



SPANISH FORK
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DRAFT

THE RIVER BOTTOMS

VISION PLAN

AGRICULTURE - ENVIRONMENT - RECREATION - LAND USE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Spanish Fork decided to develop an updated vision for the future of the River Bottoms annexation policy area as the continuation of a long tradition of proactive planning. Previous long-range comprehensive plans for the area have preserved this area as farmland. As the population of Utah County grows, pressure for additional development in the River Bottoms likewise grows. These pressures highlight the significance of the historical and natural features that define this unique area, and have prompted Spanish Fork to revisit the vision and recommendations for the future of the River Bottoms from the 2001 Nebo Community Vision. The Nebo Community Vision Implementation section reports:

“At the public workshops, it was obvious that Spanish Fork residents placed a premium on protecting the sensitive River Bottoms to the south. In response to this mandate, two special presentations were made to the City Council and Planning Commission that highlighted these issues. A strategic planning session was also held with the City planner to discuss needs and opportunities for open space conservation. As an outgrowth of this effort, the City requested help with determining appropriate open space preservation techniques for the River Bottoms and the potential addition of conservation subdivision language to the City’s development code.”

While the Nebo Community Vision identifies preservation of open space as the primary value in the River Bottoms, it also anticipates some level of future development, identifying conservation subdivisions as a potential useful tool for open space conservation. Through an extensive public engagement program, the 2019 River Bottoms Vision project identifies the defining characteristics of the River Bottoms that residents, landowners, and visitors value. Based on the shared values, a vision for the future of the River Bottoms is articulated; this document describes alternative futures for the River Bottoms, and identifies patterns of future development that could be designed to be consistent with the values and vision described by project participants. The River Bottoms Vision will inform Spanish Fork City’s future decision making regarding this annexation policy area.

The visioning process extended over twelve months and included stakeholder interviews, workshops, and other public events. Project participants were asked to identify and describe the attributes of the River Bottoms area that define its character and make it unique. While a great deal of information was gathered and shared, the key desired outcomes for the River Bottoms identified by the community's visioning include:

- » Preservation and conservation efforts should focus on the Spanish Fork River and its riparian areas.
- » A future land use plan that promotes a feeling that most of the area is open space that includes private and public natural and agricultural lands.
- » Identification and preservation of those key attributes and amenities that define the character of the River Bottoms.
- » Proactive early initiatives including the development of a river bottom multi-purpose trail and acquisition of open space, parks and parking areas.
- » A program that builds on current land-use rights and uses incentives that are win – win for both the landowners and the community.
- » A program to support a variety of incentives to maintain or improve property values while preserving open space.
- » Alternative potential future land development patterns that support achieving the River Bottoms Vision.
- » Location of future development in a manner that can support the efficient provision of City services.
- » Development that provides a variety of living options while preserving the character of the River Bottoms.

A frequent comment during the visioning process was, “we like the River Bottoms just the way they are.” While there are options to preserve an area in its current condition for the long term, they require substantial funding and involve purchase of the affected area in whole, or acquisition or transfer of development rights through conservation easements and other mechanisms. For most communities, including Spanish Fork, a feasible alternative is to specifically identify the qualitative attributes that make an area unique and valuable, and then to develop alternative futures that allow for a mix of development and attribute protection to acknowledge property rights while preserving the unique character of the area.

This Vision describes a probable baseline future condition for the River Bottoms if it remains in the jurisdiction of Utah County, and alternative future land use patterns that could be designed to protect community values and unique attributes if all or portions of the River Bottoms were annexed into Spanish Fork City. Under Utah law, the annexation process is somewhat complex, and depends on the interests and needs of both the property owners and the annexing city. In most communities, agreements regarding the types and intensities of development that would be allowed, and the rights and responsibilities of both the landowners and the city would be documented as a condition of annexation. That approach would be likely for the River Bottoms if annexation is deemed appropriate.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**HERITAGE
VALUES AND
LEGACY**

01



Spanish Fork has long been identified as an agricultural community. In 1850, the first settler claimed land in the area and soon after populated it with cattle. Since then, the area has grown its roots in agriculture. The first Utah County Livestock Show was held within the Spanish Fork City boundaries in 1925, with three livestock auctions and agrarian-centered businesses opening in the town thereafter. These farms and businesses have not only had an economic impact on the residents of the area, they have had a cultural impact. The agricultural landscape, complete with open fields and pastoral landscapes, has strongly influenced the City's sense of place and identity. The River Bottoms represents the natural and agrarian heritage of Utah County, and provides direction about how to plan for the future.

The River Bottoms are within Spanish Fork's declared annexation policy area, and are therefore within the City's future land use map area. The 2018 Land Use, Moderate Income Housing, and Annexation Elements of the General Plan and accompanying Land Use Map and Annexation Policy Map are included in Appendix 1. The River Bottoms are located north of 8800 South and Powerhouse Road; west of the Spanish Oaks Golf Course and River Bottoms Road; south of River Bottoms Road, South Lane, 7650 South, and the City limits; and east of State Highway 198 and Main Street. The Land Use Element of the General Plan designates the future land use for the majority of the River Bottoms area as Agricultural. The City owns several parcels of land within the River Bottoms. The City has not contemplated

any significant development of its lands in the River Bottoms; however, it has received several proposals for annexation of other properties and multiple requests for development approvals in recent years. These proposals led City staff and officials to discuss the future of the area and whether plans should change to allow for development - and if so, what forms potential development should take. New and renewed interest in the area makes this the ideal time to engage with stakeholders and the community on their vision for the future. City staff, officials and the community have decided to act proactively to pursue the protection of the character of the River Bottoms by identifying its defining characteristics and potential methods to protect them in the future.

All great plans are based on preserving that which we value in the places we live. Creating a legacy for generations to come is "why" we plan. The River Bottoms Vision also discusses the "how" by identifying the character and values of the River Bottoms, and finally the "what;" desired future conditions for the River Bottoms. The River Bottoms Vision is based on commonly shared values, those values that are broadly supported and agreed upon. The River Bottoms Vision acknowledges what may happen in the River Bottoms if no changes are made, and identifies steps that could be taken to protect character-defining attributes of the River Bottoms. The Vision process begins by listening to the community, reporting what we have heard, and articulating common values. It establishes what we know to date - and then outlines what might be possible for the future.





FOUNDED ON COMMUNITY PLANS

Previous City-wide planning efforts provide decades of insight about the River Bottoms. The voices from these earlier efforts are recognized and are carried forward into the visioning process. The 2001 Nebo Community Vision, a collaboration among Utah County and ten County communities, articulates the desired future for eastern Utah County and the River Bottoms, and documents the values and character that are shared by all the project participants. The 2008 Spanish Fork Master Plan also documents extensive outreach to determine what Spanish Fork citizens desired for the area. The sense of the community in 2008 was that the River Bottoms should remain a place where agriculture, nature and residents coexist. The 2011 Spanish Fork General Plan acknowledges this, as does the Utah County General Plan.



The River Bottoms Vision also responds to and builds on City plans such as the Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan (the "Parks Plan"). The Parks Plan acknowledges existing and rapidly growing popularity of trails, parks and open spaces, including the integration of nature. The Parks Plan recommends expansion of existing trail systems for pedestrians and bikers, links to other trail systems, and connections between neighborhoods by asphalt and soft surface trails. The Parks Plan also indicated a need for new parks in the future, one of which could be located in the River Bottoms area on over 100 acres now owned by the City. The City's overall goal for parkland is to provide 5.9 acres of parks per 1000 persons.

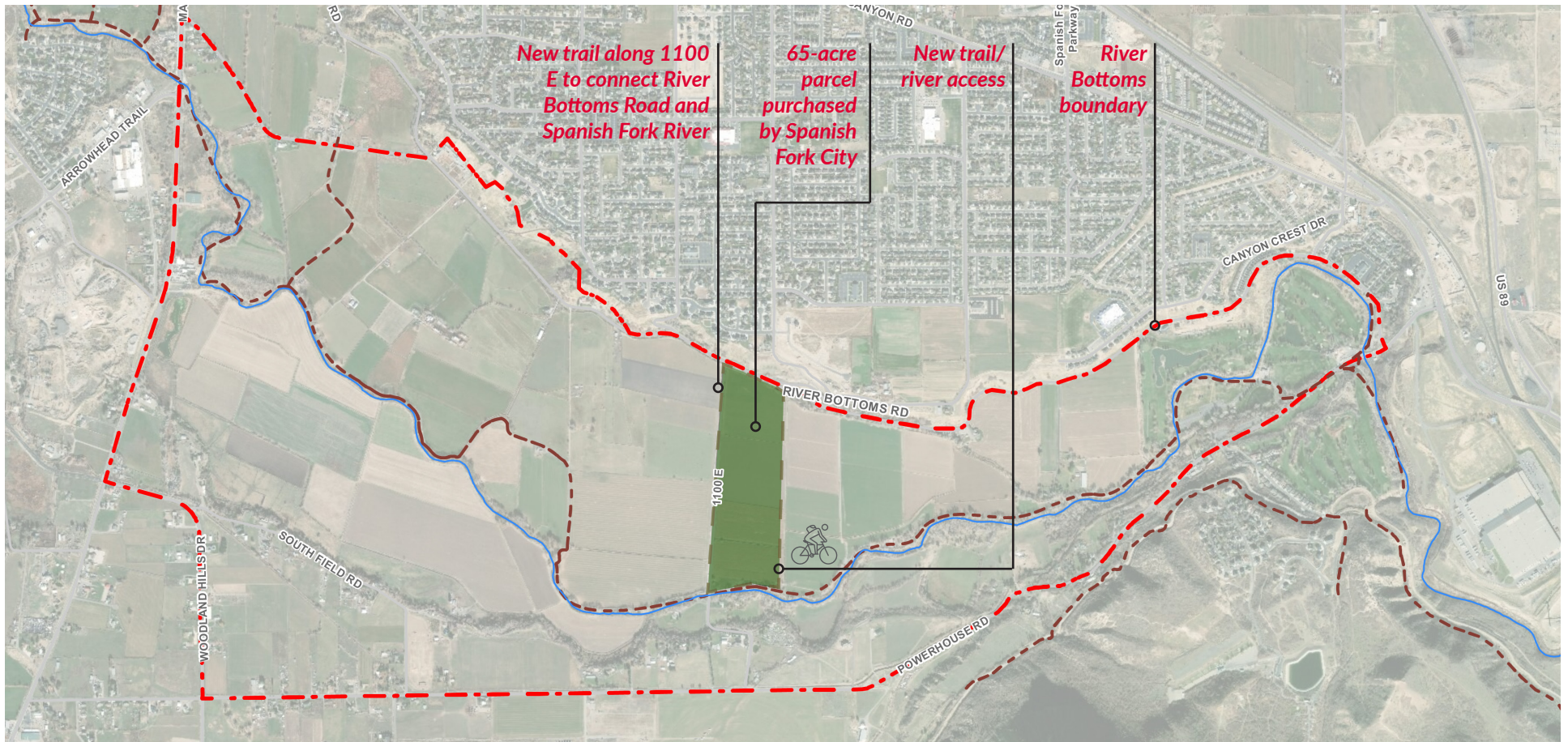


Spanish Fork City has constructed seven miles of paved trail adjacent to the Spanish Fork River, and continuously invests in the operation and improvement of the Spanish Oaks Golf Course. The development of the River Trail provides access and opportunities for the community to experience the River Bottoms' unique environment from within. At least partly because of the River Trail, thousands of residents and visitors have come to appreciate the unique attributes and qualities of the area.

