



Santa Maria
General Plan

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Recreation and Parks Element

Final Draft | February 12, 2026



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Introduction

Though not a required Element, the Recreation and Parks Element is included in the General Plan to reflect the City's dedication to providing high-quality recreational and park facilities and programming for all residents. In the previous General Plan, these topics were addressed in the Resource Management Element.

The Recreation and Parks Element focuses on recreational facilities, trails, recreational programming, arts and culture programming, and parks.

This Element consists of three main sections: Background, Issues and Opportunities, and Recreation and Parks Policies. The *Background* section introduces existing conditions and trends related to priorities addressed in this Element. The *Issues and Opportunities* section describes the key issues and opportunities that shaped the Element. Finally, the *Recreation and Parks Policies* section establishes regulatory standards and outlines the City's Recreation and Parks goals, policies, and implementation actions.

The Recreation and Parks Element guides the development of a high-quality recreation and parks system that serves all Santa Maria residents. It prioritizes equitable access to modern recreational facilities, a comprehensive trails system, well-maintained parks, and inclusive programming for all ages and backgrounds. The Element also ensures that new neighborhoods and historically underserved areas receive adequate park and recreational facilities. Through strategic investments, partnerships, and sustainable design, Santa Maria can provide a connected and vibrant system of parks and recreation amenities.



Recreation and Parks Administrative Office

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Background

This section introduces existing conditions and trends related to priorities addressed in the Recreation and Parks Policies.

Recreation

Facilities and Programming

The City of Santa Maria owns and operates a youth center, senior center, aquatics center, public green, and seven community centers (see Table REC-1, Figure REC-1) that support aquatics, youth and teen services, senior programs, arts, sports, and special events. As of 2026, the City is constructing a new Sports Complex in the Blosser Southeast Area 5B Specific Plan area to expand athletic facilities and programming opportunities for residents. The roughly 21-acre complex is intended to provide additional multipurpose playing fields and supporting amenities to address ongoing demand for youth and adult sports, while also creating flexible space for community events. This investment supports the City's broader recreation system by increasing capacity and enhancing opportunities for organized and informal sports programming.

The City also supplements its facilities through joint use of school gyms and fields and private providers such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club. Additional private recreational amenities that the City does not own or maintain benefit residents who have access to these amenities.



Paddleboard Yoga Class at the Paul Nelson Aquatics Center.

Table REC-1: Recreational Facilities

Facility	Type	Address
Abel Maldonado Community Youth Center	Youth community center	600 S. McClelland Street
Atkinson Park Community Center	Community center	1000 N. Railroad Avenue
Blosser Ranch Sports Complex	Recreation (Sports fields, playgrounds)	Southwest corner of Stowell Road and Depot Street
Bob Orach Park Neighborhood Community Center	Community center	1800 Westgate Road
Edwards Community Center (at Sierra Vista Park)	Community center	809 Panther Drive
Elwin Mussell Senior Center (at Alice Trefts Park)	Senior center	510 E. Park Avenue
Grogan Park Community Center	Community center	1155 W. Rancho Verde
Hagerman Sports Complex	Recreation (sports fields)	3300 Skyway Drive
Joslyn Bowling Green	Public green	420 S. McClelland Street
Maramonte Community Center	Community center	620 E. Sunrise Drive
Minami Community Center (at Adam Park)	Community center	600 W. Enos Drive
Newlove Community Building	Community building	1619 S. Thornburg Street
Paul Nelson Aquatic Center (at Simas Park)	Aquatic center	516 S. McClelland Street
Veterans' Memorial Community Center	Community center	313 W. Tunnel Street

Source: *City of Santa Maria, 2020*

Trail System

Santa Maria's trail system includes 4.7 miles of Class 1 shared-use paths, 7.1 miles of trails within City limits, and an additional 14 miles of trails at Los Flores Ranch Park (see Figure REC-2). The City's Active Transportation Plan (ATP) covers the planning, maintenance, and enhancement of the trails system. The most recently adopted ATP (2020) proposes improvements to existing trail amenities, including wayfinding, seating, lighting, and a planned increase to 26.3 miles of Class 1 shared-use paths.

