



# Rapid City Comprehensive Plan

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*Issues and Opportunities for the Plan to Address – July 2013*

## **Overview**

This paper summarizes key planning-related, issues, opportunities, and challenges facing Rapid City now and in the future. These issues and opportunities emerged from conversations with community stakeholders, elected and appointed officials, and City staff during the project kickoff meetings on May 14 and 15, 2013. The ideas documented in this paper will be used to help inform and guide the Comprehensive Plan process as it moves forward, so that the Plan can remain focused on the most relevant and important issues. As additional input from other stakeholders and community members is gathered, this paper will be refined and updated as needed.

## **Issues and Opportunities**

The following issues and opportunities are listed in no particular order, but are grouped into categories of related topics, which include:

- Growth and Development
- Economic Vitality
- Community Appearance and Amenities
- Community Demographics
- Transportation and Utility Infrastructure
- Communication and Coordination

## **Growth and Development**

### **Growth and coordination at the community's edges**

New, outward growth and development continues to occur at the community's edges. Coordination between the City and adjacent Counties, municipalities, and utility and service providers is currently occurring, but on a somewhat limited basis. The Plan should address coordination and planning within the City and 3-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction area in order to make more efficient use of City

and County resources, and to add predictability for area residents in terms of annexation, development projects, public infrastructure improvements, services, and design standards.

### **Developable land available in town and at the perimeter**

Rapid City has a significant amount of developable land both at the community’s perimeter and on many in-town parcels. Outward growth of the City to the west is becoming constrained due to steep hillsides, yet there are vacant lands located to the north, east and south that can be developed should utilities and urban services be provided. Factors such as higher land costs, natural drainageways, hillsides, facility conflicts around the landfill and airport, and availability of services, has resulted in a “leapfrog” pattern of development on many closer-in parcels. Over time, development interest in infill development on those unused tracts will likely begin to increase as outward growth opportunities become more limited, because of their closer-in locations and proximity to existing infrastructure and services.

### **Focusing reinvestment and redevelopment**

As with infill development, as land availability for outward growth decreases, more reinvestment in and redevelopment of underutilized properties may be needed to make more efficient use of closer-in land and infrastructure. The plan should clearly identify redevelopment opportunities in and around the downtown core, at the City’s two original shopping centers, Baken Park and Rushmore Mall, and at key locations along major corridors. In addition, the plan should address appropriate transitions between redevelopment areas and existing uses and coordination between land use and transportation.

### **Differentiating neighborhood areas**

Rapid City features a broad assortment of existing, established neighborhoods and new, growing development areas. Many existing neighborhoods are viewed as “stable” and unlikely to experience much change over the planning horizon. In these areas, the plan should address their unique characteristics and histories. On the other hand, some neighborhoods are just emerging and distinct identities and connections to the City may not be clearly established. The plan should identify opportunities to recognize and unify individual developments as part of distinct neighborhood areas. The plan should also address the roles of parks, recreation, schools, and transportation connections in neighborhood identity and vitality.

## **Economic Vitality**

### **Diversifying the economy**

The City seeks to diversify its economic base, with high-wage jobs that provide an alternative to the tourism and service-based industries prevalent in Rapid City. Recognizing the challenges associated with attracting existing industry – such as the highly-competitive incentive requirements and the risk related to long-term industry commitment – the City is concentrating on cultivating economic development using its local resources. The Comprehensive Plan should address ways the City can leverage its success with locally grown industry and provide sufficient land and resources to ensure

that new industry can thrive. Key elements will be integrating local higher education (e.g., School of Mines, University Center) with targeted ED clusters, recognizing that talent drives economic development and retaining talent from local university is key so the expansion of the Rapid City economy. The role of land uses around the Airport should be examined during the plan's creation to enhance economic development opportunities. The Plan will address "idea flow" as a key concept in innovation and tech industry, and will address ways to facilitate the exchange among local industry anchors, the academic institutions, startups, and retired Boomers that have sought out Rapid City for its quality of life and bring a wealth of insight and networks to the local community.

### **Exploring new fiscal and economic development tools**

Rapid City has a substantial set of infrastructure and capital improvement needs with limited resources to address them. Based on preliminary discussions with City staff and elected officials, the funding requirements associated with deferred maintenance, repairs, and expansion for roadways alone exceeds \$100M. The City operates within the State-mandated standards for property and sales tax and is limited in their ability to increase revenues, notwithstanding substantial impact from visitation that could, in theory, cover a greater share of the cost to maintain the City's systems. The City uses Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts to cover costs for system expansion and has benefited with long-term growth in the level of assessed valuation; however, the proportional benefit to residents may not be balanced and the resulting cost-of-service for new development may create a disproportional cost to the City. The Comprehensive Plan should identify opportunities for the City to leverage its fiscal position and expand its resources to enhance the quality of life for local residents as well as tourists. The Plan should also address the goal of fiscal balance, the use of TIF and long term fiscal costs and benefits of this tool, and seek to balance City investment between infill and peripheral development. Finally, the Plan should address the need for a methodical Capital Improvements Program (CIP), developed with tiers that show planned improvements under current fiscal constraints as well as the potential improvements that could be achieved, if new revenues can be adopted.

### **Addressing housing quality, affordability, and diversity**

Rapid City's housing market features a large proportion of rental units, predominance of single-family homes, and somewhat low vacancy rates. These factors contribute to somewhat higher rental housing rates, which are out of reach for many fixed-income or lower-income residents. In addition to housing affordability, the plan should address challenges with housing quality, and building and property maintenance, especially in the rental housing market and in older parts of the City. Lastly, the plan should ensure that the overall diversity of housing options in Rapid City is sufficient to meet the community's changing needs (e.g., increased demand for retiree and senior housing options).

