

## ***Conservation, Open Space, and Natural Resource Element***

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

The Southern Nevada region is graced with some of the most spectacular scenery and public lands in the nation. They range from vast tracts of wild, environmentally sensitive lands managed by federal agencies to popular national recreational areas like Lake Mead. Perhaps because of the abundance of federally owned lands, the region has a shortage of close-in, easily accessible local parks and trails when compared to most other major western cities. This deficit was recognized by the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Authority, which recommended increasing the local parks/people ratio. It also recognized that the way that park space is calculated varies from jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction.

Much of the vacant land in the Valley and its environs is environmentally sensitive and not easily developable. The rugged terrain, steep slopes, washes and water resources make up an environmental system that poses significant management and conservation challenges. For example, the region is home to a number of threatened and endangered species such as the Desert Tortoise that are given special protection under federal law.

In addition to environmental issues, cultural and paleontological resources must also be taken into consideration. For example, the Upper Las Vegas Wash area is culturally significant to native and indigenous peoples, and contains a continuous section of Pleistocene strata with thousands of Ice Age mammal fossils. Other examples of significant historic and cultural resources include native and indigenous sites along the Whitney Mesa in Henderson, the Las Vegas Springs Preserve, and Kiel Ranch, among others. Provisions should be made to ensure the long-term preservation and sensitive treatment of these resources.

These challenges have led to a flurry of efforts to address conservation, open space, and natural resource issues:

- The Las Vegas Wash Coordinating Committee, a broad-based inter-jurisdictional coalition, is crafting a plan to preserve this vital resource and protect water quality in the Valley;



#### **Conservation Case Study: *Buckskin Basin Park***

The City of Las Vegas has recently added seven acres of open space, picnic shelters, walking paths, a state of the art playground, and sports fields to its inventory of recreational facilities. Not only does this park provide up-to-date recreational facilities, it serves as a storm water detention basin that provides for the storage of 84.1 million gallons of storm water and is an integral part of the storm water management plan for the Las Vegas Valley. This is but one of several examples of joint efforts between the City of Las Vegas and the Clark County Regional Flood Control District currently under construction or being planned that serve dual use purposes.

- The region has adopted an intergovernmental protection plan for the Desert Tortoise that includes a development fee to pay for habitat protection and acquisition.
- A regional trails plan is being developed by the entities in the Valley.
- The state has authorized local governments to assess a residential construction tax that is used by all jurisdictions in the region to fund purchase of open space and parks.
- There are a variety of local initiatives underway that hold promise such as the recently completed Clark County Parks Master Plan, the Henderson steep slope protection regulations, joint use agreements for school playgrounds, and efforts by the regional Flood Control District to encourage joint planning and recreational use of flood control projects.



*Summerlin Trail*

Other efforts are underway to address pressing issues. For example, there are good prospects to include trails as an integral part of all future flood control and drainage projects and to retrofit existing channels to provide greater recreational opportunities. Similarly, public utilities in the Valley have indicated their willingness to consider recreational use of utility corridors such as power lines. And of course, the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act offers enormous possibilities to provide land and funding for parks, open space, and resource protection.



*Desert Tortoise*

This plan calls for a regional approach to open space planning and resource conservation. It recommends taking advantage of some clear opportunities to provide more easily accessible parks and trails and to conserve natural resources while maintaining the region’s vibrant economy.

## **PLAN POLICIES**

### **Regional Initiatives**

- Establish a regional trails and open space plan with a regional funding base, without interfering in the design and provision of local parks by local jurisdictions. The Regional Planning Coalition will serve as the regional oversight organization. Local governments will be encouraged to develop complementary local trail plans.
- Adopt a standard definition of parks and open space (i.e., neighborhood, community, regional) in each jurisdiction to facilitate regional parks planning.



*Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve*

---

### **Plan Priorities**

1. Establish a regional trails and open space plan with a regional funding base, without interfering in the design and provision of local parks by local jurisdictions.
2. Plan and construct flood control systems to provide trails and recreational facilities as well as serving flood-control functions.
3. Promote better coordination between the school district and local governments on both facility sharing and joint development of schools and parks.
4. Coordinate the protection of environmental, cultural and historic resources across jurisdictional boundaries.

- Target the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act special account to address areas with the most significant parks, trails, and open space needs. These funds should be used specifically for park development in more densely populated areas to create incentives for infill development.
- Coordinate the protection and preservation of environmentally, culturally or historically significant lands where such resources extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

### **Development Standards**

- Adopt a minimum parks and open space subdivision land dedication standards for new development (2.5 to 10 acres/1000 people depending on location). Seek to bring park developments in older established areas up to these standards. Require subdivision land dedication in accordance with applicable local and regional trails plan. Encourage the preservation of open space in accordance with local and regional open space plans. Give credit towards the existing residential construction tax to developers who dedicate land for open space and parks. Make the residential construction tax uniform throughout the Valley at the maximum level authorized by the State of Nevada.
- Encourage new subdivisions to maintain historic access to adjacent public lands that will remain public, or provide new access. Give credit for providing this access towards any local open space dedication requirement or residential construction tax.
- Adopt uniform regional sensitive lands protection standards throughout the Valley (e.g., no development on slopes greater than 30% without compliance with standards; 50-100 foot setback from defined major, environmentally sensitive stream/wash channels such as Las Vegas Wash, depending on whether it is located in an urban or suburban setting).

