

INTRODUCTION

VISION STATEMENT

The Douglas County Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP or Plan) reflects, acknowledges and balances the common values, rights, and needs of all County residents and landowners, and honors and protects its unique, diverse communities and resources. This intent is most effectively realized through citizen understanding of, and participation in, land-use review processes and public forums.

The CMP clearly states the desired community vision for the future and establishes the guiding policies needed to achieve sustainable growth over a twenty to thirty year period.

The CMP has been developed as the foundation for the County's future growth and development, and as such, is intended to provide decision makers with guidance on how to maintain and improve identified community values.

The first County Comprehensive Master Plan was completed in 1974 and conditions in the County have been changing ever since. Therefore, the Comprehensive Master Plan must be periodically updated to ensure the community vision is achieved.

In the State of Colorado, it is the duty of the county planning commission to draft and adopt a comprehensive plan for the unincorporated territory of the county, pursuant to C.R.S. §30-28-106(1).

The CMP uses community values as the basis for goals, objectives, and policies to shape and guide future growth. An extensive process was followed to identify community values in the Chatfield Basin area, an area previously identified for future growth, during this update. The community identified values in 10 categories:

- Access and Transportation
- The Natural Environment
- The Planning Process
- Property Rights and Property Values
- Quiet, Peacefulness, and Privacy
- Recreation
- The Rural/Unique Area

SECTION 1

- The Safe Environment
- The Sense of Community
- Water Supply

The value statements for each category can be found in the Chatfield Basin Public Involvement Process Report, available from the Community Development Department. Subsequently these values were validated as being applicable on a County-wide basis.

This Plan builds on these community values in developing goals, objectives, and policies to guide land-use decisions and shape development. A future land use map is included to demonstrate how this Plan's policies guide the desired location, use, and intensity of land development. Each of these components of the CMP is described below:

- Goals provide general statements reflecting County desires regarding land-use, decision-making processes.
- Objectives establish a more specific framework for the larger goal.
- Policies provide the guidelines for direction or action.
- The Comprehensive Master Plan Land Use Map illustrates future land uses and important geographic features based on this Plan's goals, objectives, and policies.

Plan components address growth-related topics such as land use, transportation, community resources, parks and open space, water supply, environmental quality, and wildlife.

This Plan is divided into land use, environmental, and service sections that detail the community's desired goals, objectives, and policies by topic and geographic area. Section background and Plan amendment processes are provided to assist with using and maintaining the relevance of the document.

The CMP is the instrument that establishes long-range general policies in a coordinated and unified manner. Decision makers can use this Plan for guidance on resource allocation, zoning of land, the subdivision of land, capital improvement plans, budgeting, and County work programs.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS AND REGULATIONS

The CMP is supported by many other planning documents that serve to shape development and the provision of County services. The chart in Figure 1.1 lists all relevant documents and depicts the context within which the CMP is considered.

The CMP is actually a group of documents. This Plan’s sub-elements provide additional information, and in some cases, are referenced in the primary Comprehensive Master Plan document. The sub-elements include:

- Transportation Plan
- Mineral Extraction Plan
- Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan
- Recreation and Tourism Plan

