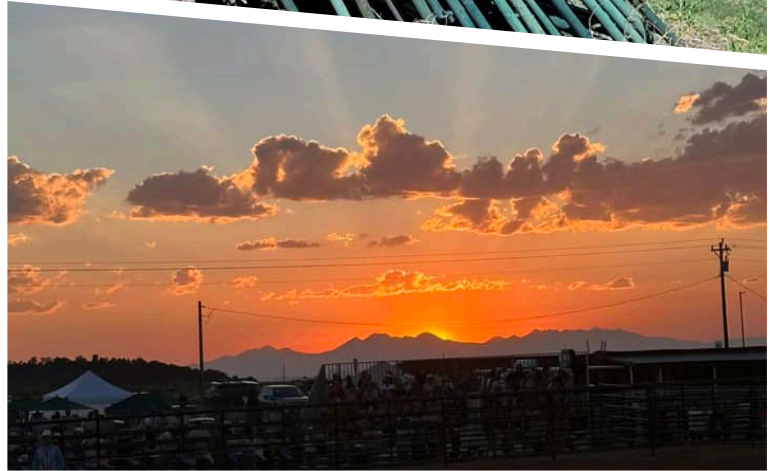


Looking for a shorter read? You can find the highlights in the Vision Plan Executive Summary: bit.ly/WE-Vision-Summary



“RURAL LIFE IS ABOUT FINDING STRENGTH IN SIMPLICITY. IT TEACHES YOU TO BE RESOURCEFUL AND TO LEAN ON YOUR NEIGHBORS. IT’S A LIFE ROOTED IN COMMUNITY AND RESILIENCE, WHERE EVERY SEASON REMINDS YOU THAT HARDSHIP IS AS INEVITABLE AS RENEWAL.”

-ANNIKA KRISTIANSEN, NORWOOD

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01.

BACKGROUND & PROCESS

IN THIS SECTION:

- » ABOUT THE WEST END
- » ABOUT THE VISION PROJECT
- » HOW TO USE THIS PLAN
- » A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS

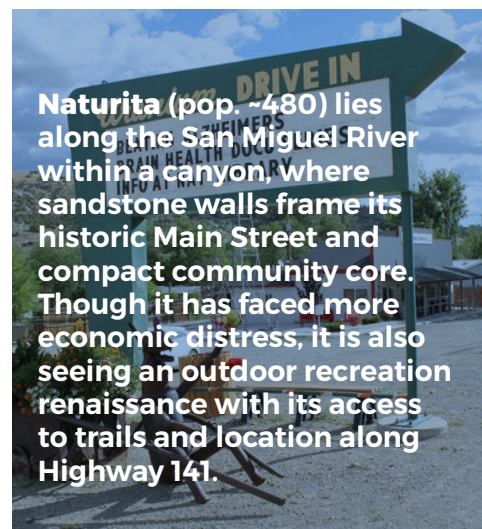
ABOUT THE WEST END

HISTORY + CONTEXT

The western portion of Montrose and San Miguel Counties, known as the West End, is a vast, rural, and scenic region nestled between the San Juan and La Sal Mountains. Its landscape is defined by agricultural mesas and valleys, deep sandstone canyons, and the winding San Miguel and Dolores Rivers. The West End includes the Towns of Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood, along with the smaller unincorporated communities Redvale, Paradox, Bedrock, and Gateway. Together, these small towns are home to about 2,100 people, with about 5,700 people in the entire region. There are only 211,000 acres of private land, surrounded by over 700,000 acres of public lands in the West End.

The West End's deep mining, tribal, and agricultural roots have shaped a close-knit community that is hard working and independent. From early gold mining along the Dolores River to the storied history of Uravan and the decades-long operation of the New Horizon Mine and Nucla Station power plant, the region has experienced cycles of boom and bust. When the coal mine and plant closed unexpectedly in 2019, two years ahead of schedule, the West End lost over 80 high-paying jobs and millions in tax revenue that once supported local schools and emergency services.

Today, the region is still responding to the many impacts of lost coal jobs and revenue, while also confronting new challenges, including the rise of tourism, and increasing external interests and pressures affecting everything from home prices to public lands. But with these changes and pressures, new opportunities exist as well. While a regional plan can't just solve the West End's challenges, it can provide tools and a voice for us to say what kind of community we'd like to be in the future. To achieve this goal the Towns of Naturita, Norwood, and Nucla, and West End Economic Development Corporation (WEEDC) have come together to chart a shared path forward: the West End Vision Project.

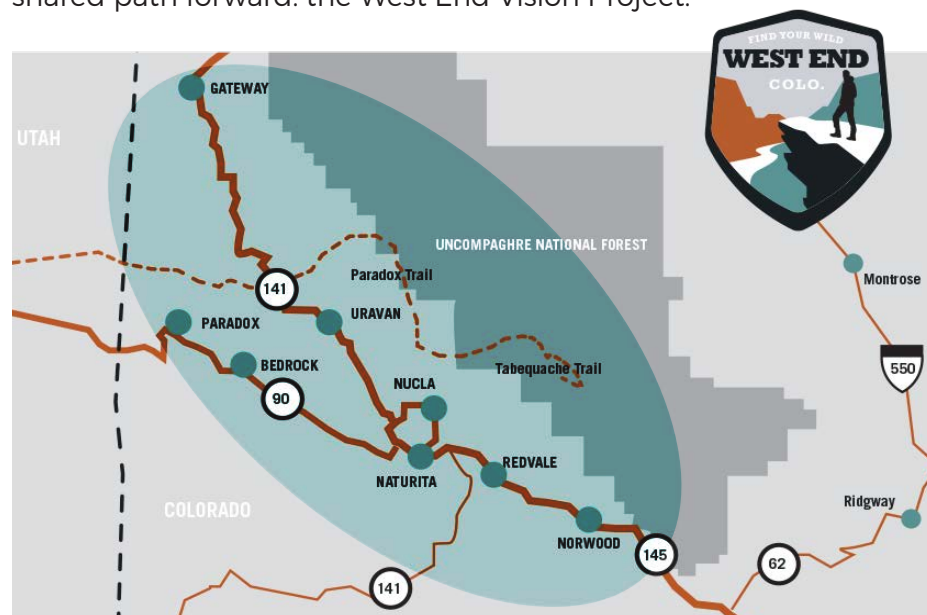


Naturita (pop. ~480) lies along the San Miguel River within a canyon, where sandstone walls frame its historic Main Street and compact community core. Though it has faced more economic distress, it is also seeing an outdoor recreation renaissance with its access to trails and location along Highway 141.

↶ Montrose County ↷



Nucla (pop. ~590) is surrounded by open fields and views of the San Juans and La Sals. Located off the main highway, the community is quiet and enjoys sweeping sunsets. Nucla is home to the region's small airport and the former coal mine and power plant site whose 2019 closure marked a major economic hardship for the West End.



San Miguel County



Norwood (pop. ~520) sits atop Wright's Mesa, surrounded by agricultural lands with the Lone Cone as its backdrop. Closest to Telluride, it faces the greatest down-valley growth pressures with a higher median income, growth rate, and commuting rate than the other communities.

ABOUT THE VISION PROJECT



WHO WE ARE (THE TEAMS)

WE Vision is more than a typical *plan*. It is a region coming together to build a shared vision for the future, and then doing the hard work of figuring out how to bring it to life. The result is a community-driven *process* that reflects the dedication of the many local partners below, and the hundreds of residents who gave their time and energy to this work.

Partners: The Project Working Group (PWG) - The Project Working Group guided the day-to-day project management and the project process. This group ensured that the process stayed on track, supported event organization and promotion, and ensured the process was in alignment with local needs and priorities. This group consists of representatives from:

- » West End Economic Development Corp (WEEDC)
- » The Towns of Norwood, Nucla, and Naturita
- » Nucla-Naturita and Norwood Chambers of Commerce



Community Ambassador Team (A-Team) - The A-Team brought together a wide cross-section of local volunteers and representatives from key organizations such as the clinics, libraries, schools, and other nonprofits. Their role was to help connect the process to the broader community through a variety of supports: ensuring engagement opportunities were well-timed, located, and attended; sharing information about the plan; and providing an initial local lens for every step and product of the process. This group had an open door policy, welcoming anyone interested in contributing to shape our future.



West End Leaders - The elected and appointed officials of the West End Towns and special districts were engaged to provide targeted guidance throughout the process. Their participation ensured alignment between the community's long-term vision and the policies, programs, and investments that will carry it forward. Several County Commissioners were also involved during the process. A key outcome for leaders was increased collaboration and understanding of the community's priorities.



Community Builders (CB) - The West End communities partnered with Community Builders, a Colorado nonprofit that supports rural towns across the Mountain West through planning, engagement, and capacity building. Unlike a traditional consultant, CB works *alongside* communities rather than *for* them—rooted in the belief that lasting solutions come from the people who live in a place and want to take responsibility for shaping its future. This partnership combined CB's expertise and process with the West End's local voices, values, and leadership to ensure the resulting plan truly reflects the community.

The project was funded through a shared investment: About half from local sources (WEEDC, fundraising, and contributions from each West End community and County) and half from CB (through Colorado-based foundations including Gates Family Rubber and the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority). CB is not a consultant that is hired. Instead, all parties agree to work together based on common goals and resources.

WHY WE CAME TOGETHER TO DO THIS WORK

The communities of the West End are stronger together. Though separated by jurisdictional boundaries, they share a similar remoteness, culture, heritage, and deep love of place. These shared characteristics, along with the challenges and opportunities they bring, makes a region-wide plan a practical and powerful approach.

In the West End our communities, economies, and futures are intertwined. Navigating the path ahead depends on our ability to work together and our willingness to take the reins on shaping the future we want. While outside forces will always play a role, the real measure of our success will come from how we choose to respond, by making thoughtful decisions and taking ownership of our collective future. Recognizing this, local leaders from across the region came together to launch the WE Vision Project, a community-led effort to shape a better future on the region's own terms. From the beginning, the mantra has been "we don't want to make decisions for the community without the community."

This collaborative effort strengthens the region's ability to act with purpose: to pursue funding, respond to external pressures, improve access to local jobs and homes, and support a resilient economy. By grounding the Plan in regional partnership, the West End has built shared goals, strengthened local capacity, and taken an important step toward a future defined by community-driven action and lasting progress.

WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

The West End Vision Project set out to create a community-led strategy for the region's future that preserves what we love about the West End while providing direction, tools, and a unified voice to guide what comes next. Through consistent collaboration and engagement, the process built shared understanding, strengthened partnerships, and translated community hopes and fears into a clear, actionable plan.

Community engagement was at the heart of every phase of this effort. From the first conversations to the final draft, residents, business owners, and local leaders shaped the values, vision, strategies, and actions that define this Plan. Each step of the process built upon the last, deepening the community's ownership and turning shared values into shared action.

The final outcome of the process is this regional Vision Plan and the accompanying Action Plan. This was not your typical planning process, and the result is not intended to be a dusty tome that sits on the shelf, but a highly usable tool that supports the West End communities for years to come. See the following section for more information on how to use this Plan.



We're proud to say the WE Vision process culminated in:

- » 16 months of collaboration
- » 710+ people engaged
- » 50+ passionate and dedicated volunteers
- » 120+ meetings
- » 5 community dinners (20 lbs of donated local beef)
- » 50+ ice cream sundaes consumed
- » 5 shared community values
- » 8 goals for the future
- » 45 strategies to reach our goals
- » 15 policy recommendations
- » 16 potential project and tools

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

PROCESS GOALS

A first step of the Vision was working with the project teams to identify and confirm the following goals for the Vision Plan Process:

- » To articulate a unified West End Vision that provides clear guidelines for growth without dictating a “one-size-fits-all” approach for each Town.
- » To ensure a community-led process that builds local trust and increases engagement across community groups.
- » To help bridge community divisions by identifying shared West End values.
- » To increase the capacity of existing West End leaders, and identify and add to the ranks of future community leaders and champions.
- » To improve regional efficiencies and cross-Town collaboration.
- » To create a practical, living document that provides the umbrella for future plans and guides the next generation of leaders—a North Star.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

Vision Plan Sections and Content

The following are the four main sections of the Vision Plan and what is included in each.

» **Background and Process**

- How and why the West End communities came together to create a shared plan for the future
- Detailed guidance about how to use the Plan
- A summary of the robust community engagement

» **Values and Vision**

- Five shared community values that capture what matters most to the people of the West End
- Eight long-term goals that define the future the community wants to build together
- This section can be utilized as a standalone handout to help residents, visitors, newcomers, partners, and other entities better understand life in the West End

» **Strategies**

- Builds upon the community’s goals with specific strategies, priorities, and direction for action
- The Plan’s central framework, translating broad goals into specific areas of focus and practical guidance

» **Implementation**

- The tools and the framing to help turn ideas into results
- Key partners, funding sources, and potential policies
- Ways to measure progress and keep the Plan relevant

Action Plan (as a separate document)

The Action Plan is a working companion to the Vision Plan. It includes detailed action steps, timelines, lead organizations, and partnerships to turn strategies into results. Designed for use by Town leaders, WEEDC, and community partners, it serves as both a roadmap and a tracking tool, helping the West End stay organized, accountable, and focused on measurable progress.

Special Sections and Pages

- » **Sidebars** - Look for colored sidebars to provide additional information and nuance related to the strategies.
- » **Breakaways and Handouts** - Sections or pages able to function as standalone info sheets, guides, educational tools, or positions that West End organizations, governments, and residents can print and use where needed.

- » [Our Community Values \(page 20\)](#)
- » [West End Welcome Guide \(page 21\)](#)
- » [Negotiating Development Agreements \(page 41\)](#)
- » [Addressing Regional Growth Pressures \(page 48\)](#)
- » [Our Public Lands Playbook \(page 54\)](#)
- » [Guidance for Local Leaders \(page 68\)](#)



TITLE



Look for a light blue header and WE Vision icon for breakaway pages. These pages don't have footers or page #s to function as standalones.

KEEPING THIS PLAN OFF THE SHELF

A Tool and Decision-Making Framework

This Plan is a reference point for everyday decisions. Elected officials, staff, and partner organizations can turn to it when weighing proposals, policies, or capital investments to check alignment with community values and goals. Embedding references into agendas, permit review checklists, and project evaluations helps make the Plan integral to governance.

- » Apply the vision and values to other efforts and processes
- » Use the Plan as a framework for responding to challenges in a way that aligns with the community's values and goals
- » Keep a copy of the Plan on hand at board meetings to reference (consider a digital copy that is easily searchable!)
- » Add the Vision Plan as a recurring agenda item on annual Town/County strategy and budget meetings
- » Consider trade-offs when complex decisions arise: use the Plan to weigh competing priorities against community values, vision, and available resources

A Living Document and Process

A Plan works best if it evolves with changing conditions. Regular check-ins with local leaders or organizations should review progress and discuss next steps. Consider a targeted engagement and update process every 3-5 years, building on this existing framework.

- » Make a commitment to continue to regularly come together as a community to assess progress, collaborate, and work towards a stronger region
- » Update the Action Plan as existing steps are accomplished and new steps are identified
- » Respond to changes in community conditions or opinions and adjust priorities as needed
- » Communicate progress and success as you go, this builds trust and helps maintain momentum

Standing the Test of Time and Turnover

Success depends on continued collaboration. A Stewardship Committee has been established to track progress, coordinate updates, and orient new decision-makers. Use this section and Guidance for Local Leaders ([page 68](#)) as a short onboarding module for new staff and leaders to build understanding about the Plan and how it can be supportive of their work.

- » Form groups around the goals to hold people accountable
- » Have an annual community check-in on progress and next steps and celebration of achievements

LESSONS LEARNED

As a final step of process, people reflected on what they learned about their community and how to carry those learnings forward:

- » “Coordination and cooperation matters greatly in success. Tolerance of viewpoints is important.”
- » “We’re strong, collaborative, caring, individuals with solidarity in our values but some reluctance to change.”
- » “Be focused in engagement efforts to keep people from getting worn out.”
- » “It is important that we as a community continue to talk. When people stop talking, things fall through.”
- » “We are not so different and when we come together we can find common ground”
- » **“We are stronger together!”**



WHO IS THIS PLAN FOR?

The West End Vision Plan belongs to everyone who calls this region home, and to all who care about its future. Whether you are an elected official, a local business owner, a community member, or a potential partner, this Plan offers clear direction for how we can work together to build a better future. The following pages outline how different users can put the Plan into action.



How to use if you are...



An Elected Official

- » **As a decision making framework:** Use the Plan to guide local decisions and policies in alignment with the community's [shared values \(page 20\)](#) and [goals \(page 24\)](#). Consult the [Policy Quick Guide \(page 69\)](#) for a full list of recommended policies and ordinances to consider.
- » **As a conduit to the community:** More than 700 residents across the region participated and each step of the process was guided, reviewed, and refined by local leaders, organizations, and community champions. This broad participation creates a shared responsibility to follow through and turn the community's vision into results. Learn more about the [engagement process on page 12](#).
- » **As a key to collaboration:** A key directive for elected leaders heard during this process is the desire for better, more regular collaboration across the region's Towns, Counties, and special districts. See the [Civic Health goal on page 62](#).



Town Staff



- » **As a guide for action:** Find clear direction on potential action steps, projects, and policies, as well as recommendations for how to carry them forward within the [Strategies and Actions section \(page 26\)](#) and the [Action Plan](#).
 - » In particular, the goals focused on housing ([34](#)), growth management ([44](#)), public lands ([50](#)), community character ([60](#)), and collaboration ([62](#)) are especially relevant to the work of the Towns.
- » **As a guide for future planning:** Use this Plan as a high-level framework when updating master plans, capital improvement plans, area plans, or special district plans to ensure consistency and community alignment.
- » **As a key for funding:** The shared regional vision memorialized in this Plan makes a strong case to potential funders. See [Funding Sources and Strategies \(page 70\)](#) for potential resources, funding guidance, and tools to support implementation.



WEEDC Staff



- » **As a guide for action:** Find clear direction on potential action steps, projects, and policies, as well as recommendations for how to carry them forward within the [Strategies and Actions section \(page 26\)](#) and the [Action Plan](#).
 - » In particular, the goals focused on housing ([34](#)), economic development ([38](#)), pathways to success ([56](#)), and collaboration ([62](#)) are especially relevant to the work of WEEDC.
- » **As a key for funding:** The shared regional vision memorialized in this Plan makes a strong case to potential funders. See [Funding Sources and Strategies \(page 70\)](#) for potential resources, funding guidance, and tools to support implementation.
- » **As a tool for coordination:** Align ongoing WEEDC initiatives with Town efforts to maximize impact across the West End.



A Local Nonprofit, Leader, or Community Champion

- » **As a tool for case-making and collaboration:** This Plan highlights the essential role of the West End's nonprofits for advancing community well-being. See [Goals 7 and 8](#) (page 60 & 62) for recommendations focused on volunteerism, collaboration, and community connection.
- » **As a guide for action:** Find clear direction on potential projects and next steps related to priorities for local nonprofits and as well as how to carry them forward. Find mission-aligned recommendations within the [Strategies and Actions section \(page 26\)](#) and the [Action Plan](#).
 - » In particular, the goals focused on health and services ([30](#)), housing ([34](#)), community character ([60](#)) and collaboration ([62](#)) are relevant to the work of local nonprofits.
- » **As a key for funding:** The regional vision memorialized in this Plan makes a strong case to potential funders. See [Funding Strategies \(page 70\)](#) for potential resources and use the Plan's goals and data to strengthen funding proposals and demonstrate community support.



A Chamber, Business Owner, or Entrepreneur



- » **As a business development resource:** A priority of this Plan is support for local businesses. See [Strong Economy \(page 38\)](#) for strategies aimed at business support and development.
- » **As a bridge to your Chamber:** The West End Chambers were key partners in this process. Use this Plan as a guide and connection to their goals and priorities, and connect with them to access the great resources they have available.
- » **As a tool for advocacy:** Use the Plan's economic and policy goals to champion local business needs with Town, County, and regional partners. See [Strong Economy \(page 38\)](#) for more information about how small businesses contribute to a stronger, more resilient economy.



A Community Member

- » **As a tool for accountability:** The Vision Plan intends to capture your community values and goals and provide a direction to hold elected officials and staff accountable to.
- » **As an invitation to get involved:** Review the projects, programs, and actions that will improve and strengthen this community. Explore the [Action Plan](#) to find projects or priorities you're passionate about, then reach out to the partners to join the effort!



A Visitor or Potential Resident

- » **As a way to connect and align:** Learn what matters most to the people of the West End. This region has a unique, rural character that these strategies and actions aim to help preserve. See more about who the West End is, and how to embrace and enjoy it [on page 21](#).
- » **As an invitation to engage:** The Plan outlines volunteer opportunities and initiatives that welcome new residents to contribute to community life. Explore the [Action Plan](#) to find projects or priorities you're passionate about, then reach out to the partners to join the effort!



Partner, Neighbor, Funder, or Other Outside Entity

- » **As a way to connect and align:** This Plan outlines the West End's values and goals, [see page 21](#), to help partners engage in true collaboration grounded in mutual respect.
- » **As a tool for understanding:** This document declares how the region intends to move forward on our most pressing challenges and opportunities. It also outlines the desires and priorities for [future development \(page 41\)](#) and [managing growth pressures \(page 48\)](#).
- » **As a key for collaboration:** In the West End we believe coordination, communication, and shared respect are the keys for good partnerships. We also believe that good fences make good neighbors. This document communicates key positions and priorities of our region and we hope you will connect with us to discuss and collaborate on a better shared future.

A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS

We're proud to have reached more than 715 West End residents, about a third of the local communities! The WE Vision engagement process has spanned over 16 months and five phases. Most of our engagement was through in-depth conversations where people took time to sit with their neighbors and reflect on the region's future. We also offered some quicker, low-barrier opportunities for those with limited time. We've worked hard to reach a broad mix of viewpoints and positions.

Note: Tracking demographics is tricky! We respect participants' choice to remain anonymous, so this section only includes information people have chosen to share. We've done our best to ensure we have accurate totals and have not counted any duplicate participants within each phase.



ENGAGEMENT GOALS

The following engagement goals were developed by the WE Vision Ambassador Team. Community members have expressed that these can and should be carried forward into related future efforts.

- » Welcome people to the table.
- » Meaningfully involve everyone.
- » Meet people where they are.
- » Build trust + understanding.
- » Work together as a region.
- » Tell our West End story.

PROCESS STEPS & TIMING

- » **Groundwork (Summer 2024)** – The project began by forming teams, setting up systems for collaboration, and defining the approach for engagement. This phase ensured that local leadership and community voices would guide every decision.
- » **Values (Fall/Winter 2024)** – The process launched with conversations across the West End to identify what people value most about their community. These shared values are the foundation for the rest of the project. When other issues become divisive, our values are often where we can agree.
- » **Vision (Spring 2025)** – With a strong sense of shared values, the community turned its attention to the future, asking “where do we want to be?” Through workshops, surveys, and discussions, participants developed a collective vision, communicated through a set of eight goals for the future, covering everything from housing, to economy, to local leadership and collaboration.
- » **Strategies & Actions (Summer/Fall 2025)** – This phase focused on moving from ideas to implementation. The team examined data, resources, and community input to draft strategies and actions that achieve the shared vision. The community was then asked: Did we get it right? What's missing? Action groups refined the strategies and determined appropriate action steps.
- » **Draft & Final Plan (Fall/Winter 2025)** – The final phase brought everything together into this Plan—a practical, community-driven roadmap for the West End's future. This phase gave partners and the whole community the chance to closely review and add to the Vision and Action Plan, ensuring they won't sit on a shelf but will serve as a living guide for the years ahead.



WHO WE REACHED AND HOW

Throughout the WE Vision process we used a mix of traditional, creative, and casual approaches to reach as many people as possible. This process has been anchored in the belief that successful engagement requires real, honest conversations as well as a fun and inviting atmosphere, because building a better future should feel like something everyone wants to be part of. In the West End this has meant everything from cowboy poetry, to spaghetti dinners, to ice cream socials. Our full tool belt of methods has included:

- » **Small Group Discussions (50):** These have been our bread and butter, providing the foundation for a shared set of values, goals, and strategies.
- » **Community Workshops (16):** We hosted larger gatherings with in-depth group discussions, usually over snacks or a meal.
- » **Pop-Ups (18):** Quick, casual activities with posters, sticky notes, and conversations in places like farmers markets and festivals.
- » **Drop-Ins (25):** We visited groups like Student Council, Senior Meals, and Vet's Coffee to tell people about the project and gather input.
- » **Leadership Meetings (15):** We held two local leadership breakfasts and a pizza dinner, inviting all Town and County elected officials to provide input. We also gave updates at nine Town Board meetings and three County Commissions.
- » **Creative Submissions (3):** We invited people to share their values and vision in creative ways, including a Facebook Photo Expo showing what they love here, a Cowboy Poetry Ad Libs community values exercise at the annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering, and a Student Council "Headlines for the Future" activity, showing what successes a future West End newspaper would report on.
- » **Dropboxes (9):** We placed boxes in local hubs so people could easily return values worksheets.
- » **Online Activities (8):** Every in-person activity was paired with an online version. Those who couldn't make it in person were still able to weigh-in every step of the way!
- » **Celebration:** To honor and celebrate all of the community input and effort that went into creating a set of shared values, we designed and handed out a set of custom stickers representing each value (at right).
- » **Storytelling:** Numbers and strategies shape our future, but stories shape how we see ourselves. That's why we launched a storytelling series in the West End, highlighting local voices that reflect our history, resilience, and shared values. You can read the five stories submitted in Appendix II.



KEY PROCESS STEPS

The following were the major steps undertaken during the values, vision, and strategy phases. For more about the importance of values and vision, see the next chapter.

Values Steps:

- » Small group values conversations about what matters most, fears and concerns, and hopes and aspirations for the future of the West End
- » Gathering and reviewing input from the community to understand the most important themes, hopes, and concerns
- » Creating draft community values statements, then reviewing values statements with the community and asking “Did we get it right?”
- » Celebrating community values and sharing personal stories that bring the values to life

Vision Steps:

- » Collecting quantitative data metrics about where the community is today to help frame conversations about the future
- » Conducting small group conversations about the changes happening in the community, what changes people want or don’t want, and what kind of future they hope for
- » Recording and analyzing community input, identifying key themes, and developing a set of draft goals and emerging strategies
- » Reviewing draft goals and emerging strategies with the community and asking “Did we get it right?”

DURING THE VALUES PHASE:

615 PEOPLE ENGAGED



16 SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS



22 POP-UPS + DROP-INS



6 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS
(150+ participants)



5 LEADERSHIP MEETINGS
(w/ representatives of 3 Towns, 2 Counties)

Folks We've Reached

45 FAMILIES

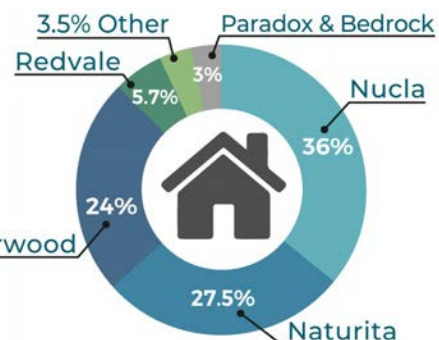
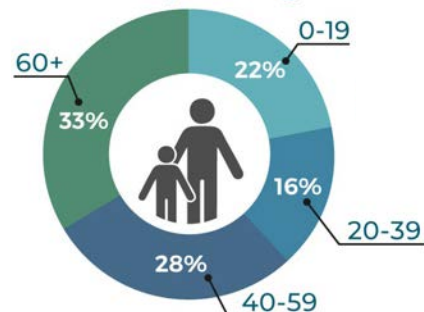
46 RANCHER/FARMERS

26 TEACHER/HEALTH WORKER

61 SMALL BIZ OWNERS

25 MINING INDUSTRY

Participant Age



Place of Residence

DURING THE VISION PHASE:

310 PEOPLE ENGAGED



11 SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS



16 POP-UPS + DROP-INS



6 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS
(120+ participants)



4 LEADERSHIP MEETINGS
(combined Town leadership dinner + 3 Board convos)

Folks We've Reached

17 FAMILIES

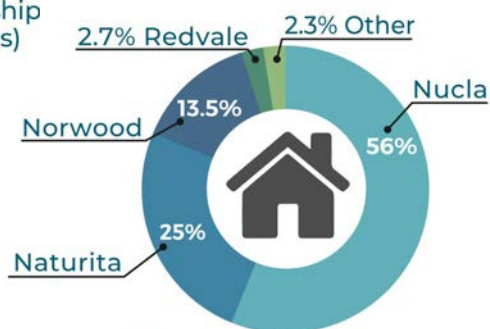
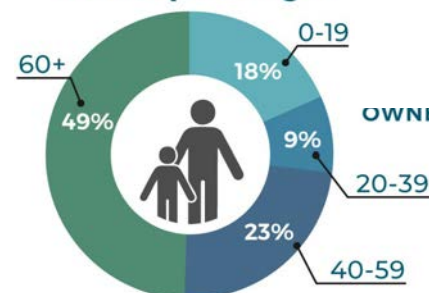
55 RANCHER/FARMERS

24 TEACHER/HEALTH WORKER

42 SMALL BIZ OWNERS

9 MINING INDUSTRY

Participant Age



Place of Residence

Strategy & Action Steps:

- » Initial strategies were developed with the draft goals during the Vision phase to give them more direction and nuance
- » Draft strategies were initially reviewed in small groups and online during the Visioning phase; community members also weighed-in on top priorities
- » Strategies were reviewed and prioritized by the Ambassador Team and then refined by the Action Groups (see below)
- » Updated priority strategies were presented with targeted questions to help develop detailed action steps for each during a series of three community open houses or “Pop-Ins”
- » The Action Groups used community feedback to develop detailed action steps for each of the priority strategies

Note: Due to the open house “Pop-In” format, demographics were only collected online during this phase and the data isn’t fully representative of all who contributed and thus not shown.

Draft Plan Review:

- » After finalizing the strategies and actions, a first “Partner Review” Draft Plan was released and distributed to over 40 key stakeholder groups including Town Boards, clinics, schools, water entities, and local non-profits for review
- » The team incorporated the Partner entities’ feedback and released a new Community-wide Review Draft Plan, with a variety of ways to weigh-in and comment
- » A “Final Piece of the Pie” community meeting celebrate the community’s efforts, reflected on the process, and looked ahead at building momentum and commitment for action

DURING THE ACTIONS PHASE:

175 PEOPLE ENGAGED



20 ACTION GROUP MEETINGS



6 SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS



3 POP-UPS + DROP-INS



3 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS
(40+ participants)

65+ DRAFT PLAN REVIEWS



12 SMALL GROUP REVIEW CONVOS



3 POP-UPS + DROP-INS



1 COMMUNITY CELEBRATION
(30+ participants)

OUR COMMUNITY IN ACTION

To move from vision to action, five West End Action Groups were formed to focus on the community’s highest-priority topics:

Health & Services, Housing Access, Strong Economy, Managed Growth, and Public Lands & Resources. These groups brought together residents, local leaders, volunteers, and key stakeholders. They operated under a shared set of ground rules emphasizing respect, open dialogue, and collaboration. Members provided a variety of viewpoints and perspectives but worked to find common ground and reflect West End values and realities.

Each Action Group met about four times between August and November, for shared learning, work sessions, and community engagement. Early meetings focused on identifying key questions and trade-offs that required more community input. These insights shaped the questions asked at the September community “Pop-ins.” Later sessions focused on incorporating community feedback, defining roles and responsibilities, exploring resources, and mapping out clear next steps.



ACTION GROUP OUTCOMES

Together these groups represented and accomplished:

- » 40 diverse local voices
- » Over 20 Action meetings
- » 3 community meetings
- » Refined and built upon 28 strategies
- » Recommended 180 actions

ENGAGEMENT PHOTOS







02.

OUR VALUES & VISION

IN THIS SECTION:

- » SHARED COMMUNITY VALUES
- » WEST END WELCOME GUIDE
- » VISION AND GOALS

SHARED COMMUNITY VALUES

WHY VALUES?

When it comes to community building, shared values are the secret sauce. They reflect what people care about most: the lifestyles, landscapes, livelihoods, and relationships that make the West End unique. Values describe both the physical and intangible qualities that define this place and why we live here. They help us understand what is worth protecting, what can evolve, and how we want to navigate change together. When issues become complex or divisive, shared values offer a steady point of agreement and a common language for working through trade-offs.

Through the Values phase of the WE Vision process, over 600 community members, across 50+ community conversations and events, came together to identify their shared values. We asked simple but meaningful questions: *What do you love about the West End? What are your fears and concerns for its future? What are your hopes and aspirations?* Those conversations sparked honest reflection and connection, revealing that there is far more that unites the West End than divides it, and that people share a deep love and care for this place. These values formed the foundation for the rest of the West End Vision Project. This Plan reflects and honors the values every step of the way.

WHO WE ARE (ON PAPER)

Frontier America is defined by geographically isolated areas with fewer than six people per square mile. The West End easily meets this definition. We are an extremely rural and remote region, a rugged oasis between the hot-spots of Telluride and Moab, home to many landscapes and ecosystems, from mountainous forests to sandstone canyons. The three small towns that anchor the area—Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood—each have only ~500 residents. Though we enjoy our rural lifestyle, the isolation also means limited access to goods, services, and healthcare, often requiring two+ hour drives for many essentials.

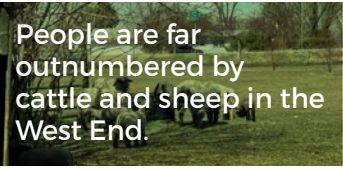
Agriculture, recreation, and small businesses currently form the backbone of the West End economy, with ranching, construction, and service-based industries providing most year-round employment. Our region also has a long, unstable history in energy and extraction: from gold along the Dolores River, to uranium for the Manhattan Project, to recent coal mining and power generation, before the 2019 closures.

Across the region we face similar challenges, but there are also important differences across County lines. The Norwood area sees the most pressure and impact from the resort communities of San Miguel County. Nucla and Naturita, in Montrose County, have seen more hardships from energy transition, including shrinking populations, and lower incomes.

But these challenges don't define us. **Our Values, are who we really are as a community.**



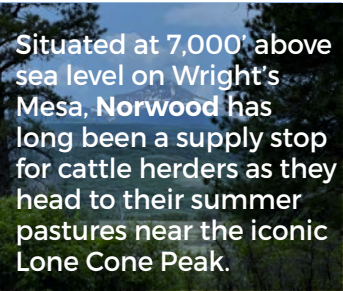
More than three-quarters of the region's land is publicly owned, largely managed by the Bureau of Land Management.



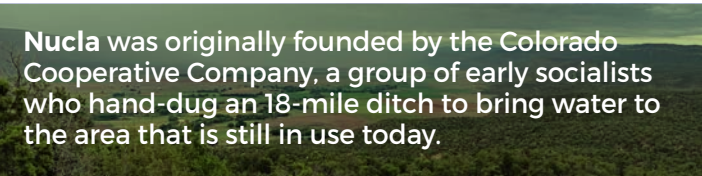
People are far outnumbered by cattle and sheep in the West End.



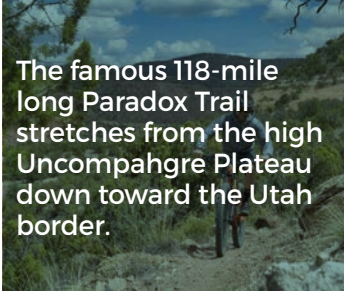
All three towns are International Dark Sky Communities and the West End region has some of the darkest skies in the state!



Situated at 7,000' above sea level on Wright's Mesa, Norwood has long been a supply stop for cattle herders as they head to their summer pastures near the iconic Lone Cone Peak.



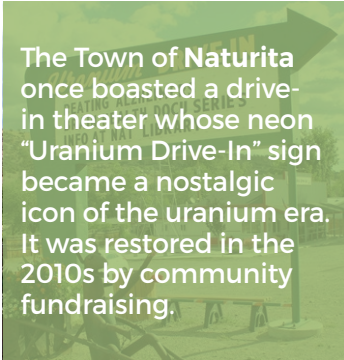
Nucla was originally founded by the Colorado Cooperative Company, a group of early socialists who hand-dug an 18-mile ditch to bring water to the area that is still in use today.



The famous 118-mile long Paradox Trail stretches from the high Uncompahgre Plateau down toward the Utah border.



In the news: the West End has fought back against outside proposals that didn't bring us to the table, including the Dolores Monument and Wright's Mesa Solar Farm.



The Town of Naturita once boasted a drive-in theater whose neon "Uranium Drive-In" sign became a nostalgic icon of the uranium era. It was restored in the 2010s by community fundraising.



OUR WEST END COMMUNITY VALUES

Our West End Values represent who we are and what we care about most as a community. They are the product of months of in-depth community conversations and the reflection of the loves, hopes, and fears of over 600 West End residents.



1. SMALL TOWN SOLIDARITY

We value small-town neighborliness because it offers a sense of safety and pride. We may have different opinions and backgrounds, but we can set those aside and show up for each other when it matters. We celebrate our shared sense of community and want everyone to play a part in keeping the West End strong.



2. RURAL BY CHOICE

Rural, remote living isn't always easy, but we choose it for a reason: we value connection over urban conveniences, peace and quiet over crowds, and dark skies over city lights. Our West End way of life provides room to roam and a shared sigh of relief whenever we come home.



3. LIVING WITH THE LAND

We value our connection to the land and access to the outdoors. This land is a part of who we are and why we are here, from farms and open range to mineral rich mesas and rugged backcountry, all framed by a spectacular sky and sustained by the water it provides. We respect the land and how it contributes to our lives and we protect our right to live and work with it.



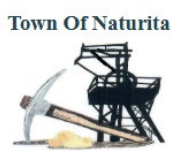
4. FOUNDATION FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

We value the opportunity to build a good life in the West End. Even as we strive to sustain our rural way of life, we want to ensure people have access to good jobs, homes, and services so families, elders, and future generations can put down roots here and thrive.



5. CHARTING OUR OWN COURSE

We value being self-reliant and resourceful. We're proud of our community's history of grit and resilience in the face of challenges. Working together, we can carry forward that pioneering spirit and sense of possibility and build a future that is true to our values.



WEST END WELCOME GUIDE

How to find your place and not block a cattle drive.

Welcome to the West End. We're a community with a lot of grit, a rich history, local pride, fun traditions, and a rural lifestyle that isn't always easy, but is worth the work. If you're ready to pitch in and take the time to learn the people and place, you will fit right in.

This is frontier country. A two-hour drive for basic necessities is normal. Cell service may be spotty. Snow might trap you at home. But the rewards are huge: mountains, canyons, dark skies, and a sense of small-town comradery that is hard to find. Whether you're here for a season or for good, this guide shares everyday tips, unwritten rules, and friendly know-how.

THE NEED TO KNOWS:

- » **Wave when you drive by.** A two-finger wave from the steering wheel goes a long way. Even if you do not know the person, it signals respect and comradery.
- » **Get involved.** People may seem a little closed off at first, but if you show up, help out, and say hi, folks will quickly warm up.
- » **Be kind and respectful.** Word travels fast in a small community. Treat others in your community well and know that out here nothing is truly anonymous.
- » **Stay informed.** Local papers like the San Miguel Basin Forum and the Norwood Post, plus Facebook community groups, will keep you in the loop.

QUIRKS, TRADITIONS, AND LOCAL LORE

- » **Sports pride.** School sports are a big deal! Show up and cheer loud for the Mustangs in Nucla and the Mavericks in Norwood. These teams have a lot of wins under their belts.
- » **Landmark directions.** People often give directions using landmarks instead of street names, especially with all our long driveways and lettered and numbered County roads.
- » **Pumpkin-smashing on Halloween.** This is a community tradition in Nucla and Naturita. Don't leave your pumpkins out on Halloween night if you don't want the teens to smash them! Local ranchers would love your left-over pumpkins for the cows.
- » **Ranch kids & working dogs.** Our ranching influence creates a great group of hard working kids. Don't be surprised when you see youngins and ranch dogs pulling their weight or riding in the back of a truck between chores or for a quick stop at Clark's.
- » **Occasional outages.** Our local governments do their best with fewer resources and staff than larger communities. Prepare for occasional power outages, water line breaks, and wifi or service interruptions. People will fix it as quickly as they can.
- » **Undercover athletes.** They're laid back like the rest of us, but the West End is home to some top tier adventure athletes. In Norwood you might even run into a winter sports Olympian.

Reach out to WEEDC to add an event to this list! ->



COMMUNITY EVENTS

We come together and celebrate all our community has to offer.

Spring:

- » Easter Egg Hunt - Norwood
- » Spring Cleanups - All towns
- » Hoof and Paw Annual Chili Dinner - Naturita

Summer:

- » Music on the Mesa - Norwood
- » Local Farmers Markets - Wild Gals in Naturita and the Pocket Park in Norwood
- » Movies in the Park - Nucla & Norwood Town Parks
- » Naturita Days - Naturita
- » Water Days - Nucla
- » Tabeguache Trail Riders Cymkhana Series - Nucla
- » Star Spangled Saturday - Norwood, Sat. before July 4th
- » San Miguel Basin Fair & Rodeo

Fall:

- » Cowboy Poetry Gathering - Nucla
- » Pioneer Days - Norwood
- » Hanging Flume 50k - Naturita,
- » Heritage Harvest Festival (the Apple Core Project) - Nucla
- » West End Gravel Rush - Nucla
- » Pack Burro Race - Naturita
- » Mountains to the Desert Classic

Winter

- » Noel Night - Norwood, 1st Fri, Dec
- » Elfin Eve and Parade of Lights - Nucla/Naturita, 1st Thurs in Dec
- » New Years Eve Fireworks - Norwood, December 31st

Learn more at West End Visitors Center community calendar:
nucla-naturita.com/events/ or
westendcolorado.com/

WEST END WELCOME GUIDE

Living Our West End Values



SMALL TOWN SOLIDARITY: BEING NEIGHBORLY

- » The West End runs on **neighbors helping neighbors**. Volunteers keep everything moving, from cooking senior meals and supporting school events to volunteering for EMS, a nonprofit, or board.
- » Volunteering is the best way to **become part of community life** and experience small-town solidarity.
- » Neighborliness also means informal help. **Strong bonds form** through helping shovel snow, move hay, or drop off soup when a family is having a rough week. What you put in is what you will get back.
- » Getting connected and **finding your people often starts small**. Try attending a pancake breakfast, a school game, a community cleanup, or a library event. Visit the farmer's market, join a workshop, or check out community theater. Local businesses are the heart of our towns, so stop by and say hello.



RURAL BY CHOICE: RESPECTING THE RURAL WAY OF LIFE

- » We love the **quiet and calm**. Many of us are here to get away from the loud noises and chaos of larger communities. We'd recommend adapting to West End time, avoiding excessive noisiness, and enjoying the pace that comes with seasonal ebbs and flows in an agricultural community.
- » Our **dark skies are spectacular** far from urban light pollution. Enjoy the stars and be mindful of your own lighting - best practice is downward facing lights on a timer to not ruin everyone else's view.
- » **Keep it rural**. We are happy to welcome new folks, but hope that those moving here do so out of an appreciation for our rural way of life, not a desire to change it.
- » **Keep it local**. All the best spots (for hiking, hunting, fishing, etc.) are local secrets! Build trust and you'll soon learn them too, but be careful about sharing them widely on social media or elsewhere online.
- » People value their **space and privacy**. Don't intrude on private property, respect people's space, and recognize that many folks live here because of the extra freedoms it allows.
- » **Embrace the trade-offs**. Yes, you'll drive farther for a lot of things, not much is open on a Monday night, and you'll get stuck in cow traffic. But we chose this rural way of life and there's so much to love.



LIVING WITH THE LAND: OUTDOOR ETIQUETTE

- » **Stay on designated roads and trails**. It prevents erosion, protects ranching operations, and respects local wildlife.
- » **If a gate is closed, leave it closed** and vice versa. Ranchers use gates for different things throughout the year. Don't block two-tracks or gates. and stay out of pastures unless invited.
- » **Leave places better than you found them**. Pack out trash. Clean up even if it's not yours.
- » **Be prepared for cattle drives**. Slow down, follow riders' signals, give horses room, and don't honk or try to pet the animals. You may see working dogs roaming unleashed. They are doing their job.
- » This is a **Right to Farm and Fence Out State**. If cattle wander into your yard, ask around or post on the local message board. You're responsible for keeping livestock out. Good fences make good neighbors.
- » **Wild asparagus is a spring treat!** Don't expect a local to share their spot with you, but if you are lucky enough to find one, make sure to harvest responsibly. Pick only the tender shoots (6-10 inches tall), cut or snap them cleanly at the base, and leave the thinner or older stalks to grow and reseed.
- » **Respect the water**. Don't hog it, waste it, or pollute it because we all depend on it. Water rights are complicated and your ditch neighbors might act as a great resource or sharp reminder.
- » We love seeing wildlife on the land, not in town. **Don't feed the animals**, intentionally or accidentally, and store food securely. (Unless it's freshly smashed pumpkins, which the deer love to snack on).
- » **Respect hunters and hunting season**. Give hunters space and honor their spots. Be mindful and wear bright colors on public lands during active seasons.



FOUNDATION FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE: HELP US THRIVE

- » **Buy local, invest local.** Spending money in local stores, restaurants, and services is a powerful way to strengthen the West End. Dollars spent here circulate through the community. Even if you work elsewhere, choosing to shop in the town where you live helps it thrive.
- » **Raising them right.** The West End is a great place for kids to grow up. It's safe, they have room to roam, and adults keep a friendly eye out. Kids can get involved in the YounGuns mountain biking club, free movie nights in the summer, library STEM programs, 4H, sports, and more. These activities rely on parents and volunteers pitching in to coach, chaperone, drive, or help organize.
- » **Respecting our elders.** Seniors are an essential part of our community fabric. They carry our stories, traditions, and local wisdom. Be sure to check out the free, delicious Senior Meals offered weekly in both Norwood and Nucla, activities at the local libraries, and the many resources available through Tri-County Health Network, Basin Clinic, or Uncompahgre Medical Center.
- » **Looking ahead.** Participate in community conversations about growth, jobs, and long-term planning. Vote in local elections, come to community meetings, be a team player, and stay open to new ideas that create opportunity while honoring our rural identity.



CHARTING OUR OWN COURSE: BEING RESOURCEFUL

- » **Be self-sufficient.** Jump in and help solve problems, don't wait for someone else to handle it. If you have unique skills, share them, and embrace the DIY spirit: repair, reuse, build it yourself, or make do.
- » **We take pride in and honor our history!** Visit the Rimrocker Museum to learn the history of the CCC ditch and Uravan or the Wright's Mesa Historical Society Museum in Norwood.
- » You may hear about **the Nucla gun ordinance** that requires heads of household to own a firearm. It is more of a cultural symbol than an enforced rule. Richard Craig (you'll find him in a tie-dye shirt around town) swears it started as a joke but now it's part of our community identity.
- » **Safety is key!** Emergency services are limited in this rural neck of the woods, so it's even more important to stay safe, be careful, and don't strain their capacity with dumb mistakes.
 - Wildlife owns the road at dawn and dusk. This is open rangeland, meaning no fences to keep large animals off the road, including deer, elk, and black cattle that are hard to see at night!
 - Take care on Norwood Hill in icy weather and in all weather.
 - Mud season (spring and fall) can be intense. When in doubt, don't drive it.
 - The desert soils are slow to absorb water after rain, which means flash floods during monsoon season. Keep an eye out for storm clouds and avoid dry drainages that can turn to raging rivers.
 - The West End is fire-prone. Always check fire restrictions before burning or having a campfire, be sure to fully extinguish fires, and create defensible space around your home.

KEY LOCAL CONTACTS

Towns & Economic Development

- » Nucla: (970) 864-7351
depclerk@townofnucla.gov
- » Naturita: (970) 865-2286
thnaturita@nntcwireless.com
- » Norwood: (970) 327-4288
office@norwoodtown.com
- » WEEDC: (970) 865-2499
weedc@chooswestend.org

Energy & Phone Companies

- » San Miguel Power Association:
(877) 864-7311
memberservice@smpa.com
- » Black Hills Energy:
888-890-5554
- » Nucla Naturita Telephone
Company: (970) 864-7335
nntc@nntcwireless.com

Key Service Providers

- » Basin Clinic: (970) 865-2665
- » Uncompahgre Medical: (970) 327-4233
- » All Points Transit: (970) 249-0128

Business & Resource Directories

nucla-naturita.com/business-directory/
norwoodcolorado.com/business-directory/
 Health resources: resources.tchnetwork.org/



VISION AND GOALS

WHY VISION?

A shared vision is one of the most powerful tools a community can have. It helps expand thinking about what's possible, creates a sense of connection and purpose, and provides a common direction for decisions. Visioning brings people together around a story of the future that they can see themselves in. By imagining the kind of place we want the West End to be, the community has created a foundation for collaboration, civic engagement, and the ongoing work of building a stronger, more resilient region.

Through the WE Vision process, community members were asked questions like *Where are we now? Where do we want to be? And what does success look like for the West End?* The result is a vision for a future West End where people of all ages can thrive; Main Streets and small businesses can prosper; rural character, open space, and public lands are protected; and where opportunities like good jobs, housing, services, and education allow people to stay, grow, and contribute to the place they love.

The following community goals describe an action-oriented vision for change across eight focus areas: housing, healthcare, growth, education, the economy, land use, community character, and civic health. They were built iteratively from multiple layers of engagement, review, and feedback, and are based on points of consensus regarding the community's concerns and aspirations for the region.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO: OUR COMMUNITY GOALS

Our vision for the West End is....



A Vital and Viable Community. We have access to the healthcare, support, and services to stay here and live healthy, thriving lives. [Page 30](#)



Housing Access and Choice. We have safe, quality housing options, both new and restored, at prices that work for local incomes and allow people to stay in the community. [Page 34](#)



A Strong Regional Economy. We benefit from a stable and diverse economy that allows a variety of local and new businesses, industries, and our workforce to thrive. [Page 38](#)



Managed and Meaningful Growth. We cultivate meaningful opportunities that contribute to livelihoods without compromising our rural character. [Page 44](#)



Balanced Use of Land and Resources. We have a locally-led balance between long-term stewardship of the land and shared use and access. [Page 50](#)



Pathways to Success. We have high-quality schools, libraries, and hands-on educational opportunities that support our teachers, students, and community members of all ages and stages to succeed. [Page 56](#)



Vibrant Community Character. We enjoy safe, welcoming, and vibrant communities that celebrate our history and encourage shared participation and community pride. [Page 60](#)



Civic Health and Collaboration. We build trust, healthy dialogue, and strong, representative local leadership to keep the West End region engaged and effective. [Page 62](#)

ACHIEVING OUR VISION

Together, these goals serve as both a roadmap and a measure of progress. They define what success looks like and provide the foundation for the strategies and actions that follow. Local leaders, organizations, and partners can use these goals as practical tools to stay focused, aligned, and accountable to the community's vision.

Use the goals and vision to:

- » **Guide decisions and investments.** Evaluate policies, projects, and funding opportunities to ensure they support the community's long-term direction (see Keeping this Plan off the Shelf, [page 9](#), for more detail).
- » **Keep it front of mind.** Cross reference the Vision Plan in agendas, annual budget and strategy meetings, and new leader or staff onboarding.
- » **Coordinate efforts.** Align Town, County, and partner initiatives around shared priorities and measurable outcomes.
- » **Inform future planning.** Use the goals as a framework for master plans, capital improvement projects, and grant applications.
- » **Evaluate progress.** Track accomplishments and revisit priorities regularly to celebrate success and identify where more work is needed (see Implementation & Measuring Progress section, [page 74](#)).
- » **Stay adaptable.** Apply the goals as a flexible framework that can evolve as the West End grows and conditions change.

The strategies in the following chapter were developed in order to achieve the community's goals. **Each goal has a set of supporting strategies nested within it.** They outline both near-term steps and long-term approaches to help turn the community's shared vision into lasting results.



A large, vibrant rainbow arches across a dark, stormy sky, illuminating a grassy field below. The rainbow's colors are bright and distinct, contrasting sharply with the grey clouds. The field is a mix of green and brown grass, with some small shrubs scattered throughout. The overall scene conveys a sense of hope and renewal after a storm.

03.

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

IN THIS SECTION:

- » ABOUT THE STRATEGIES
- » QUICK WINS & BIG MOVES
- » GOAL 1: VITAL & VIABLE
- » GOAL 2: HOUSING ACCESS
- » GOAL 3: STRONG ECONOMY
- » GOAL 4: MANAGED GROWTH
- » GOAL 5: LAND & RESOURCES
- » GOAL 6: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS
- » GOAL 7: VIBRANT CHARACTER
- » GOAL 8: CIVIC HEALTH



ABOUT THE STRATEGIES

The strategies in this section represent the high-level direction for achieving the community's shared goals. An iterative engagement process built strategies that are informed by local experience, shaped by community input, and ready to guide implementation. **The strategies are organized by the eight goals** of the Vision Plan and provide a framework for turning the community's goals into practical next steps.

This section is designed to serve as both a learning and implementation tool. **A section for each goal includes:**



- » **Why It's Important** - Describes how the goal connects to the broader community vision. This text can also help strengthen funding requests by tying proposed projects to local priorities.
 - » **Where We Are Today** - Outlines data, trends, and conditions to illustrate current needs and opportunities. Note, this **data is current to 2025** and offers a point in time snapshot.
 - » **Ongoing Efforts and Progress** - Highlights current initiatives, projects, and partnerships that are already advancing the community's goals.
 - » **Key Tools & Learning** - Many of the goals, particularly the five priority areas (see below), include additional learnings and resources to provide more nuance and shared understanding about potential tools, case studies, and local positions.
 - » **Strategies** - The key focus of this Plan, the strategy sections are highlighted throughout the following chapter. Strategies list the specific approaches identified to achieve each goal.
- ✓ Those **identified as community priorities are marked** to highlight where to focus early efforts.

PRIORITIZING NEXT STEPS

With so much we want to accomplish, but limited capacity and funding to do so, focusing on near-term priorities is essential. There are a lot of strategies, but not all need to be accomplished right away. Many offer long-term direction to achieve the vision. **Filtering by community priority can focus initial efforts:**

- » **Filter 1:** Initially prioritized goals/actions: Health & Services, Housing Access, Strong Economy, Managed Growth, and Public Lands & Resources.
- » **Filter 2:** Additional community input (see table) about what areas are the highest priority for our limited capacity.
- » **Filter 3:** The Quick Wins and Big Moves on the following page outline the most low-hanging fruit and highest potential for impact.
- » **Filter 4:** Immediate Actions for the first year after Plan Adoption are identified in the Action Plan.

Prioritizing Time for Short-Term Action	Votes	% of total
Healthcare and Services	22	25.6%
Housing Access	21	24.4%
Economic Health	19	22.1%
Managing Growth & Character	12	13.9%
Public Lands & Natural Resources	12	13.9%

THE ACTION PLAN

To keep the Vision Plan streamlined and long-lasting, it focuses on high-level goals and strategies that will guide local leaders for years to come. However, implementation requires clear next steps. These Actions can be found in the West End Action Plan. **A 2026 read-only version of the Action Plan can be found [here](#).** Learn more about the Action Plan, what it includes, and how to get involved in the Implementation section, page 65.



RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE GOALS

The eight Plan goals are deeply interconnected. Each represents part of a larger system that supports a livable, self-reliant, authentic, and thriving region, where progress in one area helps strengthen the others.

Foundations of Community Well-Being

- » Housing (Goal 2), Health & Services (Goal 1), and Education (Goal 6) form the core of community stability.
- » These foundations enable families, workers, and employers to stay and invest locally, supporting a Strong Economy (Goal 3).
- » Stable housing, schools, and healthcare are also essential to attract and retain teachers, nurses, and skilled professionals.



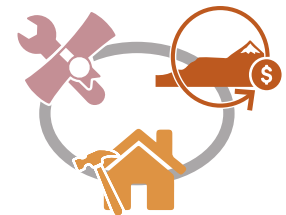
Growth, Economy, and Community Character

- » Growth (Goal 4) and the Economy (Goal 3) are closely linked: modest growth sustains local businesses, jobs, and services. But we must ensure economic growth in nearby communities doesn't overwhelm the West End.
- » Growth must reflect Community Character (Goal 7) to ensure that it doesn't erode our rural identity. Modest growth supports main street vibrancy, events, and volunteerism which support local character and connection.
- » Housing (Goal 2) plays a role too, as the type, scale, and location shape both the pace of growth and the look and feel of the community.



Supporting Our Youth and Workforce

- » Economy (goal 3) and Education (goal 6) reinforce each other; apprenticeships and technical training help support and retain youth and fill workforce gaps.
- » Housing choice (Goal 2) is key for keeping youth and attracting families, which in turn supports a healthy local economy.



Public Lands, Livelihoods, and Identity

- » Public Lands (Goal 5) are central to livelihoods and culture, supporting industries (ranching, mining, & rec) that create a Strong Economy (Goal 3).
- » Thoughtful land management supports Managed Growth (Goal 4) and Community Character (Goal 7) by protecting access and open space.



Leadership and Collaboration

- » Civic Health & Collaboration (Goal 8) underpin all goals; aligned leadership and consistent coordination are essential for progress.
- » The success of all strategies depends on the region's capacity to work together, share resources, and stay committed to long-term goals.



CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

- » **Capacity** including, time, staff, volunteers, & funding are limited resources essential for implementation
- » **Collaboration** takes effort, but prevents duplication and ensures that local actions reinforce each other
- » **Water** impacts everything from agriculture and ecology to housing, industry attraction, & livability
- » **Infrastructure** (water, sewer, roads, & services) is the backbone for housing, economy, & managed growth
- » **Quality of Life**, the ability to build a good life and stay here, means access to jobs, homes, healthcare, education, recreation, and welcoming communities

QUICK WINS AND BIG MOVES

The following lists highlight two types of early actions: Quick Wins and Big Moves. These are intended to focus early implementation efforts, build momentum, and illustrate the potential for bigger impact. They are ordered to reflect relative priority and readiness, but all are considered critically important.

QUICK WINS

Quick Wins are near-term, achievable steps that demonstrate progress, strengthen partnerships, and build trust in the process. These actions require minimal funding and resources but deliver tangible results. Many build on existing efforts and leverage previous investments.

- 1. Town-County Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs)** – Create IGAs between each Town and County to align development approvals in unincorporated areas with local codes and priorities, ensuring consistent and community-driven land use decisions. ([See Goal 4, Strategy 2](#))
- 2. Regional Leadership Group** – Establish a region-wide leadership team with joint meetings of all three Town Boards and representation from Montrose and San Miguel County Commissions. Regular coordination will strengthen communication, alignment, and shared learning across jurisdictions. ([See Goal 8, Strategy 1](#))
- 3. Apprenticeship Expansion** – Grow the local apprenticeship and internship program by recruiting more local employers and participants, strengthening youth pathways and business workforce connections. ([See Goal 6, Strategy 2](#))
- 4. Regional Resource Directory** – Compile and maintain a comprehensive, user-friendly, living directory for local resources including healthcare, housing, youth, seniors, local services and businesses, and volunteer opportunities. ([See Goal 1, Strategy 2](#))
- 5. Business Support Hub** – Centralize and promote existing business assistance programs on the WEEDC website, with Chambers linking and promoting resources to their members to ensure all entrepreneurs can access available tools. ([See Goal 3, Strategy 2](#))

BIG MOVES

Big Moves are large, transformative efforts that can redefine the region's trajectory, often across multiple goals. They will take coordination, investment, and time in order to create lasting, positive changes

- 1. 24/7 Critical Access Care** – Expand the Basin Clinic into a Critical Access Hospital to provide round-the-clock emergency and long-term care, improve health outcomes, and allow more residents, especially seniors, to remain in the community. This facility would also create skilled jobs and strengthen the region's healthcare economy. ([See Goal 1, Strategy 3](#))
- 2. Vacant Housing Program** – Establish staffing and systems to identify, rehab, and reuse deteriorating homes in Nucla/Naturita, turning existing housing stock into livable options and improving community appearance, safety, and stability. ([See Goal 2, Strategy 2](#))
- 3. WEEDC's Regional Role and Capacity** – Build WEEDC staffing and funding to serve as the regional backbone for implementation. As one of the only organizations spanning all West End jurisdictions, WEEDC is well positioned to lead many of the Plan's strategies. Strengthening its capacity is essential for advancing regional collaboration and sustained progress. ([See Goal 3, Strategy 1](#))
- 4. Regional Voice in Public Lands Decisions** – Form a regional, multi-stakeholder group to coordinate, align, and advocate for local public lands priorities with state and federal agencies, ensuring that West End needs and values help guide land management decisions. ([See Goal 5, Strategy 1](#))
- 5. Town Water Sources and Systems** – Invest in reliable and efficient infrastructure, including wastewater, stormwater, and source water, to improve quality of life and unlock opportunities for housing, economic growth, and managed development. ([See Goal 3, Strategy 4](#))



GOAL 1: A VITAL AND VIABLE COMMUNITY

We have access to the healthcare, support, and services to stay here and live healthy, thriving lives.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Quality healthcare is fundamental to the viability of rural places. Timely access to care, adequate emergency response capacity, and strong community health all directly contribute to the West End's stability, resilience, and vitality. Reliable community services, especially healthcare, are also essential for attracting and retaining workers and businesses.

While healthcare is a central emphasis of this goal, it is not the whole picture. A Vital and Viable Community includes access to activities, support services, healthy food, and transportation, which in turn foster belonging, connection, and overall community health. Together, these supports form the foundation of a strong and livable place.

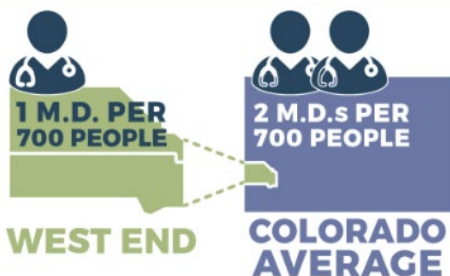
Behavioral health is one of the most significant factors influencing personal and family well-being, workforce participation, and public safety in the West End. Yet behavioral health needs and substance abuse remain widespread and under-addressed, emphasizing the importance of prevention, treatment, and long-term recovery support close to home.

Strengthening behavioral health also means creating opportunities for connection and spaces where people feel seen, supported, and valued. For youth especially, access to positive activities, mentors, and mental health resources helps build confidence and acceptance, reducing isolation and risk while strengthening the next generation's ties to community and to one another.

Older adults are also an integral part of the West End's identity and community life. Some were born and raised here and carry the region's stories and heritage, others moved here as adults and built unique lives off the beaten path, and some chose the West End in retirement for its peaceful setting and access to nature. Most want to remain in their communities as they age, close to loved ones and familiar places. However, major gaps in healthcare and senior services often make that impossible, forcing many to relocate when care needs increase. This loss is deeply felt across the West End, and addressing it has become a shared priority for the community.



**WEST END MEDICAL CARE
AVAILABILITY IS ~1/2
THE COLORADO AVERAGE**



IN TOTAL, THE REGION IS SERVED BY:



WHERE WE ARE TODAY

West End communities face significant and persistent challenges in accessing healthcare. Distance and funding are the biggest barriers. Local clinics provide primary and behavioral healthcare, but for after-hours care, emergency care, specialists, surgeries, and long-term care, residents must travel 2+ hours. In addition to the clinics, the West End's emergency responders, nonprofits, senior services, public health programs, and volunteers form a safety net in a region where 29–45% of residents are uninsured or rely on Medicaid. But this system is fragmented and fragile, and many are unaware of or unable to access existing resources.

With no emergency care facility in the West End, the communities rely primarily on volunteer Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to provide emergency response and transport to larger regional health systems. These organizations and the volunteers who support them are highly dedicated and a crucial asset for such a remote area, but face challenges of limited funding and equipment and high risk of burnout.

Limited and uncertain funding, compounded by federal Medicaid changes, continues to strain providers' ability to sustain operations and meet growing needs. Local healthcare workforce shortages reflect broader trends, exacerbated by distance from population centers, limited housing, and long travel times.

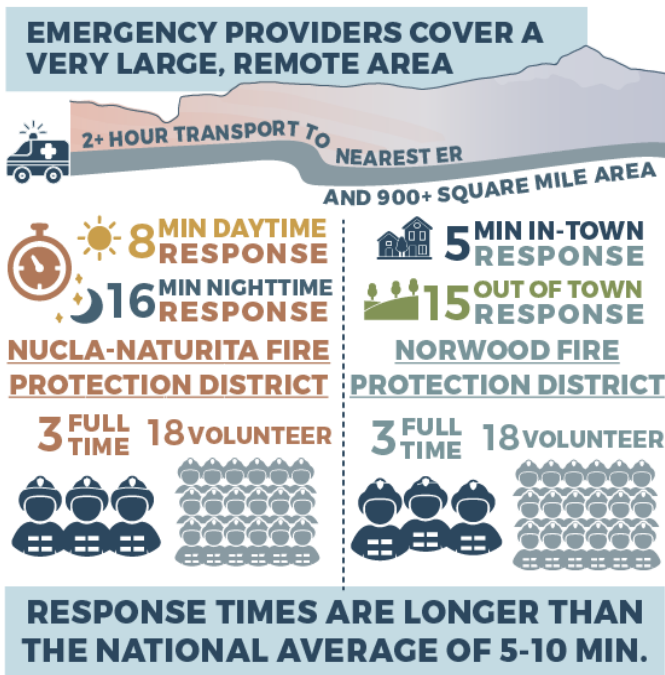
The region also faces challenges with behavioral health and substance abuse, particularly opioids, methamphetamines, and alcohol. According to the most recent community health survey of San Miguel County, 56% of respondents expressed concern about substance use, while 34% of middle and high school students reported consistently feeling sad or hopeless and 7% have attempted suicide one or more times in the past 12 months. These challenges are compounded by limited access to mental health resources.

Seniors make up an increasing portion of the West End's population, rising from 19% in 2015 to 29% in 2023, about 1,660 older adults in a region of roughly 5,700 residents. Local options for aging in place are limited, with no assisted living, nursing home, or hospice facilities and few in-home care providers. Transportation barriers also make it difficult for many seniors to reach medical appointments, essential services, and community activities.

LOCAL HEALTH NEEDS

A recent (2025) poll on healthcare access, conducted by a local healthcare access group, asked residents of western Montrose County to identify their top three needs for local healthcare. After-hours emergency care emerged as the community's most pressing need. Respondents could select multiple options, so percentages do not total 100%.

Top Local Healthcare Needs	% of Responses
After-hours emergency care	67%
Specialist appointments	41%
Increased access to home health care	30%
Transportation to/from medical appointments	29%
Recreation/exercise facilities and programs	21%
Mental health services	20%
Increased access to healthy, nutritious food	20%
Substance abuse treatment & prevention	13%





ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » **Uncompahgre Medical Center** (UMC) is a Federally Qualified Health Center in Norwood that provides primary, preventative, and behavioral care, dental services, and a pharmacy, along with transport to and from appointments and food bank deliveries to patients with significant transportation barriers.
- » **Basin Clinic** is a small, independent nonprofit medical clinic located in Naturita that provides primary, preventative, and behavioral care. The clinic is evaluating options to strengthen financial sustainability and expand services, including forming a Special Healthcare District or Critical Access Hospital.
- » The **Axis Health Systems Clinic** in Norwood is an outpatient behavioral health service, including psychiatry and walk-in crises services in Norwood, with hopes to continue expanding services.
- » San Miguel County Public Health recently completed a **behavioral health strategic plan**, identifying the West End as a high-need area and emphasizing community-based approaches and coordination, including a resource hub and co-response. Montrose County Public Health also provides behavioral health services, but there remains a gap in local access.
- » **Emergency responders** coordinate across Towns, sharing personnel and resources to cover calls.
- » **San Miguel Resource Center, Concerned Citizens for a Clean Community**, and the emerging **Happy Healthy Humans** provide resources, community action, and peer support for addressing mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence.
- » **Tri-County Health Network supports older adults** to age in place through in-home safety and needs assessments, care and service navigation, and efforts to grow the caregiver workforce.
- » **Two widely-utilized food banks**, one in Nucla operated by West End Family Link and another in Norwood operated by Fresh Food Hub, improve food access across the region.
- » **Nucla-Naturita Senior Center and the FRESH Foundation run senior meal programs** that provide regular hot meals and importantly, opportunities for social connection for older adults.
- » **Region 10** provides resources for **senior and caregiver services** in the West End and surrounding areas.
- » West End Trails Alliance, Montrose West Rec, Norwood Parks & Recreation, True North, Norwood Youth Sports, and the local libraries all provide **youth programming**.
- » Tri-County Health Network and Region 10 have **resource directories** for health and senior services, and the Naturita branch of the Montrose County Library is planning to develop a living resource directory for the West End of Montrose County.
- » Region 10 hosts the **Gunnison Valley Transportation Planning Region** which enables planning and coordination between member entities, including the Towns and San Miguel Area Regional Transit and All Points Transit.



SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

The goal of a Vital and Viable Community is to ensure that all West End residents can rely on strong, accessible, and sustainable systems that support daily life, especially healthcare. The region's healthcare network is vital but under strain, and strategies focus on strengthening and expanding existing providers and emergency services, diversifying funding, and expanding access to behavioral health and specialty care. This plan also encourages more support for senior care, opportunities for youth, local food systems, and transportation access, building a healthier West End for all generations. ✓ Checks mark priority strategies.

- ✓ 1. Diversify and increase funding and resources to strengthen, sustain, and expand local healthcare providers and services.
Focuses on making the local healthcare system more resilient by stabilizing funding and improving collaboration. Priority tools:
 - » Healthcare Services District in western Montrose County
 - » County, state, and federal funding
 - » Community Benefit Agreements with new major industries
 - » Nimble structure for regional coordination
- ✓ 2. Improve access to essential physical and behavioral healthcare, specialists, and services.
 - » Addressing key gaps and enhancing health workforce development and attraction
 - » Support expansion of behavioral health programs through Axis Health, TCHN, and other providers
 - » Improving access to existing resources
- ✓ 3. Strengthen emergency and urgent care capacity, including paramedics, EMS, and emergency facilities.
 - » Advancing a Critical Access Hospital and supporting first responders
- 4. Provide more support, activities, care, and services for seniors to help them age in place.
 - » Emphasizes caregiver workforce, developing senior housing, and adding activities
- 5. Develop more avenues of support and wellbeing for young people outside of school.
- 6. Create more safe and easy ways to get to Main Streets, community centers, and key service providers.
- 7. Ensure the whole community has access to healthy food options, prioritizing local food systems and solutions.

See the [Action Plan](#) for more detailed Action Steps for this and the following goals and strategies.





GOAL 2: HOUSING ACCESS AND CHOICE

We have safe, quality housing options, both new and restored, at prices that work for local incomes and allow people to stay in the community.

KEY DEFINITIONS

“Affordable Housing” costs no more than 30% of a household’s income. For federally-funded developments affordability is based on Area Median Income (AMI), but in the West End, County AMI is skewed by higher incomes in Telluride and Montrose and overstates what West End locals can afford. As a result, housing projects priced to County AMI are often unattainable.

An Inverted Housing Market is one where building or repairing homes costs more than residents can afford in rent or mortgage. Bridging this gap requires subsidies, public investment, or creative partnerships to make new housing feasible.

Missing Middle Housing is small-scale housing that fills the gap between single-family houses and large apartment buildings, including duplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs). These can fit within the scale and character of small towns while offering more options for young families, workers, and seniors.

Deed restrictions are legal tools that help keep homes affordable and available to local residents. They are often required for publicly-funded projects, but can be tailored to fit local needs. In the West End, there is support for deed restrictions that prioritize homes for full-time residents and workers, along with some support for resale caps that limit price increases while still allowing owners to build modest equity.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

The lack of attainable housing is one of the West End’s biggest challenges, affecting both the local economy and the fabric of community life. Limited housing options makes it difficult for young people, families, and older adults to stay in the community. Local businesses and essential service providers struggle to attract and retain workers because housing is scarce and often unaffordable relative to local wages.

New development and construction is limited by infrastructure, high costs, and other barriers. When housing is built, the type and cost of those units can quickly shape community character, influencing both how towns look and who can afford to live there. Addressing these realities will require housing solutions that are intentional, resourceful, and strategic.

The housing market on Wright’s Mesa is characterized by low inventory, high prices, and limited water resources. Meanwhile, many homes in Naturita, Nucla, and unincorporated Montrose County are older, vacant, or in disrepair. Investing in these properties makes better use of existing infrastructure, improves appearance, and can be less costly than new construction. Rehabilitation programs coupled with clear codes and consistent enforcement can revitalize neighborhoods while adding housing stock.

Expanding attainable housing, especially workforce and modestly priced market options, supports small businesses, schools, and essential services and is a key part of economic development. Homeownership also offers an important path toward building community wealth and stability. Creating opportunities for older residents to downsize while remaining in the community can improve quality of life for seniors and increase the inventory of “naturally occurring” affordable homes available to younger adults and families.

A diverse mix of housing options can help preserve the West End’s authenticity and small-town spirit. West End communities want to remain welcoming and family-friendly, not overdeveloped or exclusive. Offering choices—from rehabilitated older homes to duplexes, starter homes, and senior housing—allows locals to stay through every stage of life while also allowing for newcomers. This balance prevents displacement and aligns with the values and character that make the West End unique.

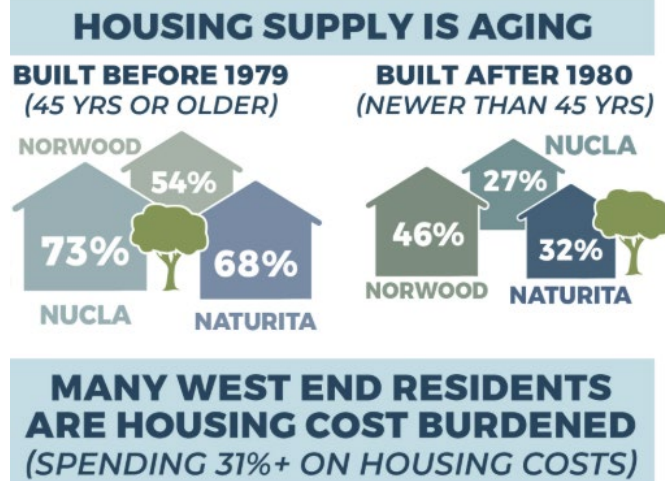
WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Housing access and affordability is a challenge across the West End, with limited availability and high housing costs relative to local budgets and wages. Options for rentals and starter homes are limited. New construction at all price levels remains slow due to high material and labor costs, long distances to suppliers, and limited contractor availability. The cost of construction generally exceeds what locals can afford.

Many existing homes in Naturita and Nucla are vacant or in disrepair, some because local owners lack the ability to maintain them, and others because they were inherited by people who no longer live in the community and have little incentive to keep them up. Nearly half of the housing units in Naturita and around 40% in Nucla are manufactured or mobile homes. In addition to the health and safety risks of these older mobile homes, they often lack foundations and cannot be taxed as real property, making them ineligible for financing and assistance opportunities.

The pressure of housing Telluride's workforce is increasingly felt by long-term West End residents as new workforce or deed-restricted housing often serves Telluride and Mountain Village employees but remains out of reach for local workers. In Norwood, Telluride's growth is already driving up prices and demand, while housing in western Montrose County remains more affordable for now, but is expected to feel similar spillover effects in the coming years.

Local capacity to coordinate housing efforts remains limited. While enthusiasm is strong, the Towns rely on small staff, and regional housing authorities that are focused on managing existing units and administering deed restrictions, not new housing. There is a clear need for regional capacity to align efforts, share resources, pursue funding, and lead initiatives. Without sustained staffing and support, housing efforts stall.



CASE STUDY: TURNING VACANT PROPERTIES INTO HOUSING

In the Town of Kit Carson, CO, a shortage of quality housing paired with a high rate of vacant and dilapidated homes has long affected the local school, economy, and ability to retain families. An inverted market and low property taxes provides little incentive for owners to put their vacant properties back into use. To address this dynamic, the volunteer-led, nonprofit Kit Carson Rural Development (KCRD) spearheads local housing redevelopment with support from one full-time housing specialist employed by the Town. Since 2010, KCRD has replaced dilapidated housing on multiple lots with 15 new single-family homes and duplexes, leveraging partnerships, grants, and volunteers to stretch limited resources.

Photo credit: Kit Carson

VALUES CONNECTIONS

Housing sits at the heart of our shared values—it's an essential component of a Foundation for a Prosperous Future as well as an expression of Small-Town Solidarity and Charting Our Own Course. A stable, diverse housing market gives families, elders, and workers the security to stay and build their lives here. Addressing housing needs requires the same resourcefulness that defines our character: rolling up our sleeves, helping our neighbors, and finding creative solutions.



ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » An ad-hoc **West End Housing Committee** has enthusiasm, relationships, and resources to leverage for housing development and redevelopment in the West End, but lacks a sustainable structure, funding, and leadership needed to maintain momentum.
- » A small number of **local and regionally-based private developers** are interested in or actively working to develop market rate and missing middle housing in the West End.
- » WEEDC-owned **property in Naturita is slated for housing development**. The Town received technical assistance from the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) to evaluate several potential housing sites. The assessment concluded that new housing should ideally serve households earning 30–50% of AMI but, given the lack of suitable sites for such a project, recommended that the Town focus in the near term on supporting WEEDC's housing development.
- » San Miguel County owns **property in the Town of Norwood** that was purchased using Prop 123 land banking funds, intended for **affordable or workforce housing** development.
- » In addition to technical assistance for early-stage planning and site feasibility, **CHFA also provides access to low-interest loans** for smaller housing developments and rehab projects as well as home loan programs that directly support homebuyers.
- » **San Miguel County is currently updating their Land Use Code** to make it easier to develop affordable housing.
- » The **Towns of Norwood and Nucla are beginning updated Land Use / Master Plan** processes with increased attention on housing needs and barriers.
- » The **Telluride Foundation** offers **down payment assistance and homebuyer education programs** that serve the West End. Citizens Bank also provides homebuyer education.
- » **Tri-County Health Network** helps low-income homeowners apply for **loans and assistance** for housing repairs.
- » The Towns of Naturita and Nucla have increased **vacant properties fees and enforcement**.
- » The **Colorado Affordable Residential Energy** program, provides energy assessments, weatherization, and free energy upgrades for low to middle income households, sponsored by San Miguel Power, EcoAction Partners, and Black Hills Energy.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



The West End community is focused on practical, community-led, collaborative solutions to address housing challenges. Efforts center on revitalizing vacant homes, making the most of existing infrastructure, and supporting smaller infill development to cultivate a diverse, balanced housing market that keeps homes within reach for residents. By coordinating across Towns and Counties, aligning local regulations, and targeting resources where they will have the greatest impact, the West End can expand housing options and build momentum for long-term progress. These strategies outline how to move this work forward.

- ✓ 1. Formalize an organizational structure with dedicated staffing to provide consistent leadership, coordination, and support for ongoing housing work across the West End.

Ideally housed within an existing organization or local government, this entity should:

- » Catalyze housing initiatives
- » Coordinate related efforts across jurisdictions
- » Ensure housing opportunities are accessible to West End locals

- ✓ 2. Create programs and opportunities to bring vacant and dilapidated homes, primarily in Nucla and Naturita, back into safe, livable condition and ensure upkeep of available housing.

- » Prioritizes resources and support for property owners
- » Encourages aligning policies across jurisdictions
- » Creates an opportunity for community-led redevelopment

- ✓ 3. Encourage a mix of new housing—including affordable, workforce, and market-rate options—so locals aren't displaced and people of all ages can find options that meet their needs.

To limit displacement, new development should:

- » Be designed and developed for local incomes
- » Utilize creative approaches like sweat equity and buy-down programs to further reduce costs
- » Create and free up existing “naturally occurring” affordable housing

- 4. Update local regulations to allow and encourage desired housing types and prices.
- 5. Promote existing homeownership resources and education.



Duplex in Glenwood Springs



Silver Leaf Cohousing, Paonia



Townhomes, Highlands' Garden Village



ADU Housing, Silverton



GOAL 3: A STRONG REGIONAL ECONOMY

We benefit from a stable and diverse economy that allows a variety of local and new businesses, industries, and our workforce to thrive.



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The past, present and future of the West End is linked to the economic opportunity for workers and their families to thrive here and live a good life in exchange for skilled work and resourcefulness. Community assets like housing, healthcare, schools, services, and amenities are also foundational for worker and business attraction, as is workforce training.

The area has a long history of agriculture. Family-owned cattle ranches and farms remain an important part of both the landscape and the economy. Other legacy industries are tied to natural resources, particularly minerals such as uranium, vanadium, and coal. Cycles of boom and bust have taken a toll in the West End both economically and on the fabric of the community. The West End experienced economic hardship following the closure of Uravan in the 1980s and of the coal plant and mine in 2019. The job losses are more than numbers here: they gave the skilled workers, who with their families were beloved community members, little choice but to move away.

To provide new opportunities, the community would like to bring back large employers. However, regulatory hurdles for mining, deficiencies in local water and wastewater systems, and the West End's remote location, are barriers. Large-scale development can bring both benefits and real impacts to the community. The West End seeks to bolster its influence on decisions about large-scale development to ensure that the local benefits balance out impacts.

