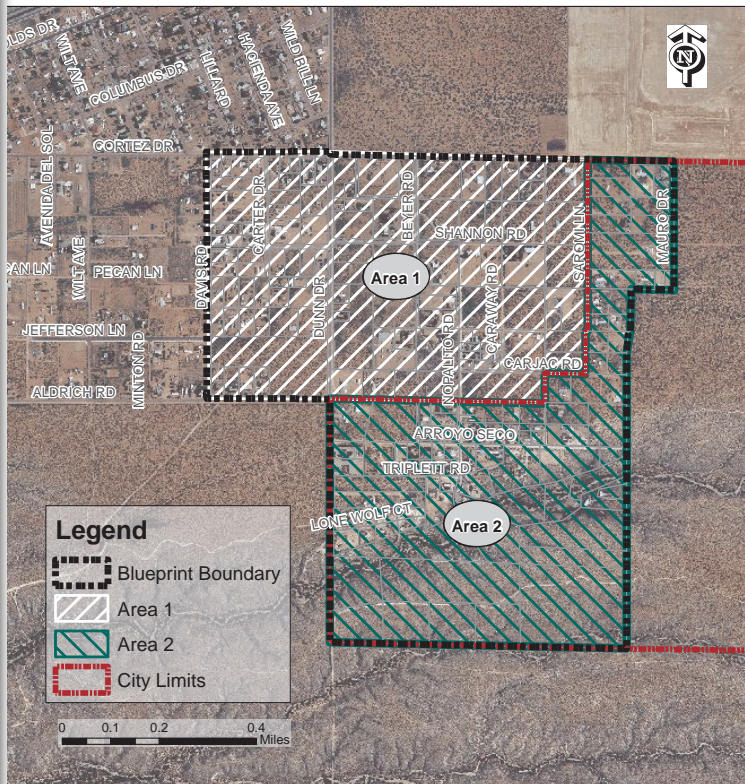




# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT



# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT



MAP 1: PROPOSED PLAN BOUNDARIES



SINGLE TRACK TRAIL \*

## Background

The East Mesa Community Planning Blueprint (EMCPB) planning area is located south of US Highway 70 and east of Porter Drive (Map 1). The planning area boundaries include the area inside the city limits (Area 1) as well as outside the city limits (Area 2). The blueprint also extends its influence over areas surrounding its boundaries that impact the overall accessibility and physical characteristics of the East Mesa neighborhood area.

The East Mesa neighborhood has certain qualities that distinguish it from other neighborhoods in the city: large residential lots; unpaved streets; natural desert landscape; large swaths of public and private undeveloped land surrounding the neighborhood; the natural features of the nearby Alameda Arroyo; horse and other large animal rearing, and relatively unobstructed views of the beautiful Organ mountains.

The East Mesa Community Blueprint is a policy guide for future planning and development efforts in the area. This blueprint was initiated because of the interest shown by area residents to plan for their neighborhood. This proactive community has been engaged throughout the process of developing the vision, goals/policies and actions for this blueprint.

## Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

The planning process for the blueprint included three neighborhood workshops/meetings to discern the issues in the area, build consensus around a central vision for the future of the neighborhood and its surroundings, and finally, to develop a set of goals and actions for future planning efforts. At the second neighborhood meeting, residents were asked to rank their top four priorities from a

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

set of nine issues that had emerged during the first meeting, with the option to add any other issue to the list. Preserving a rural atmosphere, improving the condition of roads and drainage in the area, rezoning of Urban Ranch property and reducing light pollution emerged as the most important issues for the community. Other issues included reducing dust and weeds in the area, discrepancies with street names and addresses, and sewer access or the lack thereof.

### *Preservation of Rural Atmosphere*

The majority of participants that were polled at the second neighborhood meeting the existing rural character of their neighborhood: the development of smaller lots; more residents; increased traffic; less views of, or access to, open space; and new development that could change the physical appearance of the area. Through several polls, comment cards, an interactive mapping session, image preference dot exercise and discussions throughout the course of the three neighborhood meetings, residents identified community characteristics and ways in which to enhance their community: maintain the existing housing density, develop roads with a rural appearance, ensure access to open space and views of the night sky, and plan for equestrian amenities.

