

# Mesa *Together*



**MESA  
COUNTY**



**COLORADO**  
Department of Local Affairs

Focus Group Summaries

**December 20, 2021**

## Mesa Together Focus Group Meeting Summaries

Planning topics for the Mesa Together Master Plan were explored in one-time focus group meeting discussions among industry experts, stakeholders, and members of the public that provide diverse perspectives on these topics. These meetings were conducted between November 10 and November 17, 2021 and ranged from 1 hour to 90 minutes in length.

It should be noted these takeaways are not intended as plan recommendations or final direction, but simply to note the discussion that took place that is one aspect of informing the plan creation. The Master Planning process will include other forms of collecting input from the community including surveys, community workshops, committee meetings, and pop-up events.

Focus Group Topic	Number of Attendees	Summary Page Start
Economic Development	18	1
Energy	12	3
Land Use and Capacity	10	4
Building Trust in Government and Civic Engagement	18	4
Recreation, Culture, and Tourism	16	5
Rural Lifestyle and Housing	16	6
Sustainability and Resilience	20	7
Transportation	11	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	

### Focus Group: Economic Development

**Topics Discussed:** Development growth and land use, economic strengths; economic weaknesses; business support strategies; partnerships and regional approaches.

#### Where are we today?

- Focus group participants generally felt that the direction of economic development in the region is somewhat headed in the right direction. It is improving but there is room for improvement.
- The Mesa County economy is growing and becoming more diverse.
- The strengths of the Mesa County economy are health care, education, agriculture, tourism, recreation, and small businesses.
- Current weaknesses of the Mesa County economy include the lack of workforce, challenges with affordable/workforce housing, distance to the Front Range or other major metro area, and keeping graduates in the area.

- Focus group participants commented about gaps in the economy that include higher paying jobs/industries, innovative businesses, education, and the cost of housing.

### What are the trends?

- Focus group participants generally felt that pace of development is just about right but these trends vary greatly throughout the County. Some areas are growing too fast and others are “just right”.
- Regulations are outpaced by the speed of the private sector. It is important to be nimble and respond to market demands.
- Historically the foundation of the economy was oil and gas, but in the past five years has diversified with growth in healthcare, tourism, and tech industries.
- Affordable housing is a consistent concern, lending to difficulty attracting and retaining talent.
- Unincorporated areas adjacent to municipalities are faced with development pressures to accommodate growth and struggle with providing services that the public expects in those locations.

### Where to next?

- Top priorities for the future economic development of Mesa County are staying diversified, attracting new businesses, keeping graduates in the area, agritourism, working with non-profits, and responsible/smart growth.
- Opportunities exist for the county to partner with a variety of organizations on economic development issues, including land trusts, non-profits, local food production/agribusiness, and the various municipalities.
- Improvements that would benefit local businesses include infrastructure like broadband and rail, multiple city centers, attainable housing, and more incentives for businesses to move to the area.
- There is a general desire to see services and goods being more closely available to neighborhoods, and to decentralize commercial development in favor of smaller commercial districts throughout the Grand Valley.
- Future commercial development should focus on Clifton, Whitewater, Mack/Loma, Orchard Mesa, Fruita (particularly the business park and Fruita South), and North Grand Junction

## Focus Group: Energy

**Topics Discussed:** Energy development trends; Land use planning needs; Opportunities for Mesa County; Regulatory issues; Energy goals

### Where are we today?

- Top Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) has adopted a mission change bringing more alignment with the rulemakings associated with ever more efficient and low emission operations while emphasizing the role of local governments and the local government designee.
- The Piceance basin natural gas is relatively low carbon, as the demand for lower carbon natural gas continues to grow there may be opportunities in that area.
- Solar is faced with barriers such as uncertainty, permitting.

### What are the trends?

- Increasing use and interest in low-carbon energy sources and accompanying need and growth of trained support professionals and industries.
- The industry has become more regulated and conflicts are increasing between energy development, wildlife habitat, and residential development.
- Traditional energy development was indicated as less robust growth patterns and potentially declining while regulatory oversight of those industries has increased.

### What is our future?

- Opportunities for energy sector growth include: carbon sequestration, hydrogen, responsibly sourced natural gas, geothermal, solar, nuclear, carbon capture and sequestration, energy efficiency and green technology.
- Existing infrastructure and transmission lines will need to be improved and expanded to accommodate both population growth and energy development.
- Mesa County energy products could be sold to larger markets in Asia and on the west coast.
- Certainty is needed within the renewable energy market to encourage growth.
- Energy transition job re-training and a more diversified economic development base
- There should be adequate planning to allow for transitions between energy markets.
- Energy experts should work together on future energy sector opportunities and the development of an overall energy plan.

## Focus Group: Land Use and Capacity Planning

**Topics Discussed:** Future land use; Conservation; Utility/Infrastructure planning

### Where are we today?

- Over the past decade, the land use changes in Mesa County were generally described as loss of agriculture, higher density, increase in population, and more residential development.
- Land use conflicts occur between residential and agricultural uses

### What are the trends?

- Continued land use changes that are anticipated include more growth in residential, higher density growth, and some commercial to support the increased residential.

### What is our future?

- In future land use planning, strong support was seen for preserving natural habitat and areas, such as wildlife habitat, rivers/creeks/riparian areas, places people can recreate in nature, as well as historic structures with rural character.
- Overall priorities for land use planning should consider affordable/attainable housing, alternative transportation, higher paying jobs/industries, retaining rural character, better infrastructure, and reducing sprawl.
- Parks/open space, mixed use, and agriculture were the top land use to encourage, followed by single family residential and multi-family residential, with less support for commercial and industrial land uses.
- In terms of supporting housing needs in the county, focus group participants indicated support for a combination of factors, including public-private partnerships, encouragement/support, incorporation of Clifton, and more opportunities for higher-income jobs.
- Infrastructure capacity, housing, and limited services could be barriers to future growth.

## Focus Group: Building Trust in Government and Civic Engagement

**Topics Discussed:** Government communication; Land use review and building permit application process; Public outreach; Community engagement; Difficult to reach populations; Underrepresented populations.

### Where are we today?

- Mesa County Government communication strengths provides personal service, consistent branding but could improve consistency, civic engagement, and outreach to the Spanish-speaking community.
- Timing of meetings and geography make it difficult for residents to attend.

## What are the trends?

- Online meetings have increased participation but not all areas of the County have adequate internet service to stream meetings.

## What is our future?

- Engage neighbors and/or neighborhoods early in the development review process and throughout the planning process, consistent communication throughout process, and conveying information simply, clearly, and transparency.
- Diversify communication methods: informal face-to-face contact such as coffee talks or dinners; small, tight knit meetings, go to where people are; utilize mailings, news outlets, text messaging alerts, and social media.
- Develop public events to interface with the community such as coffee talks with staff and electees. In addition, leverage existing events and meetings rather than creating additional meetings or events.
- Provide education in laymen's terms on how an issue can impact the community, their neighborhood, an individual, or their family.
- Show follow-up on issues and planning efforts, such as how the Master Plan will be implemented in the County.
- Be open to all ideas and listen to all voices and opinions, listen to community priorities.

## Focus Group: Recreation, Culture, and Tourism

**Topics Discussed:** Tourism trends; Tourism opportunities; Celebration of culture; Recreation opportunities; Fostering partnerships

## Where are we today?

- Key challenges for tourism include crowd management, available lodging, coordination across the county, and other infrastructure needs to support a sustainable level of tourism.
- Lower income populations are currently underserved in terms of access to outdoor recreation. Other populations mentioned include the elderly, homeless, and the physically challenged.
- Focus group participants see the county as having a limited contribution to fostering the culture of the area.

