

Colorado is Growing Too Fast

The “Mind of Colorado” survey of 900 Colorado registered voters released this month overwhelmingly showed that two thirds of the respondents believe the state is growing at too fast a pace. More than half of those surveyed say the growth effects are positive but they also believe that it is imperative with the high rate of growth to have better local planning. Local plans that are implemented were judged important to 94% of the respondents.

In the survey the people were asked to choose between having state legislation requiring cities and counties to prepare, with public involvement, comprehensive or master use plans. Eight out of ten respondents support a state planning requirement; 49% saying they strongly support the idea while 34% saying they somewhat support the idea.

Front Range residents support state planning more than others but in all cases at least 70% support the idea of having the state mandate local governments to prepare plans. They believe that the state should specify the criteria for what plans address and how the plans will relate to other local decision making affecting development.

In addition, 91% support the state requiring cities and counties to approve proposed developments in a timely manner if they are consistent with the community’s comprehensive plan development regulations. The same proportions of people also want the state to require cities and counties to make zoning and development regulations and their budgets for infrastructure consistent with their comprehensive plans.

City and county plans must also balance the rate of growth of residential and commercial developments so people who fill new jobs can live nearby according to 86% of the respondents. In addition neighboring jurisdictions must have plans that are compatible. This requirement would be mandated by the state and enforced by several different means.

One of the methods of enforcement that was favored by 7 out of 10 of the respondents was an appeals process that extends across jurisdictional boundaries. This process could be structured by using qualified mediators or using an agency or land appeals board at the regional level. Both were equally supported by those surveyed.

Statewide, according to 1990 statistics, Colorado has 40 people per square mile. Cities such as Boulder, Arvada, Lakewood, Longmont and Wheatridge have 3-4,000 people per square mile. With these population densities increasing, a majority of the people surveyed believe the state should provide financial assistance to help local governments pay for the cost of planning. Based on the fact that out of 70 counties, 53 already have written plans in place, how local governments decide who will get what financial aid remains to be seen.

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