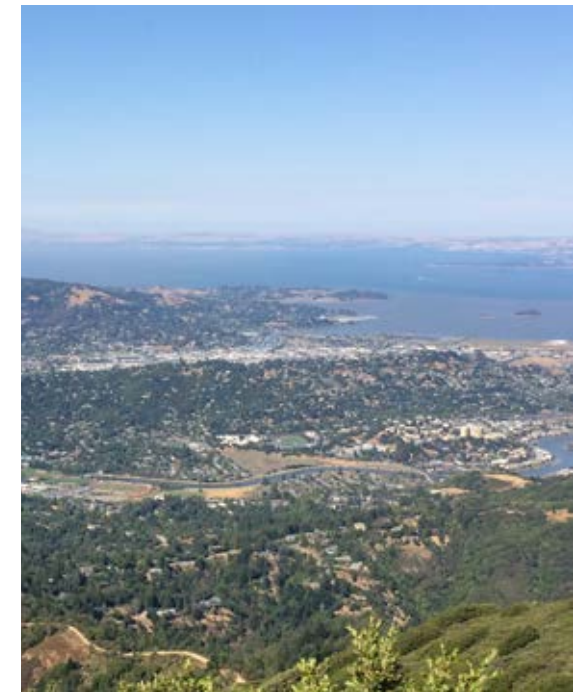


Figure 3.17 San Rafael's natural context makes it vulnerable to both wildfire and sea-level rise.

1. Source: Marin Bay Waterfront Adaptation and Vulnerability Evaluation (BayWAVE)

Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

- 7A.** Develop a comprehensive set of adaptation strategies for Downtown curated from city-wide and region-wide resources².
- 7B.** Evaluate both near and long-term flood control measures in Downtown, ranging from tidal gates and levees to dredging San Rafael Canal, creek restoration, and shoreline modifications; as well as engineering solutions to reduce stormwater run-off and retention.
- 7C.** Prioritize natural systems and multipurpose solutions such as urban wetlands that can provide flood protection, create habitat, and add a new public amenity.
- 7D.** Continue to implement the Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan and ensure compliance and regular monitoring.
- 7E.** Update building codes to require structural adaptations to withstand flood inundation and wildfire protection, and support innovative construction technology for remodels and new construction.

2. Including (but not limited to) the San Rafael General Plan 2040, San Rafael CCAP 2030, Marin County Climate Action Plan (2015), San Rafael Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (2017), Resilient by Design's "Elevate San Rafael" (2018).

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown adapts holistically to climate change, relying on a long-term plan with interim "best practices" solutions.
- Natural solutions such as creek restoration and urban wetlands control local flooding and provide open space and wildlife habitat.
- Improvements and widening of San Rafael Canal, Mahon Creek and Irwin Creek create opportunities for urban trails and waterfront promenades connecting the Montecito Commercial area to Downtown.
- Engineering flood control solutions such as pervious streetscape materials and subterranean retention cisterns are employed where feasible in Downtown.
- New development incorporates design adaptations to sea-level rise, particularly in the Montecito Commercial area.
- Systematic implementation of the Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan helps to mitigate damage from wildfires.
- Education programs and activities such as nature walks create greater awareness and stewardship of Downtown's natural assets.



Figure 3.18 (Above) Tanner Springs Park in downtown Portland provides a natural ecosystem in the heart of the Pearl District.

Image source: www.onlyinyourstate.com

Figure 3.19 (Below) Education programs build community support for adaptation strategies, such as in this walking tour by the Resilient By Design initiative in 2018.

Image source: www.resilientshore.org

Principle

8

Promote housing access at all income levels and establish strategies to prevent homelessness, gentrification, and displacement.

Downtown will gain a stronger sense of community by promoting greater access to housing at all income levels that will allow a diverse population to put down roots for years to come.

San Rafael, like much of the region, is facing a housing affordability crisis, with related issues such as homelessness, gentrification, and social inequity. Among the ways to address these issues is by expanding the supply and variety of housing, creating incentives to deliver more affordable housing, and developing strategies to prevent displacement and gentrification.

Downtown is a prime location for adding housing at all income levels. Its walkable environment and access to amenities and transit support reduced parking requirements for new housing and mixed-use projects, making them economically feasible. A diversity of housing types including Missing Middle types, and a balance between rental and for-sale units will enable residents to continue living in the same neighborhood, moving from one housing type to another or from renting to owning as their needs change over time. It will also support "aging in place" for older residents,

an important consideration as demographic patterns change across the country. Increased housing production can help meet City goals related to affordable housing, and streamlined regulations and development standards crafted for Downtown's unique conditions will encourage innovative, "affordable-by-design" solutions such as micro-units and shared living options. Anti-displacement strategies will safeguard existing residents from getting priced out of Downtown.

Downtown is a regional hub for a variety of social services, and a suitable location to test housing solutions with support services for its unsheltered population, as part of a comprehensive approach to address homelessness. A range of short and long-term strategies, such as "Housing First"³, and community ambassadors, can be considered to end chronic homelessness.

3. More information at <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/>



Figure 3.20 Diverse housing options including Missing Middle housing allow a variety of families and household types to live in the same neighborhood. It enables innovative living arrangements and supports aging-in-place.

Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

8A. Update the City's below-market rate (BMR) policies to encourage more development and site-by-site affordability requirements, and find ways to increase the stock of permanently affordable units.

8B. Balance rental and ownership housing, and encourage a variety in housing sizes and types to cater to diverse population groups.

8C. Incentivize private developers to produce market-rate, "affordable-by-design" housing units, by exploring strategies such as reduced parking, minimum unit sizes, and impact fee requirements; "unbundling" parking costs, etc.

8D. Employ the Downtown Form-Based Code to stimulate housing production.

8E. Encourage Missing Middle housing types (see Figure 3.20) where appropriate.

8F. Continue current tenant protection laws and develop strategies for anti-displacement crafted for Downtown's unique conditions.

8G. Develop strategies geared to comprehensively address homelessness, including housing and supportive services.

Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown has a healthy ratio of market-rate and below-market rate units, as well as rental and for-sale units.
- New housing is innovative and in a variety of configurations to suit a range of family types, and includes workforce housing, shared living options, "micro-units", etc.
- The entitlement and development process for Downtown is streamlined and predictable, spurring new residential and mixed-use projects, including Missing Middle housing types.
- Downtown has effective strategies to avoid gentrification and displacement of established communities.
- The City takes initiative in addressing homelessness in Downtown, and continues to offer supportive and social services.
- There is an increase in Downtown's resident population, incorporating a variety of household and family types; as well as an increase in the number of long-term residents.



Figure 3.21 (Above) A side-by-side duplex in Phoenix provides two units in a house-form building.

Figure 3.22 (Below) Mixed-use buildings in Berkeley provide apartment units over ground floor retail.

