



INTRODUCTION

Adopted in 1997, *Eye to the Future 2020*, the Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan, requires an update of all County area plans to help ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. The *Rainbow Valley Area Plan* is an update of the 1992 Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan. The updated *Rainbow Valley Area Plan* includes revisions in text, data, maps, and citizen issues. Included are five additional planning elements that are now required by the state-enacted Growing Smarter and Growing Smarter Plus legislation. The planning area was expanded south to the boundary of the new Sonoran Desert National Monument so that future planning in the region will consider the Monument and potential growth issues in the unincorporated areas bordering public lands and the City of Goodyear. To reflect this expanded area, the updated plan name drops 'Little' and is now called 'Rainbow Valley'. The plan also includes an Agenda for Action that identifies specific measures to implement the plan.

Plan Organization

This document presents the results of the update process for the Rainbow Valley planning area. It is organized to follow the Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan guidelines, and includes the following seven sections:

Introduction: Describes how the plan is organized, how it should be used, a brief history of the planning area, and an overview of the Area Plan process in Maricopa County.

Inventory and Analysis: Analyzes existing conditions in the Rainbow Valley planning area. Plan elements are based in part on information contained in this section.

Issue Identification: Summarizes important land use and planning issues raised by Rainbow Valley area residents. A discussion of current issues follows a brief review of those identified in the 1992 Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan.

Plan Elements: Defines specific goals, objectives, and policies that guide growth and development in the Rainbow Valley planning area.

Action Plan: Outlines how the Rainbow Valley Area Plan will be implemented through specific strategies and programs.

Amending the Plan: Specifies the process for changing this Plan. By design, plans are flexible documents that can adapt to changing conditions. The amendment process highlights this and will facilitate the plan's evolution.



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Appendix: Contains a glossary of terms, a list of acronyms, and other supporting documents.

This area plan identifies planning area goals, objectives, and policies for land use, transportation, environment, and economic development. In addition, per Growing Smarter and Growing Smarter Plus requirements the plan includes elements for open space, water resources, environmental impacts, growth areas, and cost of development.

Update Process

The Rainbow Valley Area Plan update is necessary to reflect current citizen issues; population increases; Growing Smarter requirements; and land use, boundary, and annexation changes. Maricopa County updates this and other Area Plans using the most recent Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) population projections, Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) projections, and U.S. Census data. Moreover, the boundaries of each Area Plan are evaluated to determine if changes are necessary. As each plan is completed, it is considered at public hearings before the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

How to Use the Plan

Each plan element contains a series of goals, objectives, and policies that define development standards, help formulate public policy, and guide public investment. In this way, the Area Plan serves as a decision making guide for the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors concerning growth and development. In addition to assisting public policy makers, it also helps private individuals and businesses make informed resource and investment decisions.

History of the Rainbow Valley Region

It is estimated that the West Valley region was settled as early as 9,000 B.C. by tribes of hunters and gatherers from numerous Native American tribes. The availability of water and the rich alluvial floodplains along the Salt and Gila River Valleys provided these early inhabitants with water for crops, wood for fuel and shelter, and fish and game for nourishment. Archaeological surveys in the general region of the planning area demonstrate that for thousands of years hunter-gatherers made use of seasonal plant and animal resources of the deserts of west-central Arizona.

About two to three thousand years ago subsistence living strategies shifted to more permanent settlements where crops including corn, beans, squash, and cotton were cultivated. The first known permanent settlers were the Hohokam Indians, who occupied the area from approximately 500 to 1450 A.D. It is believed that this group lived in small farming villages throughout the region, with settlements along



the Gila River extending west as far as the Gila Bend area. Some of the larger villages boasted public architectural features such as ballcourts and platform mounds. The Hohokam farmers of this era became the most sophisticated irrigation agriculturists in North America. Most of the routes they developed have been incorporated into the modern canal system, which serves the Valley today. Sometime during the late 13th century, the Hohokam population abandoned the region for locations and reasons still not known.

Very little is known about human settlement in the region during the period between the 14th and late 17th centuries. Beginning in the 1500s, Spanish explorers colonized the region, and from 1540 to 1821 claimed the area as part of the Spanish Empire. After the Mexican War of Independence in 1821, Mexico declared independence from Spain and the region became part of the Republic of Mexico. However, little permanent occupation occurred in either the Salt or Gila River Valleys by Spain or Mexico. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo split the area in half, with the portion north of the Gila River belonging to the United States and the portion south of the Gila River belonging to Mexico. With the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, the entire area became incorporated into the Arizona Territory of the United States.

