

The image features four hands, two at the top and two at the bottom, positioned to form a square frame. The hands are light-skinned and have their fingers pointing towards the corners of the square. The background is a vast desert landscape under a clear blue sky. The foreground and middle ground are filled with numerous saguaro cacti of various sizes, interspersed with low-lying green desert shrubs. In the far distance, a range of low mountains is visible on the horizon.

Is Arizona Growing Smarter?

*A Review of the Growing Smarter
Statutes and Recommendations for Improving
Growth Management in Arizona*



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This review, although not comprehensive, seeks to provide valuable insight on the current progress of the Growing Smarter Legislation, shed light on some inconsistencies between adopted plans and legislative requirements, discuss further possible improvements to planning in Arizona, and attempt to better clarify the distinction between the “Growing Smarter” legislation, and planning for smart growth. This review is illustrative, rather than rigorous or analytic, in assessment of best planning practices. Examples are not intended to be exhaustive of all commendable plan components.

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The nonprofit Sonoran Institute inspires, informs and enables community decisions and policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Facing rapid change, communities in the West value their natural and cultural assets, which support resilient environmental and economic systems. Founded in 1990, the Sonoran Institute helps communities conserve and restore those assets and manage growth and change through collaboration, civil dialogue, sound information, practical solutions, and big-picture thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

In response to a citizen initiative to establish urban growth boundaries and require increased development impact fees, in 1998 the Arizona State Legislature with support from Governor Jane Hull passed House Bill 2361, the “Growing Smarter Act.” Its purpose was to create an urban growth management framework by strengthening land planning processes, providing for open space preservation, and establishing a Growing Smarter Commission to make recommendations on long-term urban growth issues. In 2000, the Growing Smarter Plus Act made several revisions to the original Act based on recommendations from the Commission. Following the passage of both acts, Governor Hull established the Growing Smarter Oversight Council to evaluate the effectiveness of these laws and to continue to address growth-related issues.¹

The name “Growing Smarter Act” – as well as the context in which it was developed – implied that it would provide a framework to address the growth management concerns expressed by the citizens of the state. Namely, that implementing the measure would lead to better planned growth and would protect the state’s cultural and natural resources from unmanaged sprawl.

Nearly ten years after Growing Smarter was first enacted, Arizona continues to struggle with growth. The pace of growth has not only been maintained, but in some areas of the state it has accelerated. Arizona is now officially the fastest growing state in the nation, and Governor Janet Napolitano has convened a Governor’s Growth Cabinet to deal with the complex issues created by the rapid growth. As growth pressures and the population continue to increase, it begs the question – is Arizona growing smarter as a result of this framework? If not, what could or should be done to improve Growing Smarter so that it lives up to its promise of better managed growth and higher quality communities?

While not an exhaustive survey, this report is an attempt to provide a representative survey across Arizona geographics. This report covers the basics of the Growing Smarter Act’s statutory framework and requirements for cities and counties, and explores potential revisions that could strengthen and better achieve the goal of smarter growth in Arizona’s communities. A companion report will be produced on the impacts of Growing Smarter on the planning processes of the Arizona State Land Department. Future assessments will examine the extent to which plans have been successfully implemented.

GROWING SMARTER REVIEW

Growing Smarter promotes improved land use planning practices by changing the general and comprehensive planning processes of town, city and county governments as well the planning for residential and commercial undertaken on state trust lands by the Arizona State Land Department. This report focuses on the city and county planning elements.

The Growing Smarter legislation reforms the general and comprehensive planning process in three key ways:

- It increases the required level of public participation in the development, approval and amendment of the general or comprehensive plan;
- It increases the scope of a general or comprehensive plan by requiring new growth-related elements and detailing aspects of those elements;
- It strengthens the implementation power of a general or comprehensive plan by requiring that future rezoning comply with the plan and that major amendments be presented at an annual public hearing and receive two-thirds approval by the governing body.

Requirements of the Growing Smarter legislation apply differently for different types of cities or counties (see Appendix 1). For most cities, requirements include: a

public participation and plan ratification process; the inclusion of a number of plan elements and element requirements, as discussed in the Findings section; and a defined distinction between major and minor amendments. Most counties face similar requirements, except that boards of supervisors adopt comprehensive plans without public ratification and fewer elements are required. Statutory language allows for flexibility on some requirements but sets clear mandates for others. The Findings section of this review focuses on those aspects of the legislation that set clear requirements.

Growing Smarter's progress is overseen by the Growing Smarter Oversight Council (GSOC), which has the mission of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Acts, developing a method for and measuring the effectiveness of the Acts, and reporting these findings and suggestions for improvements to the citizens and government of Arizona.² Since its formation, the GSOC has conducted a number of surveys regarding the implementation of the legislation, and recently sought to advance a more proactive statewide vision and principles for how we grow. The following review was conducted with reference to the evaluations by the GSOC, and many of these findings support trends identified in the GSOC records.

A representative of the Sonoran Institute served as a member of the original Growing Smarter Commission, and an Institute representative sits on the GSOC. Recognizing that the fruits of this legislation should now be ripening, as well as having a long-standing interest in the progress of Growing Smarter, the Institute has reviewed the Growing Smarter law through a survey of Arizona county, city and town general and comprehensive plans

(see Appendix 2 for a list of plans reviewed). This review reveals an approach to planning that charts and discusses future needs created by continued growth, without attempting to greatly reshape that growth. The recommendations section initiates a discussion on how planners and decision-makers can work within the Growing Smarter context to encourage local governments to envision and work toward a future that better addresses the negative consequences associated with current growth patterns. With these recommendations in mind, a final section raises the question of whether smart growth should be a legitimate goal of Growing Smarter and discusses the potential to more firmly impel Arizona toward smart growth as an official state policy.

FINDINGS

The Growing Smarter legislation appears to be successful in prompting cities and counties of all sizes to involve their communities and adopt more holistic plans. Almost all of Arizona's communities have adopted general or comprehensive plans in recognition of the legislation. While results vary among plans, and even elements within plans, these plans are an important step toward more effective planning and growth management. Our review suggests, however, that plans do not provide sufficiently specific policies, objectives and implementation measures to assess whether the goals of the plans could be met. In addition, almost all plans lacked internal evaluation mechanisms and clear benchmarks on which to evaluate future change. However, an on-the-ground application of plans was not conducted as part of this review and awaits future assessments.



SUMMARY REVIEW OF CITY AND COUNTY PLANS

Plans from 14 Arizona counties and 22 cities and towns were reviewed, and findings were divided into three categories: Adoption, Elements, and Effectiveness. The key overall results of this survey are summarized below, and are discussed in more detail in the sections following this summary.

Adoption

- Plans have been adopted or amended as required.
- Public involvement has been accomplished.
- Required elements have been included.

Elements

- Element requirements have been mentioned in the narrative of plans.
- Some element requirements of the legislation are chronically ignored or inadequately addressed, despite clear legislative direction.
 - In the Land Use Element, these requirements include:
 - identifying infill or compact development programs;
 - considering air quality and solar energy access;
 - maintaining a variety of uses.
 - In the Open Space Element, they include:
 - inventorying designated access points;
 - analyzing forecasted needs and management policies;
 - promoting integrated regional open space and recreation resources.
 - In the Environmental Planning Element, they include:
 - analyzing and addressing the anticipated effect of projected growth.
 - In the Cost of Development Element, they include:
 - identifying policies or strategies requiring developer payments.
 - In the Water Resources Elements, they include:
 - addressing the projected future demand for water and analyzing how that demand will be served.
- The following elements are consistently handled in a thorough manner:
 - Growth areas are clearly identified and often linked to supplemental plans;
 - Circulation Elements include extensive discussion of alternative transportation options, but still prioritize road networks.
- Many plans include a character element, housing element, or economic development element, even when not required to do so.
- Large cities do the most comprehensive job of covering all required elements in detail.

