

# Vernon Area Community Plan

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*\*Working DRAFT 10.3.23\**

**Vernon Community Planning Committee**

**10/3/2023**

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## Apache County's Comprehensive Plan Process

Apache County has facilitated the community plan process in accordance with Arizona Law A.R.S. §11-804 that requires that the comprehensive plan be developed to conserve the natural resources of the county and ensure efficient expenditure of public monies. Its primary use is to guide elected officials, appointed officials, and staff in the performance of their duties.

To accomplish these purposes, a community plan addresses the challenges facing Apache County and each community and presents opportunities for the continuing success and diversity of the region by:

- Encouraging coordinated physical development in accordance with present and future needs of the county.
- Promoting stewardship of and respect for the natural and cultural resources of Apache County.
- Guiding growth to achieve efficient expenditure of public funds.
- Protecting investments in private property.
- Encouraging economic growth and diversity.

The Vernon Area Communities agreed to participate in an effort to help Apache County meet the law and fulfill their vision of Apache County's future. We also participated in building our plan to educate people about the wonderful and diverse communities that make up the Vernon area. Although, not incorporated, we were able to organize and rally participants from the various communities to formulate a plan. That plan attempts to consolidate viewpoints and create a singular vision of our area and provide direction to help Apache County with a framework to plan for our future. As with all communities, opinions and perspectives are varied and often polar; as such, our plan is a broad-spectrum document that includes clarity of the history of our area and carries forward a look at our future.

This information is provided to the Board of Directors of Apache County Planning and Zoning to use as a reference and subsequent guide as they review and determine outcomes for all land use and development in our area. Our request is simple: that Apache County and Apache County Planning and Zoning recognize our communities, honor our plan, when possible, within the law, and help our residents preserve our current way of life.

## Vernon Area Community Planning Committee

Dave Niehuis	Chairman
Jon Dahl	Vice –Chair; Survey Results Sub-Committee
Tamara Applegate	Co-Secretary; Survey Development Committee
Leslie Foster	Co-Secretary
Blake Haney	Member at Large; Survey Results Sub-Committee
Paula Johnson	Member at Large; Vernon History Sub-Committee
Mel Wilhelm	Member at Large; Vernon History Sub-Committee
Gregg McClendon	Member at Large; Survey Results Sub-Committee
Nick Scienski	Member at Large
Scott Caswell	Member at Large

The Vernon Community Planning Committee (VPC) was formed in 2019 after a series of meetings held at the local Stanford Store. The owner, Jon Dahl, opened his store as a public service on Thursday evenings to allow residents of the area to meet and discuss community issues. As the Vernon Fire Chief, I attended these meetings as an opportunity to address the public and help people understand the fire district services. It was not long before people from all around the area began gathering and discussing the growth issues and community issues we were facing. Along with Jon and myself, Dave Peelman, a man with a drive to help our community, began discussing the possibility of developing a Vernon Community Plan to present to Apache County Planning and Zoning.

That Vernon Planning Committee was formed in May of 2019. I was elected Chair and Dave Peelman, Vice- Chair. We began by reviewing other Apache County Community plans and developing a committee and process. After the basic elements of our community plan were written and reviewed, a community survey was developed. After much discussion and revision, the survey was completed and through the Apache County Development office the survey was mailed to a selected number of property owners and made available online. Unfortunately, this occurred at the same time COVID hit our community and the process was greatly delayed as participation was limited. Before COVID ended, we lost Dave Peelman and several others in our community, which further delayed our process. *To David Peelman and Jim McGrew, we thank you for your work and dedication to this project.*

Here in 2023, the final version of our community plan is complete. This document brings together, as best it can, the diverse and often opposing viewpoints of the residents of all communities within the Vernon area. With an eye cast toward the future, the goal is to provide Apache County Planning and Zoning with an idea of the wishes of the residents. Many want growth and services while many want to restrict growth and services. Knowing that growth is inevitable, we developed a plan to help express our wishes and provide concepts for a controlled growth plan.

Sincerely,

Dave J. Niehuis

Vernon Planning Committee Chair

## Mission Statement

Draft by: Dave Peelman (approved 8/15/2019)

**The Vernon Community Planning Committee** is the advisory and advocacy body designated by the Planning and Zoning Committee of Apache County that is entrusted to:

- **Seek reflect and support** those opinions and ideas of the citizens at-large from the Vernon area; as defined by the boundaries of the Vernon Fire Response Area, that are intended to better ensure the peace, health, safety, prosperity, and liberty as desired by the general consensus of the community at-large.
- **Work cooperatively** with the citizenry within the guidelines that Apache County Comprehensive Plan and Apache County Planning and Zoning Committee may deem appropriate from time to time.
- **Develop objectives, plans, and strategies** with the cooperation of Apache County government and other entities that comport with the Apache County Comprehensive Plan, that will achieve an enduring and practical community plan with the desired quality of life as envisioned and desired by the citizens of the Vernon area.
- **Dissolve and Disband** upon the successful adoption of the Vernon Area Community Plan by the Apache County Board of Supervisors.

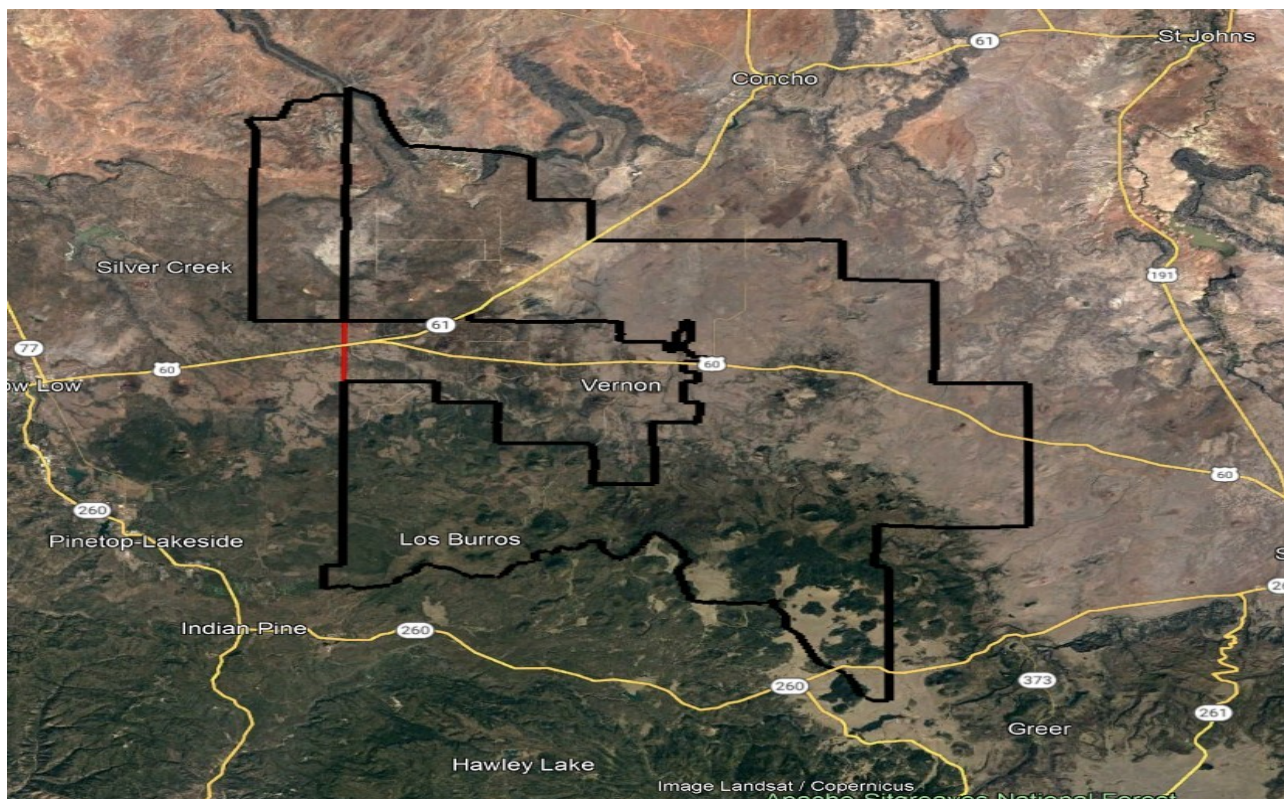
## Regional Setting & Planning Area Map

Draft by: Vernon Planning Committee Chair – Dave J. Niehuis

The Vernon planning area, as defined by the planning committee, sits along the western border in the southern part of Apache County. The center of the Vernon area is approximately where the US-60 enters Apache County from the west and extends north and south of the US-60 approximately 10 miles in both directions. To the east, it extends approximately 18 miles. The Vernon area consists of approximately 300 square miles or 19,200 acres. Ownership of the land includes private property, Arizona State Land Trust and United States National Forest.

