Chapter Six:
Pathways to Implementation

Photo: Visit Santa Barbara

6.0. Pathways to Implementation

6.1. Recreation Planning & Funding Toolbox

This section summarizes several existing and proposed tools available for the acquisition and development of new parks and trails in Santa Barbara County.

County Parks currently acquires and develops parks, recreation, open space, and trails using a variety of tools, including zoning requirements for new development, Park Development Impact Mitigation Fees, state and federal grants, and partnerships with trail or conservation groups. In the past, one of the most common methods for acquiring new parks and trails has been the dedication of public parkland as part of private development projects, often supplemented by additional funding. Interagency coordination and public-private partnerships are also critical to negotiating access to public open spaces and providing high-quality recreation facilities. The County employs several programs, regulations, and ordinances to acquire and develop new parks, open areas, and trails, primarily through the permit process for new development. Land use regulations in the Land Use Element and Zoning Ordinance provide the opportunity for exactions of parks and trails, and the County's development impact fee program collects funds for recreational capital improvements.

Notably, the County's existing tools rely heavily on private developers to create the opportunity for park and trail acquisition. In growing communities, these tools have a higher potential to result in valuable and desirable park and trail development; however, in communities with little to no growth potential (i.e., built-out communities), these tools are less successful. Additionally, as planned urban development trends have shifted over time toward streamlined infill housing development projects, County Parks has fewer opportunities and less agency to create new public parks and trails as a condition of development approvals. Therefore, County Parks requires a more diverse recreation planning and funding toolbox to ensure the continued acquisition and provision of parks, trails, and recreational facilities that meet the needs of existing and future residents.

To support County Parks in the next era of planning and funding of public parks, trails, and recreation facilities, several new tools were developed for the Recreation Master Plan. These tools support creative opportunities to meet recreation needs countywide. Each tool is described below as a means for the implementation of County Parks' planned recreation projects.

No.1. Recreation Benefit Projects Program

Funding and constructing parks and trails in sufficient numbers and locations to meet the needs identified in the Recreation Master Plan is challenging due to several factors, including land availability, land acquisition, site development, staffing, and ongoing maintenance costs. Park and trail projects are more feasible when land is either already owned by a public agency or

is acquired through donation or other public-private agreement, when site development is supported with a clear, reliable permitting path and a variety of secured funding sources, and maintenance needs are accounted for in the project design and implementation. The County recognizes that the success of the Recreation Master Plan hinges on the ability of the County to acquire and develop the land for parks, recreation, and trails, including in partnership with other agencies, such as cities and special districts in Santa Barbara County, as well as private entities, such as local foundations, non-profit organizations, and property owners.

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 dedicate, develop, and maintain publicly accessible recreation amenities in exchange for incentives 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.). RBPs are eligible for valuable permitting incentives, such as downshifted permit requirements, adjusted development standards, and an expanded range of allowable uses under the County's zoning ordinances. The incentives are intended to attract private investment in public recreation to supplement the capabilities of public agencies to meet recreational needs countywide.

What is the Recreation Benefit Project (RBP) Program?

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

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

- **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 on-site or off-site within the same recreation planning area as the site.
- **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.

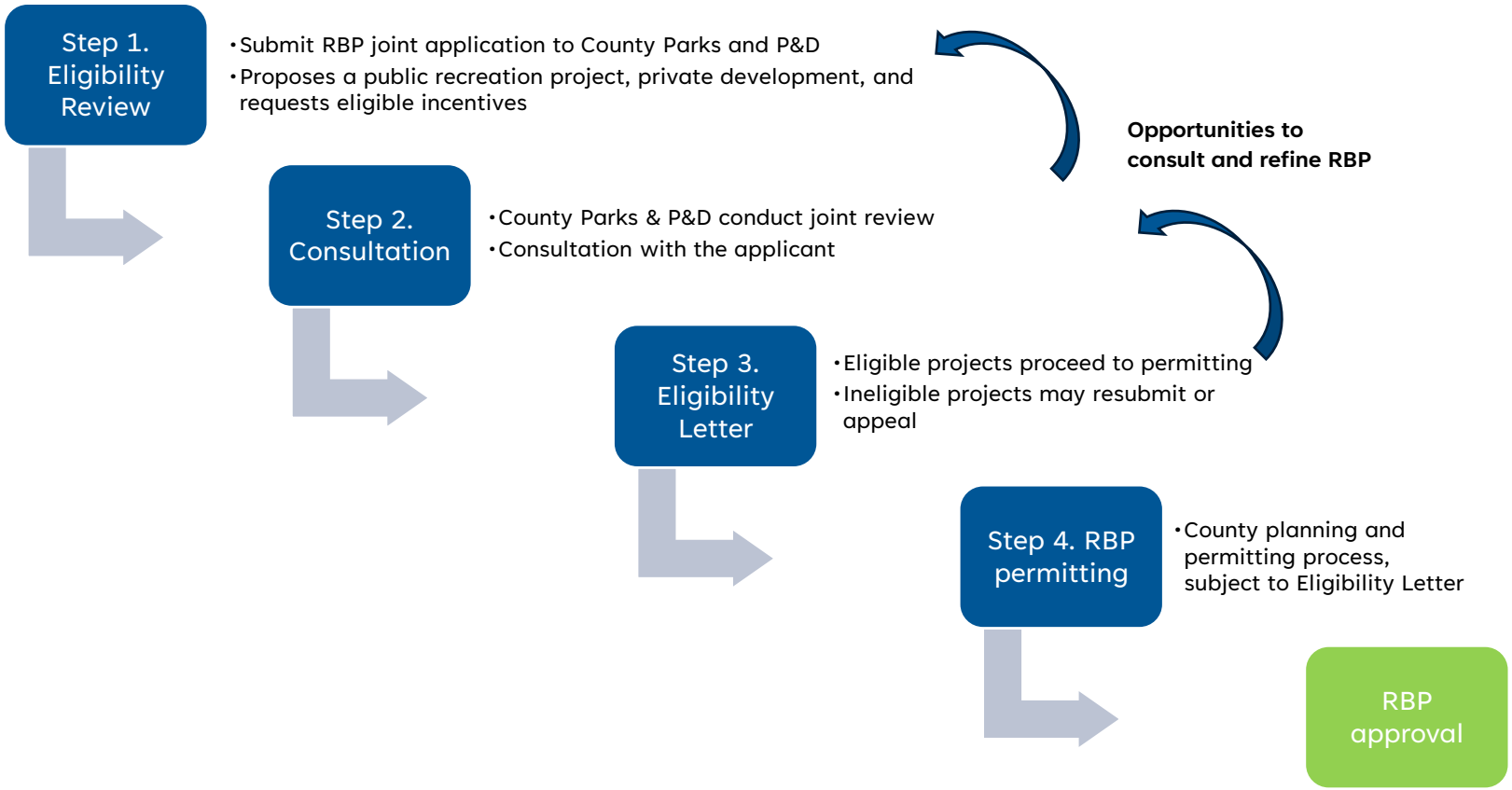
To support successful RBP projects, County Parks would assess the public recreation component of the proposed RBP to determine eligibility through a preliminary review process before permit processing. Criteria for the assessment would include whether the project would result in a public recreation project 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:

Why RBP Eligibility Review?