Figure REC-1: Recreational Facilities

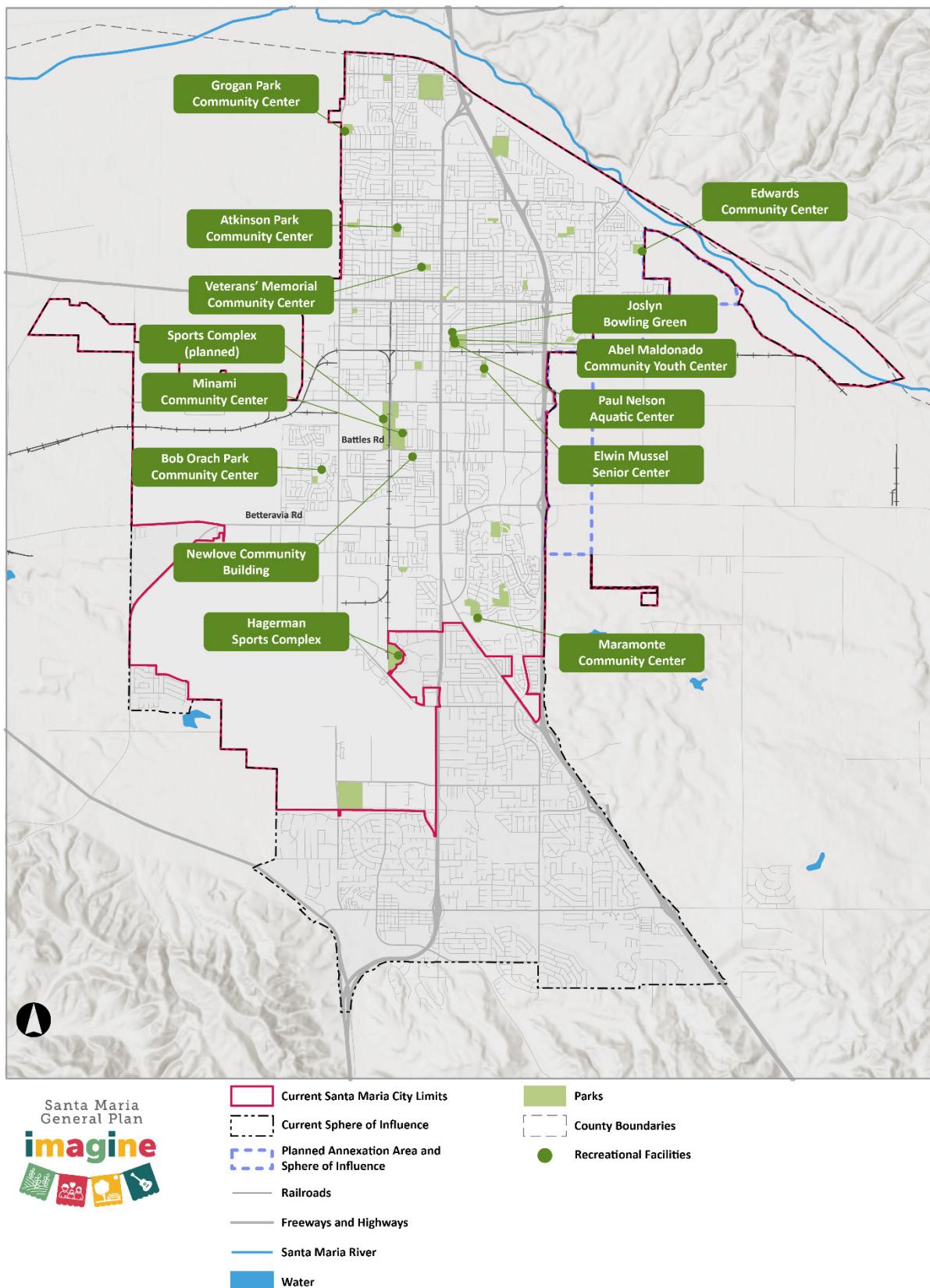
