

Extent of Urban Development

Vision: A defined urban growth boundary/area (UGB/A) will promote an orderly, compact and efficient pattern of future development within the region. Focusing development within the growth boundary/area will prevent the unnecessary and inefficient extension of roads, transit services, water and wastewater treatment plants. It will reduce regional vehicle travel, help achieve greater density, conserve open land outside the boundary/area and separate communities.

Goal: *Ensure that urban development occurs within a defined urban growth boundary/area to promote an orderly, compact and efficient pattern of future development.*

Policies

1. Growth Boundary/Area. The urban growth boundary/area defines where urban development will take place in the region over the next 25 years. The boundary/area encompasses 921 square miles of urban development, which is intended to achieve at least a 10 percent increase in the region's overall density between 2000 and 2035.

2. Growth Allocation. The DRCOG Board of Directors allocates growth areas to each community, based on historical development trends and future projections. Working with DRCOG, each community determines the specific geographic location of this growth allocation.

3. Flexibility. Communities have the flexibility to postpone committing their allocated urban growth area until specific development plans are in place. These communities will be referred to as urban growth area (UGA) communities.

4. Compact Development. Metro Vision promotes smaller lot sizes and multifamily housing to achieve a more compact development pattern. At the same time, it is recognized that density doesn't need to increase everywhere within the urban area and that there is a need to accommodate varied housing opportunities, such as multifamily and single-family detached residential.

5. Infill and Redevelopment. Metro Vision encourages local governments to use overlooked vacant parcels and under-developed parcels for infill and redevelopment. Infill and redevelopment can absorb significant population growth and use existing infrastructure more efficiently.

6. Outlying Areas. Growth will be strategically designated to conserve appropriate areas for urban development beyond 2035 to maintain separation between the larger urban area and smaller outlying communities and avoid open spaces and environmentally sensitive areas.

7. Infrastructure. Metro Vision seeks to direct future urban growth within the urban growth boundary area into areas where infrastructure already exists. In newly urbanized areas, development will be planned to provide infrastructure and services efficiently and cost-effectively. Regional transportation systems should be provided in a way that will most effectively encourage the desired future development.

8. Intergovernmental Coordination. Metro Vision encourages local governments to establish intergovernmental agreements to address planning and service delivery issues in areas of mutual interest.

9. Annexation. Metro Vision encourages the annexation of unincorporated areas within the urban growth boundary/area, consistent with local comprehensive plans and annexation procedures. Annexation should be a logical extension of a municipality's boundaries so the local government can provide urban services to the annexed area at a level equal to what is provided to the existing municipality. In that way, annexation will not significantly affect the ability of surrounding jurisdictions to continue providing necessary services.

10. Regional Facilities. Facilities such as airports, solid waste disposal sites and major cultural facilities will be located to maximize their regional benefit and minimize their impact on existing and future development. Once these facilities are planned and constructed, however, future development should not occur if it conflicts with or could affect their sustainability.

11. Water Supply. Metro Vision calls for urban development only in areas where long-term water service can be established or where adequate service is available from an existing water supply system. Conservation of water resources through innovative design, reuse, landscaping and education will be encouraged and considered in making service provision decisions. Water conservation measures will be incorporated in specific service plans. Overall, the regional increase in water consumption should be proportionally less than the population increase.

12. Mining Activity. Development is discouraged in areas with commercially viable deposits of sand, gravel and quarry aggregate until these deposits are extracted or the mining causes serious, adverse impacts on the environment or existing development. The extraction of coal deposits will be allowed where mining will not have significant environmental impacts and where it will not be incompatible with surrounding land uses.

Large-Lot Development

Vision: A limited amount of low-density large-lot development will continue to occur beyond the urban growth boundary/area, contributing to the region's diversity of land uses. Careful planning will minimize its financial, environmental and visual impacts. Special care will avoid developing in potential future open space areas. Semi-urban development, in particular, will be planned to avoid interfering with the urban area's logical future expansion beyond 2035.

Goal: *Manage the extent of low-density, large-lot development occurring on the periphery of the urban area consistent with Metro Vision's stated policies.*

Policies

1. Regional Growth Target. Limit the total amount of semi-urban development in 2035 to a proportion that does not exceed the current (2006) proportion of semi-urban households, which is estimated to be approximately 3 percent.

