

CHAPTER 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this Master Plan is to provide goals and objectives for the development of Storey County. Contained in the Executive Summary is an outline of those goals and objectives as well as a definition of the study area, its history, and the direction of land use development.

1.1 The Study Area

Storey County is located in northwestern Nevada approximately 40 miles from the California stateline. The western boundary follows township, range and section lines that roughly conform to the western crest of the Virginia Range. (Table 1.1) The northern boundary is defined as the line equidistant between the north and south banks of the Truckee River, which it follows for about 25 miles. The southeast boundary line connecting the north and west boundaries, trends along the base of the southeasterly edge of the Flowery Range.

The county is bordered on the west and the north by Washoe County and on the east and south by Lyon County. With 264 square miles of total land area, Storey County accounts for less than one-quarter of one percent of the state's total land area. This makes Storey County the second smallest county in Nevada. In 1990 with a population of 2,526, the county had a population density of 9.6 people per square mile, compared to the state's population density of 11.7 people per square mile. The U.S. Bureau of the Census classifies the county as "rural".

The major geophysical feature of the county is its mountainous topography. The county seat is Virginia City which is located on the steep eastern slope of Mt. Davidson. The majority of the land developed over the past 40 years has been on the perimeter of the county, primarily in the level areas adjacent to Lyon County and along the riparian zone of Truckee River. Although there is a considerable amount of developable land in the interior of the county, the mountainous terrain and lack of adequate road networks have combined to restrict development. Therefore the development trend of the past 40 years is encouraged to continue.

Storey County is defined by four populations areas:

Virginia City/Gold Hill: This area is located in the mountainous southwest section of the county. The development of this area can be directly attributed to the discovery of the Comstock Lode and is a major tourist attraction in the State of Nevada.

Virginia Highlands: Located 5 miles north of Virginia City, this is a mountainous residential subdivision of one, ten, and forty acre parcels with primarily upscale housing. There is currently no commercial development in this area.

Mark Twain: Located six miles due east of Virginia City, this is a residential subdivision consisting primarily of mobil homes. The terrain is relatively level.

The River District: This district stretches about 25 miles along the south bank of the Truckee River and makes up the northern boundary of the county. It has a mixed land use of residential, agricultural, recreational, industrial and commercial development.

All of these districts are within a mile or two of the county boundary, none are in the interior. With few exceptions, all of the population of the County is located within these four districts.

Unlike most of Nevada, 87% of which is managed by federal agencies, over 90% of Storey County is privately owned. Without the active support of a federal land management agency or sufficient revenues necessary to develop a County Planning Department, land management efforts in the interior have been minimal and the resources available are largely unknown.

1.2 Land Use Master Plan Development

This Master Plan will serve as an update to the Storey County Land Use Plan written by the Carson River Basin Council of Governments in 1973. Many of the original elements have been incorporated into this Master Plan. Land use zoning districts have been defined by county ordinance and incorporated in the county code (Title 17). However, planning decisions have been hampered by unclear zoning district maps. The Board of County Commissioners is prepared to geographically redefine these zoning districts with the assistance of this document.

A further goal of this Master Plan is derived essentially from a desire to preserve and improve the present quality of life in Storey County, to resist changes detrimental to the historic integrity of the Virginia City area, to define geographic growth areas, and to direct growth in all parts of the county. Since 90% of county land is in private hands, the potential threat of change is perceived to come from large scale land subdivisions. This type of development could destroy historic land use patterns, the unique social and architectural environment of the Virginia City/Gold Hill area, and other values which residents want to protect.

Storey County has experienced phenomenal growth since 1973 and reflects modern development trends and problems occurring throughout the state.

An important consideration in this Master Plan should be future land use planning in the Virginia City/Gold Hill area. In an effort to retain the historic flavor of this area, county officials should adopt distinct development standards and zoning requirements to allow for land use development that will enhance this effort. These standards should be designed so they do not conflict with requirements of public and private development loan agencies.

A master plan is not a zoning ordinance. It carries no penalties under the law, rather it is a guide to development. It sets forth a view of the future, a direction for development growth and a guide for community action.

