

7 PARKS AND RECREATION

Novato features a wide variety of parks, recreational facilities and open space. These provide recreational amenities for residents, support a healthy environment, and contribute to Novato’s scenic beauty. This chapter describes applicable plans, policies and regulations and identifies the parks, recreational facilities and open space in Novato and its surrounding areas.

A. Regulatory Framework

1. State Plans and Regulations

a. Quimby Act

Cities and counties are authorized by the Quimby Act (California Government Code Section 66477) to require developers to dedicate land or pay an in lieu fee for park and recreational purposes as a condition of approval for residential subdivisions. Quimby fees only apply to residential subdivisions; the subdivider dedicates land for a local park or recreation facility that serves the needs of the residents or pays an in lieu fee. Revenues generated through the Park Dedication In-Lieu Fees cannot be used for the operation and maintenance of park facilities.

b. Olompali State Historic Park General Plan

Olompali State Historic Park is a 700-acre State park north of the Novato city boundary and west of Highway 101. The Olompali State Historic Park General Plan is the long-range planning document that guides the development, management and operation of the park. The Plan aims to preserve the historic and cultural features of the park while balancing the recreational needs of its users.

2. County and Regional Plans

a. Marin Countywide Plan

Section 4.14 of the Marin Countywide Plan aims to expand and improve recreational facilities in the county. Section 4.14 also examines how local jurisdictions can contribute to an enhanced park system. Policy PK-1.d calls for the County to work with local jurisdictions “to determine how their facilities contribute to meeting park and recreation needs in Marin.”

b. Marin County Parks and Open Space Comprehensive Strategic Plan

Marin County Parks and Open Space Department prepared a Comprehensive Strategic Plan for parks and open space in the county in 2008. The Strategic Plan assesses existing conditions of parks and open space resources in Marin County, identifies a future vision for the County’s park and open space system, establishes goals and strategies and puts forth a financing plan to implement the future vision.

As a component of the Strategic Plan, the Parks Master Plan and the Land Conservation Plan describe resources within specific regions of the county and details about individual facilities. The Land Conservation Plan targets lands that should be preserved as open space. Areas identified in the Land Conservation Plan near Novato include the North County Gateway, including land from the Rush Creek wetlands to Stafford Lake Park, and the East Novato Ridge and Baylands.

The Parks Master Plan specifically addresses issues and opportunities at the County’s Stafford Lake Park. The Parks Master Plan recommends that an updated master plan be prepared for Stafford Lake Park to explore ways to improve

and expand the facility. Subsequently, the County approved a 17-acre bike park, with construction projected to begin in 2014. Another County facility near Novato identified for improvements is the Black Point Boat Launch on the Petaluma River at the Highway 37 bridge. The plan recommends expanding the facility and improving amenities.

c. Bay Trail

The San Francisco Bay Trail is a regional effort to develop a continuous bicycling and hiking trail along the perimeter of the San Francisco and San Pablo bays. Trail planning is administered by the Bay Trail Project, which is staffed by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). Once completed, the 500-mile Bay Trail will pass through 47 cities and nine counties. Currently, more than half of the Bay Trail is already built. A feasibility study for the Bay Trail segment that would pass through the City of Novato was developed, but the recommendation met with significant community resistance and plans for construction have not move forward. The County hopes to find an acceptable alignment between the Petaluma River and Pacheco Pond near Bel Marin Keys Boulevard in the near future.

d. Bay Area Ridge Trail

The Bay Area Ridge Trail is envisioned to be a continuous multi-use trail that spans the ridgelines of the nine Bay Area counties. Currently, there are 310 dedicated miles of trail with an ultimate goal of more than 550 miles of trail. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, a local non-profit, works with jurisdictions, public agencies and other non-profits to complete the remaining links of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. A portion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail connects the Indian Tree Open Space Preserve, west of Novato, to the City's O'Hair Park, located in the western portion of the city on Novato Boulevard and Sutro Avenue.

e. Marin County Healthy Eating Active Living Strategic Framework

The Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Strategic Framework includes six strategic directions which focus a county-wide focus on a healthier Marin. The six strategies are divided into two groups, Healthy Communities and Infrastructure. Healthy Communities focus on inspiring communities to engage in place-based active living, catalyzing the community to build healthy food systems, and enhancing early childhood, school and afterschool environments to promote HEAL. The Infrastructure efforts are focused on prioritizing and utilizing resources based on data and results, generating culturally relevant and persuasive marketing and messaging, and developing policies, practices, and political will to support HEAL throughout Marin County.

