RIO SALADO DISTRICT
POLICY PLAN

CITY OF PHOENIX







A Transformative Vision Beyond the Banks

Adopted
October 21, 2026

RIO PHX

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
PRESERVE SHAPE BUILD

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The City of Phoenix acknowledges that Phoenix is located within the homeland of the O'Odham and Piipaash peoples and their ancestors, who have inhabited this landscape from time immemorial to present day. The landscape is sacred and reflects cultural values central to the O'Odham and Piipaash way of life and their self-definition. This acknowledgment demonstrates our commitment to work in partnership with the Ancestral Indigenous Communities to foster understanding, appreciation, and respect for this heritage.

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRP-MIC) and the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) claim aboriginal title (Original Indian Title) to lands exclusively used and occupied by the Akimel O'Odham and Piipaash, equaling 3,751,000 acres of South-Central Arizona. Ancestral O'Odham settlements are located throughout the entirety of present-day Phoenix. This land remains spiritually connected to the O'Odham of the SRP-MIC and the GRIC, both of which are confederations of two distinct cultures with their own languages, customs, traditions, religions, and histories. Both the O'Odham and the Piipaash are oral history cultures, and the song cultures of these people are tied explicitly to tangible places. These places can be natural landforms, such as the mountains that surround our valleys. Still, they also include archaeological sites because they are part of a cultural landscape associated with specific historical, cultural, and religious values. Those places are tangible reminders to the O'Odham and Piipaash about shared attitudes, goals, and practices that characterize who they are, where they belong, and how they relate to each other in the past, continuing today, and into the future. The City of Phoenix has preserved and continues to steward several Ancestral O'Odham sites and landscapes, and is committed to honoring the vital meaning and intent of this land acknowledgment.

Source: City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department

PROJECT FUNDING STATEMENT

The Gila River Indian Community has generously funded the work presented in this plan. The City of Phoenix would like to thank them for their contributions to community building, economic development, and a consistent vision for ecological resilience. This grant marks the next stage in developing the Rio Salado District into a vibrant part of the city and region, while reconnecting the community to the river and fostering a sustainable future for both human and non-human inhabitants.

Cover page photo credits: Protectors of the Salt River (People gathering)
Photo credits of all uncredited photographs: City of Phoenix



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Liberty Wildlife

Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center

Phoenix Revitalization Corporation

Protectors of the Salt River

Roosevelt Elementary School District

Sagrado Galleria

SoPho Convening

South Central Collaborative

Salt River Project

Tiger Mountain Foundation

Unlimited Potential

Valley Metro

Boards and Commissions

Planning Commission

Parks and Recreation Board

Central City Village Planning Committee

South Mountain Village Planning Committee









Community workshops
Source: Multistudio



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Central Avenue Bridge
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan establishes a framework for guiding development within the neighborhoods that abut and surround the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (RSHRA), through a shared vision centered around people, nature, and the built environment. Developed through extensive public engagement and data-driven technical analysis, the plan outlines goals, strategies, and actions into four big ideas to inspire public and private public and private investment decisions. Furthermore, this plan is a key implementation tool of the regional Rio Reimagined project by promoting economic development along and beyond the banks of the Rio Salado, and supporting continued riverbed restoration, in addition to water management activities.

In 2023, the City of Phoenix Planning and Development Department launched the RIO PHX initiative as a collaborative effort with a diverse group of stakeholders, including businesses, property owners, residents, and other community groups, to develop a strategy and shared vision to attract positive investment for the benefit of locals, while attracting tourists to the area. Supported by a grant from the Gila River Indian Community, the Rio Salado District Policy Plan also identifies existing community needs and opportunities towards a respectful transformation of the area.

As the Rio Salado District evolves, this plan offers a strategic roadmap that aligns growth and investment with community values and priorities. The plan also presents a vision for a more walkable and connected community to support long-term health outcomes, resiliency, and housing affordability.



Event at the Audubon Center
Source: Audubon Southwest by Danny RJ



Tres Rios Wetland Cleanup Event
Source: Office of Mayor Kate Gallego



Dear Neighbors,
Rio Reimagined celebrates the river that made Phoenix, and our neighboring communities, possible. From the dedication of grassroots efforts and Indigenous communities, to the halls of the United States Congress, this initiative is made up of the dedication of people from all walks of life who are committed to preserving the riparian habitat and creating opportunities for residents to enjoy this special river corridor.

This plan builds upon investments in environmental restoration projects, public transit, active transportation pathways, and landmark buildings like the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center to encourage appropriate design and development as parcels along the riverbanks are converted to new uses. Phoenix is proud to partner with our neighboring Tribal communities, cities and towns to bring to fruition the vision of a Rio Salado that belongs to everyone, including future generations.

Respectfully,

Kate Gallego

Kate Gallego
Mayor of Phoenix

City of Phoenix
Office of Mayor Kate Gallego

PARTS OF THE PLAN

The plan assesses the existing conditions of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan project area, outlines a vision for its future, and offers a framework for achieving that vision. This is structured into four key parts as described below.

Part 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter offers a summary of the plan, detailing the study area, community engagement objectives, and planning framework and process. This chapter also orients the reader to the different zones that connect neighborhoods and the Rio Salado.

Part 2: Who We Are

This part highlights the historic context of the area, past efforts within the Rio Salado District and assesses its current condition through six planning elements: **Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Health, Mobility, and Green Systems**. This chapter integrates public and other data with input from the community while identifying existing assets, opportunities, challenges, demographics, and areas that require change. By gaining a clear understanding of the current state of the Rio Salado District, we can effectively shape its future.

Part 3: What We Want

This part outlines the community's vision for the Rio Salado District over the next 25 years. This vision was created through a community-driven process that reflects the insights of business owners, local groups, residents, visitors, workers, and recreational users. A variety of active and passive engagement methods were utilized, including community workshops, group meetings, tabling events, mailers, and surveys, to help shape this **vision**. The **vision**, **big ideas**, and **design concepts**, gathered from the community, serve as the foundation for the next chapter.

Part 4: How We Get There

This section presents the steps for realizing the Rio Salado District's vision using a collaborative approach to transition the current conditions. A list of **goals, strategies, target outcomes and actions** where responsible parties are identified to achieve the community vision for the area.

WHY WE NEED A PLAN?

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan is a guide for transforming the Rio Salado Corridor into a more walkable, healthier, and well-connected part of Phoenix. This plan can serve as a framework for future planning efforts along other segments of the Rio Salado Corridor, while supporting broader regional objectives of the Rio Reimagined or Rio Salado Project.

WHAT THIS PLAN DOES:

- Incorporates previous plans and their intent, including the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan and South Central Transit Oriented Development Community Plan, among other area plans.
- Summarizes community input with technical analysis.
- Provides city-wide policy guidance to encourage transitioning the existing conditions to a more equitable, connected, healthier, economically resilient, and sustainable environment through multi-disciplinary collaboration with internal and external partners.
- Lays a foundation for future land use decisions, river-oriented design, and rethinking zoning tools.
- Lays a foundation to connect to the Rio Salado and infrastructure investments to prioritize people walking, biking, and using transit.
- Provides support for future grant and funding opportunities towards achieving the community vision.
- Provides guidance and support for public and private investments to ensure community and environmental benefits are prioritized in alignment with the local and regional vision for the future.
- Provides a tool for all partners to be held accountable as vision advisors through advocating and participating in a diverse array of implementation actions to achieve the community vision.

THIS PLAN DOES NOT

- Rezone any property, business, or residence.
- Purchase any property, business, or residence.
- Impose any regulatory standards that are not already applicable.
- Create a new river restoration plan, but it does support the continued restoration of the RSHRA.

ONE

INTRODUCTION

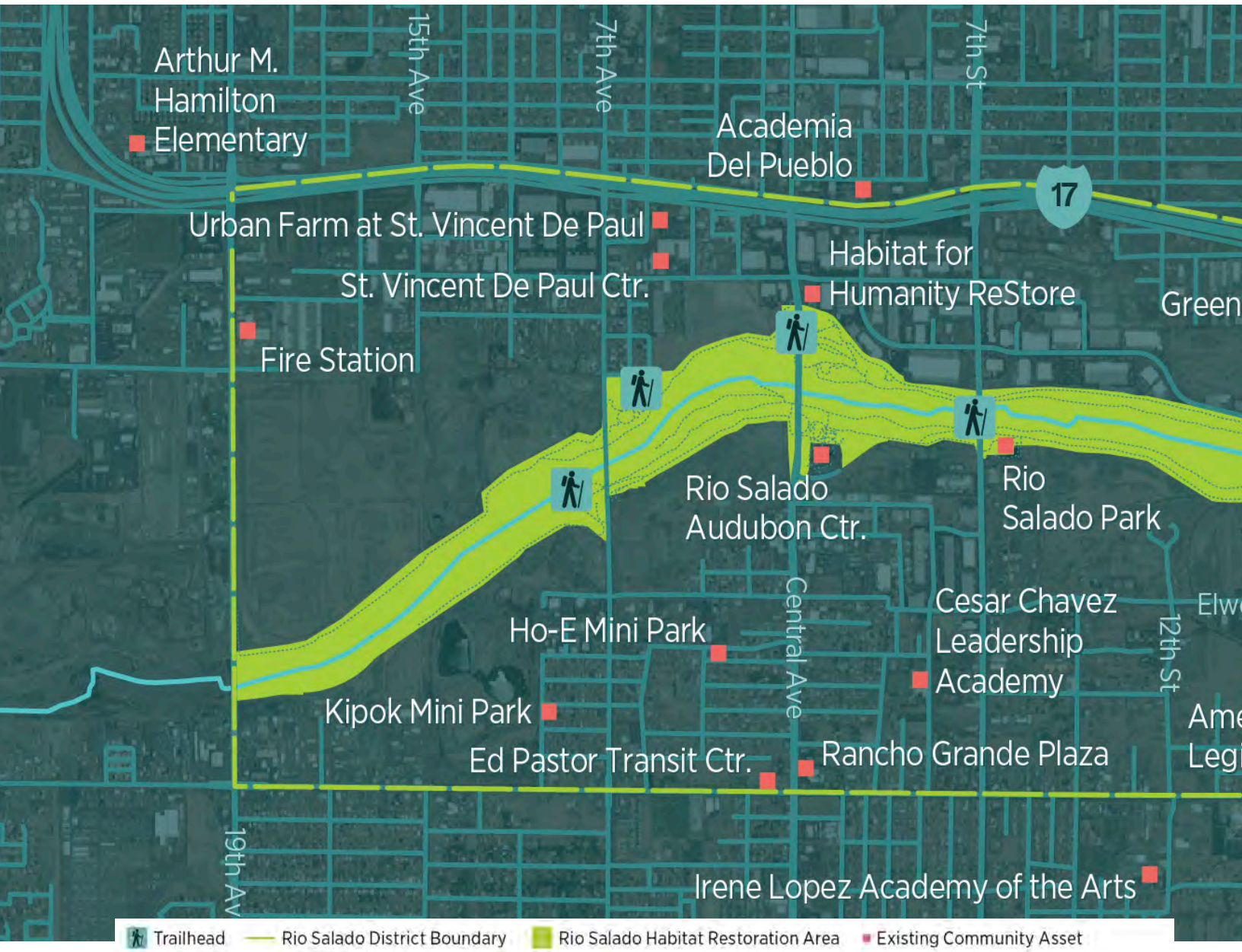
The Rio Salado District Policy Plan provides a framework for directing development within the neighborhoods surrounding the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (RSHRA). This plan is built on a shared vision that emphasizes the integration of nature, community, and the built environment.

This section of the plan describes the key policy for promoting a walkable, healthy, and well-connected Rio Salado District. It also summarizes the planning process and highlights the efforts made to actively promote public participation.

RIO SALADO DISTRICT AREA

In 1999, U.S. Congress authorized more than $85 million through the federal Water Resources Development Act to transform approximately 595 acres along five miles of the Salt River (Rio Salado), from 28th Street to 19th Avenue, in Phoenix.

This transformative construction project spanned from 2002 through 2009 and consisted of low-flow channel improvements to mitigate flooding and habitat restoration which created a unique urban ecosystem that restored native wetland and riparian habitats of the historic Salt River. The project was and is known as the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (RSHRA). Although the river restoration itself is not part of this plan, the RSHRA is a focal point for the Rio Salado District area.

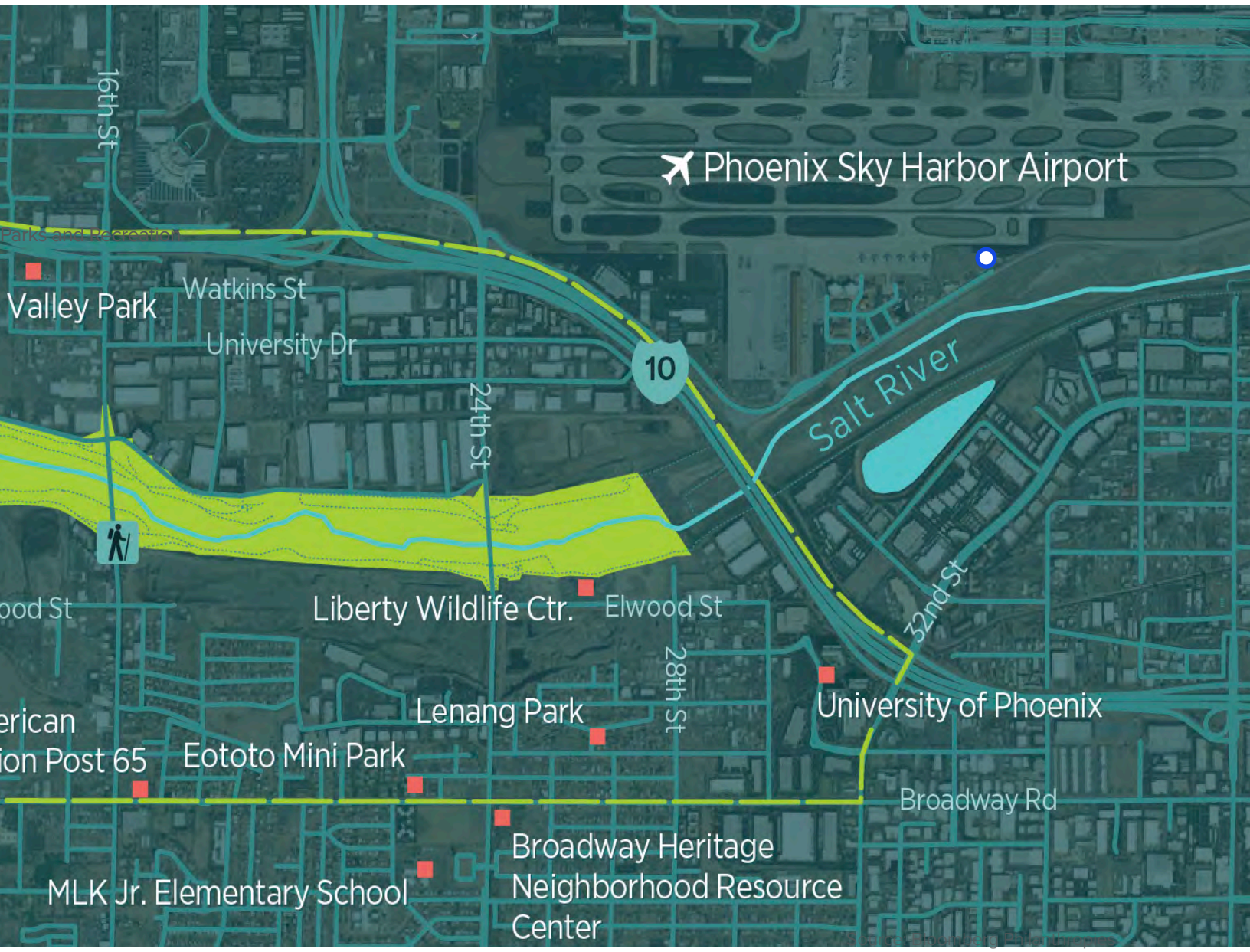


The Rio Salado District Policy Plan presents a renewed vision for transforming the area along and beyond the banks of the RSHRA, building on the foundation of prior efforts, including the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan (2003).

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan provides a robust plan that respects the existing neighborhoods and restored ecosystem, while delivering a tailored approach that will guide development in alignment with the community vision for the study area.

7 Square Miles
Rio Salado District

595 Acres
Habitat Restoration Area



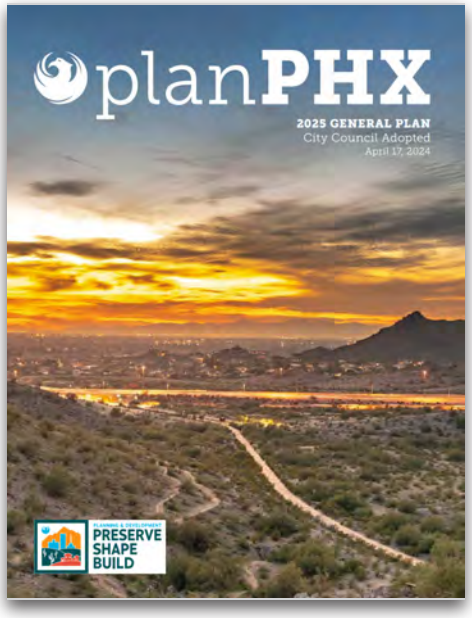
EXISTING PLANS + INITIATIVES

Citywide Policy Foundation

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan relies and builds upon numerous planning efforts undertaken by the City. Some of the plans were adopted decades ago, while some are more recent. Below is a non-exhaustive list of these foundational plans:

City of Phoenix General Plan (2025)

As the city's long-range policy guide, the General Plan sets overarching principles around livability, opportunity, and connectivity. Its emphasis on growing smarter, building a connected city, and strengthening neighborhoods is carried forward in the Rio Salado District Policy Plan.



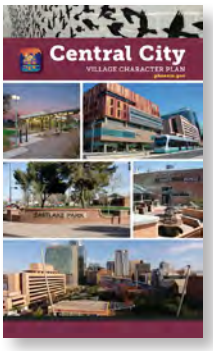
South Central TOD Community Plan (2022)

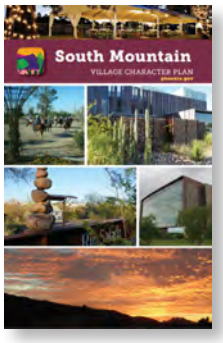
The South Central Transit Oriented Development (SCTOD) Community Plan was adopted in 2022 and provides a guide for transforming the South Central Corridor communities into walkable transit-oriented communities. The plan describes the history of the area, the multi-year public engagement process, implementation strategies and five-year action plans to achieve the vision.



Other Relevant Plans

- 2021 Climate Action Plan (Update In Progress)
- 2024 Shade Phoenix Plan
- Active Transportation Plan (2023)
- PHX Land Reuse Strategy (2020)
- Target Area B Redevelopment Plan (1980, Rev. 2016)
- Del Rio Area Brownfields Plan (2012)
- Village Character Plans (2018 and 2021)
- Rio Montaña Area Plan (2000)
- South Phoenix Village Redevelopment Area Plan (2001)



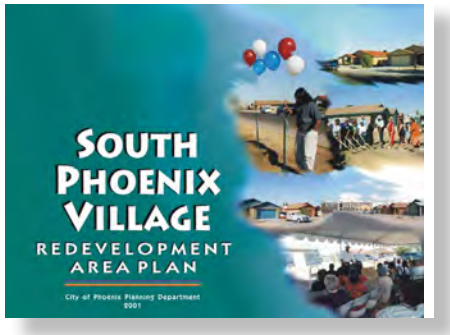


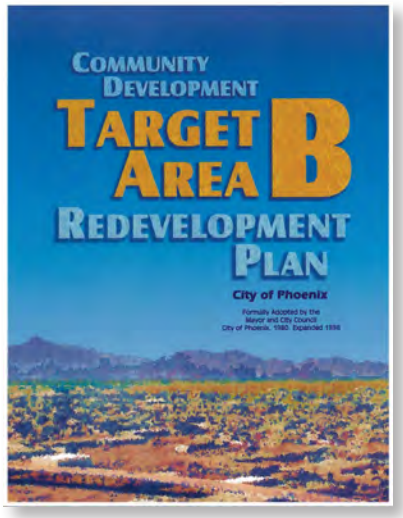


Other Relevant Plans (Continued)



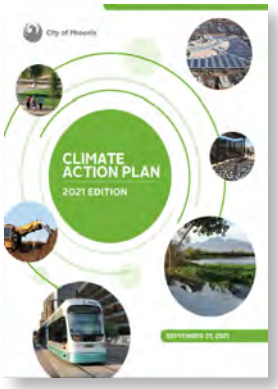






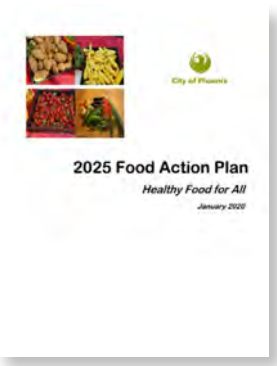
Other Department Plans and Initiatives









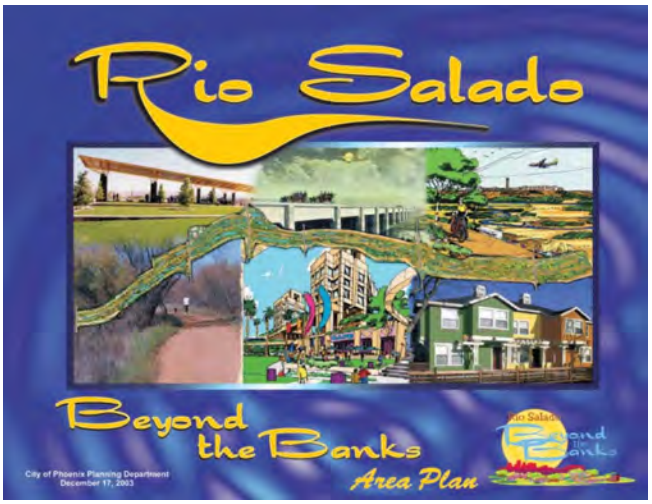






RIO SALADO BEYOND THE BANKS AREA PLAN

Source: Bloomberg Associates



Beyond the Banks Area Plan

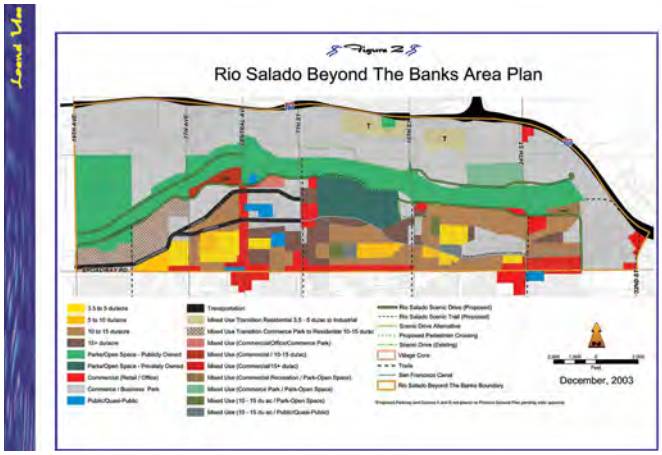
In early 2000, a 25-member Rio Salado Advisory Committee was appointed, and began with a series of six public workshops, and 37 public meetings were held to discuss land use preferences and to gain input from area residents. This led to the creation of the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan, adopted by the Phoenix City Council in 2003. The area plan identified goals and policies to guide development decisions along and beyond the banks of the RSHRA. To date, this plan continues to be a source of information and guides land use decisions.



Construction of **trails along Habitat Restoration Area (photo to the left)** (Goal 2.A), which allow community members and beyond to access this great natural amenity.

Completion of the **Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center (top photo)**, which opened in 2009 to serve as a nature education center and event venue. This site is integrated with the light rail station and gateway along Central Avenue, public trails, and the Rio Salado Scenic Drive (Goal 2.B).

Several plan goals and priorities were achieved including:



Adoption of **Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan and amendment of the General Plan** (Priority 1) which City Council approved in 2003 along with the adoption of the Rio Salado Interim Overlay District (Goal 1.G), Section 626 of the City of Phoenix Zoning Ordinance, to help guide development in the Beyond the Banks area.



Connecting the Habitat Restoration Area to other parts of the city via public transit (Goal 5.B), which in addition to traditional bus stops now includes a direct connection to the regional light rail system with the light rail station at Pioneer Street and Central Avenue.



Seeking and **utilizing brownfield redevelopment funds** (Goal 6.C) to clean up pollution and rehabilitate land for future development, such as the Del Rio Landfill, now the site for the proposed Arizona Fresh Agri-Food Innovation Center.



Source: Valley Metro

Pedestrian and **streetscape improvements to South Central Avenue** (Priority 15), which the South Central light rail extension did much to advance as part of the construction of this major infrastructure project connecting Downtown Phoenix to the the South Mountain Village.

RIO PHX FRAMEWORK

Rio Reimagined

The Rio Reimagined Project is a regional effort that includes six municipalities, two tribal communities, and other entities such as Maricopa County and Salt River Project (SRP), that were convened in 2018 by Arizona State Unviersity (ASU) to sign a statement of intent. The Rio Salado District Policy Plan builds upon these principles and shared vision for the Rio Salado corridor.

RIO PHX

RIO PHX is a collaborative effort by the City of Phoenix and various business and community stakeholders to create a series of land use policy plans to help promote the Rio Salado corridor as a local and regional destination that attracts positive investment for the benefit of businesses, residents, and tourists. The Rio Salado District Policy Plan is the first policy plan under the RIO PHX initiative that will cover the 20-mile stretch of the river across the city, and establish a framework that is centered around people, nature, and the built environment.

PEOPLE

Reconnecting people to the Rio Salado and improving the well-being of communities along this river corridor is critical to realizing the vision of the Rio Salado District.

NATURE

Great respect must be paid to the river and its history as a life source, past and present. This district plan does not direct but builds on the success of previous and ongoing river restoration projects, promoting sustainable development to benefit ecological health of the river and prosperity of adjacent communities.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Integrating and designing the built environment to coexist with nature and neighborhoods is a key goal of this policy plan; while improving the quality of life for the area, attracting positive development, and increasing economic prosperity.



First Street in Downtown Phoenix
Source: Doug Golden



RIO SALADO PLACE TYPES

Reinvent PHX Strategic Policy Framework

As a result of many years of research and community engagement, plus adoption of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) policy plans and the Walkable Urban Code, the Reinvent PHX TOD Strategic Policy Framework was adopted in 2012 and identifies TOD Place Types, which correlate to land use intensities, along light rail corridors. This policy document also includes implementation policies, methods, and objectives. This framework supports the six planning element multi-disciplinary process used in prior TOD district planning efforts, in addition to the Rio Salado District Policy Plan.

The Audubon Place Type

Emerging from the Reinvent PHX Strategic Policy Framework, the Audubon Place Type located just south of Central Avenue and the Rio Salado (along the Pioneer Street light rail station) is an adopted place type that has modified policies and performance measures based on the Medium Urban Center place type. Two tiers identify the policies and performance measures for development to achieve 6 stories, up to 10 stories, if certain amenities such as open space, enhanced site design, and pedestrian access are provided.

Next Steps

As part of the adopted 2025 Phoenix General Plan, the Planning and Development Department is working with the community, including the 15 Village Planning Committees across the city, to identity areas of growth and potential new place types that will inform scale and intensity across a vibrant network of cores, centers, and corridors (including the Rio Salado). This effort will inform future land use map changes to promote opportunities to live, work, and play along these target areas.

For more information on place types, please visit the **2025 Phoenix General Plan** website.



Emerging place type categories and associated intensities based on Reinvent PHX Strategic Policy Framework (2012, amended 2016 and 2018) and City of Phoenix General Plan 2025.

CREATING A PLAN TOGETHER

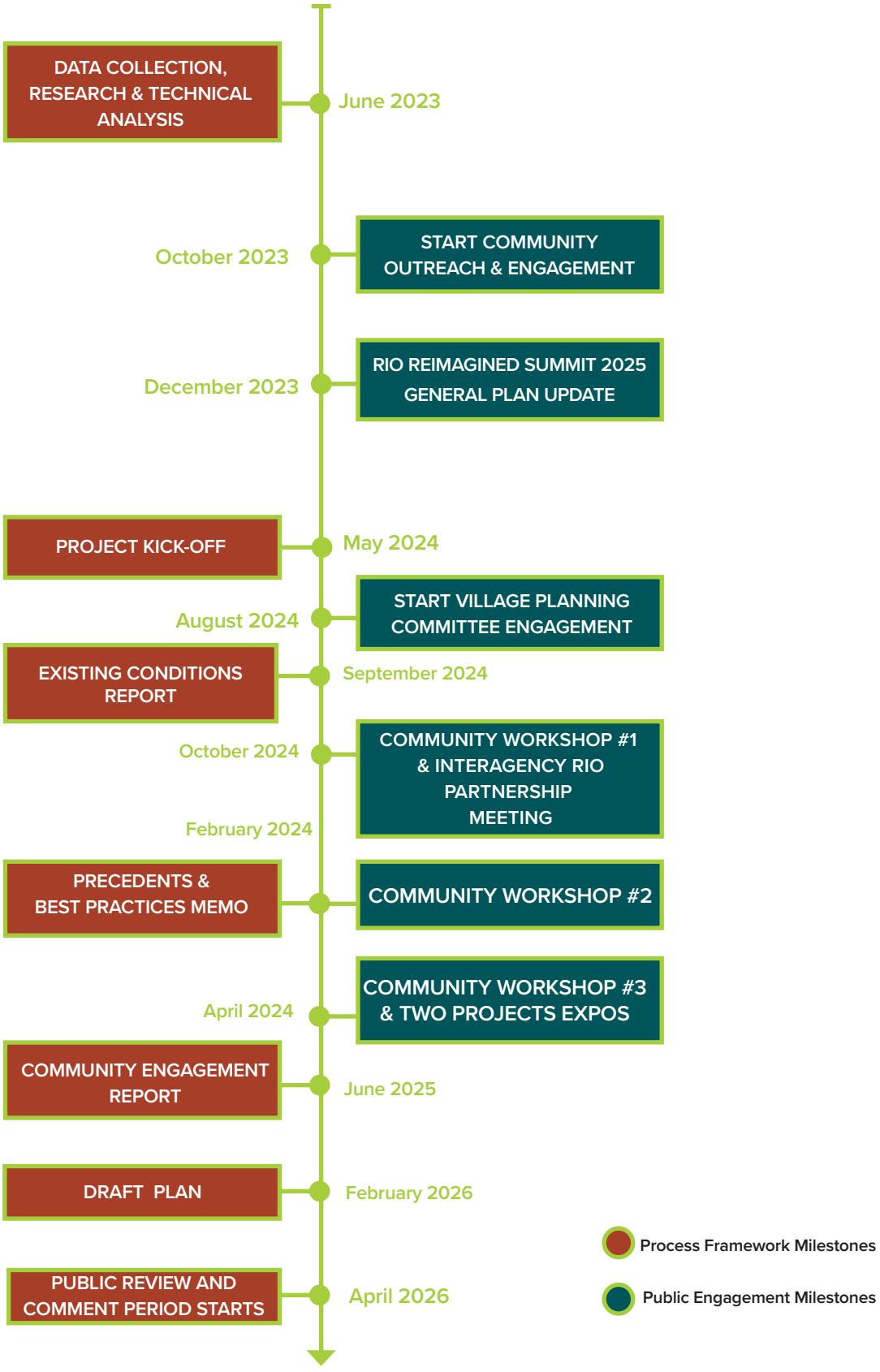
Process Framework and Public Engagement Timeline

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan was founded on the core principle of authentic, timely, and comprehensive community engagement and outreach. During the planning process, the outreach and engagement strategy was responsive and adapted to successfully reach and connect with a wide range of community stakeholders.

This strategy was embedded in a three-step planning process framework that the City of Phoenix has utilized over the last decade to engage diverse communities, resulting in a comprehensive engagement and visioning process. Early and frequent community outreach and engagement were integral to the success of the project, building public trust through ample opportunities for public input to a wide audience. A strategic combination of outreach and engagement methods resulted in diverse voices, new collaborations, trust-building, and widespread public support for the Plan throughout the planning process.

