



## Preliminary Issues and Opportunities Summary

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### INTRODUCTION

A preliminary series of stakeholder meetings was held (virtually) in June and July 2020 to identify key issues, opportunities, and priorities for the Master Plan and Development Code rewrite. Participants included staff from the County’s Comprehensive Planning Department, County Commissioners, Planning Commission members, outside stakeholders, municipal and regional partners, Town Advisory Board and Citizen Advisory Council members, and staff from other County Departments.

The purpose of this summary is to document major themes that emerged from these meetings as a starting point for future discussions. Broader input regarding issues and opportunities is being solicited through an online survey. The combined results of this outreach will be used to help inform the development of a preliminary draft vision and goals for the Master Plan.

While many of the issues and opportunities raised by participants were specific to either the Master Plan or Development Code, others were more general. To help focus future discussions and next steps, major themes are organized into three categories: 1) Overarching Themes, 2) Master Plan Themes, and 3) Development Code Themes.

### OVERARCHING THEMES

#### Make the Master Plan and Development Code more user-friendly

Numerous stakeholders noted that they found the current Master Plan and Development Code challenging to use and understand. Master Plan users explained that, while the topical plan elements contain many important ideas, their organization as a series of standalone documents makes it challenging for users to “connect the dots” between the goals and policies found in different elements, or to quickly ascertain what the County’s priorities are. Development Code users cited overall length, formatting that makes information difficult to find, a lack of definitions, and regulatory language that is perceived as unclear, as some of the factors hindering usability. Suggestions offered by participants were to ensure both documents:

- Use clear, succinct language that is easy for anyone to read and understand—not just staff and professionals;

- Are easy to find on the County’s website and published in a searchable, web-based format to allow for easier navigation;
- Are organized in a more intuitive, user-friendly way;
- Share a common structure, terminology, and vision for the future;
- Define key terms and ensure there is a clear distinction between advisory or policy language and regulations; and
- Include illustrations and photo examples to help clearly convey key concepts and desired outcomes.

Participants also noted that the importance of creating a clearer policy connection between the Master Plan, the Planning Area Land Use Plans, and the Development Code as part of the rewrite process.

### **Foster greater unity and transparency in County government**

Participants repeatedly noted that decision-making within the County tended to be very district focused. While some noted that they appreciate this leadership structure and the accessibility it provides to constituents in individual districts, others expressed concern that it had created fragmentation within the County organization and resulted in a perceived lack of transparency. Participants expressed the importance of having a set of common goals or priorities for the County as a whole to:

- Guide day-to-day decision-making;
- Serve as a lens through which district-specific decisions could be objectively evaluated;
- Facilitate more predictable processes and outcomes;
- Enable consistent application of the Plan and Code, with decisions based on adopted policies and standards; and
- Foster better communication and coordination between County departments.

### **One size does not fit all**

Many stakeholders discussed the wide range of conditions found in different parts of Clark County, and the challenges that arise from “one size fits all” policies or regulations. While the current Master Plan provides policy guidance for different planning areas within the County, participants noted that the current Code is more geared towards urban areas, and regulations that “fit” in urban areas are not always appropriate for rural areas. Moving forward, participants expressed the importance of tailoring both the Master Plan and Development Code to:

- Reflect the differences between urban, suburban, and rural areas;
- Be mindful of the unique challenges and opportunities in maintaining the character of different communities in the Las Vegas Valley and greater Clark County;
- Clarify and consider expanding protections for unique areas of the County (e.g., historic and environmental resources);
- Expand possibilities for mixed-use development at different scales and intensities;

- Allow for more flexibility in applying development standards in different areas, possibly through a “character area” approach; and
- Coordinate requirements for county enclaves and edge areas with adjacent jurisdictions.

### **Need for a common vision that reflects shared values**

When asked, many participants struggled to articulate a clear vision for the County as a whole. However, several clear themes did emerge from the discussions as participants were instead asked to discuss what they valued about their local community or neighborhood within the County, or to identify key words or phrases that characterized their vision for the future of Clark County:

- Quality of life;
- Outdoor recreational opportunities and the ease of accessing these opportunities from unincorporated areas of the County;
- Family-friendly communities; and
- Ability to choose from a variety of lifestyles.

Additionally, during the kickoff meetings, participants in group sessions completed a short poll, answering the question “What three words best characterize your vision for Clark County’s future?” The emphasis among the 79 responses is strongly representative of the issues in this summary: the most frequently occurring response was sustainable, followed closely by diverse, pedestrian-friendly/walkable, and safe. Detailed input received from stakeholders during the kick-off meetings will be combined with responses to the first online survey.