However, a zoning ordinance is a law. It creates districts and land use regulations. Land owners must abide by zoning ordinances. Violations of the zoning ordinance are the same as violations of any law and are punishable by fine or even imprisonment. The master plan forms the basis for the designation of the various zoning districts.

The relationship between a master plan and a zoning ordinance should be considered. Since the master plan is a statement of direction, the zoning ordinance should only be amended in conformity with the master plan. In fact, once a master plan is officially adopted, non-conformity with the master plan is ample reason for rejecting an amendment to the zoning ordinance. In short, the zoning ordinance expresses more closely what is. The master plan expresses what should be.

1.3 History of Storey County

The unprecedented wealth of the Comstock Lode virtually created Virginia City and Storey County. The following account gives a historical outline of Storey County:

One of the most famous mining camps in the world, Virginia City was established in 1859 after the discovery of the Comstock Lode. The mining camp was named in honor of James "Old Virginny" Finney by the early prospectors because of his discovery and knowledge of placers below what would later be the Ophir Mine and his location of the first quartz mining claim on the Comstock.

Virginia City, county seat of Storey County, is on the east side of the Virginia Range just below Mountain Davidson at an elevation of 6,220 feet. Today Virginia City is a year-round international tourist attraction with a population of about 700.

In the fall of 1859, Virginia City had an initial population of between 200 to 300. After word of the Comstock discovery in early 1860, perhaps 10,000 rushed to the Comstock, many from the California goldfields. About 4,000 remained in the area: 2,345 in Virginia City (868 dwellings), the rest in Gold Hill and vicinity. The political ramifications resulted in the creation of the Nevada Territory, carved from Utah Territory, by President Buchanan on March 2, 1861.

The population remained about 4,000 through 1862. Samuel Clemens arrived in late 1862, worked as a reporter for the Territorial Enterprise for 21 months, and left as Mark Twain. During this period construction of the old Geiger Grade Toll Road was started and in partial use by the end of the year. This road linked Virginia City with emigrant trails and supply routes that crossed the Truckee River at the site that would become Reno in 1868. Organization of the San Francisco Stock Exchange Board, the first mining exchange in the United States, also occurred in 1862.

By 1863, mining successes and promotion brought the Virginia City and vicinity population to some 15,000. Homes, business buildings and office blocks were built, gas and sewer pipes were laid in the principal main streets. Daily stages brought in all the luxuries of the Bay Area. The

town was made up of two classes of people, each of which kept its own place and went its way without interference from the other. Seventy-five stamp-amalgamation mills were operating in the region: 19 in Virginia City and in Six and Seven Mile canyons below, 35 in Gold Canyon from Gold Hill to Dayton, 12 on the Carson River, and nine in Washoe Valley.

The Comstock brought enough people, money and politicians to the area that on October 31, 1864, Nevada was admitted as the 36th State. Economic slow-down saw 10,000 leave the area, many for other mining camps, leaving an area population of about 4,000 in 1865. Virginia City population increased to about 11,000 by 1868. The Yellow Jacket Mine fire occurred in 1869, which also saw the construction of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad between Virginia City and Carson City and Reno was completed on August 24, 1872, linking up with the existing Central Pacific Railroad. This pretty much ended the wagon freight business over the Sierra and to Virginia City.

The increased mining operations and population between 1869 and 1870 expended the available local water from natural springs and mine tunnels to the west of town. In 1870, plans were made to bring water to the Comstock from Marlette Lake high in the Sierra near Lake Tahoe, down the east slope of the Sierra, and across Washoe Valley using an inverted siphon system. This was completed in August 1873 and, now modernized, is the source of Virginia City water today.

