



**BRIEFING BOOK**  
ON SANTA ROSA'S EXISTING CONTEXT





MARY'S  
RESTAURANT  
"Farm-to-Table" "Locally Sourced"

MARY'S

ATM

ACRE  
ROASTED  
COFFEE  
& CIGARS

HAPPY HOUR  
12PM - 5PM  
24 BEERS  
\$5 WINE  
APPETIZERS  
LATE NIGHT'S  
BURGER &...  
TIL 11PM





## GENERAL PLAN UPDATE CONTEXT

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# The City of Santa Rosa is undertaking a comprehensive update

to its General Plan, which serves as the City's primary policy guide for the community's future. The City recognizes that Santa Rosa has undergone significant transformation in recent years and that conditions are continuing to change quickly, along with the needs of the community. And in turn, this process includes many opportunities for community discussions on the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing Santa Rosa.





## INTRODUCTION

Updating the General Plan provides an opportunity to understand these and other issues facing Santa Rosa and allows the City to work closely with community members to develop policies and actions to effectively address current and future challenges. The following **Briefing Book** summarizes important background information and emerging opportunities, organized into six key topical areas:



*Land Use and  
Community  
Character*



*Social and  
Environmental  
Justice*



*Fire and Related  
Hazards*



*Housing,  
Employment, and  
Economic  
Development*



*Travel and  
Commute  
Patterns*



*Parks and Public  
Services*

More information on these and many other topics can be viewed in the detailed Existing Conditions Report, available on the project website at [www.SantaRosaForward.com](http://www.SantaRosaForward.com).



## Some key topics that will be discussed during this project include...



- ▶ **The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic** which are touching nearly every aspect of community life.



- ▶ **Social justice issues and the need to address longstanding inequities** both locally and nationally.



- ▶ **The 2017 Tubbs and 2020 Glass fires** which have demonstrated the city's acute vulnerability to natural hazards.



- ▶ **Finding affordable and safe housing** is becoming ever-more difficult, especially for our most vulnerable residents.



- ▶ **Changes in mobility technology and patterns** that are creating new ways for people and goods to move through the city.



- ▶ **The need to improve community health** by making neighborhoods safer and more walkable, expanding access to healthy foods, and improving access to healthcare.





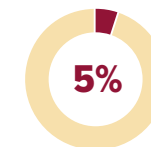
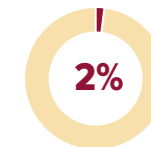
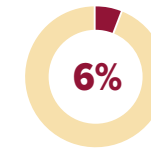
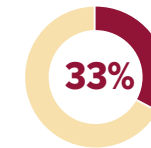
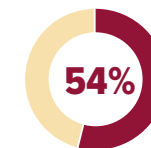
# LAND USE AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

**With nearly 180,000 residents, Santa Rosa is the largest city in Sonoma County, and for the past decade it has grown more rapidly than the rest of the county.** Much of that growth is among Latino, Asian, and Black communities, which now make up 45 percent of the total population. However, these racially and ethnically diverse communities are not evenly distributed throughout the city. Instead, they are concentrated in northwest, southwest, and southeast Santa Rosa, while the White population is mostly located in the northeast Santa Rosa.

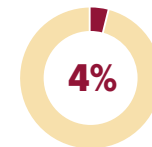
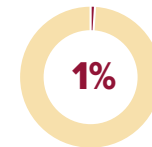
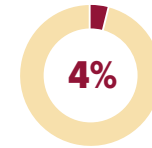
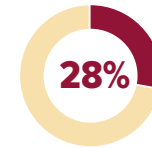
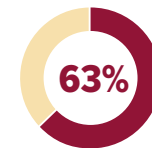
Most of Santa Rosa has either urban or suburban development, with many **well-established residential neighborhoods**. The current housing in Santa Rosa is primarily low density and intensity, with single-family lots covering 52 percent of the city. Given the mounting pressure to provide living opportunities for more people by building new housing of all types, the General Plan Update will likely consider trade-offs between the development of vacant sites versus redevelopment or intensification of already-developed properties.

