

DELTA COUNTY

PROPERTY OWNER DROP-INS SUMMARY REPORT

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DRAFT

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PROPERTY OWNER DROP-INS SUMMARY

The first phase of the Delta County Master Plan update consisted of assessing current community conditions and policies, and identifying key issues, concerns, and hopes for the future. Phase-1 began with two types of citizen engagement sessions designed to gather the most dynamic and wide-reaching input possible. Significant effort was made to reach out to residents throughout the community in order to ensure that those who were interested had the opportunity to participate in the process. As part of the Delta County Master Plan Update process, property owner drop-in sessions occurred in five locations throughout the county: Paonia, Cedaredge, Crawford, Hotchkiss, and Delta. Property owners from any part of the county were invited to attend any of the sessions. This format allowed participants to attend a session that was most convenient for their schedule. A total of 84 individuals participated in the drop-in sessions. Meetings occurred on the following dates, between 3pm and 5 p.m.

- May 15, Paonia (Paonia Town Hall)
- May 17, Cedaredge (Cedaredge Civic Center)
- May 18, Crawford (Crawford Town Hall)
- May 22, Hotchkiss (Hotchkiss Memorial Hall)
- May 23, Delta (Bill Heddles Recreation Center)

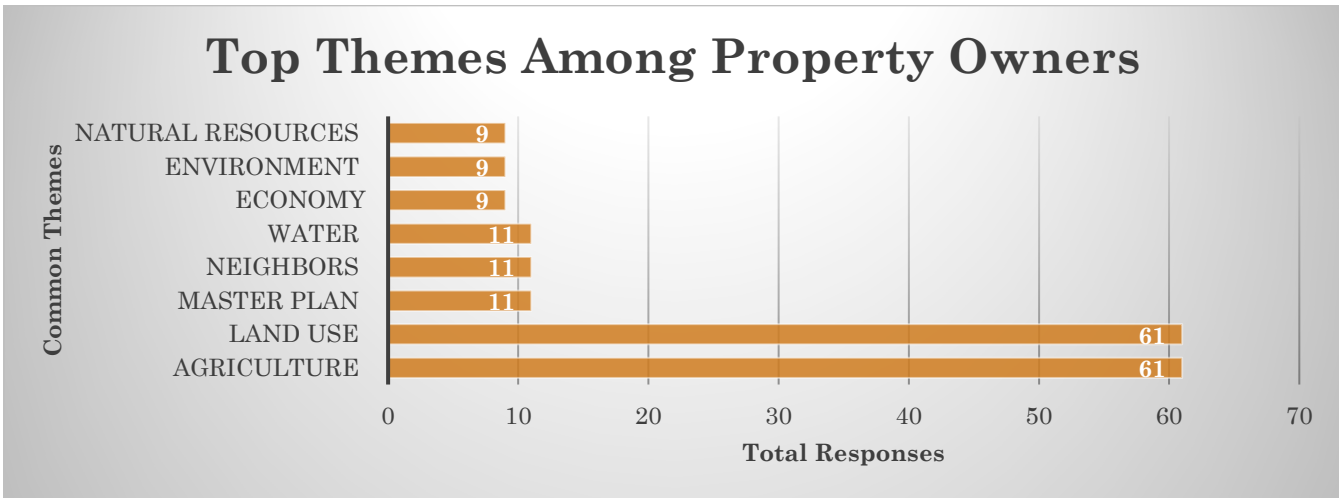
Drop-in sessions were one of two direct public participation meetings scheduled and designed for residents to communicate the major issues facing the county, and characteristics of the county they value the most and wish to preserve for future generations. The drop-ins were designed to be purposefully informal and free-flowing, offering participants the opportunity to freely contribute. Vision Workshops immediately followed the property owner drop-ins on the same meeting dates, beginning at 6 p.m. Drop-in session participants were encouraged to also attend a Vision Workshop as these workshops provided a more structured format. In the workshop sessions, residents participated in a more formal, structured question and answer session

facilitated in a round-robin format with fellow residents. The results of this process are available on the Delta County Master Plan update website (<https://www.deltacountyplan.com/documents>). The two formats offered different opportunities and levels of facilitation designed to gather citizen feedback to be used as the foundation of the Delta County Master Plan update.

