



# City of Surprise

## Rural Development Standards and Design Guidelines Study



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**CITY OF SURPRISE**

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**

**AND**

**DESIGN GUIDELINES STUDY**

**ADOPTED BY COUNCIL**

**DECEMBER 13, 2001**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rural Development Standards and Design Guidelines Study was developed through the efforts of a citizen Task Force, elected and appointed City officials, and City staff as well as an extensive citizen participation program. The Planning and Zoning Commission approved the Study as: Resolution No. 01-125 Major Plan Amendment -- Designating Rural Lands in the City (July 17, 2001); and Resolution No. 01-76 Rural Development Standards and Design Guidelines -- as Element of General Plan 2020 (October 16, 2001). City Council approved both Resolutions on December 13, 2001.

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# INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

The Rural Development Standards and Design Guidelines Study considers criteria pertaining to non-urban portions of the City. It is intended to supply recommended policy definition for Surprise General Plan land use decisions. In particular, the objective is to prevent actions that may negatively impact lifestyles as well as outlying areas appropriate for rural preservation.

Property rights receive deserved attention. Rural living preferences should be respected with community support where they add to the City's character and do not detract from others' enjoyment of their lands. Reasonable development expectations in keeping with the General Plan and Arizona statutes, likewise, should be honored.

## Coordination

The Study attempts to balance input from numerous interests. Landowner positions varied from the desires of prospective developers to utilize land in future subdivisions or masterplanned communities to meet the West Valley housing demand to rural homeowners' preferences in maintaining open, equestrian, animal-raising areas and agribusiness commitments to sustain profitable farming operations. Municipal officials seek orderly land use patterns that contribute to protection of public health, safety, property values and municipal economic feasibility.

Consistency with the adopted General Plan, recently approved by local voters, is paramount. The Study's recommendations suggest a long-term program for refining the General Plan. Findings serve as a general guide. There is no call for premature, large-scale Major Plan Amendments. However, the Planning Commission may wish to advise City Council to embark on a closely-monitored, phased action plan to increase protected rural lands over time rather than allow the attrition of spaciousness that has occurred in other parts of the metropolitan area.

Municipal staff coordination of improvement standards is key to rural residential preservation. City engineers, systems administrators, public safety personnel and enforcement officers have day-to-day responsibility for assuring adequate, efficient and safe services to rural areas. Where appropriate to lower density living, infrastructure may be scaled-down to allow more economical installation and maintenance.

The City is sponsoring creation of a clear, streamlined Unified Development Code with planning and design guidelines tailored to the City and its Plan. The Rural Residential project offers general performance standards which may be incorporated into ordinance provisions, offsite improvement requirements and construction design themes.

## Methodology

A Rural Residential Task Force, comprised of residents, landowners and City leadership was appointed in late 2000, prior to voters' approval of the General Plan at the March 13, 2001 election.

Consultants were engaged by the City to facilitate Task Force findings into this summary report. These planners reviewed the General Plan, its background documentation and applicable codes/standards. They then conducted field observations to gain familiarity with Surprise's vacant, undeveloped and rural-living areas. Additional Task Force meetings, public workshops and hearings were held with consultants in attendance.

Three Rural Residential Task Force sessions focused on the project's major tasks:

***March 21 Rural Residential Area Designations*** -- Discussions focused on previously-designated areas. Differentiations in rural lifestyle were suggested, ranging from extensive farming, livestock and equestrian uses to preferences for spacious living without the nuisances associated with keeping large animals. Attention was directed to rural neighborhood appearance as well as to achieving compatibility with adjacent residential areas.

***April 4 Development and Design Standards*** -- City staff highlighted safety and maintenance concerns regarding adequate municipal systems. Citizen participants favored suggestions that would allow distinct, non-urban standards for off-site improvements in rural areas. Examples included: minimal street widths, elimination of curbs/sidewalks, natural drainage solutions and limited lighting on private property as well as on public streets.



Rural themes were preferred for fencing. Desert landscaping, stressing low-water use, desert vegetation, received strong consensus.

Gradations of Rural Residential living quality types were further refined from previous discussions. Attendees generally approved the Animal/Agriculture, Rural Estates and Character Transition subdistrict approach. Several participants urged that the process should consider adding substantial acreage to the designated Rural Residential areas.

***April 19 Buffering Criteria*** -- After revisiting Rural Residential locations, as requested by citizens during the April 4 meeting, the Task Force and citizen attendees focused on edge treatments to mark a smooth transition among Rural Residential subdistricts and adjacent land uses. Rural character districts were considered as appropriate buffers to more intense development such as major transportation corridors, gateways designated

in the General Plan and abutting, non-rural uses ranging from suburban housing to commercial or industrial uses. Natural washes, trails systems and established setback distances were considered as primary means for separating different types of development. Screening requirements -- foliage, walls and berms -- received general assessment by the group.

