

AGENDA ITEM #: _____

DATE: May 23, 2016

COAC #: 16-5822

**CITY OF GOODYEAR
CITY COUNCIL ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT: Resolution No. 16-1761
adopting the El Rio Design Guidelines and
Planning Standards**

STAFF PRESENTER: Joe Schmitz, Long
Range Planner

CASE NUMBER: N/A

OTHER PRESENTER: N/A

RECOMMENDATION:

ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 16-1761 ADOPTING THE EL RIO DESIGN GUIDELINES AND PLANNING STANDARDS RELATING TO THE LAND MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EL RIO WATERCOURSE MASTER PLAN.

PURPOSE:

The design guidelines were prepared pursuant to an Intergovernmental Agreement between the cities of Avondale, Buckeye and Goodyear, Maricopa County Planning and Development, and the Flood Control District of Maricopa County, to provide a consistent set of goals and policies for development within the Gila River corridor across jurisdictional boundaries. A resolution adopting these guidelines will be considered by the governing bodies for each of the participating local jurisdictions in the upcoming months.

BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS ACTIONS:

Since 2006, the City of Goodyear has been cooperating with the Maricopa County Flood Control District, Maricopa County Planning & Development Department, the City of Avondale, and the City of Buckeye to develop plans for the future development of the El Rio corridor. The goal of the El Rio Watercourse Master Plan (ERWMP) adopted in 2006 was to develop and identify alternative structural and non-structural plans for providing flood control along the Gila River while preserving the heritage of the Gila River with a long-term, multi-use vision for the river. The intent of the project is to preserve the link between the river and the surrounding communities and foster public-private partnerships where appropriate.

Implementation of the 2006 ERWMP was delayed by the downturn in the national economy, but saw renewed interest in 2013. The local governments entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) and agreed to jointly fund preparation of the El Rio Watercourse Implementation and Management Plan with the following objectives in mind:

- a. Consistent design guidelines and planning standards for local jurisdictions as well as public and private sector developers and property owners.
- b. A prioritized list of potential projects (at least one in each jurisdiction) based on the conceptual framework outlined in the El Rio WCMP. Preliminary level design drawings,

capital and maintenance costs, and funding sources shall be developed for each potential project.

- c. Developing strategies and supportive materials to promote stakeholder and public awareness of the El Rio WCMP.
- d. Design standards for interpretive trails and overlooks.
- e. Planning and designing signage and way-finding programs.
- f. Developing a list of specific existing and potential sources of funding to protect, manage and develop the Gila River consistent with the vision for the El Rio WCMP.
- g. Inventorying resources, respecting private property rights, contained within the El Rio WCMP area, including a list of any properties that are related to the vision of the El Rio WCMP and should be preserved, restored, managed, developed or maintained because of their natural, cultural, historic, recreational or scenic significance.
- h. Developing draft policies for resource management that detail the application of appropriate land and water management techniques, including the development of cooperative agreements to protect the historical, cultural, recreational and natural resources of the Gila River consistent with the vision for the El Rio WCMP in a manner compatible with economic development.
- i. Completing an analysis of ways in which local, State and Federal programs may best be coordinated to promote the purposes of the El Rio WCMP.

The IGA for the project was finalized in December 2013 and allocated \$200,000 (a quarter from each jurisdiction) to engage a consultant to prepare the plan. The IGA provided that Avondale would handle the procurement of the consulting services and accounting, while Buckeye would provide project management and oversight. The scope of work was coordinated with all of the parties to the agreement, and a contract was executed with J2 Engineering and Environmental Design, LLC, on October 6, 2014. While the consultant worked diligently to keep the project on schedule, due to the delayed start, it was clear that it would not be completed by the deadline in the IGA of June 30, 2015. As a result, the participants in the IGA agreed to extend the deadline to June 30, 2016. The draft document was completed and released to the public in September of 2015 and an Open House with stakeholders and interested parties was held on October 27 at the Estrella Mountain Regional Park Visitor's Center. The final draft of the "El Rio Design Guidelines & Planning Standards: A Guide to Implementation and Management of the El Rio Watercourse Master Plan" was published on December 18, 2015.

