Vernon Town
GENERAL PLAN 2023



Honoring OUR PAST,
BUILDING OUR *Future*

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INTRODUCTION



Vernon Town's General Plan identifies goals, policies, and strategies necessary to guide the future growth and development of the Town. Formulating goals will increase the Vernon Town's safety, welfare, and quality of life for existing and future residents.

The detailed community town survey, taken in April 2021, helped draft this plan. The document will become a working tool of the municipality that will often be referenced and continue to evolve as the community vision and goals change.



ABOUT THE GENERAL PLAN

UTAH STATE LAW AND THE GENERAL PLAN

Utah State Law (Title 10 Chapter 9a) requires local general plans and development guidelines to address general health, safety, morals, and welfare issues. The laws also require public participation in the planning process through public notice and open public meetings. Therefore, the information outlined in this document represents the community's unified views, vision, and goals.

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The general plan aims to provide the community with defined visions or goals and a framework for the town policymakers for the next decade following the plan's final approval.

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN

The update of the general plan included the participation of the residents and property owners, the planning commission, and the town council through a town survey, zoning open house, planning and zoning work meetings, and a public hearing. This process helped draft a plan that is inclusive of the desires of the residents of Vernon Town.

AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

The Vernon Town's General Plan is a working document that forms a foundation for future planning. Amending this Plan will be done with great thought, time, and consideration when we meet our goals and policies change. Amendments and updates will not change the feel and direction of the Plan. The Vernon Town Council and the Vernon Town Planning and Zoning Commission can update the General Plan for one of the following reasons:

- Ten years have passed since the last update of the Plan.
- Changes in applicable federal, state, or local law.
- Annexations or large-scale developments have happened since the previous update.
- The Town Council has made a request.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The implementation of this Plan will occur with the approval of the Vernon Town Council.
Actions will be taken as resources are available. The Vernon Town will then update the town ordinances to coordinate with the General Plan. Finally, the Mayor, Town Council, and the Planning and Zoning Commission will strive to achieve the goals set by this Plan by reviewing the community goals often, prioritizing the goals, and applying for grants.

HISTORY OF VERNON



Vernon Town, Tooele County, Utah, is a small community located thirty-one miles south of Tooele near the original Pony Express route in the southern end of Rush Valley on SR-36. Most visitors see it as the last oasis to the unyielding west desert, the jumping-off point for recreation and hunting in the nearby Sheeprock Mountains, rockhounding for "Wonderstone" in the Vernon Hills, and fishing on the Vernon Reservoir. To residents, it is much, much more! Not only do we appreciate and love the surrounding natural beauty and plentiful recreational activities available, but we also recognize and revere the sacrifice of hardworking pioneers who carved out a living in the unforgiving desert soil and paved the path for current residents to follow. A reverence of the past, faith in the future, and a desire to give our posterity those same pioneer characteristics, drives the sense of community one feels within Vernon's boundaries.

Vernon Town takes its name from a man named John Vernon. In 1857, he was shot and killed in the Vernon Creek bottoms by Tabby Weepup during an argument over a gun that Vernon had repaired for Weepup. Early settlers soon entered the area and grazed large herds of livestock on the plentiful meadow grasses created by the meandering streams and natural springs in the area. "Numbers of livestock which seem incredible now were grazed in the area with no need for

winter supplements. [This included] Year-long ranging of 10,000 head of cattle, several large herds of sheep, and thousands of horses" (Colin Bennion, *Making a Living in Vernon*, Sketches of Vernon History, p.10). Not understanding the growth habits of the desert grasses, the immigrant settlers overgrazed the valley. Within fifteen years of their arrival, sagebrush, greasewood, rabbit brush, cheatgrass, and juniper trees found in abundance today replaced the native grasses.Farmers soon began to use the waters from Vernon Creek and other small streams to irrigate crops and gardens. Freighting to the nearby mines in Ophir, Mercur, and Eureka provided supplemental income to some and a few explored mining ventures for themselves. These were tough times, but these faithful pioneers persevered, and through hard work and tenacity, they were able to provide for their families and create a settlement.

Most of the early settlers of Vernon were converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and came to the valley as they were beckoned by their Prophet leader to "gather to Zion." One can only imagine their feelings as they left the opulent lands of Europe to settle in this high desert valley void of the lush foliage of their former homes. These settler "saints" united together to provide for much of the spiritual and social needs of the community.

In 1934, Vernon, Clover, and St. John, as a bureaucratic measure to facilitate electricity coming to the communities, were incorporated into a vast town called Onaqui. Vernon was far from the rest of Onaqui, and the locals always looked on the Town as somewhat independent. Vernon residents petitioned to incorporate separately. Vernon became a town on February 22, 1972; the remaining part of Onaqui became Rush Valley.

