



CHAPTER 1

GILBERT GENERAL PLAN

“Gilbert is a Clean, Safe and Vibrant Community.”

Gilbert Town Council, 2010



Cotton Trucks by Downtown



Gilbert Christmas Downtown - 1930's

Vision Statement

Gilbert, a safe, healthy, clean, attractive, family-oriented community that embraces our Town's heritage yet recognizes the opportunities of the future without sacrificing the resources of today.

Gilbert will continue to grow into a Town with:

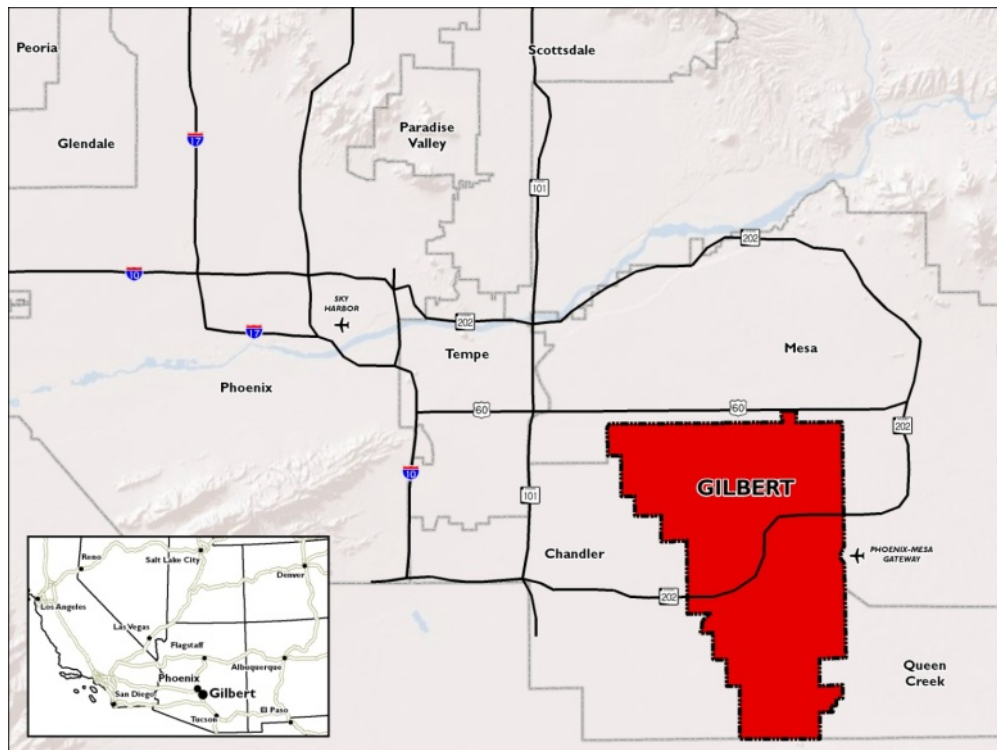
- A vibrant and dynamic business climate
- Excellent educational opportunities
- A sense of community and neighborhoods
- Environmental stewardship
- Cultural amenities
- Diverse recreational opportunities
- Enduring architecture and design
- Sustainable practices
- Efficient transportation



INTRODUCTION

1.0 Gilbert at a Glance

The Town of Gilbert is located in the southeast valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area. Gilbert's planning area encompasses 72.6 square miles. The Town shares boundaries with the City of Mesa, City of Chandler, Town of Queen Creek, Gila River Indian Community and Pinal County. Gilbert's planning area is not fully developed with portions remaining as vacant and undeveloped land. There are several areas of unincorporated land within the planning area, many entirely surrounded by the Town.



In 2011, Business Week magazine ranked Gilbert as one of the nation's 50 best places to live. The best city ranking reflects Gilbert's great schools, a high income level, low unemployment and quality of life. Also in 2011, Businessinsider.com ranked Gilbert the 5th safest city in the nation.

In 2012, CNN Money magazine honored Gilbert as the nation's 33rd best place to live. The list recognizes communities in the United States with plentiful jobs, top-notch schools and affordable housing.

Gilbert's population has grown from 5,717 people in 1980 to approximately 217,000 people in 2012. This population surge earned Gilbert the title of the fourth fastest growing community in the nation from CNN Money Magazine and the U.S. Census Bureau in 2009.

Gilbert's amenities are also award winning. Gilbert's Cosmo Dog Park was chosen as one of the top 5 Dog Parks in the U.S. by Dog Fancy Magazine in 2010 and azcentral.com's 2010 Readers Choice chose Cosmo as Best Dog Park.