The El Rio Administrative Committee, which is made up of the managers of each local jurisdiction, accepted the document as complete on February 25, 2016 and recommended adoption of the document to the Steering Committee, which is made up of the Mayors from each jurisdiction and two Board of Supervisors members. On April 12, 2016, the Steering Committee

agreed to recommend adoption of the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards by each of their respective governing bodies.

CURRENT POLICY:

Besides the General Plan, the Zoning Ordinance and other City Codes and Ordinances, the City uses various master plans and design guideline documents to guide development throughout the community. Among these plans and documents are the Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Master Plan and the City of Goodyear Transportation Master Plan which were adopted in 2014 and are consistent with the Goodyear 2025 General Plan, but provide a detailed review of these topics and include a more specific implementation plan. The El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards are intended to provide a consistent set of goals and policies for development within the Gila River corridor across jurisdictional boundaries when adopted by each of the local jurisdictions. They will supplement and complement existing plans and guidelines.

DETAILS OF THE REQUEST:

The final draft of the “El Rio Design Guidelines & Planning Standards: A Guide to Implementation and Management of the El Rio Watercourse Master Plan” was completed as of December 18, 2015 and consists of eight chapters:

1. Background
2. Character and Vision
3. Land Use Design Concepts
4. Open Spaces, Paths, Trails and Edge Treatments
5. Landscape Guidelines
6. Signage Guidelines
7. Economic Development
8. Pilot Projects

Chapter 1 describes the Gila River which drains an area of over 46,000 square miles at its confluence with the Agua Fria River in Avondale. The study area covers 17.5 miles of the Gila River from the confluence with the Agua Fria River to SR85. Of this total, about six miles passes through Goodyear. The study area covers 53 square miles and extends out from the center of the river to include the floodplain and an additional ¼ to one mile of adjacent lands. Approximately 35 square miles within the study area are impacted by a FEMA floodway or floodway designation, including 6.9 square miles in an area called the Buckeye Slough which was recently added to the floodplain. The study area involves four local jurisdictions including the cities of Avondale, Buckeye and Goodyear and unincorporated Maricopa County. There have been studies conducted on this river corridor dating back to 1987, the most recent being the El Rio Water Course Master Plan adopted in 2006. The land ownership in the study area is predominantly private (79%) with BLM owning 12%, State Land Department 4%, State and Local Parks 3% and State Wildlife 2%.

In Chapter 2 twelve character areas are identified and described, five of which are located in Goodyear. These character areas include:

Area 1 - High Value Habitat;
Area 4 – King Ranch and Recreation;
Area 5 – Estrella Park Recreation;
Area 7 – El Rio East Employment Recreation Core; and,
Area 8 – Goodyear North Bank Development.

Each character area identifies and interprets the existing notable qualities and historic features of the area so that they may be considered in each community's future land use designations. The El Rio Theme is also discussed in this chapter which promotes the use of recycled and local materials, accessibility, connectivity, year-round use, discovery zones and respect for the natural and historic setting.

Chapter 3 discusses the land development guidelines for the corridor which are intended to minimize the impacts of flooding on human health and safety; encourage development in areas that are not at risk of flooding; allow development at a scale appropriate to the risk of flooding and mitigation measures; and recognize the potential for changes in flood risk resulting from local or regional flood improvements. In this chapter, the concept of two land use transects is introduced.

