

VIRGIN TOWN GENERAL PLAN

Draft May 2025

VISION STATEMENT

Virgin aims to remain the unique rural town that its residents and visitors cherish. It is one of the most desirable places in the country to live, for both its climate and the beauty of its surroundings. The Town is committed to maintaining its eclectic character and small town atmosphere and will be proactive in balancing the desires of residents with appropriate business growth. This vision recognizes that new growth and development will occur and emphasizes the need to carefully guide such development to keep Virgin the charming and unique place it is today.

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INTRODUCTION

The Virgin General Plan is a guide for the present and future needs of the Town. This public document lays out goals and policies regarding land use and development. These goals and policies have been established by the Virgin Town Council and Planning Commission, with input from the community. It was adopted by the Virgin Town Council and will be used by the Virgin Town Council, the Planning Commission, and other Commissions and Committees, as they work together toward these development goals, consider future land use, and make other decisions for the Town. This plan has seven elements which address: Environmental, Land Use, Housing, Transportation and Circulation, Economic, Public Services and Facilities, and Water Use and Conservation. Several open houses were conducted where the public was able to express their concerns and desires. As part of the update of the General Plan, a community survey was conducted to gather input from as many community members as possible. This feedback was used to create this General Plan.

The goals and policies are based on the town Vision Statement, which lays out the vision for the next 5-10 years for Virgin Town.

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ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENT

The natural environment and setting for Virgin is stunning and is often what attracts people to move to and stay in Virgin. The town is surrounded by public land and there are more than 4,290 acres of BLM land and more than 280 acres of Washington County Water Conservation District land within the town boundaries. Combined they account for nearly 60% of the land within the town boundaries. Additionally, though it is not public land, a land conservation organization owns more than 400 acres within the town boundaries along the Virgin River.

Current Conditions

Virgin Town is at an elevation of 3,600 feet above sea level. The climate is semi-arid or steppe which means, precipitation ranges between 10-12 inches per year and temperatures can reach 115°F during the summer and are cold in winter months. These levels fall between desert and arid climates. Virgin receives approximately 12 inches of rainfall per year. This precipitation can come in sudden torrents, so the Town has suffered numerous damaging flood events even in the last ten years.

Floodways – creeks and washes, erodible soils are sensitive areas which require protection to avoid harm to public and private property and assure public safety. While envisioning responsible growth, Virgin understands environmentally friendly growth is essential and acknowledges these areas have not always been protected.

Preservation of the night sky and conserving energy are among the top concerns of the community, and therefore continue to be a key aspect of Virgin's conservation focus.

Virgin sits on both sides of the Virgin River which is an important resource not just for Virgin but for the entire region. All development in the town currently is served by septic systems, and therefore density is limited to prevent contamination of the river. The river also provides recreation opportunities for the community, but access is currently limited. There is little public support for development south of the river.

Since the Town currently utilizes individual septic systems, soil limitations are important. Soil analysis shows some areas with slight limitations, with large areas rated as somewhat limited to very limited septic absorption ratings for septic systems. In 2024 Virgin Town became part of the Ash Creek Special Service District. Being part of the district can lead to providing

wastewater collection and treatment in the future, which could allow greater development density.

Desired Outcomes

Preservation ~ During the public open houses, strong public desire of preserving the night sky was expressed. The importance of energy conservation also became clear. These desires can be reached through ordinances promoting and encouraging the reduction of light pollution, the use of energy efficient devices as well as construction materials and methods, and use of alternative energy sources.

Sensitivity to the Environment ~ Building designs, site plans and subdivisions need to be sensitive to environmental preservation. It is also desired to designate areas of restricted development due to highly sensitive natural characteristics, including significant ecological, archeological, visual, or water resources.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Preserve the Character and Integrity of the Environment

- Make as little environmental impact as possible when developing properties, including running power underground and leaving floodways undisturbed as much as possible.
- Encourage sustainable development and building practices.

Goal: Promote Conservation

- Encourage reduction of overall water consumption with site design and landscaping plans.
- Preserve natural drainage passages whenever possible, and use approved alternative diversions, where required, to avoid flooding and require new development to maintain and enhance the floodways while keeping safety as a high priority.
- Encourage conservation of sensitive lands through cooperation with private and public property owners. Sensitive lands are defined in Title 16.18 of the town code.