### **Cooperation with Existing Regional Entities**

- Plan and construct flood control systems to provide trails and recreational facilities as well as serving flood-control functions. Acquire adequate rights-of-way to allow multipurpose use. Create program to retrofit existing flood channels and detention basins with trails and other recreational amenities as appropriate. Identify funding for implementation, including BLM funds. Explore the use of incentives to

encourage developers to utilize drainageways as recreational amenities where appropriate. Convene an inter-jurisdictional planning committee under the auspices of the Regional Planning coalition to explore the planning, construction, financing and other aspects of expanded multi-purpose use of flood-control facilities.

- Promote better coordination between the school district and local governments on both facility sharing and joint development of schools and parks.
- Work with utilities to explore potential to use utility corridors for trails and other recreational purposes.
- Implement the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan to protect critical habitat and avoid federal control of local land development decisions. Expand the plan to include protection of riparian species.
- Implement the Southern Nevada Water Authority Cooperative Adaptive Management Plan, which establishes a strategy for preservation and restoration of the Las Vegas Wash.
- Work with the BLM to develop a plan for the protection of the cultural and paleontological resources of the Upper Las Vegas Wash.
- Continue working with the EPA, NRCS, Conservation District of Southern Nevada, Nevada Cooperative Extension Service and similar conservation-oriented agencies as appropriate to fund and implement environmental remediation, demonstration, and educational programs in the region.

# Public Schools/K-12 Education

## SETTING THE STAGE

In 1950, the Las Vegas Valley’s population was fewer than 50,000 residents and the Clark County School District was not yet in existence. In contrast, the Valley’s population in 2009 exceeded two million residents, and the District was the fifth largest in the nation, with over 300,000 students.

The District manages one of the nation’s largest school construction and modernization programs. Local entities and the District must work together to ensure that the locations of new schools/facilities and the expansion of existing schools and facilities serve the community, focus as community focal points and are fully integrated and accessible to residents and children via all modes of transportation be it motorized, bicycling, or walking.

Facilitating community involvement is essential. Schools are important public assets in their neighborhoods and can increasingly provide space for daycare, community recreation, and adult education programs. Integrating community uses with school facility planning will help schools continue to play a vital role in their community, while achieving economies for public agencies. To achieve meaningful engagement and support, both structured and informal dialogue must be facilitated with all stakeholders. This is an essential part of the process that will begin transparency and foster more open communications.

To the greatest extent practicable, schools should be located adjacent to public facilities and have minimal adverse impacts to neighborhoods. Communicating the key elements of the final plan document to each regional agency and the surrounding community ensures familiarity with its elements and support for its aims. Continual identification of opportunities for partnerships and more extensive and innovative community use of public schools should be a collaborative effort.

This plan promotes improved coordination for the development of school facilities with local entities through future land use planning and the site selection process. The plan also encourages coordination between the regional entities to allow for appropriate and well-planned school and school facility locations.



Clark County School District covers 1,500 square miles and includes the entire Las Vegas area, all outlying and rural areas. Under state law, Nevada County has one school district responsible for K-12 public

education. The District is divided into four Area Service Regions – an innovative region – Magnet Schools, which include Gifted and Talented Schools, Empowerment Schools, Expedition Models, Career and Technical Centers and Professional Learning Communities. The District operates over 1,000 schools, including the elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as alternative and charter schools.

## PLAN POLICIES

### *Regional Initiatives*

- Complete a coordinated and integrated schools facility master plan that reflects and informs local land use plans.
- Promote co-location of schools and public facilities where and when appropriate.

### *Development Standards*

- Encourage the development of multi-jurisdictional planning for schools.
- Develop common planning strategies to achieve the most efficient use of resources and maximize utilization of facilities for the mutual benefit of stakeholders.
- Encourage the use of the School Development Tracking Form for new and existing developments for residential and commercial uses.
- Implement and adopt the use of a Public School Facilities' Element outlining goals, objectives and policies relating to and ensuring and improving school concurrency.

