

# Sanpete County

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## General Plan Update

### OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Growth Management and Land Use	3
Planning for New Growth	3
Agricultural Preservation	5
Agricultural Character	7
Natural Resource Management	7
Water	8
Existing Subdivisions and Resort Home Development	8
Historic Preservation	9
Quality of Life	9
Transportation	9
Economic Development and Tourism	10
Education	10
Public Land Management	11
Next Steps	11

## Introduction

In July 2008, Sanpete County began the County's General Plan Update process. The General Plan Update will articulate a long-term vision for Sanpete County and outline policies and programs to obtain this vision. Updating the General Plan will enable the County to affirm or modify existing policies and establish new policies, create a foundation for community involvement and informed decision making, and react to recent land use and development trends.

The next step in the process is to begin discussing opportunities and constraints identified in the stakeholder interviews and community workshops. The purpose of this report is to capture the key topics that need to be addressed in the general plan update and identify possible solutions to these topics. While the General Plan update will address a wide variety of topics, the following emerged as high-priority topics, with accompanying opportunities and constraints, to be addressed as part of the General Plan Update:

- Growth management and land use
- Transportation
- Economic development and tourism
- Education
- Public land management

## ***Growth Management and Land Use***

### *Planning for New Growth*

Sanpete County is a collection of individual cities and towns, each with its own unique character and special places. While the local governments are separate jurisdictions, they provide similar governmental services. Each recognizes that the Sanpete Valley is a popular destination for people and businesses. Each is faced with concerns about the most efficient way to expand facilities and services to meet the needs of expected future populations. Coordination of land development patterns and cooperation in service provision can offer mutual benefits.

The high cost of providing basic infrastructure and services in rural communities encourages efficient use of existing facilities. As such, new growth should be located within existing city limits, buffer areas around the cities, or within master-planned communities where all essential services (paved roads, public water and sewer, etc.) are provided.

Twenty-five percent of the county land is zoned Agriculture (AG). The AG zone allows residential development at 1 unit per 5 acres. Development in this pattern has led to several concerns:

- Strained interface between active agricultural operations and new residents
- Loss of land from agricultural production
- Large-lot property maintenance
- High number of new water wells
- Impacts on groundwater from the number of septic tanks
- Increased cost of agricultural land
- Cost of infrastructure to support the development
- Inefficient use of land
- Housing affordability
- Property-tax assessments

There are three different options to address these issues. The first option is to create lower-density land use categories through the creation and application of new zoning districts. However, there may be resistance to changing the existing AG zoning. A second option is to use a variety of growth-management strategies that encourage clustering, require public infrastructure, etc. The advantage of this option is that it does not change the existing zoning entitlement but rather creates development that is more efficient and sustainable. The disadvantages of this option are that it does not protect prime agricultural uses or reduce the number of homes that could ultimately be built in the Sanpete Valley. A third option is to combine options 1 and 2 by identifying those areas where residential 5-acre or smaller lots are

appropriate and identifying other areas for agricultural production. New land use zoning categories could be created to implement this option. Development regulations for agricultural areas could then be developed that allow residential uses as accessory uses in support of agricultural operations.

Growth-management strategies that could be considered include the following:

- Cluster Development—This technique provides flexibility in housing density on a parcel to use land more efficiently, reduce the cost of infrastructure and public services, and create open spaces for appropriate uses.
- Conservation Subdivisions — Conservation subdivisions are characterized by common open space and clustered compact lots. The purpose of a conservation subdivision is to protect farmland and/or natural resources while allowing for the maximum number of residences under current community zoning and subdivision regulations. In some cases a greater density (density bonus) may be offered in the local ordinance to encourage this approach to residential development planning. Conservation subdivision ordinances generally require permanent dedication of areas as open space. Open space uses may include agriculture, sensitive land preservation, and wildlife corridor preservation.
- Master Planned Communities—This type of development encourages innovative, well-planned developments by allowing some variation in dimensional and use requirements to shift development to more appropriate portions of the site. Adequate public facilities are an essential component.
- Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)—This tool allows growth to be directed to preferred locations through the sale and purchase of development rights. Development rights are established for a given piece of land and can be separated from the title of that property. These rights can then be transferred to another location within a parcel of land (in the case of a planned residential development) or to another location where development is desirable and planned for.
- Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances—The ordinances limit new development until needed infrastructure can be or is provided. Requiring concurrency between new construction and public service capacity is intended to help communities address some of the problems associated with population growth.