Figure 1.1

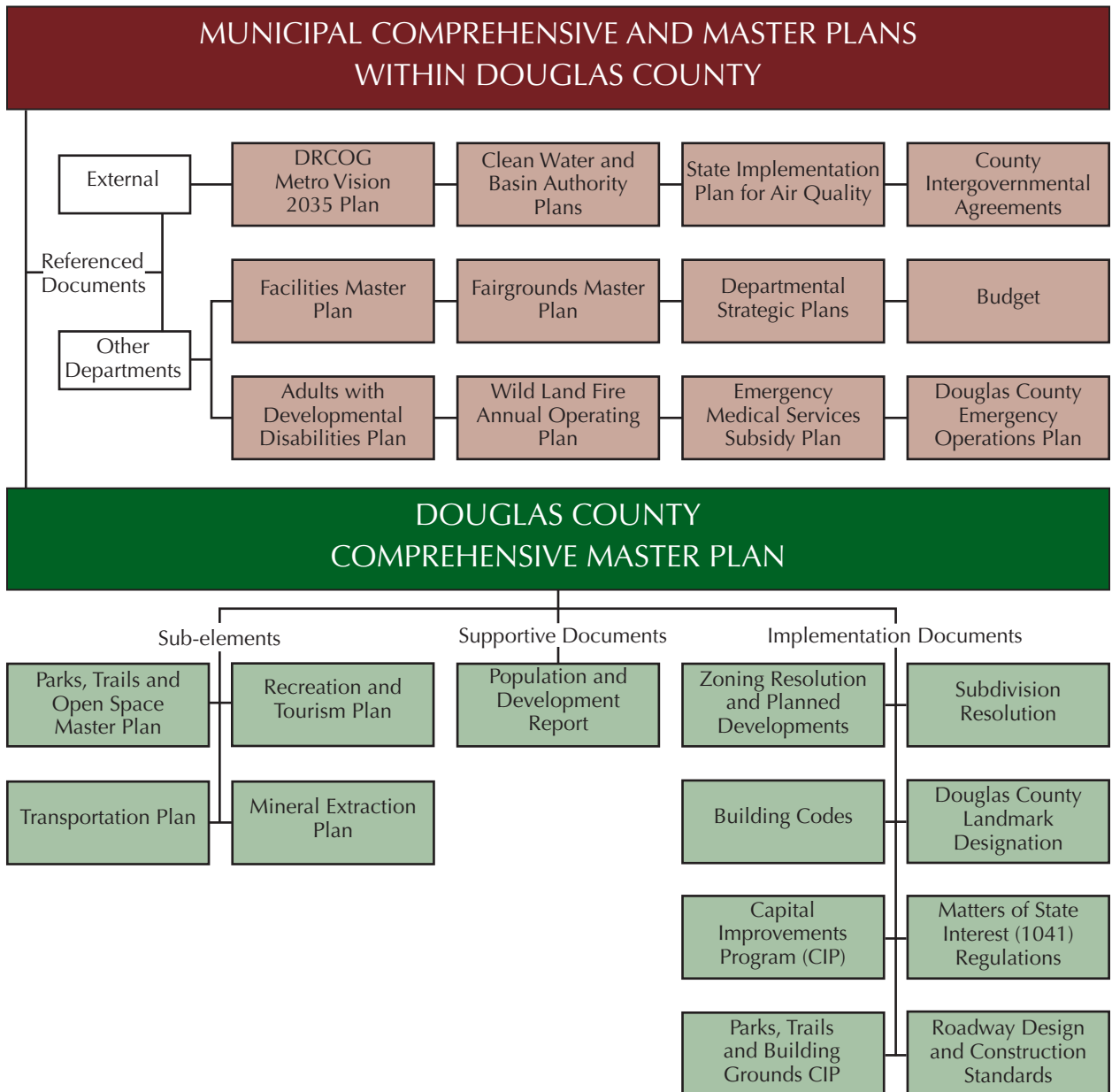


Figure 1.1 also shows the relationship between the CMP and its supporting documents and the implementation and long range plans produced by neighboring municipalities and outside agencies.

The Metro Vision 2035 Plan is established by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG). Metro Vision 2035 identifies such things as future transportation investments, growth trends, regional open space needs and opportunities, and air and water quality standards over a 27 year horizon.

The County is a signatory to the Mile-High Compact, a voluntary agreement between members of DRCOG to manage growth throughout the region by implementing Metro Vision 2035. The CMP has historically encouraged planning goals and values highly consistent with those in Metro Vision 2035.

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

Douglas County, Colorado lies close to the center of the state along the I-25 Corridor between the major urban activity centers of Denver and Colorado Springs. It encompasses over 540,000 acres of mountain vistas, dramatic ridgelines, hills, and grass covered plains. Elevations can range from a low of 5,400 feet in the northeastern areas to the high point of 9,836 feet at Thunder Butte in the Pike National Forest.

After the Rockies were thrust skyward, the volcanic, seismic, and erosive forces of nature created the layers of sandstone that act as aquifers today. Those same forces also carved the striking rock formations that remain.

Douglas County's vegetation is as varied as its topography. Pine, spruce, and fir trees cover the mountains of the Pike National Forest. The foothills are home to Gamble Oak, Mountain Mahogany, and Choke Cherry. The numerous riparian ways running throughout the County play host to Cottonwood trees, willows, and lush grasses. The mid-grass prairies prevalent in the County are populated with blue gramma, switch grass, and winter wheat grasses.

