

# Chapter 1

## Comprehensive Plan Summary

### **Purpose**

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The Carbondale Comprehensive Plan is an officially adopted policy document that establishes the town's goals for the future and provides direction for decisions affecting the use and development of land, preservation of open space, transportation systems, partnerships with other organizations, economic growth, the expansion and maintenance of public facilities and services, and the relationship between land use patterns and fiscal policies.

The citizens of Carbondale provided the policy direction articulated in the Comprehensive Plan through an extensive and broad-based public process. This is their document and it can be used to protect the unique qualities that brought them to Carbondale; small town character, economic opportunity, recreational assets and natural amenities. The Comprehensive Plan will also serve as a guide to property owners and developers to help them understand the vision of the community, predict what uses could occur both on and near their properties, set the expectations for the physical form of development, and make informed land-use decisions.

The Comprehensive Plan is not the same as the land use code. It does not change existing regulation, nor does it create new regulations. It is an advisory document that recommends and provides guidance changes to the land use code. The Comprehensive Plan is written to provide general policy direction while also providing enough detail to set priorities and guide decision-making.

Five factors make the Comprehensive Plan “comprehensive”:

- The plan covers the entire area of the town and the town periphery.
- The plan integrates authentic and diverse community participation spanning the full-range of perspectives and interests.
- The time horizon considered in the plan is long-range, extending two decades into the future, well beyond the pressing concerns of today.
- The plan provides general guidance on where growth and various land uses should occur and articulates community expectations about the physical form of development.
- The plan provides a framework for achieving a sustainable future at the local level with strategies that aim to align community, environment, and economy.

## Carbondale's Challenges

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In many ways Carbondale is the ideal small mountain town. It is a compact town, surrounded by predominantly open lands, bordered by two river corridors, has easy access to mountains and rivers, and enjoys expansive views in all directions. The watersheds are far more healthy than most in the West, the air is clean and it is a healthy place. The town is small enough to get around in easily by foot or bicycle and many people integrate outdoor activities into their daily lives.

But throughout the West there are many towns that manage to share these outstanding physical qualities. What makes Carbondale unique is its diversity, the welcoming atmosphere, the compassion and generosity, the artistic and intellectual creativity, the quirkiness, the celebrations and gatherings, and the environmentally sustainable ethos. There is an infectious passion for this place that sets it apart from other towns that may seem similar. Decades of steady settlement by people from all walks of life helped to create Carbondale and those that proudly call it their permanent home have all pitched-in to make the community what it is today.

Because Carbondale is extremely well-loved by its residents and by the region as a whole, it has become a place of civic engagement, small-town democracy and intense debate about the future. While Carbondale's residents have a long history of open-mindedness and are welcoming to new people and new ideas, they are also fiercely protective of their town. People do not want to lose the qualities that prompted them to stay put or come here in the first place.

The ongoing civic debate shares a common thread; while the community wants to evolve, improve and be prosperous, it wants to do so in a way that enhances what Carbondale already is, and does not want to turn its back on the things that make it a great place.




For this Comprehensive Plan, where land use planning is the core concern, the fundamental challenge is best stated as a question: How can Carbondale evolve and become an even better place without losing its quality and small town character?

One thing that nearly all residents agree on is that maintaining the town's small, compact form is paramount. The town's compact form gives it a distinct geographic identity to match its cultural identity, makes it easy to get around with or without a car, contributes to infrastructure and service efficiencies, saves energy, and ensures that the predominantly open lands at the edge of town are never far away.

Growth projections call for an additional 3,600 people and an additional 600,000 sq. ft. of commercial floor area by 2032 (Figures 1.4 and 1.9). Regardless of whether these projections accurately reflect the forthcoming level of change, it is clear that some growth and change is inevitable. The challenge is how to respond to this inevitability and maintain the town's small town character. The Comprehensive Plan addresses this challenge by offering guidance for how to manage change in the future in a way that maintains and enhances Carbondale's small town character.

## Goals and Strategies for Achieving a Sustainable Future

**Chapter 2 - Vision, Goals and Strategies** provide the framework for achieving a sustainable future at the local level. The strategic direction is a reflection of Carbondale’s sustainability ethos and its local, regional, and global awareness about how decisions can affect the community today and future generations. Achieving a sustainable future requires a continuous effort to align community, environment, and economy. When these three components are aligned, Carbondale can prosper without compromising its core values or degrading its assets.

