POLICY ANALYSIS

DOWNTOWN LAS VEGAS: HEIGHT LIMITS ARE HOLDING BACK GROWTH

A parcel-level review of Vision 2045, the current zoning code, airport airspace rules, desert water conservation, and research from Harvard and other leading institutions.

Central finding
Downtown occupies only about 4.4 square miles before historic residential areas and other unavailable land are set aside. Yet most form-code acreage is limited to seven stories or less, while true high-rise capacity occupies only a small pocket. Airport review does not justify this blanket low-rise approach.

Prepared for Gateway to Fremont
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EXECUTIVE FINDING

The plan calls for growth. The code limits the room to achieve it.

The City of Las Vegas adopted the Vision 2045 Downtown Las Vegas Master Plan in 2016. The plan calls for more residents, mixed-use hubs, transit-oriented density, economic diversification, and faster approvals. It identified roughly 2,800 acres - about 4.4 square miles - across the downtown districts and only about 640 acres available for development.[1][2]

After historic residential neighborhoods, highways, streets, parks, government campuses, existing buildings, and other unavailable land are excluded, the realistic growth area is closer to roughly four square miles or less, depending on the boundary used. That is a very small land base on which to build an urban economy for a metropolitan region of more than two million people.

4.4 mi^2	640 ac	86%	19 ac
Approximate official downtown planning area	Land identified as available for development	Form-code acreage capped at 7 stories or less	Approximate T6 Urban Core acreage

The strongest conclusion is not that every downtown parcel has the same limit. It is that scarce central land is governed by a fragmented system: strict low- and mid-rise caps in form-code districts, discretionary review elsewhere, and only a very small amount of true high-rise zoning.

The economic consequence is predictable. When a site can support only a small amount of floor area, a fixed land price must be carried by fewer apartments, hotel rooms, offices, shops, or medical facilities. If those uses cannot support the land and construction cost, the likely outcome is not an inexpensive short building. It is often no project, a surface lot, a temporary use, luxury pricing, or development pushed to cheaper peripheral land.

The report recommends lifting local height limits on mapped growth sites, retaining objective urban-design rules, protecting actual historic neighborhoods through targeted transitions, requiring project-specific FAA review rather than using airport overlays as a blanket low-rise policy, and treating compact urban growth as part of Southern Nevada's water strategy.

01 | THE POLICY CONTRADICTION

Vision 2045 asks Downtown to grow, then implementation constrains its capacity

Vision 2045 is a city plan, not technically a UNLV plan. UNLV participated through its Downtown Design Center and the HUNDRED Plan for the Historic Westside, which became part of the broader planning framework.[1][3][4] The distinction matters because Vision 2045 is aspirational policy; the binding restrictions appear in the zoning map, Unified Development Code, overlays, and approval procedures.

The plan itself recognized the central problem: downtown population and density were too low to support the desired economic expansion. Its preferred scenario contemplated approximately 12 million gross square feet and 6,471 dwelling units, together with commercial, employment, and civic development.[2]

The implementation presentation also described the earlier zoning system as ineffective, inconsistent, unpredictable, and burdened by heavy site-plan review. Form-based zoning was intended to provide predictable street form, mixed uses, and pedestrian-oriented design.[5] Those are legitimate goals. The contradiction arises when rules designed to improve form also place low numerical limits on how much building the scarce land can support.

The newer 2050 Master Plan again acknowledges that available land supply will greatly diminish and calls for infill and redevelopment.[6] Yet the city still generally describes even its transit-oriented overlay as permitting five to seven stories, with up to ten stories when attainable housing is included.[7] That remains a mid-rise strategy, not a high-capacity downtown strategy.