Douglas County is home to a diversity of wildlife including deer, elk, coyote, mountain lion, fox, hawk, black bear, the Preble's meadow jumping mouse (a threatened species), and is the nesting ground of the Sharp-tailed Grouse.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

The County's coveted natural amenities accommodate a wide array of lifestyles ranging from pastoral agricultural settings to faster paced urban living. It is no wonder that over 286,000 people choose to call Douglas County home.

Douglas County is one of the fastest growing counties in Colorado. In 2007, the County's growth rate decreased to a modest 1.8% from the 2006 growth rate of 4.5% in 2006. Although the growth rate between 2000 and 2010 is projected to slow, the projected population growth total of 140,000 by 2010 exceeds the 115,000 population gained in the 1990s.

The County's rural character has been maintained simultaneously with the more urban growth in the County's northern tier, providing a diverse sense of place and identity for new residents. In 2008, the County is home to seven incorporated municipalities including Castle Rock, Larkspur, Lone Tree, Castle Pines North, Parker, Littleton, and Aurora. Combined, these municipalities make up almost 39% of the County's total population. The incorporated areas of the County currently have 110,000 residents.

Recreational opportunities abound within the County. Local and regional parks; ball fields; trails; Castlewood Canyon, Chatfield, and Roxborough State Parks; and the Pike National Forest are examples of some of the recreational amenities to be enjoyed.

Douglas County has experienced significant job growth since the year 2000. From 2000 to 2006, the labor force grew by 30,700, for an average of nearly 6,140 new jobs per year. While the jobs in the County are still mostly in the service industry; professional, technical, and health care employment opportunities are growing rapidly. This growth in the number and types of jobs available has increased the possibility that Douglas County residents will find employment within the County.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND GROWTH

After the release of the 2000 Census population estimates, Douglas County made national news as the fastest growing county in the United States between 1990 and 2000. During that period, the population almost tripled to over 175,000. Between 2000 and 2010, the County gained another 110,000 people, which was a 62 percent increase in population. By the year 2040, the population

is expected to reach 484,000 people. (See Figure 1.2)

Douglas County has moved from being a predominately rural county with a small population to being a significant portion of the expanding Denver Metropolitan Area suburbs.

As Douglas County continues to grow, the type and location of housing, the number and type of jobs, and population trends for the next several years will diverge from historic development patterns.

Figure 1.2

Douglas County Population Projections 2000-2040

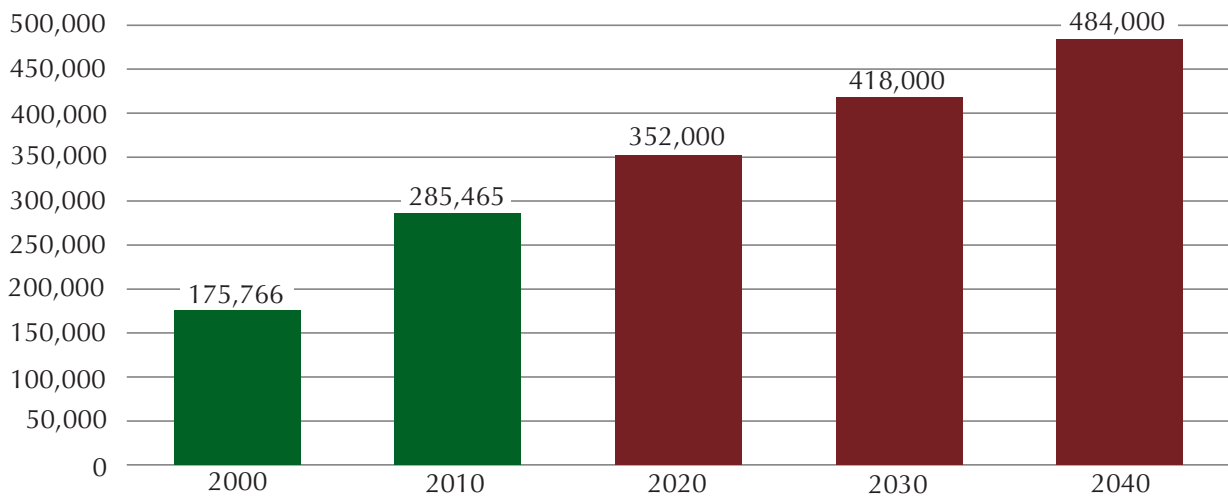
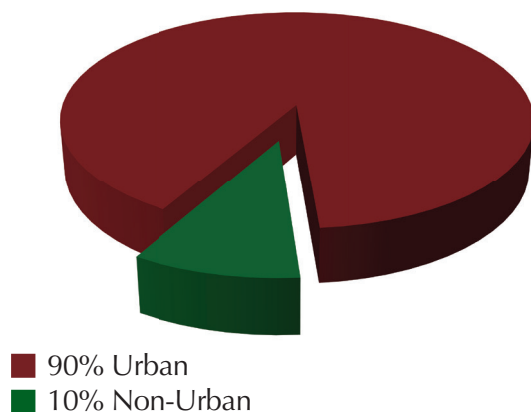