The Flood Risk Transect applies to land in the floodway and floodplain. The intensity of the land uses allowed is based on location of the land relative to flood depth. Less intense land uses are recommended for areas close to the floodway and with greater flood depths. There are three land planning components of the Flood Risk Transect: 1) the Regular Floodway; 2) a Natural Area (3'+ depth; and 3) a Transitional Rural Area. Very low density residential can be considered in each of the sub-areas, but new development must still comply with floodplain restrictions and build to above the flood elevation on individual sites or in clustered development. Although no development within the floodway and floodplain would be preferable, development cannot be prohibited completely due to the potential for a regulatory takings claim. The second transect is the Viewshed Transect and it applies to land outside of the floodplain, or removed from the floodplain, and recommends appropriate land uses based on proximity to the floodway. The intensity of the land use increases as the distance from the floodway increases, and is reflected in three planning components for this transect: 1) River Development (River Urban Core and River Suburban Fringe); 2) General Urban; and 3) Urban Center. High intensity development adjacent to the river floodway can be considered with detailed, specific development plans which would be reviewed and approved by the appropriate jurisdictional entity. Regardless of the recommended land uses in these transects, development within the floodway or floodplain would still have to comply with locally adopted flood protection regulations that are consistent with federal flood protection regulations.

Chapter 4 contains development standards for trails, paths and overlooks and for development adjacent to the edge of the river, which essentially is the floodway boundary. The El Rio Trail is intended to be a paved multi-use trail with a parallel soft path located along the river's edge. The El Rio River Trail is designed to be a soft-surface path that would be located in the river bottom and subject to periodic wash out. Also introduced in this chapter is the concept of a special edge treatment at the floodway boundary. The "Edge" would be developed with a minimum 25 foot wide transition area from the edge of the El Rio Trail. New development would be encouraged

to provide connectivity between the adjacent area and the river pathway system every 500 feet and an open edge along 60% of its river frontage. The intent of these guidelines is to encourage including the river environment in the design of developments, rather than closing development off from the river.

Chapter 5 provides suggested landscape design guidelines for various habitats based on the location of the land relative to the river bottom. Certain species of trees perform better than others depending on the availability of surface water or depth to groundwater. The species recommended are suggested replacements for the salt cedar trees that have taken over large areas of habitat and present a significant fire hazard, consume large quantities of groundwater, and obstruct the flow of flood waters resulting in the enlargement of the floodplain.

Chapter 6 presents sign guidelines for the public signs that would be erected along the El Rio Trail and at educational or recreational facilities within the corridor. The guidelines were developed to be consistent with the Wayfinding Guidelines for the Valley Path recently adopted by MAG and provide two alternatives for project identity signs and educational signs so that the signs will be compatible, yet can be distinctive.

Chapter 7 on Economic Development reviews the success of other river development projects and provides guidance on what could be done to facilitate future development in the El Rio Corridor. Goodyear's vision for the corridor has been focused on passive recreation and promotion of trail development with future connections to the Sun Circle Trail and the Maricopa Trail, with commercial notes at strategic river crossing locations. This chapter also provides several recommendations for future activities to foster economic development:

1. Identify unique recreational districts
2. Provide a wide range of recreational opportunities
3. Activate trails and parks
4. Engage children and families
5. Form partnerships with stakeholders
6. Market the El Rio Corridor

Lastly, Chapter 8 provides conceptual level drawings for three pilot projects - one in each of the three cities. The Goodyear Pilot Project is the "Rio Vista Trailhead" which would be developed in cooperation with the Maricopa County Parks Department at the intersection of Vineyard Road and Bullard Avenue. The project would expand upon the existing parking and amenities available at this site which currently has an educational kiosk for the County's previous salt cedar habitat replacement demonstration project. This location was identified in the recently adopted Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Master Plan as a Level 1 Trailhead with Equestrian Connection (T1E) and will not only serve as entry point to the El Rio Trail, but also access to the Maricopa Trail as it passes through Goodyear and the Sun Circle Trail to the east at the confluence of the Agra Fria and Gila Rivers. The project has been designed so that it could be developed in two phases with the first phase providing enhanced interpretive signage, a drinking fountain and bike racks for an estimated cost of \$20,000. Phase II of the project would involve expanding the parking area, constructing a picnic ramada (20' x 20') with a small plaza area and enhanced landscaping at an estimated cost of \$333,515. Since these trails have not yet

been developed, the Rio Vista Trailhead project currently is not in the City's Capital Improvement Program, but will be considered for inclusion at the appropriate time in a future budget cycle.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