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

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.
4. An application for an RBP may not be accepted or processed by the County Planning and Development Department without RBP eligibility review by the County.

Figure 6-1. Conceptual Planning Process to Develop a Recreation Benefit Project



Over the course of planning and community outreach for the Recreation Master Plan, County Parks considered several conceptual projects that would help meet recreation needs but are not within the control or agency of County Parks. These project concepts could be developed and pursued by proponents, and, accordingly, they are recognized by the Recreation Master Plan. As described in Table 6-1, these projects could benefit from partnering with the County under the RBP Program to realize mutual goals for public recreation and private land development. These descriptions are informational for planning purposes only and would require independent project planning and approval processes.

Table 6-1. Conceptual Public Recreation Projects Potentially Assisted by the Recreation Benefit Project Program

Project	Description	Location	Key Parties
Chumash Triangle Camping & Sports Park	This project would provide a new playground equipped with swings and slides. The site would also support outdoor social gatherings with shaded picnic areas, water fountains, and restrooms. A new park in Santa Ynez would meet the needs of existing neighborhoods and future housing development.	Santa Ynez Valley	Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, County Parks
Foxen Canyon Winery Trail	This project would consist of new on- and off-road trail improvements parallel to Foxen Canyon Road, from Los Olivos to Sisquoc, a distance of approximately 22 miles. The Foxen Canyon Wine Trail is proposed as a multi-purpose trail connecting wineries and estates along the route. The trail would provide recreational opportunities while helping to support agricultural tourism in the region. Most of the trail is envisioned as an off-road natural surface trail; however, the trail may follow the existing road shoulder in some segments. To support the trail's success, the project could also include signage and branding for the Foxen Canyon Wine Trail, park-and-ride lots for cyclists, electric bicycle rental, charging, and repair stations, and safety barriers where needed.	Santa Ynez Valley	County Parks, private landowners
Jalama Beach to Point Conception Lighthouse Trail	This project would create a new coastal trail extending from Jalama Beach County Park toward Point Conception. In support of the California Coastal Trail, the County would pursue partnership opportunities with The Nature Conservancy's Dangermond Preserve to advance public programming on the Preserve from Jalama	Lompoc Valley	County Parks, The Nature Conservancy/Dangermond Preserve

Project	Description	Location	Key Parties
	Beach County Park and develop appropriate public access mechanisms. The trail would provide hikers with breathtaking views and passive outdoor recreation. Trail development would be coordinated with the Dangermond Preserve on land owned by the Nature Conservancy. Trailhead parking could be available on County-owned land associated with Jalama Beach County Park.		
Los Alamos Community Plaza	This project would create a new community gathering space in the heart of Los Alamos. A new plaza would feature a patio, grassy area, gazebo, and outdoor seating. Adjacent to the plaza would be an open play area with an interactive water feature, picnic benches, shade structures, and restrooms. No location is currently identified for this needed project.	Santa Ynez Valley	County Parks, private landowners
Los Olivos Park	This project would provide a small park nestled into existing neighborhoods in Los Olivos, which currently does not have a children's park. The new park would provide a playground, a small open lawn area, and shaded seating areas with natural landscaping. A natural surface trail could be provided to improve neighborhood connections to the new park. No location is currently identified for this needed project.	Santa Ynez Valley	County Parks, private landowners
Los Olivos to Los Alamos (LOLA) Trail	This project would create an 8.4-mile-long trail extending from Zaca Station Road near the community of Los Olivos to Los Alamos. The trail would traverse private agricultural lands and winery estates along the north side of U.S. Hwy 101. The trail would be predominately off-road	Santa Ynez Valley	County of Santa Barbara, private landowners

Project	Description	Location	Key Parties
	natural surface hiking, biking, and equestrian trail, though the trail would likely follow existing private ranch roads in some segments. The trail would provide a valuable recreational connection from Los Olivos to Los Alamos, offering a significant new route for bicyclists and equestrians, as well as long-distance hikers/backpackers. The exact alignment of the trail requires further investigation and will depend largely upon participating landowners. Trailheads and park-and-ride lots could be developed at either end of the trail, at Zaca Station Road near Los Olivos and Price Ranch Road near Los Alamos.		
Orcutt Creek Neighborhood Park	This project would provide a neighborhood park as part of future development along the Orcutt Creek Trail.	Santa Maria Valley	County Parks, private landowners
Santa Ynez Valley Sports Complex	This project would create a multi-purpose destination for recreation, fitness, and leisure in Santa Ynez Valley. The proposed sports complex would include multiple softball/baseball fields, multi-use fields suitable for soccer and football, and indoor and outdoor courts for basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts. A children's playground with integrated water features would offer an engaging space for younger visitors to play and cool off. A modern community center would provide flexible indoor spaces for fitness classes, community programs, and events. The facility would be surrounded by outdoor exercise stations and a walking path to encourage movement and wellness. Supporting amenities	Santa Ynez Valley	County Parks, City of Solvang, Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, private landowners

Project	Description	Location	Key Parties
	would include shaded seating areas, picnic tables, and a central concession area.		
Toro Canyon Neighborhood Park	This project would develop approximately 3 acres into Toro Canyon's first neighborhood park. To adequately serve the surrounding community, the project would provide a modern playground designed for all ages and abilities with such features as inclusive swings, ramps, and spinners. The park would feature an open lawn area, shaded picnic and seating areas, and potentially a restroom.	South Coast	County Parks, private landowners

No. 2. Parks & Recreation District

A special district is a powerful, common, and relatively accessible tool for recreation planning. Special districts are local government agencies that provide essential services to millions of Californians. Special districts are formed and governed by residents to establish or enhance essential services and infrastructure in their communities. Each special district focuses on providing specific types of services, consistent with state law. It is this focused service that allows for innovation, flexibility, and long-term planning to meet the community's needs. Ultimately, a special district is a tool for communities that need something done well with local control.

In California, a Parks and Recreation District (District) is an invaluable tool available to overcome deficiencies in recreational amenities and programs, as well as coordinate regional leadership and advocacy for recreation and parks. A District would provide a solid source of annual funding distributed to a range of recreation needs throughout the County to support the goals in each community for high-quality and diverse recreation and park amenities. Further, a District would have built-in leadership and representation from all communities within its boundaries to ensure a balance in project and program development to serve unique needs throughout Santa Barbara County. The District would facilitate annual assessments, funding management, and project development to serve residents within the boundaries of the District.

