

*“I desire no future that will break the ties of the past.”*

*- George Eliot -*

## **2.0 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **2.1 Planning Area**

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The planning area for the **Surprise General Plan 2020** is approximately 306.57 square miles as shown in Figure 2-1, Surprise Planning Area. It includes significant areas to the north and west of the current incorporated boundaries (i.e., approximately 70 square miles) of the City of Surprise. The planning area is divided into six “Special Planning Areas (SPA)” that are described in Chapter 4.0: Community Elements. SPAs 1, 2, and 3 are located within the “primary planning area” that includes lands that are anticipated to be developed over the next 20 years. It also comprises areas where the City of Surprise can work closely with Maricopa County to assist in directing that growth. SPAs 4,5 and 6 are located within the “secondary planning area,” that is considered the city’s “sphere of influence.” How the sphere of influence develops could positively or negatively impact the City of Surprise’s development patterns.

### **2.2 Regional Context**

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Surprise is located 25 minutes northwest of downtown Phoenix along US Route 60/State Highway 93 in the Northwest Valley of the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. It is strategically positioned about 13 miles west of Interstate 17, three miles from SR 303, and 18 miles north of Interstate 10. Surprise is 25 miles from Sky Harbor International Airport. Located in the City of Glendale, Luke Air Force Base is 2.5 miles south of the Surprise strip annexed area. The City of Surprise is bordered on the east by the cities of Peoria and El Mirage and on the west by the Town of Buckeye. The unincorporated retirement communities are north (Sun City West) and east (Sun City) of the City of Surprise. South of the City of Surprise is the City of Glendale. The unincorporated communities of Morristown, Circle City, and Wittmann are located within the Secondary Planning Area. The White Tank Mountain Regional Park is located in the southwest portion of the planning area. Lake Pleasant Regional Park is located approximately ten miles to the northeast of the planning area. Sun City and Sun City West are adjacent to the eastern boundary of the planning area.

FIG. 2-1  
MAP

FIG. 2-2  
MAP

## 2.3 *Historic Overview*

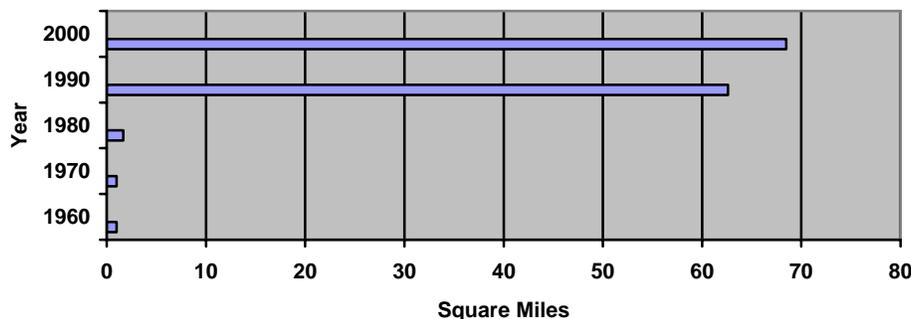
The area now known as Surprise received its first residents in 1937. The two families that settled the Original Townsite consisted of eight people who operated one service station and occupied four small dwelling units. They utilized a gasoline-powered auxiliary power unit to produce electricity and collected water from a nearby well. The surrounding land was either vacant or under agricultural production with their nearest neighbors located over two miles away.

By 1950 the area population had grown to nearly 300 residents with two service stations, two grocery stores and numerous substandard houses and cabins. Surprise became an incorporated town on December 12, 1960 and boasted a population of nearly 1,600 people located on a Townsite of 640 acres. At the time of incorporation, only 169 acres of the Townsite were developed.

The existing incorporated area was expanded for the first time on November 14, 1978, when a 10-foot strip of land encircling roughly 26 miles of unincorporated land was annexed by the city. The purpose of the strip annexation was to reserve this unincorporated land until future development occurred in the area, at which time the city would annex the land into its incorporated area. The 1987 Surprise Comprehensive Development Guide included this area as well as other lands bordered by Perryville Road and Grand Avenue as its study area boundary.