LAND ACQUISITION IN THE CITY

In 2018, Spanish Fork City completed a transaction to purchase 65 acres in the River Bottoms (Map 2), which will continue to be cultivated for alfalfa, corn, and wheat for the foreseeable future. New trail amenities are proposed, including a trail along 1100 East between River Bottoms Road and the Spanish Fork River Trail. This new trail will connect to the River Trail, and to a future trail on 1400 East and a parking lot and restrooms serving as a trail head to the River Trail. This parking lot will help with parking issues along 1100 East. Both of these amenities will make traveling along 1100 East and recreating for trail users safer. Future plans for the City's land include a regional park and open space. Through this Vision process, the Mayor and Council have heard the residents' call for the preservation of open spaces in the river bottoms. The Mayor and Council see this 65-acre purchase, coupled with 41 acres previously acquired, as a long-term investment in preserving open spaces in the River Bottoms.

Map 2. City Acquired Property





COMMUNITY
VISION AND
VALUES

02



The River Bottoms Vision process was not designed as a normal plan development process. Instead, it focuses on commonly held values and the desired future for the River Bottoms. Because the River Bottoms are located outside the Spanish Fork City limits, the City doesn't have planning or regulatory jurisdiction. In the usual community planning process, a plan for the future desired use and development of an area is prepared, land use regulations and incentives are established, and the plan objectives are implemented and monitored. For the River Bottoms Vision project, the questions to be answered are "What is most valuable about the River Bottoms?"; "If some of the area were to be developed in the future, what attributes should be preserved?"; "How should any future development be managed?"; and "Does it make sense for some or all of the River Bottoms to be annexed into Spanish Fork City as the best means for ensuring the desired future of the River Bottoms?"

The stakeholders involved in the River Bottoms Vision project include River Bottoms property owners and agricultural operators, River Bottoms and Spanish Fork City residents, neighbors and visitors to the River Bottoms, and others who have expressed interest in or attachment to the study area. The visioning process is premised on:

- » Respect for private property and agricultural operators
- » Ensuring transparency
- » Fostering creative ideas and conversations
- » Respect for the landscape and how it informs future uses
- » Building on heritage and values
- » Listening to those who live here now and those who will live here decades from now.

The year-long process included three phases:

Phase 1, Discovery: Introducing the process to create the Vision, engaging with project stakeholders and the community on their values and vision for the River Bottoms, and gathering information about existing conditions, key trends, opportunities, and constraints.

Phase 2, Envision a Way Forward: Presenting opportunities, analysis, and potential scenarios for the future, and developing the preliminary Vision statements.

Phase 3, Alternative Futures: Presenting the draft Vision for public review and refining, and describing futures for the River Bottoms that could be consistent with and support the Vision.



PHASE 1: DISCOVERY

The first phase of the River Bottoms Vision began with listening to the stakeholders and community. Project participants shared their values and thoughts through an online visioning survey, stakeholder interviews, and the visioning social event at the Fairgrounds, which kicked-off the visioning process.

The community visioning social was held at the Fairgrounds in Spanish Fork City on March 8th, 2018, from 5-7 p.m. Approximately 100 participants attended the open house including residents, land owners, community leaders, youth, and other stakeholders. The purpose of the open house was to give interested members of the public an opportunity to describe their vision for the future of the River Bottoms. Open house attendees were invited to ask questions, give feedback, and leave comments on presentation boards, maps, and through the Online Questionnaire.

Those in attendance at the open house were presented with a four foot by 20 foot paper banner to write on in the middle of the room. The banner invited participants to finish the phrase, “in 20 years, the River Bottoms will be...” and close to 50 comments were left on it. Most of the comments left on the banner fell within four themes of land-use, environment, agriculture, and recreation, while some comments were miscellaneous in their content. All the verbatim written comments received at the social were documented in a report posted to the project website.

In addition to the Spanish Fork River Bottoms Vision Open House held on March 8th, an opportunity to participate online was provided. Online Survey #1 asked a range of questions regarding participant’s emotional connection to the River Bottoms, what they envision the land to be in the future, as well as how they feel about various opportunities that could be explored for area. The survey was available from February 19th - April 2nd and received a total of 695 responses. The survey was also made available in hard-copy form for pick up at and return to City Hall.

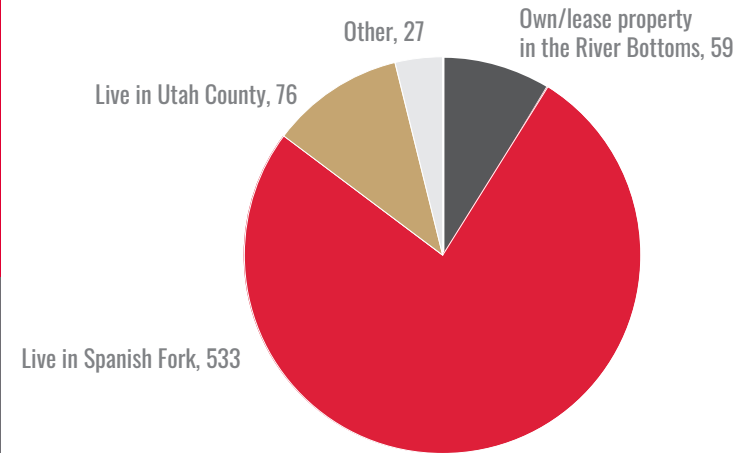
In the online survey, one River Bottoms land owner commented:

“OUR PREVIOUS GENERATIONS HAVE MADE THE RIVER BOTTOMS WHAT IT IS TODAY AND HAVE PASSED THE LOVE OF THE FARMS DOWN TO GENERATIONS THAT WANT TO NOW PRESERVE THE FARM LANDS.”

A project participant who grew up in the Spanish Fork area observed:

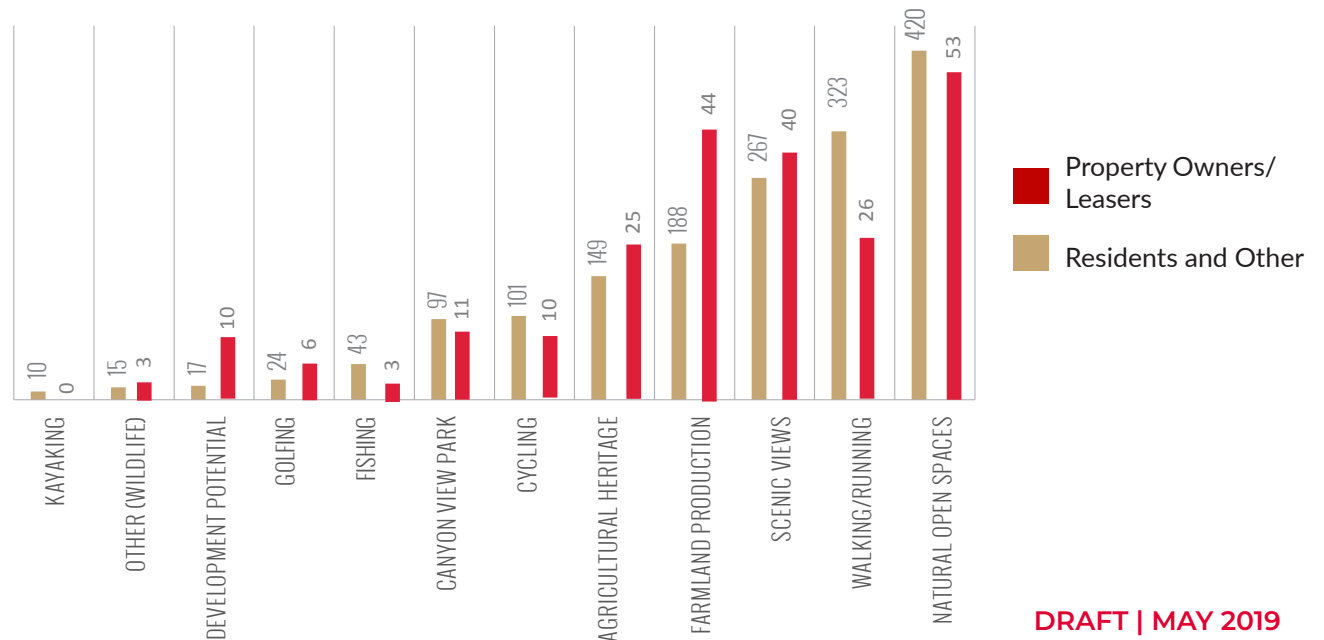
“I SPENT MY ENTIRE GROWING UP YEARS EXPLORING THE RIVER BOTTOMS, WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IS THAT HUGE DIVERSITY OF PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE THAT WILL BE THE VICTIMS OF DEVELOPMENT. I WANT TO SEE THIS AREA PRESERVED AS AGRICULTURAL SO THAT THE LIFE THERE WILL CONTINUE TO THRIVE.”

Who did we hear from?

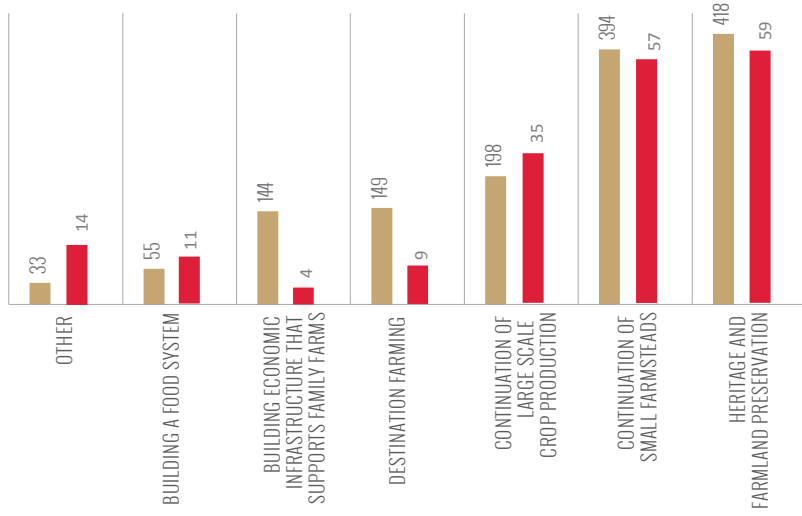


The online survey participants included property owners and leasers (8%, in red) within the River Bottoms, nearby Spanish Fork residents and people living nearby in other Utah County towns and cities (92%, in beige). Several participants selected more than one identifier (i.e. they both lease property in the River Bottoms and live in Spanish Fork City). The online survey asked 8 questions and tracked responses based on each respondent’s relationship to the River Bottoms as either a property owner/lessor (87 responses), or a neighbor from Spanish Fork or other Utah County communities (956 responses). The questions and responses are shown on the following charts, and all responses to the survey were collected and are reported in the River Bottoms Vision Survey #1 Summary Report (Appendix 2).