Effectiveness

- All plans, as required, include goals, objectives and policies.
- All plans include definitions of major amendments and the major amendment process.
- As allowed by the legislation, most plans rely heavily on supplemental plans for outlining policies and agendas for specific areas (such as neighborhoods or downtowns) or topics (such as open space or water quality).
- The legislation does not require a vision element or specific visioning requirements, and most plans lack a compelling, unifying vision.
- The legislation does not require an implementation element or specific implementation requirements. There is a rough split between plans that include implementation charts and timelines and plans that do not address implementation strategies at all.
- The legislation does not address the regional nature of many land use issues. Most plans fail to examine their impacts on surrounding areas, although some discuss the impacts of their neighbors on their abilities.
- The legislation does not require an evaluation element. Most plans do not include evaluation measures or process.

The above findings are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

THE PLAN ADOPTION PROCESS

This review does not examine any city or county's actual adoption process, except as that process is documented in the body of the general or comprehensive plan. As such, the findings regarding adoption are limited.



It is noted, however, that essentially all cities and counties required by this legislation to adopt or amend their plans have done so since its passage. Also, a good number of smaller cities and coun-

ties have passed plans in accordance with the legislation without the requirement.

It appears that in all cases the public has been involved in the adoption or amendment process. Many plans document a participation process that included citizen committees, public workshops, and other planning activities. The degree to which public participation impacts the final plan is not known from this review, and it is not clear that these processes were structured to arrive at a unified community vision for the future.

Almost universally, adopted plans contain all of the Growing Smarter elements that are required based upon population size and growth rate. Their accordance with the legislation is often noted in the introduction of each element.

General and comprehensive plans must be re-adopted, following a similar public involvement process, at least every ten years. Existing plans were primarily ratified between 2001 and 2004. It will therefore be a number of years before the re-adoption process can be reviewed. Plans reviewed did acknowledge this deadline and made provisions for both the re-adoption and amendment processes (findings related to major amendments will be further discussed in the implementation section). Plans are not static documents, and some communities have amended their plans as frequently as every year. A number of communities are undertaking major revisions now (e.s. Pinal County, Town of Marana).

THE ELEMENTS

The plans reviewed follow a pattern in which an introduction section is followed by a series of element sections.

Each element is introduced with a brief history of that issue in the community, a narrative vision of what the community would like to promote, and a discussion of how to approach that vision. Following this discussion is a laundry list of goals, objectives and policies. Goals are intended as statements of broad ideals, objectives are the various components necessary to accomplish those ideals, and policies are the stepping-stones followed to reach the objectives. Maps are included where appropriate.



With some exception for extremely small and extremely large cities, the seven main elements required by the Growing Smarter legislation are: Land Use, Circulation, Open Space, Growth Areas, Environmental Planning, Cost of Development, and Water Resources. (Most counties are only required to include the Land Use, Circulation, and Water Resources Elements.) This review focuses on the handling of these seven elements. While all of the elements played an important role, aspects of some are consistently better handled than others. Our findings show that:

- Not only are required elements included, but the sub-requirements of each element have at least been mentioned in the narrative of plans (see Appendix 3 for a list of topics required for each element).
- Despite a brief narrative mention, some element sub-requirements are chronically ignored or inadequately addressed, particularly in the goals and policies section, despite clear legislative direction. It is important that requirements be met through policies, because only policies have implementation authority. The following mandates were disregarded or poorly handled by a significant portion of reviewed plans:

Land Use Element: Infill/Compact Development

[“A land use element that identifies specific programs and policies that the municipality may use to promote infill or compact form development activity and locations where those development patterns should be encouraged” ARS 9-461.05 (C)(1)(c)].

Infill or compact development is mentioned in city plans, but specific policies of encouragement – such as infill districts or density incentives – are rarely included. As allowed by the statute, some towns specifically discourage such development in order to promote their rural character. All towns, however, are required to identify allowable programs; this identification is absent in many plans.

For examples of strong infill and compact development incentives and direction, see the Avondale General Plan. Goal Four of the Land Use element promotes infill, and the plan includes, by reference, the Avondale Infill Incentive Plan. [Other plans attuned to infill and compact development include the Coconino, Maricopa, and Cochise Comprehensive Plans, and the Sahuarita, Chandler, Tempe, Phoenix, and Tucson General Plans.

Land Use Element: Air Quality & Solar Energy Access

[“A land use element that includes consideration of air quality and access to incident solar energy for all general categories of land use” ARS 9-461.05 (C)(1)(d)].

Such consideration is not mentioned in most plans’ Land Use Elements. Air quality, alternative energy and solar access are sometimes covered by the Environmental Planning Element, but not in relation to land use requirements.

Fulfilling the solar access requirement does not have to be difficult. The Sahuarita General Plan successfully addresses solar energy in one land use policy (number 1.2.7 on page 18): “Promote the orientation of new housing stock to maximize use of solar energy and review building codes to ensure that new structures utilize best available practices for energy conservation.”

Considering air quality in the Land Use Element is more complex and subjective. Air quality is closely tied to transportation and other issues. Land Use elements

should consider these interactions, and promoted patterns should be directed accordingly. The Oro Valley General Plan includes air quality in its Land Use Element, as well as a series of policies promoting transit-oriented development, connectivity, dust regulation, and others (policies 1.5.1-1.5.7).

Land Use Element: Variety of Uses

[“A land use element that includes policies that address maintaining a broad variety of land uses including the range of uses existing” ARS 9-461.05 (C)(1)(e)].

While land use maps and descriptions do include a broad range of uses, most plans do not state such variety as an explicit policy.

The Sahuarita General Plan provides a good example of a specific land use policy that meets this requirement (LU-1.3.1 on page 20): “Provide in the Town’s zoning code for all types of uses existing at the present time within the Town.”

Open Space Element: Access Points

[“An open space element that includes a comprehensive inventory of [...] designations of access points to open space areas and resources” ARS 9-461.05 (D)(1)(a)].

Consideration of access points is seldom addressed. Future policies could plan for this requirement by creating an access point policy, such as a mandate of a minimum distance to an open space access point for every residence.

Access points, such as trailheads, are clearly marked on the Cottonwood General Plan’s Open Space and Recreation Areas Maps (Figs 9-4 & 9-5 on pages 18 & 19).

Open Space Element: Analyzing Forecasted Needs

[“An open space element that includes an analysis of forecasted needs [and] policies for managing and protecting open space areas and resources...” ARS 9-461.05 (D)(1)(b)].

Although the need for open space is universally recognized by plans, forecasted acreage and access need (based on projected population or other methods) is only included in roughly half of all plans. Any mention of

implementation tools, including an analysis of appropriate policies, is largely absent.

The Prescott Valley General Plan provides a clear analysis of current and forecasted recreational needs based on informed, population-based standards (pages 151-153). Clear recreation and open space management policies were not evident in any of the reviewed plans.

Open Space Element: Regional Open Space

[Policies and implementation strategies designed to promote a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources and a consideration of any existing regional open space plans. ARS 9-461.05 (D)(1)(c)]

Regional considerations were poorly considered by most of the reviewed plans. While some open space elements mentioned nearby regional open space resources, few integrated them into their own plans.