 <p>Community</p>	<p>The values, lifestyles, preferences, and social/civic capacity of residents and the workforce.</p>
 <p>Ecology</p>	<p>The natural environment, resources, and climate of the community, region, and earth.</p>
 <p>Economy</p>	<p>The community’s fiscal conditions, business capacity and individual wealth and economic opportunities.</p>

There are four areas of alignment that stand out and are emphasized throughout the Comprehensive Plan:

- Carbondale’s community identity and attractiveness are tied inextricably to its small town form and compact size. A compact town with attractive multimodal options reduces dependence on the personal automobile, which in turn contributes to improved air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The ability to get around town without a car also promotes a healthier, more out-going community.
- Protecting and enhancing rivers, valleys, and mountains is an essential economic development strategy. These core assets attract visitors, new businesses, workers and retirees. Protecting air and water and maintaining open spaces and natural areas for recreation all contribute to a healthy community.
- Developing and using renewable energy and reducing consumption and waste protect the environment while opening new markets for sustainability enterprises.
- Diversity in housing types creates a community where people can live near to where they work. This close proximity reduces commuting time and encourages walking and biking for daily needs, which contribute to making for a diverse and civic-minded community.

## **Priority Strategies**

The goals and strategies section of the Comprehensive Plan is inherently strategic. Goals provide statements of WHAT the community aims to accomplish over the life of the plan. Strategies are specific actionable measures for HOW to implement the goals. The public process included a series of community events during which participants ranked the strategies in the plan. Following are the top priority strategies identified for each of the topics:

### ***Small Town Character***

Strategies for maintaining small town character are articulated in ***Chapter 4 Future Land Use Plan*** and are summarized later in the Executive Summary.

### ***Economic Growth, Diversification and Self-Sufficiency***

- Promote Carbondale as a destination for arts, festivals, performance and recreation.
- Encourage local food production and value added agriculture.
- Support the use of renewable energy and the growth of sustainability enterprises.

### ***Diversity in Housing Types***

- Encourage multi-family and higher density housing.
- Integrate mixed-use development: connect housing with commercial.
- Plan for housing options for the aging population.

### ***Infrastructure and Town Government Fiscal Health***

- Implement multi-modal improvements, especially along/across Highway 133.
- Establish enhanced gateways into town and downtown.
- Develop a coordinated downtown parking strategy.

### ***Ecology and Renewable Energy***

- Protect riparian corridors while promoting public recreation.
- Implement codes and incentives for green/conservation commercial buildings.
- Encourage local energy production.

## **Multi-Modal Mobility**

Because the ability to get around without using a personal automobile is paramount, multi-modal mobility is central to many of the Comprehensive Plan strategies and is a critical element of quality of life and a sustainable future. The multi-modal mobility element of the Comprehensive Plan centers around a network of priority multi-modal corridors that are planned to become the focus of future sidewalks, pathways, highway crossings and other bike and pedestrian improvements. Streets mapped as multi-modal corridors include unique site specific conditions such as street right-of-way width, neighborhood character, and traffic volumes, all of which need to be considered in the design and construction of the improvements.

### ***Highway 133 Multi-Modal Priorities***

- Highway 133 crossings to connect neighborhoods.

- Separated paths or sidewalks along both sides of the highway.
- Highway 133 crossings that create safe routes to school.
- Minimize driveway cuts along paths and sidewalks.

#### ***Town-wide Multi-Modal Priorities***

- Focus on improving priority multi-modal corridors.
- Tailor improvements to neighborhood character and street width.
- Connect to and embrace the Rio Grande Trail, Hwy 133 Trail and Crystal Trail.
- Connect to the 3rd Street Center and the Roaring Fork School District campus.

## **Future Land Use**

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The future land plan synthesizes the guidance contained in the vision, goals and strategies into a series of mapped designations representing the desired future land use for various areas in town. The Comprehensive Plan identifies the characteristics that make Carbondale a great place and includes policies to maintain and enhance them. The future land use plan designations use several distinct but interrelated elements of small town character to describe the desired future conditions for the neighborhoods throughout town. The future land use plan focuses mostly on neighborhoods that are more likely to experience change over the next two decades. The developed neighborhoods, platted subdivisions that are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, are delineated but given less attention. The Town Periphery portion of the future land use plan articulates strategies for coordination, land conservation and conservation development in the unincorporated areas around the town. The designations are described below with priority strategies listed for each.

### **Downtown Residential Neighborhood Designations**

The downtown residential neighborhood designations (Old Town Residential and the Downtown Old-Town Periphery) are focused on managing change, infill and redevelopment to maintain and enhance small town character and to build off of the assets offered by the town's grid-pattern such as alleys, wide streets, street trees, sidewalks and landscaping.

