

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Recreation Benefit Projects Program Overview & Guidelines

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Recreation Benefit Projects Program Overview & Guidelines

Introduction

The Santa Barbara County Recreation Master Plan is a strategic long-range plan currently under development by the County of Santa Barbara (County) Community Services Department, Parks Division (County Parks) to fund and construct new public parks and trails to meet current and future recreation needs countywide over approximately 20 years. To meet those needs, the Recreation Master Plan includes planned capital improvements, programs, funding, and implementation strategies to guide the development of a range of public park and trail projects.

What is the Recreation Benefit Project (RBP) Program?

A voluntary opportunity for private projects that provide public recreation facilities to receive permitting incentives and assistance in the County of Santa Barbara

One of the Recreation Master Plan’s key strategies is a public-private partnership program called the Recreation Benefits Projects (RBP) Program. This new, innovative program would encourage private landowners to develop and maintain publicly accessible recreation amenities in exchange for incentives, benefits, and assistance from the County. The program creates a framework for formal public-private partnerships between the applicant and the County to address recreation facilities development, management, and maintenance for the long term (i.e., acquisitions and transfers of land and/or assets to public ownership, maintenance and funding agreements, etc.).

To be eligible for permitting as an RBP, a proposed project must have a public recreation facilities component and a private use or development component. Eligible RBPs would be processed on a case-by-case basis. The RBP Program is voluntary for private developers. The County does not exact public recreation from private development projects. It also does not dictate how and where private projects are identified or proposed and the County is not the proponent for any project. This approach would ensure that any eligible project has an opportunity to be considered, including locations and recreation needs that emerge over the long-term implementation of the Recreation Master Plan, including in disadvantaged communities (DACs) and communities with known unmet recreation needs identified by the Recreation Master Plan.

This guide provides background information, an overview of the criteria and rules, and guidelines for RBPs to proceed in partnership with the County. It is intended for informational purposes only.

Background

In February 2022, the County of Santa Barbara (County) Board of Supervisors expanded the scope of the Santa Barbara County Recreation Master Plan project to update the County’s Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinances (including the County Land Use and Development Code (LUDC), Montecito LUDC, and Article II, Coastal Zoning Ordinance) to support public parks,

recreation, and trails development and implementation of the Recreation Master Plan. This action responded to input and opportunities gathered through over two years of community engagement and research through the planning process for the Recreation Master Plan. Amendments include a new recreation policy framework, an updated description of the existing recreational land use designations and overlay, attention to underserved areas and disadvantaged communities in consideration of recreation needs countywide, prioritization of sustainability and resilience of recreation assets, and updates to planning strategies to support Recreation Master Plan implementation. The RBP Program goals would be adopted in the County Comprehensive Plan and would be enacted through the County's Zoning Ordinances and the Recreation Master Plan.

The planning process to develop the amendments package occurred in 2022, starting with outreach to the public and stakeholders. The County held one public workshop and several stakeholder meetings to gather input, including meeting with known potential RBP proponents to inform the RBP Program. As part of this process, the County considered how, where, and when the RBP Program is available to private projects. This planning process ensured the RBP Program is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinances, as amended, and directly related to Recreation Master Plan implementation, including for disadvantaged communities, youth, families, and accessibility. The County learned through community engagement that several conceptual private development projects in the County could qualify as RBPs and become eligible for the RBP Program once adopted (depending upon final eligibility criteria and exclusions). Some of these private development projects include needed public recreation amenities such as major public trails and active sports fields. Accordingly, the Recreation Master Plan acknowledges these potential locations. However, this acknowledgment is for planning purposes only and does not commit, enact, or otherwise grant any rights or entitlements associated with the RBP Program.

Program Goals

1. Use public-private partnerships to help meet needs for public parks, recreation, and trails as determined by the Recreation Master Plan.
2. Create an innovative land use permitting program that encourages private development projects to contribute publicly accessible recreation amenities.

Purpose & Intent

The purpose of the RBP Program is to provide regulatory incentives for private development projects to include public parks, recreation, and trail facilities as part of project plans and permits. The intent is for the County to support RBPs, including permit and regulatory streamlining.