## What are the trends?

- In terms of tourism in Mesa County, there has been an overall increase, especially for biking and mountain biking as a driver. There is a need for more trash receptacles, bathrooms, and other support facilities at trailheads.

## What is our future?

- Tourism plays a role in a future balanced economy in Mesa County, but a need exists to plan for the increases and to not get too overcrowded.
- Future opportunities for tourism tend to be centered on outdoor recreation, including Colorado River access, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, trails, and open space usage in general.
- Recreation in the county is seen as a major positive factor to the quality of life. The role of the county should be to support coordination across jurisdictions, convene stakeholders, and collaborate. Trails along the canals was an example of an area where the county could get involved to support recreation, along with more bike lanes and paths around the county.
- Mesa County could foster partnerships with a variety of entities, including school districts, land trusts, the BLM, and river front trail organizations.
- Investments in the riverfront, bike lanes/paths, public transportation, a rec center, more trails, and education would benefit both residents and visitors.

## Focus Group: Rural Lifestyle and Housing

**Topics Discussed:** Trends and risk; Assets to conserve; Strategies for conserving rural lifestyles; Housing strategies; Rural economic support

### **Where are we today?**

- There is a range of feedback on land use changes in the past decade, with some indicating right direction and some wrong direction, depending on the specific geographic area and specific topic.

### **What are the trends?**

- Residential areas are expanding into rural areas, the homes are becoming larger, loss of wildlife habitat and agricultural lands.

### **What is our future?**

- Water scarcity and development growth are the biggest threats to rural lifestyle.
- Ideas to support local agriculture are various and include Innovative agriculture techniques, Farm-to-table markets, Agritourism, Education programs, Conservation Easements, Farm-stay lodging options, and Community gardens.
- Create policy and land use regulations to encourage development of attainable and affordable housing.
- Support for more diverse housing variety and types, including tiny homes. New residential development should be located near employment opportunities, infrastructure, and transit.

- There should be continued protection and preservation of irrigated lands, open land, farmland, orchards, historic buildings, recognition of indigenous people and lands, and riparian corridors through education, funding, and County support.
- Coordinate housing with new infrastructure, transportation, and jobs.

## Focus Group: Sustainability and Resiliency

**Topics Discussed:** Trends; Improving resiliency; Floodplain management; Strategies for sustainability; Resources and partnerships

### Where are we today?

- The land use changes in the County were perceived as somewhat positive, but seeing gaps in terms of wetland mitigation, inconsistent application of regulations, and higher impacts to recreational lands due to overuse and unclear guidelines.

### What are the trends?

- Drought and air quality are growing concerns. Wildfires increasingly contribute to diminished air quality. Vulnerable populations are disproportionately impacted by reduced air quality.
- The agriculture industry is being impacted by development pressures and drought.
- Recreation is leading habitat degradation.

### What is our future?

- Group wanted to see a greater focus on implementation of existing protections and regulations to support a healthier natural environment in addition to new programs as needed.
- The idea of bringing in concepts of a circular economy, focusing on waste recharacterization, use of existing resources, developing more local production and services, seemed to resonate.
- Focusing on water conservation and living with drought provides opportunities to scale back water use, look at innovative water recapture and reuse, and can help prepare the County for potentially drier conditions over the long run.
- “Leading by Example” by the County may be a good way to kick-off some of these initiatives for resource conservation; energy, water and waste were specifically identified.
- Renewable Energy will continue to be a big deal moving forward; figuring out the best way to accommodate those needs will help define success in this area.
- Transportation was mentioned in terms of transit, but not as strongly emphasized as some other communities have done.



## Focus Group: Transportation

**Topics Discussed:** Safety; Driving; Multimorbidity; Walking; Connectivity; Biking; Transit; Freight; Innovation; Programs and policies

### Where are we today?

- Mesa County Government, the Cities of Grand Junction and Fruita, and the Town of Palisade have developed solid partnerships.
- Barriers to multimodal transportation include: infrequent service, transit doesn't serve enough areas, lack of sidewalks, long cycling distances between destinations, and certain corridors like North Ave, Broadway Bridge, and G Road.

### What are the trends?

- The Grand Valley is improving transportation issues such as the addition of roundabouts that improving traffic flow, pedestrian improvements on Horizon Drive, development of bike and ped facilities, and Safe Routes to School programs.

### What is our future?

- Ensuring the multimodal transportation network continues providing strong connectivity to trails and recreation while also expanding access within developed communities.
- Using pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure/service as a tool for supporting more dense, compact development.
- Making Mesa County a more competitive location for goods movement by addressing the constraints on load capacities that freight rail operators currently face and the connectivity challenges posed by events like closures of I-70.
- Identifying specific strategies for leveraging emerging technologies like electric vehicle charging and adaptive signal control to support Master Plan goals.
- Address safety, specifically as it relates to walking and bicycling.
- transportation needs and have raised general awareness of transportation planning. Participants appreciate the advances made with adoption Safe Routes to School programs, the increase in on-street bicycle facilities and trails (and new connections to trailheads), and pedestrian connectivity improvements on key corridors like Horizon Drive.
- In addition, participants support the addition of roundabouts, which have anecdotally improved traffic flow.
- Multimodal connectivity has improved in recent years due to the trails that have been planned and constructed. These projects are the result of solid partnerships between and among Mesa County Government, the Cities of Grand Junction and Fruita, and the Town of Palisade. They would like to see these partnerships further strengthened and used for jointly planning and funding additional improvements.

- The final question of the session asked participants to identify the top transportation planning priority for the Master Plan. Answers to this question were varied; several participants felt safety should be the top priority, while others felt mitigating the growth in travel demand that occurs following development should be the top priority.
- There was some agreement that mobility planning in the western side of the County will be an emerging need as that portion of Mesa County continues to grow.



## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES MEMORANDUM

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This memorandum organizes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relevant to Mesa County in summarization from research and analysis and feedback from the community survey. Due to the unique complexities of Mesa County, we have identified **driving forces and limitations** to identify and inform the key themes of the Master Plan to define the shaping the future Master Plan. A full summary of Community Engagement and a Summary Presentation of Existing Conditions Research can be found on the [Mesa Together](#) project website.

### **MASTER PLAN VISION**

Mesa County is a region in the Western Slope that is home to many communities. This includes two cities, three towns, five census-designated places, and multiple unincorporated neighborhoods. Due to its many communities, Mesa County has several unique identities. Combined with its plethora of open space, this attracts many residents and visitors. It is home to 155,703 people, of which 47.1% live in unincorporated area. Overall, the County is moderately growing. As a result, development pressure has raised the question of how to address growth and properly plan for it.

Mesa County is a place of contrasting communities. Several small unincorporated rural communities are driven by historic agriculture and ranching in a bucolic scenic setting. Comparatively, a number of incorporated and unincorporated communities along the I-70 and Colorado River corridor are more urban in nature, with varied amenities from commercial, retail and office uses to less dense sprawling area. Yet, the community survey shows that overall, incorporated and unincorporated areas have a great degree of commonality than difference in a shared future vision.

In understanding the values of Mesa County, it is important to consider is the surrounding environment, the vision of the community, and neighboring jurisdictions. A significant portion of Mesa County-72.7%- is undisturbed open lands and natural areas. Similarly, a long-standing history of agriculture and ranching is core to the culture. Yet Mesa County is growing in population- at 5.9%- which has impacts to the economy, transportation systems and way of life. This project aims to understand what the driving factors of growth are, what the barriers to are, and answer the question of how to balance the two with the values and desires of the community.

Based on feedback from residents, natural land preservation and recreation access are key values for the future. The master plan will serve as a guide for intentional and directed growth to maintain a high quality of life and preserve the natural setting that makes Mesa County special. Future planning will need address the community's desire for accessible housing and a

diversified economy that celebrates and preserves the natural setting and rural character of Mesa County.