The plan thoughtfully integrates the diverse stories and feedback gathered from on-the-ground experiences during the planning process into its framework. This input was crucial in shaping the plan's actions, goals, and strategies, contributing to a more comprehensive vision for a connected, equitable, and vibrant Rio Salado District.




DATA COLLECTION, RESEARCH & TECHNICAL ANALYSIS
June 2023
October 2023
START COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT
December 2023
RIO REIMAGINED SUMMIT 2025 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
PROJECT KICK-OFF
May 2024
August 2024
START VILLAGE PLANNING COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT
EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT
September 2024
October 2024
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #1 & INTERAGENCY RIO PARTNERSHIP MEETING
February 2024
PRECEDENTS & BEST PRACTICES MEMO
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #2
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #3 & TWO PROJECTS EXPOS
April 2024
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT
June 2025
DRAFT PLAN
February 2026
PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT PERIOD STARTS
April 2026
Process Framework Milestones
Public Engagement Milestones

MEETING THE COMMUNITY WHERE THEY ARE

Early community engagement by the City of Phoenix project team began in Fall 2023 to identify community needs and gather input for shaping a vision for the area through 2050. A community Engagement Plan was created in 2024, incorporating best practices to ensure diverse voices were heard through active and passive activities.

Stakeholder outreach included businesses, property owners, residents, schools, community groups, and neighborhood associations. In June 2025, a Community Engagement Report was published, detailing the outreach process, including workshops, survey results, and key takeaways.







52
Events/ Meetings Attended

530
Survey Responses Collected

1,000+
Stakeholders Reached










AUDUBON




HELLO
MUBIA





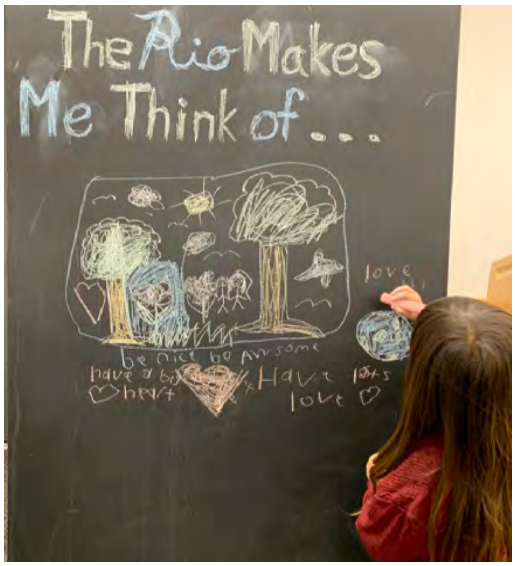











The Rio Makes
Me Think of...
love
be nice be Awsome
have a big heart
Have lots
love

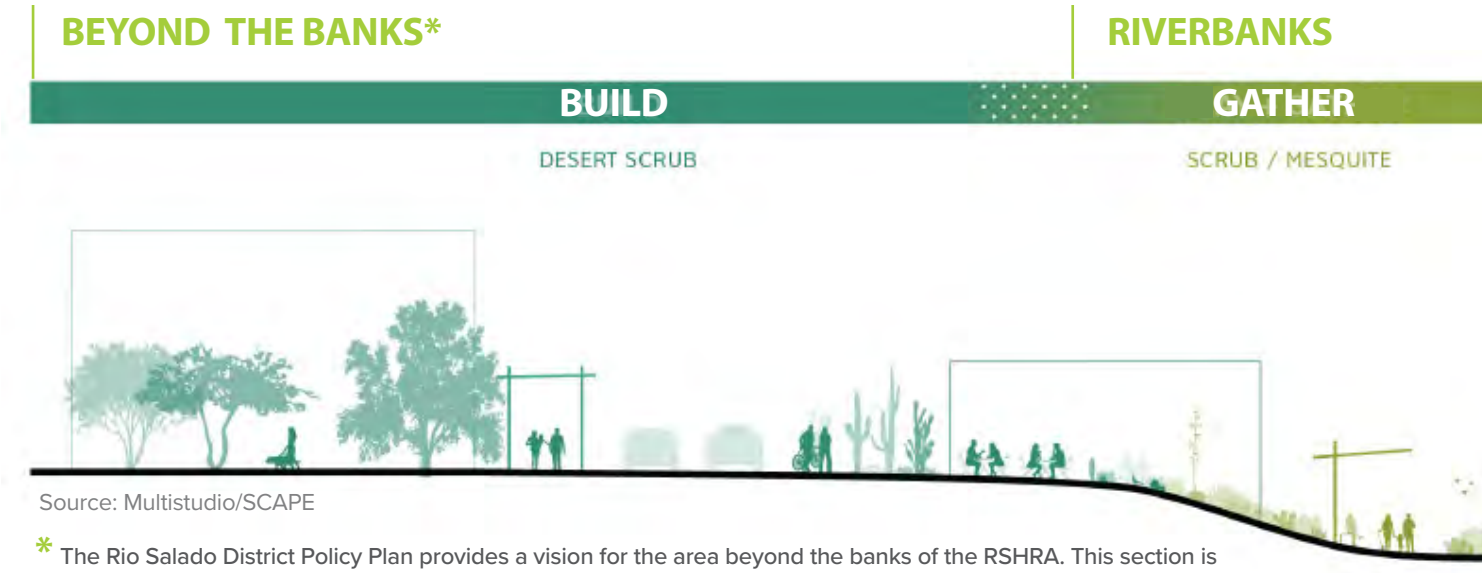






REORIENTING OURSELVES

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan presents a renewed vision for transforming the area beyond the banks of the RSHRA, while supporting continued restoration work along and within the riverbanks. This plan inspires respectful development that complements the habitat restoration within the RSHRA, while emphasizing the importance of creating connections from the river to adjacent neighborhoods to expand environmental and social benefits beyond the banks.



Source: Multistudio/SCAPE

* The Rio Salado District Policy Plan provides a vision for the area beyond the banks of the RSHRA. This section is illustrative only and is not intended to specify exact terrain conditions or future improvements in the RSHRA.

BEYOND THE BANKS

Generally set above the floodplain, outside the riverbanks, this zone extends from the limits of RSHRA on the banks of the river to adjacent neighborhoods. This zone can accommodate fixed elements, such as buildings and other large structures, that overlook the river and adjacent streets; connecting the existing urban fabric to the riverbanks.



Active Street
Source: Doug Golden

RIVERBANKS
(OVERBANK + TERRACE LEVELS)

The riverbank zone offers flexible spaces for gatherings and passive recreation between the overbank and terrace levels. Movable or resilient furnishings, shade structures could allow the area to welcome groups of people, while leaving a minimal footprint on the landscape. This area occasionally is subject to flooding.

By doing so, the city re-establishes our connection with the Salt River, which is vital for sustaining life in one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States, as well as the largest city in the Sonoran Desert. Additionally, the Salt River serves as a vital link to other natural areas, tribal nations, and neighboring cities.



RIVERBED (ACTIVE CHANNEL)

This zone allows visitors to experience and admire the natural beauty of the river up close using the existing trail system. A restored desert riparian, xeri-riparian, and wetland habitat provides a home to many of the over 150 species of birds and other wildlife that live in the area. The zone experiences seasonal flooding and contains a more consistent flow of water.



Nature Fest PHX
Source: VGPhotoz



TWO

WHO WE ARE

This chapter delves into the Rio Salado District through research and community engagement, examining the current conditions, demographic profile, key assets, and challenges the community experiences in the area.

By focusing on the unique characteristics of the District, it offers a comprehensive overview of its identity, utilizing a framework based on six essential planning elements.

Furthermore, this analysis highlights the ways in which community assets can be leveraged to address challenges and enhance overall well-being.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for informed decision-making and future planning initiatives that aim to foster sustainable development in the District.

RIO REIMAGINED: VISION IN THE MAKING



Historic Rio Reimagined Design Concept
Source: AZ Big Media

A Long-Standing Regional Vision

The Rio Reimagined or Rio Salado Project encompasses portions of the Salt River (Rio Salado), the Gila River and confluence with the Agua Fria River along a 55-mile corridor that spans across City of Buckeye, City of Goodyear, Gila River Indian Community, City of Avondale, City of Phoenix, City of Tempe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, City of Mesa, and Maricopa County.

1966-1969

The College of Architecture at ASU studied the redevelopment and habitat restoration potential for the Salt River.

1969-1974

Valley Forward Association assumed responsibility for carrying forward the Rio Salado project and completed community-wide activities and consultant studies related to the Salt River.

1978

The Corps of Engineers completed a study of the Salt River from the Gila River Confluence to the Granite Reef Dam.

1979-1980

The Rio Salado Development District (RSDD) was the first official Rio Salado organization created by law.

The San Francisco Canal

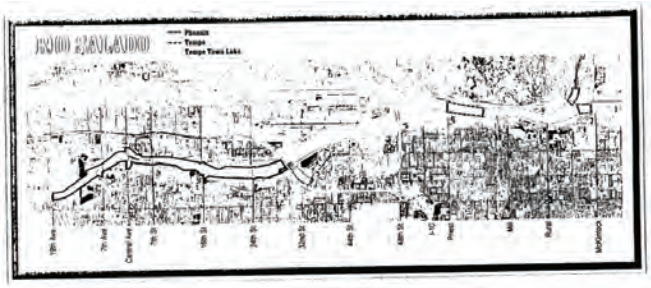
The San Francisco Canal (North Branch), an open ditch irrigation canal located north of Broadway Road, is an important relic of the area's agricultural history dating back to the late 1800's. Originally constructed to manage irrigation needs and facilitate the drainage of excess water, the canal played a vital role in the development of the surrounding agricultural areas.

As part of the larger network of canals designed to support the growing population and farming activities in Maricopa County, the San Francisco Canal helped to transform what was once a desert landscape into a productive agricultural region. Over the decades, the canal has also provided recreational opportunities for local residents and served as a habitat for various wildlife species, contributing to the region's biodiversity.

Today, the San Francisco Canal remains a vital component of South Phoenix's infrastructure, underscoring the community's enduring connection to water management and land use. Its historical significance highlights the engineering efforts of early settlers and planners who envisioned a sustainable future for this bustling area.

Mid-1960's to Early 1990's

This regional project was championed by Arizona's late Senator John McCain and late Congressman Ed Pastor, who requested designation as a Federal Urban Waters Partnership location. Through the leadership of the late Congressman Ed Pastor, the City of Phoenix has worked to revitalize the Rio Salado and the corridor surrounding it since the late 1990s.



1987

A public vote defeated a countywide property tax to support project implementation.

1990

The Maricopa County Flood Control District started a six-year project to control floodwaters that recovered approximately 800 acres of developable land in the Salt River floodplain.

1997-1998

The Corps of Engineers conducted a feasibility study on the Salt River in Phoenix and Tempe, recommending federal involvement in the project.

Continue on next page

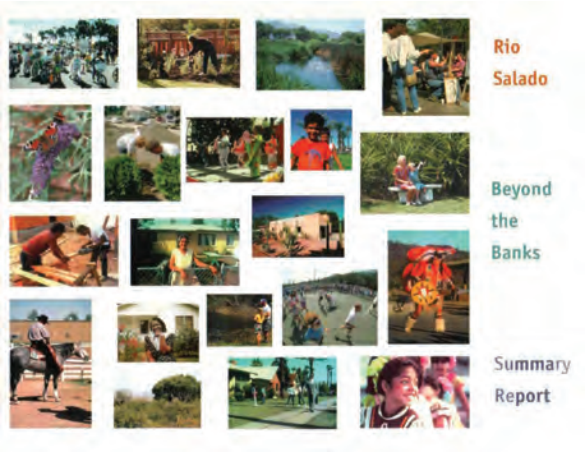
The canal is managed by SRP Salt River Project (SRP) and provides water irrigation to a few remaining residential customers. The activation of this linear corridor will require close partnership between SRP, City of Phoenix, and adjacent landowners along existing open ditch areas between 12th Street and 28th Street.

The accompanying image from 1980 shows a segment of the water-filled San Francisco Canal between 40th Street and Wier Avenue and 36th Street and Roeser Road.



San Francisco Canal
Source: Library of Congress

RIO REIMAGINED: VISION IN THE MAKING



1998

The City Manager appointed the 28-person Beyond the Banks Advisory Committee, who spent over a one-year period to develop a vision for the area beyond the banks of the Rio Salado Project.

1999

Congress authorized more than $85 million through the federal Water Resources Development Act to transform about 595 acres along the five miles of the Salt River, from 28th Street to 19th Avenue, in Phoenix.


City aims to clean up Rio Salado area

Beyond the banks

"New projects along the river will have ... better aesthetics and more jobs, too. We plan to be taking away the more damaging uses and replacing them with nicer ones."

Newspaper Article
Source: Arizona Republic



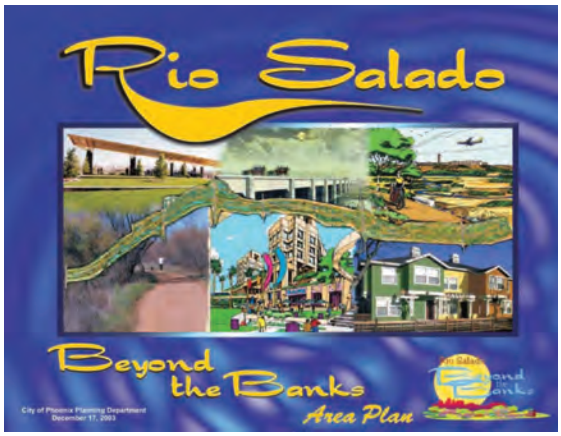
2000-2002

Construction of the low-flow channel started approximately 1,500 feet west of the I-10 bridge, continuing west to 19th Avenue. Phoenix City Council approved the Rio Salado Interim Overlay (RSIO) District, which became effective in January, 2002. Habitat construction is scheduled from 19th Avenue and 28th Street between 2002 and 2005.

2003-2009

Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan is adopted by Phoenix City Council in 2003.

The Rio Salado Phoenix project opened to the public in 2005, and was completed in 2009.



Late 1990's to Present



Rio Reimagined Brochure
Source: Arizona State University

2018

Six cities (including City of Phoenix), two tribal communities, Maricopa County, and Salt River Project signed a statement of intent for the Rio Salado Project, convened by Arizona State University.



South Central Light Rail Extension Opening
Source: Valley Metro

2025

The City of Phoenix purchased 30 acres of land for redevelopment just east of Central Avenue, south of the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center, using voter-approved GO Bond (2023) funds.

The South Central light rail line extension project opened in June 2025.

TODAY

2026

Del Rio Area Brownfields Plan is approved in 2012.

2012

The U.S. Department of Transportation awarded a $25 million RAISE grant to the City of Phoenix for the 3rd Street Rio Salado Bike/Pedestrian Bridge and Pathway improvements. The project is currently in the design phase and is expected to be completed by Fall 2029.

The Phoenix City Council approved the South Central TOD Community Plan in 2022.

2022





Bridge Grant Award Ceremony
Source: azbex

HISTORIC FACTORS

Hohokam

Over a thousand years ago, nomadic peoples began settling on the banks of the Salt River, what is now considered the Rio Salado. These precontact farmers, referred to as the "Hohokam" and understood to be primarily Ancestral O'Odham and Piipaash, developed an expansive network of irrigation canals and constructed large villages in this area. This agricultural society farmed throughout the valley, skillfully managing water, and creating a complex, longstanding civilization.

The Rio Salado District area was the site of at least four Hohokam canals and two nearby villages that were located on higher ground beyond the river's floodplain. Floods and modern-day activities have removed much of the Hohokam cultural resources along the banks of the river.

San Francisco Canal

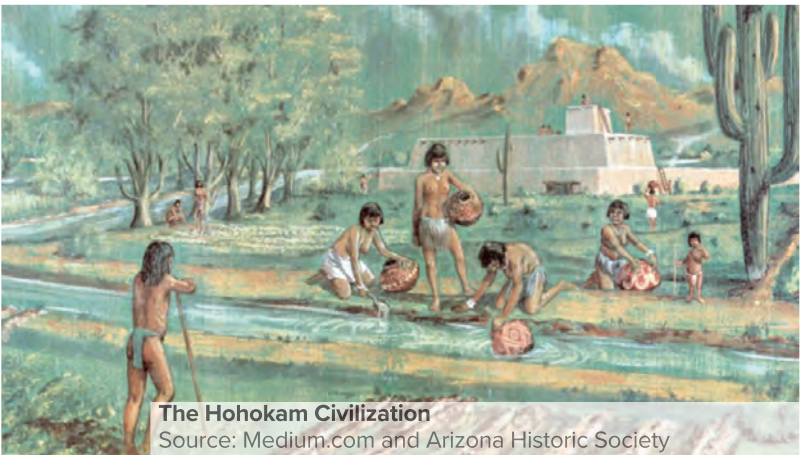
In 1871, Anglo and Mexican farmers had established grain farms along their newly constructed canal, what we know as the San Francisco Canal. The coverage of this canal extends west from Tempe, along the south bank of the Salt River, with the north branch of the canal reaching beyond Central Avenue and its south branch between 28th and 16th Streets.

Although several pioneers had established homesteads in the area near the river and along the San Francisco Canal, the first of these to consolidate large parcels of land was Michael Wormser. By investing in water rights in the area, Wormser was able to use most of his land for farming. Three years after Wormser's passing in 1898, 6,070 out of the some 9,000 acres under Wormser's ownership were acquired by Bartlett-Heard Land and Cattle Company. This company established one of the most successful and diversified farming operations that produced many grains, citrus, fruits, nuts, vegetables, cotton, and its primary crop alfalfa, known for feeding livestock, something the ranch had plenty of including cattle, horses, mules, sheep, poultry, and ostriches.

Rio Salado Flooding

The cycle of dramatic floods from the late 1800s to 1910 prompted a fierce competition between Tempe and Phoenix for a bridge over the Rio Salado. During this period, areas south of the river were agricultural, requiring laborers in Phoenix to cross the river via a dirt track (then Center Street) on foot or in horse-drawn carriages. Tempe argued for a bridge due to its shorter span and better bedrock, while Phoenix had support from Dwight B. Heard, whose 7,000 acres lay south of the river and who had land planning experience from the Roosevelt Dam project. Following the 1909 county election, Phoenix was awarded the Center Street Bridge, now known as the Central Avenue Bridge, which was dedicated in 1911. At that time, it was recognized as the world's longest reinforced concrete bridge.

From its completion until 1966, the bridge facilitated easier commutes for laborers and spurred development in south Phoenix, but flooding continued to impact the bridge in 1922, 1938, and 1941. In the 1922 flood, one part of the bridge lowered three inches due to unstable conditions.



The Hohokam Civilization
Source: Medium.com and Arizona Historic Society



Postcard view of typical southside farmlands
Source: Beyond the Banks Area Plan



Center Street Bridge
Source: Phoenix Magazine



Familia el Corazón de la Comunidad Mural
Source: Arizona Memory Project

Ultimately flooding destroyed the Center Street Bridge in 1966. Traffic was redirected to a separate bridge, which became congested, leading to the demolition of both bridges for the construction of the current Central Avenue Bridge.

Additionally, regulation of water flows starting in the early 20th century adversely impacted the natural riparian habitat of the Salt River, altering its perennial flow regime and resulting in a drier river bed. The dry riverbed became a site for sand and gravel mining, landfills, and illegal dumping, prompting efforts to restore the Rio Salado.

To learn more about the area's history, refer to the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan.

Sources: The South Central Transit Oriented Development Community Plan (2022), "Phoenix's Center Street Bridge connected a city divided by the Salt River" (AZ Central/The Republic), and "A Bridge to Remember" (Phoenix Magazine).



Infamous image of 3-year old DeWitt Wheat leading construction workers on site during Center Street bridge construction
Source: AZ Central/The Republic

BARRIOS UNIDOS

Located in south-central Phoenix, several neighborhoods, or barrios, are situated between Washington Street (North), 24th Street (East), University Drive (South), and 7th Street (West). To the west of 16th Street are Cuatro Milpas, Green Valley, and El Campito, while to the east lies a barrio formerly known as Golden Gate. Following the west approach land acquisition, "Barrios Unidos" came to represent the remaining residents and their shared community identity.

Prior to the late 1940s, housing segregation was prevalent, with deeds that barred Mexican Americans from purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods. From the 1900s until 2003, this area underwent significant change. Between the late 1970s and early 1980s, Golden Gate began to decline, and today, it has few, if any, residents remaining.

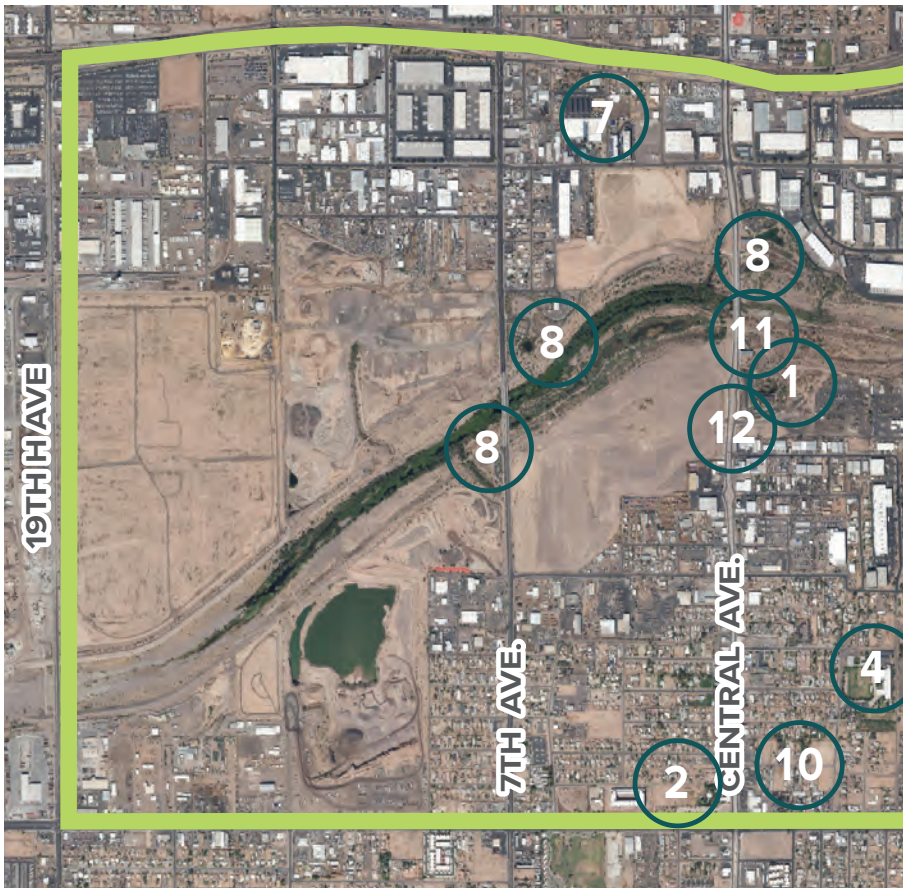
The construction of the Interstate 17 in the 1950's and expansion of the Sky Harbor Airport in the 1970's relocated some of the barrios or neighborhoods that existed in this area which were predominantly comprised of minority residents. Cuatro Milpas, Green Valley, and El Campito have gradually faced a similar fate as that of Golden Gate.

The struggles for social and civil rights related to housing, education, and employment in the 1950s, along with the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, impacted Phoenix and reached the barrios, bringing César Chávez and the United Farm Workers to stay at the Santa Rita Center, also known as Santa Rita Hall, the social hall for Santa Rita Chapel of Sacred Heart Parish. However, real change was difficult to achieve, as residents observed that their living conditions appeared neglected. Until 2003, some barrios lacked sidewalks, paved streets, and city services.

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS

The Rio Salado District has unique destinations to the north and south of the RSHRA, that are celebrated and support existing communities within and beyond the district boundaries. Through researching existing plans and community engagement efforts, several community assets have emerged. These assets are represented on the adjacent map.

In addition to the assets represented in the adjacent map, other community assets include mini parks, long-standing businesses and organizations, health facilities, and historic buildings.





1. Audubon Center



2. Ed Pastor Transit Center



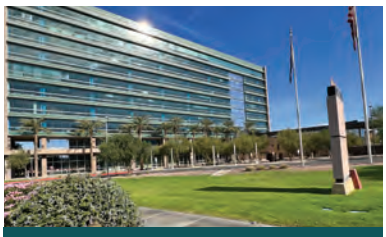
3. RSHRA /Trails



7. St. Vincent De Paul

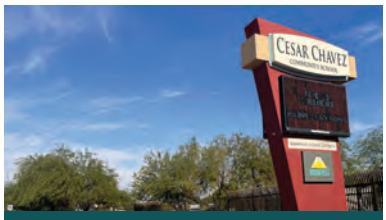


8. Rio Salado Trailheads



9. Riverpoint Business Park





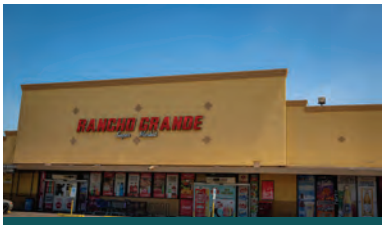
4. Cesar E. Chavez School



5. Liberty Wildlife Center



6. Green Valley Park



10. Rancho Grande Plaza



11. Rio Gateways on Central



12. Light Rail Station

DEMOGRAPHIC & SOCIOECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Rio Salado District		City of Phoenix
54%		38%
Percentage of households that have an income of less than $50k		
19%		12%
Percentage of individuals with limited English proficiency		
15%		4%
Percentage of households that do not have access to a vehicle		
32%		18%
Percentage of population employed in a service occupation		

Rio Salado District		City of Phoenix
20%	Percentage of individuals that are employed in management, business, science and arts occupations	37%
52%	Percentage of all housing units that are renter-occupied	44%
4%	Percentage of working individuals of age that use public transit or bike to work	18%
72%	Percentage of residents that are Hispanic	42%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5 year Estimates (MAG, 2025)

EXISTING CONDITIONS & POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Six Planning Element Framework

The three-step planning process for the Rio Salado District Policy Plan utilized the six planning element framework to engage stakeholders. This framework helped inform and capture a variety of interdisciplinary topics while addressing diverse stakeholder perspectives toward establishing a shared-community vision incorporated into the Rio Salado District Policy Plan.



Land Use

Land Use focuses on the spatial pattern of urban development, including intensity, design, building form, and unique place-making characteristics.



Housing

Housing focuses on the variety of types, quality, quantity, and affordability of residential units.



Economic Development

Economic Development focuses on the community's access to jobs, training, education opportunities and types of employers and employment diversity.



Health

Health focuses on key aspects of the built environment that impact public health such as access to healthy food, healthcare, recreation, and shade.



Mobility

Mobility focuses on the movement of residents, including the availability of public transit, safe pedestrian routes, and other transportation considerations.



Green Systems

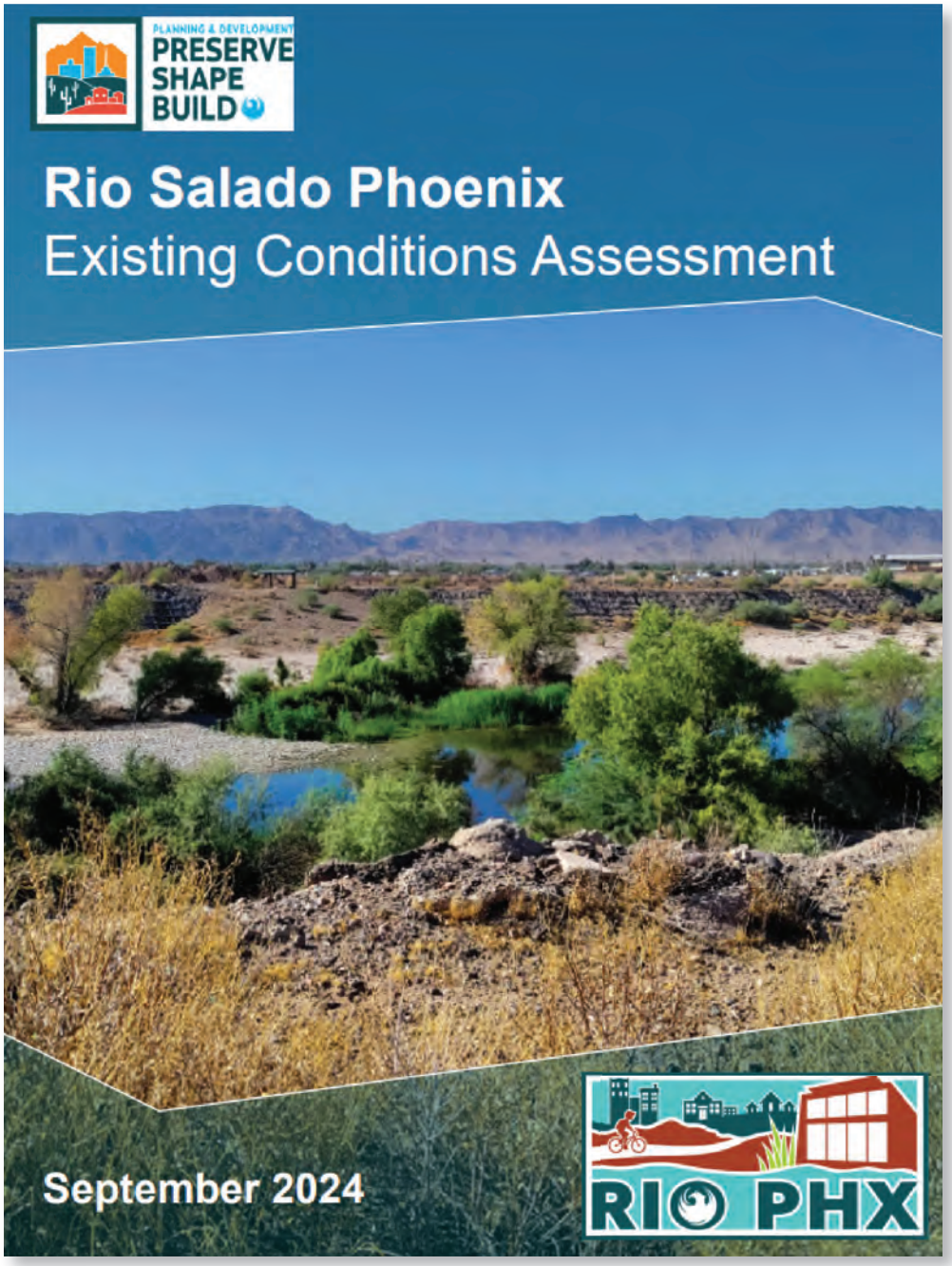
Green Systems focuses on climate mitigation through building design, adaptive infrastructure, and improving climate resilience.

Understanding the Current Conditions

In 2023, the City of Phoenix launched the RIO PHX initiative, as a collaborative effort with various project and community stakeholders to create a series of land use policy plans across a 20-mile corridor following the Rio Salado to be a key implementation component of the regional Rio Reimagined project.

The Existing Conditions Assessment was the first step in developing a policy plan for the Rio Salado District, initially referred to as “Rio Salado Phoenix”. The assessment serves as a baseline for the City and the public to measure the impact of policy and changes in the community over time. This assessment, along with the District Plan, highlights the current conditions of the District, categorized by the six planning elements.

To review the latest **Existing Conditions Report**, please visit the RIO PHX website.

