

# Design and Visual Resources Element

*"Subdivisions should be designed as if conservation matters." - Randall Arendt*

**Vision: Design development to complement the environment, existing neighborhoods, and the historic nature of the County.**

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## Introduction

The quality of life enjoyed by County residents can in many ways be attributed to our amazing natural mountain setting. As growth continues to occur in the County, the type of development that occurs can have a direct impact on our quality of life. Appropriately placed and designed buildings can complement the natural environment and essentially serve as extension to the natural landscape. However, inappropriately designed development can detract from the area's overall character. It is the goal of this element to encourage types of development design that fit with the natural landscape. It is not the intent of this element to dictate to minute detail the type of design that should be used. In fact, there are many types of architectural and site design styles that can complement our surroundings.

The County is blessed with many highly scenic visual resources. High mountain peaks are the most obvious of these visual resources, but they also include many other features such as open meadows, riparian corridors, wetland areas, and forested areas. Development will inevitably occur within some of these areas. However, the way that development is placed in these areas can have a profound effect on the visual landscape. For example, tucking residential homesites into trees at the edge of a meadow can preserve the view of the meadow. Keeping building heights below the forest canopy and using materials that blend with the forest can help maintain the visual dominance of the forest. This element attempts to guide the appropriate placement of development so that the natural landscape continues to be the dominant view.

When one reviews the policies of this Plan, the emphasis on avoiding impacts to open meadows, environmentally sensitive areas, forested areas, etc. may beg the question of what locations are appropriate for development. The intent of this element is to focus development in areas where it is screened. Thus, forested areas are looked upon as a favorable location for development, provided development is located in a manner that protects the overall visual character of the forest and avoids adverse environmental impacts.

## Countywide Design Program

Recognizing the importance of good design in future development, the County embarked in 2000 on a process to develop design standards and guidelines. A prominent consultant was hired to lead the effort, and a Countywide Design Advisory Group was formed. By the end of 2001, the Group had reached consensus on draft design standards and guidelines that the County should use in future development review. None of these standards and guidelines have yet been adopted by the County, although a number of the proposed standards are being packaged into an amendment to the Land Use and Development Code expected to occur in 2003. When fully implemented, these standards and guidelines will provide further guidance for the character of development in the County. Some of the policies in this element are based on recommendations from the draft standards and guidelines.

## Green Design

Buildings have a tremendous impact on the environment—both during construction and through their

operation. Considering ways to reduce the pressures or impacts resulting from new construction and existing structures can help protect our environment. A pragmatic means to address this is through incorporating green standards into new developments and remodels. Green standards refer to building design, construction strategies, and maintenance techniques that reduce environmental impacts by incorporating energy efficiency, water conservation, water minimization, pollution prevention, resource-efficient materials, and indoor environmental quality in all phases of a building's life.

In simple terms, the concept of "green" design means to design, construct, and maintain a building in such a way that it will minimize impacts on its environment throughout its life. Green built structures aim to incorporate resource conservation techniques. There are many benefits that stem from homes built to more stringent energy, water, and resource-efficiency standards. Some of these benefits include reduced energy consumption, protection of ecosystems, and improved occupant health. Promoting green buildings helps achieve sustainable and efficient use of resources in design, use of materials, siting, and land use.

There are many aspects of green design for designers and builders to consider. Deciding which measures are most important is not easy as green design priorities change, can be subjective, and are often driven by local, state, or federal incentives. The following lists some of the environmental values of green design:

- Minimizes impacts to the environment.
- Promotes environmentally responsible practices in construction.
- Conserves and safeguards water and energy.
- Reduces material use and selects low-impact materials.
- Provides greater efficiency and maximizes longevity.
- Reduces resource depletion and pollution.
- Protects indoor air quality.
- Improves site planning.

The BigHorn Improvement Center in the Town of Silverthorne is an example of a locally green built structure that incorporates green design concepts and eco-friendly amenities. The Center has won awards for sustainability as it incorporates and uses recycled materials and energy-saving methods (e.g., clerestroy windows, skylights, photovolataics, and solar walls). A green design program available through the County's Building Department was E-Star (Energy Rated Homes of Colorado). The program was available to developers and contractors for approximately 10-years and was never utilized. The discontinued program offered discounts to building permit fees for constructing to a minimum level of energy efficiency and using ecologically friendly materials.

## **Goals, Policies/Actions**

**Goal A. Visually important lands should be preserved and the rural mountain landscapes of the County should be maintained.**

Policy/Action 1. Basin master plans should identify and prioritize visually important lands. The following criteria should be used when identifying these lands:

- 1.1 Lands that provide visual separation between communities.
- 1.2 Lands that are visually prominent (e.g., hillsides, open meadows) as viewed from key public places (e.g., major arterials and highways, parks and public open space areas).