## **KEY THEMES**

Preparedness is key for a community to thrive. Therefore, this plan should be a guideline for future growth. This plan will result in a modern, consolidated, and community-informed plan. It will be representative of both the past and present growth and as such, balance the goals of both. It should acknowledge the past while allowing for evolution in County responses to community and market goals. It is also important that the plan is a living document – it should have the ability to be revised as conditions change.

The previous 1996 Plan elements were organized into the following goals categories:

- Land Use and Growth Management
- Community Character/Image
- Agriculture
- Open Lands and Trails
- Parks and Recreation
- Community Services and Facilities

We propose the following themes to organize the Mesa County Master Plan, each theme will address the connected nature of the above elements and align goals and policy in accordance with DOLA requirements. The themes will create the structure of the Mesa County Master Plan, each theme serving as a chapter of the plan, with related goals, policies and implementation strategies.

- **Build Community with Jobs, Housing and Transit.** The following elements will be addressed:
  - Future land use and growth patterns
  - Transit, mobility and infrastructure
  - Jobs and workforce
  - Public services
- **Diversity and Economic Strength.** The following elements will be addressed:
  - Recreation economy/tourism
  - Agricultural tourism
  - Agricultural industry
- **A Legacy of Rural Character.** The following elements will be addressed:
  - Cultural heritage and viewsheds
  - Wildlife habitats
  - Parks, trails, and recreation
- **Environmental Preservation and Resilience.** The following elements will be addressed:
  - Economic diversification of energy sector
  - Hazard mitigation and preparedness
  - Preservation/conservation of public lands
  - Natural Resources

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS BY KEY THEMES**

The following section explores what we have learned through data and analysis, focus group conversations, the community survey as key plan drivers, limitations to consider in future development, and implications for future planning stages.

<b>Community Building</b>		
<b>Driving Forces</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Why this Matters for our Future</b>
<p>Community desire for a high quality of life. (61% of the community feels quality of life is good or excellent)</p> <p>The small-town feel is a strength of the Mesa County community.</p>	<p>Growth and change can be perceived as a threat to quality of life.</p> <p>The community is divided on rate of growth (specifically residential growth)- some preferring more progressive growth planning and others wanting slow or no growth.</p>	<p>Planning should support or enhance this value as expressed by community members.</p> <p>Broad agreement that the natural and agricultural character should be preserved, however growth occurs.</p>
<p>Mesa County is one of the fastest growing communities on the Western Slope (but growth has slowed over the last decade to 5.9% which is still quite strong.)</p>	<p>Demand for housing and the need for more affordability in housing options.</p> <p>Historic growth has been sprawling, sporadic and has outpaced planning efforts.</p> <p>The community expressed a high desire to address sprawl, cost of housing and increase housing diversity.</p>	<p>Need to explore and drive where and what type of growth could happen to support the high quality of life in the area.</p> <p>Supporting a diversity of housing types and promoting growth would help avoid sprawl and preserve agriculture.</p> <p>A targeted focus on smaller and more attainable home types would support housing affordability.</p>
<p>Residents living in semi-urban settings (such as Clifton and Whitewater) are governed by the County. 41% of the County population lives in rural areas.</p>	<p>The high number of special districts can create overlaps or inconsistencies.</p> <p>Special districts provide services typically handled by counties.</p>	<p>Planning efforts need to address planning in these areas to support the County in providing for residents. Understand utility services, special districts and capacity as drivers for growth.</p>

<p>A growing community requires improved access</p>	<p>Roads, sidewalks and infrastructure in rural areas are difficult to build and maintain.</p> <p>Concern for increased traffic as growth increases.</p> <p>GVT (Grand Valley Transit) does not run frequently enough to provide service capacity.</p> <p>Sprawling development patterns limit the ease of bike and walking commuters</p>	<p>More bike facilities, paths and route would support safer, more walkable neighborhoods,</p> <p>Expansion of transit service is needed especially in lower income communities.</p> <p>Continue to support or strengthen regional partnerships on trail connectivity and transit.</p>
<p>There is a strong sense of safety and community. (63% state it is what they like most about their neighborhood)</p>	<p>Fear for rising levels of crime (specifically in Clifton)</p>	<p>Self-reliance and confidence in government services can foster a sense of safety.</p>

**Potential plan considerations:**

- Explore 20-minute communities, specifically focused on Clifton, Whitewater, Mack and Loma.
- Land use and Transportation to support economically vibrant places.
- Define rural areas vs. more urban areas. Be clearer on appropriate growth patterns in different contexts.
- Simplified development procedures and a community expressed desire to ease restrictions on ADU and Multi-family development.
- The future of transit such as EV, drop off zones and autonomous vehicles.

<b>Economic Strength</b>		
Driving Forces	Limitations	Why this Matters for our Future
<p>The natural environment and recreation are highest rated for why people love Mesa County.</p> <p>Strong recreation economy over the past 10 years, increase in tourism, contributing millions to the economy (Approx. 464 Million in impact)</p> <p>Over 10,000 miles of recreational trails.</p>	<p>Increased recreation has impacts to natural lands.</p>	<p>Future planning should address the balance of accommodating economy.</p>

<p>Agricultural history and rural setting tied to the last 100 years of history.</p> <p>Rural development policies have strong support. There is a strong desire to continue to support working agricultural lands.</p>	<p>Balancing growth demands and agricultural needs.</p> <p>Water availability for agriculture balanced with increased demand from growing communities.</p>	<p>Celebrate these legacy landscapes through conservation, without limiting uses for ranchers and farmers to maintain their livelihood.</p>
<p>A strong community desire to support economic expansion in Agricultural tourism and outdoor industries.</p>	<p>Balancing impacts of tourism and agricultural needs.</p>	<p>Planning should coordinate where the river valley has opportunity for synergistic uses.</p>
<p>A strong medical/healthcare economy and University students.</p>	<p>Loss of workforce (to the front range).</p>	<p>Appropriate land uses to support future businesses in key areas.</p>
<p>Strong climate of development, and strong desire from the community to expand local businesses and attract high-quality jobs.</p>	<p>Development pressure on unincorporated areas to offer more services.</p>	<p>Support continued commercial growth, especially small business. Focus more on nodal/neighborhood local scale development, reducing car trips.</p> <p>Increase to retail/restaurant in unincorporated areas.</p>
<p>Long history of transit.</p> <p>Access to I-70 supports strong freight and shipping. History of rail connecting the region to the west.</p>	<p>Managing trucking and industry and traffic to promote community friendly roads.</p> <p>I-70 related issues (closures/low clearance/weather) can impede access to businesses.</p>	<p>Mesa County supports significant interstate and regional freight movement</p> <p>The county imports and exports commodities that rely on the road and rail network</p>

**Potential plan considerations:**

- Business incentives.
- Provision on basic services in rural areas.

<b>Rural Character</b>		
<b>Driving Forces</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Why This Matters for our Future</b>
Nearly 72.7% of the County is federally owned/managed.	Mesa County has limited influence on balance industries and overuse of lands.	These areas will likely not change in future planning efforts.