The central planning mistake

Las Vegas has treated walkable form and substantial height as competing ideas. They are not. A tower can sit above an active, shaded, fine-grained podium. The public realm can be controlled through frontage, stepbacks, loading access, garage screening, shade, glazing, and sidewalk standards without preventing the additional floors that make expensive central land economically productive. A six- or seven-story street wall may feel urban to a pedestrian, but across the immense visual scale of the Las Vegas Valley it barely registers as a skyline. If this is the urban core, the code must permit true urban-core height above that street wall.

02 | WHAT IS ACTUALLY RESTRICTED

Most form-code land is low- or mid-rise

Current form-based zoning regulates the number of stories through a transect system. The precise permitted building type and envelope vary within each zone, but the broad base-height pattern is as follows.[8]

Form-code zone	General base height	Growth implication
T3 Neighborhood	About 2 stories	Preservation-scale development
T4 zones	About 3 to 5 stories	Low-rise and small mid-rise
T5 Neighborhood / Maker	About 5 stories	Moderate capacity
T5 Corridor / Main Street	Generally up to 7 stories	Mid-rise ceiling on major corridors
T6 Urban General	Up to 12 stories	Limited high-density capacity
T6 Urban General Limited	Up to 14 stories	High-density mid-rise
T6 Urban Core	Up to 20 stories	Only base high-rise form-code zone

Attainable-housing incentives may add approximately one to six stories depending on the zone and qualifying percentage. Bonuses are useful, but they do not substitute for adequate base capacity and remain subject to overlay and adjacency limits.[9]

Parcel-level result

Gateway to Fremont overlaid the city zoning parcel layer with the Downtown Master Plan district layer. Approximately 2,214 acres of zoned parcels fell inside the district polygons, excluding most street rights-of-way. About 866 acres carried a T3 through T6 form-code designation.[10][11]

Form-code capacity group	Approx. acres	Share of FBC acreage
T3-T5: generally 7 stories or less	744	85.9%
T6 Urban General / Limited	103	11.9%
T6 Urban Core: up to 20 stories	19	2.2%
Total form-code acreage	866	100%

Method note: figures are approximate parcel-area calculations. Parcels crossing a district edge can affect totals, rights-of-way are generally excluded, and the calculation should not be interpreted as a city-published statistic.

Fremont East contains the principal T6 Urban Core pocket, but it is only about 19 acres. The Medical District has some T6 Urban General and Limited land but also extensive T4 and T5 acreage. The Historic Westside contains substantial T3, T4, and T5 zoning, including corridors and vacant sites where carefully placed additional capacity may be compatible with neighborhood preservation.

03 | THE PROBLEM IS FRAGMENTED

There is no single seven-story cap - but that does not solve the growth problem

Some central districts, including portions of the Arts District, Civic District, Gateway, and Resort areas, remain under conventional commercial, industrial, civic, or planned-development zoning. The Downtown overlay states that height limits are not automatically applied to certain properties.[12]

That means it would be inaccurate to say every Arts District or Gateway parcel is capped at seven stories. But it would be equally inaccurate to conclude those areas have a simple, predictable right to build tall. A proposal can still be affected by:

- Parcel-specific planned-development conditions or use restrictions;
- Residential adjacency, setbacks, lot coverage, loading, access, and parking rules;
- Downtown overlays and design standards;
- Major or minor site-development plan review;
- Planning Commission or City Council discretion when relief is required;
- Airport airspace review and project-specific federal findings.

The city requires site-development review for form-code development.[13] Discretion is not free. Before approval, an applicant may spend substantial sums on architects, engineers, attorneys, traffic studies, environmental work, financing commitments, and carrying costs. The uncertainty raises the required return and particularly disadvantages smaller or local developers.

A nominally unlimited conventional zone can still be functionally restrictive if a developer cannot know the approvable height, timeline, conditions, and cost before making a major investment.

This is why the reform should address both dimensions: increase physical capacity and make approval ministerial for a project that satisfies objective rules. Height without predictable approval is speculative capacity. Predictable approval without adequate height is predictably inadequate.