Why a Parks District?

A Parks and Recreation District in Santa Barbara County would be a powerful tool to fund local parks, trails, and recreation facilities under local control. District boundaries can be set to reflect the needs of residents directly benefitting from the projects funded with district resources.

Santa Barbara County residents fund two special districts specifically to provide parks and recreation. The Isla Vista Recreation and Parks District develops and maintains public parks in the unincorporated community of Isla Vista. The Cuyama Valley Recreation District provides programming and maintenance for public recreation facilities in Cuyama Valley. Other special districts also help fund park and open space maintenance, such as the Mission Hills Community Service District, which provides the only public parkland in Mission Hills.

Future efforts to form a new special recreation district to fund parks, trails, and recreation projects countywide would provide a strong funding source to support local parks and trails projects and recreation programs, and would require leadership among County and City decision-makers, other recreation providers, and the public. Fortunately for Santa Barbara County, **AB1613 - County Regional Open Space District Formation** is an existing state law that allows for the formation of a regional open space district in Santa Barbara County to be initiated by a resolution of the County Board of Supervisors without the burden of effort and cost that can accompany a community petition campaign. District formation is then subject to an election by voters within the proposed district. Since AB1613 was enacted in 2000, no districts have been formed in the county under this legislation.

No. 3. Local Funding Strategies

A community's park and recreation goals are often attainable with a less formal initiative. A District may ultimately be the goal for a community, but other tools are available to continue recreation planning and improvements in the near term while progressing toward a District, including a Joint Powers Authority, Community Facilities District, and benefit assessment districts.

- **Joint Powers Authorities (JPA)** are legal entities of two or more public agencies jointly exercising common powers. The Joint Exercise of Powers Act (California Government Code section 6500) governs JPAs. Per state law, JPAs are available to public agencies only, including, but not limited to, the state or state department, public districts, and cities.
- **Community Facilities Districts (CFD)** are special tax districts in California that fund public improvements and ongoing services in a specific area, including parks and trails. The Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982 allows any county, city, special district, school district, or JPA to establish a CFD. CFDs levy a special tax on taxable property within the district boundaries. The special tax levy, secured by the property within the CFD, is the security for any debt issued, including municipal bonds, bank loans, and state funds (see also *Municipal Bond Programs*, below). A CFD can be initiated by registered voters, landowners, or a legislative body.
- **Benefit assessment districts** are financing tools to fund capital improvements and maintenance of public facilities, including specific parks and recreation amenities. Unlike taxes or fees, such as assessments to fund a District, a benefit assessment distributes costs in proportion to benefits. Benefit assessments ensure that the defined group of property owners who use and benefit from the public services pays for them.

Further, recreation funding may need to be creative and opportunistic while a secure, established funding source (i.e., property assessment) is created through District formation and voter initiatives. Recreational funding can come from unique sources, including transient occupancy tax (TOT) and grant programs. As demonstrated by several examples in California, a creative combination of organizational structures and funding sources provides the means and flexibility to coordinate and plan for recreation with flexibility regardless of whether a District exists or is in the works.

No. 4. Municipal Bond Programs

Municipal bonds are debt securities issued by government entities, often to finance capital projects such as public parks, water systems, transportation, and other essential infrastructure. By purchasing municipal bonds, investors lend money to the bond issuer in exchange for a promise of regular interest payments and the return of the original investment, or "principal." A municipal bond's maturity date, or the date when the issuer of the bond repays the principal, may be years in the future. Investor income from bond payments is generally tax-free as an incentive to bondholders to invest. In California, bonds must

be approved in elections by two-thirds of the voters in the jurisdiction for which the bonds are to be issued. The two most common types of municipal bonds are the following:

- **General Obligation (GO) Bonds** are issued by local governments for the acquisition or improvement of real property. GO Bonds are backed by the "full faith and credit" of the issuer, which has the power to tax residents to pay bondholders.
- **Revenue Bonds** are not backed by the government's taxing power but by revenues from a specific project or source, such as user and/or lease fees. Some revenue bonds are "non-recourse", meaning that if the revenue stream dries up, the bondholders do not have a claim on the underlying revenue source.

In addition, municipal borrowers sometimes issue bonds on behalf of private entities such as non-profit colleges or hospitals. These "conduit" borrowers typically agree to repay the issuer, who pays the interest and principal on the bonds. In cases where the conduit borrower fails to make a payment, the issuer usually is not required to pay the bondholders.

Bonds in the County

The County currently has no GO Bond obligations, but in 2024, COP bonds were issued to finance six projects, including the $14 million Lake Cachuma RV Park Renovations project.

The County uses debt financing to: 1) fund certain capital assets that support the provision of services by the County; and 2) provide for short-term cash flow requirements. The decision to use debt financing is governed by several factors, including the nature of the project to be financed, the availability of other financing, and the current economic climate. The County's financings adhere to a Board of Supervisors-approved Debt Management Policy, which aims to provide benefits to the public, including identifying the benefits, cost savings, and the prudent use of debt financing, and investing cash to use municipal assets most effectively and to finance or refinance to maintain the lowest practical cost (i.e., to maximize the use of municipal assets to determine pay-as-you-go or debt financing alternatives). Debt repayment requires establishing debt payment schedules that accommodate the ability to pay and synchronize the cost with the benefits or useful life. The level of debt must be closely coordinated with the responsible agency's capital and operating budget processes to avoid adverse impacts of debt on the County's credit rating and total debt burden. Also, when entering into public market financings, they undergo the scrutiny of the credit rating agencies.

Financing parks and trail projects typically utilizes long-term obligations. In the County, long-term obligations could include GO Bonds and/or Revenue Bonds. With an adopted Recreation Master Plan, the Board of Supervisors could initiate and approve the bond measure proposal, then hold a special election for voters to approve the bond(s), which requires a two-thirds majority vote for passage. The county then works with underwriters to sell the bonds and use the funds for park projects as outlined in the approved plan. The funds raised from the bond sale are used to finance the park projects described in the approved plan.

Alternatively, the County could issue a local **Certificate of Participation (COP)** to investors for specific recreation projects. Investors purchase COPs that represent a share in the project being financed, which the County leases back to itself. The County uses the bond proceeds to fund the recreation project(s), and the annual lease payments from the County's general fund are used to repay the COP holders. The general fund is supported by revenue streams like property and sales taxes, as well as fees.

No. 5. Grant Programs

Grants are used to fund park, trail, and open space acquisition and development. In combination with the local zoning requirements, grants contributed to the acquisition of the County's Point Sal Reserve, Rancho Guadalupe Dunes County Park, San Marcos Foothill Preserve, Ellwood Mesa-Sperling Open Space, the City of Guadalupe's recent park improvements, and the Devereux Slough restoration and trail system.

