

## CHAPTER 5. LAND USE AND URBAN DESIGN

Chapter 4 describes the multi-modal circulation framework and facilities that will serve the San Rafael Civic Center Study Area and improve connectivity between existing neighborhoods and to the new SMART Station. This chapter discusses the land use opportunities and desirable character of future development and public spaces that can help realize the community's vision for the area. It describes the station area's existing site conditions, the potential areas appropriate for new development, and design guidelines that will ensure that new development supports transit and improves and enhances the surrounding neighborhoods, without disrupting the special character of the area.

### 5.1 TRANSIT- ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Transit-oriented development is good town planning: it aims to create an environment that is attractive and provides daily goods and services in proximity to transit.

The four fundamental components of transit-oriented development are:

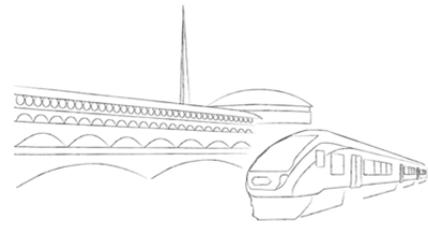
- A mix of land uses, such as housing, office, retail and civic uses that attract people to the area
- Sufficient densities to support transit, services, and retail for the area
- A circulation framework that supports all modes of travel, including bicycles and pedestrians
- An attractive and safe public environment of streets, sidewalks, crosswalks, plazas, and other spaces.

Transit-oriented development is supported in this area by the 2005 City of San Rafael General Plan 2020. The Housing Element of the General Plan encourages infill near transit, allowing higher densities at transit hubs. The Neighborhoods Element supports construction of the Civic Center SMART station and encourages a plan "that provides higher density housing, bus transit connections, a parking lot, and incorporates pedestrian facilities and bicycle access . . .".

### 5.2 A BALANCED APPROACH

In accommodating any transit-oriented development in existing districts, it is important to take a balanced approach that is sensitive to existing conditions and current policies. Therefore, in the Civic Center Station Area, the underlying principles of this study are to:

- set a sound but flexible framework of land use, circulation and transit facilities that will serve the area well for many years,
- respect current policies and regulations that have been discussed and developed with local community involvement and that contribute to the livability of the area,
- at the same time recognize that over time there may be a gradual change of use and density in the Study Area to those that are compatible with a balanced, transit-oriented neighborhood, and that this Plan should guide that change appropriately,
- protect and enhance the special character of the area, including the residential neighborhoods and open space resources.



There are opportunities within the Civic Center Station Area to support more transit-supportive development, either through the development of existing parking lots, storage, or strip-commercial sites or through the long-term conversion of existing underutilized sites to higher, transit-supportive densities and uses.

### 5.3 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The City of San Rafael has a longstanding commitment to affordable housing, as reflected in policies included in General Plan 2020's Housing Element and Section 14.16.030 Affordable Housing Requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. These policies identify affordable housing as a vital community need. The City has developed policies and programs to produce affordable units by requiring new residential development to include affordable units and for new job-producing commercial development to contribute financially to affordable housing programs. With the residential, retail, and commercial development that could occur within close proximity to the station, increases to the City's affordable housing stock could occur. This Plan supports and includes those affordable housing provisions.

### 5.4 TRAFFIC CAPACITY

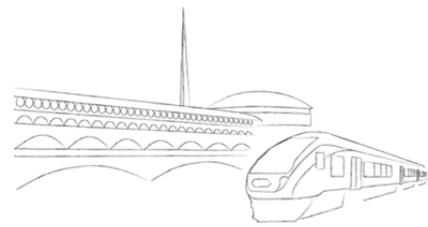
The capacities of area streets and intersections are among the primary constraints to any future development in the Study Area. The San Rafael General Plan 2020 evaluated traffic capacities based on existing and planned circulation improvements. Subsequent analysis conducted by the City for this project confirmed that even with the construction of the traffic improvements identified in the General Plan, the Study Area can accommodate only the growth already assumed in the General Plan. The General Plan-projected increase in residential units, office, and retail uses over that existing within the three geographic portions of the study area are shown in Table 3 below. Traffic improvements over those identified in General Plan 2020 are not proposed by this plan, so the total amount of development assumed will not exceed the General Plan assumptions in Table 3. While the assumed amount and general location of development cannot change, it has been directed and focused by the provisions of this Plan.

<b>Planning Areas</b>	<b>Residential (Dwelling Units)</b>	<b>Office (Square Feet)</b>	<b>Retail (Square Feet)</b>
East of US 101 Area	200	200,000	0
Redwood Highway Area	100	0	0
Northgate Area	320	0	80,000

Source: City of San Rafael.

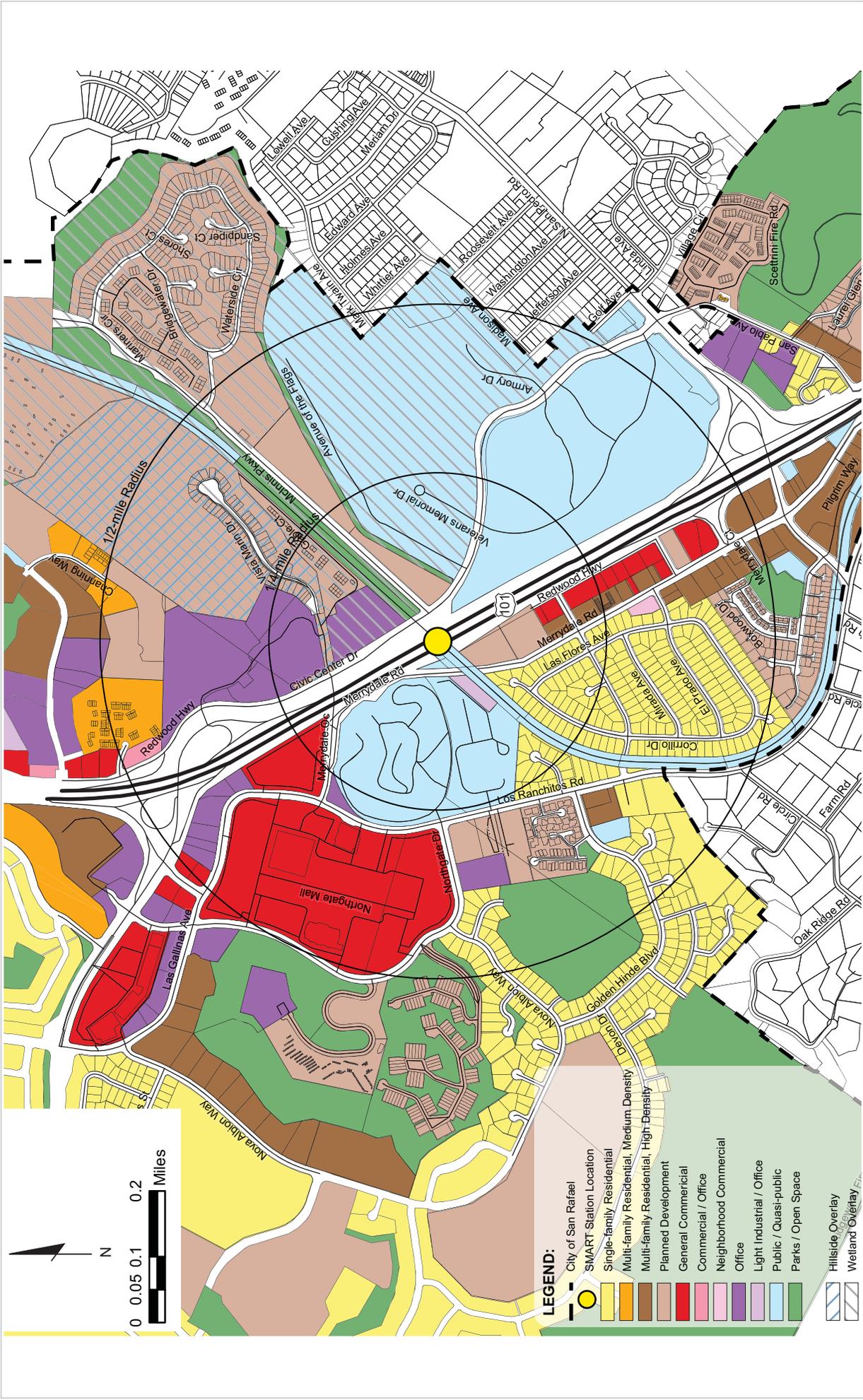
### 5.5 REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS

Table 4 summarizes the allowable densities of development set by city zoning regulations and the General Plan throughout the City including the Study Area. Figure 16 shows the zoning designations on properties within the Study Area. Allowable residential densities are determined by the number of dwelling units allowed per acre of land. The intensity of office or retail development allowed is based on a floor



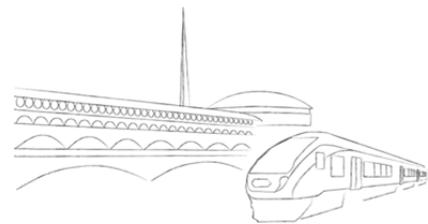
area ratio (FAR), the ratio of total building development (in square feet) to total site area. In mixed-use districts, where both residential and commercial uses are allowed, allowable development intensity is determined by combining the floor-area-ratio (FAR) for the non-residential component, with the minimum lot area required per dwelling unit for the residential component. For purposes of clarity, minimum lot area per dwelling unit has been converted to dwelling units per acre (dus/ac).

<b>TABLE 4 ALLOWABLE DENSITIES PER SAN RAFAEL ZONING CODE</b>			
	<b>LAND USE</b>	<b>FAR</b>	<b>DWELLING UNITS/ACRE</b>
	LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL Single-family homes.	N/A	0.5-9
	MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL Duplex, townhomes, apartments and condominiums; hotels/motels, clubs and similar uses.	N/A	9-22
	HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL Apartments and condominiums; hotels/motels, clubs and similar uses.	N/A	24-44
	GENERAL COMMERCIAL General retail and service uses, restaurants, automobile sales and service uses, and hotels/motels. Offices as secondary uses. Residential use allowed.	0.3	44
	NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL Neighborhood-serving retail and services. Residential use allowed. Ancillary office uses allowed.	0.3	24
	OFFICE General offices, medical and professional offices, and administrative or headquarters offices. Residential use allowed.	0.3	44
	LIGHT INDUSTRIAL/OFFICE Motor vehicle service, contractor uses and yards, light manufacturing, distribution, warehousing and storage, incidental employee-serving retail/service, and office uses.	0.30 (1.0 for storage)	N/A
	PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC Public and civic uses, such as government, education, public safety, public utility and similar facilities owned or operated by public or non-profit agencies. Residential use allowed.	1.0	24
	PLANNED DEVELOPMENT Uses are set for each individual PD consistent with the General Plan and parking. Changes in use require an amendment to the PD.	Set in PD	Set in PD



SOURCE: BMS

# ZONING MAP



## 5.6 LAND USE CONCEPTS

The goal of this Plan is to “set the stage for creating a vibrant, mixed-use, livable area supported by a mix of transit opportunities, including passenger rail service.” Several overarching principles were established by the Committee to ensure that the Civic Center Station Area achieves its goals, while also preserving the existing neighborhood character. These include the following:

- Protect the existing residential neighborhoods from adverse impacts of new development
- Allow new residential, office and mixed-use development that is both in scale with the existing neighborhoods and is complementary to the community character
- Provide safe and attractive transit access for all modes of transportation
- Encourage mixed-use development to accommodate additional small businesses that provide local neighborhood services and amenities.

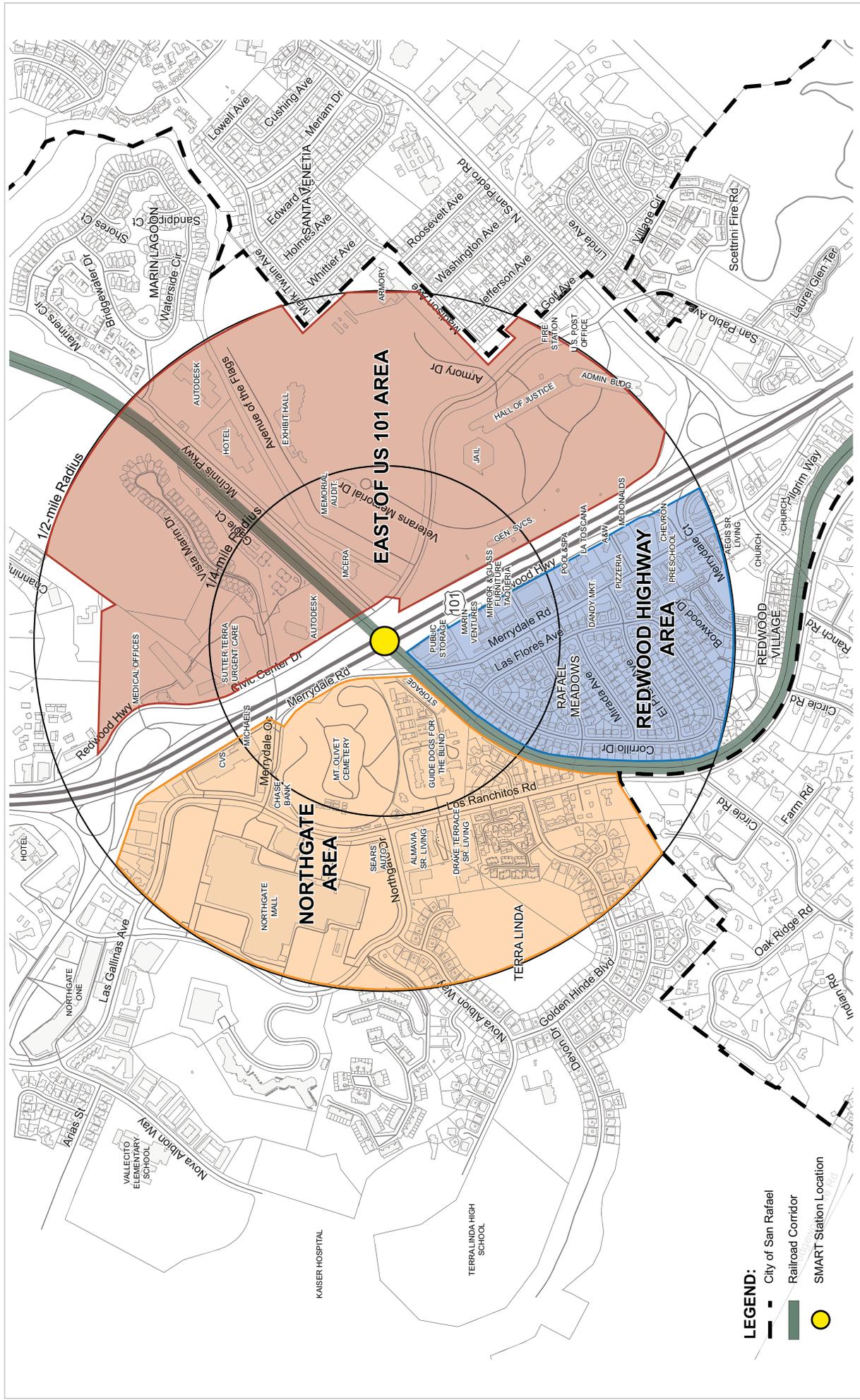
The Committee also articulated overall land use considerations that have, in turn, informed the specific land use recommendations that follow. The considerations include the following:

1. In general, multi-family residential buildings should be encouraged within walking distance of the station (generally within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile). This is a long range plan, looking 25 years into the future, and major alterations in uses could occur that are not currently contemplated. Market considerations will ultimately determine what uses are feasible and when.
2. While policies should emphasize residential development, increases in both residential and commercial intensities are encouraged in the immediate vicinity / within walking distance of the station. This pattern of uses can help achieve lessened reliance on single occupancy vehicles. It can also aid in the enhancement of the station area as a center of activity and community resource. With development that is focused and clustered around the freeway and train station, the existing residential neighborhood character will be protected. The conversion of existing commercial buildings to residential uses could also increase residential development.
3. There does not appear to be market demand to support significant additional general purpose retail in the area. Limited station-related retail should be allowed in proximity to the station. Additional neighborhood-serving retail should be allowed, but not required, in areas that are appropriate for mixed-use development.
4. Higher densities demand greater attention to high quality design. Where height limits are increased, architectural quality becomes essential. Within close proximity to the freeway, care should be taken to maintain occupant safety and health are maintained. Further, environmental considerations are always important, especially attention to the area’s creeks and wetlands.

The vision for the Study Area is further refined with recommendations specific to three geographic zones, each of which has unique characteristics and opportunities:

- East of US 101 Area
- Redwood Highway Area
- Northgate Area.

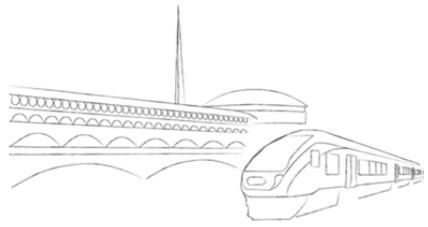
A more detailed discussion of recommendations for each of these three zones is provided below. The zones are illustrated in Figure 17.



- LEGEND:**
- City of San Rafael
  - Railroad Corridor
  - SMART Station Location

SOURCE: BMS





## 5.7 EAST OF US 101 AREA

The East of US 101 area generally encompasses all uses east of the freeway, including the Civic Center.

### 5.7.1 Existing Conditions

East of US 101, the Study Area is dominated by the Marin County Civic Center, which includes the Hall of Justice, Administration Building, Armory, General Services Building, Memorial Auditorium, and Exhibit Hall. Encompassing about 128 acres, 90 of these are open space and include the Lagoon and Lagoon Park. Parking lots define the edges of the site, especially on the west along the US 101 right-of-way and along Avenue of the Flags north of the lagoon. North of the Civic Center along McInnis Parkway are located a commercial office building and an Embassy Suites hotel. Further east lies an 3900 Civic Center Drive office building and Marin Lagoon, a residential neighborhood. North of the rail tracks, which parallel McInnis Parkway, the hillsides accommodate a range of uses including an 3900 Civic Center Drive office building, the Sutter Terra Linda Urgent Care facility, medical offices, and the Vista Marin residential development which faces the Civic Center. A mix of smaller office and multi-family residential uses lie further north along Redwood Highway and beyond the Study Area. The freeway right-of-way presents a major barrier between this area and the areas to the west. At the station, where the freeway overpass is elevated, it creates not only a physical barrier, but also a visual one.



*Lagoon Park at the Marin County Civic Center*



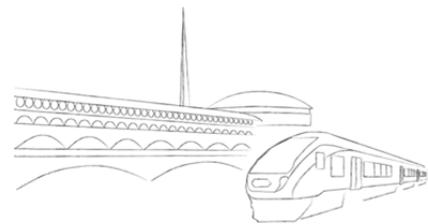
*Sutter Terra Linda Urgent Care Facility*



*McInnis Parkway, with wetlands in foreground and office and hotel uses beyond*



*Vista Marin residential neighborhood*



### **5.7.2 General Plan and Zoning**

The General Plan designates various sites in the study area as suitable for public use (the Civic Center), office (e.g., 3900 Civic Center Drive), general commercial (the hotel), and various residential types. All of the properties that lie along McInnis Parkway are zoned as Planned Development parcels and contain site specific land uses. All of the office zoned properties have a maximum allowable FAR of 0.3 and are also permitted to include residential uses, although this mix of uses has never been implemented. A majority of the area has an overlay zone of Hillside, Wetlands or both, where specific General Plan and zoning permissions apply to protect these natural resources. The building height limit in the area is 36 feet, except on hillside sites. Zoning uses and densities are shown on Table 4 and existing zoning is shown on Figure 16.

### **5.7.3 Opportunities**

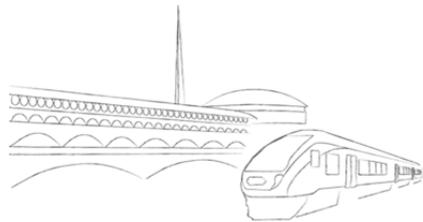
This Plan concludes that sites along McInnis Parkway in close proximity to the station (within ¼ mile or easy walking distance) that currently include office or hotel uses could, in the long run, be developed at somewhat higher densities and heights and could also include new housing. The level properties along Civic Center Drive within walking distance of the Station are also possible locations for more intense development. This Plan acknowledges the County Plan for the Marin County Civic Center, but also notes that the vacant County site adjacent to the station, also known as the Christmas tree lot, presents an opportunity for a transit-oriented project since it is large, close to the station and vacant. Any housing on the Civic Center Drive hilltop sites must include improvements that facilitate access to the Station, including pedestrian improvements to address the perceived barrier of the uphill climb from the station to the site.