As shown in Table 2-1, City of Surprise Annexation History, what was once a small farming village now encompasses more than 70 square miles, including urban and commercial developments, ranches, and industrial parks.

**Table 2-1, City of Surprise Annexation History  
(Square miles of incorporated area)**



Over nearly 50 years, Surprise has grown from 500 residents to a city with an estimated population of over 30,000 in November 2000. The city offers a broad range of lifestyles, from small family subdivisions to secluded ranches. Surprise also offers a significant presence of retirement communities that address the needs and lifestyles of active adults. The city covers a wide variety of recreational facilities within or proximate to its boundaries including seven golf courses.

## **2.4 Physical Characteristics**

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The topography of the planning area is shown in Figure 2-3. Topography should be understood to determine the developability and provision of infrastructure to serve the city’s residential, employment and service needs. The planning area, located in the northwest region of the Phoenix Metropolitan Area, generally exhibits a slope ranging between two and four percent. The region generally drains from north to south, north of Grand Avenue. South of Grand Avenue, the planning area drains northwest to southeast with the exception of the White Tank Mountains, that drains from south to north and east to west.

The northern boundary of the planning area (SR 74) slopes from west to east at elevations ranging from approximately 1,900 to 2,000 feet above sea level. The southern boundary (northern boundary of White Tank Mountain Regional Park and Peoria Avenue) exhibits elevations from 1,800 to 2,200 feet above sea level at the park to elevations ranging from approximately 1,100 to 1,400 feet. The western boundary (271<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 254<sup>th</sup> Avenue) drains from south to southeast, ranging in elevation from approximately 1,600 to 2,000 feet above sea level. The eastern boundary ranges from approximately 1,900 feet at the intersection of SR 74 and Sarival Avenue to 1,100 feet at the intersection of Dysart Avenue and Peoria Avenue. The highest point of the planning area is an elevation of 2,345 feet above sea level. The northeast quadrant, and the lowest point of 1,119 feet above sea level, is located near the intersection of Dysart Road and Peoria Avenue.

The planning area contains both natural and man-made landforms that are, and will continue to influence the pattern of development within the city and its planning area. A natural landform located within the planning area includes Bunker Peak at an elevation of 1,817 feet above sea level. Manmade landforms located within the planning area include McMicken Dam at an elevation of 1,361 feet above sea level. Landforms that frame the planning area include White Tank Mountain Regional Park to the west, Hieroglyphic Mountains to the northeast, and the Vulture Mountains to the northwest.

Fig 2-3  
MAP

## **2.5 Critical Issues**

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Early in the process, a list of critical issues were identified that the General Plan would explore. These issues were developed through discussions with staff, Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council as well as the general public. The following are some of the issues identified:

- ✓ **Reinvest/revitalize the Original Townsite area and other mature neighborhoods.**
- ✓ **Determine viability of agriculture preservation.**
- ✓ Determine appropriate land uses on noise impacted areas near Luke Air Force Base.
- ✓ Establish non-vehicular connections to the Agua Fria River.
- ✓ Evaluate edge treatment of the city and El Mirage.
- ✓ Evaluate SR 303 for appropriate uses.
- ✓ Utilize the recharge area for open space/recreational activities.
- ✓ Delineate open space buffer for regional park.
- ✓ Protect the Upper Sonoran Desert outside of the White Tank Mountain Regional Park.
- ✓ Identify near and long-term land use strategy for landfill and adjacent area.
- ✓ Determine appropriate land uses in noise impacted areas around Luke Air Force Base Auxiliary Field #1 and the proving grounds.
- ✓ Evaluate appropriate uses along Sun Valley Parkway.
- ✓ Preserve wash corridors.
- ✓ Establish better north-south and east-west transportation connections.