



# General Plan Parks and Open Space Element and Conservation Element

## Parks and Recreation Assessment

*prepared for*

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# 1 Introduction

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Parks are a cornerstone of Foster City's quality of life. As a distinctive urban environment, Foster City offers a diverse range of park facilities and recreational programs that enhance residents' health, well-being, and cultural engagement. This Parks and Recreation Assessment provides an evaluation of existing parks, amenities, and recreation programs, identifying opportunities for enhancement and growth. This document serves as a foundational tool to support policy development and identify multi-benefit opportunities in coordination with the Parks Master Plan for the update to the Parks and Open Space and Conservation Element.

The Parks Master Plan is a coordinated effort between the Foster City Parks and Recreation Department and WRT to assess current conditions of the city's park system and propose strategic recommendations tailored to the park system's needs.<sup>1</sup> The planning process for the Parks Master Plan began in summer of 2024, and is scheduled to finish in the Summer of 2025. This assessment relies heavily on data and insights from the Parks Master Plan process, which includes valuable information about Foster City's park system.

This assessment presents the parks system in terms of park type and describes recreation amenities. It highlights unique assets such as the levee pedway and the lagoon. A key component of this initiative is the identification of community priorities, which have emerged through a public engagement and a Parks Master Plan Community Survey. The assessment compares Foster City's parks and programs with national standards, offering insights into areas for improvement and strategic development.

By presenting a detailed overview of Foster City's parks and recreation landscape, the assessment will be the foundation for policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of these essential services. These recommendations support the city's ongoing commitment to meeting the recreational needs of its residents while aligning with the objectives outlined in the Parks and Open Space Element of the General Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Foster City Parks Master Plan | Foster City California

## 2 Regulatory Triggers

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The following California regulations mandate an update to the Parks and Open Space Element and the Conservation Element. A full regulatory setting is provided in the Open Space and Conservation Assessment.

### **Senate Bill 1425 Open-space element: updates**

Senate Bill (SB) 1425 (Stern 2022) requires that every city and county review and update its local open space plan by January 1, 2026. The bill requires the local open space plan to include plans and an action program that address specified issues, including climate resilience, equitable access, and rewilding opportunities, correlated with the Safety Element, Environmental Justice Element, and Land Use Element respectively. The requirements set forth in SB 1425 may be best met by pursuing policies that promote multi-benefit approaches.

Fundamental to the multiple benefits of open space is the provision of natural areas that provide human and ecological benefits through habitat, recreation, natural resources, historic and tribal resources, water management, and aesthetics. In the context of climate change, open space provides a form of natural infrastructure, for which a definition is provided in Gov. Code § 65302(g)(4)(C)(v). Natural infrastructure utilizes natural ecological systems or processes to reduce vulnerability to climate change related hazards, or other related climate change effects, while increasing the long-term adaptive capacity of natural areas by perpetuating or restoring ecosystem services.

### **Assembly Bill 1889 Conservation element: wildlife and habitat connectivity**

Assembly Bill (AB) 1889, known as the Room to Roam Act (Friedman 2024), requires the Conservation Element of a city's general plan to include an identification and analysis of connectivity areas, permeability, and natural landscape areas within its jurisdiction by January 1, 2028. It further requires an assessment of existing or planned wildlife passage features, such as wildlife crossings or underpasses, to ensure planned developments do not comprise these critical habitats or wildlife movement corridors.

Specifically, the bill directs local governments to consider the impacts of existing and future development on wildlife connectivity, emphasizing the importance of protecting and enhancing wildlife corridors, particularly in response to the challenges posed by climate change and habitat fragmentation. Local jurisdictions are required to:

- Identify connectivity areas, permeability, and natural landscape areas.
- Inventory and analyze existing or planned wildlife passage features, aligning efforts with state-level connectivity assessments and plans.
- Evaluate how development may create barriers to wildlife movement.
- Develop strategies to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to wildlife connectivity from land-use decisions.
- Explore opportunities to remediate existing barriers and restore degraded habitats, integrating best available science and datasets from regional habitat connectivity assessments, wildlife movement studies, and other relevant resources.

## 3 Foster City's Parks System

Foster City originated as a master-planned community on the edge of the San Francisco Bay. As shown in Figure 1, a lagoon winds through the city and connects all the city's neighborhoods. Foster City has 155.8 acres of parks and open space. At the heart of the city is Leo J Ryan Park, which borders the lagoon and lies along Hillsdale Boulevard, one of the city's main arteries. The park also contains two of Foster City's primary recreation facilities – the currently-under construction Community Center and the Vibe Teen Center. Sea Cloud Park is located to the south closer to the Bay's edge and is Foster City's largest park and the location of many of its soccer, baseball and softball fields. Smaller parks are distributed throughout the neighborhoods, placing all residents within a half mile walk of a park. Lining the edge of the city is the Levee Pedway, an integral part of the San Francisco Bay Trail. The Levee Pedway allows residents to walk, bike, and jog along the city's edge and take in scenic views of the bay.

### 3.1 Park Classification

Foster City's park system consists of five park types, as outlined in Table 1. **Community parks** offer a wide range of active and passive recreational opportunities that serve a substantial part of the city; the four parks in this category account for the largest portion of the city's park land. **Neighborhood parks** provide a smaller range of amenities tailored to the daily recreational needs of one or more neighborhoods; these parks make up about one-third of the city's parks acreage. **Mini parks**, which occupy the least acreage, offer basic recreational amenities for residents within a specific neighborhood. **Special-use parks** are designed for specific recreational purposes or population groups; in Foster City: Boat/Dog, Baywinds and Bridgeview parks fall into this category. Trails and pathways also comprise a significant portion of Foster City's Park system, with the Levee Pedway making up a substantial share of this acreage.

Foster City also has several privately owned parks and recreation facilities. Though not detailed in this assessment, these facilities also help meet residents' recreational needs. Private parks that have been officially designated as publicly accessible, such as Town Center and Triton Parks, have been included (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

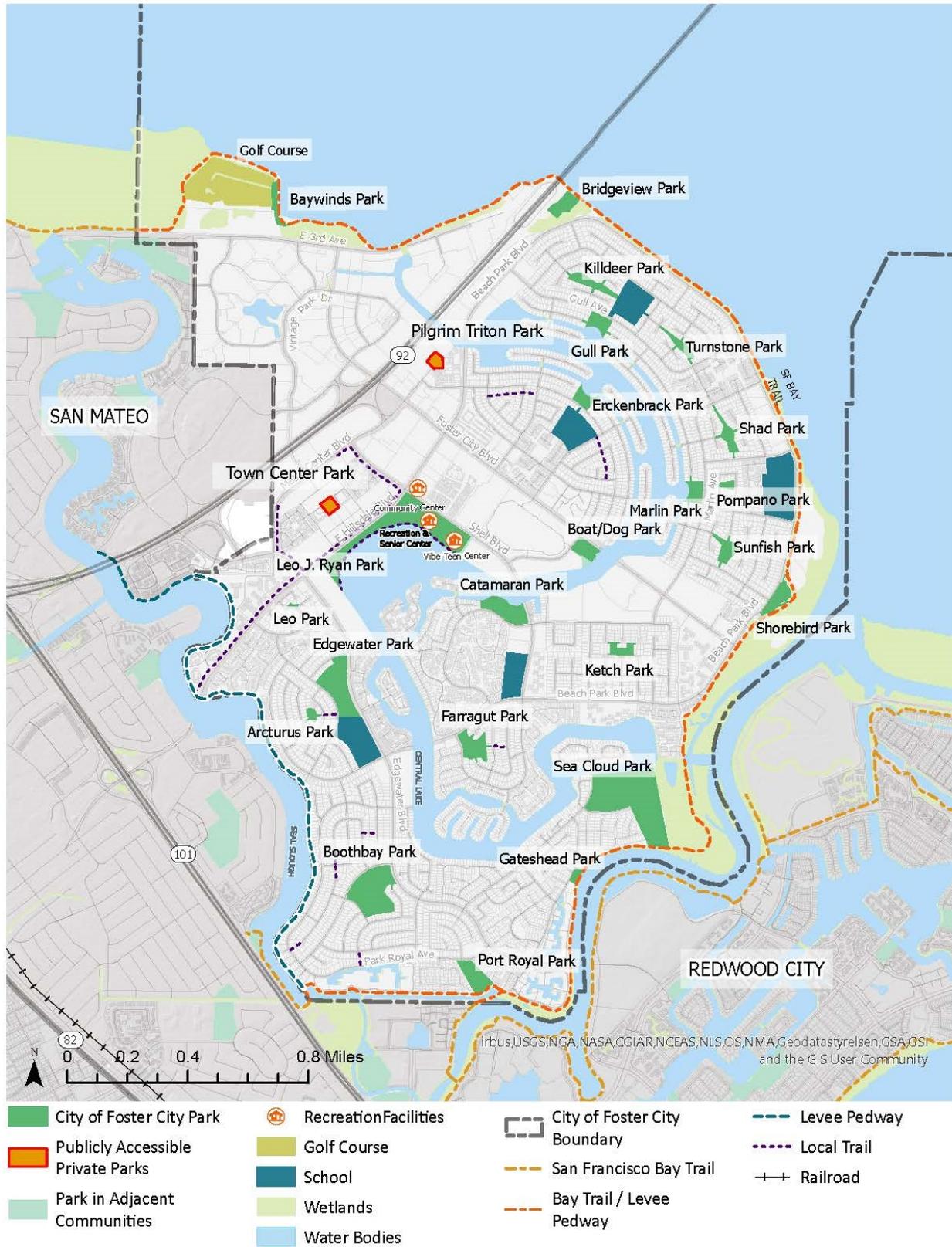
**Table 1 Foster City Parks by Type**

Park Type	Number	Acres	Amenities
<b>Community Parks</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>64.7</b>	
Boothbay		11.2	Playground, Ballfield, Basketball Court, Soccer/Multipurpose Field, Tennis Courts, Volleyball Court, Restroom, Picnic Shelter, BBQ
Edgewater		8.5	Playground, Ballfield, Basketball Court, Soccer/Multipurpose Field, Tennis Courts, Restroom, Picnic Shelter
Leo J Ryan		20.7	Basketball Court, Pickleball Courts, Bocce Ball Courts, Tennis Courts, Beach, Boat Launch, Parking Lot
Sea Cloud		24	Playground, Ballfields, Soccer/Multipurpose Fields, Restroom, Picnic Shelter

Park Type	Number	Acres	Amenities
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>34.9</b>	
Catamaran		5.9	Playground, Basketball Court, Soccer/Multipurpose Field, Tennis Court, Volleyball Courts, Restroom
Erckenbrack		3.5	Playground, Restroom, Beach
Farragut		3.9	Playground, Restroom
Gull		3.1	Playground, Restroom
Kildeer		2.4	Playground
Marlin		3.1	Playground, Restroom
Port Royal		4.0	Playground, Basketball Court, Soccer/Multipurpose Field, Restroom, Parking Lot
Pilgrim Triton*		1.2	Playground, Picnic Area
Shad		2.1	Playground, Basketball Court, Restroom
Shorebird		3.5	Restroom
Sunfish		2.4	Playground, Basketball Court,
<b>Mini Parks</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5.7</b>	
Arcturus		0.75	Playground
Gateshead		0.1	None
Ketch		1.6	Playground, Basketball Court
Leo		0.015	None
Pompano		0.5	None
Turnstone		1.5	Playground, Basketball Court,
Town Center Park*		1.1	None
<b>Special Use Parks</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7.7</b>	
Bridgeview		3.2	Restroom, Parking Lot
Baywinds		1.3	Restroom, Shower, BBQ
Boat/Dog		3.2	Restroom, Boat Launch, Dog Park, Parking Lot
<b>Subtotal, Parks</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>112.9</b>	
<b>Trails and Pathways</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>45.2</b>	
Levee Pedway		43.3	
Arcturus		0.09	
Constitution (North)		0.17	
Constitution (South)		0.7	
Pilgrim (East)		0.19	Sandbox
Pilgrim (West)		0.73	
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>158.1</b>	

