

CHAPTER 1

Introduction & Framework



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1.1 Introduction

Storey County adopted a twenty-year County Master Plan in 1994, and that version of the master plan remained in effect until the adoption of the 2016 Master Plan. The master plan is required by Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS Chapter 278.150) for the purpose of providing a comprehensive long-term general plan for the physical development of the county. This master plan presents information on existing conditions, highlights current and future issues, and recommends goals, policies, and objectives to address identified issues in the county. A master plan is made up of several functional elements, including land use; transportation; housing; population; economic development; cultural and historic resources; public services and facilities; and water and natural resources. The Storey County Planning Commission is responsible for preparing and adopting the master plan before final adoption by the Storey County Board of Commissioners. Additionally, the Planning Commission may prepare and adopt updates to the master plan before submittal to the board for adoption.

Storey County staff met with the county communities of Virginia City/Gold Hill, Mark Twain, Lockwood, and the Highlands during the summers of 2023 and 2024. At the meetings, Storey County residents expressed satisfaction with the existing master plan goals and policies, while acknowledging some goals as completed and some new goals on current topics to add. Based on these discussions, staff proceeded with updating the 2016 Master Plan rather than a complete re-write of the document, as the information in the document is still relevant. This updated version is titled the 2024 Master Plan Amendment.

As Storey County is midway through the second decade of the twenty-first century, many challenges and opportunities unique to its history will continue to be encountered. Since the county continues to evolve, it must identify and address the land use challenges of the next decade with greater sophistication. Preserving and enhancing the quality of life is a priority for the entire county.

This plan is intended to serve as a reference document which the Board and Planning Commission may use when exercising their authority to establish land use policy through the creation and approval of zoning maps and zoning ordinances. However, traditional master plan issues – those which directly affect the use of the county’s land, such as transportation and industrial growth – have changed substantially. This master plan incorporates a more comprehensive approach, one which addresses issues that go beyond zoning.

The master plan update adopts this approach by recognizing the interdependence of traditional land uses with nontraditional master plan topics such as population, public services and facilities, economic development, and natural resources. However, discussion of these nontraditional issues in this master plan is intended only as additional guidance for the Board and Planning Commission when it acts to establish land use policy.

The makeup and character of Storey County is like many maturing areas in the western United States, whose growth took place in the late nineteenth century and then again in the modern era. Buildings, facilities, and infrastructure in most of the older areas of the Comstock region date back over one hundred years. Infrastructure in these areas has well exceeded life expectancy and is in need of repair and replacement. Conversely, capital improvement projects within the industrial center located toward northeastern interior portions of the county are impressive and rival large metropolitan areas. This master plan recognizes that aggressive infrastructure development at the industrial center is vital to the county’s

economic sustainability. It is also recognized, however, that considerable effort needs to be directed toward updating utilities and facilities within existing population centers elsewhere in the county.



Figure 1.1-1: Virginia City, shown below, a community principally developed in the nineteenth century has land use, infrastructure, and other needs which contrast substantially with those of the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (depicted above) and other newer communities in the county. This master plan discusses unique challenges of each community and provides a framework by which those challenges should be addressed now and in the future. (Source: SJS Commercial Real Estate, 2016)



Storey County holds a strong reputation for its ability to preserve relics of the past and provide visitors an authentic historic experience. Chapter 3 – Land Use and Chapter 11 – Cultural and Historic Resources discuss efforts to preserve the past and meet challenges that are faced today. While the County has taken such measures to preserve the past, it has also embarked on endeavors to promote the county as a modern “place to conduct business,” and the county has resultantly been put on the map as a world competitor in manufacturing, distribution, technology, renewable resources, and emerging experimental industrial development.

Since adoption of the 1994 Master Plan, the County has consistently implemented many of the concepts of “smart growth.” Land use decisions handed down by the Board facilitated a strong economic base and designated residential growth to remaining infill sites. This master plan strengthens and modernizes the tools to conserve and enhance existing communities and businesses, while providing needed services to

existing areas and infrastructures. By preserving the rural areas while discouraging urban sprawl, the County can commit its fiscal resources to the improvement of its existing developed areas. The knowledge that resources will be directed toward existing communities and commercial needs should bolster county residents' confidence in the continued viability of their communities.

