

A History of the Development and Expansion of the DRCOG's Urban Growth Boundary/Area

As of May 2008

Establishing a policy framework and regional growth target

Considerable policy analysis preceded the development of the original *Metro Vision 2020 Plan* and the UGB/A.

- 1. Vision Statement.** The original statement of principles and policies that laid the foundation for the *Metro Vision Plan* was adopted by the Board in 1992.
- 2. Framework document.** In 1995, the DRCOG Board adopted the *Metro Vision 2020 Framework*, which provided more specific direction for developing the *Metro Vision 2020 Plan*. It also specifically identified goals and recommendations for defining the 2020 extent of urban development.
- 3. Four development alternatives considered.** Four alternative development scenarios were analyzed: compact, corridor, satellite cities, and dispersed. The alternatives were compared by evaluating their relative advantages and disadvantages in terms of land consumption, transportation infrastructure required, potential environmental impacts, impact on open space resources, and difficulty in implementing.
- 4. Preferred scenario selected.** A modified scenario was eventually selected. It was not as densely developed as the compact alternative, which was determined would result in excessive traffic congestion and degraded air quality. However, it was more compact than the corridor or satellite cities scenarios, because it included fewer satellite cities and assumed urban centers throughout the region. Specifically, it achieved approximately a 10 percent increase in urban density compared to projections based on historical development trends between 1990 and 1995.

Establishing growth allocations and maps for each jurisdiction

- 1. 2020 UGB/A set at 700 square miles.** Based on the results of the scenario analysis, the initial *Metro Vision 2020 Plan* that was adopted in March 1997 established a target of 700 square miles (maximum) of urbanized area by 2020. This was deemed sufficient to

accommodate expected population and employment growth through 2020. This represented an increase of approximately 165 square miles from the base year of 1995.

2. Mapping criteria established. Once the overall regional target was established, it was then necessary to identify where and how the target would be achieved. Mapping criteria were developed in order to assist local jurisdictions in planning and mapping growth through the year 2020. The criteria encouraged the achievement of the goals that were included in the *Metro Vision 2020 Plan*.

3. Preliminary growth area identified by each jurisdiction. Using the criteria, communities were asked to propose an area they believed would urbanize by 2020.

4. Preliminary allocations established. The composite of all the preliminary proposals totaled approximately 800 square miles, which was more than the 700 square mile goal. The communities then asked DRCOG to derive, in consultation with each community, a more specific target for each jurisdiction so that the total would not exceed 700 square miles. To assist in this effort, the historical development trends between 1990-1995 were analyzed for each community. DRCOG considered four specific trends: population growth, building permit approvals, land consumption, and employment rates.

5. Local desires considered. Some communities stated a desire not to grow at the same rate as their past trends. Some submitted projections smaller than what would otherwise have been forecasted. In those communities that had not experienced much population growth, but had land to develop, the regional average percentage was assumed.

6. Open space and undeveloped land not included. The historical trends in land consumption accounted for developed areas and all of the supporting infrastructure including roadways, parks and small open spaces less than 160 acres. Open space parcels larger than 160 acres, which were considered regionally significant, were *not* included in the tabulated amount of urbanized land.

7. Second mapping effort results in a 730 square-mile UGB/A. Once the specific targets were forecasted a second mapping effort was undertaken. Most jurisdictions agreed with the targets, but some did not. For those that did not, compromises were made to reach goals that were acceptable to each community. The second mapping resulted in a UGB/A of approximately 730 square miles, 30 square miles above the target. (Note that the 2020 regional forecast was later refined, partially justifying this increase.)

8. Interim 2020 UGB/A map adopted. An interim UGB/A map was adopted in December of 1997 using the 730 square mile figure. Certain “flexibility provisions” were also adopted that gave local jurisdictions the ability to change the physical location of the boundary, as long as they maintained their budgeted allocation.

Subsequent modifications

- 1. UGB/A increased to 735 square miles.** Between 1997 and 2000, several minor changes were made to the UGB/A. Some were minor “self-certifications,” which had no impact on the regional total allocation. Two other changes, however, did increase the regional total. DRCOG allocated additional UGB/A to Adams County to recognize certain existing urban area that was previously overlooked, and to Boulder County to enable their newly established transfer of development rights program.
- 2. “Growth area communities” recognized.** In 1999, informal provisions were made for several communities that wished to use an area total rather than a specific boundary map. In order to recognize this alternate approach, the term urban growth boundary was changed to urban growth boundary/area (UGB/A). These provisions were formalized in the adoption of the *Metro Vision 2030 Plan*.
- 3. Ad Hoc committee on extent of development appointed.** This committee was appointed in 2001 to consider several issues related to the extent of urban development element of Metro Vision. Specifically, the committee was charged with evaluating the 2020 urban area forecast, updating the flexibility process, and addressing certain issues in several individual jurisdictions.
- 4. UGB/A increased to 750 square miles.** After completing its review, the ad hoc committee recommended increasing the UGB/A to 747 square miles to accommodate several minor adjustments and four major adjustments (Arapahoe County, Castle Rock, Douglas County, Lone Tree). Three additional square miles were subsequently added to account for development in Strasburg and Byers.
- 5. Other recommendations.** Also included in the recommendation were certain modifications to the flexibility provisions and the establishment of a more rigorous biennial review cycle. The committee also updated the definitions of urban and non-urban land to encourage more accurate and uniform reporting across all communities. The DRCOG Board adopted the recommended amendments in January 2002.

