

La Plata County Comprehensive Plan

Table of Contents

Chapter 1:	Introduction	1.1 through 1.5
Chapter 2:	Growth Trends	2.1 through 2.8
Chapter 3:	Land Use	3.1 through 3.25
Chapter 4:	Transportation	4.1 through 4.2
Chapter 5:	Housing	5.1 through 5.6
Chapter 6:	Environmental Resources	6.1 through 6.12
Chapter 7:	Agriculture	7.1 through 7.8
Chapter 8:	Public Safety.....	8.1 through 8.6
Chapter 9:	Airport Area	9.1 through 9.4
Chapter 10:	Extractive Resources	10.1
Chapter 11:	Parks, Recreation, and Trails	11.1 through 11.10
Chapter 12:	Implementation	12.1 through 12.12

La Plata County Comprehensive Plan

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Public Attitudes Towards Land Use and Wildlife in La Plata County:1996**
- Appendix 2: Summary of Agreements with Southern Utes**
- Appendix 3: Comprehensive Plan Adopting Resolution**

Planning Department Project 2001-176

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Land use planning is intended to give residents, property owners and community leaders a means for creating a shared vision for the future development of their community. Authority for planning is granted to counties by the State of Colorado under Section 30-28-106 of the Colorado Revised Statutes. In part, the statute reads:

“It Is the Duty of a County Planning Commission to Make and Adopt a Master Plan for the Physical Development of the Unincorporated Territory of the County”

The La Plata County Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for planning in the County. Planning is not intended to be a static, one-time event, but an ongoing process that reflects changing conditions in the community. While the comprehensive plan establishes the framework, the ongoing planning process sets forth the specific actions to carry out the plan so the community can work together to achieve its desired future.

***The Comprehensive Plan Is Intended to Guide Planned Growth
While Protecting the Environment
And Enhancing the Lives of County Residents.***

The comprehensive plan establishes a number of goals to guide planning in the coming years. A prioritized list of “action items” in the plan provides a road map for achieving the goals. The goals and action items are based upon the goals and visions established as part of the district land use planning process of the mid 1990's. The district land use plans form the foundation, or baseline, from which the comprehensive plan's various elements have been crafted.

The Comprehensive Plan Also Seeks to Recognize the Diverse Perspectives on Land Use and Private Property Rights Expressed by County Residents.

This introduction includes a brief look back at several planning efforts in La Plata County over the past two decades. It provides an overview of the 2001 Comprehensive Plan's purpose, its structure and its layout. It documents the planning process used during the preparation of the plan. It presents a brief overview of other government entities that influence the plan. Finally, it recognizes that changes may occur to the land use regulatory process in Colorado that could affect the content and direction of the plan in the coming years.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In La Plata County, the process of planning has been underway for many years. Early iterations of the comprehensive planning process included a master plan prepared and adopted in 1984. It was replaced by a follow-up planning process undertaken in the late 1980s which resulted in the 1990 adoption of the ***“La Plata County Comprehensive Land Use Plan: Element 1-Policy Plan”***. Both of these plans were based on the philosophy that land use regulation should be kept to a minimum except when the health and welfare of County residents was at stake.

The 1990 Plan was the precursor to what today is known as the ***“La Plata Land Use Code”***, the permitting system by which development is regulated in La Plata County. The emphasis of the land use code is the concept of compatibility between adjacent properties and the mitigation of impacts to improve compatibility rather than the imposition of restrictive land use classifications. The intention was to establish standards for new development to ensure impacts to neighbors are mitigated while allowing flexibility in the use of one’s land.

As the mid 1990s approached, however, a county-wide survey indicated that attitudes toward land use regulation in the unincorporated County was shifting (See Appendix 1). This new sentiment suggested that mitigating the impacts of development was only addressing part of the issue. It was felt that without some type of county-wide organization of what types of uses went where, providing essential services in the County would become more difficult and expensive as more development occurred. As a result, a new comprehensive planning process was undertaken. By 1997, the County had established 10 planning districts, eight of which established land use plans to guide growth by identifying preferred land uses types and densities within their district.

The district planning process identified a vision of what each of the districts should look like in the future. Goals and objectives were established; preferred land use types, locations, and densities were mapped; and district review groups were established to watch over implementation of each plan. While each of the plans has its own unique vision, goals and objectives, several prevailing themes tie each of the plans together. These include such things as retaining rural character, accommodating new growth, protecting the environment, respecting private property rights, and ensuring housing affordability.

Plan Purpose and Structure

While the district land use plans share common themes, there are a number of county-wide issues that are either inadequately addressed in the district plans or were not addressed during the district planning process at all. ***While the comprehensive plan is intended to incorporate and uphold the intent of the district plans, it is also intended to provide further detail and guidance to the overall growth management system of La Plata County.***

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Plan Consists of the Following Twelve Plan Elements:

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----|------------------------------|
| 1. | Introduction | 7. | Agriculture |
| 2. | Growth Trends | 8. | Airport Area |
| 3. | Land Use | 9. | Public Safety |
| 4. | Transportation | 10. | Extractive Resources |
| 5. | Housing | 11. | Parks, Recreation and Trails |
| 6. | Environmental Resources | 12. | Plan Implementation |

Chapter 4 and 11 each summarize topics that have already been addressed through separate planning processes. The *La Plata County Transportation Plan* and the *La Plata County Trails Plan* were each adopted in 2000 and are briefly summarized and incorporated by reference into the 2001 Comprehensive Plan. **Chapter 3: Land Use** incorporates by reference the *District Land Use Plans*.

Each primary plan element is organized in the following manner: 1) an overview and background of the issues is provided; 2) the plan elements goal or goals are identified; 3) analysis is provided for the plan element; 4) goals and key points are summarized; 5) Plan recommendations including specific action items are identified.

Within each plan chapter certain issues have been highlighted for recognition as important facts or recommendations, and are identified as “**Key Points**”. These key points help to clarify the significant aspects of each plan element for the reader. Many, but not all, of the key points lead to **Action Items**--specific actions that should be taken to implement the plan.

The Plan Implementation chapter is structured differently. It is intended to outline strategies for implementing the plan. It provides a prioritized list of action items that should be undertaken to ensure the plan recommendations become a reality.

Plan Preparation Process

La Plata County’s 2001 comprehensive planning process actually began in the mid 1990s with Phase I, the creation and adoption of the district land use plans. Phase II of this program was initiated in 1999 by identifying approaches for dealing with issues of county-wide concern, those that overlap the district plans and ultimately affect the cost of living and/or quality of life of all County residents.

The framework for the Phase II document was initially established with input from the County Planning Commission, a number of community focus groups, and staff. Several public forums were held in the summer of 1999 at which members of the community shared their perspective on issues of concern ranging from housing, public safety, utilities, agriculture, recreation, open space, and a number of other topics.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the next two years, planning staff, in conjunction with a planning consultant, worked with the Planning Commission, the Board of County Commissioners, and the public to establish a set of working papers which helped to set the stage for the plan's main features. The working papers titled "*La Plata County Comprehensive Plan: Framing the Discussion*" were widely distributed during the fall of 2000. Nearly one hundred written and oral public comments were collected during that period and modifications were made to reflect those comments.

Between January and March 2001, five informal planning commission public work sessions were held to gather public input relative to individual plan topics. A facilitator walked the public and planning commission through a set of draft planning policies. The meetings were well attended with a session on agriculture drawing well over 100 participants. Nearly 15 hours of public testimony was received during these meetings.

All meetings were publicized via press releases to the major local media outlets and a number of print ads appeared in the Durango Herald. Herald and Pine River Times reporters attended several of the public work sessions and prepared a number of pre-meeting issue articles as well as post-meeting outcome articles.

From the background research, public input, and the guidance of the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners, a draft plan was written and presented to the Planning Commission for review/discussion and process direction in early June 2001. Five additional work sessions were held with the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissions between June and August to finalize the draft plan. The draft plan was then distributed to local media outlets and widely publicized for public comment. Two public hearings were tentatively schedule for late September and early October to gather final public comment prior to consideration for adoption by the La Plata County Planning Commission.

Relationship to Other Public Entities, Plans and Regulations

The Comprehensive Plan and its implementation tools are intended to be used in conjunction with a number of other public entities, and their plans and regulations. Following is a overview of a number of those public entities and their relationship to the 2001 La Plata County Comprehensive Plan.

Local Municipalities

The City of Durango and the Towns of Bayfield and Ignacio all have adopted comprehensive plans which include, among other things, land use and transportation elements which overlap into lands regulated by La Plata County. The County also enters into a multitude of agreements with these entities regarding issues ranging from road maintenance to revenue sharing.

Southern Utes and Ute Mountain Utes

La Plata County includes approximately 176,000 acres of Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribal lands located in the southern portion of the County. Recognized as sovereign nations by

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

the Federal government in the late 1800s, the regulatory function of La Plata County government does not apply to tribal lands. None-the-less, issues that transcend political boundaries require a degree of interaction and cooperation. This interaction has led to a number of formal and informal agreements between tribal and non-tribal interests. Appendix 2 includes a list of those agreements.

Federal and State Land Management Agencies

With approximately 41 percent of land in La Plata County controlled by Federal and State land management agencies--Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Colorado State Land Board, the coordination of activities and sharing of information is critical. Whether it be information of plans for controlled burns or plans for a new development proposed near interface lands, coordination will help to ensure that comprehensive planning policies and strategies are met.

Colorado Department of Transportation(CDOT)

Activities of the Colorado Department of Transportation have significant ramifications for the residents of La Plata County. The proposed upgrade of US Highway 160 and south 550 through the County will have a lasting effect on traffic and development patterns throughout the County. The coordination of County land use and transportation goals with those of CDOT will help to ensure consistency between the two entities.

The Changing Landscape in Colorado

With significant population growth expected to continue in the coming decades, the debate over the effects of growth and its impact on residents' quality of life have risen to primary importance. This debate has lead to a number of citizen and legislative efforts to radically change how land use is regulated in Colorado. While most initiatives failed in both 2000 and 2001, it is likely that new initiatives will be forwarded in 2002 or 2003.

This plan has attempted to address the most common aspects of a community comprehensive plan. It has not, however, attempted to anticipate and incorporate all aspects of any potential constitutional or statutory changes that may occur in the coming years. As a result, this plan may require significant modification in the coming years if major changes to the land use regulatory process in Colorado occur.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Overview

Many demographic changes have occurred in La Plata County in recent years. Since 1990 alone, the population of the County has grown nearly 36 percent. With this growth in population, a number of other significant changes have occurred. *Growth Trends* are documented in this section of the comprehensive plan.

Population Change

Significant changes have occurred in the County’s population over the past several decades. Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 and Charts 2-1 and 2-2 outline this change. During the 1970 to 2000 period, the County’s total population increased by approximately 129 percent, from 19,199 in 1970 to 43,941 in 2000. During the 1990s alone, the County’s total population grew by over 36 percent. The growth in the unincorporated portions of the County has been particularly significant, increasing by over 11,000 during the 1990 to 2000 period. By contrast the City of Durango’s population increased by approximately 1,500 residents, or nearly 12 percent, during the same period.

**Table 2-1
Historic County Population Levels: 1970 - 2000**

	1970		1980		1990		2000		Change By Decade			
	Number	Percent of Total	70 - 80	80 - 90	90 - 00	70-00						
Bayfield	320	1.7	724	2.6	1,090	3.4	1,549	3.5	126.3	50.6	42.1	384.1
Durango	10,333	53.8	11,649	42.1	12,439	38.5	13,922	31.7	12.7	6.8	11.9	34.7
Ignacio	613	3.2	667	2.4	720	2.2	669	1.5	8.8	7.9	-7.1	9.1
Unincorporated *	7,933	41.3	14,607	52.8	18,035	55.9	27,801	63.3	84.1	23.5	54.2	250.4
La Plata County	19,199	100.0	27,647	100.0	32,284	100.0	43,941	100.0	44.0	16.8	36.1	128.9

* Includes Tribal and non-Tribal

Source: Colorado Division of Local Affairs and the U.S. Census Bureau

**Table 2-2
Historic Population Levels: 1991 - 2000**

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Percent of Total
Bayfield	1,126	1,163	1,239	1,356	1,452	1,590	1,590	1,607	1,611	1,549	3.5
Durango	12,751	13,167	13,350	13,582	13,713	14,095	14,151	14,485	14,913	13,922	31.7
Ignacio	727	741	740	745	742	773	788	792	784	669	1.5
Unincorporated *	18,879	19,547	20,444	21,439	23,129	23,435	24,410	25,012	23,840	27,801	63.3
La Plata County	33,483	34,618	35,773	37,122	39,036	39,893	40,939	41,896	41,148	43,941	100.0

* Includes Tribal and non-Tribal

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Source: Colorado Division of Local Government and the U.S. Census Bureau

**Chart 2-1
Historical Population Distribution: 1970 - 2000**

**Chart 2-2
Population Distribution: 2000**

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Chart 2-3 shows County population projections for the 2005 to 2025 time period. Consistent with statewide trends, future growth is projected to slow over the next 25 years. The County's total

Chart 2-3 Projected County Growth: 2005 - 2025

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

population is expected to grow from 43,941 in 2000 to 67,378 in 2025, a 53 percent increase. This corresponds to just under 2 percent annual growth rate. By contrast, during the 1990 to 2000 period, the annual growth rate for the County was 2.8 percent, and 3.5 percent in the unincorporated areas. By most accepted standards, growth rates of 2.5 percent or higher are considered very high rates of growth.

Building Permits

Historically, the population of La Plata County was concentrated in and around Durango, with smaller concentrations in Bayfield and Ignacio. The rest was thinly spread throughout the unincorporated countryside. In recent years, however, growth rates have increased significantly

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

in the unincorporated parts of the County. Major areas of growth within the past decade include: Rafter J, Shenandoah, Durango West I and II subdivision in the west, The Animas Valley in the north, and areas such as Grandview, Loma Linda, Sunnyside, El Rancho Florida, Ticolote, and Forest Lakes in the east. During the 1990s the number of building permits issued annually in the County increased nearly 80 percent, from 673 in 1990 to 1,201 in 2000, providing yet another indication of the County's consistent growth.

Subdivision Activity

The pace of subdivision activity has remained relatively steady. Chart 2-4 shows the number of new lots approved during the 1990 to 2000 time period. These figures do not include lots 35

acres or larger which do not require County review or approval. The County Assessors Office estimated that 160 lots 35 acres or greater in size were created in 1999. The number of new lots created does not always correlate to new development. In fact, as Table 2-3 indicates, as of 2000 there were nearly 8,500 unbuilt lots in the County ranging in size from less than one acre up to 100 acres.

Chart 2-4
Subdivision lots Approved: 1990 - 2000

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

**Table 2-3
Vacant Parcels: 2000**

Acres	0 - 2.99	3 - 4.99	5 - 7.99	8 - 9.99	10 -35	35 -100	Total
Number	4,410	876	400	217	1,017	1,473	8,478

Individual Sewage Disposal Systems

Linked to development is the construction of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems (ISDS). The majority of developments in the unincorporated County rely on ISDS. As shown in Chart 2-5, the number of ISDS permits issued annually has fluctuated during the past decade but has, in general, experienced significant increases since 1988.

**Chart 2-5
ISDS Permits Issued: 1990 - 2000**

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

The Changing Economy

It has been estimated that as much as 57 percent of the County's economy is dependent upon the tourism industry. Table 2-4 and Chart 2-7 depict the number and percentage of jobs within nine major employment sectors in the County. During the 1990s, the most significant job growth was experienced in the Wholesale and Retail Trade sector, the Services sector and the Construction sector. These sectors are largely related to tourism and the construction of new homes.

**Table 2-4
County Employment By Sector**

	1980		1990		1999		Change 1980 -1990		Change 1990 -1999	
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change
Agriculture	948	6.5	1,104	5.9	949	3.2	156	16.5	-155	-14.0
Mining	104	0.7	263	1.4	333	1.1	159	152.9	70	26.6
Construction	1,101	7.5	1,677	8.9	3,519	11.8	576	52.3	1,842	109.8
Manufacturing	633	4.3	711	3.8	1,063	3.6	78	12.3	352	49.5
Transportation, Communications, and Public Utilities	626	4.3	700	3.7	969	3.2	74	11.8	269	38.4
Wholesale and Retail Trade	3,410	23.4	4,131	22.0	7,115	23.8	721	21.1	2,984	72.2
Finance, insurance, and Real Estate	751	5.1	1,104	5.9	1,698	5.7	353	47.0	594	53.8
Services	4,583	31.4	5,890	31.3	10,515	35.2	1,307	28.5	4,625	78.5
Government	2,428	16.6	3,212	17.1	3,751	12.5	784	32.3	539	16.8
Total	14,584	100.0	18,792	100.0	29,912	100.0	4,208	28.9	11,120	59.2

Source: Federal Bureau of Economic Assistance

The coal bed methane extraction and distribution industry has also played a significant role in the La Plata County economy. Employment associated with this industry is broken into two sectors—the Mining sector, and the Transportation, Communications, and Public Utilities sector, both of which experienced significant increase in employment from 1990 to 1998.

**Chart 2-7
Employment by Major Job Sector: 1999**

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Property Valuation

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

During the 1990s tax revenues in the County increased dramatically, partly due to appreciating property values, and partly due to a significant growth in natural gas production. Table 2-4 depicts total assessed value and change in values during the 1990 to 1999 time period.

**Table 2-4
Total Assessed Value of Taxable Property
in La Plata County: 1990 - 1999**

Year	Assessed Value	Percent Change From Previous Year
1990	\$396,535,120	---
1991	\$430,374,210	8.5
1992	\$445,216,120	3.4
1993	\$516,832,600	16.1
1994	\$624,804,060	20.9
1995	\$752,063,090	20.4
1996	\$706,256,580	-6.1
1997	\$918,132,090	30.0
1998	\$1,125,640,730	22.6
1999	\$1,163,142,350	3.3

As mentioned, the coal bed methane extraction industry has played a significant role in the La Plata County economy. As shown in Chart 2-7, this industry accounted for approximately 45 percent of the total County assessed value by class in 2000.

**Chart 2-7
County Assessed Value by Property Class: 2000**

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Recent industry projections indicate that over the next six to eight years production may decline by as much as 8 to 10 percent annually. This, however, seems to contradict recent trends. State policy changes allowing additional gas wells to be drilled on the same acreage already occupied by one or more wells, as well as an emerging national energy policy that encourages energy exploration have led to a steady increase in the number of gas permits issued by the County in recent years.

Southern Ute Tribe

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe also plays a significant role in the growth of La Plata County. Employment opportunities created by the tribal government center, the casino, as well as numerous natural gas operations provide jobs for non-tribal residents of the County. Additionally, there were only limited commercial and retail operations within tribal boundaries in 2000, and as a result, most purchases of goods and services by tribal members took place elsewhere, injecting additional revenues into the local economy. Based on the sound financial stability reported by the Southern Utes, it is anticipated that the Tribes role in shaping the economy and development patterns within La Plata County will likely increase in the coming years.

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CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Overview

The *Land Use Element* of the comprehensive plan focuses on the County's land use system and how it shapes the development pattern of the County. While other plan elements such as transportation, housing, and environmental resources are also critical to land use, they are addressed separately, in subsequent chapters. This plan element will focus its attention on the following issues:

- **Urban Growth Areas**
- **District Land Use Plans**
- **Land Use Code**
- **Other Land Use Considerations**

The district land use plans, created in the mid 1990s, establish the framework from which land use and density determinations are made in most of the County. This plan element is intended to provide clarity to those plans by removing ambiguities, and adding detail where needed.