04 | AIRPORT AIRSPACE

The airport overlay is a review trigger, not a blanket low-rise mandate

Las Vegas has long maintained airport overlay districts associated with Harry Reid International Airport and North Las Vegas Airport. Older city planning documents describe the overlays as limiting structures and requiring a Special Use Permit in specified circumstances.[14]

However, the local overlay must not be confused with a final federal determination. Under 14 CFR Part 77, projects that may affect navigable airspace must be submitted for an FAA aeronautical study. Exceeding an obstruction surface creates a need for evaluation and may create a presumption of hazard; it is not automatically a permanent prohibition.[15][16]

Decision layer	Who controls it	What it means
Local zoning / height waiver	City of Las Vegas or Clark County	Controls local land use and may allow a taller proposal subject to conditions.
Airport-owner coordination	Clark County Department of Aviation or other airport sponsor	Provides airport operational input and processes local airspace materials.
Federal aeronautical finding	Federal Aviation Administration	Determines whether the proposal creates a substantial adverse effect on safe and efficient air navigation.
Building approval	Applicable local jurisdiction	Still requires compliance with zoning, building, fire, and other laws even after an FAA finding.

The FAA expressly provides for a Determination of No Hazard when a structure exceeds obstruction standards but does not create a substantial adverse effect. A determination may require marking, lighting, supplemental notice, procedure changes, altitude adjustments, or other conditions.[16]

Therefore, local elected officials do not waive federal aviation law. They can grant local zoning relief, support a project, coordinate with the airport, and advocate for a thorough site-specific study. The FAA retains responsibility for the federal No Hazard or Hazard determination.

The Strip comparison

Much of the Strip is geographically closer to Harry Reid International Airport than Downtown. Clark County has nevertheless processed and approved projects hundreds of feet tall through local land-use relief and FAA review. The Majestic Las Vegas proposal, for example, sought approximately 620 feet where the ordinary standard was 100 feet and was identified as intruding into the Airport Airspace Overlay. County records and contemporaneous reporting state that FAA approval was required.[17][18]

That example proves a narrow but important point: intrusion into an overlay is not always the end of the analysis. It can initiate a project-specific process that determines whether the proposed height is compatible with actual flight procedures.

05 | A MORE RATIONAL AIRSPACE POLICY

Lift local caps first, then let the FAA evaluate the actual building

Downtown is farther from Harry Reid International Airport than much of the Strip, but it is closer to North Las Vegas Airport. Its sites may intersect different approach, transitional, radar, or procedure-protection surfaces. It would therefore be irresponsible to claim that every proposed Downtown tower can receive FAA clearance.

It is equally unsound to use generalized airport overlays as a reason to cap whole districts at five, seven, twelve, or even twenty stories when the FAA process is capable of evaluating a precise latitude, longitude, ground elevation, proposed height, construction crane height, and cumulative effect.

Recommended rule: local zoning should permit the height justified by urban economics and neighborhood context, while every affected project remains conditioned on the FAA determination applicable to that exact site and design.

The city should commission a three-dimensional Downtown airspace capacity map using current FAA criteria and verified ground elevations. The map should distinguish:

- Height that does not penetrate a Part 77 notification or obstruction surface;
- Height likely to require notice and routine study;
- Height that may require flight-procedure, radar, marking, lighting, or crane coordination;
- Locations where a substantial adverse effect makes major height genuinely unlikely.

The result should be a transparent pre-application tool, not another absolute cap. Applicants should be encouraged to file FAA Form 7460-1 early, and the city should establish a joint review team with airport and FAA contacts for major downtown projects.

This approach separates two questions that are currently blurred together: “Should urban policy allow a tall building here?” and “Can this exact building safely coexist with aviation?” A broad zoning map can answer the first. Only a site-specific aeronautical study can answer the second.