COMMENT SUMMARY – QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A total of 274 comments were recorded from drop-in sessions. The recurring themes arising most frequently among property-owners included the following:

TABLE 1—PROPERTY OWNER CORE THEMES



While the key topics are grouped into general themes the overall feedback is not without nuance, most responses touch on multiple topics and cannot be relegated to a single thematic grouping. The synopsis captures these nuances in the summary of each key theme in order to remain true to participants' intent and the general nature of each comment.

Issues related to land use and agriculture topped the list in frequency of discussion, each with 22% of total comments. Preserving positive relationships among neighbors and protecting water ranked in second place each with a total of 4% of comments. The economy, environment, and natural resources tied as the third-most common concerns.

EXHIBIT A—MAJOR THEMES SYNOPSIS

Land use (22%)	Agriculture (22%)	Neighbor Relationships (4%)	Water (4%)	Economy (3%)	Environment (3%)	Natural Resources (3%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning/SDR • Economic development • Agriculture • Neighbor relations • Housing • Private property development • Consistency • Grandfather existing use • Don't limit use • Predictability • Compatible use • Maintain large tracts of land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Protection of "right-to-farm" • Preservation of practice and land • Agritourism • Impact of ag • Population growth • Private property rights • Ag designations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication • Preserve good relationships • Openness to change • Preserve property values • Respect • Managing differing land uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection • Collection • Irrigation • Conservation • Water and land ties • Jurisdiction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mining • Light industry • Non-ag diversification • Future generations • Youth retention • Opportunities • Sustainable economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean resources • Scenic byways • Appreciation • Wildlife habitat • Open space • Public lands • Wildlife • Protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil and gas • Coal • Separate from ag • Impact

LAND USE

Land use tied with agriculture as the top-two issues of concern among property-owners. Out of 61 land use-related comments collected, approximately one-third of comments specifically referenced zoning. Concerns with the future potential for zoning

were prevalent. Most other land use comments indirectly spoke to the benefits or challenges related to implementing a zoning regulation as it impacts the aspects of life that are highly valued throughout the county such as private property rights, creative business ventures, and economic impacts. Some comments conveyed the concern that zoning or similar regulations would limit adaptive and creative use of private property. Improving the county’s business investment climate and economic development potential by providing more predictable land use regulations was another idea expressed in the sessions. Additionally, balancing future development with the desire to maintain community character and rural quality of life is imperative. Several residents referenced the inadequacy of the Specific Development Regulations (SDR) and its ability to promote positive neighbor relations or contribute to successful business development, asking for a more effective land use system to be adopted.

Agriculture and land use are intrinsically linked. Preserving the right-to-farm, agricultural heritage and status in Delta County and preserving larger in-tact properties for agricultural use is a high demand expressed in both the property-owner drop-in sessions and the vision workshops. One comment summarized many property owners’ comments:

“Land use has to protect agriculture, property rights, and ongoing business.”

Delta County property owners placed a high value on maintaining positive relationships among neighbors and in the community. This theme arose frequently during the drop-in sessions. Participants expressed the desire to ensure that the planning commission adopts policies that promote positive relationships with neighboring land owners into any solutions regarding future zoning regulations. This sentiment of valuing close neighbor relations aligns with several high priority values expressed in the workshop series, including community, community character, people, and quality of life.

Exhibit B contains many of the unique thoughts on land use expressed in the drop-in sessions, although this is not a comprehensive list of all comments collected.

EXHIBIT B –ZONING RESPONSES

No zoning laws in place creates a significant uncertainty in the minds of developers, keeping them out.	Zoning should be realistic.
Where is the right place for industrial zoning?	Zoning should protect and preserve
Don't want zoning.	Prevent incompatible uses.
Prefer the freedom and creativity of no zoning.	Zoning shouldn't eliminate the need for neighbors to communicate.
Unpredictability zoning potentially limits future use.	Keep light industry in certain areas; prevent extension of planned activities from evolving into incompatible uses over time.
Keep freedom of private land use without zoning.	Development today is "hodge podge." Need zoning.
Concerned about ending up with zoning.	Existing zoning regulations in communities are unclear and boundaries are indecipherable.
Concerned about processes that can only be implemented with zoning.	Change-of-use problems prevent business growth and development.
Land splits (e.g. a 1-acre split for family vs. 35-acre split for family) don't make sense.	Grandfathering uses should be considered.
Having a zoning code and maintaining property rights can co-exist.	Agricultural zoning should include hemp/marijuana.
Predictability in what is acceptable and what isn't would help.	Zoning is a good idea and buffer zones can help with mixed-use.
Zoning needs are a sign of growth and maturity.	Need to manage de facto land management tactics with clear regulations.
Cities look at compatible uses; county should.	Zoning could help keep large land tracts in place.
Examples of cluster development exists that could be copied.	Land owners should be protected against impacts of other land owners not caring for their properties.
Zoning can increase property values and stabilize communities.	

