

2020 Together Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan

WEBSITE

Award Video



2021 Merit Award: Community Engagement

by Nora Bland, Planner + Community Engagement Coordinator, Cushing Terrell

Chaffee County tells the story of the Old and New American West. It is a place occupied by environmentalists and entrepreneurs, attorneys and artists, and thrill-seekers and transplants – all who share stories with families who have worked the land outside their homes for 150 years. This community needed a plan as diverse as the denizens that live in its houses, work in its shops, tend to its cows and raft on its waters. Like the Upper Arkansas in June, the process proved full of eddies, haystacks, holes, and sleepers as two decades of planning work needed to be done. However, as the Plan’s moniker implies, the entire county was in the boat, digging in, ready to make the run together.

“Our last comp plan update was in 2000 – we didn’t have a plan that reflected the current challenges and needs of our community. We didn’t have the tools to protect what we value most and what brings so many visitors here” explains Keith Baker, Chaffee County Commissioner. Despite some continuity in community perspectives towards

growth from previous planning efforts to today, unprecedented changes in the way people live and work required an updated strategic approach and growth framework.

Chaffee County is home to over 20,000 residents with strong and differing opinions and priorities. With an influx of new residents within the past 20 years, the county's social fabric has been stressed as long-standing and newer value systems come into conflict. Community values of preserving agricultural and rural lands threaten the widely-held value of private property rights, highlighting the financial hardships of the ranching industry today. This plan actively engaged both sides of the conflict to craft solutions and policies that honor both community value



systems.

In a county where reliable internet connection is not accessible to all, in-person engagement and offline outreach strategies were crucial to hear from community members in the more rural parts of the County. This planning effort went to great lengths to engage those that don't typically show up to public meetings. Pre-pandemic, the engagement effort included open houses, neighborhood meetings, drop-in events, stakeholder interviews, high school workshops, online surveys, and various online engagement tools. In-person meetings were well-attended and the online surveys had high response rates. All this input was incorporated into a first draft, released in March 2020.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Colorado, the County's resources became stressed and staff and leadership were handed pressing responsibilities to try to manage the crisis on top of their normal workload. With shifted priorities, the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners took a second look at the draft plan. "The really unique part of this process were the joint work sessions led by the consultants with Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners. We had over a dozen virtual sessions focused on further refining the draft plan. It was amazing to work collaboratively with my fellow commissioners to make sure this plan would reflect the values of Chaffee residents and provide us with the guidance we need as decision-makers" Keith Baker remarks. "The hours put in by local leadership on this plan were unprecedented. They took ownership of the process and the result is a truly implementable plan that addresses all the community's challenges from the last 20 years while staying flexible to address future uncertainties" Dave Dixon, senior planner at Cushing Terrell adds.

"To be successful in our first comprehensive plan in 20 years, we really needed our community to be able to own this plan. Cushing Terrell was supportive of our efforts through Chaffee County and the Planning Commission in ensuring that this was a truly community-driven planning process, and we're exceptionally grateful" concludes Marjo Curgus, Chaffee County Planning Commissioner.