

September, 26 2011



Update of the Zoning Ordinance

Report from Planning & Zoning Commission



INTRODUCTION

Gila County adopted its first zoning ordinance right around 1960. That is over 50 years ago. The Chamber of Commerce was the driving force to have land use regulations established throughout the county.

At the time the first zoning ordinance was adopted the population for Gila County was 25,000 persons. Today the population is over 53,000 people. Almost one half of our population resides in the unincorporated areas of the county. Two very critical elements that fostered this change were the idea that development needed to be sustainable and the 2003 Comprehensive Plan for the County.

Our Comprehensive Plan has done a good job in identifying issues that need to be addressed. The following was taken directly from the Comprehensive Plan.

Community Land Use Issues: (Items/Issues of Concern to Residents)

- Adequacy of existing and future water supplies
- Limited amount of privately owned property
- Lack of economic development opportunities
- Actual and potential impacts of septic tanks to the environment
- Lack of managed growth and development
- Maintenance and access of private roads
- Road maintenance
- Emergency response times and accessibility
- Wildfire danger

Transportation related Issues identified by County residents:

- Adequacy of Emergency Access
- All Weather Property Accessibility
- Lack of Alternative Transportation Mode Facilities
- Unimproved Roadways / Dust Control
- Deficiency in Roadway Construction and Maintenance Funding
- Need for Regional Transportation Planning
- Inadequate Roads and Rights-of-Way

Community facility-related issues identified by county residents:

- Potential negative impacts due to excessive use of individual septic systems
- Adequacy and reliability of water supply to residents
- Adequacy and response timing of fire and medical emergency services
- Adequacy and response timing of law enforcement services
- Lack of capacity of existing jail facilities
- Travel distances required to access governmental offices and functions
- Lack of automated and remote service options
- Lack of funding for service expansion and lack of service coordination



The first step in building a land use regulatory system is to know what it is you want to be. This is the role of the Comprehensive Plan. It is common practice to modify the land use regulatory system once the comprehensive planning process is completed. It is through the land use regulations that we can achieve the vision of our comprehensive plan.

Our comprehensive plan has provided the following directions for updating our codes:

1. We need to promote infill developments in order to reduce housing costs.
 - Continue to find ways to expedite and streamline permit review process and review feasibility of tax incentives
2. We need to provide greater protection for hazardous areas such as floodplains and steep topographic areas.
 - Consider allowing a "Transfer of Development" to decrease density in sensitive areas and increase density in nonsensitive areas.
3. We need to promote planned developments that have adequate utilities and infrastructure.
 - Promote the development of subdivisions in GU zoning
4. We need to provide more buffering between noncompatible land uses.
 - Include a landscape and buffering ordinance in the UDC
5. We need to assure a diversification of residential land uses.
 - Allowing housing for seniors and granny flats should be provided for in our code
6. We need to develop location standards for regional and neighborhood commercial development.
 - Promote the creation of small commercial establishments within residential areas
7. We need to encourage the development of shared driveways where feasible.
 - This is primarily a State issue. We can have standards allowing minimum frontage on State highways, minimum distance between driveways etc.
8. We need to provide adequate opportunity for lodging and resort developments.
 - Rethink zoning allowances to promote guest ranches in rural areas with appropriate access and infrastructure
9. We need to provide a more aesthetically pleasing development
 - Consider expanding our design review program to other areas of the county
10. We need to expand our water requirements to ensure an adequate water supply for future generations
 - We want to encourage adequate water supply for future generations
 - i. This includes promoting safe water quality
 - ii. Protection of public wells
 - Encourage reuse of high quality discharged waters
11. We need to provide protection for historical and geological features.
 - Develop a Historic Overlay program
12. We need to assure that buildings and signage do not detract from our natural environment
 - Expand and rethink signage regulations
13. We need to provide adequate screening for outdoor storage areas.
 - Include In landscaping and buffering ordinance

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH WITH AN UPDATED CODE

Our aim in updating our current zoning ordinance is to bring about a major change in how Gila County regulates the use of land in Gila County.

- The new code must recognize the need for increased flexibility in the application of land use regulations. No one rule will work in all cases. We don't want to stand at the counter and say no way you can do what you want and there's no way to change that. We need to provide other avenues for our customers to achieve what they want within the guidelines of our code. Let's provide the opportunity to be creative while creating a more attractive county that enhances our ability to bring in new investment.
- The new code must find other avenues by which to reduce processing times and costs for our customers. We need to explore use of administrative and quasi-legislative procedures that are much quicker. An example would be to allow the Commission to render a final decision on Conditional Use Permits with appeal rights to the Board of Supervisors.
- We want our regulatory system to provide greater protection against the adverse dangers of developing in hazardous areas such as floodplains, floodways and hillsides. Provide options that enhance their ability for economic gain while decreasing the dangers of development in these hazardous areas.
- We want the new code to enhance our ability to provide protection from the loss of beautiful scenic vistas, loss of significant geologic formations, and loss of historically significant structures and areas.
- We want our new code to be clear and understandable to our customers. Graphics can say so much more than words sometimes and we need to get away from legalese language.
- We want our entire land use regulatory system to be coordinated within a single code book so that our customers don't have to search through numerous documents to find out what they need to do.
- We want our new code to incorporate smart growth principles so that we can preserve our valuable resources for both quantity and quality. We want our focus to be more on sustainable development.
- We want our new code to help a village or community foster the sense of place by looking at local design parameters that will enhance their identity.
- We want the new code to provide more options to the developer to create attractive and sustainable communities.
- We want the new code to foster the ability to provide more affordable housing by allowing use of accessory structures such as a guest house to be utilized for rentals and providing the opportunity for senior housing and granny flats.