### *Roadways*

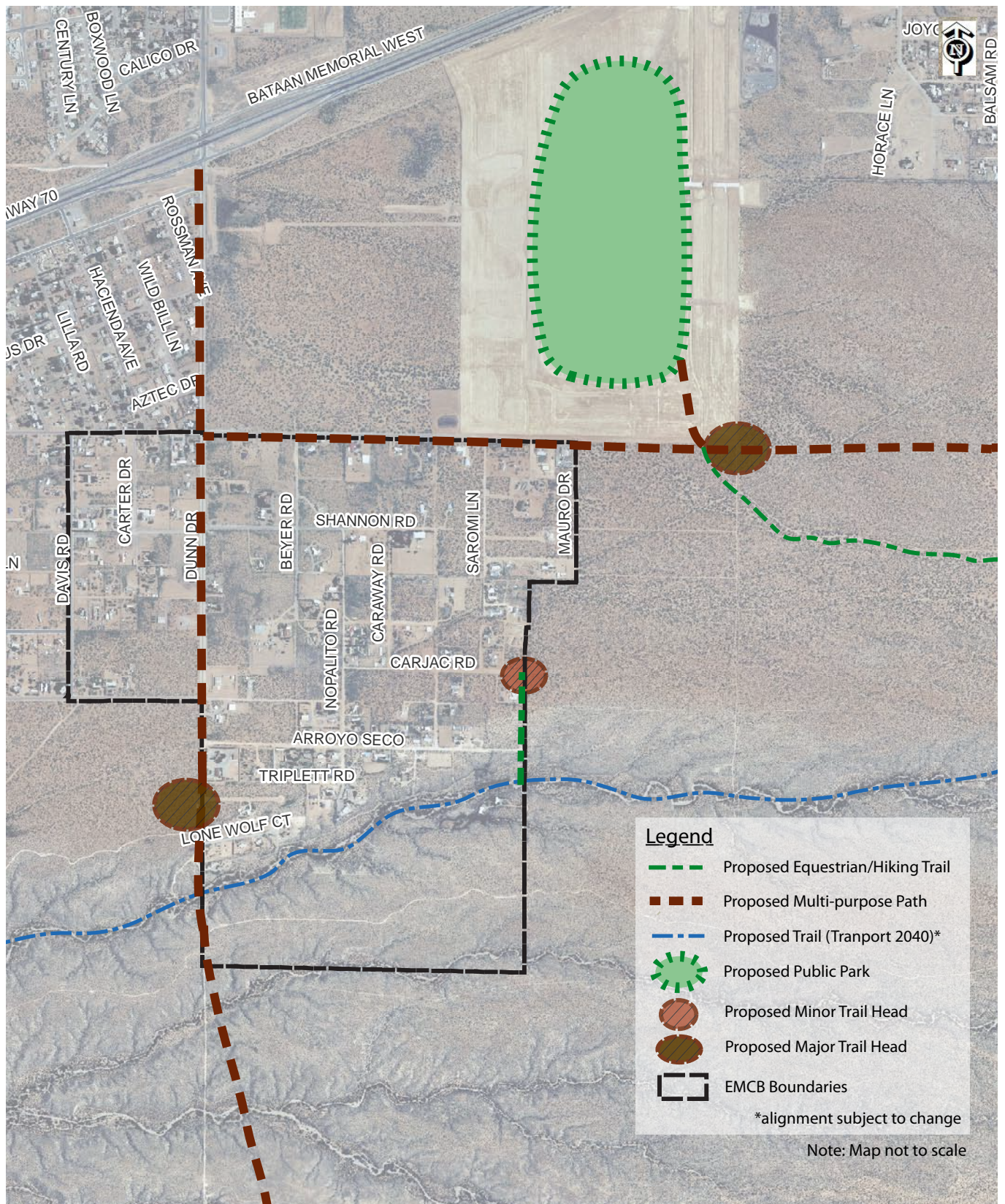
Roadway function and maintenance is a major concern in the area. Many of the roads in the area have not been designed per City standards and do not function well in terms of stormwater conveyance and drainage. Since most of these road surfaces are untreated and/or unpaved, they also contribute to the dusty conditions that concern residents. These issues are related to the fact that most local roads in this area are under private ownership. As a matter of practice, the City accepts maintenance responsibility on streets that have been dedicated to the City, which is contingent upon their being designed and built to City standards. However, current City standards are for general application throughout the city and may not be best suited for the context and/or users in the planning area.