98.3% of the Mesa County land area is zoned as AFT (Agriculture, Forestry and Transitional)	Land uses in the AFT zoning areas are predominantly agricultural and residential.  Co State Law- 35 Acres State policy on large lot development patterns.	These areas will likely not change in future planning efforts.
Heritage and views to the Mesa, Monument and Mt. Garfield surround Mesa communities	These popular areas increase crowds and risk land being 'loved to death'	Coordinate with recreation plans to support impacts to high use areas.  Land use policy that will preserve community assets.  Support multimodal trail connections to high-use trailheads
Colorado River, Gunnison River and river related activities (rafting fishing, paddling, etc...)	River and stream corridors are particularly sensitive habitats.	These areas will likely not change in future planning efforts.
Strong sense of stewardship for natural lands.  Farming has increased in the region by 9%, but farm sizes are generally smaller.	Concern for encroachment and competing land uses.	Planning needs to consider growth policy to preserve agriculture and ranching

**Potential plan considerations:**

- Land banking or incubator spaces to support agricultural industries.
- Conservation easements policy

<b>Environmental Resilience</b>		
<b>Driving Forces</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Why this Matters for our Future</b>
Strong sense of stewardship	Division of county controlled and federal land may not be fully understood	Communicating the County's desire to conserve land and ability to do so within jurisdictional boundaries can support greater understanding  Setting a strong example will help in working with federal partners
Wildfires and Droughts are impacting the landscape	Water supply is a critical issue the viability of agricultural industry,	Water policy and conservation needs to be addressed to support



including air quality and agriculture.	residents, and lifestyle in the region.	projected growth in the region.  Adapting to lower water availability scenarios can be considered over the planning horizon
Oil and gas has been the foundation for a long time- Existing pipeline supports strong marketability	Boom and bust cycles have long driven the local economy. Coal industry closing down in N. Colo Counties.  Pipeline infrastructure in need of maintenance.  Some division in the community around the types of energy industry. Incorporated areas favor renewable and unincorporated areas lean towards natural gas extraction.	Recent interest and increasing technology and capacity of green industries have opportunity to diversity and provide more resilience to jobs and workforce. (Including carbon sequestration, hydrogen, solar, geothermal).  There is a community value to providing clean energy and lower costs  Natural gas futures are strong and there are leadership opportunities in low emissions gas
Green industry attraction would for economic diversification and jobs creation.	Regulatory environment is challenging/ policy and permitting.  Habitat impacts and growing land areas infringe on extraction areas.	Transmission infrastructure may be needed to support alternative energies and expanded electric use.  Integrating more distributed energy resources requires county coordination with other agencies
Mesa University is a strong asset for research and partnership.	Opportunities may be limited by available programs and interest	Better aligning with University goals would allow for increased support and integration of graduates and university resources

**Potential plan considerations:**

- Look into federal mineral lease districts. Coordinate with BLM on large scale production opportunities.
- Support pipeline integrity programs on County lands
- Support Renewable Energy goals.
- Establish clear conservation land use goals
- Encourage energy development as a county priority
- Broadband in rural areas to support increased businesses.

**7. What types of housing development patterns do you think should be encouraged in unincorporated areas in the future? (Select all that apply) (Multiple Choice)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Multi-family housing in our more developed rural communities	3%	2	6%	2
Smaller single-family lots, directed to more dense centers to encourage more affordable options	7%	5	13%	4
Midsized single-family lots, similar to current trends	13%	9	9%	3
More rural ranching and estate lots (~35 acres)	7%	5	6%	2
Clustered conservation development	15%	10	19%	6
A mix of all the above	34%	23	31%	10
Do not encourage future housing in unincorporated areas	18%	12	13%	4
Other	1%	1	3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**8. How might we balance agricultural land preservation and natural land preservation with the demand for future housing growth? (Select all that apply) (Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Don't do anything	1%	1	0%	0
More policy and financial support for agriculture	23%	24	22%	7
Encourage growth in urban areas (Grand Junction, Fruita and Palisade)	39%	40	32%	10
Encourage growth in Clifton and Whitewater	28%	29	34%	11
Make Mesa County less desirable and reduce our tax base	8%	8	3%	1
None of the above	0%	0	6%	2
Other	1%	1	3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**9. How would you answer the question “How does the County want to grow?” (Select one response) (Multiple Choice)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Stay the same- assume 32% unincorporated growth	17%	11	12%	4
Direct more to the municipalities- assume 25% or less growth	44%	28	41%	13
Capture more in the County- assume 35% or more growth	21%	13	25%	8
I do not know yet	17%	11	22%	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**10. Which statement best describes your reaction to Scenario A: “Focused Growth in Unincorporated County” (Select one response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Scenario generally seems appropriate	29%	17	50%	16
Worth exploring but make modifications to this scenario	32%	19	31%	10
Other scenarios are more appealing or feasible	37%	22	19%	6
Other	2%	1	0%	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**11. Which statement best describes your reaction to Scenario B: “Minimal Growth in Unincorporated County” (Select one response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Scenario generally seems appropriate	35%	20	40%	13
Worth exploring but make modifications to this scenario	38%	22	38%	12
Other scenarios are more appealing or feasible	28%	16	22%	7
Other	0%	0	0%	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**12. Which statement best describes your reaction to Scenario C: “Undirected Growth in Unincorporated County” (Select one response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Scenario generally seems appropriate	5%	3	3%	1
Worth exploring but make modifications to this scenario	17%	10	16%	5
Other scenarios are more appealing or feasible	76%	45	78%	24
Other	2%	1	3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>31</b>

**13. Which Scenario do you think best supports plan drivers? (Select one response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Alternative A – Focused Growth	40%	25	63%	20
Alternative B – Minimal Growth	37%	23	25%	8
Alternative C – Undirected Growth	3%	2	3%	1
I would like a combination of the Scenarios	16%	10	6%	2
I’m not sure yet	3%	2	3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**14. Which Scenario do you anticipate would best provide the quality of life you desire? (Select one response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Alternative A – Focused Growth	36%	22	50%	16
Alternative B – Minimal Growth	48%	29	35%	11
Alternative C – Undirected Growth	5%	3	3%	1
I would like a combination of the Scenarios	10%	6	9%	3
I’m not sure yet	2%	1	3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**II. Themes and Values**

15. Do you agree that the following themes are important themes for the future of Mesa County? (0, completely disagree – 10, completely agree)

Responses		
	In-Person Average	Online Survey Average
Build Community with Housing and Transit	6.0	8.0
Legacy of Rural Character	9.1	6.0
Diversity and Economic Strength	8.4	8.5
Environmental Preservation and Resilience	9.5	9.0

**III. Open Comment Cards: “Are we missing anything?”**

- Growth in urban areas, including Whitewater in Clifton but I strongly disagree with the county policies that limit landowners’ ability to develop privately owned property. No policies to limit zoning changes of agriculture land.
- Stop using large growth and focus on preserving/maintaining infrastructure we have.
- Conservation cluster seems appealing. One thought is to preserve farmland and parcel opportunities for veterans to learn skills, get affordable, housing, and grow food for the community.
- How does this planning effort affect the 201 boundary – city annexation?
- Encourage new growth to use measurable energy and with wise preservation so we create a resilient community in the decades ahead.
- Housing and water go hand in hand. We need to keep that in mind, and not outbuild for the available water.
- Policy to protect agriculture, needs to address, balancing current landowners, opinions with prioritizing it. Also, for city annexation in my experience inhibits development.
- Housing needs a progression – starter homes, rental townhome, to subdivision to estate.
- The Mesa County land planning area map should show the city of Grand Junction’s urban development boundary established by the 2021 Grand Junction Comprehensive Plan and not just the city limits for the city. This area, which includes some unincorporated Mesa County, should not be planned for future development in this plan.
- Not enough information to develop a detailed map.
- Consider encouraging grow centers in the other CDPs - not just Clifton and Whitewater.
- I believe agriculture is crucial to our future, but many of the current practices are harmful/not sustainable. How do we express the need for moving toward environmentally sustainable agriculture with including diversity to energy?
- I would like to see some pointed conversation around sustainability being greater than climate change. Should the county invest in new buildings with solar panels, electric fleets, etc.?
- Under the environmental, preservation and resilience value, I think that should be redefined. It has a heavy focus on energy development and energy as an economic driver.
- The more parks we have, the more they draw the bums for lack of a better word. Homes should have yards for children to play at home.