#### ***Old Town***

Old Town encompasses the oldest residential neighborhood in the historic town grid. Top priorities as ranked in order by the community include:

- Single-family dwelling units are predominant.
- Street emphasis on sidewalks, trees, and homes not off-street parking.
- Opportunity for accessory dwellings-need simplified permitting process.
- Use naturalized storm water treatment practices instead of curb and gutter on most streets.
- Improve priority multi-modal corridors with sensitivity to street character/context and width.
- Alley loaded parking/garages/carports where possible.

### ***Downtown/Old-Town Periphery***

This designation consists of town grid and early annexation areas where a mixed multi-family and single family development pattern has evolved. Top priorities as ranked in order by the community include:

- Create a diverse mix of single-family and quality-design multi-family residential.
- Avoid monotonous, box-like multi-family buildings.
- Focus street emphasis on sidewalks, trees, and homes not off-street parking.
- Use alley loaded parking/garages/carports where possible, or side-loaded parking if alleys are not available.
- Provide opportunities for accessory dwellings, requires permitting process to be simplified to facilitate approval.
- Use naturalized storm water treatment practices instead of curb and gutter on most streets.
- Improve priority multi-modal corridors with sensitivity to street character/context and width.

### **Downtown**

The most important priority for the future of Downtown is to maintain and enhance the characteristics that have proven so successful in the past. Downtown has a finite area, so it is important to make the best use of the land available to continue to build on the vitality of the community. Land uses have evolved to make the best use of the land and these patterns should be continued, i.e. customer-oriented commercial on the street level with second and third story office and residential.

The top priority strategies for downtown as chosen by participants in the community meeting series ranked in order include:

- Preserve existing historic buildings.
- Maintain the core downtown characteristics, emphasizing pedestrian-oriented design that connects the buildings to the sidewalk with architectural elements.
- Reduce visible mass by stepping back upper stories from the street.
- Consolidate downtown parking into collector lots that serve multiple purposes.

### **Downtown North**

Downtown North has two alternative futures, both of which are supported by the community. It is currently occupied by several light industrial and transportation oriented businesses and this property may remain light industrial for decades to come. However, as Carbondale evolves, this cluster of larger parcels adjacent to the Historic Commercial Core is a prime location for redevelopment complementary to downtown. This designation looks to the future of redeveloping this property as an extension of the traditional town form, scale and mixture of uses that would add to and support the critical elements of the downtown.

Should property owners choose to pursue a mixed use redevelopment of the light industrial area, the following list represents the community priorities ranked in order:

- Complement the downtown, do not duplicate it.
- Extend downtown/urban, walkable form of Downtown.

- Integrate mixed use and commercial.
- Redevelopment can include some lower impact light industrial/employment uses.
- Connect to Rio Grande Trail and the Carbondale Nature Park.
- Design with sensitivity to impacts on adjacent neighborhoods.
- Integrate a mix of housing types.

### **Developed Neighborhoods**

The developed neighborhoods designation is intended to provide for neighborhood stability while allowing remodeling, replacement and new construction in established residential neighborhoods. Top priorities include:

- Protect existing zoning/approvals/permits.
- Allow remodeling, replacement and new units on vacant lots.
- Encourage accessory dwelling units.
- Improve bike/pedestrian connectivity.

### **Highway 133 Corridor**

**Employment / Light Industrial:** Site design is primarily oriented towards functionality, accommodating buildings, outdoor work areas and vehicles. Developing and redeveloping properties that front Highway 133 or are near residential neighborhoods and other non-industrial neighborhoods will need to provide generous landscaping to buffer these areas. Buildings will often be set back from the highway/street in order to provide landscape screening. Redevelopment should include connections to the Rio Grande Trail and the Highway 133 Trail.

**Auto-Urban:** This designation emphasizes convenient automobile access and parking and allows well-screened small-scale parking lots to be located in the front as seen from the highway/street while also providing obvious and convenient access for pedestrians and bikes. Avoid monotonous block-like structures by incorporating interesting and varied façades. This designation allows for a flexible mix of retail, restaurants, service commercial, offices and other uses aimed at attracting and accommodating customers on-site. Multiple story mixed-use buildings may include residential upstairs.

**New-Urban:** This designation balances an urban, pedestrian/bike friendly feel with the need to accommodate automobile access and parking on-site. Buildings should be the focal point of the site by locating them close to the sidewalks or pathways along the street, while parking should be behind the buildings or located in less visible, well screened lots to the side of the buildings. Commercial, mixed-use, light industrial, local food production, live/work, and urban residential uses are all allowed in appropriate places.