Key Point: *The Land Use Element is intended to uphold the visions and goals of the district land use plans while guiding future growth in the County.*

Background

The implications of growth are far reaching. During the 1990's increased costs for the provision of County services were offset in large part by revenues from gas production. However, with gas production expected to decrease in the coming decades, taxing entities throughout the County will be faced with the challenge of finding new sources of revenue to supplement declining gas revenues in order to meet level of service expectations. While new development will provide some relief in this area, it is widely held that development does not pay it own way relative to the service demands it creates. New development has significant implications that can be grouped into two categories – impacts and demands.

Growth can *impact* the physical environment in many ways. These impacts can sometimes be subjective and difficult to measure. Moreover, many of the physical impacts are cumulative in nature – that is, they are not attributable to any one specific development, but result from numerous developments.

Examples of the Physical Impacts of Development Can Include:

- Visual impacts such as the disruption of views, scarring of hillsides, obtrusive road cuts, and unsightly grading;
- Destruction and fragmentation of wildlife habitat;
- Traffic congestion and accelerated road deterioration;

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- Increased erosion and runoff;
- Pollution – noise, light, water and air;
- Negative impacts on ground water aquifers;
- Proliferation of individual septic disposal systems; and
- Loss of productive agricultural land

Growth also creates *demands* for new, improved or expanded services. Historically, the demand for services in the unincorporated areas of the County has been relatively low, and the County's role in providing services has been limited to such things as:

- Construction and Maintenance of County Roads
- Sheriff/Jail/Search and Rescue, Emergency Preparedness Planning
- Social Services
- Animal Control
- Fairgrounds Operations

As the population of the rural County grows, land that was once in rural and agricultural uses, and requiring minimal services, is converted to higher-density, non-agricultural uses that create higher service demands on the County. The demand for services traditionally provided outside the County governments purview also grows-- fire protection, emergency medical services, schools, and parks and recreation. As these demands increase, so does the public pressure to ensure that expectations are met.

Key Point: The challenge is to adequately and cost-effectively meet new service demands while not disproportionately placing the cost associated with new development on existing residents.

Minimizing the physical impacts of growth while also ensuring that the service expectation of the citizenry are met within the resources available is the essence of proper growth management. It does not mean stopping growth but establishing sound management strategies that can allow the County to grow while maintaining and enhancing its economic base, and protecting its unique character.

Key Point: The qualities and character that make the County unique, and economically stable, must be maintained as new development is accommodated.

Land Use Goals

Goal 3.1: To accommodate a growing population through the fair and consistent administration of a land use system that provides clear direction for private and public land use.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- Goal 3.2:** To uphold the visions and goals established within each of the district land use plans.
- Goal 3.3:** To periodically reevaluate and refine the district land use plans.
- Goal 3.4:** To support Bayfield, Durango, and Ignacio in their efforts to expand commercial and residential development, and employment opportunities.
- Goal 3.5:** To encourage growth hubs in the County that would provide opportunities for higher-density commercial and residential development, and employment centers.
- Goal 3.6:** To support efforts to extend central services to growth hubs and other areas envisioned for higher densities in the district plans.
- Goal 3.7:** To support efforts to create a rural water system to serve areas consistent with the district plans.
- Goal 3.8:** To encourage the preservation of contiguous open lands in La Plata County

URBAN GROWTH AREAS

Due to a lack of central water or sewer service in most of the unincorporated County, there are only a few places where development can occur at urban densities, that is, a density higher than one unit per 3 acres. These urban growth areas include much of the joint planning areas around Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio; as well as several residential developments scattered throughout the County. Following is a discussion of existing urban service areas as well as future potential urban growth areas.

Joint Planning Areas

Development regulated by La Plata County is often times proposed near the borders of Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio. These communities have their own comprehensive plans which outline the type and intensity of development that should occur within their urban growth areas. As shown on the diagrams on the following page, the urban growth areas around each community (diagonal lines) include land that is not located within the corporate limits of the community (solid grey) but on adjacent lands that are likely to be served by central services in the future and, at some point, likely annexed into the community. These areas tend to change with revisions to a community's comprehensive plan.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

In order for a property to be annexed a number of criteria must be met including one-sixth contiguity between the parcel to be annexed and the annexing community, as well as property owner consent. As a result, the timing on an annexation can sometimes be uncertain. It is therefore important that there is good coordination between the County and each of the respective communities at the time a development is proposed so that an appropriate analysis of the proposal can be undertaken and the goals of each community can be met.



A few of the issues to consider include:



- Is the property eligible for annexation? If so, the development proposal should be processed by the community rather than the County; If not, is the development proposal consistent with the community's plan?
- What urban services can be provided to the property?
- What engineering and development standards are appropriate given its location—urban or rural?, County or municipal?

Some lands within the joint planning areas may not be eligible for annexation or may not be served by central services for a number of

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

years. In these cases, it is important that there is consistency between the County's plan and that of the local community with regard to preferred land use types and densities. This will ensure that development administered by the County in these outlying areas does not interfere with the preferred future development pattern of the community.

Key Point: *Overlapping areas of influence near Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio should be clearly defined and conflicting issues and processes should be resolved and agreed upon via joint planning efforts and intergovernmental agreements.*

As of 2001, only the City of Durango had a formal Joint Planning Agreement with La Plata County. While discussions had been initiated with both Bayfield and Ignacio, no formal agreements have been established.

Other Urban Service Areas

In areas of the County where central water and sewer services are available, these services are provided by entities such as local municipalities, metropolitan districts, private companies, homeowner associations, and, in some cases, the Southern Utes. The map to the right shows the general location of major central service areas in the County.

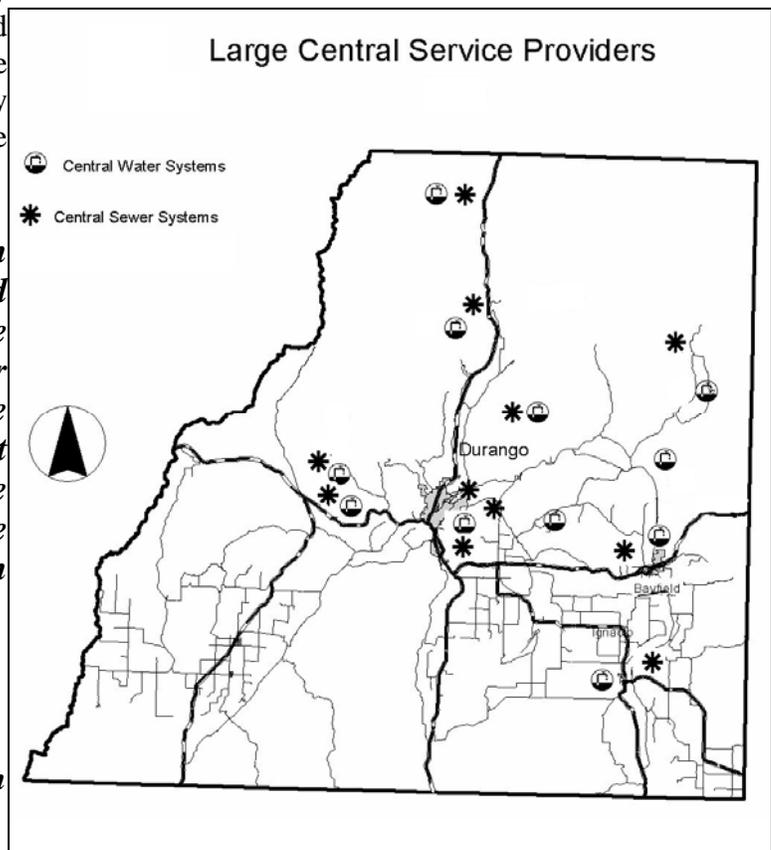
These systems tend to serve smaller developments scattered throughout the County. Efforts to bring a large-scale rural water system to the southeastern part of the County have been underway since the mid 1990's. If established, this system would provide residents with a safe and consistent source of central water. Such efforts should be supported by the County.

Assuming such a system is eventually established, cooperation and coordination with the service providers will be critical to effectively upholding and implementing the district land use plans.

Key Point: *Coordination between service providers and the County should be established and/or strengthened to ensure that the County district land use plans are adhered to during the provision or expansion of central services.*

Growth Hubs

La Plata County Comprehensive Plan



CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

The development of a rural water system and the addition of central sewer systems in outlying parts of the County would provide opportunities for higher-density development to occur than has been possible using individual on-site systems. While *it is not the intention of this plan to encourage the proliferation of unplanned and scattered high-density development in outlying parts of the County*, the provision of central water and sewer to key growth hubs could create opportunities to modestly decentralize the County. The growth hubs would essentially be higher-density developments having a mix of uses including such things as residential, commercial, employment, and civic opportunities.

As of 2001, the City of Durango was relied upon as the main source of jobs, goods and services in the County. The adjacent map depicts several potential growth hubs in the County based upon their historical land uses, higher densities, and in some cases, large number of platted lots already found in the area. This map is not meant to be all-inclusive. Additional study would be required to determine if these area, or others, would be appropriate growth hubs.

Key Point: The growth hub concept is not intended to encourage the proliferation of unplanned and scattered high-density development in outlying parts of the County but to allow for strategically located growth areas.



The reliance on the City of Durango as the primary center of commerce results in daily vehicular traffic patterns that overburden the major arterial roadways during peak periods. It forces County residents to drive significant distances in order to address even the most basic needs for goods and service. By encouraging the improvement or creation of strategically located growth hubs, this reliance on Durango can be lessened.

Key Point: The strengthening of growth hubs in the County, including Bayfield and Ignacio, will help to lessen the reliance on the City of Durango as the primary source of employment opportunities, goods and services in the County.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Planning Districts

It is recognized that the County plays a limited role in the provision of central services, and that it may be some time before central services are available to some of these areas. As such, rather than limiting new development in the unincorporated growth hubs until such time that the central services are available, development should be allowed to occur, but at rural densities. However, project proponents should recognize the potential for additional on-site development in the future as services become available, and incorporate that potential for additional density into their initial site design.



Key Point: Project proponents should recognize the potential for additional on-site development as services become available and design their initial site plan accordingly.

When services do become available, the growth hubs could serve as “receiving zones” for transferred development rights (TDRs). Establishing the growth hubs as receiving zones would allow for the transferring of likely future development from the outlying rural areas to these higher-density areas. This would provide the County with an additional mechanism for helping to maintain the rural character and agricultural uses of the outlying County while compensating the rural land owners for the right to do so. The concept of TDR is discussed later in this chapter.

DISTRICT LAND USE PLANS

Overview and Background

In the mid 1990s, the County created 10 planning districts as shown on the map above. Advisory land use plans were prepared for seven of the 10 districts. The Animas Valley District had previously established a plan that was subsequently codified and incorporated in the land use

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

code making the plan required rather than advisory. Each of the seven district land use plans are similar in format. The particular emphasis and character of each plan varies somewhat however. The underlying theme of all of the plans reflects a desire to maintain the existing qualities of each district while they grow.

Key Point: *The underlying theme of each district plan is to maintain the existing character of the district as it grows.*

Each plan was prepared with extensive input from the residents of each planning district. The plan preparation process spanned several years, during which time more than 100 district planning group meetings were held to solicit public involvement. ***The district plans are integral sub elements of this comprehensive plan.***

The District Land Use Plans Are Intended To:

- Provide guidance for County staff, project applicants, residents, business owners, service providers, and elected and appointed officials in determining preferred land use types and intensities for properties within the planning districts.
- Help direct growth to specific areas that are capable of accommodating it in a manner that reinforces the goals of each particular district.
- Influence site planning and design in a manner that promotes the goals of the individual districts.
- Direct the provision of services by the County government and other entities.
- Assist planning efforts of the County's municipal jurisdictions, tribal governments, and federal and state land management agencies by providing them with a vision of preferred development patterns along their borders.

At the time as when the plans were being prepared, residents from the Fort Lewis Mesa District and the Southeast District expressed concern with the concept of mapping preferred future land uses. They expressed a preference for not creating traditional plans for their districts. As an alternative, the Fort Lewis Mesa District established a mission statement and project review checklist. The Southeast District undertook a similar approach. Since that time, development proposals in these districts have been guided solely by the land use code and State Statute. With limited development pressures in these districts, this approach has appeared to work adequately. However, with the potential for a consistent and viable source of water becoming available to these districts at some point in the future, development pressures will likely increase and result in difficulties using the checklist approach only.

Key Point: *The County should work with the Fort Lewis Mesa and Southeast districts to establish district land use plans.*

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

District Plan Review and Analysis

While the comprehensive plan is intended to uphold the goals and visions established within each of the district plans, it is also intended to refine and add clarity to them, focusing on areas of the plans that have proven problematic to administer over the years.

The Review and Analysis of the District Plans Is Separated into the Following Categories:

- Issue Clarification
- Public Benefit Criteria Process
- Plan Review Procedures

Issue Clarification

The district land use plans have provided guidance for review and approval of many projects. However, after several years of application, a number of issues have been identified that need clarification and/or augmentation. Additionally, since the plans were adopted over a period of several years, there is also a need to unify the treatment of similar issues among plans. This section contains recommendations that are intended to provide more certainty for project applicants and reduce the potential for subjective interpretations of specific plan provisions.

Topics Identified for Clarification Include:

- Clustered Development
- Open Space within Development
- Areas For Business Development
- Mixed Uses
- Public Facilities
- Park and Ride Lots
- Recreational Vehicle Parks
- General Definitions

Clustered Development: Cluster development is a form of residential development that concentrates lots on only a portion of the development parcel in order to preserve rural character, agricultural uses, wildlife habitat and other open space values. By reducing the size of the lot or the building envelope on each lot while also maintaining the overall density of the project, the developable area associated with the project can be concentrated on only a portion of the development parcel thus leaving some land undeveloped. While the district plans all encourage cluster development as a means of preserving rural character and open space, none provide guidance as to what makes an effective cluster design to achieve these goals.

This section of the plan is intended to provide some very general design guidelines for determining what an appropriate cluster development may look like. It is not intended to be a comprehensive cluster guide, but an overview of concepts.

Key Point: *The County should create a comprehensive cluster design guidebook*

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Because of the unique development patterns in La Plata County, clustered development may need to be treated differently depending upon the size of the development. Be it developments having a small number of lots, say, five or less, and those having a large number of lots. While five is not a hard and fast rule, typically subdivisions having five or fewer lots are characteristic of a projects that may have difficulty undertaking some of the traditional approaches to cluster development. None-the-less, many of the design guidelines presented herein may be appropriate for both types of subdivision

Important Elements of a Cluster Development Include:

- Preservation of existing natural features
- Preservation of open space adjacent to existing roadways
- Screening new housing with topography, or existing and/or new vegetation
- Preservation of sufficient open space for viable wildlife habitat

Preservation of Existing Natural Features– Efforts should be taken to preserve as much of the existing natural features of the development site as possible so to minimize the visual effects of the new development on adjoining land uses.

Preservation of Open Space Adjacent to Existing Roadways-- Since the perception of rural character is largely a function of what motorists in passing cars see, the preservation or enhancement of the view of the development from the adjacent public roadway is critical. Significant minimum setbacks from the roadway can go far in protecting the rural character. If these setback areas do not contain existing vegetation or topographic features sufficient to significantly screen the houses, it is essential that vegetation, preferably native, be added to screen the development from the road.

Key Point: *Significant minimum setbacks from the public roadway and adequate vegetation can go far in protecting rural character.*

Screening New Housing with Topography, or Existing And/or New Vegetation-- A good local example of significant setbacks and screening can be found in Durango West II. While not a traditional cluster development, it incorporates a naturally landscaped setback from the highway of approximately 200 feet along its southern boundary that provides both passive recreational open space for trails and an effective buffer to minimize the visual impact of the development from the highway. It should be recognized, however, that due to the varied terrain and vegetation found throughout La Plata County, no one specific standard can be applied to all clustered developments.

Preservation of Sufficient Open Space For Wildlife Habitat–while open space objectives and layout considerations are discussed later in this section, it is important to note that wildlife corridors should be considered an important element of a well designed cluster development.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Key Point: *A menu of flexible design options and setbacks should be established that can be applied under varying circumstances to help protect rural character.*

While maintaining rural character is a critical element of a clustered development, *the design and layout of the homes on the site (cluster groupings) within the overall development is equally critical to a successful clustered development.*

As shown in Cluster Diagram No. 1, by limiting the size of each cluster group—to say 10 units or less per cluster group; by requiring open space within each cluster group, and by requiring cluster groups to be separated from one another by open space, it is possible to locate each lot in the development adjacent to some form of open space. While this approach will help to preserve rural character and offer residents accessibility to the open space parcel, it will not automatically serve to protect wildlife corridors, agricultural lands, or other unique natural feature unless these issues are specifically taken into consideration during the design phase.

Diagram No. 1

Diagram No. 2

The main objective of Cluster Diagram No. 2 is the preservation of agricultural land. As you can see, a slightly different approach is taken. Houses are grouped near one another on the remnant parcel, that is, that portion of the development parcel not being used for agricultural purposes. When possible, the houses should also be placed so as to limit views from the adjacent public roadway.

As you can see by the above examples, there are a number of issues to consider when evaluating the merits of a clustered development proposal. First, and probably foremost, *is the open space objective*. What has traditionally been the case in La Plata County is that most open space designations are intended to protect agricultural lands, wildlife corridors, view corridors, or other unique natural features. *It is this issue that should determine the location of the houses, or cluster groups, on the parcel.* For instance, if the objective of the open space is to preserve unique natural features, the homes should be located in general proximity to one another and

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

away the natural feature as shown in Diagram No. 3 below. If the objective is to preserve an agricultural parcel, the approach would be similar—locate the houses near one another but away from the agricultural parcel.

Key Point: *The objective of the open space designation should help to determine the location of the houses on the parcel.*

Secondly, *should the lands identified as open space be maintained in common ownership?* or should the subdivision have platted building envelopes that allow development on only a portion of the lot and individual ownership of portions of the open space. With large cluster developments, common ownership of the open space should be required to ensure the preservation and maintenance of the open space as originally envisioned. *In cluster developments that are limited in the number of total lots*, as we typically see in La Plata County, a joint management agreement between individual owners may suffice. The individual ownership approach has been common practice in the past in La Plata County and does serve as a pragmatic means of ensuring that open space is provided in limited-lot subdivisions while also eliminating the need for common ownership. There are pitfalls associated with this approach however. In particular, unless there is a management agreement established for the entire area designated as open space, there is no assurance that once the development is occupied that the open space will be maintained for such things as weed control, or the protection of wildlife habitat or unique natural features.

Key point: *It is clearly preferable to have common ownership of the open space, or a joint management agreement to ensure that the open space objective is maintained.*

Diagrams No. 3 and No. 4 below explore the concept of *limited-lot cluster subdivision* a bit further by showing what should, and should not, qualify as limited-lot clustered subdivision. Diagram No. 3 shows a design that effectively utilizes clustering in a way that protects maximum functional open space, unique natural features, and views from the adjacent public roadway. In this example, the lots sizes are smaller and building envelopes are established in general proximity to one another. It should qualify as clustering. Diagram No. 4, on the other hand, fails to achieve the intent of clustering. The development parcel is split into four large lots and the placement of building envelopes has little relationship to the open space parcel, view corridors or natural features. Without some consideration for these issues, this example should not be considered as a limited-lot cluster subdivision.