Housing or mixed-use on these development sites could be 4 stories, and must be designed with sensitivity to the scale and layout of existing residential neighborhood and to the nearby creeks and wetlands, views to the surrounding hills, and the visual character of the County Government Center. An additional 5<sup>th</sup> story could be added where a significant public benefit is provided in the Planning Area. Public benefit could be items such as additional affordable housing, additional creek improvements, public plazas, or other amenities.

### **5.7.4 Recommendation**

In order to achieve the vision for the area, focused increases in height limits, allowable FAR and/or residential densities would be required. The actions necessary to support the vision of the East of US 101 Area include the following:

- In the current office and commercial areas, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity. Amend the General Plan and zoning designations on PD zoned lots to allow residential use.
- Density increases can be higher on the level lots (MCERA APN 180-410-06; 3900 Civic Center Drive parking APN 180-124-06), than on the more distant flat lots or on the hillside lots.
- The Christmas tree lot is under County jurisdiction, and in addition, any development that exceeds 250 sq. ft. in building area requires a two-thirds countywide vote. If changes to the existing master



plan are contemplated in the future, density and FAR increases to the same level as the (MCERA APN 180-410-06 and 3900 Civic Center Drive parking APN 180-124-06), are appropriate.

- On development sites close to the station, amend the General Plan and zoning to increase height limits to 4 stories for residential and mixed-use development only, subject to design requirements. Allow an additional story (for a total of 5) for developments that propose a significant local benefit or amenity in the Planning Area. Public benefit could be items such as additional affordable housing, additional creek improvements, public plazas or other amenities.
- Develop design guidelines that specifically address:
  - Consideration of views from the hillside residences
  - Establishment of view corridors along Avenue of the Flags to the hills, Mt. Tam and the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Civic Center
  - Height step-backs and buffers from single-family neighborhoods
  - Continuation of the City's creek and wetlands policies.

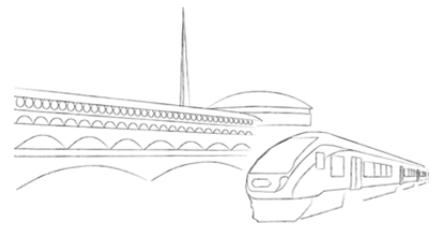
## 5.8 REDWOOD HIGHWAY AREA

### 5.8.1 Existing Conditions

The Redwood Highway Area is characterized by single-family residential neighborhoods with some parcels providing commercial uses and multi-family housing. The Redwood Highway frontage paralleling US 101 is lined with uses which utilize the freeway visibility, such as a McDonalds and Chevron gas station, as well as restaurants and home improvement retail outlets.

Merrydale Road is largely fronted by multi-family apartments between North San Pedro and El Prado Avenue. Some senior housing is also located along this extent of Merrydale Road. North of El Prado the street has multi-family units on the east and backyards of homes in the Rafael Meadows neighborhood on the west. At the north end of Merrydale Road lies the larger sites of Marin Ventures, a local community services organization, and a Public Storage self-service facility. A branch of the Gallinas Creek south fork and parking strip on the west side of Merrydale Road partially separate the Rafael Meadows neighborhood from the taller multi-family buildings. The newer Redwood Village planned development lies south of Rafael Meadows and includes single-family homes as well as townhouses and a public park.

The freeway right-of-way and the rail corridor create significant barriers in this area, limiting movement by all modes of travel, making easy access to amenities, services and recreation resources difficult. The freeway, where it is elevated, also blocks views to the east.



*Redwood Highway frontage road*



*Public Storage on Merrydale Road*



*Multi-family housing on Merrydale Road*



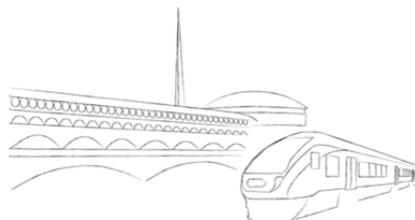
*Rafael Meadows residential neighborhood*

### **5.8.2 General Plan and Zoning**

Allowed uses in this area include single-family and multi-family residential uses, and commercial uses, as well as several planned development areas. The single-family neighborhood, Rafael Meadows, is zoned low density residential, with a maximum of 9 dus/ac. The multi-family residential uses, generally located along Merrydale Road, are zoned high-density residential, and have a maximum of 44 dus/ac. The commercial uses along Redwood Highway have an FAR of 0.30. The building height limit in the area is 36 feet, except in the single-family Rafael Meadows neighborhood, where it is 30 feet. Zoning uses and densities are shown on Table 4 and existing zoning on Figure 16.

### **5.8.3 Opportunities**

This plan recommends that all single-family areas should remain as such and be buffered from new development. Multi-family housing should be encouraged on the properties closest to the Station, specifically Northgate Storage, Public Storage, and Marin Ventures. These nearby lots could also contain small amounts of station serving retail, such as a coffee shop, convenience store or cleaners, clustered



near the station. *Development should be allowed up to 4 stories, except along Merrydale Road, facing the Rafael Meadows neighborhood, where the 3 stories would be more appropriate.* Development in this area would need to ensure that building articulation, massing, and setbacks provide an appropriate transition to the single family neighborhood.

The Committee reached consensus on the Draft Plan to include the italicized text above. After hearing the public comments on the Draft, the Committee was not able to reach consensus on heights for the Redwood Highway frontage, the Marin Ventures site, or either storage lot parcel, and were evenly divided between a No Change Alternative and a Four-Story Alternative.

The area south of the station along Merrydale Road and Redwood Highway is an appropriate place for mixed-use developments with retail below residential units.

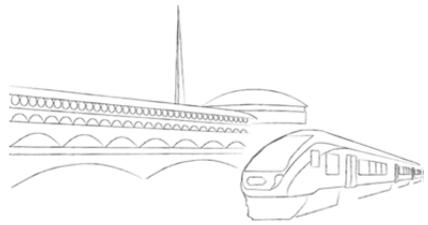
#### **5.8.4 Recommendation**

The General Plan and zoning generally supports the future vision for the Redwood Highway Area, with the exception of building heights in certain areas and the use specific regulations on the Planned Development zoned sites. No changes are proposed for single family areas. The Plan also recommends the establishment of design guidelines for the area. The following measures are needed to complete the vision for the Redwood Highway Area.

- On the properties closest to the station, specifically the Public Storage and Marin Ventures sites, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity. Amend the PD zoning to allow a mix of residential and retail.
- *Increase height limits on Redwood Highway to 4 stories where residential is constructed over ground floor retail.*

The Committee reached consensus on the Draft Plan to include the italicized text above. After hearing the public comments on the Draft, the Committee was not able to reach consensus on heights for the Redwood Highway frontage, the Marin Ventures site, or either storage lot parcel, and were evenly divided between a No Change Alternative and a Four-Story Alternative.

- Develop design guidelines for the Merrydale Road properties to include height transitions, building articulation and varied setbacks to prevent the appearance of a solid wall to the adjacent single-family neighborhood.