The process and results of the Verde Valley Regional Open Space plan provide an example of one approach to this issue. The Cottonwood General Plan does an exemplary job of considering this plan in its own open space element (pages 2-13). It includes regional considerations in its own local and regional policies.

Environmental Planning Element: Analysis and Policies to Address Development

[“An environmental planning element that contains analysis, policies and strategies to address anticipated effects, if any, of plan elements on air quality, water quality and natural resources...” ARS 9-461.05 (D)(3)].

While plans express general concern for the protection of the environment, none reviewed showed any projection of cumulative growth effects. Policy approaches varied widely, addressing anything from just water quality to the inclusion of native vegetation, wildlife corridors, and soil erosion, among others. Strong policy approaches were rare. Environmental Planning was consistently the weakest of all elements.

The Coconino Comprehensive Plan also provides a unique, successful approach to this element by basing its entire plan around a specific Conservation Framework. In this way, Coconino successfully integrates environmental concerns throughout the plan, while

also providing more specific directions in its Natural Environment Section (page 23). (See Appendix 6 for discussion).

Perhaps the most powerful Environmental Element is Pima County’s Conservation Land System, which was designed to “protect biodiversity and provide land use guidelines consistent with the conservation goal of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan.”³ The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan successfully provides regional guidance to appropriate use and management in various habitats across most of Pima County and specific natural open space standards within the biologically significant areas identified in the plan.

However, it should be noted that this effort is largely the result of addressing federal endangered species regulations rather than originating for the Growing Smarter requirements.

Cost of Development Element: Developer Pays Fair Share

[“A cost of development element that identifies policies and strategies that the municipality will use to require development to pay its fair share toward the cost of additional public service needs...” ARS 9-461.05 (D)(4)]

This element was relatively strong in most plans, but most rely on import fees and the typical “horse trading” that occurs as part of development agreements negotiations.

The Cottonwood General Plan provides an excellent discussion of the pros, cons and practicalities of available funding mechanisms, including developer payment measures (beginning on page 3 of the Cost of Development Element).

Water Resources Element:

[“A water resources element that addresses the demand for water that will result from future growth [and] an analysis of how the demand [will be served]” ARS 9-461.05 (D)(5) (b-c)]

All plans recognize water as an important resource and support conservation measures. There is little quantitative analysis linking water availability with projected

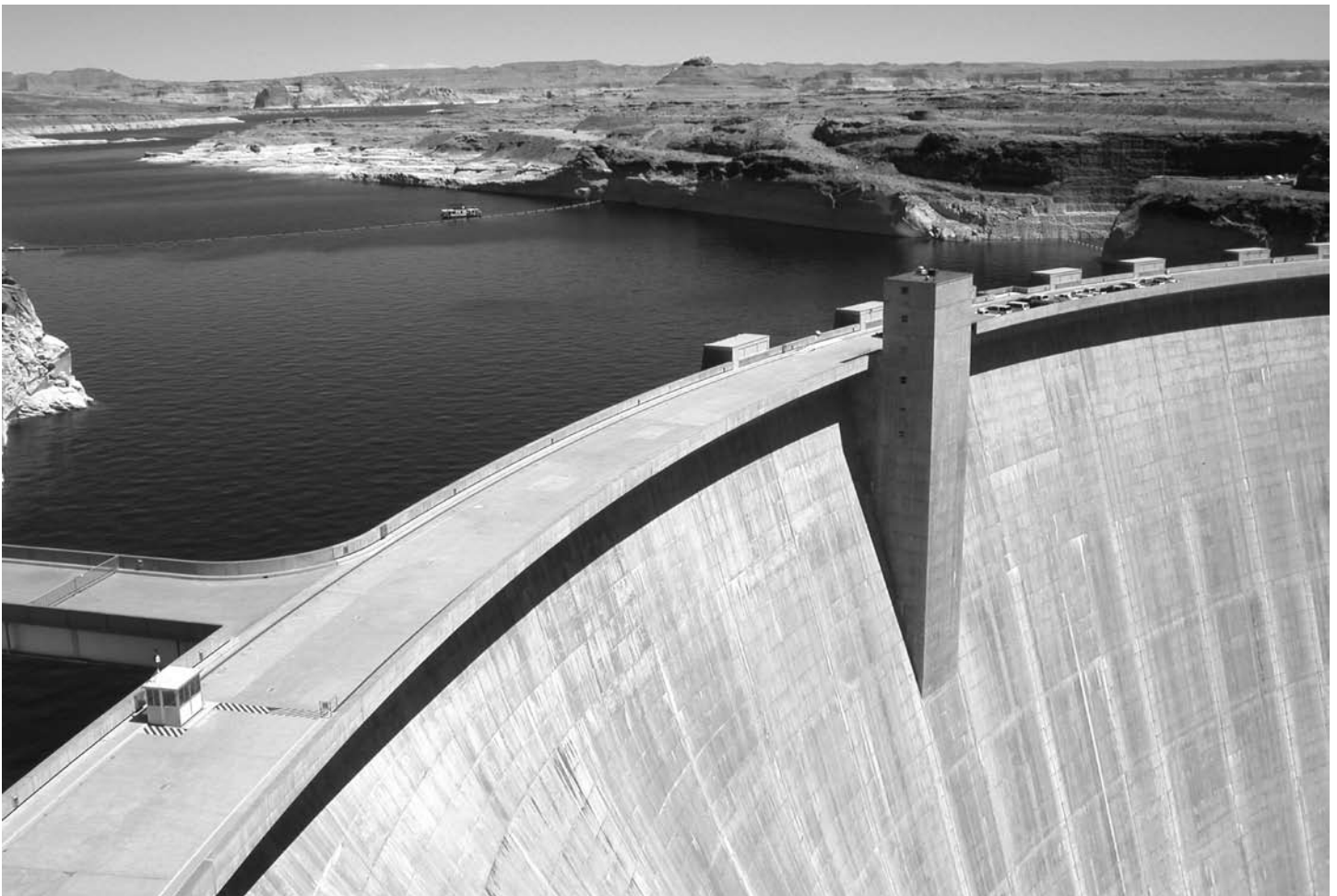
growth. While some plans appear to have extensive data and pre-existing plans for future water supply (these cities and towns are part of an Active Management Area and are already required to have water plans and analyses), others provide little more than the names of their water supply sources. There is wide variety in approach to this element, but it is particularly weak in county plans.

With the notable exception of Cochise County, which recently amended its comprehensive plan to establish clear water use requirements in relation to land use for the Sierra Vista sub-watershed.⁴

The Phoenix General Plan Water Resources Element does provide a comprehensive view of water sources, water uses and future projections. Although the margin for error appears relatively small, the element successfully shows how the city will meet future demand. This element is a good example of how other cities could meet the Water Resources requirements, if they have the capacity to gather the necessary information.

Other element requirements are adequately met by nearly all the plans reviewed. One noteworthy finding shows that many plans explicitly highlight potential growth areas and generate separate growth area plans for them (including plans for circulation, land use, and service provision). In many plans, however, the chosen “growth areas” are simply the remaining large vacant lots on the periphery of current development and the “growth area plans” appear to be a reflection of landowner developer plans or aspirations.