Goal: Night Sky Preservation

- Continue to restrict lighting to low, downward, and efficient types to preserve the night sky while keeping safety and security in mind.

- Find ways, through events and publications, to educate residents and local businesses about best practice night sky protection and its rewards.

Goal: Views Preservation

- Preserve viewsheds – where possible – through thoughtful infrastructure and building construction.

LAND USE ELEMENT

The land use element outlines long-term goals, and policies related to the general distribution of land for housing, commercial uses, civic uses, and so forth. These will assist the town council, planning commission, and other committees as they help the town work towards these goals.

Virgin started as a typical settlement town in the West, with all the uses needed for a remote community within close proximity to, and intermixed with, each other. As the highway was built and automobiles became the main mode of transportation, many of the original commercial uses became less viable and are no longer available in town. However, the core of the original community remains, with some of the historic buildings surviving to the present day.

The original town, centered around Mill Street on the north side of the Virgin River and extended several blocks east and west. As the town has grown, it has extended further east and west along both sides of the highway. Areas of single land use have developed, such as residential only neighborhoods, and most commercial along the highway. A majority of town facilities are close to Mill Street, though there is the cemetery north of the highway.

Current Conditions

There are a variety of land uses throughout Virgin. The vast majority of existing housing is single-family developments. Commercial development is centered on SR-9, with the majority being services related to tourism. Access to the Virgin River is through public lands and Falls Park is on Bureau of Land Management land on the south side of the river. The town has easements which are planned to provide additional access to the river. Virgin recently acquired a church as the new town hall in the same block as the town park.

Desired Outcomes

Commercial Use –Based on input for commercial uses which would benefit residents, there is work on new zoning categories with the idea to entice village and neighborhood type commercial uses to come to town. Though there is still a lot of vacant commercially zoned land, some of the ideas which come with the new zoning may result in additional commercial areas. The Economic Element looks at this area in greater detail.

Orderly Growth ~ Orderly growth is expected where there is an availability of public facilities such as roads, water service, fire protection and other public

services needed to support it. Commercial uses are more successful when they are near to each other. A variety of uses attracts more customers, so developers should plan on cross access and interconnection. To the greatest extent possible, encourage attractive development. Walkability is important, along with smooth traffic flow. A policy for parks, trails and open space will clearly indicate to developers that those amenities should be coordinated and built into their sites.

Trails, Trailhead Improvements, River Access ~ A pedestrian friendly town that preserves Virgin Town's natural setting is a high priority. Connecting neighborhoods to trailheads with some river access is important and expected. See more information in the Transportation and Circulation element.

Economic Enhancements ~ Encourage responsible economic activities that will benefit all residents of the Town while retaining the atmosphere of the area. Promote the revitalization and maintenance of remaining historic buildings.

Private Property Protection ~ It is desired to continue the protection of constitutionally based private property rights while at the same time balancing these rights with the general welfare of the community, so mandates and changes do not unduly infringe on those lands and rights.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Economically Sustainable Development

- Utilize development impact fees to provide adequate public facilities and services in a timely manner.
- Require that adequate infrastructure exists or is programmed for construction within a defined period of time as a condition of development.
- Pursue cooperation with governmental entities that administer and control areas bordering Virgin Town in regard to all policies and activities, which may have cross-boundary impacts.

Goal: Growth Management

- Encourage the development of higher density, lower cost housing adjacent to the commercial zones only where and when access to sewer and other public infrastructure is readily available.

- Encourage commercial uses which serve the needs of both residents and tourists.

Goal: Commercial Zones Enhancement

- Mitigate the negative impacts of commercial zones on existing development and residents by ensuring that businesses are of a type to make compliance with nuisance regulations possible, and that site plans, designs, and operations follow Town code.
- Capture tax and service revenues to benefit all residents.
- While the town will encourage the use of existing land zoned commercial, the new village commercial and neighborhood overlay may result in additional commercial areas to help accomplish the goals and objectives of the General Plan.
- Encourage adjacent commercial uses to share parking and provide cross access so that vehicles can move between properties without the need to enter and exit the highway.
- Effectively use the Permitted and Conditional Use process for development.
- Explore the benefits and drawbacks of establishing design standards in the development code.

