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1 OVERVIEW/Summary

1.1 Important Changes Addressed in this Update

In this 7-year update are addressed a significant number of new issues and changes to the context of the City that have important implications for land use planning. They include:

- The city’s general growth rate has slowed to approximately 3% in the last 4 years, easing growth pressures slightly, without changing overall build-out projections.

- The Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) boundary has been finalized, giving clearer direction to both conservation and development immediately north of St. George.

- Several major new residential developments have been approved that increase the reservoir of authorized development by hundreds of homes. Construction is underway on several new developments that are expanding the development area of St. George.

- Several “big box” retail stores (Costco, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Lowe and Target) have been built within St. George and in surrounding communities, promising stiff competition – not only between themselves but with local retailers as well.

- Several new infill development projects have been proposed for the downtown, but they have been slow to materialize and the downtown still languishes at a relatively low level of activity compared to other commercial areas in the city and nearby areas.

- The Southern Corridor, a proposed major east-west highway, has received additional environmental study, and an alignment has been established. As this highway comes closer to reality, the City needs to carefully consider its potential impacts on development and the extension of public services.

- A proposed relocation of the St. George airport to a location southeast of the city has been given FAA approval and a public information and planning process is well underway. The new airport will not only provide much-needed service to the region, it will also create potential needs for roads, utilities and other public services. To assure the long-term viability of the airport care must be taken to make sure compatible land uses are located in the surrounding area.
Insert Map
Important Changes in the Last 7 years
The State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) has begun planning on the “South Block”, a 10,000-acre parcel of land south of St. George. This development has the potential to become a significant community with residential, commercial and industrial uses that could approach 15,000 population, one quarter of the size of present-day St. George. Obviously, this development must be carefully integrated into the growth pattern of the City.

The West, in general, is facing increasing challenges in providing inexpensive water and power and St. George is no exception. Once long-term objectives, reducing water and power consumption have now become near-term priorities.

1.2 New Directions

The Population and Economic Context chapter (Chapter 3) points out several key realities about St. George’s future:

- St. George will continue to grow. St. George reached approximately 50,000 population in 2000 and is projected to grow to 98,000\(^1\) by 2020. The current Land Use Plan anticipates a buildout population of 125,000.

- The Ivins-to-Hurricane region will also continue to grow. If the five communities in this urbanizing area follow their General Plans, and assuming that there will be sufficient water resources, the region could grow to a population of approximately 300,000\(^2\) at buildout.

Given the growth anticipated for St. George, it will continue to be the largest city in the region, but not as significantly as in the past. In this context it will be important the City to not “rest on its laurels”, but rather realize there is much work to be done to remain competitive in the regional economy.

To accomplish this, the General Land Use Plan sets out a vision for St. George, and then a number of important objectives and strategies for the next planning period. High on the City’s priorities should be the following:

1. **Hillside protection.** The City’s striking backdrop is one of our most important assets. The Hillside Ordinance is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done. Existing scars need to be repaired, and ordinances, standards and plans need to be strengthened and revised to zealously guard the City’s image.

2. **Downtown revitalization.** St. George’s downtown represents a capital investment of millions of dollars over many years. It is also the symbolic heart of the community. And yet, in the competition with shopping centers, strip malls and big-box centers, the downtown is not winning. The reason is that the downtown has a competitive disadvantage, including high land costs, demolition costs, traffic issues, and zoning constraints. There is much that can, and needs to, be done to “make the playing field level”. All over America cities are
rediscovering the importance of healthy
downtowns. The beneficiary of a
rejuvenated St. George downtown will be
the whole community.

3. **Smart growth and creating livable,
sustainable communities.** Communities are
discovering that current planning and
development practices contribute to sprawl,
that disproportionately eats up open lands,
creates gridlock traffic problems and
siphons vitality from existing commercial
areas. Alternatives are available—to create
development that places homes in closer
relationship to shopping, jobs, schools, and
thereby to reduce dependence on the
automobile for every need.

4. **Coordinated planning for the South
Block.** The School Trust lands, the Southern
Corridor, and the new airport represent the
most significant development the region will
experience for many years. If planned and
implemented carefully, they collectively
have the potential to be an extraordinary
asset to the future vitality of St. George. If
their development is not carefully
coordinated, these elements have the
potential to drain fiscal resources and sap
the vitality of the rest of the community.
Careful first steps have already been taken.
It will be important to smartly manage both
the macro and micro impacts of this regional
growth.