California State Parks' grants cover a diverse range of projects, such as the renovation and expansion of local parks' basketball courts and soccer fields, the construction of boat launching facilities on California's waterways, programs for off-highway motor vehicle safety and environmental education, youth theater programs, and the repair of playground equipment. Future grant funding becomes available in cycles, often in response to voter initiatives like the 2024 voter-approved Proposition 4, which dedicates approximately $10 billion for safe drinking water, wildfire prevention, drought preparedness, and clean air, with $700 million identified for parks. Near-term recreation projects may be supported by several upcoming state and federal grant programs

Proposition 4 (2024)

Park acquisition and development projects in California will be eligible for up to $700 million in near-term funding from the State of California.

Table 6-2. Upcoming State and Federal Grant Programs

Grant Name	Program	Funding Available	Max. Project Funding	Local Match %	Timing
Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Program (SPP)	Creates new parks and new recreation opportunities in underserved communities across California. Projects must involve either development or a combination of acquisition and development to create a new park, expand an existing park, or renovate an existing park.	SPP Round 5 allocates $188.5 million in the 2025/26 State Budget	$8.5 million	0%	2026/27

Grant Name	Program	Funding Available	Max. Project Funding	Local Match %	Timing
Statewide Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	Provides funds annually to develop and maintain recreational trails and trails-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized projects.	TBD	TBD	12%	2026/27
Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP)	A nationally competitive program targeting grant assistance to help economically disadvantaged urban communities with no or almost no access to publicly available, close-by, outdoor recreation. Funds can be used for the acquisition and/or development of, or to substantially renovate, obsolete public parks and other outdoor recreation spaces.	$90 million; funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund	$15 million	50%	2026/27
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	Provide funding for the acquisition or development of land to create new outdoor recreation opportunities for the health and wellness of Californians	$35 million	$6 million	50%	TBD

Source: California State Parks, Grant Programs 2026/27: https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=29752

The projects included in the Recreation Master Plan are strategically aligned with California's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Program (SCORP) to ensure their eligibility for grant funding as opportunities are renewed over the next 20 - 30 years. Additionally, community trail projects that support active transportation may be eligible for transportation funding programs under the County's Active Transportation Plan.

No. 6. Development Impact Mitigation Fees

Developer fees, specifically Quimby Fees and Park Development Impact Mitigation Fees, are a source of funding for the acquisition or development of parks, open space, and trails. The Quimby Act (Government Code Section 66477) is the enabling statute for County Ordinances Nos. 3339 and 3656 of the Santa Barbara County Code, which require dedication of land and/or payment of a fee to provide park and recreation facilities as a condition of all subdivisions. Any subdivision creating 50 or more units may be required to dedicate land for park purposes. Expenditure of Quimby funds is limited to capital improvements. Park Development Mitigation Fees are collected for other residential developments per County Resolution 88-328, including a fee per unit proposed as part of new development; discounted fees may be available for specific project types

such as affordable housing projects. The use of these fees is not restricted, but they have only been used for capital improvements. The balance of these two funding sources fluctuates based on development trends and capital expenditures.

No. 7. Private Open Space Dedication Program

This new program would provide the opportunity for undeveloped and underutilized HOA-owned common open space areas that are suitable for public recreation to be transferred to County Parks for development and management as public parks and open spaces. Past development of residential neighborhoods under the DR zoning district commonly results in underutilized and unmanaged open space areas within existing communities, which have occurred in Orcutt, Eastern Goleta Valley, and Mission Hills. Through this proposed program, remnant open space lands could become public parks and trails to better serve existing unmet recreation needs. This program would benefit the public by creating new parks in built-out communities under a public management program, as well as benefit HOAs that struggle with management costs, trespassing, natural hazards, and insurance and tax liabilities associated with maintaining common open space in private co-ownership. Interested organizations would consult with County Parks on the location, condition, features, and desirability of potential donations to meet needs identified in the Recreation Master Plan. If accepted, the County would foster the real estate transfer.

No. 8. Interagency Partnerships

In 2019, County Parks formed the Santa Barbara County Recreation Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all 8 cities, 2 recreation and park districts, and other recreation nonprofit advocacy groups. Under the Recreation Master Plan, the Recreation Steering Committee should continue as a standing committee that works together throughout the year (at least twice annually) to discuss and coordinate improving recreation in Santa Barbara County. The Recreation Steering Committee will continue to identify and pursue opportunities for park development, acquisition, funding, and beneficial partnerships between agencies and recreation interest groups in the recreational needs of our communities. This would include coordinating to:

- Identify available district- and public agency-owned lands for future parks, recreation, and trail development.
- Facilitate inter-agency trail planning and development.
- Provide support to nonprofit organizations to aid in acquiring land easements for parks and trails.
- Provide support to nonprofit organizations and recreation partnerships through methods such as fundraising for park and trail land/easement acquisition, improvement, and maintenance.

The Recreation Steering Committee would be led by County Parks, with committee composition including, at a minimum, a designated Representative and Alternate from the 8 City parks/recreation departments, Isla Vista Recreation and Parks District, Cuyama Valley Recreation District, Los Padres National Forest, California State Parks, UCSB, and the Chumash Nation,

with optional committee members from other special districts (e.g., Mission Hills Community Services District) and nonprofit groups and organizations (e.g., Santa Barbara County Trails Council, Sage Alliance, Santa Maria Valley Open Space, Elings Park Foundation) as determined at the discretion of the County Parks Director. As a long-term goal of the Recreation Master Plan, the Recreation Steering Committee could serve as the foundation for a future Santa Barbara County Recreation District Board.

Local nonprofit groups can raise funds to purchase property or easements and develop and maintain parks, trails, and recreation facilities. For example, the Land Trust led the acquisition of sites such as the Coronado Butterfly Reserve in Goleta and the protection of Midland School open space in the Santa Ynez Valley. The Montecito Trails Foundation built and maintains over 40 miles of trails in Montecito. The Los Padres Forest Association builds and maintains trails in the National Forest. The Santa Barbara County Trails Council helped the County build the Franklin Trail in Carpinteria and the Orcutt Hills trail system. Lompoc Trails is currently working with County Parks to build the Bodger Trails system south of Lompoc. These and other trail groups help build and maintain trails due to public funding and staffing shortages. Additionally, public-private partnerships with sports and/or recreation organizations, including aquatics groups, schools, and other recreation-based businesses, could result in fundraising and sponsorship for new recreation projects, as well as ongoing maintenance, operations, and programming. These partnerships are highly beneficial to large capital projects with ongoing operational needs, such as community centers, aquatic facilities, campgrounds, and competitive sports complexes. County Parks, in coordination with the Recreation Steering Committee, would continue to work closely with local organizations in partnership to acquire and maintain parks, recreation, and trails that meet local needs identified in the Recreation Master Plan.