- 2. Discouraged in Urbanized Areas.** New large-lot development is specifically discouraged within the urban growth boundary/area or other areas defining where future urban development will occur.
- 3. Urban Reserves.** Cities and counties are encouraged to work cooperatively in establishing intergovernmental agreements that identify joint planning areas where future contiguous urban development beyond 2035 will occur.
- 4. Open Space.** Large-lot development will avoid potential future open space areas as identified in the Regional Open Space Plan and other sensitive environmental areas, unless mitigated through creative subdivision and site design.
- 5. Planning Tools.** Local governments are encouraged to adopt and use innovative planning tools to manage large-lot development.
- 6. Infrastructure Investment.** The priority for investing regional funds in transportation infrastructure and other services is the urbanized area within the urban growth boundary/area. Regional funds should, in general, not be expended to serve large-lot development.
- 7. Financial Accountability.** To the extent practical, local jurisdictions should ensure that large-lot development, like all development, pays its own way.
- 8. Water and Wastewater Provisions.** It is preferred that development occur in areas where central water and wastewater treatment can be provided. However, it is recognized that large-lot development is often served by either decentralized or on-site systems. Regardless of the technology, in areas where large-lot development is planned, it must be ensured that adequate water supply and wastewater treatment can be provided.
- 9. Mining Claims.** Limited development currently occurs on historic mining parcels, but these parcels represent a significant inventory of the region's undeveloped land. Local jurisdictions should discourage development on mining claims that do not meet the development standards of the jurisdiction, especially access and setback requirements.

Urban Centers

Vision: Urban centers -- concentrated urban areas more dense and mixed in use than surrounding areas -- will be developed across our region. Urban centers will be active, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly places, with employment, housing and services nearby. Urban centers will be served by transit, either rapid transit or bus, and also will support transit by providing riders and pedestrian-oriented environments. Some people will even live and work within the same urban center, avoiding entirely the need to use a car or transit.

Goal: *Encourage the development of higher-density, mixed-use, transit and pedestrian-oriented urban centers throughout the Denver region.*

Policies

Metro Vision 2035 Visions, Goals and Policies

- 1. Location.** Metro Vision encourages the development of urban centers throughout the metro area, while recognizing the unique significance of the Denver central business district.
- 2. Regional Growth.** A significant portion of future regional population and employment growth will occur within recognized urban centers.
- 3. Infrastructure Investment.** Metro Vision supports the development of urban centers by focusing infrastructure investment in related roadway, transit and pedestrian facilities.
- 4. Design.** Innovative planning, zoning and urban design strategies are encouraged to promote mixed-use development and pedestrian activity within urban centers, increasing the likelihood that they will develop successfully and achieve other policy objectives.

Freestanding Communities

Vision: The outlying communities of Boulder, Brighton, Castle Rock and Longmont will continue to be distinguished by their historic town centers, their separation from the larger urban area, and their capacity to absorb future population and employment growth. These communities will continue to develop in a way that enhances their self-sufficiency. Each will remain separate from the larger urban area -- surrounded by an open space or rural buffer -- and have an adequate mix of jobs and housing, an internal transportation system with regional transportation connections, and a town center at its core.

Goal: *Maintain Boulder, Brighton, Castle Rock and Longmont as distinct and self-sufficient communities, separate from the larger urban area.*

Policies

- 1. Regional Growth.** Metro Vision encourages a significant portion of future regional population growth within recognized freestanding communities.
- 2. Self-Sufficiency.** Freestanding communities encourage a balance between employment and population so people can live and work in the same community. It is a Metro Vision goal that a diversity of housing types be provided for a variety of income levels.
- 3. Physical Separation.** Freestanding communities will establish a permanent open space or rural buffer to maintain physical separation from the larger urban area and retain a sense of community identity. Highway interchanges or transit stations will be located away from buffer areas to avoid development pressure.
- 4. Town Centers.** Each freestanding community will maintain a viable mixed-use town center to preserve community identity.
- 5. Transportation.** Multimodal transportation systems will be developed in each freestanding community. These systems include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and internal and external transit services. Communities will be linked to the larger metropolitan area with rapid transit and highway facilities.

Rural Town Centers

Vision: Small, established towns and villages found in rural places beyond the region's urban area will provide services, employment and entertainment for residents of the surrounding trade area, and tourists and travelers. Although they will serve the rural area, the communities themselves will be relatively compact, each with a town center, small lots and a street grid. They also will have the infrastructure to accommodate population growth.

Goal: *Recognize the small communities located in the rural and semi-urban areas of our region and more clearly define and support their regional role.*

Policies

1. Regional Growth. New development in the rural portion of the region is encouraged to occur within rural town centers where necessary infrastructure, including central water and sewer, can be provided more efficiently.

