

The General Plan

General Plan Purpose

The General Plan contains the city's policies on character and design, land use, open spaces and the natural environment, business and economics, community services, neighborhood vitality, transportation, and growth issues. Its focus is on shaping the physical form of the city, yet it includes policies and statements about other aspects of community as well. Human services, protection of desert and mountain lands, economic vitality, and the character of neighborhoods are all discussed in Scottsdale's General Plan.

The plan is used by the City Council and Planning Commission to evaluate policy changes and to make funding and budget decisions. It is used by city staff to evaluate building and development and to make recommendations on projects. It is used by citizens and neighborhood groups to understand the city's long-range plans and proposals for different geographic areas. The plan provides the basis for the city's development regulations and the foundation for its capital improvements program.

Why does Scottsdale have a General Plan?

Arizona state law (ARS 9-461-05A) requires that each city adopt a comprehensive, long-range General Plan to guide the physical development of their community. The Scottsdale City Charter also establishes that the city have a General Plan. Scottsdale's General Plan has three interrelated functions:

- *It is an expression of community goals and priorities;*
- *It is a decision-making guide; and*
- *It fulfills legal requirements created by state law.*

A General Plan may include maps, diagrams, tables, and text setting out community conditions, principles, goals, objectives, and strategies.

The General Plan represents goals and policies to guide the community over a 20 to 25 year period. (*The Arizona state laws governing general plans currently require readoption and voter ratification of the city's General Plan every 10 years*) There is a natural tendency to presume that the Plan, as adopted, will be applied in its entirety with minimal change over that period of time. But, such rigid application would not be responsive to the natural changes and unforeseen opportunities that arise in a community as dynamic as Scottsdale. Making long-range decisions means that issues need to be



periodically readdressed to reflect new or emerging circumstances. Beyond this practical issue, there is also a legal issue. Each succeeding City Council has the discretion to reconsider previous long-range policy decisions and may choose to modify them, subject of course, to community discussion in public hearings. The General Plan is a key instrument to reflect changing perspectives and attitudes.

General Plan



Scottsdale's General Plan promotes the community's vision by establishing policies, goals, and strategies for each of twelve elements. These elements include consideration of the issues identified and required by state statute, but are designed to be specific to Scottsdale. As with any flexible policy document, there is room for interpretation on the policies and goals contained in these elements, and flexibility is needed to meet the overall objectives.

Common Misconceptions

In practice, there is often confusion or blurring of the distinction between the role of the General Plan and the role of the Zoning Ordinance. The Plan is a “general” policy document that guides community growth and development decisions. The Zoning Ordinance, and associated zoning maps, are legal instruments that define with significant precision the permitted land uses and associated performance standards for every property within a municipal jurisdiction. The confusion between the two very different roles probably has its origin in the fact that Zoning Ordinance amendments and zoning map changes must conform to the generalized policies of the General Plan.

Many people struggle with a common misconception that the General Plan is merely the land use map. For many development decisions, it is true that land use appropriateness is the focal point of dialogue. However, this view will typically disregard many interrelated issues that can include transportation or other infrastructure concerns, and the community's environmental and economic philosophy. The best community decisions are those that recognize and address these complex interrelationships.

The term “General Plan” is occasionally confused with other planning terms, such as “specific plan” and “master plan.” A General Plan may include specific plans that apply to a specific area or areas of a community; however, it is incorrect to assume that one is, in and of itself, the complete policy statement for an area of the community. Scottsdale has a three-level General Plan structure (discussed in detail later) that includes character plans and neighborhood plans. These more specific plans are a part of the General Plan, but not the total package. CityShape 2020 established the three levels of general planning to achieve more specific guidelines, usually in regards to design and character or neighborhood issues. Likewise, a “master plan” may speak to General Plan issues, most notably infrastructure (for example Water/Wastewater Master Plans), and a master plan may be complimentary to the General Plan goals and policies, but a master plan is not a substitute for the long-range community goals and policies contained in the General Plan. Master plans deal with much shorter time frames than the 20-25 years of a General Plan. The General Plan should serve as the foundation for the creation of master plans for different issues or topics.

How does the General Plan relate to other City Policies and Procedures?