Sanpete County has established a buffer zone around a majority of the cities within the county. The buffer zones are implemented by application of the Residential Agriculture 1 (RA-1) and the Residential Agriculture 2 (RA-2) zoning districts. The RA-1 district allows 0.5-acre lots within a 0.5-mile radius of the city limits. The RA-2 district allows 1-acre lots within 1 mile of the city

limits. The County also requires review and approval for the adjacent jurisdiction when a proposed development is within the buffer zones or within annexation policy areas (APAs).

As a rule, development within a city or buffer zone is preferable because the cost of providing services is less. The biggest challenge in implementing the buffer zones has been the differing development standards between the County and the adjacent city. An opportunity exists to work with the cities to revise the existing development standards to be consistent, to require new development to provide infrastructure as part of the development approval, and to adopt a standardized review process.

APAs allow a city to identify areas of future annexations. The buffer areas and APAs should be consistent. There is an opportunity to prepare a land use map that is consistent with the cities' land use maps for areas within APAs. A policy could also be developed that requires annexation into the adjacent city when the proposed development is within the APA. This would encourage development to be located within a city.

One of the impacts of the existing zoning and development patterns is the rising housing prices and the shortage of affordable housing. The use of growth-management strategies could provide opportunities for additional housing choices.

#### *Agricultural Preservation*

The existing agricultural operations in Sanpete County have a significant role in the economic health and viability of the community. Development outside city limits in Sanpete County takes land out of agricultural production. Preserving prime agricultural land as both an economic and natural resource is a key issue.

The goal of any preservation strategy should be to preserve productive farmland in order to maintain a long-term business environment for agriculture in the county, to preserve the rural character and scenic attributes of the county, to enhance important environmental benefits, and to maintain the quality of life of county residents. To be effective Sanpete County will need to develop and implement a variety of mechanisms for the effective preservation of productive agricultural land. Some mechanisms include the following:

- Conservation Easements—Creation of a conservation easement is similar to the transfer or purchase of development rights. A conservation easement is an interest in real property created when the development entitlements of a property are separated and conveyed to a third party. The landowner retains the right to continue to use the property for non-development purposes, but transfers the development rights to an identified holder of the easement who is then responsible for ensuring that the use of the property continues to be consistent with the terms of the easement.

- **Fee-simple Purchase**—This is the simplest method for obtaining control over property and ensuring long-term management of the property and its desired use. Governments and nonprofit organizations can use this technique for control of identified lands. With fee-simple purchase, permanent or dedicated protection of land is achieved and public access can be allowed. The owner, however, assumes responsibility for long-term maintenance of the property.
- **Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)**—The PDR concept is similar to the TDR concept, except that the acquiring party is the governmental entity. Under a PDR arrangement, landowners sell their development rights to a jurisdiction while retaining all other rights of ownership. The price is generally determined as the difference between the appraised market value of the property and the current land use value. The local government then has control over the future use of the property without the responsibilities of fee-title ownership.
- **Agricultural Zoning**—Agricultural zoning strives to protect the viability of agriculture in a region and is generally used by communities that are concerned about maintaining the economic viability of their agricultural industry. Agricultural zoning limits the density of nonagricultural development, and restricts nonfarm uses of the land. The density of residential development is controlled by establishing a minimum lot size that corresponds to the amount of land needed to sustain an individual farm.
- **APAs**- APAs are areas identified by cities for possible future annexations. Growth is encouraged inside the area with infrastructure and development-friendly policies. Growth is discouraged outside of these areas.
- **Growth-management Strategies**—Many of the growth-management strategies mentioned above can assist in preserving agricultural lands. The most commonly used tools are conservation design, cluster development, and TDR. The key to the effective implementation is having enough land available to sustain a farm.

### *Agricultural Character*

A community's character is defined by its distinct features that contribute to its physical character. Many of these features reflect common values for preserving a community's rural character, appearance, natural resources, open spaces, recreation areas, scenic views, vegetation, architecture, and development patterns. These features promote quality of life and economic well-being. Preservation should not prohibit development; however, the County needs to ensure that new development fits the existing community fabric.