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the only theme where participants in the citizen-engagement process specifically asked for the topic to be made a top priority for the county. This prevalence mirrors what participants expressed in the workshop series, listing the economy

and agriculture as the top two concerns. Nearly 40% of workshop participants included agriculture as a core community value, stating its place as a cornerstone economic driver.

Property-owner comments regarding agriculture incorporated several additional major themes including tourism, the economy, land use, and water. Ultimately, both workshop participants and property owners largely agree that the quality of life in Delta County is inextricably linked to the rural character, the right-to-farm, and agricultural production and that these qualities should be preserved for future generations.

Supporting agriculture can be achieved through a number of ideas contributed in the drop-in sessions. More clearly defining agriculture's distinctions for the purpose of creating effective policies to support, preserve, and grow its status should be considered. Addressing land use as it applies to agriculture with future implications in mind is another way to preserve this industry and value.

Exhibit C lists many of the unique thoughts, ideas, and concerns regarding the future of agriculture in Delta County. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all comments collected.

EXHIBIT C –AGRICULTURE RESPONSES

Larger blocks of land are better, keep pristine vistas coming into valley. Need larger acres to allow future generations to make a living.	Want the master plan to define agriculture.
Need to preserve ag and agritourism.	Need to be able to grow the ag base and be efficient and grow overhead. Ag is the backbone.
Keep and continue ag.	Issues like spraying and chicken barns shouldn't be a case of lawsuits, built on ag land/environment then they should not be a lawsuit issue. These things happen in ag and there should be an acceptance of agriculture's impact on land in an ag area.
Want to limit the amount of regulations that would prevent ag. Want to promote the ability to farm and ranch, ag and livestock are economic drivers in the county and would like support to continue.	Strongly believe in the right to farm, open space, property rights.
Define agriculture to be able to allow multiple uses and to be able to change type based on economic need.	May not do the same thing as neighbor but need to acknowledge that it is all ag and should recognize that all ag has a right. Can't differentiate between "types of ag."

More people means more restrictions. How do we as ranchers maintain what we're doing while having more people move in?	Need to be able to continue doing what we do but also be able to improve as science progresses.
We have to look at the county as a whole. When you say agriculture we think of cattle here, but have to think of the whole picture, it's more than cattle throughout the county. We forget and isolate our ideas of ag, must bring others into our circle. We want all ag to succeed.	Concerns - tried to put a chicken house in - why should a neighbor 2 miles away have an influence on whether or not I can do it?
County is ag and residential, it happened that way and we aren't going to change that. Want 30-40 acre small farms that don't affect neighbors (small cattle).	Would like to see a way to deal with confined operations, want legitimate set of definitions, what is being used in the county is inaccurate. What's happening now is people who want confined versus people who want to keep family farms.
Want to be able to expand to survive but we have created something that everyone wants so they move here, we have open space.	We are a true family farm, only make our living through farming. What we do is important, for generations we have kept agriculture and open space here but we shouldn't limit someone else's ability to bring in something new.
Agriculture - if it's a priority then it needs to be labelled as a priority, it should be stated.	Want - Ag established as a priority
Ag has to be profitable, can't do it on broken up unplanned growth, with houses in the middle of former fields that are now 20 acres - house - 20 acres - house.	Lack of processing and transportation, can produce but what do you do with it after? Need a plan for people to sell product at sustainable prices. Had vinegar, apple juice and sugar beets processing, and a dairy processing - gone now.
Need value added processing.	Need to bridge between small and large operations and cooperative approaches work well.
Have to have a critical mass of fruit growers to be successful - many orchards are now vineyards.	Ag is on its knees but still the backbone of Delta and Montrose Counties.