\*Pilgrim Triton and Town Center Park are private parks, but are publicly accessible

**Figure 1 Parks and Open Space in Foster City**



## 3.2 Park Amenities

Foster City’s parks provide numerous recreation amenities. The amenities with the highest quantity are playgrounds, tennis courts, soccer/multipurpose fields, and ballfields, showing how Foster City provides ample opportunity for sports and fitness within its parks. There are relatively fewer picnic shelters and barbeque spots, and one dog run. Because of the lagoon, Foster City has four beaches and two boat launches as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2 Foster City Park Amenities**

Amenity	Number
<b>Sports Fields and Courts</b>	
Ballfields	10
Soccer/Multipurpose Fields	12
Basketball Courts	8
Pickleball Courts	6
Bocce Ball Courts	4
Volleyball Courts	2
Tennis Courts	13
<b>Playgrounds and Passive Use Amenities</b>	
Playgrounds	16
Picnic Shelters	4
Barbecues	2
Beaches	3
<b>Special Features</b>	
Boat Launch	2
Dog Run	1
Community Garden	1

## 3.3 Indoor Recreation Facilities

Foster City’s indoor recreation facilities serve as community gathering spaces and provide a wide range of activities that serve all demographic groups, including kids and seniors. The facilities also provide spaces that can be rented by residents for birthday parties, meetings, and other special events.

### 3.3.1 William E. Walker Recreation Center and Future Facility

Located within Leo J. Ryan Park, the William E. Walker Recreation Center was demolished in late 2024 to make way for a new facility. The future community center will expand event space and create more opportunities for Foster City residents. The new facility will include dedicated rooms for seniors, a space for preschool, art studios, and fitness rooms. The new facility will also incorporate sustainable design strategies related to water efficiency, energy conservation,

and waste management, achieving a LEED Silver certification.<sup>2</sup> The project is expected to be complete by the summer of 2026. Foster City Community Center

Located across Shell Boulevard from Leo J. Ryan Park is the Foster City Community Center. There are four spaces residents can rent for parties, large meetings, training classes, and more. These spaces range in size. Additionally, there is an outdoor patio on the second floor of the building, and an outdoor garden facing Shell Boulevard.

### 3.3.2 The Vibe Teen Center

Like the future recreation center, the Vibe Teen Center is also located within Leo J Ryan Park and is meant to primarily serve youth in Foster City. The facility offers a multipurpose room, kitchen, patio, and game room. In addition to serving as a meeting place for residents, the city organized drop-in and after-school programs at the Vibe Teen Center.

## 3.4 Paths and Trails

### 3.4.1 Levee Pedway

The Levee Pedway is one of the most significant features of Foster City's park system, forming a key segment of the San Francisco Bay Trail. As shown in Figure 1, this 8-mile paved path follows the shoreline along the city's outer edge, accommodating pedestrians, cyclists, rollerbladers, scooters, and strollers. Offering scenic views of the San Francisco Bay, the pedway runs past Baywinds Park, Bridgeview Park, Shorebird Park, Gateshead Park, Sea Cloud Park, and Port Royal Park. The route provides a continuous path without requiring on-street travel. While much of the pedway overlaps with the Bay Trail, a segment of the trail runs alongside Seal Slough and terminates in San Mateo City limits, allowing users to navigate much of the city. Further development of the trail within San Mateo would establish a complete trail loop around the City.

### 3.4.2 Neighborhood Trails

Given Foster City's compact size, its network of neighborhood trails plays a crucial role in serving residents' open space and recreational needs. According to the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, a multi-use trail system for walking, biking, and jogging is the top investment priority for residents<sup>3</sup>. Ranked as the most important facility in the survey, 81% of respondents expressed a need for these trails, making them the highest-priority amenity. Beyond recreation, these neighborhood trails provide safe connections for children traveling to school, easy access between parks, and a sustainable, pedestrian-friendly way to navigate the city.

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<sup>2</sup> Recreation Center Rebuild Project, City Council Presentation, September 2023. URL: <https://www.fostercity.org/parksrec/project/recreation-center-rebuild-project-cip-301-678>

<sup>3</sup> Parks Master Plan Community Survey



**Photo #1:** The Levee Pedway, as seen from Gateshead Park. Source: WRT

### 3.5 Foster City Lagoon

The lagoon is a defining feature of Foster City. The lagoon spans five miles and offers residents water-based recreational opportunities such as kayaking and paddling. Residents appreciate how the lagoon complements Foster City's parks, particularly Leo J. Ryan Park. As reported in Section 8.1 Community Priorities, waterfront parks and programming emerged as a popular activation opportunity, with strong resident support for opportunities such as waterfront dining, park-lagoon interactions, and floating art installations. Concerns about water quality have made some residents hesitant about recreational activities on the lagoon. Many expressed a strong interest in improving water quality for swimming and some were open to reconfiguring the lagoon edge. Residents emphasized the importance of creating safe and engaging ways to interact with the lagoon.

### 3.6 Park Walksheds

Walkable access to parks and open spaces is essential for promoting physical activity, fostering community interaction, and supporting overall well-being. Having a park within a 10-minute walk is generally considered the national gold standard by well-known organizations such as the Trust for Public Land, which uses walkable access as a key metric to rank city's by park access.<sup>4</sup> As shown in Figure 2, all of Foster City's residential neighborhoods are within a 10-minute walk of a park – a feat that many communities struggle to achieve.

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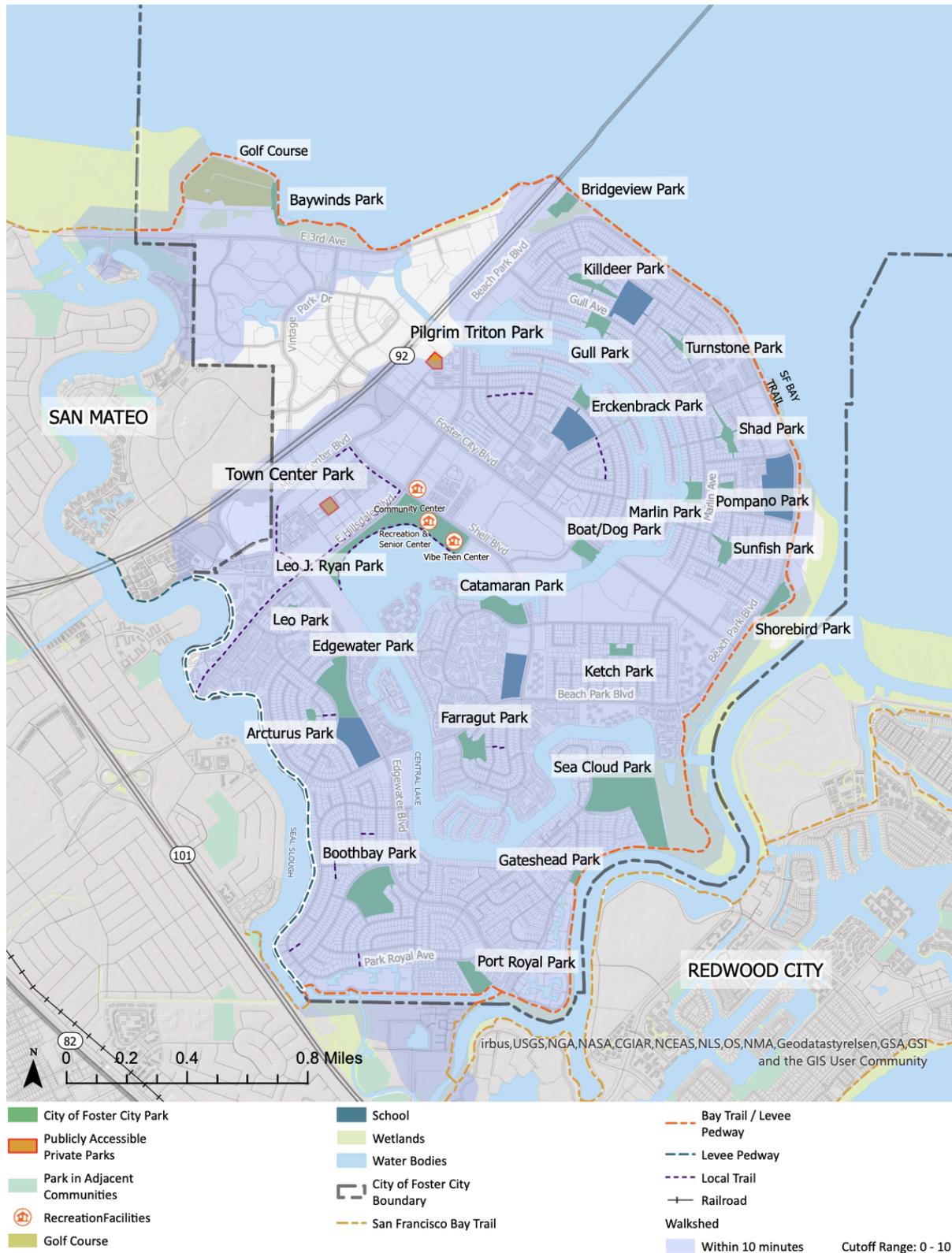
<sup>4</sup> Trust for Public Land Park Equity Scoring: Understanding A City's Parkscore: Trust for Public Land

### 3.7 Park Access and Equity

All neighborhoods in Foster City have access to parks. However, there are notable demographic patterns in Foster City that should be taken into account when considering future park development. As shown in Figure 3, there is a concentration of people 65 and over in central Foster City neighborhoods, generally along the Foster City Boulevard corridor. This suggests an opportunity to focus senior-serving recreational resources in this area. The central location of the existing and future Community Centers supports this. Leo J. Ryan, Catamaran, Ketch, Port Royal and Edgewater parks are also in close proximity to where many seniors live, including Metro Center Senior Apartments and Alma Point Senior Apartments. Youth appear to be more evenly distributed in Foster City, though overall the central neighborhoods have a higher density of people (of all ages).