Small numbers of Anglo-American settlers, primarily trappers, began arriving in the region during the 1820s. However, it was after the discovery of gold in California that about 60,000 "Forty-niners" crossed Arizona through the Gila River Valley area on their way to California. Pima and Maricopa farmers in the Gila Valley raised and sold three crops of wheat during the summer of 1849.

By the late 1880s, Anglo settlement increased due to the expanded presence of the U.S. Army, large-scale irrigation development, the discovery of minerals, and the opening of the railroad. In 1877, the Desert Land Act permitted settlers to obtain title to as many as 640 acres of land if they agreed to irrigate it within three years. By the 1890s, over 100,000 acres of desert were irrigated in the Salt and Gila River areas, which attracted still more settlers to the region. In 1884, construction of the Buckeye Canal was started. With the organization of the Buckeye Irrigation Company in 1888, water began flowing in the Buckeye Canal for the first time that same year, opening vast areas of the valley to farming. In 1887, the Clanton family became the first permanent Anglo residents of the Buckeye area. A history of the Liberty cemetery indicates that the oldest burial with a stone remaining was for John R. Beloit (1863-1892). There are over 500 names on record with the Liberty cemetery; the last burial was in 1962.

In 1891 and again in 1896, the Gila River Valley was ravaged by severe flooding, which damaged canals and destroyed crops. Many farmers left the valley after the



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1891 flood wiped out the entire season's crops. In 1907, local farmers formed a cooperative venture, a new Buckeye Irrigation Company, and in 1923 the Roosevelt Irrigation District was established to drain waterlogged lands in the Buckeye Valley and surrounding areas. Irrigation and agriculture production accelerated with the completion of Roosevelt Dam in 1911 and the entry of Arizona into the Union in 1912. Other dams were also constructed along the Salt, Verde, and Agua Fria Rivers.

By World War I, several West Valley communities were beginning to emerge. The period between 1917 and 1920 was known as the "Cotton Boom" as a result of skyrocketing cotton prices due to World War I demand. El Mirage, Surprise, Litchfield Park, Goodyear, Avondale, and Tolleson grew primarily due to cotton production. Electricity was brought to Buckeye for the first time in 1920, and in 1929 the town of Buckeye was incorporated. Goodyear and Avondale were both incorporated in 1946. In 1941, a 1,440-acre site was chosen in the West Valley as an Army Air Corps field for training fighter aircraft pilots. The site was known then as Litchfield Park Air Base, soon renamed "Luke Field." Luke trained over 12,000 fighter pilots by the end of World War II, but was decommissioned in 1946. Luke Field was later reactivated in 1951 as Luke Air Force Base and has been training U.S. and Allied pilots ever since.

World War II also marked a change in land use patterns throughout the area. Low-cost land and industrial decentralization brought electronics, aluminum, and aerospace industries to the region. Completion of Interstate 10 and other major roadways have had a significant impact on growth in the West Valley as individuals and businesses are now able to move farther away from central city services.

Today, the Rainbow Valley Planning Area, illustrated in **Figure 1**, is located in one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Despite the rapid pace of growth within and around the planning area, it remains primarily a farming and ranching community. While agricultural areas north and east of the planning area are being replaced by residential development, the agricultural land along the Gila River has remained relatively stable. New homes in the planning area are being built primarily on undeveloped desert land south of the Gila River. With rapid growth comes certain benefits such as increased employment opportunities and location choices for residents. However, growth and development are also creating certain problems, including the urbanization of rural and Sonoran Desert areas; increasing cost of servicing scattered development; and increasing air pollution concerns. The Rainbow Valley Area Plan helps address these problems by enhancing cooperation between government agencies, citizens, and other affected interests, and by considering regional implications.



Planning History

Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan (1988)

In July 1985, the Maricopa County Department of Planning and Development issued a public "Request for Proposal" to professional urban planning consultants to prepare seven specific land use plans as part of the Maricopa County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. One of these specific areas was the Little Rainbow Valley planning area.

For the Little Rainbow Valley planning area, Maricopa County requested that the consultants provide an analysis of existing data leading to specific goals, policies, and land uses to guide general land development. The resulting plan encompassed 48 square miles of natural desert, cropland, Gila River floodplains, and a small amount of very low density residential development. The *Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan* was adopted by the Board of Supervisors May 1988.