The fact that many of the roads and trails in this area are not completely developed or not yet built, presents the opportunity to establish new rural and equestrian design standards for roadways and trails located here and in similar rural areas in the city. This also provides us with the opportunity to apply the Complete Street principles adopted by the City. Preferred cross-sections and images of trails



PREFERRED TRAILS: NATURAL SURFACE & SINGLE/SEPARATED TRACK \*

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT



MAP 2: FUTURE TRAILS NETWORK

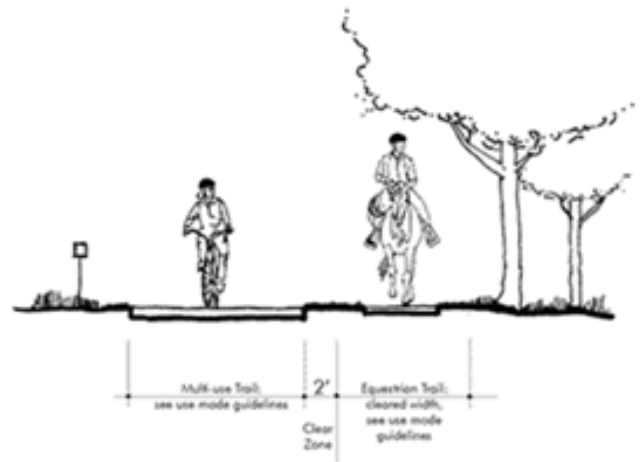
# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

and roads, as indicated by the dot exercise, can serve as a starting point for the development of design standards in rural context zones of the city. The City has already experimented with modified cross sections and alternative paving for roads in this area.

Another opportunity that presents itself in the rural or semi-rural context of the East Mesa planning area is the potential to utilize low impact development and green infrastructure techniques to reduce the impact of development in terms of stormwater management. Such practices address drainage issues without compromising the look and feel of the relatively open desert and natural landscape in this area.

On a broader scale, developing natural desert trail connections and green infrastructure in combination with each other can provide functional, visual and ecological networks that can link to a city-wide or regional network of trails, paths and parks, ultimately leading to preserved areas, such as the Bureau of Land Management's Area of Critical Environmental Concern located further east of the planning area, adjacent to Eason Lane. Map 2 is an illustration of the future trails system for the planning area which is based on public input received during the mapping exercise.