Figure 1.3

Douglas County Urban and Non-Urban Population Shares, 2013



To protect the rural patterns of development, the County has adopted policies that guide growth to designated urban areas and municipalities in the northern portion of the County. Most of the County's population lives in the designated urban areas which make up a mere one fifth of the County's land. (See Figure 1.3)

In 2013, the incorporated communities in the County had a combined population of close to 121,000 persons, which is a little more than forty percent of the total County population. (See Figure 1.4) Plan policies will encourage the incorporated communities to increase their share of the urban population over time.

Another sign of change in Douglas County is its increased share of the Metro Area population. In 1990, Douglas County residents were a small portion of the Denver Metro Area. By 2005 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau showed Douglas County with almost one tenth of the Metro Area population. (See Figure 1.5)

The County housing growth rate has slowed considerably since the 1990's. The recession in 2009 brought the housing market to a near standstill, but building activity has

increased in the past few years. The highest annual County housing growth rate occurred in 1996 while the lowest occurred in 2011. (See Figure 1.6)

The type of housing built has also changed over the years. In 1990, there were very few apartment units in Douglas County. By 2000, that total had tripled. In 2013, all multifamily housing, including condominiums, townhouses, duplexes, and apartments, were over one fifth of the total housing stock.

Figure 1.4
Incorporated and Unincorporated Douglas County Population Shares, 2013

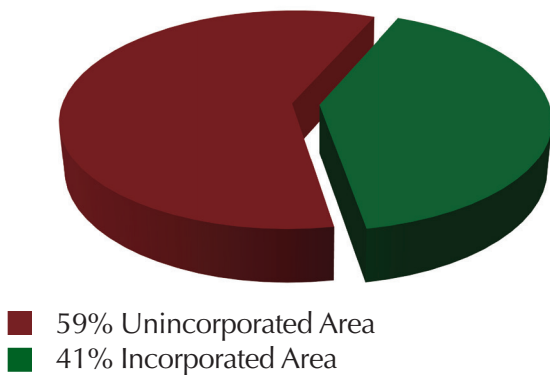


Figure 1.5
2011 Denver Metro Area Population Shares by County, State Demography Office

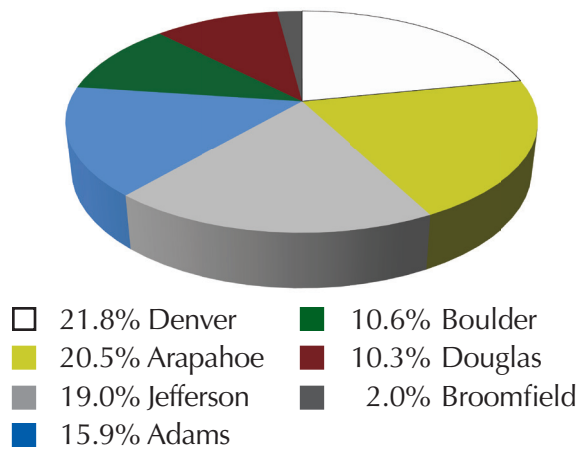
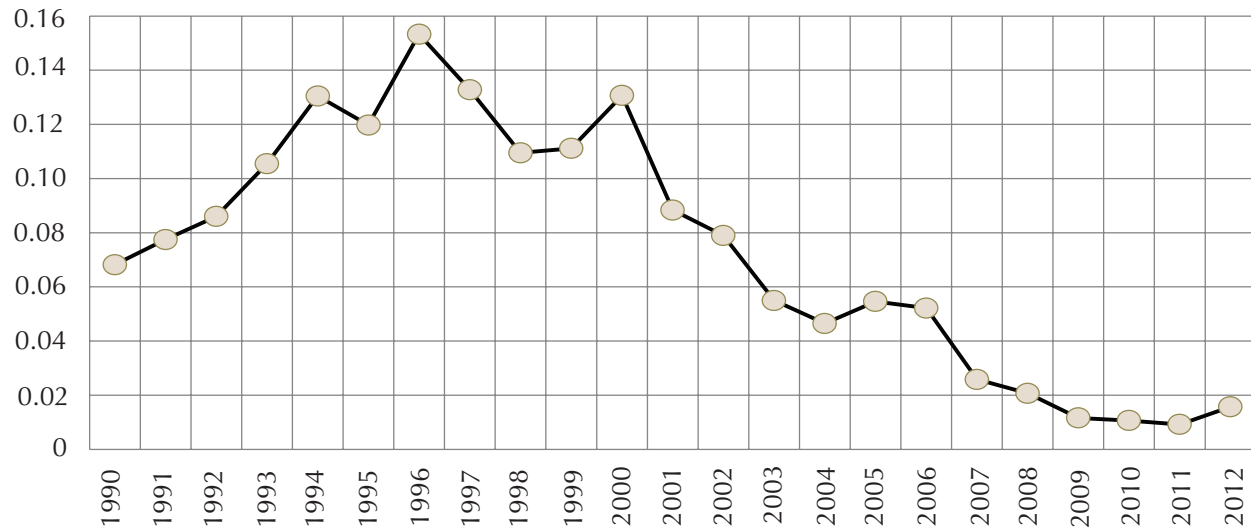