Program Benefits

The RBP Program would have the following potential benefits:

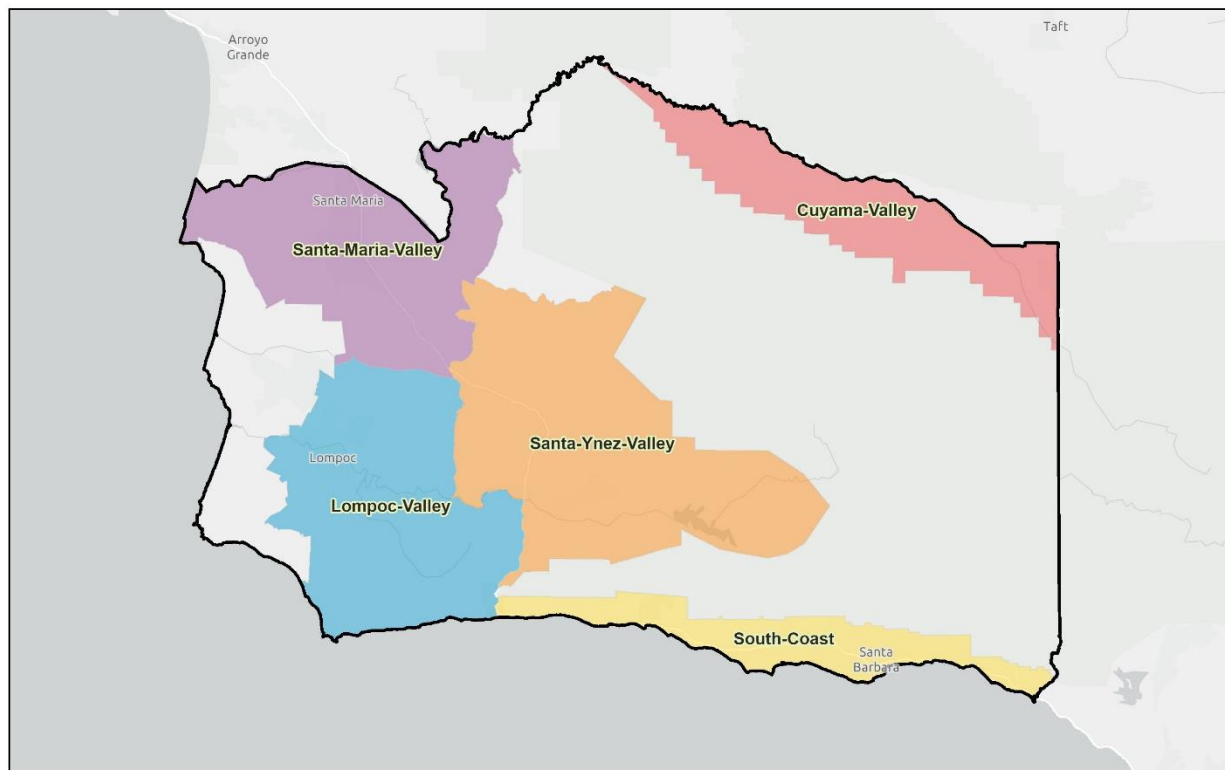
1. Provision of significant public recreational benefits that may otherwise not be obtainable by the County.
2. Facilitating private recreational development projects that provide new diverse recreational opportunities for the public such as hiking, biking, equestrian activities, outdoor sports facilities, outdoor leisure activities, and community gatherings areas.

3. More fully developing the County’s recreation and tourism economic sectors with consequent employment gains and economic benefits to property owners, developers, and local agencies' tax revenues.
4. Maximizing efficient use of public funds for public recreation projects by partnering with eligible interested parties to leverage public funds with private investments in recreation project development.

Applicability & Features

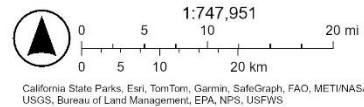
The RBP Program would apply to all unincorporated areas within five Recreation Planning Areas defined by the proposed Recreation Master Plan (Figure 1), subject to applicable regulations, limitations, or exclusions (e.g., zoning, site constraints, etc.). This program would allow any project that meets the eligibility criteria to be processed as a recreation benefit project, subject to applicable laws and regulations (e.g., CEQA, local permitting).

Figure 1. Santa Barbara County Recreation Master Plan – Recreation Planning Areas



11/6/2024

- Santa Barbara County
- Lompoc Valley
- Santa Ynez Valley
- Santa Maria Valley
- South Coast
- Cuyama Valley



California State Parks, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USFWS

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Definition

Recreation Benefit Project. A private development project that provides one or more publicly accessible parks, recreation, and/or trail facilities as part of the project and substantially expands

the range and amount of available public parks, recreation, and/or trail facilities in Santa Barbara County.

RBP Program Guidelines

The RBP Program of the Recreation Master Plan would be enacted through amendments to the County's zoning ordinances, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as amended. Amendments to the zoning ordinances would include a new code section to provide the purpose, criteria for RBP eligibility, and incentives offered to eligible RBPs. An overview and guidance for these criteria and incentives are provided here.