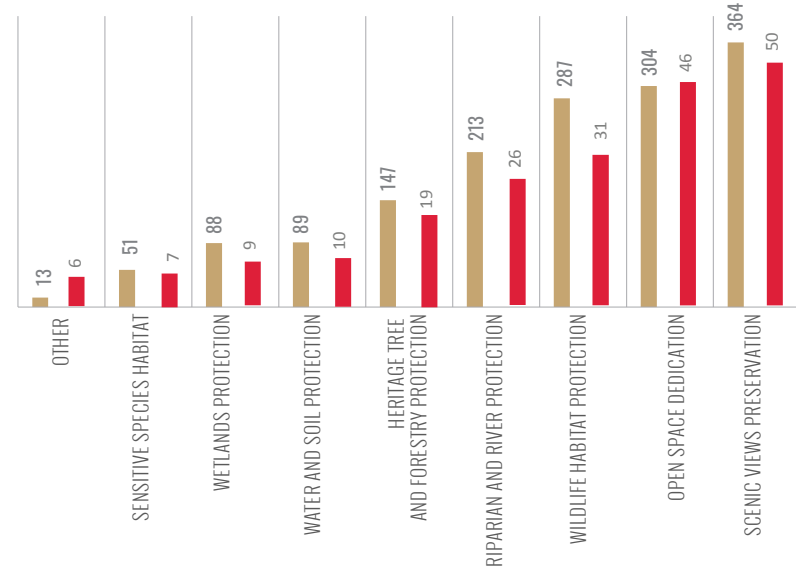
WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT THE RIVER BOTTOMS?



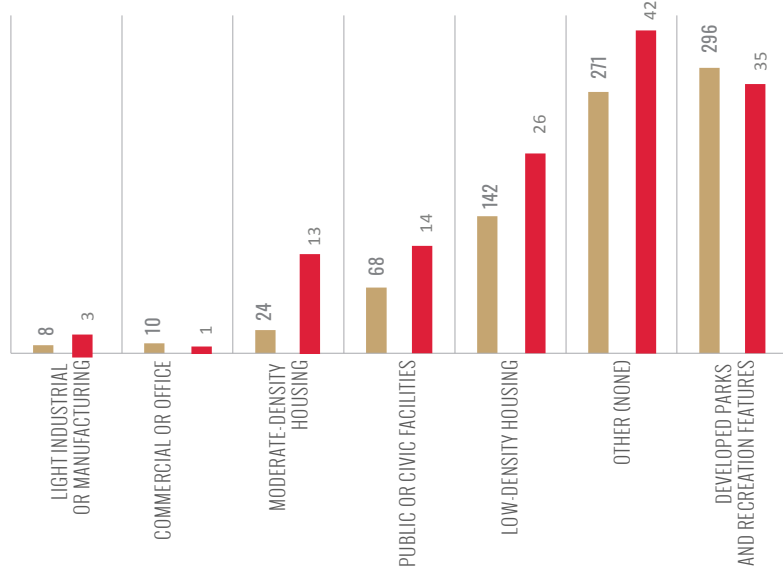
WHAT ARE OUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN AGRICULTURAL FUTURE?



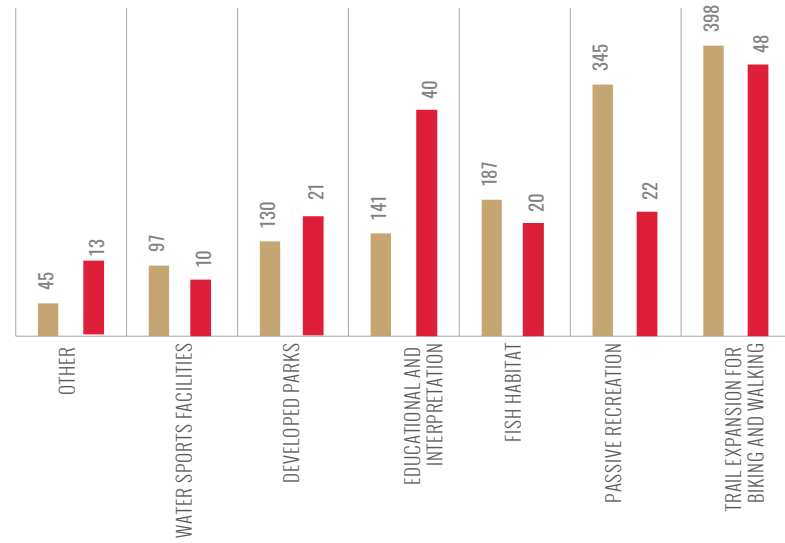
WHAT ARE OUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?



WHAT ARE OUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT?



WHAT ARE OUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATION?



WHERE WE WENT

During Phase 2, booths were set up at two public events and a stakeholder meeting was held in Spanish Fork City.

Approximately 150 participants were able to voice their opinions in these meetings including residents, land owners, community leaders, youth, and other stakeholders.

Alongside these events was survey #2, which gave participants the opportunity to answer the same questions that were presented in open houses and stakeholder meetings (please note that this summary is only for in-person outreach).

Food Truck League

August 3rd
City Park



Farmers' Market

August 4th
Center Street



Stakeholder Summit

August 16th
City Hall



In the online survey, one River Bottoms resident noted that:

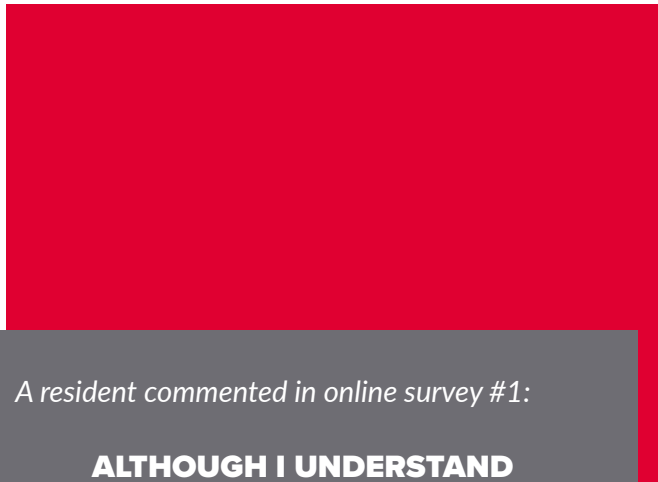
“WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY IN SPANISH FORK TO MAINTAIN AN OPEN SPACE. CITIES AROUND US HAVE HAD TO RECLAIM SPACES THEY ALLOWED TO GET DEVELOPED. WE SHOULD DO ALL WE CAN TO LIMIT DEVELOPMENT IN THE RIVER BOTTOMS, FOCUSING ON CREATING LOCAL APPEAL AND SOMETHING THAT WILL DRAW PEOPLE TO OUR CITY OTHER THAN RETAIL AND RESTAURANTS. “



WHAT WE HEARD

During the choices events, the passion of local residents and stakeholders and their enthusiasm towards public engagement was reflected in the responses and feedback received. The following is a summary of that feedback.

Below is a list of all the vision statements and big ideas that were reviewed at these events. They are shown in order (from top to bottom) of the apparent favorite, and least favorite according to the votes received.



A resident commented in online survey #1:

ALTHOUGH I UNDERSTAND THE PROSPECT AND DRIVE OF RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL GROWTH IN THE RIVER BOTTOMS AREA, I CANNOT EXPRESS ENOUGH HOW BADLY I FEEL OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS THIS NATURAL RESOURCE AND ITS BENEFIT TO ALL WHO LIVE HERE..”

RIVER BOTTOMS VISIONS



Environment - A flourishing natural environment that is centered on how our river shapes our lifestyles, plans, policies, and practices

Overall Vision - With a flourishing and vibrant river corridor, idyllic views, expansive open spaces, renowned recreation amenities, and context-sensitive land uses, the River Bottoms is respected and protected as the defining heritage edge of Spanish Fork City.

Recreation - The River Bottoms offers a range of renowned and thoughtful recreational amenities for residents and visitors.

Agriculture - The agricultural heritage and identity of the River Bottoms will be preserved for future generations to experience and enjoy

Land Use - A mosaic of natural areas, agriculture, context-sensitive development, conservation development, and rural residential frame the river and the landscape we cherish.

RIVER BOTTOMS BIG IDEAS



Living River Corridor

Access to Nature

New Paradigm - Ecoagriculture

Sustainable Living and Eating

Heritage Greenshaping

Landscape Speaks


Bottomland Communities

PHASE 2: ENVISION A WAY FORWARD

Based on the input received at the March 8th Open House, on the responses to the survey questions, and on additional public input received during the course of the Discovery phase, a preliminary vision statement was developed for the River Bottoms as a whole. In addition, preliminary vision statements were developed for the future of Agriculture, Environment, Recreation, and Land Use.

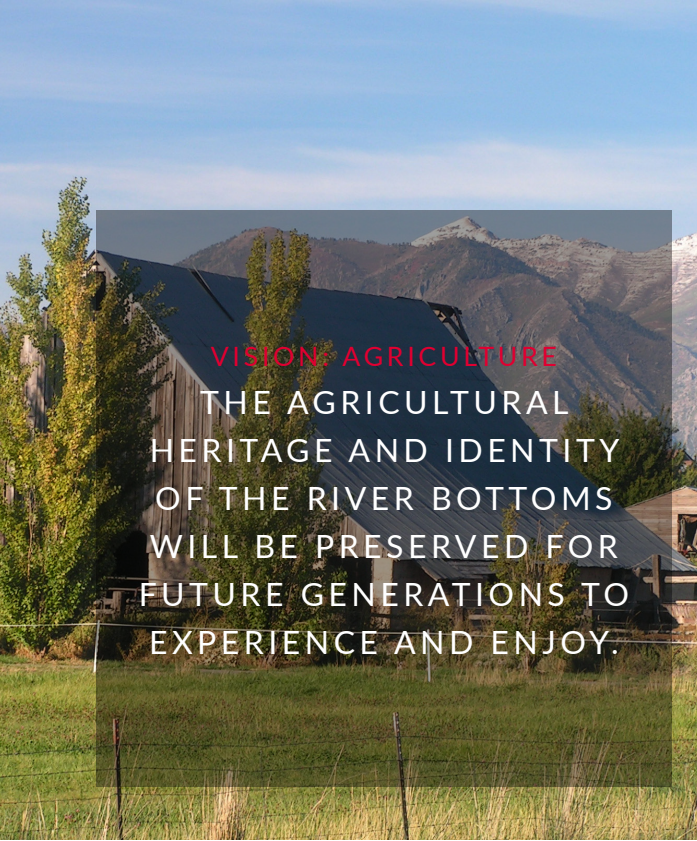
The overall River Bottoms Vision focuses on the Spanish Fork River as the defining feature of the River Bottoms, farmland and open space as the underlying fabric of Spanish Fork City's rural landscape, a culture of self-sufficiency and rural living, and numerous and connected recreation amenities.





