



7. Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Element

The Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Element guides the long-range preservation and conservation of open space as well as the park and recreational facilities. These areas and facilities enhance the character of the Town, helping to create a unique and pleasant atmosphere for Town residents and visitors.

The Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Element is divided into the following sections:

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The Government Code requires that General Plans identify and address six types of open space. This Element addresses open space for outdoor recreation and preservation. Other Elements in the General Plan cover the remaining types of open space. Table 7-1 lists the six open space types and describes where each type is addressed in the General Plan.

Table 7-1 Government Code Open Space Classifications

Category	Addressed In:
Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources	
■ Plant and animal habitat areas	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Section 8.3
■ Rivers, streams, lakes, and their banks	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Sections 8.3 and 8.10
■ Watershed lands	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Section 8.10
■ Areas required for ecological and other scientific study purposes	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Section 8.3 and 8.7
Open Space Used for the Managed Production of Resources	
■ Agricultural lands and rangelands	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Section 8.2
■ Forest and timberlands	■ Not applicable to Los Gatos
■ Mineral resource production areas	■ Not applicable to Los Gatos
Open Space for Outdoor Recreation and Scenic Resources	
■ Areas of outstanding historic or cultural value	■ Community Design Element, Section 4.3
■ Parks and other areas used for recreation	■ Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Element, Section 7.2
■ Scenic corridors, trails, and links between different open space areas	■ Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Element, Section 7.1
Open Space for Public Health and Safety	
■ Areas requiring special management or regulation because of risks presented by natural hazards such as steep slopes or flooding	■ Hazards and Safety Element, Section 9.4
Open Space in Support of the Mission of Military Installations	
■ Areas associated with military bases	■ Not applicable to Los Gatos
Open Space for the Protection of Native American Sacred Sites	
■ Local tribal lands	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Sections 8.7 and 8.8
■ Native American cultural sites	■ Environment and Sustainability Element, Section 8.8

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Key Terms

Accessible. The ability to accommodate everyone regardless of ability.

Active Recreation Open Space. Land used for outdoor activities that include additional onsite infrastructure.

Community Garden. An otherwise undeveloped lot divided into multiple plots for the growing and harvesting of fruits, vegetables, flowers, or herbs, primarily for the personal use of the growers, and that is established, operated, and maintained by a group of persons.

Common Recreation Space. Privately owned outdoor recreational facilities as part of a residential development. Features include, but are not limited to, play lots, playgrounds, and athletic fields.

Multi-Use Facility. A facility shared for multiple activities and/or utilized by multiple types of users. For example, a trail accessible to and utilized by pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians. A multi-use field would have facilities that could be used for more than one sport and could be available for informal pick-up games or organized play.

Open Space. Land in a predominantly natural state or altered for natural resources-based uses (i.e., farming) and may include, but is not limited to, riparian habitat, agricultural lands, grassland and upland habitat, wetlands, and agricultural buffers.

Park. An open area that offers recreational and green space for residential and visitor use. May also be called an urban or municipal park if within jurisdictional limits or a public park if publicly owned.

Passive Recreation Open Space. Land used for outdoor activities that has a limited impact and minimal development on land designated for recreation or open space. Passive recreations space would include but is not limited to, hiking mountain cycling, boating, and nature observation.

7.1 Open Space

Open space areas and preserves within Los Gatos protect the area's natural beauty and contribute to a regional system of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. As shown in Figure 7-1, the Town of Los Gatos Planning Area contains a total of four open space areas, all of which are publicly owned and operated and total approximately 3,020 acres of wildlife and plant habitat. Two of the open space areas - Santa Rosa Open Space and Heintz Open Space - are located on Town-owned land and are maintained by the Parks and Public Works Department (PPW), while the other two - St. Joseph's Hill Open Space Preserve and the Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve - are owned and operated by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD). The MROSD is a special regional district that was created in the 1970s to acquire and preserve open space lands and provide and maintain access for public enjoyment. All four of the open space areas offer abundant natural beauty and are available to the entire community for passive recreation and environmental education.