2. Development Pattern. New development within rural town centers is encouraged to be compact, so the infrastructure necessary to serve the new development can be provided cost-effectively. Compact development also helps differentiate between developed and undeveloped areas, provides for pedestrian accessibility and maintains community identity. Rural town centers are encouraged to promote infill and redevelopment activity within their existing boundaries for compact development and the use of existing infrastructure.

3. Self-sufficiency. Where appropriate, rural town centers will encourage economic development to improve the balance between employment and population. An appropriate mix of zoning designations will ensure that necessary services and employment generators are provided for so the community can become more self-sufficient. Other communities have an abundance of employment (Black Hawk, Central City), but limited workforce housing. These rural town centers will encourage the development of affordable housing options and accessibility to jobs.

Senior-Friendly Development

Vision: The housing, transportation, social, health, recreational and service needs of a growing senior population will be accommodated in the future by improved development patterns and community design sensitivities. Local governments wanting to create communities that provide for their citizens throughout their lifespans will embrace these changes.

Goal: *Create senior-friendly communities by promoting development patterns and community design features that meet the needs of residents as they age.*

Guidelines for Local Governments

1. Housing Options. Allow and encourage a diversity of housing types and a mix of housing densities that range from single-family homes to apartments to assisted living facilities.

Metro Vision 2035 Visions, Goals and Policies

Encourage rehabilitation, modification and maintenance of existing housing stock. Consider the adaptive reuse of schools, historic and other buildings as senior housing opportunities.

2. Housing Location. Locate a variety of senior housing types near senior-supportive land uses such as senior centers and other recreational facilities, social and emergency service providers, public facilities, medical offices and shopping areas to reduce feelings of isolation and to enhance a sense of independence. In addition, senior housing should be located adjacent to pedestrian-friendly environments so as to maximize access to employment, volunteer and educational opportunities, restaurants, and entertainment and cultural venues.

3. Housing Affordability and Suitability. Increase the access to and availability of affordable and suitable rental and for-sale units in order to meet present and future housing demands of seniors and other populations in the region.

4. Development Patterns. Encourage compact mixed-use neighborhoods and multi-use developments to reduce seniors' reliance on the automobile, if they so choose. Provide alternative transportation mode options by building senior communities near rail stations and major bus routes. Consider the physical and cognitive limitations of seniors in planning new development (e.g., a grid-based street pattern is easier to navigate than winding streets and cul-de-sacs).⁵

5. Pedestrian-Friendly Environments. Enhance community walkability by providing sidewalks, narrowed street crossings, manageable curb cuts, increased crosswalk signal timing, medians as midway stopping points, traffic calming measures, pedestrian-friendly access to transit facilities, and improved greenway and trail systems. Surfaces should be pedestrian-friendly (non-slip and non-glare) and should be properly maintained.⁶

6. Transportation Networks and Services. To better meet the mobility needs of seniors and other populations, consider transportation improvements such as increased transit access, enhanced local bus routes, expanded paratransit, ridesharing and other specialized transit services, bus shelters, subsidized taxi service, on-street bicycle lanes and the pedestrian connections described previously.⁷

7. Building and Site Design. Encourage commercial and public building design that incorporates a variety of textures, colors and distinct architectural features to help seniors differentiate between buildings and improve navigation within buildings. Ensure that buildings comply with established adaptability and accessibility requirements and universal design and "visitability" tenets (e.g., hallway width, hand railings, hazard-free walking surfaces, etc.). Minimize the use of steps and provide larger elevators.

8. Parks Facilities. Design parks that are easier for seniors to use. Avoid abrupt elevation changes and make pathways hard-surfaced. Use easily identifiable signs and equipment, and provide street furniture, bathrooms and other facilities to ensure comfort and encourage interaction.

9. Safety and Security. Ensure that walkways and public spaces are well lit to enhance safety and security while respecting local governments' "dark skies" policies. Apply defensible space strategies and employ techniques like Crime Prevention through Environmental Design to

reduce seniors' exposure to crime. Be aware of the impacts excessive noise has on seniors' feelings of security.

10. Wayfinding. Directional and informational signs should be provided throughout the community, especially near transit stations. Large letters with contrasting colors and enhanced illumination improve readability. Reduce visual clutter.

Transportation System

Vision: A balanced multimodal transportation system will include rapid transit, a regional bus system, a regional roadway system, local streets, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and associated system and travel demand management services. This system will provide reliable mobility choices to all of its users: residents and visitors of all ages, incomes and physical abilities, as well as businesses that provide services and produce or sell goods. Users will find the transportation system easy to access, safe and secure, and it will permit efficient state and nationwide connections for people and freight.