**WITH A FLOURISHING AND VIBRANT
RIVER CORRIDOR, IDYLIC VIEWS,
EXPANSIVE OPEN SPACES, RENOWNED
RECREATION AMENITIES, AND
CONTEXT-SENSITIVE LAND USES, THE
RIVER BOTTOMS IS RESPECTED AND
PROTECTED AS THE DEFINING HERITAGE
EDGE OF SPANISH FORK CITY.**

OUR VISION



VISION: AGRICULTURE
 THE AGRICULTURAL
 HERITAGE AND IDENTITY
 OF THE RIVER BOTTOMS
 WILL BE PRESERVED FOR
 FUTURE GENERATIONS TO
 EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY.

SHARED VALUES - AGRICULTURE



River Bottoms farms and businesses have not only had an economic impact on the residents of the area; there is a cultural impact as well. The agricultural landscape, complete with open fields and pastoral landscapes, has strongly influenced the City's sense of place and identity. The River Trail also allows locals and visitors to observe this agricultural heritage from the views it provides of the River Bottoms agricultural lands. Values identified during the visioning process include:

- » Recognize the importance of thriving farmland to a resilient future;
- » Honor the importance of agriculture in our heritage;
- » Respect private property rights by providing choices to property owners that meet their goals and support the community's vision;
- » Preserve opportunities for country living and self-sufficiency; and
- » Promote a sense of peace and quiet through careful design and significant open spaces.



VISION: ENVIRONMENT
 THE RIVER BOTTOMS IS A
 FLOURISHING NATURAL
 ENVIRONMENT THAT IS
 CENTERED ON THE SPANISH
 FORK RIVER AND ITS
 EFFECTS ON LIFESTYLES,
 DEVELOPMENT PLANS,
 POLICIES, AND PRACTICES.

SHARED VALUES - ENVIRONMENT



The preservation of open spaces and natural resources ensures a sustainable ecosystem for the River Bottoms' diverse vegetation and wildlife species. Preservation of the natural systems in the River Bottoms is considered a core community value. Built on the River's riparian system, this natural setting helps maintain the open, rural feeling. Values identified during the visioning process include:

- » Acknowledge natural areas as part of the community identity;
- » Focus on the protection of a river corridor and its waterways, riparian areas, wetlands, floodways, and associated upland habitats;
- » Create a sustainable and resilient natural area management program; and
- » Preserve the scenic beauty of the River Bottoms.

SHARED VALUES - RECREATION



Recreation values center on existing recreational amenities such as Canyon View Park, the Spanish Oaks Golf Course, and the River Trail, and are based on the preservation of existing natural resources, wildlife corridors, and habitat areas. Parks, open space, and trails increase the quality of life in the region, and offer off-street transportation options and recreational opportunities that could extend into Spanish Fork City and other neighboring cities. Values identified during the visioning process include:

- » Create destinations for recreational activities;
- » Provide additional recreational amenities such as trailheads, parking, and toilet facilities in appropriate locations;
- » Ensure trail connectivity through the River Bottoms area and to nearby communities and recreational destinations; and
- » Serve a range of users, including hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.

SHARED VALUES - LAND USE



The River Bottoms offers a sense of solitude and escape for residents and visitors. To the extent possible, new development should occur in a way that maximizes open spaces, creates a footprint that protects the floodway, habitats, and viewshed corridors, and follows rural and agrarian land use patterns. Values identified during the visioning process include:

- » Maintain a land use mix that allows for appropriate land uses;
- » Plan future land uses to protect recreational and natural resources;
- » Reflect the rural and agrarian context of the community by providing significant open space; and
- » Design new development and infrastructure to reflect the rural and agrarian context of the community.



VISION: RECREATION
THE RIVER BOTTOMS
OFFERS A RANGE
OF RENOWNED
AND THOUGHTFUL
RECREATIONAL AMENITIES
FOR RESIDENTS AND
VISITORS.



VISION: LAND USE
THE RIVER BOTTOMS IS
A MOSAIC OF NATURAL
AREAS, AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION
DEVELOPMENT, AND RURAL
RESIDENTIAL USES THAT
FRAME THE RIVER AND THE
LANDSCAPE.



A PLAN FOR
MANAGING
CHANGE AND
PROMOTING
EXCELLENCE

03

RIVER BOTTOMS CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

Participants in the visioning process identified a number of attributes and features of the River Bottoms that define the overall essential character of the River Bottoms area and that should be preserved in the future. These character-defining features (Map 3) were identified based on the stated shared values of project participants as reported in Chapter 2. For the River Bottoms Vision to be accomplished, protecting these character-defining features should be the starting point for all future activities and development in the River Bottoms, and future development should incorporate these attributes:

VISION

**SHARED
VALUES**

**CHARACTER
DEFINING
FEATURES**

1. A Living River Corridor
2. Open Spaces and Natural Areas
3. Agriculture and Heritage Resources
4. Recreational Amenities and Trails
5. Agrarian and Rural Character

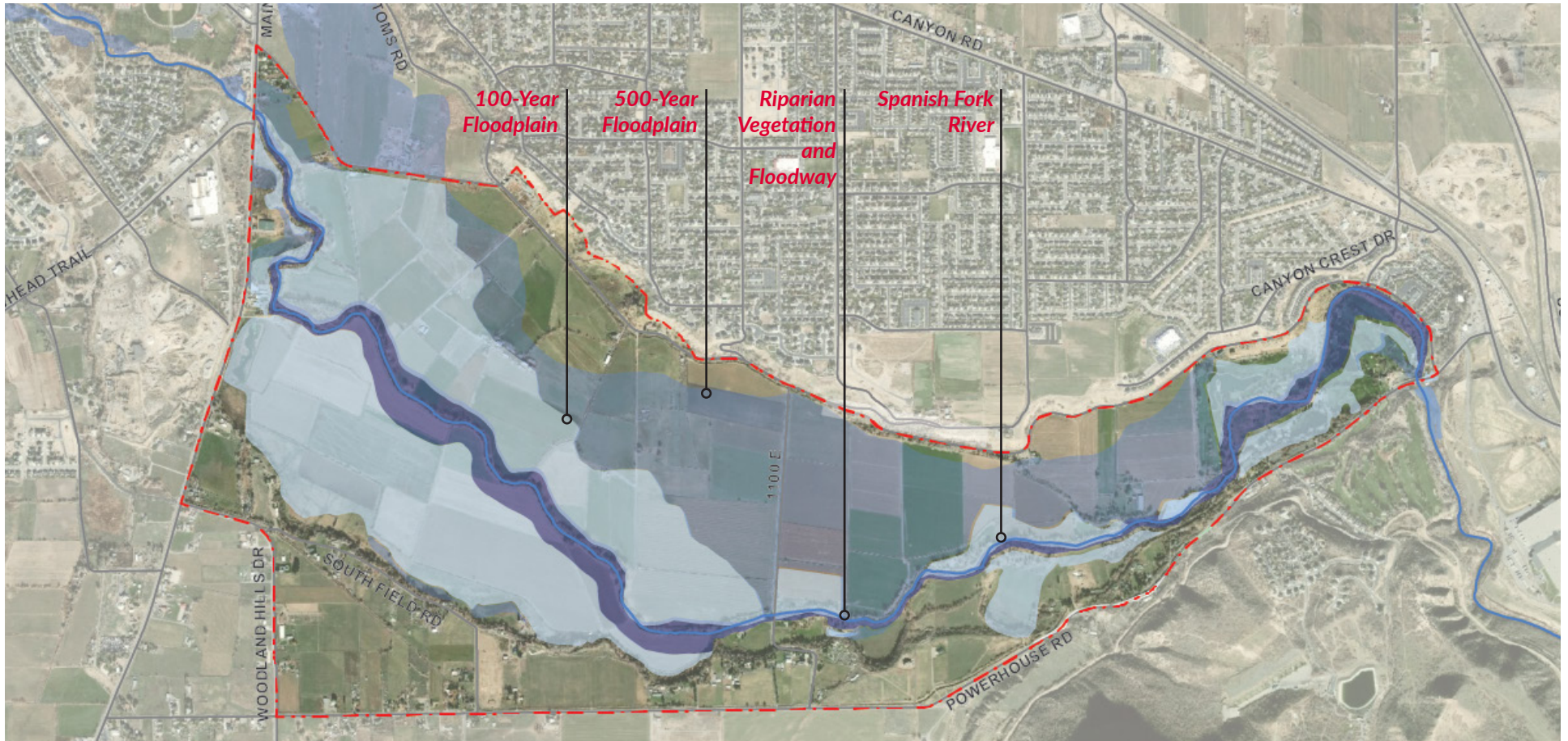


A LIVING RIVER CORRIDOR

The vision for the future of the River Bottoms focuses on the Spanish Fork River and its riparian areas as the prime character-defining feature of the River Bottoms project area. The concept is of a “living” river corridor that contains the river itself and its associated riparian vegetation, wildlife habitats, and floodways. All future development should protect the functional integrity of this entire river corridor, should protect views

where the river corridor is a dominant feature, and should dictate the form and patterns of future development. The animating concept is to provide for flood risk reduction and habitat restoration, while supporting local agriculture and recreational activities. By respecting the dynamic nature of the river corridor through its meanders, oxbows, and pools, we can reduce the potential for flooding of agricultural lands, improve the fishery habitat, create new upland wildlife habitats, and offer visitors a natural area experience.

Map 3. Character -Defining Features





OPEN SPACES AND NATURAL AREAS

Access to and views of open spaces and protection of natural areas in addition to the river corridor is a key character-defining feature of the River Bottoms. Open spaces that contribute to the River Bottoms character include agricultural fields, irrigation canal corridors, the golf course, parks, and large residential lots. The River Bottoms open spaces and natural areas provide for opportunities for work, play, relaxation, and solitude, and foster physical and mental health.



AGRICULTURAL AND HERITAGE RESOURCES

Current agricultural operations and the agrarian history of the River Bottoms are identified as key character-defining features that should be preserved in the future. Future land use patterns should minimize conflicts among differing land uses; preserve agricultural resources; and provide for the continuation and viability of agricultural operations for landowners who wish to continue operations as an important component of the region's economy. Working farms and landscapes can be integrated into changing land use patterns and nearby communities.