Figure 1.6
Douglas County Annual Housing Growth Rate, 1990-2012



The number of wage and salary jobs (not including sole proprietors) located in Douglas County has been increasing steadily over the past two decades, except for during the recession in 2009. The total number of jobs in 2012 was over 95,000, which was a new high. By 2040 total employment in the County could reach 195,000 jobs. (See Figure 1.7)

County industries experiencing the largest increases in jobs from 2007 to 2012 were health care and social assistance, professional and technical services, and administrative and

waste services. As of 2012, retail trade continued to be the County's largest employer followed by government, and accommodation and food services.

In the past Douglas County had very low percentages of people over the age 65. As the population ages, the percentage of the senior population will increase to be one fifth of the County population by the year 2040. The county will have to adjust many of its current policies in order to meet the needs of seniors. (See Figure 1.8)

Figure 1.7

Douglas County Employment Projections 2000-2040

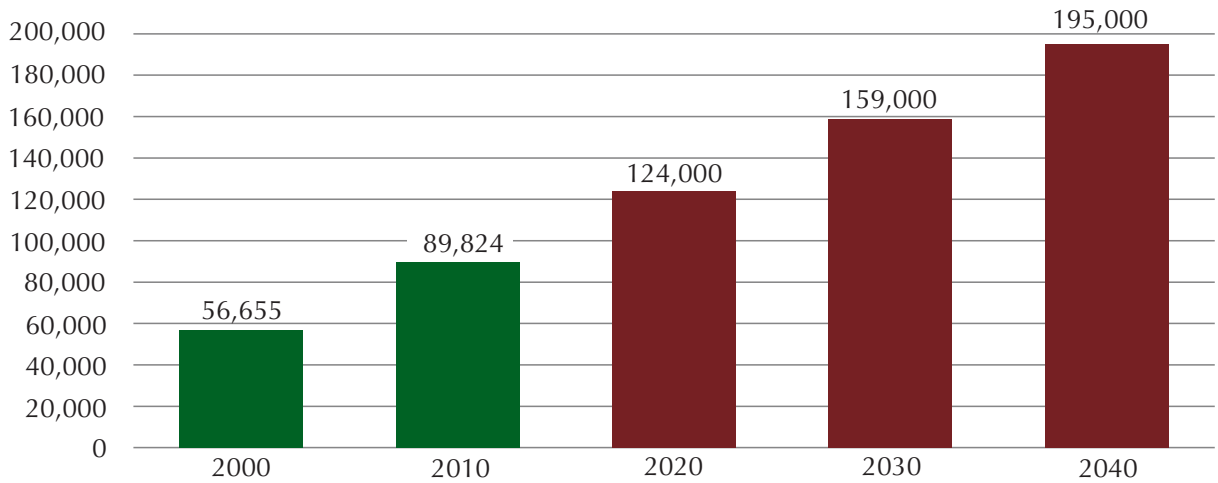
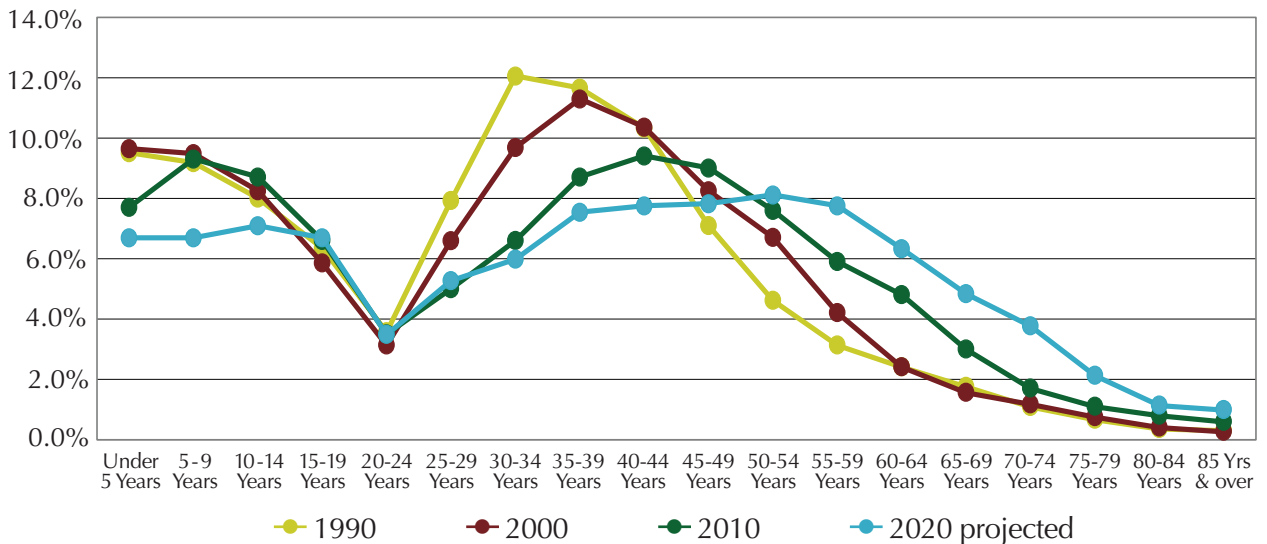


Figure 1.8

Douglas County Age Group Share Projections



GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

The unincorporated county population will increase by nearly 93,000 people by the year 2040. Based on 2013 estimates and densities, that is like adding another Highlands Ranch in the unincorporated areas of the County.

It is important to remember that the characteristics of the future population are projected to change in comparison to what the county has experienced in the past. Adjustments to plan policies and budget priorities will need to be considered to meet the needs of a different population.

Based on trends and growth projections, the County can plan for the future by focusing on growth related topics. These include: Develop new areas for urban levels to help preserve the open spaces and nonurban areas of the County.

- Create communities suited for a senior population.
- Support development of renewable water resources while emphasizing conservation efforts.
