



Fountain Hills General Plan 2020

2025 Annual Report

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Arizona Revised Statutes Section 9-461.07 A. 2. states that after the municipal legislative body has adopted a general plan, the community's planning agency shall render an annual report to the legislative body on the status of the plan and progress in its application.

The Town of Fountain Hills has adopted and implemented general plans in accordance with state statutes since 2002. The Fountain Hills General Plan 2010 was adopted by the Council on January 7, 2010 and was the guiding document for the Town until the voters ratified the 2020 General Plan on November 3, 2020. This annual report summarizes the Town's implementation efforts for the 2025 calendar year.

Fountain Hills General Plan 2020

The Fountain Hills General Plan 2020 was adopted by Council on May 19, 2020 and ratified by the voters on November 3, 2020 as a long-term vision for local development. The Plan did not become official for use by staff and the Town until it was ratified by the voters. This report discusses some implementation advances in the 2025 calendar year and continued efforts going into the next several years. The report also identifies some implementation challenges and identifies a few immediate and short-term General Plan goals that have fallen outside their expected completion window.

Page 124 of the 2020 Plan includes direction regarding the annual report. It states:

Each year, the Fountain Hills Development Services Department must prepare, and the Fountain Hills Planning & Zoning Commission must review and submit to the Town Council an annual report on the status of the General Plan progress. The report must include, but not be limited to, the following:

- 1. A summary of General Plan amendments processed during the preceding year and those pending review, including General Plan amendments initiated by Town Council.*
- 2. A report on the progress and status of implementation actions enumerated in the General Plan Implementation Strategy.*
- 3. A review of policy issues which may have arisen regarding provisions of the*

General Plan.

4. *A recommendation for General Plan amendments to be initiated to maintain an effective, up-to-date General Plan including: policy changes, clarifications, and new policy development; changes in character area; and other applicable changes. The recommendation may also include suggestions to change implementation actions priorities, as Town's priorities shift, as well as General Plan amendments, if any, to be included in the work program for the following fiscal year.*

The conclusion of the report outlines several immediate and short-range goals that have not yet been initiated and may be reevaluated through broader discussions with the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Town Council. While many of these unmet goals have been noted in prior years and are therefore repeated in this report, their inclusion is intentional. The purpose is to ensure that any items the Commission or Council may wish to revisit, refine, or continue discussing remain clearly identified.

1. SUMMARY OF GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENTS

There were no General Plan Amendments in the calendar year 2025, nor were there any proposals for a General Plan Amendment.

It is important to note that the Town of Fountain Hills is landlocked and nearing full build-out. The 1,276-acre State Trust Land located in the far northeast corner of the Town represents the area with the highest potential for a future major General Plan amendment. It is also the largest contiguous undeveloped property in Town, with zoning in place to accommodate single-family residential uses, lodging, neighborhood-scale commercial development, and an interconnected network of open space.

After several years of limited interest from the development community, Development Services staff has recently been asked to host a series of informational meetings with potential developers. However, no land auctions have been scheduled by the Arizona State Land Department at this time. Based on current expectations, an auction may occur sometime during the 2026 calendar year.

2. PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

The General Plan organizes the Town's goals and policies according to three overarching principles that guide its development, including Thriving Environment, Thriving Neighborhoods, and Thriving Economy. These overarching principles contain eight (8) general plan elements required by Arizona statutes. This section briefly highlights progress and implementation actions as they relate to each of the eight (8) general plan elements and their respective goals and policies. Each goal in the General Plan prescribes a time frame for initiation:

- Ongoing
- Immediate – (initiate no later than 6 months after General Plan ratification by the voters)
- Short-range (First 4 years): Prioritizes development and redevelopment efforts that will support the fiscal viability of the Town.
- Mid-range (5 to 8 Years): Prioritizes strategies that require funding and may not be pursued until funding is available.
- Long-range (Within 10 years): Includes identification of funds for the preparation of conceptual plans for State Trust Land in coordination with ASLD.

There is considerable progress to report on several fronts. This section briefly describes each of the three overarching principles of the General Plan and their essential elements, and also provides a brief description of the implementation actions taken during the 2025 calendar year.

Thriving Neighborhoods

Thriving Neighborhoods is the first of three overarching principles of the General Plan, addressing policies pertaining to housing, neighborhood preservation/revitalization, neighborhood-scale amenities and neighborhood safety to support healthy, complete, and vibrant neighborhoods. Most of the implementation actions are identified by the General Plan as “Ongoing” efforts and are realized daily.