Recognizing that current agricultural operators may wish to cease operations at some point, future land uses should strive to acknowledge the agricultural heritage of the River Bottoms by preserving features that are iconic, incorporating heritage landmarks, and creating thoughtful site and improvement designs that are compatible with and reflect the agrarian history of the River Bottoms and of Utah County.



RECREATION AMENITIES AND TRAILS

The existing trails in the River Bottoms and public access to the river, parks, and recreation amenities are identified as valuable attributes that should be protected and enhanced in the future, and incorporated in all future developments. This character-defining feature brings into focus the importance of public and natural spaces that connect us to each other (Map 4). People crave the sense of being connected to where they live. Future recreation opportunities in the River Bottoms range from river access improvements to kayak parks, nature-based recreation; opportunities for water sports; access to and creation of regional parks; new equestrian trails; and pedestrian and cycling trails/loop trails.





AGRARIAN AND RURAL CHARACTER

The defining rural character of the River Bottoms has historically been preserved by the economic value of agricultural uses, and by large wetland areas that are not suitable for development. Ultimately, protection of rural character means “limiting what’s out there.” The extent to which development can occur in the River Bottoms while maintaining agricultural character is directly related to a proposed development’s design. If or when development occurs, rural character can be preserved with small-scale farming operations; larger residential lots, shared open spaces such as pastures and arenas; compatible architectural design, clustered development, and greenways. Agrarian architectural themes like barns, farmhouses, and gable-ended structures and historic land development patterns are useful design considerations to ensure that any new development blends into the rural character of the River Bottoms.



Map 4. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space





EXPLORING
POSSIBLE
FUTURES

04

POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR THE RIVER BOTTOMS

As mentioned above, the River Bottoms Vision project was prompted by a need to revisit the future vision and policies proposed in the 2001 Nebo Community Vision in light of recent trends and events. The sentiments and values expressed by visioning participants in 2001 are remarkably similar to the discussions and vision of participants in this River Bottoms Vision. What has changed since 2001 is the growth of Utah County and the expressed preferences of some River Bottoms landowners and agricultural operators to move on from farming and provide for new uses for their lands, although previous long-range comprehensive plans for the area have consistently preserved this area as farmland. The River Bottoms are not within the City limits of Spanish Fork, but are within the City's growth boundary established by the 2018 Spanish Fork City Annexation Policy Plan. The development currently taking place in the River Bottoms is under the jurisdiction of Utah County.

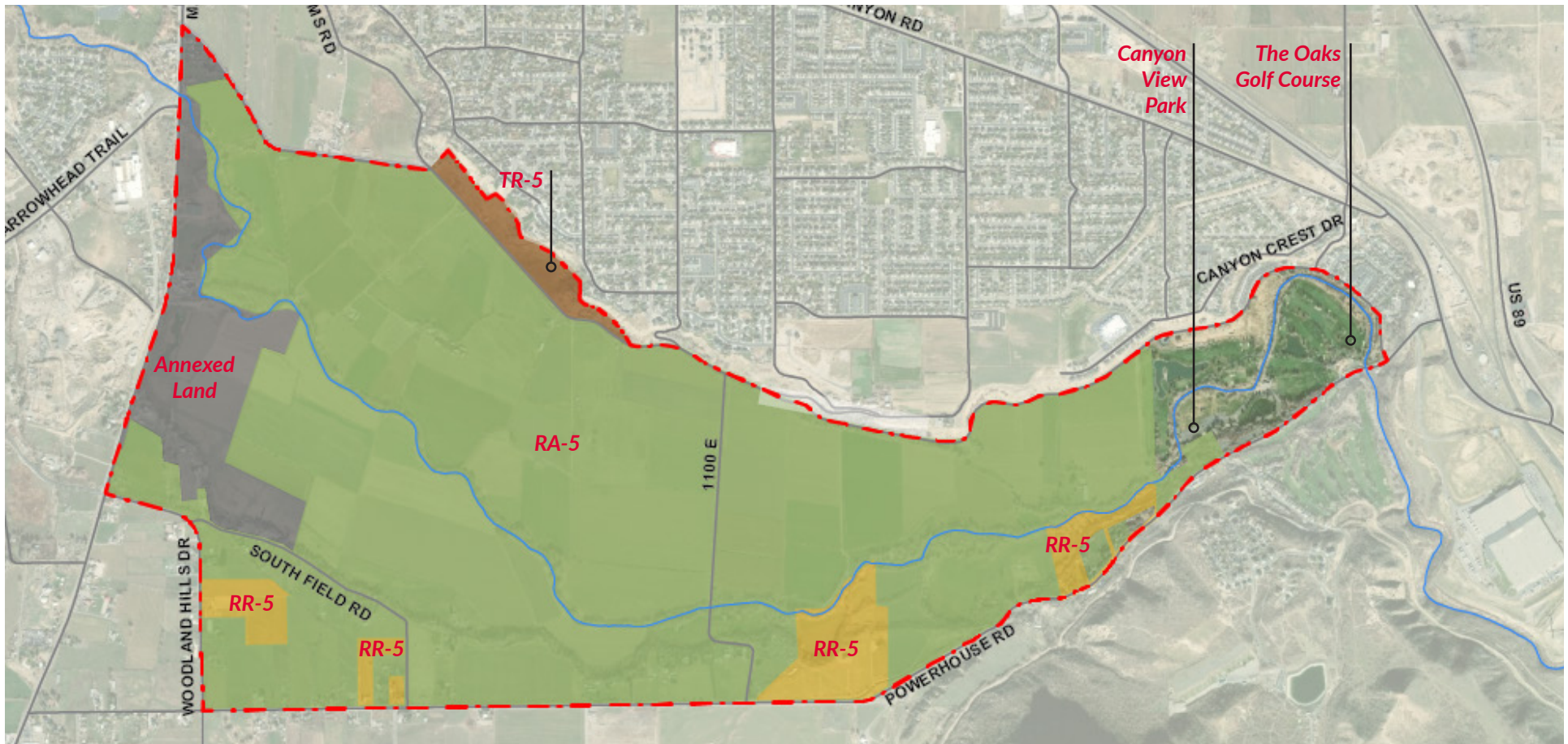
The River Bottoms geography is dominated by the Spanish Fork River and its floodway, riparian zone, and floodplain. Largely because of the influence of the river, other land uses in the River Bottoms are low intensity, and place relatively small development footprints on the land. During the visioning process, a variety of future potential development patterns in the River Bottoms were developed based on the Vision, which were presented and discussed at a series of Opportunities Workshops. Based on the geography of the River Bottoms, the public input that was received at the workshops, and on input received since the workshops, several different future development scenarios and possible future development patterns were developed for consideration. Each scenario and development pattern was then evaluated to determine the extent to which each one supported the Vision for the future of the River Bottoms. This section of the Vision Plan considers alternative potential futures for the River Bottoms. It describes the likely baseline case without annexation by Spanish Fork City, and identifies land use and development patterns that could be designed to be compatible with the River Bottoms Vision if annexation were to occur.

BASELINE FUTURE FOR THE RIVER BOTTOMS

The first possible future is the baseline scenario, which assumes that the River Bottoms would remain in the jurisdiction of Utah County, and that no future annexations of properties in the River Bottoms lands would occur. Predicting the future accurately is not possible, of course, so the assumptions underlying the description of the baseline scenario and alternative future scenarios are stated.

Current Utah County zoning in the River Bottoms (Map 5) is predominantly Residential Agriculture (RA-5). There are a few parcels zoned RR-5. There is a limited area of Transitional Residential (TR-5) along the base of the bluff adjacent to the City. The RA and RR zones allow for development of up to one residential unit per five acres in the River Bottoms area. Several smaller parcels in the study area are within City limits and are currently zoned for commercial and other higher intensity uses, primarily along existing road corridors.

Map 5. County Zoning



As a practical matter, it takes 5.25 acres in order to build a house that relies on individual well and septic systems in these zones. This size lot also allows the property to be taxed at a lower “greenbelt” property tax rate. At this time, there are no known impediments to continued residential development in the River Bottoms on this large-lot pattern with the current zoning under Utah County jurisdiction.

The Utah County Code provides an opportunity for landowners to apply for Planned Subdivision or Planned Unit Development (PUD) as conditional uses under the RR-5 zoning. Permitted uses within a PUD include “... One-, two-, three-, and multiple-family dwellings, including residential condominium projects; town homes; manufactured home parks; and manufactured homes...”, among other uses. Clustering of development is encouraged, and a minimum of 20% open space is required. County standards require that within PUDs, all areas in the 100-year floodplain are to be preserved as open space. The maximum density allowed is 2 units per acre, or 3 units per acre if additional open space (30%) is provided, and for other considerations. A parcel of land must be at least 20 acres to be considered for PUD approval. Planned Subdivisions are also a conditional use under RR-5 zoning, with a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet (roughly two units per acre).

Under RA-5 zoning, Planned Subdivisions are a conditional use, while PUDs are not. Under RA-5, the land uses in a Planned Subdivision are limited to those allowed as permitted under the base RA-5 zoning. The minimum lot size is 5 acres. For both PUDs and Planned Subdivisions, a central culinary water supply must be provided for all lots smaller than 5 acres. In a PUD in RR-5, a central sewage disposal system is also required.

While the development of a PUD under County zoning would require the construction of central water and sewage disposal systems, rising land values and the demand for residential opportunities in areas such as the River Bottoms may support the investment needed for such systems.

Under the baseline scenario, there would be no specific provisions to protect the River Bottoms Vision character-defining features or ensure public access to the river corridor. With PUD development, 20% or 30% of the parcel would be set aside as open space.

Build out of the River Bottoms area in the baseline scenario may be gradual if the current large lot residential pattern is pursued, or more quickly if the planned unit development or planned subdivision options are pursued. Although the overall development density may be less than current development within Spanish Fork City, development impacts could be significant in terms of effects to the character-defining attributes of the river corridor and open space in the River Bottoms.

CURRENT OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FEATURES

The River Bottoms Vision project area is approximately 1,844 acres, a portion of which is already within Spanish Fork City limits. There are currently 7.6 miles of existing trails (2.4 miles of the 7.6 are under construction), and 19 additional miles of planned trails. There are also developed parks in the River Bottoms; Canyon View Park covers 23.2 acres, and is surrounded by the 90-acre Spanish Oaks Golf Course. Both Canyon View Park and the Spanish Oaks Golf Course are owned and maintained by Spanish Fork City. All of these would most likely remain as open spaces under continued County jurisdiction. Spanish Fork City has also acquired 65 acres in the River Bottoms that are envisioned as a future regional park.

AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE FOR THE RIVER BOTTOMS

An underlying assumption of the River Bottoms Vision project is that change in Utah County in general, and the River Bottoms in particular, is inevitable. Many Vision project participants expressed a desire for the River Bottoms to remain relatively unchanged. However, no Utah communities have been bypassed by the growth and subsequent development that is occurring and is anticipated to continue for the foreseeable future. The primary focus of the visioning project has been to identify those attributes of the River Bottoms that make the area valued and which should be protected as anticipated future changes occur. A secondary purpose is to describe the types and patterns of development that could be compatible with protection of the character defining features of the area. As the area evolves, goals, objectives and policies to protect the character of and vision for the River Bottoms can guide change to achieve the overall vision.