The present planning challenge is to direct and
manage growth in order to preserve the quality of
life now enjoyed by residents. This document, the
St. George General Land Use Plan, is an important
tool in meeting that challenge.
2.1 Historic Background

In December 1861, 308 families camped in their wagon trains and tents near the confluence of the Virgin and Santa Clara Rivers while Mormon leaders planned the new settlement of St. George. Modeled on the principles used in other Mormon settlements, the streets were laid out 90 feet wide, with large lots for gardens and irrigation ditches carrying water to the front of homes. Mormon town plans were designed to promote harmony and efficiency, and to make the task of creating a community out of the desert wilderness an orderly and pragmatic endeavor.

The early years of St. George are a history of a people overcoming harsh desert conditions, rebuilding after devastating floods and surviving disease and crop failure. After securing a safe and dependable water supply, the hardy, resourceful settlers eventually began to acquire the basic necessities and comforts of life.

Because of the efforts of those who have gone before, St. George today is recognized as one of the most livable communities in America. The qualities and opportunities of St. George attract families, retirees, college students and tourists. St. George is generally considered to be one of America's "most livable cities."

Because of its many qualities, St. George has attracted a large influx of new residents over the years. While the growth rate has fluctuated from time to time, the end result is a growing community.

And the growth has not been limited to St. George.

Figure 2-2: St. George, Washington County Vicinity

Surrounding communities have also been growing. The cumulative population of St. George, Ivins, Santa Clara, Washington and Hurricane has been designated as a Metropolitan Area\(^3\). For St. George, we must realize that the city is evolving from the central community of an essentially rural area, to a larger community within a much larger urban setting.

\(^3\) This designation allows the region to qualify for special Federal and State funding.
2.2 What is a General Land Use Plan?

A General Land Use Plan is sometimes referred to as a "Master Plan" or "Comprehensive Plan." It is a community's general guide for making land use decisions. It usually describes how the community wants to grow, where the community wishes various land uses to take place and what the community wants to look like. In many ways a General Land Use Plan is a reflection of the community's values. As such, this General Land Use Plan is a continuation of the effort originally begun in 1861 to strive for a better, more efficient, functional and beautiful community.

The General Land Use Plan provides guidance for decisions that affect land use. It covers the area within the City limits as well as land anticipated to be annexed to the City in the future.

Although the General Land Use Plan is not a regulatory document, it can be given great authority under Utah law. The Utah Code authorizes communities to adopt a General Plan and to require that all streets, parks, public buildings and utilities (public or private) be constructed in conformance with the General Plan.

Ideally, the General Plan is the first level in a three-level process of regulating land uses:

1. The General Plan guides broad decisions regarding Land Use (such as rezoning).
2. The Zoning Plan, following the basic land use pattern established in the General Plan, assigns specific densities and uses to individual parcels of land.
3. The Subdivision Regulations and Building Permit process implement the requirements of the Zoning Plan.

That is (taken in reverse order) a building permit is granted by the city only for building uses that are in conformance with the zoning designation for the building site. One cannot normally get a permit, for example, to build a gas station on a lot that is zoned residential. The zoning designation given to a parcel is usually based on the land use designation given to that area in the General Land Use Plan. For example, an area that is designated "low density residential" in the General Land Use Plan would subsequently be zoned for single family lots (rather than apartments or a gas station) and only one permit for a single, residential home would be granted for each lot.

Figure 2-3: Land Use Regulation Hierarchy

Figure 2-4: Zoning and the General Plan work together to accomplish important objectives
Therefore, once the General Land Use Plan is adopted, it is important that the City Zoning Plan be made consistent. This may be brought about by rezoning any parcels that are not in conformance with the General Plan, or by amending the General Plan, or both. It should be noted that either rezoning or amending must follow the City's required procedures, including public notices and public hearings. Also, while the City has the authority to re-zone land, that authority is not unlimited. Recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings are clear that a land owner may not be deprived of all use of his or her land without compensation. The key point is that the General Plan has little value to the community if the General Plan and the Zoning Plan are not brought into conformity.

The General Plan is intended for use by City Council members, Planning Commissioners and other City boards, City staff, developers and residents concerned about the future of the community. The purpose of the Plan is to provide a comprehensive guide to the physical development of the City. It is a basic tool to guide zoning, budgeting, capital improvement decisions and policy making.