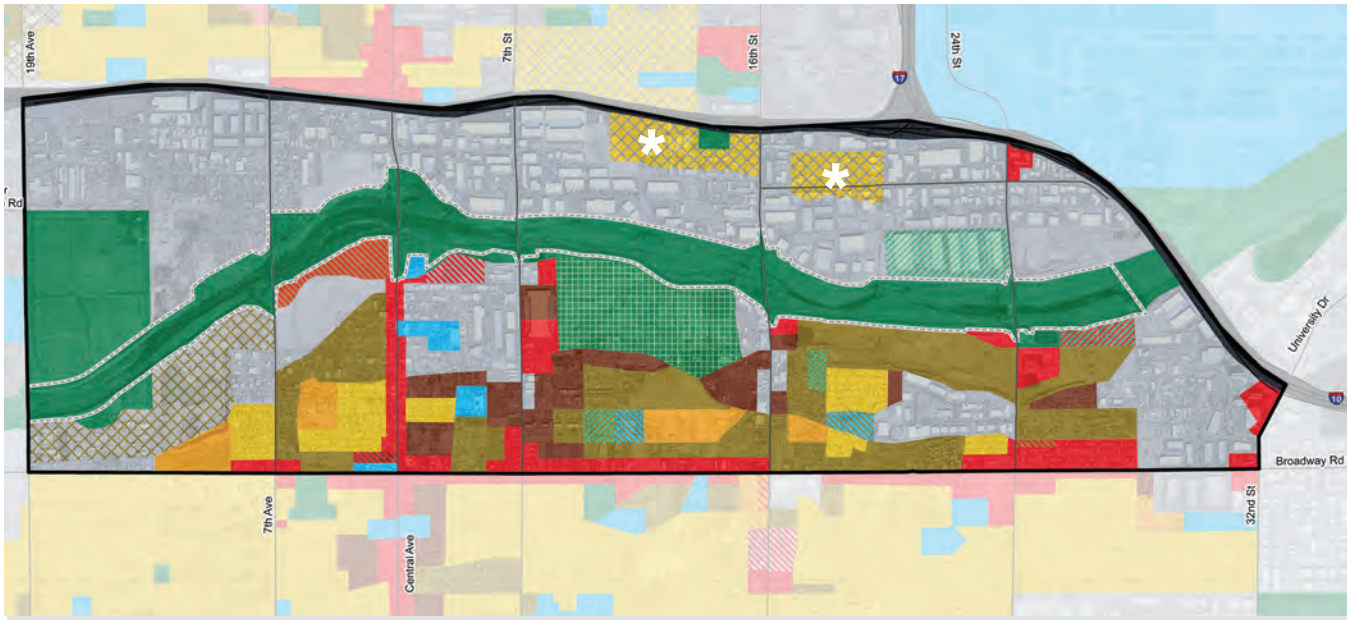


Current Conditions

Overview

Land use has a significant impact on the character of a neighborhood and the quality of life for existing businesses and residents. These impacts also affect the natural ecosystem and outside visitors exploring the area. By adapting new and existing land uses through policy and action to meet community needs, a positive downstream effect will be observed on the other five planning elements.

Existing General Plan Land Use Map



Residential

- 3.5 to 5 du/ac
- 5 to 10 du/ac
- 10 to 15 du/ac
- 15+ du/ac

- **Parks/Open Space (Public)**
- **Public/Quasi-Public**
- **Commercial**
- **Transportation**
- **Industrial or Commerce Park**
- * **Transition from residential to non-residential land use**

Existing Zoning Entitlements

Over 75% of the Rio Salado District is zoned for industrial use, primarily north of the river banks. A mix of zoning districts, including residential and commercial, is primarily located south of the river. The area experiences encroachment of additional industrial uses, both small and large-scale developments.



Quick Facts

- Rio Salado District Area: **7 square miles**
- Land area within a half-mile of a light rail line: **1.5 square miles** (21% of land)
- Land area within 500' of the RSHRA: **3 square miles** (43% of land)

Rio Salado Interim Overlay District

The Rio Salado Interim Overlay District (RSIOD), Section 655 of the Zoning Ordinance, is designed to protect the investment in and maximize the benefits of the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (RSHRA).

The overlay district is designed to control open, outdoor land uses and other uses in order to have a positive impact on the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Project and add to the long-term value of adjacent land. The RSIOD also established a 500-foot buffer around the RSHRA which requires certain development within the buffer to pursue a special permit or use permit, a type of land entitlement.

Other unique standards of the overlay include special permit requirement for specific land uses, and an administrative review of industrial development projects under 10 acres, while large projects are subject to Commerce Park District standards. The overlay also contains standards for new one and two dwelling unit homes and the filling and compaction of open pits. New uses such as billboards, slaughterhouses, and salvage yards are prohibited.

Unique Districts and Area Standards

Four Corners Overlay District (FCOD)
The FCOD overlaps the Rio Salado District boundary along the intersection of 24th Street and Broadway Road and provides guidance to new development on site design and zoning standards.

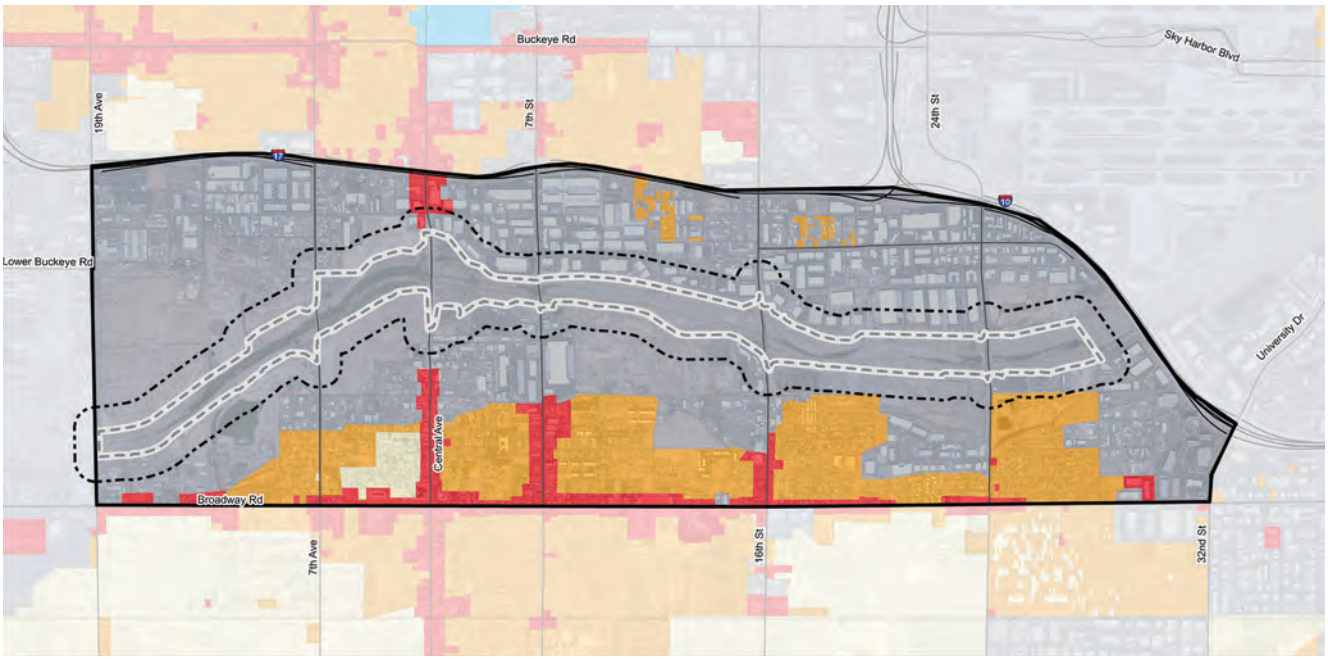
Airport Noise Impact Overlay District (AIOD)
The AIOD intends to protect the health, safety, and welfare of residents from the noise of Sky Harbor Airport and promote compatible non-residential uses in noise-impacted areas.

Infill Development District
This infill district promotes single-family attached development, whether by right or Use Permit, to encourage housing diversity and affordability.

South Mountain Village Core
The Village Core is located along the intersection of Central Avenue and Broadway Road, where additional height and parking reductions are allowed by right.

South Central TOD
In 2022, the South Central Transit Oriented Development Community Plan established policy “between the 7s” along the new light rail line. This allows for properties within half a mile of the light rail to rezone to the Walkable Urban Code.

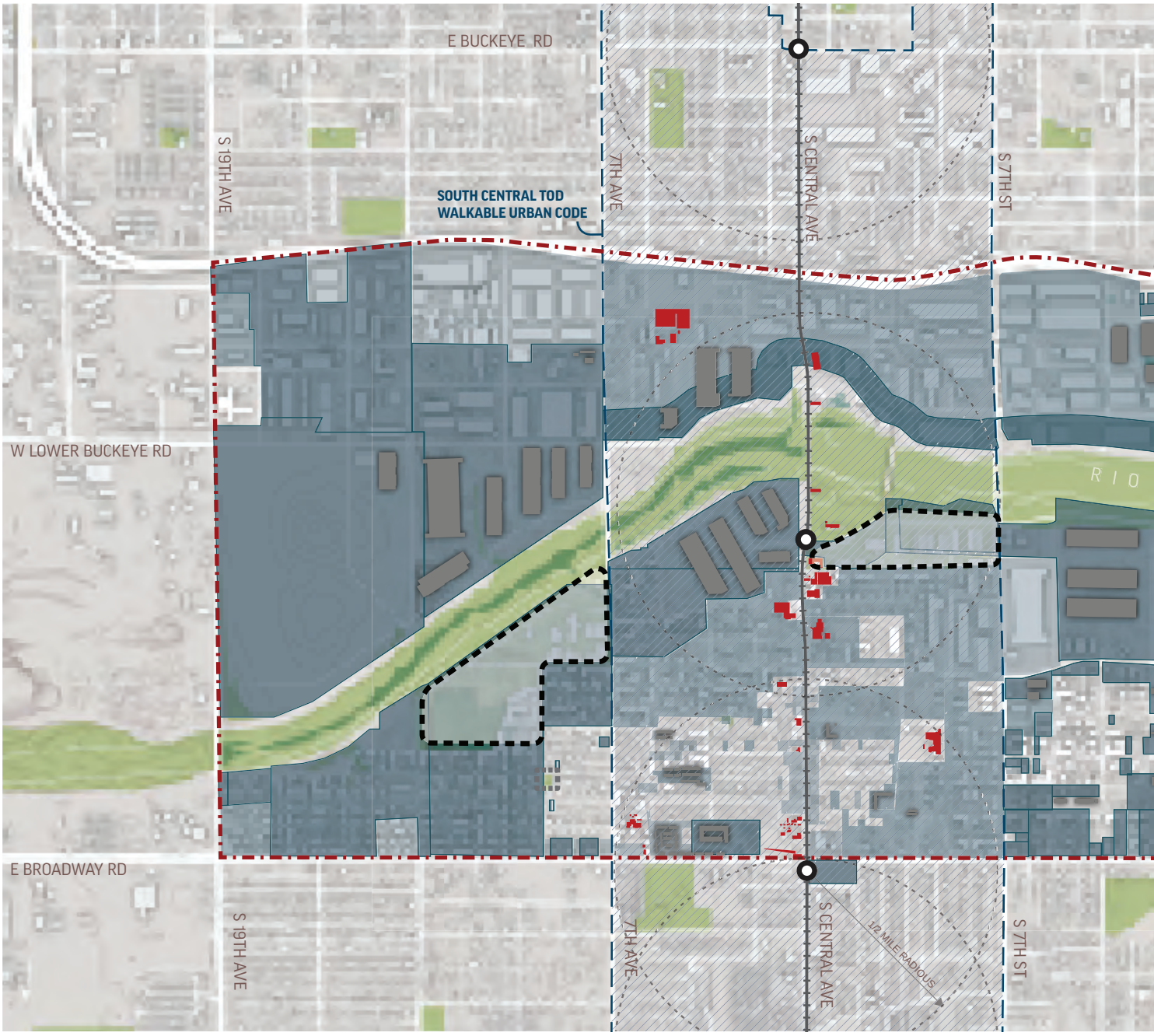
Existing Zoning Map (2025) and 500-Foot Buffer from the Rio Salado HRA



Community Identified 'Areas of Change'

Areas Of Change

In the visioning process for the Rio Salado District, community members were asked to identify areas they like, areas were they want to see change, and areas they want to see improved. The map below represents the general consensus from that feedback paired with guidance from city staff, giving shape to future recommendations in this plan. This map also shows existing points of pride and building footprints generally depicting active or proposed development projects that submitted site plans at the time of this activity.



Protect

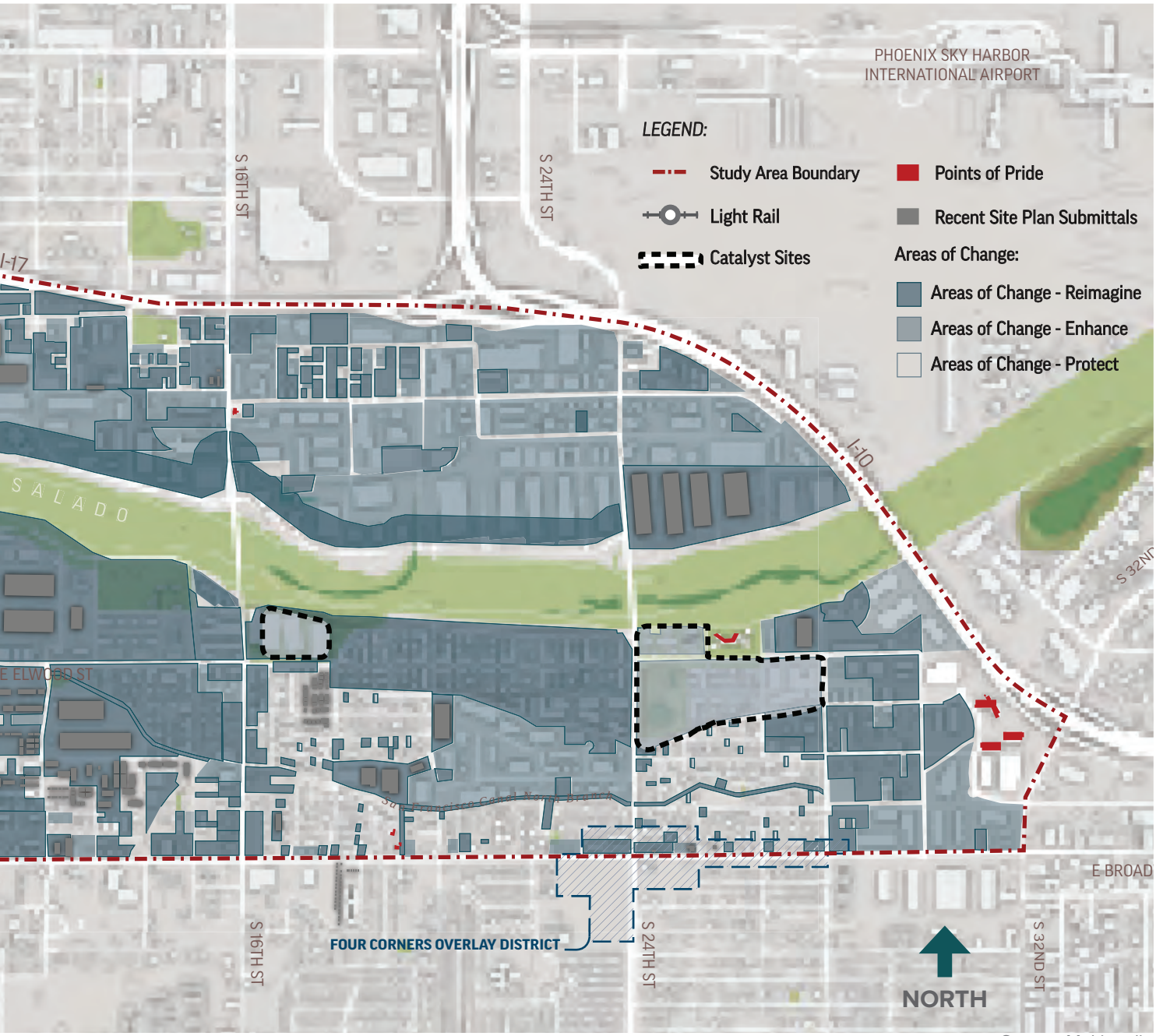
Areas where the community supports the least amount of change, such as improvements to existing single-family residential homes or the restoration of historic buildings.

Enhance

Areas that would benefit from additional landscaping, adaptive reuse of existing buildings or adding new buildings on vacant properties or parking lots with an elevated scale and intensity.

Reimagine

Areas that may completely redevelop, including a change in the scale, intensity, and potentially the land use itself. These areas would require significant investment.



Source: Multistudio

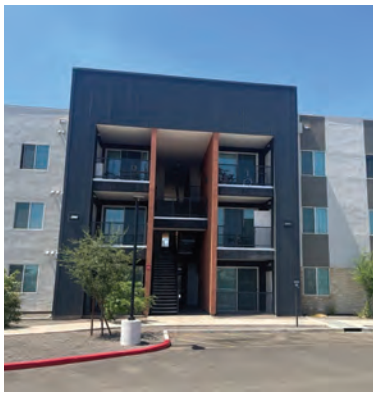
Current Conditions

Overview

Less than a fifth of the Rio Salado District is zoned for residential use, and half of the existing housing stock is 50 years or older. Additionally, the area faces high vacancy rates of 14%, which is double the city's average vacancy rate of seven percent. While having a higher vacancy rate could result in lower housing costs for renters in the area, it may also be indicative of other factors, such as housing quality or location. As the population in the metropolitan area is expected to grow 48% between 2020 and 2050, the need for new housing is urgent to increase affordability across the region, including the Rio Salado District.







Housing Units	% of all housing units are considered overcrowded	% of housing units that are single-family type (almost exclusively south of the river)	% of housing units are multi-family (these are not concentrated in one particular area)
Rio Salado District 2,362	16%	60%	35%
City of Phoenix 633,863	6.3%	32%	56%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Decennial Census

Quick Facts:

- 34 registered neighborhood associations
- 58% of homeowners have an active mortgage
- 50% of housing units are 50 years or older



New homes under construction near 28th Street and Wood Street
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Raymond Place Townhomes near 16th Street and Elwood Street
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Salt River Flats at 14th Street and Wood Street
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

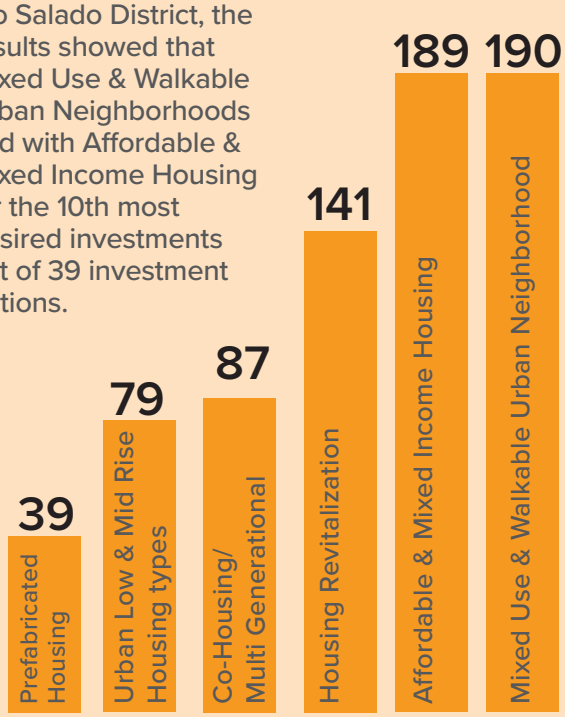
20% of Rio Salado District's housing stock was built between 1960-1970, while 30% of the existing housing stock is over 60 years old.



Single-family home near 28th Street and Wood Street
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Housing Responses Results

In a city-led survey on future investments desired by the community within the Rio Salado District, the results showed that Mixed Use & Walkable Urban Neighborhoods tied with Affordable & Mixed Income Housing for the 10th most desired investments out of 39 investment options.



Housing Affordability

1/2 of renters

pay more than 1/3 of their household income on rent,
slightly higher than the City overall (48.1%)

1/3 of renters

pay over 1/2 of their household income on rent

Current Conditions

Overview

Communities with diverse employment types and commercial activities are more resilient in the face of challenging economic times. They can provide opportunities for partnerships between businesses and the communities they operate in. The study area is a significant employment hub, with nearly 20,000 employees compared to a population of about 7,000.

Top 5 Employers (300+ Employees)

1. Apollo Group (University of Phoenix) - 1,800
2. Hamilton Sunstrand Collins Aerospace - 1,300
3. City of Phoenix - 620
4. Southwest Airlines - 530
5. Amazon - 380

Workforce Education & Employment

Of the **6,800** residents in the Rio Salado District Area, **36.7%,** are employed by **531** employers

Within the local labor pool (persons between 16-64 years old) **11%** are unemployed (City: 3.9 %)

Of the Rio Salado District Area residents age 25+, **4%** have a Bachelor degree or higher (City: 33.5%)

89.5% does NOT have a college degree (City: 31.4%), while **10.5%** have an associates degree or higher (City: 30.6%)

Quick Facts:

- 11% unemployment rate
- Local workforce has 2,513 residents
- 275 businesses specialize in MAG defined key industries



Arizona @ Work
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Key Industries

The Rio Salado District's top 5 employment types by number of employees are:

- **Construction**
- **Transportation & Distribution**
- **Education**
- **Business Services**
- **High Tech Manufacturing & Development**



Food truck
Source: Doug Golden

Size of Employers

There are a total of 531 employers with a combined 20,000 employees. Several of these employers employ the majority of the District's workforce.



Market
Source: Doug Golden

89%
of employers have less than 100 employees, but account for 50% of employees in the District

79%
of employers have less than 50 employees but only represent 32% of employees

275

Businesses specialized in key industries, as defined by Maricopa Association of Government (MAG) in the Rio Salado District

10,900
Individuals employed in key industries, as defined by MAG in the Rio Salado District

Top 3 Occupations

32% Service Occupations

23% Sales and Office Occupations

20% Management, Business Science, and Art Occupations

Current Conditions

Overview

Having easy access to affordable clinics, grocery stores, and fitness centers is crucial for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Families without nearby wellness options may put off medical care and health-promoting activities due to the time, cost, or safety concerns associated with traveling. This lack of access exacerbates health disparities, particularly in communities that have been historically underserved. Without these necessary services, people may feel more stressed and their health can suffer, making it hard for them to break this cycle of disadvantage. It's essential to ensure that everyone has equal access to health and wellness resources to improve overall health.



Source: Vitalyst Health Foundation

	Life Expectency (years)	Have High School Diploma	Households that do not own a car
Rio Salado District	67-79	58%	8%
City of Phoenix	70-80	84%	6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Decennial Census



Fresh food choices at St. Vincent De Paul Urban Farm

Quick Facts:

- There are no heat respite or city cooling stations in the District
- There are six urban parks in the Rio Salado District
- There is one grocery store and one mental health facility in the District

Food Access

Most of the Rio Salado District is considered a food desert, as there is limited access to affordable healthy food. This lack of healthy food options can lead to serious health problems such as heart disease and type two diabetes. Rancho Grande is the only grocery store in the Rio Salado District, located at the northeast corner of Central Avenue and Broadway Road. To help with this problem, community gardens such as the St. Vincent De Paul Urban Farm and Gardens of Tomorrow, provide access to fresh food in the area.

Food Desert: *low-income areas more than 1-mile from a supermarket*

Heat Risk

The high temperatures in Phoenix can cause heat-related illnesses and deaths. In 2023, Maricopa County (AZ) experienced its highest number of heat related deaths, 645, and 2024 saw the first decrease in over a decade, down to 608 deaths. While there are no heat respite or cooling centers in the Rio Salado District, there are two nearby public libraries (Harmon Library and Ocotillo Library) within a mile of the district boundary that serve as cooling centers.

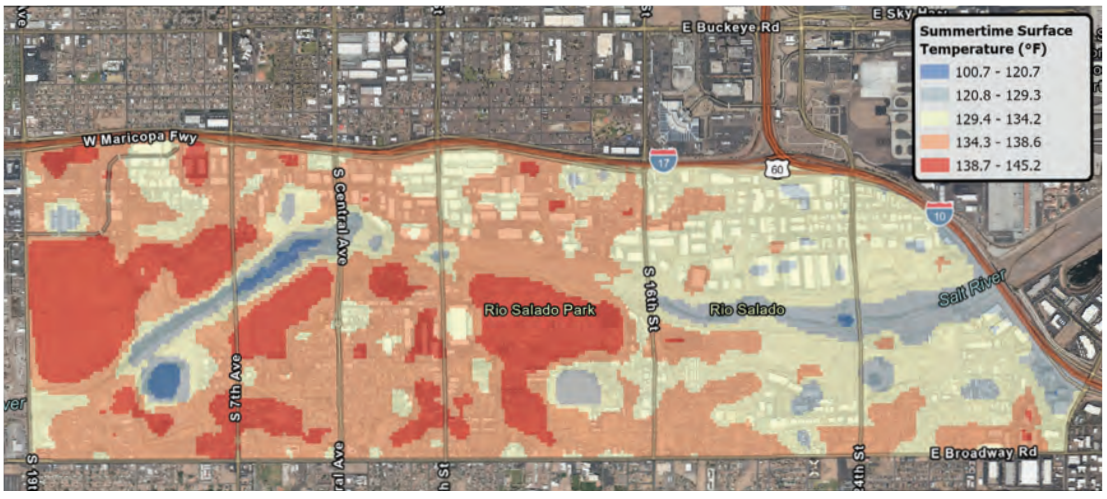
Cooling Stations/Center: *Designated, air-conditioned spaces where individuals can escape extreme heat. These centers help prevent heat-related illnesses, particularly for vulnerable populations.*

Hydration Stations: *Provides free water and cooling resources to help vulnerable populations to stay hydrated during hot weather. They aim to prevent heat-related illnesses in the community.*

The surface temperature imagery below represents the median surface temperature for summertime (June, July, and August) in 2025. The image below illustrates large areas within the study area with surface temperatures ranging from 134.3°F to 145.2°F (some surfaces get even hotter at around noon). These areas are generally bare, lacking vegetation, and directly exposed to the sun's radiation.



Cooling Center at Ocotillo Public Library
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Surface Temperature (Degrees Fahrenheit) - Summer 2025 (Source: Landsat-8, U.S. Geological Survey)

100.7-120.7 | 120.8-129.3 | 129.4-134.2 | 134.3-138.6 | 138.7-145.2

Current Conditions

Overview

Like most of Phoenix, the street grid in the Rio Salado District was designed largely for the movement of goods and people in automobiles. While various street types including local, collector, and arterial streets, serve diverse wheeled vehicles, these also serve public transit vehicles such as buses and the newly opened light rail line along Central Avenue. Sidewalks provide mobility options for pedestrians, while bicycle lanes move people in bikes.

The Rio Salado District is uniquely characterized by having an existing or planned network of scenic drives that are parallel to the north and south banks of Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area. The Rio Salado District Policy Plan proposes pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure enhancements along these scenic drives and other streets. Furthermore, current initiatives such as the Active Transportation Plan and programs such as the Phoenix Connected Active Neighborhoods (PhxCAN) promote improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in the area for increased mobility options. The Chilled Drinking Water initiative can also promote active transportation projects, in addition to shade.

Streets

The Rio Salado District largely follows the traditional street-grid network that characterizes Phoenix, but with four significant disruptors. Interstate 10 and 17 are two major freeways that border the Rio Salado District along the north and western boundaries. Former landfills and inactive mining pits along the banks of the Rio Salado present mobility barriers for residents and employees. The Salt River itself limits the north-south access across the districts to six bridges located on arterial streets. The lack of shade along many of the streets in the District challenges pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users who are exposed to high temperatures during the hotter months of the year. The Cool Corridors program launched by the Street Transportation Department intends to plant trees in targeted transportation corridors to promote safety and provide relief from high temperatures.

Quick Facts:

- 5% of District residents commute by public transit, biking, or walking
- There are 0.75 motor vehicles per person 18 years of age or older
- There are 3 HAWK (High Intensity Activated Crosswalk) signals in the District



Central Avenue and Broadway Road
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Transit (Bus and Light Rail)

Residents of the Rio Salado District have access to one light rail station at Central Avenue and Pioneer Street, with a second station near Central Avenue and Broadway Road. The Ed Pastor Transit Center at Central Avenue and Broadway Road enhances the experience for bus riders with amenities like benches, water fountains, and public art. Connecting a commuter's origin or destination to a transit node is key to improving urban mobility, in addition to overcoming other challenges such as incomplete sidewalks, bus stops without shelters, lack of shade and wayfinding on public streets



Light rail on Central Avenue
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Active Transportation (Bicycle, Pedestrian, Scooter)

There are 8.5 miles of existing bicycle lanes, primarily located on north-south arterial roads, with plans to expand east-west through future projects that include 5.5 miles of bicycle lanes on Broadway Road. The City's micromobility program currently serves the Rio Salado District west of 20th Street, providing shared scooters as a convenient option for the first and last mile connections. A major pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure project in the Rio Salado District is the 3rd Street Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge that will connect the north and south bank of the Rio Salado along the 3rd Street alignment.



Bicycle lane on Central Avenue
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Recreational Trails

There are approximately 17 miles of public trails in the Rio Salado District, primarily along the banks of the RSHRA. The 3rd Street Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge project envisions pedestrian improvements between Central Avenue and 40th Street, along the south bank trail. Additional trails and paseos, including those envisioned along north-south thoroughfares, can be planned and built over time to improve connectivity in the area and to the river.



Multi-use trail along Rio Salado
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Current Conditions

Overview

Green systems are built environment techniques designed to work in harmony with nature, creating more resilient communities. Common examples of green systems are vegetated swales or rain gardens, permeable pavement or pavers, and natural or engineered shade. Supporting "green businesses" that can develop these green systems provide an opportunity to create a circular economy and innovative sustainable solutions.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI): Measures designed to work with nature, the water cycle, and the environment to manage stormwater runoff, and achieve other co-benefits.



Benefits of GSI:

- Mitigate localized flooding
- Reduce UHI effect
- Improve localized air-quality
- Reduce supplemental landscape irrigation and support native vegetation

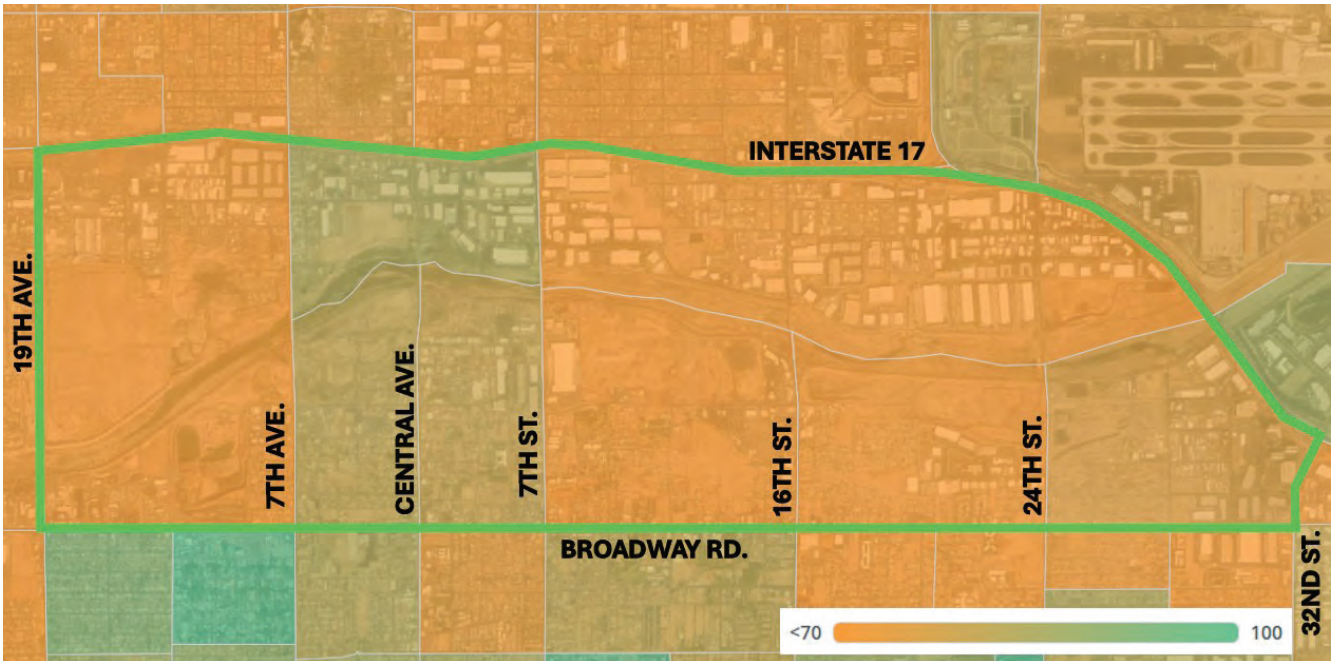
Quick Facts:

- Tree coverage ranges from 3-10% in the district, while the city as a whole has 11% coverage
- Surface temperatures can reach 151°F in the summer
- Single-family homes account for 51% of water use in the City of Phoenix (not including agriculture)



GSI project collaboration between private and public sectors
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Shade Canopy & Tree Coverage



Source: American Forests, Tree Equity Score (2025)

The above Tree Equity map shows tree equity in the Rio Salado District, indicating a tree equity score range from 66 to 72 (out of 100), and a tree coverage ranging between 3% and 10%. The average City of Phoenix tree equity score is 86, while tree coverage is estimated at 11%.