### **Gateways**

Gateways create a sense of arrival and provide way-finding for visitors arriving to Carbondale. They should be designed to reflect the small-town character, exhibit Carbondale's creative, festive culture, and landscaped generously. The gateways on the edge of town should define the transition from an agricultural landscape into small-town Carbondale. The intersection of Highway 133 and Main Street should announce the gateway to downtown.

## **Town Periphery and Potential Future Annexation Areas**

One of the primary goals for retaining small town character is to maintain a compact development pattern and a distinct geographic identity. Some of the land in the Town Periphery can be purchased or protected with conservation easements. However, some owners will seek development approvals for land in this area. As a result it is important to establish planning strategies in the Town Periphery that seek to balance the needs of conservation and development. Achieving this goal requires a coordinated effort between the town, the county, and the land conservation entities at work in the valley.

Following are the top strategies identified during the planning process, ranked in order by the community.

- Support local land conservation organizations.
- Support creation of a Garfield County open space fund.
- Coordinate with Garfield County to align objectives.
- Promote conservation development/clustering in county developments.
- Coordinate with land owners to find common objectives and Identify areas suitable/desirable for annexation.

## **Land Conservation Priorities**

During the planning process, the community prioritized their preferences for land conservation during a series of community meetings using key pad polling. The following are the preferred conservation areas ranked in order.

- #1 Riparian areas and river access.
- #2 The 100-Year floodplain.
- #3 Agricultural lands on the perimeter of town.
- #4 Corridors accessing public lands.
- #5 Historic sites.
- #6 Gateways.

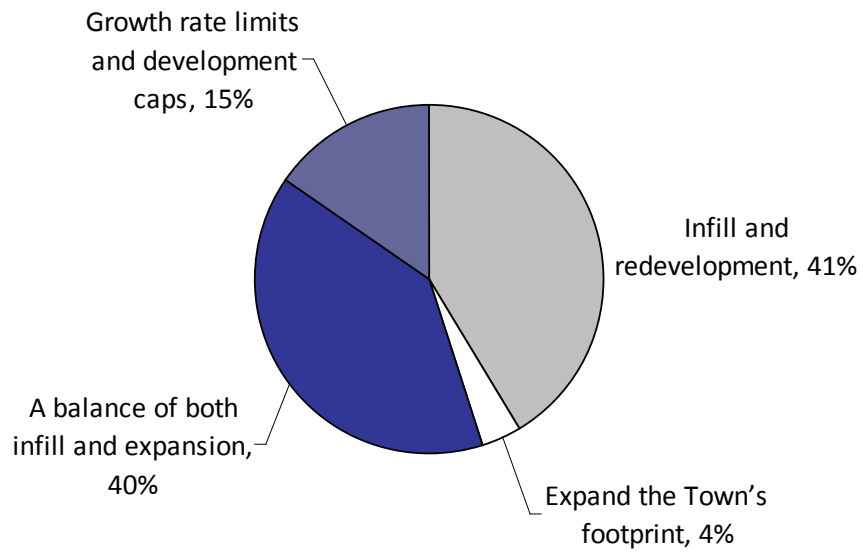
## **Opinion Polling Results: Infill vs. Expanding the Town Boundaries**

During the community meeting series, participants were asked their opinion regarding