**May 9 Public Workshop** -- A public workshop was conducted to review preliminary study findings. City staff and consultants presented graphics illustrating recommended Rural Residential areas with additions mapped by participants at the April 19 Task Force session. It was noted that the City would have no control, but, perhaps, an advisory function over lands that citizen had designated beyond current Surprise City limits. State Land holdings were discussed.



Citizen comments included: expressions of desire for including more area within the City for Rural Residential designation; general approval of design standards; discussion of open space/trails maintenance responsibilities; commitment to protecting existing equestrian enclaves, trail linkages and many other observations.

**May 15 Joint Planning Commission City Council Workshop** -- City staff presented working draft findings reported in consultants' memorandum report. Inquiries from the Council/Commission participants centered on lower dwelling densities, allowable number of horses per acre and potential affects on future development plans. They offered suggestions for map improvements, protecting scenic vistas and clearly stating the responsible entity for maintaining trails.

Public comment indicated a need for: areas where fowl and swine may be raised, concentric transition buffers around all equestrian enclaves, more horse and transition areas, keeping farm interests informed -- possibly considering an Agricultural Preservation District.

Additional consultations with City staff and Unified Development Code consultants provided valuable input to the Study report.

# I. RURAL RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

The Surprise General Plan, adopted by City Council in November 2000, illustrated 4,261 acres of the City's 70 square mile land area as "rural" residential at one or fewer dwelling units per acre. The City Council directed further study of this land use category for more explicit definition of rural living with distinguishing standards and design criteria.

Arizona statutes now require that any landowner is entitled to a presumption of at least one home per acre unless a lower yield is expressly agreed to in writing. Many rural area residents prefer substantially larger lots; however, such restrictions would have to be protected in a given area or subdivision through private deed restrictions.

Specific sectors where rural lifestyles predominate were studied by the Rural Residential Task Force. Those areas, indicated on the following graphic (Figure 1), comprised more than seven square miles. Members of the public and the Task Force suggested additional rural residential acres (both within and beyond the municipal boundaries) during deliberative sessions in March and April 2001.

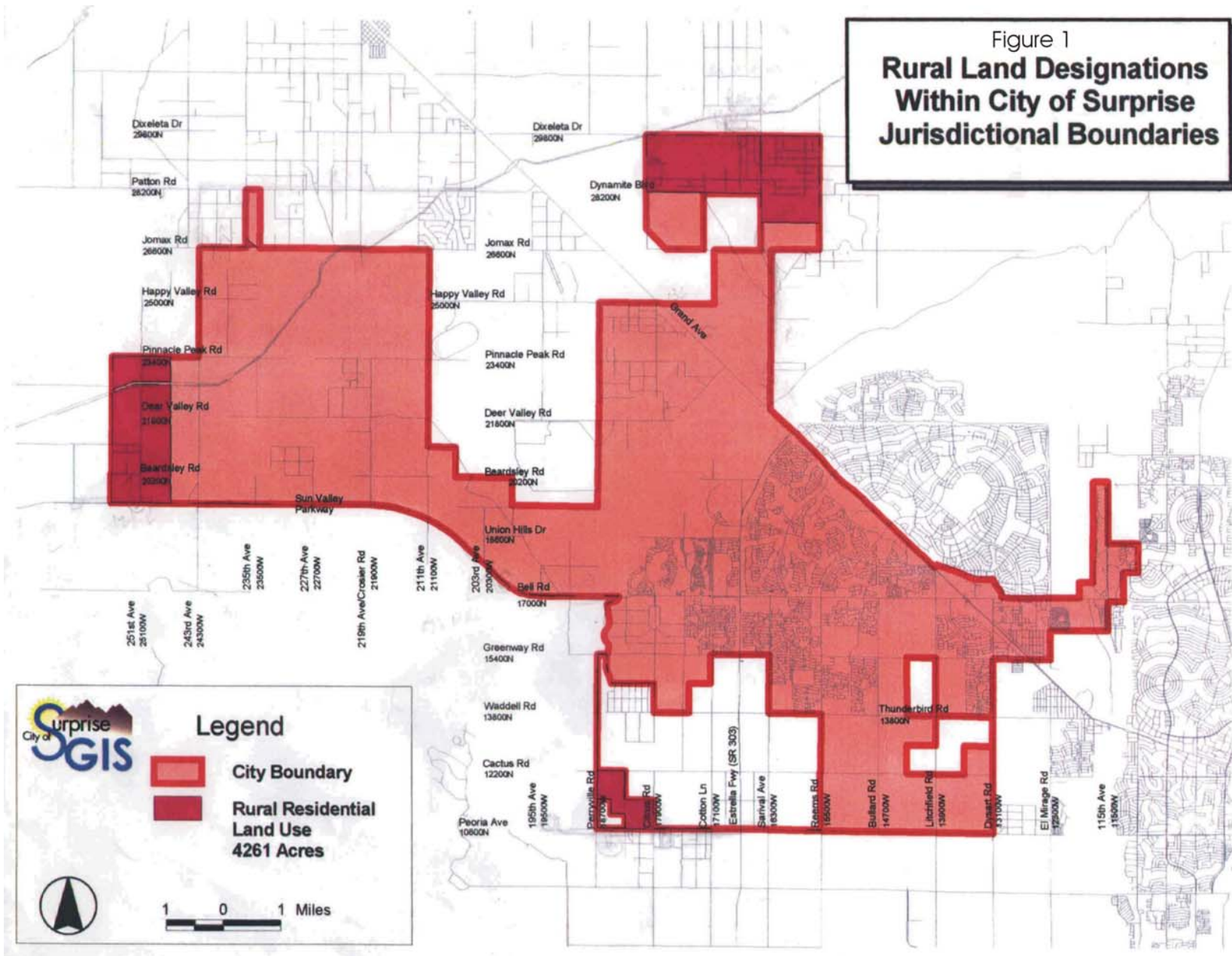
Much of the land beyond the Surprise city limits would be anticipated for use as rural residential designation either in the County -- or, possibly, at some future date, if desired by property owners, annexed into the City. Except for lands within strip-annexed areas (e.g., along Perryville and Peoria corridors), tracts beyond the municipal boundaries are not shown on the Rural Land Designation Concepts Map (Figure 4 at page 11). Likewise, areas of State Trust Land south of Happy Valley Road and east of Perryville Road are intended as advisory only -- until such time as City representatives have the opportunity further to confer with Arizona State Land Department officials to integrate planning efforts.