- Develop viable alternative transportation systems that do not rely heavily on the automobile.
- Consider and evaluate services for residents of all ages.
- Promote housing diversity.
- Increase open space preservation activities.
- Identify and protect important viewsheds
- Identify areas for commercial activities.

The clear goals and expectations of the Comprehensive Master Plan must be used to guide how development will look and where it will go. The Comprehensive Master Plan is the primary tool for establishing a vision and shaping development. By focusing on the stated growth topics, staff and officials can better prepare the County to meet the challenges of growth while protecting the resources and natural amenities of the County to maintain a high quality of life.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As Douglas County continues to grow, the vision for the future has turned toward preserving the quality of life residents enjoy. County officials and residents understand the need for a balance between environmental quality and adequate services in the face of new growth. To address the need for balance, the CMP incorporates the concept of sustainability as part of the community vision.

Overall, sustainability has many definitions and means different things to different people. In Douglas County, the definition of sustainability is rooted in the ability of residents to live their desired lifestyles well into the future. To accomplish this, the County will have to balance growth in a way that protects resources while providing desired services and amenities.

To ensure balance is maintained as growth occurs, the County must have strong building blocks of sustainability. Each building block is described below:

- Economic – ensure goods and services are easily distributed. The County must have jobs to ensure a strong tax base so services can be maintained.
- Social – have services and governance so County residents' needs can be met and maintained over time.
- Environmental – maintain or improve the quality of the environment and preserve natural resources through such means as implementation of green infrastructure principles.