Santa Rosa contains five of Sonoma County's twelve "Priority Development Areas," which support a wide range of community activities and are best suited for jobs and housing growth. In addition, the city contains more than 20 State-designated landmarks, one Federally-recognized historic resource (Luther Burbank property), and eight historic districts. The General Plan Update offers an opportunity to define preservation and/or change in key areas of the city to **maintain historic character while also revitalizing neighborhoods** as appropriate.

## SANTA ROSA DEMOGRAPHICS IN 2018



## SONOMA COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS IN 2018



WHITE

HISPANIC OR  
LATINX  
(OF ANY RACE)

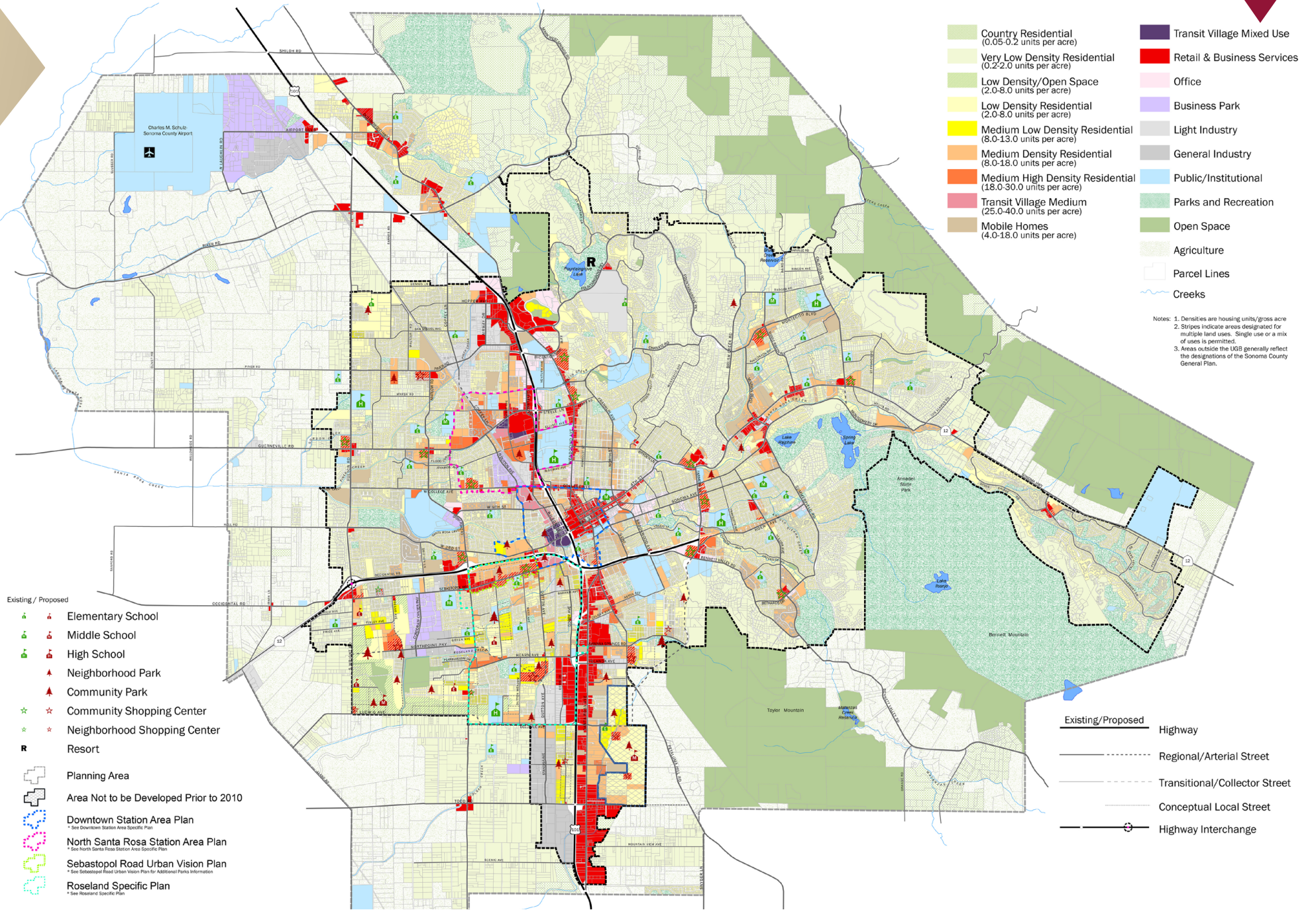
ASIAN OR  
PACIFIC  
ISLANDER

BLACK OR  
AFRICAN  
AMERICAN

ALL OTHER  
RACES

Sources: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2018; Strategic Economics, 2020.





**EXISTING SANTA ROSA LAND USES**  
(2020)





# SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

**Social justice is only possible if resources are distributed fairly and all community members are psychologically and physically safe and secure.** Many of the social justice issues we face are issues of **environmental justice**. Environmental justice is defined by the State of California as “the fair treatment and

meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins, with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” Similarly, environmental justice is deeply intertwined with individual and community health.

*Several communities in northwest, downtown, and southwest Santa Rosa face undue environmental and health burdens such as:*



*Proximity to unhealthy uses like highways, industrial sites, and waste processing facilities*



*Exposure to contaminated groundwater, often from dry cleaners or leaking underground gasoline tanks (this affects much of Santa Rosa)*



*High rates of asthma and heart disease, which increases vulnerability to pollutants*