Further in-City increments, especially in the northwest outlying sectors, were considered. They were deleted from Rural Residential Concepts map because they conflict with the City's "employment area" designation (i.e., protecting Luke Air Force Base auxiliary fields, proving grounds). A small, 80-acre parcel adjacent to the landfill was also deleted as a result of commitments made by the City at the time of General Plan adoption.

Various subdistricts were suggested for specific Rural Residential designation in order to preserve a desired variety of lifestyles and to extend opportunities for Surprise to maintain and perpetuate a rural way of living moreso than other Valley communities. Figure 2, Rural Residential Acres, revises and summarizes data from the General Plan in comparison with Rural Residential study recommendations. Estimated Subdistrict acreages (calling out the recommendations for lands inside the City as well as strip-annexed lands) are included on the chart. Explanations that define and distinguish the subdistricts follow the tabular land use comparison.



Figure 1  
**Rural Land Designations  
 Within City of Surprise  
 Jurisdictional Boundaries**



**Surprise City GIS**

**Legend**

- City Boundary
- Rural Residential Land Use  
4261 Acres

1 0 1 Miles

**Figure 2**  
**RURAL RESIDENTIAL ACRES (Estimated)**

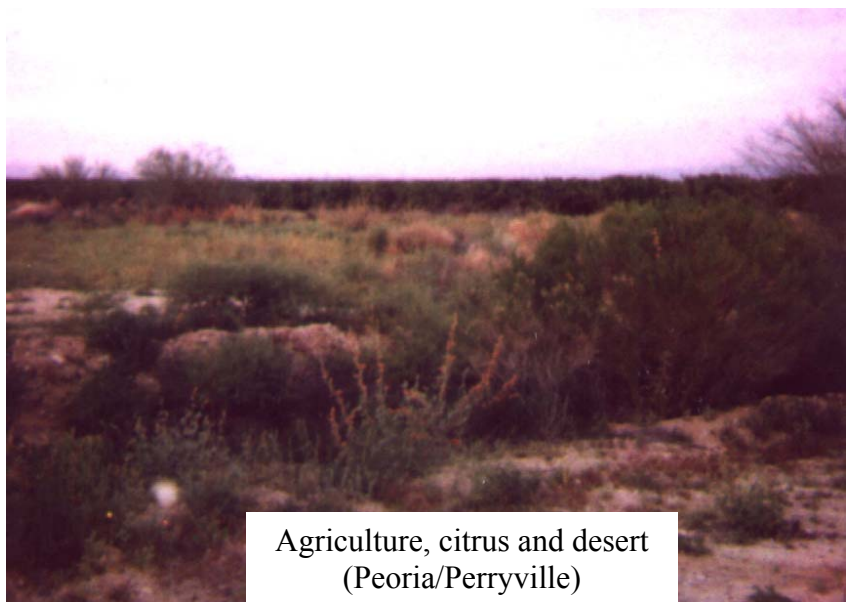
	Animal/AG	Rural Estates	Rural Character	Total Rural Residential	% of City
General Plan	--	--	--	4,261 ac.	9.5%
Recommended:					
Rural Subdistricts (all)	6,480 ac.	1,160 ac.	3,960 ac.	11,600 ac.	--
(in City)	5,240 ac.	520 ac.	3,300 ac.	9,060 ac.	20.2%

There are numerous interpretations of "rural" living. Three broad categories have been suggested to accommodate different landowner preferences. These gradations allow for a blending of styles, together with protection from incursion by more dense or otherwise incompatible development.

**Animal-keeping/Agriculture**

Equestrian and livestock-raising preferences are appropriate to sectors with Animal/Ag designation. Keeping of other animals may be permitted in accordance with City Codes. Raising of crops is an intended use.

Rural Estate-type uses (without animals, see next subsection) would be permissible in the Animal/Ag rural subdistrict. It would be the responsibility, however, of the homeowner who does



Agriculture, citrus and desert  
(Peoria/Perryville)

not keep animals to maintain buffers from adjacent properties where animals are permitted. Residents with animals in the Animal/Ag subdistrict on homesites abutting or adjacent to a Rural Estate subdistrict are expected to provide the required buffer between the two subdistricts.

Limited accessory businesses may be allowed (e.g., by conditional use permit). These enterprises might include: horse boarding, feed and tack stores in conjunction with a residence, kennels, and the like.

All lands previously designated as Rural Residential within the Surprise municipal boundaries are suggested for this RR subdistrict classification. Additional area is designated west of 243rd Avenue. Initiatives by landowners to establish the equestrian/farming lifestyle on other, outlying tracts (that do not conflict with General Plan designations) could significantly expand Surprise's Animal/Ag subdistrict.

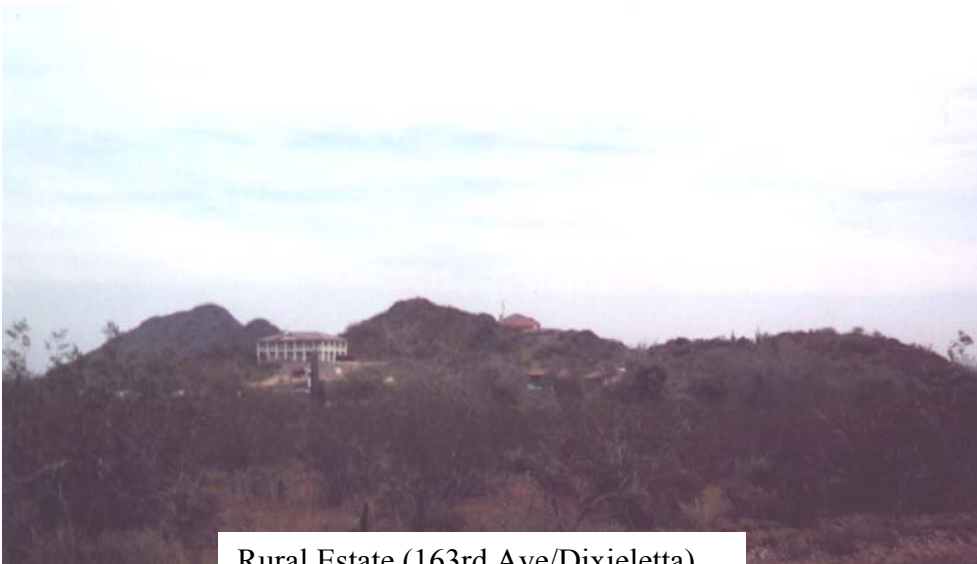
### **Rural Estate**

Homeowners who do not desire to keep horses or livestock prefer designated neighborhoods that allow for spacious lots, an acre or larger in area. The Estate classification is appropriate to gateways into rural character areas and enclaves where scenic vistas, wildlife corridors, natural desert landscape and outdoor living with multi-purpose trails access are emphasized.

Rural estates mark a compatibility gradation between Animal/Ag areas and Rural Character transition subdistricts. These sectors may be masterplanned into large lots with

common open spaces and other homeowner amenities. Private deed restrictions (CC&Rs) and/or City regulations would be in order to strengthen the prohibition against keeping large animals in the Rural estates subdistrict.