A major component of protecting the agricultural character of the community is the preservation of viable agricultural lands. The challenge is to provide for the orderly transition of agricultural lands to other uses as development occurs, while preserving the rural character. There are several other ways to preserve the rural atmosphere including:

- Requiring development to be located within cities and towns
- Clustering development at appropriate locations
- Open space corridor preservation
- Adopting design guidelines for residential and nonresidential building
- Adopting rural street standards
- Gateway preservation and design

### *Natural Resource Management*

The County has the opportunity for planning, management, and preservation of natural resources. Many types of opportunities exist for wildlife habitat, watershed protection, recreation, tourism, oil and gas development, protection of agriculture, etc. By first identifying these resource opportunities and limitations, a sound basis is developed for making later decisions about land use. How land is used and where various land uses are located are critical to the future productivity of the county's resources. Good resource planning can help protect the land's productivity and avoid many of the problems associated with use.

With the majority of the land in Sanpete County being managed by public agencies, it is important that the County be involved in preparation of public land-management plans and documents. It is also important to develop and maintain good working relationships so that when issues arise they can be effectively addressed.

One of the most effective tools in preserving natural resources is sensitive land regulations. Sensitive land regulations identify areas with special development constraints and allow the reasonable use and development of those areas, while promoting the public health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the community, and maintaining the character, identity, and natural function of sensitive areas. Examples of sensitive land regulations include hillside, floodplain, wildfire, river/stream corridor preservation, critical habitat protection, ridgeline preservation.

Many of the growth-management strategies mentioned assist in preserving agricultural lands. The most commonly used tools are conservation design, cluster development, and TDR.

## *Water*

The availability of water is one of the most critical factors in planning for the future of our growing county and managing these resources is essential. Since water moves easily across city and county boundaries, much of the regulation is at the regional, state, and federal levels. However, since cities and counties have legal authority over development and land use, they are involved in considering the adequacy of water supplies and how development affects the quantity and quality of water available.

As development has continued, the long-term adequacy of groundwater and surface water resources has become a major public concern. Water-related issues include water availability, lowered groundwater levels, watershed protection, conservation methods, water storage limitations, and continuing changes in state and federal regulations. The primary goal is to ensure that Sanpete County's water resources are sustained and protected. To achieve this goal, a coordinated effort will be needed from all jurisdictions in the county. In addition, water resources will need to be managed to ensure that water that can be used over the long term without exceeding the replenishment rates over time or causing long-term declines or degradation in available resources.

### *Existing Subdivisions and Resort Home Development*

Another challenge commonly mentioned was the build out of existing subdivisions that were approved without adequate road widths, paved roads, or public water and sewer. Further, some subdivisions have been designed and constructed for resort/vacation homes that were only to be occupied in the summer months. Recently, there has been a trend for these homes to be occupied year round. As these areas develop into year-round residential areas, the demand for public services will increase. In some cases public health and safety issues could arise. Capital improvements are needed to provide the infrastructure needed to serve these developments. The challenge is how to finance the improvements. The most common tools used include special assessment areas, community development areas, user fees, and impact fees. Possibly the most important step is to prevent this situation from reoccurring in the future by reviewing existing regulations to ensure that adequate public facilities are required with all new development.

### *Historic Preservation*

Sanpete County is a county with deep roots and a long history. It is important to ensure that the historic character of the county is not lost and to provide direction to all as to how various historic resources within the county can best be preserved for future generations. Historic structures, districts, and landscapes are important aspects of what makes Sanpete County unique. Historic resources not only provide a physical link to the past but also help shape the county's identity. The County has the opportunity to develop strategies and actions that will

help ensure that the qualities that define Sanpete County as a special place are safeguarded as a legacy for future generations.

### *Quality of Life*

Quality of life is a key element of any community. It provides the overarching determinants that are critical in attracting new residents and businesses. A need exists to find ways to retain Sanpete County's scenic beauty, small-town values, historic character, and sense of community. The challenge for the new plan will be to define how growth and development will be utilized to enhance the quality of life for all county residents.

### **Transportation**

An effective transportation system should provide the means for a safe, efficient and cost-effective, multimodal circulation system for the movement of people and goods within and through Sanpete County. Highway, air, and rail transportation are all necessary in the movement of goods and people from one place to another. Both local and regional traffic must be managed. Due to the cost and interconnectivity of major transportation improvements, they must be addressed on a regional basis.

The transportation system should incorporate a set of roadway classifications related to the proposed land uses throughout the county. Future land use patterns and transportation systems should be planned in a coordinated, continuous, and comprehensive manner. Land use patterns and the transportation system should promote improved air quality by reducing travel miles and encouraging alternative transportation modes.

The bulk of the roadways serving Sanpete County fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, the State of Utah, local municipalities, and other entities. The primary routes within Sanpete County consist of Highway 89 and State Routes 28, 29, 116, 117, 132, and 137. County and US Forest Service (USFS) roads provide access to areas managed by the USFS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), as well as to pockets of private lands located within these areas.

The presence of private lands and development within national forest boundaries, the need for improved emergency access to rural areas, and the competing needs of rural and urban county residents complicate the planning, funding, and implementation of transportation improvements within Sanpete County. Transportation partnerships have been an important factor in the development and maintenance of the County's transportation system and will continue to be encouraged in the future.

## ***Economic Development and Tourism***

Economic development entails all aspects of stimulating and fostering job development and improving the foundations that support local, regional, and global commerce. Pursuing economic development is important to ensure that the community continues to capture its needed share of job opportunities, and to maintain the region's existing economic base. Economic development today must focus not just on being a cost-competitive location but on offering value. Therefore, factors such as productivity, profitability, quality of life, and many others are evaluated by companies in determining where to start up or expand an operation. The community must offer a quality of life that will attract and retain the skilled workers. Communities that are viewed as desirable places to live will tend to be more successful in attracting companies that require a highly educated workforce.

For a community to attract new business to the area, or to allow existing businesses to expand or relocate, it is necessary for it to have an inventory of available land and available buildings to facilitate this business expansion. Without the necessary available sites, business expansion and economic development opportunities become severely limited.

A community's ability to support and sustain economic development is dependent on the quality and capacity of its existing utilities and infrastructure. Communities with inadequate systems run the risk of not being considered for a possible business location or being eliminated from a site search.

Economically, as well as socially, tourism provides numerous positive benefits to Sanpete County. Visitor spending provides income for businesses, and in turn, more job opportunities are available within the community. Tourist visits vary considerably in their purpose, length of stay, and economic impact. The tourist who makes the greatest economic impact is the destination tourist who stays in the area for one or more nights. Sanpete County has the opportunity to develop key strategies to capture tourist economic activity.

## ***Education***

Counties where a quality education is available will attract and produce skilled workers. This, in turn, will create the ability for the County to lure new businesses with the ability to pay higher wages. In addition, an adequate supply of well-educated and skilled workers attracts businesses seeking a qualified labor pool.

The development of a labor force should work cooperatively with economic development in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace by ensuring that the pool of labor has, at the very least, a minimum level of basic skills. In addition, new or emerging job sectors must be identified where the labor force is fully up to date in terms of operational technology. Mutual

involvement with Utah State University and Snow College and interest by workers and employers is the key.

### ***Public Land-management***

While local governments do not have regulatory control over state and federal lands, federal land-management agencies protect open space on BLM and USFS lands through congressional designations of lands, through designations by the Secretaries of Interior (BLM) and Agriculture (USFS) and the heads of the agencies and through approved land-management plans completed using extensive public involvement processes. It is through these approved land-management plans that the local governments can have considerable influence over landowners and managers that are not subject to local government regulation. For example, the Federal Land Management and Policy Act that governs the BLM's management of public land provides for a significant role for local governments to influence federal land-management policies.

Utah cities and counties can also have some input in land-management decisions made by the Utah State Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, and by the State and Institutional Trust Lands Administration. As federal and state land-management plans are undertaken, local governments should express their preferences so that they may be incorporated into the plans. A public lands committee can be formed to coordinate efforts between the land-management agencies, the cities, and the County. Members should include key stakeholders who have an understanding of the state and federal land-management processes. The committee should be appointed by the County commissioners.

### **Next Steps**

This Opportunities and Constraints Report will serve as the starting point for the next phase of the General Plan Update. Following review by the Technical Advisory Committee, an annotated outline of the new general plan will be prepared. This document will have a very specific focus on the elements and structure of the new general plan. The annotated outline will serve as the final preparatory document before the actual restructuring and revision of the general plan begins.