



City of Phoenix

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT STAFF ANALYSIS

July 13, 2026

<u>Application:</u>	GPA-CC-SM-1-26-7-8
<u>Applicant:</u>	City of Phoenix Planning Commission
<u>Location:</u>	Area generally bounded by Interstate 17 on the north, 32nd Street on the east, Broadway Road on the south, and 19th Avenue on the west
<u>Approximate Acres:</u>	4,364 acres +/-
<u>Requested Change:</u>	To establish the Rio Salado District Policy Plan
<u>Reason for Requested Change:</u>	To provide a district plan to realize the shared community vision to make the Rio Salado corridor a local and regional destination in which current and future residents and businesses both share in the prosperity. The plan is a collaborative effort by the City, area residents, businesses, and community stakeholders aimed at transforming this area beyond the banks of the Rio Salado into a more connected, vibrant, and healthy river-oriented community. The plan will serve as a policy document built by the voices of the community and research to attract, guide, and prioritize development and strategic investments in infrastructure, housing, economic development, and other areas.
<u>Village Planning Committee Dates:</u>	May 11, 2026 – Central City Village (Information) May 12, 2026 – South Mountain Village (Information) July 13, 2026 – Central City Village (Action) July 14, 2026 – South Mountain Village (Action)
<u>Staff Recommendation:</u>	Approval, as provided in Exhibit A with a modification

SUMMARY

The purpose of this request is to establish the Rio Salado District Policy Plan. The plan is a result of a multi-year collaborative effort between the city, area residents, businesses and community stakeholders to transform the area beyond the banks of the Rio Salado. The plan articulates a future vision for the area to ensure a more connected, walkable, and vibrant corridor that builds upon people, nature, and the built environment by supporting locals, small businesses, sharing culture, preserving natural habitat, and improving health for all existing and future residents of the Rio Salado corridor.

The Rio Salado District is an approximately 4,364-acre area generally bounded by Interstate 17 on the north, 32nd Street on the east, Broadway Road on the south, and 19th Avenue on the west. The Rio Salado District Policy Plan is part of the city's RIO PHX initiative, which supports the regional [Rio Reimagined](#) project, by creating a series of land use policy documents to promote the Rio Salado corridor as a local and regional destination that attracts positive investment.

The objective of the plan is to fulfill the community derived 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 Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (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.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, the Phoenix City Manager created a 28-person Beyond the Banks Advisory Committee, a citizen committee that met over a one-year period, to identify potential benefits and vision for the area beyond the limits of the Rio Salado Phoenix Habitat Restoration Project along the Rio Salado (Salt River) from 28th Street to 19th Avenue.



Rio Salado District Policy Plan Area, Source: City of Phoenix

In 1999, the Beyond the Banks Summary Report (1999) was published to identify the results of the Beyond the Banks Advisory Committee's public involvement process, and making recommendations for future land uses, while developing broad planning goals. In 2003, the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan was adopted by City Council as a land use plan that identified goals and policies to guide development decisions along and beyond the banks of the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (RSHRA). To date, this plan continues to be a source of historical information and provides guidance on land use decisions in the area generally bounded by Interstate 17 on the north, 32nd Street on the east, Broadway Road on the south, and 19th Avenue on the west, also the same boundary as the proposed Rio Salado District Policy Plan. In 2002, The Rio Salado Interim Overlay District (RSIOD) was adopted to protect the investment in and maximize the benefits of the RSHRA. The overlay district is designed to control open, outdoor land uses and other uses to have a positive impact on the RSHRA and add to the long-term value of adjacent land. Among the unique regulations within the RSIOD are administrative reviews for industrially zoned development under 10 acres and a Use Permit requirement for development within 500 feet of the RSHRA.

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. Habitat restoration efforts began in 1999 after Congress approved more than \$85 million in federal Water Resources Development Act funds to facilitate the restoration of about 595 acres of the Rio Salado. The Rio Salado Phoenix Habitat Restoration Project opened to the public in 2005 and was completed in 2009. The City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, Natural Resource Division manages this area. Key management activities include trailhead maintenance, removal of invasive species, planting of native species, and erosion management. Over 180 species of birds and

other wildlife have been observed at Rio Salado Phoenix and passive recreation such as hiking, bicycling, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, and photography are encouraged. There are two trailheads located along the northbank and four trailheads located along the southbank of RSHRA, with approximately 4.2 miles of paved trails in the northbank, and 4.5 miles of paved trails along the southbank, in addition to unpaved trail segments.

