

OURAY COUNTY MASTER PLAN

Prepared by:

Ouray County Planning Commission:

Jim Irvine, Chairperson

Barbara Vanhoutte, Vice-Chairperson

Linda Ingo

John Trujillo

Judy Wolford

Ouray County Land Use and Planning Department

Gary Laura, Administrator

Greg Moberg, Planner

Carol Dunn, Planning Technician

Jane Bennett, Secretary to the Commission

Adopted by the Ouray County Planning Commission

December 1, 1999

Endorsed by:

The Ouray County Planning Commission would like to express its sincere appreciation to the citizens of Ouray County who devoted their time and effort to giving the Planning Commission insight and direction during the preparation of this Master Plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page
Introduction	1
Purpose of the Plan	1
The Planning Process	1
Ouray County Development Goals	2
1 Goals and Policies	
A. Agricultural Lands	2
B. County/Municipal Relationships	3
C. Economic Development	4
D. Housing	4
E. Natural Resources	5
F. Rural Character	6
G. Tourism	6
H. Transportation	7
I. Utilities	8
J. Visually Significant Areas	9
K. Wildlife and Plant Habitats	9

Introduction

As Ouray County citizens enter a new millennium, words that introduced the original Ouray County Zoning Regulations in 1971 are still applicable today. "The area encompassed by Ouray County is a quiet land of awesome beauty, even today nearly untouched and unspoiled . . . It ranges from the magnificent San Juan Mountains on the south across the Uncompahgre Valley, and on in to the rolling foothills and mesas covering the northern parts of the county. Ouray County, then, possesses a rare combination of assets; a priceless and varied natural environment, ranging from unique wilderness to more hospitable areas, and a population which is aware of the value and delicacy of the physical setting surrounding it."

"Ouray County is now becoming known to people from all areas as a winter and summer recreation area . . . In the face of such potential popularity, how can the unique environment for living, including the delicate natural environment, be protected? How can the County accommodate the inevitable development pressures, without letting these pressures negate or even destroy the unique and irreplaceable qualities that attracted them in the first place?" The questions being asked then are still relevant to this day. Building on our history and incorporating results of a recent survey of the people of Ouray County, this update of the Master Plan for Ouray County seeks to encompass and expand upon these original precepts.

Purpose of the Plan

The Master Plan is a comprehensive, long-range guide, prepared by the Ouray County Planning Commission, to be used in making decisions that affect the physical, cultural and socioeconomic development of Ouray County. The Master Plan provides a realistic and achievable image of the County, both present and future, through a framework of goals and policies. The goals provide general statements reflecting the desires of county residents regarding the use of land and lay the groundwork for zoning and the land use decision-making process. The policies provide the County's positions relating to the identified goals and establish guidelines for direction or action.

The physical development of the County has direct and indirect effects on property rights, natural resources and property values. This Master Plan seeks a balance that respects these concerns in an effort to maintain the County residents' quality of life. Therefore, it is the intent to allow only that development which is responsible and consistent with the goals and policies set out in this plan.

An additional purpose of this plan is to facilitate cooperation between the municipalities and the County on matters of mutual concern.

The Planning Process

In 1994, the County declared a one-year moratorium on new planned unit developments due to an increase in proposed residential development and circumvention of the Master Plan goals. After three years of collecting information, a geographic information system (GIS) was developed, a county planner was hired, and a Demographic and Economic Trend Line Report was completed.

In December of 1997, joint Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners meetings were held to define the planning process. The Planning Commission held open workshops twice a month to obtain community comments and concerns. Joint planning commission workshops were held with the two municipalities.

The Master Plan is the end result of analysis of all pertinent data collected as well as community input. After a formal public hearing, this Master Plan was adopted by resolution of the Ouray County Planning Commission. These goals and policies are a reflection of this community's values and desires for Ouray County.

Goal of the Ouray County Master Plan:

The overall goal of the Ouray County Master Plan is to allow gradual, long-term population and economic growth in Ouray County in a manner that does not harm the County's irreplaceable scenic beauty, wildlife, air and water resources, and other environmental qualities and that does not unduly burden the County's residents or its governments. To better define and implement this overall goal of the County Master Plan, the following goals and policies are set forth.

For organizational purposes, the order of the goals are listed alphabetically with no weight or priority implied.

A. Agricultural Lands

Agricultural uses within Ouray County are important physical, environmental, cultural, aesthetic, and economic asset to both urban and rural residents. In addition, preservation of these lands in large tracts is desirable to maintain the agricultural economy of the County. Development of these agricultural properties is a matter of public concern in both the agricultural community and the residential community because of the interface between agriculture and development activities.