Diagram No. 3

Diagram No. 4

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Open Space Designations within a Development: A number of issues relative to open space within a clustered development have already been presented. However, since properly designed cluster developments are very much a function of the open space that is being preserved, further discussion is needed. *This section will only deal with open space as it relates to a development.* Open space preservation as a broader category, one that is intended to identify and preserve certain environment features or other lands in the community but occurring outside the development process, will be addressed in a later element of the plan.

Land Designated as Open Space Should Be Consistent with the Following:

- **Open space should, in general, be contiguous:** The purpose of contiguity is to ensure that open space areas are large enough to be functional as agricultural parcels or wildlife habitat. They do not merely consist of numerous isolated pockets of land that were otherwise unusable for development purposes. Certain smaller remnant parcels may be included in the overall open space designation when the remnant parcel is intended to preserve a unique natural feature such as a wetlands or tree stand or when serving as a landscaped buffer or playground area for children.
- **Open space should be held in a single ownership:** As mentioned previously, while management agreements can sometimes serve the same purpose, ideally the title to the open space parcel should be held by a party that can ensure ongoing maintenance and management such as a land trust, homeowners association, or other single ownership entity.
- **Uses of Open Space Should Be Limited to Agricultural, Conservation, or Passive Recreation.**

Open Space Uses Within a Development May Include:

- **Environmental Features** - wildlife habitat protection, flood control, water quality protection, and visual buffering from roads or between developments and recreation; or certain other features such as landscaped cul-de-sac islands;
- **Agriculture** - except those higher-intensity agricultural uses requiring Class II land use permits such as intensive animal production or processing facilities;
- **Limited Structures** - limited agriculturally related structures such as barns, well houses, and stables may be considered appropriate but should be kept to a minimum. Fencing should be prohibited except as necessary for agricultural uses;

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- **Passive Recreation** including such things as trails, fishing, and undeveloped picnic areas (Refer to *Chapter 11: Parks, Recreation, and Trails* for discussion of active recreation)
- **Roads** - driveways and road cuts should be minimized and placed, when feasible, on the edge of the open space;
- **Open space tracts should be of an appropriate width:** An important aspect of open space is that it has a “natural” character. The appropriate minimum dimension is related to its use. For example, a meadow or hay field should be large enough to turn around farm equipment and to irrigate. On the other hand, a natural stream corridor, or trail access, can be relatively narrow and still have a natural character.
- **Management of open space:** The easement or title that creates an open space parcel will incorporate management objectives and commitments, and provisions for monitoring and enforcement. Commitments need not be onerous, but they should be recorded into property deeds and on the subdivision plat when created. Such restrictions should provide enforceable and unambiguous guidance for the long-term management of open space.

Management Commitments May Include Such Things As:

- Fencing prohibitions or restrictions;
- Allowable uses;
- Allowable structures; location and size;
- Maintenance requirements for noxious weeds, irrigation ditches; fire hazard prevention, etc.;
- Commitments to vegetate with appropriate plants immediately after grading, filling, road construction and other types of ground disturbance;
- Locations for and restrictions on public access.

Subdivisions having a limited number of lots: As suggested earlier, establishing single ownership and/or management entities for open space areas designated within a subdivision having a limited number of lots/owners, while preferable, can be onerous. It is for this reason that designating building envelopes and open space areas on each parcel has become an accepted alternative for preserving open space within limited-lot subdivisions.

Key Point: *The platting of building envelopes on individual lots with the remaining lands designated as the open space has become an accepted, yet less effective, means of preserving open space.*

None-the-less, even under this scenario, many of the same management criteria could apply with the establishment of a homeowners association or management agreement. Another component of the open space issue relates to how much land should be dedicated as open space in order to receive a district plan density bonus. Each district plan has an

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

established threshold for the bonus but each is also different to one another. This issue will be further evaluated later in the section of this chapter that addresses the public benefit criteria process.

Areas For Business Development: The district plans each address non-residential land uses differently. With few exceptions, the designation of land for non-residential uses in the plans was based primarily upon uses already in place at the time of plan adoption. The few exceptions are areas in Grandview, Gem Village and on the Koshak Mesa where larger tracts of undeveloped land were designated for business use, and where central services are likely to be in the future. Since the adoption of the plans, the County has received, and granted, a number of individual requests to redesignate specific parcels for business development. This has not, however, fulfilled the apparent demand. The business community has expressed interest in seeing the establishment of additional areas designated for non-residential uses.

Key Point: *An analysis of existing non-residential land uses and plan designations should be undertaken to identify available lands or land deficiencies associated with such uses.*

This analysis should focus on areas where central services already exist or may be feasible in the future development, such as in and around areas appropriate for growth hubs.

Mixed Use Land Use Classification: The *mixed use land use classification* is included in the Florida Mesa, Bayfield and Vallecito district land use plans. Areas designated as mixed use include: portions of Grandview, Gem Village, and northwest of Vallecito Reservoir. The mixed use classification is *generally defined as a transition area between residential and commercial uses*. The mixed use designations vary slightly among the district plans with regard to underlying residential densities as well as the allowable non-residential uses.

During the district planning process, the mixed use classification was applied only in areas already having a mix of residential and commercial uses and where no new or expanded mixed use areas were envisioned. Since the adoption of the plans, however, the County has received, and granted, requests to establish additional mixed use areas. This has resulted in new isolated pockets of mixed land uses, running counter to the intentions of the plans and the definition of the mixed use classification.

As an alternative to applying the mixed-use classification to new areas, a similar effect can be achieved with less potential for conflict by carefully delineating the proposal area with “non-residential” and “residential” land use classifications.

Key Point: *As an alternative to creating new mixed-use areas, a similar effect can be achieved with less potential for conflict by carefully delineating the proposal area with “local commercial” and “residential” land use classifications.*

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

For example, the first tier of parcels fronting a highway or main road might be designated local commercial or light industrial, while the second tier of parcels could be designated medium-density residential. ***For areas being proposed for development that already have a mixed use classification***, requiring specific mitigation standards and uses could lessen impacts on surrounding land uses.

Key Point: The mixed use classification should be refined by adding specific development and mitigation standards, and allowable uses, so to lessen impacts on surrounding residential land uses.

Refinement of the Mixed Use Classification Could Include:

- Establishing standards for maximum building size and minimum setbacks to residential structures;
- Limiting non-residential uses to minimum impact uses such as office, service and limited retail to minimize the potential for conflict with less intensive surrounding uses;
- Establishing lighting, landscaping, buffering, and signage standards; and
- Establishing criteria for determining the mix of commercial uses allowed (the Vallecito Plan may serve as a good model with its mixed Residential/Accommodations classification).

Recreational Vehicle Parks: The district plans do not specifically address RV parks as a land use classification. Such uses are neither traditional commercial or residential uses. They are also different than mobile home parks, which are treated as residential subdivisions in terms of density.

Key Point: RV Parks are probably most similar to lodging, campground or country tourist land use classifications and should be allowed in areas classified for such uses. RV parks should also be allowed in other commercial areas.

Public Facilities: Several of the district plans include language stating that public facilities are allowable in all areas provided that they meet land use code requirements for compatibility. The Florida Mesa, Vallecito, Florida Road and North County plans should be made consistent by including language stating that public facilities may be appropriate in any area subject to an approval of a plan amendment and land use permit.

Key Point: Public facility uses may be compatible with most land uses provided that the site is adequately buffered from adjacent properties to mitigate impacts.

Park and Ride Lots: The La Plata County Transportation Plan has identified generalized locations suitable for park and ride lots. Such facilities are compatible with most land uses provided that the site is adequately buffered and set back from adjacent properties and has good

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

access to the arterial highway system. As such, park and ride lots should be allowed within any land use classification contingent upon receiving approval for a Class II land use permit. No plan amendment should be required.

Park and Ride Lots Should:

- Share parking lots that receive mostly evening or weekend use;
- Not be located on intersection corners (reserve for buildings);
- Have hard surfaces that minimize dust; and
- Be designed with adequate landscaped buffers and drainage

Key Point: Park and ride facilities may be compatible with most land uses provided that the site is adequately buffered and set back from adjacent properties and has good access to the arterial highway system.

General Definitions: Each district plan has a set of land use classifications which identify preferred uses and densities. In many cases, however, determining allowable uses is left to subjective interpretation due to a lack of specificity. In order to ensure consistency in application of uses allowable in each classification, definitions should be refined for each classification. The definitions should not be considered exclusive to only those uses listed but should clarify the intent of each classification while establishing a baseline from which other uses could be considered.

Key Point: To ensure consistency in application of uses allowable in each land use classification, definitions should be refined to clarify the intent of each classification.

Public Benefit Criteria Process

The public benefit criteria density bonus process was established as an incentive program within the district plans to allow for higher residential densities to occur if certain public benefits were provided as part of a project. Each district plan is slightly different in how density bonuses are determined and awarded. Each has similarities though, especially as they relate to clustering development to protect open space and other natural features. There is, however, a lack of detail in each plan relative to what is meant by clustering, open space, trails, ridge lines, etc. This has resulted in case-by-case interpretation of the density bonus criteria.

Key Point: The public benefit criteria process in each district plan should be refined to ensure consistent and objective application of the bonus criteria.

The application of the clustering and open space guidelines provided earlier in this chapter will help to lend specificity to the public benefit criteria process relative to those issues. The County Trails Plan also provides guidance relative to new development and should be incorporated by reference into the public benefit criteria section of each plan that addresses trail issues.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Additionally, there may be opportunity to improve upon the process by adding additional, alternative public benefit criteria that allow for density bonuses beyond 100 percent. Some, but not all, of the plans have density bonuses available for providing affordable housing. This should be expanded upon for all districts. Other possible alternatives include the provision of sewer and water, paved road, internal neighborhood commercial uses, mass transit opportunities, public facility sites, etc. By assigning bonus values to an assortment of public benefit alternatives, a development proposal could choose among a menu of alternatives to reach a desired density, with a maximum density bonus of, say, 150 percent being established.

Key Point: The public benefit criteria process should be expanded to provide developers with further incentive to add amenities to a development, enhancing the overall quality of the project.

Plan Review Procedures

The district plans were completed in the mid-to-late 1990s. At that time, a process was established for modifying the plans based on citizen request, be it a project-specific need or general amendment based on a changing environment. A later change to this process provided for semi-annual plan amendment hearings to occur in March and September.

Key Point: The criteria by which plan amendment are considered should be more clearly defined.

The amendment process as written does not identify a specific time frame for comprehensive reviews to evaluate the “big picture” changes that may have occurred since a plan’s original adoption. Typically, community plans are revisited every five to 10 years in most communities.

Key Point: For the district land use plans to be effective tools for directing growth in the County, each plan should be re-evaluated on a periodic and consistent basis.

Key Point: La Plata County, having seven district plans and one zoning plan in place as of 2001, should establish an evaluation schedule of one plan per year on a rotating basis. This would allow for a comprehensive revision of each plan approximately every seven years.

This approach, while providing a schedule to revisit each plan, does not address the question of which plan gets revisited when. Based on development pressures occurring in the County, it is recommended that the Florida Mesa Plan and the Animas Valley Plan receive reviews prior to others. Additionally, efforts should continue to develop plans for the Southeast La Plata district and the Fort Lewis Mesa district. The balance of plan reviews should be based on need and interest.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

LAND USE CODE

Overview

The Land Use Code is the primary means by which the comprehensive planning goals of the County are implemented. It is therefore critical that any changes in planning policy as outlined in the comprehensive plan and elsewhere are accurately reflected in the Code. The following discussion is not intended as a detailed analysis of the Code. It is however a brief history of the Code as well as a discussion of several issues that should be considered prior to any Code revisions.

Background

In 1990 La Plata County adopted a land use permitting process, currently titled “*La Plata Land Use Code*”, to guide its review of subdivisions and development. The Code was prepared as a follow up to the 1990 adoption of the “*La Plata County Comprehensive Land Use Plan - Element 1: Policy Plan*”. The development review process envisioned in the Plan, and subsequently outlined in the Code, has since undergone a number of revisions but still remains largely based on the concepts of compatibility and the mitigation of impacts.

In 1990, planned land uses were not designated on district maps. In fact, the whole premise behind the Plan and the Code were to not designate land uses at all but to ensure compatibility between adjoining land uses by mitigating negative impacts such as excessive noise, lighting, dust, etc. This approach was very much a reflection of the historically strong perspective in the County relative to private property rights and individual freedoms. It was felt at the time that by establishing performance standards for new development, flexibility in use of one’s land would be maintained while ensuring that impacts to neighbors would be minimized.

As the mid 1990s approached, however, a shift in attitudes was emerging. This new sentiment suggested that mitigating the impacts of development on neighbors, while critical, was only addressing part of the issue. An important piece seemed to have been overlooked. It was felt that without some type of county-wide organization of what types of uses went where, that cumulative community-wide impacts would be overlooked, and providing essential services in the County would become more difficult and expensive. As a result, a new comprehensive planning process was undertaken. By 1997, the County had established 10 planning districts, eight of which established land use plans to guide growth by identifying preferred land use types and densities within their district.

The designation of preferred land uses throughout most of the County has indeed resulted in a more organized pattern of development for service delivery, and has also provided a degree of certainty for land owners and developers. Unfortunately, the land use code, which was originally established upon the notion of compatibility and impact mitigation rather than use designation, was never revised to truly reflect this change. An additional factor is that State Statute dictates

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

that land use plans are advisory only, and that the land use code is the primary, legally enforceable means by which development proposals are reviewed and processed. What this has resulted in is a unique blend of two distinct approaches to land use administration that sometimes do not work well as one system.

Key Point: The La Plata Land Use Code, established as a performance-based system based upon the notion of compatibility and impact mitigation, rather than use designation, was never revised to appropriately reflect the changes established by the district plans.

Revision of the Land Use Code

With the difficulty in blending the existing land use code with the district plans, it is critical that a comprehensive revision of the code be undertaken. The question of whether the County should refine its existing performance style code or move towards a more traditional zoning system has likely already been answered by the historically strong preference for a flexible land use system. A traditional zoning system may provide for more certainty in allowable uses, densities and land values but it would be quite rigid, and inflexible to the incentive-based land use system of La Plata County.

A number of code revisions have already been identified that would provide for a far more functional integration of the code with the district plans. These changes would likely improve the overall function of the code for areas that do not have plans as well. Revising the code in its current style, as a performance-based system, will allow for a continuation of the flexibility that is currently found in the code and the plans. It is yet to be seen, however, whether this type of revision would improve the County's ability to implement such progressive tools as purchase and/or transfer of development rights programs which rely heavily upon regulatory-based densities to determine land values.

Key Point: A comprehensive code revision must be undertaken in order for the Code to work more effectively with the district land use plans.

OTHER LAND USE CONSIDERATIONS

Several other growth management tools are introduced here for consideration. They are programs that have been used effectively in other communities but are not currently being utilized, or are underutilized, in La Plata County. This list is intended as a brief overview only. Thought should be given towards whether a thorough evaluation of these programs should be undertaken to determine whether they could prove effective in La Plata County.

Capital Expansion Fees

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

Colorado State Statutes authorize statutory counties such as La Plata to collect certain narrowly defined capital expansion fees such as fees-in-lieu of school and park land dedication, or road impact fees. They are a one-time charge assessed on new development that is intended to ensure that the new development will pay for at least a part of the cost of the capital facilities needed to serve it. Capital expansion fees must be specifically tied to the impacts of development on public facilities, and must be used to provide or improve facilities that benefit the development in question. In order to meet the legal requirements, a careful analysis of existing conditions and the public facility needs which are attributable to the new development must be undertaken. La Plata County uses capital expansion fees on a limited basis. School fees-in-lieu are collected, as are road impact fees associated with certain development.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs)

A transfer of development rights program creates a mechanism by which a property owner can transfer a predetermined amount of development “right” from one parcel to another. Rather than developing a specific site, the development rights associated with that site are transferred to another site, where the development then occurs. This allows more intensive development on the second site than would have originally been allowed previous to the transfer. It also removes the right to develop the transferred rights on the original site. A variety of different approaches to TDR have been used effectively around the country to direct density, retain rural character, and protect unique natural features where desired.

Key Point: A Transfer of Development Rights study should be undertaken to determine the feasibility of such a program in La Plata County

Purchase of Development Rights (PDRs)

A purchase of a development rights program is similar to a transfer of development rights program in that it is premised on the idea that every piece of property has a specific number of development rights or allowed housing units which can be defined and quantified. However, instead of transferring the right to develop to a different parcel, the rights are purchased outright as a tool for eliminating the ability to develop all or part of the parcel. The PDR approach to preserving undeveloped land is a less technical approach than the TDR approach but it tends to be very expensive due to the outright purchasing of rights rather than the transferring of them.

Key Point: Growth management programs used in other areas should be evaluated for consideration in La Plata County.

Summary of Goals, Key Points and Plan Recommendations

Goals

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- Goal 3.1: To accommodate a growing population through the fair and consistent administration of a land use system that provides clear direction for private and public land use.
- Goal 3.2: To uphold the visions and goals established within each of the district land use plans.
- Goal 3.3: To periodically reevaluate and refine the district land use plans based on their visions and goals.
- Goal 3.4: To support Bayfield, Durango, and Ignacio in their efforts to expand commercial and residential development, and employment opportunities.
- Goal 3.5: To encourage growth hubs in the County that would provide opportunities for higher-density commercial and residential development, and employment centers.
- Goal 3.6: To support efforts to extend central services to growth hubs and other areas envisioned for higher densities in the district plans.
- Goal 3.7: To support efforts to create a rural water system to serve areas consistent with the district plans.
- Goal 3.8: To encourage the preservation of contiguous open lands in La Plata County

Key Points

The ***Key Points*** presented in this chapter are summarized below. Many, but not all, should be considered ***Action Items***--specific actions that must be taken in order to implement the plan.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- I. The Land Use Element is intended to uphold the visions and goals of the district land use plans while guiding future growth in the County.
- I. The challenge is to adequately and cost-effectively meet new service demands while not disproportionately placing the cost associated with new development on existing residents.
- I. The qualities and character that make the County unique, and economically stable, must be maintained as new development is accommodated.
- I. Overlapping areas of influence near Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio should be clearly defined and conflicting issues and processes should be resolved and agreed upon via joint planning efforts and intergovernmental agreements.
- I. Coordination between service providers and the County should be established and/or strengthened to ensure that the County district land use plans are adhered to during the provision or expansion of central services.
- I. The growth hub concept is not intended to encourage the proliferation of unplanned and scattered high-density development in outlying parts of the County but to allow for strategically located growth areas.
- I. The strengthening of growth hubs in the County, including Bayfield and Ignacio, will help to lessen the reliance on the City of Durango as the primary source of employment opportunities, goods and services in the County.
- II. Project proponents should recognize the potential for additional on-site development as services become available and design their initial site plan accordingly.
- I. The underlying theme of each district plan is to maintain the existing character of the district while it grows.
- I. The County should work with the Fort Lewis Mesa and Southeast districts to establish district land use plans.
- I. The County should create a comprehensive cluster design guidebook.
- I. Significant minimum setbacks from the public roadway and adequate vegetation can go far in protecting rural character.
- I. A menu of flexible design options, buffering standards, and setbacks should be established that can be applied under varying circumstances to help protect rural character.
- I. The objective of the open space designation should help to determine the location of the houses on the parcel.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- I. It is clearly preferable to have common ownership of the open space, or a management agreement to ensure that the open space objective is maintained.
- I. The platting of building envelopes on individual lots with the remaining lands designated as the open space has become an accepted, yet less effective, means of preserving open space.
- I. An analysis of existing non-residential land uses and plan designations should be undertaken to identify available lands or land deficiencies associated with such uses.
- I. As an alternative to creating new mixed-use areas, a similar effect can be achieved with less potential for conflict by carefully delineating the proposal area with “local commercial” and “residential” land use classifications.
- I. The mixed use classification should be refined by adding specific development and mitigation standards, and allowable uses, so to lessen impacts on surrounding residential land uses.
- I. RV Parks are probably most similar to lodging, campground or country tourist land use classifications and should be allowed in areas classified for such uses. RV parks should also be allowed in other commercial areas.
- I. Public facility uses may be compatible with most land uses provided that the site is adequately buffered from adjacent properties to mitigate impacts.
- I. Park and ride facilities may be compatible with most land uses provided that the site is adequately buffered and set back from adjacent properties and has good access to the arterial highway system.
- I. To ensure consistency in application of uses allowable in each land use classification, definitions should be refined to clarify the intent of each classification.
- I. The public benefit criteria process in each district plan should be refined to ensure consistent and objective application of the bonus criteria.
- I. The public benefit criteria process should be expanded to provide developers with further incentive to add amenities to a development, enhancing the overall quality of the project.
- I. The criteria by which plan amendment are considered should be more clearly defined.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- I. For the district land use plans to be effective tools for directing growth in the County, each plan should be re-evaluated on a periodic and consistent basis.
- I. La Plata County, having seven district plans and one zoning plan in place as of 2001, should establish an evaluation schedule of one plan per year on a rotating basis. This would allow for a comprehensive revision of each plan approximately every seven years.
- I. The La Plata Land Use Code, established as a performance-based system based upon the notion of compatibility and impact mitigation, rather than use designation, was never revised to appropriately reflect the changes established by the district plans.
- I. A comprehensive code revision must be undertaken in order for the Code to work more effectively with the district land use plans.
- I. A Transfer of Development Rights study should be undertaken to determine the feasibility of such a program in La Plata County
- I. Growth management programs used in other areas should be evaluated for consideration in La Plata County.

Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations have been included throughout this chapter. They should be implemented through the prioritization and initiation of action items. The *Action Items(AI)* summarized below are drawn, in part, from the *Key Points*. They are incorporated into an *Action Item Prioritization Table* included in Chapter 12.

- AI3.1:** Define overlapping areas of influence near Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio; and establish consistency between plans and processes.
- AI3.2:** Coordinate with service providers to established and/or strengthened recognition and adherence to district plans during the provision or expansion of central services.
- AI3.3:** Establish criteria for developing and/or expanding growth hubs.
- AI3.4:** Work with the Fort Lewis Mesa and Southeast districts to establish district land use plans.
- AI3.5:** Create a menu of flexible design options, buffering criteria, and setbacks that can be applied under varying circumstances to help protect rural character. This could be undertaken as part of a comprehensive cluster design guide.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

- AI3.6:** Analyze existing non-residential land uses and plan designations to identify available lands or land deficiencies associated with such uses.
- AI3.7:** Refine the mixed use land use classification by incorporating specific development and mitigation standards, and allowable uses, so to lessen impacts on surrounding residential land uses.
- AI3.8:** Clarify land use classification definitions to ensure consistency in application of uses allowable in each classification.
- AI3.9:** Refine the public benefit criteria process in each district plan to ensure consistent and objective application of the bonus criteria.
- AI3.10:** Expand the public benefit criteria process to provide developers with further incentive to add amenities to a development, enhancing the overall quality of the project.
- AI3.11:** Reevaluate each district land use plan on a regular basis to ensure that each plan is effective at appropriately directing growth in the County.
- AI3.12:** Undertake a comprehensive revision of the Land Use Code.
- AI3.13:** Evaluate growth management programs used in other areas. In particular, undertake an analysis of transferable development rights for use in La Plata County.
- AI3.14:** Work with San Juan Basin Health Department to review ISDS regulations.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 4: TRANSPORTATION

Overview and Background

In January 2000, the County Planning Commission adopted the La Plata County Transportation Plan as an element of the La Plata County Comprehensive Plan. A summary of the transportation plan follows.

Plan Summary

The La Plata County Transportation Plan was initiated in August 1998 in order to develop a coordinated strategy for the management and improvement of the County's transportation system for the next 20 years and beyond. The plan studies the county road network and predicts the need for future improvements and traffic management strategies based on roadway conditions, traffic volumes, and realistic growth projections.

The overall findings of the study indicate that many roadway improvements will be required in coming years to safely accommodate existing and future traffic on county roads.

Since the costs of such improvements will be extremely high, the study prioritizes recommended improvements and identifies potential funding sources to finance recommended projects.

The Plan Was Developed Through a Year-long Process, Which Included the Following Major Steps:

- Analysis of existing roadway conditions, signage and striping, traffic counts, speed patterns and accident histories
- Citizen input gathered from nine public meetings and the circulation of questionnaires, meetings with local government and agency staff members, and truck and heavy equipment operators.
- Modeling of existing and projected traffic patterns to identify future needs and related improvements

The Plan includes the following elements, which are intended to guide the management and expansion of the County road system for the next 20 years and beyond:

- 1) ***A comprehensive set of transportation policies*** intended to guide future management, planning, and funding decisions are defined in Section 3.
- 1) ***Prioritized recommendations for improvements to existing roads and the strategic construction of new roads and upgrading/realignment of existing roads.*** Projects are

CHAPTER 4: TRANSPORTATION

categorized as Safety, Capacity or Road Network Efficiency Improvements - Section 9, 11 & 12.

- 2) ***Definition and categorization of most roads in the county road network according to their role within the overall network*** - Chapter 9.

- 1) ***Financially constrained analysis and prioritization of recommended projects*** and an identification of alternative funding sources- Chapter 13 and 14.

- 1) ***Discussion of measures intended to reduce traffic congestion***, including park and ride lots and road improvements to better accommodate bicycles - Chapter 15.

- 1) ***Discussion for the implementation of the Model Traffic Code, Benefits and Costs*** - Chapter 16.

- 1) ***Measures to mitigate the impacts of trucks and heavy vehicles*** - Chapter 17.

A copy of the Plan is available for review at the County Planning Office or Engineering Office.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

Overview

The *Housing Element* of the La Plata County Comprehensive Plan focuses on housing affordability issues that La Plata County government can play a role in. It documents recent housing trends, overviews several elements of affordability, looks at past and ongoing County efforts to assist with the creation of affordable housing, establishes goals, and presents plan recommendations that may help to ensure that a full range of housing is accessible to all County residents.

It should be recognized that the preferred location of housing in the unincorporated County is a function of the district land use plans and is not addressed here. And although important to the provision of affordable housing, the comprehensive plan does not attempt to overview or evaluate the assortment of public and private non-profit housing organizations working in La Plata County.

Background

The County's housing market experienced significant change during the 1990s. The growth rate exceeded three percent annually for most of the decade. Spurred by the intense interest of those moving here, land and home prices increased dramatically. At the same time, most wages remained relatively low, a function of the tourist-based economy which relies heavily on traditionally low-paying service jobs. This situation compromised the ability of many long-time residents and young adults to obtain reasonably affordable housing.

Key Point: *“Affordable” housing is defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a household that pays no more than 30 percent of its gross income for rent or mortgage, and utilities.*

A look at median home prices in the County illustrates the significance of the affordability issue. Table 5-1 shows the median priced houses and percentage of families unable able to qualify to purchase a median-priced house in 1995 and 1998. As shown, In 1998, 54 percent of families in Durango had incomes that did not qualify, while 51 percent of families in unincorporated parts of the County did not qualify. A comparison with 1995 indicates housing has become slightly more attainable over that three-year period in unincorporated areas yet relatively unchanged in Durango.

Key Point: *Over half of the families living in unincorporated parts of the County in 1998 were unable to afford the purchase of a median-priced home.*

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

Renters were also faced with similar difficulties in finding affordable units. Nearly 60 percent of jobs in the County in 1998 were in the lower-paying service and retail/wholesale sectors. Average annual wages in these sectors consistently fall well below the threshold for affordability to rent an average two-bedroom or three-bedroom unit.

One result of the high housing costs in the Durango area has been the tendency for people to move to the outlying, less-developed areas of the County where land tends to cost less. Moving to the outskirts of the County has allowed many lower-income families to buy or lease a parcel, and occupy it with a mobile or modular home served by an individual well and septic system. Outwardly, this would appear to provide for reasonable, lower-cost solution. But there are secondary costs, some non-financial, associated with this approach. Ownership and maintenance of one or more automobiles is one cost. As is the installation and maintenance of onsite sewer and water systems. Both add thousands to annual cost of living. Non-financial costs to consider include increased travel times and, in most cases, slower service response times.

The cost of land is often the least significant factor in housing affordability. There are a number of other variables affecting the cost of housing. Interest rates and the cost of construction--both labor and materials, are two aspects of the affordability equation that are difficult to control. Only a modest rise in long term interest rates can add thousands of dollars per year to the cost of housing. This often can mean the difference between mortgage loan qualification and denial. Construction costs also tend to fluctuate based on changes in the market, sometimes resulting in significant cost increases in a relatively short period of time. Installation of infrastructure is another factor. Infrastructure costs typically exceed land costs. If all other factors were equal, higher-density development probably provides the best method for minimizing housing costs.

Key Point: *By developing at higher-densities, less land is needed per unit, and the cost of roads and other infrastructure are typically less.*

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

A major requirement for high-density development is centralized infrastructure such as water and sewer. A number of areas in the unincorporated County are already served by, or can likely be served by, central water and/or central sewer in the future.

Developing at higher densities in areas with centralized infrastructure provides a number of benefits including:

- 1) More economical provision of utilities, police, fire, road maintenance, and other services
- 2) Easier access to schools, businesses and, in some cases, public transit
- 3) The protection of agricultural uses resulting from the reduction of low-density development spreading into the countryside

Housing Goals

Goal 5.1: To support efforts to provide housing that is decent, safe, and affordable for all County residents.

Goal 5.2: To Support Efforts to create a county-wide housing authority.

Past And Ongoing Efforts

There is an wide array of approaches for addressing affordable housing. The primarily approaches fall into two categories: *incentive-based and regulatory*. Incentive-based strategies provide benefits such as density bonuses and tax benefits, making affordable housing more appealing to developers. Regulatory solutions generally require some sort of recognition or commitment to affordable housing as a condition of development approval. Other initiatives may include housing developments built by the local government, non profits or housing authorities, or the subsidization of rents or mortgage down payments via an assortment of different public and/or private non-profit programs.

La Plata County has historically used the incentive-based approaches to affordable housing. By offering density bonuses, development fees waivers or low-interest loans, the County has made efforts in the past to support individual affordable housing projects.

Key Point: The County has made efforts in the past to support individual affordable housing projects.

Fee Waivers

In the past, the County has agreed to reimburse the cost of land use permit and application fees as well as building permit fees for housing units considered affordable. While not a significant

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

cost savings, the fee waiver/reimbursement process has provided some relief for the development of affordable units in the County.

Key Point: While not a significant cost savings, the fee waiver/reimbursement process has provided some relief for the development of affordable units in the County.

1996 Housing Needs Analysis

A 1996 City of Durango/La Plata County affordable housing report analyzed local affordability issues and concluded, among other things, that the magnitude and range of affordable housing needs are such that no single entity is likely to be able to address them all. The report recommended, among other things, that there needed to be stronger public/private partnerships. The report stated, “developing workable solutions to the County’s affordable housing problems will require imaginative solutions and cooperation among local and state governments, and private developers.”

Key Point: The magnitude and range of affordable housing needs are such that no single entity is likely to be able to address them all.

Housing Revolving Loan Fund

The County has a segregated housing fund that can only be used for affordable housing-related projects. The fund was capitalized in 1992 with La Plata County’s share of the \$237,000 balance in the trustee’s reserve account that resulted from the refunding of approximately \$7.5 million in the six county Southwestern Colorado Single Family Mortgage Revenue Bonds issue from 1979. A July 2001 restructuring of the outstanding 1992 bonds elicited another \$93,000 that was deposited to the Fund. The Fund has been used to provide a \$125,000 loan in 1996 for 12 income-restricted apartments in a 48 apartment complex in Durango. Also, a \$62,000 loan was made to an assisted living facility which reserves six beds for low to moderate income occupants. As the loans are repaid, the returned funds recapitalize the loan fund for use on other Board of County Commissioner approved projects. As of August 2001, the loan fund had a balance of approximately \$325,000.00. Future uses of the fund could include the payment of capital improvement fees, permit fees, or other fees that are typically paid to the County as part of the development review and approval process.

Key Point: Future uses of the revolving loan fund could include the payment of capital improvement fees, permit fees, or other fees that are typically paid to the County as part of the development review and approval process.

2001 Housing Needs Analysis

The City of Durango, La Plata County and the Towns of Bayfield and Ignacio entered into a partnership in 2001 to establish a system to annually collect and update county-wide housing data. The analysis includes annual sale prices, availability, and other pertinent information. The baseline for the analysis the 1996 affordable housing study prepared for the City of Durango.

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

Key Point: The County's housing problems will require imaginative solutions and cooperation among local and state governments, and private developers.

Summary of Goals, Key Points and Plan Recommendations

Goals

Goal 5.1: To support efforts that help to provide housing that is decent, safe, and affordable for all County residents.

Goal 5.2: To Support Efforts to create a county-wide housing authority.

Key Points

The ***Key Points*** presented in this chapter are summarized below.

- U** “Affordable” housing is defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a household that pays no more than 30 percent of its gross income for rent or mortgage, and utilities.
- U** Over half of the families living in unincorporated parts of the County in 1998 were unable to afford the purchase of a median-priced home.
- U** By developing at higher-densities, less land is needed per unit, and the cost of roads and other infrastructure is less.
- U** The magnitude and range of affordable housing needs are such that no single entity is likely to be able to address them all.
- U** Future uses of the revolving loan fund could include the payment of capital improvement fees, permit fees, or other fees that are typically paid to the County as part of the development review and approval process.
- U** While not a significant cost savings, the fee waiver/reimbursement process has provided some relief for the development of affordable units in the County.
- U** The County has made efforts in the past to support individual affordable housing projects.
- U** The County's housing problems will require imaginative solutions and cooperation among local and state governments, and private developers.

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations should be implemented through the prioritization and initiation of action items. The *Action Items (AI)* identified below are incorporated into an *Action Item Prioritization Table* included in *Chapter 12: Implementation*.

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

- AI5.1:** Evaluate each district plan to determine whether an affordable housing density bonus and/or other incentives can be incorporated into the public benefit criteria process.
- AI5.2:** Evaluate whether the expansion of central services in the County has created new opportunities for higher-density residential neighborhoods.
- AI5.3:** Participate in a County-wide housing authority. Discussions relative to the establishment and funding of a housing authority should continue.
- AI5.4:** Form an expert panel to review County subdivision and building regulations to determine whether there are changes that could be made that would lower the cost of development while not undermining the safety, integrity or aesthetics of new development.
- AI5.5:** Find funding sources to recapitalize the County's affordable housing loan fund and other affordable housing efforts.
- AI5.6:** Encourage the private sector to take a stronger role in the provision of affordable housing.
- AI5.7:** Implement affordable housing requirements within the land use code reflective of those envisioned within the district land use plan.

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CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Overview and Background

La Plata County's natural resources are a valuable community asset. Ensuring their preservation and appropriate use is important to both the natural beauty and economy of La Plata County. The *Environmental Resources Element* of the comprehensive plan focuses on environmental quality and unique natural features.

Environmental quality and unique natural features are what defines the character of La Plata County. It is what has attracted people to this area for hundreds of years. That is why ensuring their continued viability and health is important. Be it clean air, water quality and quantity, the sparsely developed open spaces and ridgelines, or the abundant wildlife, each plays an integral role in the overall texture of the community.

Environmental Resources Goal

Goal 6.1: To Maintain or Improve the Quality of La Plata County's Environmental Resources Including Water, Air, Visual Resources, Open Lands, Forests, Wildlife Habitat, Riparian Areas, and Wetlands.

Ground Water



La Plata County is blessed with an abundance of land. This has not, however, translated to an abundance of potable drinking water for many County residents. Many areas of the County are considered water critical (See map), essentially, establishing them as areas requiring groundwater investigations prior to the issuance of a groundwater well permit.

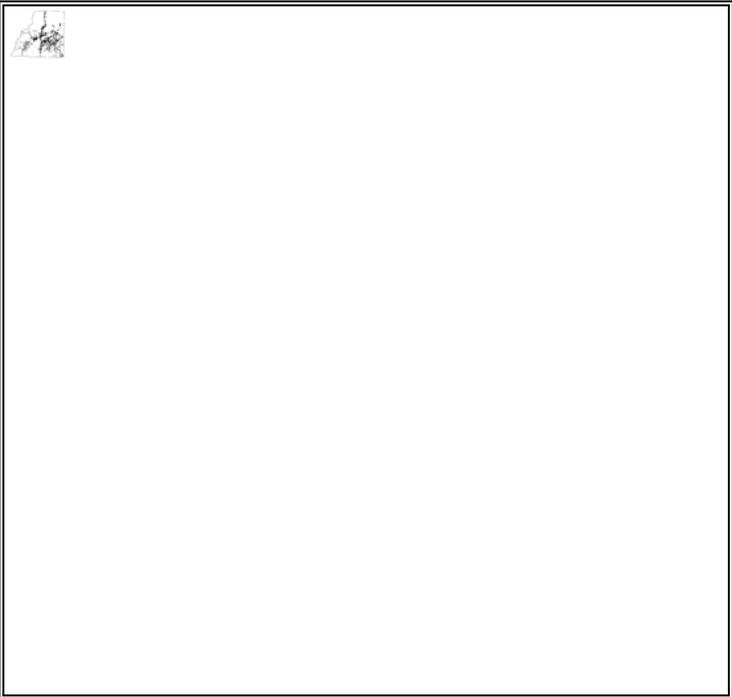
Parts of the County, while not considered water critical, also experience water problems. Bacteria, selenium, fluoride, methane gas, hydrogen sulfide and salinity have all been found in ground water at different times throughout many

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

parts of the County. Many residents rely on hauled water for a consistent source of potable water.

The extensive use of on site individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS) also plays a role in the ground water quality issue. Nearly 11,500 single-family homes were built in the County between 1976 and 2000 (See map to the right). Most rely on ISDS systems and individual groundwater wells. While no major instances of well contamination have been reported as a direct result of the ISDS as of 2001, it is likely that contamination occurs but goes unnoticed and, as a result, unreported. Recent improvement to ISDS regulations, particularly setback requirements, have lessened the potential for contamination from ISDS systems. A reduction in irrigable lands with a commensurate increase in the number of individual wells also has implications for the continued availability of ground water.

Structures Built Since 1976



Annual research conducted by the United States Geological Survey(USGS) since 1995 indicates that in many rapidly developing areas, such as the Florida Mesa, ground water recharge is highly dependent on infiltration of irrigation water. As areas develop and previously irrigated agricultural lands are taken out of production, recharge is in many cases insufficient to maintain the existing water table

Key Point: *The continued proliferation of on-site ground water wells and individual sewage disposal systems may have a negative effect on both water quality and quantity.*

The Colorado Department of Health and Environment supports the development of a rural water system in La Plata County as a means of addressing the growing concern over the lack of a consistent source of potable water for County residents. Since the late 1990s, efforts have been underway to establish a rural water system. Construction of a system had not begun as of 2001. Development of a rural water system in La Plata County would provide County residents with a safe and dependable source of water for domestic use. And due to the largely onsite disposal and treatment of wastewater in the proposed service delivery area, there is the potential that the system water may help to replenish aquifers previously strained by the large number of on-site wells.