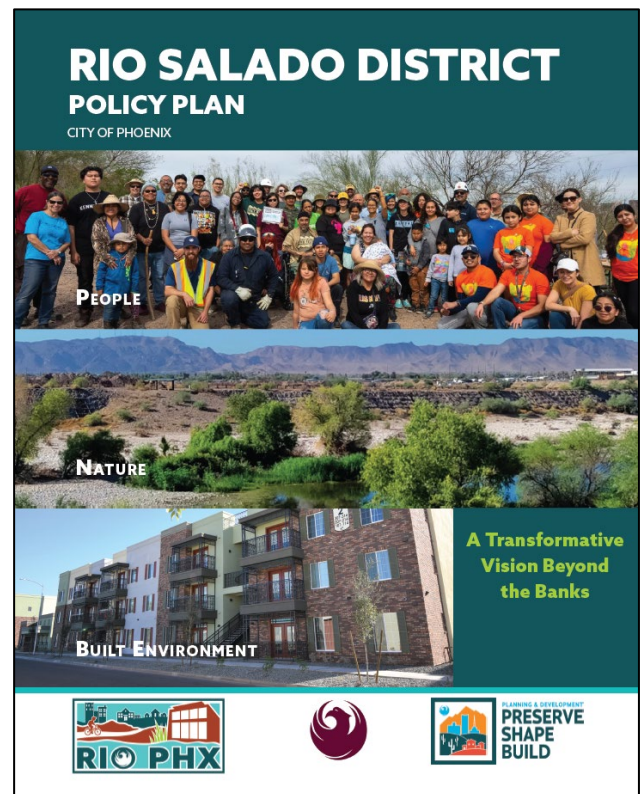
In 2018, the City of Phoenix along with five other municipalities, two tribal communities, Maricopa County, and Salt River Project, convened by Arizona State University, signed a statement of intent for the Rio Salado Project, also known as Rio Reimagined. Dating back to the mid-1960s, the Rio Reimagined vision spans across a 55-mile corridor that encompasses portions of the Rio Salado, the Gila River and confluence with the Agua Fria River which aims to revitalize the Rio Salado corridor for the benefit of adjacent communities and the environment. To support the regional Rio Reimagined efforts, the City of Phoenix started the RIO PHX initiative in 2023 to continue “reimagining” the communities surrounding the Rio Salado by creating new land use policy plans to guide growth and investment in these areas. Furthermore, in 2023, the City of Phoenix was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) to support in the creation of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan.

These major achievements summarized above were the result of a partnership between local and federal agencies, strong civic leadership, and visionary urban planning that began decades earlier.

RIO SALADO DISTRICT POLICY PLAN

The Rio Salado District is uniquely situated between two regional destinations, Downtown Phoenix to the north, and South Mountain Park and Preserve to the south; and it offers an abundance of recreational and open space opportunities due to the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area and trail connections that lead eastward to Tempe Town Lake. With existing or planned private and public projects in the area, such as the South Central Light Rail which opened on June 7, 2025 and the active [Third Street Bike and Pedestrian Bridge and Pathway](#) project, the Rio Salado District is positioned for growth and continued investment for the benefit of existing residents, businesses, and tourists.

*Rio Salado District Policy Plan (right)
Source: City of Phoenix*



Other area plans that overlap the Rio Salado District include the South Central Transit Oriented Development Community Plan (2022), PHX Land Reuse Strategy (2020), Reinvent PHX (2012-2018), Target Area B Redevelopment Plan (1980, Updated 2016), Del Rio Area Brownfields Plan (2012), South Phoenix Village Redevelopment Area Plan (2001), and Rio Montaña Area Plan (2000). Additional plans include the Central City (2021) and South Mountain (2018) Village Character Plans and Black Canyon Maricopa Freeway Specific Plan (1998). These foundational documents provided valuable insight on the community's desired vision, goals and values. Other city-led plans and initiatives were evaluated to align these priorities to the vision of the Rio Salado District.



Conceptual River-Adjacent Development Illustration, Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Many communities across the nation historically concentrated industrial activity along their rivers, canals, and other waterways due to various topographic and other geographic factors associated with those industries. Most of the land within the proposed Rio Salado District is zoned Industrial (A-1 or A-2) or Commerce Park (CP). This industrial zoning largely dates to the 1950s before the area was annexed into the City of Phoenix from unincorporated Maricopa County, although some industrial and commerce park zoning has been approved gradually over the years. Additional information on historic factors and existing conditions is provided in the [Existing Conditions Report](#) (2024) for the Rio Salado District.

However, more communities are shifting away from this approach to land use and are rethinking ways to activate and reimagine these areas as local and regional destinations with an active mix of uses along and beyond the riverbanks to promote continuous activity. Examples of river-adjacent and other community-focused projects from across the nation were identified by the City of Phoenix and consultant team to inspire the

conversations with community members and groups, plus the vision in the Rio Salado District Policy Plan. These examples are referenced in the [RIO PHX Precedents and Best Practices](#) report (2024).

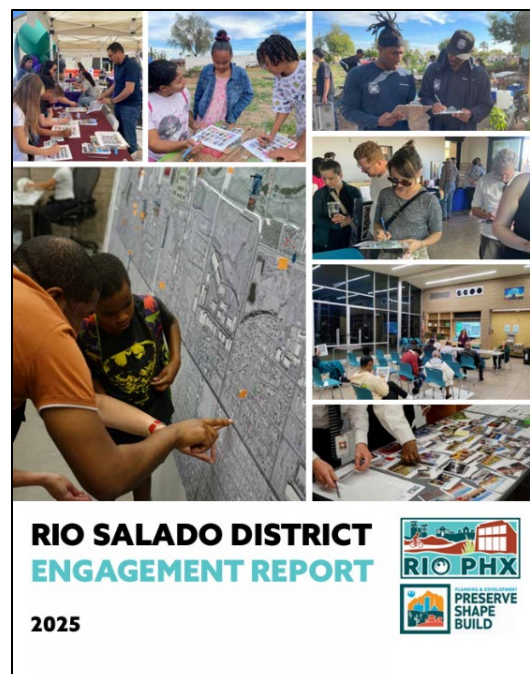
The City of Phoenix, in collaboration with project partners, consultants, community stakeholders, embarked on the planning process in 2023 to develop a policy plan for the Rio Salado District. Now this new policy plan, building on the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan, driven by voices of the community and stakeholders, will serve to attract, guide, and prioritize strategic investments in infrastructure, housing, economic development, and other areas to realize a shared community vision for the future of the district.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

Between August 2023 and June 2026, City staff facilitated community/board meetings, email blasts, interagency meetings, mobile workshops (pop-up events), postcard mailers, social media, surveys (online and in-person), regularly updated website information, and a series of workshops were held. City staff held or participated in the neighborhoods within and beyond the limits of the project area, reaching not only residents but also schools, local organizations, property owners, and business groups. Engagement materials and events were provided in both English and Spanish either through written translation or interpreters. These city-led engagement efforts, guided by the [RIO PHX Community Engagement Plan](#) (2024), resulted in a comprehensive and diverse amount of feedback, particularly from a community survey that was organized around the six planning elements using a best-practice investment menu based on the prior South Central Transit Oriented Communities planning efforts. The survey received over 500 responses, and along with all the other feedback, provided a focus synthesizing the community's vision.

