

Sierra Vista City Council  
Work Session Minutes  
February 20, 2024

1. Mayor McCaa called the February 20, 2024, City Council Work Session to order at 3:03 p.m., Council Chambers, City Hall, 1011 N. Coronado Drive, Sierra Vista, Arizona.

Mayor Clea McCaa – present  
Mayor Pro Tem Carolyn Umphrey – present  
Council Member William Benning – absent  
Council Member Gregory Johnson – present  
Council Member Angelica Landry – present  
Council Member Marta Messmer - present  
Council Member Mark Rodriguez – present

Others Present:

Victoria Yarbrough, Assistant City Manager  
Chris Hiser, Police Chief  
Brian Jones, Fire Chief  
Sharon Flissar, Public Works Director  
Laura Wilson, Leisure, Parks, and Library Director  
Matt McLachlan, Community Development Director  
Tony Boone, Economic Development Director  
Adam Curtis, Marketing and Communications Manager  
Elizabeth Wrozek, PIO  
Mike Cline, Management Analyst  
John Healey, Sports Coordinator

2. Presentation and Discussion:

- a. [General Plan Ballot Process / Survey Results](#)

Mr. McLachlan noted that Council has been following the process through their liaison roles with the commissions and have seen various aspects of the plan taking shape. He stated that this presentation covers where the City is at with the schedule, next steps, and what was learned through the community survey.

A General Plan is designed to guide the community on its future actions, and it presents a vision for the growth and redevelopment of the community. Attached by reference and incorporated within the General Plan are the specific plans and studies that have been developed over the years that are still relevant, i.e., the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the West Sierra Vista Redevelopment Plan, the forthcoming Stormwater Master Plan and Wastewater Treatment Master Plan. Moreover, the General Plan serves as a blueprint or road map for the undeveloped portions of the City. The goals and strategies provide a course of action implementing the vision and serves as a foundation or backdrop for future strategic plans or capital improvement plans.

The General Plan is adopted by resolution, and it serves as the official policy guide and the basis for land development regulations that all site plan and building permit applications must

meet.

The current General Plan was adopted a decade ago and sunsets in 2024. Under State Law, the Council must either readopt the current Plan for a term of up to 10 years or adopt a new General Plan. Staff has been meeting with the commissions since last summer following the restructuring, and the focus has been on reviewing the goals and strategies for any needed amendments, deletions, or new additions. The process was wrapped up in December, but they are still going to be ongoing dialogue as the draft is finalized. By law, staff must disseminate a copy of the draft Plan to Council, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and outside agencies no later than 60 days prior to the official start of the notice for the public hearings, March 7, 2024. There will be two public hearings before the Planning and Zoning Commission at the end of May and early June, and by law, those meetings must be held at separate locations within the community. The public hearing before the City Council is scheduled for June 27, 2024. From there, staff will work with the City Clerk on developing a pamphlet that will go out to the voters along with other information. Staff will also be working with the Public Affairs Office to educate the community about the draft General plan. The General Plan will be on the November 5, 2024 ballot.

The topics that were covered with the commissions are group by theme as outlined in the Commission Handbook. The commissions served as the focus group for reviewing the goals and strategies in the Plan and making recommendations on the changes.

An online survey was pushed out in June 2023 using the Gauge Platform, covering a wide array of subject matter affecting people's views on the community. Over the six months that the Plan was posted, there were over 1,600 visitors and 335 submissions, mostly from Sierra Vista residents. Only 13 percent of the respondents reported that they lived outside the city limits.

Using a sample size calculator to reach a 90 percent confidence interval with a five percent margin of error, staff determined that 271 surveys would be needed that was not a random sample, people had to engage on the survey, but staff believes that it is representative of the viewpoints of the community on the questions that were asked.

- Community Growth and Development

The survey respondents favored suburban style neighborhoods consisting primarily of detached single family homes over other housing types. People like the small-town, tight knit feel community that showed up in multiple places throughout the survey.

- Public Facilities and Services

People highly value the safety and security that Sierra Vista offers and would like an indoor recreation facility. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan has a line item for either rehabbing the current gym or replacing the gym at the Veterans' Memorial Sports Complex.