Goals: *Provide safe, environmentally sensitive and efficient mobility choices for people and goods; and integrate with and support the social, economic and physical land use development of the region and state.*

Policies

- 1. System Preservation.** Assure the preservation and maintenance of existing facilities.
- 2. Transit.** Provide increased transit service and facilities that stimulate travel by means other than the single-occupant motor vehicle, encourage transit-oriented developments and provide mobility options.
- 3. Roadways.** Expand capacity of existing roadways in the most critically congested corridors and at key traffic bottlenecks and encourage access controls to maintain capacity.
- 4. Rights-of-Way Preservation.** Reserve adequate rights-of-way in newly developing and redeveloping areas for pedestrian, bicycle, transit and roadway facilities.
- 5. Denver Central Business District.** Improve and maintain transportation access to downtown Denver.
- 6. Safety.** Develop and maintain a safe transportation system for all of its users.
- 7. Security.** Develop and maintain a transportation system that provides increased security for all of its users.
- 8. Management and Operations.** Make the best use of existing transportation facilities by implementing measures that actively manage and integrate systems, improve traffic operations and safety, provide accurate real-time information and reduce the demand for single-occupant motor vehicle travel.

9. Bicycle and Pedestrian. Provide bicycle and pedestrian access through and between developments and provide links to transit facilities.

10. Interconnections. Improve interconnection of the transportation system within modes, between different modes, and between the metropolitan area and the rest of the state and nation.

11. Transportation-Efficient Housing and Business Developments. Design new developments to allow the efficient movement of pedestrians, bicyclists, buses and motor vehicles within, to and through the area.

12. Land Use Integration. Implement transportation system components that support Metro Vision's urban growth boundary/area, urban centers, open space and associated concepts.

13. Transportation for the Disadvantaged. Provide a transportation system that considers the needs of and impacts on minority, low-income, elderly and disabled persons.

14. Environmental Quality. Develop a transportation system that protects and enhances the environment.

Parks and Open Space

Vision: By 2035, the region will have protected its major natural resource areas, including the mountain backdrop, riparian corridors, and other key open space and wildlife habitat. Several key working farms and ranches adjacent to the urban area will be preserved. Recreational areas in both developed parks and passive open space will be readily available and accessible to the region's residents. The region's open space will help define the urban area and separate communities.

Goal: *Establish an integrated, linked, permanent parks and open space system that will include a variety of open space and make appropriate open space accessible to all of the region's population. A minimum of 854 total square miles of parks and open space should be protected by 2035.*

Policies

1. Focus Areas. Metro Vision encourages preserving open space in key focus areas, as shown in Figure 23.

2. Agriculture. Agricultural resources of state or national significance, and ranches and other grazing lands of local or regional importance should be preserved. They are integral to the region's heritage, and economic and cultural diversity.

3. Natural Resources. Natural resource areas will be conserved and protected for future generations. Important natural resources include surface waters, riparian areas, wetlands, forests and woodlands, prairie grasslands, wildlife and wildlife habitat, other environmentally sensitive lands and commercial mineral deposits.

4. Hazard Areas. Where practical, natural (geophysical) and human-made environmental hazard areas will be used and managed to contribute to a regional open space system in the region. Public rights-of-way, such as utility corridors and other places where land development is constrained, should also be used to augment open space.

5. Recreation. The physical and aesthetic enjoyment of the out-of-doors will be provided for in an integrated regional parks and open space system.

6. Urban Shaping. Protected open space lands will help shape future urban growth and land development, and encourage communities to be compact.

7. Prominent Features. The region will preserve prominent geologic and geographic features and important cultural resources for their visual, historic and educational values.

8. Trails Network. Metro Vision calls for an area-wide trails network to link open space and provide access. This network should take full advantage of all potential connections, including road and railroad rights-of-way, floodplains, ditch service roads and utility corridors.

Water Quality

Vision: As a semi-arid region, the Denver area values its water resources. Metro Vision seeks to ensure that, to the extent possible, every stream, lake and reservoir in the area will be fishable and swimmable. The Colorado Water Quality Control Commission identifies standards for the anticipated uses of water resources in the state. These standards will be achieved to protect water quality. DRCOG's Clean Water Plan, a companion document to the Metro Vision Plan, provides the forum for discussing water quality goals. Interested parties within the region have different interpretations of the meaning of "clean" water. By coordinating water quality planning at the regional level, DRCOG will balance these divergent community interests. Matching wastewater facilities plans with expected urban growth will save on infrastructure costs. New facilities will be sized to match demand and built as needed. The planning will also ensure that potential conflicts between different providers are avoided. The best management practices for addressing nonpoint pollution will also allow urban development to take place with the least impact on water quality.