Goal:

To encourage the continued use of lands for agricultural productivity and the right to farm and ranch.

Policies:

1. Ranching and farming shall remain a use-by-right within specific land use zones except as restricted or modified when a change in land use is granted by the County.
2. Develop and implement right to farm/ranch regulations that protect the agricultural community by ensuring the right to continue agricultural activities.
3. Develop and implement regulations and a process that give incentive to an owner to develop the land in a manner that conserves productive agricultural lands.
4. Consider intergovernmental agreements with the Town of Ridgway, the City of Ouray and areas of future incorporation that would maintain irrigated fields and low-density development surrounding each municipality

in exchange for establishing and maintaining urban growth boundaries.

5. Evaluate and consider for adoption programs and incentives that encourage the placement of land into conservation easements and other protective status.
6. Develop and implement a regional agricultural economic development plan in conjunction with the surrounding counties to promote agricultural activities.
7. Obtain, maintain and update a map of ditches and irrigated lands provided by the Colorado Division of Water Resources, supplemented or amended, as required, using other sources. Require developers to designate all irrigation ditches, return flow ditches and drainage ditches located within the boundaries of any development plan and designate access to such ditches and surrounding irrigated fields.
8. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives and amendments to the Land Use Code that keep or augment existing water rights within the County.

B. County/Municipal Relationships

Municipalities located within Ouray County today are the Town of Ridgway and the City of Ouray. In addition, the unincorporated town site of Colona is also located within Ouray County. Each municipality has developed and adopted a master plan or comprehensive plan to guide their growth. Of importance to all residents are the land use decisions that may be made by the municipalities and the County. These decisions can impact development patterns and the natural environment.

Goal:

To preserve the community character of the City of Ouray and the Town of Ridgway.

Policies:

1. The County and Municipalities (future and present) in cooperation should come to an agreement regarding the location of urban growth boundaries and urban influence zones. Having created and agreed to these boundaries, the County should recognize them in the following manner:
 - a. The County should not rezone or allow the development of any property, other than agreed upon uses, within the urban growth boundaries.
 - b. The County should support municipal annexations when the subject properties are located within the urban growth boundaries provided all conditions of the intergovernmental agreements are met.
 - c. The County and municipalities should enter into intergovernmental agreements to jointly review any development proposals within established urban growth boundaries and other areas of mutual

concern

2. Encourage and foster intergovernmental agreements that uphold the intent of this master plan with any areas of concentrated residential development that undertake a process of incorporation.

C. Economic Development

Ouray County's economy has changed significantly in recent decades. Historically, the economy relied upon underground metal mining, agriculture and tourism. In recent years, mining and agriculture have declined while the economic activities of people with income derived outside the County have increased and service and retail businesses now play a more important role in the County's economy. In addition, the purchase of goods and services has shifted from within Ouray County to nearby Montrose County. A more sustainable and diversified economy is desirable in order to ensure that Ouray County will not be as susceptible to seasonal cycles of a boom and bust economy and that traditional interests and values do not become totally displaced.

Goal:

To promote a diverse and balanced economy that is less susceptible to the economic swings of any one industry.

Policies:

1. Develop and implement standards that allow home based occupations that are appropriate for the property on which they are located.
2. Encourage high quality telecommunications infrastructure in the high-density areas of Ouray County.
3. Encourage commercial and/or industrial uses to locate within the municipal boundaries.
4. Define acceptable commercial and/or industrial uses in the unincorporated areas and develop and implement standards that allow the specific uses to be approved through the special use permit process.

D. Housing

The residents of Ouray County desire attainable and varied housing options for all segments of the population. Attainable housing units are becoming more scarce as population growth continues. Only by ensuring the availability of housing for a diverse and varied population will Ouray County be able to maintain a socially and economically balanced community.

Goal:

To assure the continuing availability of diverse housing to meet the needs of the County's growing population.

Policies:

1. Develop and implement definitions of attainable housing, for both owner-

occupied and rental units, using standard methodologies.

2. Periodically evaluate the housing situation within Ouray County and consider for adoption appropriate changes to the Land Use Code to address the need for attainable housing.
3. Evaluate and consider for adoption regulations concerning the long-term rental of accessory apartments and dwelling units.
4. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives that assist in development of attainable housing within proposed Planned Unit Developments.