The Clarkdale General Plan provides a clear rationale for the growth areas it chose, which fits with the requirements of the Growing Smarter legislation. It also provides objectives and policies that have clear action implications and implementation strategies and time frame. Clarkdale can serve as a brief, but solid example for smaller communities. Other interesting growth area elements are found in the Tempe General Plan (growth areas are mainly redevelopment areas), the Oro Valley



General Plan (the town has instituted an urban service boundary), and the Phoenix General Plan (provides an extensive discussion of designated growth areas).

Most plans exceed the requirements for the Circulation Element by documenting not only existing and proposed transportation routes, but also policies providing for and encouraging non-traditional transportation such as bicycling, walking, hiking and transit. However, immediate priority is still given to street widening and road construction.

Additionally, many cities and some counties choose to include optional elements. The most popular are Housing, Community Character, Neighborhood Character, and Economic Development (or similarly titled) elements.



Lastly, the most comprehensive plans are those of the cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. These plans are least likely to omit direct requirements (although there are exceptions) and most likely to contain innovative and compelling approaches to some of the elements. Although not discussed here, they also include the more intensive requirements such as addressing public services, public buildings, safety, and redevelopment, among others.

PLAN EFFECTIVENESS

Plans only have meaning if they are actively implemented through the day-to-day decisions made by the community. Evaluation of plan implementation through city or county regulations, ordinances, and agency actions was not conducted as part of this review, but the following findings shed some light on this issue.

Growing Smarter includes three provisions to ensure plan impact. First, it requires that all elements include goals, objectives and policies. Second, it requires that all

rezoning must be in accordance with the plan and that major amendments to the plan follow specific guidelines. Third, it allows for the creation of sub-plans to allow for greater detail and implementation power. All reviewed plans utilized all three of the above tools, although with different levels of success. The Growing Smarter legislation does not require other elements that are necessary for a strong plan, including visioning, implementation tools, and evaluation requirements. Finally, Growing Smarter encourages regional cooperation but does not set the stage for regional planning; this reduces the ability of many communities to address issues of a regional nature, such as open space, water resources and cost-efficient growth.

Goals, Objectives and Policies - All plans include an extensive network of goals, objectives and policies. The greatest weaknesses of plans are that they are hard to implement and the language of their goals, objectives and policies is general and nonspecific. Objectives are rarely more than restatements of the goal; they are not stated as measurable outcomes and may not logically lead to the accomplishment of the goal. Vaguely written policies have little meaning in the absence of any clearer direction on implementation; they use language such as “support the growth and expansion of the economic base,” or “encourage circulation efficiency.” Also, many policies, rather than dictating courses of action, call for studies to determine possible courses of action – this may be the result of a lack of time and resources to adequately finish the plan before adoption.

Major Amendment Processes – According to the legislation, a major amendment is “a substantial alteration of the municipality’s land use mixture or balance” as defined by that municipality’s general plan (A.R.S. 9-461.06 (G)). Major amendments are normally defined as changes that increase or significantly decrease the land use intensity of an area or changes that affect a large area or a large number of people. The appropriateness of such thresholds was not evaluated in this review. One concern, however, is that major amendments are defined with such high thresholds that plans could be weakened through repeated amendment without the annual hearing and board approval required of major amendments. The major amendment process is a topic that warrants further exploration.

The Scottsdale Plan innovatively added character and water/wastewater infrastructure criteria to its major amendment definition:

Character Area Criteria

If a proposal to change the land use category has not been clearly demonstrated by the applicant to comply with the guidelines and standards embodied within an approved character area plan, it will be considered a major amendment.

Water/Wastewater Infrastructure Criteria

If a proposal to change the planned land use category results in the premature increase in the size of a master planned water transmission sewer collection facility, it will qualify as a major amendment. (Scottsdale 2001 General Plan, pg. 64)



Supplemental Plans - The use of supplemental plans to provide more specific policies and implementation strategies for critical areas is relied on for many of the plans reviewed. The general and comprehensive plan process has provided a platform to develop these site-specific plans, which are intended to outline policies for specific areas (such as neighborhoods or downtowns) or topics (such as open space or water quality), as allowed by the legislation.⁵ These plans allow for more specific zoning recommendations, development incentives, and a closer consideration of a certain area or issue.

Visioning - The legislation does not require a vision element or specific visioning requirements. This is arguably a significant weakness of the legislation. A strong vision is important to unite a community toward a common goal, tie elements together as tools for a larger purpose, and provide an opportunity for communities to state a commitment to smart growth, if desired. Although some vision aspect is included in most plans, almost all lack a compelling, unifying vision.⁶ Visions, when included, are often universally applicable and hold no meaning for the community. An example is the following vision statement, which could be applied to essentially any community in the state:

“[Our community] will remain a large and growing city with a dynamic, sustainable economy. The city adapts and preserves its Sonoran desert environment and

preserves and promotes its diverse cultural heritage, job opportunities and lifestyle choices. Strong public involvement will preserve a sense of community.”

Such a statement provides no information about the future of the community. Most plans include details of the community’s history and values. These narratives could be used as a launching point for a proper vision for the future. Individual element goals, then, should specifically relate back to this vision.

While the content of a vision depends on the values of the community, the effectiveness of a vision statement can be assessed based on its specificity to the community and applicability within the context of land use planning. The Prescott General Plan provides an example of an effective vision statement (see Appendix 7).

Implementation – Growing Smarter does not require an implementation element or offer specific implementation requirements. As a result, there is a rough split between plans that include implementation charts and timelines and plans that do not address implementation strategies at all. Furthermore, only a handful of plans include implementation strategies (such as specific incentive programs) as part of their objectives and policies. To achieve the objectives laid out in plans to meet the goals of Growing Smarter, it is important for plans

to include stronger implementation measures. Plans are vague by nature, and without specified tools, policies will be applied in an ad hoc, discretionary manner. Planning and development are already heavily dependent on the individuals implementing them; overly discretionary plans will fail to have long-term application if they do not include some prescriptive implementation policies.

The Cottonwood General Plan includes a particularly thorough implementation plan. It includes implementation policies and timelines for each of its elements that specifically tie back to each policy; in this way, implementation is integrated throughout the entire document. Also see Appendix 4 for implementation aspects of Florence's Land Use Element.

Evaluation – The legislation does not require that communities evaluate their plans. As a result, few, if any, of the general or comprehensive plans include evaluation elements. Communities should be sure to define and then measure their progress toward both benchmarks and outcomes.

The Chino Valley General Plan includes “measurements” after each goal and related policies. These measurements are specific accomplishments that can provide evidence of plan success (number of businesses with upgraded services, for example).

Regional Planning – The legislation does not address the regional nature of many land use issues. It does not provide guidance for regional plans or guidance for coordinating plans with neighboring communities. As a result, most plans fail to examine their impacts on surrounding areas, although some discuss the impacts from their neighbors. Legislative direction on adoption, amendment and implementation processes for regional plans and regional interactions could aid such cooperation. It may also be reasonable to require regional plans for certain elements, such as the circulation element and the open space element.

CONCLUSION

The Growing Smarter legislation has clearly had an impact on general and comprehensive plans throughout Arizona. While many cities, and some counties, had

general or comprehensive plans before the Growing Smarter Acts, this legislation required, in all cases, significant procedural changes, and in many cases, substantive changes to the content of these plans. The reviewed plans are a direct response to this legislation. It appears that the extent and quality of general and comprehensive planning has improved in line with the legislation's intent.