The draft document was completed and released to the public at the end of September 2015. It was posted online on the Gila River Projects webpage at www.gilariverprojects.com with public comments accepted until November 10. The agencies hosted an Open House/Public Meeting on October 27 at the Estrella Mountain Regional Park Nature Center. Notices for this meeting were sent by regular mail to owners of property 50 acres or larger (about 70) and to another 45 stakeholders who had expressed interest in the project. A public notice was published in the West Valley View and a press release resulted in a front page story in the West Valley View on October 27. The open house was attended by about 30 stakeholders and interested parties.

In total, six written comments were received from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Audubon Arizona, Sonoran Audubon and several interested citizens. The comments expressed concerns about illegal dumping, target shooting, and minimizing development along the river. Both Audubon Arizona and Sonoran Audubon expressed support for retaining agriculture adjacent to the river to benefit water birds and encouraged the use of native plants to benefit wildlife. Other comments received expressed support for open space and trails along the river. Some minor revisions were made to the plan based on the comments received.

The El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards document was presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission at its regular meeting held on April 20, 2016. At that meeting, the Commission, by a vote of 5 to 1, approved a motion to recommend adoption of the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards. Commission member Randy Barnes voted against the motion because he wished to have more time to review the document before making a recommendation.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

The El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards document is intended to provide a consistent set of goals and policies for development within the Gila River corridor across jurisdictional boundaries when adopted by each of the local jurisdictions. These guidelines and standards will supplement existing local codes, ordinances and regulations and are not intended to replace, supersede or modify local land-use regulations or development standards. However, they will be used in the review and evaluation of any proposed change to the General Plan, rezoning of individual properties, and future development plans for properties located within the study area boundaries.

Approval of these design guidelines and development standards is consistent with the Goodyear General Plan 2025, Objective CC—3-3, Policy b., which recommends partnering with the Flood Control District of Maricopa County and other stakeholders to implement the El Rio vision and plan, and provide public recreational open space along the Gila River.

It is also consistent with the Action: 3d.3. and 3d.4. of the recently adopted Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Master Plan which recommended that the City work with the Flood Control District of Maricopa County to identify and secure land along the Gila River, Waterman Wash and other floodplains for linear parks and open space corridors and work with Avondale, Buckeye and the Flood Control District of Maricopa County through the El Rio Implementation Plan to plan trails, access and recreation areas within the Gila River Floodplain.

Lastly, it is also consistent with the overarching goal of the El Rio Watercourse Master Plan to provide flood control along the Gila River while preserving the heritage of the river with a long-term, multi-use vision for the river.

For these reasons, City staff recommends adoption of the El Rio Design Guidelines & Planning Standards: A Guide to Implementation and Management of the El Rio Watercourse Master Plan, dated December 18, 2015.

It should be noted that on April 16, 2016 the consultant on the project, J2 Engineering and Environmental Design of Phoenix, was the recipient of an Honor Award in recognition of outstanding professional achievement from the Arizona Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects in the category of Analysis and Planning for the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards project. This award is shared with the Agencies who sponsored the project, namely the City of Avondale, the City of Buckeye, the City of Goodyear, Maricopa County (Planning & Development) and the Flood Control District of Maricopa County.

FISCAL ANALYSIS:

The implementation of the recommendations of the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards will involve the development of public facilities within the study area, such as parks, open spaces and trails. While some of these facilities may be development in concert with or by adjacent private development, there is likely to be property acquisition, construction and on-going maintenance costs associated with such improvements which will be assumed by the City. These costs will vary depending on the level of improvements to be made and have not been projected at this time. Such costs will be reviewed when projects are proposed and considered for funding during the City's budget process.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution No. 16-1761
2. Exhibit to Resolution - "El Rio Design Guidelines & Planning Standards: A Guide to Implementation and Management of the El Rio Watercourse Master Plan," December 18, 2015.