## 5.9 NORTHGATE AREA

### 5.9.1 Existing Conditions

The Northgate Area is the commercial heart of North San Rafael. The most prominent use is Northgate Mall, a large, partially enclosed regional shopping mall surrounded by surface parking. Auto supply stores, banks, office buildings and additional retail is located in Northgate III to the north and east sides of the mall site. Just north of the rail line and the proposed station are two large land uses: Guide Dogs for the Blind and Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Both sites are fenced and gated with no through access. A small storage facility, Northgate Security Storage, is located adjoining Guide Dogs for the Blind on the west, immediately adjacent to the station.

Direct access from the northern portion of this area to the station is compromised the large Guide Dogs for the Blind and Mt. Olivet Cemetery sites. In addition, the strip commercial and shopping mall have large parking lots fronting their buildings which do not encourage pedestrian access.



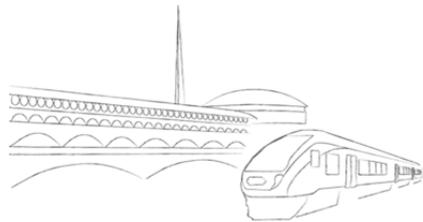
*Northgate Security Storage on Merrydale Road just north of the station*



*Northgate III shopping center on Los Ranchitos Road across from Northgate Mall*



*Northgate Mall viewed from Los Ranchitos Road*



### **5.9.2 General Plan and Zoning**

Zoning in this area consists mostly of commercial and office uses, as well as public/quasi-public for the Guide Dogs and cemetery sites. The storage site adjacent to the station is zoned industrial. All use areas allow residential uses with the exception of the industrially-zoned storage site. The office and commercial uses have an allowable FAR of 0.30; they allow multi-family residential in a mixed-use configuration with a maximum density of 44 dus/ac. The building height limit in the area is 36 feet. Zoning uses and densities are shown on Table 4 and existing zoning on Figure 16.

### **5.9.3 Opportunities**

Multi-family residential should be encouraged at Northgate Mall and allowed to develop up to 5 stories. Multi-family residential and commercial mixed-use should be encouraged on the Northgate III site at 4 stories. As discussed in the Station Access and Connectivity chapter, this site should also accommodate an extension of the Promenade to facilitate pedestrian access to the Station. Housing, while permitted, is not encouraged in the office area along Las Gallinas across from Northgate Mall. This stretch is well suited to its current office and convenience-oriented commercial uses.

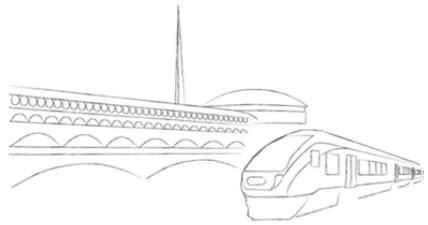
### **5.9.4 Recommendation**

In order to achieve the vision for the area, increases to height limits, FAR and residential densities in focused and specific locations would be required. No changes are proposed for single family neighborhoods. The actions to support the vision in this area include the following:

- On the properties closest to the station, specifically the Northgate Storage site and Northgate III, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity.
- Amend the General Plan and zoning for Northgate III to increase densities to the levels assigned to the areas within walking distance of the station, and to allow 4 stories for residential over retail uses.
- Consider the extension of the Promenade through Northgate III in any major reconstruction of the site.
- Develop design guidelines to buffer height increases from single family neighborhoods.
- Amend the General Plan and zoning to allow height increases to 5 stories for residential development at Northgate Mall.

## **5.10 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

The existing natural environment of hills, creeks and wetlands are important and valued resources of the area. Specific reference to these resources are made in the Vision North San Rafael and in the General Plan policies and zoning designations. This Plan supports and includes those natural environment protection provisions.



### 5.10.1 *Natural Environment Actions*

- New development should celebrate natural resources.
- Restore and enhance the natural environment by improving and protecting creeks, wetlands and hillsides as provided in the General Plan and zoning provisions.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that mean sea level rise will rise between one and three feet by the end of this century. A three-foot rise would inundate much of eastern and central San Rafael, potentially impacting the study area. In accordance with the San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan, the City will monitor sea level rise and plan for shoreline defense; develop a program of levee analysis; participate in Marin County’s regional vulnerability assessment, and prepare a local vulnerability assessment for San Rafael; and continue to provide emergency planning and community awareness.



*The existing wetland along McInnis Boulevard is attractive and is a valuable environmental resource.*



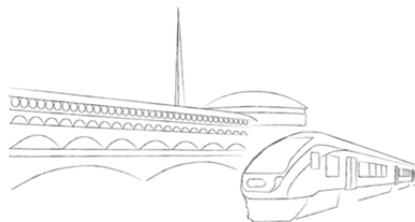
*Gallinas Creek is daylit along a portion of Merrydale Road, and can be restored to provide an attractive amenity for the neighborhood.*

## 5.11 DESIGN GUIDELINES

The existing San Rafael Design Guidelines are intended to promote “pedestrian-friendly and people-oriented” design in new development. The guidelines encourage context-sensitive design and design that is in harmony with existing development. The following guidelines should be considered for addition to the existing Guidelines.

### 5.11.1 *General Transit-oriented Design Guidelines*

Generally, any new development should take the following into consideration:



### Street Orientation

Buildings should address the street and sidewalks to create a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment.

### Building Scale and Massing

New buildings should be a reasonable height and scale compared with adjoining parcels and neighborhoods. Height and scale transitions should be provided between adjacent buildings where needed.

### Building Configuration

New development should have varied and articulated facades to reduce the apparent size and bulk. Color and materials should also be used to provide variety and to mitigate scale.

### Parking

Minimize parking lots adjacent to the street and sidewalk. Place parking to the side or rear. Minimize the number of curb cuts for parking lot access as these can conflict with pedestrian movement. Screen parking from sidewalks and pedestrian walkways.

### Setbacks

Where appropriate, buildings should be located facing the sidewalk with modest setbacks. A landscaped buffer consistent with that already in the area should be provided. Large setbacks, as commonly found in business parks, are not appropriate.

### Ground-level Uses

Provide active uses, transparency, public open space, and/or well-maintained landscaping at the ground level to create interest along the street and sidewalk, making for a pleasant pedestrian environment.

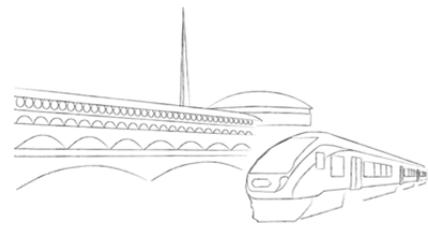
### **5.11.2 Specific Building Design Guidelines**

Building design guidelines can and should vary somewhat among the three geographic development areas of the Study Area. Key considerations in these three areas are as follows.

#### East of US 101 Area

East of US 101 the development pattern close to the station is dominated by large structures and parking lots. Although some retail may ultimately be added, the area is likely to continue to be characterized by larger buildings, significant parking, and streets providing vehicular, transit, bicycle and pedestrian access. This area is not likely to become a mixed-use village, but can become a much more pedestrian-friendly zone.

