

# Chapter 2: Plan Context and Key Issues

## Overview

Early in the planning process, the planning team worked with the community to identify a list of “key issues” to be addressed within this Comprehensive Plan. This list was developed and refined through a series of interviews and meetings with town staff, Citizens’ Advisory Committee members, the public, Planning Commission, and Town Council. These issues, which formed the backdrop against which the plan was focused and developed, are summarized within this chapter under the following topic areas:

- Growth and Development;
- Land Use and Zoning;
- Economy and Tourism;
- People and Culture;
- Natural Environment;
- Housing;
- Transportation;
- Paying for Services; and
- Coordination with Other Planning Efforts.

## Growth and Development

The fast pace of growth in and around Pagosa Springs poses a growing challenge to the town’s efforts to keep up with demand for services and facilities, such as general administration, streets, development proposal reviews, parks and recreation, parking, and police. Current trends of sprawling development in rural areas mean that services and infrastructure are needed to cover a more dispersed area, which impacts the cost of providing those services.

Representatives from the town have emphasized the importance of appropriately pacing and locating new growth to ensure that the town is able to keep up with the growing demand for services. This Plan establishes tools and policies to help guide the location and intensity of future growth and development to help maintain a high level of service.



*Aspen Village is well under construction in 2006.*



*Newer commercial development in Pagosa Springs Lakes area is shown here.*

Other growth and development issues include annexation patterns, town/county government coordination; the quality of new and large-scale county developments, and the impact of growth on the surrounding rural character of the community.



*County rural lands, such as this, face development pressure and may develop as residential ranchettes.*



*This image shows a church in historic downtown.*

## Land Use and Zoning

Several issues related to zoning have resulted in a low level of predictability in patterns land use and development in and around the town. Within the town, an abundance of commercially zoned property, variability of uses, and undefined or inappropriate residential densities combine to offer uncertainty to residents in the face of proposed developments and development pressures. See Figure A-1: Existing Town Zoning. Likewise, in the county, a lack of zoning provides little predictability regarding which types of land uses might occur and where. The combination of these factors creates a need for a new approach toward land use and zoning. This Comprehensive Plan establishes a Future Land Use Plan and goals for town-county coordination to help implement that plan and offer a higher degree of land use predictability.

## Economy and Tourism

Like many small communities with tourism-based economies, Pagosa Springs must continually balance economic development with community needs, as well as the seasonal highs and lows that often accompany tourism. Given the seasonal nature of tourism in the town, this Plan includes goals and policies that address local community needs, strengthening the tourism economy, and economic diversification to smooth seasonal fluctuations. The town is conscious of promoting commercial development that retains the uniqueness and quality of life in Pagosa Springs.

## People and Culture

Recent growth has meant changes in the town's population characteristics. In the face of this change, Pagosa Springs seeks to protect its small town atmosphere and heritage. Residents enjoy the casual atmosphere, community events, and willingness of people to pitch in, volunteer, and take interest in community affairs. This Comprehensive Plan promotes strategies to continue fostering this civic spirit throughout the town.

Efforts will also be unified for arts and culture planning. Programs that emphasize community efforts and traditions ensure long-term viability of the town.

## Natural Environment

Many people are drawn to and remain in Pagosa Springs because of its natural environment in the San Juan Mountains near the San Juan River. Residents and visitors appreciate the scenic quality, large mature trees, and other natural environment features.

The Pagosa Springs area is home to Colorado’s rarest plant species, the Pagosa Skyrocket Plant (*Ipomopsis Polyantha*), as well as other rare and endemic species. It is especially important that such natural resources be protected. Through this Comprehensive Plan and development of appropriate ordinances, recycling programs, and other initiatives, the town will be on a path to conserve its natural environment.



*Pagosa Skyrocket Plant—a rare plant species—is shown in this image.*

## Housing and Neighborhoods

The Pagosa Springs area has some livable, memorable neighborhoods, including Hermosa Street, Lewis Street, Mesa Heights, South Pagosa, and the Lakes (in the county). Residents are concerned that new development be in keeping with the character of the neighborhoods that already exist in the community.

Until recently, Pagosa Springs had been regarded as an affordable housing market, but land and home costs are rising—causing equity in homes to rise, but also making it more difficult for people to afford a home. With housing and land prices expected to continue rising in the county, and an increase in retirement and second home demand, this Plan addresses the implications of these market forces and explore ways in which citizens will continue to have reasonable choices of housing.



*Many older homes retain the traditional rural quality of the town.*

## Transportation

There are several major transportation issues currently facing Pagosa Springs: increasing traffic on State Highway 160, a deficient bike and pedestrian network, expansion of public transit, and downtown parking needs.



*Highway 160 runs through downtown.*

Projected growth will exacerbate problems already present. For instance, traffic on Highway 160 already creates east/west bottlenecks and limits access during certain times of day. The town will need to coordinate with Archuleta County and the State Highway Department to address issues such as traffic bottlenecks and solutions along Highway 160, downtown parking, connectivity of sidewalks and paths, and safe pedestrian crossings in the downtown and neighborhoods. Public transit should be incorporated into new developments and improved within existing development. The county currently operates Mountain Express, the only public transit bus service in the region. This Plan addresses these issues in Chapter 11, Transportation.



*Fire and police services are strained by growth.*

## Paying for Services

The town currently has limited ability to pay for existing and new needs and services. Recent growth and development has expanded the laundry list of needed services within the town faster than it has increased tax revenues needed to pay for these improvements. The Economic Development Study and this Comprehensive Plan identify further what alternative taxing and financing strategies could be employed by the town to avoid any reduction in the quality of services. These plans also address issues arising from the water and school districts, maintenance of park facilities, prioritizing open space and parks, and any necessary coordination that must take place to effectively deal with these issues.

## Coordination with Other Planning Efforts

It has been the goal of this comprehensive planning effort to incorporate recent or current plans, such as the Access Management Plan, Wetlands Plan, and River Restoration Plan, to provide a thorough and consistent planning document.