- Connectivity

With respect to transportation, the overwhelming sentiment is to concentrate attention on maintaining existing roads, sidewalks, and pathways.

- Environmental Sustainability

One of the more alluring aspects of the community is the natural beauty, open space, and outdoor recreation areas. However, being in the Southwest, water security is the top of people's minds and ensuring that there is an adequate water supply for current and future population in the community.

- Economy Vitality

Creating an environment that is supportive of small businesses and facilitating a greater mix of businesses and services was rated as the top economic priority. People would also like to see a walkable downtown, and national store chains. A lot of the businesses that showed up in the survey are ones that have been heard about. Therefore, staff will continue to work with the private sector to bring those in where opportunities arise.

Mr. McLachlan stated that what staff has learned so far suggests that the City is on the right track, with the highest rated comments being in sync with the City's goals and strategies. The City is projected to grow at a modest pace, which is what the community prefers, and in becoming essentially a better version of what the City already is through continuous improvement.

The best attributes are the weather, being surrounded by nature and mountain views, the slow pace of life, easy to get around town, low traffic, friendly, generous people. These are all things that residents love about Sierra Vista.

Residents want the City to be at the forefront of water conservation. Being strong on crime rate helps further the City's atmosphere of safety and trust, as well as being proactive on economic development using incentives to support local businesses, which should continue to be a focus.

The multi-use pathways are recognized as one of the top assets. The City should continue seeking out federal funds to finish the perimeter loop around the City. The City also needs to focus on street maintenance and wastewater infrastructure to ensure it remains in good condition and adequate to expect growth patterns.

Investing in the parks and open space by adding desired amenities included in the Parks Master Plan should be a key focus. As well as continuing to work with the private sector to attract new businesses, especially those that appeal to youth and families to provide new sources of entertainment that should also be considered as part of the Plan.

The public request map was developed in 2009 to help with the annual action planning for CDBG. It is hosted on our City's website and to date, including the participation from the survey, the City received about 100 comments. This is a tool to collect public feedback in an interactive way, a source of information that was put up along with the General Plan survey. Therefore, it is important to gain some perspective on current and projected growth patterns to get a sense as to what can be expected in terms of anticipated growth.

A current land use map was displayed that depicts that the section of the community west of State Route 90 and 92, south of the bypass as being primarily built out with some scattered sites available for infill development. Sierra Vista is geographically a large city, 150 square miles, with 90 percent of the City being under public ownership, 82 percent as federal land that is managed by BLM or the Department of Defense, 13 percent as state land, and the remaining two percent as municipal, county government, or school facilities. Therefore, 13 percent is in the private sector that equates to about 13 square miles.

A graph was displayed of the historic population growth which showed that that the City has grown with every census. There is a large spike in the 1970s that coincided with the annexation of Fort Huachuca that continued into the 1980s, and then flattened out in the 90s. However, it took off again in the early 2000s post 9/11, and then there was a halt that coincided with the sequestration in 2013. The City was largely able to recover those losses by the end of the decade, ending up with a 3.2 percent overall change in population between 2010 and 2020.

According to the State Demographer, the City is projected to grow by about 8,000 people through the planning horizon of 2020/2040 that represents about a six percent change, quarter percent annually, or about 117 people. This is a drop from the previous General Plan, which had a one percent growth rate. Compared to the County, Sierra Vista is going to grow at a slightly faster rate. The County is projected to grow by about 4.2 percent.

The methodology that the State uses is the Age Cohort Method, which looks at birth rates and in migration minus death rates and out migration. This could be influenced a lot by federal spending, which is hard to project. However, for planning purposes, staff is going to go with the best available data, which is the State Demographer.

The permit history over the last 40 years correlates with the population growth. During the 1980s and the early 2000s the City was issuing permits between 500 and 1,000 permits per year, well above the median average of 244 permits per year. Since the General Plan was adopted, over the last 10 years the City has issued just under 1,000 permits, 70 percent for detached single family homes, 24 percent for manufactured units, which largely coincides with the redevelopment of the manufactured home parks in town, and six percent for multifamily units that was the second phase of Casa del Sol that is currently under construction. No other multifamily permits were received during that time frame. The median average is about 85 permits per year.