The [Rio Salado District Engagement Report](#) (2025) details the community outreach strategy, community workshop overview, and key takeaways from the community engagement process. The following is a summary of the major planning activities that contributed to and influenced the community vision, investments, and actions represented in the plan:

Regional Stakeholders: Rio Reimagined Partnership Interactive Presentation (Morning of October 1, 2024) – This hybrid meeting brought together over 90 participants representing a diverse group of stakeholders, including local, regional, tribal, and federal agencies to discuss the project; collecting input and setting the stage for subsequent planning efforts in a coordinated vision for the future.



Community Workshop 1: Orienting Ourselves (Evening of October 1, 2024) – The first community workshop brought together 47 attending residents and business owners from the Rio Salado District area to introduce RIO PHX and share their perspectives. This included identifying places of pride, discussing the history of the area, and community priorities.



*Community Workshop #1
Table Discussion (top)*

Community Workshop 2: Reimagining the Area (Evening of February 4, 2025) – Over 70 members of the public attended the second community workshop, which displayed the incorporated feedback from the first community workshop, technical research, and precedents from other communities that could inspire the policy plan actions and concepts. This second workshop also was intended to gather additional feedback on the conceptual areas of change map, proposed land use map, connectivity corridors map, corridor cross-section designs including the scenic drives, and potential investments for priority areas.



Community Workshop #2 Activities (top)

Community Workshop 3: Roadmap for the Future (Evening of April 16, 2025) – Nearly 70 members of the community attended the final workshop at the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center. This third workshop focused on sharing the incorporated feedback from the first and second community workshops, in addition to showcasing updated conceptual maps, and catalyst site illustrations. At this third workshop, the team also gathered ideas for future RIO PHX design guidelines, and actions for implementation on the policy plan.



Community Workshop #3 Activities (top)

Project Expos

After the conclusion of the community workshops, city staff held two open-house style informational events or expos as additional learning and input opportunities. These expos were held at the following locations and dates:

- Harmon Public Library – April 22, 2025
- Broadway Heritage Neighborhood Resource Center – April 24, 2025

Informational Brochures at Public Locations

Information on the project was provided at the following nine strategic community locations in and around the study area:

- Hayden Park Center
- Muriel Smith Community Center
- Travis L. Williams Family Services Center
- Harmon Library
- Ocotillo Library
- Rio Salado Audubon Center
- Liberty Wildlife
- Salvation Army Kroc Center
- Broadway Heritage Neighborhood Center

Meeting with Other Community Groups and Public Events – (Various)

City staff also met with several individual residents, landowners, and attended both small and large community events and gatherings such as homeowner or neighborhood association meetings, and public events hosted by agencies and organizations.

Village Planning Committee (VPC) Informational Sessions – There were a total of eight informational presentations provided by staff to the Central City and South Mountain village planning committees. Updates on the planning process were provided to the committees in 2023, 2024, and 2025. The final draft of the plan, GPA-CC-SM-1-26-7-8, and the proposed General Plan Land Use Map Amendment, under case GPA-CC-SM-2-26-7-8, were presented and discussed at the May 11, 2026 Central City VPC meeting and at the May 12, 2026 South Mountain VPC meeting.

Neighborhood Meeting (May 20, 2026) – City staff hosted a neighborhood meeting at Travis L. Williams Family Services Center on May 20, 2026 where copies of the policy plan, proposed General Plan Land Use Map amendment, and design guidelines were displayed for public comment. Information boards on the project were also displayed, in addition to boards seeking input on the proposed Rio Salado Scenic Drive alignment and ideas on a potential amendment to the Rio Salado Interim Overlay District. Approximately 29 community members attended this meeting.

Planning Commission First Public Hearing (June 18, 2026) – An overview of the policy plan and proposed General Plan Land Use Map amendment was presented to the Planning Commission on June 18, 2026. Approximately 15 community members attended the meeting.

PLAN STRUCTURE

Borrowing from the six-planning element framework established within the ReinventPHX Transit Oriented Development Strategic Policy Framework, the Rio Salado District planning effort successfully provided holistic and multidisciplinary engagement, visioning, and implementation effort utilizing six interconnected planning elements that consists of: Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Health, Mobility, and Green Systems. The

framework, combined with active public engagement, created a plan that is responsive to the specific needs and desires of the community in the Rio Salado District.



The Six Planning Elements, Source: City of Phoenix

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan is comprised of four sections – *Introduction*, *Who We Are*, *What We Want*, and *How We Get There*, as described below.

The ***Introduction*** section (Part 1) orients the reader to the Rio Salado District, noting existing community assets, including the RSHRA. The section also includes an overview of other existing city plans and initiatives that informed the plan, and celebrates the successes of the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan. The reader is also introduced to the three-pronged RIO PHX framework:

- **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 ensure 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.

