

Information for Community Members

What are General and a Comprehensive Plans?

The General and Comprehensive Plan are the primary land use policy document for cities and counties in Arizona. Both documents are required by law to either be revisited at least every ten years. Largely based on the community's vision and goals, these plans guide the type of development and places the city desires; including where new homes should be built, where new commercial and industrial sites should be located, how and where parks will be provided, where new roads are built, and where new mass transit routes should go.

Are these plans required?

Arizona state law requires municipalities to adopt a comprehensive, long-range General Plan (ARS 9-461.05 and ARS 11-805) and counties to adopt Comprehensive plans. Additionally, the municipality and county must readopt their plans every 10 years.

How does health fit in to the General Plan?

General and Comprehensive Plans can be tools for those who wish to lay the groundwork for creating healthier communities. The built environment (i.e.: the way American communities are developed) contributes to population health, and these plans act as a blueprint for what that built environment will look like and how it will be developed. Health starts where you live, learn, work, and play. Each of these areas is addressed in the "elements" or chapters of the General and Comprehensive Plans – but it is the community member's responsibility to advocate for these elements to include policies and standards that will create healthy communities.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services defines a healthy community as one that continuously creates and improves both its physical and social environments. Such communities are designed and built to improve the quality of life for all people who live, work, learn, and play within their borders. Ideally, a good General Plan will protect and improve the quality of life of community members residing in that municipality.

Why should I get involved?

Public participation is important to the success of your community's General and Comprehensive Plans. The public participation part of the General Plan process allows the public to develop long term recommendations

How can health be integrated into my community's General or Comprehensive Plan?

Vision Statement

Does it make reference to healthy living?

Transportation Element

Does it discuss multimodal transportation and Safe Routes to School?

Parks and Recreation Element

Does it require parks and recreational facilities to be near residential areas?

Healthy Eating/Active Lifestyle Element

While this element is currently not required by the Arizona state legislature, a community can voice their support for a specific plan amendment which discusses health.

for their community. When your community is working to write or update the General Plan, it is your opportunity to help shape the kind of place it will be for generations to come. Without you and your ideas, the General Plan may not reflect the values found most important in your community.

How can I get involved?

In most communities, the full text of the currently operating General and Comprehensive Plan is available online at the city or town's main website. If not available there, it may be accessible at your city library or you can request a copy at your local government office. Give yourself time to read through the plan. Are your areas of concern addressed? Is healthy community design included in the vision statement or as the overarching theme for each individual element?

If your community is currently working on updating, readopting, or rewriting their plan, you can read drafts of the plan and provide your comments and ideas. Some cities have websites dedicated to public engagement and involvement. For example, Phoenix has [My Plan PHX](#), Mesa has [This is My Mesa](#), Sierra Vista has [Speak Up Sierra Vista](#), and Tucson has [Plan Tucson](#). These websites have areas where community members can provide their comments, opinions, and ideas on what their concerns are and how they envision their community's development in the future.

Even if your city does not have a specific website designated for public engagement, you can find more information about the General and Comprehensive Plan through the Community Development, Planning and Zoning, or Economic Development departments on the city or county webpage. Most communities updating their General Plan have an informational page where community members can find the dates for upcoming meetings and events, the timeline for update, and contact information for questions and concerns. If this information is not available online, community members can always stop by or contact their local government office with questions.

Community members are encouraged to attend public hearings, which are a part of the General and Comprehensive Plan process. Furthermore, a city, town or county's General or Comprehensive Plan must achieve ratification through a public vote before it can officially go into effect.

What if my city is not currently updating the General Plan? Can the adopted plan be changed?

Yes! As communities change over time, so do the goals and visions of that community. That is why there is an amendment process for each community's General and Comprehensive Plan. Communities will review major amendments annually, and there are periodic procedures in place for minor amendments. However, this varies by city. You can check your city's or county's General or Comprehensive Plan webpage or read the amendment section of the plan to review the amendment process. Generally, amendments may be requested by anyone in the community or by the city or town council.