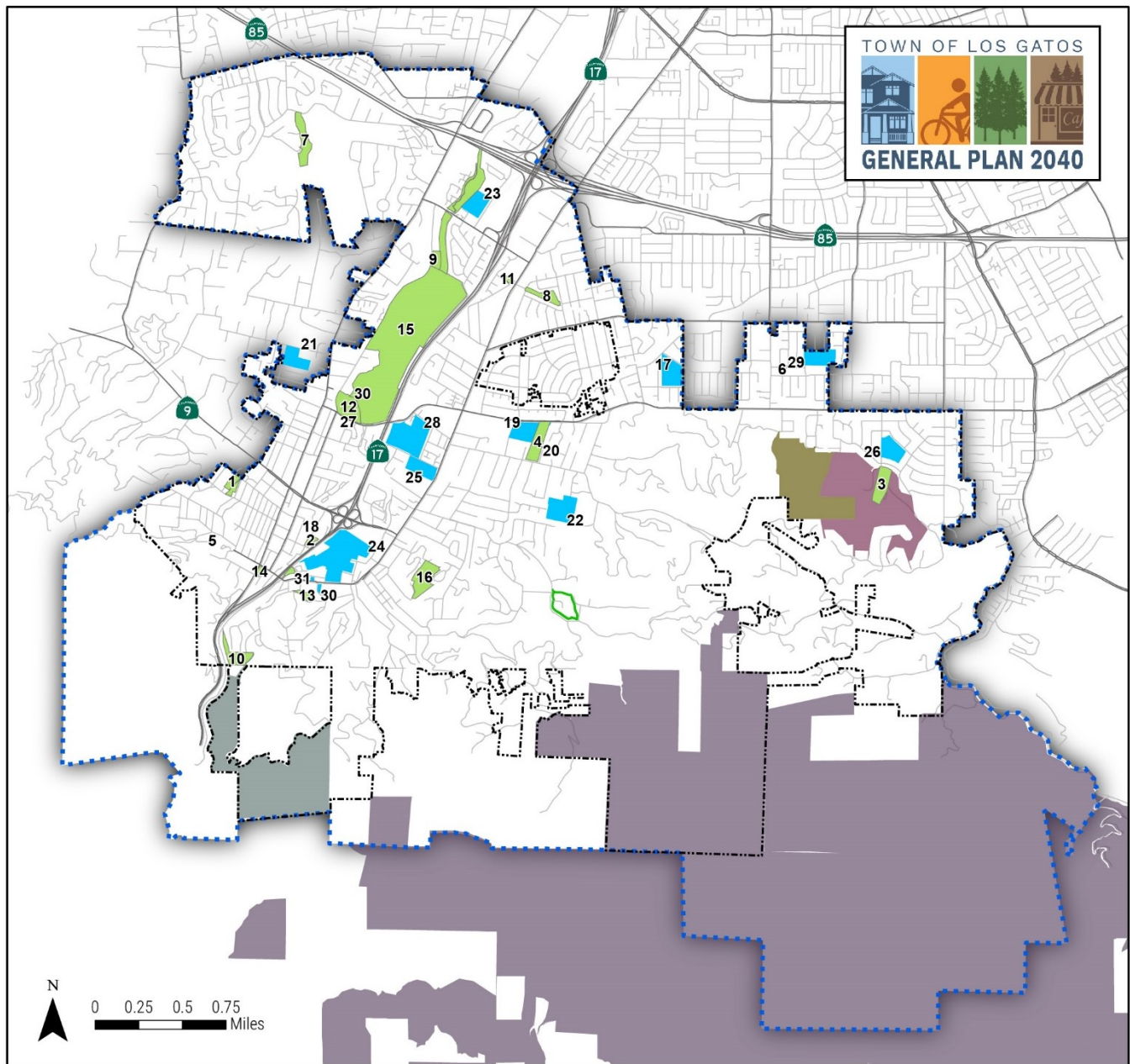
Acquisition of Open Space Areas

To enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors, the Town of Los Gatos actively participates in the acquisition of properties as open space. Whether acting individually or in collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, or private landowners, the Town seeks to acquire open space areas that contribute to the protection of the environment and the safety of residents.

Access to Open Space Areas

The Town recognizes that open space areas, particularly regional open space areas, should be easily accessible to all residents and visitors. To that end, the Town encourages development of appropriate staging areas and trail heads for equestrians, hikers, and bicyclists. Additionally, the Town will work to ensure that access is available for physically disabled persons.