## DESIGNWORKSHOP

Landscape Architecture

Planning

Urban Design

Strategic Services

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## OPEN HOUSE FEEDBACK SUMMARY

To: Mesa County, Greg Moberg and Sean Norris

From: Anna Laybourn, Alison Bourquin, Emily Burrowes, and  
Ashley McKnight

Date: October 10, 2022

Project Name: Mesa County Master Plan

Project #: 6699

Subject: Community Open House Feedback

### Introduction

On Tuesday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, staff from Design Workshop and Mesa County convened 90-minute, open-house structure workshops at the Mesa County Fairgrounds to collect community input about Mesa County's growth over the next 10 years. The team held three workshops throughout the day (morning, afternoon and evening) to accommodate various community members. The meeting was noticed through flyers, email blasts and postcards sent to a random sample of Mesa County residents.

Each workshop included an informational session, a clicker-based (keypad polling) survey to collect basic biographical information and feedback on growth issues, a growth scenario exercise and a mapping activity for participants to locate potential development and growth. Analyses of these workshop activities revealed common themes that reinforce the four Master Plan "drivers." Total attendance was approximately 53 community members.

Following the Open House, all materials were uploaded to the Mesa Together website. In addition, an online virtual platform, social pinpoint, offered the opportunity to interact virtually through a similar survey and mapping activity to the open house. The online platform was available to October 3<sup>rd</sup> and was shared through email and social media.

### Workshop Summary



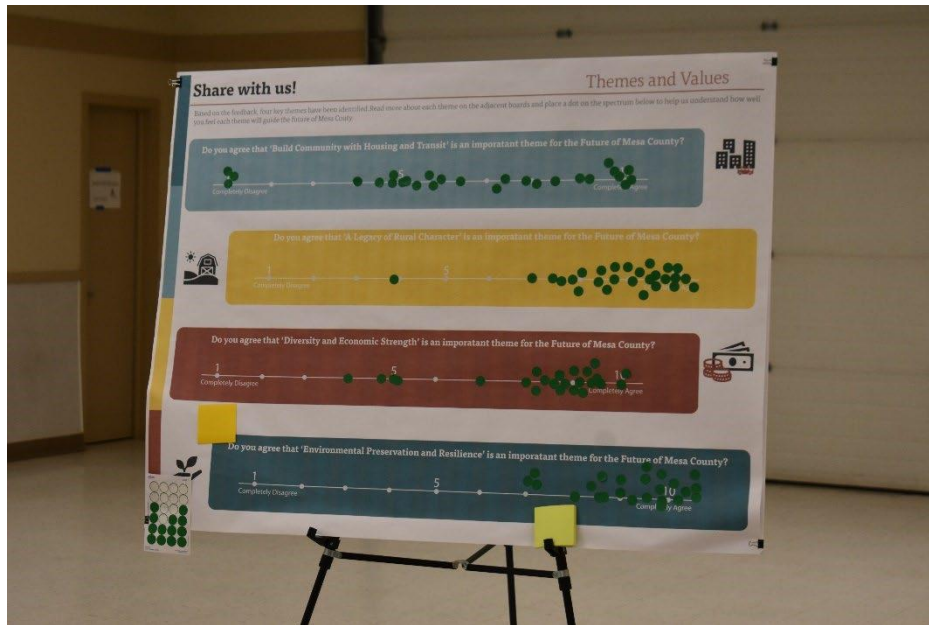
Figure 1: Photos from workshops

Each workshop session began with an informational presentation and poster session that explained the Master Plan process and existing conditions of Mesa County (See Figure 1). Community members learned about the four drivers

(Plan Drivers) for the future of Mesa County that the Master Plan team had identified based on prior community survey data and existing conditions studies. These drivers are:

- Build Community with Housing and Transit
- Diversity and Economic Strength
- A Legacy of Rural Character
- Environmental Preservation and Resilience

Community members were able to give input on which Plan Drivers they thought would be most important to the Master Plan (See Figure 2).






**Figure 2:** Plan Drivers board with engagement from workshop

In the second workshop exercise, attendees were asked the question, “In the next 10 years, how would you like to see Mesa County grow?” Participants then responded to three different growth pattern scenarios. The team chose the scenarios based on areas of limitation as determined by analysis of land ownership, jurisdiction, zoning, land use and hazards. The scenarios differed in quantities and distribution of potential development within the County. The three scenarios were as follows:



- Scenario A: Focused Growth in Unincorporated County

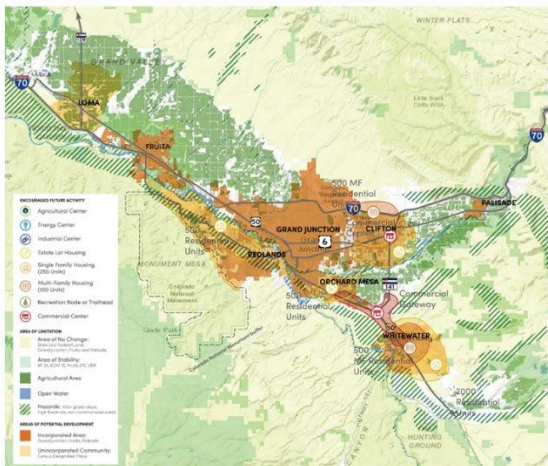
### Scenario A- Focused Growth in Unincorporated County

Assumes approximately 5,000 Housing Units (60% projected growth is captured in municipalities)




Growth directed to centers to minimize agricultural land impacts

Commercial growth along 141 and Hwy 50 Corridors



- Scenario B: Minimal Growth in Unincorporated County

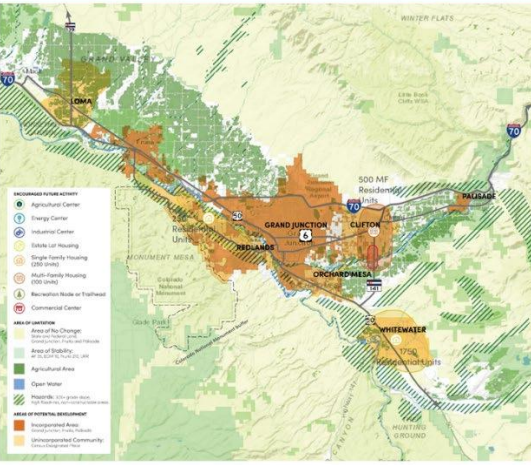
### Scenario B- Minimal Growth in Unincorporated County

Assumes approximately 2,500 Housing Units (80% Projected Growth is captured in municipalities)

Preserves agricultural land


Commercial growth along 141







- Scenario C: Undirected Growth

Scenario C- Undirected Growth



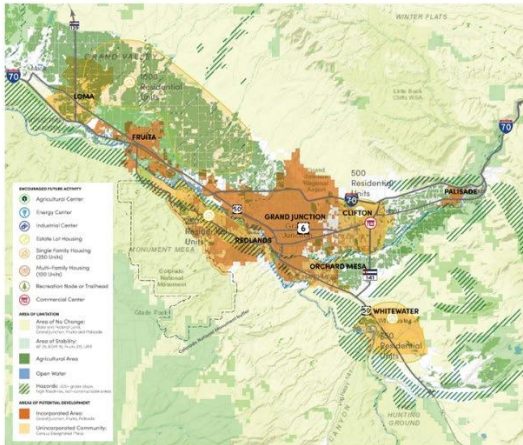




*Assumes most growth is captured in municipalities and on large estate lots in rural areas*

*Preserves private property rights but loss of some productive agriculture*

*Nodes of commercial at key intersections*



Workshop participants largely expressed a preference for Scenario A and Scenario B. While Scenario A fit the plan drivers, Scenario B fit their desired lifestyle.