No. 9. Strengthening County Parks

Community starts at the park, and the park starts with the people, including the parks staff who plan, maintain, and upgrade the parks and recreation properties. Funding and staffing are critical to ensure the quality and adequacy of the parks, recreation facilities, and trails serving the community. These metrics also indicate whether capacity exists in existing resources to take on needed park, recreation, and trail projects in the Recreation Master Plan.

Revenue Generators

In 2023/24, County Parks received over $10.3 million in revenue from its two campgrounds and rental properties, including two restaurants and several concessionaires. That's 60 percent of its total annual operating costs!

The Recreation Master Plan will require substantial long-term effort by County Parks. To implement the Recreation Master Plan, County Parks' responsibilities and resources should expand incrementally over time and in response to new park, trail, and recreation facility development, including grant writing and funding management, enforcing County Parks rules and regulations, managing and operating facilities to generate local revenue, and coordinating with local agencies, partners, and other County departments. This investment reflects County Parks' role as a leader for public parks and trails acquisition, development, and management countywide. Expanding department funding for County Parks could be accommodated through adjustments in the County's annual budget, additional revenue from planned facilities and programs, private development fees, and new local funding sources (refer to ***Error! Reference source not found.***). Additional department funding would be utilized to support the provision or acquisition of additional resources and facilities, including equipment, specialized staff and training, program funding, and the operation and maintenance of existing and proposed facilities such as pools or sports complexes. This support would be bolstered by increased revenue from these high-value recreation improvements, which have user and reservation fees to offset capital and operational costs, including campgrounds, concessionaires, facility rentals, and competitive sports league fees.

The Recreation Master Plan evaluates the costs, revenues, and staffing of County Parks to understand current operations based on the adopted 2023/24 budget relative to the County's recreational assets and service populations. Current operations are compared to national benchmarks to indicate how County Parks compares to typical recreation agencies. As the Recreation Master Plan is a County Parks project, only County Parks staffing and funding information was assessed relative to unincorporated populations. This assessment does not consider the operations or service populations of incorporated cities. A summary of County Parks' annual operational information compared to national benchmarks published by the NRPA for 2023 is provided below:

- **Operating Costs (Expenditures Per Acre of Public Parkland**). In 2023/24, County Parks had annual operating expenditures of $17.3 million. Based on national benchmarks published by NRPA, a typical agency serving a similar population to County

Parks spent $7,323 per acre of parkland and non-park sites. In 2023/24, County Parks spent $1,549 per acre of its public parks and non-park sites, including Cachuma Lake Recreation Area, which is owned by the federal government but operated for recreational use by County Parks. Excluding Lake Cachuma, County Parks spent $6,955 per acre of public parks and open spaces.

- **Cost Recovery (Non-tax Revenue as % of Operating Costs)**. In 2023/24, County Parks revenues were balanced with the operating budget, including $4.1 million (24 percent) in general fund contributions. Based on national benchmarks published by NRPA, a typical agency serving a similar population to County Parks recovered 22 percent of its operating costs through non-tax revenue sources. In 2023/24, County Parks received $10.3 million in revenue from camping, administrative fees, site use/rental, concessionaires, and cabin/yurt rental, contributing 60 percent of annual operating costs. County Parks' primary operational revenue sources include charges for services at Cachuma Lake Campground and Recreation Area and Jalama Beach County Park.
- **Staffing (Total Employees (FTE) and FTE per 10,000 residents).** In 2023/24, County Parks employed 62.75 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. Based on national benchmarks published by NRPA, a typical agency serving a similar population to County Parks employed 121.5 FTE and 8 FTE per 10,000 residents. County Parks is staffed with only 52 percent of the staffing levels typical for similarly sized agencies. Further, County Parks staffing levels provide 4.5 FTE per 10,000 residents in the unincorporated area, which is approximately half of what similar agencies enjoy nationwide.

No. 10. Sustainable & Resilient Parks

To integrate the Recreation Master Plan with the County's One Climate Initiative, this program builds sustainability and resiliency features into existing and future recreational facilities. Under this program, park development projects may include sustainability features (e.g., drought-tolerant landscaping, use of recycled water supplies for landscaping, net-zero facilities, sustainable building strategies) and/or features in their design to support the resiliency of our communities, such as emergency shelters, cooling/warming centers, livestock evacuation centers, and other support for County emergency management operations. In addition to supporting the County’s existing commitments to reducing GHG emissions and increasing sustainability and resiliency, sustainable and resilient parks can strengthen grant eligibility and funding acquisition.

The County has a long history of adopting and implementing policies, programs, and projects directly or indirectly involving climate action, and in 2020, the County reaffirmed its leadership in addressing climate change through the One Climate Initiative. As a result, the County takes an active role in helping to address climate change through GHG reduction, climate sustainability, and climate resiliency strategies. As a component of the One Climate Initiative, the County prepared and adopted the new 2030 Climate Action Plan, which identifies measures and actions under the County’s direct jurisdiction or represent areas the County can influence through collaboration and coordination.

One Climate Actions for Parks

Promote and support land management practices that sequester carbon.

Tree Planting & Maintenance: Plant new drought tolerant, native, fire resistant trees at County facilities, parks and in rights-of-way, where appropriate, focusing on areas that are at risk from extreme heat. Secure additional funding to maintain existing trees. Apply to Tree City USA to become a recognized jurisdiction expanding benefits of trees and committing to the four-step framework outlined by the Arbor Day Foundation.

Increase sustainability and resilience of County-operated facilities.

Electrification Policy: Adopt a policy requiring all new county buildings to be all-electric and replace or retrofit space and water heating devices and equipment in existing buildings with heat pumps at time of replacement.

Energy Procurement: Procure renewable natural gas for County-owned facilities that cannot be electrified.

Renewable Energy Expansion: Expand the use of renewable energy and energy storage at County facilities.

Water – Energy Nexus Projects: Implement cost-effective measures to reduce County facilities' water use and water-related energy use.

To further support these actions and the County's commitments, County Parks will strive to incorporate sustainability and resiliency features in existing and future recreational facilities, including applying the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating Systems™ (STARS) standards or other comparable sustainability ratings. Under this program, special attention or focus will be given to parks and trails projects that would be suitable for or incorporate sustainability and resiliency features (**Error! Reference source not found.**). These could include park development projects that directly propose or could accommodate sustainability features (e.g., drought-tolerant landscaping, use of recycled water supplies for landscaping, net-zero facilities, sustainable building strategies) and/or features in their design to support resiliency of our communities, such community centers that could serve as emergency shelters, cooling/warming centers, horse evacuation centers, and that support County emergency management operations.