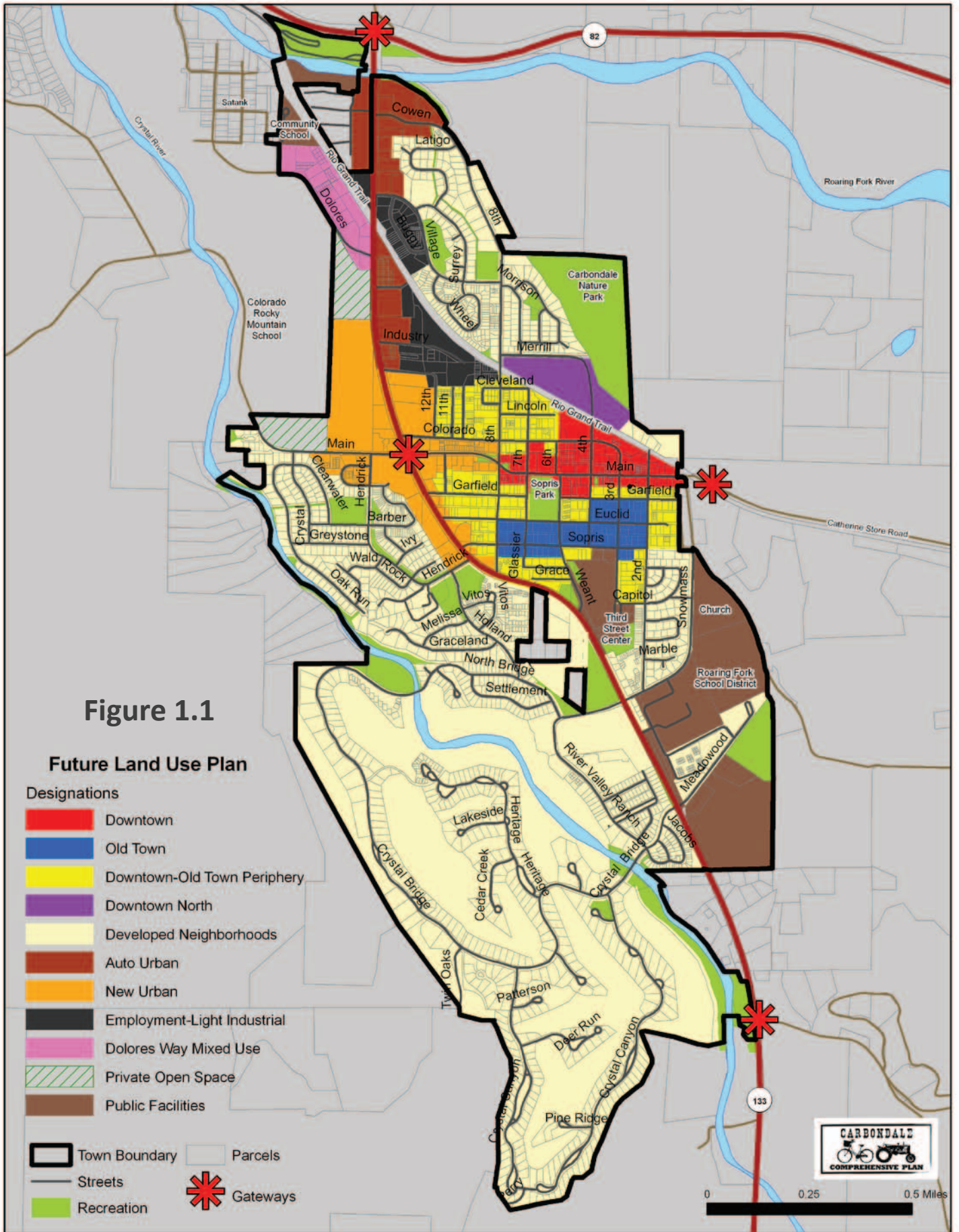
- 1) whether the town should pursue a strategy that accommodates future growth within the town boundaries.
- 2) whether the town boundaries should be expanded to accommodate future growth.
- 3) some combination of both expansion and infill/redevelopment, or whether to implement a growth management system that ultimately limits growth.

According to the opinion polling results over the three day community meeting series, the majority of people split between those that would like to see future growth accommodated by infill only and those that feel that a combination of infill and expansion would be the best strategy. There is a certain segment of the community that favors a legislated growth cap, but this is not the dominant opinion according to the polling results.





***Figure 1.2 Community Opinion Polling Results Regarding Development Patterns***



## Summary of Appendix 1 - Background Information

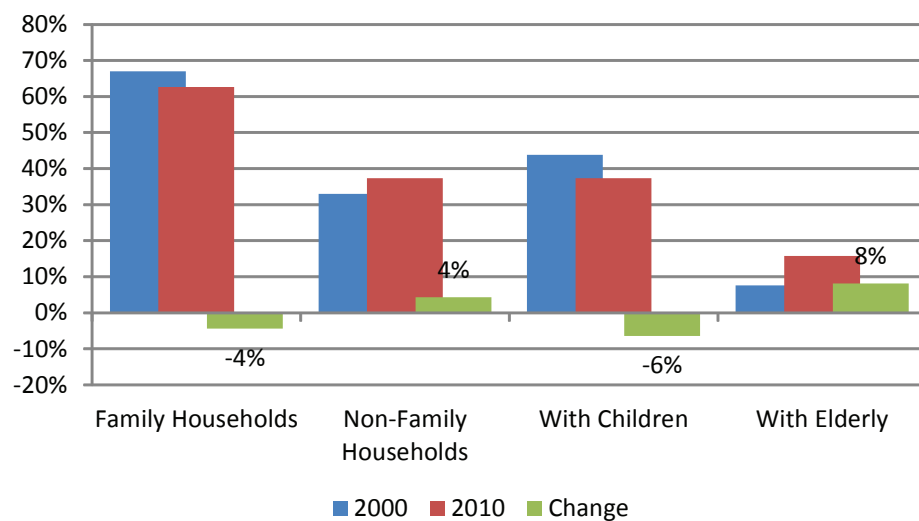
**Appendix 1 Background Information** is a two-part description of the existing demographic, economic, and fiscal conditions in the town. The Demographic and Economic Trend Summary contains baseline data used to inform the dialogue throughout the planning process. This summary includes demographic characteristics of the county population, housing growth projections, economic indicators and other information that is useful for planning for future growth. The second part, Linking Land Use and Fiscal Realities, describes the relationship between land uses and the fiscal conditions for the town government.

### Demographic and Economic Information

#### Who is in Carbondale?

- During 2000-2010 Carbondale's population became generally older and households with elderly individuals increased (Figure 1.3).
- Family households and households with children experienced relative decreases between 2000 and 2010 while non-family households increased (Figure 1.3).
- In the last decade Carbondale has become more diverse. The white, non-Latino population, decreased by 17%, when measured as a percent of the total. Latino and other populations experienced 7% and 8% relative gains.

The trend towards an older population points towards the need to plan for and develop a variety of housing for the aging population, which is reflected throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The trend towards more non-family households also signals a shift in the housing market with more demand in the future for smaller homes and attached units. The Comprehensive Plan encourages diversity in housing types to meet changing demand.

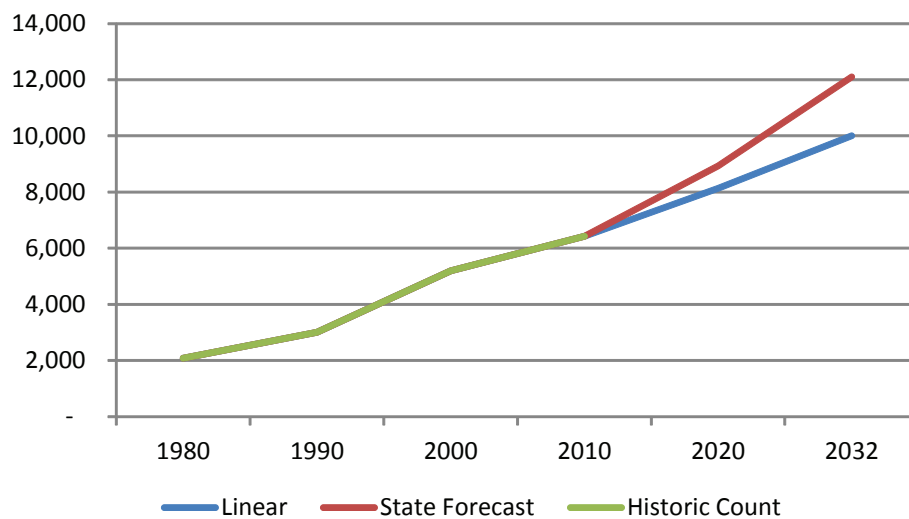


**Figure 1.3- Household Composition 2000-2010**

### ***How much has Carbondale grown?***

While growth rates slowed drastically with the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, the rapid growth leading up to the recession is a reminder of the level of demand for new development that remains possible when economic conditions are favorable. Within the 20 year planning horizon of this plan, favorable economic conditions will likely prevail again, sparking investment and growth in Carbondale.

- Between 2000 and 2010 Carbondale’s population grew by more than 1,200 people, representing a 24% increase (Figure 1.4).
- Housing units increased by 36% between 2000-2010, with 647 housing units added in the town limits.
- Commercial sq. ft. doubled between 1990-2009 from 500,000 sq. ft. to 1 million sq. ft.



***Figure 1.4 - Carbondale Historic and Projected Population***

### ***How much growth is forecast?***

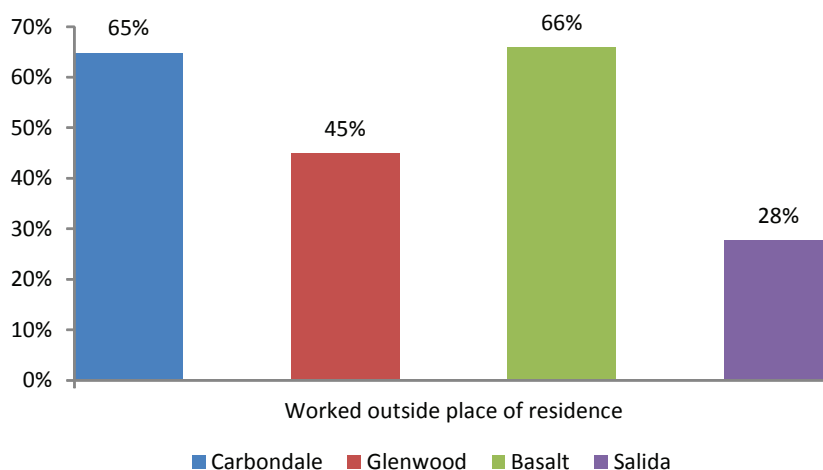
Early in the planning process, it became clear that the residents of Carbondale did not want to develop a Comprehensive Plan centered on accommodating the future population forecasted by state demographers. Instead, the community wanted a character-based plan that accommodates future growth only if it enhances small town character. With the emphasis on small town character established, it is still important to acknowledge that the State and Garfield County are forecast to experience significant population growth in the coming decades, and some of this growth will manifest itself as market demand for residential and commercial development in Carbondale.