3. Local Plans and Policies

a. Novato General Plan

Parks and recreation is addressed in the Environment chapter of the existing General Plan. EN Objective 14 calls for the City to “provide an attractive and comprehensive system of parks and trails throughout the city to meet the recreational needs of the entire community.” Policies and programs to implement this objective call for the City to maintain existing park facilities, provide neighborhood parks, improve existing undeveloped parks, provide a system of greenways and provide an integrated trail system.

b. Novato Municipal Code Chapter 10

Parks and recreational facilities are addressed in Chapter 10 of the Novato Municipal Code. The purpose of this chapter is to “regulate the use of parks and recreational buildings so that all persons may partake and enjoy them, and to protect the rights of people and uses in the surrounding areas.” This chapter discusses activities that require a park permit or application, and provides a summary of unlawful uses within parks regarding domestic animals, camping, fires, amplification of sound and other issues.

c. Novato 2028: A Vision for the Future Community Strategic Plan, 2003

The Life Enrichment chapter of the Community Strategic Plan addresses recreation within Novato. The Plan includes vision statements for the future of parks and recreational facilities in Novato and policies to guide the City in accomplishing these goals. The vision describes a community that meets the needs of all ages with high quality, safe, well-designed and maintained facilities; offering recreation programs that appeal to a variety of interest groups; and promoting commercial recreation, leisure opportunities, and community-wide celebrations and events. The Community Strategic Plan includes a number of objectives to achieve this vision.

d. Draft Trails Master Plan, 2007

The Trails Master Plan, currently in draft form, will guide the preparation of new trail development and improvement. The Master Plan inventories existing trails, identifies gaps between trails, identifies trail deficiencies, recommends new trail linkages, considers trail design and establishes trail related goals and policies. Additionally, the draft Master Plan explores potential funding sources for trail acquisition and implementation. The draft Trails Master Plan can serve as a resource for trail information within the Novato city limits and help guide trail connection and create continuous transportation corridors.

e. Target 2000

Target 2000: Taking Novato's Park and Recreational Facilities Into the 21st Century is Novato's most recent comprehensive parks and recreation master plan. This Plan, completed in 1992, provides a recommended framework for the planning, development, acquisition and management of city parks, recreational facilities and recreational programs. The Plan includes an inventory of existing facilities and a description of facilities by Park Planning District. The Plan also identifies funding sources for future park development.

f. Hamilton Area Community Facilities Implementation Plans

The Hamilton Field Community Recreation Facilities Implementation Plans provide an overall master plan for the Hamilton area community recreation facilities and a potential program of activities to be offered through the facilities. The Plan also includes an estimated cost analysis and recommendations on development of community facilities in the Hamilton area. This Plan was completed in January 1998; a Phase 2 Study was subsequently completed in August 1999.

g. Art in Public Places

The Art in Public Places Program was developed to facilitate the integration of art into civic places. The Program is administered by the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department and the Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Commission, who are charged with identifying suitable locations for artwork and implementing the set criteria to select art pieces for display in public buildings and outdoor areas.

h. Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign

The City adopted Resolution No. 11-12 in February 2012 in support of the Healthy Eating Active Living Campaign led by the League of California Cities, setting forth the City's commitment to obesity prevention. In many areas of Novato the number of adults who are overweight or obese exceeds 55 percent of the population and the number of youth who are overweight or obese exceeds 20 percent. This commitment to obesity prevention includes making every effort to plan and construct a built environment that encourages: walking, biking and other forms of physical activity; addressing walking and biking connectivity between residential neighborhoods and schools, parks, recreational resources, and retail; encouraging restaurants and food retailers to remove foods containing artificial trans fat from menu offerings; and promoting healthy food choices.

