



chapter **4**

PLAN PRINCIPLES

One of the challenging aspects of a countywide comprehensive plan is the diverse range of interests and perspectives brought to the process by landowners, residents, municipalities, and other stakeholders. To bring together these disparate views, residents were engaged throughout the process.

Using the information gathered at these meetings and guidance from the Plan Committee, fundamental principles that will guide the more detailed parts of the county comprehensive plan have been identified. While consensus-driven, they are specific and capable of being put into operation. The following section provides an overview of the community input process and the plans guiding principles.

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

A Steering Committee

A Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, representing residents and elected officials from across the county, was the primary contributor to this process. Committee members met regularly to assist in identifying issues, developing vision statements, and guiding the land use concepts. Their effort at the end of the project, to balance all the issues, was invaluable in development of the final land use plan.

County Report Card

To begin the planning process, a questionnaire was completed by residents countywide. The questionnaire provided insight on important issues and goals that were addressed in more detail during Steering Committee meetings. Survey participants completed a "report card" questionnaire in which they were asked to rank various issues and opportunities on a one to five scale, with five representing excellent and one representing poor. Attributes with average scores of 3.0 or above are perceived strengths and those with scores below 2.5 represent areas of perceived weaknesses.

Survey respondents felt strongly about the county's strengths. These included:

- Medical services (4.10)
- Rural electric distribution (3.92)
- Overall quality of life (3.91)
- Public safety systems (3.85)
- Strength of the rural economy (3.78)
- Management of livestock operations (3.67)
- Services for seniors (3.63)
- Citizen involvement (3.61)
- Soil conservation (3.60)
- Overall quality of Cuming County's environment (3.59)
- County Government (3.57)
- Rural water distribution (3.51)

- Housing for seniors (3.12)
- Business climate (3.07)
- Regional road and transportation networks (3.09)
- Prospects for future growth (3.03)

Survey respondents were less likely to identify weaknesses in the county. Those areas that rated the lowest included:

- Ability to retain young people (2.16)
- Diverse job opportunities (2.53)
- Availability of housing (2.66)
- Job creation and growth (2.68)
- Quality of development in rural areas (2.68)
- Quality of housing (2.73)
- Cost of Housing relative to income (2.75)
- Quality of development along Highway 275 (2.75)

The survey also asked participants to identify the most important issues facing Cuming County in the next ten years. These included (in order):

- Ability to retain young people
- Attracting new industries and businesses
- Low paying jobs
- Aging population
- Providing a variety of housing options
- Taxes and county finances
- Transportation improvements



Housing Perceptions

From the inception of the planning process the County Board identified housing as an important countywide issue. For this reason additional questions regarding housing were included in the survey. Housing perceptions included:

- An undersupply of rental housing priced below \$500 a month.
- A lack of housing options for:
 - Multi-generational families
 - Single professionals
 - Families with children
 - Elderly singles or couples
- An undersupply of buildable lots. Fifty-four percent felt there was a moderate to severe undersupply.

Finally, residents were asked to identify the most important housing issues facing Cuming County. The most common responses fell within the broad areas of:

- The cost of owner-occupied housing
- The condition of housing and general maintenance
- The quality of housing that is available for both rental and ownership
- The availability of good paying jobs
- The shortage of quality rental properties



Stakeholder Meetings

The resident input process began with stakeholder meetings in April of 2013. These meetings engaged residents from the area and asked them to share their concerns and priorities for the future. From early in the process, residents were highly engaged and generally satisfied with previous planning efforts. Much of the conversations focused on housing related issues and the concern about attracting new or returning residents to the area. As the groups moved forward, common issues and opportunities were identified. These included:

- **Housing & Community Development.** Housing was a topic discussed within every group that met during the day. Overall, participants were concerned with the availability of quality rental and mid-priced housing. It was noted that buyers are often frustrated by the lack of options on the market and that good quality homes and rentals are picked up by word of mouth, never appearing on the market. Most felt that the market could support new construction if affordable lots were available.
- **Land Use.** There are currently no significant conflicts between urban and rural development. Participants were concerned about the carving off of acreages from farmsteads and the long term conflicts this could create.
- **Economic Development & Employment.** Much of the economy in Cuming County will continue to be driven by the agricultural sector but participants noted a need to expand job variety with better pay. It was noted that there is a shortage of skilled workers who are willing to work for the slightly lower wages common to rural areas. Compounding this problem is a lack of housing for these workers. Participants also expressed concern over the need for succession planning among the business community. This was especially concerning for main street businesses and professional service providers.