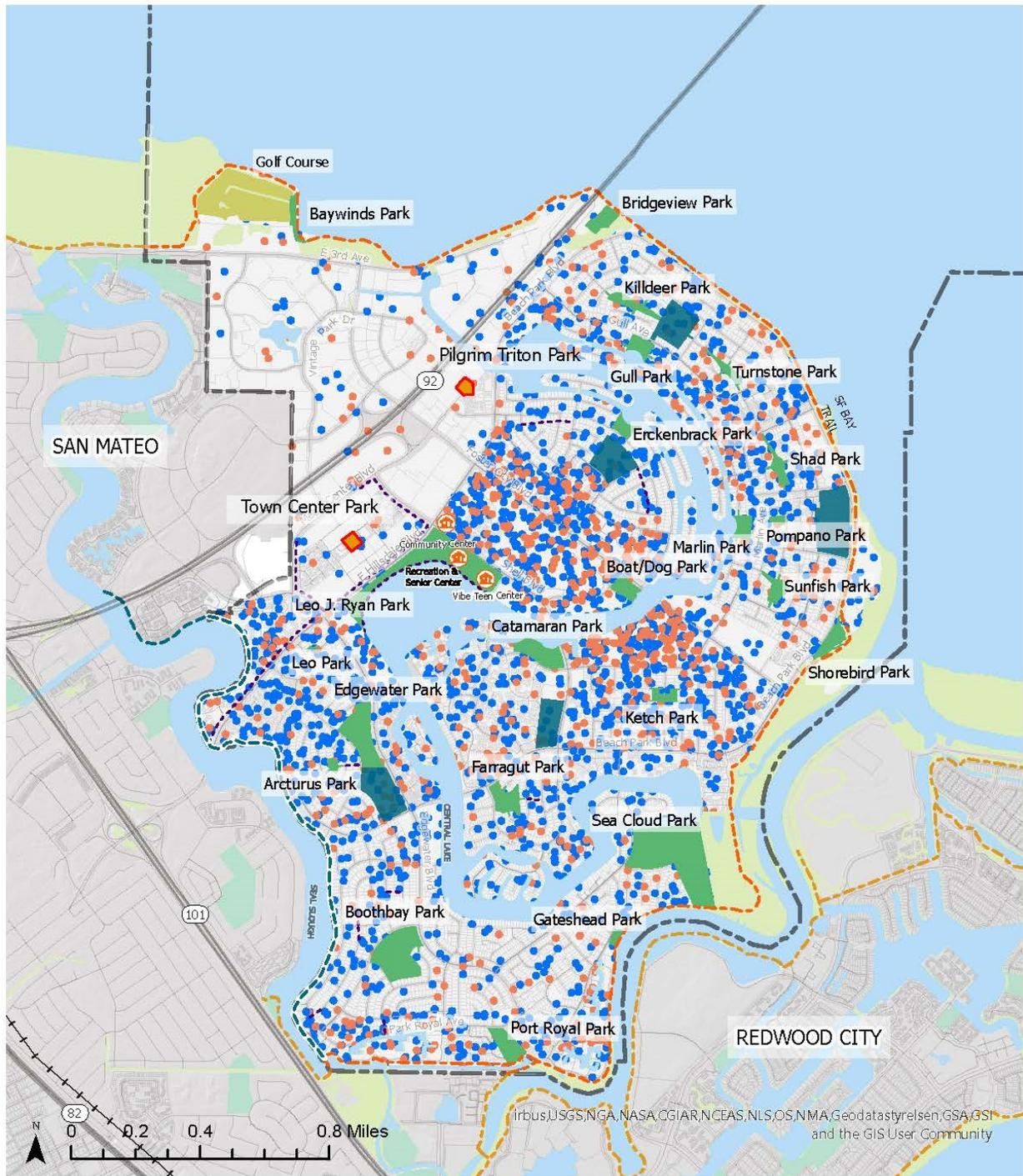
As shown in Figure 4, parks are generally accessible to residents across different racial and income groups. While most residents in Foster City are Asian and/or White, there are no areas with culturally specific communities. As shown in Figure 5, household income does not appear to influence spatial access to parks in Foster City, with most residents enjoying sufficient park access regardless of income.

Figure 2 10-Minute Walkshed in Foster City



Source: WRT

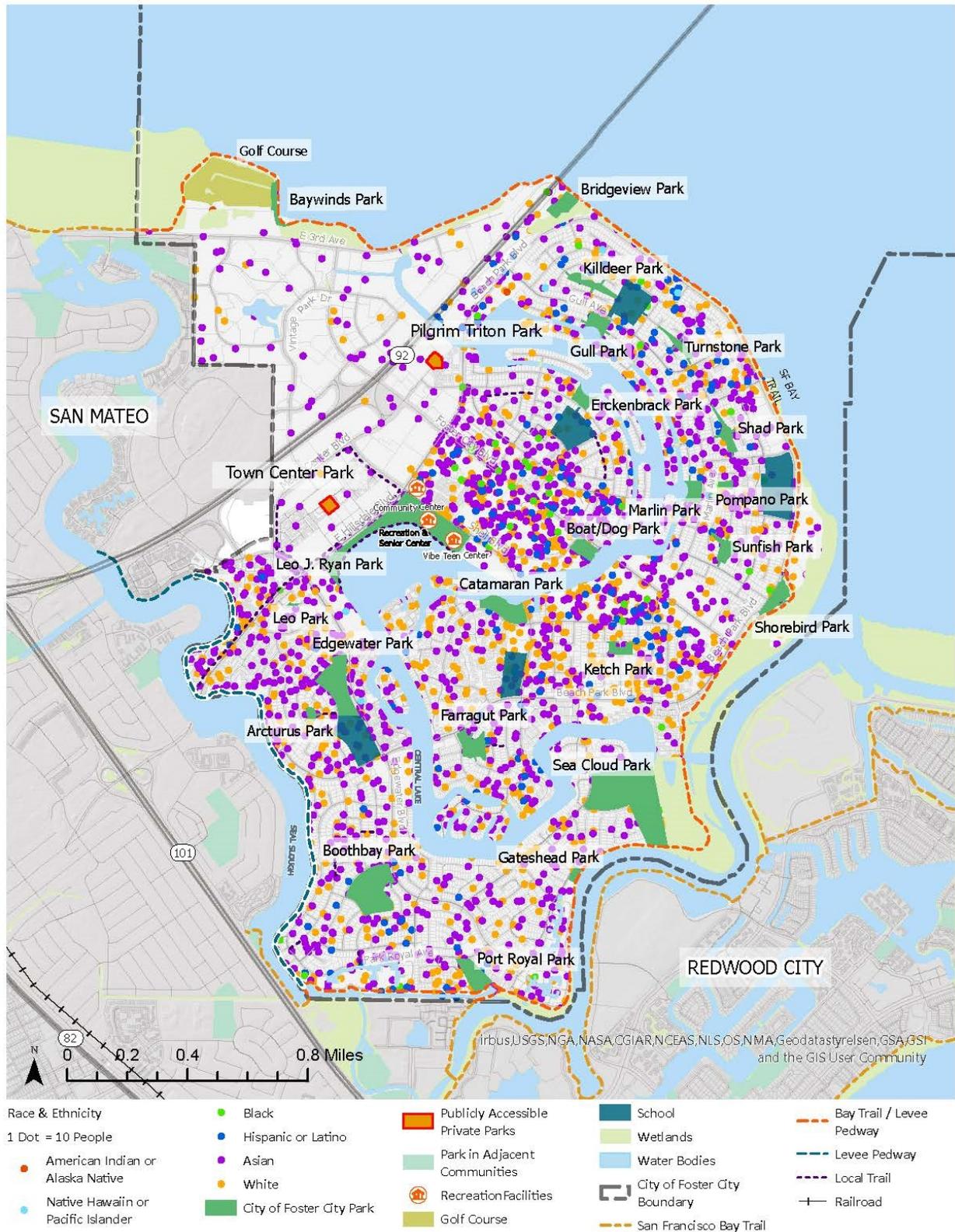
**Figure 3 Foster City Youth and Senior Population**



- |                            |                              |                              |              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Age Range                  | Publicly Accessible          | Wetlands                     | Levee Pedway |
| 1 Dot = 3 People           | Private Parks                | Water Bodies                 | Local Trail  |
| ● Seniors (65 and older)   | Park in Adjacent Communities | City of Foster City Boundary | Railroad     |
| ● Youth (Under 18)         | Recreation Facilities        | San Francisco Bay Trail      |              |
| ■ City of Foster City Park | Golf Course                  | Bay Trail / Levee Pedway     |              |
|                            | School                       |                              |              |

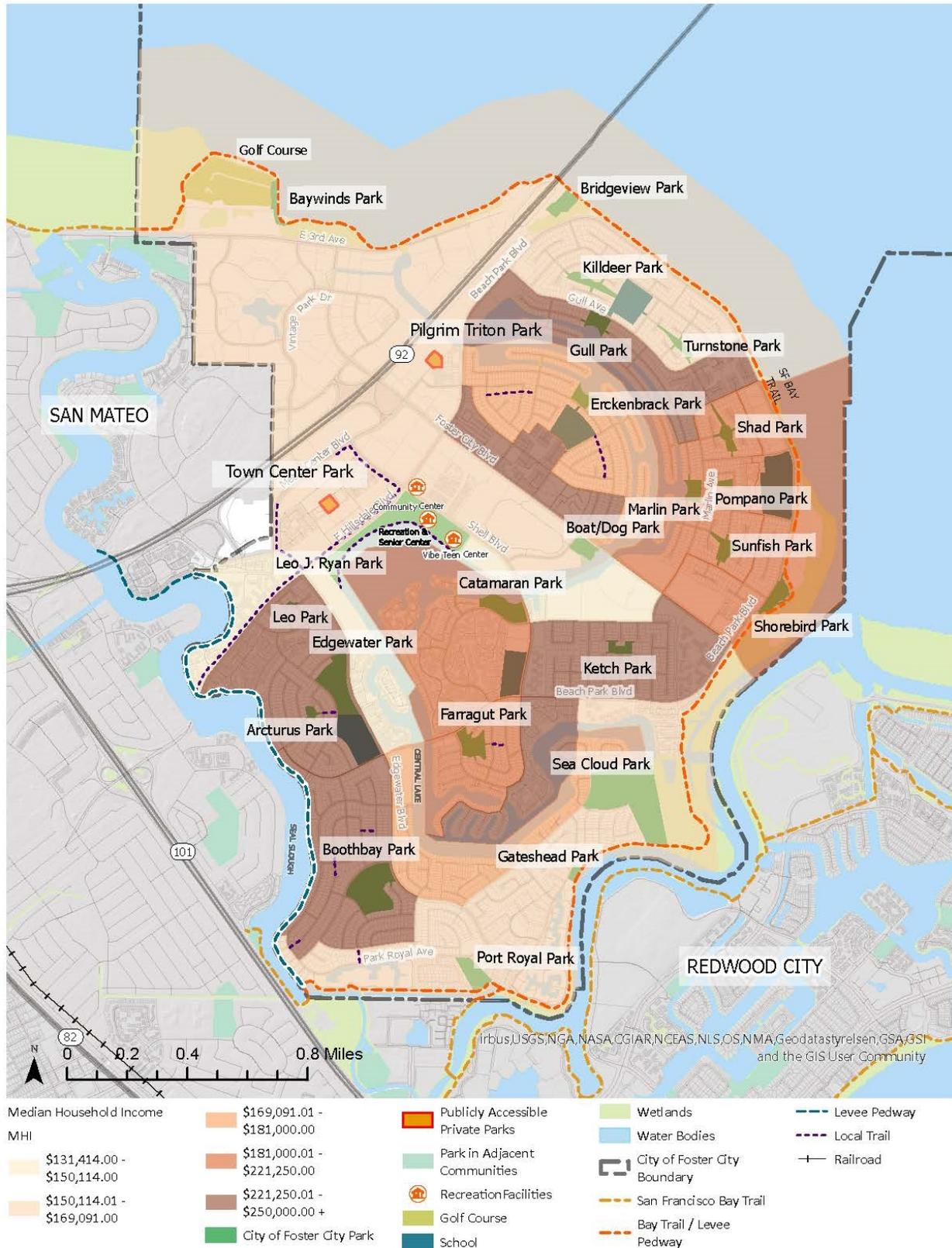
Source: American Community Survey, 2023 5-Year Estimates

**Figure 4 Race & Ethnicity in Foster City**



Source: American Community Survey, 2023 5-Year Estimates

**Figure 5 Median Household Income in Foster City**



Source: American Community Survey, 2023 5-Year Estimates

## 3.8 Level of Service

### 3.8.1 Acreage Level of Service

Park level of service (LOS) measures the availability and quality of parks and recreational facilities relative to a community’s population, ensuring equitable access and adequate resources. As shown in Table 3, Foster City’s approximately 158 acres of parks, open space, and trails provide a level of 4.5 acres per 1,000 residents. When considering developed parkland only, Foster City’s current inventory equates to 3.2 acres per 1,000 residents. As shown in Table 4, Foster City offers a relatively high level of service in terms of developed land per resident.