i. Let's Move Cities, Towns and Counties

The City of Novato joined the national movement *Let's Move! Cities, Towns and Counties* in 2010 to focus on reducing childhood obesity and enhancing the health of the entire Novato community. *Let's Move!* is a comprehensive initiative launched by First Lady Michelle Obama. The program is dedicated to solving the problem of obesity within a generation, so that children born today will grow up healthier and able to pursue their dreams. Combining comprehensive strategies with common sense, *Let's Move!* is about putting children on the path to a healthy future during their earliest months and year by: giving parents helpful information and fostering environments that support healthy choices; providing healthier foods in our schools; ensuring that every family has access to healthy, affordable food; and, helping children become more physically active.

At the launch of the initiative, President Barack Obama signed a presidential memorandum creating a Task Force on Childhood Obesity to conduct a review of federal programs and policies related to child nutrition and physical activity and to develop a national action plan to maximize federal resources and set concrete benchmarks toward the First Lady's national goal. The Task Force recommendations focus on the five pillars of the *Let's Move!* initiative:

1. Creating a healthy start for children
2. Empowering parents and caregivers
3. Providing healthy food in schools
4. Improving access to healthy, affordable foods
5. Increasing physical activity

Everyone has a role to play in reducing childhood obesity, including parents and caregivers, elected officials from all levels of government, schools, health care professionals, faith-based and community-based organizations, and private sector companies. City leadership and multi agency collaboration is key to ensuring a healthy future for our children.

j. Healthy Parks Healthy People Bay Area

Encouraged by growing evidence that spending time in nature improves physical and mental health, leaders from around the Bay Area representing parks, open space, healthcare, and public health agencies initiated a Healthy Parks, Healthy People collaborative in June 2012. The international movement for Healthy Parks, Healthy People provided inspiration. The collaborative will increase opportunities for Bay Area communities to enjoy parks and open spaces.

As the idea of Healthy Parks, Healthy People gathered momentum, parks and health agencies from around the Bay Area came together to coordinate their efforts for maximum impact. In response, the Institute at the Golden Gate is facilitating a partnership between over 30 parks, community, and health organizations from the nine Bay Area counties committed to leading a regional Healthy Parks, Healthy People initiative.

As a first step, HPHP Bay Area launched a coordinated effort to provide approachable, culturally-relevant park programming for communities with high health needs. These programs kicked-off June 1, 2013, and will continue the first Saturday of every month.

The initiative hosts seasonal trainings to ensure consistency and effective implementation among all participating agencies. The program also builds in rigorous evaluations to validate the collaboration between local agencies, as well as measure the long-term impact on engagement and support for parks and public spaces.

B. Parks, Recreational Facilities and Open Space

Parks and recreational facilities in Novato are administered by the City's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services. The Department works to provide Novato residents with access to parks in their neighborhoods and a wide variety of recreational activities at facilities throughout the city. This section describes city parks, recreational facilities, and recreational programming coordinated by the City. The City's Public Works Department maintains City parks and recreational facilities.

1. City of Novato Parks

The City of Novato manages and operates 27 parks totaling approximately 470 acres. Parks in Novato feature, among other amenities, hiking trails, playgrounds, playing fields, outdoor courts, amphitheater, a skate park, a dog park, a community swimming pool, and picnic areas. A list of City parks is provided in Table 7-1. The location of these parks is shown in Figure 7-1. In addition to facilities formally recognized as parks, Novato residents have access to school playgrounds and playing fields, which are available for public use outside of school hours. School facilities in Novato are discussed in Chapter 14, Public Services and Facilities.