Storey County continues to face development pressure from neighboring Washoe and Lyon Counties, and to a lesser extent Carson City. While land use decisions continue to support the existing land use policy in Storey County, it must be noted that approximately 90 percent of the land in the county is privately owned, and the potential threat of change is perceived to come from large-scale residential developments. This type of development can have devastating effects on historic and current lands use patterns; can dissolve the unique social climate and quality of life residents currently enjoy; can destroy the historical integrity and feel of the Comstock Historic District, including Virginia City and Gold Hill; and can dissolve other values and lifestyles which residents across the county want to protect.

In addition to preserving the small-town community character of existing population centers and promoting commercial expansion in areas where appropriate, this master plan recognizes the importance of retaining the existing character of each community. Special attention is given to preserving the character of the Comstock. The setting of the Comstock Historic District and its structures serve as a landmark to our heritage and contribute an important part of what we perceive about the area's character. Any change or destruction of these features could irreversibly change the character of the district and diminish its historic integrity. County officials should ensure that any future development within the Comstock Historic District strictly conforms to adopted zoning requirements and established State Statutes, and otherwise enhances the historical area.

1.2 Master Plan Basics

1.2.1 Essential Elements of a Master Plan

A comprehensive master plan is a blueprint that provides guidance on where and how the county will grow in the next twenty years. Master plans typically consist of charts, drawings, diagrams, schedules, and reports addressing issues pertaining to growth, housing, economic development, transportation, environment, parks and recreation, aesthetics, community character, and the preservation of natural, cultural, and historic resources. The primary emphasis of this master plan is to provide short-, medium-, and long-term guidance to property owners, businesses, citizens, and policy makers on land use and other issues.

The master plan is an officially adopted guiding document that outlines Storey County's vision and goals for current and future land uses and growth patterns. It provides guidance for elected and appointed officials in making decisions regarding the immediate and long-range needs of the county. The expressed goals, objectives, and policies, in combination with the master plan land uses maps, provide guidance for decisions affecting residential and non-residential growth, the use and development of land, preservation of cultural, historical, and natural resources, and the management of public facilities and services. The master plan consists of written goals and policies, and maps which are used together when making decisions.

This master plan should be reviewed and updated periodically, at least every five years, at public hearings in order to reflect the availability of new implementation tools, changes in federal and state regulations,

changes in funding sources, the results of monitoring the effectiveness of existing policies and the impacts of past decisions, as well as to reflect changes in the County’s goals for land use planning.

1.2.2 Community-Based Planning

This 2024 Master Plan Amendment was developed through a collaborative relationship between Storey County elected and appointed officials, and the residents, business owners, homeowners associations, general improvement districts, and other entities within the county. The public was engaged throughout the entire process of the 2024 Master Plan Amendment, from conception to adoption by the Board.

Public involvement for the master plan update was achieved through public workshops, social media communication, and physical site visits and field trips. Public involvement venues included traditional settings, such as Planning Commission meetings at the Storey County Courthouse, and non-traditional settings, such as workshops and town halls held in each of the county’s communities, site visits, and bus tours.



Figure 1.2-1: The Storey County Master Plan was built from the ground-up with extensive public participation occurring over years of workshops occurring in each of the county’s five communities.

1.2.3 Statutory Requirements

NRS 278.150 through 278.170 require that the Planning Commission prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county. The comprehensive plan is to be referred to as the “master plan.” The master plan is to be prepared so that the following elements may be adopted by the Board with recommendation by the Planning Commission as appropriate.

- Community design
- Conservation
- Economic development
- Historic properties preservation
- Land use
- Population
- Public buildings and facilities
- Public lands policies

NRS also explains how the master plan is to be adopted. The County followed and exceeded NRS requirements in the preparation and public hearing process for this master plan.

1.2.4 Master Plan and Zoning Relationship

Land use zoning districts have been defined by county ordinance and are incorporated into Title 17 of the Storey County Code. A district zoning map, created in 2012, accompanies that written code and has supported many planning decisions across the county. Several inaccuracies existed within the 1994 district zoning map, including inaccurate parcel map data and land use changes since its creation which were not reflected therein. In 2012, the County engaged in an inter-local agreement with the Douglas County GIS Department to perform GIS mapping services for the County. The entities made many needed corrections to base parcel maps that will ultimately result in corrections to layered zoning and other mapping. In 2016, the County changed its contract from Douglas County GIS to its engineer of record, DOWL (formerly known as Farr West Engineering). The zoning maps were updated into the current format in 2017. Minor updates associated with zone change/zone map amendments have occurred with Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners review and approval.

The synergetic relationship between a master plan and a zoning ordinance should be expressly recognized. 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.