Eligibility Criteria & Exclusions

To ensure a direct benefit to public recreation, potential recreation benefit projects must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan (as amended), the Recreation Master Plan, and the following eligibility criteria:

1. RBPs may be eligible based on site zoning, as amended, and subject to limitations by zone.
2. Project sites shall include adequate site access and utilities and services, subject to applicable regulations, standards, and permitting requirements.
3. The project includes the development and maintenance of one or more publicly accessible recreational amenities that meet a known public recreational need in Santa Barbara County as identified by the Recreation Master Plan and/or determined by County Parks. Qualified public recreation amenities include:
 - a. Parks improved with equipment and recreation facilities (e.g., playground, picnic facilities, fields, courts, etc.)
 - b. Active sports fields and types (soccer, baseball/softball, football)
 - c. Sports courts (tennis, basketball, pickleball)
 - d. Pools, splash pads, and other water-based recreation
 - e. Skate park or bicycle/BMX pump track
 - f. Disc golf courses
 - g. Off-leash dog parks and trails
 - h. Public hiking, riding, or biking trails
 - i. Equestrian trails and outdoor training facilities
 - j. Other public recreation facilities that meet a need identified in the Recreation Master Plan
4. The project's public recreation component is free and open to public visitation and use.
5. The project provides substantial public recreational benefits, particularly where a public-private partnership would enable the provision of such benefits that may be otherwise difficult to obtain.

6. The proposed commercial and/or non-recreational uses are supportive and compatible with the proposed public recreation use(s) and subject to limitations (see below), including but not limited to RV campgrounds, lodging, and food service establishments.
7. The project conforms with the site's land use and zoning regulations.
8. The project proponent may be a landowner with a private site and/or multiple landowners combining multiple properties as the project site.
9. The recreational component of an RBP does not necessarily need to be an accessory use to the primary use of the property, but the recreational component must provide high-quality recreation opportunities and be maintained for public use.
10. The public recreation facility may be provided on-site or off-site when appropriate (e.g., when the public recreation facility would be more compatible and/or better serve or be more accessible to the community). If the public recreation component is provided off-site, it must be proposed within the same Recreation Planning Area as the project site.
11. The project proponents should conduct outreach to nearby neighbors and community organizations, documenting any known or emerging concerns, and include measures to address any known concerns as part of the project application.
12. The public recreation facility shall either be transferred to public ownership or maintained publicly accessible under private ownership. If the facility is maintained in private ownership, a signed agreement must be made with the County to confirm the terms for ongoing public access and maintenance.
13. The project must predetermine the maintenance plan for the recreational facility. For example, the landowner may propose to maintain the public recreation facility. Failure to adequately maintain the public facility could result in a code violation or loss of permitted use. Alternatively, maintenance responsibilities may be accepted by County Parks. Other scenarios may include a landowner association or other non-governmental organization to manage and maintain the public recreational facilities.
14. Any public access agreements or easements on private property would be deeded to the property to ensure the protection of the public recreational assets through real estate transfers.

Incentives for Recreation Benefit Projects

Incentives for RBPs would be offered by the County based on the public recreation facilities proposed. Incentives for recreation benefit projects may include:

1. Downshifted permit types for currently allowed uses to reduce the cost and time required and streamline the review process (Table 1).
2. Allowing land uses that are otherwise not allowed within selected zoning districts (Table 2).
3. Increased intensity of use (i.e., more square footage, increased density, or increased building height).
4. Waiver or modification of site development standards (i.e., property line setbacks, parking, and landscaping).

5. Waiver or reduction of fees (i.e., Development Impact Mitigation Fees/Quimby fees, permitting fees).
6. Waiver or reduction of PRD/DR zoning district open space requirements and allowance for the provision of public parks, open spaces, and trails in dedicated common and public open spaces, either on- or offsite.
7. Waiver of requirement for a Development Plan for RBPs, subject to applicable permitting standards (e.g., CUP requirements).

Table 1. Proposed RBP Program - Downshifted Permitting for Currently Allowed Land Uses by Zone

Zoning Districts	Land Use Permit Downshifting for Eligible RBPs by Zone
<p>Eligible RBPs in the zoning districts listed could be eligible for permit downshifting for the land uses below. Permit downshifting could reduce a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to a Minor CUP (MCUP) or a Land Use Permit (P), depending on the project location and details. All RBPs would be subject to all applicable regulations and development standards for each proposed use to ensure compatibility with zoning district regulations and between the proposed private development and public recreation components.</p>	
<p>Agriculture Zones (AG-I & AG-II)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country clubs • Equestrian facilities • Golf course or driving range • Lodging – Guest ranch • Lodging – Homestay • Lodging - Hostel • Rural recreation • Sports and outdoor recreation facilities
<p>Resource Management Zones (RMZ, MT-GAV, MT-GOL, MT-TORO)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country clubs • Equestrian facilities • Golf course • Golf driving range • Rural recreation • Sports and outdoor recreation facilities • Education or research facility, limited
<p>Residential Zones (PRD & DR only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country clubs • Conference center • Equestrian facilities • Golf course or driving range • Rural recreation • Sports and outdoor recreation facilities • Hostel
<p>Commercial Zones (CN, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-S, C-H, C-V only)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor or indoor commercial entertainment • Conference center • Country clubs • Conference center • Equestrian facilities • Golf course or driving range • Rural recreation • Sports and outdoor recreation facilities • Lodging - Hostel