Figure 7-1 Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Facilities within Town Limits



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Open Space and Existing Neighborhoods

Where access to public open spaces pass through an existing neighborhood, or where trails within public open space are in close proximity to existing development, the Town endeavors to provide access without creating a burden on the neighborhood. This approach allows for a pleasant outdoor experience, while preserving the character of each neighborhood.

Open Space, Development, and Hillside Preservation

The Town's hillside areas are unique and add to the quality of life of Town residents and visitors alike. The Town's Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines ensure that open space areas in the hillsides are preserved to the greatest extent possible. Viewsheds and the existing character of the hillsides and open space areas are carefully maintained through the implementation of the General Plan and the Town's various planning processes.

The following goals and policies will guide the preservation and conservation of open space in Los Gatos.



Goals and policies concerning maintenance of open space for wildfire protection are covered in Section 9.2 (Urban and Wildland Fire Hazards) in the Hazards and Safety Element.

OSPR-1

Expand open space areas within the Town of Los Gatos, particularly lands which provide recreational uses.

OSPR-1.1

Passive Recreation Open Space

Acquire and maintain open space areas in order to define the Town's southern boundary as passive recreation open space.

OSPR-1.2

Acquisition Coordination

Promote coordination with all levels of government and non-governmental organizations to identify and pursue available resources for the acquisition and development of open space areas (especially areas that provide recreational uses) by both the Town and by other agencies and organizations.

OSPR-1.3

SUS

Environment and Safety Program Support

Use open space acquisitions to support programs in the Environment and Sustainability Element and Hazards and Safety Element of this General Plan.

OSPR-1.4

Open Space for Hazards Protection

Acquire open space lands in areas identified as flood, fire, or geologic hazards in order to protect the health, welfare, and safety of residents and visitors.

OSPR-2

Preserve hillside areas as natural open space. SUS

OSPR-2.1

SUS

Hillside Natural Open Space Character

Preserve the natural open space character of hillside lands, including natural topography, natural vegetation, wildlife habitats and migration corridors, and viewsheds.

OSPR-2.2

Hillside Open Space Provision

The provision of open space areas should not detract from the existing character of the Town's hillsides.

OSPR-2.3

SUS

Hillside Open Space Dedication

In all hillside subdivisions, the dedication of open space in fee or as an easement shall be required to protect unique natural features, habitats, and movement corridors.

OSPR-2.4

SUS

Uninterrupted Wildlife

Adjacent parcels in the hillsides shall provide an uninterrupted band of useable segments for wildlife corridors.

OSPR-2.5

Hillside Open Space and Scenic Vista Preservation

Maximize preservation of open space and scenic vistas in the hillside area by requiring dedications in fee (preferred) or easements and by restricting buildable areas on lots. Where buildable areas are restricted through clustering, planned developments, or other means, these means shall not allow higher overall density on the parcel than would otherwise be allowed by the zoning. Dedications should be granted to the Town or MROSD.

OSPR-3

Make open space areas within the Town accessible to all residents and visitors to the Town.

OSPR-3.1

EJ HC

Open Space Access

Open Space access shall protect the safety, privacy, and security of adjacent residential areas.

OSPR-3.2

EJ HC

Open Space Connections

Improve connections between passive open space areas and on-street bicycle facilities and multi-use trails.

OSPR-3.3

EJ HC

Open Space Access for Persons with Disabilities

All open space areas and related facilities shall provide adequate access for those with accessibility issues.

OSPR-3.4

Open Space Access from all Residential Development

Provide access from all residential developments to open space, where appropriate.

OSPR-3.5

SUS

Access to Open Space Areas

All open space areas shall have access by trails or maintained streets, with adequate protection of rare and sensitive plants and animals and their habitats.

OSPR-4

Consider the provision of recreation and open space in all development decisions.

OSPR-4.1

EJ HC

Private Open Space in New Development

Promote private open space in all planning decisions for new development.

OSPR-4.2

Open Space Preservation

New development projects shall include conditions to preserve open space (non-recreational common space), where appropriate.

OSPR-4.3

SUS

Development of Open Space

Consider effects on watershed areas, plant and wildlife habitats, and migration corridors before allowing development of any open space.

OSPR-4.4

Design of Common Recreation Space Facilities

Consider health, welfare, and public safety in the design of common recreation space facilities.

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OSPR-4.5 Common Recreation Space in Residential Developments

Provide permanent common recreation space in all residential developments.

OSPR-4.6 Open Space Dedication Requirement

Evaluate all development projects to determine the benefit of requiring open space dedication.