*Limited access to fresh, healthy food*



*Poverty and relatively low educational attainment for adults*



*Limited English skills, with 15 percent of residents speaking English “less than very well” (Approximately 80 percent of whom speak Spanish and 13 percent speak Asian or Pacific Island languages)*





**Sonoma County**

**SOCIAL JUSTICE SUMMIT 2020**





DEFINING OUR REALITY BEYOND THE STATUS QUO

**A CALL FOR COMMUNITY UNITY**

(2-Day) Virtual Event  
**Monday & Tuesday, July 27th & 28th**  
**3p-6p on Zoom**

Improve the lives of others. Your help is needed.  
 Interested in volunteering or being a community partner  
 contact: [SonomaEEC@gmail.com](mailto:SonomaEEC@gmail.com)







## SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (continued)

In general, the location of communities identified as “disadvantaged” corresponds to the distribution of the city’s racially and ethnically diverse populations. They also match those areas identified by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (the Bay Area’s regional planning agency) as “communities of concern,” which include households with no car, senior citizens living alone, persons with disabilities, single-parent families, and severely rent-burdened households (spending more than 50 percent of income on housing).

Similar locational trends are seen in city health outcomes. **The life expectancy for Santa Rosa residents (79 years) is lower than the state average (82 years)**, driven by particularly low life expectancies among residents in downtown, northwest, southwest, and southeast Santa Rosa. Asthma, stroke-related deaths, and mental health and substance-abuse issues occur more frequently in the city than statewide due to higher rates in these same neighborhoods. In addition, despite a concentration of high-quality jobs in Santa Rosa, average city resident incomes and educational attainment are lower than they are county-wide.

The General Plan is one of the most important tools to affect change and promote social justice in the Santa Rosa community, and its update offers opportunities for the **City to work collaboratively with community members** to chart a path to a future Santa Rosa that is socially and environmentally just through policies and actions that directly support the city’s diverse and vulnerable communities





## SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: COMMUNITY HEALTH INDICATORS

(per 100,000 population)

### STROKE-RELATED DEATHS



**38**

SANTA ROSA

**35**

CALIFORNIA

### MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS



**10.6%**

SANTA ROSA

**6.1%**

CALIFORNIA

### SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDER PATIENTS

**9.9%**

SANTA ROSA

**6.6%**

CALIFORNIA



### FOOD ENVIRONMENT INDEX\*

**8.5%**

SANTA ROSA

**8.9%**

CALIFORNIA

### ASTHMA PATIENTS



**7.1%**

SANTA ROSA

**4.9%**

CALIFORNIA

### LIFE EXPECTANCY

**79**

SANTA ROSA

**82**

CALIFORNIA



\*County-wide data (from 0 to high of 10) that includes distance to grocery store or supermarket, locations for healthy food purchases, and cost barriers to accessing healthy food.





# FIRE AND RELATED HAZARDS

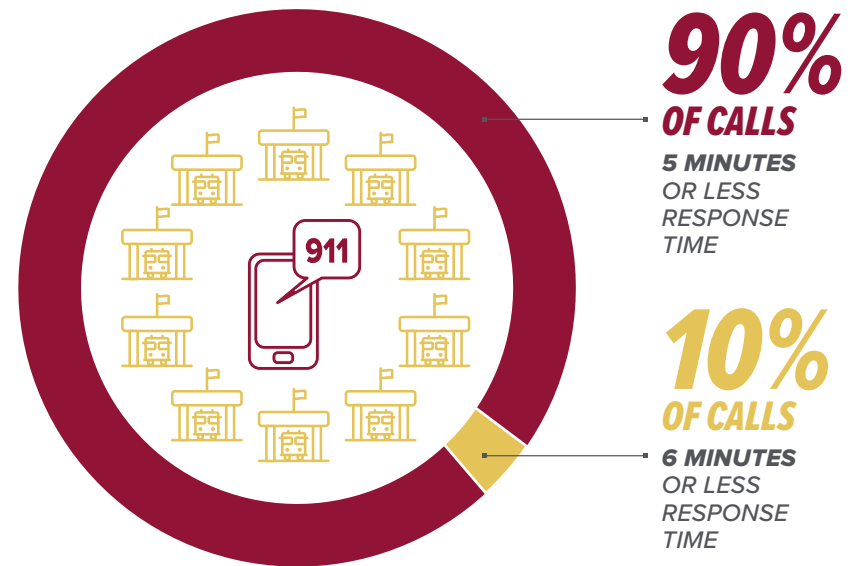
## Many areas in Santa Rosa are vulnerable to wildfires.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), nearly one-third of the city is susceptible to wildfire—and this will likely be expanded based on new data. Wildfire risk is expected to increase with hotter and drier conditions that promote fire ignition and enable spreading. Embers from wildfires in rural regions can quickly spread and cause fires in urbanized areas, and smoke can threaten community health everywhere. Loss of vegetation due to fires in steep areas increases the risk of landslides and mudflows, affecting homes and businesses below.

An independent review after the 2017 fires offered a series of recommendations regarding community fire preparedness, which the City is actively addressing in collaboration with regional and State agencies. The City is also preparing a **Community Wildfire Protection Plan** with broad public engagement to detail actions to address the wildfire threat. Once completed, these actions will be incorporated into the updated General Plan.

Fire evacuation routes are clearly defined, but the ability to use them in an emergency could be improved with upgrades to

## SANTA ROSA FIRE DEPT. RESPONSE GOALS



*The Santa Rosa Fire Department (SRFD) operates 10 fire stations in the city and receives support during fire events from CAL FIRE, Rincon Valley Fire Protection District and other mutual aid partners. The SRFD's goal is to respond to 90 percent of calls in 5 minutes or less, and all calls in 6 minutes or less. The latest reports indicate that the Department currently responds to 90 percent of calls in 6 minutes or less.*









## FIRE AND RELATED HAZARDS (continued)

roadway design and conditions. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) transmission lines caused some of the recent fires in Santa Rosa and Sonoma County, and PG&E has begun to service lines to help prevent future fires. The General Plan can consider actions to reduce fire risk, such as requiring new **fire-resilient construction techniques and site planning**, and boosting fire preparedness to preserve vital community operations during PG&E planned power shutoffs.

Earthquake risk affects the entire city. Santa Rosa has not experienced a damaging earthquake since 1969, but there is now a **72 percent probability the city will experience damage from an earthquake** in the next 20 years. Fires occur following earthquakes that significantly shake the built environment, especially in urbanized areas with wood-framed buildings. The General Plan can include actions to reduce the risk of earthquake-induced fires by fortifying existing structures and ensuring that water is available for fighting fires.

“  
The hots are getting a lot hotter and the wets are getting a lot wetter...We have to own that reality and we have to own the response to that reality

”

California Governor Gavin Newsom  
September 11, 2020









# HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Housing demand in Santa Rosa continues to outpace supply.

Demand is strongest for home ownership, with average sale prices for single-family residences and condominiums increasing at a much higher rate than apartment rents over the last several years. Recent growth in Santa Rosa is comprised largely of senior households (65 and older) and families without children.

Almost 2,000 dwellings have been built in Santa Rosa over the past six years, including many built to replace homes lost in the 2017 Tubbs fire; however, the City expects that the State will require us to plan for **more new housing** as part of the General Plan Update. Developers are pursuing lower-density projects in Santa Rosa, but the City has not been as successful attracting higher-density multifamily infill projects, which provide the majority of housing for lower-income households.

In terms of employment, Santa Rosa provides about **one-third of all jobs in the county**, including many in professional services, public administration, and finance. Health care and retail jobs are also concentrated in the city, which contains several major hospitals and two regional malls. Long-term job growth potential in Santa Rosa includes food service, research and development, and agriculture



*1 million square feet of supporting retail space*

Between 2020 and 2050, if Santa Rosa builds enough housing to meet the estimated need, more development can happen.



*1.5 million square feet of industrial space and 1 to 2 million square feet of office space*

The impacts from COVID-19 may slow future hotel development, which was estimated prior to 2020 to be about 1,400 additional rooms by 2050, serving both tourism and business travel needs.

businesses. The city's large concentration of retail jobs may experience limited growth or even decline due to the ongoing shift away from brick-and-mortar stores toward online shopping, along with the potential long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Santa Rosa is the region's primary retail destination, with taxable sales per household about 17 percent higher than in Sonoma County overall, as of 2018. Pre-pandemic retail performance was strong, especially for motor vehicles and parts, home furnishings and clothing, and at-large general merchandise.









# TRAVEL AND COMMUTE PATTERNS

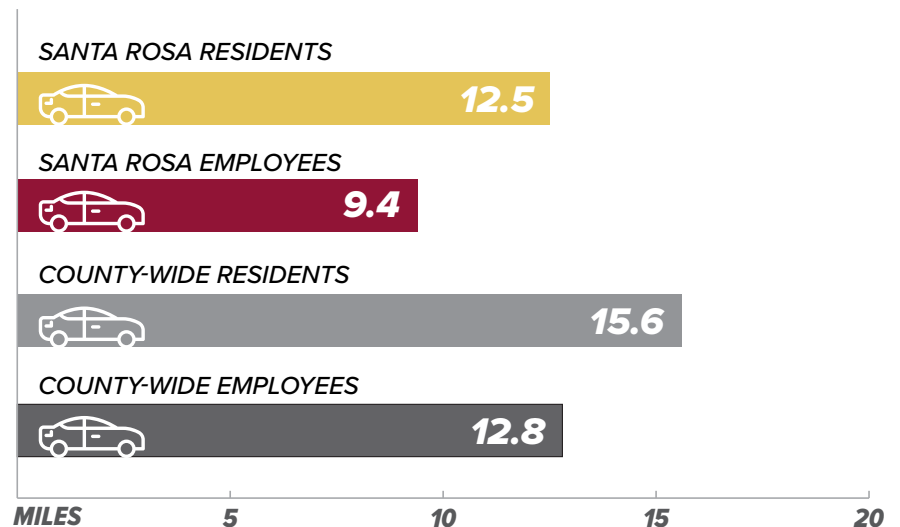
**Santa Rosa enjoys a balance of jobs and housing that enables more than one-third of employed residents to work locally, filling roughly 60 percent of jobs in the city.** This balance also

contributes to fewer average daily vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by Santa Rosa residents (12.5 miles) and employees (9.4 miles), compared to the county-wide averages of 15.6 miles and 12.8 miles, respectively. Through the 40 percent expansion of city bike lanes since 2010, improvements to pedestrian facilities, and other measures, the City has demonstrated a commitment to minimizing VMT to alleviate congestion and pollution, particularly near Highway 101. Still, there are gaps in the city's sidewalk and bicycle networks that create impediments to safely connecting all of the community.

While shorter commute times help reduce VMT, nearly 90 percent of employed residents still drive to work, most of them traveling alone. The opening of Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART), the City's emphasis on high-quality transit corridors, and efforts to expand and improve the safety of the bicycle and pedestrian networks create significant opportunities to encourage alternative modes of transportation. The ongoing impacts of fires and COVID-19 and the

increasing prevalence of remote working may also affect local travel patterns over the longer term. Land use and circulation policies established in the General Plan can have direct and positive effects to reduce VMT and promote walking, wheeling, and transit.

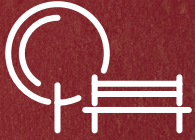
## AVERAGE VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED (VMT) PER DAY











# PARKS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

**Santa Rosa features nearly 6 acres of parks and open space per 1,000 residents, achieving the City’s goal and doubling the State standard and national average.** In addition to providing access to open space and recreation opportunities, many local parks offer youth and adult enrichment programs and amenities. Parks and open spaces are well distributed across the city—a majority of residents have access to a park within a half-mile of their homes, including people in areas of the city designated as communities of concern (which in other cities often lack easy access to parks or open space).

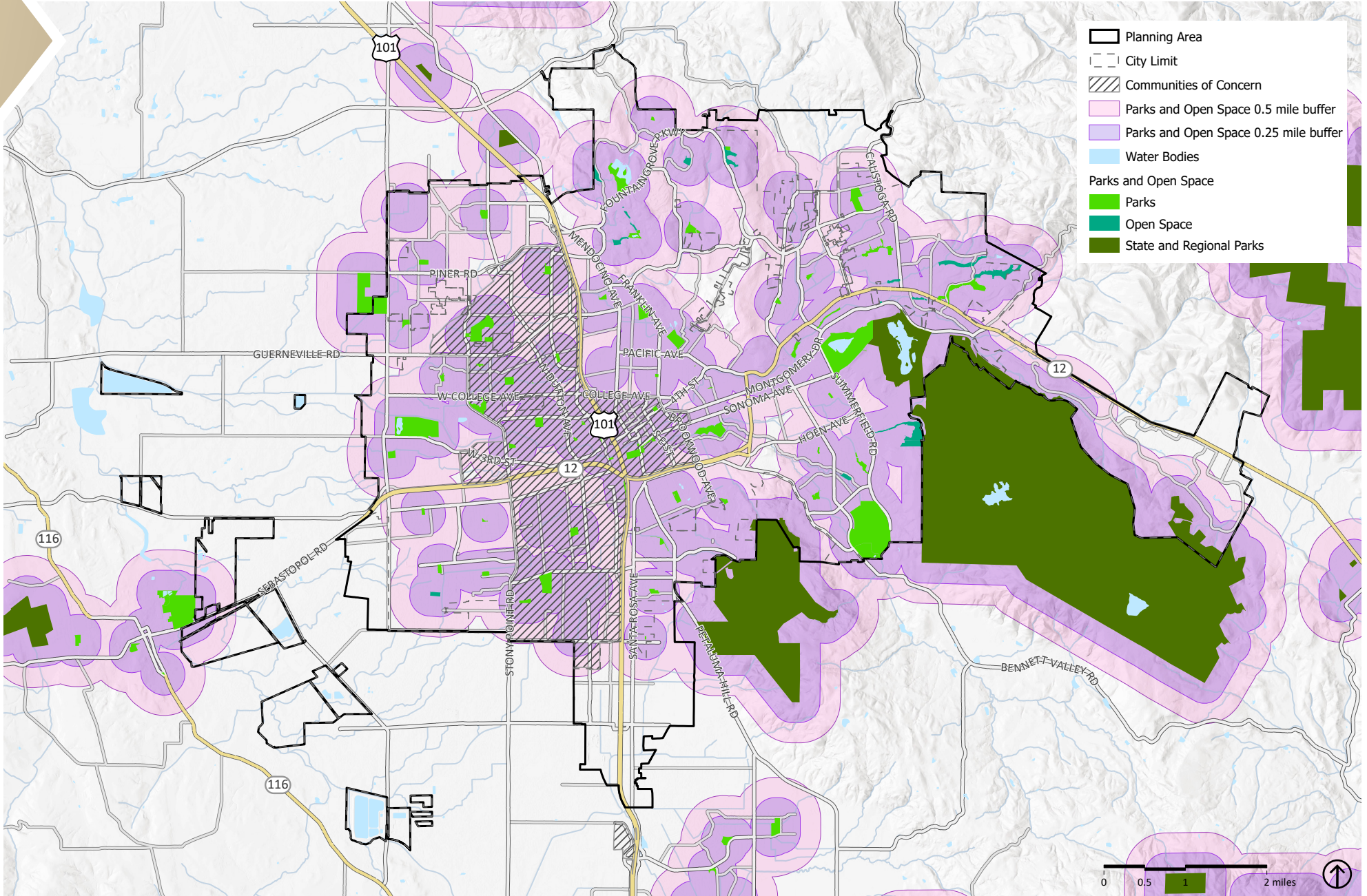
The Santa Rosa Police Department (SRPD) is dedicated to working with the community to change long-standing policies regarding use of force. In response to the recent outcry for racial justice, the City drafted the **Santa Rosa Community Empowerment Plan, which is rooted in principles of community engagement.** SRPD is working to **increase dialogue and strengthen ties with Black, Native American, and Latino residents;** the General Plan Update can support and build upon these efforts to achieve racial equality and social justice. SRPD is also working to improve response times. The Department goal is to respond to any call that may involve

an immediate threat in less than six minutes; in 2019 the average response time was approximately 6.5 minutes. The Department anticipates needing a larger Public Safety Building with an onsite training center in the next 10 years, plus two new substations—one in east Santa Rosa and one in Roseland—along with a new, standalone communications and emergency operations center.

Santa Rosa contains eight public school districts, one community college, and 27 private schools. Schools are dispersed throughout the community so that most students live within walking or biking distance of at least one school. In addition, the Sonoma County Library has four branches in the city. Despite their prevalence, school districts and libraries are suffering from budget cuts due to the 2017 Tubbs Fire and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Extracurricular programs, non-essential educational services, and facility maintenance and improvements may continue to be suspended for an unknown length of time.

The General Plan Update can include actions to augment existing public services and resources, as well as to promote land use activities and patterns that help create a safer, more educated, and healthier community.





**PARKS AND OPEN SPACE NEAR SCHOOLS**  
(2020)





Santa Rosa City Hall  
100 Santa Rosa Avenue  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
[www.SantaRosaForward.com](http://www.SantaRosaForward.com)