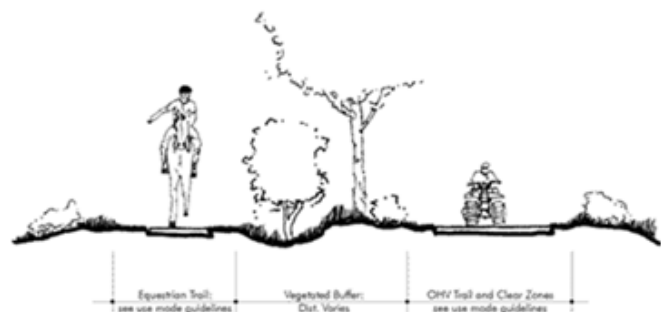
PREFERRED CROSS-SECTION \*



MULTI-USER TRAIL \*



MULTI-USER TRAIL \*



PREFERRED CROSS-SECTION \*

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

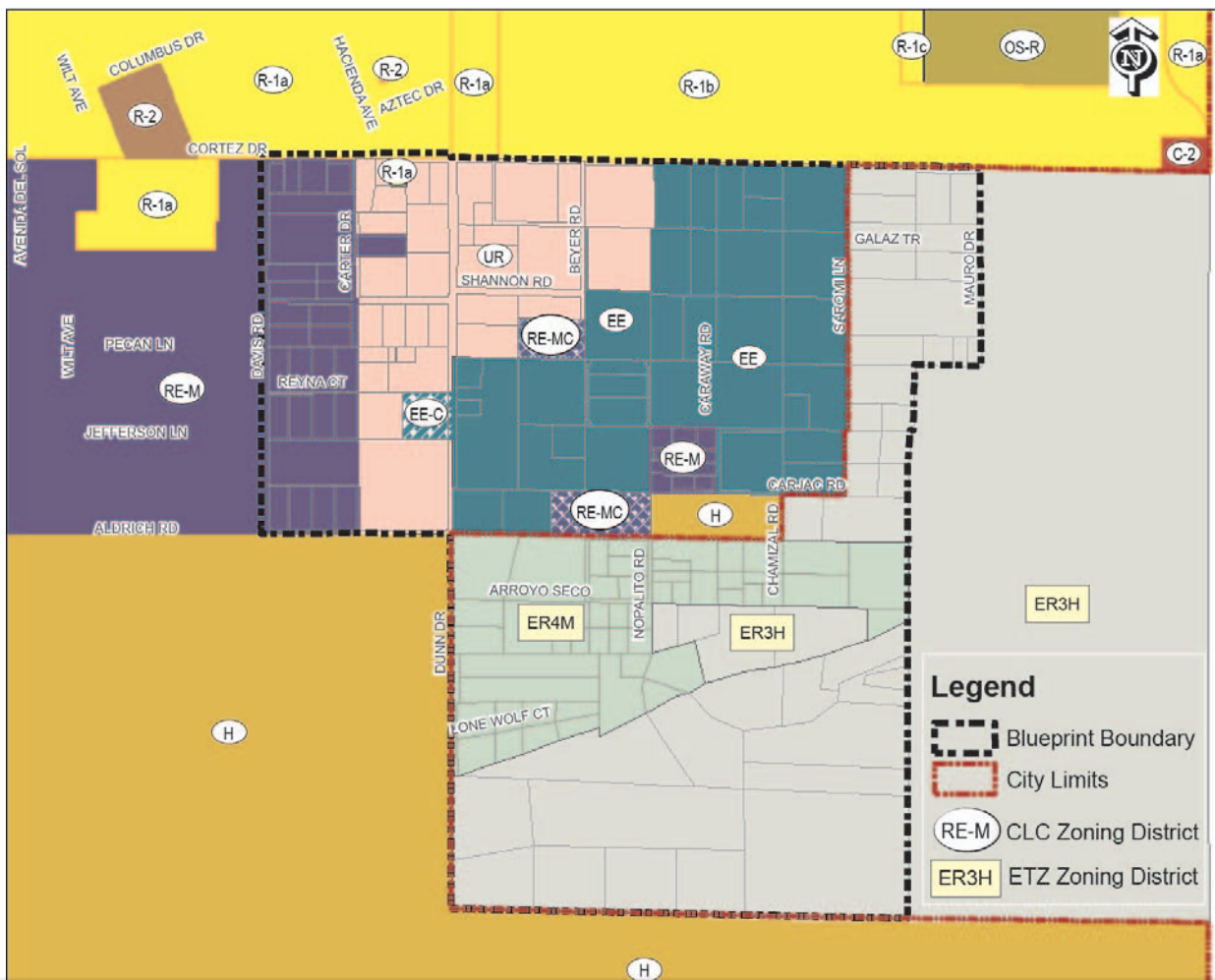
## Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

### Rezoning of Urban Ranch

Another concern for the planning area is the status of properties previously zoned Urban Ranch (UR). When the City updated its zoning code in 2001, the UR zoning district was removed and it became a non-conforming zoning district. Upon the adoption of the 2001 Zoning Code, the City provided a "grace period" to bring non-conforming zoning districts into compliance through rezoning. Despite public notifications and additional extensions to the grace period, some area residents

have expressed their lack of awareness of the UR rezoning process and its implications at that time. The use of parcels remaining in the non-conforming zoning district is limited to the City's non-conforming provisions, beyond which they would need to be rezoned to a conforming zone. Participants at the neighborhood meetings were concerned that these non-conforming properties could be rezoned to a higher intensity/density zoning district.

Equestrian Estates (EE) is the current zoning district that is most similar to the UR zoning



MAP 3: EXISTING ZONING

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

district. Property owners of UR zoned land who attended the meetings indicated that they were willing to bring their property under compliance. A City-initiated rezoning process to convert all UR property in the area to an equivalent conforming zoning designation appeared to be the preferred option.

### *Night Sky*

The concern over light pollution could partially be addressed by the recently adopted Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (Ord. no. 2662) for the city. The ordinance only regulates new development or substantial alterations to existing developments; however, property owners can choose to apply the standards in the ordinance and thereby voluntarily bring their properties into compliance. The ordinance provides a tiered approach for lighting standards, but focuses more on regulating outdoor lighting for commercial properties, whereas meeting participants considered residential lights, street lights and other undefined light sources more problematic in their area.

The rural night sky is a rare feature to find within the



ILLUSTRATION 1: NIGHT SKY TRANSECT

Source: stellarium.org

setting of a city. In order to preserve the dark/night sky as an amenity and natural resource, more than one tier of protection or regulations for light may need to be assessed. One way to meet this challenge is to utilize the rural-to-urban transect where different standards apply according to the local context and the community is allowed to develop in a manner that embraces variations in physical settings along the continuum of the Transect (Illustration 1).