Between 1873 and 1874, the population of the area exploded to 25,000 in Virginia City and 5,000 in Gold Hill as the result of the discovery of the Bonanza ore body in the Con. Virginia Mine and extending into the California Mine. On October 26, 1875, just after 6 a.m., a fire, probably started from a wood stove, destroyed most of Virginia City, burning an area of about one square mile. During 1876 Virginia City was rebuilding and supported a regional population of 23,000. The Irish predominated in Virginia City and the Cornish in Gold Hill. The third line vertical shafts were being sunk east of town (evidence by the large mine dumps) to intersect the Comstock Lode at depths of 2,500 to 4,500 feet. Of the 135 Comstock mines quoted in the San Francisco Stock Exchanges in 1876, only three, the Con. Virginia, the California, and the Belcher, were paying dividends. The others were levying assessments.

The decline of Virginia City began in 1877 as hard times hit the Comstock and discoveries were made in other mining districts in Nevada and California. In 1880 there were about 11,000 people and 1,200 buildings in Virginia City of which 92 were made of brick. Most of the mines closed after the panic of 1893 and by 1900, the population of Virginia City had dwindled to 2,700, and continued downward to about 500 in 1930. In 1980, the census showed 1,503 living in the Virginia City-Gold Hill area.

As an epilogue it can probably be said that the Comstock produced 29 millionaires in an environment where more than 1,000 mining companies were formed, of which only 19 ever paid dividends. More money was lost in the essentially unregulated stock market through assessments and stock manipulations than was ever produced in gold and silver.

1.4 Goals and Objectives

The following list of planning goals and objectives is recommended for consideration by the Storey County Planning Commission and the residents of the county. In developing and implementing a master plan, planning officials need direction concerning the type of community which they and the residents agree should develop over a period of years. The goals and objectives perform that function by becoming official policy statements. Future planning decisions should reflect these policy statements.

Chapter 2 - Population

Goal 1: Anticipate populations changes and the level of county provided services needed to accommodate the change.

Objective 1.1: Request population and demographic data be presented the Board of County Commissioners annually from the office of the Nevada State Demographer and review same for impacts to county finances and county provided services.

Chapter 3 - Economy

Goal 1: Enhance diversification of economic opportunities within the county.

Objective 1.1: Develop and adopt standards for industrial park development before a large project is proposed.

Objective 1.2: Promote commercial business activity in Virginia City which will benefit local residents as distinct from tourists and visitors.

Objective 1.3: Expand programs and improve communications and interaction with existing economic development and diversification agencies.

Recommendation: Contact the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada regarding membership and the coordinated development of prime industrial land in the River District.

Chapter 4 - Housing

Goal 1: Encourage that adequate housing is provided all residents of the county through zoning and planning.

Objective 1.1: Encourage development of affordable housing.

Chapter 5 - Conservation and Natural Resources

Goal 1: Ensure that present and future county residents have an adequate water supply meeting safe drinking standards.

Objective 1.1: Require all proposed development furnish proof of the availability of owned rights to adequate water meeting safe drinking standards before necessary land use or building permit applications are approved.

Objective 1.2: Actively participate on regional governmental water agencies to ensure the water rights of all owners and residents are protected. In addition, actively protest the granting of water rights or land development proposals which will have a negative impact on the quantity and/or quality of Storey County resident's water supply.

Objective 1.3: Investigate the feasibility of using recycled, treated effluent water for agrarian and recreational uses. Establish the county's priority of right to the use of this water.

Objective 1.4: Working with the Nevada division of Water Planning, create and maintain within the Public Works Department a data base of water resources within the county.

Objective 1.5: Request the Nevada State Engineer to undertake a hydrologic study of water resources in the undeveloped northerly and easterly portion of the county.

Objective 1.6: The condition of the Marlette Water System pipe line be periodically replaced as necessary.

Goal 2: Protect the quality of present and future water resources.

Objective 2.1: Refuse special use permitting of industries which cannot guarantee the quality of effluent produced by their activity. Require users of toxic or hazardous materials to provide monitoring capabilities to assure protection from surface and groundwater contamination.

Goal 3: Minimize risks to public welfare and private property resulting from seismic activity.

Objective 3.1: Review the seismic activity map when considering development permits and require sufficient engineering structural safeguards when building construction is proposed on or near active seismic areas.

Goal 4: Regulate use of open range and watershed areas to minimize fire danger and prevent degradation.