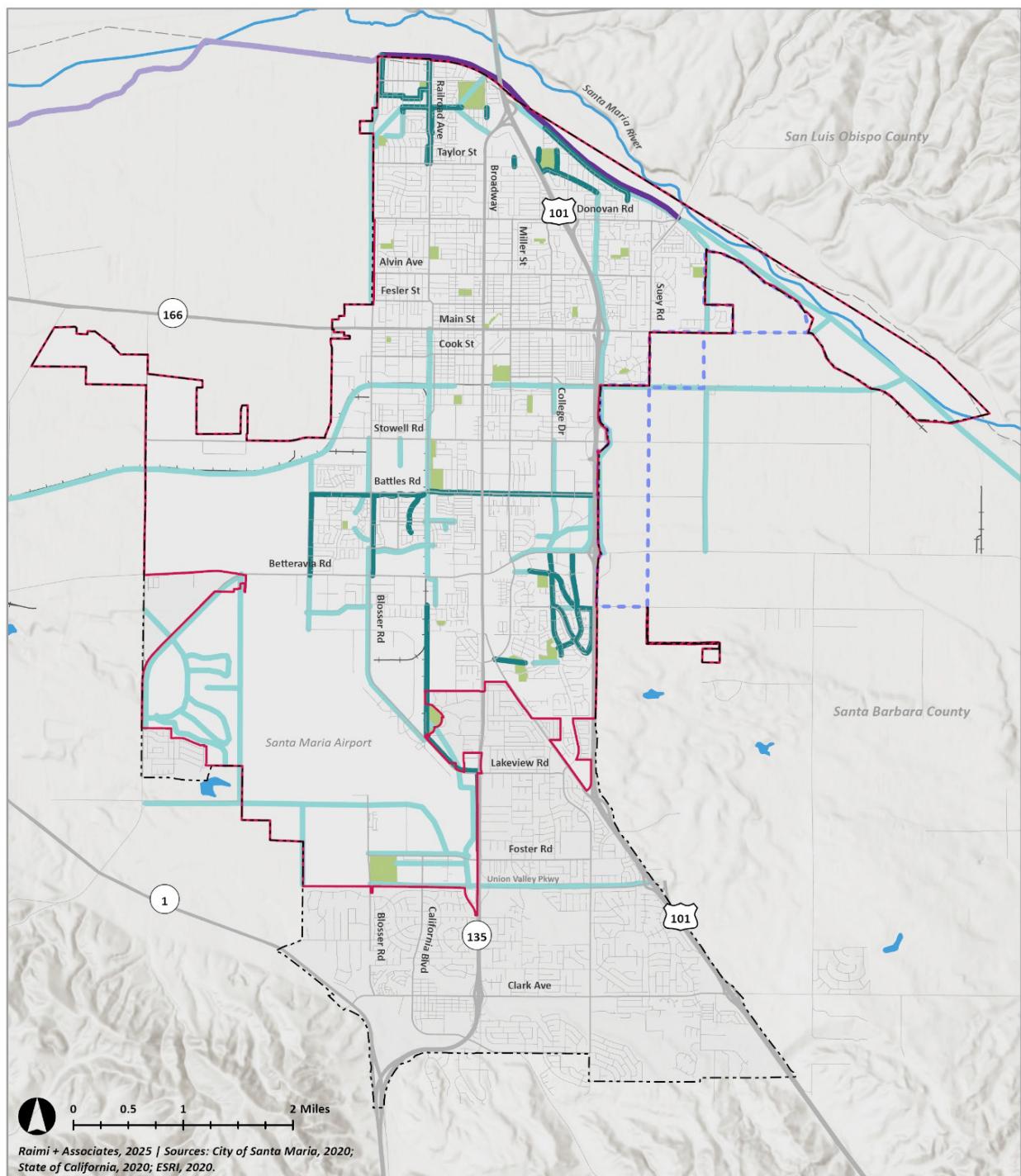