The Vernon area consists primarily of forestland and grassland. The elevations run between just over 9,000 feet above sea level down to approximately 5,000 feet. Vegetation in the higher elevations includes ponderosa and pinon pine, spruce-fir, aspen, and oak while in the lower elevations includes juniper and cedar trees. Some of the area is covered in grassland with only a few trees.

The Vernon area is a community by definition, and has an estimated population of 7,526\* as of 2019. This calculation is not reflective of highs and lows that occur with seasonal travel and/or seasonal occupancy.



*\*Formula: As of 10-2019 Apache county has issued - 9559 - 911 addresses. Conducting a sampling of areas both dense and sparse in the area of 568 lots, there were 199 determined to be occupied. This indicates 35% of the available lots are occupied. 35% of the 9559 leaves 3345 lots estimated to be occupied. 3345 was calculated by 2.25 persons for lot, providing an estimate of 7526 residents for the Vernon area.*

## History of the Area

*Draft by: Tamara Applegate*

In August 1875, the first settlers, Don Casimiro Padilla and his family settled in the Mineral Canyon. Their group consisted of about 25 people. Around the turn of the century the Wilhelm brothers, Haight, George, and John settled in the Vernon Valley, as well as Cap Naegle and Dick Gibbons. By 1910 there were about 15 families in the area. A post office was established, and it was decided to come up with a name. Some wanted to adopt the Mexican name for the area, "Mineral", but "Vernon" was the final decision. Most of these people made their living by sheep and cattle ranching.

At first school was held in people's homes. In 1917 George Wilhelm donated land for a schoolhouse. With donated labor and materials, a one-room schoolhouse was soon built which served not only as a school but as a place for church functions, dances, plays, and community meetings. Later on, as the population grew, another room was added. At one point the schoolhouse was the only building in Vernon Valley. Everyone lived on ranches scattered far and wide over the surrounding country.

George and Haight Wilhelm, who owned what is now Vernon town site, decided to divide the land into town blocks so that people might buy it for homes. George owned the land on the east side of the street and Haight owned the land on the west side. Haight donated land to build a church. Lee and Effie Wilhelm, Haight's son and his wife donated land for a community park. The rest of the land was sold to individuals for home sites.

Peaking in the 1920's, the Homestead Rush brought an increase of settlers to Vernon including those displaced by the Mexican Revolution.

At the time, the communities near Vernon were Bannon, Pinon, Concho, Floy, and Hunt. There were 6 post offices and 6 voting precincts in the area. Vernon and Concho are the only 2 towns still in existence.

Starting in the mid 20's through the 30's and for eighteen more years the lumber industry brought great economic prosperity to the Vernon area. The Goodman and Webb sawmills brought many people to the area and employed many locals as well. There were about 5 logging camps in the area at one time. Most of the money was made in logging and ranching, but some tried "dry land" farming as well – the Padilla family grew vegetables here and sold them in Concho.

Nancy Riggs was a midwife in Vernon in the 20's and was the closest thing to a doctor that the area had. Besides that, if anyone needed medical attention they went to McNary.

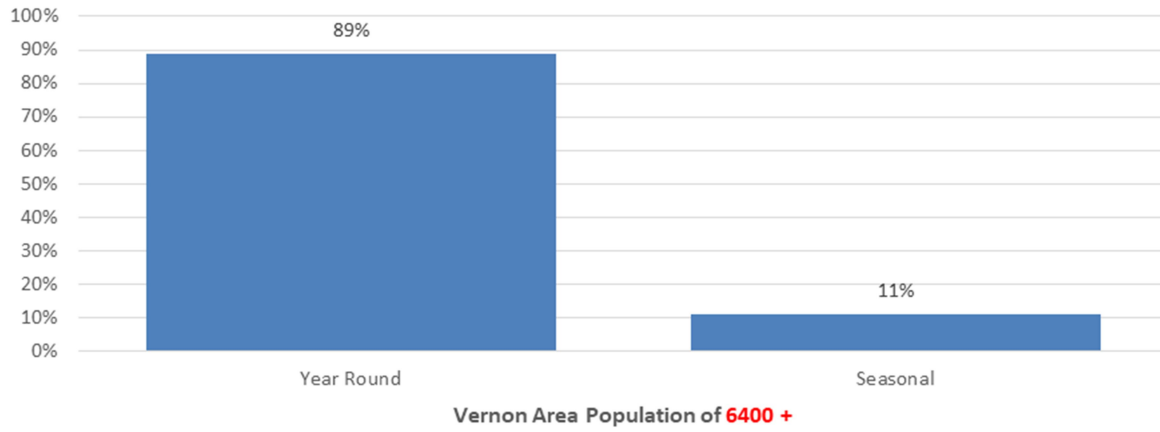
By the 1960's and 1970's the sawmills were gone, and many residents moved on to other areas.

Starting in the 80's and continuing through the 90's outlying neighborhood developments were established, and the Vernon area has continued to grow and develop and now includes neighborhoods such as Timber Knoll, Winchester Trails, The Wilderness, Ojo Bonito, Apache Trails, Eagle Ridge, the Crossroads, the "Y", etc.

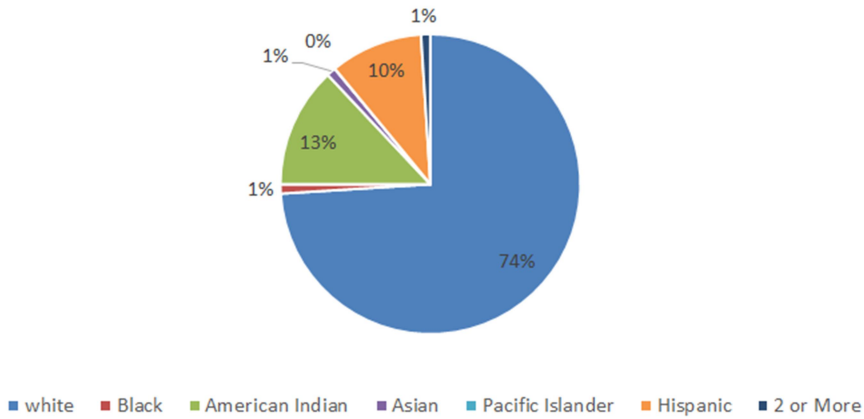
Vernon remains an unincorporated community with its main governance being from Apache County.