Objective 4.1: Assist property owners and interested groups in controlling grazing and public use of critical watershed and riparian areas.

Objective 4.2: Cooperate with ranchers, property owners and interested groups in the county in maintaining wild horses and other grazing animals, but in numbers which will not exceed capacity of the land.

Chapter 6 - Public Services

Goal 1: Provide county residents with more efficient means of communicating their needs to county administrators.

Objective 1.1: Provide efficient transportation routes between all communities in the county.

Objective 1.2: Form local advisory boards as necessary within each community to advise county commissioners regarding problems of concern to their community. Advisory boards can be requested for their input regarding controversial land use permits affecting their communities.

Goal 2: Provide adequate park and recreation facilities for all residents of the county.

Objective 2.1: Undertake a study of the adequacy of existing facilities and prepare a plan for developing additional facilities as anticipated population increases require.

Objective 2.2: Initiate a study of the feasibility of a regional or county park along portions of the Truckee River riparian zone including an examination of the availability of federal, state and private development grants.

Goal 3: Anticipate future public building new construction, renovation and repair requirements resulting from projected population growth.

Objective 3.1: Prepare a study of future requirements of each county department based upon expansion requirements.

Goal 4: Anticipate costs of expansion of county provided public services and/or utilities.

Objective 4.1: Prepare a study of county absorbed costs of future development projects and consider the implementation of a capital improvement development fee schedule.

Objective 4.2: Establish and adopt regulatory standards for present and future private operations of water supply and sewage disposal systems to ensure that the county will not be required to maintain such systems due to poor management or operation or due to insufficient capital investment on the part of the private developer.

Goal 5: Protect the public safety and welfare of the residents of newly developing areas.

Objective 5.1: Require the preparation and submittal of an acceptable emergency response plan for all proposed development projects outside the response perimeter of existing emergency response units. This plan should be approved before required land use permits are issued by the appropriate emergency response management personnel.

Goal 6: Support efforts to provide Storey County students with superior education opportunities.

Objective 6.1: Maintain liaison with Storey County School district in regards to population growth and school facilities expansion.

Objection 6.2: Review the need for additional education facilities when considering land use permit approvals for residential development.

Chapter 7 - Transportation

Goal 1: Provide efficient transportation routes between all communities in the county.

Objective 1.1: Request the Nevada Department of Transportation to undertake a feasibility study for paving Six Mile Canyon Road connecting Virginia City and Mark Twain.

Objective 1.2: Request the Nevada Department of Transportation to undertake a feasibility study for the construction of a two-lane rural, paved or unpaved, road connecting State Route 341 with Lockwood.

Objective 1.3: Undertake a complete survey of all existing public and private roads to prioritize funding for new construction, upgrading existing roads, and repair of deteriorating roads. Additionally, this survey will give planners some indication of future needs for dedicated roads on private lands.

Objective 1.4: Actively promote the upgrading of state roads within the county before the Nevada Department of Transportation.

Goal 2: Enhance transportation availability to the Reno-Sparks metropolitan area.

Objective 2.1: Request the Washoe County Regional Transportation Public Service Commission to study the feasibility of extending full or partial bus service to Virginia City, Virginia Highlands and the River District.

Goal 3: To see the completion of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad from Virginia City to Carson City.

Objective 3.1: To participate and support the Tri-County Railroad Commission.

Goal 4: Anticipate future needs for a small airport or helipad to serve Virginia City and the Virginia Highlands area.

Objective 4.1: Identify area.

Chapter 8 - Cultural Resources

Goal 1: Protection of the historic resources.

Objective 1.1: Maintain and enhance the existing policy of consultation between the Storey County Building Department and the Comstock Historic District Commission regarding CHDC prior approval of exterior design of structures before county permitting is approved.

Objective 1.2: Enforcement of ordinances and statutes that facilitate protection of resources.

Objective 1.3: Public education on the importance of the protection of historic resources.

Goal 2: Long term planning of the direction of historic preservation within the district.

Objective 2.1: Grants planning for historic preservation.

