

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.



Figure 1-1: Looking South over the HCP area toward 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

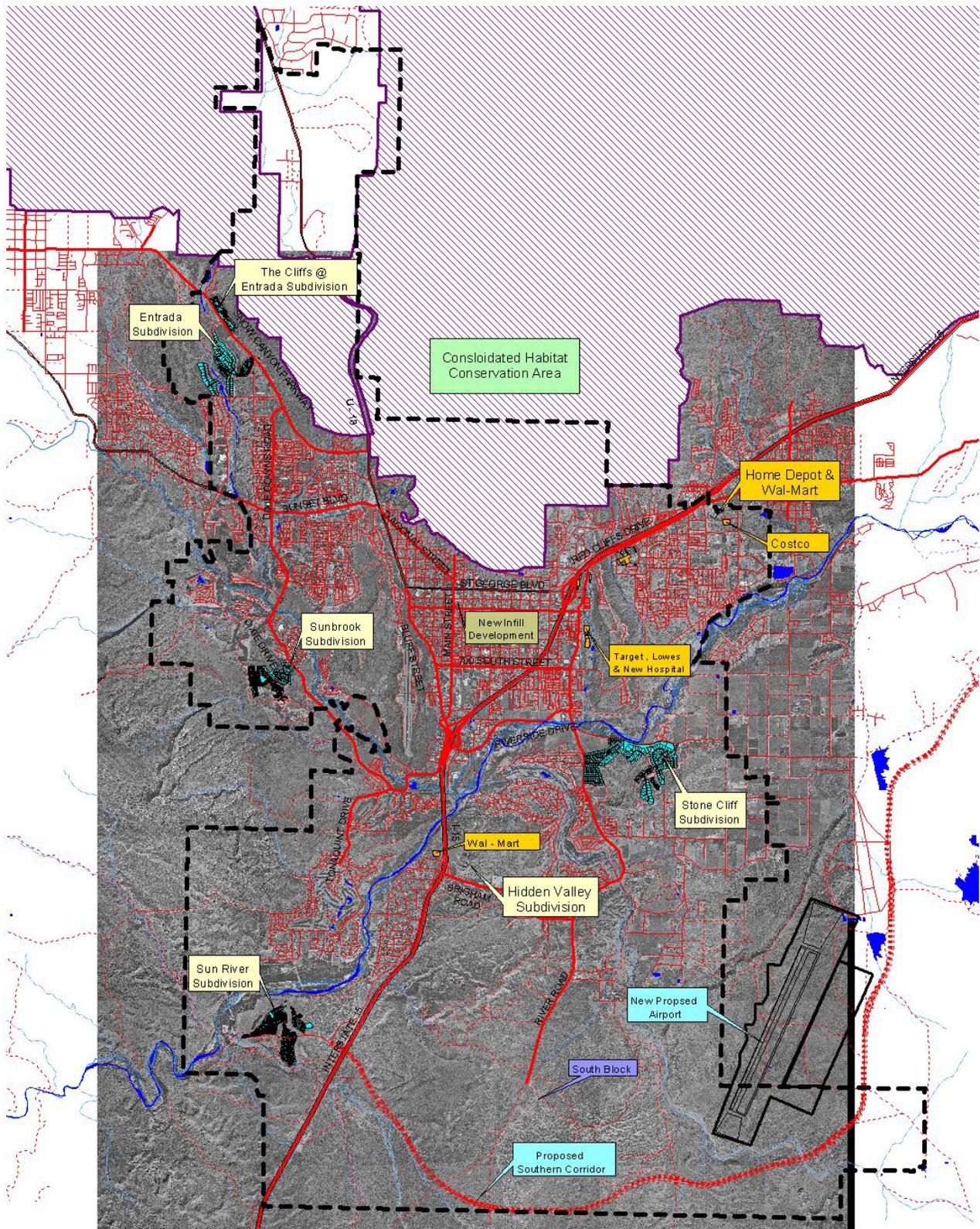
been built within St. George and in surrounding communities, promising stiff competition – not only between themselves but with local retailers as well.

- 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.



Figure 1-2: A proposed new office building for Main Street in downtown St. George

- 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.



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 98,000¹ by 2020. The current Land Use Plan anticipates a buildout population of 125,000.



Figure 1-3: The 'White Dome', a central landform of the South Block, with St. George in background

- 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 300,000² 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.

¹ Estimate by Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget.

² The Washington County Coordination Plan, 1998.

- 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.