The workshops concluded with a clicker survey activity and a mapping activity. In the mapping activity, community members broke into three groups to provide further input on future land use and growth. Groups used stickers to locate categories of potential activities, markers to draw trail systems and sticky notes to add further comment (Figure 3). The following sections summarize the results of both the survey and mapping activities.





Figure 3: Photos from mapping activity in workshops

## Results: Survey

Workshop participants took a clicker-based survey asking basic information about themselves and for their input on the Master Plan. The same survey was also available on Social Pinpoint. Several key takeaways emerged from the data. The summary of responses for individual survey questions follows the key takeaways.

### Key Takeaways

1. Most participants are from incorporated Mesa County.
2. Environmental Preservation and Resilience was the most important Plan Driver.
3. Participants would like to see a varied mix of housing development patterns in unincorporated areas.
4. Participants would prefer that future growth be focused in urban areas (Grand Junction, Fruita and Palisade) as well as Clifton and Whitewater.
5. A high percentage of participants would support more policy and financial support for agriculture.
6. Following the growth pattern scenario exercise, participants gravitated towards Scenario A and B. Scenario A supported the plan drivers the most, but Scenario B provided the quality-of-life participants desired. Scenario C was not favored.

### I. Multiple Choice

1. What activities are you most excited for this fall? (Select one response) (Multiple Choice)

2. How have you participated in the Mesa Together Master Plan process so far? (Select all that apply)

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Hiking at the Monument, Mesa or Mt. Garfield	14%	9	N/A	N/A
Mountain biking on the Mesa or Rabbit Valley	5%	3	N/A	N/A
Hunting Season	17%	11	N/A	N/A
Colorado Mountain Winefest in Palisade	2%	1	N/A	N/A
Back to School activities	2%	1	N/A	N/A
Relaxing outdoors in cooler weather	48%	32	N/A	N/A
Fall harvest	5%	3	N/A	N/A
Other	9%	6	N/A	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>

(Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Interview/Focus Group	16%	15	5%	2
Mail-in/Online Survey	31%	29	38%	14
Technical Advisory Committee Meetings	5%	5	3%	1
County staff or Commission/Board involvement	15%	14	19%	7
First time involved	29%	28	32%	12
Other	4%	4	3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>37</b>

3. Where do you live? (Select one response)

Responses				
	In-Person Event		Online Survey	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Incorporated Mesa County (Fruita, Grand Junction, Collbran, De Beque, Palisade)	42%	28	69%	22
Unincorporated Mesa County- CDP (Clifton, Redlands, Orchard Mesa, Fruitvale, Mack or Loma)	39%	26	25%	8
Other Unincorporated Mesa County- Rural Area	17%	11	6%	2
Live outside of Mesa County	2%	1	0%	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

4. How did you hear about our meeting today? (Select all that apply)

Responses				
	In-Person Event		Online Survey	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Email	41%	33	N/A	N/A
Flyer	15%	12	N/A	N/A
Post Card or Trifold Mail	11%	9	N/A	N/A
Social Media	5%	4	N/A	N/A
Television	0%	0	N/A	N/A
Newspaper or radio	3%	2	N/A	N/A
Signs	0%	0	N/A	N/A
Word of mouth	20%	16	N/A	N/A
Other	5%	4	N/A	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>

**5. What do you think the most important outcomes of this Master Plan could be? (Select all that apply)  
(Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)**

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Protect natural resources (water, soil, agriculture, etc.)	27%	43	41%	13
Prioritize County investments in infrastructure and public services	22%	36	19%	6
Be proactive in creating diverse housing opportunities	20%	33	12%	4
Encourage diversification of our economic base	14%	23	22%	7
Support rural communities to thrive	15%	24	6%	2
Other	2%	3	0%	0
None of the above	0%	0	0%	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

**6. At first glance, how do these plan drivers resonate with you? (Select one response) (Multiple Choice)**

- Build Community with Housing and Transit
- Diversity and Economic Strength
- A Legacy of Rural Character
- Environmental Preservation and Resilience

<b>Responses</b>				
	<b>In-Person Event</b>		<b>Online Survey</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Strongly Agree	12%	8	N/A	N/A
Agree	46%	30	N/A	N/A
Somewhat Agree	28%	18	N/A	N/A
Neutral	5%	3	N/A	N/A
Somewhat Disagree	6%	4	N/A	N/A
Disagree	2%	1	N/A	N/A
Strongly Disagree	2%	1	N/A	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>

- Please change the word transit to transportation or access or mobility.
- I have not seen an answer to the question that I asked at the pre-planning meeting. Show me the water/wastewater.
- Often multifamily housing is for low-income cash for every community area would be better off with a mix of usage.
- Let's be the first net zero county in Colorado.
- Do not require sewer for developer if the land can handle septic. Wasted expense of added cost putting in dry line sewer is a waste of money added to housing cost.

#### IV. Social Pinpoint: Contact Information

- Cassandra Bocker: cassbocker@gmail.com
- Doni O'Rourke: doniorourke@bresnan.net
- Erik Cornelison: alienballoon@gmail.com
- Karla Klemm: karla.klemm@mesacounty.us
- Kris Snowcoton@gmail.com
- Larry Kempton III: Lkempton3@gmail.com
- sshrader@bonsai-design.com

#### Results: Social Pinpoint Engagement

For community members who could not attend the workshops, they were given the opportunity to participate in the same survey and map activity using the online platform Social Pinpoint. The Social Pinpoint activities were open for two weeks following the workshops. Figure 4 displays the two-week activity on Social Pinpoint. Social Pinpoint results are included within the following sections, which summarize the mapping activity and survey results.

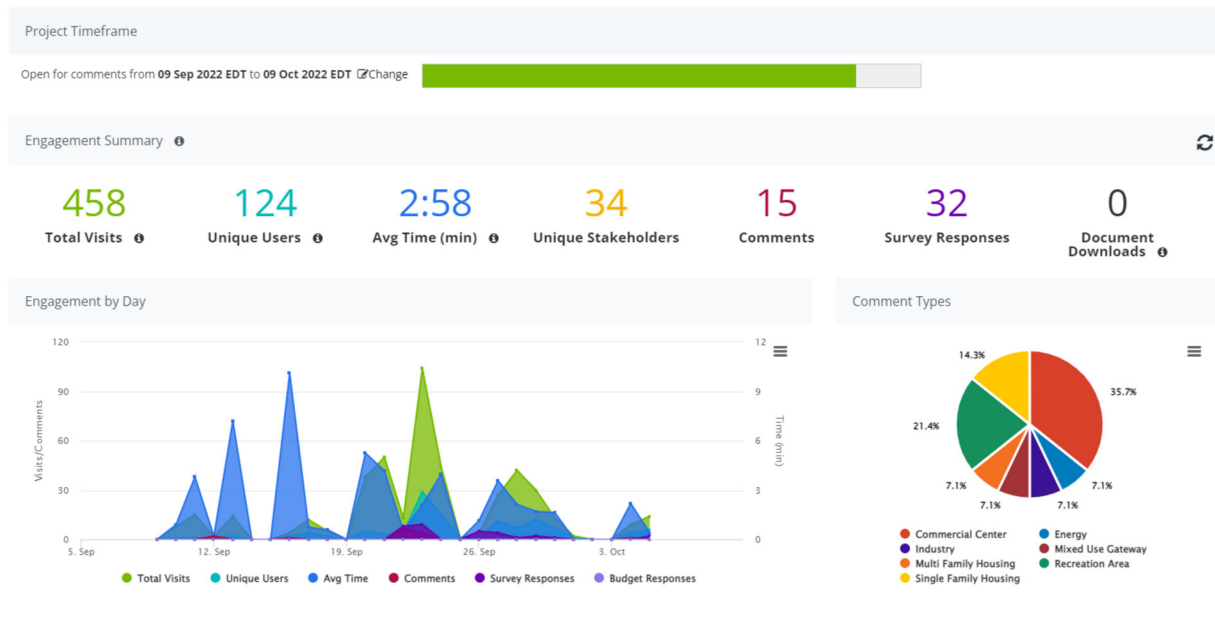


Figure 4: Social Pinpoint engagement summary



## Results: Map Activity

Figures 5 and 6 display feedback from the in-person workshops and the Social Pinpoint engagement, respectively. Figure 5 is a composite of nine maps, whereby three groups in each of the three workshops created a map.