- Efforts to mitigate the scale of buildings will be important, especially as it relates to the residential neighborhoods. Design of roofs, façade materials and the arrangement of building elements can all contribute to a pleasing scale of development.



- Care should be taken to not block views from public streets, parks and pathways wherever possible, and to provide views from the new development to the area's significant hillsides and wetlands.
- Buildings and site development should respect the hillsides and wetlands of this area. Plantings that are consistent with native species would be particularly appropriate.
- The pattern of development in this area should change to be more supportive of pedestrian and transit activity: building entries should be near and oriented to the street, and "eyes on the street" from windows and front doors should be employed to create a sense of security and safety.

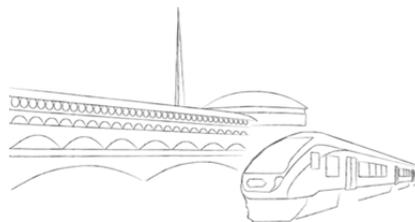
### Redwood Highway Area

The Merrydale Road / Redwood Highway area is quite different in character from the other two areas. The Merrydale and Redwood Highway frontages of the area are, also quite different from each other, and buildings located on or adjoining them must respond to these varying conditions.

### *Merrydale Road*

The Merrydale Road area is characterized by primarily residential uses, with some neighborhood-serving retail uses in its southern portion. Specific recommendations for new development in this area are as follows.

- Development in this area must carefully respect its context of nearby single-family residential neighborhoods. The scale of new buildings should provide a transition from the low scale single-family homes to the higher intensity development that is suitable directly adjoining the rail station. Care should be taken to preserve the privacy of the rear yard areas of single family residences backing on to Merrydale.
- Buildings should be located facing sidewalks with minimal setback, and with front doors readily and clearly accessible from the sidewalk.
- New development should have varied and articulated facades to reduce the apparent size and bulk of its buildings.
- Local-serving uses and amenities are suitable in mixed-use development in this area. These uses should be on the ground floor of buildings near the station, with the possibility of outdoor seating.
- Provide active uses, transparency, public open space, and/or well-maintained landscaping at the ground level to create interest along the street and sidewalk, making for a pleasant pedestrian environment. Sidewalk cafes and displays are possible in appropriate locations.
- New buildings along Merrydale Road should respond to the existing residential context in the use of materials and architectural design. A wide range of styles is possible but design should fit well with and be compatible with existing neighborhoods.



### *Redwood Highway*

Unlike the Merrydale Road area, which is predominately residential, the Redwood Highway frontage features a number of auto accessed retail and commercial uses, and therefore, the recommendations for this area are different than for those in the Merrydale Road area. Specific recommendations for the Redwood Highway area are as follows.

- Buildings along Redwood Highway are likely to continue to be appropriate locations for more auto accessed uses, such as home decorating, supplies, and restaurant uses, where highway visibility is helpful. Wherever possible, these uses should be incorporated into a mixed-use building at the ground floor.
- *Buildings in this area may be taller than on Merrydale Road since they can thereby capture views of surrounding hillsides and the Civic Center, while this greater height would not negatively impact the surrounding residential neighborhoods.*

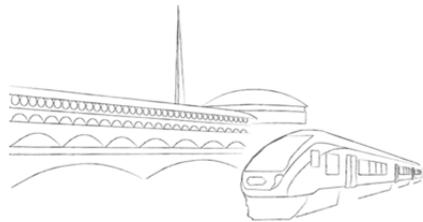
The Committee reached consensus on the Draft Plan to include the italicized text above. After hearing the public comments on the Draft, the Committee was not able to reach consensus on heights for the Redwood Highway frontage, the Marin Ventures site, or either storage lot parcel, and were evenly divided between a No Change Alternative and a Four-Story Alternative.

- Although its location adjoining US 101 detracts from its attractiveness as a pedestrian environment, improvements to sidewalks, lighting and ground level building design should be directed to create a comfortable pedestrian environment.
- Parking should be located at the side or rear of buildings.

### Northgate Area

The Northgate area has the potential to continue to evolve as an increasingly pedestrian and bicycle friendly town center for North San Rafael. In order to achieve this outcome, the shopping center / strip commercial form that the area currently takes should evolve into a pattern that is more pedestrian-oriented.

- Rather than lying behind large parking lots, new development should be located, where possible, to adjoin and thereby reinforce the sidewalk edge, providing an engaging environment for the pedestrian. If parking is structured, it should be on the side or back of parcels.
- Pedestrian access through parking lots should be separated from drive aisles and parking spaces. These walkways should be clear and improved with special lighting and plantings to create a comfortable environment.
- Buildings should face and animate the Promenade throughout this area with retail or other active uses at the ground floor, to create an attractive pedestrian environment.
- Taller buildings may be most appropriate nearer major arterials and the freeway, with sensitive scale transitions to residential neighborhoods on the periphery.



### **5.11.3 Public Environment Design**

The design of the public environment applies to the sidewalks, walkways, and small open spaces that will be found throughout the Study Area. The public environment supports and encourages pedestrian activity which contributes to transit use and a safe and active community life.

#### Continue Promenade Implementation

Continue to implement the Promenade through the Study Area, providing an attractive pedestrian environment with access to the station as well as to surrounding uses.

#### Sidewalks

Generous sidewalks should be provided to accommodate pedestrians and pedestrian amenities such as lighting, seating, street trees and landscape, and areas for retail establishments to spill out onto the sidewalk if desired, with outdoor dining or casual seating.

#### Crosswalks

Provide clear, well-marked crosswalks. Where appropriate, provide corner bulbouts (curb extensions) to facilitate street crossing for pedestrians, particularly those with impaired mobility.

#### Parking

Locate new parking underneath, behind, or at the side of buildings and screen from view of pedestrians.

#### Curb Cuts

Minimize curb cuts to parking or service areas to avoid conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists.

#### Service Areas

Screen service areas from view and locate away from sidewalk whenever possible.

#### Landscape

Provide street trees and other landscaping to create an attractive pedestrian environment.

#### Lighting

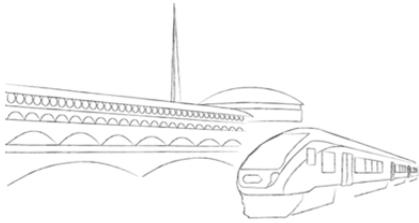
Pedestrian scale lighting, at 12 – 15 feet in height, rather than taller roadway lighting, should be considered along all pedestrian walkways, sidewalks and the Promenade. Lights should be designed to avoid spillover light into residential units and should promote a dark sky environment.

#### Public Spaces

Public spaces in the form of small plazas or community gathering spaces should be well lit and located in areas that maximize visibility and access.

#### Informal Gathering Places

Restaurants, cafes and other commercial establishments are encouraged to provide outdoor seating.