Housing Element

Fountain Hills continues to accommodate a variety of housing types and quality development and continues to maintain its existing housing stock and residential areas as essential to sustaining Fountain Hills’ thriving neighborhoods. Residential permit and land entitlement activity in 2025, as in previous years, saw a higher percentage for single-family residential use. Calendar year 2025 saw 44 permits issued for new single-family residential homes, less than the 54 permits issued in the prior year. Permits were also issued for 7 single-family attached housing units for the development adjacent to the MCO Realty building on Saguaro Blvd., just north of Shea Blvd, while another 8 units are still awaiting special use permit approval.

Special use permits were approved for six residential units on the Avenue of the Fountains in the Downtown area, as well as for twelve units in a commercial area along Panorama Drive. In addition, building permits have been issued for fifteen townhome-style units near Saguaro and Shea Boulevards. All three projects required, and were granted, Special Use Permits prior to submitting for site plan and construction review, as each involved a residential use proposed within a commercial zoning district.

The proposed 316-unit apartment complex at Four Peaks Plaza received zoning entitlements in 2024; however, the developer has not yet submitted construction plans to the Town. They are awaiting more favorable market conditions before filing for building permits.

Neighborhood Amenities

In 2021, the Town approved the Active Transportation Plan (ATP) to ensure multimodal connectivity between neighborhoods, neighborhood parks, and significant natural open space. Pedestrian, bicycle and trail connectivity are further addressed in the Social Environment Element and in the Connectivity, Access and Mobility Element.

Safety

The Town applies Safe-by-Design concepts during the site plan review process. Safe-by-Design is about including safety at the earliest possible stage of development review. During the design review stage, staff implements concepts such as visibility of entryways, lighting, accessibility to outdoor accessibility areas, and clearly defined pedestrian, bicycle, trails and open space connectivity.

Thriving Environment

Thriving Environment integrates all aspects of the built, social, and natural environments by carefully knitting growth areas, infill, redevelopment and revitalization, place-based land use utilizing a character areas approach, connectivity, access and mobility supporting circulation for all travel modes, parks, recreation, trails, and open space, resource protection, energy conservation, air and water quality, infrastructure and public services in a cohesive manner as integral parts of Fountain Hills.

Great Places

The Great Places Element defines the Town of Fountain Hills major character areas and the land use mix supporting those areas. As a strategic tool, the Great Places Element guides new development, redevelopment and infill to sustain the long-range viability of the Town and continue to support the quality of life valued by the community. The following implementation activities for 2025 demonstrate considerable progress in creating and fostering Great Places:

- Although not yet open to the public, construction of the long-awaited International Dark Sky Discovery Center was completed this year, including installation of the telescope. Originally scheduled to open in Fall 2025, funding issues have delayed its opening until the coming year.
- The shade structure at the linear park along the Avenue of the Fountains—one of several ongoing capital improvement projects in the plaza—was installed over the summer. Located above the midpoint plaza and fountain on the eastern half of the plaza, the structure measures approximately 60 by 40 feet. Picnic tables have also been added in this area, which serves as a performance space for the “Concerts on the Avenue” series held in the spring and fall. This installation is part of a three-year, \$200,000 improvement program for the Avenue of the Fountains. Additional work includes upgrading the electrical system

for event receptacles, installing root barriers to protect the brick walkway from tree-root lifting, and completing other landscaping enhancements.