Green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) is one solution to growing the city's tree canopy. GSI utilizes techniques that captures water where it falls for multiple co-benefits, such as air and water quality improvements, reduction in localized flooding, urban heat-island effect reduction, and use of non-potable water for landscape irrigation to support the natural environment.

Urban Heat Island (UHI): *Areas paved with asphalt that can store heat, resulting in higher surface temperatures. UHI "Hot spots" include areas where exposed pavement and building materials absorb solar energy.*



GSI project along Central Avenue
Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

THREE

WHAT WE WANT

This chapter outlines the long-term aspirations for the Rio Salado District area, shaped through a comprehensive community engagement process. It highlights the desired conditions envisioned by stakeholders and the community for 2050—a 25-year horizon.

The vision incorporates the six essential planning elements: land use, housing, economic development, health, mobility, and green systems.

This vision is driven by the community desire to promote vibrant mixed-use developments, ensuring diverse and affordable housing options, enhancing mobility, advancing public health, bolstering local businesses, and increasing access to green spaces.

This chapter outlines a strategic framework for development and policy-making, ensuring alignment with the community's goals.

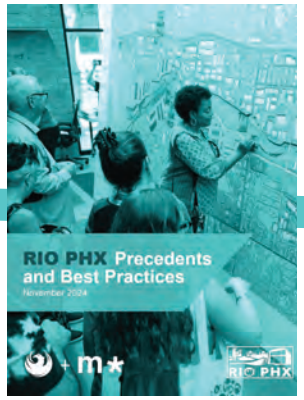
VISION 2050 STATEMENT

The Rio Salado District is envisioned as a vibrant community that offers diverse opportunities for active living, working, shopping, recreation, and entertainment for people of all ages and incomes. Shaded and safe streets make for walkable corridors that connect neighborhoods to local shops, schools, public green spaces, and other destinations such as the RSHRA, to support healthy lifestyles. The area offers diverse and affordable housing options within walking distance of public transit, daily services, and job opportunities.

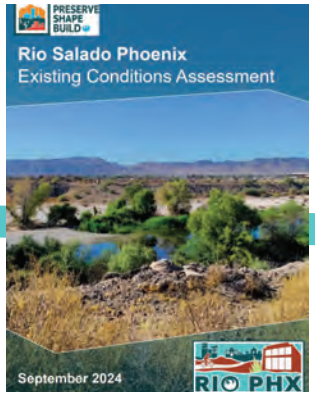
The area is celebrated as a hub for economic growth, where small and medium-sized businesses thrive in new green industries, and where local entrepreneurs choose to start their business. An abundance of art and cultural events draw locals and visitors to the area, supporting a growing eco-tourism industry. The RSHRA is located at the heart of the Rio Salado District. It serves as a gathering place where individuals, couples, and families come to enjoy its natural beauty, public art, and cultural activities year-round.

Existing Assets & Plans + **Case Studies & Precedents** + **Community Input** + **Technical Analysis**











1 Establish a Vibrant Mix of Uses



2 Connect Residents and Visitors to the Rio Salado

FOUR BIG IDEAS

Following the planning process, four themes or "big ideas" emerged to influence the vision of the Rio Salado District for a healthier, vibrant, and well-connected area. **Part Four (How We Get There)** of the policy plan describes each big idea in more detail.



3 Improve Community Well-Being and Quality of Life



4 Establish a Hub for Eco-Tourism and Green Infrastructure

REJECTING DISPLACEMENT
A Shared River Corridor

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan **REJECTS DISPLACEMENT** of existing residents and businesses and celebrates our diverse cultural heritage and unique connection to the Rio Salado. We support equitable transit-oriented development, designed as a sustainable future that improves the quality of life for all existing and future families and residents of this corridor. As investment and change occur, they can lead to displacement by demolishing existing homes and businesses, creating economic challenges that limit residents' and businesses' ability to remain, and intensifying environmental and health issues within the built environment.

To address this vision and reduce risks for displacement, the plan provides a comprehensive framework to guide public and private investment aligned with the community's vision, designates areas identified for protection and enhancement, establishes a policy foundation that respects the character and scale of corridor neighborhoods, and outlines strategies for continued collaboration between the city and the community to implement the plan.

Rio Salado District Considerations to Reject Displacement:

- Encourage long-term affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing as an important objective.
- Encourage a mix of housing types, sizes, and scales to meet the diverse housing needs of families and individuals.
- Help residents access existing resources to stay in their homes to preserve existing housing stock.
- Empower existing residents to build personal and community wealth and resiliency through equitable and innovative strategies to achieve home, land, and business ownership.
- Creation of an active, vibrant, culturally and ethnically relevant corridor prominent in safe, unique, and intentional public gathering places where everyone is welcome.
- Prioritize equitable community identified investments and services for the most vulnerable populations.
- Foster community collaboration on new development projects to create a convenient, affordable, and opportunity rich place in which our residents, businesses, and youth will thrive.
- Prioritizing safe, authentic, shaded, green infrastructure networks connecting to existing and new assets, schools, services, retail and amenities to support equitable access and overall community health.
- Support other goals of the Housing Phoenix Plan to increase the overall supply of market, workforce, and affordable housing through the implementation of policy initiatives and programs.

Additional Affordable Housing Projects: Other affordable housing projects in the City of Phoenix include the Sunnyslope New Homes project that completed four new 3-bedroom single-family homes (with dens) built on City-owned vacant lots and the Trellis at Colter project that delivered a 20-unit, three-story townhome community featuring two-bedroom layouts.

Project Spotlight: Affordable Multifamily Housing



Source: Ulysses Development Group

Built across two phases, the Salt River Flats affordable housing community located at 4027 S. 13th Street is expected to deliver a total of 360 units for individuals and families earning 60% of the area median income. Supported by federal low-income housing tax credits, State Housing Trust funds, Maricopa County, and tax-exempt bonds from the Arizona Industrial Development Authority, the ground breaking for the latest phase of the project was held on May 2026, according to Yield Pro news (2026).

Project Spotlight: Affordable Home Ownership



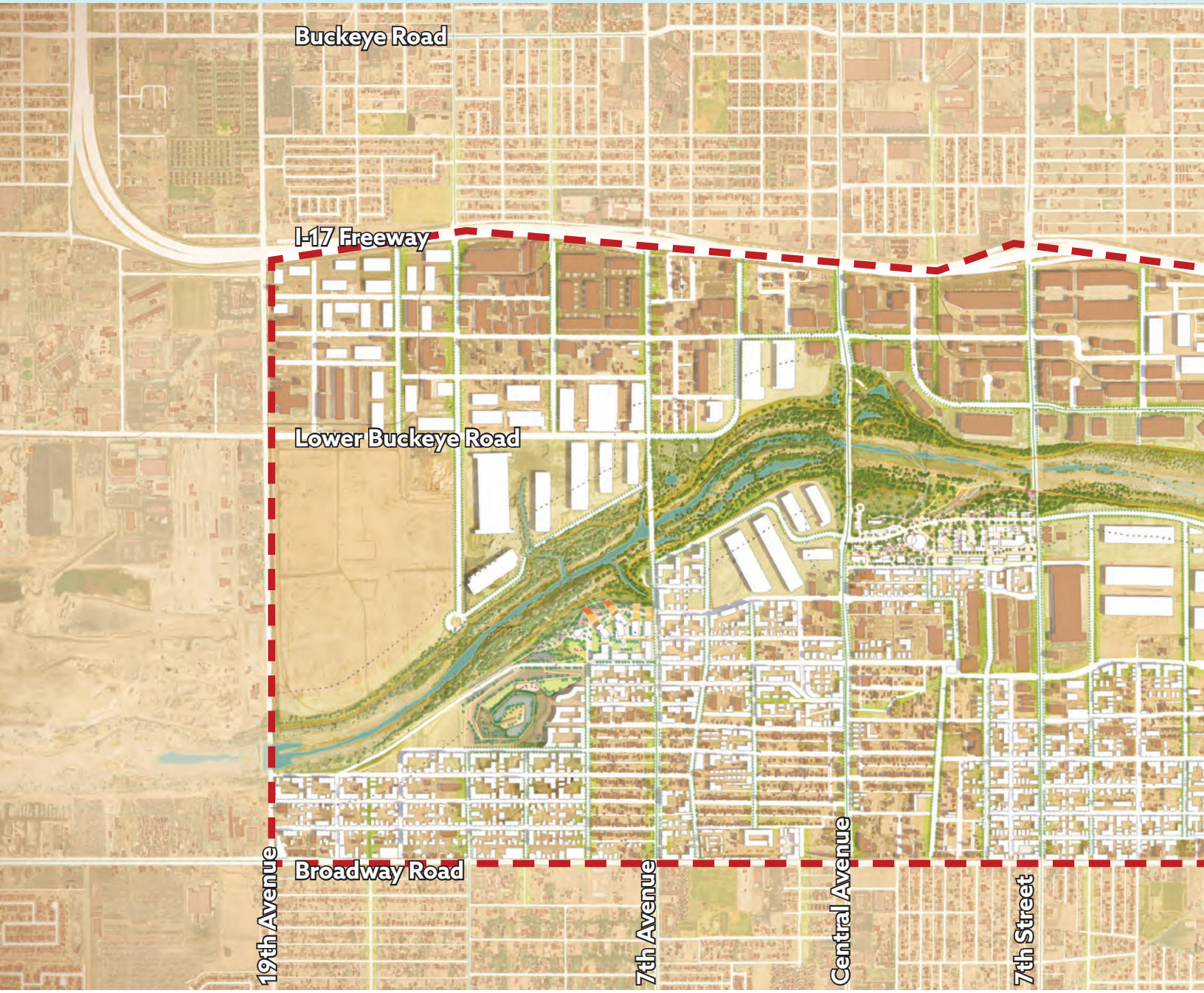
Source: Habitat for Humanity Central Arizona

The Alta Vista Ranch Community located at the southwest corner of 13th Place and Alta Vista Road in Phoenix, Arizona, presented an affordable home ownership opportunity with 25 new affordable single-family homes for households with an annual income below 78% of the county's median income according to Habitat for Humanity Central Arizona (2026).

2050 ILLUSTRATIVE MASTER PLAN

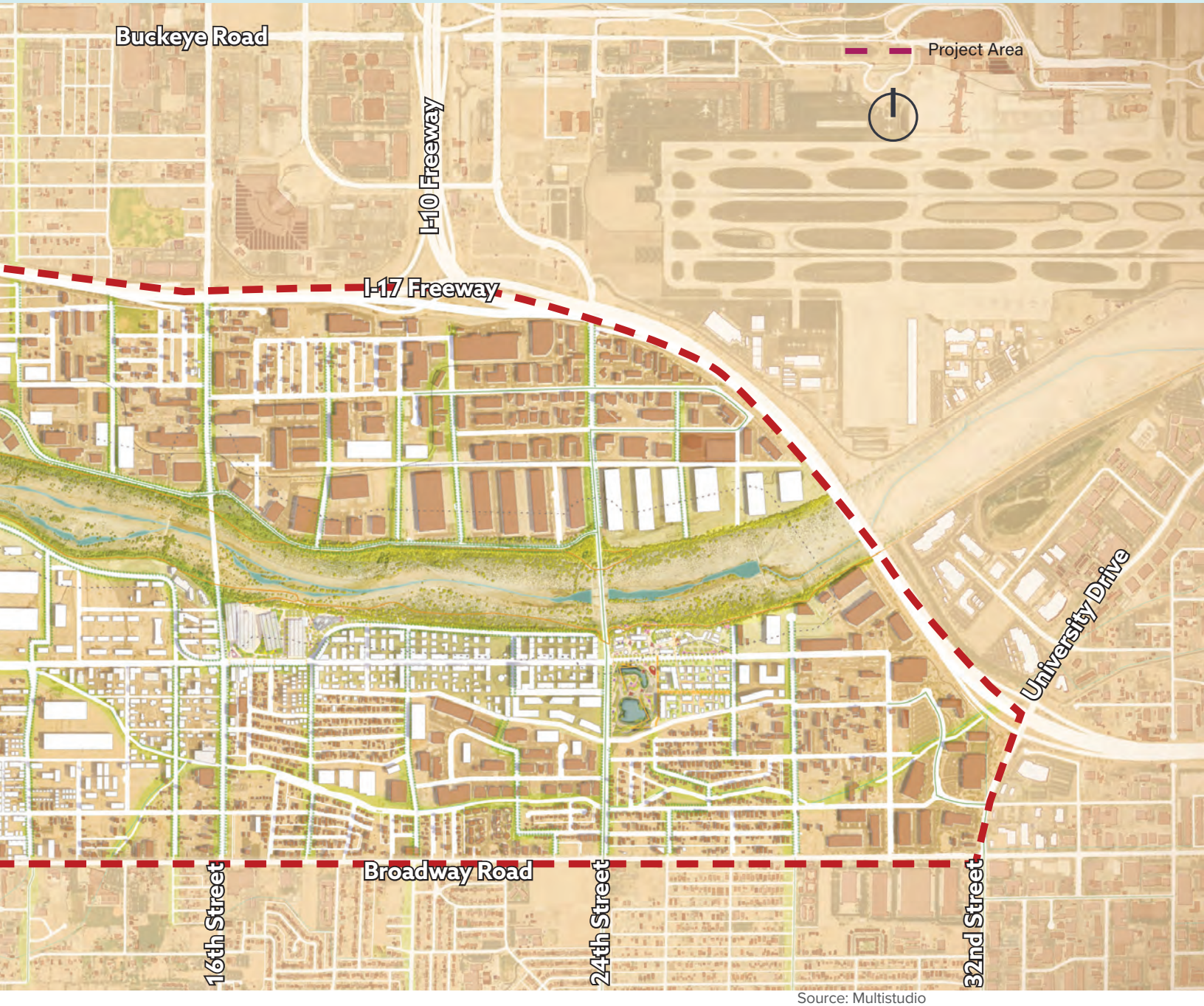
The community-led vision for the Rio Salado District is centered around the protection of existing neighborhoods, continued habitat restoration in the Rio Salado, and incremental build-out of vacant spaces with an 'active' mix of uses at various building scales.

The vision illustrates both active development projects by private developers and conceptual development of key sites as inspiration for how the area can be developed gradually over time to achieve the community vision.



This vision also illustrates conceptual build-out of streets, paseos, and other corridors in the Rio Salado District, as it is important to support a walkable street grid for alternative mobility options, while reconnecting existing neighborhoods to the RSHRA.

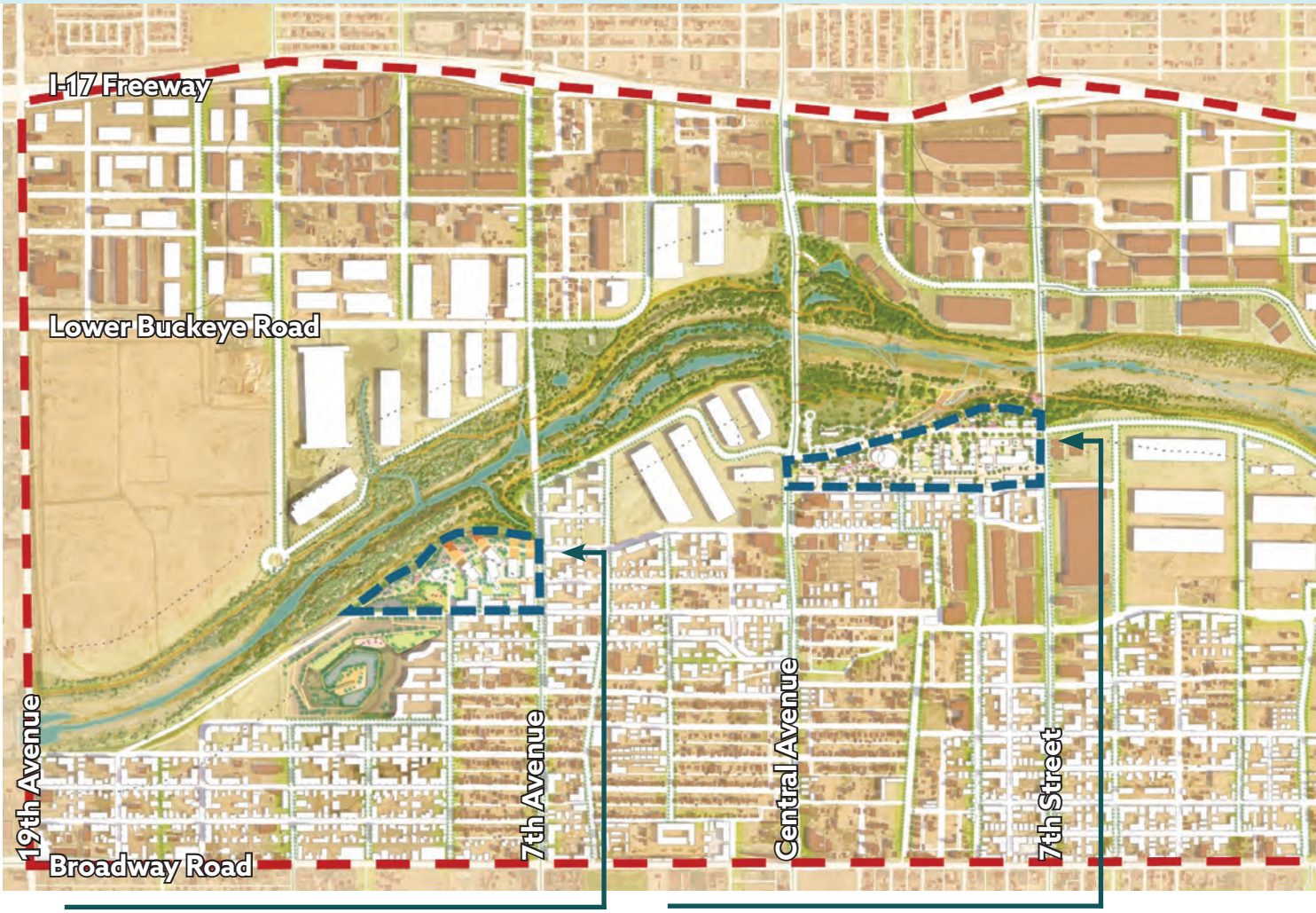
The illustrative master plan is intended to inspire future development and projects in the area, and is not intended to depict exactly how the area will be built out over time.



Source: Multistudio

2050 CATALYST SITES

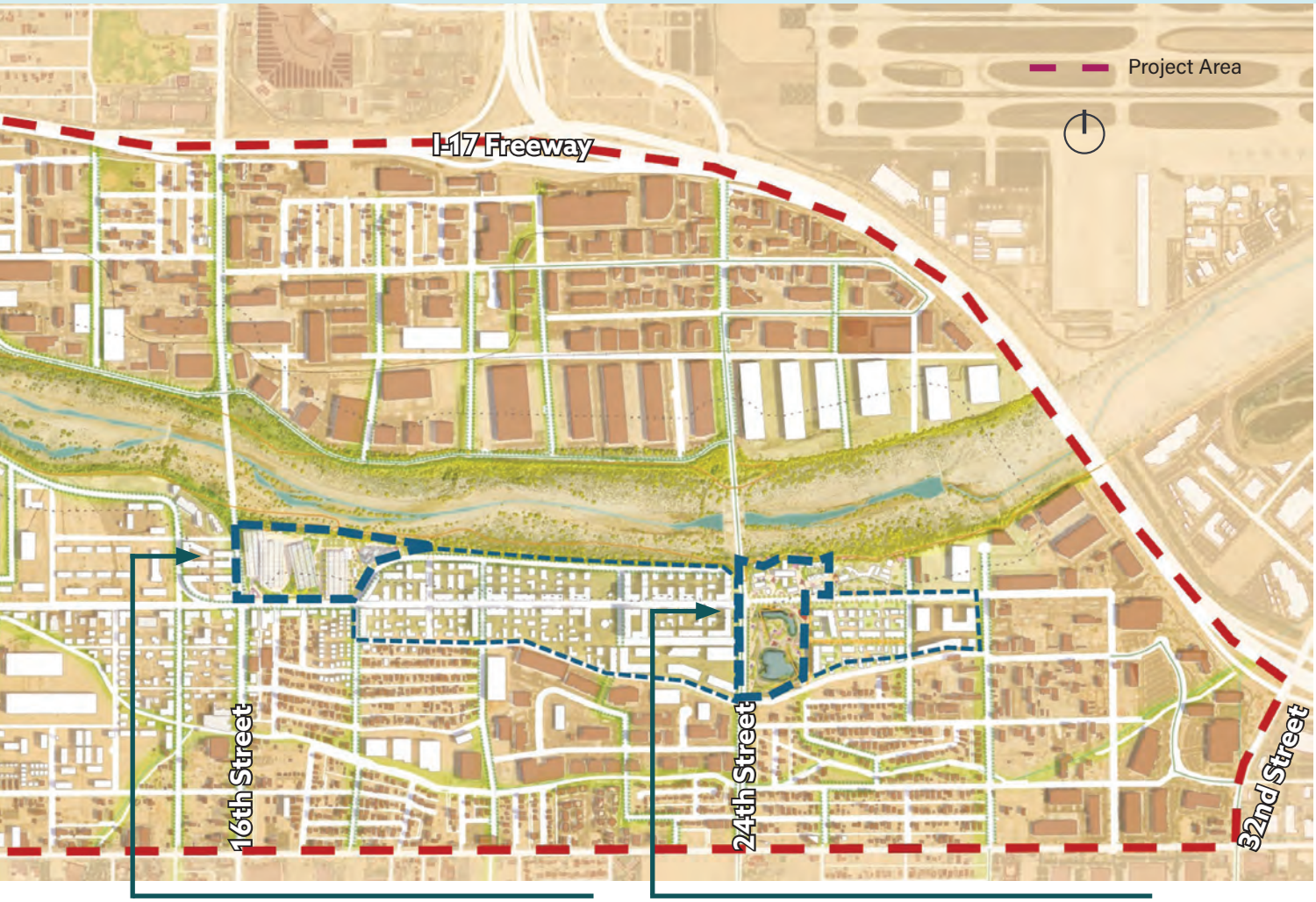
The Rio Salado District is envisioned as a vibrant community with a wide range of options for housing, active living, working, shopping, recreation, and entertainment for people of all ages and incomes. This area is also celebrated for its 'green' walkable corridors that connect vibrant destinations, including small businesses, unique landmarks, neighborhoods, and the RSHRA located at the heart of the district. This plan recognizes that the development of catalytic sites and other projects is key to achieving the plan's vision.



1 **7th Avenue.** Perched above the RSHRA, this site is envisioned as a thriving **mixed-use campus** with uses that could include biomedical laboratories, educational institutions, and other employment uses. Multi-family residential uses could complement employment uses here and provide housing units for workers or students. This site presents an opportunity to rediscover and explore the western reach of the RSHRA.

2 **Central Avenue.** Located adjacent to the most active and visited reach of the RSHRA, this site is uniquely positioned at the junction of a light rail station, RSHRA, and a future pedestrian and bicycle bridge. As a gateway for visitors and a celebrated corner of the RSHRA by residents, this site is envisioned as a vibrant **mixed-use community** with **businesses** and a **multi-purpose community building and plaza.** By cultivating a respectful coexistence of urban densities and life in the ecological corridor, this site presents an opportunity to foster an "arts, culture, and nature" district.

Four sites were illustrated as catalyst developments to represent various conceptual projects with a mix of uses at different scales at the edge of the RSHRA. These conceptual catalyst projects depict a vision for the Rio Salado District that includes opportunities for residents and visitors to live, work, and play, while connecting with the natural environment in a positive way.



3 **16th Street.** A former sand and gravel mining pit, this site is conceptualized with **interim active recreation uses** that could include an amphitheater/venue, pedestrian amenities, play areas, programming, and other pedestrian-oriented activities. This site presents an opportunity to access additional recreation and entertainment opportunities, while the site redevelops.

4 **24th Street.** At the eastern reach of the RSHRA, this site is envisioned as an emerging mixed-use neighborhood with housing, employment, and educational opportunities. Uses here could include an **ecological hotel, research campus with housing, businesses, multi-family housing, and a wildlife-supporting facility.**

Additional sites were identified as catalysts due to their strategic location and redevelopment potential. Collaboration among all public and private entities is important to exploring the full potential of these sites and realizing the vision. Refer to the Additional Opportunities illustration for additional catalyst sites in the Rio Salado District.

Catalyst Site 1 Overview
7th Avenue & Elwood Street

The intersection of 7th Avenue and Elwood Street is a key gateway into the western reach of the RSHRA, where an existing trailhead facility welcomes visitors year-round just north of this intersection. Mid-to-large-scale properties are located at this intersection today, largely developed. By 2050, this area is envisioned as a walkable, bikeable, and active neighborhood with an expanded street-grid that includes the construction of the Rio Salado Scenic Drive. A mix of low to mid-rise buildings are envisioned at this intersection to provide employment, neighborhood-friendly services, and mixed-income housing near the RSHRA.

Site Design Elements





Local play area





Gathering areas and walkways





Lookout and community pavilion



Street and river-oriented buildings



Shade structures

Detailed Conceptual Plan Illustration



Source: Multistudio

Legend:

1. Multi-Use Path
2. River Porch – Public Art and Community Programs
3. Mixed-Use Campus Buildings
4. Site Parking
5. Flexible Open Space or Park
6. Open Space, Retention Lagoon or Wildlife Habitat (Active Amenity)
7. Active Street-Oriented Building Frontage, including Shaded Detached Sidewalks
8. Pedestrian Connections (Between Buildings and Adjacent Streets)
9. Community Pavilion
10. River Overlook – Shade Deck and Community Program
11. Existing River Trail
12. Rio Salado Scenic Drive (Enhanced Bicycle Facility)
13. Enhanced Pedestrian Crossing Intersection

2050 Vision: A Vibrant Mixed-Use Campus

Perched above the Rio Salado, this site at the northwest corner of 7th Avenue and Elwood Street, is envisioned as a thriving mixed-use campus with uses that could include biomedical laboratories, educational institutions, and other employment uses compatible with a pedestrian-scale campus setting. Multi-family residential uses could complement employment uses here and provide housing units for workers or students. This site presents an opportunity to rediscover and explore the western reach of the RSHRA.



Source: Multistudio

Key Community Priorities Illustrated:

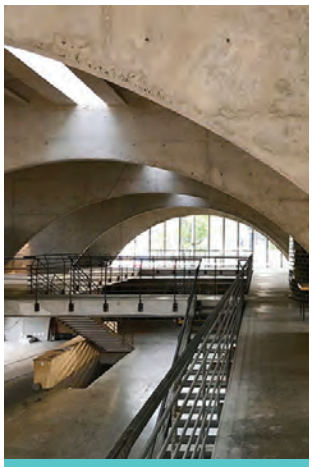
- Active Use Parks
- Natural & Engineered Shade
- Trails & Paseos
- Public Art
- Water Efficiency


RIO SALADO
7TH AVENUE
7TH AVENUE
ELWOOD STREET

Catalyst Site 2 Overview
Central Avenue & Rio Salado

The intersection of Central Avenue and the Rio Salado is where the local community and visitors from across the region meet the natural environment and its beauty of the Rio Salado up close. The Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center welcomes visitors to the area throughout the year, just south of this intersection. Small, mid, and large-scale properties are located south of this intersection today. By 2050, this area is envisioned as the most active node along the banks of the Rio Salado with a mix of uses in a walkable, bikeable, and well-connected neighborhood through an expanded street-grid that includes the construction of the Rio Salado Scenic Drive (or a pedestrian-street alternative) between Central Avenue and 7th Street.

Site Design Elements



Community plaza



Active frontages



Community gathering areas



Mercado





Stormwater gardens (rain gardens) and harvesting



Shaded paths

Detailed Conceptual Plan Illustration



Source: Multistudio

Legend:

1. Existing Light Rail Station
2. Mixed-Use Development
3. Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center
4. Rio Salado Scenic Drive (Alternative Pedestrian Street)
5. Existing Pollinator Gardens
6. Active Open Space, Art Features, Programming
7. Community Building and Plaza
8. Adjacent Future Mixed-Use Development
9. Future 3rd Street Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge
10. Existing River Trail
11. Stormwater Management/Harvesting
12. Mercado Area (Retail), Programming
13. Arts, Culture, and Small Business Corridor (Retrofit)
14. Flex Commercial
15. Retail, Active Open Space, Programming
16. Pedestrian or Vehicular Accessway
17. Flexible Open Space or Restored Habitat
18. Signalized/Enhanced Pedestrian Crossing
19. Public Paseo (North-South Corridor)

2050 Vision: An Emerging Arts & Biocultural Hub

Located in the most active and visited reach of the Rio Salado, this site at the southeast corner of Central Avenue and Rio Salado Scenic Drive (Park Drive), is uniquely positioned at the junction of a light rail station, RSHRA, and a future pedestrian and bicycle bridge. As a gateway for visitors and a celebrated corner of the RSHRA by residents, this site is envisioned as a vibrant mixed-use community with businesses and a multi-purpose community building and plaza. By cultivating a respectful coexistence of urban densities and life in the ecological corridor, this site presents an opportunity to foster an "arts, culture, and nature" district. This vision complements ongoing activities at Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center and activities by local groups.



Key Community Priorities Illustrated:

Source: Multistudio

Mixed Use & Walkable Neighborhood

Farmer's Market

Trails & Paseos

Public Art

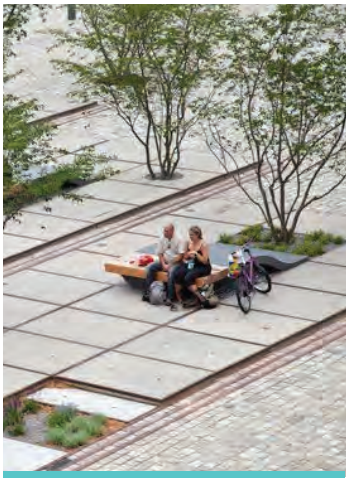
Gathering Places


Rio Salado
7TH ST
RIO SALADO SCENIC DR
PIONEER ST
VICTORY ST
7TH ST

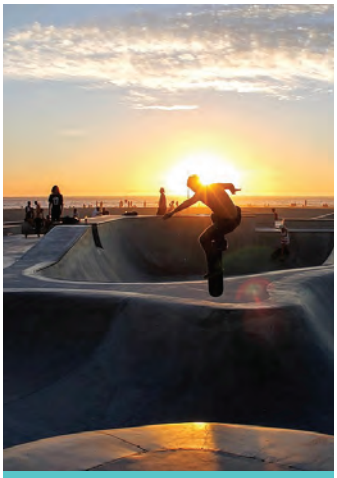
Catalyst Site 3 Overview
16th Street & Elwood Street

The intersection of 16th Street and Elwood Street is located halfway between the central and most eastern reach of the RSHRA, where an existing trailhead facility welcomes visitors year-round just north of this intersection. Small, mid, and large-scale properties are located at this intersection today, largely developed. By 2050, this area is envisioned as an increasingly active neighborhood with an expanded street-grid that includes the construction of the Rio Salado Scenic Drive. A mix of low to mid-rise buildings are envisioned at this intersection to provide employment, neighborhood-friendly services, and mixed-income housing near the Rio Salado.