This section also reflects on the Reinvent PHX TOD Strategic Policy Framework that was adopted in 2018 to identify TOD Place Types and inform land use intensities along light rail corridors in Phoenix. This document established the Audubon Place Type just south of the intersection of Central Avenue and the Rio Salado along the existing Pioneer Light Rail station to guide future growth in this area. A Medium Urban Center designation was identified here with slightly modified policies and performance measures related to the consideration of additional height (up to 10 stories) and intensity from those found in the TOD Strategic Policy Framework. These standards are broken up into two tiers, each with unique conditional standards.



Pioneer Light Rail Station at Central Avenue and Rio Salado, Source: Valley Metro

The 2025 Phoenix General Plan also supports the Rio Salado District by referencing the Rio Reimagined vision and includes several policies, such as:

- Develop a series of Rio Reimagined Community Plans that identify place types and character areas.
- Prioritize a mixture of ‘active’ land uses that serve existing and future residents and attracts tourists.
- Encourage public-private partnerships between the City and private entities to explore the redevelopment of City-owned land within the Rio Reimagined Corridor in alignment with the community vision and needs.

The final part of the introduction highlights the City’s community engagement efforts and shows the interconnectedness of the areas within the habitat restoration area and adjacent neighborhoods.

The **Who We Are** section (Part 2) provides context on the corridor obtained from historical sources, local residents’ expertise and their shared experiences, and technical data. After going over a timeline of the area, historical events, and a map illustrating community identified assets, as part of the initial planning process, an existing conditions report was created for the Rio Salado District. Highlights and key information from the [Existing Conditions Report](#) (2024) for the Rio Salado District are provided in this section of the plan, utilizing the six-planning element framework: land use, housing, economic development, health, mobility, and green systems. The land use section element contains a community-identified “Areas of Change” map to help guide future development within the planning area based on desired levels of change categories that include: Protect, Enhance, and Reimagine.

The ***What We Want*** section (Part 3) outlines the vision of the community to 2050 both graphically and written. As described in the public participation section above, residents and other District stakeholders participated in surveys, bilingual workshops, and public events designed to identify and map assets, community needs, and improvement opportunities. Based on input received during the public engagement process, a district-wide vision was developed.

2050 Catalyst Sites

Through previous planning work and community engagement four catalyst sites were identified as opportunities for investment. Each of these sites have conceptual renderings, specific features and assets called out to demonstrate the type and level of investment the community and the city is looking for in these areas. Furthermore, community-identified priorities from the investment menu survey conducted, are depicted in the conceptual renderings for the catalyst sites. This plan recognizes that the development of catalytic sites and other projects is key to achieving the plan's vision. Except for Catalyst Site 2, all catalyst sites are privately owned, thus the plan presents a vision to inspire future redevelopment of those sites.

List of Catalyst Sites and Conceptual Visions:

Site 1 (7th Avenue) – Mixed-Use Campus

Site 2 (Central Avenue) – Mixed-Use Community

Site 3 (16th Street) – Interim Active Recreation Uses

Site 4 (24th Street) – Ecological Hotel, Research Campus, Multifamily, etc.



2050 Catalyst Site Map, Source: Multistudio and City of Phoenix

Catalyst Site 2 is a 30-acre city-owned property located in the most active and visited reach of the Rio Salado, at the southeast corner of Central Avenue and Rio Salado Scenic Drive (Park Drive). This site is uniquely positioned at the junction of a light rail station, RSHRA, and in close proximity to 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.



Conceptual Catalyst Site 2 Illustration, Source: Multistudio and City of Phoenix

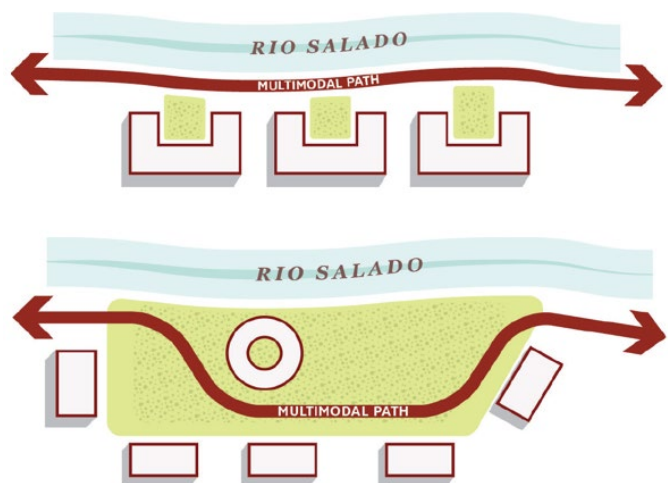
The above and below conceptual illustrations depict this site as an emerging arts and biocultural hub. Community-identified priorities from an “Investment Menu” survey results, conducted during the planning process, informed several elements shown on this site, including a farmer’s market, gathering places, public art, trails and paseos, and a mixed-use walkable neighborhood. This site presents an opportunity to showcase 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 could make 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.



Conceptual vision for a river-adjacent destination (Catalyst Site 2), Source: BandukSmith Studio

2050 Land Use Vision

This section of the plan presents the land use vision with the goal of 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.



Conceptual Open Space Illustrations, Source: SCAPE/Multistudio

Components of this section include:

- Conceptual Land Use map (this map has been refined by the proposed Major General Plan Land Use Map amendment under case GPA-CC-SM-2-26-7-8)
- Land use types (primary and secondary) and building typologies tables
- Four land use and open space design concepts
- River-oriented design elements and concepts, and landscape themes

2050 Connectivity Vision

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. The area is envisioned with an abundance of transportation options such as bus, light rail, and neighborhood circulators, to 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.

