SAN LUIS COLORADO

2025 RECREATION PLAN



RADIAN

THE CIVIC CANOPY

The Colorado Health Foundation

AYRES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many leaders, organizations, community members, partners, and institutions contributed to this plan for recreation in San Luis and the surrounding villages. Their work, wisdom, guidance, and ongoing partnership will ensure that the dreams within this plan come to fruition. We recognize and extend gratitude to the following organizations.

San Luis and the Culebra Villages Community Members

The dozens of community members who attended meetings, came to community events, took surveys, provided feedback, and shared their experiences and insights about the history of recreation in San Luis and their needs and dreams for the future.

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*All images were taken by Town of San Luis staff or consultant teams unless otherwise noted.

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San Luis Recreation Committee

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

6 **Introduction**
- Executive Summary
- Journey Map
- Purpose of this Document

10 **History of San Luis**
- Community Spaces
- Sports to Gather Community
- Connection to the Land
- Cultural Activities

12 **Current Landscape**
- Challenges
- Opportunities

14 **Community Engagement**
- Soul Players of San Luis Surveys + Round Tables
- Town of San Luis' Community Events + Surveys

22 **Plans for Recreation Spaces**
- Recreation Park + School Fields
- Farm Park
- Rodeo Fairgrounds

26 **Next Steps**
- Future Planning Opportunities
- Fundraising
- Bringing the Plan to Life



INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For our people of San Luis and its surrounding Culebra Villages – San Pablo, San Pedro, El Rito, Los Fuertes, Chama, Chama Cañon, San Acacio, Garcia, Jaroso, Mesita – the meaning of recreation is different from the dominant culture around recreation in Colorado. The town of San Luis, with a population of 582, has one of the largest percentages of Hispanic or Latino individuals (87%) in the San Luis Valley as well as the largest percentage of Spanish speakers (59%). 33% of the population is disabled, 31% live below the poverty line, and the median household income is $30,381 compared to $92,470 throughout the state. Steeped in a deep tradition around rural life, the people of San Luis engage in practices that date back to the early Spanish settlers of the 1850s. Today, our small town faces challenges in accessing the kinds of recreational activities that allow a community to thrive. There is a lack of space and programs, especially for youth, as well as many interlocking factors that affect the health and wellbeing of our community. This includes a lack of access to healthy and affordable food, availability of quality employment, transportation, rising rates of mental health issues and substance abuse, and a shortage of spaces and opportunities for physical and cultural activities.

However, our small community refuses to be pulled into a deficit mindset. Through several stages of community engagement and listening, led by a coalition of leaders and organizations, the town of San Luis and its surrounding villages has developed their own priorities to create the future they want to see for their town. This plan for recreation addresses many (though not all) of those priorities: outdoor recreation spaces, planning for an indoor recreation center, spaces for more youth activities, community gathering spaces, land to grow food and learn about agricultural practices, space for traditional cultural activities, and places to support programming for all ages.



JOURNEY MAP

The recent work around recreation in San Luis has involved many different partners, people, and non-linear evolutions. In order to build a shared understanding of many of the overlapping and intersecting pieces of this work, the Civic Canopy worked with the Town of San Luis' Recreation Committee to generate a "Journey Map" that depicts some of the milestones over the last 8 years that the community has experienced. We start the timeline at the moment when the town of San Luis lost one of its central places for recreation, the "Old Gym", and moves through several of the partners who contributed to the process including building a community park with KABOOM, the Colorado Health Foundation's planning grant, conversations with the high school around their baseball field, the Soul Players of the Valley's deep community-led research made possible with the Latino Community Foundation, and support from multiple contractors.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This plan is intended to bring together many of the threads held both collectively and separately by partners making progress towards their goals in San Luis. This is a "big picture" document that will help to communicate our community's plans for recreation to partners, community members, and funders who will help bring them to fruition. While this plan represents a moment in time and will change and adapt, it is intended to act as a road map to execute on the priorities expressed by the community who deserve to have more spaces, opportunities, and options to connect, play, relax, and live out our unique way of life.