Goal: Floodplain

- Provide clarity to the Town's existing floodplain and drainage requirements.

HOUSING ELEMENT

Quality, affordable housing is the foundation of a strong and thriving community. It attracts people from a variety of household types and sizes, as well as those with varying income levels. Residents from diverse professions and backgrounds help to create a welcoming, vibrant community with a good quality of life.

The United States is experiencing a housing shortage that is expected to continue for at least several decades. Addressing this shortage is a key focus of legislatures across the country. Utah's leaders are working on ways to address this pressing need for families throughout the state.

Current Conditions

A pressing concern in Virgin Town is for quality housing that is affordable. The volatility of the housing market, lagging housing construction, land costs, high ownership rates, and low vacancy rates have increased housing costs. Virgin Town's proximity to Zion National Park, limited available land, and the purchase of some available housing stock for use as vacation/seasonal properties and short-term rentals in Virgin and neighboring towns has also added to the increased housing costs. Much of the housing stock is relatively new, but some are getting older and may require renovation to keep them healthy and desirable.

Desired Outcomes

Affordability ~ Current and future housing needs to be affordable. The Town may need to review and revise planning, zoning and development regulations to allow for an adequate supply of a variety of housing types. Housing that meets the needs of people at varied income levels will benefit the community.

Design, Quality and Maintenance ~ Well maintained and clean neighborhoods are a high priority. Housing designs need to be built with quality and be well maintained.

Provide Areas for a Variety of Housing Types ~ Land should be identified for a variety of housing types. Priority will be given to areas with adequate public services and utilities needed to facilitate varied densities of residential developments. As Virgin Town develops, higher density housing could be considered adjacent to commercial uses and shuttle stops to reduce the need for vehicular use. Where possible, encourage these higher density areas to be constructed at a level of one story with a maximum of two

stories. Connecting to a potential highway commercial and a sewer system should be considered and planned for to incorporate this type of housing with its proximity to the highway.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Facilitate Housing Affordability

- Existing and future infrastructure needs should be addressed in consultation with agencies which assist low and moderate-income families and senior citizen households with their housing needs.

Goal: Quality Construction and Maintenance of Housing

- Identify areas which may need housing rehabilitation and maintenance. Work with Five County Association of Governments, the State, and federal agencies to identify programs which focus on housing rehabilitation for those currently in need.
- New development should be reasonably complementary to existing structures, in both scale and architecture.
- Explore the benefits and drawbacks to establishing design standards for commercial uses in the development code.
- Street patterns and trails within the community should be designed to be direct and interconnected to encourage walking and bicycling.

Goal: Provide Areas for Different Housing Types

- Review and make adjustments as needed to standards for short-term rentals.
- When wastewater infrastructure becomes available, explore if there is a need to provide for higher-density housing and clustered unit developments.
- Explore higher density housing and clustering to enhance the availability of land for residential development within the framework of the land use element, zoning and housing element while providing for open space.

Goal: Maintain Areas for Larger Lots

- Limit subdividing in the currently developed, well-established neighborhoods, which may have vacant lots.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION ELEMENT

The transportation and circulation system for Virgin provides access within the town as well as to and from other locations. Local streets and the highway provide year-round connections for goods and services. Maintenance and improvements of roads, as needed, are important for residents and visitors.

With proposed transportation changes in the surrounding area, such as the closing of Zion Tunnel to large vehicles in mid-2026, the paving of Sheep Bridge Road between 2025-2030, planned improvements and roundabouts on Highway 9 at Sheep Bridge and Kolob Terrace Roads, and initiatives for a county-wide multi-use trail system connecting communities from St. George to Springdale – traffic patterns are likely to change. Virgin is at the center of many of those changes.

Current Conditions

State Route 9 (SR-9) connects with Interstate 15 approximately 20 miles to the west and with U.S. 89 approximately 40 miles to the east through Zion National Park. As the main road between the Park and the interstate, it is heavily traveled – making it hazardous for pedestrians. Kolob Terrace Road, is a County road which carries seasonal traffic. Sheep Bridge Road is also a county road and is expected to be paved within the next 5-6 years to handle large vehicles which will not be allowed in the Zion National Park tunnel after mid-2026. The remainder of roads within town are local in nature. These Roadways, as in many rural areas, need constant repair and maintenance.

