

**Review Draft  
 Proposed Goals, Policies, Actions**

**1.0 URBAN GROWTH AREAS**

**ISSUES:**

- There is widespread support in the public for encouraging a significant portion of future growth to occur in and adjacent to municipalities.
- County land use decisions, particularly those immediately adjacent to municipal boundaries have been viewed by local communities, in some cases, as not being compatible and making orderly expansion difficult.
- Because they are difficult to re-subdivide once developed, 1-acre to 5-acre lots will generally preclude more dense development. Therefore, it is desirable to avoid this pattern in a Growth Area.
- Due to the differences between county and municipal land use regulations, it can be difficult to use county land use regulations to achieve objectives of the local community.
- The county is not well set up to provide urban services—organizationally or fiscally. Therefore another entity is required to provide services if/where urban types of development to occur in the unincorporated areas—either a municipality or a metropolitan district.
- The county cannot abdicate its land use and regulatory obligations for the unincorporated areas.
- There are several areas of urban development in the unincorporated county, which are served by already-established metropolitan service districts.

**GOALS:**

1. To encourage future development requiring urban services to be located in areas where these services are or can readily be made available—such as in a city, municipal growth areas, or in a special district.
2. Ensure that County land use policies and development approvals are compatible with the existing zoning and future land use objectives of the appropriate municipality.
3. Retain rural character outside of community limits.

**STRATEGIES/ACTIONS**

1. Enter into an IGA with each community that stipulates mutual commitments to follow the plans, and procedures for review, within the Area of Influence.

2. ~~Create a procedure for efficient, coordinated local municipal input into Planning Commission decisions (such as via a joint planning commission) prior to making recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners.~~
3. ~~Create a reasonable timeframe for vesting of development rights.~~
4. Preserve land area within community growth areas to accommodate growth for the next twenty years.

**POLICIES**

1. Within defined Growth Areas, the County Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Resolution revisions, and individual projects, will be consistent w/local municipal land use plans and policies.
2. Projects proposed adjacent to local municipalities requiring urban services will be encouraged to annex into the affected jurisdiction, if contiguity exists.
3. Development in a Growth Area will have land use and street patterns that are compatible with the affected municipality. Within a locally planned Growth Area, development applicants will be required to obtain project review comments from the local community prior to submitting for County review (the procedure to be defined through and IGA).

**2.0 HOUSING**

**ISSUES:**

- A significant amount of the county's employment is found in the upper Roaring Fork valley, whereas the most significant supply of less expensive homes is found in the western part of the county—resulting in long commutes (and attendant time and costs), traffic congestion (especially through the constricted Hwy 82 corridor in Glenwood Springs) and road impacts.
- This affects not only the well being of the county's workforce, it also affects the ability of the county to attract businesses that will increase the diversity of employment and the long-term stability of the county economy.
- The County recently adopted a requirement that new development provide 15% of homes that meet affordable guidelines.
- Providing affordable homes in rural subdivisions is counter-productive if the residents still have to drive individual cars long distances to work, schools, and shopping. (However, affordable housing anywhere in the Roaring Fork valley does offer the potential of being

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closer to upper valley work without having to pass through the Glenwood traffic bottleneck.)

- [Housing affordability is a regional issue and should be addressed on a regional basis.](#)
- Current policies do not allow, or even encourage, developers in the unincorporated area to locate required affordable homes offsite—in areas close to urban services.

#### GOALS:

1. To bring about a range of housing types and costs that ensures for our current and future [residents](#), affordable housing opportunities in safe, efficient residential structures.
2. Encourage [a mix of housing types](#) within a development.

#### STRATEGIES/ACTIONS

1. Attack the affordable housing issue on several fronts:
  - o Encourage provision of affordable housing closer to where jobs are located.
  - o [Allow the sale/transfer/purchase](#) of affordable units to urban locations.
  - o [Place a high priority on providing](#), cost-effective transportation alternatives, to areas of affordable housing.
  - o Encourage development within urban growth areas that can best provide affordable living.
2. Coordinate efforts with the Garfield County Housing Authority and municipalities to foster regional housing goals.
3. Monitor the effectiveness of the County's affordable housing requirement and adjust as necessary.
4. Work with municipalities to explore allowing required affordable housing to be constructed where urban services are available (transit, neighborhood support, health services, schools, etc.) to lower the overall cost of living of affordable housing residents.

#### POLICIES

1. [Garfield County is committed to take appropriate, cost-effective measures to assure that new development contributes its fair share to providing housing affordable to those that live and work in the county.](#)

### 3.0 TRANSPORTATION

#### ISSUES:

- With projected growth, SH 82, especially through Glenwood Springs, will continue to operate at unacceptable levels
- Even assuming a significant gain in industrial and commercial employment opportunities in western Garfield County, large numbers of County residents will continue to be employed up valley, further adding to commuter congestion of the Hwy 82 corridor

#### GOALS:

1. Ensure that County roads are constructed and maintained on a safe, and fiscally sustainable basis
2. Support public transit services as well as alternative modes of transportation, [when and where feasible.](#)

#### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

1. Encourage development of a regional public transit system.

- Development in unincorporated areas of the County will continue to place demands on roadways initially designed to carry traffic related to agricultural uses
- CDOT procedures allow development proposals to avoid contributing to intersection improvements by showing <20% increase in traffic. Result: many inadequate intersections with no funding for improvements on a County-wide basis.
- Land use decisions have placed incompatible traffic mixes on some roadways, due to the approval of projects placing residential and commercial/industrial traffic on the same transportation corridors without appropriate mitigation
- Approximately 1/3rd of the county roads are in fair or poor condition. Heavy truck traffic related to oil and gas drilling causes the roads to deteriorate much faster than normal. The roads were not built for heavy truck traffic and the life of the road is severely shortened due to the truck volumes.
- The road and bridge revenues are adequate to provide continuing maintenance, but not sufficient to reconstruct roads due to the truck damage, to correct safety deficiencies, or to provide additional capacity. A 2006 traffic plan estimated the funding shortfall to be about \$18 million for 20 years.
- The current road impact fee program is set up by individual county roads. There are many impact fee areas, but the program does not cover the entire county. Fees are collected for development within the specific corridor and are required to be spent only for that corridor. The fee revenues are not sufficient to pay for any significant improvements and cannot be pooled from the different corridors to fund a major improvement on any one corridor.
- Without additional funding, the County should anticipate that road condition will gradually deteriorate and congestion will increase.
- Many county/state intersections will need improvements to accommodate future development.
- Concentrating future development will reduce the improvements needed on county roads. This will allow improvements to be concentrated on those roads directly impacted by development. It will be possible to maintain some county roads with little or no major improvements.

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2. Assure the interconnectivity of the county roadway system, to provide multiple routes to reduce congestion and provide for emergency access.
3. Focus infrastructure improvements (and road maintenance) in cost-effective pattern, in areas where growth is appropriate.
4. Create and maintain a map of existing road conditions and ownerships, and establish road standards.
5. Create a Plan of Roadway Improvements to bring all county roads to county standards within a rolling 10-12 year rotation (the typical lifecycle of a roadway) with anticipated funding at the local, State and Federal level.
6. Update Road Master Plan in relationship to the Capital Improvement Plan.

**POLICIES:**

1. Garfield County will participate and cooperate with regional/statewide transportation planning to promote access to all available modes for County residents.
2. County road extensions will be prioritized based on the following criteria:
  - o Logical extension of existing roadway
  - o Presence of Existing land uses adjacent to the project
  - o Consistent with Future land uses based on the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Regulations

#### 4.0 ECONOMICS, EMPLOYMENT, COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL USES

**ISSUES:**

- The county has a diverse employment base, the most significant sectors being:
  - o Construction (17%)
  - o Retail sales (12%)
  - o Mining (10%)
  - o Accommodations, food –tourism (10%)
  - o Wholesale trade (8%)
  - o Healthcare (8%)
  - o Education (8%)
  - o Information, finance, real estate (6%)

Over the last decade, the biggest change in relative importance has been the increase in Mining (2000=1%, 2008=10%) and the slightly reduced role of many of the other sectors.

- Notwithstanding the role of mining, there is also a realization that mining employment is subject to strong external forces (price of oil, gas/oil technology, etc.) that make it vulnerable to variations that can occur suddenly (as has recently happened), and that in the long run, oil and gas are finite resources that gradually diminish.
- At the same time, there is a possibility that prices and technology could make oil shale extraction practical, which would result in extraordinary growth in employment and all the attendant impacts.

- As a result, there is a strong desire to continue to diversify the county economy.
- The County is currently analyzing potential business sectors that could be attracted to the Airport Industrial Park.
- Key factors that affect business recruitment include:
  - o Transportation access (air, highway, rail)
  - o Availability of an appropriate workforce (education, training)
  - o Availability of housing for workers
  - o Quality of life that appeals to workers
- Commercial development in unincorporated areas can reduce the sales tax receipts of incorporated communities, and constrain their ability to provide services and amenities on which the majority of county residents depend.
- The growth of tourism in Garfield County continues to diversify the County economy. Tourism based commercial activities are an important part of the commercial economic sector, and tourism based employment provides jobs for Garfield County residents.

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**GOALS:**

1. Maintain a strong and diverse economic base (employment and income generation).

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**STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS**

2. Ensure that adequate land is reserved for the type, size and scope of industrial/commercial/tourism development that is consistent w/ long-term economic development objectives
3. Continue to develop the Airport Industrial Park as a major regional employment center.
4. Explore with municipalities their interest in participating in an expanded version of the Airport Industrial Market Analysis (with financial participation).
5. Ensure that commercial/industrial/tourism developments are compatible w/adjacent land uses and preserve the visual quality of the county.
6. Where appropriate, encourage diverse tourism-related development in order to sustain it as an economic and employment base in Garfield County.
7. Ensure that tourism development is compatible with adjacent land uses and preserves the natural environment of the County.
8. Encourage commercial/tourism development in areas where existing infrastructure (water /wastewater facilities) are currently available and where affordable housing is convenient.
9. Initiate a Transportation Impact Assessment Process for review of proposed commercial/industrial developments to address:
  - o Traffic generated
  - o Contribution to capacity increases and increased maintenance needed
10. Employ alternative uses of the existing resource base specifically including Natural Gas.

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11. Facilitate the growth of institutions that educate the county work force.

**POLICIES**

1. Garfield County will encourage the retention, and expansion, of modest, viable commercial uses that meet the convenience shopping needs of county residents.
2. The county will discourage commercial development in the unincorporated areas that would significantly reduce sales tax revenues in incorporated municipalities.
3. Garfield County will encourage the development of a diversified industrial base, recognizing physical location-to-market capabilities of the community, and the social and environmental impacts of industrial uses.
4.
5. Ensure that transportation modes and nodes are directly tied in with existing economic centers.
6. Direct industrial developments to the airport center and other designated areas.
7. Facilitate growth of institutions that educate the county work force.
8. The tourism industry is an important part of the Garfield County economy.

**5.0 RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAILS**

**ISSUES:**

- The County has traditionally supported (contributed to) the efforts of other organizations to create trails in the county.
- A regional trail already exists in the Roaring Fork valley.
- County policy regarding trail systems should reflect regional goals and be consistent and complementary with other jurisdictional efforts
- Zoning, subdivision and PUD regulations must be consistent with general County open space and recreational objectives.
- The Garfield County Fairgrounds are currently located in the center of Rifle, a location that has much higher potential for other uses that will contribute to the vitality of Rifle.
- A number of conservation easements exist in Garfield County, and are under the oversight of non-profit organizations.
- Strong public support was indicated for the County taking a more active role in both trails and open space.
- Acquisition of open space (land and/or easements) is the surest method of compensating land owners fairly.
- Recreational opportunities are an important part of tourism in Garfield County.

**GOALS:**

1. Assure that new residential development in the unincorporated areas provide recreational opportunities for County residents that are appropriate to the density and type of development.
2. Ensure public access to federal lands is preserved, consistent with BLM/USFS policies.
3. Provide opportunities for tourism industry to utilize recreational resources as well as to preserve recreation resources for local access.
4. Support the development of a continuous trail system along both major river corridors.

**STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS**

1. Work with communities, municipalities, and other organizations to collaboratively develop a Colorado River trail and preservation plan.
2. Working with Rifle, determine the appropriate location for the Fairgrounds.
3. Update the Subdivision Regulations for urban density projects to specify appropriate recreation requirements.
4. Create incentives, such as density bonuses, for the provision of public access to rivers and streams.
5. Research, and present for public consideration, options appropriate to Garfield County regarding feasible/legal means to acquire open space/recreational easements (density bonuses, GOCO funding, land exchanges, etc.).
6. Encourage appropriate development in or near recreation areas to contribute to the continuation and enhancement of tourism in these areas.

**POLICIES**

1. The County supports the creation of an interconnected trail system in the Colorado River valley.
2. Any actions regarding open space and trails must respect the property rights of land owners in the County and must be based on the concepts of just compensation or mutual benefit for landowners, residents and visitors. Open space dedications must include provision for maintenance.
3. Proposed development adjacent to streams/rivers w/rafting or fishing potential are encouraged to dedicate easements for public access to these areas, where compatible with wildlife habitat.

**6.0 AGRICULTURE**

**ISSUES:**

- Agriculture accounts for approximately 2% of county employment, and contributes \$22m to the county economy.
- Agriculture is strongly associated with the western heritage and rural image of the unincorporated areas of the county.

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- Farm and ranch operators have been diligent stewards maintaining the most significant landscapes, enjoyed by residents and visitors.
- The rollover of agricultural land into more intense uses is accelerating in the County
- The prime agricultural lands in the county are also those lands which present the least development constraints (geology, topography, water availability, and floodplain)
- Some owners of large acreages depend on the valuation of development capacity as collateral to leverage capital that permit them to farm/ranch. For many, their land is their savings account. The ability to easily sell small portions of land for income and to family members is an important survival resource.
- The County currently offers a variety of tools that allow a landowner to bypass (via exemptions) onerous subdivision regulations in subdividing up to 14 lots.
- [Note: deletion to be moved to land use density discussion] Residential subdivisions often cause conflicts with agricultural practices, which can eventually discourage farming/ranching.
- For many owners of small-to-intermediate acreages, their agricultural income is subsidized by other sources.
- As the rural areas of the County continue to develop, the need to ensure compatibility between these uses and active agricultural lands will intensify.
- Agricultural land provides important habitat for winter game as well as non-game species and also provides desired "open space."

**GOALS:**

1. Promote the continuation and expansion of agricultural uses.
2. Preserve a significant rural character in the County.
3. Preserve scenic and visual corridors in the County

**STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:**

1. Create and maintain a "tool box" of methods for agricultural protection. Consider:
  - o a program for the purchase/transfer of development rights
  - o land trusts and conservation easements (already available)
  - o cluster development incentives
  - o exemptions from subdivision regulation for small land partitions
2. Facilitate farmers and ranchers working together in an ongoing effort to develop strategies to help preserve agriculture.
3. Ensure active agricultural uses are buffered from higher-intensity adjacent uses
4. Require all Final Plats to carry a note that notifies prospective lot owners that Garfield County has adopted a Right to Farm and Ranch Policy
5. Review and revise county land use regulations as appropriate to increase their effectiveness for land conservation and agricultural protection.

**POLICIES**

1. Agricultural land will be protected from infringement and associated impacts of higher-intensity land uses w/buffer areas between the agricultural uses/proposed project
2. Discourage densities greater than the underlying zoning if the proposed development would adversely affect the adjacent agricultural operations
3. Encourage clustered development in areas that present potential incompatibility

**7.0 WATER AND SEWER SERVICES**

**ISSUES:**

- The proliferation of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems (ISDS) on individual sites should be carefully reviewed in terms of soil constraints and drainage characteristics of each site
- Water is essential to all life in the watershed. Potential threats to water supply include, but are not limited to, climate change and drought cycles, oil shale production, urban development pressures (even from the Front Range), reservoirs and interbasin transfers.
- Garfield County has an extensive supply of ground water, especially in the Flattops Wilderness Area and in the alluvial deposits of the Colorado and Roaring Fork Rivers. However, outside of these areas, in the areas where growth is likely to occur, ground water has only a moderate probability of being found, and when it is present, there are legal and regulatory restrictions on its availability for use. Thus, water will continue to be a significant consideration in determining where development should occur.

**GOALS:**

1. To ensure the provision of legal, adequate, dependable, cost-effective and environmentally sound sewer and water services for new development.

- STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:**
1. Work with existing special districts to coordinate their plans with county policies and plans.
  2. Encourage special districts to expand services to development of new "centers" in the unincorporated areas.

**POLICIES:**

5. Development located adjacent to municipalities or sanitation districts w/available capacity in their central water/sewer systems will be encouraged to tie into these systems
6. County will strongly discourage the proliferation of private water/sewer systems
7. Development proposals in rural areas without existing central water and/or sewer systems are required to show that legal, adequate, dependable and environmentally sound water/sewage disposal facilities can be provided

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- 8. Require new development to mitigate impacts on existing water/sewer systems.
- 9. High-density development, defined as exceeding one (1) dwelling unit per one (1) acre, should be located in areas where central sewage treatment facilities are either currently available, or feasible in the future.

## 8.0 NATURAL RESOURCES

### ISSUES:

- Tourism is an integral component of the economy of Garfield County. Therefore, it is important, for economic development, to respect the natural environment that brings residents and visitors to the County.
- Many of the natural resources in the county are under the jurisdiction of other agencies, and extend beyond county boundaries. A cooperative approach is required. The continuity of wildlife corridors, degradation of riparian and other wildlife habitat, and protection of native fish species, such as the cutthroat trout, are all important to watershed health. Threats include development pressure in sensitive areas from industry, land use, and roads.

### GOALS:

1. Ensure that natural, scenic, ecological, and critical wildlife habitat resources are protected and enhanced.
2. To preserve natural drainage patterns so the cumulative impact of public and private land use activities will not cause storm drainage and floodwater patterns to exceed the capacity of natural or constructed drainage ways, or to subject other areas to an increased potential for damage due to flooding, erosion or sedimentation or result in pollution to streams, rivers or other natural bodies of water.
3. Enhancement of the river corridor
4. The reclamation of land after extraction processes
5. Control of drainage that impacts the communities

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

1. Explore options to integrate an environmental review process throughout the County. Performance standards should be developed that ensure adequate mitigation of identified constraints.

### POLICIES:

1. The County shall discourage development in areas identified as having unmitigatable environmental constraints. The County will protect critical wildlife habitat of state and federally protected, threatened, or endangered species. Development within these designations that cannot be designed, constructed and conducted so as to have a minimum adverse impact upon such habitat or these wildlife species shall be discouraged.

2. Garfield County will encourage the protection of watersheds, flood plains, river-fronts and riparian areas.

## 9.0 MINERAL EXTRACTION

### ISSUES:

- Garfield County has significant mineral resources that have, and will continue to have, a considerable benefit to the economic health of the County.
- Mining and extraction operations have had significant negative visual impacts on the scenery of the county (tourism and business recruitment) as well as on nearby residential development (visual, noise and traffic)
- Primary regulatory control of mineral extraction rests with State agencies: the Division of Reclamation and Safety (sand and gravel) and the Oil and Gas Commission.

### GOALS:

1. Ensure that mineral extraction is not overregulated so as to diminish its benefit to the general public.
2. Ensure that mineral extraction activities do not adversely affect the natural environment, including air quality, water quality, wildlife habitat or important visual resources.

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

1. Work with oil/gas providers to assess market conditions and long- and short-range plans for exploration, production, hiring, etc.
2. Maintain an inventory of viable gravel resources in the county.
3. Ensure that developers of energy or mineral extraction projects contribute proportionately to the construction and operation of any public improvements which are, or will be, required by their projects.

### POLICIES:

1. Garfield County recognizes that surface and mineral interests have certain legal rights and privileges, including the right to extract and develop these interests. Private property owners also have certain legal rights and privileges, including the right to have the mineral estate developed in a reasonable manner and to have adverse land use impacts mitigated. The property rights of mineral lessees must be balanced with the rights of private property owners and the general public
2. Mineral resource extraction activities will protect critical wildlife habitat as identified by state and federal agencies. Development within these designations that cannot be designed, constructed and conducted so as to have a minimum adverse impact upon such habitat or these wildlife species, shall be discouraged.
3. Natural drainage patterns will be preserved or mitigated so the cumulative impact of mineral extraction activities will not

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cause storm drainage/floodwater patterns to exceed the capacity of natural or constructed drainage ways, or to subject other areas to increased flooding, erosion or sedimentation or result in pollution to streams, rivers or other natural bodies of water.

## 10.0 RENEWABLE ENERGY

### ISSUES

- The volatility and increasing cost of conventional energy is an incentive to explore alternative sources to reduce costs—for individuals, communities, and the county as a whole.
- There is potential that alternative energy is a tool for economic diversification.
- It is likely that the individual and large-scale use of alternative energy will become more prevalent in Garfield County and the County needs to anticipate visual and other impacts.

### GOALS

1. Promote and encourage the development of renewable energy resources within the County.
2. [Encourage the implementation of energy efficient site design and building orientation in development proposals.](#)

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

1. Develop county standards for renewable energy installations.
2. Encourage current, and require future, HOA's to develop local standards to promote and allow for renewable energy technologies to occur within their subdivisions. (before there is a conflict).
3. Evaluate the viability of various renewable energy resources within the County. Develop appropriate mechanisms to encourage their development.

### POLICIES:

3. The County encourages the development of energy efficient building design and the use of alternative energy sources.

## 11.0. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION (to be combined with Section 1.0)

### ISSUES:

- Access to the policy making process must be expanded to ensure public participation from those most affected by land use decisions
- All County-wide planning efforts must be responsive to the diversity among subareas in the County
- Respect and use of existing adopted local plans and adherence to those plans.

### GOALS:

1. Assure that the comprehensive plan is current as an accurate reflection of current County policy and public values—so that it can serve as an effective tool for coordinating the actions of private land owners, cities, utility providers, special districts, federal and state agencies, etc.
2. An integral part of the County land use planning is the opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process.

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

1. Be consistent in following or amending the comprehensive plan.
2. Coordinate regularly with affected governments and agencies as to consistency of their plans with the comprehensive plan.
3. Annually review progress toward implementing the Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed annually.

### POLICIES:

1. A review of the Comprehensive Plan should be undertaken at least every 5 years.

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