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Key Point: *The development of a rural water system would provide many County residents with a consistent and safe source of domestic water.*

Surface Water

A number of factors affect surface water quality. Effective storm water management techniques and appropriate erosion control measures are probably two of the most critical. Maintaining the quality of surface water is critical to the overall environmental health of many of the natural features of La Plata County including rivers corridors, other riparian areas, floodplain and wetlands. Without consideration of these issues, unique natural features and wildlife habitat can be irreparably damaged or destroyed.

With the significant amount of open, permeable surface area found in the County, a County-wide storm water management plan is not likely to be a significant concern. Storm water management is, however, an important issue relative to individual projects and their impact on downstream features. As more permeable surface areas are built upon throughout the County, there is less surface area to rely on for storm water absorption. As a result, drainage ditches and natural water courses tend to bear the burden of the additional runoff with downstream natural and man-made features being affected. Typical storm water management techniques may include such things as curb, gutter and piped storm sewer; detention ponds; and building to site ratios that require a certain percentage of permeable land as part of the development site.

Key Point: *To minimize the impact on the downstream features, both manmade and natural, adequate storm water management techniques must be incorporated in all development projects.*

Erosion control measures can play an instrumental role in the protection of surface water quality. As with other storm water management techniques, adequate erosion control measures can prevent excessive silt and other debris from running off a development site during rain falls or snow melts. The use of silt fencing or berming during site preparation as well as adequate landscaping immediately after construction can help to minimize the potential for erosion problems.

Key Point: *Erosion control measures such as adequate landscaping can play an instrumental role in the protection of surface water quality.*

Key Point: *Working to minimize non-point source pollution resulting from existing development and agricultural operations is also an important tool for limiting surface water contamination.*

Identifying non-point source pollution can sometimes prove difficult, however, as it is often hard to identify the source of non point pollutants.

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Air Quality

Good air quality in La Plata County is essential to the tourism economy. The Durango area is an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Attainment Area for all air pollution criteria including ozone, carbon monoxide and PM_{10s}. La Plata County, on occasion, experiences localized air quality problems and decreased visibility common to many western slope communities. The majority of these occasional hazy days arise from factors unrelated to activities in the County.

Despite La Plata County's generally clean air and Durango's attainment status, air quality is a concern of local residents who recognize that past and likely future growth could lead to air quality problems. Measure's are being taken to address Countywide air quality issues. In 1998, the San Juan Basin Health Department initiated a community-based air quality improvement initiative for the Durango area called the *La Plata County Air Quality Advisory Council*. The Council's focus is to monitor and evaluate air quality issues important to the community. In 2001, the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad put a pollution "scrubber" on its locomotive maintenance facility in downtown Durango.

Key Point: *While air quality in the County is generally good, residents recognize that growth impacts could result in a decrease in air quality.*

There are a number of other activities and issues that affect air quality. One in particular is road dust. The County has established a program to use Magnesium Chloride, a dust inhibitor and bonding agent, on gravel County roads that experience high-volume traffic. It has proven to be an effective agent for holding the roadbed in place and limiting dust.

Other Activities with the Potential to Affect Air Quality Include:

- Open burning
- Wood burning
- operations
- sand and gravel mining
- Asphalt batch plants
- vehicular emissions

Key Point: *Partnerships should be established and/or strengthened which help maintain air quality in La Plata County.*

Open Space/Visual Resources

The distinct character and feel of La Plata County is, in many ways, created by the beauty and openness of the landscape. The County encompasses 1,692 square miles. From the 14,000-foot peaks and rugged wilderness in the north, to the lush river bottoms and pinon juniper woodlands in the heart of the County, to the dry farmlands and desert arroyos in the south, the County's

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

landscape defines the County itself. The many “faces” of the County are reflected in its scenery and views. Residents, business owners and visitors place high value on maintaining this scenic character that contributes to community pride and well-being. The County’s economy is, in many ways, dependent on the continued vibrancy and integrity of the landscape.

Open Space

Open Space Serve a Variety of Uses Including:

- Agriculture
- Wildlife habitat
- Visual buffering around and between developments and communities
- Protection of view corridors along County roads and state highways
- Preservation of Floodplain, wetlands and other unique natural areas
- Passive recreation uses such as hiking, horseback and bicycle riding
- Buffering of noise, dust, and lighting glare between adjacent land uses

Approximately forty-one percent of La Plata County land is in public ownership (BLM, Forest Service, Division of Wildlife, State Lands Commission). Still another 18 % (approximately) is tribally owned. However, the public lands are largely concentrated in the northern third of the County, generally removed from areas where the most development is occurring, such as the Animas Valley and the Florida Mesa. It is in these growing areas where concerns about the retention of open land and community character are the greatest.

Preserving open space and the rural character of the County is not just a nostalgic wish to avoid change. There is a direct relationship to the health of the County’s economy and the quality of life of its residents. For example, two major sectors of the economy – tourism (which accounts for over 50 percent of the County’s economy) and the influx of retirees – are strongly linked to the County’s scenic and rural qualities. The County’s continuing ability to attract and retain visitors, residents, and businesses will depend on maintaining the values and characteristics that brought them here in the first place.

Key Point: The primary purpose of protecting open space should be to preserve unique ecological, biological, cultural and aesthetic features of the community.

Existing and Potential Open Space Protection Programs

Apart from the County’s land use system which encourages the preservation of open space as part of the development process, ***there are a number of other land protection techniques that can provide tax benefits and economic incentives to landowners including:***

- Dedications of conservation easements
- Donations for tax and/or estate planning purposes
- selling or transferring development rights

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

- Exchange of land with public agencies

Several land trusts exist in the County, each having been relatively successful. These land trusts generally work directly with landowners helping to establish easements and monitor the land for compliance with the easements.

Land Trusts Active in La Plata County Include:

- The La Plata Open Space Conservancy
- The Animas Conservancy
- The Trust for Public Lands
- Colorado Cattlemen's Association

In existence since the early 1990s, the La Plata Open Space Conservancy has protected more than 40 properties through acquisition or easements, protecting more than 5,000 acres. Just established in 1999, the Animas Conservancy has begun acquiring easements and is dedicated to protecting properties primarily in the Animas River drainage. The Trust for Public Lands, a national organization, has also helped facilitate several large land acquisitions in the County.

In 2001, a proposal was brought before the La Plata County Board of County Commissions to establish an advisory committee to oversee the creation of a County-wide open space acquisition program. Additionally, a proposal to fund open space acquisitions via proceeds of a use tax was brought before the electorate in November 2001. The ballot measure failed by a 3 to 1 margin, thus eliminating it as a near-term funding source.

Key Point: The creation of a County Open Space Advisory Committee would establish a foundation for the development of a comprehensive open space program for La Plata County.

Visual Resources

As stated earlier, the scenic beauty of the County plays a significant role in shaping the local economy and quality of life for local residents. However, as the County grows, the potential exists for development to degrade and diminish many of the view corridors in the County.

Key Point: Poorly designed development has the potential to degrade many of the view corridors in the County.

Of particular importance are the State and U.S. highway corridors passing through the County. The land use code establishes these corridors as “view corridors” that should be treated uniquely by preserving their aesthetic values. The San Juan Skyway, which includes Hwy 550 North and 160 West, has already received significant attention relative to protecting visual resources. Conversely, Hwy 160 East between Grandview and Gem Village has not received nearly as much attention. It should, however, be of particular importance and should be considered a

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

priority corridor for visual resource protection. It serves as the only major east-west arterial through the County and is also located in an area that has significant commercial development potential. New development along this corridor should include significant setbacks and/or vegetative cover to ensure the integrity of the view corridor.

Key Point: *Due to development pressures in the area, the Highway 160 corridor between Grandview and Gem Village will be particularly susceptible to a loss of visual resources.*

Activities That May Affect Visual Resources Include:

- Excessive grading, cutting and filling associated with new roads and site preparation
- Placement of structures in prominent or sensitive locations, such as open meadows, river bottoms, ridge tops and open hillsides
- Obtrusive residential structures that obscure views of prominent natural features, such as meadows, lakes, streams, hilltops, ridgelines and mountains
- Unscreened outside storage areas
- Excessive removal of vegetation and/or lack of re-vegetation along pipeline and utility rights-of-ways and new roads
- Excessive on-site signage and lighting
- Billboards

Existing Visual Resource Protections

Protection of visual resources is addressed in a variety of existing studies and plans. Following is a brief summary of these protection measures.

District Land Use Plans: The District plans contain a variety of incentives to protect visual resources. All seven district plans make use of the public benefit criteria process which provides density incentives for residential developments that are compatible with the goals of each plan. Much of the focus of the public benefit criteria process is oriented toward development that is visually unobtrusive to the surrounding environment.

La Plata Land Use Code: The Code contains several references to the protection of visual resources and development within the Corridor District. Protections, however, are primarily among the Code's encouraged standards and lack specificity. Most notable are the omission and inadequacy of grading and excavation standards; comprehensive signage standards; and enforced landscaping, buffering and revegetation standards.

San Juan Skyway Open Space Strategic Plan: Prepared in January 1998, the plan provides a strategic framework for stimulating open land protection of key corridor segments that have been identified as having important scenic, natural, recreational, wildlife, and/or historic landscape values. The San Juan Skyway encompasses a 232-mile loop connecting Durango, Silverton, Ouray, Telluride, Dolores, Cortez and Mancos.

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

City of Durango Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan(POST): The POST Plan was prepared by the City of Durango in 2000. The Open Space Element of the plan identifies a number of key parcels that should be preserved for the unique characteristics. A number of these parcels are located outside Durango city limits in the unincorporated County.

Key Point: *Proposed developments should recognize and accommodate visual resources as an important aspect of La Plata County’s character.*

Wildlife Habitat

La Plata County has always been home to a diversity of wildlife. Elk herds are commonly seen grazing the Animas Valley during the winter months; Black Bears and mountain lions are often reported in residential areas adjacent to forest lands during the spring and fall. Throughout the year, small game and other wildlife can be seen in any number of places throughout the County. As development of the Animas Valley and along arterial roads continues throughout the County, there will continue to be increasing conflicts between humans and wildlife.

The County district land use plans all recognize the importance of wildlife habitat as a unique aspect of each district, an aspect that the crafters of those plans hoped to retain.

Key Point: *By recognizing and preserving critical wildlife habitats in the County, conflicts between humans and wildlife can be reduced, thus maintaining this unique aspect of La Plata County’s character.*

Wetlands/Riparian Areas

Wetlands

Wetlands is the collective term for marshes, swamps, bogs, and similar areas found in flat vegetated areas, in depressions in the landscape, and between dry land and water along streams, rivers and lakes. They are areas which are saturated or inundated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support life forms associated with saturated soils. Wetlands are a unique, yet somewhat limited, natural feature in the ecosystem of La Plata County. They serve a number of important functions including erosion and flood control, and as habitat for a variety of aquatic plants and animals.

The County Land use code requires new development to establish a setback of no less than 50 feet from known wetlands. A determination of whether wetlands are on a project site are typically made by qualified engineers or the Army Corp of Engineers. The Corp regulates permitting for disturbance or modification of wetlands under their jurisdiction. The Army Corp has a “no net loss” policy which requires replacement, or mitigation, of wetlands heavily

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

impacted by development. Unfortunately, wetland mitigation has shown to be minimally effective.

Key Point: *Wetlands are a unique, yet somewhat limited, natural feature in the ecosystem of La Plata County that should be preserved.*

Riparian Areas

Riparian areas are typically linear strips along either side of rivers, streams, creeks, and other drainages. They are characterized by saturated soils that support both wetland vegetation as well as other natural features such as cottonwoods, willows, river birches, adlers, sedges, and rushes. Riparian areas also typically provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife. They are also attractive for housing and recreational activities. Additionally, the high productivity of these areas also make them attractive for grazing.

While the County Land use code requires new development to establish a setback of no less than 50 feet from bank high-water line of rivers, streams, and other water courses, this does not, in all cases, provide the protection necessary to limit disturbance of the riparian area.

The **Southwest Colorado Riparian Partnership (SWCORP)**, a local consortium of concerned residents, landowners, land management agencies, and others has formed to establish and maintain a network of interested and diverse parties working toward the common goal of maintaining healthy riparian habitat for multi purpose uses. They are, in essence, developing a long-term plan for conservation of riparian areas throughout the County.

Key Point: *Because of the importance of riparian areas to the biological diversity and character of La Plata County, SWCORP's efforts to establish conservation practices for riparian areas should be supported.*

Other Environmental Resource Considerations

A number of other resource issues which have not received significant attention in the past are mentioned here for future discussion. Things such as energy efficiency standards in new developments; water conservation techniques; alternative energy uses; recycling, and light pollution are all issues which have the potential to impact the County. Given the recent energy problems experienced in California, as well as ongoing concerns over water usage here in La Plata County, a number of these issues, if properly addressed, could play a very positive role in shaping the County as it grows.

Each of these issues have been, or are currently being, addressed via a number of private and public/private initiatives in the County. It is not the intention of this iteration of the County comprehensive plan to recommend any specific steps relative to them. None-the-less, the County should stay informed and support local efforts that lead to appropriate use of these resources.

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Key Point: *The County should stay informed and support local efforts that lead to appropriate use of resources.*

Summary of Goals, Key Points, and Plan Recommendations

Goal

Goal 6.1: To Maintain or Improve the Quality of La Plata County's Environmental Resources including Water, Air, Visual Resources, open lands, forests, Wildlife Habitat, Riparian Areas, and Wetlands.

Key Points

The ***Key Points*** presented in this chapter include:

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

- I. The continued proliferation of on-site ground water wells and individual sewage disposal systems may have a negative effect on both water quality and quantity.
- I. The development of a rural water system will provide many County residents with a consistent and safe source of domestic water.
- I. To minimize the impact on the downstream features, both manmade and natural, adequate storm water management techniques must be incorporated in all development projects.
- I. Erosion control measures such as adequate landscaping can play an instrumental role in the protection of surface water quality.
- I. Working to minimize non-point source pollution resulting from existing development and agricultural operations is also an important tool for limiting surface water contamination.
- I. While air quality in the County is generally good, residents recognize that growth impacts could result in a decrease in air quality.
- I. Partnerships should be established and/or strengthened which help maintain air quality in La Plata County.
- I. The primary purpose of protecting open lands should be to preserve unique ecological, biological and aesthetic features of the community.
- I. The creation of a County Open Space Advisory Committee would establish a foundation for the development of a comprehensive open space program for La Plata County.
- II. Poorly designed development has the potential to degrade many of the view corridors in the County.
 - I. Due to development pressures in the area, the Highway 160 corridor between Grandview and Gem Village will be particularly susceptible to a loss of visual resources.
 - I. Proposed developments should recognize and accommodate visual resources as an important aspect of La Plata County's character.
 - I. By recognizing and preserving critical wildlife habitats in the County, conflicts between humans and wildlife can be reduced, thus maintaining this unique aspect of La Plata County's character.
 - II. Wetlands are a unique, yet somewhat limited, natural feature in the ecosystem of La Plata County that should be preserved.

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

- I. Because of the importance of riparian areas to the biological diversity and character of La Plata County, SWCORP's efforts should be supported.
- I. The County should stay informed and support local efforts that lead to appropriate use of resources.

Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations have been included throughout this chapter. They should be implemented through the prioritization and initiation action items. The *Action Items (AI)* summarized below are incorporated into an *Action Item Prioritization Table* included in Chapter 12.

Water

- AI6.1:** Evaluate and refine USGS water monitoring program to improve baseline data collection.
- AI6.2:** Continue study of impacts gas industry activities have on ground water wells
- AI6.3:** Encourage San Juan Basin Health Department to comprehensively review ISDS systems to determine impacts on ground water.
- AI6.4:** Publicly support development of rural water systems

Air

- AI6.5:** Continue support for, and participation in, the La Plata County Air Quality Advisory Council
- AI6.6:** Establish standards for residential wood burning in new developments as part of the development review process.
- AI6.7:** Support the implementation of the County Transportation Plan and its efforts to reduce road dust and promote alternative modes of transportation

Open Space

- AI6.8:** Provide technical assistance to organizations and/or entities attempting to establish a County open space acquisition program.

CHAPTER 6: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

AI6.9: Develop a County voluntary open space plan as an element of the County comprehensive plan

AI6.10: Fully evaluate merits of a purchase and transfer of development rights programs

Visual Resources

AI6.11: Revise and refine County visual corridor map.

AI6.12: Create design guidelines for development proposed in visual corridors

AI6.13: Define Highway 160 between Grandview and Gem Village as a high-priority visual protection corridor.

AI6.14: Evaluate and consider for adoption road development standards that emphasize the minimization of grading, cutting and filling; the avoidance of steep slopes and visually prominent hillsides; and revegetation after construction.

AI6.15: Complete and expand upon the Animas Valley ridge line study, establishing guidelines to minimize visual impacts of hill side development.

Wildlife Habitat

AI6.16: Initiate discussions with the Division of Wildlife to create a revised comprehensive wildlife inventory and develop a “best development practices” guide to integrate new development with wildlife considerations.

AI6.17: Work with DOW to create education format on wildlife and their habitat.

AI6.18: Create habitat inventory with DOW for planning and educational purposes.

Wetlands/Riparian Areas

AI6.19: Support the Southwestern Colorado Riparian Partnership in their efforts to find solutions to maintaining healthy wetland and riparian habitats.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

Overview

Historically, agriculture has been the predominant land use in the rural parts of La Plata County. It has defined the area's character. Over the past decade, however, consistently declining agriculture commodity prices coupled with skyrocketing land values resulting from an in-migration of new residents has made selling agricultural land for residential development a far more profitable enterprise than agriculture. While this phenomenon is not unique to La Plata County, it has been a cause for concern for many area residents who believe that the preservation of agriculture in La Plata County is essential to maintaining the historic character of the County.

The *Agriculture Element* of the comprehensive plan describes La Plata County Government's role in helping to ensure that agriculture remains an integral part of the community. It is not the intent of this plan element to recommend new land use regulations restricting agricultural operators from selling land for development. It is, however, intended to outline current and proposed land subdivision processes, as well as other tools that agricultural land owners can use to realize non-agriculturally based income from their land while at the same time continuing their agricultural activities.

Key Point: *It is not the intent of this plan element to recommend new land use regulations restricting agricultural operators from selling land for development.*

Background

In 1999 there were approximately 468,592 acres of land taxed agriculturally in the County. Despite this large amount of land, agriculture is a small component of the County's economy. As of 1998, agricultural products and services accounted for a mere 4 percent of jobs in the County, comprising only 1 percent of employment income in the County. The average salary for agricultural related jobs was \$16,134, the lowest rate of any employment sector in the County. Table 7-1 depicts agricultural receipts and net realized income for the County from 1992-97.

Table 7-1
La Plata County Agricultural Income: 1992 - 1997

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

These data show that net income from agriculture has been a net loss for the entire period. This fact, coupled with high real estate values creates an attractive option for farmers and ranchers to “cash in” by selling off all or part of their land. The simplest means of selling land is in tracts 35 acres or larger which are not subject to County development review. Over many years, the cumulative effect of selling off 35-acre parcels is a gradual filling in and breaking up of agricultural land. The overall effect is a loss of rural character.