- In 2010, Carbondale had 6,400 residents.
- Carbondale’s share of the State Department of Demography forecasts for Garfield County is 12,000 additional residents in Carbondale by 2032, an 88% increase (Figure 1.3).
- A linear projection of growth in Carbondale between 1980-2010 calls for an additional 3,600 people by 2032 a 56% increase (Figure 1.4).
- Population forecast for Garfield County show 65,000 residents county-wide by 2032.

- Population forecast for Colorado as a whole calls for 44% growth by 2032, over 2 million additional people living in the state.

***How does Carbondale compare to other nearby small towns?***

In order to provide a frame of reference, this appendix summarizes key indicators for Carbondale as compared to two other municipalities in the valley, Basalt and Glenwood Springs, as well as Salida, a nearby small mountain town with many similar amenities including the Arkansas River and a strong downtown. Over two-thirds of Carbondale’s working residents commute out of town for their jobs (Figure 1.5). This is a much higher commuting rate than other towns in the comparative analysis, with less than half of Glenwood Springs workers commuting out of town and less than a third of Salida’s workers commuting out for work.



***Figure 1.5- Comparison of Workers by Place of Work 2010***

In order to make Carbondale a place where more of its residents can live and work in town, the Comprehensive Plan articulates strategies for diversifying the economy and establishes clear direction to achieve diversity in housing types.

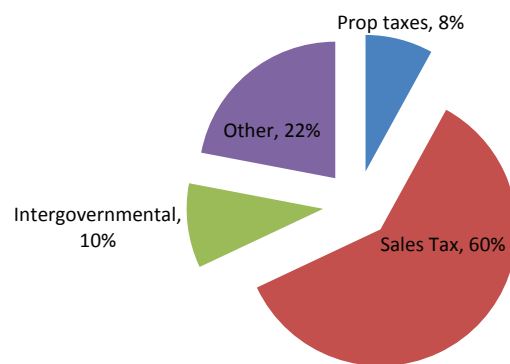
In comparing the economies of Carbondale’s peer towns, Carbondale is only local economy where:

- Light manufacturing is a top employer
- The economy is not mostly reliant on tourism and development
- Retail is not in the top three employers

These observations all underpin the general finding that the Carbondale local economy is more diversified than other towns nearby. The Comprehensive Plan contains policy guidance and future land use planning that encourages further diversification. For example, manufacturing small-businesses are top employers in Carbondale. Because manufacturing is an important component of Carbondale’s economic base, the Comprehensive Plan identifies areas for employment/light industrial uses. While over-reliance on the retail trade can be problematic for many communities, it is important to realize that retail makes up a much larger portion of the economy for other nearby towns. This signals an opportunity to expand the retail sector in Carbondale but it also signals the danger of losing market share to nearby communities with a more robust retail sector.

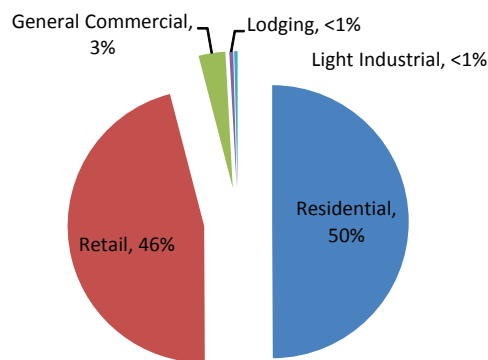
## Linking Land Uses to the Town's Fiscal Conditions

The land use/fiscal analysis quantifies the link between the town's budgetary realities and the types of land uses in town. Because 60% of the town's revenues come from sales taxes (Figure 1.6), retail land uses are a fiscal net-gain while residential land uses and other non-residential land uses (general commercial, lodging, and light industrial) cost more than they generate in annual revenue. The appendix also examines the origin of the revenues by type of land use (Figure 1.7). When the sales tax generated by local household spending, property tax and other revenues generated by households are accounted for, Carbondale's households yield half of the revenues for the town. While the costs of serving households exceed the revenue they generate, it is critical to maintain a balance between housing, retail, and other revenue generating land uses to achieve long-term fiscal stability.



