

COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN
LOS ALAMOS COUNTY 2016



DRAFT

PLACE HOLDER COVER

August 31, 2016 Draft

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Executive Summary

In 2015 Los Alamos County undertook completion of a new comprehensive plan. The foundation of the new plan was laid by the original adopted 1987 comprehensive plan, and by work done by the community through subsequent plans and efforts, many of which have been adopted by County Council. Building upon past work and the history of the County, the Plan recognizes certain central and iconic features of the community. Los Alamos is defined by two key elements – history, specifically recent history and the advent of the Manhattan Project; and environment, the spectacular physical setting of the County and the integral nature of that setting to every aspect of life in the County. The community is constrained geographically by its setting on the several mesas and canyons that establish physical limitations and constraints to future growth.

Many of the goals established by the community in the past have been accomplished. The success of previous planning efforts can be ascribed in large part to continued community participation and oversight. This record of success, and the community's strong and stable set of values, allow the County to set new goals and develop new strategies with confidence. Work on the current plan began with an examination of past planning efforts and outreach to the community today. This process enabled the community to confirm the goals and direction set by the County Council's 2016 Strategic Leadership Plan.

The current document is primarily a policy plan, based on the goals of the Strategic Leadership Plan, and offering a multifaceted set of potential strategies for Council and community consideration going forward.

Recognizing that the purpose of the comprehensive plan is predominantly to guide the physical development of the County, the plan focuses primarily on those goals and policies that relate to the growth, appearance and land uses on the ground. While many issues and topics were discussed in the early stages of developing the current plan, several core issues came to the forefront as those of most importance to the community. The plan is organized around these core elements, among which there is considerable overlap. All are based on the desire for

greater economic development, a strong commitment to neighborhood preservation, and protection of open space. The community has established the following three key areas as central to the identity, the values, and the issues facing Los Alamos over the coming years (*following page*):

In addition to articulating goals, policies and strategies related to these three core areas, the plan also adopts a Future Land Use Map that illustrates the broad direction of future growth and desirable land uses.

As the community develops, changes will occur. The comprehensive plan provides direction for change as well as for preservation, and outlines the parameters and expectations for future growth. The comprehensive plan is also subject to change and should be reviewed periodically for relevancy, for accomplishments, new ideas and changed or new circumstances.

The community has established the following three key areas as central to the identity and the values of Los Alamos:

HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOODS and GROWTH

The plan supports:

- Protecting existing residential neighborhoods
- Providing more choices in housing, especially downtown
- Planning for modest growth

DEVELOPMENT, REDEVELOPMENT and DOWNTOWN

The plan supports:

- Keeping development contained within current boundaries
- Redeveloping vacant and blighted areas
- Focusing development priorities downtown

OPEN SPACE, TRAILS and MOBILITY

The plan supports:

- Protecting all existing open space
- Maximizing connectivity for open space, trails and pedestrian ways
- Supporting streets designed for the safety and comfort of all users

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Plan

The 2016 comprehensive plan is a high-level, long-range policy document that will guide decisions about the physical development of Los Alamos County.

The comprehensive plan is intended to be a living document that should and will change to accommodate and reflect new circumstances, technology, natural and cultural forces, and the evolving vision of its citizens.

This document replaces prior planning documents and serves as the unified statement of goals and policies for the future growth, development, preservation and aspirations for the county.

In addition to formalizing the goals and policies related to future growth, the plan suggests various strategies for how the policies can be advanced and the goals achieved. These strategies are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. Rather, they are a compendium of ideas, some of which came out of previously developed documents, others came from current public participation in a variety of forms.

The comprehensive plan articulates the vision, the goals, and the aspirations of the community. At the same time, the plan aims to be a practical and useful document for its many users. Adopted as part of the comprehensive plan is the County's first official Future Land Use Map. The map is a visual representative of the plan's goals and policies, especially as they relate to land use. Land use categories are described in broad terms to allow flexibility while depicting the agreed upon and general direction of future growth.

The County Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission will use the policies in the plan, together with the Future Land Use Map, to guide and inform their decisions on requested changes to those policies as well as for development proposals. County staff, especially within the Community Development department, will look to conformance with plan policies when reviewing applications. Members of the community will find assurances in the plan's policies and the map on what to expect, both for change and for neighborhood preservation. Developers and individual applicants will look to the plan and the map for guidance in preparing and presenting land use applications.