In terms of growth areas, the southeast quadrant of the City is going to be the focus for new growth going into the future. About 2,200 acres is covered under two specific plans, Tribute and Ventana De Flores. There is also the recently approved final subdivision plat for Buffalo Soldier Ranch that was 349 lots that is going to be developed in five phases between 5 and 10 years and the two tracts of state land. Private development follows the path of least resistance; therefore, the two tracts of lands are difficult to develop due to the unique requirements of the State, going to auction to the highest and best bidder, which is why they have been skipped over in the past. However, they still represent opportunities for commercial and residential growth going into the future.

Tribute presents commercial and residential growth opportunities. The residential offers everything from low density, large lots, single family to attached housing types with commercial along the front. However, its status remains uncertain given that Castle and Cooke's announcement, but it still represents a growth opportunity, and it is still on the books.

A chart was shown depicting how acreage is allocated among the various use types with the highest percentage being set aside for medium density residential uses, which is consistent with the independence plat that was recently approved, 73,176 lots. That project is the most likely project on the horizon following the school construction that could absorb a lot of the projected growth together with the Buffalo Soldier Ranch Project.

Southeast Golden Acres was adopted in 2007 and named Ventana de Flores, 335 acres with a

target dwelling unit count of 14,180 homes. It makes the lot sizes from 3,500 square feet to 8,000 square feet, another project that will likely not move until there is a change in ownership.

Over the last decade the City has been principally concerned with community development and redevelopment which is about the process of getting better versus growth management, which is about the process getting bigger. Towards that end, the City has established focus areas for revitalization including the Urban Infill Incentive Districts that cover the West End and Cloud 9, the redevelopment area, which is north and south of Fry Boulevard, west of 5th Street, as well as the low-income neighborhoods that qualify for Community Development Block Grant investments. The City will continue to work with the private sector to try to stimulate investment within those areas to strengthen those neighborhoods and the West End.

A deep dive was done of all the plans and studies considered over the years and a lot of the comments repeat over the decades. The Community Development Department is looking at all the plans and studies and figuring out what is still relevant and incorporating those into the general planning efforts. The Department has been active on code enforcement since 1958 and that is the posture and strong stance on code enforcement and growth management planning which is reflected in the quality of the community that everyone can enjoy.

Also being looked at is the current and future Land Use Map and adjusting to be consistent with the zoning designations. There are about 85 sites that the public can look at that shows the current and proposed land use changes. There were some discrepancies between the Land Use Map and zoning districts that need to be cleaned up, and in no case is the Community Development Department down planning any properties that could result in some sort of takings claim. For the most part, there are increases in density to be consistent with the zoning district on the property. The Department is also looking at public sites like Fab Avenue property, which has a commercial designation that has been identified as a future park site that will be changed to public.

The Department is also going to try to make the General Plan more straightforward and easier to read, using graphics and maps to illustrate concepts, removing jargon to make it more reader friendly. The Department is working with the Public Affairs Office and others to streamline the Plan and establish context for the goals and strategies, i.e., what is leading up to some of the decisions that are being made in terms of future direction that the City is seeking to pursue, trends that are impacting that decision making.

Next steps for the Department is to focus over the next couple weeks on finishing up the draft for the General Plan, disseminating it out to the required agencies under the State Law, putting it up on the City's website, continuing the dialogue with the commissions to make sure that everything is still in sync with what their views and expectations are, the goals and strategies, and then checking each of the boxes to make sure that all the statutory requirements are met. Lastly, going through the steps to schedule and publicize the public hearings to maximize the opportunity for input.