2. State and County Parks

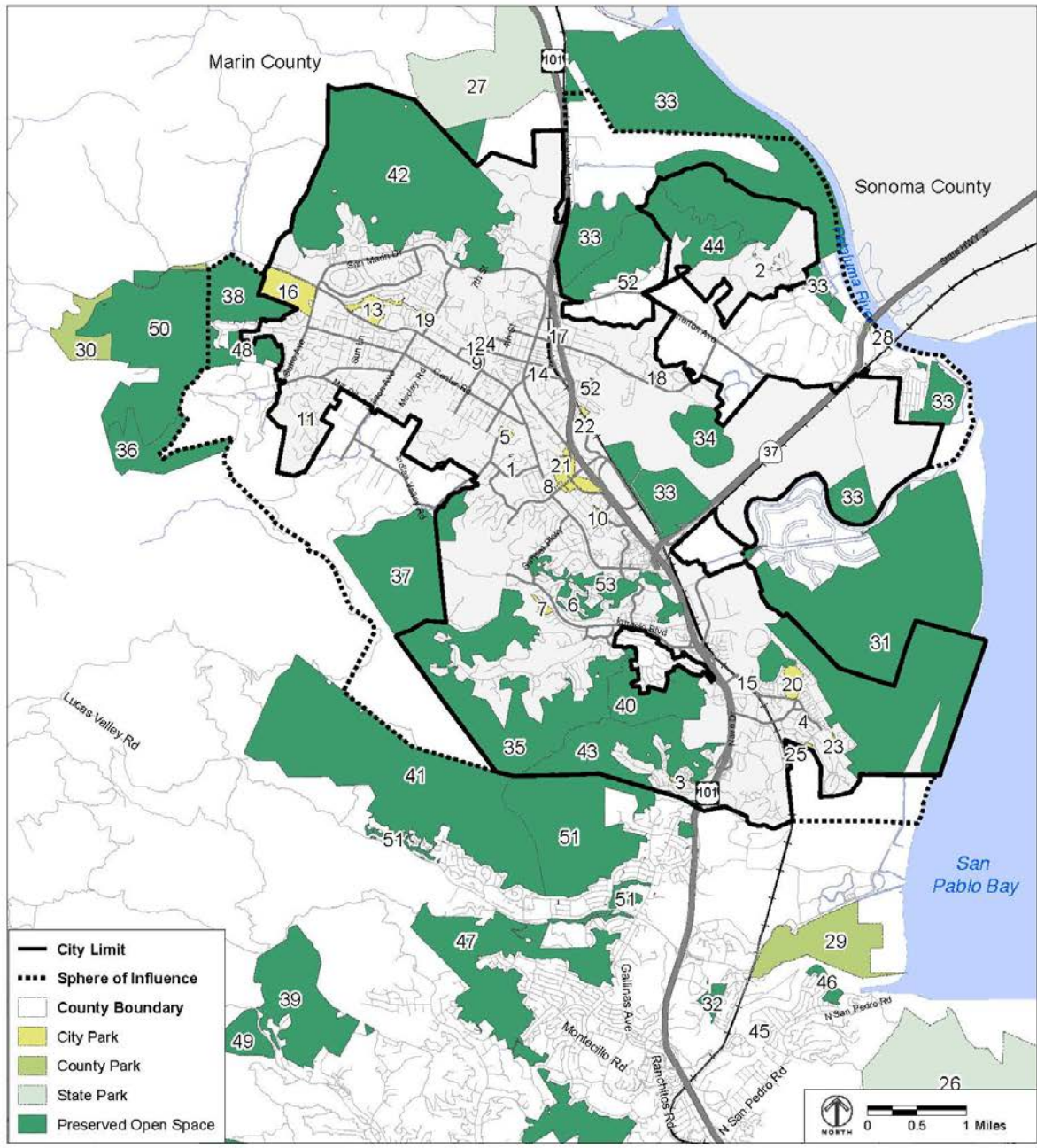
There are two State parks and three County parks near Novato, as identified in Table 7-2 and shown in Figure 7-1. China Camp State Park is 13 miles south of the city limit east of Highway 101. Olompali State Historic Park, located at the base of Mount Burdell, is adjacent to the northern city limit to the west of Highway 101.

