

South Jornada Community Blueprint

Introduction

The South Jornada community is a residential neighborhood that exudes the many desirable features inherent to rural living. Located on the western piedmont slope of the Organ Mountains, residents of this limited-access community enjoy panoramic views across the desert landscape, as well as the convenience of nearby access to downtown Las Cruces. The absence of sidewalks and paucity of street lights reflect the rural culture residents find aesthetically pleasing, and the diverse architectural styles contribute to the unique character of the community. Characterized by large lots with home sites that conform to the natural topography of the landscape, the South Jornada neighborhood fosters peacefulness and privacy in a natural setting rarely found in a city development.

Background

In the mid-1970's the South Jornada community was platted within the corporate limits of Las Cruces, representing a style of development unlike those in the urban center and adjacent areas.

Established in 1976, the Protective Covenants of the South Jornada community restricted development to a minimum lot size of one acre. The Protective Covenants also prohibited "grading, dams, or retaining walls that would unreasonably restrict natural drainage-ways or create flood hazards to adjoining properties." Clearly, low-density development and preservation of landscape topography are documented priorities of the South Jornada community.

When the Protective Covenants expired in 2001, the existing R-1a zoning of the South Jornada community left the neighborhood vulnerable to subdivision of up to eight dwellings per acre. However, in more than 13 years directly following the expiration of the Protective Covenants, not a single landowner sought subdivision into a parcel less than one acre. The strong commitment by neighbors to the peaceful, rural character of the unique South Jornada community is the motivation for development of this Blueprint.

Issues and Challenges

As Las Cruces has grown, a more urban style of development reached the South Jornada neighborhood and now surrounds this small community on all sides. Residents feel the growth and development is threatening the very lifestyle they have grown to enjoy and now seek opportunities for its preservation. Recent development adjacent to the South Jornada community brought forth a desire to ensure that neighborhood characteristics are not compromised. Mitigation measures, in the form of transitioning elements, were sought to minimize development impacts of neighboring communities upon the unique South Jornada neighborhood.

For example, a recent development of higher density located directly south of the South Jornada community maintains an open space buffer of land between the two distinctly different developments. In Mesa Grande Estates, located immediately east of the South Jornada community, the developer provided an approximate gradation of residential lot sizes. To accommodate this, single-family zoning was established to allow lot sizes that transitioned from lots of more than one acre, to those of approximately one-half acre, one-quarter acre, 5000 sq. ft., and finally zoning affording a multi-family style of development. Zoning of lots adjacent to the boundary of the South Jornada community restricts minimum lot size to one acre. In both adjacent developments, suitable transition between the neighborhoods allows each community to coexist with minimal impacts to one another.

When each of the neighboring developments was approved, connectivity between the South Jornada community and surrounding developments was limited to pedestrian access via Panorama Drive to Mesa Grande Estates, further signifying the unique qualities of the South Jornada community. Within the South Jornada community itself, subdivision into a lot size of less than one acre was denied when the Planning and Zoning Commission “found essentially that the approval of the subdivision wasn’t in keeping with the character of the neighborhood” (Las Cruces City Council meeting on 6/2/14).

In order to preserve the rural character of the South Jornada community, there is a desire to restrict minimum lot size. Excessive subdividing would increase noise and traffic, and negatively impact the privacy, peacefulness, and rural livability of residents. The market value of existing homes and property would also be negatively impacted by excessive subdividing. Large lot size is also necessary to accommodate residential septic systems that have proven very suitable for the sandy soil throughout this community. The vision of the original South Jornada Protective Covenants recognized the importance of lot size in maintaining the rural character of the community and, therefore, limited minimum lot size to one acre.

Another area of concern for residents is the desire to preserve, in as much as is possible, the natural topography of the landscape, with hills, drainages, and coppice dunes dictating the placement of each homesite. The diversity of site development is apparent

throughout the neighborhood. Dwellings are located at various elevations, residing on hills, flat areas, or nestled into natural terraces. Some are located close to the road while others are set back in excess of a hundred feet. These diverse homesite placements serve to further preserve the peacefulness and privacy desirable for rural living.

Opportunities

While not a regulatory document, the Community Planning Blueprint provides the South Jornada residents an opportunity to develop a “policy plan” that “becomes a component of the City Comprehensive Plan.” Our issues are well-suited for the Community Planning Blueprint Initiative, in that our neighborhood is “facing expanded development pressures” that jeopardize the unique qualities and “character” of our community (Community Planning Blueprint Initiative, Resolution No. 11-234, Exhibit A). At the same time, the Blueprint process enables our community to play an active role in our city’s plan for community development. That is, to “create distinct neighborhoods which, through their design, functionality and aesthetic appeal, contribute to the quality of life that residents desire” (City of Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan 2040, Policy 31.4).

The Blueprint process was first suggested to members of our community by a City Councillor at a Council Meeting on June 2, 2014. Since that time, the South Jornada community has worked with City Planner Susana Montana who attended neighborhood coffees where she explained the Blueprint Initiative, heard community issues and, through frequent communications, helped us initiate the Blueprint process. Deputy Director Vincent Banegas presented information to South Jornada residents in a Pre-Planning Meeting at the Sage Cafe and provided extensive editorial assistance. At the meeting, there was no opposition to the goals of the South Jornada Blueprint from the owners. Director David Weir has enthusiastically supported our efforts and continues to offer invaluable suggestions for a cohesive document. The South Jornada community sincerely thanks everyone who has contributed to this Blueprint process and looks forward to working with the Department of Community Development in order to achieve our goals of preserving the unique qualities of our community. We appreciate all suggestions and are anxious to proceed with the Blueprint process.

Through neighborly participation, development of this community Blueprint again presents the opportunity to further protect the natural resources necessary for a peaceful, rural lifestyle. Given the limited availability of large residential lots within the city limits, the Blueprint Initiative also provides our community with the opportunity to the provide diversity of residential housing options within the City of Las Cruces.

Vision Statement

“The South Jornada community will maintain a rural quality characterized by peacefulness, dark skies, and large lot sizes amid the beauty of mountain and desert vistas. New development will contribute to this Vision and will support the natural beauty of the area by sustaining and strengthening the natural resources, rural character, privacy, and healthy livability of the community.”

Land Use Policies

1. Promote and preserve a minimum lot size of one acre for all tracts and home sites within the South Jornada community.
2. Encourage and advocate the preservation of the natural topography.
3. Minimize both soil disturbance and creation of impervious surfaces.
4. Consider alternative ways to protect the rural character of the South Jornada community that would preserve the rural, large lot nature of the area.

Implementation Strategies and Actions

1. Consider the rezoning of the South Jornada community Blueprint Plan area to a zoning district that establishes a minimum lot size of one acre.
2. Utilize construction practices that adhere to best practices and City of Las Cruces Erosion Control Standards for new development and redevelopment.
3. Investigate the re-adoption of subdivision covenants, use of easements or other methods to preserve the rural, large lot nature of the neighborhood.

South Jornada Community Blueprint Plan Area Map



