

2 INTRODUCTION

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.



Figure 2-1: Early settlers of the City of St. George

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.



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

And the growth has not been limited to St. George. Surrounding communities have also been growing. The cumulative population of St. George, Ivins, Santa Clara, Washington and Hurricane has been designated as a Metropolitan Area¹. 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.

¹ 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:

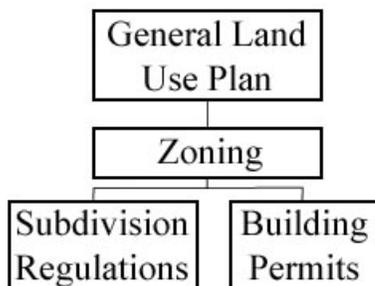


Figure 2-3: Land Use Regulation Hierarchy

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.

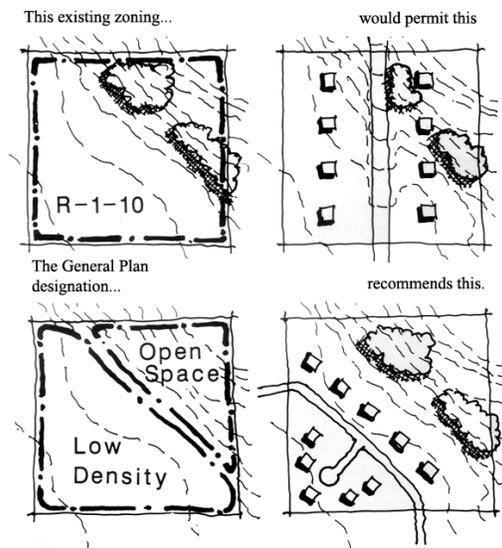


Figure 2-4: Zoning and the General Plan work together to accomplish important objectives

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 3 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 4 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 5 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 6* 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 7 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 8 addresses several important City policies regarding annexation and growth management: criteria for annexation, services required for annexation, and potential annexation areas.

Chapter 9 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.

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.