In 1942, with World War II raging in Europe and the Pacific, the U.S. Department of Defense opened three military facilities in the area. From the very beginning, many Vernon residents found employment at one of the three: Tooele Army Depot, Dugway Proving Ground, or Deseret Chemical Depot. In 2021, these establishments are still a major source of employment for the citizens of Vernon.

Throughout the years, the people of Vernon have endured boom and bust cycles with the local economy, snow-packed mountains with rain in plenty and drought afflicted lands; celebrations and rejoicings along with dejection and grief. Through it all, the small Town of Vernon has retained its sense of community and its proud heritage. Former resident Colin Bennion wrote in 1963, and it is still true today that "Pioneering is not dead in Vernon. Nor is the love of cattle and horses and the valleys and mountains surrounding. Those who stay in the valley find happiness in hard work, a good school for their children, religious and civic activities, and recreation in the uncrowded, free lands about them (Colin Bennion, *Making a Living in Vernon*, Sketches of Vernon History, p.13).
Welcome to Vernon!

VISION

Vernon Town desires to preserve the natural terrain and native vegetation while maintaining an agricultural lifestyle, allowing measured growth that aligns with and enhances the Town's character of strong community bonds, helpful neighbors, a rural setting with wide-open spaces, and scenic views.



Vernon Town is a community where residents enjoy a lifestyle that blends its agricultural heritage with the natural desert environment, open space, scenic views, and outdoor activities. Complementing these land uses is an array of residential homes, farms, ranches, and public services. The town center on Main Street includes a church, elementary school, post office, fire station, and cemetery. The town fire station serves as the headquarters for the fire department, EMS services, and a meeting place for the town council, planning and zoning commission, and other public services. The post office serves Vernon and the outlying areas; UPS and FedEx also deliver to Vernon.




Permission to use old post office and mercantile picture from Brian Fredrickson.






Permission for use of painting by Elizabeth Kay and Lana Thomas



The Tooele County School District opened a new elementary school in the fall of 2020. It serves K-6th grades. Grades 7th through 12th travel 25 to 35 miles to either Tooele or Eureka for school. There is one store/gas station located on SR-36 with a commercial zone on the north end of Town past the Bureau of Land Management fire station on the east side of SR-36. Currently, there are no future plans for commercial development. Major shopping is done online, in Tooele City or Salt Lake and Utah County. Employment opportunities are limited, and most residents travel to work. The internet has made it possible for more residents to enjoy working from home.

As Vernon Town matures, the town will face particular challenges as it implements its vision as the urban communities in the county grow and rural land disappears. The Town's ability to maintain its distinct character may be more difficult as undeveloped raw materials with access to infrastructure utilities becomes scarcer in the county. The community will see a significant shift in the interest in developing land within the town limits. Looking forward, the Town can address its evolving challenges and preserve its unique lifestyle by allowing measured growth that aligns with and enhances the character of the Town. New opportunities should be encouraged:

- That enhances the community's sales tax base which will provide additional security for the Town's fiscal health and align with the Town's needs and character, especially home-based businesses.
- Developments, residential and commercial, should be mindful of their impact on the sensitive nature of the desert environment and sensible in their planning and expectations.
- The Town will be more capable of implementing its General Plan, maintaining its character, and using its limited desert resources wisely.

Community Survey

The survey was available online for fifteen days from April 12 to April 26, 2021, postcards were sent out April 10, 2021 to seventy-five residents and thirty-seven property owners. The addresses were acquired from county property records and the town emergency preparedness resident list. Two were returned for insufficient addresses. Each post card contained a key code to keep track of the number of surveys taken with the option to request more if needed. We were also available April 16, 2021 from 2pm to 6pm at the fire station to assist anyone who needed it. We gave out 188 key codes and 81 people responded. The results aided in the drafting of the general plan and will be referred to throughout the document.

Community Goals Assessment from the Survey

Town road improvements:

- The Town will apply for grants for road improvements. We will use the grant money and our minimal road funds to improve and maintain our existing roads.

Create a Gathering place for the community:

- The Town will apply for grants and get donations to fund the purchases of land to develop a community/recreation center.

Economic growth:

- Create multi-use zoning to allow residential and business development.