None the less, there are indications that some communities may have lost sight of the purpose of the plans. The results are plans without clear visions, elements that are treated in isolation rather than as a cohesive whole, and policies without the specific data or designated tools necessary for them to be effectively acted upon. The positive impact of these plans on-the-ground remains uncertain, and further study is needed to assess implementation of these plans through mechanisms outside the general and comprehensive plan process.



While these are significant problems, it may be the case that the plans will improve over time. Perhaps in the next round of plan adoption (for most plans this will occur between 2012 and 2015) agencies will be better prepared to use the required elements to meet their community's needs, rather than viewing them as requirements to be checked off. In addition, many communities are undertaking plan revisions in advance of the ten-year timeframe (e.g. Town of Marana, Pinal County, Town of Buckeye). They may also be more prepared with adequate data, assuming it has been collected as proposed in many plan policies through water studies, population studies, neighborhood studies, open space studies, and the like. Policies will only be effective if they are rooted in a strong understanding of the current situation and

the available options. Tracking both the impact and the evolution of these plans over time will help inform the planning process and the built environment Arizonans will inhabit in the future.

It is also reasonable to assume that these plans will continue to evolve as more information is gathered and communities become more comfortable with these plans as management tools. With this in mind, this report provides some examples of noteworthy elements of general and comprehensive plans. This survey was not exhaustive and was not designed to identify the best practices, but rather representative examples of best practices. Undoubtedly some have been missed, and deeper examination may reveal other examples, as well as challenges.

Recommendations

Plans should depict a strong, compelling, and comprehensive vision for the community.

The vision is the opportunity for the city or county to determine the ultimate goals toward which the plan should aspire. Such a vision should be less focused on projections of what is happening, or will happen, but rather on what the community wants to happen. It should reveal the desired qualitative and quantitative physical environment well into the future. Creating this vision may prove contentious as different opinions of the desired future come into conflict, but only through such conflict and compromise will the community be able to create vision on which action can be taken. Without a clear picture at the outset, it should be no surprise that the other elements can be interpreted in multiple ways and can even generate conflict.

State Action - This is a recommendation for which it may make sense to amend the legislation and add a vision element to the requirements. The state may also assist in guiding local visions by clearly calling out the statewide vision for growth throughout the state.

Local Action – Plans can include a vision element without legislative requirement. Local agencies could work with all members of their community to create a shared vision and to evolve such a vision through a thoughtful, well-structured community visioning process.



Plans should provide strong, measurable, implementation guidelines and evaluation methods.

Implementation begins with clear goals, objectives and policies. Objectives should be measurable and policies should be specific enough that they can stimulate direct action. Such an element could be laid out with a time-frame, actor responsible for its completion, source of funds and resources to accomplish the action, and preferably a clear product of the action. The product could be a regulation, an ordinance, a physical accomplishment, a specific dollar amount of funds, or some other tool. Some plans already provide implementation timelines (see Cottonwood, among others). If the goals, objectives and policies are well laid out, the implementation of policies should achieve the objectives, which should bring the community closer to its goals. The implementation element should also include an evaluation process with clear measurable benchmarks so that policies and objectives can be reviewed and modified if necessary. This form of adaptive management will help ensure progress over time and will allow the flexibility necessary for the general or comprehensive plan to be a success.

State Action – This is another area where it may be appropriate to seek a statutory amendment. Growing Smarter could be revised to require an implementation element that includes benchmarking.

Local Action – All plan revisions and updates should work toward an implementation plan for each element.

Regional planning coordination is essential.

The impacts and costs associated with regional growth on individual communities are obvious, particularly in the peripheral cities of larger metro areas. This dilemma is recognized in some plans (the Queen Creek plan provides a good discussion), but the current system lacks the tools with which to adequately address it. A major problem appears to be relative lack of control over growth in unincorporated areas. To provide healthy open spaces, efficient circulation, adequate environmental protection, and economical service provision in Arizona, more planning needs to occur at regional levels. Counties and cities need to provide complementary policies to achieve a regional vision. Numerous approaches, both theoretical and practical, can be drawn upon to inspire an appropriate method for Arizona.⁷

State Action – Growing Smarter currently requires cities and counties to notify and share general plan and major amendment proposals with neighboring jurisdictions. However, this courtesy information sharing often falls short of true coordination and ongoing dialogue at the regional scale. The Growing Smarter Statutes could be amended to provide greater specificity on what constitutes substantive regional planning coordination. Alternatively, the state could

provide greater incentives to regional cooperation along the same vein as that fostered by the federal government in the distribution of transportation funding. State agencies could also be directed to support such regional efforts by providing data, maps, and regional scale information to assist local governments in understanding and responding to regional planning needs.

Local Action – Local governments should seek ways to act at the regional level and capitalize on any opportunities to create multi-jurisdictional plans, policies and programs, including the establishment of regional compacts.

SO, ARE WE GROWING SMARTER?

Growing Smarter has done much to bring a more uniform level of general and comprehensive planning to Arizona. It has led to the inclusion of open space, environmental issues, water resources, and most recently energy resources, in general and comprehensive plans.⁸ It has also encouraged plans to more directly focus on impending growth and to more directly include citizen perspectives.



All these aspects improve the planning process and give communities the tools to proactively engage the future.

Despite these positive steps forward in land use planning, we see little in existing plans that will change the current pattern of growth. Despite the legislation's moniker, there is little we can point to that suggests Arizona is "growing smarter" as embodied in the principles of the smart growth movement. These principles typically include:⁹

- Promote a mix of land uses while taking advantage of compact building design
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective

- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

The smart growth movement has continued to gain multi-disciplinary support across the United States and has been endorsed for some time by the U. S. EPA. A number of states have adopted these principles in some form as a mandated standard and have instituted state-wide policies directing growth in such a manner. These mandates do not have to remove local authority over planning; they simply establish baseline goals supported by larger programs to promote smart growth.

In fairness, apart from a "truth in advertising" criticism, by design, the Growing Smarter statutes were not intended to direct growth in any particular manner but rather were designed to improve and strengthen the local community planning process and ability to plan for the future. While individual communities may choose to embrace the principles of smart growth as a policy if they so desire, there is no mandate to create policies that direct development in a manner that is appreciably different from the development of the past. In a crude sense, Growing Smarter was intended



to bring more order to the apparent chaos and do so statewide for all levels of local government. With this context in mind, the question should be asked: Should there be a state role to encourage (even require) smart growth? Currently, policies dictating pedestrian-oriented site design, prioritizing transit and bicycle circulation and designating urban service boundaries are noticeably absent. Furthermore, land use elements still overwhelmingly tend to separate low-density residential areas from job centers and amenities and dictate this use over large swaths of landscape. As discussed above, the aspects of Growing Smarter that lean toward smart growth – the infill requirement, the open space needs requirement, and details of the growth areas requirement – are most often poorly addressed, if at all.

A smart growth directive at the state level will also help address some of the regional issues plaguing effective planning. With a more clearly stated goal of preserving open space, the state could play a larger role in coordinat-

ing and directing regional interactions. Such cooperation is crucial in protecting rural communities, economizing infrastructure needs, promoting vibrant cities, preserving natural ecosystems, and addressing transportation needs. A more active state role in smart growth would create the opportunity for programs and research that require significant resources. State or regional resources could be pooled to create multi-jurisdictional TDR districts, develop ecosystem-sensitive development practices, evaluate development-funding mechanisms, and address the development and fiscal consequences of inter-municipal competition. In response to concerns of lost local authority, it should be noted that none of these programs remove municipalities' power, but actually provide them with more resources and better options.