OSPR-5

Preserve and enhance Los Gatos Creek, Los Gatos Creek Trail, and Ross Creek as open space amenities. **SUS**

OSPR-5.1 Los Gatos Creek Restoration

SUS

Restore Los Gatos Creek to a more natural state, removing concrete channelization, where feasible.

OSPR-5.2 Los Gatos Creek Trail Accessibility

Ensure that Los Gatos Creek Trail is accessible to and safe for all users.

OSPR-5.3 Ross Creek Restoration

SUS

Restore Ross Creek to a more natural state, removing concrete channelization, where feasible.

7.2 Parks and Recreation

In addition to the four open space areas and preserves described above, the Town has a total of 32 parks and recreational facilities.

Town Parks

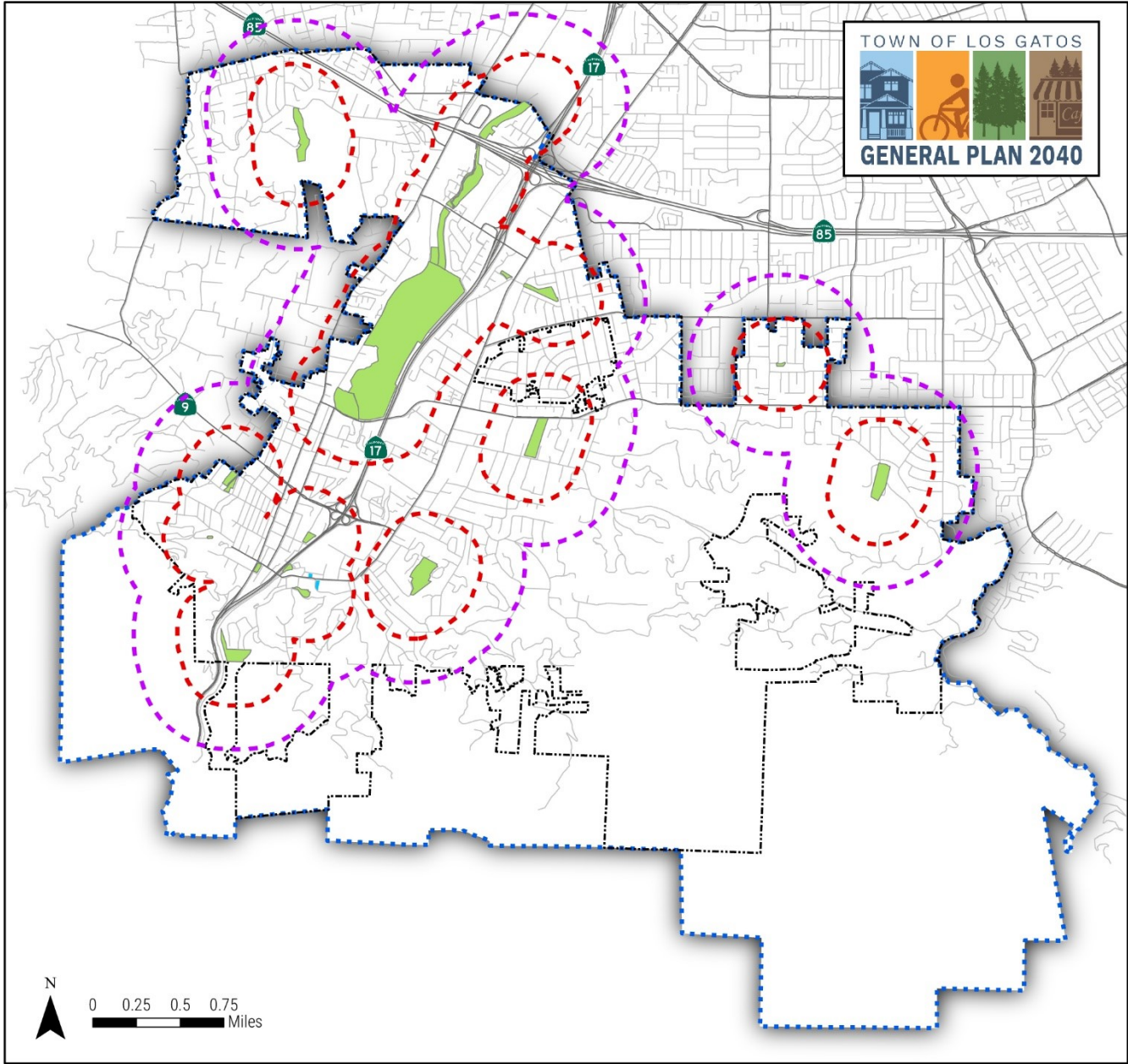
Local parks are essential to the quality of life for many Los Gatos residents, providing recreational opportunities, neighborhood gathering facilities, and natural beauty throughout the community. The Town of Los Gatos contains a total of 16 publicly owned and operated parks throughout the community (Figure 7-2). As listed above, 15 of these parks are located on Town-owned land and are maintained by the Parks and Public Works Department and the remaining park (Vasona County Park) is owned and operated by the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department. In total, there are more than 250 acres of parkland within Los Gatos, containing nearly 15 miles of multi-use trails and over 65 acres of lawn area.

