

# County seeking input on area's future, growth

**By Carole McWilliams**  
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The county has been holding open houses to get public opinion on the things residents value about the county and want to keep, what they want to change, and how they want the county to be or not be in 20 years.

It's part of the process of updating the county comprehensive plan and eventually writing a new land use code.

Around 48 people gave up their Saturday on July 25 to participate in a visioning workshop in Durango to start the process and share their ideas and opinions with each other and with county staff.

A visioning open house was held at the Bayfield Town Hall on July 27, and open houses were held Wednesday at Vallecito and Thursday at the Ignacio Community Library.

Other community events are today from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Three Springs; today and tomorrow at the La Plata County Fair; the Aug. 13 Ignacio Farmers Market from 4 to 7 p.m.; and Aug. 14 at the Three Springs Fresh Farm Friday from 3 to 6 p.m.

The county has a nine-page "community snapshot" for meeting participants. It's part of a much larger community profile that's now in

draft stage. The profile will be posted soon at [www.laplata-countyplan.com](http://www.laplata-countyplan.com).

According to a community snapshot, county population has increased 13.2 percent (5,817 people) since the current comprehensive plan was completed in 2001. County population is currently around 50,000.

The State Demographer projects another 37,258 people living in the county by 2030. Many of these are expected to be Baby Boomers and 20-somethings.

Some other statistics from the snapshot:

- Starting in 2000, more income has gone out of the

county than has come in, suggesting that people are commuting from outside the county to jobs in the county.

- Construction accounted for 10 percent of all jobs in the county in 2007, versus 6.8 percent nationally.

- Per capita income in the county was \$36,491 in 2006, versus \$39,491 for the state and \$36,714 nationally.

- The county covers 1,692 square miles, with 43 percent private land, 37 percent federal, 16 percent tribal, and 2 percent state. About 53 percent of the private land is in agriculture.

- Ag land was 1 percent of county assessed valuation in

2008. Oil and gas was 56 percent; residential 19 percent; commercial/ industrial 14 percent; vacant land 8 percent; utilities 2 percent.

- The number of housing units in the county increased 11,030 from 1990 to 2007, with 72 percent of new residential construction in unincorporated areas, 4 percent in Bayfield, 1 percent in Ignacio, and 23 percent in Durango.

- Potential build-out of all potential parcels based on current land use policies county-wide: 28,897 existing structures plus a minimum 17,113 and maximum 42,847 new structures. "Structures" means any building with a

foundation. These are outside town limits.

Bayfield Planning District – current 4,407, with minimum 1,827 and maximum 7,757 new structures.

Vallecito Planning District – current 1,802, with minimum 451 and maximum 1,935 new structures.

Southeast Planning District (no plan adopted by the county) – current 3,345, minimum 951 and maximum 951 new structures.

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## County: building permits down, small ranches up

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- The number of county building permits issued per year has gone down but the value of those has gone up, peaking in 2007. The most permits were issued in 1997, with 1,485; 780 were issued in 2008. Value peaked at around \$125 million on 900-plus permits in 2007.

More commercial permits were issued in 2008 (42) than in 2007 (33); fewer single family home permits were issued in 2008 (135) than in 2007 (241).

- “Ranchettes” are proliferating. The number of properties of 10 to 49 acres has grown 53 percent since 1992. Most are not designated as ag use. Median size of ag properties was 900 acres in 1992. In 2007 it was 530 acres. The number of ag properties of 1,000 or more acres was 67 in 1992 and 45 in 2007.

- Traffic volumes in the unincorporated county are expected to increase 67 percent by 2030. The county is working toward adopting road impact fees to help pay for rural road improvements, including capacity and safety. The county will look at the

### County applying for grant for 172 intersection in Oxford

La Plata County is applying for a \$600,000 state Energy Impact Grant to help pay for intersection improvements on Highway 172 in Oxford.

The county commissioners approved the grant application on July 28. The application is due this month to the State Department of Local Affairs (DOLA).

According to the county staff report, the county is using a previous Energy Impact Grant to redesign the intersection so that County Roads 311 and 513 connect the highway directly across from each other instead of being off-set, and to add right and left turn lanes in both directions on Hwy. 172.

Russell Engineering is supposed to complete plans this fall, the staff report says. The project is expected to cost \$1.8 million. The county proposes to pay for it with the new Energy Impact Grant plus \$1.2 million of road impact fees collected from the gas industry required by memorandums of understanding that several producers have signed with the county as part of infill drilling on 80 acre spacing.

The staff report notes, “The intersection is located within the energy-impacted portion of La Plata County and experiences much heavy truck and industry traffic.”

The county probably won’t know if the grant application is successful until December. So county administrators propose to include \$1.8 million for the project in the 2010 budget, with \$1.2 million of previously collected MOU fees and the \$600,000 grant.

If the county doesn’t get the full grant amount, staff would prepare an alternate funding recommendation as an amendment to the 2010 budget.

needs of all transportation users, including pedestrians, bicyclists and public transit. A recently approved transportation study recommends

creation of a Regional Transportation Authority.

- Access to health care – An estimated 25 percent of local emergency room patients are

uninsured. Most at risk for health care access are families with 200 percent or less of federal poverty level income, young adults, people with low-education levels, Hispanics, and people who work for companies with fewer than 100 employees.

- Public school enrollment has increased by 398 students (6 percent) since 2004 in the county’s three school districts, with the largest increase in Ignacio, then Bayfield, then Durango.

- In 2000, one-third of county residents were renters, while 22 percent (4,102 units) of housing was second homes.

- Since the 2000 Census and 2001 comp plan approval, the median home price increased 104 percent while median incomes increased 20 percent. The median home price has decreased slightly in the recession, but “there are still very few family-sized homes in decent condition available for less than \$275,000.”

- Aside from mobile homes, almost no new homes in the county are affordable for households with incomes below \$75,000, which is 125 percent of median household income.