Site Design Elements



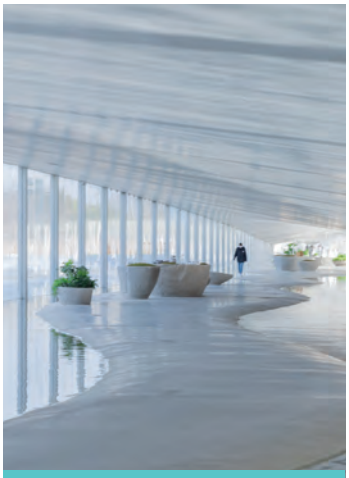
Shaded gathering areas



Skate park



Terrace planting



Art connection



Upper & lower park connections



Nested amphitheater & shade

Detailed Conceptual Plan Illustration



Source: Multistudio

Legend:

1. Retail Business
2. Flexible Open Space or Park (Passive Amenity)
3. Amphitheater Space and Outdoor Performance Space
4. Active Open Space Amenity, Art Features or Programming
5. Art Features, Mercado, or Programming
6. Solar Array Structures
7. Retail Businesses and Passive Amenities
8. Existing River Trailhead
9. Adjacent Neighborhood Connections
10. Parking Structure
11. Flexible Open Space or Wildlife Habitat
12. Programming or Flexible Open Space or Park
13. Community Programing - Active Plaza
14. Active Open Space, Art Features or Programming
15. River Porch- Public Art and Community Programs
16. River Trail
17. Signalized/Enhanced Pedestrian Crossing
18. Enhanced Pedestrian Crossings

2050 Vision: Temporary Pit Activation

A former sand and gravel mine, this site at the northeast corner of 16th Street and Elwood Street, is conceptualized with interim active recreation uses that could include an amphitheater/ venue, pedestrian amenities, play areas, programming, and other pedestrian-oriented activities. This site presents an opportunity for the private owner or future developer to provide neighborhood retail uses at the edges plus other temporary uses that can generate revenue by bringing interim entertainment and recreation options to the site, while the pit is backfilled or redeveloped over an extended period of time. The large scale and site's proximity to the RSHRA, residential neighborhoods, and employment areas present an opportunity to develop a mix of uses here.



Source: Multistudio

Key Community Priorities Illustrated:

- Natural/Engineered Shading
- Active Use Park
- Trails & Paseos
- Public Art
- Gathering Places

Case Study: Mining Pit Redevelopment

Depending on the area and depth of the pit, full backfill and redevelopment of a former mining site could take decades as it requires the collection of inert material to fill and compact over time. The Irwindale Business Center in Irwindale, CA, is a redevelopment example of a former 130-acre gravel pit that required partial fill and installation of a drainage system to develop a commercial and light industrial business park.



Source: AO Architects

Irwindale Business Center



Additional Considerations

Given the existing conditions of this inactive mining pit, future considerations for residential uses here include but are not limited to floodplain regulations, accessibility, aviation noise impacts, geotechnical challenges, and the process to fill and compact soil gradually over time to an elevation above the floodplain.

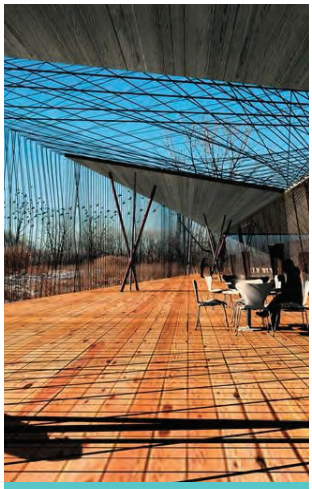
Catalyst Site 4 Overview
24th Street & Elwood Street

The intersection of 24th Street and Elwood Street is located at the easternmost reach of the RSHRA. East of this intersection is Liberty Wildlife Rescue Center which welcomes visitors to the area throughout the year, while providing wildlife rehabilitation. Mid and large-scale properties are located at this intersection today, largely undeveloped. By 2050, this area is envisioned as a more active node with a mix of uses at the riverbanks that expand south of Elwood Street and are connected through a growing street-grid that includes the construction of the Rio Salado Scenic Drive. A mix of low to mid-rise buildings are envisioned at this intersection to provide employment, neighborhood-friendly services, and mixed-income housing near Rio Salado.

Site Design Elements



Mid-size education facility



Shaded gathering area



Ecological Hotel



Desert Landscaping







Wildlife supporting facility and education center

Detailed Conceptual Plan Illustration



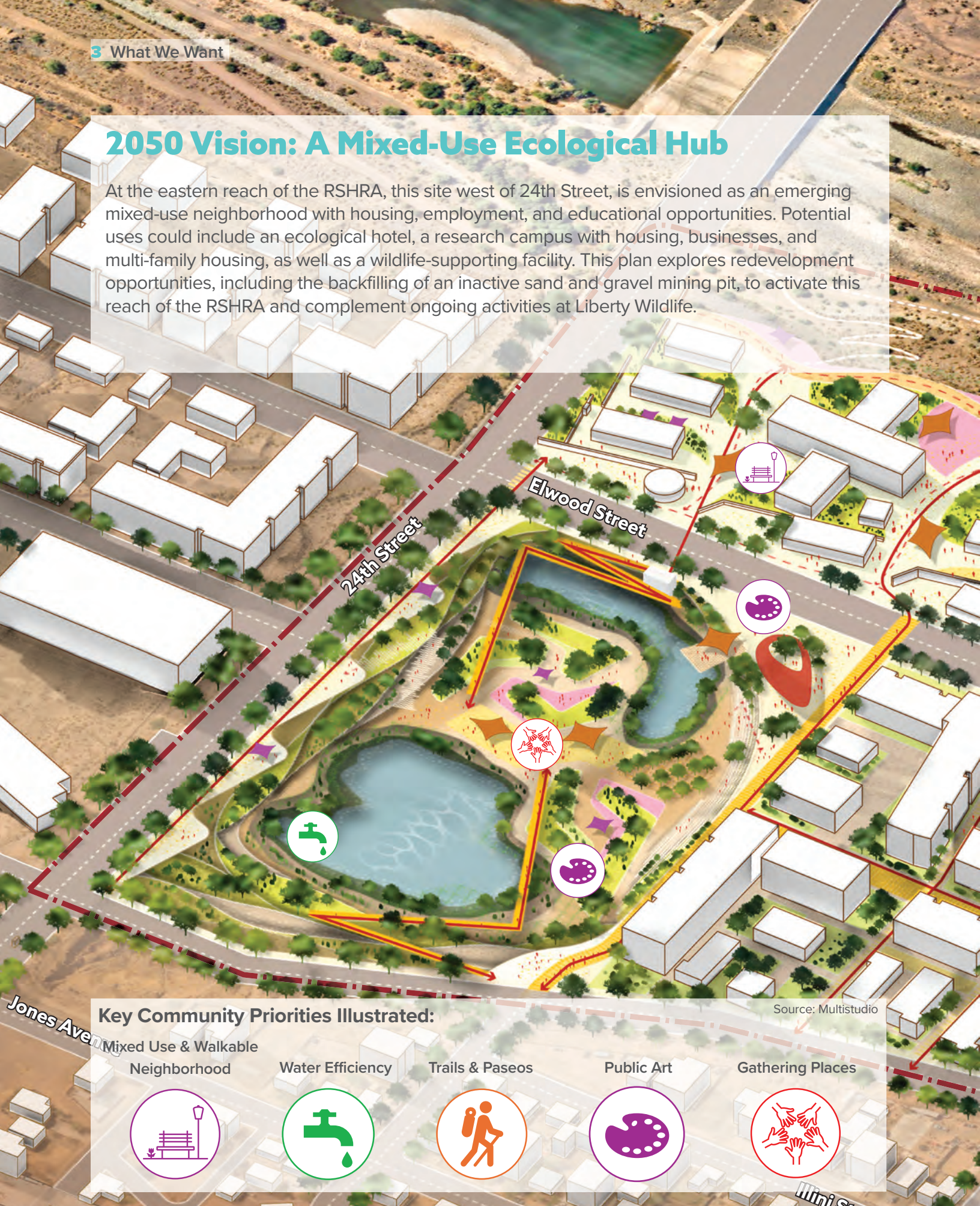
Source: Multistudio

Legend:

1. Wildlife Supporting Facility
2. Pedestrian Connections (Between Buildings and Adjacent Streets)
3. Businesses/Incubator Space
4. Eco-Hotel or Mixed-Use Research Campus with Housing
5. Signalized/Enhanced Pedestrian Crossing
6. Educational/Learning Center
7. Future Neighborhood Street
8. Artist Designed Bus Shelter
9. Mixed-Use Development (Multi-family Housing or Retail)
10. Pedestrian Crossing
11. Active Open Space Amenity, Art Features, Activity Area, or Programming
12. Active Open Space Amenity, Outdoor Performance Space
13. Art Features or Passive Open Space Amenity
14. Flexible Open Space or Park
15. Flexible Open Space or Wildlife Habitat
16. Flexible Open Space or Park
17. Retention Lagoon or Wildlife Habitat (Active Amenity)
18. Existing River Trail
19. Active Open Space Amenity, Art Features, Activity Area
20. Enhanced Pedestrian Crossings

2050 Vision: A Mixed-Use Ecological Hub

At the eastern reach of the RSHRA, this site west of 24th Street, is envisioned as an emerging mixed-use neighborhood with housing, employment, and educational opportunities. Potential uses could include an ecological hotel, a research campus with housing, businesses, and multi-family housing, as well as a wildlife-supporting facility. This plan explores redevelopment opportunities, including the backfilling of an inactive sand and gravel mining pit, to activate this reach of the RSHRA and complement ongoing activities at Liberty Wildlife.



Key Community Priorities Illustrated:

Source: Multistudio

Mixed Use & Walkable Neighborhood

Water Efficiency

Trails & Paseos

Public Art

Gathering Places


Rio Salado
27th Street
Elwood Street
Illini Street

Additional Opportunities



1. **Food System Sites -** Vacant space within the Rio Salado District presents opportunities for interim or permanent uses for growing, processing, and selling fresh food products, where no adverse environmental conditions are identified.

2. **19th Avenue Landfill Site -** This 190-acre city-owned closed landfill is a potential future redevelopment opportunity for non-residential development, as allowed by regulatory, environmental, engineering, and financial conditions.

3. **Broadway Corridor -** A vision for a diverse mix of commercial and residential uses. The activation of land at arterial and collector street intersections, such as 19th Avenue, 15th Avenue, 7th Avenue, Central Avenue, 7th Street, 12th Street, 16th Street, and 24th Street, is key to providing additional opportunities.

4. **Transformation Site at Central -** A one-acre parcel of land owned by the City of Phoenix presents an opportunity to activate this space with amenities and programming.



Source: Multistudio

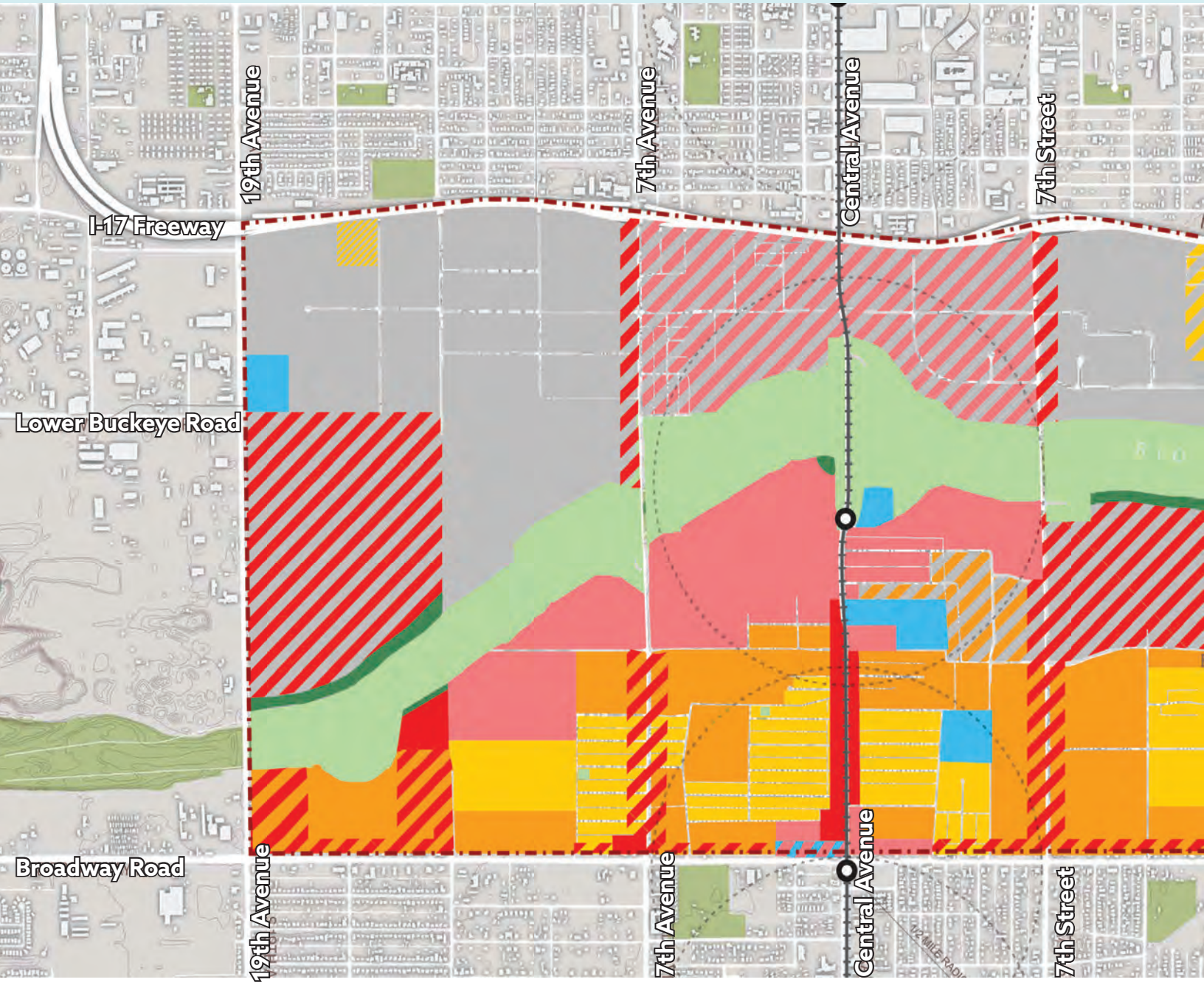
5 **Arts, Culture, and Nature District -** The establishment of an arts, culture, and nature district near the RSHRA offers a chance to attract visitors, support local businesses, and celebrate regional heritage and artistic talent.

6 **Eco-Business District -** Creating an eco-business district can attract green industries, such as advanced manufacturing, energy systems, and emerging technologies, promoting a sustainable logistics chain and circular economy.

7 **32nd Street and University Drive Office Park -** Since the early 2000's, this office park has been a hub for employment in the area. As demand for housing increases, surface parking lots present opportunities for integrating housing units into institutional or office campuses.

2050 LAND USE MAP

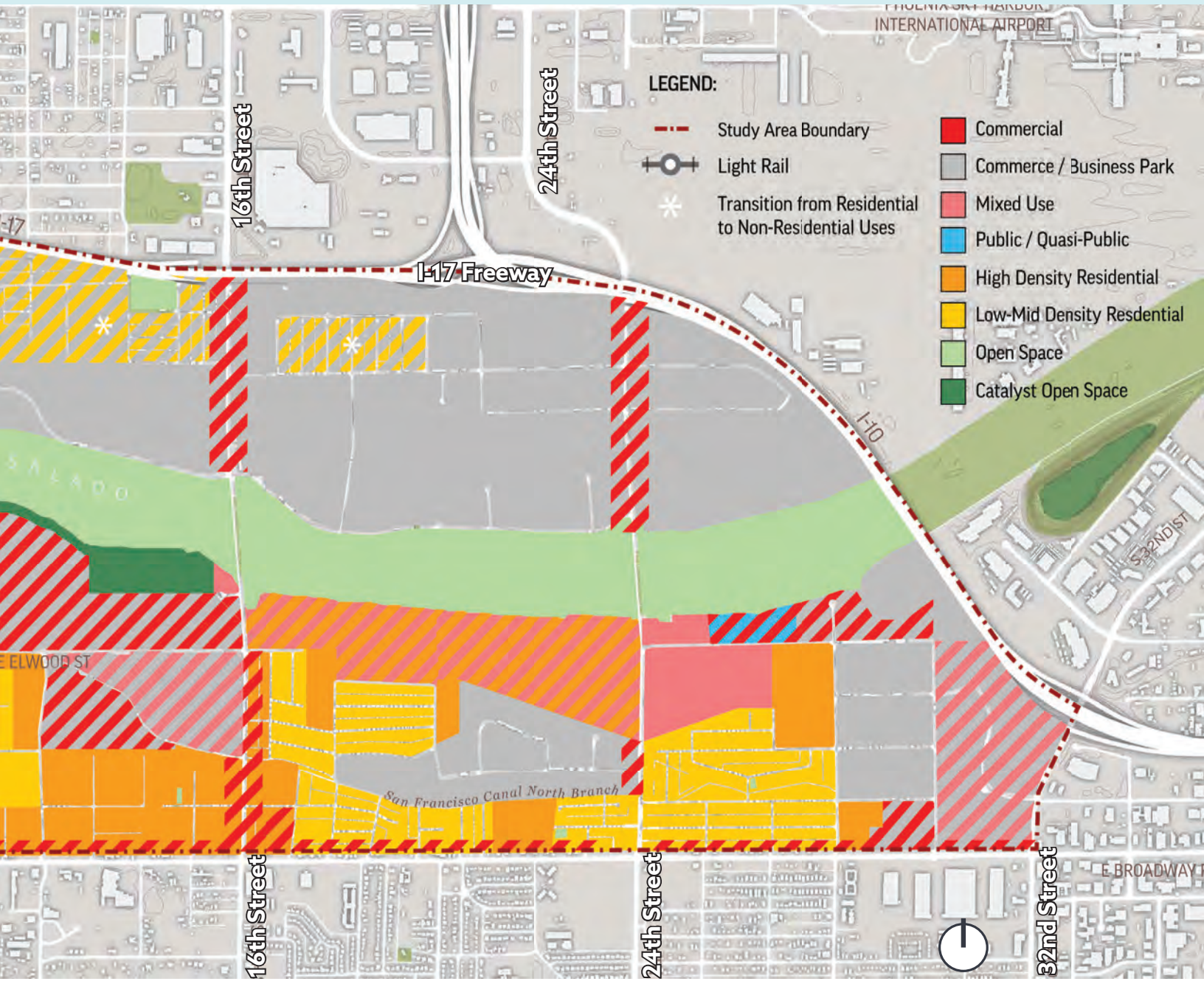
The 2050 Land Use Map is the master plan that presents the vision for the Rio Salado District which includes promoting a vibrant and 'active' mix of uses along and beyond the banks of the Rio Salado, while protecting existing neighborhoods and the natural habitat in the river. This vision also supports new investments that promote a wide range of housing types (primarily south of the Rio Salado and along the light rail corridor), diverse business corridors along major streets, and active recreation options along the RSHRA. This vision supports the transition from an industrial dominant past to a more balanced future that encourages a mix of uses to attract additional investment and support the Rio Reimagined and City of Phoenix goals. The Land Use Master Plan also supports several land use themes that emerged during the planning process, including adaptive reuse of existing buildings, establishing an "arts, culture, and nature" and "eco-business" districts, and brownfield revitalization.



The latest General Plan Land Use Map contains a more detailed map for this area.

This Land Use Master Plan illustrates a conceptual vision for a land use mix across public and private properties in the Rio Salado District. This concept considers various inputs such as existing plans, environmental factors, active development projects by private developers, and community-voiced priorities to propose a vision for land use mix in the Rio Salado District. This master plan is intended to guide future land use decisions and inspire future development in the area, and not to intended to depict exactly how the area will be built out over time.

The Land Use Master Plan illustrates land uses mainly at the block-level, however, a greater vibrancy can be achieved by introducing a wider mix of uses at the site-level (as appropriate by the content) where the use enriches daily life with more frequent access to services in a walkable scale. The **Land Use Types** table provided in the plan, identifies primary land uses consistent with the land use categories, in addition to secondary (or alternate) land uses that may also be compatible depending on the neighborhood context and environmental conditions; while the **Building Typology** table contains building types/scales for each land use category.



Source: Multistudio

Land Use Typologies

Land Use Types

The Land Use Master Plan has eight (8) land use types defined below. These land use types guide development and the character of a given area through compatible land use types and design, which are most effective when paired with character area standards. These land use types are intended to complement the Land Use Master Plan and inform land use decisions.

Land Use Category	Land Use Types	
	Primary	Secondary
	Low-Mid Density Residential	Commercial (Corner), Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space
	High Density Residential	Low-Mid Density Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial, Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space
	Mixed Use	High Density Residential, Commercial, Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space
	Commercial	High Density Residential*, Mixed Use*, Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space
	Commerce/Business Park	Commercial, Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space
	Public/Quasi-Public	Commercial, Open Space
	Open Space	Public/Quasi-Public, Commercial
	Catalyst Open Space	Commercial, Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space

***These land use types are only appropriate where there are no environmental conditions present, including but not limited to brownfields or aviation noise.**



Source: Dahlin Group

Low-mid density residential



Source: LH3

High density residential



Source: Apartment Guide

Mixed use



Source: rsm design

Commercial

Buildings Typologies and Scales

Each of the land use types has corresponding typologies that describe building types and scales that are generally compatible with the character of those areas. These typologies are intended to complement the Land Use Master Plan and inform land use decisions.

Land Use Category	Land Use Building Typology	
	Building Types	Scale
	Single-Family, ADU, Duplex, Triplex/Quadplex, Garden Apartment, Bungalow Court, Townhomes, Senior Housing	**Height:** 1-3 Stories, up to 4 with Housing Bonus* **Scale:** Small, Medium
	Garden Apartment, Townhomes, Co-Housing, Mid-Rise Apartment, Senior Housing	**Height:** 2-4 Stories, up to 6 with Housing Bonus* **Scale:** Medium, Large
	Mid-Rise Apartment, Senior Housing, Live/Work, Office, Retail, Services, Market	**Height:** 3-5 Stories, up to 7 with Housing Bonus* **Scale:** Medium, Large
	Live/Work, Office, Retail, Services, Market *(No Outdoor Uses)*	**Height:** 1-3 Stories, up to 6 with Housing Bonus* **Scale:** Small, Medium
	Markers Space, Office, Manufacturing, Research and Development, Warehousing	**Height:** 1-3 Stories **Scale:** Small, Medium, Large
	Institutional, Schools, Government, Places of Worship, Utility Sites	**Height:** 1-3 Stories **Scale:** Small, Medium
	Natural Areas, Environmental Restoration, Improved Open Space (Active and Passive)	N/A
	Improved Open Space (Active and Passive)	N/A

***Affordable housing bonus: To encourage more affordable housing, additional building height may be supported on new developments. Areas within adopted Place Type policies may defer to those existing policies on height and incentive standards.**



Source: Architect Magazine

Commerce/business park



Open space



Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Public/quasi-public



Source: Great Park Neighborhoods

Catalyst open space

Urban Redevelopment

Thinking Adaptive Reuse and Infill

Repurposing existing buildings is a great way to reimage a space and give it a new life. With most of the Rio Salado District developed, adaptive reuse of older buildings can be an important strategy to achieve the vision for the area. This method can support both existing and emerging small businesses, contribute to the economic prosperity of the area, and preserve the history.

Land is a finite resource that should be utilized thoughtfully to advance the vision of the Rio Salado District. As most of the land within and surrounding the Rio Salado District has been developed, infill development will become increasingly common. This type of development may include "greenfield" development on undeveloped land or redevelopment of existing land, partially or fully.

These redevelopment methods can support both existing and new uses by utilizing land in a more efficient manner that adds value to existing properties and utilizes existing infrastructure to support new uses.

Other benefits include the concentration of goods, services, or housing, which may reduce travel distances. Local, regional, and national examples of successful adaptive reuse projects are commonly found throughout Phoenix.

Adaptive reuse elements may include:

- Building façade enhancements and treatments
- Repurposing outdoor spaces and parking lots
- Adapting existing older buildings and adding new structures
- Enhancing existing open spaces and landscape areas
- Artistic elements on buildings, fences/walls, gates, and other structures
- Energy efficient fixtures

Infill development opportunities may include:

- New development on vacant parcels
- Underperforming commercial properties
- Underutilized surface parking lots and landscape areas
- Abandoned rights-of-way or railroad easements
- Infill housing such as accessory dwelling units or "casitas", middle housing, and micro-homes



Source: Utile

Outdoor space concept



Pueblo Apartments, Source: Chicanos Por La Causa

Infill housing

District Branding and Identity

Arts, Culture, and Nature District

Increasing activity and vibrancy in the Rio Salado District, especially near the Habitat Restoration Area, is essential. Creating a community-led arts, culture, and nature district can attract both locals and tourists to foster a stronger appreciation and connection with the land and its historic significance. Starting with temporary installations that may evolve into permanent ones, the district should continue to feature regular programming and events to engage audiences. Improving existing mobility networks and providing new connections will be key to reconnect locals with the RSHRA.

Elements of the arts, culture and nature district may include:

- Mercados, farmer's markets/festivals
- Food trucks, semi-permanent vendor leases
- Public art displays or staffed festival events
- Cultural and nature-themed events
- Small local music events (band/singers, etc.)
- Outdoors group fitness activities and classes
- Sidewalk art, wall murals, and shade structures
- Nature focused activities, facilities, and educational programming (bird walks, volunteering, etc.)
- Other eco-tourism activities



Cultural events



Source: Doug Golden

Food truck festival



Source: Valley Metro

Art festival/event



Source: Doug Golden

Farmer's market/Mercado

Land Recycling

Revitalizing Brownfields

Brownfields are properties that are vacant or underutilized and are either contaminated, or have the perception of being contaminated, which creates a barrier to redevelopment.

Examples of brownfields are former mining sites or landfills and dumping sites, which are common along the Rio Salado, but also include other former site uses such as salvage yards, drycleaners, and gas stations.

The clean-up and redevelopment of brownfields sites can give new life to these contaminated sites to improve community health. This also facilitates land revitalization by returning a property to a safe and sustainable use which also creates a benefit for the community. Brownfield cleanup and former mining site redevelopment is key to achieving the Rio Salado District vision.

Brownfield redevelopment considerations include:

- Common remediation methods include soil excavation, capping with clean soil, and lead or asbestos abatement (removal).
- Redevelopment plans for the site may be limited by the type and amount of contamination at the site. For example, heavily contaminated sites may not be either appropriate or economically feasible to redevelop with housing.

Former mining or landfill site redevelopment considerations include:

- Ongoing land settlement, soil backfilling and compaction, preventing the penetration of the final landfill cap (exposure of landfilled waste), landfill gas management infrastructure, and accessibility for ongoing landfill gas and groundwater monitoring.
- Regulatory approvals by Federal, State and County agencies on closed landfills, and City, County and State regulations on mining sites.
- Redevelopment costs to design, engineer and construct on a closed landfill, including other site-specific costs related to the site's history and regulatory requirements.



Source: AtlantaBeltline

Recreation corridor



Source: AFAR

Amphitheater



Source: The Standard

Commercial development

A Greener Future

Eco-Business District

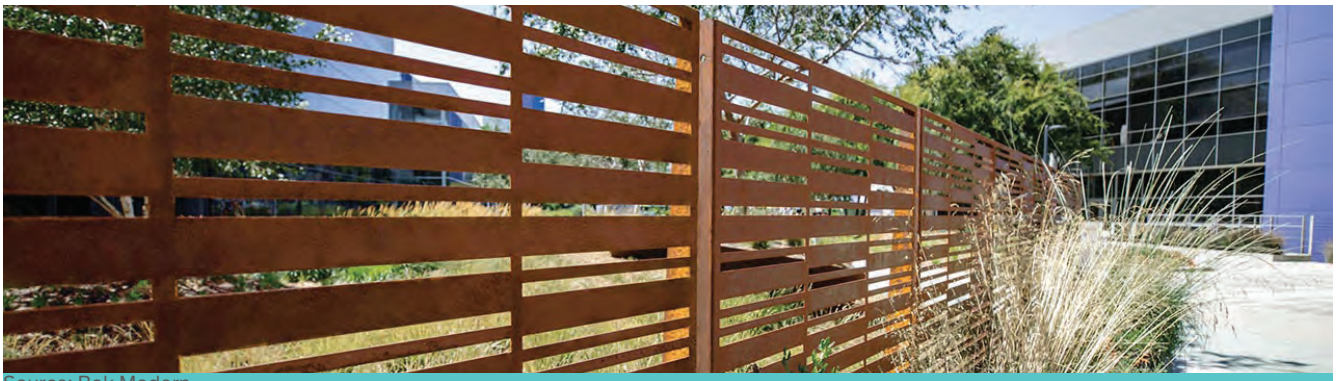
As a significant employment hub with nearly 20,000 employees and over 500 employers in diverse sectors, the Rio Salado District has the potential to become an eco-business district that pioneers a greener industrial park in areas with predominant employment uses, particularly north of the RSHRA near Interstate 17.

The renewal of existing industrial areas through adaptive reuse can support new and innovative businesses, while promoting the area as a hub for green industries, with businesses that emit minimal greenhouse gases or have an overall lower environmental footprint.

Establishing an eco-business district can attract new green industries in advanced manufacturing, energy systems, and emerging technologies, to promote a sustainable logistics chain and circular economy for a positive environmental impact.

Eco-business district considerations include:

- Mix of uses and buildings at various scales
- Adaptive reuse of existing buildings and addition of new structures
- Active building frontages and sustainable building/site design
- Ample landscaping, pedestrian connectivity, employee/pedestrian amenities, and open space
- Green energy ports (i.e. commercial electric chargers, hydrogen fuel stations)
- Renewable energy generation (i.e. on-site solar panels)
- On-street and on-site green stormwater infrastructure or treated water discharge
- Artistic and environmental elements on buildings, fences/walls, gates, and other vertical structures



Source: Bok Modern

Decorative fencing



Source: PV Tech

Energy generation



Source: Charged EV's

Commercial electric chargers

River-Oriented Development

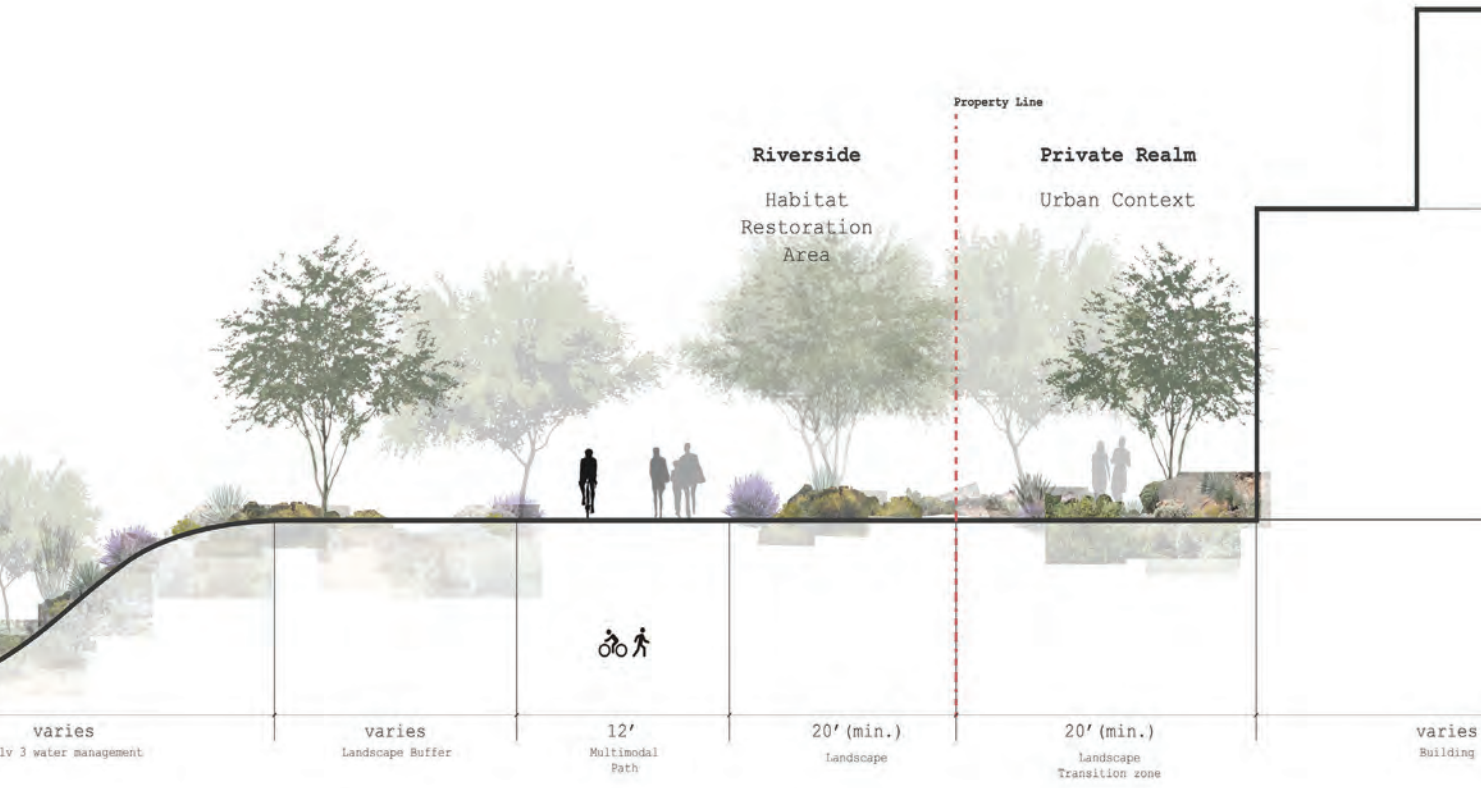
River Adjacent Design

Orienting development to the Rio Salado is a key objective of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan. Integration of river-adjacent development with the RSHRA is essential to provide a seamless transition between private property and the publicly-owned RSHRA, to facilitate activity along the riverbanks to foster environmental sterwardship.