Thirty-five Acre Subdivision Has Many Negative Consequences Including:

- A reduction of land for farming and ranching
 - Diminished feeling of the rural character
 - Creation of parcels too small to ranch and too large to mow
 - The proliferation of noxious weeds
 - Disruption and fragmentation of wildlife habitat and unique natural features

Key Point: *The cumulative effect of selling off 35-acre parcels is a gradual breaking up and filling in of contiguous agricultural areas and loss of rural character.*

Agriculture Goals

Goal 7.1: Encourage the continuation of agriculture as an integral part of La Plata County.

Goal 7.2: Establish voluntary incentive- and compensation-based programs for preserving agriculture in La Plata County.

Goal 7.3: Find creative solutions to help support the agricultural community’s own efforts to improve the economic viability of farming/ranching in the County.

Goal 7.4: Establish a land use process that provides farmers and ranchers with additional alternatives to 35-acre subdivisions.

State and Local Government Initiatives

Recognized as an issue of concern for quite some time, the loss of agricultural lands to development came to the forefront in the early to mid 1990s as the economy strengthened. In Colorado, an influx of new residents put significant development pressure on local communities.

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

This led to myriad initiatives at the State and local level to find ways to help preserve agriculture and rural character.

1995 State Agricultural Task Force

In January 1995, Colorado Governor Roy Romer convened an agricultural task force to study the causes, trends and consequences of agricultural land conversion. The task force published a report, which included a variety of strategies¹. A number of the strategies would require the involvement of County, State or Federal government while the agricultural community would likely initiate others. They included:

¹ A Report on the Conversion of Agricultural Land in Colorado, Colorado Department of Agriculture and the Governor's Task Force on Agricultural Lands

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

- **Flexible Subdivision Regulations:** Increase flexibility of County subdivision review processes in order to maintain productive agriculture while encouraging clustering of developed units.
- **Income Tax Credits and Enterprise Zones:** Provide state and federal income tax credits for activities that protect agricultural lands and other natural resources. State and federal legislation would be required to implement this strategy.
- **Value-added Processing:** Increase state and local food and fiber manufacturing, and by-product processing opportunities.
- **Agricultural Land Tax Classification:** Clarify the state’s agricultural land classification to limit abuses of tax breaks by landowners who are not true agricultural producers.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Direct infrastructure development and growth to protect agricultural lands.

Key Point: It is somewhat unclear as to what effect the 1995 Task Force recommendations have had in stemming the tide against agricultural land conversion statewide.

A number of local initiatives have, however, been initiated that have implemented some of the Task Force’s recommendations including the modification of subdivision regulations and the adoption of district land use plans that have designated areas for higher density development in areas served by central services while maintaining lower density in outlying areas. See *Chapter 4: Land Use* for additional information.

The Governor’s Commission on Saving Open Spaces, Farms, and Ranches

Governor Bill Owens appointed the Commission in May 2000 to examine Colorado’s land preservation efforts and identify the most efficient and effective means of protecting the State’s natural landscape, in particular agricultural lands. A number of recommendations came from the Commission. They included:

- **Creating a Conservation Revolving Loan Fund--**to assist local communities in their preservation efforts.
- **Allowing Great Outdoor Colorado to Bond--**against future revenue streams so as to provide more flexibility in spending when “once-in-a-lifetime” projects arise.
- **Finding Additional Funding Options--**for State and local conservation efforts.
- **Creating Incentive Programs--**for agriculture community who voluntarily sign management agreements to protect wildlife, soil, or water resources on their land.

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

- **Strengthening Conservation Easement Tax Credits**
- **Ending Federal Estate Tax on farms and ranches**
- **Enhancing Office of Smart Growth**
- **Initiating Water Banking Program**
- **Increasing State Assistance--to find new agricultural product markets and value added processes**

Because the Commission's report is relatively recent, not a great deal of progress has been made towards implementing the recommendations. However, one important aspect of the recommendations has been implemented--the strengthening of conservation tax credits. Effective August 2, 2000, House Bill 1348 allows a tax payer who claims a state income tax credit for a conservation easement to have the unused portion of the credit refunded to the taxpayer in an amount up to \$20,000.

Key Point: Effective August 2, 2000, House Bill 1348 allows a tax payer who claims a state income tax credit for a conservation easement to have the unused portion of the credit refunded to the taxpayer in an amount up to \$20,000.

La Plata County Agricultural Protection Task Force

In 1995, La Plata County established the *Agricultural Protection Task Force* made up of members of the farming and ranching community. The purpose of the Task Force was to determine what actions the County could take to help protect agriculture while also helping to protect open lands.

One outcome of the Agricultural Protection Task Force was the proposal to change the County development review processes, to provide a menu of options for agricultural landowners who were interested in subdividing some of their land or changing land uses. Several changes have already been initiated, including the refinement of the eligibility requirements for home-based businesses and the revision of eligibility requirements for Minor Exempt Subdivisions (3 or fewer lots)

Key Point: The County has already revised several regulations to ease the requirements associated with developing agricultural land in the County.

Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption Proposal

Another outcome of the Task Force was the 1998 initiative to streamline the subdivision process to provide an alternative to subdividing land into 35-acre parcels. The *Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption (APSE)*, as it is titled, is intended to be an optional process for agricultural landowners that would allow more lots to be created than could be achieved by dividing property into 35-acre tracts. It would encourage the clustering of homes to retain the

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

majority of the land for continued agricultural activities. As proposed, it would allow the subdivision of up to nine lots, of up to five acres each in size, clustered on 25 percent of the property, while the retaining 75 percent of land in agricultural use. *Chapter 4: Land Use* includes an illustration demonstrating how an residential subdivision could be integrated into a traditional agricultural setting under this scenario. Due to a number of concerns raised by the agricultural community regarding eligibility criteria and development standards, the process has not yet been formally acted upon by the County.

Key Point: *The proposed Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption process has the potential to provide assistance to agricultural landowners needing to generate additional income, while still maintaining the majority of their lands in agriculture uses.*

The proposed APSE process is similar in a number of respects to a process that seems to have gained acceptance in Larimer County, Colorado. In Larimer, a rural lands development director was appointed who guides development applicants through a streamlined review process known as the *Rural Land Use Process*. As with the La Plata County proposal, this process provides an alternative to full subdivision or 35-acre subdivision. It allows two lots per 35 acres given the proponent meets certain minimum standards regarding the clustering of homes and maintaining two-thirds of the total acreage in a 40-year agricultural easement.

Key Point: *The proposed Agricultural Protection Subdivision is similar in a number of respects to a process that seems to have gained acceptance in Larimer County, Colorado.*

Key Point: *The County should reconvene an agricultural task force to refine for adoption the voluntary Agricultural Protection Subdivision Process.*

Adoption of an APSE process would give agricultural land owners in the County a menu of subdivision process options to choose from. They would include:

- 1) **Thirty five acre subdivision**--exempt from the County subdivision review process;
- 1) **Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption**--streamline County review process for subdivision of up to 9 lots;
- 1) **Minor Exempt Subdivision**--streamlined development County review process for 3 or fewer lots; and
- 1) **Major Subdivision**-- full County review for subdivisions conforming to densities set forth in district land use plans.

Key Point: *Adoption of an APSE process would give agricultural land owners a menu of subdivision process options to choose from.*

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

Other Local Strategies

Key Point: *It is clear that strategies in addition to a streamlined subdivision process will be required if County residents are truly committed to preserving agriculture as a integral part of the community.*

There Are a Variety of Other Strategies That Should Be Considered:

- 1) Working with project applicants to promote site planning that maximizes the protection of agricultural lands consistent with County regulations and the landowner's development goals.
- 1) Working with interest groups, such as land trusts, to assist in land owner education regarding the physical and financial benefits of agricultural land preservation, including the provision of information regarding the potential tax benefits.
- 1) Segregating annual agricultural property tax revenues for exclusive use in agricultural preservation strategies such as funding the costs associated with managing conservation easements or expanding the noxious weed abatement program.
- 1) Supporting the creation and funding of an open space acquisition program that would assist with agricultural land preservation.
- 1) Creating an inventory of irrigable or other important agricultural lands identified for continued farming/ranching.
- 1) Creation of a Transferrable and/or Purchasable Development Rights Program.

Summary of Goals, Key Points and Plan Recommendations

Goals

Goal 7.1: Encourage the continuation of agriculture as a integral part of La Plata County.

Goal 7.2: Establish voluntary incentive- and compensation-based programs for preserving agriculture in La Plata County.

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

Goal 7.3: Find creative solutions to help support the agricultural community's own efforts to improve the economic viability of farming/ranching in the County.

Goal 7.4: Establish a land use process that provides farmers and ranchers with alternatives to 35-acre subdivisions.

Key Points

The *Key Points* presented in this chapter are summarized below.

- U** It is not the intent of this plan element to establish new land use regulations restricting agricultural operators from selling land for development.
- U** It is somewhat unclear as to what effect the 1995 Governor's Task Force recommendations have had in stemming the tide against agricultural land conversion statewide.
- U** Effective August 2, 2000, House Bill 1348 allows a tax payer who claims a state income tax credit for a conservation easement to have the unused portion of the credit refunded to the taxpayer in an amount up to \$20,000.

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

- I. The cumulative effect of selling off 35-acre parcels is a gradual filling in and breaking up of contiguous agricultural areas.
- I. The County has already revised several regulations to ease the requirements associated with developing agricultural land in the County.
- I. The proposed Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption process has the potential to provide assistance to agricultural landowners needing to generate additional income, while still maintaining the majority of their lands in agriculture uses.
- I. The proposed Agricultural Protection Subdivision is similar in a number of respects to a process that seems to have gained acceptance in Larimer County, Colorado.
- I. The County should reconvene an agricultural task force to refine for adoption the voluntary Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption Process.
- I. Adoption of an APSE process would give agricultural land owners a menu of subdivision process options to choose from.
- I. Strategies in addition to a streamlined subdivision process will be required if County residents are truly committed to preserving agriculture as an integral part of the community.

Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations have been included throughout this chapter. They should be implemented through the prioritization and initiation of action items. The *Action Items (AI)* summarized below are drawn, in part, from this plan element. They are incorporated into an *Action Item Prioritization Table* included in Chapter 12.

- AI7.1:** Refine for adoption the voluntary Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption Process.
- AI7.2:** Lobby the State to implement additional initiatives from the Governors Task Force
- AI7.3:** Establish a program to work with project applicants to promote site planning that maximizes the protection of agricultural lands.
- AI7.4:** Determine feasibility of establishing a agricultural property tax segregated fund to use in assisting in the preservation of agricultural operations.

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

AI7.5: Research potential of transfer and purchase of development rights programs for implementation in La Plata County

AI7.6: Work with land conservancies and other preservation groups to establish an agricultural easement acquisition fund.

AI7.7: Work with agriculture community to establish an education programs regarding the benefits of agricultural land preservation, current State laws, and other potentially beneficial information.

AI7.8: Support creation and funding of an open space acquisition program that would assist with purchase of agricultural land easements.

AI7.9: Evaluate effectiveness of existing Minor Exempt Subdivision Process.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

Overview and Background

The *Public Safety Element* of the comprehensive plan is intended to provide an overview of several public safety issues affecting residents of La Plata County. The provision of timely and adequate law enforcement, and fire and emergency medical services are paramount as the County continues to grow. So is thorough emergency preparedness planning, search and rescue services, and a number of other hazard mitigation issues such as wildfire and floodplain management.

Public Safety Goal

Goal 8.1: To ensure that, as the County grows, emergency preparedness planning and the provision of emergency services continues to meet the growing demands of residents and visitors.

Law Enforcement

The La Plata County Sheriffs Office is the primary law enforcement agency for the unincorporated County. Other agencies that provide law enforcement include: the Durango, Bayfield and Ignacio Police Departments; Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Police; Colorado Bureau of Investigation; Colorado Division of Wildlife; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Immigration and Naturalization Service; and United States Forest Service.

The Sheriff's Office is also responsible for operating the jail and the juvenile detention facility. Demand for law enforcement services has grown significantly in recent years. Between 1997 and 2000 the number of incidents investigated by the Sheriff's Department has increased by 25 percent from 17,737 incidents investigated to 22,100 (estimated). In order to meet service demands, the Sheriff added a number of additional deputy positions in the detentions division and the public safety division in 2000.

Key Point: Between 1997 and 2000, the number of incidents investigated by the Sheriff's Department has increased by 25 percent

The County's 88-bed jail opened in 1987, was intended to meet the County's needs until 2010. Increases in crime and tougher sentencing laws have led to significant overcrowding at the jail. The average daily jail population increased 83 percent between 1997 and 2000, surging from an average of 63 inmates per day in 1997 to 115 inmates in 2000. While planning is underway to meet the demands of this increasing population, a request of residents to finance a new jail was defeated in a November 2000 ballot initiative.

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

Key Point: *Between 1997 and 2000, the average daily jail population increased by nearly 83 percent.*

Fire and Emergency Medical Service

Fire protection in the County is provided by the Animas, Upper Pine, Hermosa, Los Pinos, and Fort Lewis Mesa volunteer fire districts and the city of Durango's full time paid fire department. The United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management fight fires on public lands in the County. Demand for fire protection services increases as the County grows. The Animas Fire District, the County's largest, had 78 calls in 1978, 800 calls in 1999, and an estimated 1000 calls in 2000.

Key Point: *The Animas Fire District, the County's largest, had 78 calls in 1978, and an estimated 1000 calls in 2000.*

Meeting increased demand is contingent upon adequate funding and the availability of volunteers. The ability to do this varies among the County's fire districts. In 1995, Animas Fire District received voter approval of a bond issue and property tax increase, allowing them to construct several new stations, purchase new equipment, and hire several firefighters to man their main station during daylight hours when fewer volunteers are available. Other fire districts in the County have been less successful at passing property tax increases. In the mid 1990's the Upper Pine and the Los Pinos Fire Districts lost ballot initiatives.

Key Point: *Meeting the increased demand for emergency services is contingent upon adequate funding and the availability of volunteers.*

With the exception of the Animas Fire, most of the districts are finding that it is becoming harder to attract volunteer fire fighters. The Hermosa Cliffs Fire District recruits volunteers county-wide because it cannot attract enough volunteers from within its own district.

In 2001, the Animas, Hermosa Cliffs and Los Pinos Fire Districts, and the City of Durango entered into a joint service agreement which establishes a single operating entity for the four districts, in essence, consolidating the four districts into one— *The Durango Fire and Rescue Authority*. As part of this agreement, Mercy medical's ambulance service also becomes part of the authority. This consolidation provides a number benefits for County residents by reducing service redundancies and territorial discrepancies, while also reducing response times and increasing efficiency.

Key Point: *Fire District consolidation has provided a number benefits for County residents by reducing service redundancies and territorial discrepancies, while also reducing response times and increasing efficiency.*

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

Even with the consolidation, the adequate provision of services is very much a function of development location and design. And while fire districts routinely provide comment on project design as they move through the County's development review process, they typically do not play a major role in determining the location of new development.

Key Point: *Continued cooperation between government agencies and fire districts is critical to ensuring the provision of high-quality emergency services.*

As presented in *Chapter 4: Land Use*, over 11,000 residential structures have been placed throughout the County since 1978. This scattering of home sites results in: 1) an overall increase in the number and time of responses; and 2) the need for additional facilities located further out in the County. Other issues such as proper road and driveway design and maintenance; as well as adequate road naming and address signing are important considerations for ensuring good access and minimum response times. The availability of an adequate water source is also an important consideration.

Key Point: *La Plata County Government, having a certain degree of control over the location and design of developments, has the ability to regulate development as a means of ensuring the continuation of adequate services.*

Another factor in the regulation of development is the fire code. The County's fire districts have endorsed the adoption of the 1997 Uniform Fire Code which would give them broad authority over building and subdivision design standards and other fire hazard mitigation measures. It is likely that they will request the Board of County Commissioner's endorsement of its adoption in 2001.

Emergency Preparedness Planning

The County operates the Office of Emergency Management which oversees emergency planning, emergency services coordination and search and rescue operations. A part time director is the office's only paid staff person. It is anticipated that the Office will likely have to hire at least one full time staff person in coming years in order to meet growing demands for emergency services.

Key Point: *It is anticipated that the Office of Emergency Management will likely need at least one additional full time staff person in the coming years in order to meet the growing demands for emergency services.*

Search and Rescue

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

The County Sheriff's Office and the County Office of Emergency Management coordinate search and rescue operations. The County's search and rescue workers are a trained volunteer force. Consistent with the demand for other emergency services, search and rescue incidents continue to grow concurrently with increases in the County's population and tourism. In recent years, the difficulty of many search and rescue operations has increased due to the growing popularity of high intensity outdoor sports such as climbing, kayaking and mountain biking. This has created a need for greater training and more complex rescue apparatus in order to reach victims in remote and rugged locations.

Key Point: The popularity of high intensity outdoor sports such as climbing, kayaking and mountain biking has created a need for greater training and more complex rescue apparatus in order to reach victims in remote and rugged locations.

Wildfire Hazard Mitigation

In recent years, the risk of wildfires has increased throughout the County due to significant development in forested areas along with the build up of tree densities and underbrush in most forests. During dry summer months, particularly in drought years, wildfires have been known to cause considerable property damage. Fortunately for La Plata County, it has been spared from the catastrophic wildfires that have impacted other communities in recent years.

While some fires can be allowed to burn naturally in order to maintain or restore the health of forest lands, out of control wildfires need to be prevented through cooperative, community and land management planning.

Key Point: Out of control wildfires need to be prevented through cooperative, community and land management planning.

In 2001, a wildfire risk assessment was conducted in La Plata County to identify specific areas in the County susceptible to a significant level of wildfire risk. The assessment indicated a large number of residential subdivision with a high degree of wildfire risk. The outcome of the assessment was to provide information to fire districts, land management agencies, property owners and local governments so that they could take the actions necessary to reduce and prevent out of control wildfires.

Key Point: The 2001 wildfire risk assessment provides La Plata County with invaluable information that can be used during the development review process to ensure wildfire risk in developing areas can be minimized

Flood Plain Hazard Mitigation

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

La Plata County regulates development in flood plains via standards established in the National Flood Insurance Program. The program establishes development standards to be used on projects located within flood plain areas designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Some areas of the County, such as the Florida and Pine River drainages, do not have FEMA flood plain designations, and as such, applying specific development standards to projects near these waterways is difficult.

Key Point: *Some areas of the County, such as the Florida and Pine River drainages, do not have FEMA flood plain maps, and as such, applying specific development standards to projects near these waterways is difficult.*

Summary of Goal, Key Points and Plan Recommendations

Goal

Goal 8.1: To ensure that, as the County grows, emergency preparedness planning and the provision of emergency services continues to meet the growing demands of residents and visitors.

Key Points

The ***Key Points*** presented in this chapter include:

- U** Between 1997 and 2000, the number of incidents investigated by the Sheriff's Department has increased by 25 percent.
- U** Between 1997 and 2000, the average daily jail population increased by nearly 83 percent.
- U** The Animas Fire District, the County's largest, had 78 calls in 1978, and an estimated 1000 calls in 2000.
- U** Meeting the increased demand for emergency services is contingent upon adequate funding and the availability of volunteers.
- U** Fire district consolidation has provided a number benefits for County residents by reducing service redundancies and territorial discrepancies, while also reducing response times and increasing efficiency.
- U** Continued cooperation between government agencies and fire districts is critical to ensuring the provision of high-quality emergency services

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

- U** La Plata County Government, having a certain degree of control over the location and design of developments, has the ability to regulate development as a means of ensuring the continuation of adequate emergency services.
- U** It is anticipated that the Office of Emergency Management will likely need additional staffing in the coming years in order to meet the growing demands for emergency services.
- U** The popularity of high intensity outdoor sports such as climbing, kayaking and mountain biking has created a need for greater training and more complex rescue apparatus in order to reach victims in remote and rugged locations.
- U** Out of control wildfires need to be prevented through cooperative, community and land management planning.
- U** The 2001 wildfire risk assessment provides La Plata County with invaluable information that can be used during the development review process to ensure wildfire risk in developing areas can be minimized.
- U** Some areas of the County, such as the Florida and Pine River drainages, do not have FEMA flood plain delineations, and as such, applying specific development criteria to projects near these waterways is difficult.

Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations are included as ***Action Items (AI)***. They should be implemented through their prioritization and initiation. The Action Items summarized below are incorporated into an ***Action Item Prioritization Table*** included in Chapter 12.

- AI8.1:** Continue active role in the funding and supporting law enforcement and emergency service agencies.
- AI8.2:** Continue to work cooperatively with special districts and volunteer groups to assist them in pursuing their missions.
- AI8.3:** Continue to coordinate with public safety and emergency service providers to ensure adequacy of development standards and review process.
- AI8.4:** Determine whether wildfire hazard mitigation standards should become further integrated into the development review process.
- AI8.5:** Request completion of FEMA flood plain mapping throughout County.

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CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC SAFETY

CHAPTER 9: AIRPORT AREA

Overview

The Durango/La Plata County Airport, located approximately 14 miles southeast of the City of Durango, serves as a regional air facility with scheduled air service to Albuquerque, Denver, Phoenix and, during ski season, to Dallas/Fort Worth. The airport also supports private aviation facilities, air freight operations and an interagency wildfire air tanker base. The airport is jointly owned and operated by La Plata County and the City of Durango. Businesses, local residents and tourists all depend upon the airport as a lifeline to major metropolitan areas and airports around the country. As a result, the airport plays a significant role in the County's economy.

Given the amount of growth and development occurring southeast of Durango on the Florida Mesa, the *Airport Area Element* of the comprehensive plan is quite important. It is intended to establish preferred land use types and impact mitigation techniques for properties that currently are, or may be in the future, impacted by airport operations. The airport area, as shown below, includes land located within both the Florida Mesa and Southeast La Plata Planning District.

Background



Land uses around an airport are typically of concern if they pose a safety hazard to residents or are a threat to the continued operation of the facility. In the case of Durango-La Plata Airport, this concern is partially ameliorated by the fact the facility is located on a mesa top, with lands to the east and west located well-below the airport facilities.

Existing land uses in the vicinity are generally mixed, with a significant amount of scattered low-density residential development surrounding the airport to the south and east, and some clustered business development immediately to the north.

Key Point: *Land uses around an*

CHAPTER 9: AIRPORT AREA

airport are typically of concern if they pose a safety hazard to residents or are a threat to the continued operation of the facility.

The airport straddles the boundary of the Florida Mesa and Southeast La Plata Planning Districts. As of 2001, only the Florida Mesa District had an adopted land use plan identifying preferred land uses in the District. This plan identified lands directly northwest of the airport as appropriate for agriculture and low-density residential. The balance of lands around the airport are within the Southeast Planning District, and are not designated for any specific use. Development in the Southeast District is based solely on County land use code requirements which are largely based on mitigating impacts and proving compatibility with existing surrounding uses.

The fact that lands surrounding the airport are contained in two separate planning districts and that the Southeast District does not have an adopted land use plan is cause for concern because there is little guidance for decision-makers to determine what may be appropriate in the area.

Key Point: *Lands around the airport that are located within the Southeast Planning District are not designated for any particular use, thus providing little guidance for decision-makers to determine what may be appropriate in the area.*

Key Point: *Due to the unique importance of the airport to the economic health and livability of La Plata County, it is critical that land uses surrounding the airport do not unduly interfere with airport operations.*

Airport Area Goals

Goal 9.1: To Protect the Safety of Persons and Property Surrounding the Airport.

Goal 9.2: To Protect the Present and Future Operations of the Airport.

Airport Master Plan

Development of the airport itself is guided by the **Durango – La Plata County Airport Master Plan**. An update of this plan is required on a regular basis by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). An update of the plan is underway in 2001. The master plan is used to determine long term budgets for airport construction and development. All airport facilities including runway, terminal, parking, air cargo and general aviation development are analyzed. The strongest focus of the plan is on airport needs for the next five to seven years. However, given growth trends in the County around the airport, airport planners have been instructed to view the 2001 plan as a final buildout plan. At the request of La Plata County, the plan will

CHAPTER 9: AIRPORT AREA

include an analysis of issues for lands located outside the airport property that may potentially be impacted by existing or future airport activities.

Summary of Goals, Key Points and Plan Recommendations

Goals

Goal 9.1: To protect the safety of persons and property surrounding the airport

Goal 9.2: To protect the present and future operations of the airport.

Key Points

The ***Key Points*** presented in this chapter are summarized below.

- T** Land uses around an airport are typically of concern if they pose a safety hazard to residents or are a threat to the continued operation of the facility.
- T** Lands around the airport that are located within the Southeast Planning District are not designated for any particular use, thus providing little guidance for decision-makers to determine what may be appropriate in the area.
- T** Due to the unique importance of the airport to the economic health and livability of La Plata County it is critical that land uses surrounding the airport do not unduly interfere with airport operations.

Plan Recommendations

Plan recommendations should be implemented through the prioritization and initiation of action items. The ***Action Items (AI)*** summarized below are incorporated into an ***Action Item Prioritization Table*** included in Chapter 12.

CHAPTER 9: AIRPORT AREA

- AI9.1:** Continue to participate in airport commissions update of airport master plan.
- AI9.2:** Establish an airport “area of influence” around the airport, developing a land use plan for that area that incorporates the needs of the airport facility as well as the concerns of area residents and property owners.
- AI9.3:** In accordance with Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) 24-65-102(1) adopt “1041 Powers” to regulate land uses around the Durango-La Plata Airport as an area of State interest.
- AI9.4:** Identify and consider adoption of land use code requirements for “avigation” easements.
- AI9.5:** Identify lands surrounding the airport that Airport Commission expects to need for future expansions
- AI9.6:** Identify and consider establishment of requirements for special construction techniques to be used on projects within the airport area of influence.

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CHAPTER 10: EXTRACTIVE RESOURCES

Overview and Background

Extractive natural resources, primarily natural gas and gravel mining, play a major role in the County, both in terms of fiscal impacts as well as impacts on the physical environment. While the extraction of these resources is mainly regulated by the State of Colorado, the County does play a role. The *Extractive Resources Element* of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide an overview of these issues and provide a baseline for future and ongoing discussions.

Extractive Resources Goal

Goal 10.1: To Balance the Economic Benefits of La Plata County's Resource Extraction Industry with the Need to Minimize its Impacts on County Residents and the Physical Environment.

The *Extractive Resources Element* of the Comprehensive Plan will be finalized in 2002 upon completion of the *La Plata Oil & Gas County Impact Report*, scheduled for completion in late 2001.

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CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Overview and Background

The *Parks, Recreation, and Trails Element* of the County comprehensive plan focuses on recreational programming and facility needs in the County—something which La Plata County government has historically played only a limited role in providing. The plan element overviews existing conditions, programs and plans; the need for partnerships and intergovernmental coordination; the identification of potential funding sources; and plan recommendations.

In recent years, La Plata County has become a hot bed for new residents and tourists. Much of this interest is the result of the County's immense scenic beauty, public lands and recreational opportunities. With over 40 percent of the land in the County held by public land management agencies, back country recreational opportunities such as camping, hiking, biking, and horseback riding abound. However, as the County population continues to increase, so does the demand for more traditional recreational facilities such as ballfields, tennis courts, swimming pools, and picnic grounds.

Key Point: *Active recreation refers to land that is managed for high levels of public use, with the purpose of providing a variety of opportunities to the public. This includes such facilities as ball fields, golf courses, playgrounds and picnic grounds.*

While it has traditionally been the communities of Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio that have provided such amenities, shifting demographics would indicate that it may have become more of a County-wide issue in recent years. The 2000 Census indicates that of the approximately 44,000 residents of the County, nearly 28,000 of those residents, or approximately 57 percent, live in the unincorporated County, outside the communities that provide the recreational amenities. In fact, it is the unincorporated County residents who make up the majority of the users of the recreational programs provided by Durango, Bayfield and Ignacio. In 1998, Ignacio reported that more than 80 percent of the participants in its three recreation programs were non-town residents. Bayfield also reported such figures. In 1999, the Town's estimated population was 1,607, while its recreation program had 1,400 participants. Over 50 percent of the participants were reported to be non-town residents. Durango, which presides over the County's largest parks and recreation program, also reported such figures, with non-city residents accounting for over 57 percent of the participation in its youth sports programs.

Key Point: *While it has traditionally been the communities of Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio that have provided recreational amenities, shifting demographics would indicate that it may have become more of a County-wide issue in recent years.*

Recreational facilities in the unincorporated County are somewhat limited. The municipal recreation programs often partner with the 9-R School District to utilize school site facilities.

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Other than school facilities and those found on State and federal lands, recreational facilities in the outlying County are limited to those provided within private developments.

Parks, Recreation & Trails Goal

Goal 11.1: To Ensure That the Recreational Program and Facility Needs of County Residents Are Met as the County Grows.

Existing County Recreational Activities

While La Plata County government, itself, does not have a formal parks and recreation function, it has been involved in a number of recreational issues, and on occasion has even provides financial assistance for recreational activities and facilities. These efforts have included:

- 1) **Fairgrounds** – The County fairgrounds has been the historic center for County sponsored recreational activities over the years with equestrian activities, public use buildings, and acreage for fairs and carnivals. A recent master planning effort has set the stage for an overhaul of the physical layout and probable future uses of the facility.
- 1) **Gold Rush Gym** – While no longer in existence, the County had partnered with this private gymnastics group by offering subsidized rent of a County-owned building located at the north end of the fairgrounds. The City has since taken over the gym’s activities.
- 1) **City of Durango Recreation Center** – The County partnered with the City by leasing County-owned land for the recreation center at the north end of the fairgrounds.
- 1) **Trail Issues** – The County has been involved with a number of trail issues in recent years including providing funding for the development of a County-wide trails plan; cosponsoring a Great Outdoors Colorado grant for a trail feasibility study; taking an easement on a trail through the Horse Gulch/Ewing Mesa area; and assisting in finding resolution to the Colorado Trail extension into the City of Durango issue.
- 1) **Equestrian Center** – The County has been active in trying to find a new site for an equestrian center that was displaced as a result of the changes occurring at the fairgrounds.
- 1) **Joint Sales Tax** – The County and the City of Durango utilize joint sales tax revenue to partner with the 9-R School District to improve and/or maintain recreation facilities around the County. This is an annually reviewed partnership.
- 1) **Park Requirements** – As part of Durango Mountain Resort’s development plans, a district park is envisioned, with maintenance of the facility taken over by the Lake Purgatory Metro District.

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Key Point: *While La Plata County government, itself, does not have a formal parks and recreation function, it does get involved in recreation issues, and on occasion provides financial assistance to recreation-oriented activities.*

Existing County Regulations and Plans

Continued growth in the County will add to the demand for municipal recreation facilities. It will likely lead to residents requesting additional park and recreational facilities for the unincorporated County. Areas of the County experiencing the most growth, such as Florida Mesa, possess the least public open lands or passive recreation areas. As a result, residents in the most-populated and fastest-growing areas of the County have limited access to recreational facilities near their homes.

The County's land use system does address this issue in a limited fashion. The land use code and several of the district land use plans contain generalized requirements and/or objectives regarding park development and recreational use of public lands. **The following is an overview of the treatment of recreational facilities in the County's existing codes and plans:**

La Plata Land Use Code

The land use code contains limited references to recreation facilities within developments. The code is more notable for its omissions than its inclusions. It does not require development of parks within developments, with the exception of some minimal standards for small playgrounds within multi-family developments and mobile home parks. The code also does not require the payment of park development fees, or land dedications, in conjunction with developments.

Key Point: *The County land use code does not require the payment of park development fees, or land dedications, in conjunction with developments.*

District Land Use Plans

Four of the district plans contain limited references to park and recreation issues:

- **West Durango:** Establish a multi-purpose community center building that fosters a sense of community, e.g. meeting room, day care, fire station, etc.
- **Junction Creek, West Durango, Florida Road:** Management of recreational use; trail access; and trail head parking on public land.
- **North County:** Identify potential locations and pursue funding for the development of local parks, playgrounds, garbage collection, a post office and, possibly, a community center to serve area residents. Encourage development to provide public benefits, including recreation areas, trail systems and needed public facilities.

Key Point: *The district land use plans provide a foundation for determining appropriate locations for recreational facilities in the County.*

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

La Plata County Trails Plan

The County Trails Plan was adopted as an element of the County Comprehensive Plan in June 2000.

The mission of the plan is to promote the ongoing development and maintenance of a strategic, well designed network of trails that provide safe, convenient and enjoyable recreation and transportation experiences for all trail users. The plan addresses recreation in a number of ways including improving access to public lands, and ensuring connectivity between neighborhoods.

Key Point: The mission of the County Trails Plan is to promote the ongoing development and maintenance of a strategic, well designed network of trails that provide safe, convenient and enjoyable recreation and transportation experiences for all trail users.

Partnerships and Intergovernmental Coordination

Providing quality recreational opportunities for all residents of the County will require a number of creative approaches. Establishing partnerships and intergovernmental coordination may help to ensure the efficient allocation of resources and a minimization of redundancies.

Local Communities

The City of Durango has taken a number of significant steps in recent years to ensure that the recreation needs of area residents are met. This has included the development of the *City of Durango Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan*; the construction of a community recreation center; continued work towards completing the Animas River Trail; and the establishment of an open space acquisition program. Bayfield and Ignacio have also been active in ensuring that recreational programming is available in their communities. These activities have largely been possible because of political support, and more importantly, funding. Funding for these activities comes from sales tax revenues and matching state and federal grants.

Key Point: Funding for recreational programming and facilities comes predominantly from sales tax revenues generated from the sale of goods and services in the local communities.

The City of Durango has recognized for quite some time that a majority of the revenue used for community improvements is generated by residents of the unincorporated County and by tourists. It is partially for this reason that the City has not differentiated between City and non-City residents when assessing program users fees, and has not made a significant issue of the fact that the majority of program users are non-City residents. As the area's population continues to grow and the percentage of non city residents using city programs and facilities also continues to grow, so will the pressure to upgrade facilities and programs. This may require more resources than the City alone may be willing to provide for. It is therefore critical that La Plata County government begin to evaluate potential funding sources that will allow it to further assist with the provision recreational facilities and programs.

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Key Point: *As the County and the local communities within it grow, the pressure to upgrade and maintain park and recreational facilities and programs may require formal governmental partnerships in order to meet the needs of the community.*

Key Point: *It is critical that La Plata County government begin to evaluate potential funding sources that will allow it to further assist with the provision recreational facilities and programs.*

School Districts

School districts in the County have typically made their facilities available to the local communities. This type of partnership is essential for ensuring that recreational activities continue to be available in areas other than within the confines of each community. Additionally, as school sites are developed and remodeled, local communities should be consulted to determine whether there are any recreational partnership opportunities available.

Key Point: *The use of school site recreational facilities such as ballfields and playgrounds should continue in order to minimize the need to develop additional recreational facilities.*

Land Management Agencies

The Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the Colorado State Lands Board, and to a somewhat lesser extent, the State Division of Wildlife, all have the capability of allowing some degree of passive and active recreational activities to occur on the land they manage. The feasibility of strengthening partnerships to provide active recreation facilities on these properties should be evaluated.

Key Point: *The feasibility of establishing partnerships with Land Management Agencies to provide active recreation facilities on properties they manage should be evaluated.*

Land Trusts/Private Entities

While currently narrow in their scope and numbers, land trusts working in La Plata County may at some point in the future provide opportunities for adding recreational amenities. Private land holders and/or corporations in the community may also have interest in forming partnerships that would provide long term land leases or funding assistance.

Key Point: *Land Trusts and private entities should not be overlooked when evaluating potential partnerships for recreational amenities.*

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Additional Potential Actions and Funding Alternatives

Additional Potential Actions

The County could take additional action in relation to providing recreational amenities for County residents. It could expand upon its incentive-based public benefit criteria system within its district plans to provide density bonuses for providing active recreational facilities within developments. *Active recreational facilities could include such things as tennis and basketball courts, golf courses, playground equipment, community centers, etc.*

Key Point: *The County could expand upon its incentive-based public benefit criteria within its district plans to provide density bonuses for providing active recreational facilities within developments.*

Potential Funding Sources

Sales Tax: As discussed previously in this chapter, local municipalities typically fund recreational programs and facilities through their general fund which is predominantly based on sales tax revenue. La Plata County, as a statutory County, does not have the same taxing authority as its local municipalities, and, as such, takes in far less sale tax revenue as a percentage of its total budget. In fact, the County already collects what it can under State law, 2 percent, and cannot increase beyond that amount. Additionally, budgetary constraints limit the County's ability to make discretionary expenditures beyond commitments it already has.

Key Point: *Budgetary constraints limit the County's ability to make discretionary expenditures for things such as recreational programs or facilities.*

Mill Levy: While raising the historically low mill levy for County property tax payers is a viable alternative for increasing revenues, this option has historically not received much political support.

Key Point: *While raising the historically low mill levy for County property tax payers is a viable alternative for increasing revenues, this option has historically not received much political support*

Capital Expansion Fees: La Plata County does not require the payment of park development fees or land dedication in conjunction with new development. This type of capital expansion fees is quite common in many communities. Like any capital expansion fee, however, such fees are typically passed on to the consumer via higher lot costs.

Key Point: *Capital expansion fees are typically passed on to the consumer.*

Use Tax: Another alternative is a use tax. A use tax is, essentially, a sales tax collected on certain goods purchased outside the County, purchases that can be tracked through auto registrations or building permits.

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Key Point: *A use tax is a sales tax collected on certain goods purchased outside the County, purchases that can be tracked through auto registrations or building permits.*

The issue of establishing a use tax in La Plata County received significant discussion in 2001. Local automobile dealers wanted a use tax instituted in La Plata County to level the playing field, so to speak, with auto dealers outside the County who are, theoretically, at a competitive advantage to local dealers because the sales tax is lower in the community where they operate. By instituting a use tax, the purchaser of the auto would be required to pay the “differential” tax at the time that they register the auto in La Plata County. The same could apply to building material at the time of building permit application.

Key Point: *By instituting a use tax, the purchaser of an auto outside the County would be required to pay a “differential” tax at the time that they register the auto in La Plata County.*

Because the institution of a use tax would require approval of the voters, earmarking the proceeds for a particular use that is supported by the community is the most likely way to get the tax approved. The 2001 ballot initiative revolved around a proposal to direct use tax revenue towards open space acquisition and affordable housing. The measure failed by a 3 to 1 margin in the November 2001 election.

Key Point: *The institution of a use tax requires approval of the voters*

Recreation District: Another revenue generating option is the establishment of a special “recreation district” which would have the ability to levy taxes for recreational facilities and/or programming. A recreation district would, essentially, have autonomy over how it utilized the funds it raised. This option would not require County involvement once the district was formed. There have been attempts to form special recreation districts in the unincorporated County in recent years. Residents of North County discussed the possibility purchasing a parcel of land on which a community center and a playing field could be built. In the Bayfield area, residents proposed a ballot measure to create a special recreation district encompassing the Town of Bayfield and surrounding areas. The Bayfield ballot measure was defeated in December 1999.