FUTURE LAND USE FRAMEWORK – DEVELOPMENT SUITABILITY

The River Bottoms future land use framework is an approach to managing future change based on the geography of the River Bottoms, and on the unique, character-defining features that are based on project participant input and are described in the River Bottoms Vision statements. The land use framework describes potential future development patterns in the River Bottoms that could be managed to be consistent with the Vision and the character-defining features of the River Bottoms

The dominant defining feature of the River Bottoms is the Spanish Fork River, its riparian area and floodplain. These features are shown on Map 3, above. These features represent a naturally occurring constraint on the affected lands, as the river corridor is the most significant environmental attribute of the River Bottoms, and development in the floodplain of the River is constrained by frequent high water table levels and the potential for damage to structures and infrastructure, such as utilities and roads, from periodic flooding. Technically, construction is allowed in floodplains as long as the finished floor level is at least one foot above the high water mark of the floodplain. This does not allow a provision for basements. Within the River Bottoms, the development framework has been established such that development in the 100-year floodplain should be a rare occurrence.

Areas in the River Bottoms outside the 100-year floodplain to the north and the south are more suitable for future development, due to the lower risk of flood damage and closer proximity to existing utilities and infrastructure.

THE RIVER BOTTOMS VISION PLAN





Spanish Fork City has been working with the Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG) on transportation planning in the area, including potential roads within the River Bottoms study area. Map 6 shows the approximate alignment of possible future roads in the River Bottoms, based on current thinking. Map 6 also shows the potential road alignments in relation to the Spanish Fork River, its floodway and floodplain.

The new 5-lane minor arterial street proposed as a north south connection through the River Bottoms would serve as a regional facility and could end up being constructed and maintained by either the City, State or County.

The new 3-lane collector street proposed as an east west connection through the River Bottoms would be a County facility unless annexations occur in the area which trigger ownership and maintenance by the City .

On the north side of the River, the roughly east-west road alignment from East River Bottoms Road to South Lane generally parallels the northern boundary of the 100-year floodplain and would provide a natural delineation between the flood-prone area on the south and the less hazardous area to the north. To the north of the road alignment, City utilities and services are also closer.

On the south side of the River, the 100-year floodplain generally ends at the topographic bluff visible on Map 6. The area to the south of the bluff has been developing on a generally one unit per five acre pattern under County jurisdiction. Utilities are more available on the bluff and near 8800 South and Powerhouse Road. There is currently some commercial development along Main Street that could expand somewhat. These features generally distinguish between areas of the River Bottoms that are more suitable for development from those that are less suitable.

Map 7 shows areas of greater and lesser development suitability in the River Bottoms, based on topographic, floodplain hazard, transportation, and utility service proximity attributes of the area. The areas identified as Tracts 5, 6, and 7 are less suitable for development because of the location of the floodplain and distance from municipal utilities and services. Tracts 2 and 3 have higher development suitability, in that most of these areas are above the floodplain and are proximate to City utilities and services. Likewise, Tracts 8 and 9 to the south of the River have higher development suitability for similar reasons. The areas identified as Tracts 1 and 4 have commercial development potential due to the proximity of access and services.

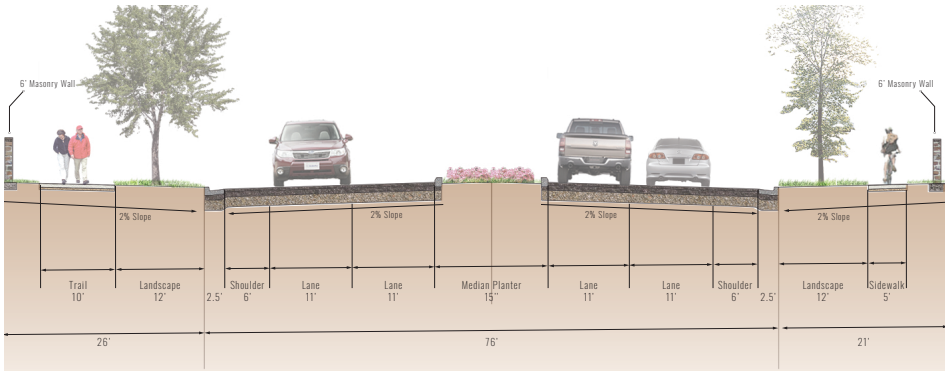


Figure 1. Minor Arterial Street (5-lane road)

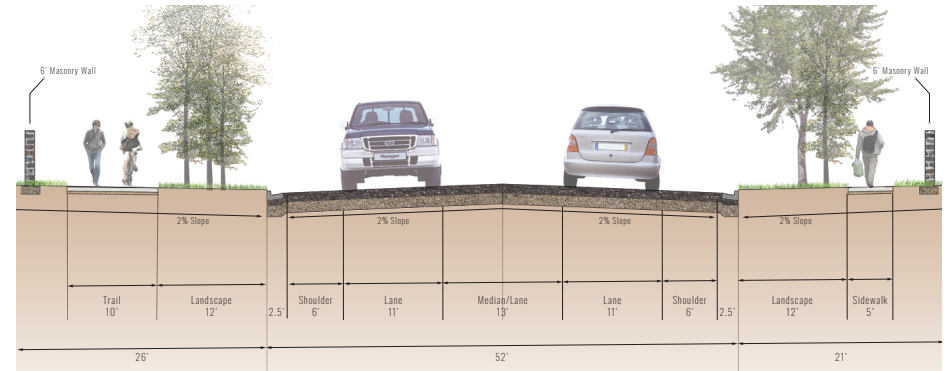
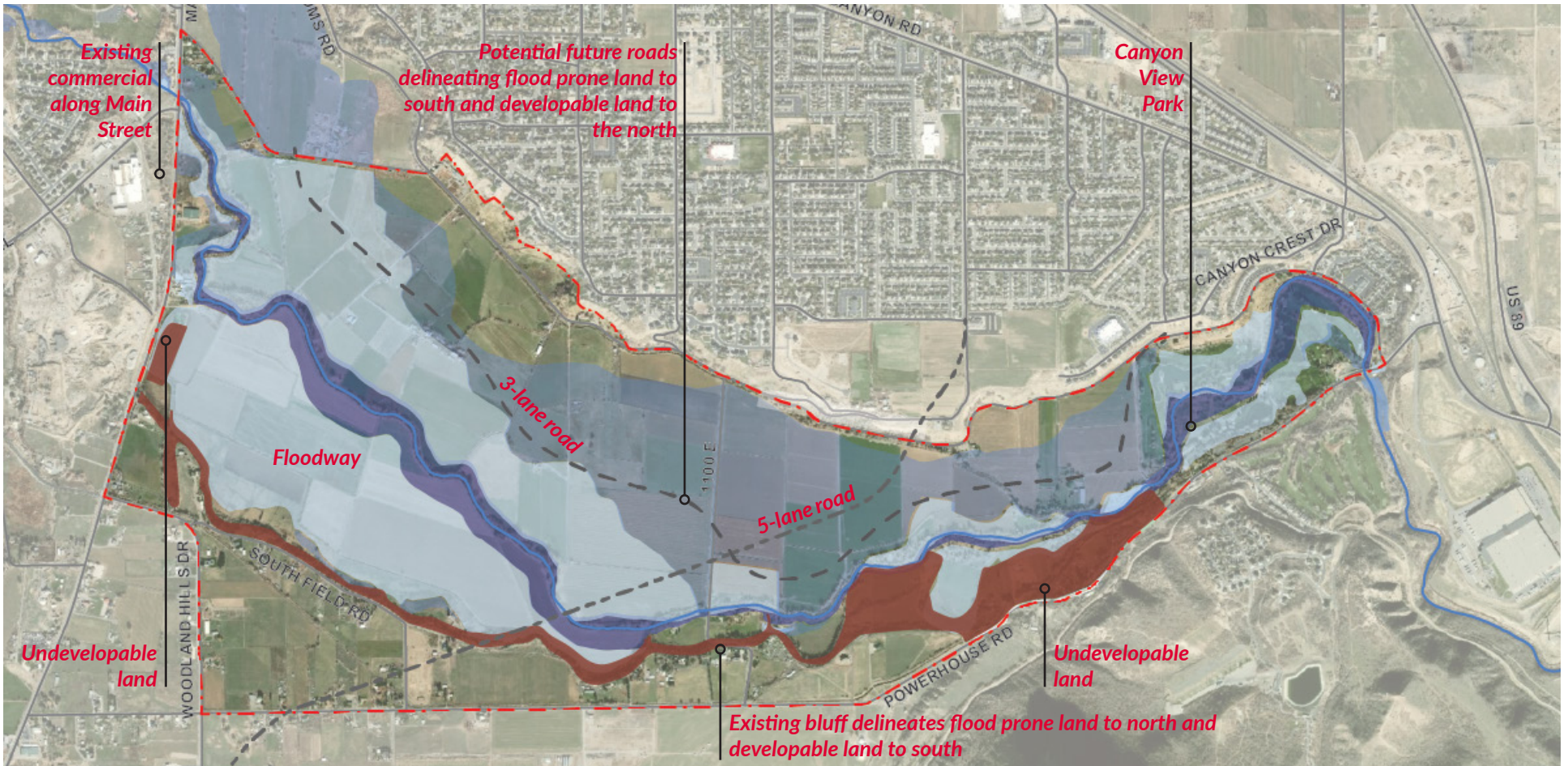


Figure 2. Collector Street (3-lane road)

