

Together Chaffee County

2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FINAL DRAFT

PREPARED BY CUSHING TERRELL



Photo: Scott Peterson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2030 Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan update was not possible without the support, input, guidance and consideration from the Chaffee County Board of County Commissioners and Planning Commission.

Board of County Commissioners | March 2020

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The 2030 Comprehensive Plan update was primarily driven by the voices of hundreds of participants representing the people of Chaffee County. Special thanks goes to those who participated in the process by contributing thoughts and ideas online or in-person at any or all of the workshops, open houses, drop-ins or other events.

2030 Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Citizen Organizations and Community Groups 2019 to 2020

The following citizen-led advisory organizations and community groups dedicated time to ensuring the Comprehensive Plan Vision, Goals, Strategies and Implementation Actions aligned with specific community ideals.

- Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area
- Central Colorado Conservancy
- Chaffee County Community Foundation
- Chaffee County Early Childcare Council
- Chaffee County Equity Coalition
- Chaffee County Visitor's Bureau
- Chaffee Green
- Chaffee Shuttle
- Clean Energy Chaffee
- Economic Development Corporation
- Envision Chaffee
- Full Circle Restorative Justice
- GARNA
- Guidestone
- Heritage Area Advisory Board
- Housing Policy Advisory Committee
- Public Health Department
- Small Business Development Center
- Sustainable Salida
- Transportation Advisory Board
- Upper Arkansas Conservation District
- Watershed Partnership



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Executive Summary

AN UPDATED APPROACH TO CHAFFEE COUNTY'S LONG RANGE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

“Up until now the past means and methods of planning have served the County fine...but because of changes in the world around us, we can't continue along that path. We need to change the way we do things and chart a new course forward.”

—Public Comment

The Together Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan is the first long range vision and plan for Chaffee County in over 20 years. Despite some similarities in community perspectives towards growth from the late 1990s to today, unprecedented changes in the way people live and work required an updated strategic approach and growth framework. The previous comprehensive plan from the year 2000 could not have addressed 2020's challenges which include a wave of incoming residents, recreation pressures, a changing climate and a growing home-based employment sector. Some of these stem from the 2020 global public health crisis, but all undoubtedly affect the way Chaffee County moves, socializes and communicates. Although the prior plan was substantially outdated, recent efforts including Envision Chaffee County, its Recreation in Balance program, a next-generation wildfire protection plan, and the creation of the Chaffee County Office of Housing create the foundation for this new plan. The aim is to create a healthier, more connected and economically successful county that sustains the lifestyles and landscapes that attract so many people to Chaffee County.

The following summarizes the new tools and ideas in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan that will help plan for a successful future.

DEEP-ROOTED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Together Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan is the culmination of a nearly two-year engagement process anchored by several cycles of community input. Chaffee County has a vigilant and engaged community with local expertise in many topics congruent with comprehensive planning. From neighborhood meetings at the Maysville fire hall, to large open houses at the Steamplant, to drop-ins with local hotel owners, the process included widespread geographic outreach to capture the voice of county residents. At farmers market booths, visitors talked about their first impressions of the County, while large employers were engaged to discuss the challenges they face with changing housing and market conditions. After 13 in-person events, numerous online forums and worksessions, and several surveys, over 3,500 data points were synthesized to develop the plan's foundation.

This plan could not have been created without the attention, effort and time commitment of the Chaffee County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners during joint worksessions, where in the closing six months the plan was vetted, fine-tuned and reorganized to ensure efficacy and simplicity.

A NEW VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Much of the community and stakeholder input gathered in first 10 months was formed into Visions, Goals and Strategies—aspirational statements that emphasize how the County will achieve desired outcomes.

Revised Goals and Strategies: The Vision, Goals and Strategies found in Section 2 were revised to reflect contemporary aspirations of current and future Chaffee County residents and visitors. These are organized into seven planning themes: 1) *People and Community Services* which addresses healthy and equal access to services and fiscal responsibility; 2) *County Character* to protect the County's culture, heritage, recreational activities and lifestyle; 3) *Affordable and Inclusive Housing* to help supply a mix of housing types and affordability; 4) *Resilient and Sustainable Environment* to strive for a sustainable future in the face of hazards and to harbor stewardship of the natural environment; 5) *Connectivity, Mobility and Access* which seeks to make all modes of transport easier and safer across the County; 6) *Jobs and Economy* that focuses on building upon the County's unique qualities to foster economic growth and a diverse workforce; and 7) *Growth and Land Use* to focus directly on changing land use patterns.

Scenario Planning: Scenarios for future growth were illustrated in the 2000 Comprehensive Plan and were updated to harbor community-wide discussion on growth management direction and goals. Future growth scenarios were created using maps, models and illustrative concepts to embody three different outcomes. The community was re-engaged to determine a desired scenario, and advantageous elements of several scenarios were assembled to inform maps and policies.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Providing guidance for the location, design, pattern and character of new development in unincorporated Chaffee County emerged as a key motivation for introducing new growth management policies. Throughout the process, citizens voiced the idea of "keeping the town, town and the country, country" resulting in an outcome where new growth should occur in existing communities where infrastructure and services already exist. Rather than limit or shift development, several new tools are offered to promote smarter growth in places where a vision had previously not been provided. This is accomplished largely through the Future Land Use Plan and Sub Area Plans, and is also implemented with expanded guidance for conservation subdivision usage and design concepts.

Future Land Use Plan and Maps: Found in Section 3 of this plan, the Future Land Use Plan and associated maps provide a vision for growth in the unincorporated county by illustrating the character and intensity of uses and activities that occur on lands outside municipalities. These maps offer guidance for decisions on land use applications and are derived from input from landowners, stakeholders, municipal representatives, the general public and an infrastructure analysis that projected future development patterns based on proximity to amenities and utilities. Future land use planning has not been a significant tool for leaders and decision makers in the past and is intended to be adapted and amended to ensure flexibility and compatibility with future conditions and to form a basis for revisions to the Land Use Code.

Sub Area Planning: Because the geographic range and unique qualities of Chaffee County's rural communities, Sub Area Plans are introduced to

capture locally-specific needs and to continually coordinate land use plans between the County and local jurisdictions. The four subareas include: 1) Buena Vista; 2) Mid-Valley/Nathrop; 3) Salida; and 4) Poncha Springs/Maysville. Sub Area policies and projects focus on lands adjacent to municipal boundaries (with the exception of Mid-Valley/Nathrop where there are no incorporated communities) and were developed with members of town or city administration, planning departments and local elected officials.

Focus Areas for Future Planning: Sub areas consider land use and planning policy at a more granular level, but the Future Land Use Plan goes further to recognize Focus Areas where additional master planning is beneficial to due particular challenges or opportunities on specific sites. Focus Areas generally would benefit from additional study and outreach to overcome infrastructure issues, physical constraints or to gather support for housing or economic development projects that further community goals.

AN APPROACH TO MITIGATE REGIONAL HOUSING CHALLENGES

The Together Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan builds on the energy and momentum brought in when the County's Office of Housing was created and offers land use-oriented strategies to help all Chaffee County residents have access to safe and attainable housing. The Office of Housing is a county-wide department that takes a multi-jurisdictional approach to housing issues and the Comprehensive Plan offers a similarly regional set of goals and strategies to promote the supply of affordable units and to avoid displacement of residents. This plan honors the housing production targets from the Chaffee County Housing Needs Assessment and offers a future land use pattern

that acknowledges locations where housing growth may occur as existing communities grow while seeking to promote residential development in rural subdivisions that utilize conservation subdivision design concepts and do not continue to strain the County's ability to provide services.

Conservation Subdivision Design: Designing subdivisions with conservation in mind is an approach to laying out new residential plats so that a significant percentage of buildable area is permanently protected to create interconnected networks of conservation lands or open space. This is seen as a tool to implement a county-wide vision for preserving agricultural and working landscapes in rural areas while allowing for well-designed residential growth. The Future Land Use Plan discusses ideal locations for such designs. While Chaffee County's current Land Use Code allows for and promotes conservation subdivisions, this Comprehensive Plan offers a model for design concepts that is intended to be implemented through a formal ordinance.

A PLAN FOR ACTION

Through several worksessions with local community groups, advisory committees, volunteers and local leaders, the Comprehensive Plan concludes with an ambitious Implementation Plan of actions and steps to enact community goals. The Comprehensive Plan cannot be implemented by one jurisdiction, agency or group, therefore the implementation actions are intended to be fostered by any and all pertinent groups, and not solely by the County itself. Intended as constantly evolving targets, the matrix outlines priority and level of resources needed for each action as a guidepost for future leaders to review, revise and complete over time.

1. Introduction



Anyone who lives in or visits Chaffee County loves the community's exceptional beauty, strong western heritage, quality recreation, and friendly people. But Chaffee County is at an important crossroads where the decisions it makes today will have long lasting implications. Over the past twenty years, tourism has become the County's largest industry bringing an influx people here to visit and to live.

However, the steady increase in population creates both opportunity and new challenges. The County has seen an economic expansion, yet its benefits are not being experienced by everyone. Residential and commercial development is placing significant strain on the region's land availability, housing affordability, and infrastructure capacity. And, finally, the community's social fabric is stressed as long-standing and newer values systems come into conflict.

The County realized the 2000 Comprehensive Plan was woefully inadequate when it came to providing the county guidance on how to address these, and many more, challenges. In 2019, it undertook the comprehensive plan update in order to develop a clear vision and a roadmap that would enable the County to direct and anticipate, rather than simply react, to community change.

The Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan 2030 is the guiding policy document, supported by Colorado law, that the County government can use to inform decision making about land use, development, infrastructure and investments. It works in conjunction with other more detailed subordinate County plans and policies, such as the Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Chaffee County Land Use Code. Over the next few years, the County will work to align and integrate its plans for consistency with the vision articulated in this new comprehensive plan.

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The 2030 Comprehensive Plan is a guidebook for how Chaffee's citizens, workforce, visitors and developers can help the County grow into a sustainable and connected community. The following maps, charts, descriptions and illustrations that make up this comprehensive plan communicate Chaffee County's 2020 values to policy makers and leaders, to use as future generations make the County their own.

Under Colorado law, the 2030 Comprehensive Plan is an advisory document and is not regulatory in nature. This means that its importance is to provide the priorities needed to guide updates to Chaffee County's policy and development regulations. For the plan to become reality, the County will need to create and adopt a variety of regulatory (e.g. zoning provisions) and non-regulatory tools (e.g. cluster development incentives).

This plan is designed to be used in conjunction with other County and Town planning documents. Subordinate plans more specific in nature like the Community Wildfire Protection Plan should be consulted in conjunction with this plan when making decisions related to wildfire planning.

WHY IS UPDATING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPORTANT?

The Together Chaffee Comprehensive Plan has been updated to communicate an aspirational vision for the future, to build consensus on growth outcomes, and to recommend policies and projects that protect working landscapes while preserving private property rights. As new planning issues emerge, new tools and approaches can be developed and incorporated into this land use plan to build upon recent successes to tackle the County's most sophisticated challenges.

A community is like an ecosystem; to thrive, all of the parts must work together in order to sustain the County's future. This comprehensive plan is meant to help policy makers and implement programs to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our community and preserve our community character for future generations. To do this in a community that is 83% public land, we must have a comprehensive plan organized around stewardship of our ecological resources. This plan extends that ethic to the private lands in Chaffee County, where most of the community lives and works.

To reach its vision, Chaffee County is not starting from scratch, this comprehensive plan instead incorporates how past decisions were made and provides new visionary thoughts and ideas to strive for better outcomes.

To use this plan, decision-making should, in the future, be based on analyzing alternatives and understanding of trade-offs. The public outreach process reached far and wide to understand the public vision from previously unreached or marginalized communities. One outcome of the extensive outreach, for example, was a vision for "keep town town, keep rural, rural", or focusing density in towns to avoid sprawl in the rural parts of the County. The Plan demonstrates these ideas in the Future Land Use Maps. This plan maintains the use of strategies and maps to convey community values on growth, and creates a venue for cross-jurisdictional coordination in the Sub Area Plans.

Photo: Scott Peterson

LAND USE PLANNING PRIORITIES

While there are many prioritized actions in the Implementation Plan spanning across multiple sectors that are all important, the comprehensive plan and in particular, the Future Land Use Plan, establishes a vision for the physical development of Chaffee County that is a priority for and responsibility of the Chaffee County government explicitly. This vision reflects two interrelated and interdependent principles. First, a desire to focus high-quality growth near existing communities, and second, to ensure development in unincorporated areas meets high quality design and use standards. As the current land use code and planning policies do not currently enable this vision, the County needs to prioritize:

1. A land use code update that includes a new zoning code that allows for a mix of development types at different densities.
2. Municipal – County collaboration and the necessary infrastructure analyses to enable more development in and around the municipalities at greater densities.
3. Completion of the resource assessments, maps, and plans to guide the development of appropriate subdivision and zoning standards that will protect priority sensitive areas, open lands and community assets.
4. Completion of a Regional Multimodal Transportation Plan that addresses the need for better multimodal connectivity.
5. Identification of specific sites and zoning districts that prioritize the development of affordable and attainable housing to support the economy and local workforce.

6. Identification of funding sources to support development of multimodal infrastructure (roads, pedestrian and bicycle trails, airport, rail, telecommunication, freight and transit) and affordable housing.

The Implementation Plan includes the specific actions associated with the above priorities. The County Planning Commission will work to steward implementation and communicate progress annually.

TOGETHER CHAFFEE: MOVING FROM PLANNING TO ACTION

Over the past few years, our community has repeatedly demonstrated we can work together to solve big challenges. We have seen the value and benefits of efforts like Envision Chaffee County and the Housing Policy Advisory Committee in creating community-driven solutions. Together Chaffee integrates this collaborative approach into the comprehensive plan. The Together Chaffee planning effort has built bridges across the community's municipalities, organizations, agencies, and community groups to create an integrated vision and action plan that reflects the tremendous work already underway in our community to actualize our shared community values. While the County will take a leadership role in stewarding plan implementation, success will be based on how we continue to work together to get things done. Together Chaffee will continue to engage the community, communicate progress, and celebrate successes as the plan is implemented.



Photo: Scott Peterson

HOW TO USE THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This comprehensive plan communicates the community's vision and priorities for the future that can inform community action and development. For the nonprofit sector, this plan demonstrates community support for policy and program development. For the development community and property owners, this plan provides greater clarity about the desired character of neighborhoods and type of future development. For local government, it reflects community desires for resource investments and should inform decision making for consistency with the Plan's Vision and Goals.

The plan includes:

1. **The Vision, Goals, and Strategies:** Establish the aspirational and strategic direction for the County on where it wants to go in the future for seven thematic areas that address issues related to the community, the economy, the natural environment, and the built environment.

2. **The Future Land Use Plan and four Sub Area Plans:** The physical manifestation of the plan, this guides the long-term physical change in the County. This includes the County-wide Future Land Use framework, description of Future Land Uses applied to the unincorporated areas of the County, and Future Land Use Maps.
3. **The Implementation Plan:** A matrix for the specific actions steps necessary to accomplish the Goals and Strategies. It includes the institutional lead and priority level with an emphasis on the next 1-3 years.
4. **Community Trends Summary:** A summary of data reflecting current conditions and drivers of change in the County. This trend data is useful to understand the extent and scope of issues, and it provides supporting data for grant makers and policy decisions.
5. **Appendices:** The public process and input summary and other valuable information can be found here as a reference.

A comprehensive plan should be a living document. Should conditions in the County change significantly, the Comprehensive Plan can be amended to reflect more current realities or be updated completely.

Guiding Principles and Values

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The development of this Comprehensive Plan was grounded in the following principles that should also be used as the County moves into action with implementation.

STRENGTHEN CIVIC CULTURE: Support, improve, and strengthen public and civic processes.

FOSTER REGIONAL COLLABORATION: Foster a climate of intergovernmental and interagency collaboration and achieve continuity and systemic integrity by synchronizing and coordinating plans across intergovernmental, interagency, interdepartmental, and private volunteer organizations and non-governmental organizations to lower costs, increase efficiencies, and maximize results.

RESPECT PROPERTY RIGHTS: Take a balanced approach to regulatory, voluntary, and incentive based approaches to achieve community goals respecting all parties.

SUPPORT INNOVATION & CREATIVITY: Approach community development and decision-making with openness, creativity, and seek win-win solutions.

PROMOTE HEALTH & EQUITY: Include health considerations in policy making across different sectors that influence health (transportation, agriculture, land use, housing, public safety, and education) to address policy and structural factors.

ACT HOLISTICALLY: Given all things are connected, consider decisions across scales from the human, site, and landscape scale and across the comprehensive plan's themes. Consider both the connections among things and the potential for unintended consequences when making decisions.

MANAGE GROWTH: Direct growth to compatible areas where growth makes sense using analysis to consider economic, physical, social, and ecological constraints. Plan and develop sustainably, with the goal of protecting our natural resources, wildlife and viewsheds.

BUILD PROSPERITY: Make future oriented decisions that contribute to the health of our economic, social, and environmental values.

COMMUNITY VALUES

A community's values reflect the culture of a community and reflect who a community is at their best. These values reflect the intangible qualities of Chaffee County that residents love and what makes it a great place to live. While the Comprehensive Plan goals and strategies are intended to support, protect, and enhance these values, community leaders and residents should also use these values to guide future action.

- **We are a caring community.** We value our strong sense of community where we know our neighbors, are welcoming and friendly, and support each other when in need.
- **We are good stewards.** We value the natural beauty in our backyard provided by the Arkansas River, surrounding mountains, and valley. We care for the environment that supports our communities and natural systems.
- **We are civically minded and engaged.** We value the willingness of people to work together and collaborate towards the betterment of our community.
- **We are authentic.** We value our rich heritage, distinctive communities and creative residents that contribute to our unique local character that sets us apart from other places.
- **We are a healthy and active community.** We prioritize the physical and mental wellbeing of all community members.
- **We are a great community for children and families.** We value being an ideal place to raise a family where we support young people and parents by providing services, affordable housing, a strong educational foundation and safe environment.
- **We are a safe community.** We value living in a County with close-knit communities where familiarity fosters trust. We respect our diversity, and we strive to ensure everyone has access to economic opportunities that offer financial security.