The appeal of peaceful, country estate living may create market demand that would encourage



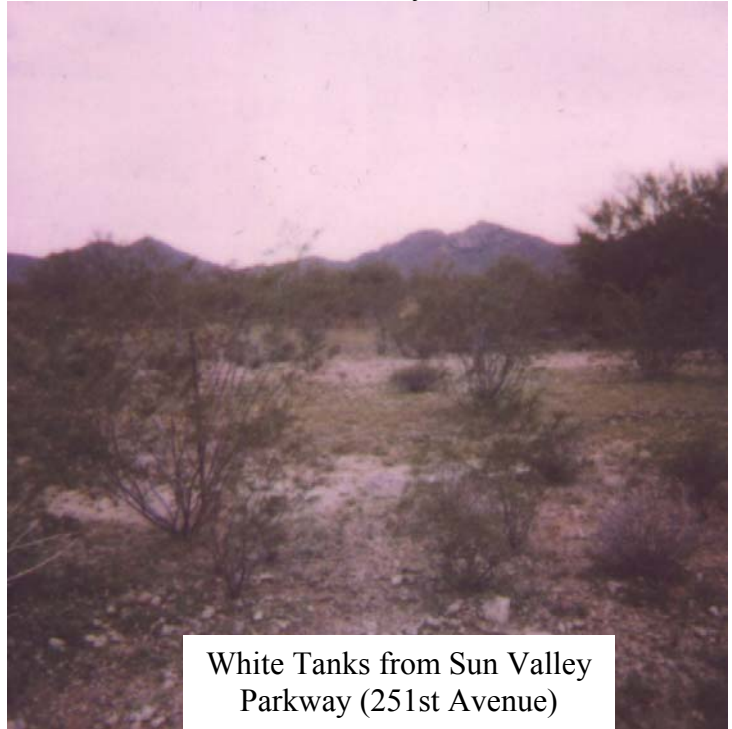
Rural Estate (163rd Ave/Dixieletta)

developers to seek this subdistrict designation for their holdings that are currently categorized as low density single-family residential; and promote their land sales for these qualities.

**Rural Character**

Keeping strong rural character on lands adjacent to more suburban development, insulating other Rural Residential sectors from more urban activity, is the central rationale for this transitional subdistrict. In particular, the classification is suggested where heavier vehicular traffic may be anticipated, such as adjacent to arterial roads or future Growth Areas called out in the City's adopted General Plan.

Portions of the Character sectors closest to Estate or Animal/Ag designations would be expected to observe lot sizes with a minimum one-acre area. That is, the Character subdistrict developer and subsequent homeowners have a transitioning responsibility where abutting other subdistricts. Otherwise, there is no minimum lot size requirement in the Character subdistrict except as provided by underlying zoning regulations (including Maricopa County), performance standards or development entitlement stipulations. In addition, broad washes crossing the Sun Valley Parkway are desired to be preserved from development as major open space for natural trails to the White Tank Regional Park.



White Tanks from Sun Valley Parkway (251st Avenue)

Expectations for rural land usage in each subdistrict are outlined in the following chart:

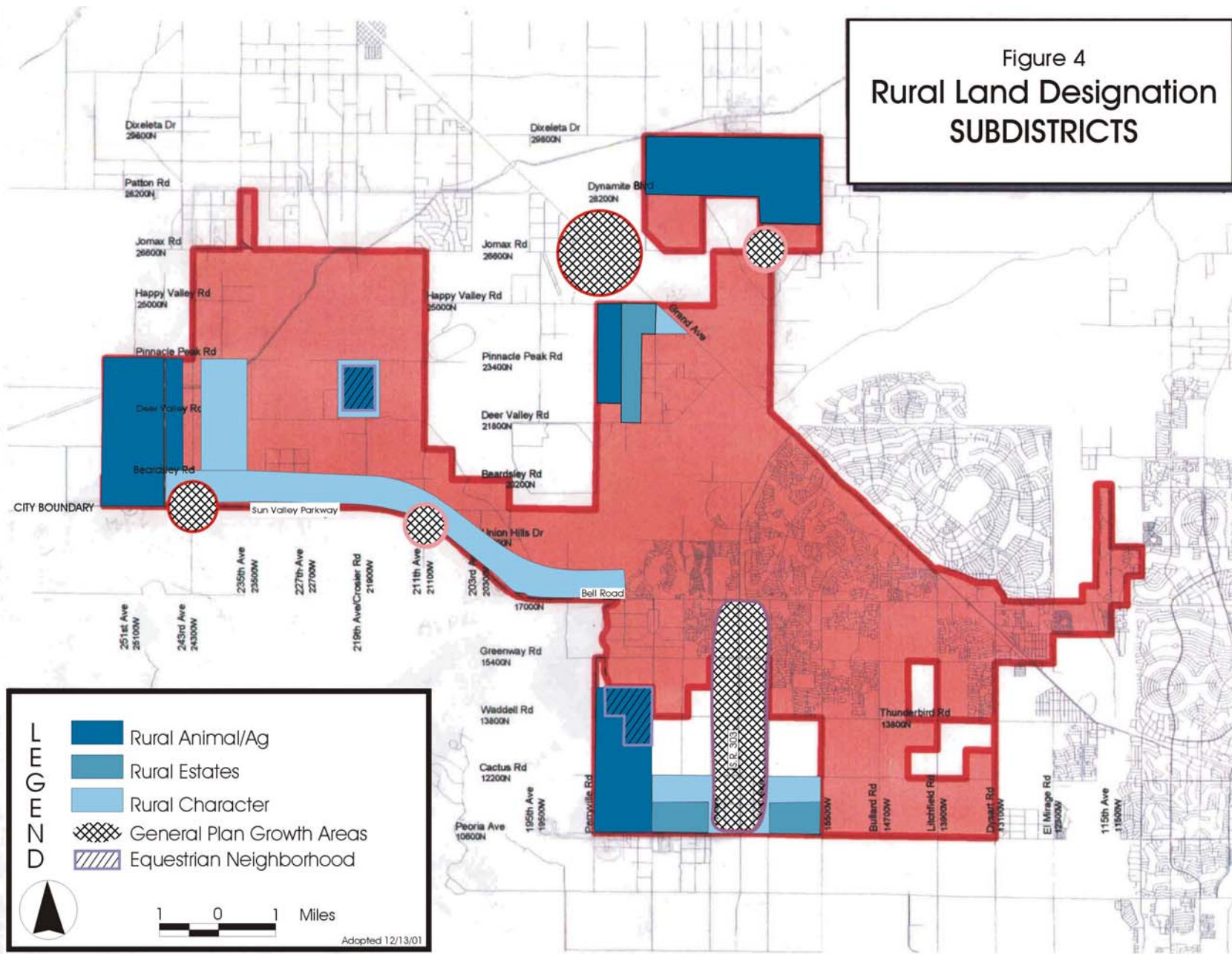
<b>Figure 3</b>				
<b>RURAL RESIDENTIAL USES</b>				
	<u>Principal Use</u>	<u>Other Uses*</u>	<u>Accessory Uses</u>	<u>Additional or Exceptions</u>
<b>RURAL ANIMALS/ AGRICULTURE</b>	Farm residence, Animal enclosures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agricultural operations: certain crops, livestock, fowl</li> <li>• screened outdoor storage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sales stand for crops grown on premises +</li> <li>• outbuildings</li> <li>• family recreation facilities</li> <li>• uses ancillary to the primary use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• horses -- no limits</li> <li>• certain livestock, fowl, minimum 2 acres</li> <li>• Conditional Permit business</li> <li>• as specified in Code or stipulated</li> </ul>
<b>RURAL ESTATES</b>	Residence	Uses compatible with and designed to fit into the rural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guest house +</li> <li>• outbuildings</li> <li>• family recreation facilities</li> <li>• uses ancillary to the primary use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as specified in Code or stipulated</li> </ul>
<b>RURAL CHARACTER</b>	Residence Business Park Research and Technology Park	Uses compatible with and designed to fit into the rural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outbuildings</li> <li>• family recreation facilities</li> <li>• uses ancillary to the primary use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as specified in Code or stipulated</li> </ul>

\*other principal uses permitted in zoning district (e.g., church, utility sub-station)

Principal and conditionally permitted uses listed under R1-43 in the Surprise Zoning Code (Sec. 17.24.020) are allowed in all Rural Residential subdistricts on lots one acre or larger in area. Businesses compatible with rural living may be permitted as primary uses in the Character subdistrict in accordance with applicable performance standards and/or zoning regulations.

Keeping horses and certain other farm animals for private use is permitted as a matter of right in the Animal/AG subdistrict. Horse boarding requires obtaining a conditional permit and is limited to the Animal/AG subdistrict. Task Force discussions indicated consensus for limiting the allowable number of horses based on the homesite's acreage. The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended allowing three horses for the first acre; two additional horses for each additional acre. Upon consideration, the City Council chose not to place any limits on the number of horses kept for private, non-commercial use.

Figure 4  
Rural Land Designation  
SUBDISTRICTS



Adopted 12/13/01

## II. DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN STANDARDS

Rural residential areas anticipate one homesite, or fewer, per acre. Lot sizes in Animal-keeping/Agriculture subdistricts would generally substantially exceed one acre, by property owner preference, subdivision platting and/or CC&Rs. Estate lots, likewise, are expected to provide a full acre or more.

Rural character transition subdistricts may include parcels less than one acre. Other uses, such as business research and technology parks may contribute to this subdistrict's spaciousness. That is, there is an emphasis on design and siting arrangements such as clustering concepts for allocation of common open space areas, desired buffers and preservation of natural drainage.

All Rural Residential designations (Animal/AG, Estate, Character) are required to meet minimum off-site improvement standards established by the City of Surprise. Criteria for wet utilities (water, wastewater), street rights-of-way and surfacing, drainage will vary according to subdistrict and, especially, the feasibility for extending municipal systems to rural properties.