Figure REC-2: Trail System



Santa Maria General Plan

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- Current Santa Maria City Limits
- Current Sphere of Influence
- Planned Annexation Area and Sphere of Influence
- Railroads
- Freeways and Highways
- Santa Maria River
- Water
- Parks
- County Boundaries
- Existing Levee Trail*
- Existing Class I Paths
- Proposed Levee Trail*
- Proposed Class I Paths

*While the Levee Trail is owned by the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, the City maintains a use agreement and provides maintenance and litter clean-up.

Parks

The City of Santa Maria owns and maintains 30 parks (see Figure REC-3, Table REC-2). Additional park facilities include Los Flores Ranch Park and County-managed parks such as Waller and Orcutt Community Parks.



Multiple children playing at Russell Park located on the west side of the City.



Children playing at Acquistapace Park.

Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan

The Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan is updated every five years to reflect recreational trends and demographic shifts in the planning of recreation and park services improvements. The Plan is developed by the Recreation and Parks Department and the Recreation and Parks Commission, with input from Santa Maria community members. The Plan assesses community priorities, evaluates progress, and establishes goals for recreation and park programs and facilities. The Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan will be one of the primary means of implementing the Recreation and Parks Element.



Top left: Adult playing pickleball at the Hagerman Sports Complex.

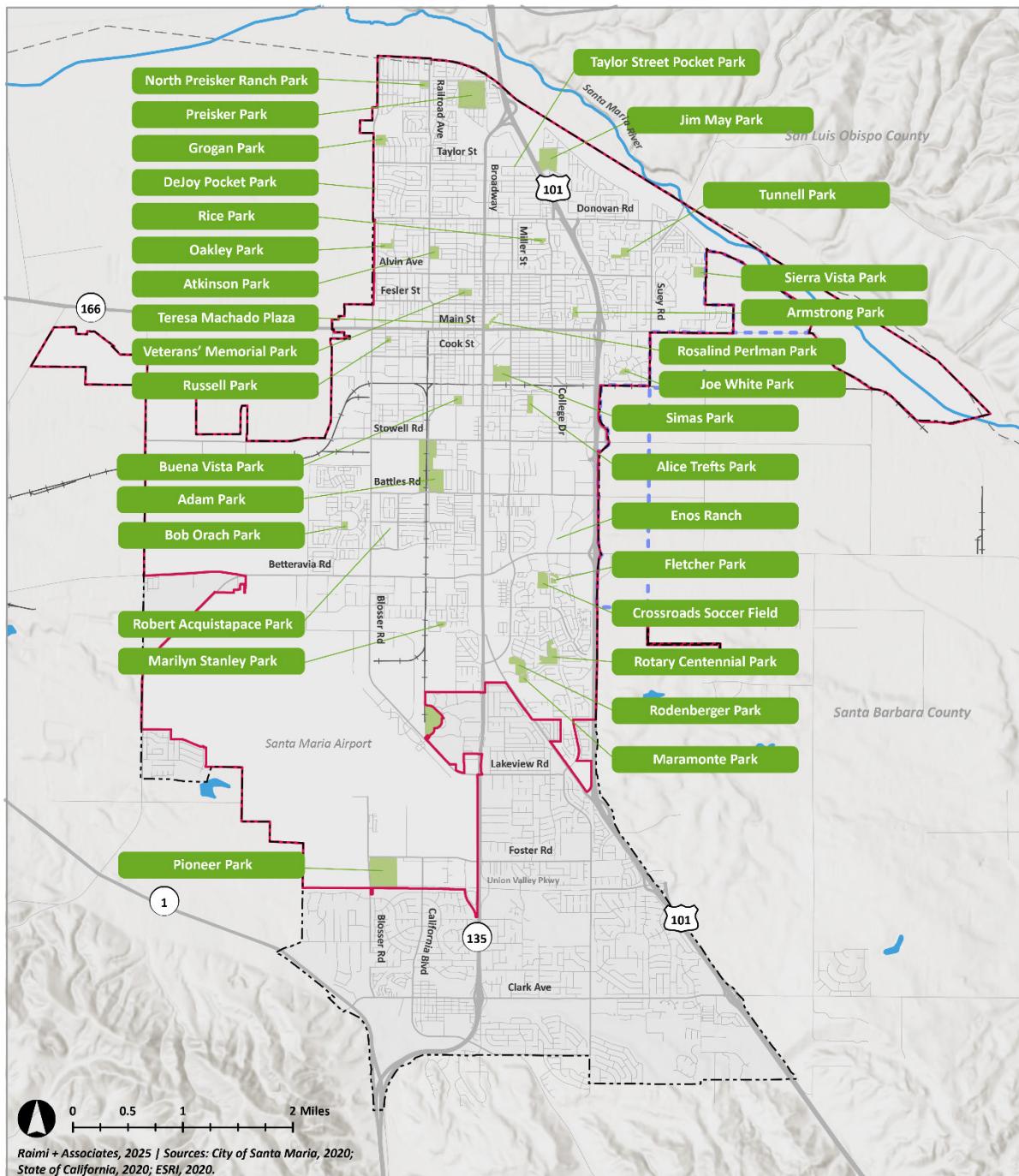


Top right: Teens gather for a basketball tournament at the Abel Maldonado Community Youth Center.

Bottom: Children play with an inflatable soccer goal at a community event hosted by the Recreation and Parks Department.