Council Member Rodriguez thanked Mr. McLachlan and commented on the number of responses given the City's population of 45,000. Mr. McLachlan stated that a random sample size is 271 for a 90 percent confidence, a five percent margin of error. It seems small, but money was spent on advertising the survey through various media channels. It is always a challenge with general surveys versus specific topics, i.e., a park or a particular issue that is affecting a neighborhood specifically and it is more short range. The Department pushed the survey out hard, and staff was hoping for a greater response, but they are happy with what they

got in terms of being a close to representative view. However, if there are things that may not seem to be quite in sync with what Council's views are based on their conversations with constituents, staff would be interested in learning where they think there is a need to re-evaluate in terms of the sentiment that was expressed. It seemed pretty on target since he has been in the City for 10 years, not only this but working through the focus groups, the commissions, and being actively engaged in and across the community.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he agrees with the sentiment in having talked to people out in the community, and for the most part it is on. He added that in looking at the demographic of people that answered the survey, he would have liked to have seen more participation. He is aware that once this document gets out, people will then want to comment and claim not to have known about it. He further stated that he is aware that everybody pushed this out and it is a challenge in the community because everybody gets their news from different sources. However, social media is the most active one.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he has had conversations with Mr. McLachlan and Mr. Boone about economic vitality and asked why national store chains are not coming to Sierra Vista after all the things that have been tried by both offices. He also asked what the biggest pushback is when it comes to places like Sprouts and Costco. Mr. McLachlan explained that it is rooftops, household incomes, and traffic counts are what typically weigh heavily in the site location criteria.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he wants to make sure that the word gets out there as much as possible. He further stated that he would like to let the public know about what the City's offices are doing, what the staff is doing, and the response that the City is getting from national store chains because it is not up to the City. He has yet to find anything that says that the City has said no. However, that is the sentiment out there and this is what he is trying to dispel as much as possible. Mr. McLachlan stated that in a lot of cases the City is not having those interactions because the City is ruled out based on the location in the state. He further stated that Fridays did not set up in Sierra Vista, but it was due to construction costs. The City does not have control over that because those are private sector influences that impact decision making. The City is not going after retailers, but after employment generating uses and the Department will be welcoming and roll out the red carpet when the interest does come forward. However, they are not proactively seeking out Red Lobster.

Mr. Boone stated that Mr. McLachlan is correct, companies look at the numbers in the population and psychographic data. Everyone has been binned in a different category. He explained that there are empty nesters, baby boomers, etc. The Department can look at every company and that is what Placer provides, options to look at. He can look at any retailer, any store, any big box, and get an answer and response. Their companies are actively looking to make sure that the population meets their target, the type of customer that they are looking at. They are actively doing that and take even the smallest elements of this as they look to expand across. They are actively looking at the community.

He further stated that over the 6 1/2 years that he has been here, the border and perceptions becomes an issue. Another issue that has come up is water and that was very early on. There was a retail broker that looked at him and Mr. Cline coldly in the eye and said that the City had to get the water issue solved and that was the perception in Phoenix. All those pieces and elements play a part, but the population and the match into that specific business is what is looked at. The data sets have the same thing. Chick-fil-A which is very popular, does not fail and the reason for that is that they know their company, they know their target, and they pick a

very specific location. Sierra Vista partnered with a citizen who went through the process because they picked the person and put them in there. He can look at grocery stores, and Fry's is in the top five from a traffic count perspective. Safeway is lower than that. These are things that can be pulled out of place. He has also looked at leakage reports, where citizens are leaving to within 80 or 90 miles and look at where they are going, Costco, casinos, and some other stores along the way. There is shopping across Cochise County; therefore, Cochise County residents are coming in and the City's residents are shopping at other locations.

Another gas station is going in Benson and there is a reason for that, and the number of Sierra Vista residents that stop there can be counted. Each company is different in that some are more public, and some are extremely private in their selection process. It truly is a population issue.

Mr. Boone pointed out that he has noted that Placer and some of the other vendors are not capturing Sonora brothers and sisters when they come to Sierra Vista because they are doing most of the tracking on the Placer side through their telephone. It is U.S. government rules. Everyone has seen the cookie debate and some of the other things that have shown up, but they have not made the decision to go in and follow those policies with Mexico. He noted that the first group that can pull that one off will make a killing amongst the community because the migration can be seen in the flow in where those residents are going. The City has looked at license plates and some of the other stuff, but those are all the elements that go into all their selection process.