### *Other Issues*

Some of the other issues brought up during the public input process are as follows: limited public access due to the lack of public rights-of-way; weeds in the surrounding area; dust in the area; illegal dumping; lack of convenient access to public transit; problems with property addressing and the lack of sewer. The City is already working on correcting addressing discrepancies in the neighboring subdivision and it will add this area's concerns to the effort.

The issue of public access is more complex as it involves agreements between private property owners and the City and/or County as well as determining financing options for acquisition of right-of-way. Challenging as it may be, developing a public network warrants further investigation.

On the issue of weeds, dust and illegal dumping, there are City and County ordinances in place that address these matters but implementation is dependent on enforcement capacity. One way of addressing these issues is to develop a neighborhood watch program. Although current densities may not justify expansion of public transit facilities, public transit planning efforts are guided by the City of Las Cruces Long

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

Range Transit Plan which does recommend a high frequency bus route along Porter Rd. and a circulator route in the area. However, funding and timing for these public transit improvements are presently decades away unless circumstances change.

Finally, the issue of sewer access is somewhat contentious in that some residents are in favor of converting from septic to sewer while other residents view sewer service as a precursor to development of the type that is considered incompatible to the area in terms of form and function, ultimately depleting the natural views and destroying the rural character of the community. The City's Water and Wastewater System Master Plan identifies most of Area 1 (Map 1) as a priority area for connection to the City Wastewater Collection System. Property owners interested in connecting to the city's sewer system also have the option of forming an assessment district. Further communication between the property owners and the City's Utilities Department is required to investigate this option.

In order to enhance and support the natural setting and distinct neighborhood character of the East Mesa community, conservation subdivisions and/or clustered development should be encouraged to occur throughout this and the surrounding area. This would help to preserve views without compromising efficiency in infrastructure planning. Care should also be given to plan for convenience and services for residents in the area in a manner that complements the physical form of this semi-rural area. Although residents agreed that the majority of land in the area should be residential and recreational open space, polling indicates interest for nearby restaurant/entertainment options. There is also potential to expand the interests of this planning area to include special economic and

recreation amenity planning that could benefit the city at large. The City should explore the potential for tourism-related economic development that revolves around equestrian facilities and events. There is also benefit to the rest of the city in expanding and diversifying recreational opportunities in the form of a hike-bike-equestrian trail network.

As the area is poised for future development, it becomes imperative to have a set of goals and policies that can ensure any physical "improvements" do not destroy the nature of this community, but actually enhance it. This involves addressing the needs and desires of a rural community within the context of a continuously urbanizing city.

Balancing these seemingly antithetical interests is the greatest challenge faced by this community. On the other hand, this challenge also presents us with the opportunity to embrace innovative practices, expand our planning vocabulary and tools, and create a plan that responds to the needs of our residents while also carrying out goals, policies and objectives stated in the City's Comprehensive Plan.



COMMERCIAL BUILDING FORM \*



# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Vision

The following is the vision statement for the East Mesa Community Blueprint, developed as part of the public input process:

*The East Mesa is a unique community that embraces the rural lifestyle within the city. This is a place that respects its natural surroundings, offers access to open spaces and night skies, and one that balances the needs and activities of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists with those of equestrians and owners of large animals.*

This blueprint articulates goals, policies/actions that form a guiding framework for the implementation of this vision.



CROSSINGS \*

## Goals

In order to address the Vision for the East Mesa community and the issues noted above, the following goals have emerged as the main points in evaluating new development or redevelopment options and improvements in the East Mesa planning area:

1. Maintain the existing rural community character by protecting the aesthetic and environmental quality of the planning area, its surroundings and its views.
2. Ensure future infrastructure design and development take into consideration the surroundings and the community's desires as identified by this blueprint.
3. Expand upon recreational opportunities, both at the neighborhood and regional scales, to ensure access to and promote functional linkages with the surrounding open space.
4. Provide public facilities and services that support residents and visitors of diverse backgrounds and needs without compromising the vision of this blueprint.

## Actions

The following set of policies/strategies is intended to support the Vision and Goals for the East Mesa blueprint area and provide guidance in their implementation.

1. Convert the defunct zoning designation of Urban Ranch to a comparable current zoning district.
2. Develop appropriate design and roadway standards that enhance and protect the rural environment of the area.