Due to the sensitive nature of the existing river ecology, development should be thoughtfully designed to mitigate adverse impacts on the local flora and fauna, while facilitating human interaction at the banks to promote a vibrant and safe river corridor. While a mix of uses and scales may be appropriate with specific design elements, a landscape transition zone should be provided as a buffer between buildings and the RSHRA.

Key edge-design elements include:

- Height (Step-backs)
- Scale
- Massing
- Wildlife-friendly lighting
- Landscaping (native species)
- Connectivity
- Public space and amenities



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Frontage Treatment

To support strong and prominent river frontage along the HRA, the following frontage elements should be incorporated in river-adjacent or river-oriented development:



Source: South Pier Live

Open edge treatment



Source: Birds Georgia

Wildlife-friendly design



Source: ArchDaily

River-facing façade



Source: Visit Phoenix (mackenziecollierinteriors)

Ground-floor activation



Source: Great Park Neighborhoods

Pedestrian amenities



Source: NZILA (Kellenberg Studio)

Landscaping and pathways

To review the latest **RIO PHX Design Guidelines**, please visit the RIO PHX website.

Open Space Typologies

Urban Edge Conditions

The relationship between urban development and the RSHRA is central to creating a vibrant, accessible, and ecologically responsive riverfront. These typologies illustrate a range of interface conditions that prioritize eyes on the river, public access, and active use of the public realm along the RSHRA.

This approach is not intended to limit or impede development, but rather to guide its thoughtful integration with the RSHRA. Development within 500 feet of the RSHRA should enhance permeability by maintaining visual and physical connections to the river, connecting to public trails in the RSHRA and adjacent multimodal paths and roadways such as the scenic drive, and transitioning the ecological character of the river into the urban fabric beyond the banks.

Green Courtyard Edge

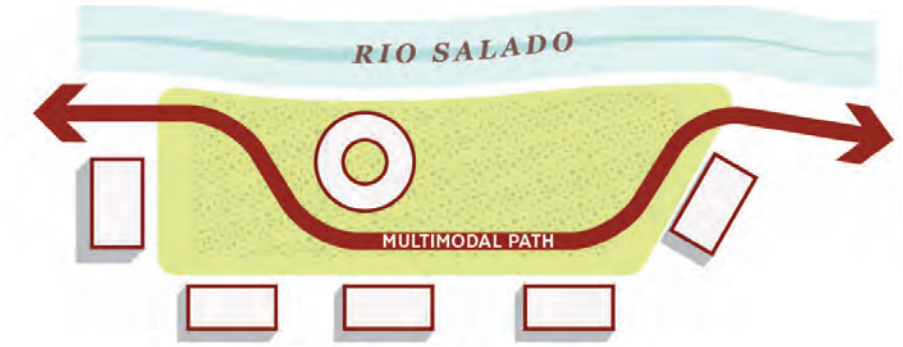
Development frames shared green courtyards that open toward the existing river trail, creating a rhythm of intimate open spaces embedded within the urban fabric. This typology encourages active ground-floor uses, fosters social interaction, and supports a fluid transition between the ecological scale of the RSHRA and the finer scale of neighborhood courtyards.



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Park Edge

A central open space is framed by urban development, with a multimodal path or paseo looping through the open space area. This typology establishes a civic anchor along the RSHRA, blending natural systems with urban life. It supports events, recreation, and cultural programming while extending the ecological and spatial continuity of the river into the heart of the community.



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

These open space typologies can be utilized to inspire future developments projects along other corridors in the Rio Salado District, including the San Francisco Canal.

Multimodal Path Edge

A multimodal path runs between the river and the development, acting as both threshold and connector. Open space "fingers" extend from the river through the urban edge, creating a rhythm of access points and framed views. Buildings are set back to support the river ecological function while maintaining strong visual and physical connections to the riverfront.



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Urban Edge

Buildings appear immersed within a park-like setting, offering both access and orientation toward the RSHRA and blurring the boundary between built and natural environments. Development fronts directly onto the river, while green "fingers" extend from the riverfront into the urban fabric, bringing its ecological character deeper into the site. The multimodal path or paseo and the scenic drive extend behind the buildings, carrying the identity of the river through the development and supporting internal circulation.



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Open Space as a Catalyst

Open space areas, whether private or public, can be activated with amenities and programming to act as a 'catalysts' in the Rio Salado District.

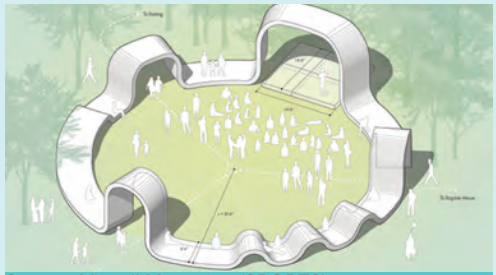
Examples of catalyst open space elements include:

- Art sculptures
- Seating/picnic areas
- Shade structures
- Playgrounds
- Performance areas



Source: Great Park Neighborhoods

Seating area and shade artwork



Source: Visuall Magazine (SPORTS)

Outdoor performance area



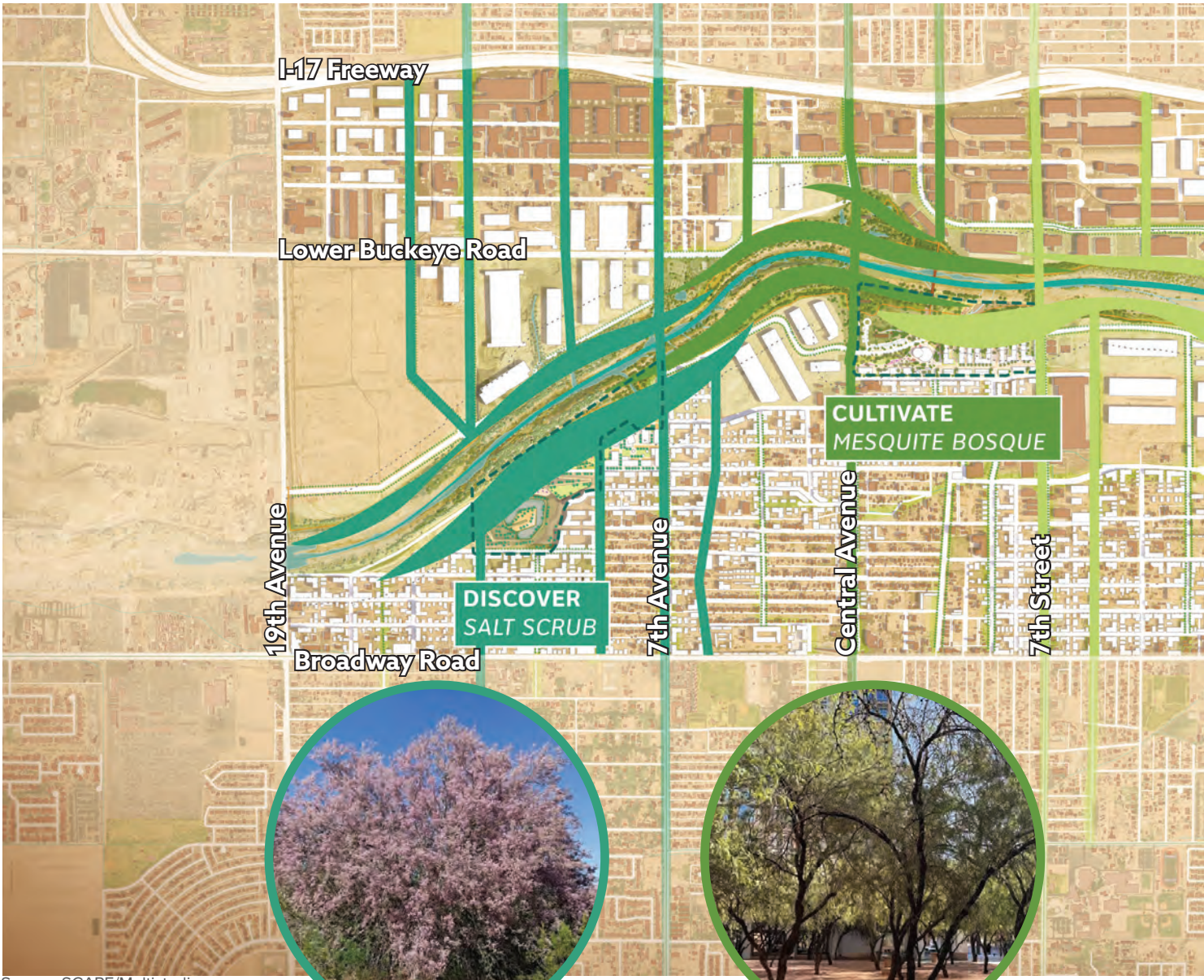
Source: Celebrate Sculpture

Ventana/window artwork

Landscape Typologies

Bio-Cultural Character

The RSHRA is a rich and thriving ecological corridor with abundant flora and fauna at the heart of the Rio Salado District. This unique asset draws locals and visitors alike, in addition to migratory birds, butterflies, and other fauna. **Landscape themes** spawned from the landscape palette defined in the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Plan and are intended to reach into the community to create planted themes that expand the opportunity for wildlife and people who experience living along a natural riparian area. The character of living, in this area, is recognizable by landscape typology, a feeling of open space and the amenities that come with it. When related to the river corridor, landscape restoration should be coordinated with the Aviation Department.



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Desert Ironwood

Mesquite Bosque Habitat

Source: Spadefoot Nursery

Four key ecological zones are defined as character areas on the map below considering community feedback on desired uses, technical analysis of what might be possible, and learning from past work to define the restoration character of the river itself. At the intersections of landscaped paseos with the scenic drive and river trail lies the opportunity of activity hubs that provide public amenities including potable water, shade, art, trash receptacles, directorial wayfinding, retail or other public gathering potentials. Reaching to these intersections, paseos are intended as shaded and lighted walkable paths with supporting public amenities in reasonable distances.



Lower Sonoran Mesquite

Source: Titan Tree Care

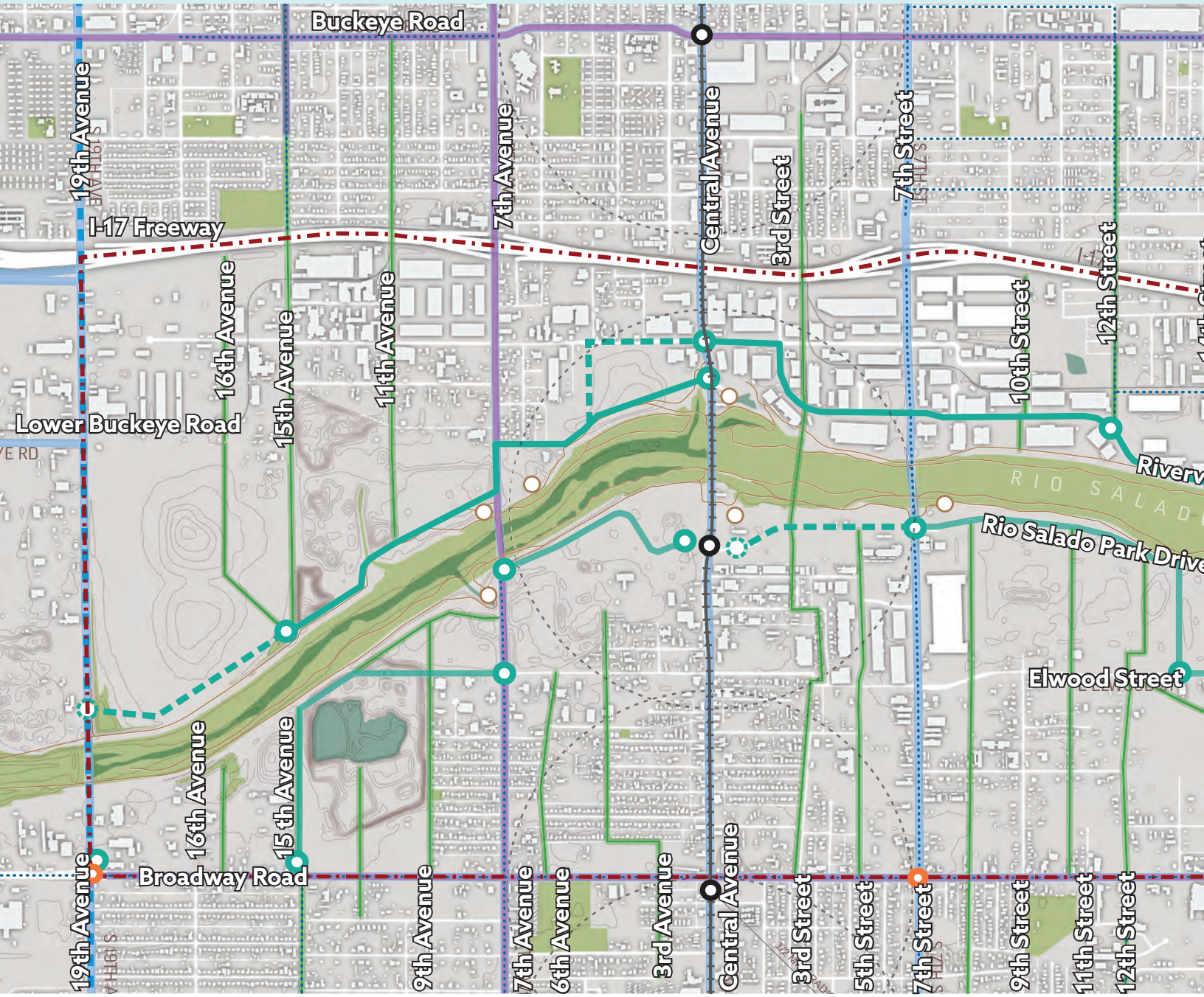
Lower Sonoran Palo Verde

Source: The Arid Land Homesteaders League

To review the latest **Plant List for Development Adjacent to the Rio Salado**, please visit the RIO PHX website.

2050 CONNECTIVITY MAP

The Rio Salado District is envisioned as well-connected network that links neighborhoods with vibrant education, employment, entertainment, and recreational destinations, including other parts of Phoenix such as Downtown and South Mountain Regional Park. An abundance of transportation options such as bus, light rail, and neighborhood circulators, provide frequent and convenient service stops. Shaded and safe streets with “smart cities” technology make for walkable corridors, while an extensive network of protected bicycle lanes facilitate short and medium commutes. The use of a personal automobile remains an option for residents who need to travel significantly longer distances. This vision also supports new infrastructure investments along the RSHRA and San Francisco Canal.



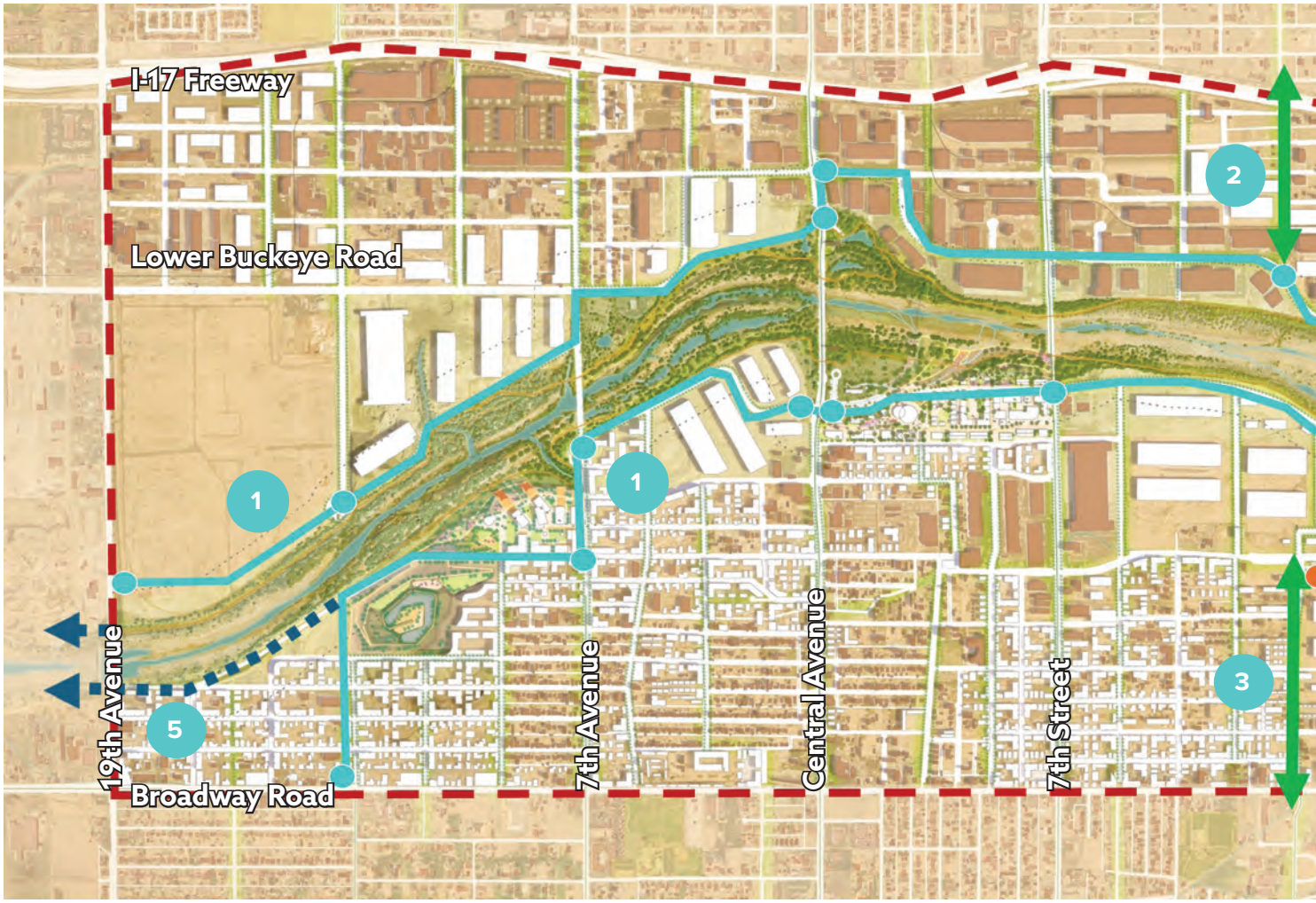
This Connectivity Master Plan illustrates a conceptual vision for streets and paths to support various modes of transportation across public and private properties in the Rio Salado District. This concept considers various inputs such as existing plans, active development projects by private developers, and community-voiced priorities to propose a vision for improved connectivity in the Rio Salado District. The illustrative master plan is intended to guide future land use decisions and inspire future infrastructure investments in the area, and not to intended to depict exactly how the area will be built out over time.

This map illustrates streets and pathways mainly at the block-level; however, more convenient and direct travel routes could be achieved by introducing additional connections at the site-level, particularly for large-scale development, to facilitate public access. Paseos represent conceptual public pathways on public or private property, while multimodal corridors represent segments of public right-of-way that should be studied for enhanced active transportation infrastructure.



Source: Multistudio

Catalyst Corridors



Corridor Connections

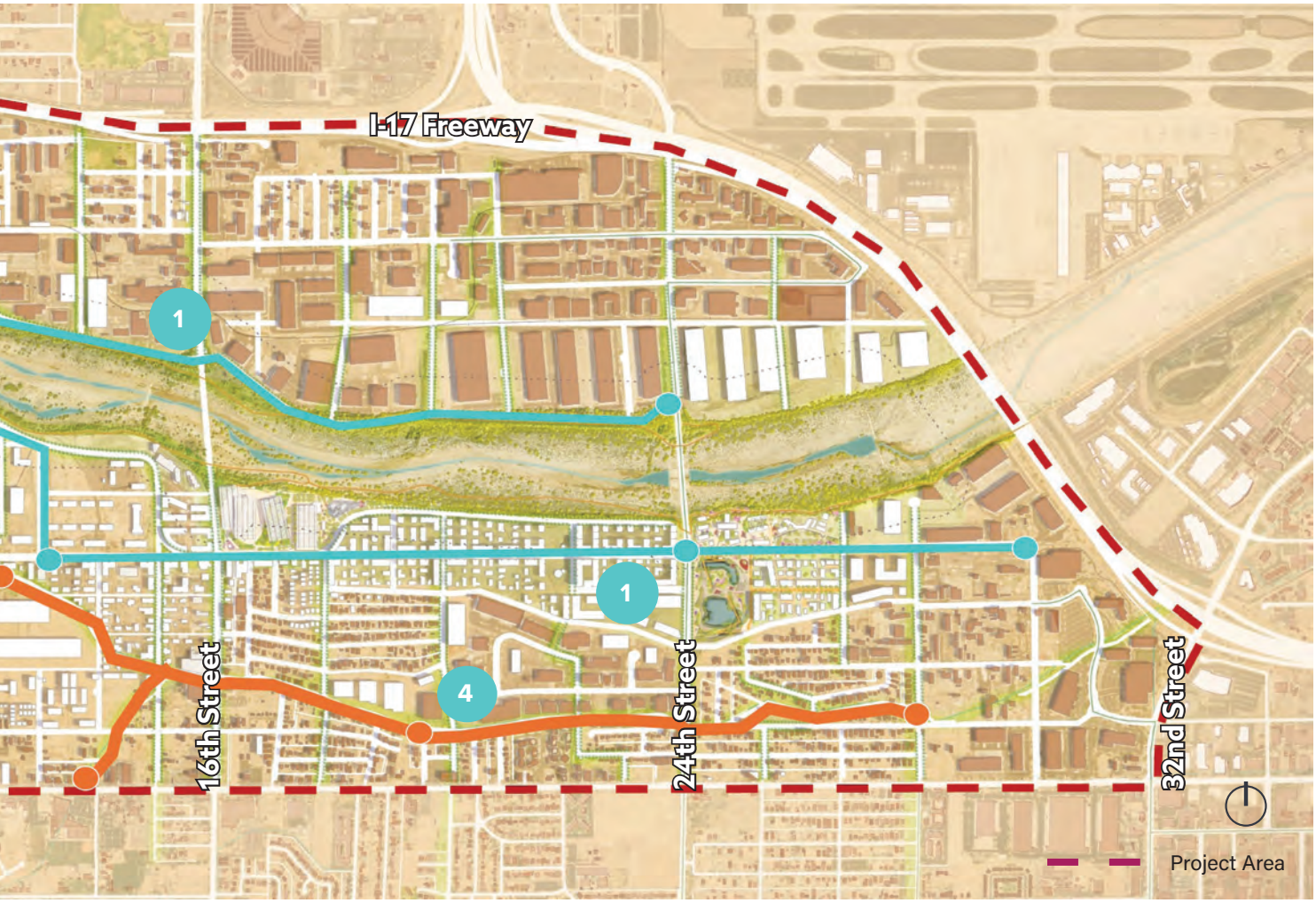
There are five key catalyst corridors to target investment and redevelopment within the Rio Salado District to achieve greater mobility and activity to accomplish the community vision over time. Having a strong interconnected bicycle and pedestrian network is a great opportunity to bridge barriers and gaps.

Having dedicated and protected bike lanes, paseos and trails can help boost local economic development by increasing retail sales, improving property values, attracting tourism, and fostering job creation. Improving bikeability creates more desirable, vibrant neighborhoods, encouraging more frequent visits to local businesses, alternative transportation options, and physical exercise.



Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Shaded street



1 **Scenic Drives and Gateways -** Parallel to the RSHRA, the buildout of the scenic drives (north and south of the river) continues the vision of a multimodal street that brings residents and visitors alike to the banks of the Rio Salado. Gateway features should be located at strategic locations to create a sense of place.

2 **12th Street Rio North Connection -** Historically, river-adjacent communities have had a deep connection with the Rio Salado. Reconnecting the "Cultural Corridor" area north of Interstate 17 with the RSHRA via the existing Interstate 17 predestrian underpass is important to reestablish this connection with nature and recreational opportunities, while improving mobility in the area for residents and attracting tourists to foster economic vitality.

3 **12th Street Rio South Connection -** This north-south corridor along 12th Street presents a unique opportunity to connect neighborhoods south of Broadway Road with fresh food and recreation opportunities at the planned Del Rio Landfill redevelopment site and the RSHRA in the future.

4 **San Francisco Canal Corridor -** A unique and historic corridor, the San Francisco Canal provides an opportunity to improve this corridor for recreation, improved mobility, and to celebrate the areas farming heritage. Gateway features should be located at strategic locations to create a sense of place.

5 **Rio Salado Trails Western Extension -** Connecting the RSHRA to the future Rio Salado Oeste ecological restoration project, west of 19th Avenue, is key to ensure local and regional connectivity along the Rio Salado corridor.

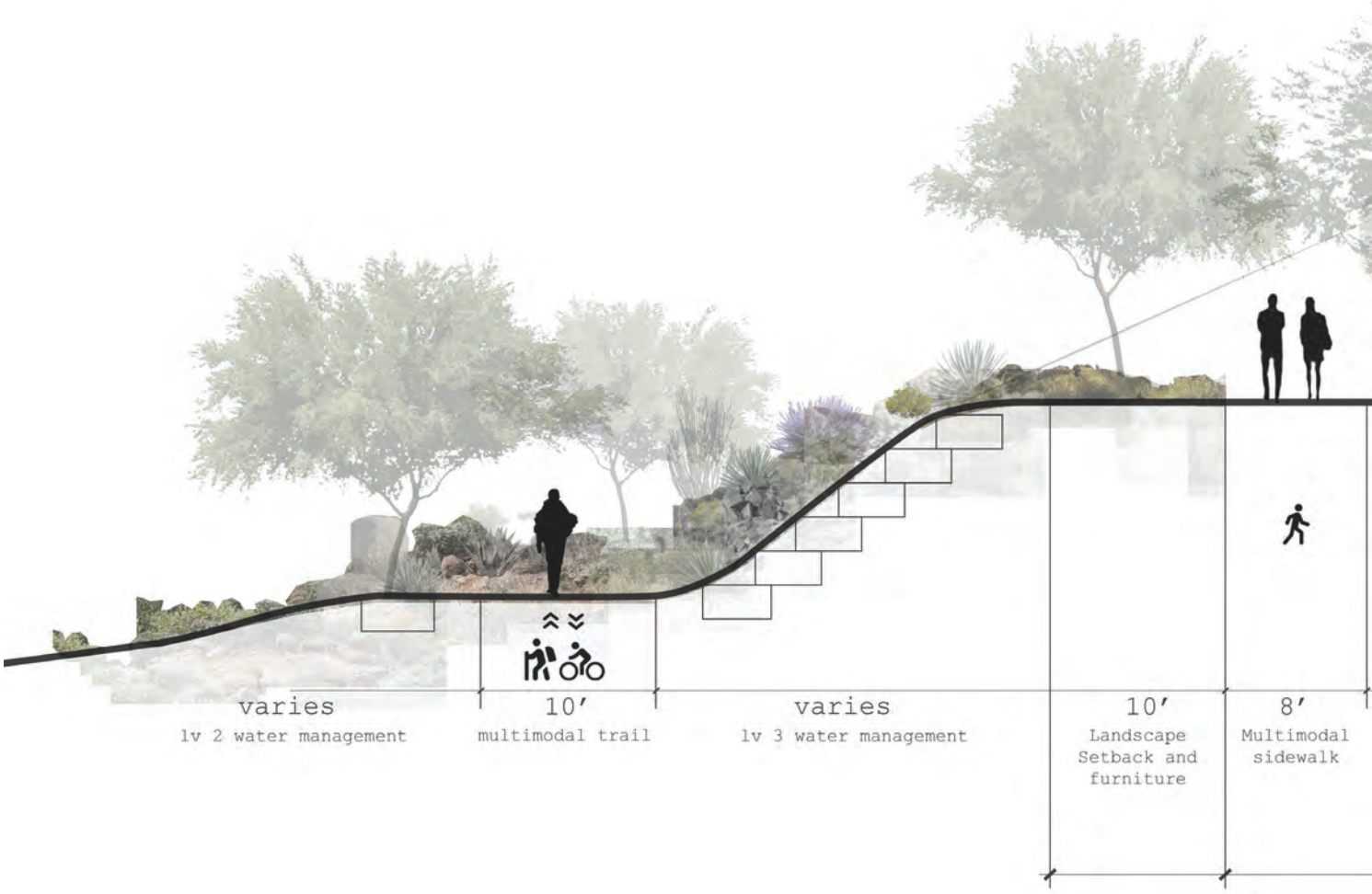
Street Typologies

Street Types

The Rio Salado District, like much of Phoenix, has a grid street pattern with various scales to serve different types of vehicles and pedestrians. While some streets are narrow and have lower travel speeds, others are wide with higher speed limits. To achieve the vision for a more pedestrian-friendly and walkable future, streets should be 'right-sized' and designed to accommodate an increased number of users of all ages and mobilities who may opt to walk, bike, scooter, or travel in mobility assisted devices. Considerations for streets include but are not limited to wider sidewalks, shade trees with green stormwater infrastructure, and protected bicycle lanes. Other access ways for vehicles include public alleys used to serve adjacent businesses and homes.