- A new mural was completed on the Pumphouse wall at Fountain Park near the Veterans Memorial. Created by a Scottsdale-based and commissioned through the Southern Arizona Arts & Cultural Alliance, the piece features the Fountain and “Fountain Hills” in large block letters filled with Sonoran Desert imagery. The mural was selected after the Public Art Committee chose to discontinue the previous Pumphouse Art Project and sought a permanent installation for the space. The mural was completed in about a week using more than 55 spray cans. New murals have also been installed on utility boxes throughout the downtown area.
- The Farmer’s Market, held every Wednesday between November and April, saw an significant increase of approximately in vendors. The Market offers healthy eating options and food trucks, as well as a variety of over 40 art vendors. The Market also hosted three special events featuring the Children’s Entrepreneur Market (CEM), featuring 50 booths for kids to make and sell all types of foods and crafts. CEM is a non-profit organization helping children learn business with first-hand experience.
- The community garden, funded in part by the Ft. McDowell-Yavapai Nation, entered its eighth year. Garden organizers and members donate to local food pantry and hosts healthy cooking classes. Pavers were recently installed to improve accessibility throughout the garden compound.
- The Town continues to coordinate service availability and enhancements with utility providers to ensure service capacity to new development, redevelopment or infill. Town staff coordinated with utility companies to relocate their infrastructure to accommodate a number of sidewalk infill projects in 2025.
- Economic Development staff regularly utilizes visitor analysis software to identify various trade areas. The analyses assist the Town in mapping out business activity and consumer behavior at various points of interest. Analyzing a trade area entails studying things like traffic patterns, shopping habits, and existing businesses, for the purpose of exploring the market potential of a planning projects or impacts from a special event.
- In November 2025, the Fountain Hills Town Council approved amendments to the Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 19), authorizing staff to approve design review plans based on objective, measurable standards rather than subjective "guidelines". This update aligns with HB2447, streamlining development, replacing subjective terms with "shall/must" language, and implementing the new code by January 2026.

- A grant totaling approximately \$50,000 was received from the neighboring Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. Another grant of \$76,329.83 was received from the Arizona Office of Tourism. These grants help fund programs and projects that focus on education, public safety, health, environment, and economic and community development. The Town applied for a grant offered by the Fort McDowell-Yavapai Nation but was unsuccessful.

Social Environment

This Social Environment Element defines the Town of Fountain Hills' built public spaces as areas for community interaction and networking. Such public spaces include community and regional parks as well as public gathering spaces like plazas and courtyards in association with compact or urban development. This element views streets, sidewalks and trails as social connectors and also addresses passive and active recreation. When addressed in an integrated manner, the social environment supports safety and a healthy and active lifestyle. The Town carried out a number of activities in 2025 to support a social environment that supports safety and a healthy and active lifestyle:

- Fountain Hills Parks and Recreation introduced new adult leagues for cornhole, pickleball, and an "Adult Return to Recess" program offering beach volleyball, table tennis, croque/bocce ball, and kickball, with Four Peaks Park also hosting its first pickleball tournament. These programs are sponsored by local companies.
- The Fountain Hills Irish Fountain Fest recently received the Outstanding Special Event Award at the 2025 Arizona Parks and Recreation Association Conference. This recognition highlights the festival's status as a premier community event, which most recently took place on March 14, 2026, drawing an estimated 10,000 visitors to Fountain Park.

Access, Connectivity, and Mobility

The Town Continues to design and maintain streetscapes that incorporate alternative travel modes. In 2025, the following actions helped further improve the accessibility, connectivity and mobility throughout town:

- The Public Works Department oversaw design and construction of several crosswalks at the following locations:
 - Golden Eagle Blvd. at Brittlebush Ln.
 - La Montana Drive & Cambria Dr.
 - La Montana Drive. & Hamilton Dr.
 - El Lago Blvd. & Verde River Dr.
 - Palisades Blvd. & Westby Dr.,
 - Paul Nordin Dr. & Verde River Dr.

- A total of 0.98 miles of new sidewalk was installed at the following locations:
 - Saguaro Blvd/Palisades Gap Elimination Project, 4,125 LF (0.78 miles)
 - La Montana Dr (at Bashas' Shopping Plaza) 462 LF (0.09 miles)
 - La Montana Dr (Hamilton to Saguaro) 580 LF (0.11 miles)
- A total of 1.51 miles of new bicycle lanes were added at the following locations:
 - La Montana Dr (Hamilton to Saguaro), 1,000 LF (0.19 miles)
 - La Montana Dr (Palisades to Ave of the Fountains), 2,080 LF (0.39 miles)
 - El Lago Blvd (Saguaro to Panorama), 4,900 LF (0.93 miles)
- In 2025, A total of 1.51 miles of new bicycle lanes were added at the following locations:
 - La Montana Dr (Hamilton to Saguaro), 1,000 LF (0.19 miles)
 - La Montana Dr (Palisades to Ave of the Fountains), 2,080 LF (0.39 miles)
 - El Lago Blvd (Saguaro to Panorama), 4,900 LF (0.93 miles)
- The Town Council approved a \$5 million budget for the Palomino Boulevard reconstruction project, which began in September with curb removal and repair as the first phase of a multi-million-dollar effort to address deteriorated pavement conditions. The full project involves complete removal and replacement of asphalt along the 1.4-mile segment between Palisades Boulevard and Fountain Hills Boulevard.
- The Town Council approved a \$3.2 million contract with DCS Contracting to widen Shea Boulevard, with 70% of the project funded through a Maricopa Association of Governments grant and the Town covering the remainder, including a temporary shortfall to be reimbursed in 2031. The project's first phase will add a third eastbound lane between Palisades Boulevard and Fountain Hills Boulevard. Additional future phases envision widening Shea to six lanes between State Route 87 and Scottsdale, along with later improvements between Fountain Hills Boulevard and Technology Drive.