### *Cooperation with Regional Entities*

- Improve upon coordination between jurisdictional entities and various outside agencies to facilitate joint development of schools/facilities, parks and other public community uses.
- Collaborate and work in coordination with local utilities and transportation agencies for better utilization of utility corridors, transit routes and future planning.
- Implement a Schools Element Plan with goals and policies advising of the site selection and land acquisition process as part of jurisdictional land use plans.
- Work with BLM and the various local jurisdictions to develop an overall land plan showcasing the various R&PP sites available and/or undeveloped and establish a strategy for land development decisions.



---

### Plan Priorities

1. Use SNRPC land use and population forecasting and estimating data when completing the schools facility master plan.
  2. Convene an inter-jurisdictional work group to assist with site development coordination.
  3. Support existing efforts to identify public properties for potential shared use and co-location opportunities.
-

# *Sustainability*

## **SETTING THE STAGE**

The pursuit of greater sustainability is an important regional issue for Southern Nevada with many aspects that can best be addressed through collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries. As residents of a unique desert environment, Southern Nevadans understand necessity as well as the benefits, both environmental and economic, of conserving natural resources and living within the bounds of nature. In the public realm, local governments are leading the charge to provide necessary services to residents while striving to address the values of efficiency and environmental responsibility that residents have come to expect. Local governments also have a civic obligation and opportunity to serve as a public forum for furthering education and outreach efforts related to sustainability.



*Nevada Solar One, Boulder City*

In Southern Nevada, sustainability has become a significant issue due to its close relationship with long-standing efforts such as water conservation, energy efficiency, and air quality. These factors will continue to play a critical role our community’s ability to grow and thrive as we look ahead into the future. Thoughtful management of our precious natural resources contributes to the quality of life of our residents and our ability to attract and retain progressive, community-oriented businesses to diversify our local economy.



*Desert-Integrated Development*

Environmental issues rarely follow clear jurisdictional boundaries, and it is essential that governmental entities combine efforts in order to make a meaningful impact. SNRPC is the most appropriate forum for this type of collaboration in Southern Nevada. This Plan Element identifies a range of critical sustainability issues facing Southern Nevada and provides recommendations to help all communities grow more sustainably.

## PLAN POLICIES

### *Regional Initiatives*

- Promote Southern Nevada as a center for renewable energy and other green industries.
- Support ongoing efforts to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions for the region.
- Promote best practices for tree health in our arid climate through a regional urban forestry management plan.
- Promote the efforts of the Southern Nevada Water Authority with regard to water conservation.
- Coordinate with the Regional Transportation Commission to reduce congestion, enhance fuel efficiency, promote alternative modes of transportation, increase overall mobility, and improve air quality.
- Promote efforts to improve energy efficiency in new and existing buildings in Southern Nevada.
- Promote recycling efforts across the region.



*Materials Recovery Facility (MRF)*

### *Development Standards*

- Integrate principles of sustainability, such as energy efficiency, water conservation, and recycling, into governmental operations within each jurisdiction.
- Revise local regulations to remove barriers and provide support for sustainable development.

### *Cooperation with Existing Regional Entities*

- Provide support for regional programs and non-profit organizations related to sustainability.
- Coordinate with local businesses and non-profit organizations to promote sustainability efforts and benefits on a regional level.
- Work with state, federal, and private partners to explore financial and collaborative opportunities related to sustainability.

---

### **Plan Priorities**

1. Coordinate regional efforts to manage and preserve natural resources.
  2. Identify and implement sustainability measures and initiatives to increase regional tourism, diversify our economy, and stabilize population and employment without adversely impacting the environment.
  3. Create educational and outreach tools to inform residents and visitors about the financial and environmental benefits associated with sustainability.
  4. Secure funding to achieve the goals and objectives outlined herein.
-

# *Infill Development*

## **SETTING THE STAGE**

Land should be viewed as a limited, valuable resource in Southern Nevada. The consumption of new, undeveloped land around the periphery of the region is necessary and will continue; however, the development or redevelopment of vacant or under-utilized land within existing urban areas can moderate the consumption of new land around the edges of the region. In addition, such “infill” development is typically able to take advantage of existing infrastructure systems.

At the same time, infill development, and redevelopment brings needed investment into areas that are often suffering from disinvestment. A healthy urban core helps ensure a healthy region.

There are a large number of vacant sites within the existing urbanized area of Southern Nevada. However, there are numerous hurdles discouraging development or redevelopment of many of these areas. These include local neighborhood opposition, environmental contamination of sites, lack of motivation by landowners to sell, antiquated infrastructure, high land values, and low holding costs. Land values and development costs have typically been lower for sites at the periphery of the valley, making greenfield development more lucrative for developers. Equivalent incentives are needed for infill and redevelopment sites to ensure that they are attractive to the development community.