Components of this section include:

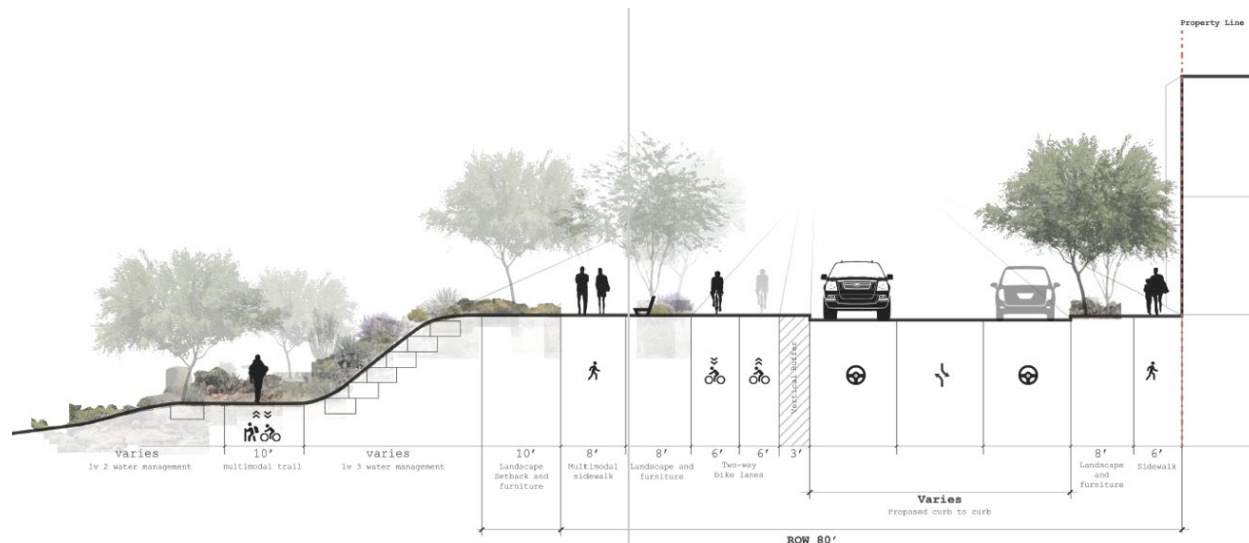
- Conceptual Connectivity map
- Catalyst Corridors map
- Cross-section concept for a paseo, San Francisco Canal, pedestrian “street” concept, and the Rio Salado Scenic Drives
- Concepts for gateway features



Catalyst Corridors Map, Source: Multistudio and City of Phoenix

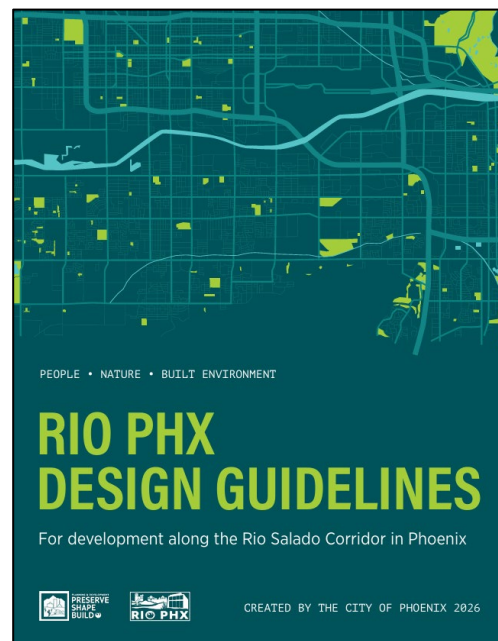
A key component of the connectivity plan is the Rio Salado Scenic Drives concept that is carried over and improved upon from the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan. Two Scenic Drives are located parallel to the RSHRA - one to the north (Riverview Drive) and one to the south (Rio Salado Park Drive). 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.



New Rio Salado Scenic Drive Cross-Section, Source: Multistudio and City of Phoenix

The **How We Get There** section (Part 4) 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. This section inspires designers, property owners, and others with the newly released [RIO PHX Design Guidelines](#) (2026) to guide new development in the Rio Salado Corridor.



Existing assets and plans, case studies, community input, and technical analysis were used to provide the “Four Big Ideas” to guide the vision for the area:

- 1) Establish a Vibrant Mix of Uses
- 2) Connect Residents and Visitors to the Rio Salado
- 3) Improve Community Well-Being and Quality of Life
- 4) Establish a Hub for Eco-Tourism and Green Infrastructure

This section of the plan also identifies four goals, each with strategies and policies, supported by 10 city-led priority actions over the next five years. The four goals are:

- 1) Create a Unique Local and Regional Destination
- 2) Foster Ecological Connectivity and Improve Mobility Options
- 3) Prioritize Community Health Outcomes
- 4) Improve Economic Prosperity and Environmental Stewardship

There are additional short (5-year) and long-term (5+ years) city-led actions, plus community-led and business-led actions for implementation of the plan. These goals and actions were identified through community input and interdepartmental meetings, including prioritized investments and locations from the visioning process. A collaborative approach will be required to achieve the vision for this area with all stakeholders involved.