The Foster City General Plan 2009 establishes a goal of 5 acres per 1,000 residents, including all types of parks and open spaces. Foster City anticipates adding 1,896 homes as part of their RHNA target, which will result in its population growing from 35,004 today to 39,070 by 2040<sup>5</sup>. To meet the General Plan standard, Foster City would need an additional 40 acres of park and open space by 2040. The Parks and Open Space and Conservation Element and Parks Master Plan process gives the City an opportunity to revisit its level of service standard. Given the high level of satisfaction in Foster City’s parks and recreation and the limited availability of land, it may be appropriate to establish a standard for parks at the current level of service (3.2 acres per 1,000) and an overall parks and open space standard of 5 acres of 1,000.

**Table 3 Acreage of Level of Service**

Parks	2024 Inventory	Service Levels		2024 Needs	2040 Needs
	Area (acres)	Current Service Level (acres/1,000 residents)	Service Level Standard (acres/1,000 residents)	Additional Acreage Needed in 2024	Additional Acreage Needed in 2040
Parkland*		3.2	NA	NA	NA
Parkland & Open Space (Pedway, Walkways, Public OS)	158.1	4.5	5.00	19	40

\*Includes city-owned and publicly accessible private parkland

**Table 4 Neighboring City Level of Service**

City	Population	Total Developed Acres per 1,000 Residents
<b>City of Foster City</b>	<b>35,004</b>	<b>3.16</b>
City of Belmont	28,307	3.99
City of Burlingame	32,121	2.91
City of Menlo Park	35,258	1.54
City of San Bruno	43,440	1.59
City of San Mateo	107,227	1.94

<sup>5</sup> Foster City Housing Element 2022. URL: [https://www.fostercity.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community\\_development/page/3431/foster\\_city\\_he\\_rev\\_3.20.2024.pdf](https://www.fostercity.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/3431/foster_city_he_rev_3.20.2024.pdf)

### 3.9 Park Amenity Level of Service

Like park acreage level of service, standards can also be applied to individual park amenities. Table 5 details the Foster City population per typical park amenity. These values can then be compared to the averages for comparably sized communities. These averages along with clear understanding of community priorities set the groundwork establishing amenity standards that are responsive to community needs.

As shown in Table 4, Foster City generally exceeds national service levels for park amenities, particularly for tennis, pickleball, playgrounds, soccer fields, basketball courts, and diamond fields. This abundance has led to most of these amenities having low Priority Investment Ratings (PIRs)<sup>2</sup> in the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, suggesting demand for additional of these amenities is low. In contrast, volleyball courts and the dog park fall below national service standards but are viewed as medium PIRs, suggesting a need for future investment.

The Parks Master Plan provides an opportunity to set specific targets for each of these amenities (and others), to help shape future investment in parks.

**Table 5 Park Amenity Level of Service**

Recreation Component	Foster City Inventory	Current Level of Service		Average Level of Service <sup>1</sup>			Priority Investment Rating	
<b>Outdoor Recreation Amenities</b>								
Diamond Field	10	1	Field Per	3,500	1	Field Per	3,007	Low
Soccer/ Multipurpose Field	12	1	Field Per	2,917	1	Field Per	3,333	Low
Basketball Court	8	1	Court Per	4,376	1	Field Per	7,501	Low
Tennis Court	13	1	Court Per	2,693	1	Court Per	5,461	Medium
Pickleball Courts	6	1	Court Per	5,834	1	Court Per	7,737	Medium
Bocce Ball Court	4	1	Court Per	8,751	1	Court Per	N/A	Low
Volleyball Court	4	1	Court Per	17,502	1	Court Per	14,280	Medium
Dog Park	1	1	Site Per	35,004	1	Site Per	27,508	Medium
Playgrounds	16	1	Site Per	2,188	1	Site Per	3,105	Low

<sup>1</sup> For agencies serving communities of between 20,000 and 49,999 residents. Source: National Recreation and Park Association, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Parks Master Plan Community Survey, 2024. Priority Investment Rating is an index score based on residents' level of unmet need and level of importance for each amenity.

### 3.10 Policy Considerations

The following policy considerations highlight strategic opportunities to enhance the availability, distribution, and quality of Foster City's parks:

#### 1. Park Land and Amenity Standards

- Through the Parks and Open Space Element update, the City can revisit and recalibrate park acreage standards to reflect realistic growth and community preferences.

- Overall, Foster City provides approximately 3.2 acres of park land per 1,000 residents—or 4.5 acres, if paths and trails and open spaces (in particular, the Levee Pedway) are accounted for. This falls slightly short of the current General Plan standard of 5.0 acres per 1,000 residents. Policies can include methods to feasibly add additional acres of parks and open spaces to meet the decided-upon General Plan standard.
  - Policies that establish an amenity level of service would help align prioritization of amenities with indicated community desires.
2. Facility and Amenity Enhancements
- Foster City could consider targeted expansions of high-demand facilities, including additional dog parks and sports courts.
3. Trail and Connectivity Improvements
- The City may consider promoting policies that support the development and enhancement of interconnected pedestrian and bicycle trails linking parks, neighborhoods, and the Levee Pedway.
  - Policies should highlight and enhance access to and experiences on the Lagoon.

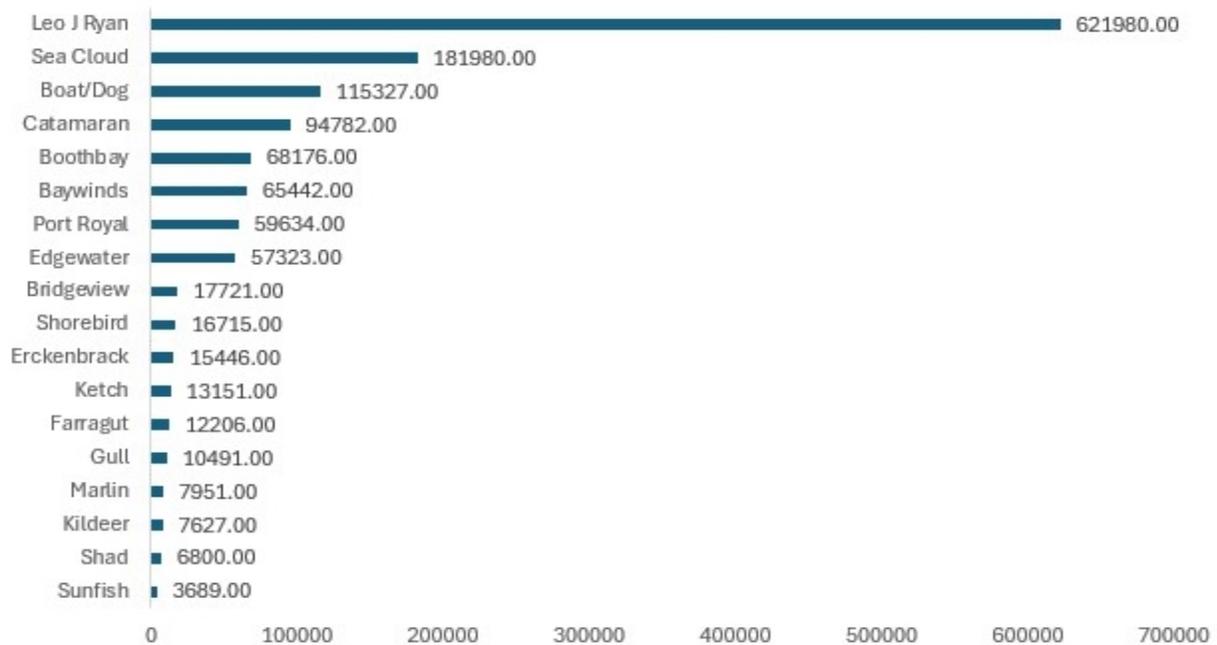
## 4 Park Usage

Park usage metrics provide insights into visitation patterns, including visitor numbers, visit frequency, and average dwell time. This data was collected in 2024 using Placer.ai, an analytics platform that leverages anonymous mobile location data to analyze how people move through and interact with different spaces.<sup>6</sup> By examining how Foster City’s parks are used, insights emerge that can inform future planning and improvements. Findings are summarized below with further detail available in the *Foster City Parks Usage Analysis*.

### 4.1 Well-Used and Under-Used Parks

High visitation, frequent use, and extended dwell times may be seen as indicators of parks that people prefer, making them valuable models for success. In Foster City, community parks on average saw many more annual visits than other types of parks; per square foot, special use parks saw the highest visitation. Leo J. Ryan Park had the highest number of annual visits at 621,923, which is nearly 500,000 more visits than the second highest park visitation count. This is likely attributed to its many successful community events throughout the year at Leo J. Ryan Park. Sea Cloud Park, which had 181,980 visits, hosts Foster City’s active sports users. In contrast, less-used parks—especially when compared to parks of similar size and context—may merit more attention. Among community parks, Boothbay and Edgewater parks saw relatively low visitor levels per square foot at 68,176 visits and 57,323 visits respectively. Among neighborhood parks, Catamaran and Port Royal parks received a high number of visits per square foot, owing in part to the sports fields there, while Farragut, Gull, Killdeer, Marlin, Shad, and Sunfish saw quite low levels of use.

**Figure 6 Annual Number of Visitors by Park (Oct 2023 – 2024)**



Source: Placer.ai

<sup>6</sup> Location Intelligence & Foot Traffic Data Software – Placer.ai

### 4.1.1 Catering to Residents, Capitalizing on Visitors

Foster City parks primarily cater to residents. However, parks like Baywinds Park and Leo J. Ryan Park, which attract significant non-resident visitation, provide opportunities for cost recovery through user fees, equipment rentals, or other strategies. Other parks with desirable recreation amenities, like Sea Cloud, may have potential to be leveraged for more cost recovery.

## 4.2 Extending Use

Lighting and shade play a crucial role in shaping park usage patterns, both seasonally and throughout the day. Parks with higher lighting scores in the site assessment (see next section) experience increased visitor activity during evening hours, with a noticeable peak around 5-8 PM. Enhanced lighting can extend usability into evening hours, while adding shade trees and structures could improve comfort and attract more users during peak sunlight. These upgrades could also promote greater year-round accessibility and enjoyment of park spaces.

### 4.2.1 Understanding Park Users

Demographic analysis highlights the importance of tailoring Foster City's parks to the diversity of its residents. Young adults and Hispanic/Latino and low to moderate-income households show strong park engagement, while seniors, middle-aged adults, and Asian residents—despite being the city's largest demographic group— may be underrepresented. It should be noted that visitor demographic data is inferred based on a visitor's census block group, providing insights into the demographic composition of neighborhoods rather than the specific traits of individual users. These trends underscore the need to maintain affordable, accessible amenities while expanding culturally relevant programming, improving language accessibility, and enhancing facilities to attract underrepresented groups.