One of the difficulties in planning for and promoting infill and redevelopment is that they are often difficult concepts to define. Many people consider infill to be narrowly applied to the urban core. Others consider the filling in of vacant sites in new developing areas to be infill. This lack of a commonly accepted definition of infill has made it difficult to arrive at a regional infill policy. The SNRPC addressed this in 2002 with its Infill Development Plan. The plan defined infill as “...*the development or redevelopment of vacant or underutilized*



### **Infill Case Study: North Las Vegas**

Walker Park is a successful infill project created by the City of North Las Vegas in response to a dramatic residential need. At nearby Windsor Park subdivision, the residents were afflicted with homes that were sinking and collapsing around them as a result of the confluence of two geologic fissures. Many of the homes in Windsor Park were in such a dilapidated condition that they constituted a health and safety hazard to their occupants. The residents petitioned the City Council for assistance, and the development of Walker Park subdivision became a part of that assistance known as the Windsor Park Revitalization Project. The project took the form of a voluntary relocation program. Each resident was surveyed to determine both the priority of the need and their willingness to take part in the program. Walker Park Subdivision is a prime example of how infill development can be used to redevelop mature areas and thereby promote a healthy economic core for urban communities.

*sites in economically or physically static or declining areas.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the future, the BLM will be a player in the infill process, through the selling by auction of substantial amounts of BLM land within the urbanized area. The BLM has already released substantial portions of land to the airport, notably west of the airport, which may be available for appropriate non-residential infill. Lands are identified for sale through a joint selection process established by interlocal agreement between Southern Nevada government entities.

A related and complementary component of infill in older developed areas is redevelopment. Redevelopment needs can be found in all of the Las Vegas Valley cities and unincorporated areas of Clark County.

An important aspect of infill development is compatibility with the surrounding area, especially if the area is a historic neighborhood. Historic neighborhoods and buildings are an important component of healthy and sustainable communities, and should be carefully considered in any redevelopment or infill policies and plans.

The challenge for development of a regional infill policy will involve overcoming infill hurdles and make living in infill areas more attractive. This plan advocates a regional strategy, implemented primarily at the local level, for defining, encouraging, and creating incentives for redevelopment and infill as a way to manage land resources in the Valley.

## **PLAN POLICIES**

### **Regional Initiatives**

- Provide incentives for infill development and redevelopment such as enterprise zones, blight removal, public investment, assistance with leasing and others.
- Encourage major public investment in facilities such as regional civic entertainment facilities in the urban core.



*Historic Neighborhood, Las Vegas*

---

### **Plan Priorities**

1. Include infill and redevelopment policies in local Comprehensive Plans. Local communities should examine utility, fire, parking, design, setback and other local standards to remove impediments to infill. Consider service fee breaks or rebates. Utilize funds generated by BLM land sales to fund parks, trails, and natural lands in urban areas, making infill and redevelopment more attractive.
  2. Encourage major public investment in facilities such as civic entertainment facilities within the urban core.
  3. Encourage historic preservation in appropriate areas.
- 

---

<sup>1</sup> Infill Development Plan, SNRPC, November 2002, p. 9.

- Identify revenue sources, tax increment financing, or other tax initiatives to create funding to support redevelopment and infill programs such as low-interest construction loans, utility fee waivers, and provision of open space and community amenities.
- Adopt a common definition of historic neighborhoods based on NRS 278 to aid in identification and historic preservation planning efforts.
- Identify funding sources for ongoing survey and inventory of historic neighborhoods and resources throughout Southern Nevada. Survey data should be compiled in a standard GIS or GIS-compatible program for efficient data sharing between local governments. A regional information management and access plan should be developed to assimilate and disseminate data on historic resources.

### **Development Standards**

- Infill is the development or redevelopment of vacant or underutilized sites in economically or physically static or declining areas.
- Include infill and redevelopment policies in local Comprehensive Plans. Local communities should examine utility, fire, parking, design, setback and other local standards to remove impediments to infill. Consider service fee breaks or rebates.
- Examine the feasibility of modifying cost recovery fees so that they are either not assessed, or are assessed at a lower rate in developed areas because public facilities needs are lower.
- Encourage higher density development in appropriate urban areas to make infill more attractive to developers.
- Historic neighborhoods are developed areas that consist of 10 or more residential dwelling units, where at least two-thirds of the dwelling units are 40 or more years of age.
- Include historic neighborhood and resource policies in local Comprehensive Plans.
- Encourage infill development of new housing, public and professional services and commercial uses in close proximity to historic neighborhoods, without encroaching into the residential boundaries.

### **Cooperation with Existing Regional Entities**

- Encourage the state and federal government to give funding priority to areas with strong infill and redevelopment programs.
- Utilize funds generated by BLM land sales to fund parks, trails and natural lands in urban areas, making infill more attractive.
- Explore creative taxation systems that encourage development of vacant, infill parcels in urban areas.
- Develop a regional information management and access plan to assimilate and disseminate data on historic resources.
- Encourage local utility companies to prioritize infrastructure improvements in historic areas.
- Promote the protection and preservation of historic buildings and resources.