

Chapter 3

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Vision 2040 process has been guided by several planning principles that function together harmoniously, and are repeated in different form throughout the three documents. An “official” definition of each principle is outlined in this Chapter. These principles shall be considered during all decision making processes within the City.

3.1 Sustainability

Planning for growth in a desert environment with limited water resources is challenging, yet possible when implementing the principle of sustainability. The United Nations developed a definition for sustainability in 1987 that resonates with appropriate planning practices today:

Sustainable developments are those that fulfill present and future needs while [only] using and not harming renewable resources and unique human-environmental systems of a site: [air], water, land, energy, and human ecology and/or those of other [off-site] sustainable systems.

3.2 Smart Growth

The concept of “Smart Growth” is applied throughout the document and helped to responsibly “organize” future land use in Doña Ana County. The principles were particularly useful in preparing a Future Land Use Plan that can successfully accommodate a large population within an environmentally sensitive region. Smart Growth principles promote the concept of sustainability and the preservation of natural resources. According to the National Smart Growth Network, Smart Growth can organize and define a community in the following manner:

- ▣ **Better access, less traffic** - One of the major downfalls of unorganized development is traffic. By putting jobs, homes and other destinations far apart and requiring a car for every trip, sprawl makes everyday tasks a chore. Smart growth’s emphasis on mixing land uses, clustering development, and providing multiple transportation choices helps us manage congestion, pollute less and save energy. Those who want to drive can, but people who would rather not drive everywhere or don’t own a car have other choices.
- ▣ **Neighborhood livability** - The central goal of any smart growth-oriented plan is to enhance the quality of the neighborhoods where we live. They should be safe, convenient, attractive, and affordable for all people. Sprawling development too often forces trade-offs between these goals. Some neighborhoods are safe but not convenient. Others are convenient but not affordable. Too many affordable neighborhoods are not safe. Careful planning can help bring all these elements together.
- ▣ **Thriving urban, suburban and rural communities** - Smart growth puts the needs of existing communities first. By guiding development to already built-up areas, money for investments in transportation, schools, libraries and other public services can go to the communities where people live today. This is especially important for neighborhoods that have inadequate public services and low levels of private investment. It is also critical for preserving what makes so many places special—attractive buildings, historic districts and cultural landmarks.
- ▣ **Shared benefits** - Unorganized development leaves too many people behind. Divisions by income and race have allowed some areas to prosper while others languish. As basic needs such as jobs, education and health care become less plentiful in some communities, residents have diminishing opportunities to participate in their regional economy. Smart growth enables all residents to be beneficiaries of prosperity.
- ▣ **Lower costs, lower taxes** - Unorganized development costs money. Opening up green space to new development means that the cost of new schools, roads, sewer lines, and water supplies will be borne by residents throughout metro areas. Unorganized development also means families have to own more cars and drive them further. This has made transportation the second highest category of household spending, just behind shelter. Smart growth helps on both fronts. Taking advantage of existing infrastructure keeps taxes down. And where convenient transportation choices enable families to rely less on driving, there’s more money left over for other things, like buying a home or saving for college.
- ▣ **Keeping open space open** - By focusing development in already built-up areas, smart growth preserves rapidly vanishing natural treasures. From farms to wetlands and wildlife, smart growth lets us pass on to our children the landscapes we love. Communities are demanding more parks that are conveniently located and bring recreation within reach of more people. Also, protecting natural resources will provide healthier air and cleaner drinking water.

3.3 Intergovernmental Cooperation

In general terms, intergovernmental cooperation is any arrangement by which officials of two or more jurisdictions communicate visions and coordinate plans, policies, and programs to address and resolve issues of mutual interest. It can be as simple as communicating and sharing information, or it can involve entering into formal intergovernmental agreements and sharing resources such as equipment, buildings, staff, and revenue. It can even involve consolidating services, jurisdictions, or transferring territory.

What are some benefits of intergovernmental cooperation?

- ▣ **Cost savings**– Cooperation can save money by increasing efficiency and avoiding unnecessary duplication. Cooperation can enable some communities to provide their residents with services that would otherwise be too costly.
- ▣ **Address regional issues** – By communicating and coordinating their actions, and working with regional and state jurisdictions, local communities are able to address and resolve issues which are regional in nature.
- ▣ **Early identification of issues** - Cooperation enables jurisdictions to identify and resolve potential conflicts at an early stage, before affected interests have established rigid positions, before the political stakes have been raised, and before issues have become conflicts or crises.
- ▣ **Reduced litigation** – Communities that cooperate are able to resolve issues before they become mired in litigation. Reducing the possibility of costly litigation can save community money, as well as the disappointment and frustration of unwanted outcomes.
- ▣ **Consistency** – Cooperation can lead to consistency of the goals, objectives, plans, policies, and actions of neighboring communities and other jurisdictions.
- ▣ **Predictability** – Jurisdictions that cooperate provide greater predictability to residents, developers, businesses, and others. Lack of predictability can result in lost time, money, and opportunity.
- ▣ **Understanding** – As jurisdictions communicate and collaborate on issues of mutual interest, they become more aware of one another’s needs and priorities. They can better anticipate problems and work to avoid them.
- ▣ **Trust** – Cooperation can lead to positive experiences and results that build trust between jurisdictions.
- ▣ **History of success** – When jurisdictions cooperate successfully in one area, the success creates positive feelings and an expectation that other intergovernmental issues can be resolved as well.
- ▣ **Service to citizens** – The biggest beneficiaries of intergovernmental cooperation are citizens for whom government was created in the first place. They may not understand, or even care about, the intricacies of a particular intergovernmental issue, but all residents can appreciate their benefits, such as cost savings, provision of needed services, a healthy environment and a strong economy.

3.4 Context Sensitive Design

While the majority of transportation planning within Doña Ana County is accomplished by the existing MPO, the Vision 2040 process was completed concurrently with the MPO’s efforts. The result is a planning process that unites the common goals of the municipalities and the MPO and ensures responsible transportation planning. As the plans were created, the principle of Context Sensitive Design was applied. Context Sensitive Design (CSD) is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation plan that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSD is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist.

3.5 LEED Community Design or “Green Development”

Most people are aware of the current “Green” movement, and applying “Green Development” principles where feasible. Specifically, this document embraces the principles set by a national organization entitled Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). LEED-friendly community design became a backbone for planning the future for the City of Las Cruces.

Encourage healthy living - LEED for Neighborhood Development emphasizes the creation of compact, walkable, vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods with good connections to nearby communities. Research has shown that living in a mixed-use environment within walking distance of shops and services results in increased walking and biking, which improve human cardiovascular and respiratory health and reduce the risk of hypertension and obesity.

Reduce the Proliferation of Unorganized Development - In order to reduce the impacts of unorganized, unplanned, uncontrolled spreading of urban development into areas outside of the metropolitan region, and create more livable communities, LEED for Neighborhood Development communities are:

- ▣ locations that are closer to existing population centers
- ▣ areas with good transit access
- ▣ infill sites
- ▣ previously developed sites
- ▣ sites adjacent to existing development

Low-density housing and commercial uses located in automobile-dependent areas can harm the natural environment in many ways. It can consume and fragment farmland and wildlife habitat, degrade water quality through destruction of wetlands and increased stormwater runoff; and pollute the air with increased automobile travel.

Protect threatened species - Fragmentation and loss of habitat are major threats to many imperiled species. LEED encourages compact development patterns and the selection of sites that are within or adjacent to existing development to minimize habitat fragmentation and also help preserve areas for recreation.

Increase transportation choice and decrease automobile dependence - These two things go hand-in-hand; convenient transportation choices such as buses, trains, car pools, bicycle lanes and sidewalks, for example, are typically more available near downtowns, neighborhood centers and town centers, which are also the locations that produce shorter automobile trips.

Benefits to Project Developers of LEED for Neighborhood Development Communities

Potentially reduced fees or waiting periods - Increasingly, municipalities are reducing fees or review periods associated with the approval process for community projects that can demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. Adopting the principles of LEED for Neighborhood Development may assist projects that are still in the planning stages to gain the necessary approvals as expediently and cost-effectively as possible.

A good impression on your neighbors - Adopting LEED for Neighborhood Development principles can help projects explain the environmental and community benefits of a project to residents and businesses in nearby areas. The process also encourages projects to work collaboratively with the existing neighborhood to make sure their needs are taken into account.

Higher tenancy rates - Rising demand for housing and commercial space in highly walkable or transit-accessible areas can result in higher tenancy rates.

In summary, LEED-oriented principles can have a positive impact on both residents and the regional developers who wish to accommodate future population growth with new development.