The three County parks include John F. McInnis Park, Stafford Lake Park and Black Point Boat Launch. John F. McInnis Park is approximately 1 mile south of Novato east of Highway 101. Stafford Lake Park is located 3 miles west of the city and offers 139 acres of recreational opportunities. Black Point Boat Launch is located at the intersection of the Petaluma River and the Highway 37 bridge.

TABLE 7-1 CITY OF NOVATO PARKS

Map ID	Parks	Acres	Amenities
1	Arroyo Avichi Park	7.2	Barbeques, playground, tot lot, water spray feature
2	Bahia Mini Parks (6)	1.8	No amenities, just natural areas
3	Creekside Park	7.9	Benches
4	Hamilton Amphitheater Park	4.1	Amphitheater, restrooms, tot lot, open lawn, gazebo
5	Hill Recreation Area	12.4	Ballfields, multi-use turf area, track
6	Hillside Park	1.2	Playground, tot lot, restrooms
7	Josef Hoog Park	9.8	Group barbeque area, multi-use turf area, basketball court, playground, tot lot, restrooms
8	Joyce Street Tot Lot	0.1	Tot lot, picnic area
9	Lee Gerner Park	2.0	Benches, creekside seating
10	Lynwood Hill Park	11.6	Open access
11	Marin Highlands Park	3.8	Playground, picnic tables, and open lawn
12	Marion Recreation Area	2.0	Multi-use turf area, ballfields
13	Miwok Park	37.9	Trails, Marin Museum of the American Indian, group BBQ areas, bocce ball courts, children's gazebo, horseshoe pits, restrooms, open lawn, playgrounds, creek access
14	Novato City Green	0.1	Open lawn and seating
15	Novato Skate Park	1.3	Skate viewing area, lawn, picnic and game tables
16	O'Hair Park	98.3	Trails, 2.8-acre Dogbone Meadow off-leash dog park, equestrian center, creek access
17	Olive Tot Lot	0.1	Barbeque, tot lot, chess table
18	Pansy Tong Lo Tot Lot	0.8	Playground, tot lot
19	Pioneer Park	8.9	Group barbeque area, multi-use turf area, playground, picnic tables, gazebo, lighted tennis courts, paved walking path, restrooms, tot lot, creek access
20	Reservoir Hill Vista Trail	32	ADA accessible trail, parking
21	Scottsdale Pond/Marsh	51.9	Fishing pier, gazebo, Evalyn Kelly Interpretive Area, model sailboat sailing
22	Slade Park	3.0	Barbeque area, multi-use turf area, playground
23	South Hamilton Park	6.9	Ballfield, multi-use turf area, playground, tot lot, SF Bay trailhead, parking, picnic tables and barbeque
24	Stafford Grove Park	0.3	Playground, gazebo
25	Thigpen Sports Courts	1.8	Lighted Basketball courts, roller hockey courts, tennis courts

**CITY OF NOVATO
EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT
PARKS AND RECREATION**



**FIGURE 7-1
PARKS AND OPEN SPACE**

TABLE 7-2 STATE AND COUNTY PARKS NEAR NOVATO

Map ID	Park or Facility	Acres	Amenities
<i>State Parks</i>			
26	China Camp State Park	1,529	Hiking, camping, picnic areas, swimming
27	Olompali State Historic Park	702	Hiking, horseback riding trails, picnic tables
<i>County Parks</i>			
28	Black Point Boat Launch	2	Boat launch, picnic tables
29	John F. McInnis Park	360	Softball fields, soccer fields, boat launch, tennis courts, picnic tables and trails
30	Stafford Lake Park	158	Fishing, trails, picnic tables, barbeque area, softball field, disc golf course, volleyball court, horseshoe court, playground

3. Protected Open Space

The Novato area includes a significant amount of land designated for open space. In total, there are over 5,540 acres of open space within the Novato city boundary. The majority of this open space is owned and managed by the Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD). MCOSD manages these areas for habitat enhancement, resource preservation, protection of the wildland-urban interface from fire, and outdoor recreation.

