

2009 Santa Fe County Sustainable Growth Plan Update

Growth Management Primer

Building a Plan



FAQs

(Frequently Asked Questions)

February 2009

Tell me more about the Plan Update.

Santa Fe County's 1999 General Plan outlines an ambitious and laudable vision:

Santa Fe County will be a place of communities where social connections and local uniqueness are valued and fostered; where local communities have an opportunity to plan for their future; where the natural environment and open space are protected; where water resources are conserved and available for present and future generations; where diversified housing and economic development are integrated and assured; where the plan directs the location of growth to efficiently accommodate the use of limited resources; and where private property rights are protected and development requirements shall strike a reasonable balance.

However, implementation of this Plan vision has been undermined by a variety of incremental planning and development decisions. For instance, subdivisions and large scale development have occurred outside of growth areas where infrastructure is not available. Water limitations and base densities are exceeded on a regular basis, causing harm to the environment and threatening the sustainability of these communities. Transportation and utility deficiencies in new and existing development in many areas of the County cause increased demands on County resources, which in addition to straining the County budget cause significant emergency access and service difficulties.

There is a lack of consistency and predictability in the planning and development review process that impacts County service providers, residents and developers alike. The purpose of the Plan update is to establish a growth management framework that gives legal weight to the Plan and identifies and prioritizes implementation strategies.

Tell me more about the Charrettes.

Santa Fe County has a strong tradition of community-based planning. Without the support of residents and decision-makers, the General Plan will gather dust on the shelf. With support, the General Plan will have local champions that help the vision become a reality.

The Charrette process is meant to be an open forum where service providers, residents, developers and other stakeholders are able to help develop a County-wide vision for the Plan, identify important issues that the Plan should address, and identify the appropriate locations for future development, including residential and commercial development as well as necessary facilities and services, transportation infrastructure, preserved open spaces, preserved agricultural lands and other physical components of our environment.

The Charrette process includes two public workshops and a public open house, where participants can drop by to share their opinion and speak with a County Planner.

The process also includes "Stakeholder Meetings." These meetings are roundtable interviews with small groups of participants that have been invited to share their experiences and ideas with the Planning Team. These interviews are formatted to allow the Planning Team to gather critical information in a limited timeframe and, while not closed to the public, are not intended to be an open forum, such as the public workshops and open house. To be included in a stakeholder session, contact Robert Griego at 505.986.6215.

Growth management and sustainable development practices address the economic, social and environmental considerations and challenges that arise out of growth.

How do Communities fit into the process?

Existing Community Plans and Ordinances are a critical component of the growth management framework. However, these processes focused on planning for small, defined environments. The General Plan recognizes the need to plan on a larger, County-wide scale, recognizing that problems don't stop and start at our community boundaries, and neither should our solutions. The General Plan and Land Development Code updates will include the policy and implementation framework of the Community Plans and Ordinances. The regulatory structure of the County must be simplified in order to be more transparent and effective for all users of the Code.

Additionally, the Plan Update will set forth a legal, manageable and transparent role for community and area-based participation. A new community-involvement process, based on Growth Management Areas, that is more meaningful and efficient will be defined through the Plan Update.

How can we promote sustainable development?

The County and the Planning Team have analyzed existing conditions and trends related to growth management, including impacts of growth and development and alternate land use patterns on facility and service demand, the environment, water, economic development, community character and fiscal sustainability. Current practices are unsustainable and could result in a declining quality of place and quality of life for residents if allowed to follow recent trends.

For instance, existing approved platted lots and master planned lots in Santa Fe County can supply over 50 years growth based on average annual growth. This type of speculative development makes it impossible for the County to provide a rational extension of services, such as water and sewer, law enforcement, fire and emergency

services, road provision and maintenance, schools and other critical infrastructure.

The County desires sustainable future development that meets the needs of existing residents without compromising the future. The County is committed to providing the appropriate governmental resources to implement a unified, County-wide, growth management strategy. A growth management strategy will:

- Direct the location of future growth to areas where facilities and services can be efficiently provided;
- Direct and phase growth necessary so the County can manage its operations and operating and capital budgets;
- Provide a variety of housing opportunities that meet the needs of residents without undue stress on the environment or County infrastructure;
- Preserve and promote the County's character by protecting existing communities and encouraging sensitive design in new development that reflects regional, historic and cultural heritage;
- Distinguish between the character and function of rural and urban environments and ensure that opportunities for each are defined, while providing clear edges between the two;
- Create and connect central mixed-use places;
- Develop a Countywide open space and trails plan;
- Develop an agricultural lands plan that provides incentives for protecting community, agriculture and ranch lands;
- Conserve water and other cultural and natural resources;
- Implement clear and concise development regulations that achieve the County's vision, make the review process more

efficient and include define opportunities for community input;

- Address service and facility deficiencies when possible; and
- Ensure that new development is responsible for its fair share of the costs associated with growth to avoid future service and facility deficiencies.

What are the Tiers?

The main objective of the Tiers system is to direct the location, timing and phasing of growth in order to achieve rational growth patterns, efficiently provide facilities and services and protect rural, agricultural, environmentally sensitive or other important open spaces from inappropriate development.

Each Tier includes a broad mix of land uses that describe and identify preferred future development patterns. Tiers are not zoning designations -- they are intended to guide local decisions on zoning, subdivision and other land use matters and reflect a future land use condition. Tiers are used to establish a framework for determining which growth management goals, policies and strategies should be used in different areas of the County, recognizing the uniqueness of each area and community.

Tiers will lay the groundwork for a new County land use regulations, to be set forth in the Land Development Code update. While the County's hydrologic zoning scheme sets forth maximum densities throughout the County, the existing land development code still allows two and a half acre zoning. This creates the low-density subdivision pattern that is neither urban nor rural, a pattern that requires urban facilities and services but is not dense enough to fiscally support such services. The Tiers system defines areas of specific levels of service in order to efficiently direct growth and preserve the remaining rural character.

The Tiers system is the first step in moving the County to a more reliable and functional land use scheme with a future land use and zoning map that will provide confidence to residents and businesses about future development expectations.

Explain the purpose of each Tier.

Communities Tier – To reflect desired land uses included in Community Plans and to protect existing community character.

Primary Growth Area – To prepare for future urban and suburban development patterns and accommodate most of the County's future growth. Higher density development patterns served by full urban services within next 10 years.

Secondary Growth Area - Urban and suburban uses may be permitted when public facilities and services become available in next 10-20 years.

Rural Tier – To accommodate very little to no growth, and specifically no new urban or suburban development. To protect and preserve environmental lands and a rural lifestyle.

Conservation/Agricultural Tier – To accommodate very little to no growth and preserve large tracts of contiguous open space, agricultural and ranching lands.

What are the Tier Scenario Alternatives?

The Planning Team has explored many unique Tier Scenario Alternatives to consider recognize that there are alternatives in how the County may choose to develop and identify the implications of those choices. By considering alternatives, we can identify key policies and strategies needed to accomplish the preferred scenario.

Two maps are presented in this overview, both of which are drafts meant to spur greater conversation. The first is a "Sustainable

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Development Alternative,” which can be accomplished through a more coordinated regulatory approach that considers locational and

environmental factors. The second map includes projected sprawl development, shown in grey shading.