Map 6. Development Constraints



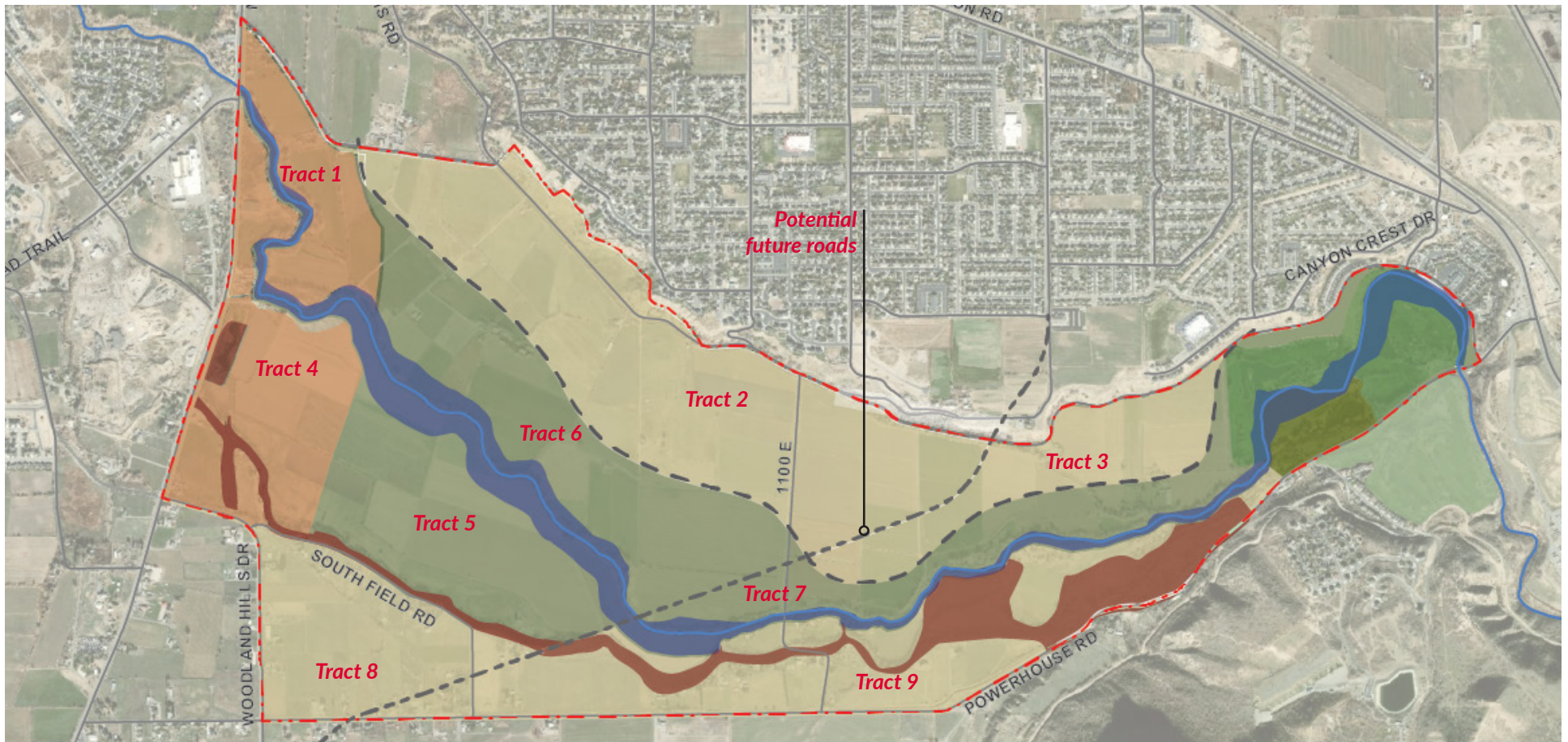
The River Bottoms land can be generally grouped into three categories of development suitability: low suitability, higher suitability, and commercial potential. The descriptions of future land uses for the suitability categories are:

- » Low Development Suitability - Agriculture, Open Space and Rural Residential - Tracts 5, 6, and 7 on Map 7;
- » Higher Development Suitability - Conservation Development - Tracts 2, 3, 8, and 9 on Map 7; and
- » Commercial Potential - Community Commercial - Tracts 1 and 4 on Map 7.

SPANISH FORK CITY OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

This alternative River Bottoms future assumes the annexation of parts or all of the River Bottoms Vision area into Spanish Fork City. The threshold consideration for an annexation proposal should be the extent to which it would further the River Bottoms Vision articulated by the community. The goal of the Vision is provide for possible development that contributes to the future of the River Bottoms. If annexation occurs, the details of allowable development would be made binding through subsequent zoning, development agreements, and project review. The Spanish Fork City objectives and policies regarding the land categories shown on Map 7 and Figure 3 are as follows:

Map 7. Development Framework



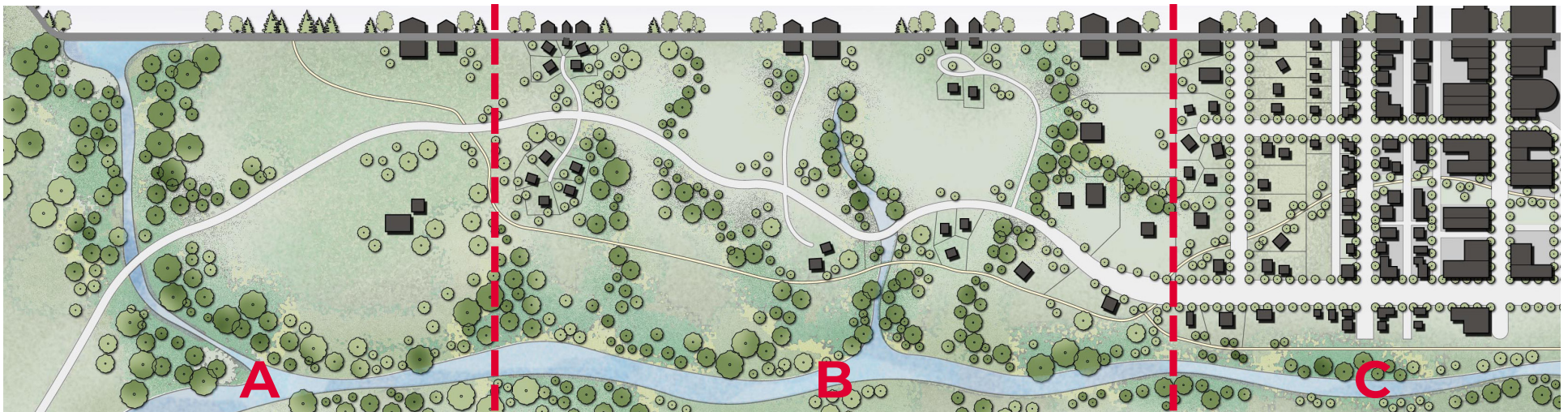
The land use framework would advance the Vision objectives of protecting the living river corridor, preserving large areas of open space, supporting recreational access, and preserving the agricultural character and heritage of the River Bottoms. At the same time, it would offer landowners options for the development and future uses of their properties in a manner that respects currently vested property rights and preserves property values.

Agriculture, Open Space and Rural Residential (A): These are currently primarily farmlands within the 100-year floodplain of the Spanish Fork River. The current development potential under County zoning RA-5 is one unit per 5 acres. Central water and sewer utilities are not nearby and, because of the risk of flood damage to public utilities and roads, the City would not support extension of City services in these areas. The City supports continued agricultural uses of these lands, and discourages significant development. If annexed, these lands would be zoned for agricultural uses and rural residential uses with a maximum density similar to the City's R-R zone. These lands would be eligible to be designated Sending Areas under the City's proposed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program (described below).

Conservation Development (B): These are currently predominantly agricultural and rural residential areas, located primarily outside the 100-year floodplain of the Spanish Fork River. Most of the lands are zoned RA-5, with some limited areas of TR-5 along the northern boundary of the River Bottoms area. These areas are proximate to municipal utilities and services and could receive City services. Development should be well designed and done in a manner that protects essential characteristics of the River Bottoms. If annexed, these lands would be zoned with a base residential density similar to the City's R-1-15 zone. These lands would be eligible to be designated Receiving Areas under the City's proposed TDR program.

Community Commercial (C): This is the area along extended Main Street on the western edge of the River Bottoms study area. Some of this land is within the City and is zoned for commercial development. This area is immediately adjacent to City utilities and services. Development should be well designed and done in a manner that protects essential characteristics of the River Bottoms. If unincorporated lands in this area are annexed into the City, they would be zoned for appropriately scaled commercial uses. These lands would be eligible to be designated Receiving Areas under the City's proposed TDR program

Figure 3. Transect of Land Categories



LAND USES

AGRICULTURE, OPEN SPACE AND RURAL RESIDENTIAL CATEGORY

The Agriculture, Open Space and Rural Residential land use pattern focuses on preserving agricultural operations, open spaces including the River corridor, and the developed and undeveloped park lands of the River Bottoms, while allowing for limited large-lot residential uses. This land use pattern is appropriate for the Low Development Suitability areas, and would support landowners who wish to continue agricultural operations for the foreseeable future, and includes incentives to help support continued agricultural production.

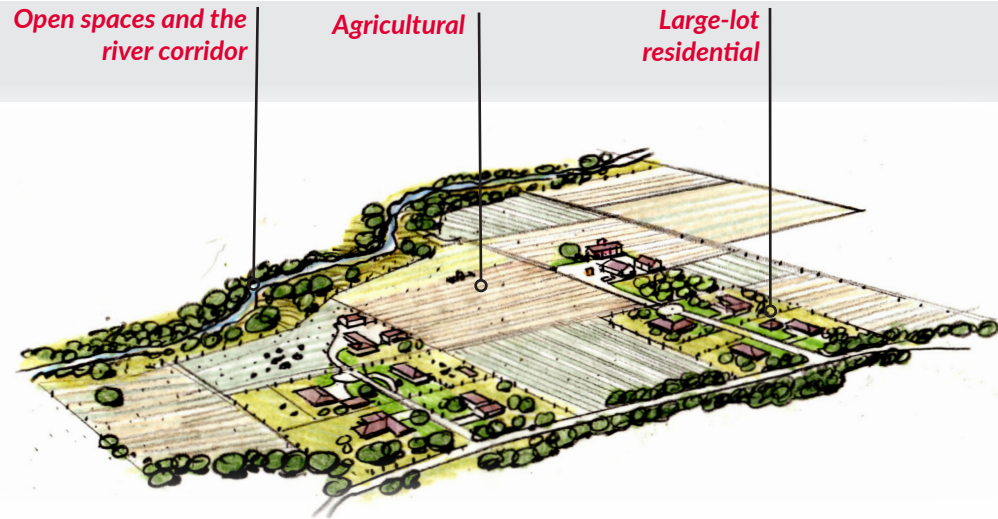


Figure 4. Typical Agriculture, Open Space, and Rural Residential

Allowable uses would include agricultural operations and residential uses at a base density of one unit per five acres. All development in this land use pattern would include a required buffer from the edge of the riparian area or floodway of the Spanish Fork River (Map 6). The Spanish Fork River has changed over time and will likely continue to change. This development pattern would allow the river to “breathe” and acknowledges that river environments are fluid, organic, and ever changing. The canals along the northern and southern boundaries would also have buffers for flood mitigation purposes and future recreational opportunities. Current Utah County zoning requires a 50’ setback from the high-water mark of water bodies.

Water and sewer services could be provided by private on-site systems, assuming compliance with applicable health laws. Access would be via small scale country roads. A buffer along the Spanish Fork River would provide opportunities for recreation and public access, with appropriate compensation to the affected landowner. Figure 4 depicts a typical pattern of land use in this category, with a mix of agricultural fields and rural residences. Residential uses would be located on lots no smaller than five acres, preserving substantial open space and preserving the agricultural heritage of the River Bottoms. The immediate yards of residences could support garden crops, beekeeping and small animal husbandry, while adjacent fields could support grains and forage production and/or animal pastures.