LAND USE

Vernon Town's land use section of the general plan considers the Town's desire to remain a rural community with land use planning consistent with that objective.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Vernon Town will provide residential opportunities consistent with Title 10, Chapter 9 of the Municipal Land Use Development and Management Act of the Utah Code as follows:

- Encourage a variety of housing and residential opportunities by establishing and providing a range of allowed residential densities and lot sizes.
- Continually evaluate the Town's land use regulations to ensure they work to achieve the purposes of the General Plan.
- The General Plan and Zoning District Map utilizes the following residential land use categories as a decision-making guide:
- The Vernon Town provides the A20 Residential Zone to implement the policies of the Low-Density Residential category.
- The Vernon Town provides the RR5 Residential zone to implement the Medium Density Residential category requirement.
- The Vernon Town provides the RR1 Residential/Mixed Use zone to enforce High-Density Residential and Multi-Use policies.
- The Zoning Ordinance defines the residential zones.
- The General Plan with the accompanying Zoning Ordinance will be implemented by applying the appropriate Residential Zoning District(s).

- The Town, in determining the appropriate Residential Zoning District to implement the General Plan will be guided by, and will find, from the Rezone Application and other materials and the facts presented that:
    - The character of the surrounding area and its uses will not be negatively affected.
    - The proposed Zoning District is compatible with existing uses and Zoning District(s).
    - The Town, and other service providers, can provide the required infrastructure and services.
    - The location, topography, and configuration of the property are suitable for the proposed Zoning District's proposed uses.

- The necessary services and required infrastructure can adequately and efficiently serve the property.
- The proposed Zoning District will not negatively affect the community's health, welfare, and safety.
- The community will benefit from implementing the General Plan, the proposed Zoning District, and the proposed uses and activities.
- All new residential developments, through appropriate subdivision design, development standards, and the provision of required amenities and facilities, will strengthen the rural town image of Vernon.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vernon Town has one store/café/gas station and an undeveloped industrial zone. The Town survey revealed that fifty-five percent of the respondents would encourage and support new business, and fifty-eight percent would support actively pursuing commercial and light industrial development that aligns with the vision and character of Vernon. Vernon Town will provide the following Commercial zones:

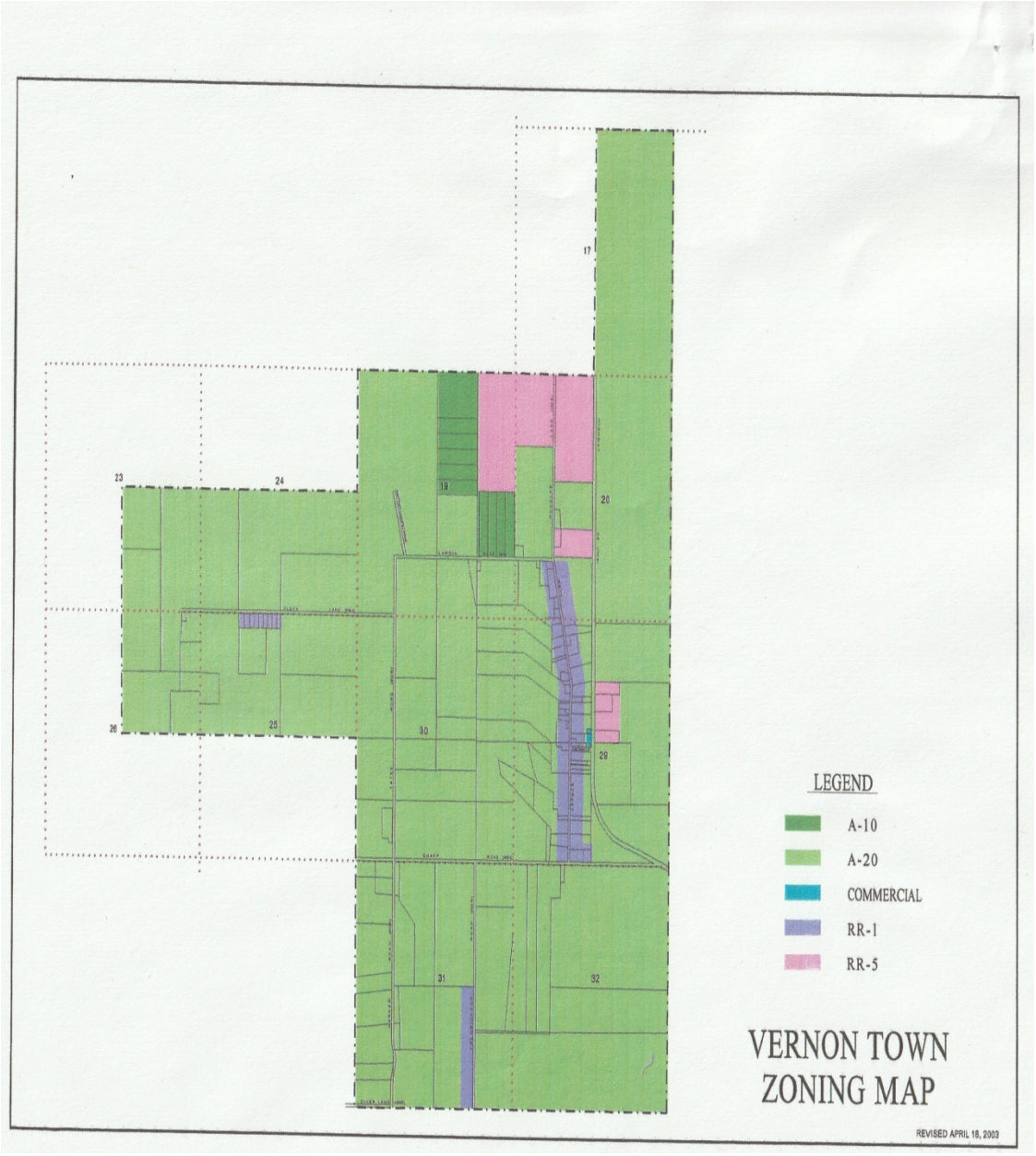
- Multi-Use (M-U)
- General Commercial Zone (C-G)
- Industrial Zone (M-D)