The Rush Creek Open Space preserve, located just north of the City of Novato and to the west of Highway 101, is a 500-plus-acre preserve that was acquired by the Open Space District, with significant help from the Marin Audubon Society, specifically as bird habitat. Each fall and winter, the Rush Creek preserve and adjacent wetlands attract thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl.

The Verissimo Hills Open Space Preserve offers hiking trails and outdoor recreation that are directly accessible from the edge of residential Novato. Several trails in the Verissimo Hills run along ridges and connect via the Stafford Lake Trail to the Little Mountain Preserve in the north and the Indian Tree Preserve to the south.

In addition to MCOSD land, open space preserves in the immediate Novato area are owned and managed by various other agencies, including the California State Department of Fish and Game, the California State Coastal Conservancy, and the North Marin Water District. As shown in Table 7-1, the City of Novato owns the 139-acre Anderson Rowe Open Space. The location of these open space areas is shown in Figure 7-1 and listed in Table 7-3.

TABLE 7-3 PROTECTED OPEN SPACE NEAR NOVATO

Map ID	Open Space Name	Acres
<i>State Coastal Conservancy</i>		
31	Bel Marin Keys Wetlands	2,694
<i>California Department of Fish and Game</i>		
32	Gallinas Creek	31
33	Petaluma Marsh	2,638
<i>Marin County Open Space District</i>		
34	Deer Island	164
35	Ignacio Valley	940
36	Indian Tree	236
37	Indian Valley	637
38	Little Mountain	239
39	Loma Alta	511
40	Loma Verde	277
41	Lucas Valley	1,672
42	Mt. Burdell	1,620
43	Pacheco Valle	460
44	Rush Creek	491
45	Santa Margarita Island	8
46	Santa Venetia Marsh	32
47	Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Divide	1,085
48	Verissimo Hills	114
49	White Hill	381
50	Stafford Lake	910
<i>Marinwood Community Services District</i>		
51	Marinwood Open Space	812
<i>Marin Municipal Water District</i>		
52	MMWD Lands	9
<i>City of Novato</i>		
53	Anderson Rowe Open Space	139

4. City Recreational Facilities and Programs

In addition to parks and open space, the City of Novato operates recreational facilities and provides recreational programs for its residents. A detailed description of the recreational facilities is provided below. Table 7-4 summarizes the amenities for each facility.

a. Downtown Recreation Center

The Downtown Recreation Center is a multipurpose community center offering a comprehensive recreation program serving all ages, from preschool to senior. Programmed activities include card games, sports, tournaments, video games, pool tables and foosball. Events held at the Center include middle school dances serving hundreds of Novato's young people each year.

b. Hamilton Community Center and Recreation Area

The recreation amenities in the Hamilton area offer a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. The Community Center includes an arts and crafts room, a dance studio, an auditorium, multipurpose rooms, and a recreation room. The Recreation Area has a pool, a baseball field, a multi-use turf area, a gymnasium with a full-length basketball court, racquetball courts, an amphitheater with a stage and a picnic area, plus lighted tennis courts and basketball and rollerhockey court. A state-of-the-art skate park and a Hamilton Field History Museum are also in the Hamilton area.