As established by the Arizona Revised Statutes and the City Charter, Scottsdale’s General Plan establishes an intent and direction for the future growth and character of the community. It is not a specific document, but rather is a guiding set of policies that provide a sense of order, coordination, and quality to the city’s policies and actions affecting its growth.



see the [Scottsdale
Values and Vision
section](#)

The policies in the General Plan are implemented and detailed through ordinances and ongoing formal procedures of the city. A few of the ordinances and written policies that carry out the plan are the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, Airport Ordinance, and Design Guidelines. The intent of the General Plan is implemented through recommendations from city Boards and Commissions and decisions made by the City Council regarding such requests as rezoning and subdivisions, road expansion or abandonments, neighborhood revitalization projects, preservation efforts, economic opportunities, and park and recreation facilities. Over time the General Plan is a living document that is manifested by many specific decisions and events that cause it to respond to the changing conditions, needs and desires of the community.

General Plan Form - Character Based Planning

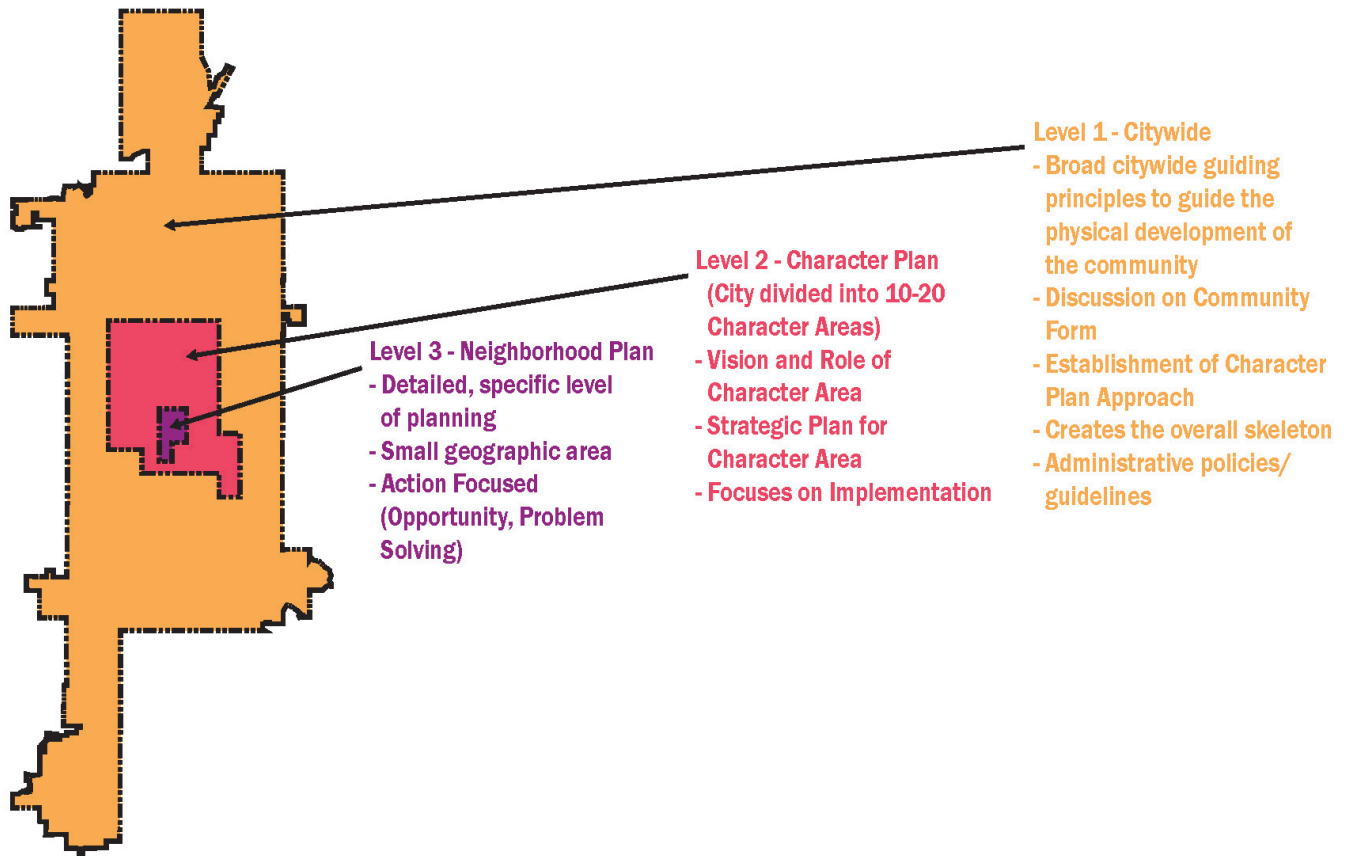
As a result of CityShape 2020 recommendations, Scottsdale has implemented Character-based General Planning. The Character-based General Plan consists of the Six Guiding Principles (discussed in the Vision and Values section) and a format that contains three distinct and interrelated levels:

Level 1 - Citywide Planning: Incorporates all policies that apply to the city as a whole. Perhaps the greatest departure from the existing General Plan is that, for the first time, it describes the origin and purpose of the Plan, and the unique attributes of planning in Scottsdale.

Level 2 - Character Area Planning: Develops Character Plans on a priority basis over a period of time and speaks specifically to the goals and special attributes of an identifiable and functional area; i.e., its land uses, infrastructure, broadly defined urban architectural design philosophy, and transitions. Character Plans will ensure that quality of development and consistency of character drive Scottsdale's General Plan at the Character Plan level, all within the context of community-wide goals. An additional strength of the Character Plan approach is its ability to address "edges," those places where two character areas meet or places where Scottsdale's boundaries abut other governmental jurisdictions. Character Area Planning will rely on the involvement and participation of an area's residents and property owners in the planning and implementation processes.

Level 3 - Neighborhood Planning: Because the health and vitality of a neighborhood is dependent on its ability to adapt to the future, steps need to be taken to address changes that will take place in the neighborhood. Neighborhood Plans will identify and implement efforts to improve specific neighborhoods within the city. Every neighborhood has different needs, issues, constraints, and opportunities. A Neighborhood Plan might

broadly define a neighborhood’s goals and may build an action plan or an issues brief. The neighborhood planning process must have the in-depth involvement of the people who live and work in that neighborhood.



This three-level General Plan approach has many direct benefits in serving as a platform for community decision-making. A key advantage of this General Plan format is its ability to address issues and challenges in existing and mature neighborhoods that may have received too little attention in the past, and inform and involve a greater number of Scottsdale citizens.

General Plan Organization

Arizona State law (ARS 9-461.05) requires that the General Plans for cities the size of Scottsdale contain nineteen (19) sections, called “elements.” Scottsdale has taken the technical considerations outlined by state law and combined them into a series of elements that reflect the community’s expectations for the future. Chapters, based on the CityShape 2020 Guiding Principals, organize the elements. The table on the next page shows how the state-mandated elements are organized in the Scottsdale General Plan.

The Scottsdale General Plan varies from the structure outlined in state law in a few ways. We’ve added three elements (Character and Design, Economic

Scottsdale General Plan

State Mandated Elements

Character & Lifestyle Chapter	Character and Design	* No Comparable Required Element
	Land Use	Land Use
Economic Vitality Chapter	Economic Vitality	* No Comparable Required Element
Neighborhoods Chapter	Community Involvement	* No Comparable Required Element
	Housing	Housing
	Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment	Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment
	Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization	Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization
Open Space Chapter	Preservation and Environmental Planning	Conservation Environmental Planning
	Open Space and Recreation	Open Space Recreation
Sustainability Chapter	Cost of Development	Cost of Development
	Growth Areas	Growth Areas
	Public Services and Facilities	Public Buildings Public Services and Facilities Safety Water Resources
	Energy	Energy
Transportation Chapter	Community Mobility	Circulation Transportation Transit
	Bicycling	Bicycling

Vitality, and Community Involvement) and a technology component (included in the Community Mobility Element). Although the additional elements address topics not required by state law, the issues they address are basic to the current and the future quality of life in Scottsdale. We also have combined some of the required elements and expanded the scope of others beyond what is required by state law. Once adopted by the City Council, all elements have the same legal status. No single element or subject supercedes any other.