The street realm should strive to achieve the following goals:

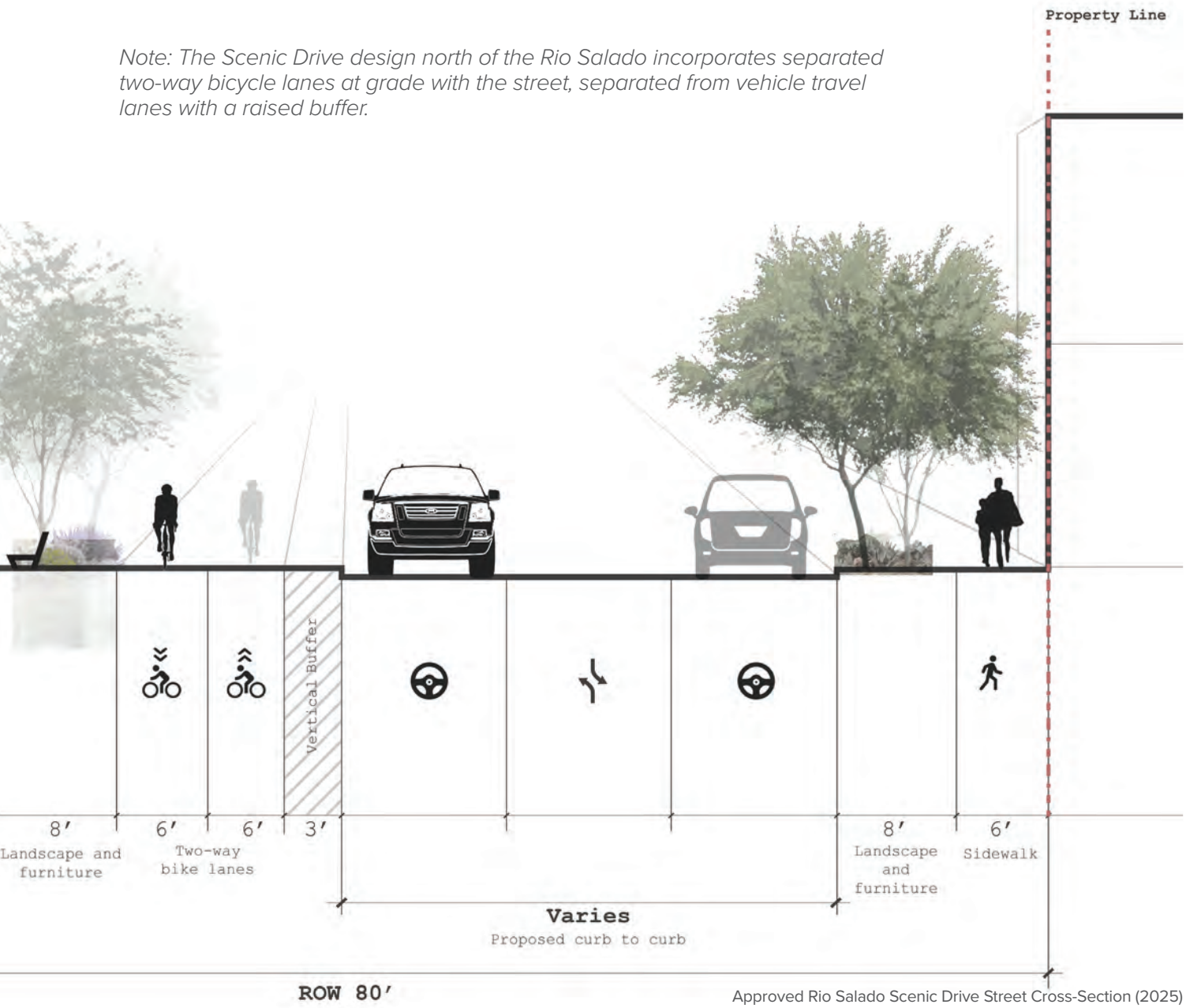
- Safety and accessibility for all
- Shade and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists
- Well-lit sidewalks and vehicle travel lanes
- Marked/designated crossing at appropriate locations
- Incorporate "Smart Cities" technologies



Rio Salado Scenic Drives

Two Scenic Drives are located parallel to the RSHRA - one to the north (Riverview Drive) and one to the south (Rio Salado Park Drive). This concept which originated in the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan (2003) continues the vision of a multimodal street that brings residents and visitors alike to the banks of the Rio Salado. A new and enhanced design of the Scenic Drives proposes a two-way vertically protected bicycle track (on the side of the road closest to the river) adjacent to vehicular travel lanes, with shaded detached sidewalks on both sides of the street. The street realm is also separated from the RSHRA by a landscaped setback with native plantings. New developments seeking a land use entitlement such as rezoning or a use permit, must adhere to this improved street design, while major redevelopment or future street retrofits should apply these street design standards where physically feasible. Street designs are subject to review and approval by the Street Transportation Department.

Note: The Scenic Drive design north of the Rio Salado incorporates separated two-way bicycle lanes at grade with the street, separated from vehicle travel lanes with a raised buffer.



Approved Rio Salado Scenic Drive Street Cross-Section (2025)
Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Other Street Typologies and Gateway Features

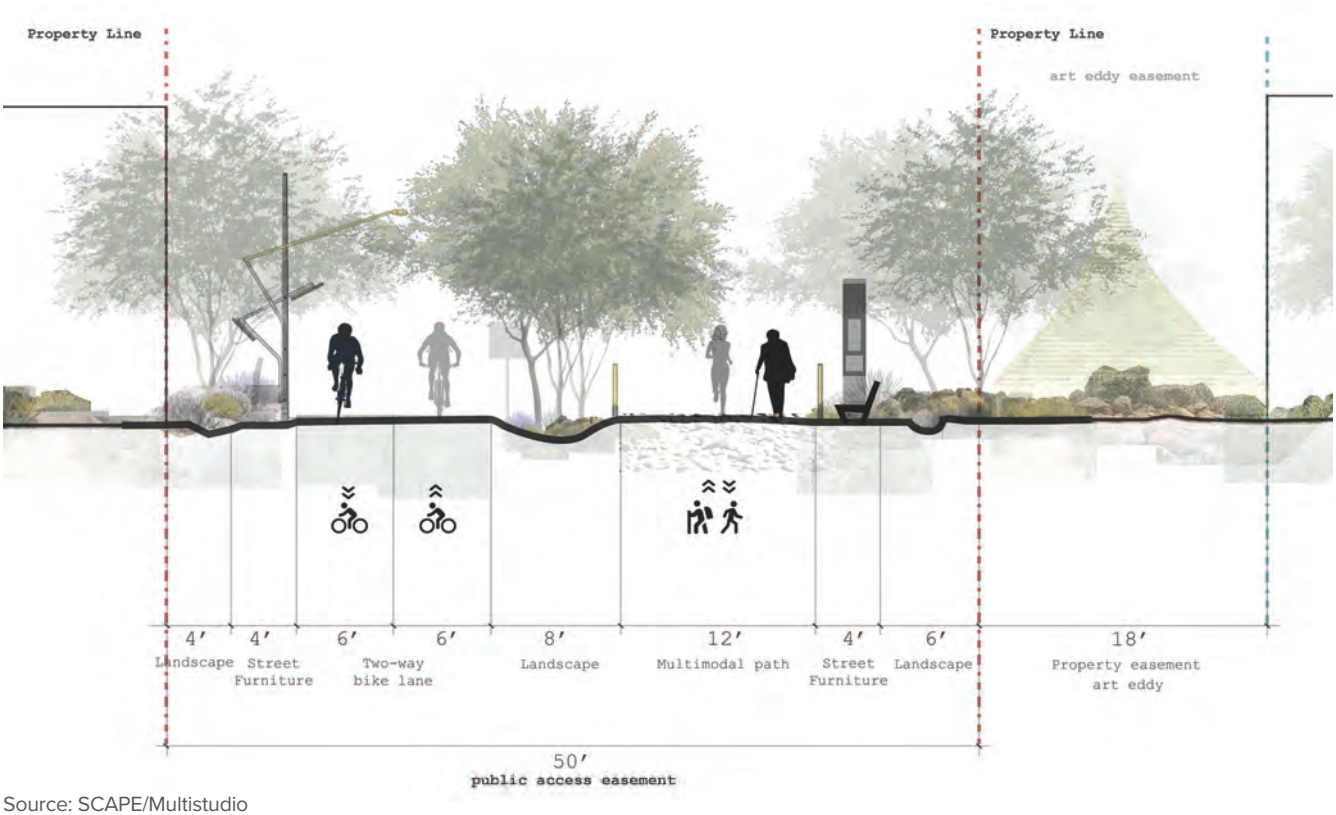
Pedestrian "Street" Concept

Alternative "street" designs for segments of the Scenic Drive could provide enhanced experience for non-motorized modes of transportation, while maintaining safe and efficient circulation in our street network. An analysis of adjacent land uses, transportation options, project-specific benefits for the community, and existing street patterns should inform alternative street design decisions. Where an alternative "street" is identified as a viable option for the benefit of general public and surrounding community, this may be provided in the form of a paseo with a public access easement for non-motorized traffic. Alternative "street" or paseo designs are inspired by local, regional, and international precedents.

Examples of pedestrian and non-motorized "streets" or paseos:

- Promenade (Car-free pedestrian plaza)
- Woonerf (Shared living street)
- Urban street (On-street parking zone)

Street designs are subject to review and approval by the Street Transportation Department.



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Pedestrian promenade/50-foot-wide paseo illustration

Gateways

To support catalyst corridors in the Rio Salado District such as the Scenic Drives and San Francisco Canal, in addition to other key intersections, gateways should be strategically utilized as markers that create a sense of place and denote boundaries. New development or redevelopment should incorporate features as gateways to support the vision of the Rio Salado District.

Examples of gateway features include:

- Signage (Including entry monuments)
- Landscape feature
- Artistic element
- Wall designs
- Seating feature
- Chilled drinking water and shade



Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Seating feature with shade



Artist: Sam Gomez, Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Artistic element/functional art



Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Landscape and wall elements



Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Monument entry feature

A Vibrant Riverwalk: Multimodal Pedestrian Promenade Concept

This concept illustrates an active pedestrian-focused riverwalk in the form of a multimodal promenade or “pedestrian street” that combines shade, art, and adaptable spaces for leisure and community life. This unique destination between Central Avenue and 7th Street, south of the RSHRA, makes for a cultural centerpiece, hosting events and art that draws visitors while supporting eco-tourism. This destination offers recreation, shopping, and entertainment for all, balancing urban vibrancy with nature to create an “arts, culture, and nature” district along the banks of the Rio Salado.



Key Community Priorities Illustrated:

Mixed Use & Walkable Neighborhood

Farmer's Market

Trails & Paseos

Public Art

Gathering Places



Source: BandukSmith Studio

Paseo and Canal Typologies

Paseos

Paseos are key corridors that can reconnect neighborhoods with the RSHRA. Paseos can act as incremental but transformative insertions, creating walkable connections that bring access, shade, and cultural expression into the existing urban fabric. Each paseo features a continuous multimodal trail for non-motorized traffic supported by street furniture, lighting, trees, and wayfinding. Property on either side of the paseo create opportunities for art edges to celebrate local identity and culture through temporary and permanent public art, or curated small interventions. The paseo typology does not require right-of-way and can be provided within a public easement on private property. It relies on targeted investments in comfort, safety, and visibility at the site or block-level.

Whether implemented through private site redevelopment, community partnerships, or city-led improvements, paseos represent a low barrier, high-impact tool to extend the river's reach into daily life and public memory.

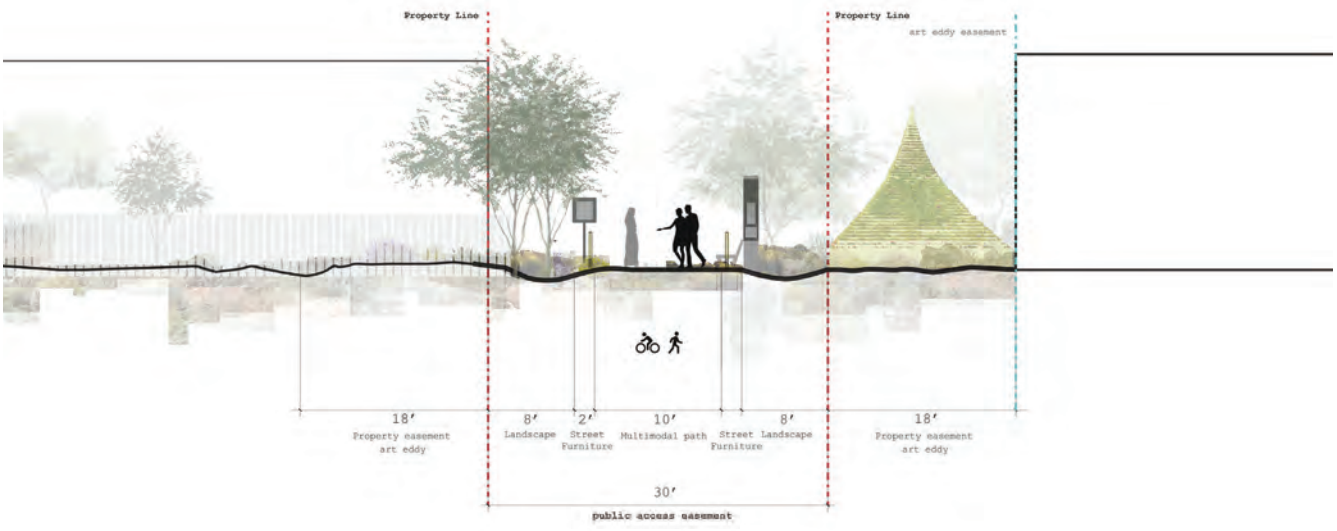


Source: Gates + Associates

Paseo lighting and artwork



Trail-oriented development



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

30-foot-wide paseo illustration

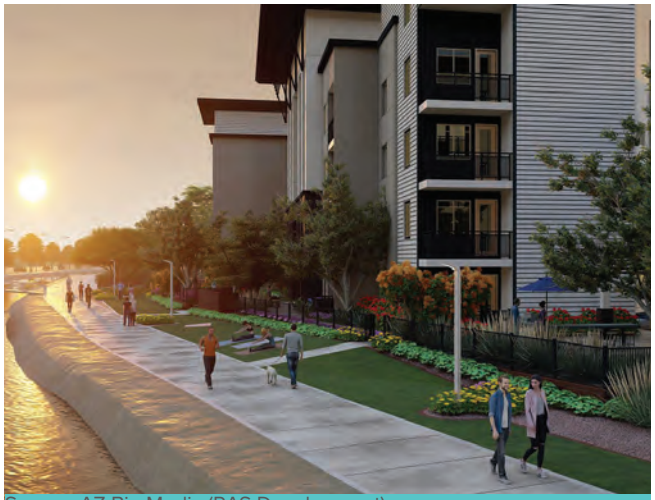
San Francisco Canal

The two-mile-long stretch of the San Francisco Canal between 12th Street and 28th Street offers a unique opportunity to activate and re-orient development to create a vibrant neighborhood corridor. Not only is it a historic feature of the land, but this east to west corridor could connect residents to fresh food and recreation at the planned Del Rio Landfill redevelopment site north of 12th Street and Elwood Street. Like paseos, this canal typology brings access, shade, and cultural expression into the adjacent urban fabric. Canal features include a multimodal path supported by street furniture, lighting, trees, and wayfinding; providing an opportunity to develop a low-stress path and part of the off-street network that many residents enjoy. Property on either side of the canal should provide functional art, artistic fences, wall murals, or spaces that celebrate local identity and culture. The canal typology requires coordination with Salt River Project (SRP), who manages this area, to understand existing conditions and constraints.

Whether implemented through private site redevelopment, community partnerships, city-led or SRP-led improvements, inspiration for the transformation of the San Francisco Canal can be drawn from the paseo typology, in addition to local projects such as Grand Canalscape by the City of Phoenix.

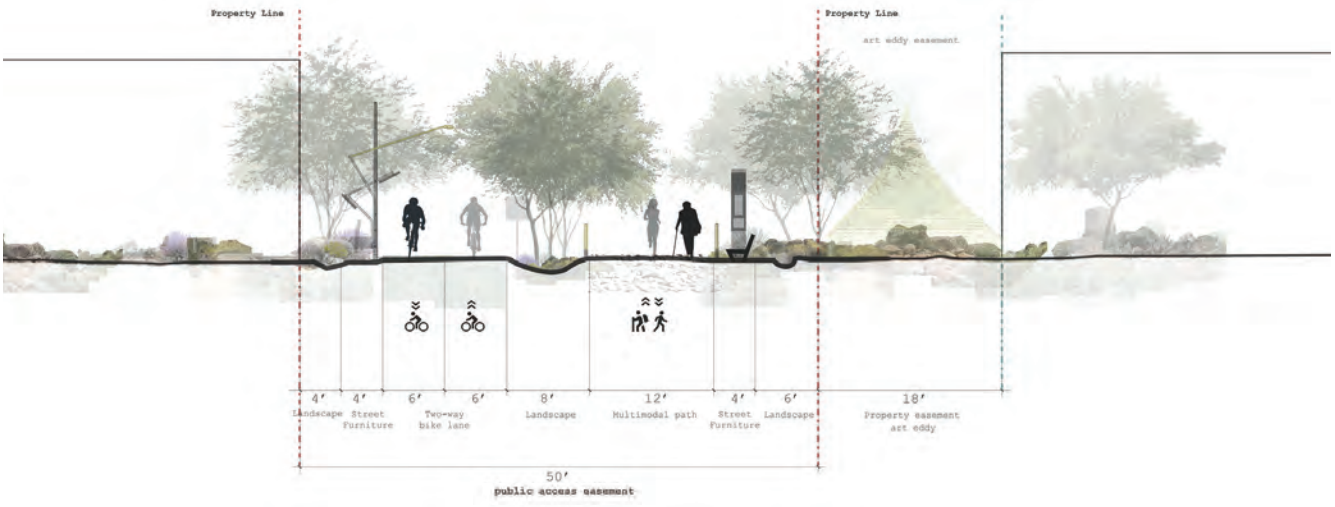


Art feature and lighting



Source: AZ Big Media (RAS Development)

Canal-oriented development (rendering)



Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Pedestrian promenade/50-foot-wide paseo illustration

FOUR

HOW WE GET THERE

This chapter presents a comprehensive implementation plan designed to realize the vision for the Rio Salado District. It transforms the community's aspirations into concrete strategies by outlining specific objectives, action steps, timelines, and shared responsibilities.
By offering a clear and organized framework, this plan helps ensure the community's vision is not only attainable but also actionable.

Furthermore, it aims to engage residents and stakeholders, encouraging collaboration and fostering a sense of ownership in the development process. Ultimately, this approach will contribute to a vibrant, inviting, and resilient community that thrives in the long term.

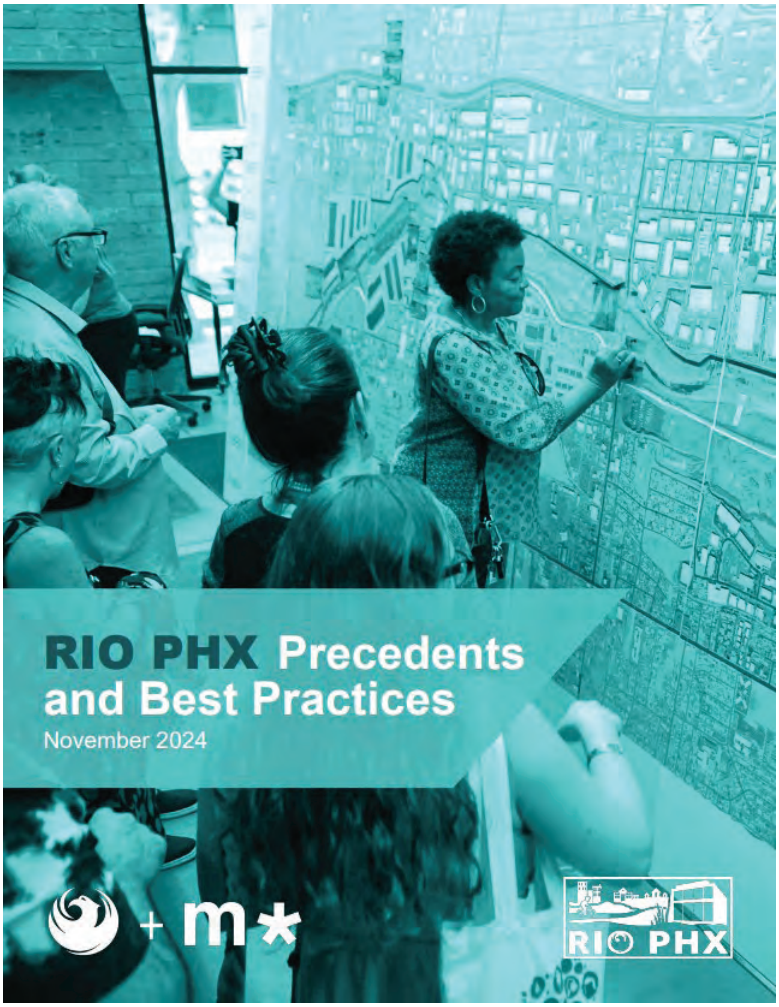
PRECEDENTS & CASE STUDIES

Learning from Precedents & Case Studies

A scan of projects across the U.S. was conducted, focusing on cities with unique local characteristics similar to those of the Rio Salado District. This exploration examined various elements, including large linear open space corridors, dynamic and engaging urban spaces, and both industrial and vacant lands, especially along rivers and waterfronts. The goal was to identify strategies that could be applied in the implementation of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan.

The selected precedents offer valuable learning opportunities that align with the goals of the Rio Salado District's vision, which focuses on enhancing biocultural diversity and fostering community-supported economic development. The best practice examples included in the **RIO PHX Precedents and Best Practices (2024)** report were considered during the planning process. However, it is important to note that new ideas or themes may emerge from community members and other stakeholders.

RIO PHX Best Practices:





To review the **RIO PHX Precedents and Best Practices (2024)** report, please visit the RIO PHX website.

Best Practices and Inspirational Projects

The best-practice examples referenced in the **RIO PHX Precedents and Best Practices (2024)** report inspired the vision of the Rio Salado District and informed implementation actions. Some of the best practices and inspirational projects include:

- River Improvement Overlay (RIO) District , Los Angeles, CA
- Trail-Oriented Development Place Type Policy, San Antonio, TX
- Riverwalk District, Reno, NV
- River North (RiNo) Design Standards, Denver, CO
- Bradley Green Alley, Los Angeles, CA
- Wynkoop Street/21st Street, Denver, CO

Key areas of review:



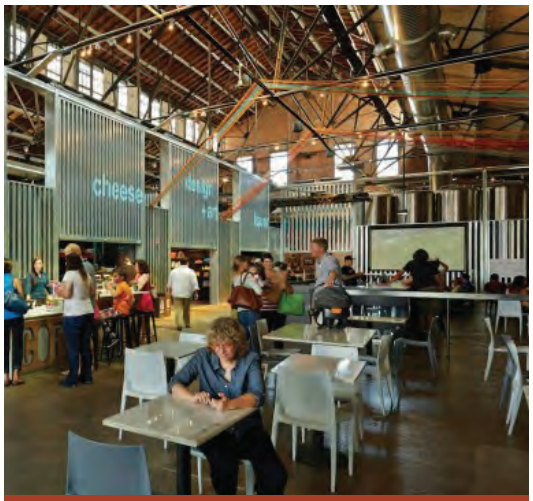
Land use policy and regulations
Building a unique district



Building and site design
Creating a sense of place



Placemaking
Arts as impact



Adaptive reuse
Creative solutions



Open space
Vibrant destinations

Source: RIO PHX Precedents and Best Practices (2024)

SOURCES OF AGGREGATE

Sand and Gravel Mining Along the Rio Salado

Aggregate extraction operations have historically been found along the Rio Salado and other watersheds, as these areas typically contain aggregate desposits, such as sand and gravel, used to meet the construction demands of the rapidly growing Phoenix Metropolitan area. This aggregate material is used to support current and future Phoenix infrastructure, housing, transportation, commercial, and public works projects. As aggregate materials along the river are depleted and extractive activities cease, many of the existing pits can be reclaimed for new uses if they are properly filled.

The redevelopment of former mining sites is key to achieving the vision of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan, as these areas offer valuable real estate development opportunities adjacent to the RSHRA where community-supported economic development can occur. Several examples of development on former mining sites across the U.S. are included in the **Sand and Gravel Mining Report - Preliminary Findings (2025)** by Bloomberg Associates referenced in the Additional Resources section of this plan. The redevelopment of former mining sites is key to achieving the vision of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan.

The General Plan 2025 contains the following land use and design principles, in addition to policies and action tools pertaining to sources of aggregate and related operations across the City of Phoenix:

Land Use and Design Principles

1. **Land Use**: Encourage appropriate land uses and transitions between existing or new residential development and active or planned mining operations.
2. **Land Use**: Discourage new mining operations adjacent to or in close proximity to existing residential development, schools or existing or planned city recreation or open space areas.
3. **Land Use**: Promote land uses on backfilled inactive mining sites that support the vision and goals of adopted policies and plans.
4. **Land Use**: Encourage Transitional Land Use Map designations on new aggregate and mining operations where appropriate and in alignment with adopted plans and policies.
5. **Design**: Enhance the interface between active or inactive mining sites and adjacent streets, planned city recreation areas, and residential uses with appropriate edge treatment that provides screening and landscaping.

Policies and Action Tools

1. **Operations**: Update the General Plan Land Use Map to recognize existing mining sites and planned mining operations when these are identified as needed.
2. **Partnerships**: Encourage mining operators and/or landowners to develop reclamation plans that identify the highest and best use of the land post-aggregate mining in accordance with adopted plans.
3. **Partnerships**: Encourage the development of master plans, where appropriate, to promote adequate scale of new development and infrastructure on large inactive mining sites upon backfilling.
4. **Partnerships**: Work with landowners and/or site operators to dedicate land intended for open space/recreational or areas envisioned for future habitat restoration.
5. **Financing**: Develop a finance or other mechanism to promote the accelerated backfilling of inactive mining sites when the future use of the land is aligned with adopted plans and addresses outstanding community needs.



Active Backfillng Operation on Former Sand and Gravel Mine at 15th Avenue

Measure of Success:

Increase the number of backfilled and redeveloped inactive mining sites (post-mining) across the Rio Salado Corridor, and support new context-appropriate development scales, intensities, and land use mixtures that align with the community vision.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

A Unique District Identity

The Rio Salado District is a unique cultural, natural, and recreational asset for Phoenix. To promote the preservation of existing assets and encourage a respectful transformation of the area, design guidelines can assist in creating a unified vision, leading to a harmonious and aesthetically pleasing environment. **The RIO PHX Design Guidelines**, developed with public input, will shape the urban fabric and establish a district identity that celebrates the existing culture, history, and natural beauty of the area. This will aid in attracting visitors and residents, fostering community pride, promoting economic development, respect for the river and its ecosystems, and cultivating cultural preservation, while creating a sense of place.

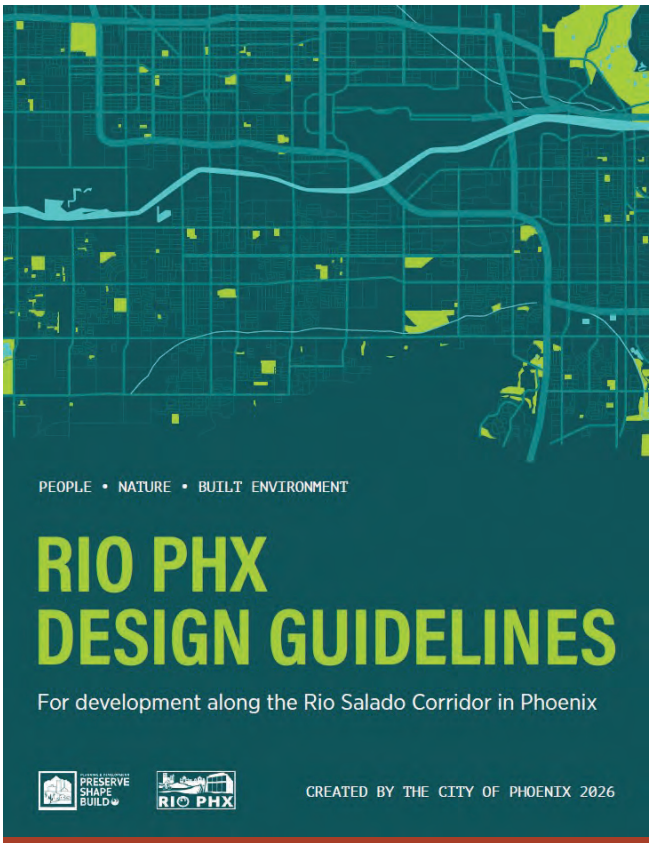
Goals of the RIO PHX Design Guidelines:

1. **Identity and Character**: Shape an identity for the Rio Salado District that celebrates and protects the natural attributes of the environment and respects the existing character and heritage of its surrounding communities and neighborhoods while creating stronger social cohesion.

2. **Connections and River Access**: Improve physical and visual access to the river corridor for abutting communities and visitors through multimodal corridors for greater connectivity.

3. **Safety and Well-being**: Improve the well-being of residents through a cleaner natural environment and increased opportunities for recreation and public open spaces by discouraging crime through intentional design of the natural and built environment.

4. **Environment, Sustainability, and Resiliency**: Advance climate-responsive development by encouraging design strategies that reduce urban heat, conserve water, improve resilience, and promote long-term ecological health and sustainability.



Rio Salado District Design Guidelines

These design guidelines are intended to be dynamic and can evolve to better reflect changing trends, environmental conditions, and community needs. As technology advances and new sustainability practices emerge, the guidelines will be updated to incorporate these innovations. By staying flexible, the plan can effectively respond to both challenges and opportunities that arise over time.

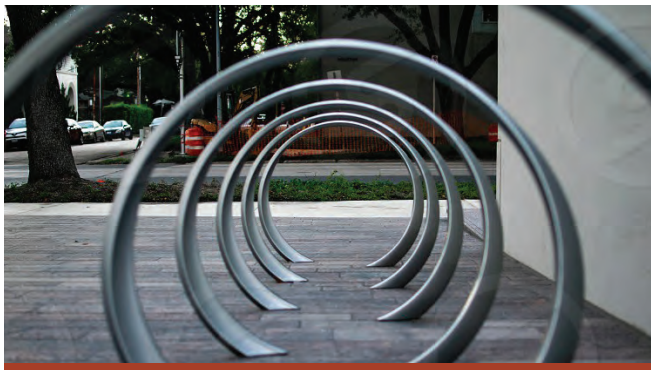
To review the latest **RIO PHX Design Guidelines**, please visit the RIO PHX website.

Design Elements

The RIO PHX Design Guidelines inspired the following design elements throughout the Rio Salado District, integrating **nature, people, and the built environment:**



Building Design



Parking and Bicycle Facilities



Site Design



Landscaping and Fencing



Art and Placemaking

Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Lighting

Source: The Outdoor Look

ACTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

GATHERING AND RESTORING THE RIVER

Individuals and groups regularly gather along and within the banks of the RSHRA to celebrate, explore, recreate, and restore this riparian habitat. Events and festivals hosted by the City of Phoenix and other organizations such as the National Audubon Society and Liberty Wildlife, which have facilities located along the banks of the RSHRA, attract locals and tourists to celebrate the natural beauty of the area and explore recreational activities that include walking, bicycling, bird watching, hiking, and educational field trips.

Restoration and maintenance of the delicate riparian ecosystem at the RSHRA is ongoing, led by the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, supported by volunteers from local groups including but not limited to Arizona Sustainability Alliance, Chispa Arizona, Protectors of the Salt River, Tiger Mountain Foundation, and institutions such as Arizona State University. The continued coordination among city departments and partnership by the City of Phoenix and community groups to activate and restore the area along and within the riverbanks is key to realizing the vision of the Rio Salado District.



Tree Planting Event, Source: Audubon Southwest by Danny RJ



Tree Planting Event, Source: Arizona State University



Transformation Site Event, Source: Protectors of the Salt River

BUILDING COMMUNITY BEYOND THE BANKS

Businesses, neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, organizations, and others, comprise the community beyond the banks of the Rio Salado. The established community in the Rio Salado District is active, resilient, and plays a major role in shaping the vision of the area. Daily living is supported by many small businesses that are found throughout the area, while special events hosted in locations such as Cesar E. Chavez Community School or American Legion Post 65, bring people together in these neighborhoods.

Organizations such as South Central Collaborative bring existing groups together to discuss and take action to address topics relevant to the south central corridor between Downtown Phoenix and South Mountain Regional Park. Similarly, the organization RE:Frame supports the empowerment of the corridor's youth. Other organizations such as Unlimited Potential support adult education, community health, and workforce development. The collective efforts from businesses, neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, organizations, and individuals, are key to achieving the Rio Salado District vision for the future.



Light Rail Extension Opening Event, Source: Valley Metro



Gardens of Tomorrow Event



Community Event, Source: Valley Metro

RECENTLY COMPLETED AND PLANNED PUBLIC PROJECTS

RECENT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT

Continued private and public investment is critical to achieving the vision of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan and supporting existing communities within and beyond the district boundaries. While private development is reliant on market conditions, public investment is often driven by City Council priorities that consider existing or anticipated community needs, among other factors.

A major capital project recently completed by the City of Phoenix in the Rio Salado District is the five-mile South Central light rail extension along Central Avenue, which connects Downtown Phoenix to Baseline Road in the South Mountain Village, with a station across from the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center. Other major capital projects approved with private development in the area include nearly 1.5 miles of protected two-way bicycle tracks generally between Central Avenue and 15th Avenue.



Transformation Site Event, Source: Protectors of the Salt River



Rio Salado/Pioneer Light Rail Station, Source: Valley Metro



Existing Seating Area at RSHRA



Tree Planting Event

PLANNED PROJECTS

Public projects that are planned include the Third Street Rio Salado Bike/Pedestrian Bridge and trail improvements (south bank), Kipok Park renovation, redevelopment of a 30-acre city-owned property at the southeast corner of Central Avenue and Rio Salado Scenic Drive, activation of a one-acre city-owned parcel at the southwest intersection of Central Avenue and the RSHRA, artwork enhancements along the Rio Salado, and continued habitat restoration (including invasive plant removal) in the RSHRA. Other longer-term projects include the redevelopment of the former Del Rio landfill and could also consider evaluating city-owned land for redevelopment potential, among future capital projects. The availability of funding and other factors will determine the completion of these projects. Public-private partnerships between the City of Phoenix and others could also be explored to support future redevelopment and capital projects in the Rio Salado District.



