



ELBERT COUNTY NEWS

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ELBERT COUNTY, COLORADO



Attendees at the comprehensive master plan workshop Nov. 15 gather to study the enlarged maps of possible development outcomes. JODI HORNER

Residents learn about comprehensive plan

Commission will now work toward final details for Elbert County

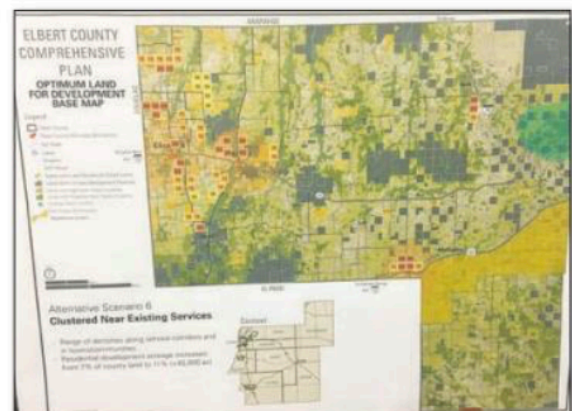
BY JODI HORNER
SPECIAL TO COLORADO COMMUNITY MEDIA

The Elbert County Planning Commission hosted the third of three comprehensive plan workshops on Nov. 15 at the county fairgrounds in Kiowa.

Kurt Culbertson of Design Workshop presented a slide show to 45 attendees, 20 of whom were county officials and staff, that provided them with highlights of the goals

for updating the master plan. Design Workshop is an international planning group with a local office in Golden. Culbertson emphasized that comprehensive plans are not regulatory. "I like to say that it's more about what kind of cake you want," he said, "and then defining the recipe for how you're going to get the plan you want."

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An example of cluster development is illustrated on a blown-up map at the comprehensive master plan workshop. JODI HORNER

PLAN

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County Commissioner Danny Willcox has been impressed with the expertise and attentiveness of the Design Workshop group.

"I was really impressed with the way DW is working through this process with us. They are offering suggestions, they have a better understanding of our county now, and I think they're doing really well," he said.

"I think we'll come in on time (for the approval deadline)," Willcox said.

Some citizens have asked members of the planning commission why the county won't re-adopt the plan put together in 1996.

"Circumstances have changed. It makes sense to revisit things," Culbertson said. "When we started the process, we asked: 'How much growth should we plan for?'"

According to projections from the state demographer, there will be 29,000 more people living in the county by 2035, which would more than double the current population.

Results from feedback received during 1996 master plan process indicated that residents wanted to protect slopes, wildlife and views.

"Can you reconcile preserving those things and accommodate the 29,000 population growth that's coming?" Culbertson asked.

The Elbert County Planning Commission consists of nine volunteer members from throughout the county. The commission is chaired by Dan Rosales, and the vice chair is Ron Turner.

There is also a volunteer task force of 13 citizens whose role is to "get the word out" about the meetings and act as a "communication link" between the community and the consultant team.



Kurt Culbertson of Design Workshop, based in Golden, speaks to the 45 attendees at the Nov. 15 meeting at the Kiowa State Fairgrounds.

JODI HORNER

Time-consuming process

Collectively, the planning commission has put in hundreds of volunteer hours toward the comprehensive plan project, and the hope has been for wider participation within the county.

"It was poorly attended," Rosales said of the Nov. 15 meeting. "But we're right in with the national average. They (Design Workshop) tell us that one-quarter to one-half percent is average, nationwide."

"In Elbert county that's 60 to 100 people — wow," Rosales added. "But when people won't participate, they don't have any room to criticize. It's everybody's right and privilege to attend — it's the incubator of policies that will directly or

indirectly impact citizens."

Willcox said attendees were mostly from the western portion of the county, with citizens mostly older than age 60.

"Even people who significantly opposed Independence (a large residential development that will be built in the northwestern part of the county), many aren't participating in the comp plan," Willcox said.

"Farmers in the east don't care about what happens in the west, and out here, you have a totally different view of how Elbert County should develop," Rosales added. "When you look at the responses we've gotten at public meetings, people want the rural look. They don't want growth, yet they want paved roads, hik-

ing trails, shopping, they want to the conveniences of a metro area, but they don't want the growth that goes along with that. It's impossible."

Rosales has a word of warning to anyone interested in the growth pattern of the county: "If you wait until a hearing and you're protesting regulations, it's too late."

Rosales also shared some recent insights gained by the planning commission, Design Workshop and the county commissioners.

"We've realized that one size does not fit all," he said. "We need to develop one plan for the eastern half and one for the western half — we have to consider both of them and come up with rules that are going to be different for both of them."

"We're leaning toward having a two-part master plan," Rosales added, "since residential development often doesn't pay its own way, and the county is in a situation to figure out how to manage servicing the needs without using commercial taxes" — which the county, at this point, does not have enough of to support a population boom.

About a dozen maps were arranged at the back of the room for citizens to view throughout the evening. The maps illustrated instances of how the county could be arranged with various scenarios of property division.

For example, if the county opted to portion lot sizes in 35-acre parcels, then 37 percent of the county land would have to be developed for residential use.

"All the prime ag (agricultural) land would be eaten up," Rosales said. "Cluster housing is the only realistic way we can reduce the footprint of the development, it makes sense from land and water conservation, and significantly reduce the need for additional roads and other services."

If the land is sectioned into five-acre lots, the amount of county land developed residentially would rise from 7

percent to 13 percent.

Infrastructure costs vary

"Who pays for the infrastructure of services?" Culbertson asked the group. "Widening, shoulders, sewer lines, extending existing roads — depending upon the growth pattern, these costs are going to vary."

It often makes sense to place it on the developers, Culbertson said, "though they may or may not be reimbursed, depending upon who will use those services later on."

Despite the low attendance in previous meetings, Rosales still hopes people will take an interest in what is to come.

"The next set of meetings are going to be critical in how we lay out the master plan. If people want to get a good feel for where we're going to on the master plan, they should attend," he said.

A meeting of the planning commission was planned for 7 p.m. Nov. 28 p.m. — prior to the Elbert County News' date of publication — in the BOCC meeting room in the Old County Courthouse.

Subsequent meetings will be on Dec. 5, 12 and 19, where the commission "will finalize the goals," Rosales said. "They won't be able to provide any input because it's a work session," Rosales said. "They will get a good feel as to what is going into the making of the master plan."

Rosales is enthusiastic about stakeholder meetings to be held in January, where segments of the population involved in areas such as roads and bridges and education will hold a series of meetings.

"We'll have them look at what we came up with, and say whether or not this is a fit with what they believe are the true conditions moving forward in each of these segments," Rosales said.

The planning commission is looking at a February/March time frame for completing the plan, with a goal of April 1 for approval of the new comprehensive master plan.