Objective 2.2: Dialogue, planning and project development between tourism promotion and historic preservation entities.

Objective 2.3: Maintain and enhance consultation between the Storey County Planning Commission and the Comstock Historic District Commission.

Goal 3: Protect the petroglyphs from vandalism.

Objective 3.1: Review ownership of the site and request state or federal assistance in protecting this resource.

Chapter 9 - Land Uses

County Wide

Goal 1: Maintain a healthy environment for all residents of the county.

Objective 1.1: Ensure that land use permit decisions are compatible with the zoning map, master plan, and previous planning decisions.

Goal 2: Minimize conflicts between mobile/manufactured and site built housing units.

Objective 2.1: Determine the impact on county revenues and services of present and increased mobile home residential development.

Objective 2.2: Creation of mobile home overlay zoning districts with distinct tax rates to ensure that property owners pay their fair share of the property tax burden.

Goal 3: Provide for the orderly development of the largest undeveloped area in the county - north and east of Virginia City and the south of the Truckee River.

Objective 3.1: Working with regional economic development authorities, private land owners and state government agencies, initiate a study of the resources of this area and its potential for residential, industrial, recreational or other types of development. Such a study would lead to orderly and desirable development, enhance the natural amenities of the area and increase county tax revenues.

Goal 4: Preserve existing agricultural areas.

Objective 4.1: Through zoning regulations direct non-agricultural development to non-agricultural areas.

Goal 5: Support the development of the county's significant mineral resources while ensuring that negative impacts to the tourism based economy of the Comstock Lode area are minimized.

Objective 5.1: Adopt standards or policy statements concerning mineral development on or near the Comstock which are distinct from development standards in outlying areas.

Objective 5.2: Refrain from duplicating permit applications requirements and fees which have been established by state and federal agencies.

Goal 6: Enhance private and public property values by redefining property boundaries in areas of conflict.

Objective 6.1: There are significant discrepancies and conflicts in property boundary definitions and, consequently property rights on deeded lands in Storey County, particularly in the Comstock Lode area. Generally these problems have resulted from faulty land surveys undertaken during the 19th century mining days and result in a significant reluctance and outright refusal of lending institutions to loan funds for property improvement. Therefore, starting with the Planning Commission the county should undertake appropriate actions necessary to initiate a federal resurvey of section, township and range baselines and a redefinition of the boundaries of Land Patents issued by the Bureau of Land Management and its predecessor, the General Land Office.

Virginia City/Gold Hill

Goal 1: Reduce land use conflicts between mining operations and other private and public land users.

Objective 1.1: Actively advise new residents of the importance of mining to the economy of the county and the proximity of patented and possessory mining property when they apply for Building and/or Special Use Permits.

Objective 1.2: Include a "visitor/tourism" element into Special Use Permit requirements for mining operations within the Comstock Historic District. Such an element could include informational signs explaining the history of the property being worked.

Goal 2: Preserve the historic heritage of the Comstock Lode area for the enjoyment and education of present and future residents and visitors and the economic opportunities it affords.

Objective 2.1: Inaugurate programs to ensure that no more historically and economically important buildings are lost through neglect (See Cultural Resources, Objective 1.1)

Objective 2.2: Adopt the Uniform Code of Historic Building Preservation to allow flexibility in plans for the rehabilitation of buildings contributing to the historical significance of the area.

Objective 2.3: Develop a sub-area land use plan for the Comstock Lode area which recognizes and enhances its unique attraction to tourists and forms the economic base of the area.

Recommendation: A portion of development and land use permit fees be placed in a separate fund for the development of an updated land use plan.

Goal 3: Ensure that an adequate drinking water supply is available for anticipated growth in the Comstock region.

Objective 3.1: Maintain the primacy of the Virginia City/Gold Hill water allotment allocated in the Franktown Water Decree.

Objective 3.2: Enhance local water conservation awareness and prioritize needed repairs on the antiquated water delivery system.

Objective 3.3: Redefine by County Ordinance the geographic boundaries of the townsite of Gold Hill as originally written.