2.3 How Was the General Plan Developed?

The first General Plan was prepared in 1980 and amended in 1984 and 1988. A rather significant, new plan was developed and adopted in 1995. This Plan is an update of the 1995 Plan. The 1995 General Land Use Plan, and this update, were developed through a lengthy process of neighborhood meetings, public input, review by all of the City departments, and consultation with other nearby cities and government agencies in Washington County. It has been reviewed and approved by the City of St. George Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council after public hearings.

2.4 Future Updates to the General Plan

Since the purpose of the General Plan is to guide development according to the goals and needs of the community, the Plan should change as the needs of the community change. To be an effective guide for decision-making, the Plan should be kept reasonably current at all times. The Planning Commission and City Council should make periodic reviews, updates and refinements of the General Plan to ensure its continued viability. The next update should be in approximately 2006.

The specific steps by which the General Plan and Land Use map may be amended are found in the Utah Code and St. George City Code and can be obtained from the Community Development Department.

2.5 How the General Plan is Organized

Chapter 2 begins with an overview of St. George’s history, its role in the regional economy, and various projections of St. George’s growth potential. The prospect for significant growth raises the question of what kind of community will and can St. George become? The residents of every community have the right to determine the quality of life they wish to preserve. The General Plan is an important tool in “smart growth” that preserves quality of life.

Chapter 3 follows with a vision for the community, derived from broad public input. To further aid in implementation and monitoring the effectiveness of the Plan, the vision is translated into broad, general goals and measurable objectives.

Chapter 4 examines the natural setting of St. George to understand the context within which the City will continue to evolve. This brief synopsis focuses primarily on the opportunities and constraints that will affect growth and quality of life.
The Elements of the General Plan in Chapter 5 applies the Goals, Policies and Objectives to all of the various areas of City stewardship that are affected by land use decisions — general residential and commercial development, parks and recreation, open space, affordable housing, traffic, utilities and schools. These subsections are based on master plan documents (and supplemental information) prepared by each department.

Chapter 6 discusses Community Form—general considerations about the physical form and character of the City. This includes elements such as smart growth, infill development and how to make sure St. George evolves as a livable city as it grows.

Chapter 7 addresses several important City policies regarding annexation and growth management: criteria for annexation, services required for annexation, and potential annexation areas.

Chapter 8 brings together all of the policies of the previous chapters and expands them into specific actions that will implement the Vision, Goals and Objectives of the Land Use Plan.

Chapter 9 is the Appendix, which includes detailed information referred to in previous chapters of the Plan.

2.6 POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Each subsection of the Plan concludes with relevant policies that are derived from applying the Vision, Goals and Objectives to each subject area. Policies are specific actions and commitments to guide future decisions that will lead to accomplishing the Goals and Objectives of the General Plan. For example, the following policies address the consistency and currency of the General Plan.

2.6.1 GENERAL PLAN POLICIES:

1. All land use decisions, including the development of streets, parks and utilities and the provision of public services shall be consistent with the General Plan, including maps, goals and policies.

2. The General Plan shall be reviewed and updated at least every five years.
3 REGIONAL POPULATION AND ECONOMICS

3.1 PROJECTED GROWTH FOR ST. GEORGE AND WASHINGTON COUNTY

For more than 20 years, Washington County has had steady demographic and economic growth, and the long-term future growth prospects remain very favorable. Washington County will continue to benefit from its scenic, climatic and cultural/religious resources in the following anticipated trends:

- a trend toward increasing numbers of upper-income retirees;
- local and national trends toward increasing leisure time and tourism;
- transportation and communications advances which will continue to reduce the importance of location (offices and residences) relative to business; and
- in-migration created by a desire to leave the congestion and expense of larger urban areas.

These characteristics will sustain a rate of growth that could greatly increase population in Washington County.

3.1.1 TWENTY-YEAR POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Figure 3-1 shows a population projection by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, based primarily on assumptions about in- and out-migration, birthrates and job opportunities. St. George is projected to grow to nearly 100,000 by 2020.

It should be noted that this is not a "buildout" estimate, but merely a projection through the year 2020.

3.1.2 WATER CONSERVANCY DISTRICT 'BUILDOUT' PROJECTIONS

A 1995 study by the Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCD) estimated the future population of Washington County based on the extent of land suitable for residential development. The study did not attempt to project population by time, nor show growth rates. Nor did it identify other constraints or thresholds (quality of life, attitudes toward growth) that might stop growth as the area approaches buildout.