06 | DESERT WATER

Building up in the existing urban core can conserve Southern Nevada's most limited resource

In Southern Nevada, the water case for compact growth is stronger than in most American cities because indoor and outdoor water have radically different effects on the regional supply. The Southern Nevada Water Authority reports that approximately 40 percent of water use occurs indoors and about 99 percent of that indoor water is recycled through direct reuse or return-flow credits.[19]

Highly treated indoor wastewater returned to Lake Mead through the Las Vegas Wash earns a gallon-for-gallon return-flow credit, allowing Southern Nevada to withdraw another gallon while remaining within its consumptive-use allocation. Outdoor irrigation and cooling water generally evaporates and cannot be recovered in the same way.[19]

For Southern Nevada, the critical water question is not simply how many people live here. It is how much unrecoverable outdoor water and irrigated land are required for each household.

Low-density outward growth typically assigns each household more private lot area, landscaping, streets, driveways, medians, utility corridors, and other exposed land. A downtown apartment or condominium concentrates many households on one footprint and shares landscaping, pools, and public space. Indoor demand still exists, but nearly all of that indoor flow can return to the system.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finds that compact development reduces water demand by reducing lot and landscaping area. It also requires shorter water-transmission systems, which are less susceptible to leakage and cost less to operate. Directing growth to existing communities makes better use of infrastructure already in the ground rather than extending new networks to the urban fringe.[20]

Development pattern	Water and land effect
Outward low-density growth	More land, private landscaping, streets, pipe length, pumping, and potentially unrecoverable outdoor consumption per household.
Compact mid-rise growth	Less land and shared landscaping per household; existing utility networks can serve more people.
Urban-core towers	Many households or hotel rooms share one footprint, infrastructure connection, roof, pool, and landscape system; most indoor flow can be recovered.
Tower plus water standards	Highest potential when paired with efficient fixtures, cooling systems, leak detection, water-smart landscaping, and limits on ornamental turf.

Density alone does not guarantee conservation. A tower with inefficient cooling, water features, leaks, or excessive pools can waste water. The appropriate policy is vertical capacity plus strict building-level water budgets and efficiency standards.

07 | LAND CONSERVATION AND RUNOFF

Compact growth consumes less valley land for the same population

EPA modeling found that higher-density scenarios generated less stormwater runoff per house at the acre, lot, and watershed scales; for the same amount of development, higher density produced less total runoff and impervious cover because it consumed less land. The report cautions that site conditions matter, but concludes that low-density development is not automatically better for water resources.[21]

Stormwater is not the principal constraint on Colorado River allocation, but the land-use mechanism matters in the desert. If a fixed number of households is spread over many square miles, the region disturbs more land and builds more streets, parking, pipes, pumping facilities, and drainage infrastructure. If more of those households are accommodated on already urbanized Downtown parcels, more desert land remains undisturbed and fewer new networks must be extended.

This makes a low-rise “urban core” internally inconsistent. Restricting Downtown to six or seven stories does not stop regional growth. It redirects a larger share of that growth outward, where each household generally requires more land and infrastructure. The valley then pays twice: once through higher consumptive outdoor demand, and again through the capital and maintenance cost of expansion.

A water-smart height policy

- Designate Downtown as a priority receiving area for population and employment growth;
- Remove local numerical height caps on selected urban-core, transit, rail-corridor, and major commercial sites, subject to FAA and life-safety review;
- Require project water budgets covering indoor fixtures, cooling, pools, water features, landscape area, and leak detection;
- Credit projects for replacing surface parking and irrigated low-density land uses with compact mixed use;
- Compare the water and infrastructure cost of each Downtown unit with the same unit displaced to a greenfield edge location;
- Dedicate part of incremental property-tax revenue to wastewater, shade, trees, transit, and water-efficient public space.

A serious Southern Nevada conservation strategy should ask not only how to use less water inside each building, but how to house more people without continually enlarging the irrigated and piped footprint of the valley.