City-Owned Future Revelopment Site

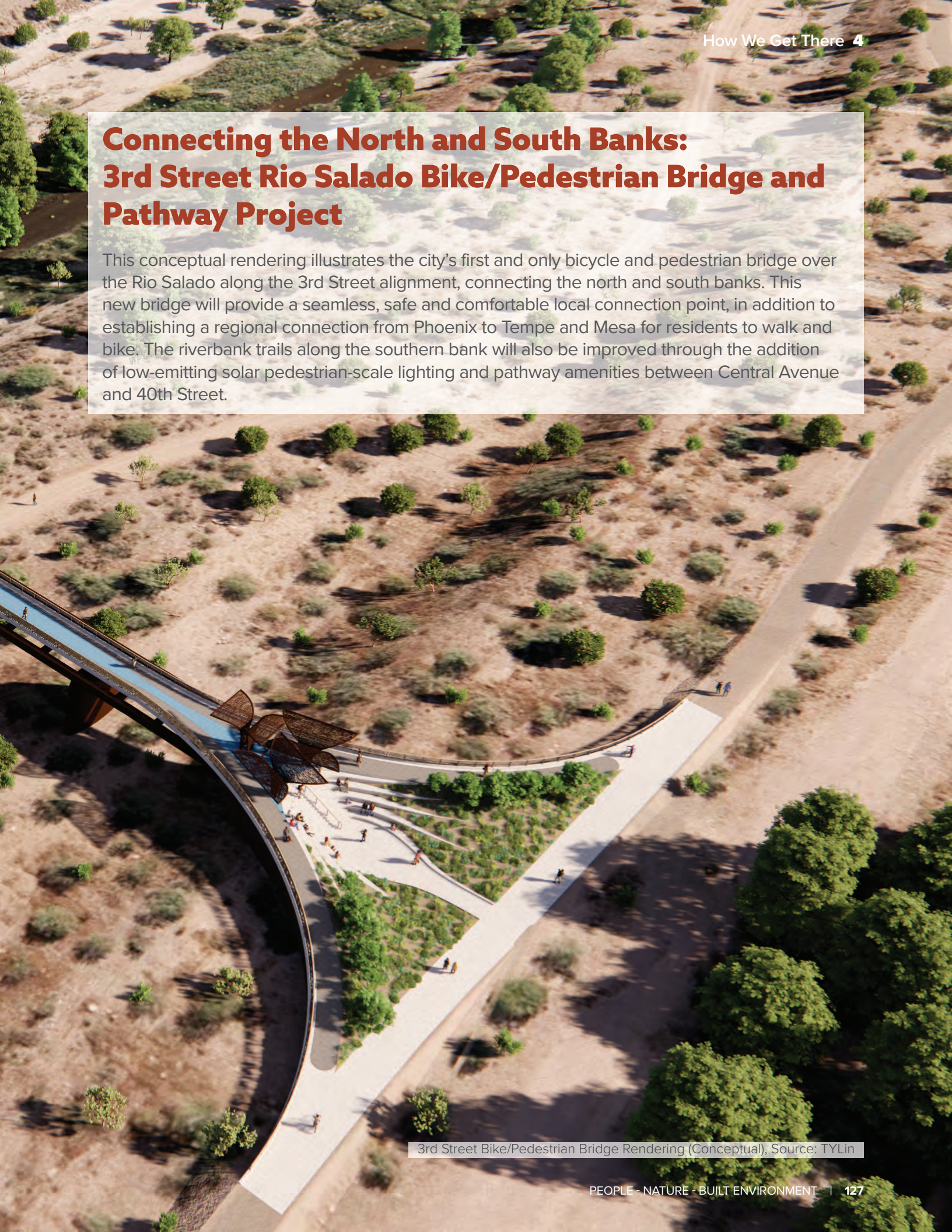

Picnic Tables (Representative Example)


3rd Street Bike/Pedestrian Bridge Rendering (Conceptual), Source: TYLin



Connecting the North and South Banks: 3rd Street Rio Salado Bike/Pedestrian Bridge and Pathway Project

This conceptual rendering illustrates the city's first and only bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the Rio Salado along the 3rd Street alignment, connecting the north and south banks. This new bridge will provide a seamless, safe and comfortable local connection point, in addition to establishing a regional connection from Phoenix to Tempe and Mesa for residents to walk and bike. The riverbank trails along the southern bank will also be improved through the addition of low-emitting solar pedestrian-scale lighting and pathway amenities between Central Avenue and 40th Street.



3rd Street Bike/Pedestrian Bridge Rendering (Conceptual), Source: TYLin

CHARACTER AREAS

Urban Form and Character

The Rio Salado District is characterized by having a wide variety of land uses ranging from single-family residential, multi-family, commercial, public/quasi-public, to industrial. These land use types are also built at various scales ranging from small to large building forms and located in parcels of various sizes.

The creation of Character Areas can promote the preservation of the existing neighborhood character, while facilitating a respectful transformation of the Rio Salado District through form-based codes, such as the Walkable Urban (WU) Code. These form-based codes can connect the complex physical environment to standards that can be adjusted for each individual context, or character area, while providing the restorative potential of time-tested pedestrian-oriented forms of urbanism.

Future studies on character areas within the Rio Salado District should consider existing land use patterns, building forms, parcel size, block pattern, parcel length, alley widths, right-of-way, among other physical conditions.

Emerging character areas and predominant character of these, include:

Traditional Residential Neighborhood (TRN)

- **Zoning:** Single-Family
- **Building** Types: Single-family, multi-generational, duplex, multi-unit housing, ADU
- **Scale**: Small

Established Residential Neighborhood (ERN)

- **Zoning**: Multi-family
- **Building Types**: Single-family, multi-generational, duplex, courtyard housing, townhouse/rowhouse, ADU
- **Scale**: Small to Medium

Transitional Multi-family Neighborhood (TMN)

- **Zoning**: Multi-family
- **Building Types**: Multi-generational, duplex, courtyard housing, townhouse/rowhouse, live/work, small multi-family
- **Scale**: Small to Medium

Transitional Commercial (TC)

- **Zoning**: Commercial
- **Building Types**: Live/work, small multi-family, multi-unit building, small commercial, townhouse/rowhouse, adaptive reuse
- **Scale**: Small

Main Street (MS)

- **Zoning**: Commercial
- **Building Types**: Live/work, small mixed-use, small commercial, medium mixed-use
- **Scale**: Small to Medium

Mixed-Use (MU)

- **Zoning**: Commercial
- **Building Types**: Live/work, small commercial, medium mixed-use, large mixed-use
- **Scale**: Small to Large

Mixed-Use Employment (MUE)

- **Zoning**: Commercial
- **Building Types**: Live/work, small to large mixed-use, small to large employment
- **Scale**: Small to Large

To review future assessments on **character areas**, please visit the RIO PHX website.



Walkable street, Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Emerging Character Areas

Several character area categories have emerged to provide guidance on future assessments and code updates. These have been organized below by the primary character of each area, Residential and Mixed-Use categories.

Residential Character Areas Examples:



Traditional Residential Neighborhood (TRN)



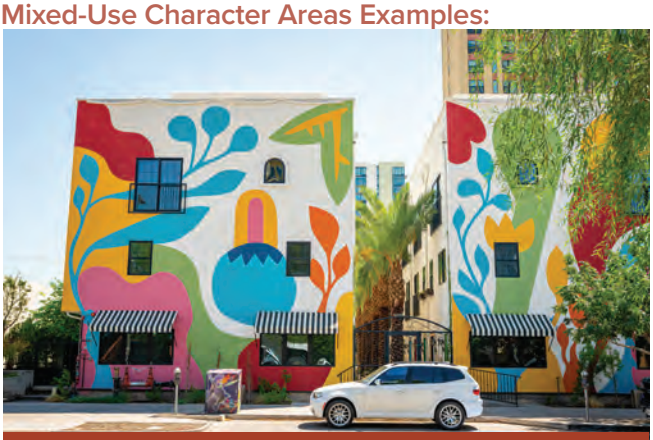
Established Residential Neighborhood (ERN)



Transitional Multi-family Neighborhood (TMN)

Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies

Mixed-Use Character Areas Examples:



Transitional Commercial (TC)

Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Main Street (MS)

Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Mixed-Use (MU)

Source: Bloomberg Philanthropies



Mixed-Use Employment (MUE)

ACHIEVING THE VISION

IMPLEMENTING THE FOUR BIG IDEAS

The vision for the Rio Salado District is centered on achieving four key goals or "big ideas": establish a vibrant mix of uses, connect residents and visitors to the Rio Salado, improve community well-being and quality of life, and establish a hub for eco-tourism and green infrastructure. These goals are supported by goals, strategies, and policies, in addition to short-term and long-term actions that will implement each of the four big ideas.

The four big ideas presented in this section collectively represent the roadmap for implementing the unified vision depicted in the Master Plans presented in the "What We Want" Chapter for a healthier, vibrant, and well-connected Rio Salado District. While not all benefits can be quantified, extensive research, combined with technical analysis and community vision for the district, presents the need for Phoenix and its partners to work together in delivering the Rio Salado District vision.

1 Establish a Vibrant Mix of Uses

A complete neighborhood can be established by creating livable and walkable communities with housing, shopping, and employment options. Diversifying the mix of uses can create complete neighborhoods and provide new opportunities to live, work, and play for locals and tourists particularly along the banks of the Rio Salado at all hours of the day.

Goal: Create a Unique Local and Regional Destination

2 Connect Residents and Visitors to the Rio Salado

A safe and well-connected neighborhood delivers multiple benefits, including mobility options such as promoting walking and biking that can lead to lower transportation costs and physical exercise. Access to natural spaces, such as the RSHRA, offers additional mental and physical health benefits by recreation and socialization opportunities. Connecting residents and visitors to the RSHRA can create a sense of pride and activate this unique space.

Goal: Foster Environmental Stewardship and Improve Mobility Options

3 Improve Community Well-Being and Quality of Life

Overcoming economic, environmental, and social barriers in the Rio Salado District can lead to an improved quality of life and well-being of residents. Increasing healthy food options, improving access to chilled drinking water and access to healthcare facilities are critical to improving well-being, while a better quality of life can be supported by jobs, education, improved built environment and social cohesion.

Goal: Prioritize Community Health Outcomes

4 Establish A Hub for Eco-Tourism and Green Infrastructure

At the heart of the Rio Salado District is the RSHRA, a unique ecosystem restoration project with wetlands, diverse flora and fauna, and recreation opportunities. Linking this natural area to local businesses and community-led eco-tourism activities beyond the riverbanks along shaded "green" corridors supported with green stormwater infrastructure, can grow and diversity the local economy while supporting the natural environment.

Goal: Improve Economic and Environmental Prosperity



Conceptual active pedestrian/multimodal street along the Rio Salado, Source: BandukSmith Studio

GOALS, STRATEGIES & POLICIES

GOAL 1

CREATE A UNIQUE LOCAL AND REGIONAL DESTINATION



Strategy 1.A: Update land use map designations and zoning codes to encourage a mix of uses while protecting ecological health and connecting people to the river

Strategy 1.B: Collaborate towards future redevelopment of catalysts sites, including mining and brownfield sites, to promote a mix of uses

Policies:

1. Support new rezoning and other entitlement projects that propose uses in alignment with the plan's Land Use Map.
2. Encourage the Walkable Urban (WU) Code on new projects.
3. New development and redevelopment should incorporate design guidelines referenced in this policy plan and the latest RIO PHX Design Guidelines, which include frontage treatments, public art, active open space, and bike infrastructure, among other elements.

2050 Target Outcome:

Transition at least 50% of the land area in the Rio Salado District to form-based code or a zoning district that is primarily non-industrial.

GOAL 2

FOSTER ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY AND IMPROVE MOBILITY OPTIONS



Strategy 2.A: Enhance existing connections and provide new connections to activities and destinations adjacent to and beyond the river

Policies:

1. New development and major redevelopment of sites should construct streets, paseos, and other connections in alignment with the plan's cross-sections and Connectivity Maps.
2. Support policy and code changes that reduce barriers for activation of streets and the use of green stormwater infrastructure, where feasible.
3. Promote active transportation and supporting infrastructure in all projects to provide a wider range of transportation choices.
4. Encourage the retrofit of existing streets to incorporate plan elements and accommodate more transportation options, where feasible.
5. Evaluate the need for pedestrian crossings and other active transportation infrastructure with new development.

2050 Target Outcome:

Facilitate direct connections to and from the RSHRA by establishing or improving a minimum of two corridors with 75% shade and active transportation infrastructure such as detached sidewalks and bike lanes.

The following Goals, Strategies and Policies support the **Four "Big Ideas"** towards achieving the overall vision for a healthier, walkable, and vibrant Rio Salado District. Additionally, 2050 Target Outcomes are also connected to each respective Goal for tracking implementation progress over time.

GOAL 3

PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES



Strategy 3.A: Increase resident and public well-being through awareness and interactions with and along the river

Strategy 3.B: Improve environmental conditions and promote active lifestyles for all residents

Policies:

1. Encourage new development that aligns with the plan's Areas of Change Map.
2. Support policy and code changes that reduce barriers for space activation, healthy food, recreation, access to chilled drinking water, and community health solutions.
3. Promote local programs that strengthen businesses, education, workforce development, and city services.
4. Create opportunities for environmental stewardship and education to promote the restoration and protection of the river and its ecosystems.

2050 Target Outcome:

Provide community health options, such as healthy food access, recreation access, and health services, within a 15-minute walk for at least 50% of residential households in the Rio Salado District.

GOAL 4

IMPROVE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



Strategy 4.A: Expedite implementation of green stormwater infrastructure

Strategy 4.B: Collaborate with community and business partners on eco-tourism opportunities

Policies:

1. Encourage green stormwater infrastructure on new development, particularly projects seeking rezoning and other land entitlements.
2. Support new community-led eco-tourism initiatives.
3. Discourage land and energy intensive uses such as data centers.
4. Promote and implement best-practices to treat stormwater discharge into the RSHRA, where feasible.

2050 Target Outcome:

Increase the monthly number of visitors to the RSHRA through eco-tourism initiatives and encourage at least two new green stormwater infrastructure projects annually in the area.

TOP 10 PRIORITY ACTIONS

GOAL 1 ACTIONS



ACTION 1: Amend the Rio Salado Interim Overlay (RSIO) District to regulate development near the RSHRA, reference new design guidelines, facilitate form-based code and interim land uses, and streamline existing regulations.

ACTION 2: Amend the General Plan Land Use map designation to adopt placetypes.

City Department Lead(s): PDD

ACTION 3: Rezone catalyst and "reimagined" properties and/or deploy an opt-in zoning approach to encourage new development in alignment with the community vision. Where added height, density or change of use is requested or where the City-owned land is utilized, or City assistance is provided to a project; when feasible, include affordable or workforce housing components, and opportunities for local business engagement or community spaces or uses.

City Department Lead(s): PDD, CEDD, HD

GOAL 2 ACTIONS



ACTION 4: Explore the feasibility and potential approaches for an urban circulator that could connect river-adjacent communities to the RSHRA, fresh food locations, and other major destinations.

City Department Lead(s): PDD, PTD



ACTION 5: Improve the Rio Salado Scenic Drive network by implementing the latest street cross-section for the Rio Salado Scenic Drives and amending the General Plan Street Classification Map.

ACTION 6: Pursue funding to develop an infrastructure needs assessment that identifies future potential infrastructure projects to promote safe mobility and improved quality of life.

City Department Lead(s): PDD, ST

Priority **five-year actions** that will be led by the City of Phoenix with support from RIOPHX partners to jump start implementation progress toward the community vision for the Rio Salado District. Identifying funding sources and partnerships will be key to implement these actions.

GOAL 3 ACTIONS



ACTION 7: Identify locations for future shade structures within the Rio Salado District.

City Department Lead(s): PDD, OHRM, OAC



ACTION 8: Research and partner with a property owner to pilot an accelerated backfill program on inactive mining sites for redevelopment.

City Department Lead(s): PDD, OEP, CEDD

GOAL 4 ACTIONS



ACTION 9: Identify funding to design and construct the one-acre city-owned "Transformation Site" west of Central Avenue and south of the Rio Salado.

City Department Lead(s): PRD, PDD, OEP



ACTION 10: Pursue funding for continued habitat restoration, facility upgrades, artistic and placemaking elements, amenities and other improvements.

City Department Lead(s): PRD, OEP, OAC, PDD, AVD

ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

Additional government actions include other **short-term (1 to 5 years)** and **longer-term (5+ years)** actions by the City of Phoenix to implement the vision for the Rio Salado District. These actions can be conducted individually or simultaneously, and combined with other actions led by government, community, and businesses partners.

No.	Implementation Actions	Lead Dept.	Key Partners
BIG IDEA 1 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: ESTABLISH A VIBRANT MIX OF USES			
11	Adopt Character Areas and standards that promote a variety of housing types to meet multigenerational and income diverse needs while preserving existing housing and supporting generational stability and community identity.	PDD	HD
12	Support the establishment of community-led "Arts, Nature, and Culture" and "Eco-Business" sub-districts and pursue funding that supports ongoing activities and district-wide improvements to attract more visitors to the RSHRA.	CEDD	PDD, OAC, OEP, PRD
13	Support organized community groups in the creation of manufactured home resident-owned communities to maintain or expand affordable housing options.	HD	PDD
14	Continue and, where feasible, expand citywide programs that promote homeownership, housing preservation, renter stability, home repairs, and business assistance to support existing residents and locally owned businesses in the Rio Salado District. Explore displacement indicators as investment occurs and use the data to identify potential assistance programs and grants to support the area.	CEDD, HD	NSD
15	Contact historic-eligible building property owners in the Rio Salado District and encourage them to register for this designation and participate in programs.	PDD	NSD
16	Develop Rio Salado District brand or design guidelines and incorporate design elements in new infrastructure projects or facility upgrades, where feasible.	PDD	OAC, OEP, OI, PRD, PTD, ST, OHRM
17	Expand the Phoenix Brownfields Land Recycling Program and prioritize key strategic sites in the Rio Salado District for redevelopment in alignment with community priorities and plan vision, where possible.	OEP	CEDD, PDD
18	Pursue funding to study economic potential to redevelop key strategic sites in alignment with community priorities and plan vision.	PDD	CEDD
19	Leverage economic tools to prioritize investment in mixed-use development and other community-identified priorities.	CEDD	CMO, PDD
20	Collaborate with the healthcare industry to promote the development of new medical and mental health facilities acilities in the South Mountain Village, considering the Rio Salado District. This includes workforce partnerships to train and hire residents into health careers and mental health support roles.	CEDD	-
21	Study the feasibility of commercial "green-energy" charging stations and pursue funding to construct these to support an advanced "green" transportation network.	OS	OI

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Some of these long-term actions may be able to be conducted earlier as staffing capacity and resources become available by each department.

NO.	Implementation Actions	Lead Dept.	Key Partners
22	Expand Middle Housing applicability area across the Rio Salado District.	PDD	HD
23	Explore adding properties within or near the Rio Salado District to a community land trust and/or leveraging other tools to support long-term affordable housing options.	HD	-
24	Prioritize small to mid-scale non-residential development types on aviation noise land sites along the northern portion of the Rio Salado District.	AVD, CEDD	PDD
25	Investigate the feasibility of a pilot business program that supports the appearance of commercial properties (including screening and buffering), while helping businesses expand.	NSD	CEDD
26	Explore the feasibility of technical assistance, financial incentives and/or public improvements to support new residential development that includes long-term affordable housing for a range of incomes, and home improvements that help existing residents remain in place. Where feasible on City-owned land, determine appropriate affordability terms through future Request for Proposals, rezonings, and development agreements.	HD, NSD	PDD
27	Collaborate with local utility providers on utility corridor planning and to encourage proactive upgrades of utility infrastructure in the Rio Salado District.	CMO	CEDD, PDD
28	Encourage local business and developer outreach and engagement during the redevelopment of City-owned properties, such as advertising Requests for Proposals through venues which will include the local development community and community partners. In addition, holding pre-solicitation teaming sessions and exploring other ways to create substantive opportunities for local participation where legally and programmatically feasible.	CEDD	-
29	Coordinate implementation efforts in the Rio Salado District and South Central corridor to promote a continuous development pattern, served by comparable access to infrastructure, programs and services. This includes identifying cross-boundary projects in future infrastructure needs assessments and related funding requests.	PDD	-
30	Create an interative online tool that is easy to use by the public and reports on progress related to the actions in the Rio Salado District Policy Plan. In addition to this tool, informing a wider audience by updating the RIO PHX project website and providing an annual implementation update through an existing public forum (such as the Village Planning Committees).	PDD	-

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GOVERNMENT ACTIONS (cont'd)

No.	Implementation Actions	Lead Dept.	Key Partners
BIG IDEA 2 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: CONNECT RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE RIO SALADO			
31	Partner with community groups to promote local food production, processing (community kitchens), and distribution (farmers markets, mobile markets, ect.) within or near the Rio Salado District.	OEP	CEDD, PDD
32	Promote local exercise, environmental education, health and social programs, smart cities technologies, chilled drinking water access in the district, including along the RSHRA.	PRD	OPH, OEP, NSD, OI
33	Strengthen active transportation connections to and within the Rio Salado District by building PhxCAN projects and supporting biking and shared micromobility as a safe, enjoyable way to access and enjoy the district.	ST	PRD
34	Pursue regional and federal funding (i.e. grants) and local funding (i.e. grants, bonds, capital improvement program) to improve connectivity to the RSHRA and other infrastructure projects.	ST	CMO, PRD, PDD, OEP
35	Work with property owners to acquire easements or right-of-way and pursue funding to improve the 12th Street alignment that connect the RSHRA and Cultural Corridor (north of Interstate 17), also considering Smart Cities technologies and design.	ST	OEP, PRD
36	Develop a creative marketing display or strategy in Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport that promotes the RSHRA and other assets for visitors, to increase tourism to the area.	OAC	AVD, PRD
No.	**Implementation Actions**	**Lead Dept.**	**Key Partners**
BIG IDEA 3 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION			
37	Promote activities that provide education and raise awareness about heat-related illness prevention in schools, businesses and public events.	OHRM	-
38	Study opportunities for new cooling centers in the project area.	OHRM	-
39	Partner with neighborhood associations, businesses, and institutional organizations to sponsor regular cleanup events.	PRD, NSD	-
40	Leverage the redevelopment of the former Del Rio Landfill (i.e. Arizona Fresh Agri-Food Innovation project) to support food industry career training, youth internship programs, and jobs between local growers, distributors, and residents.	CEDD	OEP

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41	Conduct a “Safe Routes to Schools” study from local schools, residential neighborhoods, and other area assets, including the RSHRA.	ST	PDD, OHRM, OEP, OI, PRD
42	Study and identify locations to create “Cool Corridors” to promote pedestrian connectivity between public assets.	OHRM, ST	OAC, PDD
43	Develop a public-facing tool that identifies locations of existing community gardens and other food opportunities.	OEP	-
41	Continue to invest in permanent housing, plus develop and implement new housing models, including master leasing and coordinate existing outreach and improve connection to behavioral health supports, including substance use and mental health treatment. This includes outreach coordination with community and city department partners, with consideration of potential impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, especially during major Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area improvements for individuals experiencing homelessness.	OHS	PRD
42	Connect residents with energy affordability programs, including programs managed by the city, utility companies, and other organizations.	OS	NSD
BIG IDEA 4 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: ESTABLISH A HUB FOR ECO-TOURISM AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE			
43	Educate and train community members and organizations on green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) opportunities.	PDD	OEP
44	Study the feasibility to design and construct a localized stormwater management system that increases clean water resources in the Rio Salado for public and ecological benefit.	WSD, OEP	PDD
45	Explore Zoning Ordinance updates that will facilitate interim land uses such as pocket parks, urban farms, community gardens and food distribution sites.	PDD	OEP
46	Coordinate with various city departments to develop clean energy projects on city facilities, and where feasible, incorporate battery energy storage systems.	OS	-
47	Install catch basin trash screens to diminish or prevent the accumulation of trash in the RSHRA.	ST	WSD, PRD, OEP

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COMMUNITY-LED ACTIONS

Community-led actions are **short term (1-5 year)** and **long-term (5+ years)** actions that will implement the vision for the Rio Salado District. These actions can be conducted individually or simultaneously and combined with other actions led by government and businesses as presented in this policy plan.

No.	Implementation Actions	Long/Short Term	Supporting Department
BIG IDEA 1 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: ESTABLISH A VIBRANT MIX OF USES			
1	Share information about the benefits of the Walkable Urban Code with neighbors and neighborhood associations, and support zoning codes that promote diverse housing types.	S	PDD
2	Share information about existing city programs with neighbors and neighborhood associations and encourage them to pursue these services to improve their homes, streets, schools, and other areas in the neighborhood.	S	NSD, ST, OHRM, OEP, OI
3	Pursue the establishment of community land trusts, manufactured home resident-owned communities or other types of resident-owned communities (ROCs).	S	HD
4	Partner with developers to shape local development projects and consider Community Benefit Agreements (CBA's) when mutually beneficial.	S, L	CEDD, PDD
5	Engage with elected officials, city management, city boards and commission members on the importance of advocating and supporting the Rio Salado District Policy Plan goals.	S, L	PDD
6	Recognize developers who create catalyst projects and innovative housing demonstration projects, and businesses that adopt river-friendly practices in the Rio Salado District.	S, L	PDD, CEDD, HD
BIG IDEA 2 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: CONNECT RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE RIO SALADO			
7	Organize river walks, clean ups, mural paintings, exercise events, bicycle rides, and other activities that bring people to the RSHRA and other local parks in the area.	S	PRD, ST, NSD, OAC
8	Support Nature Fest PHX and other events organized by businesses, City of Phoenix, and other organizations along the RSHRA and beyond by participating and sharing event information with others.	S	OEP, PRD, NSD, OAC
9	Share educational information with youth, residents, schools, and neighborhood associations on active transportation safety on an annual basis.	S	ST
10	Organize walking audits alongside city staff to identify opportunities for safety, increased shade, and other investement such as chilled drinking water and activation improvements along streets and parks.	S	ST, NSD, PRD, OHRM, OI

No.	Implementation Actions	Long/Short Term	Supporting Department
BIG IDEA 3 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION			
11	Participate in gardening and tree planting events to improve food resources, shade, and tree coverage.	S	OEP, OHRM, PRD, ST
12	Support people experiencing homeless by volunteering at local shelters and sharing existing resources.	S	OHS
13	Shop at local small businesses, mobile grocery locations, and farmer's markets.	S	CEDD, OEP
14	Pursue grant funding that supports activities, programs, and projects that improve the quality of life and natural environment in the area.	S, L	OEP, PDD, NSD
BIG IDEA 4 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: ESTABLISH A HUB FOR ECO-TOURISM AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE			
15	Share information about workforce training programs that support local green industries and healthcare programs.	S	CEDD
16	Utilize the green stormwater infrastructure handbook for residents on green stormwater projects on front yard or backyard home projects and share this information with other residents.	S, L	PDD, OEP, WSD
17	Organize events that celebrate arts, culture, and nature to promote eco-tourism and establish the area as an "arts, culture, and nature" sub-district.	S, L	CEDD, OAC, PRD
18	Utilize the Sonoran Desert pollinator plant guide to identify flowers, shrubs and trees on home, school, and other planting projects to increase shade, plus support native fauna.	S, L	OEP
19	Participate in annual budget meetings and future bond elections to identify priority projects in the Rio Salado District and surrounding areas of the city.	S, L	CMO
20	Support business that participate in the city's voluntary Green Business Leaders Program to operate in a more environmentally responsible manner through sustainability actions.	S, L	PWD

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BUSINESS-LED ACTIONS

Business-led actions are **short term (1-5 year)** and **long-term (5+ years)** actions that will implement the vision for the Rio Salado District. These actions can be conducted individually or simultaneously and combined with other actions led by government and community as presented in this policy plan.

No.	Implementation Actions	Long/Short Term	Supporting Department
BIG IDEA 1 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: ESTABLISH A VIBRANT MIX OF USES			
1	Participate with the community on future zoning code updates by the City of Phoenix that promote the Rio Salado District Policy Plan goals.	S	PDD
2	Utilize the RIO PHX Design Guidelines on redevelopment and new development projects.	S	PDD
3	Share information about existing city programs with other businesses and encourage them to pursue these services to improve their businesses, streets and other areas in the neighborhood.	S	NSD, ST, OHRM, OEP
4	Engage with industry professionals on the environmental, economic, and social benefits of supporting the Rio Salado District Policy Plan goals.	S	CEDD, PDD, OEP
5	Partner with community groups to incorporate community-identified priorities in development projects and consider Community Benefit Agreements (CBA's) when mutually beneficial.	S, L	CEDD, PDD
6	Construct catalyst projects, including a mixed-use project, using the Walkable Urban code along or near the RSHRA.	S, L	CEDD, PDD, OI
BIG IDEA 2 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: CONNECT RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE RIO SALADO			
7	Organize company river walks, clean ups, mural paintings, exercise events, and other activities that bring people to the Rio Salado District.	S	PRD, ST, NSD, OAC
8	Support Nature Fest PHX and other events organized by the City of Phoenix and other organizations along the RSHRA and beyond, by participating and sharing event information with others.	S	OEP, PRD, NSD, OAC
9	Encourage and incentivize employees to utilize public transportation and alternative mobility options.	S	PTD

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BIG IDEA 3 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION			
10	Utilize the Sonoran Desert pollinator plant guide to identify flowers, shrubs, and trees on commercial landscape projects to increase site and parking lot shade, plus support native fauna.	S	OEP, OHRM
11	Support people experiencing homeless by organizing company-led volunteering at local shelters and sharing existing resources.	S	OHS
12	Explore building enhancements that reduce energy costs and water consumption, while providing other social benefits such as shade, and chilled drinking water.	S	OEP, OS, PDD, OI
13	Host mobile grocery and pop-up markets on vacant or underutilized parking lots, where allowed, to support community health.	S, L	PDD, NSD, OEP
BIG IDEA 4 TO ACHIEVE THE VISION: ESTABLISH A HUB FOR ECO-TOURISM AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE			
14	Expand recycling and composting programs to support hands-on environmental education while promoting neighborhood cleanliness and overall community well-being.	S, L	PW, OEP, OS
15	Target local hubs such as community colleges and training centers for apprenticeship and job opportunities.	S	CEDD
16	Utilize Rio Salado District information in business marketing materials and physical business locations to increase public awareness of the area.	S	CEDD, PDD
17	Utilize the green stormwater infrastructure manual to develop projects on commercial properties and share this information with other businesses.	S, L	PDD, OEP
18	Attend and share information with others on community events to promote eco-tourism in the area.	S, L	OEP, PRD
19	Organize and establish a business coalition that recognizes river-friendly businesses and establish the area as an “eco-business” sub-district to attract green industries and encourage sustainable practices.	L	CEDD, PRD, NSD
20	Participate in annual budget meetings and future bond elections to identify priority projects in the Rio Salado District.	S, L	CMO
21	Participate in the city’s voluntary Green Business Leaders Program to operate in a more environmentally responsible manner through sustainability actions.	S, L	PWD

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

REPORTS AND MEMOS

1. Rio Salado District Engagement Report (2025)
2. Sand & Gravel Mining Report – Preliminary Findings (2025)
3. RIO PHX Precedents and Best Practices Memo & Report (2024)
4. Existing Conditions Report – Phase I (2024)

TECHNICAL REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

1. RIO PHX Design Guidelines
2. Approved Plants and Top Dressing Application for Development Adjacent to the Rio Salado

APPENDIX A: FULL-SIZE MAPS

This contains the full-size maps referenced in this plan.

To review these reports, reference documents and maps, please visit the RIO PHX website at: https://www.phoenix.gov/pdd/riophx

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City of Phoenix
Planning & Development Department
(PDD)

For more information, or to view the electronic version of the document please visit phoenix.gov/pdd/riophx. This publication can be made available in alternative format upon request. Contact the Planning and Development Department at 602-262-7131 TTY: Use 7-1-1