The Planning Process

In 2015 the Los Alamos County Council directed the Planning and Zoning Commission, with support from the Community Development Department, to produce an update to the County's Comprehensive Plan. While some sections of the plan had been updated over the previous several years, other sections still dated to the last complete revision in 1987. The Vision Statement and Policy Plan adopted by Council in 2005 served as the consensus document for planning policy for ten years. The Council adopted subsequent long range policy plans, including the 2016 Strategic Leadership Plan, which forms the basis for the Goals and many of the Policies in the 2016 comprehensive plan. The Council also directed staff to engage the services of a consultant to create and implement a public outreach and participation process and to complete that process as well as completing the new plan within twelve months.

Architectural Research Consultants, Inc., (ARC) of Albuquerque, NM, was retained to perform a broad-based public outreach and participation process over the course of twelve months. Development of the comprehensive plan was led by the Planning & Zoning Commission with technical and professional work performed primarily by Community Development Department (CDD) staff. ARC provided facilitation and analysis of public input, as well as some technical and graphic support.

Additionally, ARC established and hosted a comprehensive plan website. In addition to regular updates of activities, meetings and plan development, the website provided an informal opinion survey, results of two statistically valid random sample surveys, links to former and current related County documents, the opportunity for citizens to request email updates and notifications, and access to all plan documents, including previous work related directly and indirectly to the comprehensive plan. Historic documentation was also available on the County's CDD comprehensive plan webpage.

Work on the new plan was divided into three phases, or rounds. In addition to review of prior documents, Round One consisted of individual interviews with key community leaders, launch of the comprehensive plan website, and three public meetings. The goal of Round 1 was to confirm the vision as previously outlined in the 2005 Vision Statement and Policy Plan, as well as in the 2016 Strategic Leadership Plan, and to identify those

The Core Themes

issues of key concern to the community. Existing conditions were identified and described in a series of white papers, which later became the Planning Context of the plan. A statistically valid survey (See Appendix) was mailed to 3,000 random sample addresses in the County and, along with the community outreach meetings, helped establish the core themes of the plan.

Round 2 focused on those key areas of interest and need identified in Round 1. A second series of three public meetings were specific to those areas and more technically based. The results of these meetings, along with much of the work previously accomplished helped to create draft Goals, Policies and Strategies for the comprehensive plan. A second statistically valid survey, (See Appendix) also mailed to 3,000 random sample addresses, served to confirm public agreement with the draft Goals and Policies, which then formed the heart of the plan in the Core Themes chapter.

Round 3 consisted of review and adoption of the plan. The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended approval of the plan to Council, and Council adopted the new plan by Resolution on _____, 2016.

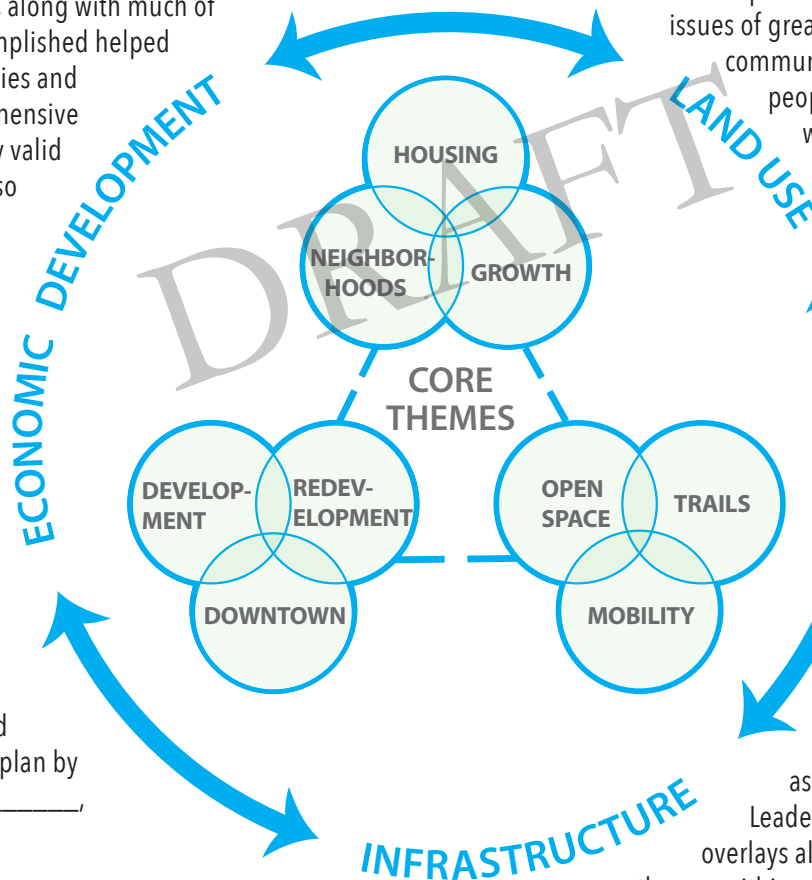
The core of the plan is organized around three subject groupings.