The recreational programs offered at the Hamilton Community Center and Recreation Area serve a range of ages and include:

- ◆ Martial arts classes geared for preschoolers, children, teens and adults;
- ◆ Dance classes for preschoolers, children and adults;
- ◆ Athletic leagues and camps for children, teen and adults;
- ◆ Aquatic programs at Hamilton Pool are run by the City of San Rafael and provide water exercise classes, lifeguard training, swim lessons, recreational swimming, community events, lap swimming, and rentals; and
- ◆ Technology workshops for children and adults.

c. Hamilton Community Gymnasium

A joint project with Novato Unified School District (NUSD), the gymnasium opened in September 2012 on the campus of Hamilton School. The facility is used as a school cafeteria, for physical education classes, as an assembly and school event space, and for City recreation programs and community active recreation purposes. Construction costs and ongoing operating costs are shared equally between the City and NUSD for the benefit of the community.

d. Hamilton Field History Museum

The Hamilton Field History Museum, opened in 2010, contains artifacts from the days when the base was used first as an Army Air Corps field and then later as a station for the U.S. Air Force. Construction was completed by the housing developer, the City and the Novato Historical Guild. The Museum is operated by the City with the help of Historical Guild volunteers.

e. Hamilton Pool

The Hamilton Pool, located at 203 El Bonito Way in the Hamilton area, was renovated in 2009, creating a new activity pool with water slide, sprays and fountains, a new lap and recreation pool, bathhouse and pool office building. Since reopening in 2010, the City of San Rafael has administered the City's aquatics program, which consists of recreational swimming, swimming lessons, water exercise, and lap swimming. The pool is closed during the winter season from mid-September through mid-May each year.

f. Lu Sutton Child Care Center

The Lu Sutton Child Care Center, located at 1800 Center Road, is operated by the City's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department and provides licensed child care services for Novato children. Recreational amenities include a multi-use turf area, playground, restroom and outdoor garden.

g. Margaret Todd Senior Center

The Margaret Todd Senior Center is operated by the City of Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department. The Center is designed to centralize senior services under one roof. The Center has a large auditorium, a stage, meeting rooms and a commercial kitchen. Amenities at the Senior Center include a computer room with internet access and a lending library. Programs and services offered at the Senior Center include enrichment and fitness courses, senior services, and referral services. Special events, such as the Holiday Crafts Faire, music events, and an indoor flea market, are offered at the Senior Center. The Senior Center also offers services and programs for Spanish speakers and partners with non-profit Episcopal Senior Communities for programs and services geared toward low-income, multi-cultural, frail seniors.

h. Novato Gymnastics Center

The Novato Gymnastics Center, operated by the City of Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department, offers instructional classes for preschoolers, children, teenagers and adults, as well as classes for special needs gymnasts. The Center hosts gymnastics classes for all experience levels, gymnastics camps, competitive gymnastics programs and meets, and offers an acro/tumbling class. The Novato Gymnastics Booster Club helps support the programs at the center.

i. Novato History Museum

The History Museum provides a look into Novato's early days, with historic photos, documents and books, featuring in-depth accounts of social and ranch life from Novato's past. The museum has a research library, and special tours of the museum can be arranged for groups. With support from the Novato Historical Guild volunteers, Novato's history comes to life.

j. Old Hamilton Gym

The Old Hamilton Gym, located at 158 San Pablo Avenue, features 19,500 square feet of gymnasium space, a full basketball court and two racquetball courts. The gym was originally built in 1944 and upgraded in 1955.

TABLE 7-4 CITY OF NOVATO RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Park or Facility	Amenities
Downtown Recreation Center	Stage, restrooms, game room, multi-use room, pocket park with synthetic turf, benches and picnic tables
Hamilton Community Center	Dance studio, restrooms, classrooms, preschool, meeting rooms
Hamilton Community Gymnasium	Gym, restrooms
Hamilton Field History Museum	Research library, restrooms
Hamilton Pool	Water spray features, activity pool, bathhouse, picnic and barbeque facilities
Hill Community Room	Meeting room, restrooms
Hill Gym	Gym, bleachers
Lu Sutton Child Care	Multi-use turf area, playground, restrooms
Margaret Todd Senior Center	Full kitchen, auditorium, meeting rooms, stage, restrooms
Novato City Hall	Community use facility for meetings and rentals.
Novato Gymnastics Center	Gymnastics equipment, restrooms, viewing area
Novato History Museum	Research library, tours, restrooms
Old Hamilton Gym	Basketball court, restrooms