### **Continuing downtown revitalization**

Downtown revitalization has been a focus for Rapid City over the past decade. As a result, the area has been transformed through public and private investment into a vibrant gathering place for residents and visitors alike. The plan should address how to maintain the momentum of this success and continue to enliven downtown and the surrounding area, while retaining the authentic feel and

stores that meet the needs of locals. One specific potential impediment to Downtown revitalization is the blockage of transportation routes by trains and noise associated with mandated train horns. The Plan should also balance downtown economic and revitalization needs with needs in other areas of the community.

## **Community Appearance and Amenities**

### **Protecting and enhancing character-defining features**

Rapid City's unique natural features contribute significantly to the community's unique character and scenic quality. Dramatic hill sides, drainages, and grasslands, coupled with Ponderosa Pine forests and mountain views to the West are valued by residents and visitors alike. While some tools exist to support the protection of these assets, additional discussion is needed to determine whether a more robust set of tools (e.g., hillside protection ordinance, cluster development standards) is needed.

### **Elevating community appearance and development quality**

Some recent efforts have focused on improving the City's appearance, but additional steps could be taken to strengthen the community's image, especially at major gateways to the community. The Plan may also explore appearance-related topics such as general design and architectural standards for residential, commercial and industrial building, landscaping and screening of unattractive uses, historic preservation, and signage. An effort is underway to improve the gateway corridor along Mount Rushmore Road.

### **Retaining a high quality of life**

The 2011 community survey reveals that residents strongly value the City's parks, recreation, greenways, arts, and cultural offerings. The plan should address the important role that these elements play in the quality of life for residents, and also their ability to attract and retain visitors, employers, and future residents. In contrast, residents appear to be concerned about safety and the plan should address how public safety affects community desirability and quality of life.

## **Community Demographics**

### **Diversifying population**

Rapid City is home to a diverse population, both ethnically and economically. At times, this diversity has created a degree of tension within the community. The plan should address the importance of, and relationships between, the various populations such as Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino residents, and international students, and ways to collaborate on planning-related issues and opportunities.

### **Meeting the needs of an aging population**

The population in Rapid City is aging, and more and more seniors are moving to the community as a retirement destination. The plan will need to address the needs of an aging population, including different housing needs and preference, mobility challenges, access to medical care and other services, affordability on fixed incomes, and other related issues.

## **Engaging youth**

It takes time and resources to support youth engagement activities, and Rapid City is making it a priority to create opportunities for young people to participate in the community, be involved in leadership activities and successfully transition to contributing adults. The Plan will need to address how Partnership Rapid City, the school district and other contributing agencies, can best address the common challenges of youth participation in the community.

## **Transportation & Utility Infrastructure**

### **Prioritizing infrastructure improvements**

Existing water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure is beginning to show its age in some parts of the community, and some newly developing areas have “leap-frogged” to outlying areas requiring longer utility extensions and transportation improvements. Incremental improvements are made as resources are available, but deficiencies continue to emerge and prioritization of the many competing capital improvement needs will need to be addressed in the plan. The City will also need to examine its long-term strategy for making investments in extending water, sewer, the airport, and transportation infrastructure into new growth areas, as well as potential streetscape updates to attract redevelopment of infill areas.

### **Expanded multi-modal opportunities**

The City has taken steps to increase opportunities for walking and bicycling throughout the community for both recreational and commuting purposes in recent years. The greenway functions as the backbone of the city’s trail system and provides connections to many adjacent neighborhoods. However, additional linkages to newer areas of the community and improvements to on-street bicycle routes and sidewalks along established corridors are needed. The City will need to develop a strategy for closing the current gaps in the sidewalk system. Many Rapid City residents depend on public transportation to conduct their daily routines, but those who have other transportation choices generally do not opt to ride the bus. The plan must encourage public transportation strategies that continue to meet the needs of the transit-dependent rider while increasing the appeal of public transportation to discretionary riders.

### **Roadway needs**

The interstate (I-90) provides a significant east-west connection across Rapid City, but north-south connectivity is not as direct or efficient. Consideration should be given to the potential for a new loop road around the southeast side of Rapid City, as this is a major regional growth area. Better regional connections such as a direct regional highway connection to the Denver area could benefit Rapid City. Land use and transportation are closely related, and consideration should be given to identifying compatible zoning adjacent to major arterial roadways. Roadway maintenance lags in some areas, and strategies for funding better upkeep should be considered in the plan.

## **Communication and Coordination**

### **Building on other recent and related efforts**

The City of Rapid City, Pennington and Meade Counties, and several affiliated organizations and service providers have already completed a great deal of planning work, including recent efforts such as the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Airport Master Plan, Campus Master Plans, Vision 2020, Neighborhood Area Plans, 2008 Land Use Plan, and the 2011 Community Survey. The City is in the process of developing an Airport Overlay District. Despite all of this planning work, the Rapid City community does not have a unified vision or plan to comprehensively its long-term opportunities and challenges. The Plan must reflect and build on these recent efforts, and chart a clear course for future collaboration and initiatives.

### **Clear priorities and implementation strategy**

In addition to helping to develop a clear vision for the community, the Plan must also establish a roadmap for the vision's implementation that recognizes funding constraints and identifies priority investments that will be most beneficial to the community and defines a timeline for completion. Aligning these priorities with the CIP process should also be explored as part of the process.