

County's draft comp plan tackles zoning, growth

by Garrett Andrews

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Among the goals of the county's Comprehensive Plan is to cut down the county's cumbersome planning process, which can take an applicant "six months and five figures, easy," said planner Jason Meininger. County planners have a draft of the comp plan ready for review, and planners and commissioners will be listening to feedback tonight in Durango.

A prioritization meeting will be held at 6 p.m. today at the Smiley Building auditorium to go over the comp plan - basically, a long-range framework for growth and development in the county.

Attendees will use keypad polling to rank the importance of issues like transportation, restricting cul-de-sacs and other unconnected streets, and regulating development in floodplains and other areas with geological hazards. Next week, similar meetings will be held in Ignacio and Bayfield, and at the Vallecito Community Center and Fort Lewis Mesa Elementary School.

The draft plan can be viewed online at www.laplatacountyplan.com.

Meininger called the county's current comp plan, which was completed 2001, a "bare-bones" "bookshelf adornment," because it lacks specificity and was never authorized by the county's elected officials.

The new plan seeks to address major criticisms of the county's current planning process, namely that it's complicated, lacks specificity and burns staff time, Meininger said.

Work on the comp plan began in June 2009 after commissioners scrapped a 400-page land-use code completed the year before.

Meininger said the 2008 code was "regulations for the sake of regulations," because, without a comp plan, there was no vision to achieve.

He said once the comp plan is adopted, planners will shift to completing the land-use code.

Meininger said he expects a final version of the comp plan to go before the county's Planning Commission in late January, and county commissioners in late February.

One goal of the new comp plan is to move the county away from a "performance-based" form of zoning, which focused on neighborhood compatibility, and toward a "Euclidean" form of zoning, which would feature segregated land uses in specified geographic districts.

Euclidean zoning is named for Euclid, Ohio, an early adopter of the system.

County Commissioner Kellie Hotter said tonight's meeting should help planners and commissioners know which priorities the public wants them to focus on, and should demonstrate to attendees what issues the county has authority over.

County landowner Michelle Gilleland, who has developed land in the county in the past, called the current process "fragmented and subjective."

She said a lack of attainable housing is a concern to her.

"For me, I'd like to see a comprehensive plan with clear and concise paths to growth," she said. "I have five kids, and it's hard for me to see how they'll be able to live on their own in the county and make a life."

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