Goal: *Restore and maintain the chemical and physical integrity of the region's waters to ensure clean water for residents and a balanced, healthy, ecological community.*

Policies

1. Wastewater Treatment. Metro Vision calls for identifying an effective regional system of wastewater treatment facilities that meets federal and state standards (Figure 24). Wastewater management strategies will be implemented locally.

2. Wastewater Service. Development should only be allowed in areas where sewer service is already available, where new wastewater facilities can be established consistent with state-adopted stream standards and the Clean Water Plan, or in areas where on-site or individual sewage disposal systems are deemed appropriate.

3. Nonpoint Sources. Local actions will reduce pollution from stormwater and other nonpoint sources. All development in the region should follow adopted grading, erosion and sediment control ordinances to minimize sediment and other pollutant runoff into the region's waters.

4. Ecological Community. Water quality protection and water resource management initiatives will achieve a locally defined, balanced community of fish and other aquatic life. These activities should take into account the needs of both the natural environment and other resource uses, such as water supply.

5. Watersheds. Water quality planning will be coordinated through a bottom-up, watershed-based process. Watershed management strategies will be identified.

6. Water Supply. Integrated resource management programs should be developed that deal effectively with the relationships between water quality management and water supply.

7. Aquifers. To avoid groundwater contamination, land uses such as waste injection wells and sanitary landfills should not be permitted over alluvial aquifers or above recharge areas to bedrock aquifers. Development over areas with permanently high groundwater levels should use appropriate mitigation measures.

Air Quality

Vision: Growth, land development and regional transportation have a significant effect on the region's air quality. The region will develop in a way that reduces growth in transportation-related air pollution. Metro Vision's development pattern will reduce growth in vehicle trips and miles of travel. Slowing the expansion of the urban area, supporting mixed, higher-intensity land uses, and increasing density around mass transit will be key urban development strategies to increase transit usage. Helping freestanding communities become more self-sufficient will also help contain the growth of vehicle trips and miles of travel. Because regional air quality is closely linked to automobile emissions, it will be critical to provide alternatives to the private passenger vehicle, as proposed in the regional transportation plan.

Goal: *Protect human health and environmental quality by achieving and maintaining ambient air quality standards.*

Policies

1. Mobile Sources. Metro Vision calls for reducing growth in mobile source air pollution emissions by providing travel alternatives, improving the efficiency of the regional transportation network and changing key features of the development pattern. In combination, these will help achieve national, state and regional air quality objectives.

2. Stationary Sources. Metro Vision calls for reducing the growth in stationary source emissions.

3. Wind Erosion. Metro Vision encourages local governments to review and modify their development regulations to include controls for wind erosion resulting from grading, construction, recreation or poor land management practices, such as overgrazing.

4. Accessibility. Metro Vision encourages local communities to modify their local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to improve community accessibility and to provide additional pedestrian, bicycle and transit travel opportunities.

Noise

Vision: Excessive noise is a nuisance and a potential public health concern. It can also impact property values and destabilize neighborhoods. Metro Vision seeks to ensure that the residents of the Denver region will have minimal exposure to excessive noise levels associated with roadways, trains, aviation, commercial and industrial land uses, special events and temporary construction activity. Minimizing this exposure will help preserve the region's quality of life.

Goal: *Minimize exposure to excessive noise levels associated with land use and transportation activities.*

Policies

1. Location and Mitigation. Metro Vision calls on the region to ensure that new or expanded regional transportation facilities are located and designed to maintain acceptable noise levels. That includes considering adjacent land uses and using appropriate mitigation measures (e.g., landscaping, noise barriers, traffic control and other noise-attenuating techniques).

2. Retrofit. Where practical, Metro Vision encourages retrofitting existing facilities to mitigate noise impacts on adjacent, noise-sensitive land uses.

3. Airport Noise. Metro Vision calls for minimizing noise exposure around airports, consistent with Federal Aviation Administration policies and local airport noise standards.

4. Local Noise Standards. Metro Vision supports local development regulations establishing noise and land use compatibility standards (e.g., use restrictions, buffering and limitations on hours of operation).

5. New Development. Metro Vision recommends locating new noise-sensitive development away from planned or existing major noise sources such as airports and freeways.