THE RECENT JOURNEY

RECREATION IN SAN LUIS



2017

1 DEMOLITION

The "Old Gym" is torn down.

2019

2 KABOOM!

A grant from the Colorado Health Foundation (CHF) brings together community members to build the community park.

Centennial High School 3

CHS approaches the town about improving their baseball field.



2022

Everyone's using the school's facilities... We need to expand!

2023

2023 CHF Planning Grant >> $25K Outreach 4

Softball tournament, Santa Ana Festival, design and feedback.

5 Soul Players of the Valley

Deep community engagement - round table and surveys highlight the need for youth programming, community spaces, and connection to the culture.

2024

6 Committee

Recreation Committee forms.

7 Architecture + Landscape Design

Collaborate with Radian and Ayres Associates to develop conceptual designs.

2025

8 The Civic Canopy

Civic Canopy supports the collaborative process and storytelling to develop one cohesive plan.

HISTORY OF RECREATION IN SAN LUIS

San Luis has had different periods of growth and decline, and many of our elders share memories of the places and ways that the town would come together to play.

COMMUNITY SPACE

The Town has memories of many of the spaces that were once the center of public gathering. "The Old Gym" that was torn down in 2017 held dances, weddings, rollerskating, boxing matches, and holiday celebrations. Music and dance played a big part in the lives of our ancestors in San Luis, and we hope to create more spaces that are suitable for live music and large gatherings. The old baseball field on the east side of San Luis brought people together from across the different villages and even further parts of the San Luis Valley for friendly (yet still fiercely competitive) baseball games. The town once had a swimming pool, but after years of problems with flooding due to its location on marshy land, it was finally closed. For most of the living memory of San Luis' history, sports have played an important role in getting communities together, engaging in physical activity, and creating connections between towns.

Finally, the people of San Luis have fought for generations for their historic right to use La Sierra, a 77,500-acre plot of land which was once owned by the people of southern Costilla County to use for wood-gathering, grazing, foraging, hunting, fishing, and recreation purposes. La Sierra is now privately owned. The ties to the land in this area carry the weight of this history, and recreation on commonly owned lands is a right our community has fought to defend. Several organizations within San Luis, including Move Mountains, 4H, and the Boys and Girls Club of the San Luis Valley are working to provide more opportunities for youth to learn and engage in these traditional activities and connection to the land.



Los Pastores de La Sierra, 2006, Colcha embroidery by Josephine Lobato, photo by The Range Saguache, San Luis Valley Colcha Embroidery.



(Right) 1910 Community Baseball Game



Community Baseball Game

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

CHALLENGES

Many of the old structures on the main street of San Luis are undergoing assessment and gradual cleanup through an EPA Brownfields grant, including the Sangre de Cristo Cultural Heritage Center which is home to the San Luis Museum, Community Theater, and a Community Kitchen. Many of these projects will take years to complete. Meanwhile, the town has lost many of the historic areas that formerly were used to gather (the Old Gym, the pool, and old baseball fields). Centennial School acts as a space for many community events, which puts an extra strain on their facility and staff who can't always keep up with the demand of use outside of the school's own activities. The High School is working to fundraise to make improvements to their baseball field that is currently in very poor condition after the irrigation system broke over 10 years ago.

The town will face several challenges to improve or build new facilities including:

- Raising millions of dollars in capital to build new facilities.
- Generating enough tax revenue to sustainably fund operation of facilities (recreation center, outdoor amenities upkeep, etc.).
- Working with owners of historical buildings with expensive restoration and cleanup needs.
- A tightening funding landscape that can fuel competition amongst nonprofit and government partners.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

OPPORTUNITIES

To overcome these challenges, San Luis will need to stay laser focused on the opportunities and assets that already exist and the clarity of vision that community leaders have provided for the future. Some of these opportunities include:

- Youth and Adult Sports outside of school hours and opportunities to re-vamp the tradition of town tournaments.
- Youth Programs that connect kids to the outdoors, traditions, and a wide array of activities like agricultural and other vocational skillbuilding, fishing, biking, and hiking with partners like 4H, the Boys and Girls Clubs of the SLV, and Move Mountains.
- Community Event Space for rodeos, live music, fireworks, carnivals, and farmers markets that will not only build connections but stimulate a thriving local economy.
- Year-round Recreation with indoor and outdoor opportunities that can be used even during the harsh conditions of the valley's weather.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



SEMILLAS OF CHANGE

This recreation plan takes lessons learned from multiple efforts of engaging the community of San Luis in envisioning a thriving future around recreation. One of the most important sources is the work of the Soul Players of the Valley and the Latino Community Foundation to build a foundation for lasting community transformation, a story that culminated in the creation of Semillas of Change which tells the story of grassroots leaders, communal approaches to data collection, recognition of ancestral histories and lineages, collective healing and shared action. The results of this ongoing process was a Community Assessment, a Shareback session with the community, and Community Strategic Plan for Change for each of the four Soul Players communities, including San Luis. This community-centered plan led to these three priority areas:

1. Youth activities and mental health
2. Physical health, affordable housing, and drug/alcohol use
3. Cultural activities, adult education, and small business development



Over and over, "the need for a community center to function as a community gathering space was further emphasized." Together with community members, the Soul Players developed goals around creating a central, multigenerational gathering place, providing meaningful and accessible youth and family-centered activities that celebrate cultural heritage, provide opportunities to improve mental and physical health, and stimulate a thriving local economy.

Additionally, Soul Players is continuing to collect survey responses (see live data here) around specific needs for a community center. From this data we can see that:

- There is a large need for an indoor recreation center (53%) followed by outdoor recreation spaces (21%).
- Folks want to see youth camps (72%), Farmers Markets (78%), and community yard sales (54%) in their village.
- The community wants this center to connect to resources around mental (64%) and physical (66%) health, adult education programs (55%), drug and alcohol use (62%), small business development (56%), and affordable housing (60%), basic necessities (food, showers, laundry, internet access, financial assistance).
- Top priority is youth activities, mental and physical health, and affordable housing.
- The types of spaces that most people want are: community gathering space (69%), basketball (61%), walking trail (58%), and a playground (54%).

From these data and stories, we can see that recreation is intimately connected to the health and wellbeing of the community. We hope that this plan is one way to make actionable, incremental steps towards the needs and desires that the community expressed through this community assessment process.

TOWN OF SAN LUIS RECREATION PLANNING

In 2023, the Town of San Luis was awarded a $25,000 "Infusing Equity into Built Environment for Better Health" grant through the Colorado Health Foundation. Over the past two years, the Town has collected surveys, put on softball and volleyball tournaments to engage the community, and solicited feedback on design renderings at events like the annual Fiesta de Santiago y Santa Ana. In addition to echoing much of what was learned through the Soul Players' data, the Town also heard from 49 survey respondents that:

- The top 4 priorities the community identified were to: Develop a multi-purpose indoor recreation center (83%), Upgrade existing park, recreation equipment, paths, and open spaces (54%), Build aquatic facilities (48%), and Develop a new multi-purpose outdoor recreation area (43%).
- 95% of survey respondents said they thought a public swimming facility is needed in San Luis.
- The top 3 features for an indoor space were: indoor pool (86%), weight/fitness room (63%), and a gymnasium (59%).
- The top 4 features for outdoor spaces were: basketball courts (65%), softball field (61%), playground (53%), and volleyball courts (46%).
- 92% of respondents said that voting-age members of your household would generally support an additional tax to support such a facility.

The town made sure to engage community members of all ages throughout the planning process, using a "meet them where they're at" mentality in order to achieve this. Through a partnership with Centennial school, art students drew concepts of a new recreation facility and listed amenities they would like to see brought to town. By hosting softball and volleyball tournaments, over 150 people of all ages gathered at the proposed recreation site to support community activity, fill out surveys, and offer feedback on conceptual designs. And through partnership meetings with organizations like Move Mountains, a youth-based organization focused on teaching cultural practices through agriculture and recreation, we heard from a diverse array of community stakeholders.



Participant in the town softball tournament reviews the town's plans for recreation amenities.



Santa Ana Festival Engagement Board - Concept Plan Voting + Feedback

Through the planning grant, the San Luis recreation committee was established. The committee is composed of 12 community members, representing different demographics in San Luis. The committee meets monthly with the goal of taking the feedback from community engagement efforts and compiling them into plans and designs for future construction. The committee plans to continue meeting after the planning grant has been closed out.

With support from Ayres Associates and Radian, both architectural firms with experience in projects based on community engagement, the Town engaged with 150 people at the Santa Ana festival. Participants voted on the concept design and provided feedback. The overwhelming favorite placed a recreation park on the North side of San Luis, near the school, and a rodeo and fairgrounds right next to a plan from the Costilla County Conservancy District's site for a new Farm Park. Additionally, they identified a few key areas of feedback to keep in mind for the project:

HISTORY + TRADITION

- Focus on preservation, upkeep, and enhancement
- Consider design elements that are more traditional than modern and compliment the aesthetic of the region
- Connect people to acequias, Rito Seco Park, and The Vega

KIDS ACTIVITY

- Very few kid focused activities currently available in the community
- Kids need safe indoor/outdoor spaces after school
- Wide range of activities is desired (equestrian, 4H, playgrounds, sportsfields, boxing ring, etc.)

ACCESSIBILITY + CONNECTIONS

- Promote trails, sidewalks, and walkability improvements
- Aging population in San Luis - provide resources that are accessible to all
- Very few trails/walking options currently available

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

In partnership with the Civic Canopy, a community-based nonprofit specializing in cross-community collaboration, the Recreation Committee developed a Journey Map, an outline for this recreation plan, engaged in 9 1:1 partner engagement interviews, and facilitated a 2-hour Partner Engagement meeting to solicit feedback from community partner organizations who will be essential to the success in the implementation and building of public support for these new facilities, as well as activating them with the kinds of programs that the community identified. Ongoing collaboration will be an essential component of this plan's success, and the consistent communication and input from partners will ensure that these recreation spaces are activated to their full potential.





Civic Canopy Meeting



2024 Santa Ana Festival



Youth Focus Group



Recreation Steering Committee

THE PLANS FOR RECREATION SPACES

RECREATION PARK

Based on the community engagement that has been done through work by the Soul Players as well as the two-year planning process that the town conducted, conceptual designs and renderings have been made for a new recreation park on the north end of San Luis. The plan includes opportunities to play softball, basketball, pickleball, volleyball, and horseshoes and be easily accessed from a path to the school that connects to a walking path all the way around the town.

Everything in the plan is community-led. We heard from seniors that a walking path around town is needed, we heard from parents that a new playground is a must, we heard from families that more pavilion space for outdoor gatherings is wanted, and we heard from the youth that more opportunities for pick up games and rec sports leagues would give them something to do in their community. The Soul Players determined that the number one priority for San Luis residents is more youth and adult programming. With the new San Luis Recreation Park, we intend to provide the space for that programming to occur.







Rendering of Proposed Recreation Park

FARM PARK

The Costilla County Conservancy District is in the process of developing a Farm Park for San Luis and the surrounding communities. With a recently acquired parcel of 18 acres located East of San Luis, this property will be home to public space that will be used for growing food and fiber, agriculture and acequia education, along with demonstration grazing practices for all to participate in. Funding through the sale of CCCD-owned properties as well as state and federal grant proposals are helping turn these possibilities into a reality.

RODEO FAIRGROUNDS

Six months ago, the Town purchased land on the east side of town, adjacent to the CCCD farm park property. The town heard from community members that they would like to complement the new farm park with agricultural recreation opportunities. A design has been put in place to install a town-owned rodeo and fairground space that can be used for Rodeos, 4H, markets, concerts, and more. The town is in early talks with the county about installing a donated roping arena in this property.