## Population Demographics (As of 2023)

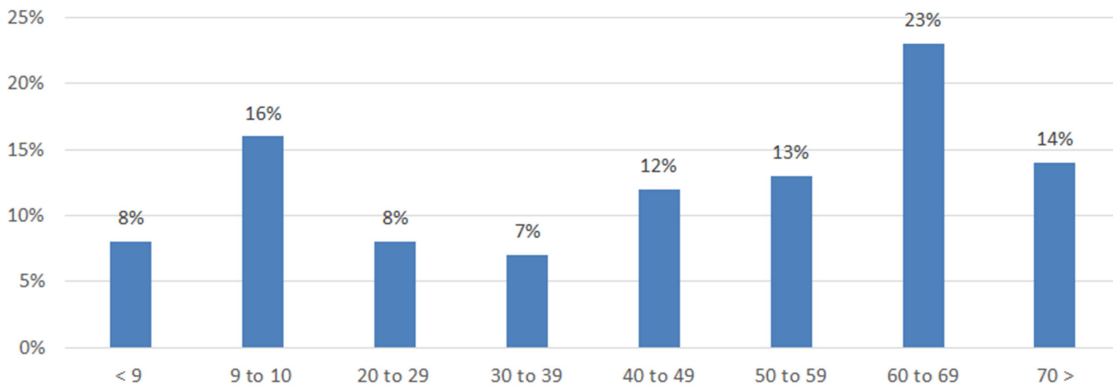
### Population



### Ethnicity Breakdown in Vernon

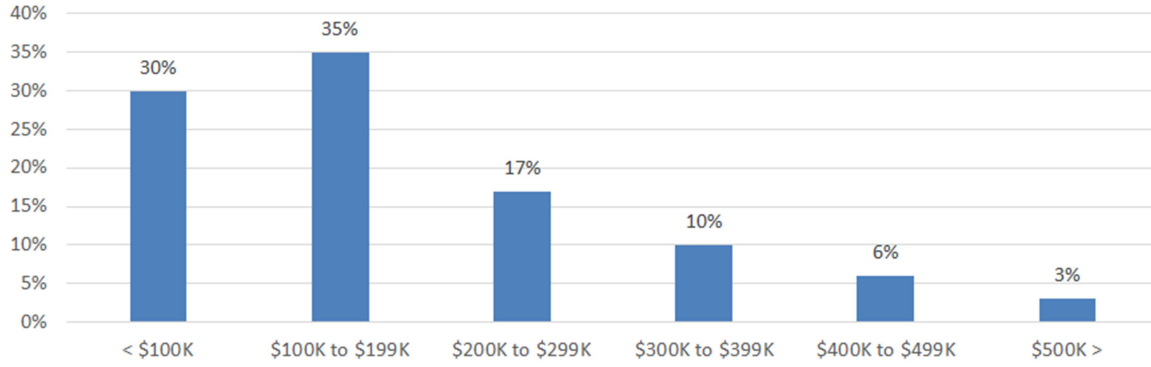


### Age Groups in Vernon Area

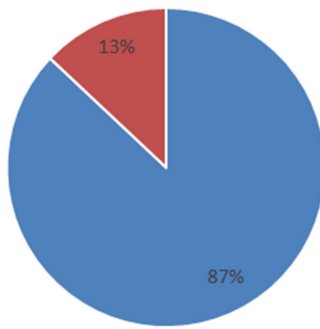


## Housing & Income Demographics (As of 2023)

### Vernon Area Home Values

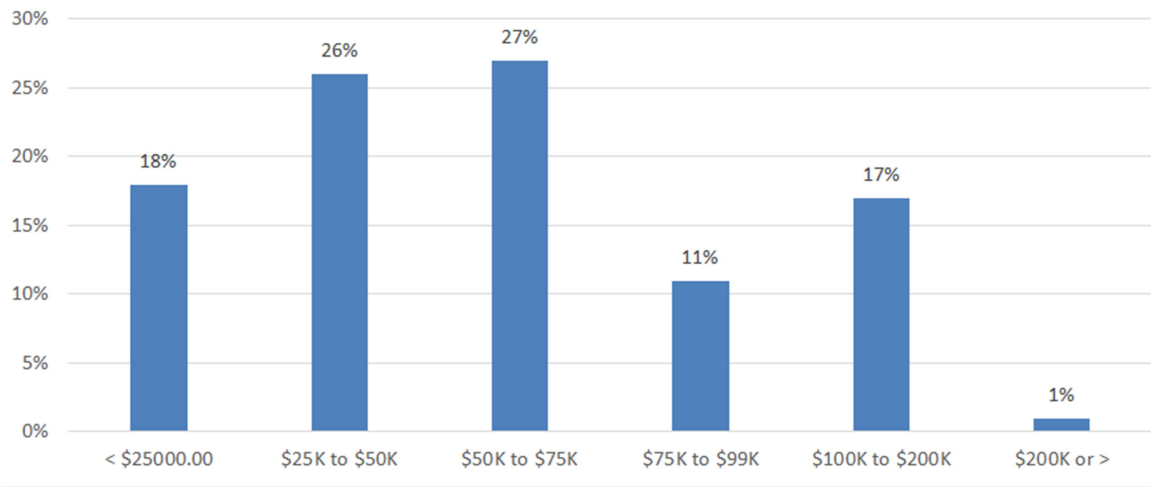


### Owner vs Rental Property in Vernon



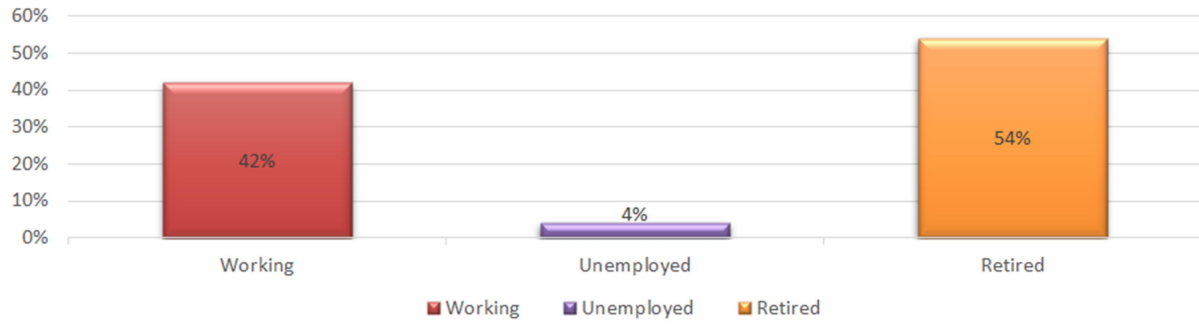
■ Owner ■ Renter

### Vernon Area Mean Income



## Employment Demographics (As of 2023)

### Employment Status in Vernon



## Vernon Community Inventory

### Commercial Development

*Draft by: Nick Scienski*

#### Goals:

1. Vernon area's primary residential and open space character should be maintained.
2. Specific locations are designated for commercial development. These roads are listed under the designations of: Highways, Main Arterial Roads, and Connector Road. Map shown on page 16 showing location of these roads color coded as Black-Highways, Green-Main Arterial Roads, and Red-Connector Roads.
3. Commercial activities are compatible with surrounding land uses in terms of visual appearance, traffic generation, lighting, water and sewer requirements, noise, and air quality impacts.
4. To ensure Goal 2 is achieved the following standards are to be met:
  - a. Nominal impacts on adjacent properties, especially on existing residential properties such as noise, lighting, and traffic.
  - b. The ability to construct and maintain access and egress from dedicated Highways, Main Arterial Roads, or Connector Roads and provide adequate parking on site.
5. Commercial activity should be tailored for the benefit and convenience of local residents with possible employment opportunities
6. There would be a demonstrated need for commercial service.
7. Proposed commercial property designed in a manner harmonious with the area's natural surroundings.

## **Emergency Services**

*Draft by: Gregg D. McClendon*

As the population of Vernon grows, and at the current growth rate, emergency services are an absolute must. The citizens of this community deserve and expect a rapid response from law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services.

### **Fire Services**

Vernon Fire District currently covers 54 square miles. They also cover 406 square miles of emergency service boundary area outside the district's area and currently respond to an average of 33% of calls for service outside of their district. It is the desire of Vernon Fire District to annex the emergency service boundary area into the district coverage area.

### **Emergency Medical Services**

Ambulance Services for the Vernon community are currently provided by ambulances from St. Johns and Springerville. In the near future, Vernon Fire District will be attempting to obtain a COE (Certificate of Need) from the state of Arizona in order to have the right to treat and transport patients in the Vernon community.

### **Law Enforcement**

The Vernon community wishes to increase law enforcement coverage to their area. At this time, law enforcement services are provided to Vernon by the Apache County Sheriff's Office. Vernon citizens have voiced the desire to have a resident deputy for the Vernon area to provide higher visibility, public interactions, and crime prevention of law enforcement.

As the community increases in population, the need to incorporate Vernon into a stand-alone city is an option. This would give Vernon the opportunity to contract with Apache County Sheriff's Office for one or two deputies to permanently be assigned to Vernon which would give the community much better law enforcement coverage and, shorter response times, as deputies would only respond to calls within the Vernon boundaries.