08 | THE HARVARD STUDY

Why the economics of building upward matters in a land-constrained center

Edward Glaeser of Harvard, Joseph Gyourko of the University of Pennsylvania, and Raven Saks of Harvard examined why Manhattan housing prices greatly exceeded the physical cost of providing additional space. Their central insight is directly relevant to a compact Downtown: in a high-rise market, the marginal cost of supplying more housing is approximately the cost of adding another floor to a new building.[22]

The land purchase, site assembly, entitlement work, foundations, utility connections, and much of the podium are fixed or partly fixed costs. When another floor would be profitable but regulation prevents it, the scarcity value does not disappear. It becomes embedded in the price of the limited existing space and the value of scarce development rights. The authors call the price-cost gap a regulatory or zoning tax.

In Manhattan, the authors found market prices more than twice estimated supply costs during the period they studied and concluded that land-use restrictions were the natural explanation for much of the gap. They also found that in constrained markets, increased demand produced higher prices rather than proportionately more housing.[22]

The historic Manhattan dollar amounts and percentage estimates cannot simply be transferred to Las Vegas. Construction technology, rents, interest rates, parking, labor, land values, hotel economics, and demand are different. But the diagnostic applies exactly:

> **If the expected value of an additional floor exceeds the marginal cost of constructing it, yet zoning prohibits that floor, the city is destroying economically supportable capacity.**

For Downtown Las Vegas, the proper local study is a parcel-level residual-land-value analysis. It should estimate the value of seven-, twelve-, twenty-, thirty-, and forty-story alternatives after accounting for construction-cost transitions, financing, parking, attainable housing, and FAA constraints. The gap between the most valuable feasible envelope and the legally permitted envelope is the local regulatory loss.

09 | HOW A HEIGHT CAP CHANGES A PROJECT

The same land cost must be carried by fewer homes and businesses

The following example is illustrative, not a project pro forma. It assumes a half-acre parcel purchased for $10 million, an 85 percent building footprint, 80 percent net residential efficiency, and an average 900 net square feet per dwelling.

Allowed height	Approx. gross floor area	Illustrative dwellings	Land cost per dwelling
7 stories	129,591 sq. ft.	115	$86,800
12 stories	222,156 sq. ft.	197	$50,600
20 stories	370,260 sq. ft.	329	$30,400
40 stories	740,520 sq. ft.	658	$15,200
60 stories	1,110,780 sq. ft.	987	$10,100

Rounded arithmetic; excludes parking, common areas beyond the efficiency assumption, construction-cost changes, financing, taxes, fees, affordable-housing requirements, and operating economics.

Taller construction is not automatically cheaper. Moving from wood-frame or podium construction into concrete or steel introduces major structural, elevator, life-safety, and financing costs. An eight- or ten-story proposal can sometimes be less feasible than either a seven-story building or a substantially taller tower because it incurs high-rise costs without enough additional revenue.

That is another argument against arbitrary caps. A city should not assume the “reasonable compromise” height is economically buildable. It should allow multiple construction types and let actual costs and demand determine which envelope can proceed, subject to objective safety and design rules.

When the legal envelope is too small, the likely outcomes include:

- The property remains vacant or operates as surface parking while the owner waits;
- A developer seeks a costly discretionary amendment or abandons the site;
- The project requires unusually high rents or luxury pricing to carry the land cost;
- Housing and employment shift outward, increasing infrastructure and transportation demands;
- Downtown businesses lose the resident customer base needed for daily foot traffic.