Table 6-3. Types of Sustainability and Resiliency Features by Park Type

Park Type	Sustainability Features	Resiliency Features
Pocket Park	• Drought-tolerant landscaping	• Shade structures and/or low-heat absorbing surfaces and structures
Neighborhood Park	• Drought-tolerant landscaping • Building electrification • Use of green building practices • Stormwater retention and recycling for landscape/ballfield irrigation • Minimization of impervious surfaces	• Shade structures and/or low-heat absorbing surfaces and structures • Siting and design of wildfire fuel buffers • Natural stormwater/flood management systems
Community and Regional Parks	• Drought-tolerant landscaping • Building electrification • Use of green building practices • Stormwater retention and recycling for landscape/ballfield irrigation • Minimization of impervious surfaces • Active transportation connections • Incorporation of solar or wind energy and storage	• Shade structures and/or low-heat absorbing surfaces and structures • Siting and design of wildfire fuel buffers • Natural stormwater/flood management systems • Accommodation of emergency shelters, evacuation centers, cooling/warming centers

No. 11. Parks, Recreation, and Trails (PRT) Maps

In unincorporated areas, the Park, Recreation, and Trail (PRT) maps are adopted in the County Comprehensive Plan and amended over time in response to local planning and acquisition efforts. PRT maps show existing and proposed parkland and trail corridors throughout the unincorporated county. The PRT maps include six subareas of the County, such as the Lompoc Valley and the Santa Barbara-Goleta area. The PRT maps depict recreation features independently from the land use designation map and are key planning tools used by the County to acquire new parkland and trails. Key elements of the PRT maps delineate parks, open areas, and various types of trails, including:

- **Existing Parks, Open Space Areas, and Joint Use Facilities**: These three designations identify existing parks, open space areas, and joint use facilities (e.g., designated school playgrounds/ballfields) in each countywide subarea, as well as within the community plans.
- **Proposed Parks, Open Areas, and Joint Use Facilities**: Proposed parks include planned new parks that are often proposed to meet existing demand or serve new development.
- **Existing On-road and Off-road Trails**: The County PRT maps include known existing on-road and off-road trails. On-road trails can be located on the travel lane on streets with low traffic volumes, combined with bike lanes, or provided on a paved or unpaved shoulder, a separate paved trail parallel to the road, or an off-road dirt trail parallel to the road, depending upon conditions such as availability of excess road right-of-way. Off-road trails are typically natural surface trails, but may also include off-road paved multi-use paths with parallel natural surface walking paths. Both types of trails support multiple uses such as hiking, running, mountain biking, and equestrian use.
- **Proposed On-road and Off-road Trails**: The County PRT maps include proposed on-road and off-road trails. These include an extensive on-road trail system in the Santa Ynez Valley and new trails in Orcutt.

As part of the Comprehensive Plan, updates to the PRT maps require a general plan amendment.

No. 12. Planned Residential Development

The County reviews the PRT maps for all proposed development projects. Where there is a reasonable relationship to the proposed development, the County can negotiate trail easements and/or dedication of public parkland or open space. As a result, new development on some sites may help create new parks, trails, or open space. In other instances, where only a portion of the planned open space is required for dedication, the owner(s) may voluntarily dedicate the remainder of the open space to reduce maintenance and liability costs.

Additionally, to acquire public recreation facilities through a dedication, the County has historically applied the Planned Development (PD) land use designation and accompanying Planned Residential Development (PRD) zone district, which requires dedication of public parkland. To develop private recreational facilities (i.e., facilities serving residents of the development only), the Design Residential (DR) zone district is often used. The DR zone district also requires setting aside open space as part of development proposals, but the space is reserved for residents of the development, including pools, playgrounds, BBQ facilities, and clubhouses. These tools are appropriate where proposed projects have adequate land area, increased density, or a large number of units, creating a sizable demand for recreation/open space, or where there is a significant historic public use of a site. However, the feasibility of this tool in creating public parks, recreation, and trails is limited in the future, as most future development includes infill housing development projects that are not mandated to dedicate public recreation facilities.

6.2. Implementation Tools for Planned County Parks Projects

In Chapter 5.0, *A Plan for Parks, Recreation, and Trails*, each planned project by County Parks includes cost estimates and timing based on feasibility and priority. This section aligns each planned project with the recommended implementation tools described above. Planning for each project will consider appropriate tools to acquire and develop the park and/or trail. The potential tools recommended factor in location, ownership, site conditions, population potentially served, acquisition techniques, and planning context. For example, all park and trail projects would be eligible for funding through a new Parks & Recreation District and would also align well with the Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Program (SPP) grant program. However, a municipal bond would be more appropriate for large capital improvements that result in operational revenue, which would support the required debt service for the bond. Overall, each project will consider the best mix of financial tools during project planning, using the Recreation Master Plan as a strategic framework for implementation.

Table 6-4. Recommended Tools for County Parks' Planned Park, Recreation, and Trails Projects

No.	County Parks Projects	RBP	Park & Rec District	Muni Bond	Grants	DIMFs	Private Open Space	Fund-raising Parters	Parks Revenue	Dept. Budget
Currently Planned Projects										
1	Baron Ranch Trails		X		X	X				X
2	Lake Cachuma Campground and South Shore Facilities Improvements		X	X	X	X			X	
3	Lake Cachuma North Shore Trails & Recreation Facilities Management Plan		X	X	X	X		X	X	
4	Oak Knoll (aka Mud Lake) Neighborhood Park		X		X	X				X

No.	County Parks Projects	RBP	Park & Rec District	Muni Bond	Grants	DIMFs	Private Open Space	Fund-raising Parters	Parks Revenue	Dept. Budget
5	Orcutt Creek Trail	X	X		X	X				X
6	San Marcos Foothills Open Space		X		X	X		X		X
7	Solomon Hills (Bonney) Trails		X		X	X		X		X
8	Vandenberg Village Park		X		X	X				X
9	Waller Park Regional Sports Fields		X	X	X	X			X	
New Planned Projects										
10	Ben Page Neighborhood Park		X		X	X				X
11	Drum Canyon Trail		X		X	X				X
12	Gaviota Marine Terminal Recreation Area		X	X	X	X			X	
13	Glen Annie to Los Padres National Forest Trail		X		X	X				X
14	Goleta Community Sports Park	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
15	Mission Hills Community Trail		X		X	X				X
16	Mission Hills Mountain Bike Park		X		X	X			X	X