## National Forest & Recreation

*Draft by: Tamara Applegate*

Vernon residents enjoy the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest in their backyard and love the convenience of being close to the beauty and recreational opportunities that a national forest provides. In addition, the watershed of this forest supports irrigation needs for some residents. Also, some residents rely on the ability to obtain firewood from the forest for heating their homes during the winter.

However, there are some drawbacks to being close to a national forest. As the Vernon area population grows, there is increasing traffic to use the forest for recreation. Visitors to the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest use a couple of routes that take them through Vernon. The main one is through Vernon/McNary Road (3140) which runs from Highway 60 south through the main part of Vernon Township. There are two additional routes through Vernon using ACR 3148 to FR 44 and ACR 3123 from US 60 to FR 117.

Given our location, there is some inherent risk of wildfires to the Vernon Community. There are a few smaller communities within the forest area that are at greatest risk comparatively. Many agencies work together to manage the forest and there are sometimes grants available to owners to use to clear portions of their land to reduce the risk of fire. Local prescribed burns also help prevent wildfires, but the smoke from these fires occasionally affects the air quality of the Vernon Community.

Many Vernon homes enjoy the shade and beauty of nearby trees, but education about taking care of such properties using fire-wise principles and following Fire Restriction Stages is important to maintain what we have. We also can use community plans, zoning ordinances, and building codes to create the protection that we need.

The Apache Sitgreaves National Forest is valuable to the Vernon Community. The availability and usage of the forest contributes to sustaining our lifestyles and traditions.

## Public Education

*Draft by: Paula Johnson*

Public education in the Vernon area has always been important to those living here. Even though the community of Vernon itself is small, there are many outlying areas where children live and need access to education. What was once a tiny; two-room schoolhouse has grown, just like the community, and is now a much bigger and better school. The school that is now used was built in 2003 and will comfortably accommodate around 200 students.

Vernon Elementary School currently provides pre-school through 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. The average classroom size is 16 and some classrooms are two grades combined. The average enrollment for the past 5 years is about 120 students. The enrollment for the upcoming 2023-2024 year is 123 so far. There are 8 full-time teachers, as well as 6 aides, 4 bus drivers, 2 cafeteria workers, 2 custodians, 1 special education teacher, 1 reading intervention/instructional coach, 3 administration staff, 1 principal, and 1 superintendent. There is also a governing board consisting of 5 local residents that are elected and volunteer their time for the benefit of the school. Vernon Elementary School is the only school in the Vernon School District.

Children are bussed by Vernon Elementary School to Show Low High School when they finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade. If high school students choose to attend Round Valley High School and there are 3 or more enrolled from the Vernon area, Round Valley will provide transportation to those students.

If the growth in the Vernon area continues, there may someday be a need to increase the number of staff or even the size of the school, but for now, the Vernon Elementary School seems to be adequate for the needs of the Vernon area children.

## Outdoor Lighting & Signs

*Draft by: Blake Haney*

As a rural community, Vernon would like to preserve its “dark skies” status. There are already many road hazards at night on the highway including wildlife crossing roads and other drivers. Responsible lighting along our roadsides is imperative to safe driving conditions.

All outdoor lighting shall comply with the Apache County Zoning Ordinance.

The Vernon area would like all its off-premises roadside signs to comply with the provisions of the Apache County Sign Ordinance as follows....

1. Preservation of a "dark sky" may be accomplished by facing lighting in a downward direction.
2. Permits are required for illuminated signs to avoid unshielded light pollution
3. Shaded or signage that does not generate glare are preferred in residential areas
4. Neither the direct nor the reflected light from primary light sources shall be visible or create a traffic hazard to operators of motor vehicles on any public thoroughfares or approaches to any public thoroughfare as determined by Apache County Engineering Department.
5. No exposed or reflective type bulbs or incandescent lamps which exceed 36 watts shall be used on the surface of the sign
6. Only indirect or internal illumination shall be used for letter faces and logos

## Vernon Road Structure & Population Density

Draft by: Leslie Foster

Vernon has two main highways, US 60 and SR 61 that run through it east to west between the communities of Show Low, Springerville and Concho, Arizona. Though these two main highway roads are located within Apache County, the provision for their care and maintenance is handled by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT.)

Off these two main corridor highway roads, there are many roads leading to and from Vernon, as listed in the following chart (*as of September 2023*). **Some** of these Main Arterial and Connector Roads are maintained by Apache County and paid for from Arizona HURF Distributions.

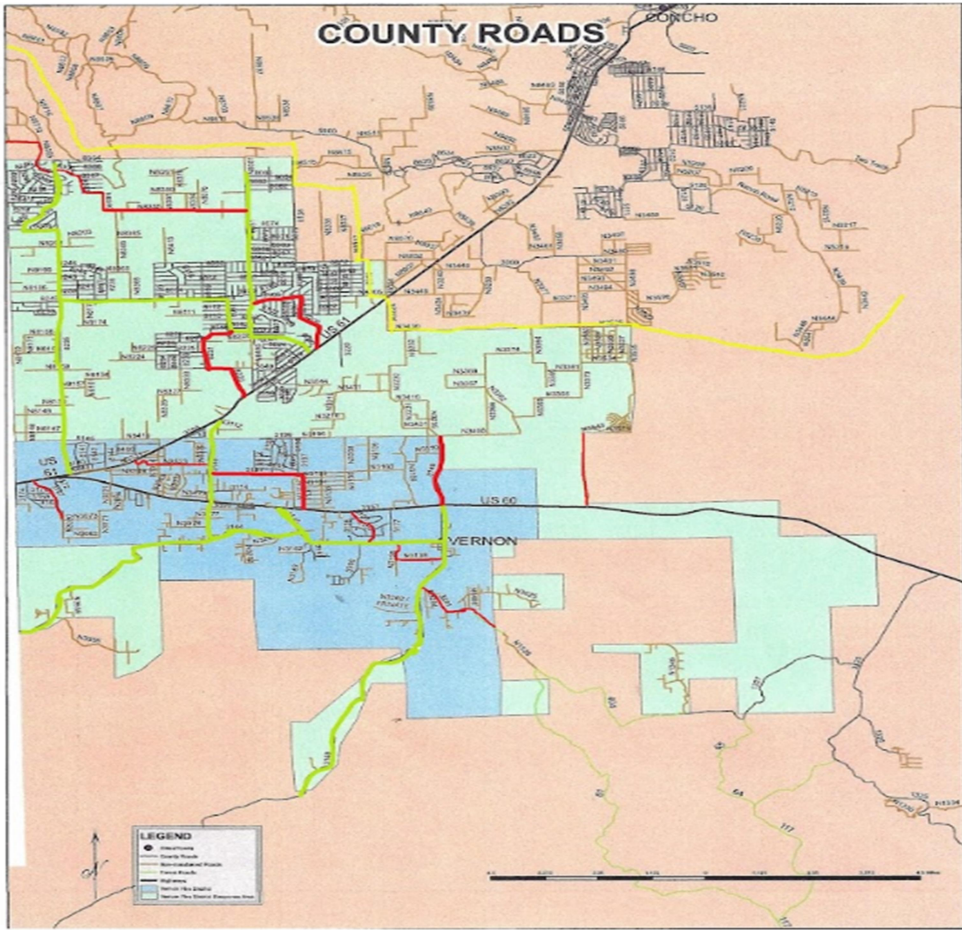
Main Corridor Highways (2)	Main Arterial Roads (14)	Connector Roads (28)	Local Roads
US 60	"ACR" - 3140, 3144, 3145, 3148, 8032, 8050, 8053, 8116, 8256, 8260, 8061	"ACR" – 3137, N3139, 3149, 3151, 3167, 3187, 3261, 3323, N3324, N3326, 3398, N3540, 8061, 8088, 8097, 8103, 8105, 8206, 8220, 8221, 8285, N8285, 8355	Country Roads
SR 61	Partial "ACR" – 8112, 8093	Partial "ACR" – N3138, 8300, 8303, 8310, 8390	Non-Maintained Roads

The image below shows a birds-eye view of our current roads and the funding for how they are maintained. Builders and businesses looking to settle or build along the two main corridors (for ease of access), should note that presently there are minimal turning lanes off either US HWY 60 or the SR 61, nor are there passing lanes. When looking to build or operate a business located off the main corridor in Vernon, we would ask that the area be studied and then work with community members, Apache County Engineering, and Arizona Department of Transportation to evaluate the safety of drivers exiting main highways, to enter business operations safely. The posted highway speed limit is presently 55 – 65 mph.