Little Rainbow Valley Comprehensive Land Use Plan (1990)

In 1990, the Land Use Plan was updated to reflect changing growth patterns, population projections, annexations, and other changes to the planning area since initial adoption. The updated *Little Rainbow Valley Comprehensive Land Use Plan* was adopted by the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors in July 1990.

Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan (1992)

The Land Use Plan was again updated to reflect changes to the planning area since the last adoption. The updated *Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan* was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in January 1992.

Rainbow Valley Study (September 28, 1997 to December 18, 1997)

This study was coordinated by the Maricopa County Planning and Development Department, in the hope of aiding area residents in resolving their specified land use and zoning problems. The study included three public meetings to obtain community input into the formulation of land use and development alternatives. The analysis specifically centered on animal rules, zoning/land use, junk/trash, and enforcement.

Rainbow Valley Area Plan (2003)

Maricopa County adopted its first comprehensive plan in October 1997. Titled *Eye to the Future 2020*, the comprehensive plan promotes healthy communities by encouraging growth in suitable areas, development of an efficient transportation system, maintaining a healthy environment, and creating a diverse economy. To effectively implement the Comprehensive Plan, the County's area plans will continuously be updated so they are consistent with *Eye to the Future 2020*.



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Public meetings were held, in September and October 2001 to inform residents of the Rainbow Valley Area Plan update project, explain the planning process, and to encourage participation in formulating the updated plan. After initial review by Maricopa County staff and public input during four public workshops, it was decided to expand the area plan to include 34 square miles south of Germann Road. The increase in area enables the development of a land use plan that considers the recent designation of the Sonoran Desert National Monument and potential growth issues in the unincorporated areas bordering the Monument, public lands, and the City of Goodyear. To make analysis easier, the north, west, and east borders were not adjusted, allowing more accurate analysis of population and housing changes relative to earlier area plans.

Public Participation

During preparation of the Rainbow Valley Area Plan, community participation was emphasized through various techniques. This participation allowed stakeholders to identify planning issues and concerns, as well as provide recommendations, comments, and suggestions. Four public workshops were held to gather input from residents, property owners, business people, and government agencies. Newsletters announcing the workshops were prepared and distributed prior to the series of workshops. A progress report was sent out several months following the first workshop series. Other methods of gathering public input included meetings with potentially affected interests, telephone discussions, and e-mail communication through the Comprehensive Planning website.

Public Meetings

The Maricopa County Planning and Development Department held two public meetings in Rainbow Valley, as well as meeting in Buckeye and Gila Bend in the fall of 2001. Initial public meetings for the Rainbow Valley Area Plan update were held in conjunction with meetings for the State Route 85 Corridor Area Plan, which covers Buckeye and Gila Bend. These “open house” style meetings allowed citizen to ask questions of project staff; obtain information about the plan updates; and provide recommendations, comments, and suggestions. A citizen questionnaire was also distributed at the public meetings to identify and gauge citizen attitudes. Once the draft area plan was completed, a second round of public meetings was held in Rainbow Valley in January 2003.

Community Mailing

To encourage public participation, in July 2001, approximately 100 plan notifications were sent to property owners in the region. Additionally, 28 plan notifications were sent to public agencies. These notifications explained the significance of County area plans, the plan update process, and how citizens could be included on an



active mailing list. Based on these requests, 26 meeting announcements were sent to property owners and 28 meeting announcements were sent to public agencies. Over time, more requests were received from property owners requesting to be added to the mailing list. Several months following the public workshops, 43 status reports were sent to property owners and other interested individuals, and approximately 40 to public agencies. The status reports contained fact sheets (condensed versions of draft transportation, water resources, and environmental effects elements) for public review and comment. Draft area plans and letters explaining how citizens could obtain a copy of the plan were mailed out to property owners, public agencies, and other stakeholders in November 2002 for review and comment. In March 2003, a second draft that incorporated comments received on the first draft was mailed to agencies and cities and counties surrounding Maricopa County. Citizens were mailed letters explaining how to access the second draft on the county website, how to contact staff, and announcing the upcoming Planning and Zoning Commission hearing.

Other Input

Input was also obtained through meetings, telephone calls, letters, and email messages from citizens, potentially affected interests, and public agencies.



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