The desire for "dark sky" enjoyment throughout Surprise's rural areas implies that no street lighting will be required in any subdistrict (except for special safety or circumstances on a case-by-case basis) and lower lighting, standards, will be observed than would be required in more urban or suburban areas. Lighting on individual lots should not spill over onto other properties and may not reflect skyward.

Citizen participants at Task Force and Workshop sessions have indicated the following improvement and design preferences:

*Architecture* -- traditional, rural appearance: southwestern, territorial, ranch styles; enforced by CC&Rs and/or City Codes; porches and free-standing garages are desirable.

*Drainage* -- natural solutions; preferably combined with pathways or trails (see Figure 5); engineered drainage facilities (concrete, gunite) minimal, only where required for safety; rip-rap for erosion protection.

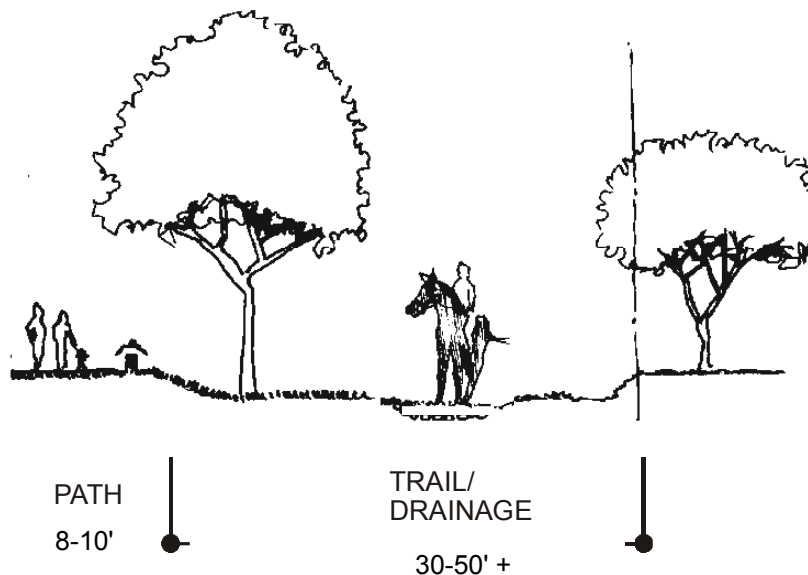
*Street Treatments* -- required right-of-way widths; surfacing appropriate to traffic generation: dust-proofing for Animal/AG areas, ribbon pavement (e.g. chip seal) for Estate or Character or as required by the City Engineer to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents; curbs only for drainage control where needed; no sidewalks.

*Fencing* -- open styles: chain link, rail, pipe; walls are discouraged except for low, decorative driveway entry or exceptions as noted in buffering treatments.

*Landscaping* -- native materials, xeriscape; turf areas limited to rear yard recreational areas; low-water use shade trees encouraged near residences; with intensity and type of materials appropriate to the character of the area.

*Trails/Pathways* -- separate equestrian trail facilities are preferred; dimensions of lineal open space should provide space for horses turning, passing; multi-purpose pathways preferred at 8-10' widths (Figure 5), apart from horse trails, unpaved or decomposed granite surfacing preferred.

**Figure 5**  
**Trail and Pathway Measurements**



Design themes are intended to conform with General Plan policies stated for Rural Character (p. 141). Connection with municipal sewer system is preferred. Outlying areas may be served by individual septic tank; however, the City may reserve the right to require "dry sewer" installation for future system connection. Rural street standards are recognized (General Plan, Figure 4-19, p. 83). Drainage accommodations in low swales within the right-of-way are permitted.



