

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW

**Situation:** The Montezuma County Comprehensive Plan was approved in 1997 and has served as the basis for the County Land Use Code since that time. Comprehensive plans should be reviewed periodically, and the Board of County Commissioners asked the County Planning Commission to conduct a review in 2009. The focus of this review was to determine whether the Plan should be revised, rewritten, or left as is. The Planning Commission held workshops to elicit community comments on the Plan over a five-month period from May to September 2009 and discussed this issue at length at their own workshop. Four main questions were asked:

1. What do you like about the Plan?
2. What do you dislike about the Plan?
3. What changes should be made to the Plan?
4. Where should commercial and industrial uses be permitted?

**Complication:** The Plan was written more than a decade ago and does not reflect significant changes in the demographics of the County, particularly the increase in second-home and retired residents. In addition, location of commercial and industrial activities has occurred in a piecemeal fashion, leading to concerns about incompatible uses. In the intervening years, increasing demands for resource development (oil and gas drilling, gravel pits, and other industrial activities) have exacerbated this issue.

**Question:** Should the Montezuma County Comprehensive Plan be revised or rewritten to address changes in demographics and to clarify the location and types of commercial and industrial activities in the County?

**Answer:** Based on the community comments received at the Plan workshops and on detailed consideration by the Planning Commission, the Planning Commission recommends that the Plan not be revised or rewritten. Instead the Plan should be updated by adding information that reflects the current demographics of the County, that projections for changes to these demographics over the next several years should be made and added to the Plan, and that the Land Use Code continue to be revised to reflect the needs of the County as these needs are identified by the Board of County Commissioners. The Planning Commission recognizes that the Land Use Code and the Comprehensive Plan are “works in progress” and that this approach has been successful in developing the Land Use Code since the approval of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Planning Commission believes that this strategy will continue to function for the foreseeable future, but that four immediate additional actions are necessary to bring the Plan and Code into congruence:

- Develop better enforcement of the Land Use Code by creating a staff position in the Planning Department charged with enforcing the Land Use Code
- Zone the County using zoning districts to achieve more predictability for future land use
- Create a strategic plan for natural resource development
- Include a requirement for analysis of cumulative impacts in the Land Use Code.

**Discussion:** A summary of public comment and Planning Commission discussions about the Comprehensive Plan are attached to this document, along with material that was presented at the workshops by County staff and members of the Planning Commission. These comments suggest that there are no major changes in the perception of the County: the same issues identified in the original Comprehensive Plan continue to exist today. Quality of life seems to be the driving force for residents of the County, along with concerns about economic development, air and water quality, and continuing the rural tradition of the County. Preservation of property rights is still considered to be a major concern, along with maintaining agricultural and ranching activities in the County. The largest issue related to the current Land Use Code is not that it does not reflect the Comprehensive Plan, but that it is not adequately enforced. The Planning Commission therefore recommends an enforcement position be added to the staff of the Planning Department.

The community and Commission believe that it is time to “zone the County”, that is, to provide predictability for future land use. The Commission recommends that the Board direct the Planning Department to establish a district zoning map for the County, which would reflect historical, continuous and current use, and that this map will reviewed by the Planning Commission and then forwarded to the Board for their approval. Public input would be engaged in the process. It is anticipated that this map will take about one year to assemble.

The Planning Commission also recommends that a natural resource (minerals, gravel, oil & gas, and so forth) strategic development plan be formulated by the Planning Department, as resource development permits have not yet been requested for a large part of the County that likely contain natural resources. Natural resource development provides excellent opportunities for economic growth within Montezuma County in terms of jobs, capital investment, housing, and secondary industry, but development of these resources also carries with it a variety of other impacts. In developing a strategic plan, these impacts will be identified, and the plan will provide the basis for policies and (or) regulations that may direct resource development away from sensitive areas and (or) mitigate those impacts.

Finally, the Planning Commission recommends that consideration be given to the effect of cumulative impacts, when multiple high impact and special use permits are located in a small area of the County. The addition of language regarding cumulative impacts may be appropriate for the Land Use Code, and the Dolores River Plan may serve as a model for implementing this recommendation.