## 4.3 Policy Considerations

The following policy considerations highlight strategic opportunities to optimize park utilization, enhance comfort, and ensure equitable access and representation:

### 1. Comfort and Extended Use

- Foster City's parks vary widely in use, from the highly used Leo J. Ryan, Sea Cloud, Catamaran and Port Royal parks to the relatively less-used Edgewater, Farragut, Killdeer, Shad, and Sunfish parks. Policies can propose amenities or enhancements to maximize the use of existing park spaces and encourage use in under-utilized parks.
- To increase park usage in the evening, the City could prioritize installation of lighting to extend park usability into evening hours.
- To boost park usage during the day, the City could incorporate shade structures or plant trees with large canopies strategically to enhance daytime comfort.

### 2. Visitor Management and Revenue Opportunities

- Management strategies could be developed for parks attracting visitors from outside Foster City, including improved user experiences and the potential introduction of user fees or revenue-generating events.

### 3. Equity and Cultural Representation

- Policies could be developed to gain insights from underrepresented groups on what amenities and programming would reflect and support the cultural diversity of Foster City residents.

## 5 Site Assessment

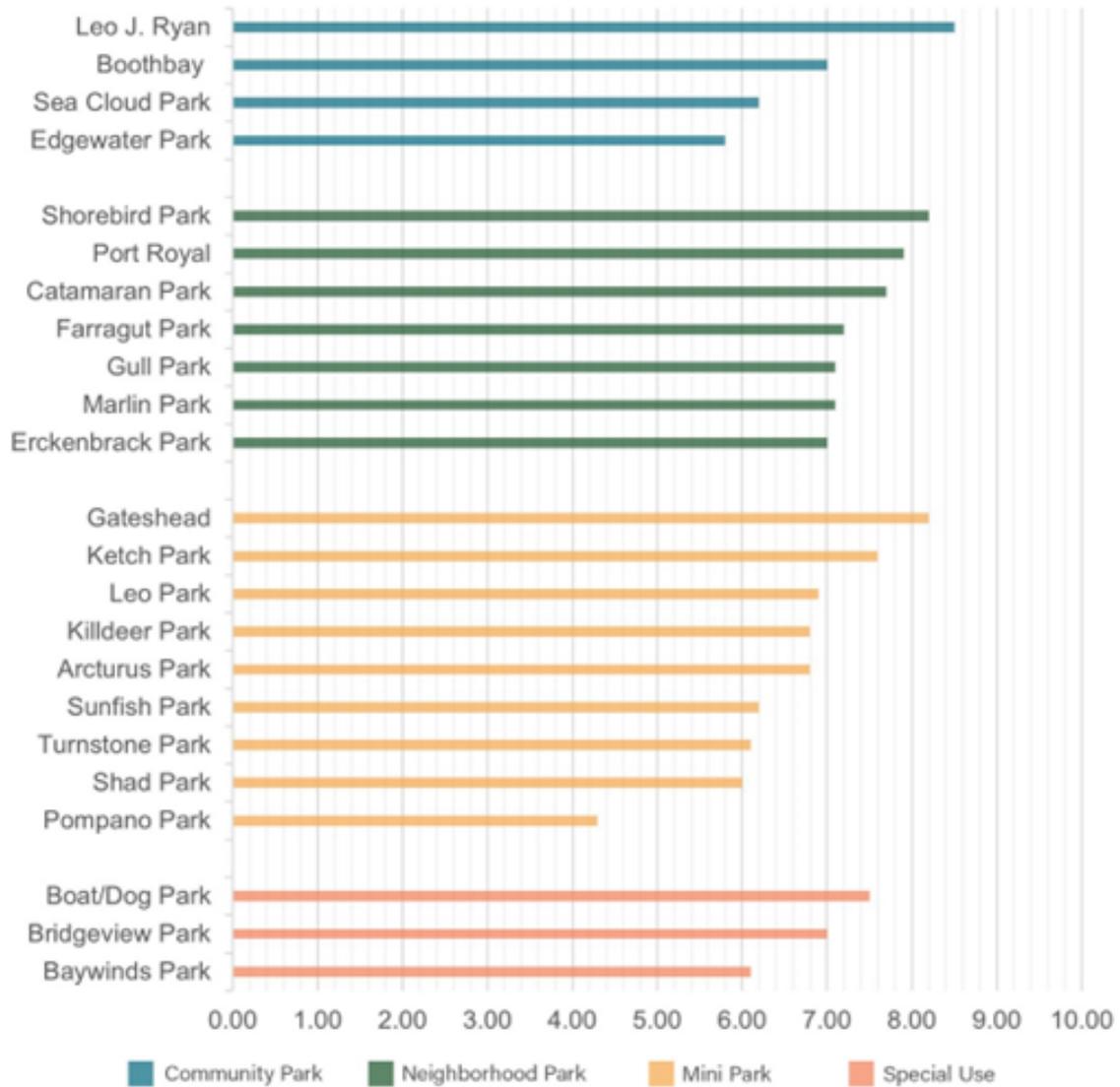
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An on-the-ground assessment of each park site was conducted to better understand how Foster City's parks are serving residents in their current condition. WRT evaluated Foster City's parks using an array of criteria, organized into four categories: access and connectivity; comfort and sense of safety; functionality; and condition.

### 5.1 Access & Connectivity

Access & Connectivity refers to the opportunity to access amenities for users of all abilities. It includes factors such as signage, internal/external path connectivity, safe pedestrian crossings, parking, and more. The highest scoring parks included Leo J. Ryan, Shorebird, and Gateshead, which generally have great internal and external path connectivity. Parks such as Pompano, Baywinds, Turnstone, Shad, and Edgewater scored lower in this category particularly due to their lack of internal pathways, signage and clear edge permeability. Some parks are more visible, while others are located away from roadways and thoroughfares, making them hard to find and access. Not all parks have the same signage. Bicycle and pedestrian connectivity rated highly, but there is a general lack of bike amenities, such as bike racks. There is sufficient parking at most parks, but additional parking could be added in parks where large events are hosted.

**Figure 7 Park Accessibility and Connectivity Scores**

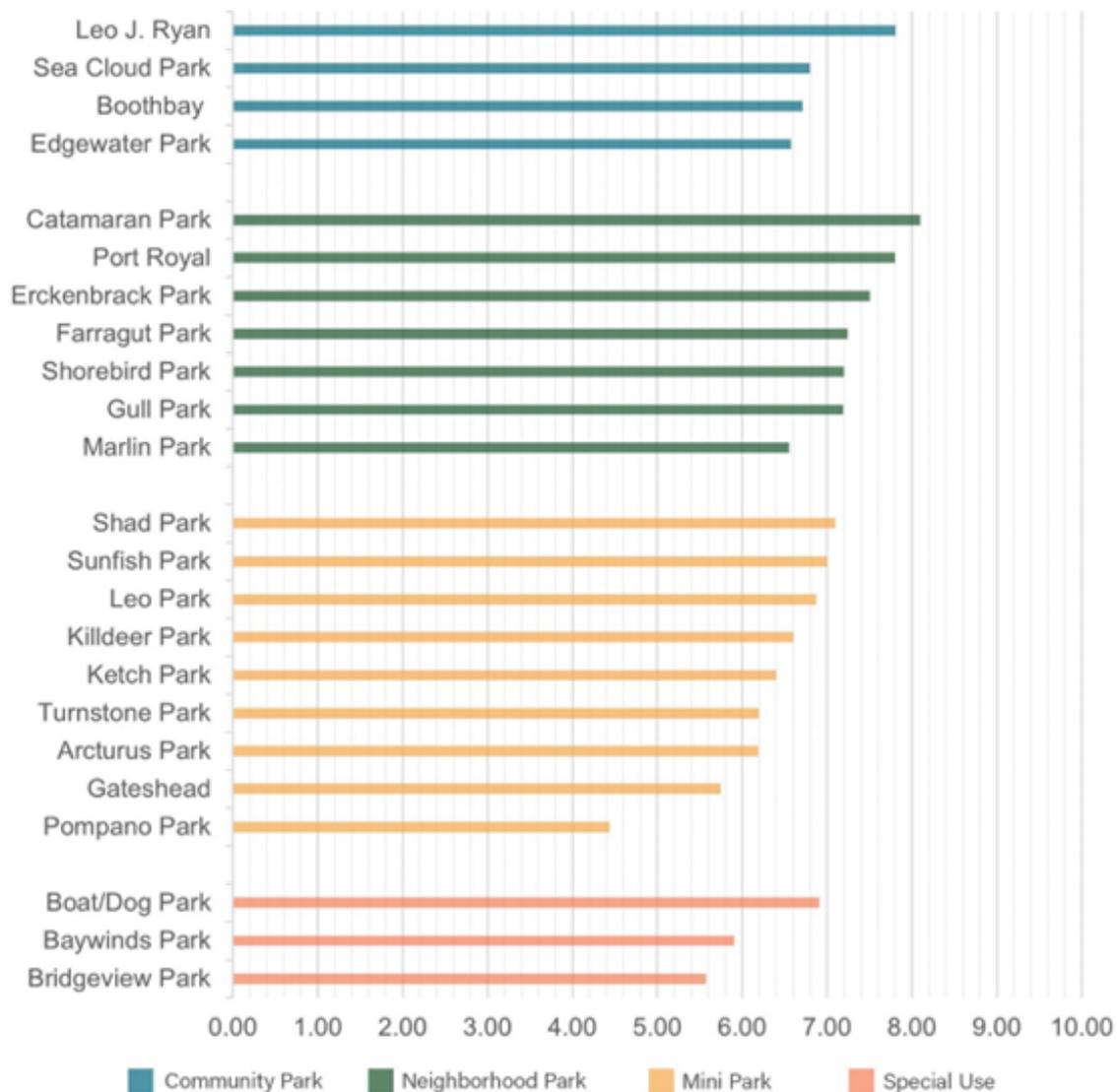


Source: WRT

## 5.2 Comfort & Sense of Safety

Comfort and sense of safety refer to the presence or absence of comfort amenities such as seating, shade, drinking fountains, and restrooms. This category also includes criteria that affect the feeling of safety within a park, such as unobstructed sightlines, signs of vandalism, and lighting. The City’s community and neighborhood parks scored better in this category compared to the mini and special use parks, which tended to have fewer amenities. While most parks are well shaded, there is more shade needed around seating and active amenity areas. Although larger parks had more amenities, many of these were clustered together, leaving areas of the park lacking in shade or places to sit. There is an opportunity to install plantings and offset sidewalks next to busy roads to mitigate noise where it’s necessary at parks next to roads. Lighting is inconsistent, with some parks having pathway and sports field/court lighting, and others not.