Some will argue that Arizona does not want the type of “growth management” many associate with “smart growth.” While Arizona is clearly wary of regulations that might reduce the potential development value of



property, there is evidence that most Arizonans also wish to protect the quality of their lives and value of their homes. The state should attempt to better assess citizen desires and create a statewide vision based on these desires. The GSOC document, “Growing Smarter Guiding Principles for Arizona” (September 2006), is potentially a good starting place for a visioning structure. Smart Growth Principles would actually correspond with, and strengthen, Arizona’s Guiding Principles:¹⁰

- Responsibility and Accountability – government oversight of community development, consideration of the property owner, overall welfare of the community...
- Preservation of Community Character – citizen participation and a “sense of place”...
- Stewardship – clean air and water, natural areas, wildlife protection, open space...

- Opportunity – choice in housing, employment, education, services...
- Infrastructure – long range transportation, utility, facility needs...
- Economic Development – diverse business climate with regional cooperation...

In sum, plans should be encouraged not only to address the Growing Smarter requirements but to address them in a way that is consistent with the tenets of smart growth. The current Growing Smarter legislation does not mandate smart growth, although it certainly opens the door for communities to embrace smart growth.

We believe that the State of Arizona needs a clear and compelling vision concerning how we will grow and to align agencies and resources behind such a vision. The Governor’s Growth Cabinet clearly provides such and opportunity and we look forward to their recommendations.



APPENDIX 1: REQUIRED ELEMENTS FOR ARIZONA CITIES & COUNTIES

CITIES	
All Cities are required to have:	
<i>Land Use Element</i>	
<i>Circulation Element</i>	
Cities with 2,500 and 10,000 people (>2% pop. growth) or above 10,000 people must also have:	Cities over 50,000 people must also have considerations for:
<i>Growth Areas Element</i>	<i>Public Recreation System</i>
<i>Environmental Planning Element</i>	<i>Advanced Circulation</i>
<i>Cost of Development Element</i>	<i>Public Services & Facilities</i>
<i>Open Space Element</i>	<i>Natural Resources</i>
<i>Water Resources Element</i>	<i>Public Buildings</i>
	<i>Housing</i>
	<i>Redevelopment</i>
	<i>Bicycling</i>

COUNTIES	
All counties are required to:	
<i>Address a series of elements including zoning and platting requirements</i>	
Counties greater than 125,000 people must also have:	Counties with more than 200,000 people
<i>Land Use Element</i>	<i>Growth Areas Element</i>
<i>Circulation Element</i>	<i>Environmental Planning Element</i>
<i>Water Resources Element</i>	<i>Cost of Development Element</i>
	<i>Open Space Element</i>

APPENDIX 2:

GENERAL AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANS REVIEWED TO DATE			
Counties		Municipalities	
Apache	Pima	Avondale	Mesa
Cochise	Pinal	Camp Verde	Oro Valley
Coconino	Santa Cruz	Carefree	Paradise Valley
Gila	Yavapai	Chandler	Phoenix
Graham	Yuma	Chino Valley	Prescott
La Paz		Clarkdale	Prescott Valley
Maricopa		Cottonwood	Queen Creek
Mohave		Florence	Sahuarita
Navajo		Lake Havasu	Scottsdale
		Kingman	Tempe
		Marana	Tucson

APPENDIX 3: PRIMARY GROWING SMARTER ELEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Element	Sub-Requirement	Statutory Reference
Land Use	Designates distribution/location/extent of land uses	ARS §9-461.05 (C)(1)(a) & §11-821 (C)(1)
	Includes pop. density/building intensity for land uses	ARS §9-461.05 (C)(1)(b) & §11-821 (C)(1)(a)
	Programs to promote infill or compact development and locations where they should be encouraged	ARS §9-461.05 (C)(1)(c) & §11-821 (C)(1)(b)
	Considers air quality and access to solar energy	ARS §9-461.05 (C)(1)(d) & §11-821 (C)(1)(c)
	Policies to maintain a broad variety of land uses	ARS §9-461.05 (C)(1)(e) & §11-821 (C)(1)(d)
Circulation	Designates location/extent of existing & proposed transportation infrastructure	ARS §9-461.05 (C)(2) & §11-821 (C)(2)
Open Space	Inventory of open space areas, recreational resources, and access to these.	ARS §9-461.05 (D)(1)(a) & §11-821 (D)(1)(a)
	Analyzes forecasted needs, policies for managing and protecting, and implementation strategies to acquire open space areas and recreational resources	ARS §9-461.05 (D)(1)(b) & §11-821 (D)(1)(b)
	Policies & implementation strategies to promote regional, integrated open space and recreational res.	ARS §9-461.05 (D)(1)(c) & §11-821 (D)(1)(c)
Growth Areas	Identifies areas suitable for planned multimodal transportation and infrastructure expansion and improvements designed to support a planned concentration of a variety of uses.	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(2)
	Makes circulation and infrastructure expansion more efficient, and provides rational development pattern.	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(2)(a)
	Conserves natural resources and open space within the growth area & coordinates their location to areas outside the growth areas.	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(2)(b)
	Promotes timely and financially sound infrastructure expansion through funding/financing planning	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(2)(c)
Environ. Planning	Analyzes anticipated air quality, water quality, and natural resource effects from proposed development	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(3)
	Address anticipated air quality, water quality, and natural resource effects from proposed development	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(3)
Cost of Develop.	Designates policies/strategies that will be used to require development to pay its fair share of additional public service needs costs	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(4)
	Identifies legal mechanisms to fund and finance public service needs of new development	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(4)(a)
	Ensures that cost of development mechanisms are fair	ARS §9-461.05/§11-821 (D)(4)(b)
Water Resources	Addresses currently available surface water, groundwater, and effluent supplies.	ARS §9-461.05 (D)(5)(a) (ARS §11-821 (C)(3)(a))
	Addresses demand for water resulting from projected growth, added to existing uses	ARS §9-461.05 (D)(5)(b) (ARS §11-821 (C)(3)(b))
	Analyzes how projected future growth will be adequately served by available supply <i>or</i> plans to obtain necessary additional supplies	ARS §9-461.05 (D)(5)(c) (ARS §11-821 (C)(3)(c))

APPENDIX 4: FLORENCE'S LAND USE ELEMENT

Florence provides a noteworthy land use element because it incorporates other elements, includes meaningful policies, includes an implementation schedule, and promotes smart growth. Here are a few examples just from Florence's first Land Use Goal.

- Incorporates aspects of other elements, including circulation, open space, etc.

This objective includes circulation considerations and promotes smart growth

GOAL 1: PRESERVE RURAL SMALL TOWN	
OBJECTIVE	POLICIES
Perpetuate compact, connected land use pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote non-motorized circulation linkages • Embrace projects with historic architecture styles • Consider perpetuating the grid road circulation • Evaluate positive economic benefits of higher densities • Establish zoning-plan conformity • Ensure signage of historic character and scale • Determine short and long-term economics of annexation

- Includes policies that can be obviously implemented. The policies are clear, direct and have measurable outcomes. The plan is innovative in its land use development standards that also include park requirements, walking to school requirements, and character requirements.

Compliance with these policies could be easily determined (also shows Open Space incorporation)

GOAL 1: PRESERVE RURAL SMALL TOWN	
OBJECTIVE	POLICIES
Integrate significant amounts of recreation facilities & open space within & surrounding neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide residential areas with one acre of neighborhood park per 1,000 residents • Provide residential areas with four acres of community park per 1,000 residents • Provide residential areas with five acres of open space per 1,000 residents. • Connect residential areas to educational facilities & the town core through parks, open space, and multi-use trails

- Includes smart growth ideas, such as infill, mixed use, pedestrian access, etc.