Desired Outcomes

Safe, Convenient Systems ~ Provide a safe, convenient and efficient system of transporting people and goods to, from, and through the community.

Sheep Bridge Road Improvement ~ Work closely with the County to ensure the town needs and concerns are met as they work to Improve Sheep Bridge Road to State Hwy 59. When completed, it will provide an alternate, all-weather access into and out of Virgin.

Shuttle Systems ~ Encourage use of the shuttle system which connects to St George through La Verkin and Hurricane, and to Springdale, which provides access for employment in both directions along the route. Additionally, the shuttle creates opportunities for visitors to stay in Virgin and spend their dollars. Additional stops could increase the number of residents

using the system, as well as the number of visitors, which could reduce the amount of traffic in town.

Proper Road and Trail Upgrades and Maintenance ~ Maintain and upgrade a viable road and trail system through proper engineering and design standards as outlined in the Virgin Transportation Master Plan. When new roads or improvements are requested by developers for the Town's road system, they are required to make the improvements so that they meet Town standards, as part of the development process.

State Route 9 ~ Continue to work with Utah Department of Transportation regarding planned and future improvements and roundabouts on State Route 9.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Safe, Convenient and Efficient Systems

- Design new roads, trails and sidewalks to provide ease of movement while meeting circulation needs of the community and safety for automobiles, pedestrians, ATVs, bicycles and equestrian modes of transportation.
- Adopt design plans for pedestrians to safely get across SR-9.
- Develop Pocketville Road as a neighborhood type road and not a major thoroughfare.

Goal: Connectivity of Trails and Roads

- Where appropriate, require multi-use trails and roadway connectivity for new development.

Goal: Improvements to Sheep Bridge Road

- With the planned improvements to Sheep Bridge Road, the Town of Virgin will have an alternative, all-weather access to State Hwy 59.

Goal: Shuttle Systems

- Future designs to include plans for shuttle systems through Virgin to surrounding areas with multiple stops in Town.
- Combine compatible commercial areas adjacent to shuttle stops and parking areas to capture sales tax revenues from shuttle users.

Goal: Walkable and Friendly

- Walkable neighborhoods for both commercial and residential areas. Street patterns and trails within the neighborhoods should be designed to be direct and interconnected to also encourage pedestrian and bicycle use.
- Consider paths or sidewalks along heavily traveled local roads, such as the very narrow Pocketville Road.

Goal: Road and Trail Upgrades and Maintenance

- Ensure that the Capital Improvements Transportation Plan continues to address planned and existing road and multiuse trail improvements. Ensure that new development provides for and covers the costs needed for connectivity.

ECONOMIC ELEMENT

Commercial activities provide revenue for the town and opportunities for local shopping, services, and employment. The number of people traveling through the town provides the potential that some of their spending will happen in Virgin. Overnight stays generate room tax, a portion of which helps the community. Without commercial activities, the cost of all maintenance and improvements in the town would be the responsibility of the residents.

Some residents own businesses and others have moved here when they've seen business opportunities.

Current Conditions

Virgin Town has a growing economy. The Town has the advantage of being located in a high tourism area with some of the most beautiful and spectacular scenery in the world. The Town is surrounded by hiking and mountain bike trails, OHV routes, and other outdoor recreation opportunities. The majority of the commercial uses in town provide accommodations, restaurants, and recreational opportunities.

Most of the land zoned Highway Resort has been developed. Just over 77% of the land zoned Commercial is vacant. There are parcels totaling about 19 acres zoned Commercial which have commercial uses on them. There are about 74 acres of vacant land zoned Commercial – most of it on the north side of Highway 9 in the general area of Sheep Bridge Road, and extending east to Pocketville Road.

Desired Outcomes

From public input, there is a desire for several types of commercial uses and increased opportunities for employment in Town. The existing commercial areas should be the backbone for growing the economy of Virgin Town. Within this commercial area there would be a new fire station, and a potential information center to welcome visitors along with a city center.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Benefit from Area Visitors

Meeting the needs of visitors to the area also benefits the residents by promoting commercial development where it is zoned on the highway corridor.

- Encourage businesses which provide goods and services for Virgin residents.

- Encourage businesses which serve the types of tourism found in the area. Attention should be given to providing goods and services for users of Kolob Terrace / Kolob Reservoir / Lava Point areas, BLM land, and recreational attractions in the area. This should be in addition to goods and services for visitors to Zion National Park.
- Establish the Town as a destination and not just a pass-through community.
- Develop a tourist information center and additional signage welcoming visitors to the Town of Virgin.
- Encourage new families to move to Virgin with affordable housing options, while maintaining sustainability for long term residents.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

Public facilities and infrastructure provide essential services and places for community activities, adding to the residents' quality of life, and attracts economic development. These services, facilities, and infrastructure are an essential part of creating and maintaining a community.

Current Conditions

Culinary water and solid waste disposal are provided through Virgin Town. The town has two parks and several town buildings for town business, which also can be rented for private events. Virgin recently became part of the Ash Creek Special Service District, which will someday provide wastewater collection and treatment. The town contracts with Washington County Sheriff's Office for police protection and the Hurricane Valley Fire District for emergency services. Trash management is provided by Washington County Solid Waste.

The realization of General Plan goals and objectives, especially for commercial and higher density residential development, depends on cost-effective wastewater services.

Desired Outcomes

Infrastructure expansion which supports General Plan goals and objectives and is paid for by projects which require the expansion.

Continued efforts to enhance municipal services through water, wastewater, drainage, and public facilities improvements. This includes a fire station, law enforcement presence, welcome center, and local history displays.

Provide additional public safety infrastructure such as police and fire substations within town limits.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Ordinances

- Strengthen ordinances which clearly define that new developments must maintain and manage existing natural and established drainage features.

Goal: Infrastructure Support

- Support plans for infrastructure support for potentially higher density residential development adjacent to the commercial zone.

WATER USE AND CONSERVATION ELEMENT

Water is essential for life. Water is also a scarce resource in our area and the supply can vary widely from year to year. Conservation and wise use of this resource is essential.

Potable water is provided as a community utility, through Virgin Town, by the Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD). Virgin is a signatory to the Regional Water Supply Agreement (RWSA), and as such, had agreed to work together with other jurisdictions to ensure there is an adequate water supply to meet projected population growth.

Washington County Water Conservancy District has a target 14% reduction in per capita water use by 2030, with 2015 as the baseline year. See WCWCD's Water Conservation Plan for details and conservation ideas.

As additional land uses are developed, the infrastructure for water will need to be expanded. Developers will bear the cost of expanding the infrastructure.

Current Conditions

Virgin Town residents receive potable water service through the town who is a member agency of the Washington County Water Conservancy District. Irrigation water is not provided for residents but is available for those who own shares in the Virgin Canal Company or Virgin Irrigation Company.

The town adopted the Water Efficiency Ordinance in August 2024 which includes regulations for indoor uses, commercial uses, and landscaping. Water efficient fixtures are required indoors for new construction and remodels. Lawns are limited in size and must be a minimum of 10 feet from areas designated for vehicular use. Drip irrigation is required for landscape plants and mulch in garden areas. Automated irrigation systems must use an EPA WaterSense labeled controller or equivalent.

Desired Outcomes

As a community, we will use water in a way which recognizes that it's an essential and a limited resource.

Ensure that development does not add a burden to existing water users.

Encourage all property owners to evaluate water use to see if adjustments to their home or business's indoor and/or landscape water use should be considered.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Education

- Educate residents and developers about the Water Efficiency Ordinance requirements and resources available to make changes.

Goal: Ensure that development provides for cost of new infrastructure

- Ensure that development pays for the cost of community infrastructure need for projects. This includes water infrastructure that meets Virgin Town Standards, as well as other infrastructure costs.

Goal: Ensure Maintenance of Water System Infrastructure

- Work with Washington County Water Conservancy District, Virgin Canal Company, and Virgin Irrigation Company to make sure infrastructure is maintained to prevent water loss.
- Incorporate existing, but under-utilized, Town water resources such as springs, wells and water rights.

Goal: Enhance Water System Infrastructures

- Enhance water system infrastructure that supports the land use and other Virgin General Plan elements. Incorporate existing, but under-utilized, Town water resources such as springs, wells and water rights.