Gilbert was named one of the top places to live and learn by GreatSchools.org. The site noted that Gilbert is a fast-growing suburb in the southeast Phoenix metro area and has a diverse mix of professional jobs in health, the sciences, high tech and renewable energy. The site also indicated Gilbert is family-focused and safe.

Gilbert has twice been named Tree City USA. Additionally, Gilbert has been named a bike friendly community.

Gilbert's Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch has been honored as one of the top birding spots in Arizona and for its unique educational programs that allow residents to participate in preserving the natural habitat of the area.

The Riparian Preserve was honored as one of the top three bird watching parks selected by Reader's Choice in the 2010 edition of Experience Arizona, a travel guide. The park was honored for being a habitat with educational programs that benefit the wildlife and allow residents to learn about nature.

Today, Gilbert Town leaders are working to create lasting bonds with others across the world through the Gilbert Sister Cities program. The local effort started in June 1995 with the intent of forging cultural and economic relationships with cities in Europe and Asia. The program coordinates cultural, trade, educational and sports programs that promote international and intercultural knowledge and understanding.

Gilbert established its first sister city November 17, 1998 with Newtownabbey, Northern Ireland. The Borough of Newtownabbey is situated immediately north of Belfast in County Antrim and covers an area of 54 square miles. Newtownabbey is a new town formed in 1958 by an Act of Parliament and has grown steadily over the last twenty years to a population of 85,000. The Borough of Newtownabbey is comprised of two towns and nine villages.

Based on Gilbert's successful partnership with Newtownabbey, the Board of Directors of Gilbert Sister Cities decided to pursue a second sister city in China. On December 12th, 2000, the Town Council unanimously endorsed the recommendation of the Board of Directors to pursue Leshan, Sichuan, China as its second sister city. An official signing ceremony took place June 4, 2002. Leshan (the name meaning "Pleased with the Place") is located in southwest China in the Sichuan Province. Leshan Municipality has a territory of 4,920 square miles and a population of 3.68 million. The city has a history of 3,000 years and is a mix of the very old and very new. As Leshan continues to evolve their market driven economy, community leaders are utilizing their Sister City relationships to acquire information on best practices in other parts of the world for challenges like government operations and protection of resources.

Gilbert continues to enjoy a friendly, safe, small town, family-oriented community feeling while having a major impact in the Phoenix metropolitan area with regards to population increase, demographics, amenities, major employment corridors and development.