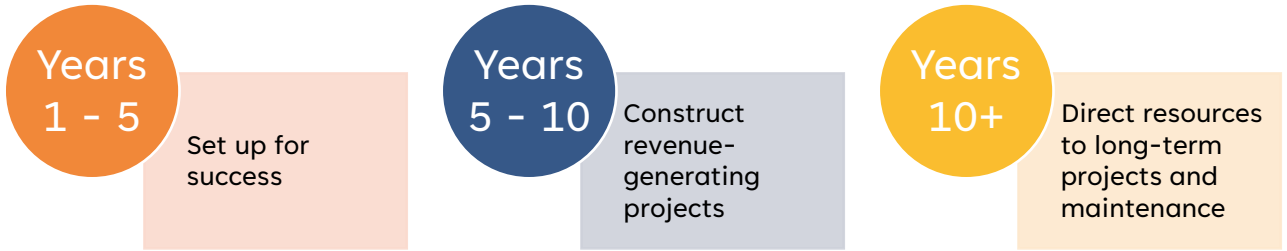
No.	County Parks Projects	RBP	Park & Rec District	Muni Bond	Grants	DIMFs	Private Open Space	Fund-raising Parters	Parks Revenue	Dept. Budget
17	Mission Hills Neighborhood Park		X		X	X				X
18	Obern Trail Play & Skate Project		X		X	X				X
19	South Coast Aquatic Center	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
20	South Coast Foothill Mountain Bike Park	X	X		X	X		X	X	
21	Sunrise Open Space		X		X	X				X
22	Vandenberg Village Community Trail		X		X	X				X
23	Guadalupe Community Park & Campground	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
24	Jalama Beach Campground Expansion & Upgrade Project		X		X	X			X	
25	Jalama Bluff Trail		X		X	X			X	X
26	Point Sal Trails & Coastal Access Improvements		X		X	X		X		X
27	Surf Beach to Ocean Beach Boardwalk		X		X	X				X

6.3. Timeline

Building a high-quality system of parks, trails, and recreation facilities takes time, commitment, and resourcefulness to maintain the facilities we have while also creating the facilities we need. Achieving the Recreation Master Plan's goals, projects, and programs requires a clear, focused work program in the near term that supports the long-term success of future efforts. As community recreation needs evolve and opportunities rise and fall, the Recreation Master Plan must adapt. An adaptive plan is achieved through periodic review. Accordingly, the Recreation Master Plan creates a framework of near-term actions within 5-year targets. This approach ensures the Recreation Master Plan adapts to change and opportunities over the long run by prioritizing the success of early efforts in support of future efforts. This section addresses the phased implementation of the Recreation Master Plan in five-year intervals (Figure 6-2).

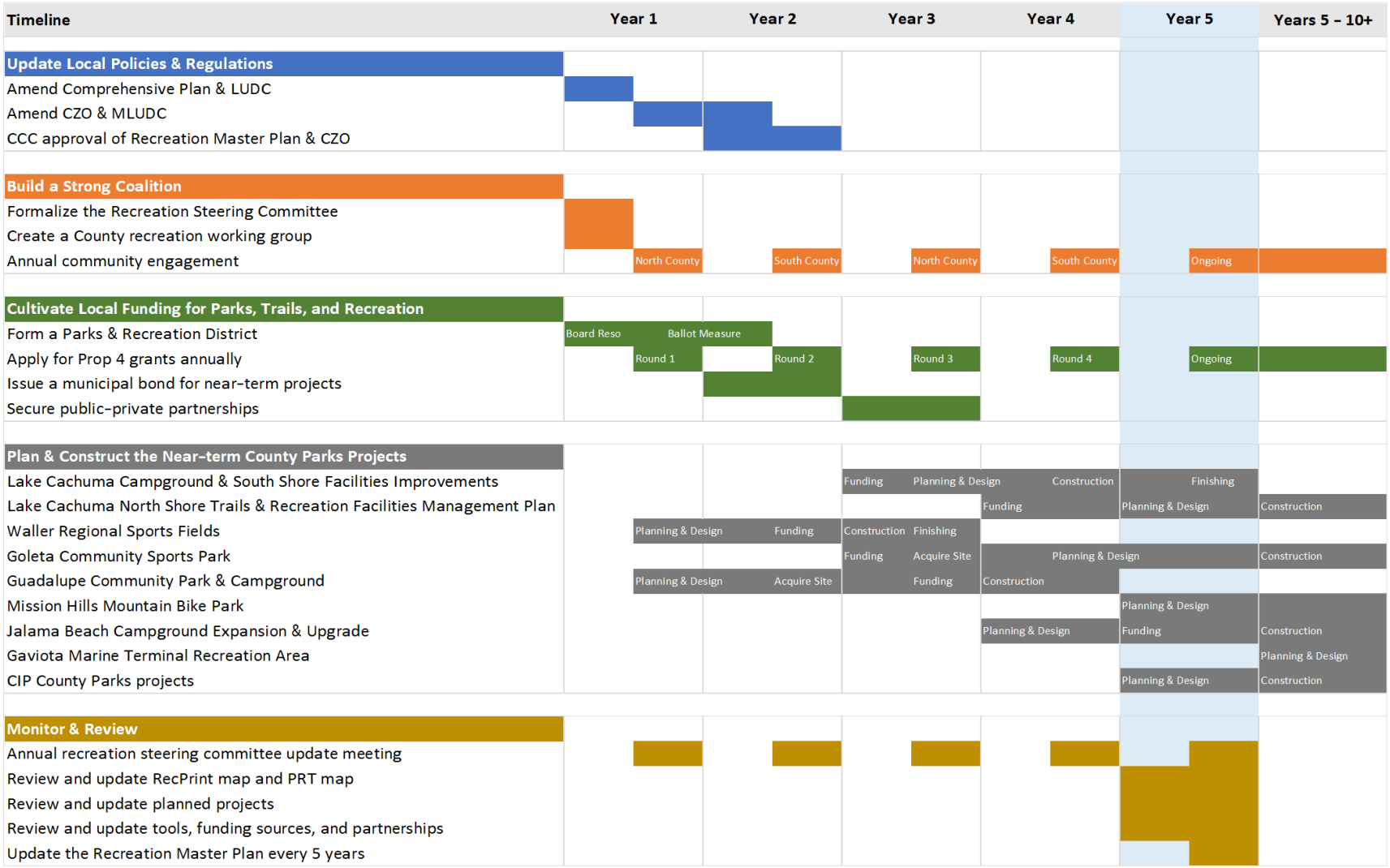
Over the life of the plan, County Parks' efforts and resources will shift as the focus changes. In the first five years, the focus is on setting up the Recreation Master Plan's programs and financial strategies, including updating County policies and regulations, building a strong coalition of recreation planning partners, cultivating local funding, and designing near-term projects. Over the next five years, the focus will shift to constructing projects that generate revenue through user fees and rates, supporting County Parks' operations and maintenance of facilities. Through 2050, with a stable operational base, County Parks can direct resources to long-term projects and support for other organizational efforts within Santa Barbara County. Annual review and monitoring paired with five-year updates will ensure the Recreation Master Plan remains relevant, effective, and timely.