E. Natural Resources

Ouray County residents have always been aware of the abundant natural resources that surround them, including water, timber, minerals, clean air, wildlife, and scenery. In the past, these resources have been utilized to support mining, ranching, tourism, and the associated businesses that make up our communities. A balance between the protection of natural resources and the protection of individual property rights must be considered. The utilization of natural resources may have an impact on the environment; however, if properly planned, such utilization need not result in degradation of those attributes that attract people to Ouray County.

Goal:

To manage our natural resources in a manner that is both environmentally sound and protects private property rights.

Policies:

1. Continue to allow underground mining as a use-by-right in the Alpine Zone. It is recognized that this activity is highly regulated by both state and federal agencies. However, the County reserves the right to review all permits to determine whether the operation is in compliance.
2. Continue to regulate, by special use permit, open pit mining, milling, heap leach operations and other mineral and non-mineral, fuel and extractive operations within Ouray County.
3. Continue to allow property owners, through the special use permit process, the ability to harvest timber on their land.
4. Continue to ensure that all commercial and industrial activities occurring in the County are in compliance with local, state and federal regulations for air and water quality.
5. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives and technologies that encourage energy and water conservation.
6. Evaluate and consider for adoption "1041" regulations (C.R.S. §24-65.1-101 et seq.).
7. Continue to maintain wildfire mitigation regulations and encourage fire protection and water supply entities to work proactively to make further

improvements in fire safety.

F. Rural Character

Ouray County is made up of diverse landscape and topography. Privately owned land varies widely in terms of the suitability for development. Many of these parcels are not in close proximity to existing planned unit developments or attendant infrastructure. As a matter of public concern, expansion of urban development into rural areas is an issue because of the increased costs of County services (e.g. emergency medical services, fire protection, sheriff services and road and bridge maintenance).

Goal:

To maintain the rural character of Ouray County.

Policies:

1. Develop and implement zoning and incentives to maintain low density or large tracts of land. Where appropriate, direct growth toward areas that are already developed or that otherwise clearly support the goals of this plan.
2. Encourage build out in existing planned unit developments.
3. Create open space or low-density development areas around the town, city and future unincorporated areas by intergovernmental agreements that further the objectives of this master plan.
4. Continue to encourage clustering of residential units within all planned unit developments and those areas of Ouray County where it supports the goals of this plan.

G. Tourism

Ouray County has many natural and scenic resources that appeal to both residents and tourists alike. The City of Ouray's history as a tourist destination began at the turn of the century. Historically, the impact of the tourist industry on the County's economy has been significant; however, this impact is primarily experienced during the summer months. Though winter recreational activities have begun to increase year round tourism, many restaurants and hotels still close down for the winter season.

Goal:

To allow a diverse and balanced tourist economy that minimizes environmental and infrastructure impacts and is less susceptible to seasonal fluctuations.

Policies:

1. Allow the development of the services and facilities necessary to adequately support year-round tourism in a manner that minimizes impacts on the environment, infrastructure and county residents' lifestyles.

2. Develop and implement special use permit regulations that allow tourist based businesses that are appropriately located within the unincorporated areas of the County and that minimize impacts on the environment, infrastructure and county residents' lifestyles.
3. Encourage the location of commercial, lodging, restaurant and other tourism-based activities in the municipalities and those planned unit developments that allow for commercial uses.
4. Allow special events within the County in a manner that minimizes impacts on the environment, infrastructure and county residents' lifestyles.
5. Encourage cooperation with the Town of Ridgway, the City of Ouray, the Ridgway Chamber of Commerce and the Ouray Chamber Resort Association.

H. Transportation

The primary purpose of a transportation network is to move people and goods within and through the County. As the amount of development and population increases, additional demand will be placed on the transportation infrastructure. It must be recognized that the transportation network strongly influences the specific uses of land and the overall pattern of development; because of this interrelationship land use and transportation planning must be coordinated.

Goal:

To promote a transportation network that allows for the orderly flow of traffic on roads in Ouray County.

Policies:

1. Developments creating the need for road improvements are expected to bear the proportional cost of such improvements.
2. If a development creates off-site roadway impacts, the mitigation of such impacts should be required. Such improvements should be considered in addition to any required on-site improvements.
3. Development that causes significant traffic impacts to overburdened roads will be discouraged unless provisions are made for necessary improvements.
4. Coordinate planning and development review efforts with the two municipalities, future incorporated areas and adjoining counties to ensure integration and continuity of the road system and adequacy of roads in Ouray County over time.
5. Roads within new developments should be designed to facilitate safe and logical flow of traffic on, off and, where appropriate, through the site.
6. Evaluate and consider implementation of mass transit and the effect it may have on intra and inter-county transportation.