Infill is an important smart growth idea. Florence heavily stresses infill throughout its plan.

GOAL 1: PRESERVE RURAL SMALL TOWN	
OBJECTIVE	POLICIES
Sensitively integrate new & infill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage infill development on vacant/underused parcels • Determine appropriate infill incentives • Evaluate expanding the redevelopment area • Assess potential TIF benefits, if approved by the state • Aggressively promote tourism, shopping & retail • Establish a housing conservation program • Actively assist rehabilitation, redevelopment & reuse in the town core (non-financial). • Coordinate with county to relocate county offices

- Includes an implementation schedule. This schedule distinguishes between near-term and mid-term activities. It includes a table (Table B.5 on page B-31 of the Florence General Plan) that designates the activity, qualifications of objective achievement, the purpose, the person responsible, the timing (i.e. 1-2 years), the origin of the resources that will be used, and any necessary inter-governmental coordination.

APPENDIX 5: PHOENIX'S DESERT VILLAGE IDEA

The Phoenix General Plan institutes the urban village model as the desired pattern for the city. An urban village has five components:

Core – central focus for the village with a pedestrian-oriented mix of land uses;

Neighborhoods – residential areas forming the major land use of each village and the neighborhood retail and other services supporting them;

Community services – retail and other services supporting a cluster of adjacent neighborhoods;

Regional services – land uses such as stadiums, airports, or universities that attract people from outside the village (some regional services are too large or non-pedestrian friendly to locate in village cores; and

Open space – natural and man-made open spaces such as mountain preserves that protect the environment and provide recreational opportunities for residents of more than one village.

This approach provides a way for Phoenix to organize its large land area, provide for access to work, play, and home amenities for all citizens, and promote other desires such as employment and population balance, infill, mixed land use, integrated transportation systems, pedestrian-oriented development, and transit-oriented development. It may be a successful model for other cities with multiple employment areas and large tracts of land. A similar “desert village” approach is detailed in the Tucson General Plan to direct new “greenfield” development, such as might occur on previous state trust land.

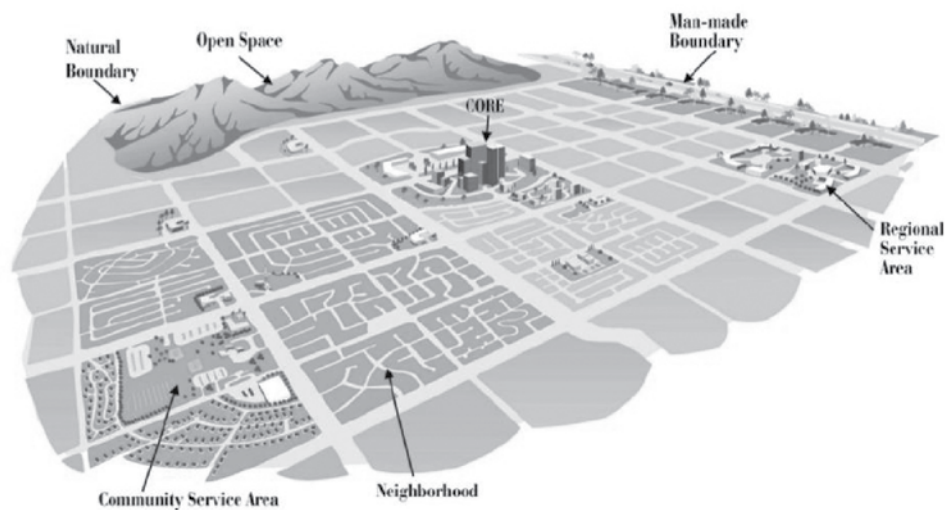


FIGURE 2
PHOENIX URBAN VILLAGE MODEL

APPENDIX 6: COCONINO COUNTY'S CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK

Coconino County has set a bold example with its comprehensive plan, which is noteworthy for its clarity, organization, accessibility, illustrations and integrated definitions. The highlight of this plan, however, is that it lays out a clear vision and then creates a “Conservation Framework” with which to support that vision and around which to shape the rest of the plan. It is the goal that “[b]y more fully integrating conservation and development, the Comprehensive Plan [will] ensure that planning decisions meet human needs while maintaining the county’s ecological integrity. This Conservation Framework can help developers and residents understand the criteria county planners use in reviewing proposed development projects.” (Coconino County Comprehensive Plan, pg. 15).

The Conservation Framework is based on five Ecological Principles:

The Time Principle

Today’s species, habitats and ecosystems developed over thousands of years; therefore, future species, habitats and ecosystems will be influenced by decisions we make today. Because the full ecological consequences of decisions we make now may not manifest for many years, our land use decisions must consider potential long-term impacts.

The Species Principle

Because species have specific roles in an ecosystem, they can help us understand its function and health. Species are connected through such processes as predation, competition and pollination. Native species are organisms that have evolved in a particular place as part of an ecosystem. Non-native or exotic species have evolved in other ecosystems and have been introduced here deliberately or accidentally. They can wreak havoc on native ecosystems by disrupting the delicate balance of native species or by spreading diseases.

The Unique Place Principle

Ecosystems, habitats and species evolve in a specific place. Not only is their evolution related to local climatic, geologic and hydrologic conditions, but it is heavily influenced by species interactions and natural processes. These factors create distinctive landscapes that are visually recognizable and have unique qualities and conditions—for example, the Colorado Plateau differs distinctly from the Sonoran Desert. Understanding the natural patterns within ecosystems and habitats is critical to the long-term, ecologically sound use of land.

The Ecological Processes Principle

Natural ecological processes—biotic, physical, disturbance and cultural—help determine how an ecosystem functions. Biotic processes include the conversion of solar

energy into plant material, physical processes include the infiltration of rainwater to underground aquifers, and disturbance processes include natural wildfires and floods. Cultural processes, on the other hand, involve human manipulation of the environment for human benefit, such as managing game species.

The Landscape Principle

Ecosystems occur within landscapes and interact in varying ways depending on their size, shape and location. Consequently, the landscape context is important to the interactions, connectivity and diversity of habitats and species. Larger habitats generally support a greater diversity of species than smaller habitats of the same type. Significant increases in the distance between habitats can alter or destroy interactions and cause species loss. Connectivity between habitats is considered a threshold dynamic—that is, gradual changes typically have gradual effects until a certain threshold is passed. At that point, effects are dramatic and may be irreversible.

These principles are translated into 11 conservation guidelines, which, in turn, form the basis of the goals and policies that appear in each element of the plan. Coconino County’s conservation guidelines are:

- Assess impacts of local decisions in a landscape context.
- Make land use decisions that are compatible with the natural potential of the site and the landscape.
- Avoid or mitigate for the effects of human use and development on ecological processes and the landscape.
- Identify and preserve rare or critical ecosystems, habitats and associated species.
- Minimize the fragmentation of large contiguous areas of habitat and maintain or restore connectivity among habitats.

- Minimize the introduction and spread of non-native species and use native plant species in restoration and landscaping.
- Conserve use of non-renewable and critical resources.
- Avoid land uses that deplete natural resources.
- Avoid polluting our communities and environment.
- Consider land use decisions over time horizons that encapsulate the natural variability of ecosystems.
- Evaluate the effects of land use decisions cumulatively and over time.

