



INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the *Eye to the Future 2020, Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan* in October 1997 required an update of all existing area plans to bring them into conformance with the Comprehensive Plan. The ***New River Area Plan*** update includes changes in text, improved maps, more recent data, changes in citizen issues and an Agenda for Action.

Refinements and changes to this plan will be required as continued development of the planning area occurs. The ***New River Area Plan*** will therefore be reviewed and updated every two years.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

This document represents the results of the area plan update process for the New River planning area and is organized to follow the guidelines found in the Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan. The ***New River Area Plan*** is an update of the existing *New River Land Use Plan* and has been reorganized and rewritten to give detailed direction for development of the planning area.

The *Introduction* to the Area Plan describes how the plan is organized, how to use the plan, a brief history of the planning area and an overview of the Area Plan process in Maricopa County.

Inventory and Analysis is a presentation and analysis of data elements that detail existing conditions in the New River planning area. Each plan element is based on information located in this section.

The *Issue Identification* section summarizes the major land development issues raised by the residents of the New River planning area. Discussion of current issues follows a brief review of issues from previous citizen participation efforts.

The *Plan Elements* define the specific goals, objectives, and policies which the Board of Supervisors adopted with regard to growth and development in the New River planning area.

Goals and policies for the Transportation element are taken from the *Northeast Valley Area Transportation Study*.

The *Action Plan* is an outline of implementation measures for the Plan. The program contains strategies and indicators for each element.

The Area Plan is a flexible document that will adapt to changing conditions. The process for modifying the Plan can be found in *Amending the Plan*. The amendment process will facilitate the continuing evolution of the plan.



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The *Appendix* section contains a glossary of terms, a list of acronyms, and by reference, other supporting documents.

The ***New River Area Plan*** presents a plan for the New River area for land use, transportation, the environment, and economic development. Unlike the “Land Use Plan” that it updates and supersedes, this Area Plan provides more detailed information to accommodate growth.

UPDATE PROCESS

The ***New River Area Plan*** update was necessary to reflect current citizen issues, increases in population, land use changes, boundary changes following annexations, and improved information and data. The *Eye to the Future 2020, Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan* is the underlying framework and impetus for the 1997–1998 Area Plan process.

The boundaries of the planning area were expanded in 1989 from 104 square miles to 216 square miles to better define land use issues in the unincorporated areas that are contiguous to the Desert Hills and New River communities. Since 1989, annexations by Phoenix, Peoria, and Cave Creek have reduced the size of the planning area to 163 square miles. The majority of residential development is located in the Desert Hills area in the southern and eastern half of the planning area.

The planning area is roughly bounded by Carefree Highway to the south, the Town of Cave Creek and the Tonto National Forest to the east, to the north and west by Yavapai County and at the southwest by the cities of Peoria and Phoenix.

Each time the Area Plan is updated, it will be considered for adoption at public hearings before the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The ***New River Area Plan*** provides a guide for decision making for the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Supervisors concerning growth and development in the New River community. While it is to be used by policy makers to guide their decisions, it also serves as a reference for the private sector in making informed investment and development decisions.

The *Plan Elements* contain a series of goals, objectives and policies used to define development standards, and guide public investment, as well as public and private decision making. The overriding goals are those outlined in the *Eye to the Future 2020, Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan* and the objectives and policies are specific to the area plan.



HISTORY OF THE NEW RIVER AREA

By Lois Essary Jacka

At the close of the 19th Century, the New River area was a vast, nearly empty desert. The native peoples who once roamed the countryside had moved on. The Sonoran Desert was home to rattlesnakes, coyotes, and livestock from a few scattered ranches, which encompassed thousands of acres, including the T Ranch, the Y Ranch, and the Spear S. The New River Stage Station, which had operated on the banks of New River as early as 1868 was gone; only a few remnants of the building and the old corrals remained.

It was around 1930 when homesteaders began moving into the New River area. Free land was there for the taking, but “free” was a relative term. It was free to those willing to endure the hardships and privations of living on the land for five years while making specific improvements. New River was some forty miles north of Phoenix over a rough dirt road that wound its serpentine way across the desert, a drive that took nearly half a day. It was a rare trip that didn't include a flat tire or two and, during summer thunderstorms or winter rains, one could spend hours on a creek bank waiting for the water to recede enough to cross. Most settlers kept a cache of supplies in their car in order to make coffee and have a snack by the side of the road while waiting.

The lack of water in the arid desert prevented farming, and cattle ranching of any magnitude required vast acres of desert grazing land. A homesteader with 160, or even 640, acres found it almost impossible to eke out a living. Most raised a few head of livestock, ran a trapline in winter, hunted wild game, planted a garden, and hung on for dear life. Faced with this hardscrabble existence, many stayed a few months or a year or two, then moved on, never completing requirements for acquiring title to the land. Others sold their claim for a few dollars or traded it for a good horse and rode on to greener pastures.

A few endured through wind, rain, heat, cold, desert storms, droughts, floods, loneliness, and near-impossible odds to become the proud owners of a patch of Arizona desert land. Homes were built of native stone, and hand-dug wells and windmills furnished water. The settlers heated their homes and cooked with wood, used kerosene lamps for light, and relied on desert breezes to cool the torrid temperatures of summer. The isolation and hardships faced by these pioneers produced a breed of fiercely proud, independent people.



Rose Jacka working on the Jacka homestead (Sun-up Ranch) 1930



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In the early 1930s, about a dozen homesteads, scattered over several thousand acres formed the original “community” of New River. “Chief” Meyers operated Wrangler’s Roost Guest Ranch and Bob Stewart had a small one-room grocery store at the junction of what is now New River Road and Fig Springs Road. “Bones” Cable owned New River Station, which is still in operation on the New River frontage road. The livestock driveway between the Salt River Valley and northern Arizona lay just west of New River. A large sheep sheering operation at New River Station included a ground level concrete trough filled with sheep dip through which each sheep was driven. Thousands of sheep were watered at Jacka’s nearby Sun-Up Ranch for one cent a head per day.

In 1934, the first school opened in Bill and Rowena Essary’s living room. The County School Superintendent promised to hire a teacher if the community could provide at least eight school children. On the first morning, thirteen students made an appearance. Some, having dropped out of school years before, were in their late teens and taller than the teacher, but the requirement for obtaining a teacher was met. The teacher, Miss Horner, boarded at Wranglers Roost and walked the three miles to and from the Essary homestead each morning and afternoon. Later that year, the community was given permission to move a small one-room schoolhouse from Cave Creek. Ernest and Sudie Essary donated the land on New River Road near its junction with Fig Springs Road. Several men of the community moved the building on an old flatbed truck, and later built playground equipment.



New River School located at the junction of New River Road and Fig Springs Road (1940-41)

Mildred Donham, who with her husband, Paul, was one of the original settlers, became the teacher in 1936, a position she held for many years. Most children walked or rode horseback to school; others were driven by their parents over many miles of rough, dusty or muddy roads to attend all eight grades in the small one-room school.



The schoolhouse was the focal point of the community. The first church services were held under the auspices of the American Sunday School Union. All holidays were an excuse for a community gathering, from Easter services followed by a pot-luck dinner to Halloween parties with everyone, child and adult alike, in costume. It was the gathering place for all activities from box socials to Saturday night dances to baseball games with all able-bodied members of the community taking part.

In the late 1930s, Bob Stewart moved his grocery store to a site on the Black Canyon Road near New River Road, and Jerry and Rose Jacka built Sun-Up Café about a mile south of New River Station. The community was beginning to grow.

“Civilization” made its move on New River in the late 1940s. Electricity was brought into the area and the winding dirt track that was the old Black Canyon Road was straightened and paved. Maricopa County began providing a small mini-bus to transport some twelve high school students to Glendale High School. Prior to that time, the students had traveled to and from high school in any transport available, often in some old truck atop bales of hay being hauled to New River.

In the early 1960s, the Black Canyon Highway became a freeway, and the grade school was relocated into several new buildings on the frontage road north of New River Road. In the 1970s and 1980s New River grew into a bustling bedroom community as people moved to the area in search of a rural lifestyle. Today, homes dot the desert landscape and are scattered up hillsides. Several major housing developments are under way, and new businesses are opening along I-17. New elementary schools and a high school are planned for the near future.

Few remember the vast Sonoran desert land as it was in the early days. Only two or three of the original homestead families remain. Yet their spirit and indomitable will live on the craggy mountainsides and rugged canyons of the area known as New River.



PLANNING HISTORY

Area Plan Development

In July 1985, the Maricopa County Planning and Development Department issued a “Request for Proposal” to professional planning consultants to prepare seven specific land use plans as part of the Maricopa County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The New River planning area was one of these specific areas.

For each of the planning areas, the County requested that the consultants provide a collection and analysis of existing data leading to specific goals and policies to guide general land development. Each specific study area was also to be provided with a land use plan.

As each planning process for an Area Plan began, community participation was emphasized. A number of methods were used for outreach. Flyers announcing workshops were prepared and distributed prior to each meeting. In addition, workshops with Planning and Zoning Commission members were held to review the project progress. Coverage by the news media was encouraged creating further awareness of the workshops and participation by the general public in the planning process.

The New River Land Use Plan was first adopted November 5, 1990 and had been revised three times but not updated. The revisions reflected amendments and changes that affected portions of the Area Plan. This update responds to the need for the Area Plan to follow the format and direction of the Comprehensive Plan.

The current Area Plan update began with a presentation of the proposed planning process to a combined meeting of the Desert Hills Improvement Association and New River Community Association on September 9, 1997. This was followed by a community-wide open house held on September 23, 1997 where citizen issues were discussed and collected. A second open house for citizen input on plan alternatives was held March 17, 1998. Focus group sessions were held November 6, 1997, May 5, 1998, and June 11, 1998 to discuss the issues and alternatives in depth and for further citizen input. A third Open House was held July 9, 1998 to present the first draft of the New River Area Plan Update and to seek community comment prior to submitting the draft plan to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Comments were received from citizens, federal, state and local government agencies, interest groups, and the development community. These comments further refined the draft plan prior to it being forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Commission for formal hearing and adoption.