The extensive public outreach process that initiated planning for the 2016 comprehensive plan served to confirm strong community agreement on core values, interests and aspirations of Los Alamos. The

issues of greatest interest to the community were those that bound people together, those on which there were strong but consistent opinions, those which the community sought either to change or to preserve. Those issues became the core themes of the plan and determined its structure.

Recognizing that there was significant overlap among the subject areas, as well as with a number of the goals as stated in the Strategic Leadership Plan, the plan overlays all the themes, and the sub-themes within each, with three distinct

and consistent dimensions considerations. These overlay dimensions help to sort and define the various policies and possible strategies. The overlays are: economic development, land use and infrastructure.





PLAN HISTORY

HISTORY OF LOS ALAMOS
COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE
PLANNING

DOWNTOWN

GOALS

1. Create a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly downtown that includes a central gathering place, nighttime entertainment, and more retail stores and restaurants
2. Focus development priorities downtown
3. Focus increased residential densities in the downtown
4. Enhance the vibrant, historic, small-town character of Los Alamos by focusing commercial density increases in the downtown area

The downtown areas of the townsite and in White Rock are key to development and redevelopment in the County. Significant improvements have already been achieved in these areas and more will be done. A short list of significant construction and improvements includes: two public libraries, a new municipal building, fire station, visitor center, teen centers, Main Street reconstruction, and senior center. The community recognizes and appreciates the work done to date. The vast majority of responses in the first comprehensive plan Survey, at a rate of approximately 4:1, believed that recent changes in Los Alamos, in the built environment (buildings, street improvements, access to trails and open space) have been for the better.

There is broad community consensus regarding the need to address blighted properties as a means of improving the appearance of the community and promoting enhanced economic development.

One of the Council's strategic goals is to maximize use of County land. This goal is especially applicable in the townsite downtown where a number of opportunities exist for major development and redevelopment. These are A-13, the 7.5 acre LASO site; A-9, 4.2 acres on the north side of DP Road; A-8, 24 acres on the south side of DP Road; the County's 3+ acre site on 20th Street, south of Trinity; and Deacon Alley.

In White Rock, the County is pursuing development of the

60 acre A-19 site, following recent development on former County property at State Road 4 and Rover.

On the private side, the County is examining ways to

I grew up here but have been gone the past 10 years. I couldn't believe how great it looked when I came back!

Laura Tietjens
Los Alamos Resident

address remaining vacant and blighted properties such as the Merrimac Center and the old "Black Hole" in the townsite and the Longview area in White Rock.

DOWNTOWN

The comprehensive plan introduces the “Mixed-Use” land use category as a means to simplify and encourage private development by allowing either residential or commercial, or a combination of land uses on designated mixed-use tracts. The County is also encouraging housing development in the downtowns, with the A-8 tract already having been zoned for high density housing. Other support for increased activity in the townsite downtown includes expansion of the Rim Trail, support for a historic district and for the Historic Society’s museum campus, Main Street expansion, and subdivision of the 20th Street property in preparation for sale and development. The County also recognizes the need to improve the use and appearance of Trinity Drive and to support new development through installation of utility infrastructure on DP Road, 20th Street, and into A-19 in White Rock.

All the accomplished and anticipated improvements will enable revitalization of both downtown areas, including attracting new retail businesses and restaurants, especially in response to increased tourism.

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DOWNTOWN

GOALS

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ECONOMIC VITALITY

POLICIES

1. Support a range of retail and service uses that complement one another
2. Support small businesses in the downtown
3. Provide flexibility for uses to change over time as market conditions change

STRATEGIES

1. Consider public/private partnerships
2. Expand Main Street program improvements



LAND USE

POLICIES

1. Support more, and different types of housing downtown
2. Limit residential density increases to downtown
3. Support Historical Society Museum campus



INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICIES

1. Continue to support infrastructure construction downtown

STRATEGIES

1. Establish a historic district in the downtown
2. Revisit parking requirements
3. Revisit code restrictions to height

STRATEGIES

1. Bring high speed internet to Los Alamos County

Pajarito Ski Area



Future Land Use Los Alamos

Draft 8-12-16

Legend

- | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|---------------------|--|--------------|
| | Low Density Residential- 0-3 | | Parks | | Industrial |
| | Medium Density Residential-3-7 | | Open Space- Active | | Federal |
| | Med-High Density Residential- 7-15 | | Open Space- Passive | | ROW |
| | High Density Residential-15+ | | Mixed-Use | | Undesignated |
| | Institutional | | Commercial/Office | | |