- We want the new code to be more conducive to the promotion of Gila County as an excellent recreation area for Valley residents.
- We want the impact of this code to foster more privately owned land in Gila County.

SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

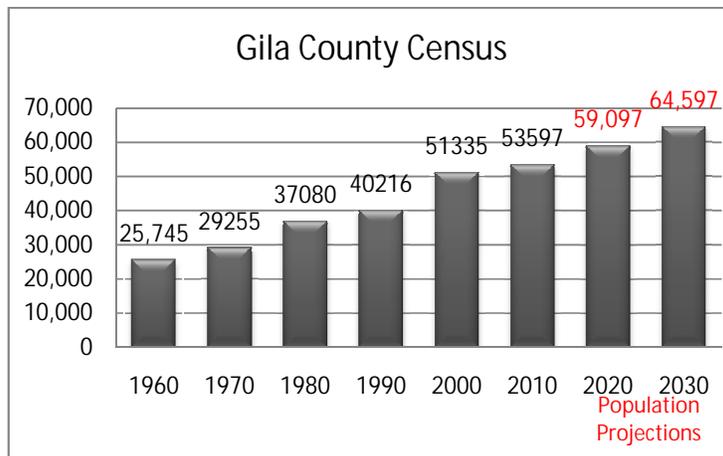
Probably one of the most effective tools that has been created in the last 20 years is the smart growth principles. The driving force behind the creation of these principles is the need to assure that future generations have the ability to have a quality of life that is as good as or better than we have today. Wise use of resources is of critical importance here.

Since the mid-1990s, the Smart Growth Network, a network of non-governmental organizations representing diverse interests, has been identifying best practices, policies, and strategies that help communities get the results they want from growth. The framework for these findings is a set of ten Smart Growth Principles (see below), which apply to a range of communities, from urban to rural, and were developed based on the experiences of communities around the country.

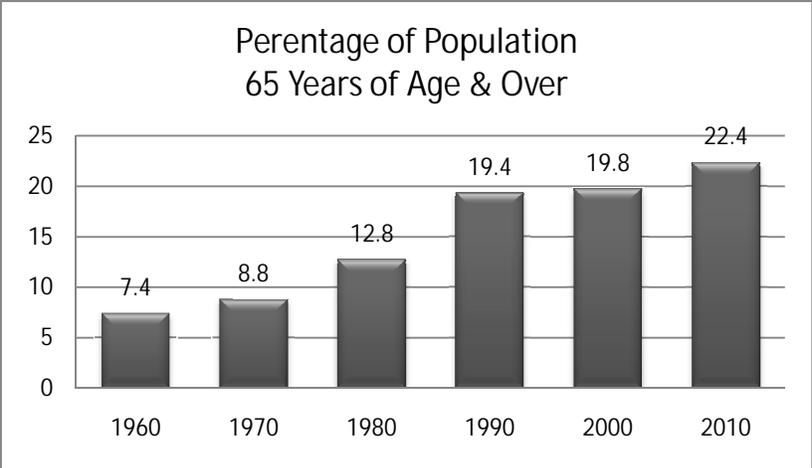
- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable communities.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation options.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

POPULATION GROWTH (1960 – 2010)

The population of Gila County when the zoning ordinance was adopted was just over 25,000 persons, today our population is well over 53,000 persons, more than doubled. The makeup of our population has also changed.

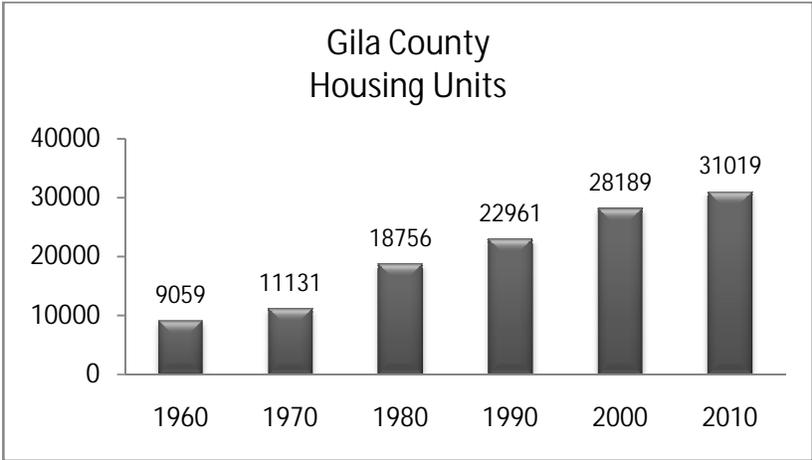


In 1960 41.6% of our population was under 18 years of age. Today 21.4% of our population is under 18 years of age. In 1960 7.4% of our population was 65 years of age or older. Today 23.2% is 65 years of age or older. In fact 40.1% of our households will have someone who is 65 or older living there.



We had a total of 7,289 households in 1960. Today we have more seasonal homes than that. The average household had 3.5 persons in 1960 while today we have 2.39. The total number of housing units has grown by 350% since 1960 for a total of 32,298 units.

Today our population is older, our housing units have fewer people living in them and we have more than twice the total number of people living here. Our housing unit count has increased by more than 3 times while our population has only doubled.



In 1960 the makeup of our population pretty much mirrored that for the State of Arizona. Since that time we have changed significantly in regards to the age of our population. Our population for 65 years and older constitutes 22.4% of our total population while the state is 13.1%.