**Figure 1.6 - General Fund Revenues by Source**

Source: 2008-2010 Carbondale Municipal Budgets



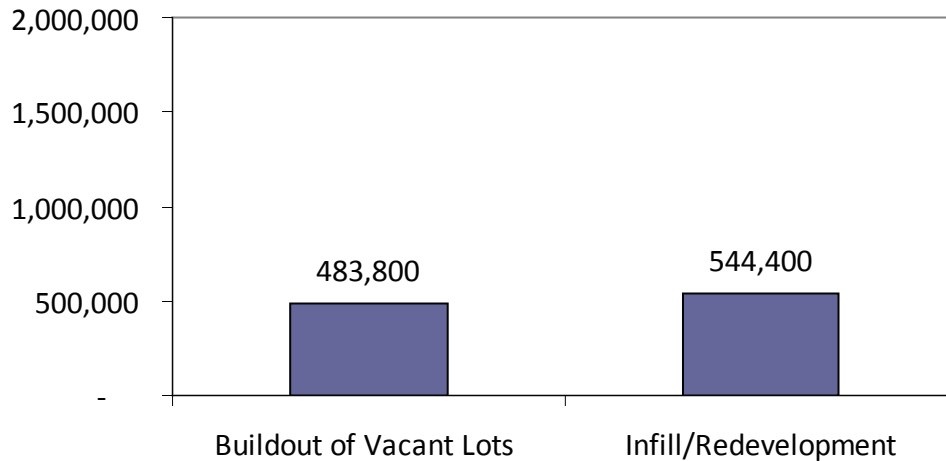
**Figure 1.7 - Revenue Generation by Land Use Type**

Source: Carbondale Financial Audits

## Commercial Build-out Study

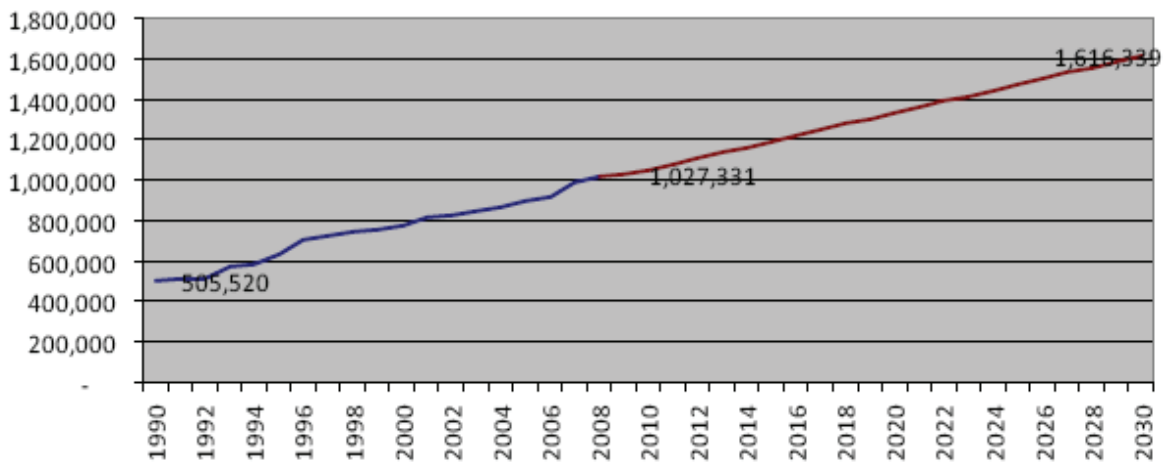
This study applied Community Viz GIS technology to estimate the potential build-out of vacant commercial lots and infill/redevelopment of commercial properties containing buildings that are 15 years or older.

Build-out of vacant commercial lots could result in almost a half million square feet of additional commercial floor area. Infill and redevelopment of properties containing buildings 15 years or older could result in over a half million square feet of commercial floor area.



**Figure 1.8 - Commercial Property Build-out Study Results**

If the commercial growth rates from the past two decades continue for the next 20 years, the town could expect demand for an additional 600,000 sq. ft. of commercial development. It is clear that the combination of build-out of vacant commercial lots and the redevelopment and infill of properties with older buildings can easily meet the projected demand for commercial development.



**Figure 1.9 - Historic and Projected Commercial Square Footage in Carbondale**