Key Point: *A recreation district would not require County involvement once the district was formed.*

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Funding: GOCO is good source for funding specific planning, development, and acquisition projects. However, GOCO funds are intended as supplemental funds, leveraged by other funding sources and as such would not alone sustain an ongoing parks and recreation effort.

Key Point: *GOCO funds are intended as supplemental funds, leveraged by other funding sources.*

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

Summary of Goals, Key Points and Plan Recommendations

Goal

Goal 11.1: To Ensure That the Recreational Program and Facility Needs of County Residents Are Met as the County Grows.

Key Points

The following *Key Points* were presented.

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

- I. While it has traditionally been the communities of Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio that have provided recreational amenities, shifting demographics would indicate that it may have become more of a County-wide issue in recent years.
- I. While La Plata County government, itself, does not have a formal parks and recreation function, it does get involved in recreation issues, and on occasion provides financial assistance with recreation-oriented activities.
- I. The County land use code does not require the payment of park development fees, or the dedication of land, in conjunction with developments.
- I. The district land use plans provide a foundation for the determining appropriate locations for recreational facilities in the County.
- I. The mission of the County Trails Plan is to promote the ongoing development and maintenance of a strategic, well designed network of trails that provide safe, convenient and enjoyable recreation and transportation experiences for all trail users.
- II. Funding for recreational programming and facilities comes primarily from sales tax revenues generated from the sale of goods and services in the local communities.
- I. As the County and the local communities within it grow, the pressure to upgrade and maintain park and recreational facilities and programs may require formal governmental partnerships in order to meet the needs of the community.
- I. It is critical that La Plata County government begin to evaluate additional funding sources that will allow it to further assist local communities with the provision recreational facilities and programs.
- I. The use of school site recreational facilities such as ballfield and playgrounds should continue in order to minimize the need to develop additional recreational facilities.
- I. The feasibility of establishing partnerships with land management agencies to provide active recreation facilities on properties they manage should be evaluated.
- I. Land trusts and private entities should not be overlooked when evaluating potential partnerships for recreational amenities.
- I. Budgetary constraints limit the County's ability to make discretionary expenditures for things such as recreational programs or facilities.
- I. The County could expand upon its incentive-based public benefit criteria within its district plans to provide density bonuses for providing active recreational facilities within developments.
- I. While raising the historically low mill levy for County property tax payers is a viable alternative for increasing revenues, this option has historically not received much political support.
- I. Capital expansion fees are typically passed on to the consumer.

CHAPTER 11: PARKS, RECREATION & TRAILS

- I. A use tax is a sales tax collected on certain goods purchased outside the County, purchases that can be tracked through auto registrations or building permits.
- I. By instituting a use tax, the purchaser of an auto outside the County would be required to pay a “differential” tax at the time that they register the auto in La Plata County.
- I. The institution of a use tax would require approval of the voters.
- I. A recreation district would not require County involvement once the district was formed.
- I. GOCO funds are intended as supplemental funds, leveraged by other funding sources.

Plan Recommendations

A number of alternatives and recommendations have been presented in this plan element. Implementation should be achieved through the prioritization and initiation of action items. The *Action Items (AI)* identified below are incorporated into an *Action Item Prioritization Table* included in *Chapter 12: Implementation*.

- AI11.1:** Establish discussions with local municipalities to assess likely future impact of County-wide use of municipal recreation programs.
- AI11.2:** Identify a viable long-term revenue source for future funding of: 1) park facility development and maintenance in the unincorporated County; and 2) existing municipal recreation programs.
- AI11.3:** Evaluate the merits of establishing requirements for the development of private parks within larger developments, and/or park fees-in-lieu of land dedication.
- AI11.4:** Revise district plans to include reference to the County Trails Plan as part of public benefit criteria process.
- AI11.5:** Continue to establish and/or enhance partnerships with local municipalities, land management agencies, and others to assist in the provision of recreation programs and facilities.
- AI11.6:** Evaluate merits of expanding district plan public benefit criteria to include active recreational facilities.

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CHAPTER 12: IMPLEMENTATION

Overview and Background

The various elements of the La Plata County Comprehensive Plan provide the foundation for guiding development in the County. The purpose of the ***Implementation Element*** of the plan is to set forth a framework that ensures that the goals outlined in the plan are met. Included in this chapter is a recommended approach for plan review and monitoring; a summary of generalized actions and time frames that County staff can use in establishing an ongoing work program; and a recommended ***Action Item Prioritization Table*** that summarizes the plan goals, action items and estimated schedule for initiating the action items.

Plan Review and Monitoring

The La Plata County Comprehensive Plan outlines a number of strategies for achieving the goals established in the plan. In order to determine whether the strategies are effective, a program for plan monitoring and review must be established. The monitoring program will help the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners understand both progress and setbacks in achieving the plan goals. It will also help staff and decision-makers determine the effectiveness of plan strategies and appropriate revisions.

On an annual basis, staff should report to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners on the previous year's progress towards implementing the Action Items listed in Table 12-1. Prior to the budget cycle each year, staff should determine whether any changes to the prioritized list of Action Items should be made, and subsequently scheduled into the next year's work program.

As discussed in ***Chapter 4: Land Use***, it is recommended that the district land use plans be put into an annual rotating review schedule. This will help to ensure that the plans remain relevant and dynamic, and incorporate changing conditions in a timely manner. It is also recommended that the bi-annual plan amendment process allowing for project-specific plan changes should be maintained on a March/September schedule.

The goals of the comprehensive plan should be revisited every 5-years to determine whether they are still relevant to the communities desires.

Action Item Prioritization

The Action Items identified in Table 12-1 are an initial list of actions that the County should undertake to help ensure that the goals of the comprehensive plan are met. The list is not intended to be all-inclusive. The County may pursue different strategies and adjust priorities based on changing opportunities and conditions. The Action Items presented in Table 12-1 are categorized into four specific ***Action Groups*** below. These Action Groups categorize specific

CHAPTER 12: IMPLEMENTATION

Action Items to be undertaken in 2001, 2002, and 2003. As mentioned earlier, these action groups should be revisited annually to establish priorities for coming years.

The Action Groups include:

- **Advocacy/Technical Support** – these are typically ongoing and not resource intensive
- **Additional Study** – likely to involve extensive staff research and/or consultant services
- **District Plan Amendments** – staff intensive with significant public involvement
- **Land Use Code Revisions** – also staff intensive with significant public involvement and possible consultant services

ADVOCACY/TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Ongoing

Advocacy/Technical support includes the ongoing assistance to other public and private entities involved in community development issues. It may include participation in task forces, steering committees and other advisory groups; requests of other public agencies; lobbying; and public proclamations. This group includes, but is not necessarily limited to the following action items:

- 1) BOCC adoption of planning goals from Comprehensive Plan
- 2) Request San Juan Basin Health to fully evaluate effectiveness of ISDS regulations
- 3) Participate in County-wide Housing Authority
- 4) Encourage stronger private sector affordable housing efforts
- 5) Support efforts of Southwest Colorado Riparian Partnership
- 6) Publicly support development of rural water system
- 7) Support open space initiatives and efforts of land conservancies
- 8) Proclaim Hwy 160 between Grandview and Gem Village as a high priority visual corridor
- 9) Lobby State to implement additional agriculture preservation initiatives
- 10) Request completion of FEMA flood plain study

ADDITIONAL STUDY

Balance of 2001

- 1) Adopt Comprehensive Plan
- 2) Refine USGS water monitoring data collection program
- 3) Update County Planning Web Site

2002

- 1) Begin refinement of Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption Process.

CHAPTER 12: IMPLEMENTATION

- 2) Undertake and complete Extractive Resources Element of Comprehensive Plan
- 3) Refine visual corridor map
- 4) Finalize Animas Valley ridge line study
- 5) Research TDR/PDR and other growth tools
- 6) Work with DOW to establish revised wildlife inventories and “best practices” guide
- 7) Evaluate ISDS regulations

2003

- 1) Evaluate recreation funding sources
- 2) Evaluate Agriculture Property Tax Fund
- 3) Evaluate recapitalization of affordable housing revolving loan fund
- 4) Reevaluate road standards
- 5) Evaluate rural lands assistance program

DISTRICT PLAN AMENDMENTS

Balance of 2001

- 1) Establish district plan revision schedule

2002

- 1) Undertake non-residential lands analysis in conjunction with “Growth Hub” analysis
- 2) Complete one district plan revision
- 3) initiate joint planning area discussions with local municipalities
- 4) Research airport “area of influence”
- 5) Work with Fort Lewis Mesa and Southeast Districts on plan development

2003

- 1) Complete one plan revision
- 2) Create flexible cluster design and buffering guidelines
- 3) Initiate service area discussions with central service providers

LAND USE CODE REVISION

Balance of 2001

- 1) Quantify necessary Code revisions

2002

- 1) Retain consultant services
- 2) Initiate Code revision

2003

- 1) Finalize Code revision

CHAPTER 12: IMPLEMENTATION

Land Use Element

Goal 3.1: To accommodate a growing population through the fair and consistent administration of a land use system that provides clear direction for private and public land use.

Goal 3.2: To uphold the visions and goals established within each of the district land use plans.

Goal 3.3: To periodically reevaluate and refine the district land use plans based on their goals.

Goal 3.4: To support Bayfield, Durango, and Ignacio in their efforts to expand commercial and residential development, and employment opportunities.

Goal 3.5: To encourage growth hubs in the County that would provide opportunities for higher-density commercial and residential development, and employment centers.

Goal 3.6: To support efforts to extend central services to growth hubs and other areas envisioned for higher densities in the district plans.

Goal 3.7: To support efforts to create a rural water system to serve areas consistent with plans.

Goal 3.8: To encourage the preservation of contiguous open lands in La Plata County.

#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	Partner(s)	Schedule
1	3.1	Define overlapping areas of influence near Bayfield, Durango and Ignacio; and establish consistency between plans and processes.	Planning	Local Communities	2002
2	3.2	Coordinate with service providers to established and/or strengthened recognition and adherence to district plans during the provision or expansion of central services.	Planning	Local Communities Other Service Providers	2003
3	3.3	Establish criteria for developing/expanding growth hubs.	Planning	PC Planning Districts	2002
4	3.4	Work with Fort Lewis Mesa and Southeast Districts to establish district plans.	Planning	PC Planning Districts	2002
5	3.5	Create a menu of flexible design options, buffering standards, and setback criteria that can be applied under varying circumstances to help protect rural character. Undertake in conjunction with cluster guide.	Planning	PC Planning Districts	2003
6	3.6	Analyze existing non-residential land uses and plan designations to identify available lands or land deficiencies associated with such uses.	Planning	Planning Districts	2002

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

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#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead
7	3.7	Refine the mixed use land use classification by adding specific development and mitigation standards, and allowable uses, so to lessen impacts on surrounding residential land uses.	Planning
8	3.8	Clarify land use classification definitions to ensure consistency in application of uses allowable in each classification.	Planning
9	3.9	Refine the public benefit criteria process in each district plan to ensure consistent and objective application of the bonus criteria.	Planning
10	3.10	Expand the public benefit criteria process to provide developers with further incentive to add amenities to a development, enhancing the overall quality of the project.	Planning
11	3.11	Reevaluate each district land use plan on a regular basis to ensure that each plan is effective at appropriately directing growth in the County.	Planning
12	3.12	Initiate comprehensive Land Use Code Revision	BOCC/PC
13	3.13	Initiate TDR study in conjunction with evaluation of other growth management programs.	Planning
14	3.14	Work with San Juan Basin Health to review ISDS regulation	Planning BOCC
15	3.15	Create a comprehensive cluster design guidebook	Planning

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

<i>Housing Element</i>				
		Goal 5.1: To support efforts to provide housing that is adequate, safe, and affordable for		
		Goal 5.2: To support efforts to create a housing authority for La Plata Co		
#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
16	5.1	Evaluate each district plan to determine whether an affordable housing density bonus and/or other incentives can be incorporated into the public benefit criteria process.	Planning	
17	5.2	Evaluate whether the expansion of central services in the County has created new opportunities for higher-density residential neighborhoods.	Planning	
18	5.3	Participate in a County-wide housing authority. Discussions relative to the establishment and funding of a housing authority should continue.	BOCC	C
19	5.4	Form a expert panel to review County subdivision and building regulations to determine whether there are changes that could be made that would lower the cost of development while not undermining the safety, integrity or aesthetics of new development.	Planning	
20	5.5	Find funding sources to recapitalize the County's affordable housing loan fund and other affordable housing efforts.	BOCC	
21	5.6	Encourage the private sector to take a stronger role in the provision of affordable housing.	Planning	
22	5.7	Implement affordable housing requirements within the land use code reflective of those envisioned within the district land use plan.	Planning	
23	5.8	Encourage San Juan Basin Health Department to evaluate new sewage disposal technologies that would allow more flexibility in minimum lot sizes and site design.	PC/BOCC	

Environmental Resources Element

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

Goal 6.1: To maintain or improve the quality of La Plata County’s environmental resources including water resources, open lands, forests, wildlife habitat, riparian areas, and wetlands.				
#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
Water Quality				
24	6.1	Evaluate and refine USGS water monitoring program to improve baseline data collection.	Planning	
25	6.2	Continue study of impacts gas industry activities have on ground water wells	Planning	
26	6.3	Encourage San Juan Basin Health Department to review ISDS systems to determine impacts on ground water.	BOCC/PC	
27	6.4	Publicly support development of rural water systems	BOCC/PC	
Air Quality				
28	6.5	Continue support for, and participation in, the La Plata County Air Quality Advisory Council	BOCC	
29	6.6	Establish standards for residential wood burning in new developments as part of the development review process.	Planning/PC	
30	6.7	Support the implementation of the County Transportation Plan and its efforts to reduce road dust and promote alternative modes of transportation	BOCC/PC	Re I
Open Space				
31	6.8	Provide technical assistance to organizations/entities attempting to establish a County Open Space acquisition program and funding source	Planning	
32	6.9	Develop a County voluntary open space plan as an element of the County comprehensive plan	Planning PC	
33	6.10	Fully evaluate purchase and transfer of development rights programs	Planning	

Visual Resources				
#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
34	6.11	Refine County visual corridor map.	Planning	

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

35	6.12	Create design guidelines for development proposed in visual corridors	Planning
36	6.13	Define Highway 160 between Grandview and Gem Village as a high-priority visual protection corridor.	BOCC/PC
37	6.14	Evaluate and consider for adoption road development standards that emphasize the minimization of grading, cutting and filling; the avoidance of steep slopes and visually prominent hillsides; and revegetation after construction.	Engineering
38	6.15	Complete and expand upon the Animas Valley ridge line study, establishing guidelines to minimize visual impacts of hill side development	Planning
Wildlife Habitat			
39	6.16	Initiate discussions with the Division of Wildlife to create a revised comprehensive wildlife inventory and develop a "best development practices" guide to integrate new development with wildlife considerations.	Planning
40	6.17	Work with DOW to create education format on wildlife and their habitat	Planning
41	6.16	Create habitat inventory for educational purposes	Planning
Wetlands/Riparian Areas			
42	6.17	Support the Southwestern Colorado Riparian Partnership in their efforts to find solutions to maintaining healthy wetland and riparian habitats.	BOCC/PC

<i>Agriculture Element</i>	
Goal 7.1:	Encourage the continuation of agriculture as an integral part of La Plata County's agricultural community.
Goal 7.2:	Establish voluntary incentive- and compensation-based programs for preserving agricultural lands.
Goal 7.3:	Find creative solutions to help support the agricultural community's own efforts to improve the viability of farming/ranching in the County.
Goal 7.4:	Establish a land use process that provides farmers and ranchers with additional alternatives.

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
43	7.1	Refine for adoption the voluntary Agricultural Protection Subdivision Exemption Process.	Planning	Ag
44	7.2	Lobby the State to implement additional initiatives from the Governor's Task Force	BOCC	Ag
45	7.3	Establish a program to work with project applicants to promote site planning that maximizes the protection of agricultural lands.	Planning	Ag
46	7.4	Determine feasibility of establishing an agricultural property tax segregated fund to use in assisting in the preservation of agricultural operations.	BOCC	
47	7.5	Research potential of transfer and purchase of development rights programs for implementation in La Plata County	Planning	
48	7.6	Work with land conservancies and other preservation groups to establish an agricultural easement acquisition fund.	BOCC	
49	7.7	Work with agriculture community to establish education programs regarding the benefits of agricultural land preservation, current State laws, and other potentially beneficial information.	BOCC Extension	
50	7.8	Support creation and funding of an open space acquisition program that would assist with purchase of agricultural land easements.	BOCC	
51	7.9	Evaluate effectiveness of existing Minor Exempt Subdivision process	Planning	

Public Safety Element

Goal 8.1: To ensure that, as the County grows, emergency preparedness planning and the provision of emergency services continues to meet the growing demands of residents and visitors.

#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
52	8.1	Continue active role in the funding and supporting law enforcement and emergency service agencies.	BOCC	

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

53	8.2	Continue to work cooperatively with special districts and volunteer groups to assist them in pursuing their missions.	BOCC
54	8.3	Continue to coordinate with public safety and emergency service providers to ensure adequacy of development standards and review process.	Planning
55	8.4	Determine whether wildfire hazard mitigation standards should become required as part of new developments.	BOCC
56	8.5	Request completion of FEMA flood plain mapping throughout County.	Building

<i>Airport Area Element</i>				
Goal 9.1: To protect the safety of persons and property surrounding the airport.				
Goal 9.2: To protect the present and future operations of the airport.				
#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
57	9.1	Continue to participate in airport commissions update of airport master plan.	Planning	
58	9.2	Establish an airport "area of influence" around the airport, developing a land use plan for that area that incorporates the needs of the airport facility as well as the concerns of area residents and property owners.	Planning	A
59	9.3	In accordance with C.R.S. 24-65-102(1) adopt "1041 Powers" to regulate	BOCC	

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

		land uses around the Durango-La Plata Airport as an area of State interest.		
60	9.4	Identify and consider adoption of land use code requirements for "avigation" easements.	BOCC	
61	9.5	Identify lands surrounding the airport that Airport Commission expects to need for future expansions	Planning	AI
62	9.6	Identify and consider establishment of requirements for special construction techniques to be used on projects within the airport area of influence	Planning	AI

<i>Parks/Recreation/Trails Element</i>				
Goal 11.1: To ensure that the recreational program and facility needs of all County residents are met				
#	AI #	Recommended Action	Lead	
63	11.1	Establish discussions with local municipalities to assess likely future impact of County-wide use of municipal recreation programs	BOCC	C
64	11.2	Identify viable long-term revenue source for future funding of: 1) park facility development and maintenance in the unincorporated County; and 2) existing municipal recreation programs.	BOCC	
65	11.3	Evaluate the merits of establishing requirements for the development of private parks within larger developments, and/or park fees-in-lieu of land dedication.	Planning	
66	11.4	Revise district plans to include reference to County Trails Plan as part of public benefit criteria process.	PC	
67	11.5	Continue to establish and/or enhance partnerships with local municipalities, land management agencies, and others to assist in the provision of recreation programs and facilities.	BOCC	

TABLE 12-1: ACTION ITEM SUMMARY BY PLAN ELEMENT

68	11.6	Evaluate merits of expanding district plan public benefit criteria	Planning
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