Metro Vision 2030 update

The 2030 update process began in 2001 and concluded with the adoption of the *Metro Vision 2030 Plan* in January 2005. The UGB/A was not expanded as part of this update, but a 20 square mile “bank” was established to address unforeseen needs and special circumstances.

1. Metro Vision Update Committee formed. MVIC established an Ad Hoc Committee on Updating Metro Vision and several subordinate work groups in 2001 to review Metro Vision's six core elements and extend Metro Vision's planning horizon to 2030. The UGB/A Definition and Mapping Work Group conducted the primary review of the Metro Vision Extent of Development element.

2. Three alternatives considered. In considering possible adjustments to the UGB/A, the Definition and Mapping Work Group identified and evaluated a number of alternative growth scenarios. Three alternatives were provided to local governments for review and comment. They included: (A) maintain boundary at 750, (B) increase boundary to projected trend of 770, (C) assume accelerated growth rates and establish boundary at 860 square miles.

3. UGB/A bank established. Based on the feedback received and on DRCOG's analysis, the UGB/A Definition and Mapping Work Group determined that 750 square miles were sufficient to accommodate growth through 2030. They recommended that the 2030 UGB/A remain as close to 750 as possible and that it be no larger than 770 square miles. They further recommended that the UGB/A be set at 750 square miles initially, and that 20 additional square miles be set aside in a newly established UGB/A bank. However, no more than 10 square miles would be allocated prior to 2020.

4. Open space threshold reviewed. In February 2004, MVIC reviewed the 160-acre size threshold that is used to differentiate between local and regional scale parks and open space in the UGB/A calculations. No modifications were made.

5. FasTracks considered. The modeling that was done to support the *Metro Vision 2030 Plan* considered the effect of FasTracks on land use and travel demand. It was found that future transit would stimulate development near transit stations and increase overall density within the UGB/A.

6. Metro Vision 2030 Plan adopted. In January 2005, the DRCOG Board adopted the *Metro Vision 2030 Plan*, including the revised 750 square mile UGB/A and the 20 square mile bank. The Board also adopted certain supporting policies, criteria, and procedures, which included the process and criteria used for administering the bank, policies for UGA communities, and policies establishing the relationship between the UGB/A and the *Clean Water Plan*.

Post Metro Vision 2030 amendments and other activities

1. 4.5 square miles allocated through bank request process. The first bank request process was initiated in 2005. Consistent with the provisions that had been recently adopted by the DRCOG Board, a special bank request review panel was appointed by

the MVIC Chair to consider requests from two communities. 2.5 square miles of additional UGB/A was eventually allocated to Thornton, and 2.0 square miles allocated to Parker. The *Metro Vision Plan* was amended in January of 2006 through the annual plan assessment process to formally recognize these allocations. This increased the total regional allocation of UGB/A to 754.5 square miles, and reduced the bank from 20 to 15.5 square miles.

2. 1.6 square miles allocated to Weld County border communities. The Metro Vision amendments adopted by the Board in January 2006 also included 1.6 square miles of total additional UGB/A allocation for Brighton, Erie and Longmont to cover the portions of those communities that are in Weld County. This was the first step in beginning to incorporate portions of Southwest Weld County into the DRCOG planning region. (Total allocation: 756)

3. Allocations to Weld County border communities revised. In April 2007 the Board revised the preliminary growth allocations for the Weld County border communities, based on a more refined analysis of the urban development expected to occur. Rather than the 1.6 square miles previously approved, the allocation was revised to 19.6 square miles. This raised the total UGB/A allocation to approximately 775 square miles.

4. Unmapped UGB/A (i.e., “surpluses”). The bank request review panel that convened in 2005 was also asked by the Board to consider what if anything should be done about those communities that have not mapped all of their UGB/A allocation (i.e., “surplus”). The panel devised a method for periodically identifying surpluses and returning any unused allocation to the UGB/A bank. Observing that the current approach to managing growth places perhaps too much emphasis on mapping, they also recommended that the future development map be abandoned altogether and that all communities use the allocation-oriented “UGA” approach (described elsewhere). The Board referred these recommendations to the Ad Hoc Committee on UGB/A Policy that would be formed in 2006 for further consideration.