HOW THE PLAN WILL BE USED

The Rio Salado District Policy Plan represents a vision for the planning area that will be used by the city, residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. The plan embodies a community-supported vision for the corridor which will aid in supporting investment and reinvestment that is consistent with the goals and priorities outlined by the community. Similarly, city staff will utilize the plan as a policy guide for new and redevelopment projects seeking rezoning approval, prioritizing city investment, as well as prioritizing public and private investment in the area. Additionally, the implementation section of the plan identifies priority actions and is key in supporting partnerships for all stakeholders to work together towards a shared community vision for the future. This will provide valuable information that can help inform future decisions made by residents, business owners and government entities for things such as infrastructure, services, and other community growth and development opportunities.

COMMUNITY INPUT SUMMARY

As of the writing of this report, five letters have been received. One of the letters is in opposition from Arizona Rock Products Association (ARPA), noting several concerns with the policy plan and design guidelines, including: lack of recognition for the value of ongoing or future aggregate operations or related uses in the area, goals to transition 50-percent of the area to a non-industrial zoning, the potential to devalue or create land-use conflicts for existing operators in the area, and concerns with applicability of design guidelines to existing operations. This letter contains seven recommendations for the policy plan and design guidelines.

A second letter was received from Local First Arizona, with suggestions to emphasize local businesses and creating more publicly accessible community areas, while identifying concerns on proposed land uses around the river that allow apartments. A third letter was received from Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department with comments in support of trail connectivity, habitat protection, operations and maintenance logistics, and strengthening the design guidance on several areas. This letter from Maricopa County was shared with the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation

Department who manages the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area and other areas along the Rio Salado for future coordination with Maricopa County.

The fourth letter received is from the Ruiz Family who supports improving the river area, adding public spaces, and bringing thoughtful investment for the benefit of people who live, work, worship, and raise families in South Phoenix. The letter contains five recommendations for the policy plan related to affordable housing, local non-profit developer preference, displacement protections, solutions to homelessness, and expanding investments or benefits beyond the Rio Salado District area along the South Central corridor.

The fifth letter received is from the Smith Family who owns property in the area south of Rio Salado and east of Central Avenue. The letter supports thoughtful investment in the area to implement the vision, and outlines several requests and questions related to future notification of zoning changes or city-led redevelopment projects, public paseo and scenic drive alignments, and clarification on the effects of plan adoption.

The previous section of this report summarizes the community engagement conducted during the planning process, further detailed in the [Rio Salado District Engagement Report](#) (2025).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of GPA-CC-SM-1-26-7-8 for the Rio Salado District Policy Plan with the modifications provided below. This is accompanied by case GPA-CC-SM-2-26-7-8, a major amendment to the General Plan Land Use Map. The Rio Salado District Policy Plan supersedes the Rio Salado Beyond the Banks Area Plan, previously adopted in 2003 (Resolution No. 20027).

Staff Recommended Modifications:

- A. Pages 85 and 86: Revise the 2050 Land Use Map accordingly per the approved General Plan Land Use Map Amendment, Case No. GPA-CC-SM-2-26-7-8.

Writers

Enrique Bojórquez Gaxiola
Chris Monahan
July 13, 2026

Team Leader

Joél Carrasco

Exhibits

Exhibit A: [Rio Salado District Policy Plan](#) (dated July 2026)
Exhibit B: Correspondence (5 Letters, 9 Pages)

South Phoenix Community Feedback on the Rio Salado Policy Plan

June 18, 2026

To City of Phoenix leaders and planning staff,

We are writing as community members who care about South Phoenix and the future of the Rio Salado. We support improving the river area, adding public spaces, and bringing thoughtful investment. But we want to make sure this plan benefits the people who already live, work, worship, and raise families in South Phoenix.

Our concern is that without clear protections, new development around the Rio Salado could raise costs, push families and small businesses out, move more homelessness into South Phoenix, or create private-feeling communities that use public resources but do not serve the broader community.

We ask the City to include these protections in the plan:

- **Require affordable housing.** Any major city-supported housing development in the Rio Salado area should include at least 30% affordable housing, similar to the recent zoning approval of the southeast corner of Central and Broadway.
- **Include local nonprofit developers.** City RFPs and public land opportunities should give strong preference to local nonprofit developers or co-developers who have real relationships in South Phoenix.
- **Protect South Phoenix from displacement.** The plan should clearly say that Rio Salado investment must not push out residents, small businesses, or vulnerable neighbors.
- **Address homelessness with care.** Public improvements should not just move people experiencing homelessness from one area to another. Housing, outreach, and services should be part of the plan.
- **Invest beyond the riverbanks.** The same kinds of incentives, overlays, infrastructure, shade, sidewalks, and small-business support proposed for the Rio Salado should also be available along the South Central corridor.

The Rio Salado should be a shared public benefit, not a project that makes South Phoenix less affordable or gives local residents less say in their own community. We ask the City to strengthen the plan so that growth, public investment, and development are tied to affordability, local participation, and long-term community benefit.

Respectfully,

Community members and supporters of South Phoenix

From: [Vance Smith](#)
To: [PDD Long Range Planning](#); [Enrique A Bojorquez-Gaxiola](#); [Christian R Monahan](#)
Cc: [Gloria Barrera-Smith](#)
Subject: Written Comment – Rio Salado District Policy Plan & GP Land Use Map Amendment (Property Owner, Catalyst Site 2 Area)
Date: Saturday, July 11, 2026 6:20:20 PM

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Dear RIO PHX Team,

We are the owners of five parcels located at Victory Street and 3rd Street in South Phoenix (Maricopa County APNs 113-09-067, 113-09-068, 113-09-069, 113-09-070, and 113-09-072C), within the area shown in the Catalyst Site 2 concept of the July 2026 Public Hearing Draft of the Rio Salado District Policy Plan. We submit this comment for inclusion in the staff report and ask that it be shared with the Central City Village Planning Committee, the South Mountain Village Planning Committee, the Planning Commission, and the City Council in connection with the hearings scheduled July 13, July 14, August 6, and August 26, 2026.

We are not writing in opposition to the plan. We are writing as directly affected property owners to place the following requests and questions on the record:

1. Notice. We request direct written notice (by mail and email) to both owners of any future action affecting our parcels, including the proposed amendment to the Rio Salado Interim Overlay District (Section 655), the adoption of Character Area standards, any city-initiated rezoning, and the terms of any opt-in zoning program contemplated under Priority Action 3 of the draft plan.
2. Public paseo alignment. The Catalyst Site 2 conceptual plan depicts a north-south public paseo corridor along the 3rd Street/3rd Place alignment, which crosses or abuts our parcels. We request clarification of the intended alignment, and confirmation of whether the city anticipates seeking easements, right-of-way dedications, or entitlement conditions on privately owned parcels along this corridor.
3. Rio Salado Scenic Drive. We request clarification of the planned Scenic Drive alignment between Central Avenue and 7th Street and whether the required street cross-section would apply to, or require dedication from, our parcels in connection with any future entitlement.
4. Effect of adoption. We request confirmation on the record that adoption of the Policy Plan and the General Plan Land Use Map amendment does not itself rezone our parcels, and that any change to the zoning of our parcels would occur only through a separate legislative process with individual notice to the owners.
5. Coordination. Given our parcels' adjacency to the 3rd Street Rio Salado Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge south landing and to the 30-acre city-owned property planned for a 2027 developer solicitation, we ask to be included in stakeholder outreach for both efforts.

We support thoughtful investment in this area and want to participate constructively as plans move from vision to implementation. Please confirm receipt of this comment and its inclusion in the staff report.

Respectfully,

Vance Smith - vance.smith@gmail.com

Gloria Barrera-Smith - gloriabsmith1@gmail.com

Owners, APNs 113-09-067, -068, -069, -070, -072C

133 E Victory Street, Phoenix, AZ 85040

480-398-5037



April 27, 2026

Enrique Bojórquez Gaxiola
Urban Planning and Policy Team
Planning & Development Department
City of Phoenix
200 West Washington Street, 3rd Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003

Re: Comments on Rio Phoenix / Rio Salado District Policy Plan & Aggregate Operations

Dear Mr. Bojórquez Gaxiola:

On behalf of the Arizona Rock Products Association, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Rio Phoenix planning effort. The Arizona Rock Products Association (ARPA) supports thoughtful redevelopment, responsible environmental stewardship, public access, and long-term investment along the Salt River corridor. However, we are concerned that the current planning documents do not adequately recognize the long-term importance of ongoing aggregate operations, valuable aggregate land ownership, and the City of Phoenix's need for construction-materials supplied from within the Rio Salado corridor.

ARPA is the oldest mining related trade organization in Arizona and for 70 years has been providing representation for 65 member companies involved with the production of aggregates, asphaltic concrete, ready mix concrete, asphalt, lime products, and portland cement used in nearly every private and public construction project in Arizona. Arizona's aggregate mining industry employs approximately 8,656 people directly and 16,691 indirectly and has an estimated direct and indirect impact on the Arizona economy of \$7.6 billion. Our producer members are combined with over 77 associate members that provide related transportation, contracting, mining supplies and consulting services.

Aggregate operations in the Rio Plan are referenced primarily as former, closed, inactive, or transitional sites to be reclaimed or redeveloped. That framing overlooks the continuing

role these properties and operations play in supplying the construction materials necessary for affordable housing, infrastructure, flood-control improvements, transportation projects, utilities, TSMC, Sky Harbor Airport expansion and the very redevelopment envisioned by Rio Phoenix.

The plan's targeted outcome to transition at least 50 percent of the Rio Salado District to form-based code or primarily non-industrial zoning, together with strategies encouraging redevelopment of mining and brownfield sites, creates a strong policy signal that existing aggregate lands are viewed chiefly not as the current material sources capable of supplying future development but simply former aggregate mines offering future redevelopment opportunities.

The planning area defined in the Rio Plan incorporates substantial land positions developed by a majority of our producer members solely for aggregate production. This includes properties that have been historically mined, are currently being mined or are valuable reserves for future mining. ARPA is concerned that the City's approach may unintentionally devalue active or viable mineral-resource lands, sterilize valuable aggregate reserves, increase entitlement difficulty, and create land-use conflicts for operators who own land or conduct operations within the corridor.

We also note that the Design Guidelines identify raw-material processing and heavy truck-oriented uses as generally less compatible with the desired riverfront experience. While ARPA understands the City's vision for enhanced public access and improved design quality, aggregate production necessarily involves material processing, hauling, stockpiling, equipment movement, and operational flexibility. These activities should not be treated as incompatible by default where they are lawfully existing, responsibly operated, strategically located, or necessary to support regional construction needs.

ARPA requests that the city revise the Plan to expressly recognize:

1. More than a dozen existing aggregate operations along with dozens of undeveloped properties owned by construction materials companies as legitimate, ongoing land uses within the corridor, not solely property available for future redevelopment, recreation or backfill opportunities.
2. The essential role of local aggregate supply in supporting current and future Phoenix infrastructure, housing, transportation, commercial, and public works projects.
3. The need to protect lawfully existing operations from encroachment, sterilization, incompatible adjacent development, and untenable entitlement conditions that impair the continued operations that the city is reliant upon.
4. The importance of maintaining feasible and expeditious zoning, special permit, and overlay pathways for aggregate operations, processing, backfill, reclamation, and related industrial activities.