Vernon Town will encourage economic growth to increase the community sales tax base by creating a M-U zone in town, encourage home-based businesses, and explore ways to support new local business opportunities.

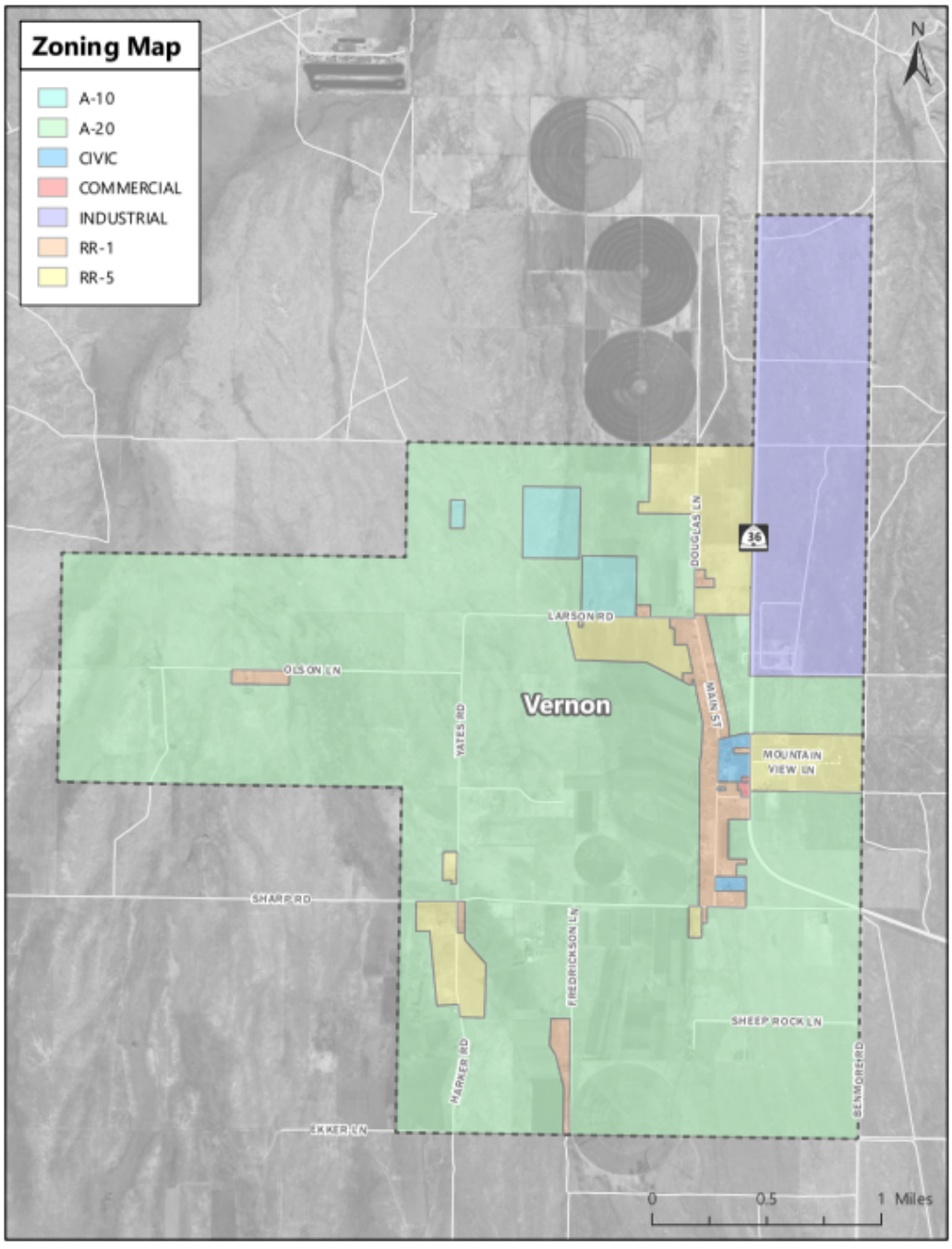
ZONING

- High Density (1 and 2-1/2 acre[s])
- Medium Density (5 acres)
- Low Density (20 acres)
- Multi-use
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Civic
- Agricultural

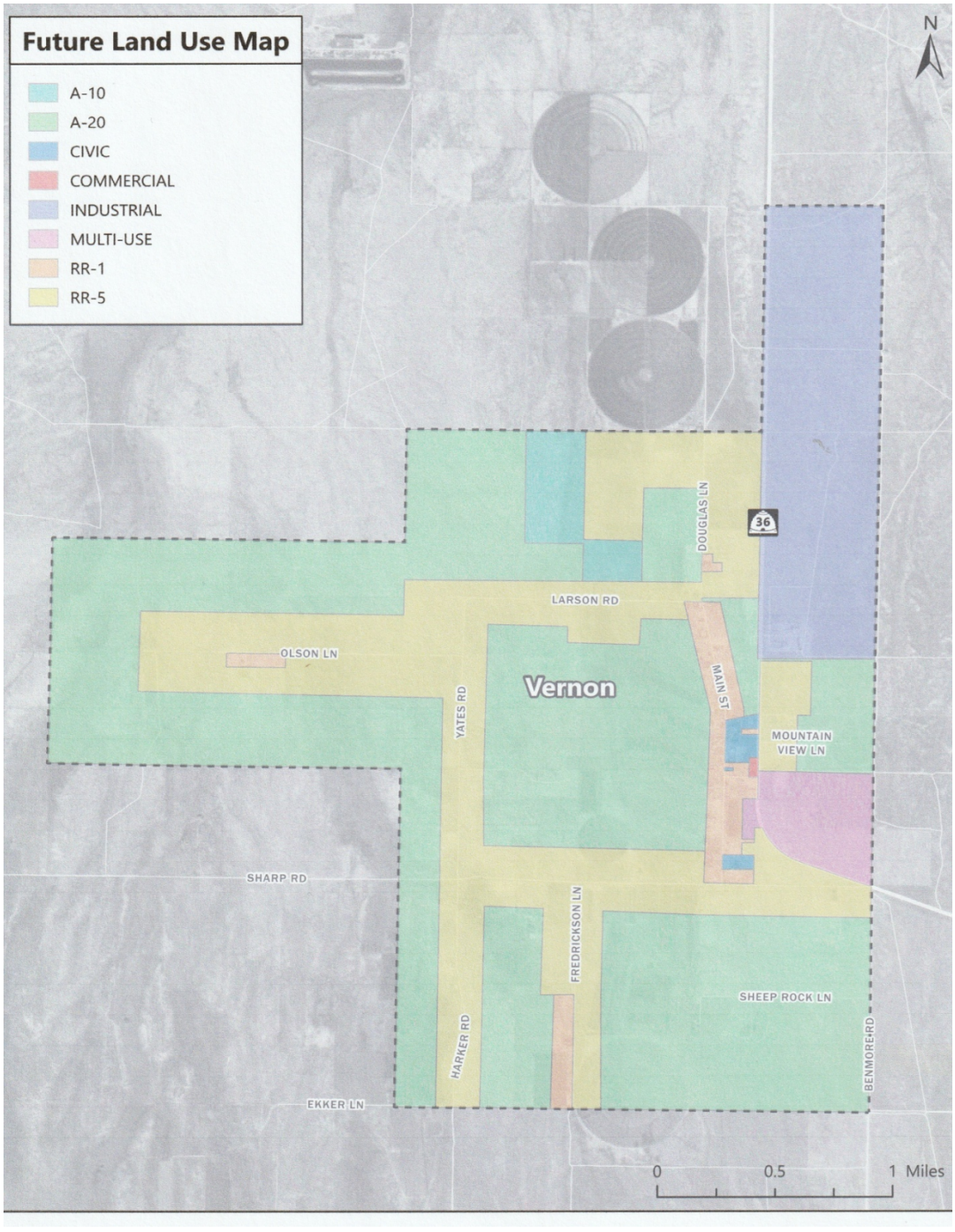
Previous Zoning Map 2003



Current Zoning Map 2023



Proposed Zoning Map



OPEN SPACE



A survey of local residents and landowners shows a significant majority desire open space, with no less than 60% of available private land being set aside for open space without development and consistent with a rural agricultural-based land-use policy. Therefore, the open space provisions for Land Use for Vernon Town will conform to the following conditions:

- That limited development of available lands will occur where there is access to existing public and private roads, considering the input of the landowner during the general plan drafting process.
- That land uses for these subdivisions will comply with the construction of single-family homes on designated parcels conforming to local zoning ordinances with exceptions of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU).
- Those subdivisions of interior properties (lands not fronting roads) will be required to provide access roads (private drives) and right-of-ways by the landowner from the existing public streets or private driveways.
- The 20% open space requirement for subdivision is no longer necessary with the 60/40 open space town policy and the individual property zoning district. Any future subdivisions planned will maximize the feel of open space.
- Limit growth to 40% of available private land by limiting high-density housing to their current areas, expanding high-density zoning to include 2.5 acre lots on Main Street, and encouraging medium-density development near existing high-density zones.

Vernon Town residents and landowners wish to provide a way for growth consistent with community standards and infrastructure limitations for landowners who desire to subdivide and sell lots for development. Open space requirements offer a way to develop land and maintain a rural agricultural feel by keeping the growth on current roads and private drives, limiting the impact on our infrastructure, and keeping the rural nature of Vernon Town for the duration of the general plan.

ENVIRONMENT



As Vernon Town strives to maintain strong community bonds, helpful neighbors, rural settings, wide-open spaces, scenic views, and preserve the natural terrain and native vegetation, we must consider the impact on the environment around us. The recent Vernon Town survey results showed concern for water and open space preservation. Therefore, any future examination of infrastructure development must consider environmental issues. It is imperative that any water or sewer infrastructure planning consider the existence of all environmental elements. Vernon Town will continue to promote policies and practices that protect air quality in the valley by researching current air quality conditions. Vernon Town will seek local expertise, grants, or other avenues of funding to cover environmental impact costs when necessary. It is not sufficient to merely examine and think about the ecological infrastructure concerns; we must do what we can.

ANNEXATION

The General Plan anticipates that at some time in the future annexation requests may be presented to Vernon Town or the Town Council may consider annexation for itself. A guiding principle for annexation will be a requirement for mutually beneficial outcomes for both the Town and those requesting annexation. At present Vernon Town occupies a rather large land footprint for its limited population and infrastructure. Annexation would need to consider these realities regarding limited infrastructure and services, roads and public safety.



INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMUNITY SURVEY

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CIVIC

The civic infrastructure of a community is more than just the building and places; it encompasses the people and their activities. Vernon is most importantly the sum of the citizens who use and inhabit it and the activities that take place here.







The citizens volunteer their time to serve on the Town Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, the Vernon Water Works Special Service District Board (SSD), the Vernon Fire Department (VFD) and the Vernon Veterans Memorial Honor Wall Committee. A group gets together as Daughters of the Utah Pioneers (DUP), and many participate in the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). We can be found at the elementary school once every two weeks to check out books from the bookmobile. Gathering together at our annual 4th of July celebration, the Vernon Elementary Veterans' Program and the elementary school Christmas Play, and the annual Easter Egg Hunt is looked forward to by old and young alike. Many of our youth participate in 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA).

Vernon needs a place to gather with our friends and family.

Creating a Gathering place for the community:

- The Town will apply for grants and get donations to fund the purchases of land to develop a community/recreation center.

To fulfill this goal the Town will form a committee of town volunteers to research building and land opportunities, apply for grants, and get donations to fund this project.



RESOURCES

Vernon Town has limited resources like most small rural towns:

- Vernon Town has rural single-family residences.
- Small businesses
- Home-based businesses
- Vernon Waterworks Special Service District
- Vernon Irrigation Company
- Rush Valley Water Conservancy District
- Rocky Mountain Power provides electricity
- Tooele County Landfill facilitates garbage collection
- Beehive Telephone
- Vernon Cemetery

Vernon Town has minimal funding from a small tax base to support our infrastructure. Property tax increases have been few and far between, and residents like it that way. We enjoy the high desert country life that comes with minimal luxuries. We do our best to be self-sufficient as residents, and the Town Council is mindful of how they spend taxpayer's monies.

TRANSPORTATION



State Route 36 runs through Town, which connects us to the rest of the world, and is the main highway through Tooele County, running north and south. Recreationists and travelers from all over the country use it, and Trucking companies also use it as a distribution route. Castagno and Sharp Roads connect Main Street and town roads to SR-36.
Public transportation is only available in the northern end of Tooele County. The Town does not see public transportation becoming available in the next 10 to 20 years. Residents of the Town provide their own transportation. Tooele County and Tintic School Districts provide bus service for their students and determine the pickup and drop-off locations. People who live in the area and work at Dugway Proving Grounds utilize Utah Transit Authority's vanpools or personal vehicles.

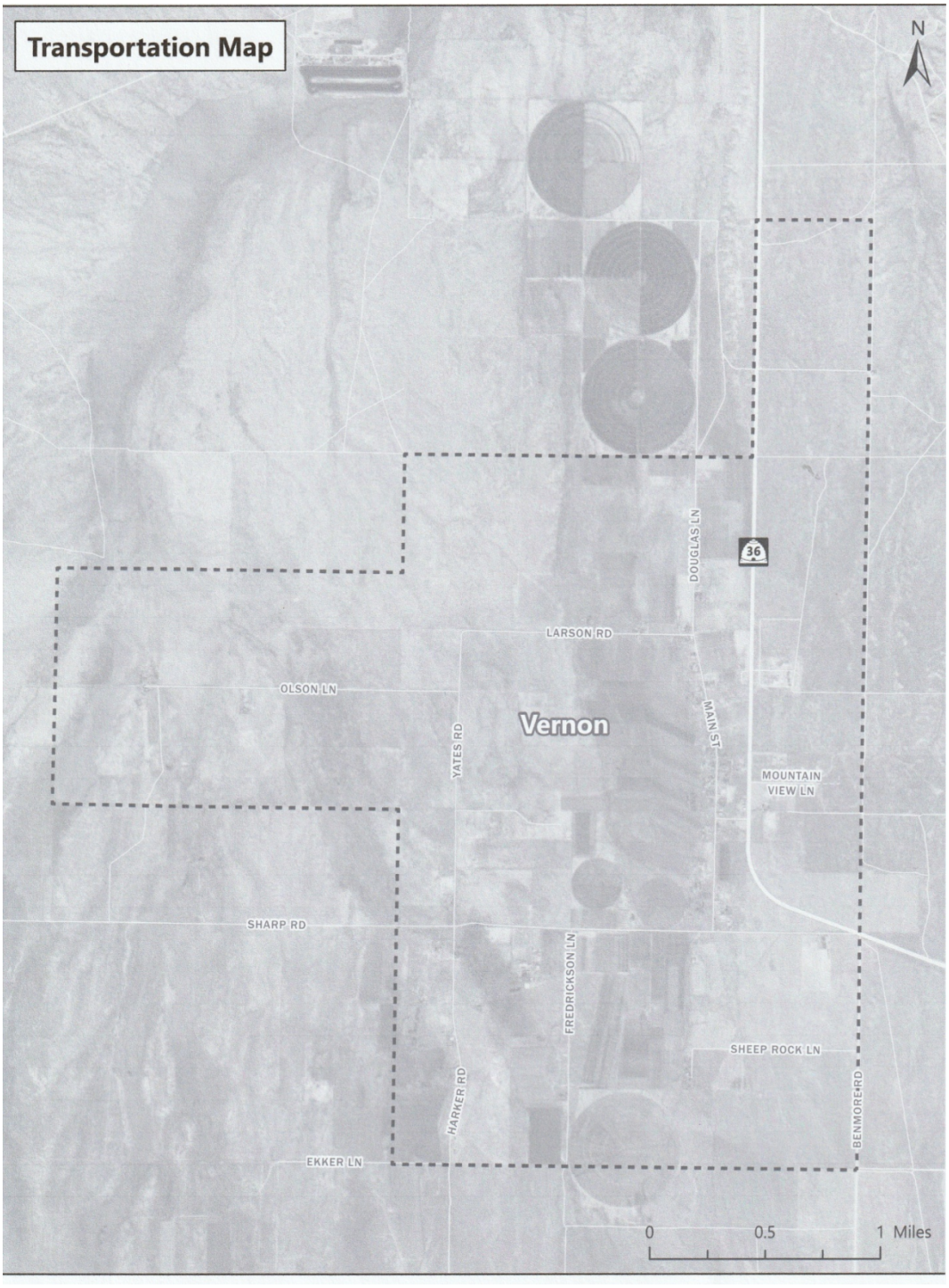
Town road improvements:

- The Town will apply for grants for road improvements. We will use the grant money and our minimal road funds to improve and maintain our existing roads.

Economic growth:

- Create multi-use zoning to allow residential and business development.

(See map on the following page.)


Transportation Map
N
DOUGLAS LN
36
LARSON RD
OLSON LN
Vernon
YATES RD
MAIN ST
MOUNTAIN VIEW LN
SHARP RD
FREDRICKSON LN
SHEEP ROCK LN
HARKER RD
BENMORE RD
EKKER LN
0
0.5
1 Miles

HOUSING



Utah Law states that housing is infrastructure. Vernon Town is a rural single-family residential community with Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU).
Vernon Town sees the benefit for the town by including ADU's within the town limits as an affordable type of home to build. This type of housing will assist with the housing gap as well as for families with medical situations within the family, assisting children of residents with affordable housing and possible additional income for residents.
https://le.utah.gov/~2021/bills/static/HB0082.html

An ADU is subordinate to the primary dwelling. It is an accessory dwelling unit meaning: a habitable living unit added to, created within, or detached from a single –family dwelling and contained on one lot. ADU's have a separate entrance, walls, bathroom, kitchen, parking, etc…



Residents will need to acquire all necessary permits and meet all building codes with this type of structure.

When the need arises, or the State mandates it, the Town will look into more affordable housing developments. The General Plan will address the zoning of residential, agricultural, and commercial areas within the Town limits. The Town requires Building approval for all construction.

ROADS



We have 13.1 miles of roads in the Town limits and Main Street is our only fully developed paved road. The remaining roads are partially paved with no road base under them or are dirt and gravel. The Town's road budget is approximately $50,500 a year making it extremely difficult to maintain paved roads, manage weed control along town roads, and pay for snow removal in the winter season when we are lucky enough to have snow. The Town Council looks for creative ways to assist in the upkeep of the roads, such as donations of paving materials and community volunteers to patch potholes. The Town is actively pursuing grants that would provide assistance to improve and maintain the town roads.



WATER



Vernon Town is in a high desert valley and water is a precious commodity. Vernon Waterworks Special Service District (SSD) supplies water to 76 homes along Main Street and a small group of homes on the east side of SR-36. The SSD has limits to its supply of water and hook-ups.
SSD goals and needs are:

- Second storage tank approximately 50,000 to 75,000 gal for culinary water storage.
- Replace either or both old lines along North Main St west on Larson Road and one from Patsy Holden's to Bryant Pehrson's to Dave Gowans along Sharps Rd.
- Sink well deeper; presently at 128 feet deep.
- Engineer to provide plan for projected/goals listed and contractor to accomplish the work.

Residences outside of the SSD have drilled wells for their domestic and irrigation needs.

WASTE DISPOSAL



The Tooele County Landfill provides waste disposal and garbage pickup is on Friday of each week. If a holiday occurs, then garbage pickup usually occurs the following day unless residents are otherwise informed.
Septic systems are required for a sewer system and are provided by the property owner for residential or business use. The Tooele County Health Department does the inspections for the construction of new septic systems.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Tooele County Sheriff's Office provides public safety. Response times are a minimum of 20 minutes. The contact number for dispatch in non-emergency situations is 435-882-5600.
For all other emergencies, call 911.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Vernon Town is conscious of its remote location and has built a volunteer-based response group that operates out of the Vernon Fire Station. The Vernon Fire Department is a group of non-paid volunteers trained to assist ambulance crews with first aid situations, wildland fires and structural fires as well as responding to motor vehicle accidents within the assigned response area. When the local departments in the south end of the county need fire control or emergency medical services assistance, help is at least 20 minutes away, more likely 45 minutes because the neighboring agencies that assist with emergencies are also volunteer-based. Mountain West Ambulance has a Basic Life Support ambulance with an on-call paid trained emergency medical service employee to cover the Town and to help with coverage in the south end of Tooele County which is the second largest response area in Tooele County.
The Vernon Fire Department is working to grow as the town grows. It looks to the future by working on obtaining grants for: all equipment upgrades in line with NFPA standards, to procure newer response vehicles, radio communication equipment, fire station additions/upgrades and other necessary items. The fire department is seeking monies to obtain a more ready resource of water by working with the Town to drill a well for department use and the Town cemetery and to find funding for fire hydrants all through the town to reduce the use of culinary water.
The Vernon Fire Department encourages town residents to become 1st responders and will work to assist them with monies and available grants to complete the necessary education.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



Vernon Town has adopted the Tooele County Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan. We have also partnered with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to create a Town emergency response plan. It is an ongoing and living document that changes as the area's needs change from growth. The plan is also volunteer based with assistance from Tooele County's EOC administration. Donations for the area shelter stockpile and volunteers are needed and encouraged to be involved with emergency planning meetings and training exercises.