

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The City of Morgan Hill is nestled in an agricultural valley between beautiful rolling hills and open spaces, just a few dozen miles from the heart of Silicon Valley. Morgan Hill is a family oriented, vibrant, and progressive community. The area offers a wide range of unique historic and natural resources including wineries, farms, lakes, golf courses, trails, scenic open spaces, public art, street fairs, summer music festivals, and holiday parades. The open spaces surrounding Morgan Hill provide easy access to over 79,000 acres for camping, backpacking, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. The City is known for its regional, world-class recreational facilities that attract over 1.3 million visitors annually.

Residents and visitors enjoy the City's small-town charm, proximity to outdoor recreation opportunities, and state-of-the art recreation facilities. Convenient access to both open space and nearby urban amenities, such as thriving employment, cultural centers, and a variety of housing options, are major assets that continue to draw people to the City. The City's recreation facilities currently serve residents while also supporting sports tourism, which is central to Morgan Hill's economic development strategy. The City is committed to providing an integrated recreation system composed of high-quality bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation facilities that respond to the needs and desires of the growing community. The Morgan Hill 2035 General Plan Update reflects the importance that community members place on recreational and cultural amenities.

The Bikeways, Trails, Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Master Plan) puts into action the General Plan's policy direction for usable, complete, well-maintained, safe, and high-quality activities and amenities that are accessible to all ages, functional abilities, and socio-economic groups. This Master Plan also provides a roadmap for creating a useable and comprehensive bikeway system that safely connects neighborhoods with workplaces and community destinations and for expanding pedestrian opportunities. Improved bicycle and pedestrian access and the development of lively public spaces will further establish Downtown as a community hub and destination for visitors. An expanded bicycle and pedestrian network and diversified recreational and cultural experiences throughout the City will strengthen Morgan Hill's community fabric and strong sense of place as the City grows and evolve.

PLAN PURPOSE

The Master Plan is a strategic and practical guide for improving and expanding the City of Morgan Hill’s recreation system over the next 20 years. The City’s bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation facilities are part of an interconnected system that is foundational to the high quality of life in Morgan Hill. This document integrates information about each of these core recreational facets, drawing on technical analyses, community engagement, and content from three existing plans: Bikeways Master Plan (2008); Trails and Natural Resources Study (2007); and Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2001). The resulting Master Plan provides a cohesive community-based vision for the future along with a comprehensive set of policies, priority projects, and programs. These tactical components will guide decision-making and investments related to capital projects and recreation programs. The document is designed for use by City staff, private developers, and other decision makers in shaping a vibrant recreation system tailored to the community’s current and future needs.



PLANNING CONTEXT

Several related planning initiatives and documents work in conjunction with this Master Plan to maintain and expand Morgan Hill's thriving bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation system. Further, several recent projects stand out as precedents to emulate through Master Plan implementation.

Related Plans

The Morgan Hill 2035 General Plan (2016) conveys the community's strong value of recreation programs and facilities, scenic hillsides, and the surrounding accessible open spaces. The General Plan articulates a vision for an interconnected network of safe, landscaped, and well-maintained streets, sidewalks, bikeways, trails, and transit and sets goals for a healthy community, reduced greenhouse gases (GHG's), and economic development. This Master Plan seeks to guide new development and investment in ways that advance the General Plan vision and goals. The Master Plan will help implement General Plan policies by identifying specific strategies, improvements and priority projects.

The Master Plan is consistent with the City's other policies, standards, practices, and plans as they relate to Morgan Hill's bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation development. The master planning process considered existing City policies and practices and makes recommendations for additions and revisions. The Master Plan also references previous planning efforts that provide guidance for the City's bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation system.

Relevant City planning initiatives include:

- Community and Recreation Center Strategic Plan (2015)
- Agricultural Lands Preservation Program (2014)
- Downtown Placemaking Investment Strategy (2014)
- El Toro Trail Access Strategy (2014)
- Aquatics Strategic Plan (2010)
- The Downtown Specific Plan (2009)

Other local and regional documents that inform the Master Plan include:

- Upper Llagas Creek Flood Protection Project (Updated 2016)
- Santa Clara Valley Open Space Greenprint (2014)
- Santa Clara County General Plan (1994)
- Santa Clara Countywide Trails Master Plan (1995)

Growth Management

Morgan Hill is committed to orderly growth and development. In 1996, Morgan Hill and Santa Clara County jointly adopted a long-term Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and associated policies. The UGB is encompassed within the Sphere of Influence (SOI) and is intended to be the ultimate limit to urbanization within which all future urban development in Morgan Hill

Chapter 1: Introduction

should occur. It is designed to encourage compact, efficient infill development and discourage more costly development at the edge of the City. The UGB also helps to ensure that urban services provided by the City to existing neighborhoods will not be reduced by the service demands of new urban development at the City's fringe.

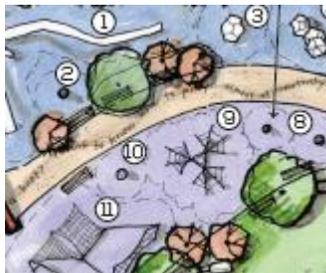
Morgan Hill's long-standing voter approved Residential Development Control System (RDSCS) has provided Morgan Hill with the ability to manage residential growth and leverage housing developer resources for the benefit of the community. In addition to leveraging park impact fees for maintenance and improvements at existing City parks, this unique RDSCS system has resulted in 41 private parks and open spaces in housing developments throughout the City.

RELEVANT PROJECTS

The City of Morgan Hill is taking steps to enhance its parks, streetscapes, and elements that enhance its unique sense of place. Several exciting Downtown projects—underway or recently completed—illustrate the City’s trajectory. These projects are imaginative, artistic, multi-generational, and functional. They reflect contemporary community input and values.