Downtown Gilbert Parade

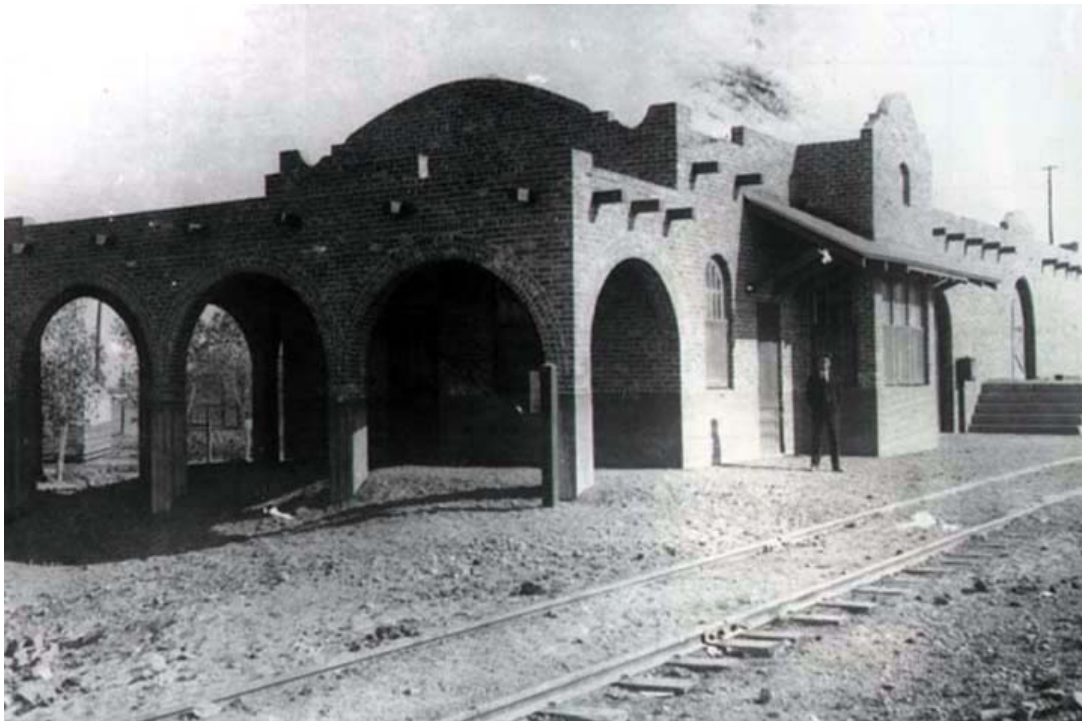


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1.1 Gilbert - The Beginning

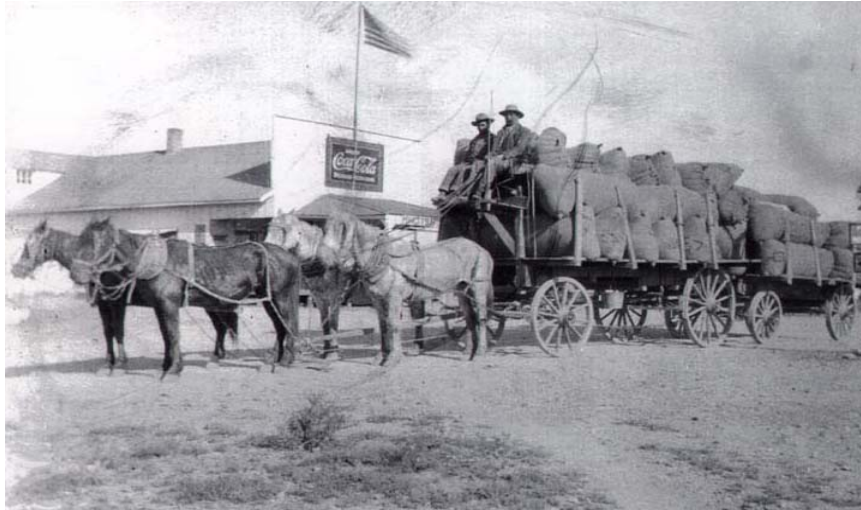
Gilbert's first homesteads were filed by six men and four women. Some of these farms were provided free if the family stayed for at least five years. Others paid the government for the land which could be purchased for as little as 50 cents an acre. The earliest homestead was purchased in 1893.

In 1902, the Arizona Eastern Railway solicited donations of right-of-way in order to establish a rail line between Phoenix and Florence. A rail siding was established on property owned by William "Bobby" Gilbert. The rail siding and the Town that developed became known as Gilbert.



Gilbert Train Depot

Gilbert was a prime farming community due to the construction of the Roosevelt Dam and the Eastern and Consolidated Canals in 1911. Because of the area's rich land, Gilbert became a center for shipping cattle, sheep and dairy products as well as growing grains, melons, cotton and alfalfa hay. During World War I, the cavalry needed an ever-increasing amount of alfalfa to feed horses. Gilbert helped supply the need, becoming known as the Hay Shipping Capital of the World.



Early Commerce in Gilbert

In 1920, the town's 500 citizens incorporated and the Town of Gilbert was officially born on July 6th. The Town was less than one square mile in size.



Gilbert's Early Years



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1.2 Gilbert - The Growing Years

Gilbert began to take its current shape during the 1970's when the Town Council approved a strip annexation that encompassed fifty-three (53) square miles of county land. Although the population was only 1,971 in 1970, the Council realized that Gilbert would eventually grow and develop much like the neighboring communities of Tempe, Mesa, and Chandler. This proved to be a farsighted decision as Gilbert positioned itself for growth in the 1980's and beyond.

Beginning in the 1980's, Gilbert grew at a pace unparalleled by most communities in the United States, increasing in population from 5,717 in 1980 to over 217,000 in 2012. As Gilbert has grown, the community has recognized the need to develop a strong, diverse economy while preserving its highly desirable quality of life. To proactively direct the growth and development of the community, the Town Council adopted and the voters approved a General Plan in November 2001, which revised existing elements, added elements required under Arizona "Growing Smarter" legislation, and incorporated new land use and economic growth considerations.



Gilbert Growing



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1.3 Gilbert - The Future

Gilbert's commitment to the concept of a forward-looking, family-oriented community with a small town atmosphere has positioned the Town for a very bright future. There is no doubt that the population will continue to increase, new houses will be constructed, jobs will be created and industry will expand. The key to the future is to balance the growth and changes within the concept that has created this exceptional community. The Town's Vision for the future builds on the solid foundation of the past.

The following Chapters reflect the Vision, Goals and Policies of the Community and are intended to provide consistent, balanced growth to help ensure a bright future for the residents of Gilbert.



Gilbert Road through the Heritage District