Virginia Highlands

Goal 1: Ensure efficient and safe transportation routes for community residents.

Objective 1.1: Require that future road and drainage design meet specific standards for rural residential development.

Goal 2: Minimize county financial jeopardy related to the issuance of building permits on properties without adequate water resources.

Objective 2.1: Require permit seekers to provide the county with documentation showing that their well water meets safe drinking standards before permit is issued.

Mark Twain

Goal 1: To improve road surfaces through paving and increased drainage engineering.

Objective 1.1: Complete road surveys by County Road Department to determine the extent of road improvements needed. This schedule is presented annually to the governing body for prioritizing roads via the Regional Transportation Commission.

Goal 2: To improve roads within the residential area.

Objective 2.1: Through the Regional Transportation Commission, an expanded road improvement program should hasten completion of this goal and objective.

Goal 3: The development of a community park and trails for walking and bicycling.

Objective 3.1: A park area should be added in the community design as an integral part thereof. The development of parks and trails should be encouraged.

Goal 4: Retain existing water resources which exist for the benefit of Mark Twain.

Objective 4.1: Request legislation, both at county and state level to allow restriction or to prevent water or water rights exportation to areas outside Mark Twain.

Objective 4.2: Request Nevada State Engineer to commence hydraulic study of water basin in Mark Twain to determine quantity and quality of aquifers to assure aquifers are not being depleted beyond their recharging capabilities.

Goal 5: To protect and enhance water quality throughout Mark Twain.

Objective 5.1: Require users of toxic and hazardous materials to provide monitoring capabilities to assure protection from groundwater contamination.

Goal 6: Minimize possibility of flooding and resultant damage.

Objective 6.1: In areas where this condition is a possibility, consideration must be given to such things as retention ponds and properly engineered drainage courses in accordance with good engineering practices.

Objective 6.2: Restrict development in areas where flood plain conditions exist.

Goal 7: Require emergency response study on all proposed projects for evaluation prior to approval.

Objective 7.1: To recognize the necessity for reasonable response by fire, law enforcement, ambulance and other emergency services.

River District

Goal 1: Increase a sense of community in the widely and thinly dispersed developing areas.

Objective 1.1: Working with local land owners and developers, create and consolidate distinct village commercial areas separate from residential and industrial areas through zoning and innovative architectural and landscape standards with the Truckee River as the major design element.

Objective 1.2: Since this area has more potential developable land, seek funding for the preparation of a detailed sub-area plan for the entire south side of the Truckee River stretching the 30 miles from Washoe county to Fernley.

Goal 2: Eliminate congestion resulting from truck traffic on Canyon Way at Rainbow Bend.

Objective 2.1: Construct an alternate access to the dump area.

Goal 3: Retain existing water resources for the River District.

Objective 3.1: Require new development to obtain water rights before land use permits are approved.

Objective 3.2: With local residents and development firms, investigate the development of a unified water and sewer district for the River District.

Goal 4: Coordinate land uses on the south side (Storey County) of the Truckee River with developments on the north side (Washoe County) of the river and vice versa.

Objective 4.1: Maintain liaison with the Washoe County Planning Commission.

Objective 4.2: Send the WCPC notification of pending planning decisions regarding developments on the south side of the river and request the SCPC be added to their mailing list regarding planning actions.

Objective 4.3: If and when the WCPC approves the proposed race track at the I-80 Patrick interchange, rezone adjacent areas of Storey County as appropriate.

Goal 5: Design zoning districts to allow for a mix in land use development.

Objective 5.1: Consider zoning the Tracy-Clark and area for industrial use.

Objective 5.2: Set aside a site for a small retail commercial area at Lockwood.

Objective 5.3: Define and designate the area including and surrounding the Aerojet facility as "High Risk Industrial Zone" with appropriate buffer zones.

American Flat

Goal 1: Minimize the potential for uncontrolled negative land use of this relatively undeveloped area.

Objective 1.1: Redefine the boundaries of Gold Hill to once again include American Flat. (See Virginia City/Gold Hill Objective 3.3)