Metro Vision 2035 update

The 2035 update process began in 2005 and concluded with the adoption of the *Metro Vision 2035 Plan* in December 2007. This update expanded the boundary dramatically from 775 square miles to over 900 square miles. However, most of the increase was due to new definitions and mapping rules that required accounting for more open space and vacant platted parcels in the UGB/A.

1. Ad Hoc Committee on Semi-Urban Development. MVIC established this committee in 2005 to review the semi-urban development policies that the Board adopted as part of the *Metro Vision 2030 Plan*. The committee recommended establishing a regional semi-urban growth target for managing large-lot development, similar to how urban development is

managed. They also recommended classifying development as either urban or semi-urban based on gross density rather than the size of individual parcels.

2. Ad Hoc Committee on Urban Growth Boundary/Area Policy. This committee was established in 2006 to review the previous recommendations of the Bank Request Review Panel and the Ad Hoc Committee on Semi-Urban Development, and to recommend a UGB/A target for the 2035 plan.

3. New approach for classifying and tracking development. The UGB/A Policy Committee recommended continuing to manage the UGB/A by mapping growth allocation, rather than rely solely on a ledger-based approach as had been suggested by the Bank Request Review Panel. The committee also recommended using final plats, rather than individual developed parcels, to determine for tracking purposes when land has been developed, as had been suggested by the Semi-Urban Committee. However, rather than using gross density to classify development as either urban or semi-urban, they recommended using the average lot size of residential parcels within platted subdivisions.

4. Preliminary recommendation to increase UGB/A by 70 square miles. The UGB/A Policy Committee in 2006 also preliminarily recommended increasing the UGB/A by 70 square miles, which would accommodate the additional population growth anticipated between 2030 and 2035 at densities that would achieve a 12% increase in households per square mile for the region as a whole, consistent with the established Metro Vision policy (10% minimum). The committee also noted in their recommendation that additional UGB/A would be required to account for the new “average lot size” methodology that will be used to redefine the UGB/A and for development in any areas outside of the current DRCOG region.

5. Rely on bank request process to allocate additional UGB/A. Another key recommendation of the UGB/A Policy Committee was that additional growth area be allocated to individual jurisdictions on an as-requested basis, using the established process for obtaining additional growth allocation from the UGB/A bank. Revisiting the previous recommendation of the Bank Request Review Panel, the UGB/A Policy Committee also recommended that relinquishing surplus UGB/A should be done on a voluntary basis, and that any returned allocation should be placed in the UGB/A bank.

6. Analysis of alternative growth “scenarios”. As part of the 2035 update, DRCOG staff evaluated several alternative growth scenarios. Scenario A assumed no increase in urban area. Scenario B assumed a continuation of established Metro Vision policies, which would expand the 2030 UGB/A approximately 70 square miles (not including area required to account for the new average lot size methodology). Scenario C assumed a 140 square mile expansion of the UGB/A. Results of the analysis indicated that Scenario A performed better in all of the evaluation criteria including minimizing traffic congestion, impact on air quality, and cost associated with constructing new infrastructure.

7. Ad Hoc Committee on the 2035 Metro Vision Update established. MVIC established this committee in 2007 to review the previous recommendations of the UGB/A Policy Committee and other proposed refinements to the regional plan. The committee affirmed the new method for classifying development based on average lot size, along with more specific mapping rules developed by DRCOG staff in consultation with local jurisdictions. The committee also refined the criteria to be used for considering bank requests, and recommended that the amount of additional UGB/A allocated be limited to the 15.5 square miles that existed at that time in the bank.

8. Establish base 2035 UGB/A growth allocation for each community. Using the new methodology for classifying development, DRCOG staff generated existing development type maps for each jurisdiction. The maps were then used to establish a base 2035 UGB/A growth allocation for each community, which also included any unplatted 2030 UGB/A. The total base allocation for all communities amounted to 899 square miles.

9. Requests for additional UGB/A considered. Five jurisdictions applied for a total of 21.8 square miles (mi^2) additional UGB/A in the following amounts: Arapahoe County (5.2 mi^2), Commerce City (4.9 mi^2), Douglas County (4.0 mi^2), Parker, (2.6 mi^2), and Thornton (5.2 mi^2).

10. Establish the total extent of the 2035 UGB/A. In July 2007 the DRCOG Board directed staff to assume for modeling purposes that 21.8 square miles of additional UGB/A would be allocated (920.8 total), consistent with the full amount of the five requests received. However, they deferred until final plan adoption at the end of the year a final decision on how much of the 21.8 mi^2 would actually be allocated to the five jurisdictions. After considerable debate, the Board formally allocated the full amount of additional UGB/A requested by all five communities.