The WCD study concluded that there are ample land resources to sustain a very large regional population (far larger than one might presume by merely looking at the year 2020 population projected by the Governor's Office of Planning & Budget). Based on density patterns found in the St. George area, the WCD projected three possible buildout population scenarios, which are summarized below. The WCD study projections for St. George, within its current boundaries as well as within expanded boundaries, range from 100,000 to 150,000 at buildout, as illustrated in Figure 3-3.
Figure 3-2: Development Areas - 1994 Washington County Water Conservancy Population Study
3.1.3 Washington County Coordination Plan

"Buildout" Projections

In 1997, Washington County commissioned a study to examine buildout growth potential from yet another perspective—the cumulative development being proposed in the General Plans of the major urban areas of the County. The Coordination Plan 4, concluded that the “buildout” embodied in the cumulative total of all the current General Plans was 328,000, or approximately the same as the WCD Scenario 2.

There are two key messages of the population and economic projections:

1. growth will continue to come to the St. George urbanizing region; and

2. we have to make sure that growth is directed and coordinated so that it results in a healthy, vibrant City, a City that embodies the goals and objectives outlined in Chapter 3.

These concerns are addressed in the General Plan that follows.

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3.2 The Economic Evolution of St. George

In its 140 year history, St. George has experienced several transformations: from an economy based on agriculture, to a combination of agriculture and tourism, to today's economy based primarily on tourism, retirement, services and manufacturing. Originally settled under the direction of Brigham Young, the mission of Utah's "Dixie" was to produce agricultural products uniquely suited to a warm climate: cotton, sugar, grapes, tobacco, figs, almonds, olive oil and other useful articles. The creation of the National Park system in 1916 and Zion National Park in 1919 began to bring tourism into the St. George area. In the mid-1960's, St. George experienced a sudden acceleration in population and economic growth fueled to a large degree by a growing number of retirees moving from metropolitan Utah (Salt Lake City, Provo) to southern Utah. By the end of the 1960's, agricultural employment had receded to less than 10% of Washington County's total employment.

The factors contributing to this growth in tourism and retirement living in St. George are:

- The synergy or mutually reinforcing aspects of recreation and retirement. Many of the support services that make St. George attractive as a

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5 Brigham Young to Orson Hyde, Journal History of the Church of the Latter-day Saints, Church Historian’s Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.
retirement community also make it desirable as a recreation destination.

- New sources of retirement income (pensions) and trends toward earlier retirement and semi-retirement which increase the number of retirees and lengthen the retirement period.
- An increased orientation at all ages toward leisure activities.
- Temperate climate.
- Unique natural resources.
- Cultural and religious resources.
- Interstate 15 and the St. George Municipal Airport.

Since 1970, Washington County has experienced rather steady economic growth. The main source of overall economic growth has been a significant increase in tourism and in-migration. This is reflected in the employment sectors with the greatest increase in total number of employees between 1987 and 1992, as shown in Figure 3-6.

The increase in Health Services relates to general population growth as well as the growth of services supporting the in-migration of retirees. Local Government includes all public agencies, particularly several new schools in the area. (Washington County School District is the largest employer in the county.) Eating/Drinking establishments and Hotels & Lodging Services are the two categories most closely related to tourism. Special Trades is related to construction services. The in-migration of retirees has played an increasing role in boosting residential construction activity to higher levels. In the 1970's, in-migration accounted for 69% of Washington County's growth. During the 1980's, in-migration accounted for almost 75% of the County's growth. Of the 16,700 people who moved to the area in the 1980's, approximately 6,000 persons (more than one-third) were of age 55 or older, an age group that now makes up almost 25% of the total County population. The same trend is illustrated by the change in population 65 years and older, and the increase of that age group as a percentage of the total population, in both the County and the City, in Figures 3-7 and 3-8.

Since 1980, Washington County has experienced rather steady economic growth. The main source of overall economic growth has been a significant increase in tourism and in-migration. This is reflected in the employment sectors with the greatest increase in total number of employees between 1987 and 1992, as shown in Figure 3-6.

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The sequence of growth associated with the development of St. George has been:

1. increasing in-migration of retirees, seasonal residents and visitors, followed by
2. expanding employment opportunities in local services and construction, which in turn led to
3. inducing existing residents to stay as well as attracting more in-migration to meet the expanded job opportunities.