Policies that support sustainability can help the County face critical issues like providing water, preserving open spaces, expanding the job base, and establishing services to meet the needs of the elderly.

The beautiful physical environment, proactive County government, and desirable lifestyles are primary reasons why Douglas County is such an attractive place to live. The CMP establishes the policies to keep these County lifestyles and environment sustainable over time.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The 2030 Comprehensive Master Plan update public outreach process began in November of 2006. The outreach process was designed to reach as many Douglas County citizens as possible. A variety of media, technologies, and more than 40 public meetings in public and private venues using different formats were used to gather input on the themes and topics most important to the County's citizens. Input is used to formulate the County's vision through goals, objectives, and policies. Below is a list of activities used to collect public comment:

- **INTERNET**
A project web site was created to provide a location on the internet where people could track project status, public meetings, educational materials and the latest drafts of plans and maps under discussion. The web site included a means for citizens to submit comments or questions about the plan and the update process electronically.
- **OPEN HOUSES – LOUVIERS, CASTLE ROCK, LONE TREE, AND HIGHLANDS RANCH**
Open houses were designed to familiarize the public with the current CMP policies and provide information on the update process.
- **COMMUNITY SPECIFIC MEETINGS**
These meetings were designed to focus on the communities in the eastern, southern, and central regions of Douglas County. Staff utilized a variety of processes to gather public input about the issues and values specific to these areas.
- **SMALL GROUP MEETINGS: FRANKTOWN, PARKER, HIGHLANDS RANCH, AND CASTLE ROCK**
Small group meetings encouraged the public to dig deeper into the topics they felt were most important for the Plan update. The specific topics the meeting participants discussed included transportation, growth management, sustainability, design, separated urban areas, rural heritage, housing, public and private partnerships, and economic development.
- **ONE DAY WORKSHOP**
The One Day Workshop was an all-day event hosted by Douglas County at the Wildlife Experience. There were four main topics targeted for discussion including water, growth management, transportation, and sustainability.
- **SMALL GROUP MEETINGS - CHATFIELD BASIN**
In the Chatfield Basin area of the County, additional public input processes were employed. Small group meetings of area residents were held to identify the values most important to them. These values shaped the goals objectives, and policies for the subareas within the Basin.
- **MEETINGS-TO-GO**
The Meetings-to-Go were designed to allow groups of people to conduct a visioning session in the privacy of their own homes. Each meeting host was given a bag that included all of the materials that they would need to host a meeting with up to ten people and provide input to staff.
- **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION**
Staff used surveys to elicit feedback on the issues on the public's mind, the best means of meeting and communicating with the public, and the effectiveness of our communication efforts. Comment cards were available at all meetings for use by citizens not comfortable speaking in a public setting. Staff coordinated with other public agencies, homeowners associations, and private groups to include meeting announcements and informational materials in existing community newsletters. Meeting announcements and informational materials were distributed to all interested parties by e-mail and traditional mail. Meetings were announced on posters and electronic message signs placed in public gathering places throughout the community.

IMPLEMENTATION: HOW THE COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN IS USED

Implementation of the CMP is the most important step in achieving the County vision. While approval criteria for various land-use applications require a finding of compliance with this Plan, the competing values of the Plan must be balanced through the public review process to achieve the larger vision of the community. Decision makers use the goals of the CMP to ensure proposals and programs meet public desires and expectations.

The public also has a key role in the implementation of the CMP - providing feedback to Douglas County through development review processes on how well the community's vision is being implemented through the CMP. The County continually strives to improve this participation by utilizing the latest technologies and techniques in distributing information to, and soliciting feedback from, the public about development review and other County activities.

CONCLUSION

The Douglas County Comprehensive Master Plan guides and shapes new growth to ensure development is well-served and that resources and amenities are preserved. The CMP evolves over time and through its regular updates responds to a changing economy, anticipated growth, population trends, and changing needs and values of County residents.

The CMP represents a shared vision of the citizens of Douglas County as expressed by the Planning Commission. It seeks to find an appropriate balance in land use that will provide opportunities for preservation of open space and wildlife habitat, while meeting the needs of daily life, including jobs, housing, recreation, and services appropriate for both urban and nonurban lifestyles. The CMP incorporates general policies about how and where growth and development should occur, while offering a broad, yet realistic plan for the County now and into the future.