



Tucson Firm Completes the First Fully-Sustainable General Plan in Arizona

Tucson, AZ.
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The City of El Mirage, northwest of Phoenix, has adopted the first fully-sustainable general plan in the State of Arizona, managed and written by The Planning Center of Tucson. The plan was unanimously adopted by the El Mirage City Council last week. According to George Flores, the city's community development director, "this is an example of what a compact, land-locked community can do to leverage limited resources when the right public/private partnership is in place." The plan includes policy direction for water harvesting, multimodal access, walkability, affordability, revitalization, contained farming, industry and technology, roof gardens, energy efficiency and a targeted reduction of the city's carbon foot print of 50% by the year 2020. It incorporates clean energy sources for development and distribution, and requires new development to meet the highest LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environment Design) standards.

Scott Chesney, director of economic development for the City of El Mirage, said that this plan helps him with the charge to rebuild the economy of a economically unsustainable city. Previous plans were based on suburban growth with old-school strategies of breaking the city into zones such as industrial, retail, residential, etc. "This is an integrated plan that allows for mixed use, flexibility, opportunities without boundaries, and the setting of policies that will result in quality of life and sustainability, and ultimately attract residents and businesses," said Chesney.

The Planning Center coordinated a national team for the El Mirage project including SERA Architects of Portland, Oregon, Nolte Associates of Colorado Springs, and Theater Simple of Seattle, and began the planning process with public participation. This started with "Park Bench" conversations in which the team gathered input in a park bench setting at local community events. Oral histories of people who have lived in the town for generations were compiled. These efforts were followed by a week-long dynamic design charrette with daily opportunities for public engagement. The public participation efforts of El Mirage General Plan received the 2009 Arizona Planning Association Public Participation Award.

A General Plan is a blueprint appointed and elected officials use in the evaluation of proposals for development, redevelopment and revitalization. All jurisdictions in the State of Arizona are required by the Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) 9-461.05 to adopt a general plan to guide future development.

Several granting agencies and the City of El Mirage have partnered with The Planning Center in the preparation of funding strategies to implement the plan. Major property owners with large amounts of acreage support the vision and are willing to invest in making the vision of El Mirage a reality. The general plan will go to voters in November for ratification.

"It has been very rewarding to work with the team at The Planning Center, El Mirage and all of our partners during this process, and will continue to be so as El Mirage realizes its vision," said Maria Masque, principal and project manager of The Planning Center. The Planning Center is also currently working on the general plan update for the City of Nogales.

Established in 1975, The Planning Center is a private consulting firm that provides a variety of multidisciplinary planning services including planning, economic market analysis, geospatial services and landscape architecture. For more information, call (520) 623-6146 or visit www.azplanningcenter.com.