INCENTIVES

In order to support continuation of agriculture operations, property owners, nonprofits, land trusts, the City, and State and local policymakers could work together. The Utah County Agriculture Toolbox identifies a number of tools to protect viable land areas for active farming and open space, such as direct acquisition, conservation easements, farming incentive programs, and transfer of development rights (TDR). Landowners who are interested in transferring development rights from their properties as a Sending Area in order to realize present value of their lands while continuing farming operations could take advantage of the density multiplier offered in the City’s TDR program as described below.

CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT CATEGORY

Conservation Development is focused on residential development at conventional densities in a clustered development pattern that provides for open space and recreational access as part of the development design. Development would be concentrated on a portion of the site, while conserving the remainder of the property in agricultural uses or other open space, rather than developing the entire property with large residential lots. Conservation developments in most western jurisdictions call for a portion of the project area to be managed as open space, for agricultural, recreational, habitat conservation, sensitive lands preservation or other purposes. This type of sustainable development benefits the environment and area residents by creating a stronger sense of community and opportunities for farming and recreation. The open space areas of the property could be placed into a permanent conservation easement for property owner use, or for public use with appropriate compensation.

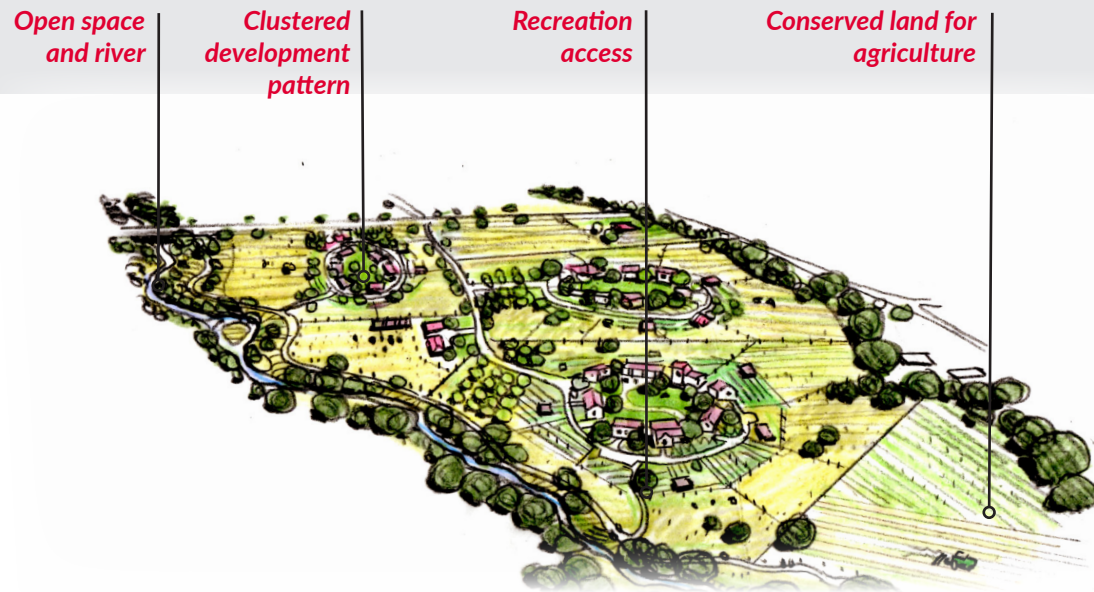


Figure 5. Typical Conservation Development Pattern

This type of development would be appropriate for the Higher Development Suitability lands shown on Map 7. Currently, landowners or developers in the County can develop, on average, 5 acre lots. If annexed, these lands would be allocated a base density similar to Spanish Fork City's R-1-15 zone. These areas could also be receiving areas under the Spanish Fork TDR program.

Figure 5 depicts the conservation development pattern. Residential development is clustered around common central open spaces, with shared agricultural, recreational or other open spaces adjacent to development. The River corridor and sensitive areas are protected by a development buffer, and open spaces are protected by conservation easements or other means. Access to the development clusters is provided by rural roads, with smaller internal local streets. Right to farm regulations would be employed to limit use conflicts between different uses and allow for continued agricultural operations. This provides for smaller lot residential uses in a predominantly open, rural setting. Central water and sewer services would be provided. Access would be via country roads to a village street network. Guidelines would provide for architectural design that is compatible with the agricultural heritage of the River Bottoms.

COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY AREA

The areas identified as Tracts 1 and 4 on Map 7 include some existing commercial development. If annexed, areas in Tracts 1 and 4 would be allocated a base residential density yet to be determined. Commercial zoning would be applied as appropriate to the location and size of the subject property. As a receiving area under the River Bottoms TDR program, landowners in this area could acquire development rights for landowners in sending areas and transfer them to their lands to achieve a higher residential density. The purpose of this land use pattern is to allow for additional appropriate commercial development and higher residential densities than would typically be allowed to support planned village development. New commercial development should be designed according to guidelines established to complement the rural character and agricultural heritage of the River Bottoms area. Central water and sewer services would be provided. Access would be via country roads to a village street network.

- » Street and pedestrian/bicycle connectivity
- » A mix of housing types
- » Infrastructure serviceability
- » Appropriate transition to lower intensity land patterns
- » Protecting agricultural activities
- » Rural architectural character
- » Sustainability
- » Active recreation areas
- » Natural resource preservation

Figure 6 shows the kind of architectural and site design that would achieve the objectives of a commercial village development.

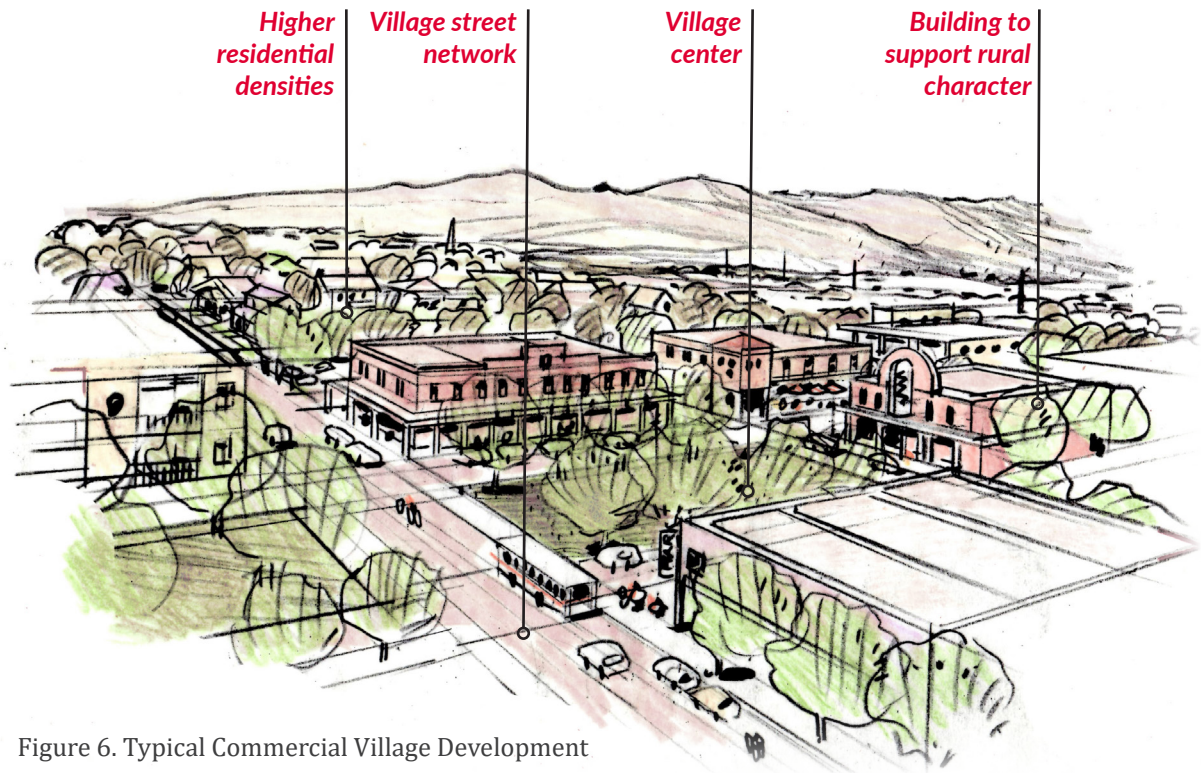


Figure 6. Typical Commercial Village Development

THE RIVER BOTTOMS TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS PROGRAM

The lands in the River Bottoms currently have development rights pursuant to current Utah County zoning and regulations. As discussed above, those rights are to utilize the property for agricultural and limited residential uses. The current zoning generally allows for one residential unit per five acres, with the option in some areas to create a PUD with up to three units per acre residential density. Under County regulations, however, a developer would need to construct both centralized water supply and wastewater management systems.

The concept of the transfer of development rights (TDR) is that, in a given geographic area, some portions are more suitable for development than others. In order to encourage development to occur in the most suitable locations, a TDR program allows landowners in less suitable areas to donate or sell the development rights attached to their lands (sending areas) and relocate them to more suitable areas (receiving areas). The most successful TDR programs have been established in relatively small, cohesive areas, and to achieve specific identified objectives. In this manner, the owners of the sending lands can receive the benefits of ownership without the need to develop the lands. Owners of receiving lands can increase their existing development density by acquiring development rights from sending area landowners.

A similar, more frequently used program is the establishment of conservation easements, where a landowner accepts cash and tax credits in exchange for removing development rights from their property. A common difficulty with conservation easement programs is that, for the donation tax credit to be valuable, the property needs to have a relatively high market value. In almost all cases of agricultural lands, additional compensation in the form of cash, other property or something similar needs to be provided to the landowner in order for them to realize the full value of the rights they are giving up.

The Spanish Fork River Bottoms TDR program focuses on the transfer of property development rights between a willing seller and a willing buyer in a private market transaction. In order to provide incentives to the seller and the buyer, the base density or entitlements need to be set for both sending and receiving properties, and additional incentives beyond the base densities need to be available.

The starting base densities, yet to be determined, could be one unit per five acres for the sending areas and two units per acre for the receiving areas. The River Bottoms TDR program proposes to incentivize the relocation of development entitlements from the sending to receiving areas by attributing one development unit for each acre placed into a conservation easement or otherwise restricted from further development by the owners of sending area lands. The owners of receiving area lands in Tracts 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 could receive an increased residential density by acquiring density units from a willing seller in a sending area. The agreed value and price to be paid for the density units would be up to the seller and buyer.

Other benefits may be available to density unit sellers and buyers, including possible tax credits, agricultural operations assistance, additional density bonuses or other benefits for the dedication of public recreation easements, provision of public amenities or other features acceptable to Spanish Fork City.

Successful TDR Programs in the Region: Mapleton, UT; Summit County, Utah; Weber County, UT; American Fork, UT; West Valley City, UT; Gallatin County, MT; Berthoud, CO; Gunnison County, CO. *(See appendix for more details)*



SPANISH FORK
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT