



DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL AFFAIRS OFFICE OF SMART GROWTH

WHAT IS PLANNING AND WHY SHOULD A COMMUNITY PLAN?

Planning is a basic function and power of local government in Colorado. Unlike some other states, Colorado does not have a statewide land use plan. Master plans and land use regulations such as zoning, building codes, design standards and sign codes are, for the most part, locally designated. Planning commissions and local elected officials prepare plans in order to preserve the public health, safety and welfare. Effective planning ensures the orderly development of land within the planning jurisdiction.

Local governments plan for a variety of reasons:

- **To protect the public and preserve quality of life**
Planning can provide a wide number of benefits to a community. Effective planning can reduce problems such as school overcrowding and road congestion and prevent development in high-risk areas like flood plains and steep slopes. It can also ensure that open space and viable agricultural lands are protected from development – an issue that is paramount to communities struggling to preserve their quality of life in the face of rapid growth.
- **To develop community vision and achieve goals**
The creation and adoption of a master plan provides the blueprint a community needs to realize its shared vision for the future. An effective planning process will engage the public and build on the strengths of the community. The master plan is more than just a list of goals and values, however. It is also a roadmap that allows the community to achieve these goals through specific land use policies and actions.
- **To protect private property rights**
Too often, planning is seen as infringing on, rather than enhancing, private property rights. While regulations like zoning may place limits on an individual landowner's ability to utilize his or her land, they are, at their core, intended to *protect* the property rights of *all* landowners in a planning jurisdiction. Striking the balance between individual liberties and the public good is critical to every planning effort.

- **To encourage/continue economic development**

Orderly planning provides the kind of certainty and predictability that developers, lending institutions and business owners seek. Planning can help outline the future capital improvements and infrastructure a community will require to grow, and identify the means to finance these infrastructure needs. Good planning can also ensure that sufficient land is available for employee housing and new business development.

- **To facilitate decision-making on land use**

Decision making by local governments is made in accordance with master (or comprehensive) plans, zoning and/or other land use regulations. Good land use planning is proactive in nature and helps prevent accusations that land use decisions have been made in an arbitrary or capricious manner. In the absence of planning, land use decisions can often be made haphazardly or by default. Without planning, the impacts of land use decisions are still felt and their costs are borne by the entire community. Good planning leads to sound decision-making.

“Successful communities don't just happen; they must be continually shaped and guided. A community must actively manage its growth and respond to changing circumstances if it is to meet the needs of its residents and retain the quality of life that initially attracted those residents to the community.” (Growth Plan, City of Grand Junction)