The elements contain a common format and similar terms and references. Each element begins with an introduction that provides reference information and historical background, and establishes the basis for the policies that follow. The introduction identifies the significance to Scottsdale of the topics covered in the element. Most elements include a vision statement and values regarding the element's topic area. These should be consistent with the overall city vision and values. Next come goal statements describing the general end towards which the city will direct its efforts. Following each goal are approaches that describe the general direction that the city sets to follow to

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section**

meet its goals and vision. Where appropriate, goals and approaches in other elements or documents will be referenced to help the reader grasp the comprehensive and interconnected nature of the General Plan. The elements may include maps, graphs, charts, and diagrams to clarify the goals and approaches. It is important to remember that the policies are equally as important as the graphically displayed information.

Finally, the General Plan contains a Reference Guide with a Glossary of Terms and Appendices. The Appendices discuss the process by which the General Plan was developed, References and Resources, Demographic Data, a Governance chapter and an Implementation Section. The Reference Guide will not be adopted by the City Council, but is a reference and background document for the General Plan policies.

Administration of the General Plan

The General Plan is designed to be a broad, flexible document that changes as the community needs, conditions, and direction change. It can be revised through city-initiated amendments, through citizen/property owner requests, or through referenda (citizen petition and vote). Ultimately, the decision to amend the General Plan is in the hands of the City Council.

The Growing Smarter (1998) and Growing Smarter Plus (2000) legislation changed some of the requirements regarding the administration of General Plans throughout the state. In many cases, Scottsdale was already doing the new things required. Growing Smarter declared that General Plans must be updated every ten years, and gave a deadline of December 2001 to accomplish this first update. It required the addition of four new elements, and provided a new way to define a major amendment to the General Plan. It proposed a more involved citizen process in the General Plan. The Growing Smarter Plus legislation added another required element, put into place more requirements for community acceptance of the General Plan, and re-defined major amendments to the General Plan.

The state statutes now define a major amendment as a proposal that results in a “substantial alteration of the municipality’s land use mixture or balance as established in the municipality’s existing General Plan land use element.” The legislation further requires that each city establish criteria to determine if a proposed change qualifies as a major amendment. If a proposal is determined to be a major amendment, a 2/3 or super majority vote of the City Council is required to approve it. Major amendments may only be heard at one public hearing during the same calendar year in which they are initiated and require two Planning Commission public hearings. Scottsdale has long had a six-month review process for what the city considered “large” general plan amendment cases to allow for thorough review by staff and the public. This review process is consistent with the state statute though the definitions of



large and major are different. Scottsdale's process for large amendments deals more with the size of the affected property and public involvement process than the substantial alteration of the planned mixture or balance of land uses described in the statute for a major amendment.

An amendment to Scottsdale's General Plan shall be defined as a major amendment if it meets any one of the criteria outlined on the following pages:

Criteria for a Major Amendment to the General Plan

(City Council approved 2/6/01 and revised to reflect the land use designations of the updated Conceptual Land Use Map)

Scottsdale's Mission: In guiding the formation of the major amendment criteria, it is important to consider the major mission elements of the city, these being –

- a. Preserve Scottsdale's unique southwestern character;
- b. Plan for and manage growth in harmony with the natural desert surroundings;
- c. Promote the livability of the community;
- d. Enhance and protect neighborhoods; and,
- e. Ensure and sustain the quality of life for all residents and visitors.



Proposed changes to the land use element of the city's General Plan that compromise the spirit and intent of these mission statements will qualify for consideration as a major amendment to the General Plan.

Scottsdale's Land Use Element: It is important that as proposals are considered in regard to the following criteria that the values and structure of the land use element be used as a guide. These values are an important part of the city's land use plan:

- a. Land uses should respect the natural and man-made environment;
- b. Land uses should provide for an unsurpassed quality of life for both its citizens and visitors;
- c. Land uses should contribute to the unique identity that is Scottsdale;
- d. Land uses should contribute to the building of community unity and cohesiveness;
- e. Land uses should work in concert with transportation systems in order to promote choice and reduce negative impacts upon the lifestyle of citizens and the quality of the environment;
- f. Land uses should be balanced in order to allow for the community to provide adequate live, work and play opportunities, and;
- g. Land uses should provide opportunities for the design of uses to fit and respect the character, scale and quality of uses that exist in the community.



It is recognized that a proposed change of land uses within any given portion of the city may have a substantial impact upon the balance of land uses within the city as a whole. The General Plan Land Use Element was formulated and adopted with full consideration of the character and balance of land uses that are appropriate within all distinct areas of the city. Beyond this level of consideration, the plan considers the relationships between and among the various planning areas and studies that have helped to build the plan. This leads to a balance and pattern of land uses that reflects the community's values, aspirations and the city's stated mission.