10 | WHAT BROADER RESEARCH SAYS

Height capacity supports supply, productivity, water efficiency, and urban activity

Research	Finding	Relevance to Downtown Las Vegas
Glaeser, Gyourko & Saks - Harvard / Penn	When demand rises but additional floors are blocked, prices can rise instead of supply.	Height restrictions can capitalize scarcity into land and rents.
Hsieh & Moretti - Chicago / Berkeley	Housing constraints can keep workers from productive locations and reduce aggregate growth.	Limited central housing separates workers from jobs and institutions.
Duranton & Puga - Penn / CEMFI	Density supports productivity, innovation, services, shorter travel, and shared amenities.	More residents and workers strengthen transit, retail, and the downtown ecosystem.
NYU Furman Center review	Additional housing generally moderates regional rents, although effects are modest and subsidy remains necessary.	Market supply and deeply affordable housing should be pursued together.
Kate Pennington - UC Berkeley	New market-rate construction reduced nearby rents and displacement risk in the studied San Francisco setting.	Adding supply need not be treated as synonymous with displacement.
SNWA / EPA water research	Indoor water is largely recoverable in Southern Nevada; compact growth uses less landscaping, pipe, and land per household.	Vertical infill can reduce consumptive outdoor demand and infrastructure expansion.

Sources and study limitations are listed in the notes. Results from other cities establish mechanisms and comparative evidence, not a precise Las Vegas forecast.[19][20][21][22][23][24][25][26]

Six channels through which low height limits restrict Downtown

- 1. Housing supply. Fewer homes can be built on scarce sites, making demand more likely to appear as higher rents and land prices.
- 2. Business survival. Restaurants, breweries, shops, arts venues, and neighborhood services receive less daily resident foot traffic.
- 3. Employment clustering. Medical, government, professional, hospitality, and creative employers lose the benefits of close proximity and a nearby workforce.
- 4. Transit performance. Low population and job density weaken ridership and make high-capacity service harder to justify.
- 5. Public revenue. Vacant land and surface parking generate less taxable value and economic activity than productive mixed-use development.
- 6. Regional form. Blocked central growth is displaced to peripheral land, increasing travel distances and infrastructure requirements.

11 | THE HONEST COUNTERARGUMENTS

Not every empty lot is caused by zoning, and not every tower will pencil

A credible case for lifting height limits should not blame zoning for everything. Several competing explanations must be tested:

- Interest rates, lending standards, insurance, and construction costs can stop an otherwise legal project;
- Some Downtown submarkets may not yet support concrete or steel high-rise rents;
- Fragmented ownership and parcel assembly can delay development;
- Utility capacity, streets, shade, parks, schools, and transit must grow with population;
- Historic and culturally significant neighborhoods deserve targeted protection;
- FAA review may legitimately constrain a particular coordinate and height.
- A tall building can waste water if its cooling, pools, fixtures, or landscaping are inefficient; compact location must be paired with a project water budget.

Those qualifications do not defend arbitrary local caps. They show why the city should legalize capacity without promising that every parcel will immediately produce a tower. Zoning should establish the option to build when demand and financing support it; it should not preemptively prohibit that option.

Form-based code also provides real benefits: predictable frontage, active streets, pedestrian orientation, and compatible building form. The recommended reform is not to discard those benefits. It is to separate street-level form from total vertical capacity.

Vacancy alone does not prove a height limit is binding. The best evidence is a local residual-value study, proposals reduced or abandoned because of height, land held for rezoning, and projects whose added floors would produce positive value after full high-rise costs.

12 | RECOMMENDED ACTION

Create a high-capacity, water-smart Downtown without sacrificing historic neighborhoods

1. Map preservation and growth separately.
Maintain lower envelopes in actual historic residential fabric, including John S. Park, Beverly Green, and culturally significant residential portions of the Historic Westside. Do not extend the same limits across vacant commercial corridors.

2. Lift caps on growth-receiving sites.
Allow at least 20 to 30 stories by right on secondary growth corridors. On selected urban-core, major transit, rail/Low Line, resort, and large institutional sites, consider 40 to 60 stories or no local numerical cap, with actual height controlled by FAA findings, engineering, life safety, and market feasibility.

3. Replace walls with transitions.
Use stepbacks and graduated height bands near historic homes: lower immediately adjacent, moderate in a transition band, and taller beyond. Protecting a house does not require suppressing an entire district.