Table 2. Proposed RBP Program - Additional Allowed Land Uses by Zone

Zoning Districts	Additional Land Uses Allowed for Eligible RBPs by Zone
<p>The land uses below would only be allowed for eligible RBPs in the zoning districts listed. All additional allowable land uses would be subject to all applicable regulations and development standards for each use to ensure compatibility with zoning district regulations and between the proposed private development and public recreation components.</p>	
<p>Agriculture Zones (AG-I & AG-II)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campground • Recreational vehicle (RV) Parks • Lodging - Boutique hotel or motel (boutique only) • Lodging - Bed & breakfast or country-style inn • Café or coffee shop or food service with or without alcohol sales • Visitor-serving commercial, retail, or market • Outdoor amusement and recreational activities for a fee or admission charge such as ropes course/zip line, BMX/mountain bike course, horseback riding, petting zoo, fishing, mini-golf, skate park, outdoor rink, and other non-motorized outdoor recreational activities • Outdoor motorbike/ATV trails and riding parks • Outdoor aquatic centers, pools, water slides, splash zones • Outdoor theaters (e.g., amphitheaters) • Education or research facility, limited • Outdoor shooting or archery range • Onsite employee housing
<p>Residential Zones (PRD & DR)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community centers • Outdoor or indoor aquatic centers, pools, water slides, splash zones • Café or coffee shop or food service with or without alcohol sales • Visitor-serving commercial, retail, or market • Office – Professional/Administrative
<p>Commercial Zones (CN, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-S, C-H, C-V)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City-style campground (KOA, AutoCamp) • Recreational vehicle (RV) park • Community center • Education or research facility, limited • Outdoor or indoor aquatic centers, pools, water slides, splash zones • Outdoor theaters (e.g., amphitheaters)

RBP Prequalification and Agreement for Permit Processing

To be processed as an RBP, a proposed project must have two components:

- 1) **A public recreation component.** The proposed RBP would offer needed public parks, trails, and recreation facilities or substantially contribute to the creation of needed public parks, trails, and recreational facilities identified in the Recreation Master Plan and/or at the discretion of County Parks. The proposed public recreation component must meet the needs identified in the Recreation Master Plan, must be permanent and open to the public, and must be provided either onsite or offsite within the same recreation planning area as the site.
- 2) **A private use or development component.** The proposed RBP would involve a component of private use or development that could benefit from incentives offered by the County in exchange for the public recreation component. Private uses or development could include:

- a. Private recreation, such as campgrounds, recreation vehicle (RV) parks, country clubs, community centers, equestrian facilities, golf courses, sports and outdoor recreation facilities, and rural recreation.
- b. Housing, including single-family and multifamily developments.
- c. Other private development projects, including mixed-use, commercial, industrial, and agricultural development (i.e., wineries).

Prequalification for RBPs would give RBP applicants confidence that they have an attractive, viable project idea before investing the effort to complete an development application and pursue discretionary approvals.

To support successful RBP projects, County Parks would assess the public recreation component of the proposed RBP to determine eligibility through a prequalification process before permit processing (Figure 2). Criteria for the assessment would include whether the project would result in a public recreation project that meets community needs identified in the Recreation Master Plan and whether the public park, trail, or recreation facility is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, as

amended. This prequalification review would give RBP applicants confidence that they have an attractive, viable project idea before investing the effort to complete an RBP application with all required components (site plans, surveys, etc.) and pursue discretionary approvals. The prequalification establishes a partnership between the private applicant and the County with the following outcomes:

1. Commits the applicant to a conceptual RBP that guarantees a qualified public recreation facility per the RBP program.
2. Commits the County to work collaboratively with the applicant to shape the conceptual RBP into an approvable project, subject to regulations/permits and the menu of incentives offered by the RBP program.
3. Establishes a public-private partnership to formalize a shared vision for the RBP and give investors/funders confidence to move it to the application stage.

The RBP prequalification does not commit the County to approve the conceptual RBP; rather, it offers a commitment to collaborate with the applicant to refine a project that meets the purpose and intent of this RBP Program and the Recreation Master Plan. An application for an RBP may not be accepted or processed by the County Planning and Development Department without RBP prequalification by County Parks.

Figure 2.

Conceptual Planning Process to Develop a Recreation Benefit Project