Recreational Services

Los Gatos relies on a unique service delivery model for recreational activities. These services are provided under a third-party Joint Powers Authority (JPA) with Los Gatos Saratoga Recreation (LGS Recreation). LGS Recreation uses Town facilities at a discount rate and provides full recreational services to the community on a full cost recovery basis. LGS Recreation is managed by its own board of directors, comprised of representatives from the school districts and members of the public.

LGS Recreation operates the Los Gatos Adult Recreation Center, located at 208 E. Main Street and the Los Gatos Youth Recreation Center, located at 123 E. Main Street in Los Gatos. From the Recreation Centers, LGS Recreation offers activities, classes, sports, and programs for youth, adults, and seniors throughout the year. Information on programming and events can be found at <http://www.lgsrecreation.org/>.

Figure 7-2 Parks Service Areas



Park

Quarter-Mile Radius

Half-Mile Radius

Town of Los Gatos

Planning Area/Sphere of Influence

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Major Recreational Facilities

Los Gatos has 15 recreational facilities containing one or more sports fields on-site.

Of the 15 facilities, eight facilities are currently (2020) at capacity (no additional field availability), including all four schools of the Los Gatos Union Elementary School District, Los Gatos High School, two schools in the Union School District, and the Jewish Community Center. In addition to student and resident use, several of the fields are utilized by local sports leagues for team practices and games. These leagues include: LGS Recreation, Los Gatos United Soccer League, Los Gatos Little League, Los Gatos-Saratoga Softball Association, Los Gatos Pony League, Los Gatos Redhawks Lacrosse League, Union Little League, Pacific Union Academy, and the Branham Hill Girls Softball League. Currently, LGS Recreation and Los Gatos Little League each use seven different fields for athletic activities throughout Los Gatos. The Los Gatos United Soccer League holds games and practices at six different facilities within Los Gatos.

Additionally, 11 of the 15 facilities include a multi-use field area that permit scheduled activities for organized group sporting events. These facilities provide a total of approximately 563,500 square feet of multi-use field space within Los Gatos. These fields are utilized by school children, organized teams, and sports leagues, as well as by the general public.

The following goals and policies address the provision, maintenance, and future of parks and recreational facilities in Los Gatos.

OSPR-6

Provide recreational facilities that address the needs of the community.

OSPR-6.1

HC

Recreation Space Acquisition

Acquire and develop more publicly accessible active and passive community recreation spaces and/or facilities, with priority given to locations not currently within ½ mile of an existing park.

OSPR-6.2

HC

Recreational Amenities and Programs

Encourage the development of amenities and programs in parks and other recreational facilities that cater to a variety of ages and address the needs of families.

OSPR-6.3

HC

Shared Recreational and Sports Facilities

Continue to work with the LGS Recreation, local school districts, and faith communities to provide shared recreational and sports facilities.

OSPR-6.4

SUS

Community Gardens

Encourage community gardens on appropriate public and private properties.

OSPR-6.5

Active Recreation Spaces

Consider including more varied, active recreation spaces in new and/or existing recreational facilities.

OSPR-6.6

Off-Leash Dog Recreation Areas

Actively pursue opportunities for dedicated off-leash dog recreation areas and/or for allowing off-leash dog times at specific parks.

OSPR-6.7

Town Park Standards

Provide five acres of parkland per 1,000 population, in order to meet the community needs for active and passive recreation.

OSPR-6.8

Accessibility of Developed Parks

All developed parks shall provide access for persons with disabilities, unless access and facility improvements would be detrimental to public safety or welfare.

OSPR-7

Create and maintain open space areas and parks that complement and enhance natural habitats and neighborhoods.

OSPR-7.1

Town Parks and Trails

SUS

Promote a system of Town parks and trails.

OSPR-7.2

Quasi-Public Areas

Maximize the use of public utility easements, flood control channels, school grounds, and other quasi-public areas for recreational uses and playfields.

OSPR-7.3

Informal Gathering Spaces

Encourage the development of informal gathering spaces for local residents and visitors in appropriate locations throughout the Town.

OSPR-7.4

Maintain Landscaping and Tree Preservation

SUS

Maintain the Town's high standards for landscaping and tree preservation, helping to maintain cohesiveness between existing neighborhoods and surrounding open space areas while reducing disturbances to adjacent natural habitats.

OSPR-7.5

Landscaping

Utilize private and public landscaping to help open space and park areas along Town streets blend with their surroundings.

OSPR-7.6

Coordination on Public School Open Space Areas

Work with the Los Gatos Union School District and Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District to preserve open space, recreational facilities, and promote reuse of facilities for community park or recreation purposes when school facilities are deemed no longer necessary.

OSPR-7.7

Recreation Space for Young Children

Encourage new multi-family residential development of eight units or more to include tot lots or similar shared off-street recreation space for young children.

OSPR-7.8

Park Visibility

Ensure all parks are visible from a public right-of-way whenever possible and are clear of unnecessary visual impediments (such as vegetation) that reduce visual connections and observation.

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7.3 Implementation Programs

Programs	Implements Which Policy(ies)	Responsible Supporting Department(s)	2020 – 2025	2026 – 2040	Annual	Ongoing
A Develop an Acquisition Program Develop and institute an acquisition program consistent with the Housing Element that includes fee purchase, easement dedications and land donations. Areas to be considered: Novitiate, hillside open space, additional park sites, closed school sites, and large land-locked parcels.	OSPR-1 OSPR-1.2 OSPR-1.3	Parks and Public Works		■		
		Community Development				
B Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines Update the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines as needed to include measures that address open space in new development.	OSPR-2.1 OSPR-2.2 OSPR-2.3 OSPR-2.4 OSPR-2.5	Community Development				■
C Review Open Space Standards Review and update the open space standards as needed, specifying the type and quantity of open space required for new developments.	OSPR-4.1 OSPR-4.2 OSPR-4.3 OPS-4.4 OSPR-4.5 OSPR-4.6	Community Development				■
D Develop a Los Gatos Creek Restoration Plan Work with the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the California Department of Fish and Game, and Caltrans to seek, develop, and obtain funding for the restoration of channelized segments of Los Gatos Creek.	OSPR-5.1	Parks and Public Works	■			
E Identify Los Gatos Creek Trail Access Opportunities Identify additional opportunities and funding mechanisms for restoration projects and trail connection opportunities to increase access along the Los Gatos Creek Trail.	OSPR-5.2	Parks and Public Works	■			
F Develop a Ross Creek Restoration Plan Work with the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and Caltrans to seeking funding and develop a restoration plan for channelized segments of Ross Creek.	OSPR-5.3	Parks and Public Works		■		
G Establish a Parks, Trails, and Open Space Database Develop, maintain, and update every 10 years an electronic database and ArcGIS files for all parks, open space easements, trails, and recreational facilities.	OSPR-6.7 OSPR-7 OSPR-7.1 OSPR-7.2	Parks and Public Works		■		
		Community Development				

Programs	Implements Which Policy(ies)	Responsible Supporting Department(s)	2020 – 2025	2026 – 2040	Annual	Ongoing
H Assess Existing Parks Conduct an assessment of existing parks to identify any unmet recreational needs and implement new facilities as parks are upgraded.	OSPR-7.1	Parks and Public Works	■			
I Install Park Signage Install interpretive signage at parks when feasible and appropriate, providing a description of features such as the park's history, native species that live in or near the park, accessibility indicator (level of difficulty), and existing or historic waterways.	OSPR-7.2	Parks and Public Works				■
J Adopt Best Management Practices Adopt Best Management Practice park service standards for the Town.	OSPR-6.7 OSPR-7.1 OSPR-7.4	Parks and Public Works	■			