- Policy/Action 2. Work with the towns and other appropriate entities (e.g., U.S. Forest Service) to provide visual open space buffers around communities to maintain separation between communities and to emphasize the uniqueness of each community.
- Policy/Action 3. Keep lands of highest visual importance (as identified in basin master plans) as free as possible from visual impacts of buildings, storage, roadways, parking areas, and other development. Development of these lands should be limited to those areas that are visually screened from major public road rights-of-way and major public trails by existing vegetation or topography. Recreational uses in these areas are acceptable provided they complement the visual resources within the area.
- Policy/Action 4. Cluster development out of visually important lands, whenever possible, or cluster within forested areas.
- Policy/Action 5. Utilize Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) to transfer density from areas of highest visual importance to less visually sensitive lands.
  - 5.1 Lands of high visual importance should not be designated as TDR receiving areas.
- Policy/Action 6. Identify and consider acquisition of lands of highest visual importance for open space purposes where development cannot be visually screened because of site conditions (e.g., lack of vegetation).

**Goal B. Ensure that new development is designed in a visually sensitive manner, complementing the surrounding natural environment.**

- Policy/Action 1. New development should be subject to design standards and prescriptions for the mitigation of visual impacts to protect and preserve the rural landscapes.
  - 1.1 Amend the Land Use and Development Code to, where appropriate, incorporate the specific recommendations of the Draft Summit County Design Standards and Guidelines.
  - 1.2 Develop architectural design standards which promote a sense of place and community without mandating a monotonous style or inhibiting innovative design.
    - 1.2.1 Where appropriate, design new development to fit with historical architectural themes.
  - 1.3 Encourage innovative design and non-repetitive architecture to avoid excessive similarity in building design, while still promoting architecture appropriate to the setting.
- Policy/Action 2. Ensure that development density is consistent with the goal of protecting views of visually important lands.
- Policy/Action 3. Mitigate visual impacts by requiring the following, where appropriate: the use of building materials, building design (e.g., building mass, size, and height), colors,

location of structures, and landscaping, so that structures blend into the natural landscape.

- Policy/Action 4. Require the preservation of significant trees, where feasible, while allowing for forest management practices necessary for forest health and wildfire prevention.
- Policy/Action 5. Amend the Land Use and Development Code to require the undergrounding of new utility lines for new development.
- Policy/Action 6. The placement of new utilities should be done in a visually acceptable manner, maintaining existing vegetation and landscapes to the maximum extent possible.
- Policy/Action 7. Require building envelopes and/or disturbance envelopes to be established when necessary in new subdivisions to minimize visual and environmental impacts.
- Policy/Action 8. Preserve and protect existing significant natural features, such as distinctive landforms (rock outcrops).
- Policy/Action 9. Larger development projects (12 units or more) should provide a usable outdoor place, to provide a focal point for the site that is readily accessed by residents of the project.
- Policy/Action 10. Orient buildings to fit with the natural topography, clustering buildings when appropriate so that natural features and usable outdoor spaces are maintained and solar access is maximized.
- Policy/Action 11. Work with appropriate parties to ensure that the visual impacts of new roads are minimized and that roads maintain character with their surroundings.
- Policy/Action 12. Provide a visual continuity in the landscape design of a site compared to the surrounding area by “feathering” the edge of the forest into the site, rather than creating abrupt transitions between development and the natural landscape.

**Goal C. The open character of meadows and other open landscapes should be retained.**

- Policy/Action 1. Wherever possible, avoid locating buildings in meadows and open landscapes. Where it is not possible to avoid these areas, development should be located and designed according to the following guidelines:
  - 1.1 When possible, buildings should be located behind landforms, berms, or along forest edges to provide maximum screening.
  - 1.2 Buildings that must be located in open areas should be clustered, designed and intensely landscaped to blend into their surroundings to the maximum extent possible.

**Goal D. The visual dominance of forested areas should be retained.**

- Policy/Action 1. Where possible, development should be located in forested areas where it can be screened from view, while still maintaining the overall visual character of the forest.
- Policy/Action 2. Building heights in forested areas should not penetrate the tree canopy.

Policy/Action 3. Removal of trees on steep slopes and ridgelines should be discouraged.

Policy/Action 4. In partially forested areas, buildings should be located behind the front edge of trees to maximize the visual quality of the forest and gain the maximum effect of screening.

**Goal E. Avoid or minimize development impacts on steep hillsides and ridgelines.**

Policy/Action 1. Development on ridgelines and steep slopes should be avoided wherever possible. Where no feasible alternative exists, buildings on ridgelines and slopes should be located and designed so that the existing visual dominance of the natural landform, vegetation and topography is maintained.

Policy/Action 2. Minimize the need for grading, earth moving, vegetation removal, and site disturbance related to development on sloped areas.

