

PLANNING FOR VAIL'S FUTURE Can we consider Vail urban in nature?

Arizona Revised Statute 9-101. Incorporation: definition, item F. "An area to be incorporated . . . shall be urban in nature."

There is no doubt that Vail has been a community for over 100 years—at least since 1880 when the first Southern Pacific Railroad passenger train rolled through Vail's Siding—at that time home to twenty-five or so rail workers.

Today the over 12,000 residents of Vail are committed to growing a vibrant, healthy, involved community defined by its excellent school system and served by an ever-expanding list of businesses, churches, and organizations.

History

Vail gets its name from Walter Vail, who stepped out of a stagecoach onto the dusty streets of Tucson in 1876. Twenty-four years old, with a keen sense of purpose, Vail intended to become a successful businessman and rancher and he succeeded. He created the legendary Empire Ranch, which eventually encompassed the better part of southeastern Arizona. He and his business partner, J.S. Vosberg, also saw the opportunities that the coming of the Southern Pacific rail line would offer and strategically purchased land along the proposed route. Such purchases supported their many business interests and provided shipping points for cattle and ore. In 1880 Vail and Vosberg deeded a right-of-way to the Southern Pacific Railroad in order to build the passing spur that became Vail's Siding.

Vail's first "boom" came at the dawn of the 20th century when the price of copper spiked. A road was built from the Helvetia copper mine to the nearest rail shipping point—Vail. From about 1895 to 1914 Vail was a bustling break-of-bulk point for copper ore as well as cattle from area ranches.

During much of the rest of the 20th century things slowed down and Vail settled into a rural rhythm of life enjoyed by the many ranching families and others who valued the beautiful landscape and mountain views. In fact, the Vail School District almost closed its doors during the 1970s due to the small number of students.

That has changed. Since 2000, Vail has grown almost 400%.

The Present

Vail's situation between a broad bajada below the Rincon Mountains and the Cienega Creek corridor has made it the convergence point of routes and people from prehistoric to modern times, including Hohokam and O'odham Indian migrations, the Mormon Battalion wagon road, several stagecoach routes, the Southern Pacific railroad, historic State Route 80, and today the Arizona Trail. Vail's past and future are inextricably linked to the surrounding landscape. Today Vail is at a crossroads, both geographically and as a community.

The original "Town Between the Tracks™" comprised a post office, a church, and a feed store. Across the northern set of tracks was a school. Those buildings still exist, but significantly changed. The historic adobe post office building is on the National Register of Historic Places and is the subject of restoration efforts. The Vail Post Office is located in a new shopping center, Old Vail Station, and is busy enough to warrant its own substation across the road. Saint Rita's

has expanded to new quarters to serve a larger congregation, but the original chapel is still in occasional use. The feed store still sells feed, along with a variety of other items.

Vail School, which started in 1903 as a one-room schoolhouse, grew over the years into a large elementary and middle school. Children went “to town” for high school. Today it is Old Vail Middle School, one of five middle schools in the Vail School District, along with eight elementary schools, three (soon to be four) high schools, and the K–12 Vail Academy. The Vail School District is nationally recognized for excellence and draws people to move to Vail for their children’s education. About 11,000 children attend Vail’s schools annually.

Meantime, Vail has grown out from the old town site to include the Old Vail Station shopping center, numerous other businesses, its first stoplight—and at least ten housing developments, all of whose residents say they hail from Vail.

Vail, Seen From the Outside

Statistically, Vail is home to a mix of inhabitants:

- White / not Hispanic - 71.6%
- Hispanic - 19.4%
- Black - 3.3%
- Asian - 2.4%
- American Indian - 0.9%

Both the Tucson and regional telephone books list Vail as one of the communities served; the Arizona Daily Star and local television stations give news from Vail; the weather broadcasts report Vail’s weather nightly. Vail has its own newspaper, the Vail Voice.

Many regional and national chains have established businesses in Vail: Nico’s, Walgreens, Dairy Queen, Curves, Quik Mart, Mountain States R&D International, State Farm Insurance.

Locally, the number of businesses that have incorporated the Vail name into theirs is impressive: Vail Family Dentistry, Vail Feed Store, Vail Florists, Vail Self Storage, Vail Steak House, Vail Water Company, Vail Internal Medicine—and that is just a small percent of the local businesses that call Vail home.

Vail-named organizations include Vail Community Action Board, Greater Vail Area Chamber of Commerce, Vail Preservation Society, and Vail Rotary Club. These are among many other local organizations, including a Kiwanis Club and a newly formed food bank.

Although the Vail School District extends further than the proposed incorporation boundaries, it operates as a cohesive entity. It brings not only a fine education to the students, but provides meeting places for groups and cultural opportunities for Vail residents. Empire High School, for example, has an annual schedule of dramatic productions open to the public. Both Empire and Cienega High Schools also boast excellent sports programs, competing with large urban schools on an equal footing.

Other cultural opportunities include lectures and concerts offered at least weekly by the Arizona Senior Academy, free and open to the public. The Vail Chorale, in existence for just nine months, has already given three concerts, also free.

Part of urbanization is the growth of religious institutions within the community. Starting with St. Rita’s, the area now includes several Vail-named churches among numerous other churches and religious organizations.

Planning for Vail's Future

In January 2010, the Vail Community Action Board called together a group of community leaders to consider Vail's future: the Vail Vision Committee. The group was charged with identifying what they valued and wanted to see retained about Vail, as they viewed inevitable growth and development in the area. They created a motto and a set of values:

VAIL, AZ – PRESERVING OUR HISTORY, NATURE, AND COMMUNITY

CONSERVATION IS PARAMOUNT.

We deeply value our beautiful environment.
We believe it is our responsibility to preserve the things that we treasure,
such as open space, dark skies, mountain views, and wildlife corridors.

WE HONOR OUR RURAL HERITAGE.

We seek to preserve the area's western character,
as expressed through architecture, events, and native landscape.

WE ARE AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY.

We actively seek to determine our future.
While independent, we also work with and rely on each other.

WE ARE A SOLID COMMUNITY.

We value the traditional building blocks of a community:
faith, education, and service.

WE ARE DYNAMIC.

We are a place where innovation and risk are welcome.

The Vail Vision Committee finished its work in June 2010.

Almost immediately thereafter, in July 2010, the Vail Community Action Board formed a new citizen's group, the Voice for Vail Committee, charged with identifying and investigating options for Vail's future. They considered the following:

- "Green Valley Model", governance by a community committee;
- annexation by Tucson, Benson, or Sahuarita;
- improvement district;
- incorporation;
- do nothing.

The Committee held a Town Hall, April 20, 2011, where they presented these options to the attendees, and asked them to vote for their top two preferences. The majority voted for incorporation.

Using this information, the Vail Community Action Board then formed the Vail Vision Quest Committee, charged with investigating the feasibility of incorporation for Vail. The first meeting of this committee was November 20, 2011. It is slated to finish its work by December 2012, and give its recommendations to the Vail Community Action Board.

After 132 years, we can now say that Vail has grown to be urban in nature.