Character of Land Uses: A change in the planned land uses may have a substantial impact upon the city by transforming the character of the land uses within a given planning area. The character of the land uses may be indicated by the physical intensity of the use in terms of massing, height or relationships between uses; the blending of different types of uses and the patterns and scale inherent to each; or the relative amount, type and placement of open spaces. Significant changes in the established land use character will be considered in determining whether or not a proposal is a major amendment.



1. Change in Land Use Category

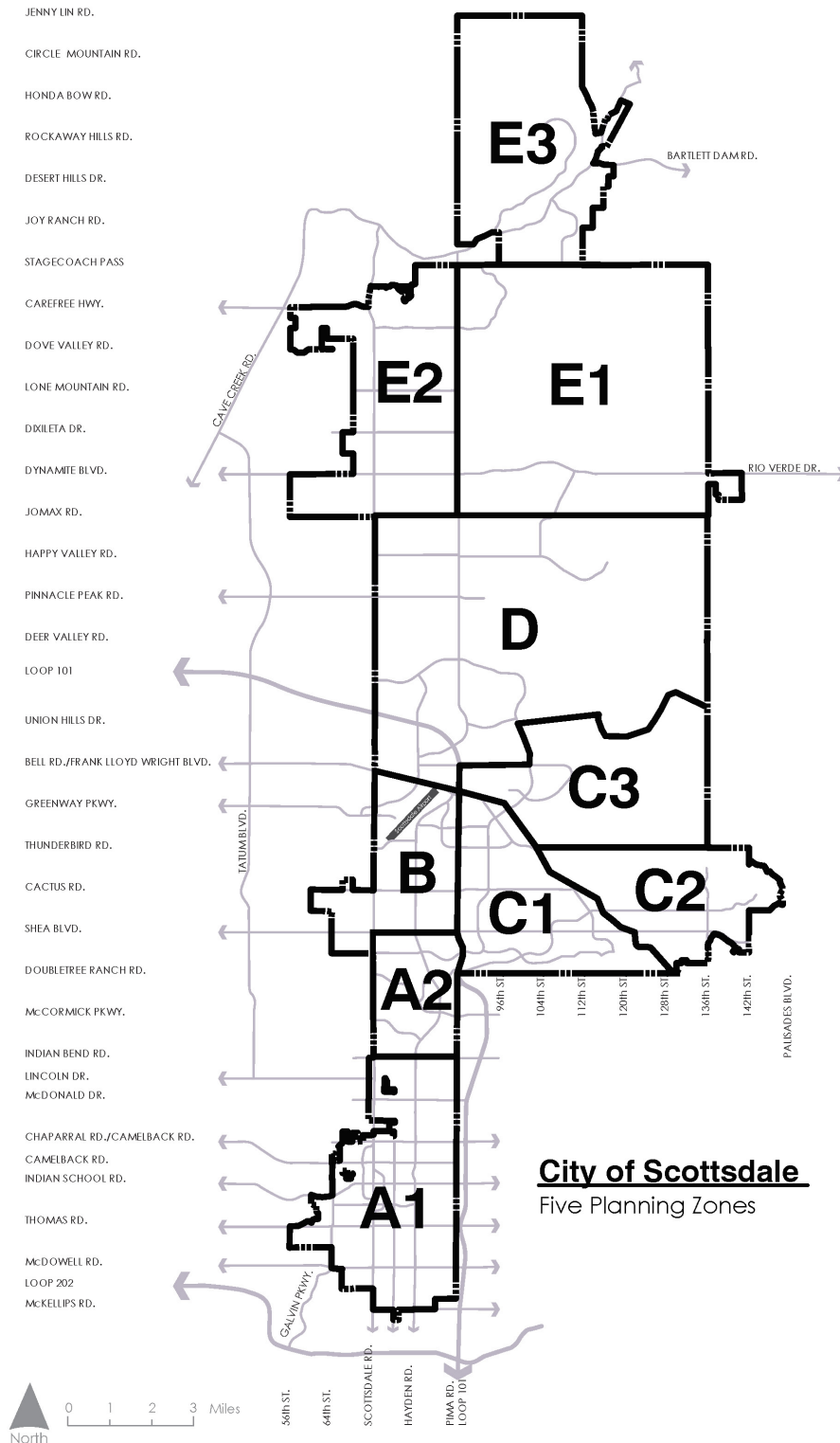
A change in the land use category on the land use plan that changes the land use character from one type to another as delineated in the following table

	To:	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E
From:	Land Use Plan Category					
Group A	Rural Neighborhoods Natural Open Space		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Group B	Suburban Neighborhoods Developed Open Space Cultural/ Institutional or Public Use			Yes	Yes	Yes
Group C	Urban Neighborhoods Resorts/Tourism	Yes				Yes
Group D	Neighborhood Commercial Minor Office Minor Employment	Yes	Yes			Yes
Group E	Commercial Office Employment Mixed Use Regional Use Overlay	Yes	Yes			

2a. Area of Change Criteria

A change in the land use designation that includes the following gross acreages:

- * Planning Zones A1, A2, B 10 acres or more
- * Planning Zones C1, C2, C3, D, E1, E2, and E3 15 acres or more



- **Zone A** Includes Old Town Scottsdale, the Indian Bend Park System, and the most mature neighborhoods in the community
- **Zone B** Includes the Scottsdale Airpark, the fastest growing and one of the three largest employment centers in the metropolitan area
- **Zone C** Covers the East Shea area, Scottsdale Ranch, McDowell Mountain Ranch, and part of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve
- **Zone D** Includes Grayhawk, DC Ranch, the Pinnacle Peak and Desert Highlands communities, several Troon communities, the Sonoran Regional Core employment center along Loop 101 Freeway, and part of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve
- **Zone E** Includes Troon North, Estancia, Terra Vita, the Boulders, Desert Mountain, Legend Trails, and part of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve

2b. Acreage Criteria Overriding Incentives

Certain exceptions to criteria contained in 2a are considered to be in the interest of the general public and in keeping with the mission and values of the community. A proposal that includes any of the following conditions will not be considered a major amendment:

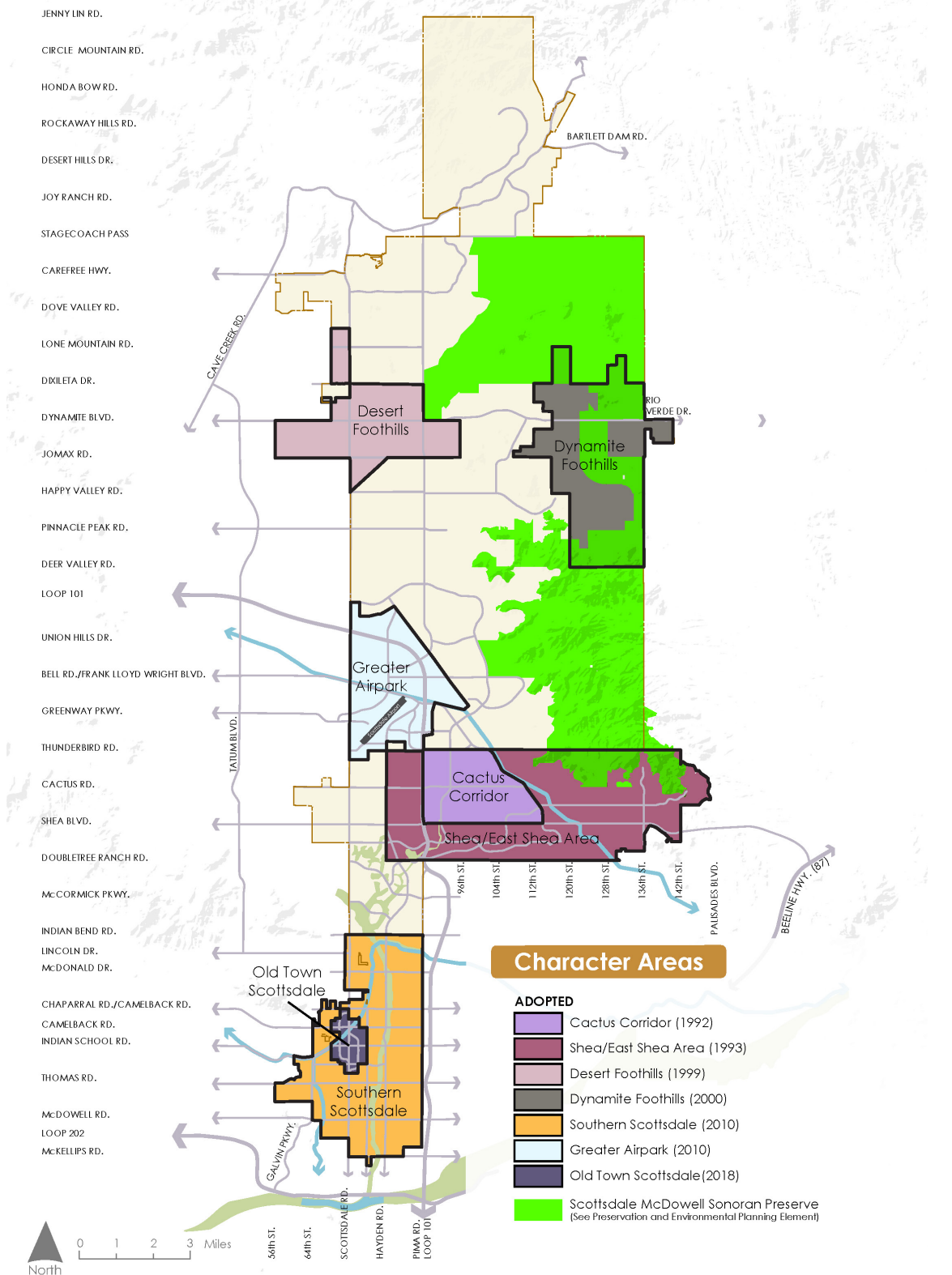
- A property owner initiated decrease in the residential land use category of units planned by the land use element, or
- A proposal for a change in the land use designation that results in no increase in the planned number of dwelling units and includes at least 30% more Natural Area Open Space than is required by the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Ordinance for the property and that is:
 - of substantial size, that being at least seven or more contiguous acres, and protected in such a manner so as to be designated with the land use category of Natural Area Open Space,
 - and where such open space protects sensitive natural features and is visually and/or physically accessible to the general public and does not include lands contained within scenic corridors or vista corridors, or
- A proposal to change the land use category to Cultural/ Institutional or Public Use with a municipal, public school or non-profit cultural facility when such a proposed facility is not adjacent to a single-family land use designation (designations of Rural or Suburban Neighborhoods) or does not share direct access to any street that has single-family residential driveway access within one-half (1/2) mile of the proposal.
- A proposal within the Old Town Scottsdale Character Area Plan that maintains the same development standards type (e.g. Type 1, Type 2, Type 2.5, or Type 3) and contains no more than fifteen (15) gross acres or less.

3. Character Area Criteria

Character areas have been added to the city's planning process in order to recognize and maintain the unique physical, visual and functional conditions that occur in distinct areas across the community. The city recognizes that these form a context that is important to the lifestyle, economic well being and long term viability of the community. These areas are identified by a number of parameters including but not limited to building scale, open space types and patterns, age of development and topographic setting.

If a proposal to change the land use category has not been clearly demonstrated by the applicant to comply with the guidelines and standards embodied within an approved character area plan it will be considered a major amendment. (Note: The character area plans that qualify for consideration include the Cactus Corridor Plan, Shea Area Plan, Desert Foothills Plan, Dynamite Foothills Plan, Southern Scottsdale Plan, Greater Airpark Plan, and Old Town Scottsdale Plan.)

see location map on
next page



4. Water/Wastewater Infrastructure Criteria

If a proposal to change the planned land use category results in the premature increase in the size of a master planned water transmission or sewer collection facility, it will qualify as a major amendment.

If a project applicant wishes to appeal the designation of a General Plan major amendment, the Chief Planning Officer, or the position equivalent, will evaluate the appeal and make a major amendment determination.

Following public review, and recommendations to approve from city advisory Boards and Commissions, the Scottsdale City Council will adopt the General Plan. Once adopted by the City Council, the General Plan must be ratified by a vote of the citizens. This will take place at an election coordinated with the Maricopa County election process. If the citizens do not ratify the updated General Plan, the existing General Plan will remain in effect until there is an affirmative vote on a new one.