### III. BUFFERING

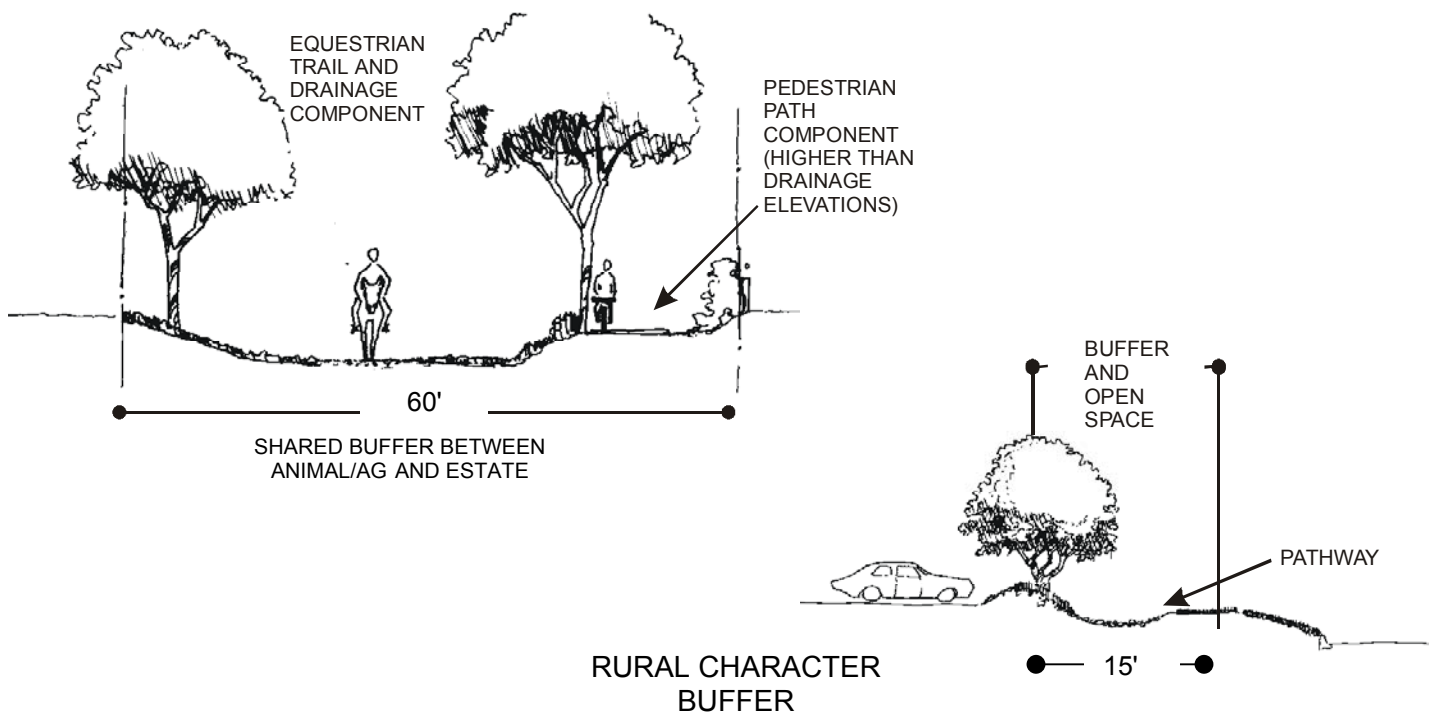
Guidelines indicate expected treatments along edges of designated Rural Residential subdistricts. The objective, to provide compatible transition between different types of rural living preferences or between rural character and non-rural areas, is served by four principal separation techniques. These measures may be applied in combination where greater distances are needed to mitigate negative impacts.

- *natural features* -- desert washes, wildlife habitat
- *designated open space* -- peripheral tracts for trails, lineal recreation areas
- *setbacks* -- separations between structures or animal-activity areas (corrals, pens, roping arenas) and property lines
- *screening* -- vegetation, fencing, berms to prevent visual intrusion and preserve privacy

Conditions requiring buffer space include both: 1) the protection of rural tranquility for homeowners who enjoy riding/keeping livestock, living in spacious settings, maintaining desert vistas and wildlife corridors; and, 2) reducing nuisance or hazard, from such factors as odors or flies, for those in adjacent neighborhoods. Residents or property owners in abutting sectors with defined lifestyle distinctions (i.e., animal-keeping/agriculture, rural estates, transitional character, non-rural) share mutual responsibility for maintaining land use compatibility.

Typical cross-sections for buffering could include:

**Figure 6  
Buffering Treatments**



Buffering standards are to be further specified in the Unified Code recommendations that are currently underway. Suggested peripheral treatments for each subdistrict adjacent where it abuts the next subdistrict category would address setbacks, screening criteria, and other criteria such as maintenance responsibilities. For instance, setbacks may exceed those otherwise required in the zoning district on properties abutting the adjacent, different classification. Screening methods may support citizens' preference for open styles of fencing, limiting solid walls for residential privacy areas, such as around swimming pools. Other considerations might include measures for mitigating nuisances -- odor, flies -- associated with animals.

Discussions among participants at Task Force and Workshops sessions were inconclusive as to responsibility for buffer space upkeep. The City of Surprise would undertake maintenance only where open space tracts were dedicated -- and accepted -- as public trail, pathway or lineal recreation assets. In principles, all improvements, including landscaping and amenities (such as rest areas or recreational equipment), would be installed by the developer to City specifications. A maintenance trust fund may also be required, the proceeds of which would be used to defray municipal costs of cleanup, replacement and revegetation within the dedicated tract.

Property owners' associations would be expected to care for open spaces separating Rural Residential subdistricts. In the event that no such organization exists, a horse owners' group may be accepted as the responsible entity for maintaining equestrian easements in safe, healthful condition; and/or individual abutting property owners would be looked to for maintenance, subject to lien where City action is required in the event of property owner noncompliance.