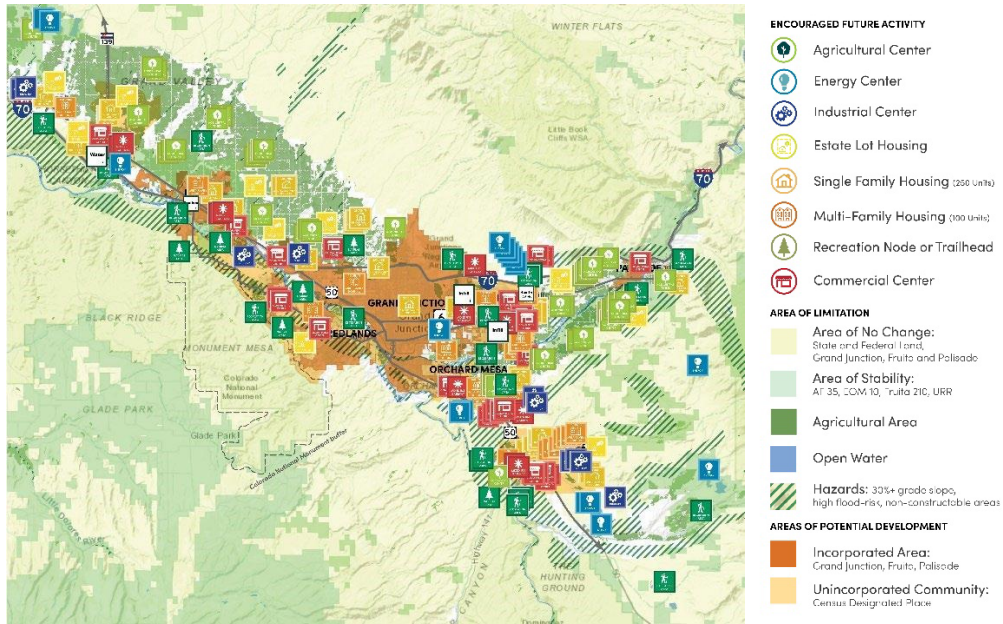


Figure 5: Composite map of workshop group responses

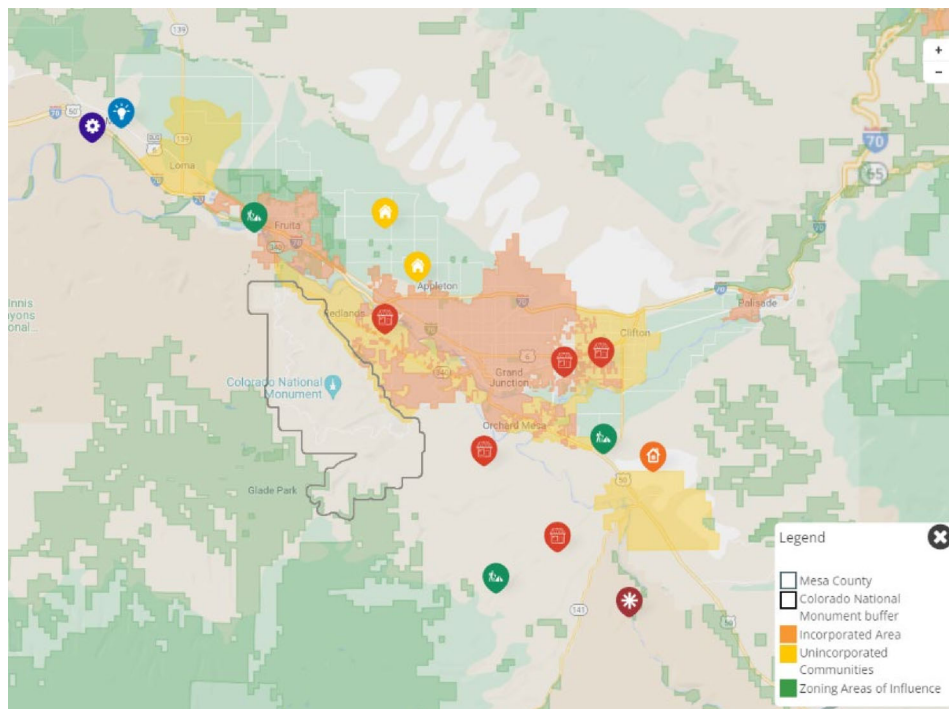


Figure 6: Social Pinpoint map activity responses

Taking the data together, common themes emerged. Figure 7 shows a summary map synthesis of the workshops and Social Pinpoint data that illustrates these themes. The data are summarized in depth below as follows.

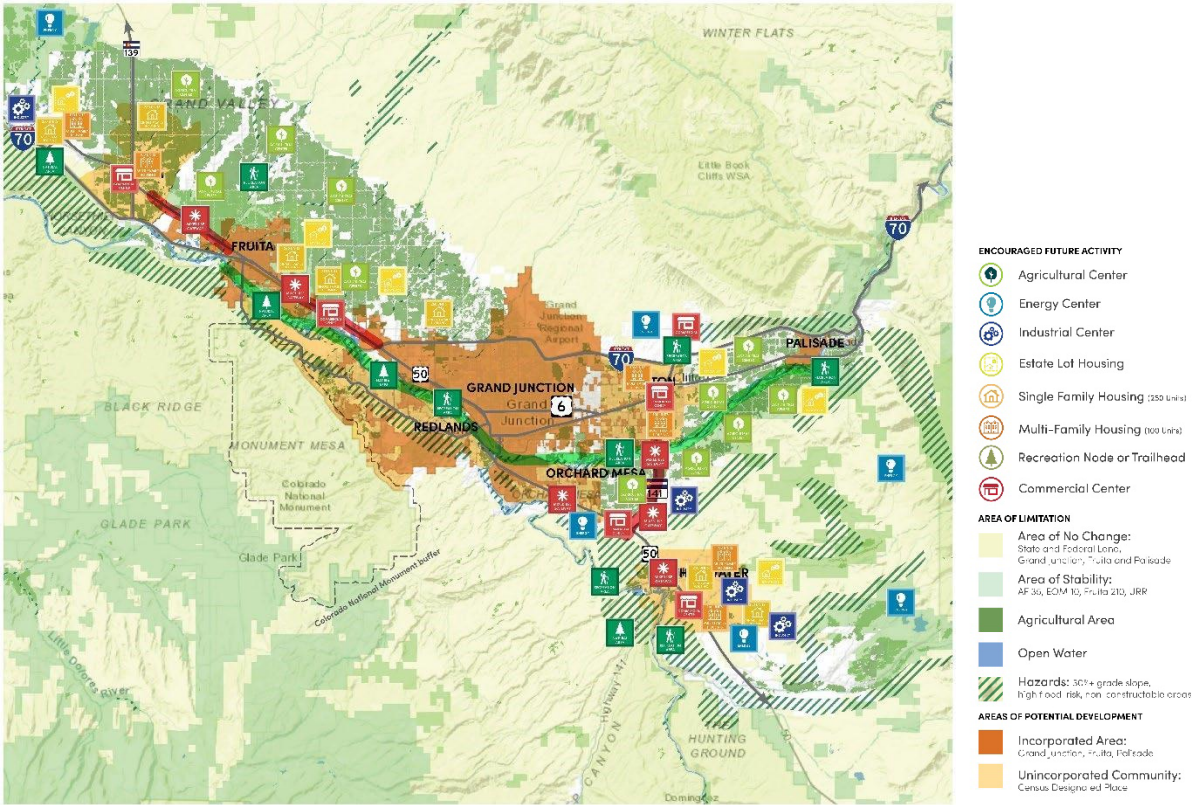


Figure 7: Summary of mapping activity responses from both in-person workshops and Social Pinpoint