For a more complete discussion, see pages 18-20 of the Coconino Comprehensive Plan.

Such a framework can not only provide for better natural resource conservation, but can provide the unifying structure for the various elements of the plans. It also provides valuable guidance for developers and agency employees when creating a new development. These principles and guidelines have real design application.

APPENDIX 7: PRESCOTT GENERAL PLAN VISION

The Prescott vision is powerful because it focuses on unique values of the community and provides a specific picture of how to protect and enhance those values. The six values are:

- Balance: between developed and undeveloped areas; between types of land uses including diversity of housing options among young and old residents, current families and future families; between private property, neighborhood and community-wide interests.
- Sustainability: of the economic foundations of the community; of the neighborhoods within the community; of the community's infrastructure; of government services at acceptable levels; of water supplies and natural resources.
- Preservation of community character including environmental, economic, cultural and historic community assets.
- Moderate growth and quality development.
- Citizen empowerment and involvement in government and community activities.
- Ethic of equity for all community members.

Stating values alone, however, is only the foundation of a strong vision. The Prescott General Plan fleshes out these values into picture of a dynamic city with three primary components: friendly neighborhoods, an energized downtown, and employment opportunities.

[Prescott] is a place where young and old, working families and retirees find wisely managed City services and good accommodations geared to all lifestyles and levels of income. The population and business growth result in variety of

*housing types and prices in people-focused **Neighborhoods**, integrated with the Prescott Community; the **Downtown** energized by a mixture of arts, entertainment, government, business, and residential uses and an abundance of different **Employment Opportunities**, encouraging a full complement of population age groups and lifestyles.*

Throughout the growth periods, Prescott retains its environmental qualities of clean air and water, extensive open spaces in the surrounding Prescott National Forest, riparian areas and significant vistas. Water is conserved through widespread education of residents and visitors, and practiced and coordinated among regional governments. Clear air is preserved through concentrating varied uses within short distances, thereby encouraging walking and bicycling, and through regional planning for public transit and shared auto usage. (pages 5-6)

Notice that this description includes not only values, such as opportunity, water conservation, and air quality, but also ways to protect those values – mixing land uses, educating citizens and providing walkable distances between uses.

Prescott further translates these values into planning principles, thereby creating an implementation means to achieve its vision. The planning principles are: well planned, moderate growth rate; sustainability; compact forms; balance; support for a vibrant city center; integrated planning; connectivity; development that helps pay for itself; reasonable and equitable tax and fee structure; and citizen involvement and participation. Greater discussion of these principles is on pages 7-8 of the Prescott General Plan.

APPENDIX 8: SCOTTSDALE'S CHARACTER AREAS

As a result of its community involvement process, Scottsdale has created an innovative, three-tiered approach to planning, which allows it to address common concerns while promoting a strong, sustainable future. As well as planning based on six guiding principles, Scottsdale is planned at three levels:

Level 1 - Citywide Planning: *incorporates all policies that apply to the city as a whole.*

Level 2 – Character Area Planning: *develops Character Plans on a priority basis over a period of time and speaks specifically to the goals and special attributes of an identifiable and functional area; i.e., its land uses, infrastructure, broadly defined urban architectural design philosophy, and transitions. [...] An additional strength of the Character Plan approach is its ability to address “edges,” those places where two character areas meet or places where Scottsdale’s boundaries abut other governmental jurisdictions.*

Scottsdale’s plan has four character types in its original form, with the possibility of adding and refining the categories: Urban, Suburban/Suburban Desert, Rural/Rural Desert, Environmentally Sensitive Lands and Native Desert. These character types do not specify land uses or even necessarily densities. Rather, they work to protect valued characteristics such as topography in the Rural/Rural Desert Type, pedestrian and bicycle linkages in Suburban/Suburban Desert Types, activity nodes and intimate developed open spaces in Urban Types, etc. Specific locations can then form character areas within these different types to reflect the history and desire of residents in specific neighborhoods or smaller communities.

Level 3 – Neighborhood Planning: *Neighborhood Plans will identify and implement efforts to improve specific neighborhoods within the city. Every neighborhood has different needs, issues, constraints and opportunities. A Neighborhood Plan might broadly define a neighborhood’s goals and may build an action plan or an issues brief. (pages 13-14)*

Scottsdale’s approach tackles the common planning problem of creating uniform policies to protect quality of life for a large area while providing the flexibility and specificity needed to maintain a healthy sense of place and a vibrant community. It also provides a mechanism through which to promote smart policies while addressing citizens’ local concerns.

In many instances, public participation revealed a concern about density, which works cross purposes to a complete smart growth agenda. This concern may have led some plans to de-emphasize density, potentially weakening some policies. Scottsdale’s plan recognizes this concern and attempts to acknowledge it, while using its character area criteria to alleviate such problems:

“Density – An inherent concern or not

High-density development generally is regarded as inherently inconsistent with Scottsdale’s image and character. People often have strong reservations about development of higher density in the community. Yet, closer analysis of public opinion reveals that perception can be more critical than reality on this high-profile issue. Bulky buildings devoid of design features and landscaping are commonly rejected as unacceptable, but other high-density projects that incorporate innovative designs that blend with the surrounding landscapes generate favorable response. Thus, from a ‘character’ perspective, the challenge is not so much to avoid high density as it is to ensure aesthetic appeal.” (Page 40)

REFERENCES

¹ Executive Order 2002-5, “Establishing the Growing Smarter Oversight Council.”

² Detailed accounting of the GSOC’s formation, studies, findings, and recommendations are available online at [http://www.azcommerce.com/CommAsst/GrowSmart/\(07/17/2007\)](http://www.azcommerce.com/CommAsst/GrowSmart/(07/17/2007)).

³ To see the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan go to <http://www.co.pima.az.us/cmo/sdcp/index.html>. This plan is a powerful example of what regional open space planning could look like throughout Arizona. Such a plan is most effective in county lands, but could be extended into incorporated areas and could provide valuable management guidelines which are costly to research and develop.

⁴ Sierra Vista Sub-Watershed Water Conservation and Management Policy Plan, Resolution 06-21 adopted by the Cochise County Board of Supervisors, March 21, 2006.

⁵ “planning agency may [...] prepare specific plans based on the general plan [...] as may, in the judgment of the agency, be required for the systematic execution of the general plan” ARS 9-461.08 (A)

⁶ Many plans include a vision, or vision statement in the introduction of their plan. Others use the Land Use Element to dictate their vision. Still others rely on individual vision statements for each of the separate elements.

⁷ Examples include state-level legislation such as the growth management statues in Oregon and other states, enforcing countywide planning principles as is required under Washington’s Growth Management Act, revenue sharing schemes discussed in economic and development literature, multi-jurisdictional TDR programs, regional or metropolitan plan associations, and many more.

⁸ HB 2638 will require all cities with a population greater than 50,000 to have an energy conservation element in their General Plan. The affected cities include: Phoenix, Tucson, Mesa, Glendale, Scottsdale, Chandler, Gilbert, Tempe, Peoria, Yuma, Surprise, Avondale, Flagstaff and Lake Havasu City. All other cities and towns may comply with the requirement. (<http://www.azplanning.org/legislative.html>)

⁹ From EPA Smart Growth Website: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/about_sg.htm#principles

¹⁰ Full document available online at <http://www.azcommerce.com/CommAsst/GrowSmart/> in the 2006 Annual Report.