**Figure 8 Park Comfort & Safety Scores**

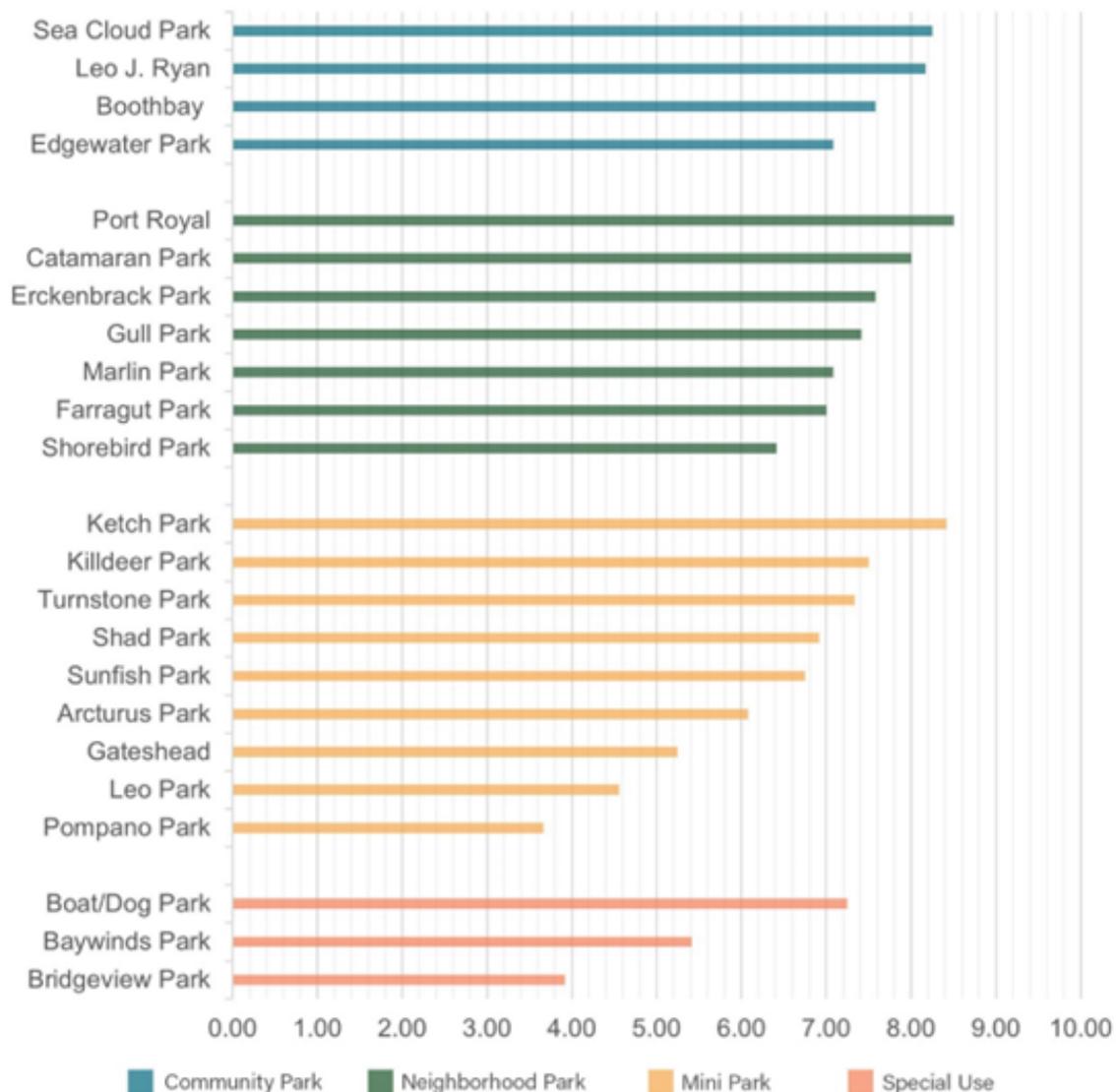


Source: WRT

## 5.3 Functionality

Functionality refers to how well the park “works” in providing recreation, a respite, and a setting for community life. It includes criteria such as the diversity and arrangement of amenities, appropriateness of vegetation, and compatibility with neighboring land uses. High scoring parks tend to have a variety of amenities (such as Port Royal, Sea Cloud, Leo J. Ryan, Catamaran, and Ketch). Parks with limited amenities scored lower, including Pompano, Leo, and Bridgeview Park. There are a variety of landscapes throughout the park system. There are water-intensive trees throughout the park system, and turf fields are common. There are few parks with distinct, identity-creating planting areas. Meanwhile, the low-water, low-maintenance planting at Shorebird Park may be a model for other sites. Many parks are in quiet residential areas, and fencing and planting provides additional privacy for nearby homes.

**Figure 9 Functionality Scores**

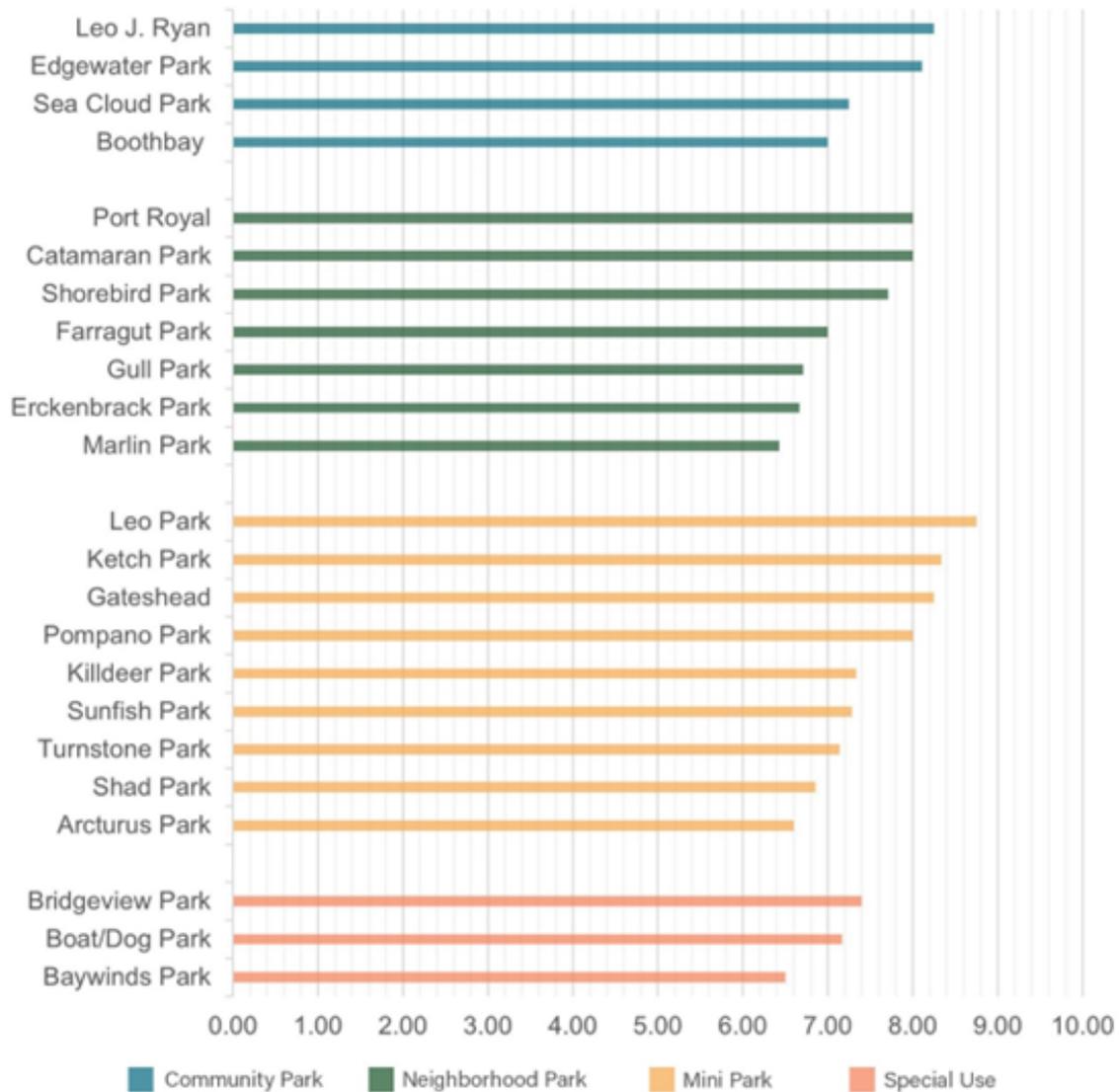


Source: WRT

## 5.4 Condition

Condition refers to the physical condition of park assets and amenities. The City’s mini parks scored the highest in this category. Geese present a significant impact on parks in Foster City; their droppings and feathers diminish the overall cleanliness, especially at sites like Erckenbrack, Gull, and Marlin Park, where there are beaches on the lagoon. Otherwise, sports fields, site furnishings, and playgrounds are generally in good condition. Some furnishings are damaged at specific parks, like Baywinds, Ketch and Shad, and Erckenbrack.

**Figure 10 Park Condition Scores**



Source: WRT



**Photo #5:** Many park amenities are in good condition, especially at Mini parks, as seen here at Ketch Park. Source: WRT

## 5.5 Overall

Foster City has a high-quality park system overall, with targeted enhancements needed to elevate park access, experience, functionality and condition. In terms of access, additional signage, improved visibility, and path connectivity are needed at specific parks. Lighting, insufficient shade, restrooms, and seating make comfort and safety challenging in some of Foster City's smaller parks. Parks like Leo J. Ryan offer a diverse range of amenities and well-placed features, but some smaller parks lack sufficient amenities. Enhancing Park amenities and adopting more low-water-use planting areas would improve the overall functionality of the park system. The condition of Foster City parks is generally high, but the presence of geese and some variability in the condition of playgrounds and sports fields need to be addressed.

## 5.6 Policy Considerations

The following policy considerations highlight strategic opportunities to address park design, infrastructure, and ecological sustainability:

### 1. Connectivity and Accessibility

- Implementing unified signage and wayfinding systems in larger parks could increase visibility and support navigability of smaller parks.
- The City should consider expanding bicycle infrastructure, including additional bike racks and facilities.

### 2. Connectivity and Accessibility

- Strategically incorporating amenities such as shade, seating, restrooms, lighting, and water fountains could improve user comfort and park usability.

### 3. Sustainable Landscaping and Ecology

- Diversifying plantings could enhance aesthetic value, reduce water usage, and create unique park experiences.
- The City should integrate drought-tolerant landscaping and water-conserving irrigation systems in park renovation projects.

### 4. Maintenance and Wildlife Management

- The City should continue monitoring and improving upon comprehensive management strategies addressing geese populations and their impacts on park conditions and lagoon water quality, as specified in the Geese Management Plan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Foster City Geese Management Plan: foster\_city\_goose\_management\_final\_draft.pdf

## 6 Market Potential Index

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The analysis also provides insight into the demand for recreation activities as well as expected consumer attitudes towards these activities by Foster City residents. To better understand demand, ESRI, a spatial analytics company that uses datapoints to visualize, analyze, and interpret geographic data, utilized the Sports and Leisure Market Potential (MPI) tool. ESRI estimates market potential by analyzing consumer survey data and grouping people into segments. They calculate how likely each segment is to use a product or service and apply those rates to local households. Combining these numbers across all segments gives the expected number of consumers in an area. Once this is complete, they compare local usage to national usage to create a Market Potential Index, showing how demand in one area compares to the national average. Higher MPI scores suggest high demand, while lower scores indicate either low interest or limited access. This data, combined with other planning insights—such as demographics, community input, and current park facilities—helps determine the appropriate level of park space and amenities.

Foster City is evaluated in four categories: general sports, fitness, outdoor recreation, and commercial recreation.