PROMOTING AND PRESERVING GOOD NEIGHBOR RELATIONS

The Delta County identity is strongly attached to its people and their ability to maintain positive relationships with each other despite differences. While many communities struggle to create a shared identity and culture, one of the resounding outcomes from the citizen engagement process is that Delta County residents already have this. This identity forms the foundation of the entire county and offers a common ground from which to progress. This common ground is rationally balanced by a strong appreciation for private property rights and the private right to pursue business interests as desired. This well-rounded identity offers the benefit of already having the necessary ties in place to collectively take ownership of the future in a mutually supportive and respectful manner. Considerations for how the identity and culture will be preserved should be at the forefront of planners' and leaders' minds.

Exhibit D offers a comprehensive list of comments made at the property-owner drop-ins.

EXHIBIT D—POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS RESPONSES

People need to be good neighbors.	Could build in a system to communicate with neighbors.
Not one of us would just do something without considering our neighbors, but changes and adaptability have to be allowed.	Live by the airport, can't complain because I moved in after airport was there. But anyone who comes in after me can't complain about me because I was first and should be respected. New people shouldn't have precedence.
(Discussion back and forth) 1. "When people do something on their ground, contained on their property, they should be able to do it. When it spreads on to another property is when other properties should have a say." 2. "Sometimes my cows are 100% contained, I want happy neighbors but sometimes it causes a bit of noise and dust."	I call my neighbors when irrigation floods my land or there is a cow on my land, but where things get out of hand like ammonia it is a bigger thing. Property values are the main reason, don't want decrease in value or quality of life.
Have a neighbor who gets me sick about 4 times a year, but I get over it. We don't always choose our neighbors but we should respect our neighbors.	Have to accept some of the things neighbors will do.
Organic farm with fertilizer that smells in the heat. Neighbors came to me and asked "can we address this?". Care about my immediate neighbors, not someone five miles down the road.	

WATER RESOURCES

Water and associated water rights are a fundamental resource needed for residential, municipal, industrial, commercial, recreational, and agricultural purposes throughout all of Delta County. Property owners singled this resource out in the drop-in sessions, highlighting many of the concerns, ideas, and general observations about the status of water as it pertains to future growth and operations. The topic overlaps into other core thematic areas including land use, agriculture, policy decisions, and permitting. These areas include significant, long-term water resources and should be carefully considered, within the context of the county's jurisdiction and influence. One of the top concerns voiced during the sessions was about exploring policies and incentives to keep agricultural water tied to the agricultural land in Delta County. It was noted that the county cannot regulate the transfer of ownership of water.

Exhibit E lists comments made in all of the property-owner drop-in sessions regarding water and water rights.

EXHIBIT E—WATER RESOURCE RESPONSES

Depend on water on the mesa.	Water is a concern.
Water- there are smarter ways to manage water.	Protect water.
Concerned about water collection.	Developed water systems that declined productivity compared to 50 years ago.
Want to address irrigation water. When 1 person splits up land, irrigation water gets split. Want to see how water gets split addressed. We can develop land policies that encourage larger land to stay intact. Several counties have gotten involved in land and water conservation.	If the county had a master plan that said water had to stay with land it would help. Smith Fork water project has precedence, the water is allocated exactly as it was with original land. Water companies would have to agree with this.
Water issues - the more water we can keep the better. Some don't think we have enough water, want to be able to buy water. Could I buy by neighbor's water because they don't use it all?	Fire Mountain (?) tied water to the system, can't sell it downstream but can sell it within the system. Now they inform the buyer that the water is tied to the system and not the land. If we could keep it in the system that would be wonderful.
Water would be good to address but it is regulated by courts too.	

ECONOMY

Promoting economic diversity ranked as a top three core issue among property owners. Residents highlighted the need to diversify the types of industry and commerce in Delta County on the basis of recent mine closures and associated job loss. Likewise, residents who participated in the workshop sessions ranked the economy as the principle core concern. While economic development is a top focus, residents consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining the quality of life and all of the local facets that support it (rural nature, lower population density, presence of agriculture and agriculture operations).

Exhibit F is a comprehensive listing of the comments gathered during the property-owner drop-in sessions.

EXHIBIT F—ECONOMIC DIVERSITY RESPONSES

When the mines downsized the economy shut down, but now we are more economically diverse.	Don't mind small industrial park.
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Would like light industrial.	Agriculture is good but we also need other business that give sales tax.
Economic development feeds into the other elements of the plan.	Want to work together to build the future. Coal closure hit the local economy hard, but it provides an opportunity to diversify the economy.
Important to keep it viable for future generations to come back and make a living.	Need to have different opportunities here. Don't see a way for young people to stay/come back without some change.
Want to see more investment in sustainable economy, avoid boom and bust.	Scenic byway

ENVIRONMENT

The environment ranks as a top three core theme, sharing its ranking with the economy and natural resources. Property owners value a number of environmental resources and attributes available throughout the county. The night sky, scenic byways, and clean resources topped the list. Many residents in the workshop sessions and comments from the drop-ins acknowledged the value the environment holds in attracting new residents and businesses to the Delta County area. Others linked the environment to the quality of life Delta County affords and the region's economic vitality.

Exhibit G offers a comprehensive list of comments gathered from the drop-in sessions that are categorized as environmentally-related.

EXHIBIT G—ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSES

Clean, quiet, night sky, friendly.	Attracted because of the clean air and water.
The scenic byways have economic value.	Preserve scenic byway.
Culture here is attracting young people and retirees who appreciate the environment.	People move here because of what ag has done here for years - provide wildlife habitat, maintain open space and public lands.
Want clean air, water, and soil.	Too much big game. Should devise a way to penalize state for not controlling their critters.
Concerned about protecting the fundamental value of resources - water, land, cattle.	

While residents often used the terms natural resources and the environment interchangeably, they do not represent the same concept. The concepts are split in this summary in order to accurately reflect residents' intents. Comments reflecting the

environment in general are included under “environment.” Comments having to do with natural resource production are categorized under the “natural resources” title.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Property owners ranked natural resources, the economy, and the environment together as the third core key value. Concern about oil and gas development and fracking is evident in this comprehensive list of comments made during each of the drop-in sessions. However, some residents are in favor of or at least generally supportive of coal production. Another resident offered the caveat that mineral and energy development is fine as long as it’s done in an environmentally conscientious manner.

EXHIBIT H—NATURAL RESOURCE RESPONSES

Concerned about fracking - it will ruin our brand.	Don't want fracking.
Ok with coal, not fracking.	Against fracking.
Need oil, gas and shale, but don't need it here. From personal experience, know it isn't safe, the fluid is not all recovered. Coal and oil resources are on their way out, should keep them away from agricultural products.	Don't think oil & gas will be big here, so it's not a pressing thing.
Don't want unclean oil and gas, but not against it if it is done well.	Pro mineral and energy development in an environmentally sound manner.
Want to see oil and gas pay for effects/damage to roads from trucks.	

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

All participants' comments from the drop-in sessions were entered into an excel spreadsheet. Data was first sorted by theme of content. A frequency analysis identified the total number of comments for each theme. The qualitative analysis presented in this report represents a condensing of the most frequently stated themes and ideas. The values list used to code comment content is the same one used in the vision workshop sessions summary. When a value that did not appear in the list used during the workshop analysis arose in the property-owner drop-ins, it was added. Sub-themes are differentiated within this analysis in comparison to the workshop sessions analysis, given the variations in sub-themes having arisen between the different engagement platforms.

EXHIBIT I—COMMUNITY VALUES LIST

MetaThemes	
Activities	Infrastructure
Agriculture	Land Use
Community	Nature & Wildlife
Community character	Outdoors
Economy	People
Education	Private Property/Property Rights
Environment/Resources	Quality of life
Family	Regulations
Government	Safety
History	Transportation System
Independence / Freedom	Types of services

NEXT STEPS

The property-owner drop-in sessions were one of three citizen-engagement strategies used to incorporate citizen feedback into the comprehensive planning process: Property Owner Drop-in Series, Vision Workshop Series, online survey. The workshop session feedback provided Delta County administration and planning commission with core values residents share and wish to preserve for future generations, as well as key concerns. The property-owner drop-in sessions offered individuals who have a vested interest in the community with the opportunity to share their outlooks, concerns, and ideas in a free-flowing, unguided format. The last element of the engagement process is the online survey, which offers residents who were unable to participate in the face-to-face engagement sessions the ability to contribute to the comprehensive plan. A summary of each session's key themes and outcomes will be published at deltacountyplan.com.

Together, Delta County leadership and the planning commission should rely on the information gleaned from the sessions as a platform to create the vision and goals in the updated comprehensive plan.