Figure 6-2. Phased Focus for Implementation of the Recreation Master Plan



With a focus on funding, County Parks will prioritize the following actions in the first five years following the adoption of the Recreation Master Plan, as depicted in Figure 6-3..

Figure 6-3. Near-Term Actions for Recreation Master Plan (5 to 10 Years)



6.4. Key Near-Term Actions

A. Update Local Polices and Regulations

To foster the successful implementation of the Recreation Master Plan, County Parks has created amendments to County policy and regulations to support public parks and recreation as a key component of sustainable communities and the County's One Climate program (https://sbco.mysocialpinpoint.com/oneclimatehome). The Project would amend the Comprehensive Plan with updated policies for parks, recreation, open spaces, and trails that reflect current community input and more actively support the County's efforts and attention to recreation needs in the unincorporated area. This effort would update the County's PRT maps to reflect the current extent of existing and planned County Parks properties and facilities.

The Project would also amend the County's zoning ordinances, including the County Land Use and Development Code (LUDC), Montecito LUDC, and Coastal Zoning Ordinance (CZO), to support permitting public parks and trails by private entities. Lastly, the Project would create the RBP Program to foster public-private partnerships as a key strategy to acquire and construct new parks and trails in Santa Barbara County.

The California Coastal Commission (CCC) will also review and approve the Recreation Master Plan and its related amendments within the Coastal Zone of Santa Barbara County.

B. Build a Strong Coalition for Recreation

The Recreation Master Plan was developed with the input and assistance of community partners and local recreation agencies throughout Santa Barbara County. This foundation of collaboration will continue through the implementation of the Recreation Master Plan. Following adoption, County Parks will formalize the Recreation Steering Committee as a standing interagency group interested in supporting the Recreation Master Plan over its implementation. The Steering Committee will be supported by a recreation planning team comprising County staff members from key departments.

County Parks will conduct community engagement for each planned project and will engage its coalition of recreation specialists annually to maximize opportunities for successful recreation planning and project development. The public will continue to be involved whenever the plan is updated and as appropriate during the monitoring and evaluation process. Tools for engaging the public may include direct emails, community surveys, community partnerships, fact sheets, social media postings, press releases, websites, and virtual and/or in-person workshops.

C. Cultivate Local Funding for Parks, Trails, and Recreation Facilities

Building and maintaining high-quality parks, trails, and recreation facilities can require substantial financial resources. Simply put, recreational amenities and programs are not possible without funding and staff to design, finance, and build the parks, sports fields and courts, trails, and community centers desperately needed in Santa Barbara County. Limits to available funding for improvements or development of recreational facilities, as well as for maintenance and provision of services, are a continuing challenge to service providers.

Park development costs vary, but $750,000 to $900,000 per acre to develop public parkland from vacant land already in public ownership is a general estimate, while specialized facilities such as baseball fields can cost more. For example, a typical baseball field of about three acres could cost up to $2.3 million, including fences, stands, dugouts, and other amenities. Specialized facilities such as gyms, pools, or aquatics centers can run into millions of dollars and have ongoing maintenance costs. The cost to develop a mile of new trail can also vary significantly depending on factors like terrain, surface material, amenities, ownership, and location. Natural dirt or gravel trails typically cost between $20,000 and $50,000 per mile, while typical paved trails cost between $100,000 and $500,000 per mile. A complex paved trail with bridges and extensive grading could reach over $1 million or more per mile.

Figure 6-4. Focus First on Funding

During the first 5 years, County Parks will focus on investment in recreation facilities that generate revenue for operations the future improvements, ongoing maintenance, and debt service.

A key goal of the Recreation Master Plan is to improve recreational facilities and services through enhanced regional coordination, strategic funding initiatives, increased revenue from recreational facilities, and improved staffing to realize recreational goals in local communities. Planned campgrounds and sports complexes are estimated to generate sustaining revenue with high-quality facilities and programming to support County Parks operations and ongoing capital improvements, as well as debt service. The total development costs must be addressed incrementally to ensure early investment supports the long-term success of the program. The funding strategy for each phase of implementation will change over time in response to improvements in recreation facilities, creation of new funding programs, and improved revenue generation. In the first five years, County Parks will focus on local funding sources, including:

- Exploring the formation of a special district or other local funding program for parks and open space countywide.
- Considering a municipal bond for strategic recreation projects.
- Pursuing annual grant funding cycles for near-term parks and trails projects.
- Fostering funding partnerships, including working with non-profit organizations to fundraise for specific projects, cost-sharing with local agencies and recreation service providers, and permitting eligible RBPs as a public-private partnership to achieve the goals of the Recreation Master Plan.

D. Plan and Construct Near-Term Projects

Project development will occur over time, with the investment in earlier projects creating financial means to support later projects. In the first five years, County Parks will focus resources first on:

- **Design and development of**:
  - Waller Regional Sports Fields,
  - Guadalupe Community Park and Campground, and
  - Lake Cachuma Campground and South Shore Improvements Project.
- **Funding, planning, and design of**:
  - Goleta Community Sports Park
  - Lake Cachuma North Shore Trails and Recreation Management Plan
  - Mission Hills Mountain Bike Park
  - Jalama Beach Campground Expansion and Upgrade
- **Initial planning for**:
  - Gaviota Marine Terminal Recreation Area
  - County Capital Improvement Program projects and long-term improvements of the Recreation Master Plan

E. Monitor and Review

County Parks is responsible for ensuring that this plan is being monitored, evaluated, and implemented on a continuing and as-needed basis. The Recreation Master Plan is evaluated annually to determine the effectiveness of programs and to react to changes in land development or programs. This includes re-evaluation of projects and programs. County Parks will call the Recreation Steering Committee to meet, review the projects, and discuss progress (Refer to Section 6.2, *Implementation Tools for Planned County Parks Projects,* No. 8. Interagency Partnerships). During these meetings, the Steering Committee may

recommend items to be updated, added, or removed in future revisions of this plan. Any updates or changes can be processed through annual updates of the Recreation Master Plan, if needed.

County Parks will formally evaluate and update the Recreation Master Plan every five years, including the following activities:

- Analyze, evaluate, and update the inventory of parks, trails, and recreation facilities and RecPrint map.
- Complete a new community survey and conduct public outreach, including the Recreation Steering Committee.
- Update the recreation needs assessment to reflect changes in the inventory and public survey results.
- Review and update planned parks, recreation, and trails projects and update the Recreation Master Plan and the RecPrint map, if needed.
- Evaluate funding sources and timing of projects, and adjust the implementation plan accordingly.
- Submit the updated Recreation Master Plan to the Board of Supervisors.