5. The need for direct consultation with aggregate mine owners and producers before any amendments to the Rio Salado Interim Overlay District, design guidelines, zoning maps, catalyst-site concepts, or character-area policies affecting their properties.
6. A balanced approach to reclamation and redevelopment that respects private property rights, operational timelines, mineral-resource values, market realities, and the City's current and future infrastructure needs.
7. That the permitting and entitlement process for future construction materials development is not simply an instrument for the City to impose site use restrictions, development fees or mitigations that fund the planned Rio Development.

ARPA is also concerned that the seven emerging character areas do not appear to include mining, aggregate production, or heavy industrial uses. If these character areas are later used to guide rezoning, general planning, entitlement review, infrastructure priorities, or public investment, the absence of an industrial or aggregate-supportive category could place existing operators at a long-term disadvantage.

ARPA further requests that the city distinguish clearly between inactive mining sites that may be candidates for reclamation or redevelopment and the numerous active aggregate (as well as concrete and asphalt blending operations) sites that remain important to the regional construction economy. A one-size-fits-all approach to "mining sites" could create a variety of unintended consequences for both private landowners and the City's broader growth objectives.

Finally, ARPA requests that the "Sand & Gravel Mining Report – Preliminary Findings" (2025) referenced in the Plan be made available. Unfortunately, you have not provided an active link to this document in the Plan.

We appreciate the City's willingness to engage stakeholders and request continued dialogue with ARPA and affected producers before the plan, overlay amendments, or design guidelines advance further.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Trussell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S".

Steve Trussell
Arizona Rock Products Association

Enrique A Bojorquez-Gaxiola

To: PDD Long Range Planning
Subject: RE: Rio Salado plan

From: Tina Phanmanivong <tina@localfirstaz.com>
Sent: Monday, June 29, 2026 3:03 PM
To: PDD Long Range Planning <pdd.longrange@phoenix.gov>
Subject: Rio Salado plan

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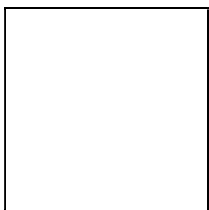
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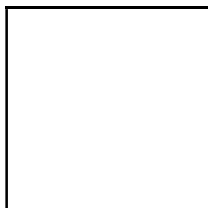
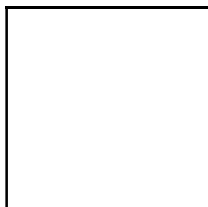
Hi,

I'm with Local First Arizona and was asked to review your new Rio Salado policy plan. I would like to see more of an emphasis on local businesses around the area. I also do not like how many apartments are located around the river. I think there should be more community areas that make it more accessible to the public.

Thank you,



Tina Phanmanivong
Sustainability Program Manager



tina@localfirstaz.com

Enrique A Bojorquez-Gaxiola

To: PDD Long Range Planning
Subject: RE: Maricopa County Parks Comments | Draft Rio Salado District Policy Plan and RIO PHX design guidelines

From: Jennifer Waller (PRK) <Jennifer.WALLER@Maricopa.Gov>
Sent: Wednesday, June 10, 2026 4:51 PM
To: PDD Long Range Planning <pdd.longrange@phoenix.gov>
Cc: Jennifer Waller (PRK) <Jennifer.WALLER@Maricopa.Gov>; David Jordan (PRK) <David.Jordan@Maricopa.Gov>
Subject: Maricopa County Parks Comments | Draft Rio Salado District Policy Plan and RIO PHX design guidelines

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Enrique Gaxiola and/or Christian Monahan,

Please accept the following:

Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department recognizes the Rio Salado corridor vision as a regional open-space, habitat, recreation, and connectivity initiative. The County recommends that future recreational improvements remain compatible with habitat restoration, flood-control operations, user safety, long-term maintenance, and accessible recreation.

The County acknowledges the potential for expanded trail and connectivity opportunities, but requests that habitat protection and river operations remain the priority where conflicts occur. Existing Rio Salado facilities already provide a mix of ADA-accessible paved trails, natural-surface trails, trailheads, and operational controls that protect sensitive habitat areas; future planning should build upon these established conditions.

The County recommends the following revisions and implementation measures:

- Add a recreation compatibility framework distinguishing appropriate facilities in sensitive river-adjacent areas, including accessible paved trails, natural-surface trails, overlooks, shade/rest areas, and trailheads.
- Include measurable accessibility standards for all new corridor connections, trailheads, and public access points.
- Require an operations and maintenance matrix identifying responsibility for trailheads, lighting, landscaping, shade structures, seating, fencing, signage, and public amenities.
- Establish post-storm closure and reopening protocols, habitat-sensitive access management standards, and controlled river-access design requirements to discourage informal access and habitat disturbance.
- Strengthen design guidance related to habitat-sensitive lighting, fencing, wayfinding, and public access management along river-edge areas.

The County also suggests the creation of an interagency implementation framework involving Phoenix Planning, Phoenix Parks/Natural Resources, Maricopa County Parks, and other affected agencies to coordinate future corridor access, habitat protection, maintenance responsibilities, and recreational improvements.

Respectfully,



Jennifer "Jenn" Waller

Director

Parks & Recreation

41835 N. Castle Hot Springs Road Morristown, Arizona 85342

O: 602-506-9506 **C:** 480-710-3965

E: jennifer.waller@maricopa.gov

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