Figure REC-3: Existing Parks



Current Santa Maria City Limits	Parks
Current Sphere of Influence	County Boundaries
Planned Annexation Area and Sphere of Influence	
Railroads	
Freeways and Highways	
Santa Maria River	
Water	

Table REC-2: Park Facilities

Park	Total Acreage
Adam Park	32.47
Alice Trefts Park	5.05
Armstrong Park	2.71
Atkinson Park	7.55
Buena Vista Park	4.03
DeJoy Pocket Park	0.16
Enos Ranch Park	6.22
Fletcher Park	2.83
Grogan Park	6.15
Jim May Park	15.59
Joe White Park	2.5
Maramonte Park (South)	3.56
Maramonte Park (North)	5.31
Marilyn Stanley Park	1.98
Memorial Park	4.42
North Preisker Ranch Park	3.03
Oakley Park	6.36
Simas Park	12.53*
Pioneer Park	15
Preisker Park	38.93
Rice Park	2.5
Robert Aquistapace Park	1.8
Rodenberger Park	5.13
Rosalind Perlman Park	2.87
Rotary Centennial Park	16.9
Russell Park	1.36
Sierra Vista (Edwards) Park	6.5
Taylor Pocket Park	0.15
Teresa Machado Plaza	0.67

Park	Total Acreage
Tunnell Park	6.68
Westgate Ranch (Bob Orach Park)	2.35

*Acreage includes Paul Nelson Aquatic Center, Abel Maldonado Community Youth Center, and Elk's Field

Source: Santa Maria Recreation and Parks Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan, 2025.



Children's playground at North Preisker Ranch Park.

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Issues and Opportunities

This section describes the issues and opportunities that informed the Recreation and Parks Policies.

Equitable access to parks and recreation facilities. As of 2020, Santa Maria's park service ratio of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents fell short of the City's goal of 5 acres per 1,000 residents. Notable underserved areas include:

- The northwest, between Blosser Road, Taylor Street, Broadway (SR-135), and Donovan Road;
- Portions of the area north of Main Street, between Broadway and US-101 and east of US-101;
- The area north of Stowell Road, east of Broadway, south of Main Street (SR-166), and west of US-101; and,
- The residential area north of Betteravia Road, east of Blosser Road, south of Battles Road, and west of Broadway

Access to recreational facilities is limited in some areas of the city, but most residential areas are planned with parks that are accessible, many within walking distance. As the city grows, it will be critical to close these service gaps by prioritizing park development in underserved areas, improving access through joint-use agreements, and investing in mobile facilities. For instance, the development of the planned Sports Complex represents an opportunity to expand access to athletic facilities and relieve pressure on existing facilities by providing additional capacity for youth and adult sports programming.

Park quality and capacity. Population growth over the last 25 to 30 years has contributed to overcrowding at many parks, and this trend is expected to continue unless new parkland is added or existing facilities are expanded. To meet the City's park service goal today would require over 270 acres of new parkland, and over 440 acres by 2050. In addition to park expansion, it will be important to optimize underutilized portions of existing parks and to incorporate new parks into future Specific Plans.

Safety and accessibility in park design. Park access is limited for some residents due to safety concerns related to lighting, visibility, and street crossings. Improving safety with lighting, marked crosswalks, and clear sightlines can increase comfort and encourage use, particularly for children, seniors, and individuals with limited mobility. Ensuring that parks incorporate universal design principles and prioritize pedestrian and bicycle access will also help create safer, more welcoming facilities.

Arts, culture, and community identity. Santa Maria can strengthen its cultural identity through an expanded arts and culture program. Integrating performances and culturally diverse events can build community pride, celebrate diversity, and activate underutilized spaces. By implementing the Public Art Master Plan, the City has the opportunity to beautify its public spaces while showcasing Santa Maria's rich history, ethnic diversity, and appreciation for the arts. Partnerships with local artists and cultural organizations can help expand programming, attract broader participation, and reinforce parks as vital community centers.

Annexation and growth. As Santa Maria continues to grow through annexation, the City must ensure that new neighborhoods receive adequate parks and recreation services. Phased development, sustainable design, and innovative funding strategies can help the City maintain high-quality park and recreation services while accommodating future growth.



Top left: Musicians playing at a community event; Top right: Community members painting a utility box; Bottom left: Public Art on utility boxes; Bottom right Image: Performers at a local cultural event.



Mural painted at Machado Plaza in Santa Maria's Downtown.

Recreation and Parks Policies

The Recreation and Parks policies are organized into two sections that, together, create a comprehensive roadmap for the maintenance and enhancement of recreational and parks facilities and programming.

The *Standards and Diagrams* section defines regulatory requirements. Standards establish levels of quality or quantity that must be complied with or satisfied, while diagrams visually illustrate the intent or application of specific policies.