SAN LUIS RECREATION PARK

NORTH SITE ROUGH COST ESTIMATE 2025

The San Luis Recreation Park design and construction are divided into six phases based on community priorities, allowing funding to be secured over time. The preliminary cost estimate includes construction costs as well as inflation, contingency, and design fees.

PHASE 1 — $2,581,362

Softball Field + Amenities

Construction Costs
- Softball Field + Dugout
- Bathrooms + Concessions
- Public Parking Lot
- Sidewalks, Trash Cans, Benches, Picnic Tables
- Sitework (Grading, Lighting, Water, Sewer)

Other Costs
- Cost Inflation
- Contingency
- Design, Permitting, Survey, Construction Testing

PHASE 2 — $1,770,947

Playground, Walking Trail, Trees + Landscape

Construction Costs
- Playground for 5-12 Year Old Kids
- Landscape (Walking Trail, Trees, Boulders, etc)
- Sitework (Irrigation, Grading)

Other Costs
- Cost Inflation
- Contingency
- Design, Permitting, Survey, Construction Testing

PHASE 3 — $85,317

Pedestrian Bridge Connection to School

Construction Costs
- Pedestrian Bridge

Other Costs
- Cost Inflation
- Contingency
- Design, Permitting, Survey, Construction Testing

PHASE 4 — To Be Determined

Recreation Center

Construction Costs
- To Be Determined

Other Costs
- To Be Determined

PHASE 5 — To Be Determined

Recreation Center Expansion

Construction Costs
- To Be Determined

Other Costs
- To Be Determined

PHASE 6 — $1,257,253

Outdoor Sport Courts

Construction Costs
- Sand Volley Ball
- Basketball
- Tennis / Pickleball

Other Costs
- Cost Inflation
- Contingency
- Design, Permitting, Survey, Construction Testing

TOTAL COST (Excluding Rec Center) = $5,694,879

NEXT STEPS



FUTURE PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES

The community spoke loud and clear about the need for an indoor recreation facility. A site has been identified for a new rec center and initial outreach around what types of features the community would like to see in an indoor facility. However, the Town of San Luis is not yet in a financial position to not only launch a capital campaign, but also earn enough ongoing revenue to maintain an indoor facility. The Recreation Committee will need to continue strategizing for how to sustainably fund that aspect of the project, while taking steps to execute some of the "lower hanging fruit" that is within reach in the next few years.

During conversations with the County (especially as they developed their 2012 Trails, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan) and SLVGO, there are more opportunities to connect the open spaces, trails, and recreation in the county to the town. One long-term project that could continue to be explored is a bike trail that connects the Rito Seco to the Town of San Luis. There is also potential for an even broader comprehensive Town and County plan that addresses some of the broader range of issues facing the community including housing and food access.

FUNDRAISING

To see all of these plans come to full fruition, the Town and other partners will need to engage in a diverse range of fundraising strategies. These may include:

- Grant opportunities - could explore Great Outdoors Colorado Outdoor Equity Grant, Colorado Health Foundation Implementation Funding, the LOR Foundation, Anschutz Family Foundation, the Daniels Fund, Boettcher Foundation, and Gates Family Foundation, or Caring for Colorado
- Capital campaign - setting a big, bold goal to raise capital to build projects
- Crowdfunding - using platforms to gain broader support from smaller donors across the San Luis Valley and the state who want to see San Luis thrive
- Town Ordinance to fund Recreation - explore passing an ordinance to increase sales tax to raise revenue to fund the ongoing maintenance of recreational facilities
- Corporate Sponsorships - provide the opportunity for local businesses and larger outside sponsors to provide funding towards the San Luis Recreation Park in exchange for permanent advertising.

BRINGING THE PLAN TO LIFE

Although this plan is large and ambitious, the community shared openly that it is important to see some progress soon, as it can be easy to lose faith that anything will happen after so much "talk" about what the town wants to build. Taking off bite-size chunks of the project, starting building a softball field, or setting up a roping ring can go a long way to see that the people working on this plan are dedicated to making these ideas a reality. It will not happen overnight, but San Luis is well on its way to becoming a thriving local community.