7. Evaluate and consider for adoption a transportation plan for roads in the County, considering citizen input.
8. Continue to maintain a strong road standard section in the Land Use Code.
9. Evaluate the feasibility of accommodating non-motorized modes of transportation, including horse, pedestrian and bicycle, in order to provide multiple modes of mobility to all segments of the population.
10. Evaluate and consider for adoption policies that direct inter-county traffic to state and federal highways where feasible.

I. Utilities

A number of entities provide utilities in Ouray County. Utility services that are currently available in various areas of the County, include electricity, telephone, sewer, cable, transmitting towers and water. A variety of federal and state commissions, departments, and agencies regulate utilities in Ouray County. However, land use activities, such as the location of transmission lines and the upgrading of existing facilities and the construction of new facilities, are subject to the County's jurisdiction and approval.

Goal:

To recognize the necessity for the timely development of utility facilities and the need for careful planning to minimize the impacts associated with utility facility siting and design. In addition, due to the economic and environmental impacts created by the increased need for energy, the County will continue to encourage the use and exploration of alternative energy sources including, but not limited to, natural gas, solar and wind.

Policies:

1. Utilities may be considered appropriate when sited so that they are as compatible as possible with surrounding land uses and the natural environment.
2. Visual impacts should be identified and effective mitigation measures employed.
3. Access, when required for utility service facilities, should provide minimal impacts to adjoining residents and the environment and should not be used for access to new development.
4. Utility facilities siting should consider joint tower use, multi-utility corridors, and clustering where possible and deemed appropriate.
5. In addition to environmental and land use compatibility issues, the land use review process should also consider the economic, technological, operational, maintenance, and safety implications of future utility facilities.

J. Visually Significant Areas

Ouray County contains some of the most unique and beautiful scenery in Colorado. The diversity of the landscape ranges from jagged high mountain peaks and mesas to river valleys and irrigated fields. Preservation of this visual beauty is of utmost importance to the citizens of the County. The citizens want to be assured that future development will not hinder, impair or destroy Ouray County's scenic beauty.

Goal:

To protect and preserve visually significant and sensitive areas of Ouray County that provide the scenic backdrops and vistas that all residents and visitors of Ouray County enjoy.

Policies:

1. Maintain strong visual impact regulations.
2. Develop and implement strategies for the protection and preservation of critical scenic vistas.
3. Evaluate and consider for adoption programs and incentives that encourage the placement of land into conservation easements and other protective status.
4. Evaluate and consider for adoption programs for the protection of open space by Ouray County.
5. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives for Planned Unit Developments to surpass the minimum open space requirement as set forth in the Land Use Code

K. Wildlife and Plant Habitats

Ouray County is fortunate to have rich and varied flora and fauna. This Master Plan recognizes the value residents place upon wildlife and plant resources for enjoyment and the economic impact that is generated by activities such as sightseeing, hunting and photography. The degradation of wildlife and plant habitats leads to the inevitable disappearance of wildlife and plant species. This resultant loss of environmental diversity weakens the ecosystem as a whole and may displace wildlife or remove certain species entirely.

Goal:

To recognize the importance of protecting all species and habitat types currently found in Ouray County and maintain healthy and diverse wildlife and plant habitats.

Policies:

1. Identify and strive to protect high-quality and significant wildlife and plant habitat areas. These areas shall include habitats of endangered species, species of special concern, migration corridors, breeding and spawning and birthing areas, wetland and riparian areas, important seasonal

habitats, and habitats supporting a high diversity of wildlife species.

2. Develop and maintain maps and information resources of significant wildlife and plant habitat areas. Each new development shall be evaluated as to the effect the development will have on wildlife and plant habitat areas. If significant habitat loss could occur, mitigation will be required or the proposed development may be denied.
3. Develop and implement zoning and incentives that protect and preserve significant wildlife and plant habitats.
4. Evaluate and consider for adoption programs and incentives that encourage the placement of land into conservation easements and other protective status.
5. Continue to reduce the proliferation of noxious weeds utilizing methods that are in compliance with federal and state laws and local regulations.
6. Evaluate and consider for adoption stronger regulations that would limit, to the extent of the law, the impact that domestic animals within planned unit developments have on wildlife. This program would integrate and support efforts of the Colorado Division of Wildlife.