4. Make compliant projects by right.
Use objective standards and a firm administrative decision period. Reserve political hearings for genuine variances, not every substantial building.

5. Treat FAA clearance as project-specific.
Permit the urban height locally, require early Form 7460-1 filing where applicable, and condition construction on the FAA determination. Do not convert a notification surface into a blanket zoning ceiling.

6. Preserve the street, not the empty sky.
Keep active-frontage, shade, transparency, loading, garage-screening, narrow-storefront, and public-realm standards. Allow towers above well-designed podiums.

RECOMMENDED ACTION - CONTINUED

Implementation tools and accountability

7 Pair growth with affordability.
Use city land, fee relief, infrastructure assistance, community land trusts, and calibrated attainable-housing bonuses. Test every requirement against actual project feasibility.

8 Protect existing residents directly.
Use property-tax assistance, repair grants, right-to-return commitments, tenant protections, and subsidized housing rather than relying exclusively on suppressing new construction.

9 Publish a capacity dashboard.
Show base and bonus height, FAA review status, approval path, applications, processing time, units, floor area, and vacant or surface-parking parcels.

10 Make water part of the zoning case.
Evaluate the consumptive outdoor water, pipe length, and infrastructure cost avoided when a household is built Downtown instead of on the edge of the valley.

11 Commission a UNLV feasibility study.
Model residual land value, water effects, and airspace capacity parcel by parcel at 7, 12, 20, 30, 40, and 60 stories. Identify where regulation is binding and where costs, aviation, or demand are the real obstacle.

The city does not need to guarantee that a tower will be built. It needs to stop guaranteeing that one cannot be built when the land, market, infrastructure, aviation review, and financing support it.

13 | PUBLIC CASE

The strongest version of the argument

Downtown Las Vegas has only about 4.4 square miles before historic residential neighborhoods and other unavailable land are removed. Yet most form-code acreage is limited to seven stories or less, and only a small pocket carries true high-rise zoning. That is inconsistent with the city's own goals for population growth, transit, economic diversification, and infill.

Airport safety should be protected through the FAA process applicable to the actual site and proposed structure. The federal rules allow a No Hazard determination even when a project exceeds an obstruction standard, and the Strip demonstrates that local land-use relief and federal airspace review can accommodate buildings hundreds of feet tall. Local government should not impose a low-rise ceiling merely because an airport overlay exists.

The reform is not unlimited construction everywhere. It is targeted high-capacity zoning on vacant, commercial, transit-adjacent, and institutional land; predictable by-right approval; carefully designed transitions beside historic homes; direct affordability and anti-displacement programs; and strict water-efficiency standards.

In a desert, building upward in the already urbanized core is also conservation. Southern Nevada recovers nearly all indoor water, while outdoor irrigation is consumptive. Compact buildings reduce landscaping and infrastructure per household and avoid continually expanding the piped and paved footprint of the valley.

Las Vegas cannot create a strong urban center while rationing the one resource Downtown cannot manufacture: centrally located land. It can, however, permit that land to support more homes, businesses, jobs, visitors, public revenue, and water-efficient growth by allowing the city to rise.

Immediate action	12-month deliverable
Citywide policy direction	Adopt a resolution that airport overlays trigger site-specific review rather than justify blanket local height caps.
Downtown zoning amendment	Create a by-right tower overlay, with 40 to 60 stories or no local numerical cap on designated core sites.
FAA-airspace work program	Publish a current 3D screening map and establish joint pre-application coordination.
Economic and water proof	Complete a UNLV-led residual-value and water analysis using local land, construction, financing, outdoor-use, and infrastructure data.
Community protection	Adopt mapped historic transitions and a funded anti-displacement package before major rezonings take effect.

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Research cut-off: September 5, 2026. Zoning and overlay provisions can change. A property-specific determination should use the current zoning map, code text, surveyed elevation, and FAA aeronautical study.