Community Workshop

County residents were invited to a community workshop where they were asked to share their ideas for the future of the county. At the workshop participants were divided into groups to discuss goals and strategies. The topic areas that residents worked in were the building blocks for the Plan Principles. These included:

- Housing
 - Work to develop move-up housing
 - Provide infrastructure to enable development on new parcels of land
 - Establish property maintenance/demolition programs
- Land Use
 - Protect agricultural industry while promoting new development and protecting resources
 - Work to prevent acreage developments from having urban characteristics
- County Facilities
 - Work in tandem with cities to provide the most cost effective services to all residents
 - Complete a needs assessment to forecast short and long term capital needs

- Conservation & Environmental Issues
 - Promote countywide recycling program
 - Work to ensure appropriate pollution control measures are in place from CAFOs
- Economic Development
 - Promote the retention of young residents
 - Work to ensure business retention and succession of local ownership
- Transportation
 - Evaluate and re-assess travel patterns
 - Use local assessments for incremental improvements to roads
- Recreation
 - Preserve and enhance recreational Elkhorn River access
 - Create and promote events for local high schoolers and young adults

Open House

An Open House was held in October 2013, offering the public an overview of the Plan and opportunities to provide feedback on the Plan.



PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

The Plan Principles are the guiding principles of the Cuming County Plan. Formulating and adopting principles or goals as part of the comprehensive planning process is important for a number of reasons. Some of these include:

- Providing advance notice to private decision-makers, including developers, builders, and property owners, about the basic principles that will guide Cuming County's public decisions. This helps these groups make decisions more efficiently, avoiding conflicts and wasting time and money.
- Providing a framework for consistent decision-making, while providing flexibility for review of individual situations.
- Keeping decisions oriented toward overall county goals.
- Increasing interagency and intergovernmental communication and cooperation, assuring that different units of government act using similar assumptions.
- Providing a firmer basis for evaluating the costs and benefits of public investments and their consistency with overall policy objectives.
- Creating opportunities for public participation in local government, help to implement ideas that grow from citizens of the area.

- Providing a general basis for interpreting and applying the comprehensive plan, maintaining the flexibility to respond to individual situations.
- Giving staff a context for developing recommendations for action by local government.

In developing this section, input from the Steering Committee, residents, and county staff was integrated with the demographic, economic, and land use information detailed in the first three chapters of this document.

Plan Principles should be broad proposals of what county residents hope to accomplish. The committee and residents evaluated preliminary goals and clarified them as needed at a County Workshop.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide more detailed directions toward implementing these policies and, in some ways, illustrate the physical outcome of their application. Decisions by public officials should be grounded in these concepts and directions. That being said, these policies are guidelines rather than laws. Situations may well arise that require a flexible rather than literal application of these principles. Sometimes, a new or changed policy can create substantial benefits to the county and its residents, and still remain consistent with overall community goals.



Land Use

- Land use policy should direct community development to settings within and adjacent to municipalities while supporting agriculture.



Conservation & Environmental Issues

- Identify and preserve Cuming County's significant environmental resources and features, in collaboration with state and federal authorities.



Housing

- Through partnerships with the communities and private sector, the county should encourage a variety of new housing types and support investment in existing housing.



Economic Development

- Planning efforts should build on and preserve the agricultural economy to develop a diverse job base across the county.



County Facilities

- The county should strive to provide services in an efficient and cost effective manner.



Transportation

- The county should support an efficient and comprehensive transportation system that serves existing and future circulation and access needs.



Recreation

- The county’s quality of life should be maintained, marketed, and supported by providing diverse recreation options for residents and visitors.