Our community is approximately made up of 7526+ residents, 89% of whom live here year-round. The percentage of part-time residents is 11%. A recent survey of our area, shows that 54% of our community are retirees, and 42% are actively working employees. Vernon Elementary School, a K through 8<sup>th</sup> school, operates two school buses regularly.

On any given day, our many Vernon roads, and local highways are being traveled by those headed into town for shopping, recreation, medical appointments, students getting transported to and from school, etc. As our community grows, we anticipate an even greater need in our area for increased snowplowing during the fall/winter months and increased regular road maintenance during the spring/summer months.

Vernon Fire District Main Arteries and Connector Roads (Map)



## Water Resources & Wastewater

Draft by: Jon Dahl

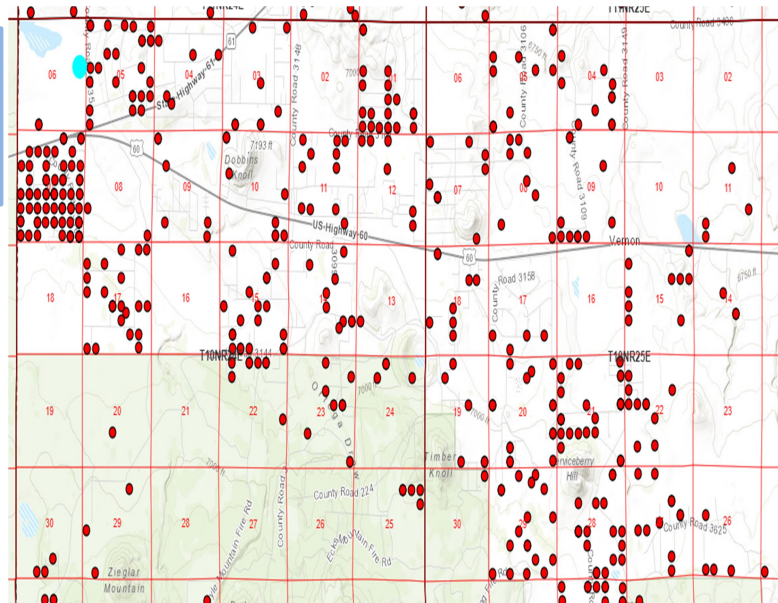
### WATER SOURCES for human consumption

Groundwater wells are the only source of water used for human consumption in the Vernon area, and there are hundreds of privately owned groundwater wells used for human consumption in the Vernon area.

**PUBLIC WATER SYSTEMS** are used to provide drinking water to the public in areas that have been approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission, The Arizona Department of Water Resources, and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. There are two types of public water systems in the Vernon Area.

- 1 **Community Water Systems (CWS)** refers to any water system that serves 15 or more service connections (also known as “hook-ups”) used by year-round residents, or that serves 25 or more year-round residents who use water for drinking, cooking, bathing, and cleaning. A CWS may also serve all the businesses and other water users within its boundaries.
- 2 **Non-Community Water Systems (NCWS)** refers to any Public Water System that serves the public on a transient, temporary, or seasonal basis. This could include small businesses, churches, schools, etc.

This image shows the Groundwater wells in the Vernon area (as of 2023)



### WATER SOURCES for agricultural and animals

Surface water belongs to the public and is subject to appropriation and beneficial use (ARS § 45-141). Surface waters include all water flowing through streams, canyons, ravines, springs, natural channels or definite underground channels, or water contained in lakes or ponds, whether perennial or intermittent or because of flood, waste, or surplus water. Surface water also comes through as drainage from culverts and ditches.

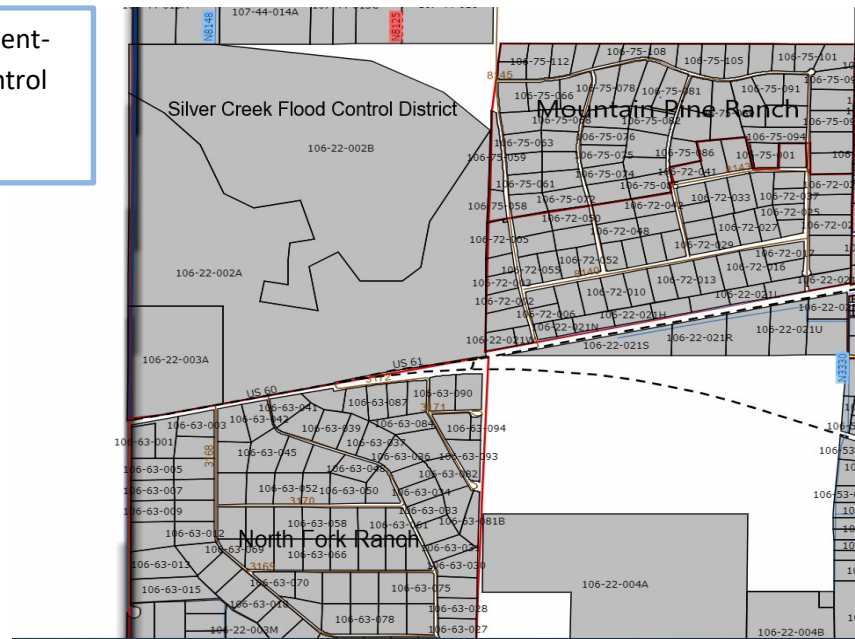
Springs exist in Vernon and there are some private springs used for domestic consumption, mostly by individual families (i.e., Sepulveda Spring).

Irrigation districts in the Vernon area have been established for many years. Of the few, the primary downstream users of irrigation water are the Silver Creek Irrigation District. See link <https://www.scidaz.com>

Rainwater is not regulated and is available for collection and use on private property.

Flood Control Districts have been established by the Apache County Engineering Department and must be maintained as designed and implemented to prevent unnecessary flooding. There are only a few flood control districts in Vernon with the primary district being Silver Creek Flood Control and Irrigation District (see picture) Contact is Bailey Hesson, Flood Plain Engineering-GIS Phone 928-337-7597. Also refer to <https://navajocountyaz.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Flood-Control/Obtaining-Flood-Hazard-Information>

This image shows the present-day Silver Creek Flood Control District (as of 2023)



## WASTEWATER

The main wastewater system in the Vernon area is the conventional decentralized on-site wastewater treatment system which consists of a septic tank and a trench or bed subsurface wastewater infiltration system, known as a drain field. This system is typically installed at a single-family home or small business. There are no point-source permitted wastewater systems which discharge wastewater to surface water in the Vernon area.

The regulatory authority for engineering and construction of septic systems is the Apache County Environmental Services Division, Michael Madrid, registered sanitarian, P: 928-337-7640.

## **WATER SOURCES AND WASTEWATER CONCERNS**

Flooding occurs in flat/low-lying areas with inadequate drainage. It is expected that flooded areas will have a negative effect on the operation of septic systems. Flooding may also inundate wells, causing contamination with bacteria and wastewater from flooded septic systems. Flooding may also cause an increase in rodent and insect infestation in these areas. High density parcel development can result in septic systems and groundwater well contamination over time. Some parcels and developments have been built in areas where small parcel size brings homes into areas where septic systems are limited in size and capacity. Over-drafting of aquifers can result in some wells being shut down because the water level in neighboring wells drops below the intake of the well.