The *Policy Framework* section outlines Recreation and Parks goals, policies, and implementation actions. A goal describes the community's desired future. A policy is a specific statement of intent that guides decision-making. An action is an activity, procedure, program, or project that carries out a policy.

Policy Summary

The goals, policies, and implementation actions of the Recreation and Parks Element respond to Santa Maria's evolving needs by promoting a modern, well-maintained, and accessible parks and recreation system.

The Element emphasizes expanding and upgrading parks and recreational facilities to meet service standards and accommodate a growing population, while improving connectivity through a comprehensive trails system and shared use of public lands (Goals REC-1 and REC-2).

The Element advances diverse and inclusive recreational programming, including mobile programs, cultural activities, and targeted outreach in multiple languages to foster diversity and ensure all residents can participate (Goal REC-3). The Element also establishes a process for monitoring community needs so that the City can respond proactively (Goal REC-4), while emphasizing equity and targeted investment in underserved neighborhoods (Goal REC-5).

To ensure long-term effectiveness of the system, the Element focuses on maintenance, safety, and cost-effective management strategies (Goal REC-6) as well as partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and the private sector to expand access and resources (Goal REC-7). Finally, the Element prioritizes environmental resilience and biodiversity through green infrastructure, sustainable landscaping, and the dual use of infrastructure for recreation and flood protection (Goal REC-8).

Standards

This section establishes standards and levels of service that determine the development, maintenance, and improvement of recreational and park facilities in Santa Maria. These standards ensure accessible, high-quality facilities while supporting the City's long-term goals.

Recreational Facilities Standards

The City's recreational facilities standards are outlined in Table REC-3 (*Policy REC-1.1*).¹

Table REC-3: Recreational Facilities Standards

Classification	Standard: Unit / People
Youth Baseball/Softball Field	1 unit/6,000
Adult Softball Field	1 unit/10,000
Regulation Baseball (lighted) Field	1 unit/30,000
Soccer Field	1 unit/5,000
Football Field	1 unit/50,000
Tennis Court (lighted)	1 unit/2,000
Handball/Racquetball Court	1 unit/3,000
Community Center Building (4,000-8,000 sq ft)	1 unit/25,000
Social-Cultural Center (15,000-20,000 sq ft)	1 unit/75,000
Performing Arts Center (20,000-30,000 sq ft)	1 unit/75,000
Senior Center (10,000-15,000 sq ft)	1 unit/50,000
Visual Arts Workshop Studio	1 unit/50,000
Gymnasium (12,000-14,000 sq ft)	1 unit/25,000
Community Swimming Pool	1 unit/20,000
Aquatic Center (extended season; handicapped)	1 unit/50,000

Park Standard

The City's park standard is 5 acres of park space per 1,000 residents (*Policy REC-2.1*).¹

Playground at a public park

¹ For the purposes of this standard, the total acreage includes both parks and recreational facilities.

Policy Framework

Goal REC-1: Modern recreational facilities. A comprehensive and well-integrated system of modern recreational facilities is accessible to all Santa Maria residents.

Policy REC-1.1: Facilities standards. Maintain the standards outlined in Table REC-3 as recreational facilities are renovated and expanded.

Policy REC-1.2: Temporary facilities. Construct and maintain temporary recreational facilities to address short-term needs or serve areas awaiting permanent facility development. Temporary amenities should meet basic recreational needs and be removed or upgraded once permanent facilities are available.

Policy REC-1.3: Multi-use public lands. Promote the shared use of public lands where feasible for recreational purposes.

Policy REC-1.4: Existing facilities. Ensure existing recreational facilities and infrastructure are equally maintained in light of planned facilities in newly annexed parts of the city.

Policy REC-1.5: Trail system. Develop a system of accessible, well-maintained trails² that connects neighborhoods, parks, and open spaces and supports multiple uses, such as walking, biking, and running.

Action REC-1.5.1: Expand the scope of the City's Active Transportation Plan to create a new, more robust Trail System Master Plan.

Action REC-1.5.2: Implement and regularly update the Santa Maria Active Transportation Plan to enable safe pedestrian and cyclist connections to recreational facilities.

Goal REC-2: High-quality parks. A robust network of high-quality parks meets the diverse needs of all Santa Maria residents.³

Policy REC-2.1: Park standard. Maintain the City's standard of 5 acres of park space per 1,000 residents, primarily in areas directly adjacent to residential and commercial developments.

Action REC-2.1.1: Adopt a park classification system to support strategic growth and management of park facilities.

² Please see the City's Active Transportation Plan for a map of all trails.

³ Please see the Health and Environmental Justice Element for policies and actions focused on parks and facilities improvements in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Policy REC-2.2: Mitigation fees. Require developers to pay park mitigation fees to ensure that new developments contribute to the expansion and rehabilitation of parks facilities.⁴

Action REC-2.2.1: Regularly review and update park mitigation fees to reflect current needs and construction costs.

Policy REC-2.3: Park grants. Pursue federal, state, and regional grant opportunities to support the development, improvement, and maintenance of parks and facilities.

Goal REC-3: Inclusive programming. A diverse array of programming is inclusive, engaging, and responsive to the community, strengthening resident wellness, social connection, and cultural engagement.

Policy REC-3.1: Inclusive programming. Offer inclusive and diverse recreational programming that meets the varied needs of all residents, including programs in Spanish, Mixteco, and Tagalog.

Policy REC-3.2: Mobile programming. Implement mobile recreational activities to reach underserved areas, bringing programs directly to neighborhoods to ensure equitable access to recreation across the city.

Policy REC-3.3: Arts and culture. Incorporate public art, cultural activities, and musical and theater performances into park spaces to foster community identity. When possible, partner with Santa Maria-based artists and organizations.⁵

Action REC-3.3.1: Implement the City's Public Art Master Plan by collaborating with stakeholders, artists, and arts organizations to enhance public spaces and celebrate the city's rich arts heritage.

Policy REC-3.4: Community events. Continue to promote local community events that celebrate the city's cultural diversity, foster neighborhood pride, and strengthen community bonds. Facilitate events in public spaces, parks, and community centers, prioritizing activities that are inclusive, accessible, and reflective of residents' interests.

Policy REC-3.5: Youth and senior programming. Expand programs for youth and seniors, as necessary, to support healthy lifestyles and social connections, fostering physical activity, creative expression, and intergenerational community-building.

Policy REC-3.6: Aquatics. Continue to develop and expand aquatic programs and facilities to promote water safety, swimming skills, and recreational enjoyment for residents of all ages and abilities.

⁴ Please see the Land Use and Circulation Elements for additional policies and actions related to development impact and mitigation fees.

⁵ Please see the Conservation and Open Space Element for additional cultural resource policies and actions.

Policy REC-3.7: Marketing and outreach. Use social media, community events, and partnerships with local organizations to increase awareness and participation in the City's recreation and parks programs.

Goal REC-4: Conditions and demand monitoring. Recreational and park facilities are safe, functional, accessible, and meet City standards.

Policy REC-4.1: Facilities monitoring. Monitor growth and demographics to anticipate demand for recreational and park facilities to ensure adequate amenities are available to serve both existing and future residents.

Action REC-4.1.1: Implement and regularly update the Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan to guide investment in community facilities, ensuring balanced support for both structured and unstructured recreation spaces.

Action REC-4.1.2: Update the Leisure Needs Assessment and Action Plan every 5 years to support the planning, development, operation, and funding of recreational and park facilities and programs in the planning area. The Assessment will also evaluate the conditions of these facilities and programs to ensure City standards are being met.

Action REC-4.1.3: Designate opportunity areas where future investments should be prioritized, with a specific focus on disadvantaged communities and historically underinvested neighborhoods.

Goal REC-5: Park access. Equitable and barrier-free parks and recreational spaces are accessible for all Santa Maria residents, with facilities that are well distributed and inclusive to residents of all ages and abilities.⁶

Policy REC-5.1: Park distribution. Strive to provide an equitable distribution of park facilities across all neighborhoods, with a focus on addressing gaps in underserved areas by prioritizing park development in areas with limited access.

Action REC-5.1.1: Create a citywide map indicating parks, open spaces, and walking distances to each to identify gaps in access and address equitable distribution of facilities.

Policy REC-5.2: Universal design. Incorporate universal design principles in the development and renovation of parks to ensure that recreational spaces are usable by people of all ages and abilities. Design parks to include accessible paths, inclusive playgrounds, and other amenities that accommodate individuals with disabilities, ensuring full participation and enjoyment for all.

Policy REC-5.3: Senate Bill 1000 neighborhoods. Target new park improvements in Senate Bill (SB) 1000 disadvantaged communities (DACs) to improve public health outcomes, reduce heat island effects, and address long-standing inequities in access to park space.

⁶ Please see the Health and Environmental Justice Element for policies and actions focused on park access.

Policy REC-5.4: Nuisance mitigation. Avoid locating parks near high-volume roads, highways, or other sources of pollution to minimize exposure to noise, air pollution, and safety hazards. When proximity to such infrastructure is unavoidable, incorporate design features such as sound barriers, vegetation buffers, and safe crossings to mitigate potential health impacts.⁷

Goal REC-6: Amenities and maintenance. Recreational and park facilities are well maintained.

Policy REC-6.1: Facilities maintenance. Conduct routine maintenance of recreational and park facilities, including upkeep, repairs, and enhancements to ensure long-term usability and safety.

Policy REC-6.2: Maintenance districts. Require that residential and commercial developments that require a conditional use or planned development permit be annexed into a Landscape Maintenance District (LMD) and, depending upon the amount of proposed public easement landscaping, a Special Benefit Zone (SBZ).

Policy REC-6.3: Cost-efficient maintenance. Implement cost-effective maintenance strategies for parks facilities to ensure long-term sustainability, such as drought-tolerant landscaping and the use of smart irrigation technologies to reduce operational costs.

Action REC-6.3.1: Study potential maintenance funding mechanisms and develop strategies to seek sustained funding, which may include the following: funding from public and private partners; bonds and tax measures; assessment districts; and expanding fee-based recreational programming and leasing agreements.

Policy REC-6.4: Safety. Promote safety in parks by implementing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) features—such as adequate lighting, clear sightlines, surveillance, and strategic landscaping—and supporting Park Rangers tasked with patrols of park facilities.

Policy REC-6.5: Vandalism. Reduce vandalism through proactive strategies such as regular maintenance and the use of vandal-resistant materials.

Policy REC-6.6: Community support. Create a network of volunteers to assist in maintaining park and recreational areas. Consider mobilizing after-school programs, local businesses, and non-profit organizations to assist with small maintenance, landscaping, and clean-up projects.

⁷ Please see the Land Use, Circulation, Noise, and Health and Environmental Justice Elements for policies and actions related to land use conflicts.

Goal REC-7: Partnerships. Partnerships with public and private entities expand access to recreational and park facilities and services to maximize the availability of resources for the community.

Policy REC-7.1: Joint use agreements. Increase recreational resources through continued coordination with the Santa Maria school districts, Allan Hancock Community College, and Santa Barbara County.

Policy REC-7.2: County facilities. Facilitate access to County-owned recreational facilities for city residents through cooperative agreements, ensuring that City and County assets complement one another to provide seamless service.

Policy REC-7.3: Public-private partnerships. Encourage public-private partnerships to enhance recreational amenities and programming where public amenities are not available.

Policy REC-7.4: Programming partnerships. Partner with local organizations to develop a multipurpose recreational facility for outdoor events.

Goal REC-8: Resilient parks. Parks and recreational spaces are resilient to environmental challenges and enhance local biodiversity.⁸

Policy REC-8.1: Protection of open space. Preserve and expand open spaces in public parks that provide ecological and scenic benefits for residents.

Policy REC-8.2: Flood protection. Incorporate flood management strategies into park areas, utilizing green spaces for stormwater detention to reduce flood risk and enhance public safety.

Policy REC-8.3: Dual-use infrastructure. New and existing retardation basins, drainage easements, utility easements, and open space corridors may be improved for recreational purposes as conditions to development – but only when the infrastructure is deemed to serve a public benefit, such as a regional recreation space for use by the general public (e.g. sports field). In such cases, the design, configuration, size, and public access must meet the requirements of the Recreation and Parks Department and the Public Works Department.

Policy REC-8.4: Sustainable landscaping. Promote the use of native plants and drought-tolerant landscaping to enhance ecological value, reduce water consumption, and support local wildlife.

⁸ Please see the Conservation and Open Space Element for additional policies and actions focused on open space, natural habitat, stormwater management, and biodiversity.

Policy REC-8.5: Tree canopy and shade. Expand tree canopy coverage in parks to provide shade, reduce urban heat island effects, and enhance visitor comfort.⁹

Policy REC-8.6: Biodiversity. Support biodiversity in parks and open spaces by integrating ecological design elements and educational signage to enhance public awareness of urban conservation.

Policy REC-8.7: Green infrastructure. Incorporate green infrastructure elements, such as bioswales and permeable surfaces, into parks to manage stormwater and improve water quality.

⁹ See the Conservation and Open Space Element for additional urban forestry policies and actions.