### Plan Driver 1: Build Community with Housing and Transit

Overall, most people expressed preferences for high density development towards Clifton and Whitewater. High density development included residential with single and multi-family housing, along with commercial corridors along Colorado State Highway 141 and US Route 50 between Clifton and Whitewater. While Whitewater would need basic infrastructure, it has the capacity for high density development. Clifton, on the other hand, already has basic infrastructure, though it needs improvement. Discussions around parks and sidewalks were the most immediate needs for Clifton’s infrastructure that must be address before any future development. Clifton also has many buildings that are not currently occupied, so doing infill development prior to new development is also a must. Many community members agreed that rather than build new, Mesa County should fix what is already there.

Housing affordability was also a focal concern. Participants expressed an interest in availability of affordable housing, including the potential for more starter homes. Community members also expressed the concern to spread out the affordable housing and integrate it more with market housing to help reduce crime rates.

### Plan Driver 2: Diversity and Economic Strength

Participants expressed an interest in commercial corridors along I-70, connecting Loma to Fruita and Grand Junction. There is space in between these areas, which community members believe has potential for development.

Ideas about economic development also centered on the energy generation that will be necessary to accommodate growing development, and community members expressed a preference for clean, locally generated energy. Community members thought it would be best to have centers for solar energy generation closest to population centers and natural gas generation further out from the jurisdictions. Ideally, as there is a push towards green energy,



it would be great to make Mesa County a net zero county in the future. Participants believed Whitewater would have the capacity to accommodate these resources, along with areas right outside Clifton, Orchard Mesa and Mack.

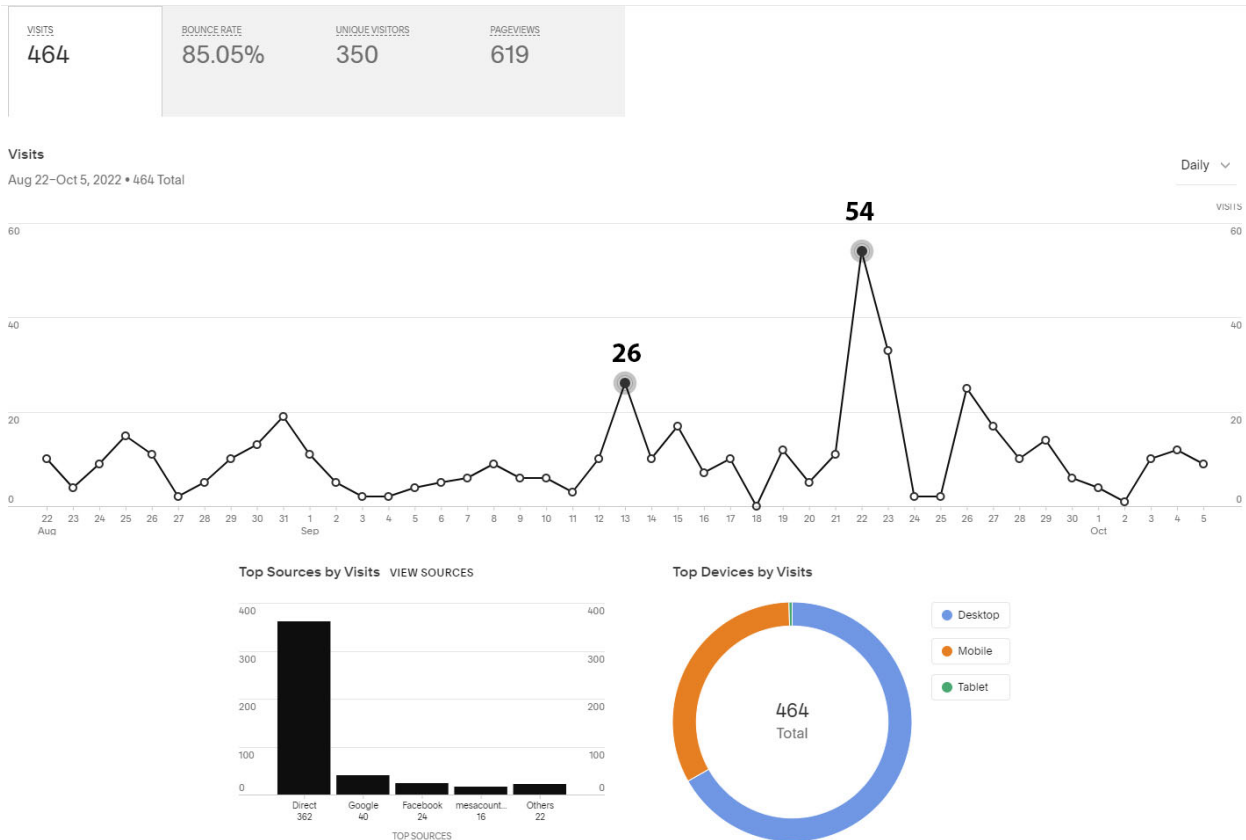
*Driver 3: A Legacy of Rural Character and Driver 4: Environmental Preservation and Resilience*

While there was a push for development, participants also expressed a desire to preserve agricultural and open space lands. Many people agreed the current agriculture land between Orchard Mesa and Palisade should remain as an agricultural center, along with the land north of Fruita. Participants felt that any residential development within these areas should be estate lots or single family.

Recreation within open space lands was also a common topic within workshop groups. Participants expressed an openness to recreational uses within these areas and also expressed that a permit system in these corridors would help prevent harmful impacts and help preserve the natural character of the landscape; given the growing popularity of outdoor recreation in Mesa County, many community members expressed concern about the potential of the County becoming the next Moab.

Lastly, participants communicated interest in improved connectivity of recreational corridors. Participants expressed an interest in a more completely connected Riverfront Trail that avoids use of streets with two-way traffic and expanded recreational activities along the trail. It was also proposed that jurisdictions in Mesa County might be better connected by extending existing recreational trails. Lastly, a recreational corridor along the Colorado River might catalyze or facilitate preservation of open natural lands.

**Website**



Through out the period of engagement, the Mesa Together Website received 464 visits. These visits were primarily by desktop users who directly input the meeting link. The highest number of visits corresponds to the social media blast sent by the county. The second highest number of visits corresponds to the day of the Open House.

## **Conclusion**

Key themes were largely consistent across the growth scenario planning activity, survey and mapping activity, and between in-person workshops and Social Pinpoint. Community members would like to see the County prioritize environmental preservation and resilience, with an emphasis on maintaining the natural character of the landscape and agriculture. Consistent with this priority, participants also expressed an interest in future development being concentrated within unincorporated areas that already have infrastructure to accommodate that development and areas that have the capacity for growth. Within that development, there was an interest in more affordable housing and a mix of housing typologies. Taken together, the Mesa County Master Plan team will take these findings and apply them towards the next steps.