**We request that Apache County officials carefully consider the implications of development on the local environment and take these risks into consideration.**

## Vernon Area Community Risk Assessment

*Draft by: Vernon Planning Committee Chair – Dave J. Niehuis*

### **1. Vernon Communities Definition:**

Vernon communities are neither townships nor cities. They are a series of residential neighborhoods and developed areas in southwestern Apache County, Arizona. The area considered the Vernon Communities encompasses nearly 400 square miles. The rough outline of the area is 22 miles east to west and 24 miles north to south with the Apache County/Navajo County line being the western edge. The southern portion of the Vernon area is located in a large portion of the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest. The National Forest is comprised mostly of ponderosa pine forest and ranges in elevation from 6,000 feet to 11,000 feet. The Vernon area continues north into pinion and juniper vegetation and evolves in high plains grasses and sparse cedar trees dropping to elevations of 5,000 feet. The Vernon Community was named by brothers George and Haight Wilhelm who were early settlers of the area and the original township organizers who donated land for the park, school, and church. They named their town, Vernon, after George Washington's Mount Vernon.

Today the residential areas of the Vernon Communities include Vernon, Stanford, Hillcrest, Windmill, Show Low Pines, Ojo Bonito, North Fork, Mountain Pine Ranch, Winchester Trails, Naegle Ranch, Red Cabin Ranch, Whiting Homestead, and Greens Peak Hideaway, along with several small areas of development that are yet unnamed or inhabited. Some of these residential areas are densely populated, but most are sparsely populated, and others are strictly recreation/vacation homes and lots. Many of these areas are land tract developments that were developed at minimum levels, long before modern rules and restrictions existed. Some development tracts were wildcat developments that were never completed. Yet lots were sold, and the plot maps were recorded despite terrain, utility, and access/egress issues. Some of these developments were actually part of large land fraud schemes where lots were sold to multiple buyers, and some were even uninhabitable yet sold many times. Given these factors, several safety and risk factors are present for people who live here today.

### **2. Access and egress:**

Access and egress are major concerns for many of the Vernon Communities. Highway US 60 is the main highway into the Vernon Communities and transverses the area from east to west. State Route 61 bifurcates from US 60 and runs northeast to Concho and St Johns at the western end of US 60. The connector roads and many of the surface roads in the Vernon Communities are maintained by Apache County and are designated with 4-digit numbers, typically 3000 and 8000 series numbers. However, the majority of surface roads are not maintained by Apache County and the 4-digit numbers are preceded by the designation of "N "which stands for non-maintained road. These non-maintained roads are greatly affected by the weather and located at elevations from 6,000 feet to 11,000 feet and are subject to snow and rain in great quantities. With no maintenance or very limited maintenance, many of these roads are impassable without 4-wheel drive, and some of these roads become impassable in certain weather conditions.

### **3. Flooding and Weather:**

People of the Vernon Communities also have to endure serious cold snaps, flooding, and significant wind conditions. The winter season can see temperatures as low as 15 -20 below zero. There are also strong winds. Vernon Communities have recorded winds of 90 miles per hour sustained over 3 minutes. However, 30 mph winds are more common, with gusts of 50 mph. Combine these 2 elements, cold temps and winds, and conditions become extreme. This can occur once or twice each winter.

Another issue is mountain rain and summer monsoon activity. Often rainstorms in the mountains result in water flowing through creeks and ravines as the runoff from a mountain storm fills the dry ravines and creek beds. These waters can result in flooding conditions. The mountain rains can occur anytime of the year with late spring being particularly difficult if the rains occur when there is still snow on the ground. The result is rain and snowmelt occurring together which increases the chance of flooding. However, the greatest flooding risk is the summer monsoon season. These rains can be large in volume and occur miles away in the mountains, and the runoff floods the lowlands where most of the settlements are. The sheer volume of water from a single storm can raise the level of nearby White Mountain Lake or in recent events fill several small dry lakes in the area. The risk from flooding is significant in some areas and people who have purchased land in flood zones and at the base of hills and ravines are more likely to have issues unlike those who have built on high ground or have water diversion trenches, culverts, and dams in place.

These weather extremes also affect the power grid and water systems which in turn can cause loss of loss of electricity to homes. Those who rely on electricity to power water pumps and heating devices can be forced to live without those items until downed power poles and equipment can be repaired. These conditions present difficulty for any resident without water or electricity but this really presents problems for someone in ill health. This presents the community with a need for medical services.

### **4. Medical Emergencies and Transport:**

Medical emergencies and emergency transportation are affected by these weather extremes and the unmaintained roadways. The Vernon Fire District has 4-wheel drive vehicles and can get through extreme conditions most of the time. However, even the most capable machines can be halted if the conditions are too extreme. Most of the local ambulances are 4-wheel drive vehicles as well, but they are located in surrounding communities and take a minimum of 30 minutes to respond. There are also air transports in the area if ground units cannot get to someone, but only if the weather allows the helicopters to fly. These situations of isolation are extremely rare but high elevations and rough terrain can present problems to anyone with medical issues; including the elderly, they should take these things into consideration when traveling or living in high elevations. Also a consideration is the lower oxygen content of the air (16% vs 21% at sea level). This lower level increases the risk for anyone suffering from heart or lung issues, and greatly impacts some people's ability to breathe and function normally while living here.

## **5. Medical Services:**

Another issue for residents of the Vernon area is medical services and hospitals. Hospitals are rated by service levels. There are 2 hospitals in the area. However both hospitals in the White Mountains are rated at level 2 or lower. This means that for certain injuries or illnesses, patients will need to be airlifted to a level 1 facility in the Phoenix area, Flagstaff, or Albuquerque, New Mexico, resulting in considerable expense and travel for family members. Also, the area has great difficulty receiving home health services and or medical supplies. People who need nursing or medical supplies provided to them at home find these services difficult to find. The roads, distance, and limited number of providers is an issue. Additionally available doctors and open appointments to see doctors can also be an issue. Many people, especially those with specific medical issues, may need to travel to larger communities to receive care.

## **6. Building Fires:**

The risk of fire varies in each developed area within the Vernon communities. Many factors affect the risk: elevation, terrain, wind, vegetation types, vegetation amounts, maintenance and upkeep of property, types of structures, and heating sources. Fire risk is also affected by building types and designs as well as building conditions and building materials. The Vernon community has million-dollar homes that have been built with the finest materials and craftsmanship available following all building codes and requirements. There are also buildings that have been constructed of pallets and discarded debris of all types. Often assembled by unskilled and untrained individuals following no building codes or standard rules of construction. Obviously, the buildings that follow approved methods of building and use premium materials and appliances have a lower risk of fire than those that don't.

With land being less expensive in the area, many people buy land and set up Recreation Vehicles (RVs) to stay in. Some of these RVs are old units that are driven or towed back to the properties and set up and left on the property to be used only when the owners are visiting. Also, in many cases RVs are set up and used as permanent dwellings. Many of these RVs have been incorporated into permanent structures with additions or add-ons. Some of these RV/homes are well built and maintained, while others are subject to the weather and the rodent population in the area. This presents potential problems for appliances and heating systems which then fail and can result in a fire. Even if these RV appliances and heating systems receive good maintenance, many of these appliances and heating units are designed for short term use and over time consistent use of these units can increase the risk of failure and/or fire.

Most homes and buildings in the Vernon area have wood burning stoves, pellet stoves or gas-operated stoves installed for heat. Even some RV based structures have been modified to be heated with these types of stoves. Unfortunately, with any open flame heating system there can be a risk of fire if the equipment malfunctions or the operator makes an error. Also, there is the potential of chimney fires from their lack of maintenance and storage issues of flammable materials are also considerations that can at times contribute to starting of fires. Due to the high cost of alternative and/or cleaner heating sources, open flame heaters are more widely used in colder climates than in warmer areas, and these also pose a fire risk.

Another factor that affects building or property fire risk is living conditions. Obviously a cleaner and well-maintained home and property has less risk of fire than homes and properties that are cluttered or in extreme cases filled with items and flammable materials items such as paper, wood, cardboard and chemical containers. For these residents, the risk of fire rises exponentially.

Additional fire risk can come from electricity systems. Examples include conventional grid systems vs solar systems or generators. Many properties “Off Grid” use solar systems which are installed by owners or non-professionals. This presents situations where those systems can fail and result in fires. Batteries and battery storage also contribute to the dangers of a building fire and these fires present additional dangers of toxicity and extinguishment depending on the amount and type used. Gasoline, diesel, or propane fired generators are also found in use in the area and present additional possibilities. Again, equipment failure due to poor maintenance and/or operator error is potential issues that may lead to building or property fires.