Policy/Action 3. Grading or earth moving to create a flat building pad on a slope should be discouraged; instead, buildings should be stepped to fit with the natural terrain.

Green Design

**Goal F. Accelerate the adoption of green building practices, technologies, policies and standards in residential and commercial development.**

Policy/Action 1. Explore options, programs, and financial incentives to achieve a higher level of green design in new home construction and remodeling.

1.1. To the extent practical, develop a viable green building rating system(s) to encourage utilization of green and energy efficient building practices (e.g., Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

1.2. Develop a 'Built Green' checklist and standards to further support a common message to the consumer and the building community about energy, water, and durable products.

Policy/Action 2. Expand the County's supply of green buildings and environmentally sensitive structures.

- 2.1 Encourage home builders to use technologies, products, and practices which:
- Conserve water.
  - Provide greater energy and materials efficiency.
  - Reduce resource depletion and pollution.
  - Protect indoor air quality.
  - Result in more durable, comfortable home.

Policy/Action 3. Explore developing a model energy code for buildings that sets minimum energy efficiency standards for building construction.

Policy/Action 4. Amend the Code to require all new public buildings to meet green standards.

Policy/Action 5. Promote and provide awareness and technical assistance programs, resources, and information to the development community and homeowners (e.g., green built, energy efficient, and environmentally responsible buildings or related areas).

- 5.1 Educate the home buying public how homes built to green standards may be more affordable, due to lower operating cost and higher performance, and may also offer home buyers greater comfort, reduced maintenance cost, and higher resale value.

## Implementation Strategies

Many of the policies and actions identified in this element propose some future work, such as an amendment to the Land Use and Development Code, in order to see their successful implementation. The table below identifies specific strategies recommended to fully implement the Design and Visual Resources Element. Priorities are identified to give an indication of the current relative importance of a particular implementation strategy. These priorities are provided as guidelines only.

<b>Goal, Policy/Action</b>	<b>Project/Description</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
A.2., A.6	Involve the County, towns, and other appropriate entities (e.g., U.S. Forest Service, Open Space and Trails department) in a work program to acquire public interest or, in another manner, protect areas of high visual importance from development, where regulatory programs are not adequate. Each basin master plan should identify areas of highest visual importance, including visual open space buffers around communities.	Ongoing effort	Medium
A.5	Ensure that existing and future County TDR programs/regulations do not identify areas of high visual importance as TDR receiving areas. Where so, the programs and accompanying mapping should be amended to ensure that lands of high visual importance are not designated as TDR receiving areas. The County should undertake this effort as part of a public process.	6 months (once areas of high visual importance have been identified)	Low
B.1, B1.1, B1.2	Amend the Land Use and Development Code to incorporate countywide design standards and guidelines. Planning Department staff should initiate this amendment, utilizing the recommendations contained in the Draft Summit County Design Standards and Guidelines. Because the recommendations are extensive, the Planning Department should prioritize them and develop a code amendment package that includes the most important recommendations. A second effort should occur subsequently to incorporate other recommendations from the draft guidelines and standards. The standards should provide enough flexibility to not stifle creativity and variety in design.	6 months (initial code amendments)  1-2 years (subsequent code amendments)	High (initial code amendments)  Low (subsequent code amendments)
B.5	The Planning Department staff should initiate an amendment to the Land Use and Development Code to require underground of new utility lines for all new development.	3 months	Low
B.6., B.7	The Planning Department should initiate an amendment to the Land Use and Development Code subdivision standards that requires the establishment of building envelopes and/or site disturbance envelopes when necessary on all new platted lots. The building envelope includes the area within which the building footprint is allowed. The disturbance envelope includes the area in which grading, excavation, tree clearing, and other disturbances to land and vegetation is confined. These envelopes should be placed to avoid areas of high visual importance and to avoid environmentally sensitive areas.	3 months	High
	Summit County Road and Bridge and the Colorado Department of Transportation should initiate		

**Table 1. Design and Visual Resources Element Implementation Strategies**

<b>Goal, Policy/Action</b>	<b>Project/Description</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
B.11	a process to review roadway standards and proposals for new roadway expansions to ensure the roadways are designed with the most minimal impact on the landscape. Issues such as minimizing road widths, including native plantings along roadways, using soft shoulders outside urban areas, and avoiding unnecessary cut-and-fill slopes should all be considered.	1 year	Medium
F.1	The County should work with homeowners and the development community to explore incentives and programs to encourage a higher level of green design and energy efficiency in new home construction and remodeling.	2 years.	Low
F.4	Amend the Code to require all new municipal buildings to meet green standards. The County shall take initiative to amend the Code to ensure future developments serve as green building examples and incorporate green design techniques, standards, and energy efficient practices.	2 years	Low
F.5, F.5.1	The County should incorporate information on home construction with green standards into the County web site.	3 months	Medium

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