- **General Sports:** Foster City shows higher sports participation rates than the national average in most categories, especially in Golf and Tennis.
- **Fitness:** The city surpasses national averages in many fitness activities, with the most notable gaps seen in Walking for Exercise, Weightlifting, and Pilates.
- **Outdoor Recreation:** Participation is generally higher in Foster City for more active outdoor pursuits, particularly Hiking and Road Bicycling.
- **Commercial Recreation:** Foster City residents engage more in dining out, cultural activities, and photography, suggesting a preference for social and artistic experiences over electronic gaming.
- **Overall Participation:** Across all categories, Foster City generally ranks average to above average, reflecting strong participation when opportunities are available.

When analyzing Foster City's MPI, it is critical to note that Foster City's participation estimates are not restricted to the city's boundaries. That is, the MPI may consider participation estimates of neighboring communities.

### 6.1 Recreation Trends

There are notable trends occurring in Foster City that align closely with national trends. Pickleball continues to be the fastest growing sport in America. Total participation for fitness, team, outdoor, racquet, water and winter sports are higher than their pre-pandemic participation rates. Walking is the most popular recreational activity nationwide. Additionally, participation in commercial recreation has risen across the country, including activities such as dining out, attending sporting events, visiting art galleries and museums, and enjoying live theater performances. Given Foster City's demographic trends and MPI, we expect Foster City's recreation trends to closely follow national trends.

## 6.2 Policy Considerations

The following policy considerations highlight strategic opportunities to proactively respond to evolving community interests and recreation trends:

### 1. Recreation Trends Monitoring

- The City may consider adopting a formal process to regularly monitor recreation trends and demographic changes, positioning program and facility offerings to remain responsive to community demand.

### 2. Targeted Program Development

- Market potential data could be leveraged to guide investment in high-demand recreation activities such as walking paths, fitness programming, swimming, yoga, tennis, pickleball, basketball, hiking, and cycling.

### 3. Flexible Facility Planning

- Policies can be developed to promote flexibility in facility design and programming, enabling adaptive responses to emerging recreation trends and community priorities.

# 7 Community Priorities

As part of the Foster City Master Plan development, several public engagement and outreach efforts were conducted as follows:

- Pop-up Events: 800+ engaged
- Public Workshop: 132 engaged
- Community Survey: 310 responses
- Park Improvement Questionnaire: 265 comments
- Focus Group Meetings: 38 Engaged
- Project Website: 1,600+ views

What emerged from public outreach and engagement further illuminates the existing condition of Foster City parks and recreation programs, and what improvements can be made.

## 7.1 Community Outreach Events

### 7.1.1 Pop-Up Events

The pop-ups involved a booth and simple engagement activities with City staff and consultants at key community events. At the pop-ups, the planning team set up poster boards and invited community members to answer key questions about what park users would like to see in their parks, such as amenities, facility improvements, and activation and programming. There were 7 pop up events and over 800 people were engaged.



**Photo #7:** Pop-Up events provided park users an opportunity to engage with the planning process in an informal and relaxed environment. Source: WRT

## 7.1.2 Task Force Meeting

The City established a task force to help guide the Parks Master Plan process. The Task Force is made up of Foster City residents who applied and were selected to represent a broad cross-section of community interests and knowledge. The goal of the Task Force is to strategize to inform an inclusive engagement process, identify facility and programmatic opportunities, and develop a vision for what Foster City parks and recreation should look like in the future. As summarized below, the first Task Force meeting was held in October 2024 at the Foster City Community Center, where members discussed the current state of Foster City’s parks and recreation, opportunities for updating and expanding parks, and a vision Foster City’s parks and recreation system.



**Photo #8:** At the Task Force meetings, stakeholders with varying knowledge and expertise offer targeted feedback about specific opportunities for different parks across Foster City. Source: WRT

### 7.1.3 Public Workshop

A public workshop was held on January 22, 2025 to engage with the community on analysis findings, to gain a deeper understanding of the City’s parks and recreation needs, and to share information about the planning process, including project updates, scope, and timeline. Additional comments were solicited via an online survey and through the Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting in February 2025.



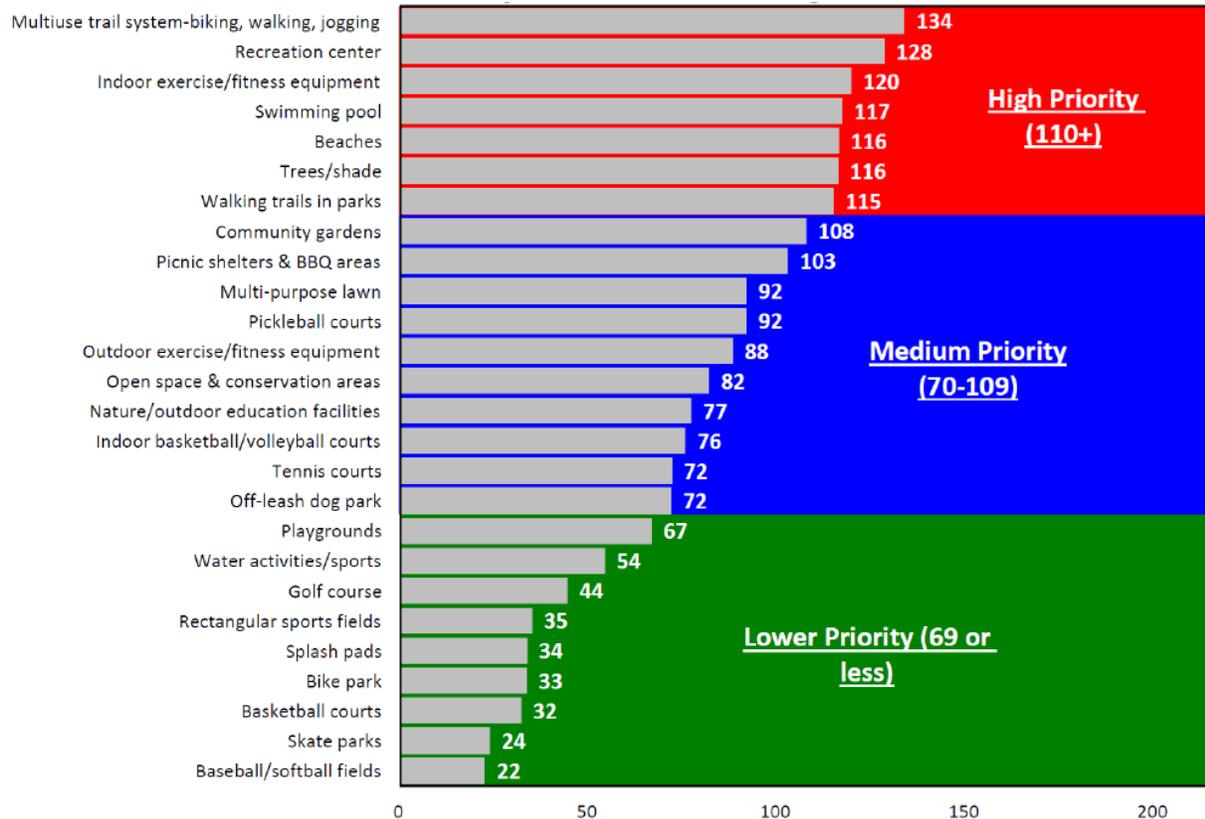
**Photos #9:** *The workshop provides Foster City residents with an opportunity to meet their neighbors and discuss various challenges and opportunities related to their parks and recreation programs.*  
Source: WRT

## 7.2 Parks Master Plan Community Survey

A Parks Master Plan Community Survey was administered by ETC Institute. The survey was distributed through mail and online to a random sample of households throughout Foster City during the winter of 2024-2025. Foster City residents were surveyed on various park-related topics: facilities and program use, the benefits, importance, and improvements to parks and recreation in Foster City, and facility/amenity needs and priorities. The survey results were compared with the national average for each category. The overall results of the over 300 residents which achieved a 95% confidence level show that the results are reflective of the City’s overall population. According to the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, 85% of residents are satisfied or very satisfied with the City’s parks and recreation system, which is significantly higher than the national average (62%).

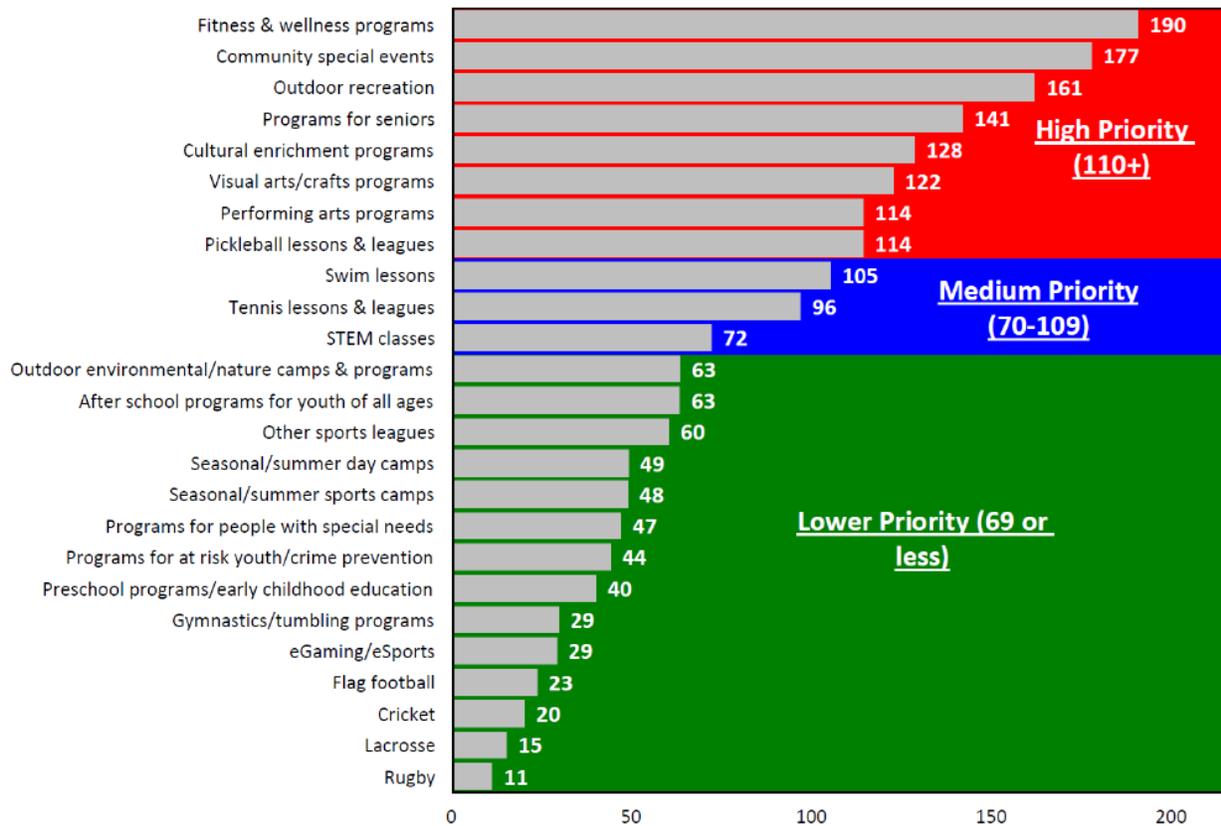
To define what facilities and programs were a priority for Foster City residents, ETC used its Priority Investment Rating (PIR) tool. The PIR equally weighs (1) the importance that residents place on facilities and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the facilities.

**Figure 11 Priority Index Rating for Facilities/Amenities**



As shown on Figure 11, multiuse trails, a recreation center, indoor exercise/fitness equipment, a swimming pool, beaches, trees and shade, and walking trails in parks are top resident priorities. Medium priority facilities/amenities include community gardens, picnic shelters and BBQ areas, multipurpose lawns, pickleball courts, and open space and conservation areas. The lower priority items include facilities that serve less traditional sports, such as a golf course, a bike park, baseball fields, and a skate park.

**Figure 12 Priority Index Rating for Programs/Activities**



As indicated in Figure 12, top resident priorities for programs and events include fitness/wellness programs, community special events, outdoor recreation, programs for seniors, cultural enrichment programs, visual arts & crafts programs, performing arts programs, and pickleball lessons & leagues. There were three medium priority programs, which were swim lessons, tennis lessons, and STEM classes. The lower priority programs ranged from less traditional sport programs such as rugby, lacrosse, and cricket to nature camps, after school programs and seasonal day camps.

## 7.3 Community Engagement Takeaways and Policy Considerations

Overall, hundreds of engaged residents have shed light on the aspects of the parks and recreation system that should be improved, added, or prioritized. Key themes emerged from the outreach and engagement process:

### Trails & Connectivity



Multi-use trails are the highest priority need according to the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, indicating a desire for additional trail connections throughout the city. In engagement activities, many residents mentioned wanting additional walking loops in parks, and improved signage and lighting. One of the more important elements that could be improved is identifying clear guidelines for trail users and installing clear markings to guide pathway users and mitigate safety hazards.

### Beaches & Water Quality



Foster City's access to the Lagoon and San Francisco Bay is unique. However, residents indicated several improvements needed to make both waterbodies true recreational assets. The water quality keeps residents away from recreating on the lagoon, and several residents mentioned eliminating the beaches entirely and replacing them with docks for boat access. Otherwise, the lagoon makes Foster City unique and creating opportunities to bring residents closer to the water, such as waterfront dining and public art, is an important next step.

### Park Amenities



There is a desire for additional park amenities, particularly passive facilities used to walk, picnic, or relax. Amenities to each of these activities could include trails, gardens, and picnic shelters. As identified earlier, the need for active park amenities, such as playgrounds and sports courts and fields, is being met compared to passive park amenities. But, given the popularity of sports and fitness classes, new and improved courts could be added.

### Park Comfort



The community expressed a desire for increased park comfort, through additional shade, restrooms, seating, lighting and more. Many residents expressed how certain parks have unplanned green space, and there is an opportunity to activate those parks with seating and lighting.

## Community Events and Programs



There is a strong need for additional programs and events in Foster City. Community events were highlighted by Foster City residents, such as outdoor markets that promote diversity and inclusion or seasonal markets around holidays. Other events included performing arts shows and holiday parades. Additionally, community programs that promote fitness and outdoor recreation is a high priority need, as well ensuring there are ample programs for kids and seniors.

## Indoor Recreation and Swimming



Throughout the community engagement process, particularly in the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, there was a demonstrated need for additional indoor recreation facilities and a swimming pool. Without improved water quality in the lagoon, a swimming pool is a high priority for residents. However, if the lagoon's entryways and water quality can be improved, the lagoon could serve as an asset to serve multiple activities.

# 8 Key Issues and Opportunities Summary

Foster City has a dynamic park and open space network. With 24 parks, several miles of multi-use paths, a lagoon, recreation facilities, and a diverse range of programs and services, Foster City’s parks are a key part of supporting livability and creating a healthy atmosphere in the city. In its current state, Foster City parks and open space are set up for success in the future, and there are actionable goals that will help sustain success into the future. This section highlights key issues and opportunities to address community priorities and changing trends.

**Figure 13 Focus Area and Opportunities**



## 8.1 Foster City's Park System

### Key Issues

- **Facility and Amenity Enhancements:** While Foster City is currently building a new community center that will augment indoor recreation opportunities, the City will still lack a gymnasium or a swimming pool.
- **Lagoon Activation and Accessibility: Limited Lagoon Access.** Foster City Lagoon is a unique and treasured asset, and one that several Foster City parks border. However, recreational use of the lagoon is currently limited by relatively limited public boat launch points and water quality concerns.

### Opportunities

- **Park Variety.** Foster City has a balanced park system, with a mix of parks serving the whole community (community parks), parks serving neighborhoods and local areas (neighborhood and mini parks), and parks serving specific types of activities (special use parks).
- **Park Accessibility.** The City's parks are well-distributed, putting virtually all residents with a half-mile walk of a park—one of the gold standards of current park system planning. Furthermore, the concentration of community parks and indoor recreation facilities in central Foster City is particularly well-suited to the concentration of seniors.
- **Park Land and Amenity Standards:**
  - Foster City's Parks and Open Space Element update and parks master plan provide an opportunity to revisit its level of service standards to make sure they are calibrated to align with priorities. The current overall standard would require 40 acres of additional park and open space land—a target that is ambitious but may be achievable with targeted new open space opportunities.
  - The City can establish amenity level of service standards to align with the level of prioritization indicated by community engagement and the Parks Master Plan Community Survey. This may result in a focus on increasing the number of dog parks and pickleball courts, while potentially holding steady or reducing the number of diamond fields and certain other amenities.
- **Recreation Facility Partnerships:** The lack of a gymnasium available for community use may be addressed through partnership with the school district and/or the Peninsula Jewish Community Center (PJCC).
- **Trail and Connectivity Improvements:** There is an opportunity to augment the Levee Pedway with new paths and trails that connect through the city and between parks. Direction may be provided both from a recreation perspective, through the Open Space and Recreation Element/Parks Master Plan, and through an active transportation planning process.
- **Lagoon Activation and Accessibility:** The Lagoon is a very special amenity with unrealized potential. There is an opportunity to support more recreational experiences, through improved access to the water and experiences along the water (e.g. outdoor dining, promenades, relaxation spaces, destination amenities.)

## 8.2 Park Usage

### Key Issues

- **Comfort and Extended Use:** Many parks in Foster City see their dwell times fall after dark, likely due to lack of lighting. Others may have lower usage during the day due to limited shade.
- **Equity and Cultural Representation:** Diverse communities may not feel represented in the availability of amenities offered in Foster City's parks. This is suggested by the relatively lower level of use by Asian residents.

### Opportunities

- **Visitor Management and Revenue Opportunities:** Parks that attract people from outside Foster City—Leo J. Ryan, Sea Cloud and Baywinds—may present opportunities for more attention to creating a positive experience, and greater leveraging of investment, such as through park user fees.
- **Comfort and Extended Use:** The addition of lighting in parks is likely to extend park use into the evening hours and provide good recreational value for residents. Similarly, more shade in parks will have the effect of bolstering their appeal on hot days, allowing people to still enjoy being outdoors.
- **Equity and Cultural Representation:** Foster City can work to improve accessibility and culturally relevant amenities and programming, recognizing the full diversity of its residents.

## 8.3 Site Assessment

### Key Issues

- **Connectivity and Accessibility:** Foster City parks generally have successful access and connectivity characteristics. Areas of potential improvement include consistent signage, wayfinding in larger parks, greater visibility for some small parks, more bike racks, and potential resizing of parking.
- **Comfort and Usability Enhancements:**
  - Some Foster City parks would benefit from additional shade around seating and active amenity areas, and more distribution of comfort amenities in parts of larger parks as well as in mini parks.
  - Most Foster City parks offer a range of passive and active amenities, in a functional arrangement. Some parks, especially the smaller ones, are thin on amenities, and in general, parks would benefit from more unique recreational experiences and planting palettes.
- **Sustainable Landscaping and Ecology:**
  - Foster City's parks involve extensive water-loving landscapes and will need to be adapted for greater water conservation, especially areas that lack amenities.
  - Irrigation systems in some parks are in need of significant upgrades.

- **Maintenance and Wildlife Management:** While parks in Foster City are in good condition overall, geese are a significant issue, leaving droppings, and feathers and degrading water quality in the lagoon. Issues are highlighted in the Geese Management Plan.<sup>8</sup>

## Opportunities

- **Connectivity and Accessibility:** Signage and wayfinding improvements can help knit together Foster City's larger parks and make some smaller parks more visible.
- **Comfort and Usability Enhancements:**
  - The strategic addition of shade, seating, lighting, restrooms, and bike racks will make Foster City's parks more comfortable and accessible and extend their hours of use.
  - Foster City can activate underutilized park spaces to meet the needs and interests of park users and create new and interesting park experiences.
- **Sustainable Landscaping and Ecology:**
  - Diversifying plantings will add character to parks in Foster City and also enable the City to maintain parks with lower water use.
  - Irrigation upgrades can be paired strategically with significant park enhancements.

## 8.4 Market Potential Index

### Key Issues

- **Recreation Trends Monitoring:**
  - Foster City has a higher-than-average market potential index (MPI) for nearly all of the general sports and fitness activities measured by ESRI. Foster City would be expected to have a high MPI for walking for exercise, weightlifting, swimming, jogging/running, yoga, aerobics, golf, tennis, and basketball. Hiking and road bicycling are also rated highly.
  - Changing trends in recreation will continue to present new challenges around delivering the facilities and services that residents demand.

### Opportunities

- **Recreation Trends Monitoring:** As recreation trends continue to evolve, it will be important for Foster City to track these changes while administering programs and building new amenities.
- **Flexible Facility Planning:** Foster City should recognize the high potential demand for certain sports and fitness activities as it creates new opportunities in existing recreation facilities, fitness programs and health and wellness classes.

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<sup>8</sup> Foster City Geese Management Plan: foster\_city\_goose\_management\_final\_draft.pdf

## 8.5 Community Priorities

### Key Issues

- **Priority Amenity Investments:**
  - Multi-use trails are the highest priority need according to the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, indicating a desire for additional trail connections throughout the city. Additionally, residents expressed a need for trail lighting, signage, and safety improvements. Foster City's access to the Lagoon and San Francisco Bay is unique. However, residents indicated several improvements needed to make both waterbodies true recreational assets. Key needs include improved water quality, increased boat access, and waterfront amenities. There is a desire for additional park amenities, particularly passive facilities used to walk, picnic, or relax. In general, the need for active park amenities, such as playgrounds and sports courts and fields, is being met compared to passive park amenities. The community expressed a desire for increased park comfort, through additional shade, restrooms, seating, lighting and more.
  - Throughout the community engagement process, particularly in the Parks Master Plan Community Survey, there was a demonstrated need for additional indoor recreation facilities and a swimming pool.
- **Program Expansion and Community Events:** There is a strong need for additional programs and events in Foster City, particularly ones that promote fitness and outdoor recreation. Additional senior programming was also indicated as a high priority need.

### Opportunities

- **Priority Amenity Investments:** Invest in improving high priority amenities that are important to park users and serve the needs of residents, the highest priority facilities being multiuse pathways for walking, biking, and jogging, recreation Center, fitness courts and stations, swimming pool, lagoon entry points, and shade areas.
- **Program Expansion and Community Events:** Invest in expanding high priority programs and services that bring residents together, reach a large swath of age groups, and are seasonally sustainable such as fitness and wellness programs, community special events, outdoor recreation, arts programs, and sport tournaments
- **Enhanced Trails and Connectivity:** Create and expand trails that connect neighborhoods and park spaces together, create more space for residents to walk, and connect to the Levee Pedway and San Francisco Bay Trail.
- **Lagoon Recreational Enhancements:** Re-imagine the lagoon entry points beyond their traditional layout and consider changing the beaches by the lagoon to docks at appropriate locations.