Public Facilities and Services

The Town in conjunction with its servicing utility companies continues to ensure potable water and sanitation services to its residents while complying with all applicable environmental regulations at all levels of government. A new \$500,000, four-stall restroom at Four Peaks Park opened in January 2025.

Natural Resources and Open Space Element

In its consistent support for preservation and conservation efforts, the Town values the natural environment as an essential component of a thriving community.

- The Adero Canyon Trailhead in Fountain Hills has seen significant expansion, with the Mesquite Hollow Trail and the new Wilderness Trail recently completed, providing a 1.8-mile rugged route connecting to the upper McDowell Mountain Preserve.

These trails, built by volunteers, offer challenging, high-elevation hiking with scenic desert views, completing a major phase of the local trail network.

- Town staff, with assistance from the State Historic Preservation Office, formally submitted an application in 2025 to request designation of the Fountain to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Listing in the National Register of Historic Places provides formal recognition of a property's historical, architectural, or archeological significance based on national standards used by every state. Unfortunately, the request was turned down. The Town will be submitting a new request in the coming year based on feedback received after the initial request.
- There have been three recycling events in 2025 sponsored in part by the Town, including the Household Hazardous Waste collection event, the Shred-a-Thon, and the Residential Electronic Recycling event. All three events were well attended by Fountain Hills residents.
- The Town implements strict re-vegetation requirements for protected hillsides that require the restoration of disturbed areas with native plant species that are consistent in type and density with the surrounding native desert and encourage builders to design with a contextual emphasis.

Thriving Economy

Thriving Economy supports a strategic economic development approach to achieve the long-range viability of the Town and provides specific mechanisms to finance new development.

Economic Development

The following activities were performed in 2025 and pertain to the Economic Development Element of the General Plan and were largely guided by the 2022 Strategic Plan:

- The Town initiated the design phase for streetscape improvements on Verde River Drive and Parkview Avenue to enhance walkability, safety, and aesthetics in the downtown area. The project includes widening sidewalks, adding trees, upgrading landscaping, and improving pedestrian crossings. These improvements are part of a five-year effort to strengthen the vibrancy of the downtown core, supported by a budget of more than \$2 million.
- The Town continues to own and maintain dual port charging stations - one at the Civic Center and the other at Fountain Park. The charging stations use the ChargePoint network which operates a nationwide charging system. Ninety percent of the revenue generated from people wishing to charge their vehicles goes to the Town, while 10% goes to ChargePoint.

- Rezone proposals and special use permit for specific locations are guided by the General Plan and its identified Character Areas. Staff cites the general plan in their recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Cost of Development

The Town continues to honor its current development agreements with the landowners and developers, as well as its cost sharing through intergovernmental agreements with other jurisdictions.

The Development Services department utilizes the Town Online Planning and Permitting System (TOPPS) to provide a streamlined design review process for development and redevelopment of the Town Center, Commerce Center, Saguaro Blvd and Shea Character Areas.

3. POLICY ISSUES

As the 2020 General Plan enters into the fifth year of implementation, a few issues remain with regards to the timing and completion of some of the goals. Staff notes a number of immediate and short-range implementation actions that have yet to be initiated. Immediate goals are intended to be initiated within 6 months of ratification by voters. Short-range goals are to be initiated within the first four years. Some goals have fallen outside of the expected time frame for initiation. A number of factors have impacted its implementation progress, shifting priorities, market conditions and logistical challenges. The calendar year 2025 is an opportunity for staff to study the changing needs of the Town and identify opportunities and constraints that will better guide the Town in its policy direction.

Immediate Goals

There are two **immediate** goals for which progress was to be initiated within six months of ratification but have not yet begun. These two goals are listed below, followed by a brief statement regarding their status:

- Goal: *Consider Part time grant writer. (Economic Development, Goal 2, Policy 1)*

Department staff regularly monitors and pursues grant opportunities that could support new infrastructure, recreational amenities, and economic development initiatives. However, available grants are limited, and not all awarded grants are ultimately accepted by the Town Council after careful evaluation. While the Town will continue to seek and apply for grants when appropriate, it may be worthwhile to reevaluate the feasibility of adding a part-time position dedicated exclusively to researching and preparing grant proposals.