## **7. Wildfires:**

Wildfire is a risk in areas within the Vernon Community; however, the risk varies with each area. The homes built in the higher elevations (mountainous areas with ponderosa pine trees) are at risk of wildfire extending beyond the National Forest. However, historically, the large forest fires that have occurred in the White Mountains in the past 20 years have caused very limited, if any damage, to residences. This is due to modern firefighting practices, fuels mitigation programs, and livestock grazing by ranchers which help control ladder fuel growth. Over the past 10 years, the United States National Forest Service Firefighters have cleared thousands of acres with thinning projects, controlled burns, and fire management. Many of their prevention efforts have occurred near Vernon Communities, along the northern border of the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest. These hazard fuel mitigation efforts have greatly reduced the risk of wildfire for the properties located in or near the forest.

Travelling north through the Vernon Communities areas, changes in both elevation and vegetation occur, and the further north you go, the vegetation thins, eventually turning into grasslands with sparse trees. There are still areas north of the forest and at the lower elevations that are densely forested, but rather than ponderosa pines, the forested areas change to pinion and juniper trees. Hazard Fuel Mitigation efforts by Apache County and the Vernon Fire District have been effective in reducing hazard fuels. Even so, in these dense areas of vegetation many properties have been treated, cleaned, and cleared to nationally accepted “Fire Wise Standards”. These properties have a considerably lower risk of fire than those that remain untreated. Unfortunately, not all people who reside in the Vernon communities recognize the value of hazard fuel reduction and their properties remain overgrown and at risk of fire.

Conversely, several communities and developments in the Vernon area, including Vernon proper, are essentially urban neighborhoods where the properties are at no more risk than urban communities or neighborhoods in nearby cities. These areas contain varieties of vegetation and shrubbery but are definitely less dense than forested areas. The decorative vegetation is usually spaced far enough apart and healthy enough to prevent significant rapid spread of a fire. Some of these areas also have fire

hydrants or ample water tanks to assist the local fire district in any firefighting activities. Unfortunately, not all developments or communities have the ability or resident density to afford these water systems. In these areas the local fire district must bring water with them to fight fires.

#### **8. Fire Prevention:**

Obviously, total fire prevention is never possible with lightning, storms, and a myriad of other causes of fire. However, a requirement of living in the Vernon communities is diligent property maintenance and responsible hazard fuel reduction. Both heavy fuels (i.e., trees) and light fuels (i.e., grasses shrubs and new tree growth) must be maintained. The processes for hazard fuel reduction can be costly and can impact others with noise and smoke, but these efforts are important for forest health and the safety for all who live here. Both Arizona State and US federal grant programs are available, and many have been utilized in the communities to help homeowners to complete projects and defer costs.

#### **Conclusion:**

The Vernon communities have benefited from local fire and medical response systems that include firefighters and ambulance responses from several communities nearby including firefighter responses from the Arizona State Department of Forestry and the USFS Fire Fighters. To date, there is no record in the Vernon community of anyone losing a home to a wildfire in the forest. Additionally, there are no records of a home being lost to a fire that spread from an adjacent property. Resources in the area have been ample and capable of holding vegetation, debris, and structure fires to a limit that prevents the spread of fire to properties near the properties of origin. However, if the people who live here and those who come here for recreation do not follow basic safety and prevention methods, fire can occur.

As with all things rural, the more rural the properties are, the more time it takes to respond. Since a large portion of the Vernon area is rural, one needs to understand and consider all factors before moving into this area; especially those people who either have or live with loved ones who have medical or mobility issues. The local fire district currently responds to all emergencies in the Vernon area from station 25 located in Vernon proper. As the community grows and the population shifts, the need for services is shifting westward, and the fire district has plans for additional locations of responders as the need arises. Regardless of location, the Vernon communities are, for many, a beautiful place to live. However, in this area, the weather, the distances from service, and other factors mentioned can present difficulties for some people, as not everyone's situation is suited to live the rural area lifestyle.

**Community Survey Results & Summary**  
**Vernon 2022 Survey**  
*(On-Line and Mail- In Results)*

The top three responses to each question has been calculated, and converted into percentage. Not everyone who completed a survey answered each question; this is why some of the reply numbers are not all the same.

**Community Satisfaction:**

A. What are the three items that best describe what you like **most** about the Vernon area?

1. The Area	<i>(226 Answered)</i>	45%
2. The Community	<i>(210 Answered)</i>	43%
3. Location	<i>(202 Answered)</i>	35%

B. What are the three items that best describe what you like **least** about the Vernon area? **NEED to double check with Gregg why the double topic %?**

1. Road Maintenance/Safety	<i>(206 Answered)</i>	34%
2. Community Resources	<i>(167 Answered)</i>	24%
3. Road Maintenance/Safety	<i>(146 Answered)</i>	33%

C. What do you consider being the three most important issues currently facing the Vernon area? **NEED to double check with Gregg why the double topic %?**

1. Area's Future	<i>(197 Answered)</i>	31%
2. Growth & Development	<i>(165 Answered)</i>	32%
3. Growth & Development	<i>(139 Answered)</i>	37%

A. Are you satisfied with the current mix of business, agricultural and residential development?

Yes – 69%	No – 31%	<i>(233 Answered)</i>
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Do you feel the Vernon area needs a community zoning plan?

Yes – 66%	No – 34%	<i>(227 Answered)</i>
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**Scale for below: 1 – Not Satisfied to 4 – Extremely Satisfied**

B. How important is the surrounding natural environment to the quality of life?

1 = 0.50%      2 = 3%      3 = 16%      4 = 81%      (236 Answered)

C. Satisfaction with the County Enforcement of the following:

a- Yard Clean-up/Waste regulations:

1 = 32%      2 = 24%      3 = 27%      4 = 18%      (234 Answered)

b- Noise Ordinances:

1 = 13%      2 = 19%      3 = 40%      4 = 27%      (230 Answered)

c. Shooting of guns in private areas:

1 = 12%      2 = 20%      3 = 34%      4 = 34%      (231 Answered)

d- Traffic Laws

1 = 19%      2 = 21%      3 = 30%      4 = 31%      (235 Answered)

e- Septic Rule enforcement

1 = 8%      2 = 15%      3 = 41%      4 = 36%      (226 Answered)

f- Domestic Animal Control

1 = 32 %      2 = 24%      3 = 25%      4 = 19%      (230 Answered)

A) Are you satisfied with the emergency response for the Vernon area?

a- Fire / Medical:

1 = 10%    2 = 15%    3 = 36%    4 = 39%    (231 Answered)

b- Ambulance:

1 = 14%    2 = 24%    3 = 36%    4 = 26%    (229 Answered)

c- Law Enforcement:

1 = 24%    2 = 30%    3 = 27%    4 = 19%    (226 Answered)

### Quality of Life:

A) Maintaining zoning for agricultural and open space:

1 = 3% 2 = 6% 3 = 14% 4 = 77% (235 Answered)

B) Creation of zoning to encourage residential development to particular areas:

1 = 13% 2 = 14% 3 = 27% 4 = 45% (233 Answered)

C) Creation of zoning to encourage business development to particular areas:

1 = 14% 2 = 15% 3 = 20% 4 = 51% (235 Answered)

D) Increased business development for residents:

1 = 35% 2 = 24% 3 = 16% 4 = 25% (234 Answered)

E) Development of a fire hazard reduction strategy:

1 = 2% 2 = 10% 3 = 20% 4 = 63% (234 Answered)

F) Importance of protecting our groundwater & aquifer supply:

1 = 2% 2 = 3% 3 = 10% 4 = 85% (237 Answered)

G) Importance of maintaining dark skies:

1 = 3% 2 = 6% 3 = 14% 4 = 76% (231 Answered)

H) Importance of maintaining air quality:

1 = 3% 2 = 4% 3 = 10% 4 = 83% (237 Answered)

### Future Development:

A) Development of more regional transportation options:

1 = 37% 2 = 27% 3 = 25% 4 = 11% (236 Answered)

B) How important do you feel tourism is to the economic well-being to Vernon?