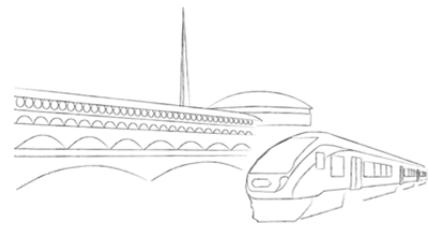


*Orienting buildings toward the sidewalk edge will help to engage pedestrians, and encourage walking and cycling. Providing sidewalk space for retail, dining, and seating, especially in the area around Northgate and along Merrydale Road provides interest and appeal.*



*In residential areas, setbacks should be kept to a minimum, and attractive ground-level landscaping, planting strip and street trees should be provided to ensure a pleasant pedestrian environment.*





## 5.12 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The land use and urban design strategies recommended by this Plan both support the community's vision for a vibrant, mixed-use, transit-oriented station area, and protect and enhance the existing neighborhoods.

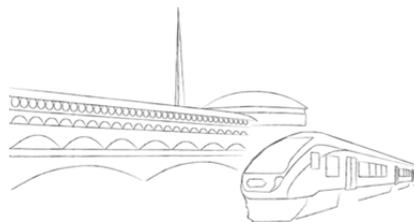
- 1. Protect existing residential neighborhoods.** No changes are proposed for the existing single-family residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods should be protected from adverse impacts of new development. New development should be both in scale with the existing neighborhoods and complementary in community character.
- 2. Encourage residential uses within walking distance (generally a ¼-mile) of the station.** Inclusion of additional multi-family residential development near the station will help increase ridership for the transit station. Affordable units will be included in this new housing throughout the Station Area through conformance with existing and future City housing policies.
- 3. Allow limited retail in proximity to the station.** Current market demand does not appear to be strong enough to support significant additional retail in the area. However, some additional station-serving and neighborhood-serving retail should be allowed, though not required, in areas appropriate for mixed-use development.
- 4. Develop design guidelines to ensure compatibility with the existing neighborhoods.** Higher densities demand greater attention to high quality design, and design guidelines can help ensure compatibility of new development with the existing neighborhood character. Design guidelines should reflect the unique character of each of the three planning areas, based on the guidelines in this plan.

East of US 101 Area Design Guidelines should be developed to preserve views, buffer single-family neighborhoods, and support the City's creeks and wetlands policies.

Redwood Highway Area Design Guidelines need to address building height transitions, building façade articulation and massing, and setbacks to ensure compatibility with the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Northgate Area Design Guidelines are needed to buffer existing neighborhoods from the height increases of new development.

- 5. Restore and enhance the natural resources in the station area.** The station area has an abundance of natural open space, hillsides, creeks, and wetlands. These resources should be restored and enhanced per the General Plan and zoning designations. They should also be celebrated by new development.
  - New development should celebrate natural resources.
  - Restore and enhance the natural environment by improving and protecting creeks, wetlands and hillsides as provided in the General Plan and zoning provisions.
  - The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that mean sea level rise will rise between one and three feet by the end of this century. A three-foot rise would

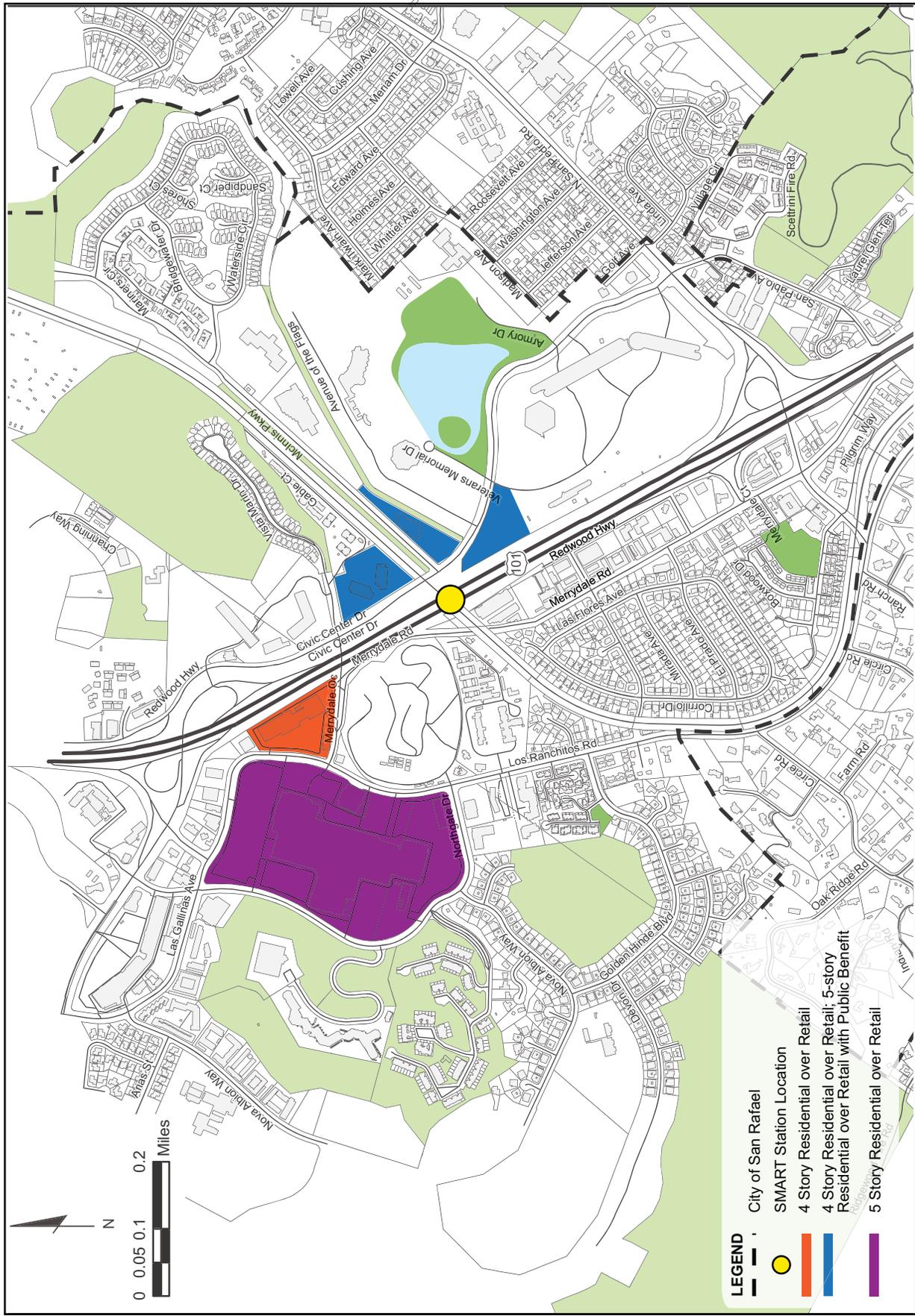


inundate much of eastern and central San Rafael, potentially impacting the study area. In accordance with the San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan, the City will monitor sea level rise and plan for shoreline defense; develop a program of levee analysis; participate in Marin County's regional vulnerability assessment, and prepare a local vulnerability assessment for San Rafael; and continue to provide emergency planning and community awareness.

6. **Allow an increase in building height, allowable FAR and/or residential density in focused locations. In addition, amend the General Plan and zoning designations on Planned Development (PD) zoned parcels to allow for additional uses.** The increases in density are contingent upon the identified limits of traffic capacity in the area. They reflect the development potential of each of the three planning areas. See Figures 18A/18B for height increases.

#### East of US 101 Area

- In the current office and commercial areas, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity. Amend the General Plan and zoning designations on PD zoned lots to allow residential use.
- Density increases can be higher on the level lots (MCERA APN 180-410-06; 3900 Civic Center Drive parking APN 180-124-06), than on the more distant flat lots or on the hillside lots.
- The Christmas tree lot is under County jurisdiction. If changes to the existing master plan are contemplated in the future, density and FAR increases to the same level as the (MCERA APN 180-410-06 and 3900 Civic Center Drive parking APN 180-124-06), are appropriate.
- Include requirements for facilitating pedestrian access to the Station from the sites at higher elevations on the hillside.
- On development sites close to the station, amend the General Plan and zoning to increase height limits to 4 stories for residential and mixed-use development only, subject to design requirements. Allow an additional story (for a total of 5) for developments that propose a significant benefit or amenity in the planning area. Also, develop design guidelines that specifically address:
  - Preservation of views from the hillside residences
  - Establishment of view corridors along Avenue of the Flags to the hills, Mt. Tam and the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Civic Center
  - Height step-backs and buffers from single-family neighborhoods
  - Continuation of the City's creek and wetlands policies.

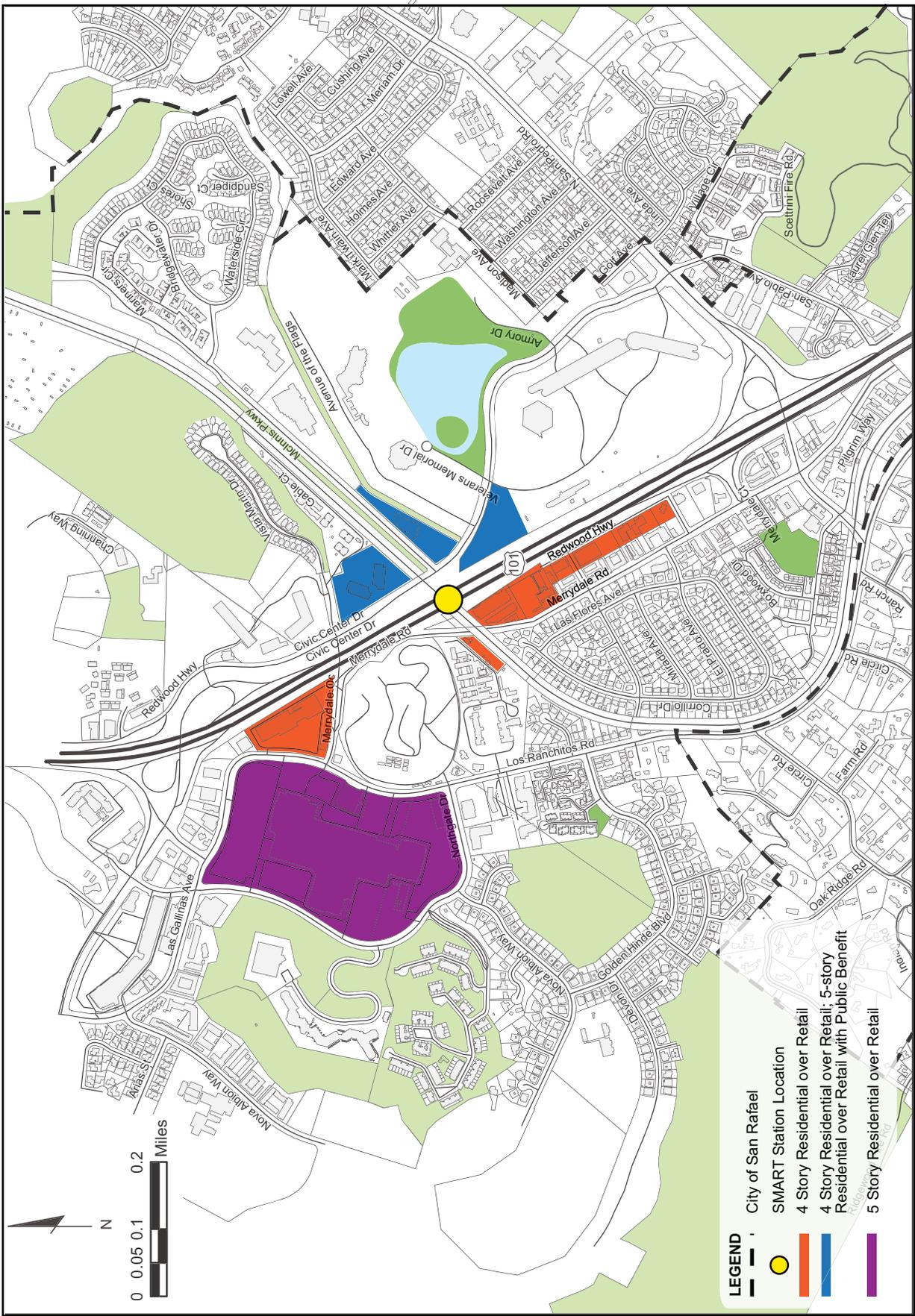


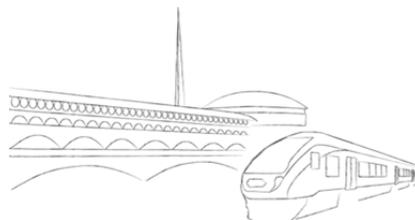
**NO CHANGE ALTERNATIVE**

FIGURE 18 A

# 4 STORY ALTERNATIVE

FIGURE 18B





### Redwood Highway Area

- On the properties closest to the station, specifically the Public Storage and Marin Ventures sites, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity. Amend the PD zoning to allow a mix of residential and retail.
- *Increase height limits on Redwood Highway to 4 stories where residential is constructed over ground floor retail.*

The Committee reached consensus on the Draft Plan to include the italicized text above. After hearing the public comments on the Draft, the Committee was not able to reach consensus on heights for the Redwood Highway frontage, the Marin Ventures site, or either storage lot parcel, and were evenly divided between a No Change Alternative and a Four-Story Alternative.

- Develop design guidelines for the Merrydale Road properties to include height transitions, building articulation and varied setbacks to prevent the appearance of a solid wall to the adjacent single-family neighborhood.

### Northgate Area

- On the properties closest to the station, specifically the Northgate Storage site and Northgate III, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity.
- Amend the General Plan and zoning for Northgate III to increase densities to the levels assigned to the areas within walking distance of the station, and to allow 4 stories for residential over retail uses.
- Consider the extension of the Promenade through Northgate III in any major reconstruction of the site.
- Develop design guidelines to buffer height increases from single family neighborhoods.
- Amend the General Plan and zoning to allow height increases to 5 stories for residential development at Northgate Mall.