Pop-Up and Pilot Projects—Recent pop-up and parklet projects proved effective tools in offering opportunities for the community to experience possible changes as temporary exhibits and provided data for future implementation. Downtown pop-up park installations helped gauge community response to park location, use, and a variety of interactive elements. A pilot lane reduction project on Monterey Road allowed community members to assess roadway performance and character; ultimately, the project provided the impetus for an alternate preferred roadway configuration (described below). The City aims to encourage additional pop-up parks, parklets, and street activation to assist in future decision-making.



Downtown Parks—Three unique parks are planned to provide permanent space for multi-generational recreation, gathering, fitness, and relaxation in the heart of Morgan Hill. The popularity of temporary “pop-up” park installations provided the momentum to move forward with implementation of final concepts for Railroad, Third Street Creek and Nob Hill Trail Parks. The parks will feature a variety of interactive elements that were included in the temporary installations such as movable chairs, games, an oversized chair, and foam blocks. Additionally, the parks will provide long term park amenities including play equipment and access to natural environments.



Monterey Road Streetscape Improvements—Bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, along with median beautification, were implemented along the Downtown segment of Monterey Road. Upgrades included bicycle sharrows, traffic calming elements, intersection improvements, and other visual enhancements. These improvements aligned with the community’s intent to strengthen community connections and provide a safer, more comfortable experience for walking and riding bikes. The City is committed to continuing to make multimodal improvements to Monterey.

Chapter 1: Introduction



Public Art—Morgan Hill boasts attractive public art ranging from traditional bronze sculptures to several contemporary pieces installed through the City’s Creative Placemaking Mini Grant Program. These comprise works such as a mural depicting Morgan Hill’s agricultural heritage and two parking garage sculptures: a large-scale illuminated tarantula (native to Morgan Hill) and a glass enclosure featuring the colors of Poppy Jasper, a local gemstone. The success of these and other local public art pieces provides inspiration for additional investment in a wide range of artwork that celebrates Morgan Hill’s heritage and distinct sense of place.

PLANNING PROCESS

This Master Plan is the culmination of an in-depth technical planning analysis and a robust community-based process. The planning process actively engaged local stakeholders, property owners, youth, sports leagues, advocacy groups, the Morgan Hill Historic Society, the Parks and Recreation Commission, City Council, and members of the public. The project team also collaborated with Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department and Roads and Airports Department as well as the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority and Valley Transportation Authority to identify potential partnership opportunities and shared priorities. The City hired multi-disciplinary consultants MIG, Inc. to support the planning process and perform necessary technical analyses for the Master Plan development effort.

Figure 1-1: Master Planning Process



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

1,100 community members participated in the online community survey

400 community members participated in the online map-based survey

150 community members participated in intercept surveys at six locations throughout Morgan Hill

25 Stakeholder Advisory Group members provided input regularly throughout the planning process

40 youth participated in a park design workshop

30 community members participated in a planning workshop

The City of Morgan Hill launched the planning process in fall 2015. The public outreach and engagement portion of the process involved gathering extensive input from the local community about current use, needs, and preferences for the recreation system. This entailed a variety of methods and tools to engage and inform the community including workshops, stakeholder interviews, a stakeholder advisory group, intercept surveys (at parks, community centers, and popular public spaces), an online mapping questionnaire and survey, public meetings and hearings, as well as a project webpage and email updates.

Early in the process, the team assessed existing conditions covering: the current bikeways, trail, and park network, existing recreation facilities and program offerings, demographics, and regional and national recreational trends. This assessment drew from existing studies and data, as well as field observations and input from stakeholders and City staff. The team evaluated geographic, program, and revenue data to identify needs and opportunities in the system. After creating updated inventories and maps of the existing parks and recreation facilities, the team analyzed the distribution and accessibility of each. This work included identifying paths and barriers within a quarter-mile and half-mile walking distance of recreational destinations.

Findings from this existing conditions assessment were used as a basis for workshop discussions and preliminary Master Plan recommendations, which were confirmed or refined with staff and stakeholder input. Final policies, projects, and priorities reflected in this Master Plan are built on this foundation of data analysis coupled with community values. Highlights of these findings and the community engagement

activities are outlined in Chapter 2: Existing Conditions and Community Needs. More detailed studies are included in Appendices H-L.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

Chapters 1 through 3 of the Master Plan set the stage for the future by summarizing the existing conditions analysis and presenting the community-informed vision and goals for Morgan Hill's bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation system. Chapter 4 is the heart of the Master Plan, describing policies and projects proposed to address community needs and create a more robust system. Chapter 5 details priority projects, actions and funding strategies for implementation. Finally, the appendices contain supporting studies and reports that are referenced throughout the document.

The Master Plan is organized as follows:

Chapter 2: Existing Conditions and Community Needs

The Existing Conditions and Community Needs chapter describes Morgan Hill's bikeways, trail, and park network, in addition to existing recreation facilities and program offerings. The chapter also provides a baseline demographic analysis and highlights important findings and gaps to be addressed through Master Plan policies and projects.

Chapter 3: Vision and Goals

The Vision and Goals chapter conveys the community's preferred future for the recreation system and sets forth goals to guide strategic decision-making and help achieve the vision.

Chapter 4: Policies and Projects

The Policies and Projects chapter will guide City staff, decisions makers, and private developers in creating bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation improvements that align with the community's vision. This chapter includes specific recommendations, policies, and actions for bikeways, trails, parks, and recreation in Morgan Hill.

Chapter 5: Implementation

The Implementation chapter outlines the specific action steps for implementing the proposed policies and projects. The chapter also identifies near-term priority projects with capital cost estimates and proposes potential partnerships and funding sources.