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Actions

3. Encourage the design of a multi-modal trail/pathway network within and around the planning area to enhance and facilitate non-vehicular access to the proposed public park off Cortez Road, as well as access to the Alameda Arroyo and surrounding open area.
4. Support the adoption of a conservation easement agreement among the City, NM State Land Office and private property owners, as recommended by the proposed trail network map in this blueprint.
5. Investigate the economic potential for utilizing equestrian-oriented site programming in and around the planning area.
6. Have residents work with the City Police Department to consider a neighborhood watch program to bolster police patrols and help aid in enforcement of illegal dumping.
7. Encourage Doña Ana County to recognize this blueprint during development review for properties within the Extra-territorial Zone (ETZ) that are included in the blueprint boundaries.

## Notes

1. Current density in the planning area is 1 dwelling unit per 2.9 acres. However, the existing zoning permits 1 dwelling unit per acre in the city limits and 2 dwelling units per acre in the county.
  2. Shannon Road utilizes a recycled asphalt millings surface. Jefferson Road, just outside the planning area has a modified cross-section.
- \* Preferred images from dot exercise.

## Related Plans & Policies

1. City of Las Cruces Long Range Transit Plan, 2012. Resolution No. 12-127.
2. Complete Streets Guiding Principles, 2009. Resolution No. 09-301.
3. Transport 2040: 2010 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. MPO Resolution No. 10-08.
4. Water and Wastewater System Master Plan Update, 2008, LCU Resolution No. 08-09-041.



## Glossary

**Complete Street:** a street that is designed and operated to enable safe and convenient access for all users (pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities).

*For further information:*

Transport 2040, Mesilla Valley MPO;  
Complete Streets resolution, City of Las Cruces;  
The National Complete Streets Coalition  
<http://www.completestreets.org/>

**Green Infrastructure:** stormwater management techniques that conserve water. It focuses on control techniques that slow, capture, treat, infiltrate and/or store runoff at its source. It can be applied at the site (e.g., vegetated roofs, porous pavement, and cisterns), neighborhood (e.g., narrow street widths, vegetated retention areas, porous pavement, and street trees), or regional scale (e.g., management of tree populations in urban settings and open space preservation).

*For further information:*

United States Environmental Protection Agency  
<http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/greeninfrastructure/index.cfm>

**Low impact development (LID):** an approach to land development (or re-development) that works with nature to manage stormwater as close to its source as possible. LID employs techniques such as minimizing land disturbance, preserving and recreating natural landscape features, decentralizing stormwater management and minimizing impervious surfaces to create functional and appealing site drainage that treat stormwater as a resource rather than a waste product.

*For further information:*

One Valley, One Vision 2040, Regional Plan adopted by the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County;  
United States Environmental Protection Agency  
<http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/green/index.cfm>

**Transect:** A transect is a cut or path through part of the environment showing a range of different habitats. To systemize the analysis and coding of traditional patterns, a prototypical American rural-to-urban transect has been divided into six Transect Zones, or T-zones. The T-zones vary by the ratio and level of intensity of their natural, built, and social components. The Transect is intended to be calibrated to local conditions.

*For further information:*

Center for Applied Transect Studies  
<http://www.transect.org/transect.html>

**Zoning Districts** referenced in this blueprint:

*City of Las Cruces*

EE: Single-Family Equestrian Estate & Agriculture  
RE: Single-Family Residential Estate  
REM: Single-Family Residential Estate Mobile  
REM-C: Single-Family Residential Estate Mobile with Condition(s)  
R-1c: Single-Family Low Density  
R-1a: Single-Family Medium Density  
R-1b: Single-Family High Density  
R-2: Multi-Dwelling Low Density  
C-2: Commercial Medium Intensity  
H: Holding  
OS-R: Open Space-Recreational

*Extraterritorial Zone*

ER3H: Extra-territorial Zoning - Residential, 1-acre minimum lot size, horses allowed.  
ER4M: Extra-territorial Zoning - Residential, ½-acre minimum lot size, mobile homes allowed.

*For further information:*

City of Las Cruces Zoning Code  
<http://www.las-cruces.org>  
ETZ Zoning Ordinance  
<http://donaanacounty.org/development/regulations/>

# EAST MESA COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT

## Acknowledgements

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Miguel Silva, *District 1*  
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## Adoption

CLC Resolution No. 14-067  
October 7, 2013



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