- Goal: Establish a General Plan Monitoring System coordinated with the CIP in conformance with the policy direction supporting this goal [to share costs with other entities]. (Cost of Development, Goal 10, Policy 1-2)

Though these meetings are not exclusively intended to address this specific goal of the General Plan, it does allow planning staff to monitor how the Town's resources are directed in implementing the General Plan's policies while also identifying cost sharing opportunities.

Short-Term Goals

Steps toward completing the **short-term** goals of the General Plan are to be initiated within four years after voter ratification. The following are short-term goals, followed by a brief statement regarding their status:

- Goal: *Develop and implement an investment plan that responds to the Economic Development Plan's priorities, and that prioritizes infrastructure improvements in the CIP.* (Economic Development)

Although the Town has not initiated a formal investment plan that ties together the CIP and Strategic Economic Development Plan and the CIP, staff makes sure that both are complementary in their vision.

- Goal: *Commission a cost/benefit study to identify the gap between actual subdivision regulations infrastructure specifications and determine the cost of meeting such specifications.* (Economic Development)

The Subdivision Regulations are a foundational part of shaping the Town's housing stock and commercial uses, as well as the infrastructure that supports them. The Town has long believed that these regulations ensure quality infrastructure. Currently, there are few large privately-owned properties with the potential of being subdivided further into residential lots. As mentioned earlier, the 1,276-acre site owner by ASLD provides the best development opportunity. Although a number of developers have approached Town with expressed interest in acquiring the property, there are no auctions scheduled for the property at this time. In anticipation of a successful acquisition from a developer, staff will be researching the feasibility of a cost/benefit study in the coming year.

Goal: *Prepare, adopt and implement an integrated Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space System Master Plan* (Social Environment)

As mentioned earlier in this report, the Town completed three new trails in its growing network. As efforts continue in maintaining or improving this network, the Town will be

able to utilize these efforts in tying together a network of trails with its large inventory of open space into an integrated and organic master plan.

- Goal: *Amend Zoning Ordinance to include, at a minimum, Safe-by-Design concepts. (Thriving Neighborhoods)*

Though not yet codified in the Zoning Ordinance, the Development Services department strongly advocates Safe-by-Design concepts in its site plan and design review processes. These concepts are similar to the Architectural Review Guidelines in Chapter 19 of the Zoning Ordinance. However, the extent to which Safe-by-Design concepts can be applied may vary depending on site conditions and related factors. Therefore, as stated in previous years, the concepts may better be suited to remain a policy in the General Plan rather than a development regulation in the zoning ordinance. However, staff welcomes feedback from the Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council on this matter.

- Goal: *Amend the Zoning Ordinance to include Low Impact Development (LID). (Natural Resources and Open Space)*

The term low impact development (LID) refers to systems and practices that use or mimic natural processes that result in the infiltration, evapotranspiration or use of stormwater in order to protect water quality and associated aquatic habitat. Like the Safe-by-Design Concepts, the LID concepts have not been codified in the Zoning Ordinance. Many of the Town's standards, such as requiring stormwater pollution prevention plans (SWPPP) and erosion control plans with new development plans largely align with many LID concepts. However, staff welcomes feedback from the Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council on this matter.

The General Plan also identifies a number of mid-range and long-range goals that will be initiated in the coming years:

- Goal: *Work with ASLD to prepare a feasibility study for State Trust land and based on the results [of a cost recovery study], consider future revenues that could be generated from development of Trust Land. (Cost of Development)*

This goal hinges on another goal which requires the Town to perform a cost recovery study mentioned earlier. When and if such a cost recovery study is completed, staff would invite a broader discussion with the Commission and Town Council before proposing amendments to the ordinances.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS

Although a number of policy issues have been identified, staff does not recommend any amendments to the General Plan at this time. Substantive changes to any goal in the general plan would require a Major Amendment per the Arizona Revised Statutes, which entails an extensive review and public notification process and could take several months from initiation to completion. However, changes to the implementation steps used to arrive at each goal may only require a minor amendment, which does not require extensive lead time and may be considered by the Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council at any time. In any case, staff appreciates further direction from the Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council.