

Meeting Notes

Meeting: Landowner Forum
Date: March 9, 2010
Location: BOCC chambers

There were approximately 15 attendees, including a cross section of land owner types—very large properties (several thousand acres), some large (hundreds of acres) and some moderate (40+ acres). Some property owners are actively ranching, some have granted conservation easements and others intend to develop residential uses. Some are within urban growth areas and anticipate development. The meeting was facilitated by Jeff Winston, planning consultant to the County.

The meeting was structured around a slide show that first presented a brief overview of:

- The difference between current land use policies in the Roaring Fork valley (1 unit per 6-10 acres) and Colorado River valley (1 unit per 2 acres)
- The comprehensive plan directions evolving from the public input received to date
 - encouraging growth in/around existing infrastructure
 - discouraging density outside growth boundaries
- water availability maps show low probability of water many places—may itself regulate growth
- cost of growth, especially road maintenance funding—growth puts pressure our farm-to-market roads were never intended for. They're very expensive to upgrade. We're falling behind each year on maintenance.
- the challenge of coordinating development in the urban growth areas—short-term needs of some landowners vs. their potential long-term gains, and the community's benefit of future growth
- the tools that are currently available for rural growth, exempt from subdivision regulations (minor exemption, major exemption, rural development exemptions, conservation subdivision exemption)
- we have, by some estimates, somewhere between 3,000 and 6,000 vacant subdivided or entitled lots in the unincorporated area of the county.

This brief overview was followed by a series of slides that posed questions for discussion. The attendees were given handouts of the questions on which to mark their answers, but in the conversation that ensued, few actually responded, or turned in, their handouts.

Key points of discussion:

1. Jobs.

- The comp plan needs to identify locations for industrial land, on job creation. If there aren't jobs, people won't come here to live. People are coming to live in the western part of the county for jobs, not for tourism.

(Note: the comprehensive Plan does/will identify areas designated for industrial, and commercial use.)

- A significant number of people are moving here to retire, they don't need jobs, but create jobs for others. Some retirees are finding the west end of the county less desirable, may move out (Battlement Mesa losing population)
- We've been through boom/bust cycles before. Each side of the cycle seems like it will go on forever, then things change and the cycle is reversed. Now is a good time to plan for when growth reappears.
- Businesses want predictability—good planning can have a positive impact on economic development.

2. "Growth should pay it's own way"

- Impact fees are means of charging growth for the impacts that it creates long before it generates taxes to pay for the impacts.
- Most agreed that residential development does not pay its own way.

3. Agriculture, open space and property rights
 - You say “how do we preserve OUR agriculture?” It’s not yours (the public’s), it ours. Don’t try to achieve the *commendable* objective of open space by taking away property rights. If people want to preserve open farmland they have to pay for it. (Agreed, have to pay if we take away development capability)
4. Development exemption process
 - The subdivision exemption process is *not* easy, takes a lot of effort, and money. (It is admittedly not easy, because some regulations are required to protect the public. It is however, *much* easier and cheaper than the regular subdivision process.)
 - I’m here because of what’s happening to my land in Pitkin County...(rights taken away, difficulty of process)
- Growth
 - Most growth should be close to towns.
 - We’d like to go back to 1920 Garfield County, but that’s not possible.
 - Clustering is not necessarily the answer: subdivision homeowners nearby are the *worst* thing that can happen to agriculture.
 - 2-acre lots need irrigation, and often foster weeds, dogs, etc.
 - What we most need is flexibility, to respond to differing conditions, especially short-term needs.
 - We don’t necessarily *want* 19,000 new homes in the County.
 - Not all here to make huge windfalls of money. True, value needs to be guarded, but we also need to figure out our values—what’s best for the land, our families, spiritually, aesthetically—development may not be in all of our best interest.

And some comments from a follow-up communication by one of the landowners who attended:

- Why can’t we define a carrying capacity for Garfield County at a level which will retain the benefits, character and amenities we want, rather than be surprised when we reach a carrying capacity that is only recognized by our dissatisfaction with conditions?
- I heard many complaints about the difficulty and red-tape involved in PUDs, dividing and subdividing land and so on. It seems to me that the more difficult it is to go through the procedure, the more the land is worth when the process has been completed.
- The very difficulty people were complaining about may actually be increasing the value of the land they’re trying to sell. If the process were easier, wouldn’t there be more incentive to divide and subdivide parcels?
- In addition, we don’t seem to have a shortage of smaller pieces of land on the market in Garfield County, indicating that the problem may not be quite as chilling as described.