1 = 54% 2 = 30% 3 = 9% 4 = 7% (237 Answered)

C) Interested in creating a regional water user district:

Yes 33% No 67% (226 Answered)

D) Are you aware of the CC&R's that apply on your property?

Yes 76%      No 24%      (231 Answered)

E) How important is it that CC&R's are enforced?

1 = 22%    2 = 21%    3 = 27%    4 = 31%    (229 Answered)

F) How important is protecting livestock?

1 = 5%      2 = 7%      3 = 25%      4 = 63%      (235 Answered)

G) How important is the maintenance of diversity of wildlife?

1 = 3%      2 = 4%      3 = 13%      4 = 81%      (236 Answered)

H) Importance of having light industry?

1 – 45%    2 = 22%    3 = 20%    4 = 14%    (233 Answered)

Type of light industry:

Small Services	51%
None	14%
Growth & Services	16%
Farmers Market	8%

What specific services or facilities would you support?

Services	60%
Utilities	7%
Community Center	4%
Emergency Services	8%
Growth & Development	6%
Misc.	15%

How satisfied are you with your current mail service?

1 = 15%    2 = 14%    3 = 28%    4 = 44%    (229 Answered)

How important is it to develop a better informal communications method?

1 = 5%      2 = 13%      3 = 28%      4 = 54%      (236 Answered)

Would you be willing to pay for road improvements with a surcharge for not maintained roads?

1 = 47%    2 = 18%    3 = 24%    4 = 12%    (217 Answered)

**Year born:**

1950-1959 36%                      1960-1969 29%                      1940-1949 13%

**Years owned property:**

1-10 years 62%                      11-20 years 18%                      21-30 years 16%

**Where do you work?**

Other            66%

Show Low      14%

Vernon          12%

Misc.            8%

(209 Answered)

**Number of people in household?**

Over 18 years of age 52%                      Under 18 years of age 48%

Male 39%                                      Female 61%                      (224 Answered)

**Employment status:**

Retired 54%    Full time 31%    Part time 11%    Unemployed 4%    (229 Answered)

**School-age children?**

No 76%    Yes 24%    (255 Answered)

Elementary 9%    Vernon 4%    High School 4%    Home school 7%

**Do you live in Vernon?**

All year round 89%    Seasonal 11%    (232 Answered)

**Comments on Survey Results:**

The general consensus based upon the survey is that the community desires additional services.

1 - Emergency Services (Law Enforcement is the predominant concern); Fire and Medical are acceptable at this time.

2 – Better road maintenance with expansion to provide more maintained roadways.

**Comments on Survey Results (*continued...*)**

3 – More regional services, small services, growth and services and more public transportation options.

Unfortunately, all of these public desires come with a price tag. In order to increase, improve, or provide most of these services, Apache County requires more funding. The only way that they can offer better services is with growth and tax increases. To increase a tax base for roads, there would or could be a service station along a major thoroughfare.

A major issue with increasing the current property tax base is the Apache County Tax Assessor and the lack of properly assessing property values.

It is in the best interest of Vernon to establish guidelines on what we want, and where we would want it. That is the purpose of this committee. It is our hope that the county will review our plan and adhere to our community's desires within it.

## Public Meetings

In the course of preparing a Vernon Community Plan, the Vernon Planning Committee has conducted 28 public meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to be transparent about the planning process and to get public comment on various issues being addressed. All agendas for these meetings were posted on our Facebook page – Vernon Community Plan Committee and at various locations including the Stanford General Store, the United States Post Office in Vernon, and the Vernon Public Library at least 24 hours prior to the meetings. Meeting dates were also available on the Vernon Community Calendar and the Vernon Library Calendar which was also available on the library's website.

Initially all meetings were held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month at 5:30 pm in the Vernon Public Library's Community Room.

First Meeting was held on June 20, 2019

Second Meeting was held on July 18, 2019

Third Meeting was held on August 15, 2019

Fourth Meeting was held on September 19, 2019

Fifth Meeting was held on October 17, 2019

Sixth Meeting was held on November 21, 2019

*I think December meeting was cancelled for holidays? – Please confirm with Jim's notes.*

Seventh Meeting was held on January 16, 2020

Eighth Meeting was held on February 20, 2020

Ninth Meeting was held on March 19, 2020

-----COVID 19 Pandemic-----

Vernon Planning Committee then switched meetings dates and times, but all continued to be held in the Vernon Library Community Room.

Tenth Meeting was held on Tuesday, April 21, 2021 at 5:00 pm

Eleventh Meeting was held Wednesday, May 20, 2021 at 5:30 pm

Twelfth Meeting was held Wednesday, June 24, 2021 at 5:30 pm

Thirteenth Meeting was held February 3, 2022

Fourteenth Meeting was held March 17, 2022

When we started up again, meetings continued on Thursdays at 5:30 pm in the same location with some variations of days, which are noted.

Fifteenth Meeting was held April 21, 2022

Sixteenth Meeting was held May 19, 2022

Seventeenth Meeting was held June 16, 2022

Eighteenth Meeting was held July 21, 2022

August 2022 Meeting was cancelled.

Nineteenth Meeting was held September 15, 2022

Twentieth Meeting was held October 27, 2022

Twenty-First Meeting was held November 17, 2022

January and February 2023 Meetings were cancelled.

Twenty-Second Meeting was held Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Twenty-Third Meeting was held Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Twenty-Fourth Meeting was held Tuesday, April 18, 2023

Twenty-Fifth Meeting was held Tuesday, May 23, 2023

*JUNE MEETING CANCELLED (date that sections were due – I don't think we were ready)*

Twenty-Sixth Meeting was held Tuesday, July 18, 2023

Twenty-Seventh Meeting was held Tuesday, August 15, 2023

Twenty-Eighth Meeting was held Tuesday, September 19, 2023

## Vernon Area Community Plan Summary

1. Preserve our current lifestyle.
2. Protect our natural resources.
  - a. Manage the use of water and wastewater
  - b. Ensure our ground water is not contaminated
  - c. Conserve our natural landscape with attention to historical restoration
3. Limit growth and development:
  - a. Reduce land splits to ensure open space.
  - b. Restrict large land development and prevent wildcat land development.
  - c. Maintain our agricultural base within our communities.
4. Ensure development does include:
  - a. Proper road and parking.
  - b. Road building and maintenance.
  - c. Conservation of resources.
5. Facilitate necessary services:
  - a. Facilitate the growth of current services.
  - b. Support increased law enforcement.
  - c. Support development of medical services.
6. Contain impact of tourism:
  - a. Ensure development of forest access that minimally impacts our communities.
  - b. Ensure development of tourist-based businesses that respect their community impact.
  - c. Ensure our local services can handle any changes caused by a population surge caused by tourism.

The Vernon Planning Committee understands that population increases, and area growth in our communities is somewhat inevitable. The committee recognizes that land developers and commercial industries will request opportunities to move into our area and conduct business. As one can see, the overall theme of our community plan is to request that all projects be looked at to ensure these priorities are reviewed and protected whenever possible.

## Closing Statement

As the Vernon Planning Committee chairman, I wish to thank all the members of the Vernon Planning Committee and all of the people of our community who have contributed to this plan development process.

I know I speak for the entire Vernon Planning Committee when I express a special thank you to Matthew Fish, Apache County Community Development Director, and Shanna Pearce, Community Development, who both assisted us in the endeavor. Also, a profound thanks you to Nelson Davis - Apache County Supervisor District 3 and Dan Muth - Apache County Planning and Zoning Chair. These people assisted our committee, which in turn helped our community, and we are extremely thankful that they devoted their time to assist.

Our goal was and always has been to help the communities of the Vernon area. We all want to see the people of our communities live a beneficial lifestyle in this beautiful area of Apache County that we call home. Thank you again to all our family, friends, and neighbors who supported our efforts and this process.

Sincerely,

Dave J. Niehuis

Vernon Planning Committee Chair

## Appendix

**TBD**