### **Expand the County’s historic preservation toolkit**

The current Master Plan includes a Historic Preservation Element and the Development Code has provisions for both the creation of historic neighborhood overlays and the preservation of individual properties through historic designation once areas or structures are over 40 years old. While progress has been made in this area, some stakeholders noted that historic preservation under the current regulations is still very difficult to accomplish. Participants expressed a desire to further encourage the preservation of historic resources areas by:

- Expanding survey efforts to document historic resources in Clark County, as feasible;
- Tailoring Master Plan policies to more clearly address the unique challenges and opportunities associated with historic properties and neighborhoods;
- Exploring the potential to establish conservation districts or a similar tool that could be offered to residents interested in protecting key aspects of their neighborhood’s historic character, but that lack sufficient resident support for a full-blown historic district designation; and
- Reviewing and updating the 2011 historic preservation ordinance to align with current best practices.

## MASTER PLAN THEMES

### Raise expectations for new County neighborhoods

Many stakeholders expressed concern that Clark County was seeing a proliferation of “cookie cutter” development. They acknowledged that some of the large, tract subdivisions filled with very small lots help fill a short-term need for inexpensive housing, but they expressed concern that many of these developments lack the basic amenities—parks, trails, landscaping—that are routinely incorporated as part of new neighborhoods elsewhere in the Las Vegas Valley. Additionally, participants noted that some fairly recent developments were already visibly in decline, and there was general consensus that the “bar” for County neighborhoods should be held higher. Suggested areas of focus included:

- Identifying better models for small-lot development that balance affordability, livability, and quality considerations;
- Establishing clear guidance on the types of recreational amenities that would typically be expected for new development;
- Strengthening development standards (addressed in more detail under Development Code themes);
- Diversifying housing options; and
- Improving design quality.

### Expand focus on sustainability and resilience

The County recently established two new departments aimed at expanding its focus on sustainability and resilience—the Department of Environment and Sustainability (formerly Air Quality) and the Community and Economic Development Department. Both departments have parallel planning efforts underway that will be used to help inform the updated Master Plan—including climate action goals, proposed updates to the Federal Land Disposal Plan, an Economic Development Strategic Plan, and an ozone state implementation plan. Key areas of focus identified by both internal and external stakeholders included the need for stronger policy direction to support:

- Protection of natural resources and landscapes through the preservation of more open space, more compact development patterns, and water conservation measures;
- Energy efficiency measures and the expanded use of alternative energy;
- Addressing climate change through an equity lens;
- The expansion of complete streets and other alternative transportation options;
- Opportunities associated with emerging technologies (e.g., smart cities);
- A greater variety of industries and employment opportunities;
- The retention of land designated for employment; and
- Alignment with forthcoming 208 Water Management Plan.

### Improve connectivity

Participants cited a lack of connectivity as a key concern for the unincorporated areas of the County, and many expressed a desire for a greater focus on pedestrians, bikes, and transit, and less of a focus

on building “fast, wide streets.” It was noted that while Clark County works with RTC, the City of Las Vegas, and other regional partners to support the integration of roads, mass transit, bicycle, and pedestrian paths on key corridors, they have stopped short in the past of adopting a formal Complete Streets policy. While stakeholders acknowledged that this was another case where “one size would not fit all” in Clark County, they felt more should be done. Recent improvements to Lone Mountain, Ann, and Fort Apache roads were cited by a number of participants as a model for ways to create more walkable, bikeable streets in unincorporated areas of the County. Specific recommendations relevant to the Master Plan included:

- Establishing a Complete Streets policy for the County that reflects urban and rural contexts;
- Expanding pedestrian and bicycle connections in unincorporated areas where they are lacking to enhance safety and comfort for people walking and riding bikes,
- Limiting use of physical barriers, such as walls—and/or requiring more frequent gaps to improve connectivity between public and private spaces;
- Encouraging development patterns that support access to transit, where appropriate; and
- Improving—or in some cases, maintaining—access to parks, trails, open space, and public lands.

### **Update land use categories to increase flexibility and predictability**

Many participants noted that the County’s current land use categories are too rigid for a long-range planning document like the Master Plan, and that they do not align well with the zoning districts that are in place to implement them. This perceived lack of flexibility in the types of uses and densities contemplated within different land use categories was cited as a key reason why waivers and nonconforming zone changes are requested so frequently (see Development Code themes). Participants also expressed concern that the frequent use of waivers and nonconforming zone changes had led to mistrust among residents and the perception that “adopted plans don’t matter” when it comes to understanding what might happen on a particular property in the future. Residents and practitioners expressed interest in exploring opportunities to:

- Move toward less prescriptive land use categories that allow land use plans to more easily adapt to changes over time;
- Provide more predictability about desired outcomes through the use of illustrations and diagrams to convey scale, relationships between uses, and character;
- Ensure more sensitive transitions in density and intensity occur in areas where more intensive uses abut neighborhoods, cities, and Rural Neighborhood Preservation Areas (RNPs);
- Remove regulatory language from the Master Plan and incorporate as part of the Development Code rewrite; and
- Review and potentially update the timing and process for updating the Planning Area Land Use Plans.

### **Align the updated Master Plan with ongoing regional efforts**

The County has many internal and external partners in its planning efforts, many of whom participated in the kick-off meetings. Participants emphasized the importance of continued collaboration within the region among service providers, jurisdictions, and regional agencies, as well as coordination with other County efforts. This highlights the need for the County's updated Master Plan to:

- Build off existing regional planning efforts, such as Southern Nevada Strong, Southern Nevada Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, as well as RTC's Regional Transportation Plan and Onboard Mobility Plan; and
- Coordinate with other planning efforts currently underway, including the Las Vegas Master Plan update, Maryland Parkway Transit-Oriented Development Corridor Plan, Stadium District Master Plan, and UNLV Master Plan.

## **DEVELOPMENT CODE THEMES**

### **Reduce reliance on waivers, PUDs, and nonconforming zone changes**

Staff and participants agreed there is a heavy reliance on all of these tools, particularly waivers. Although most waiver requests receive approval, there is a perception of inconsistency, where the same request is reviewed differently each time it comes up. The PUD process was also cited as unpredictable, and time-consuming. Any proposed alteration in an approved project requires a further investment of time since all approvals occur at the beginning of the project, they cannot accommodate changes, which require new review processes. Suggestions to improve processes as part of the Development Code rewrite included:

- Review waivers that are approved 100% of the time and permit these by right;
- Seek consistency in decisions – similar waivers should be subject to similar review and outcomes;
- Clarify PUD process to make it less time-consuming and unpredictable; and
- Adjust the review process to allow small changes to approved PUDs rather than initiating a full new review.

### **Improve efficiency of procedures and administration**

A number of stakeholders noted that while review timelines are relatively quick, the current multi-phase approval process can be time-consuming. While there was general agreement that multi-phase approvals should be maintained for major or especially controversial projects, stakeholders expressed support for a review of current procedures in the Code, with an eye toward improving efficiency. Some of the potential opportunities identified for further consideration included:

- Exploring opportunities to condense or consolidate some steps in the multi-phase approval process;

- Allowing certain types of decisions to be made at the staff level rather than requiring public hearings;
- Permitting staff to approve minor changes on an approved project rather than restarting the review; and
- Reviewing notification requirements and clarifying language used in notifications.

### **Modernize uses and broaden the lineup of zoning districts**

Participants who frequently work with the Development Code noted that many of the uses referenced in the code are obsolete and often not defined, and that the current lineup of zoning districts does not always allow the kind of development advocated in approved plans. Specific areas of focus that were flagged for consideration as part of the Development Code rewrite included:

- Modernizing the use table to eliminate outdated terminology and define key terms;
- Aligning the zoning district lineup with the updated Master Plan land use categories;
- Revisit existing mixed-use overlays and other tools to make it easier to achieve mixed-use development at different densities and in different neighborhood contexts—ranging from rural centers to urban transit-oriented development;
- Incorporating residential districts that allow a diversity of housing types by right—including very small lot, live/work, and townhomes; and
- Consideration of inclusionary housing provisions to help expand the supply of affordable housing.

### **Raise the bar for development quality**

Many stakeholders noted that development in unincorporated Clark County is held to a lesser standard than that which occurs in the cities. Most agreed that opportunities to “raise the bar” on development quality should be explored as part of the Development Code rewrite through stronger standards and incentives for:

- Building design (e.g., anti-monotony/overall quality);
- Neighborhood protection/compatibility (e.g., screening, transitions);
- Landscaping and site design (e.g., community amenities, desert-sensitive and water efficient landscaping);
- Parks and open space requirements (including fee-in-lieu or service-in-lieu options); and
- Infrastructure and Complete Streets (e.g., wider sidewalks, fewer lanes, and more bike and trail facilities).

Stakeholders also agreed that, as a general rule, standards should be flexible to reduce reliance on waivers.

### **Remove regulatory barriers to infill, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse**

Many participants noted that infill and redevelopment opportunities existed throughout the Las Vegas Valley, but that the current Development Code is generally geared toward new development. Stakeholders with experience in these types of development noted that the current Development Code makes it difficult to do any of these, and that they hoped to “get the Code out of the way,” by exploring:

- Resolution of inconsistencies between zoning and other codes such as building and fire; and
- More flexible regulations in areas within close proximity to transit; and
- Opportunities to incentivize the adaptive reuse of obsolete shopping centers, hotel towers, and other vacant buildings.