Mr. Boone stated that in 6 1/2 years that he has been with the City, they have never turned anyone down. They have cold called people, i.e., Main Event in Tucson and they asked how big the City was. Then they politely laughed and commented that they go into a million-person metro. Dave and Busters are a million-person metro as well as Top Golf, and there are residents that go there. Costco is another example because they look at their trade area. The two southern Costcos in Tucson are on the South side and their trade area includes Sierra Vista. He noted that it is not that the City does not want them, and staff has worked with all of them and some of the names that have been heard of, staff has had direct interaction and that is where the City has been positioning itself. The staff has not actively gone looking for those because they are trying to work the primary job piece which will drive the population, i.e., Allo Fiber that will create 50 plus jobs, Black Star Orbital jobs because those things provide primary jobs that are outside of Fort Huachuca. Lastly, he stated that a lot of the folks do not understand the market because of the driving force of the Department of Defense and because of where Fort Huachuca positions itself. There are 10,000 plus students that flow, Department of the Army, civilians and contractors with good paying jobs, soldiers, and families, both on and off the installation. The City has had to do this because the data does not necessarily reflect, nor can they lift the community to Prescott Valley. It doesn't match when you look at Sierra Vista and the economic drivers that are underneath it.

In closing, Mr. Boone explained that he has been using the Placer data to try to drive people to see, depending on what they come to the community with, what their competitors are doing and what those folks are in so that Sierra Vista has an opportunity, but it comes down to the population.

Council Member Rodriguez asked about the multifamily permits that have not been pulled in 10 years because the last one was the senior living facility that is expanding. He wonders if this is due to demographics, population, the growth of jobs, land for sale around town, but there are no investors. Mr. Boone stated that the issue is that they do not know about Sierra Vista because of the economic development framework. When there is a hot market in the Valley where the

world is known and due to what is going on in Pinal and Pima County, it is much easier to go where they know about and that may even be where Castle and Cooke made the decision to go to Bakersfield. First is an awareness issue of what is going on in the community and second is the perceived piece. It is going to go to the core jobs, a core population, unless they choose to do an active over 55 retirement community like they have in the West Valley or Tempe. It is going to come down to the jobs in the community, whether they are created for the Fort, off the Fort or separate - do they drive more people to Sierra Vista to bring their families? Then the builders, the developers will follow.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he likes the draft and noted that there is a lot of stuff on there, but he did not see any mention of the word "veteran". He noted that this is a very strong veteran community. He further stated that he did not see any mention of the City being the Hummingbird Capital, but the Buffalo Soldiers are mentioned.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey thanked Mr. McLachlan, and everybody involved for their efforts and hard work. She noted that Mr. McLachlan must interact with the commissions and bring forth all the different things that are being looked at and there is a lot. She voiced her appreciation to the over 1,000 people that took the time to provide feedback that is desperately needed to do a good job on this. She also likes the idea of removing the jargon and making it more user friendly, including the fact that Sierra Vista is the Hummingbird Capital. Lastly, she praised the person responsible for the slides for the General Plan presentation.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked Ms. Yarbrough to include that Sierra Vista is the Hummingbird Capital when announcing Sierra Vista at the NLC Conference.

Mr. McLachlan stated that the percentage of the population in Sierra Vista that is a veteran is one in five, 20 percent, which is much higher than the statewide average.

Council Member Johnson stated that it was interesting to see the comments, many of which requested a recycling center that fits with people not understanding how recycling works. Additionally, there were a lot of the requests for a Red Lobster and a Costco, which is totally unrealistic because people do not understand how things work. If these are the types of things that people think that the City can generate, they must understand that the City has several challenges. First, nobody knows where Sierra Vista is located and second, the demographics and the rating organizations, which do not take into consideration the cross-border traffic that can possibly generate population in Sierra Vista.

Council Member Johnson stated that he is unsure how the City is going to work on the recycling issue because there were a lot of comments about recycling. He added that this subject is part of the Environmental Stewardship Commission's discussion; however, he did notice on the City's website that there is a recycling guideline for getting rid of paint. Perhaps once the Environmental Stewardship Commission realizes what there is already information on the City's website, they can enhance it to make people more aware that if they do want to recycle aluminum cans, the animal shelter will gladly take them.

Ms. Flissar stated that there were a lot of recycling center drop off centers for recycling in the City; however, very few people used them. The City gave it a good six months maybe more. It was attempted.

- b. [Youth Commission Presentation regarding their experience at the Arizona League Youth Conference](#)

Sophia Rosa, a Buena High School senior planning on attending Arizona State University, stated that she is planning on majoring in environmental engineering and then minoring in law. She stated that she is currently the President of the Youth Commission of Sierra Vista and reported that in 2023 the Youth Commission held a coat drive for the homeless during the months of January and February because those are the coldest months in Sierra Vista and collected over 100 coats that were donated to the Good Neighbor Alliance and the Salvation Army. The Youth Commission also held a roadside cleanup on Highway 90 to pick up trash and participated in the Youth Arts Festival where they made recyclable dog toys out of used T-shirts for children in the community.

In 2024, the Youth Commission attended the NLC Arizona League of Cities in Tucson where they represented Sierra Vista's youth and town. They handed out hummingbird stickers which a lot of kids from Maricopa County were excited to know that Sierra Vista is the Hummingbird Capital and eager to find out about Sierra Vista. There are also plans for a youth car show in April in conjunction with the Cars for Kids where they will be able to show off used cars, their tires, stereos, and paint jobs. Also, in the plans is a youth job fair where Sierra Vista Youth will be able to learn how to interview and participate in interviewing; participating in the Youths Art Festival; sponsoring a mobile drive-in movie for families and teens in the community; holding a roller-skating event, and in raising funds for three commissioners to attend the March NLC Conference in Washington, DC. Lastly, the Youth Commission is planning on a Youth Synopsis where they would create a program that will equip youth with confidence and inspiration to help them feel empowered and have success and thrive for the future.

The Youth Commission will need help with their fundraising events. The Youth Commission is open to all youth, 8th grade through 12th grade, and they meet virtually or in person. All ages can participate in their community projects. Also, the Youth Commission would like to partner with local organizations to ensure that the youth's voice is heard and understood.

Council Member Rodriguez noted that the rest of the youth commissioners are currently in school right or in after school projects, practices, or work. He thanked Ms. Rosa for speaking.

In response to Mayor McCaa, Ms. Rosa stated that their youth car show would be in collaboration with Cars for Kids. Their hope is to get a lot of youth interaction from that event and get their name and word out so that more youth will join the Commission. She further stated that the Youth Commission recently started up again in 2022 and they have been growing since then. At their Sunday monthly meetings, they have four commissioners attend online, enough for a Commission, but they are looking to gain more throughout the year.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey praised the Youth Commission and shared that she had the opportunity to hear Ms. Rosa speak and she impressed. She thanked the Commission for the fundraising that they have been doing, the coat drive, roadside cleanup, the involvement with the Youth Arts Festival because that does need a lot more hands-on supervision for the little ones. She added that Council will miss Ms. Rosa after she graduates, but it sounds like she is already lining up her replacement.

c. Report on Recent Trips, Meetings and Future Meetings

There was nothing to discuss.

d. Future Discussion Items and Council Requests

In response to Mayor McCaa, Ms. Yarbrough stated that she is still tracking two items for next month, the midyear financial review and a review of the Roadrunner Park design concepts.

Council Member Johnson asked if there has been any more feedback on the Municipal Court. Ms. Yarbrough stated that the RFP has been reposted.

### 3. Adjourn

Mayor McCaa adjourned the February 20, 2024 work session of the Sierra Vista City Council at 3:50 p.m.

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Clea McCaa, Mayor

Minutes prepared by:

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Maria G. Marsh, Deputy Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jill Adams, City Clerk

A recording of the Council Meeting is available at:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8PtUplbkQsixlhSy-jeR\\_Q/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8PtUplbkQsixlhSy-jeR_Q/videos)