Tourism and outdoor recreation benefits the region through visitor spending, supporting local lodging, retail, and dining businesses. However, the community has also experienced negative impacts by visitors to the landscape and resources that are a core local value. Managing and educating visitors and striving for a more sustainable flow throughout the year would improve the benefits of this economic sector.

Looking to the future, an increasingly diverse, homegrown economy that is rooted in place will make the West End more resilient to market, resource, and business cycles. There are opportunities to grow local businesses, foster entrepreneurs, and provide locally owned jobs and livelihoods. Most rural jobs today are created in small businesses, a few at a time. Fostering entrepreneurship and business growth and improving local livability, services and amenities to bring new businesses and entrepreneurs, is the most cost effective and fruitful path for investing economic development resources.

VALUES CONNECTIONS

Growing a more resilient and diverse regional economy is a central component of laying the Foundation for a Prosperous Future. To do this, West End workers need more local job opportunities in more diverse businesses and industries. Many of these opportunities come from working with and Living with the Land and natural resources that surround us. Finally, the independent spirit of Charting Our Own Course focuses these strategies and actions on supporting and developing local entrepreneurs from our own community, advocating for our values with outside interests.



WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Today, household incomes in the West End lag behind the state and their respective Counties. Among West End workers who have stayed, there are lower workforce participation rates and higher commuting rates compared to a decade ago. As prime age workers have left for better and more abundant jobs, the remaining population is older on average, with fixed incomes.

The top two employment industries in the West End are “Construction, manufacturing and retail” and “Education and health care”. Industries that are tied to the open land and natural resources are also regionally important. The community has strong regard for the legacy industry group of “Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Mining,” and has expressed interest in growing, attracting, and bolstering more local businesses and employment in these fields.

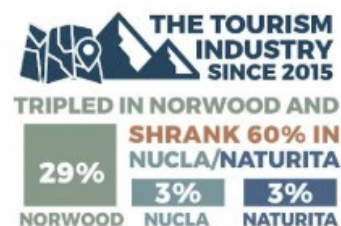
“Tourism” is another industry tied to the abundant natural resources in the West End. Norwood has seen strong growth in tourism revenue, while the other two communities have actually seen a decline since 2015, despite a local sense that visitation and tourism have been increasing.

THE TOWNS' MEDIAN INCOME ARE THE LOWEST IN THE REGION



THE WEST END'S MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ARE MUCH LOWER THAN

INDUSTRY SECTORS ARE EVOLVING, BUT THE TRADES REMAIN THE TOP EMPLOYER





Roles in a Strong Regional Economy

A strong regional economy with diverse jobs and stable revenues is a collaboration between public, private, and nonprofit actors. The West End community has a healthy respect for letting the private sector lead, while also creating local conditions and programs to help businesses thrive. See the Implementation section Partners, Roles and Responsibilities for more information about who does what in economic development.



ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » [WEEDC](#) is a **nonprofit economic development organization** that works to create an inviting, pro-business environment in the West End. WEEDC bridges the shared economic interests of the three West End Towns and leads the region's efforts to identify and attract new businesses and industries.
- » WEEDC, Telluride Foundation, and West End Schools facilitate an **Internship and Apprenticeship Program** that places youth in local businesses to provide work experience and skills.
- » The **Collective Mine** is a **co-working space, commercial kitchen, and entrepreneurial hub** in Naturita operated by WEEDC. Business support programs, such as coaching and pooled health care access, are offered in person here.
- » The [Norwood Chamber of Commerce](#) (NCC) is a member-based business alliance.
- » [Nucla-Naturita Area Chamber of Commerce](#) (NNACC) is a member-based business alliance. NNACC also operates the West End Visitor Center in Naturita.
- » [West End Colorado](#) is a **visitor information** and responsible recreation website that was built as a project of WEEDC and NNACC. It includes listings of local businesses, but due to lack of ongoing funding, has not been updated in several years.
- » The [Unaweep Tabeguache Scenic & Historic Byway](#) is a local visitor attraction and education asset. State websites advertise and channel traffic to the local website with more information. The byway features historical signage in a number of pullouts.
- » **Excellent quality broadband** in the Towns is an asset for business attraction, though there are gaps in outlying areas.
- » The **Mustang Water Authority**, a Town-created entity, provides potable water needs for both Nucla and Naturita. The Towns manage their own water and sewer infrastructure.
- » The Town of Naturita **replaced the main water line** and looping system and added five hydrants in 2023.
- » The Town of Nucla completed a \$2.6 million **water and sewer line replacement** on Main Street, plus a water line replacement and paving to the new school.
- » The Town of Norwood has an active and responsive **Water Commission and Sanitation District** that work in partnership with the Town to support infrastructure updates.
- » All three Towns have a **lodging tax** to capture visitor revenue. The allocation of these revenues varies by Town. Some is used to support the NNACC visitor center and marketing efforts.
- » **Local farming and food operations** such as the [Apple Core Project](#) and [FRESH Foundation](#) are important economic assets and provide support for small local farmers.
- » The recently updated **Hopkins Airfield** supports wildland firefighting, EMS transport, and economic opportunities.



DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS & BENEFITS

Best Practices for Large-Scale Development

Balancing Large-Scale Development: Benefits and Impacts

This page is designed to inform large-scale developers about the development impacts and benefits that matter most to West End residents.

Fundamentally, **West End communities welcome new businesses and industry**. Industry has been essential to making livable wage jobs available that directly sustain our families and indirectly support our communities and way of life. Our history includes extractive industries like mineral mining and coal energy production. We have seen first hand that these can be done responsibly and managed well.

But for all its benefits, **large-scale development or neighboring projects can have negative impacts** like degrading lands, vistas, and local quality of life. All too often, development is approved that has impacts in our local area, while primarily benefiting those outside our region. We want to understand the scale of likely local benefits as well as potential impacts.

When large projects are proposed, **we seek a two-way flow of information and a meaningful say** in decisions. Through respectful dialogue, we can help developers troubleshoot a workable balance, and memorialize commitments in Community Benefits Agreements or Good Neighbor Agreements.

Impacts of Local Concern

When it comes to development impacts, there are some that concern us more than others. Through public input, we identified examples of impacts that are usually considered “deal-breakers” and other impacts that many community members consider to be negotiable, if they are offset by local benefits.



Deal-breakers

- » Strains a limited natural resource like water
- » Restricts local access to public lands
- » Provides wages that are too low for workers to afford local housing



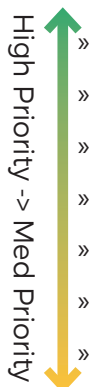
Negotiable

- » Interrupts views of landscapes or vistas
- » Strains limited services or emergency response capacity
- » Adds more traffic than roads are designed to carry
- » Shifts agricultural lands to commercial or industrial uses
- » May restrict future mining operations



Desired Local Benefits

As a starting point, we embrace large-scale development when it provides high-paying jobs for locals, and delivers local revenue (property tax, sales tax, etc.). Through community input, we identified examples of additional **benefits that could help to offset negotiable, negative impacts**.



- » Commitment to train and preferentially hire locals
- » Support local health clinics and emergency medical services
- » Upgrade local infrastructure like roads, water, or drainage systems
- » Provide childcare for workers and community members
- » Host apprenticeships to train local youth in job skills
- » Develop housing that is affordable to local workers
- » Sponsor community events or local youth sports teams





SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



The West End is looking to build an economy of varied job opportunities in businesses that are rooted in place by local assets and ownership. This begins with supporting existing owners, creating opportunity for entrepreneurs, and cultivating existing clusters like agriculture. It requires ongoing effort to make and advocate for development decisions that balance local benefits and impacts. Ultimately, the goal is to provide workers with opportunities that allow them to stay locally and feel a sense of stability and belonging.

- ✓ 1. Identify and enable opportunities to grow local businesses and industries that create family-supporting jobs and reflect our community's identity and values.

Potential steps include:

- » Identify State and Federal programs, conduct studies such as CHiPs and Advanced Energy
- » Explore options to increase WEEDC capacity and provide stable funding
- » Develop industry-specific area marketing profiles
- » Reach out to business and industry leaders
- » Develop local value-added agricultural products and facilities (the highest priority industry indicated in community engagement)

- ✓ 2. Enhance the reach and impact of programs and services that support growth of local small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Potential steps include:

- » Consolidate information for businesses to access on demand
- » Build on strengths and successes
- » Identify and deliver priority business support needs
- » Upgrade existing commercial buildings
- » Develop a West End Start Up incentive package

3. Provide guidance for large-scale development projects to offset local impacts with local benefits.

Potential steps include:

- » Use Intergovernmental Agreements to create structure for local input
- » Create and maintain a list of trade-offs
- » Adopt developing standards or conditions that are predictable yet flexible
- » Use tools like Community Benefits Agreements or Good Neighbor Agreements

4. Upgrade physical infrastructure to support businesses growth and attraction.

These are significant community investments that must be paced. Priorities, from an economic standpoint are:

- » Reliable water and wastewater systems to serve existing and new businesses
- » Source water protection and development
- » Stormwater systems to reduce risk and insurance costs
- » Streetscape improvements on Main Streets
- » Long term, enhanced facilities at Hopkins Airfield
- » See Goal 7 for additional community investments and beautification opportunities

5. Invest in visitor attraction practices that help sustain more local businesses and jobs year-round.

Potential steps include:

- » Focus attraction on off-season visitors
- » Combine visitor attraction and responsible recreation education
- » Update and streamline existing resources
- » Increase awareness and cross-promotion
- » Improve coordination between local businesses and events
- » Increase lodging capacity, which is a constraint in high season and when occupied by construction workers





GOAL 4: MANAGED AND MEANINGFUL GROWTH

We cultivate meaningful opportunities that contribute to livelihoods without compromising our rural character.



WATER AND GROWTH

Water availability is one of the most critical factors shaping how and where the West End can grow. Limited water resources constrain both new housing and economic development, but they also offer a powerful opportunity to guide growth responsibly. By aligning water planning with land use and infrastructure decisions, the community can ensure that new projects are sustainable, efficient, and compatible with local priorities.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Growth and change are among the most powerful forces shaping a community's future and the hardest to talk about. In the West End, growth isn't happening at the pace of Montrose or Telluride, but regional and national trends suggest it's coming. The pandemic, remote work, and rising housing costs in mountain towns have pushed more people toward nearby rural communities. But rather than letting change steer itself, our community has chosen to take the wheel—setting clear parameters that reflect our values and ensuring that future opportunities strengthen the community rather than strain it.

Managing growth matters because it affects nearly everything: housing, infrastructure, schools, small businesses, and the character that makes a place feel like home. Too little growth can lead to economic stagnation, aging infrastructure, and fewer opportunities for young people. Whereas thoughtful, intentional growth can bring new life to Main Streets, create jobs and tax revenue to support essential services, and attract teachers, nurses, and other vital workers.

At the other end of the spectrum, unmanaged or rapid growth can erode the qualities that make the West End special. The “down-valley effect” occurs when unsustainable growth and rising costs in resort communities like Telluride begin to spill into more rural, affordable areas nearby. Across Colorado there are examples of these pressures driving up prices, displacing longtime residents, and overloading small-town character and infrastructure, eventually creating “bedroom communities” that have lost their soul.

This does not have to be the West End's fate. The community has set their sights on a different future: one where the West End plans ahead, puts up intentional fences to protect against over-growth, and intentionally cultivates and nurtures what is most special and important to our community. The key is finding balance: allowing growth where it makes sense, at a pace we can manage, and on a scale that fits the West End. The Vision Plan helps chart this middle path. It aims to equip local leaders with the tools to shape growth with thoughtful land use and policies. Through collaboration and planning, the region can welcome new opportunities, preserve our rural character, and support our economy. Change will happen, but how it happens, and who it benefits, is up to us.

VALUES CONNECTION: CHARTING OUR OWN COURSE

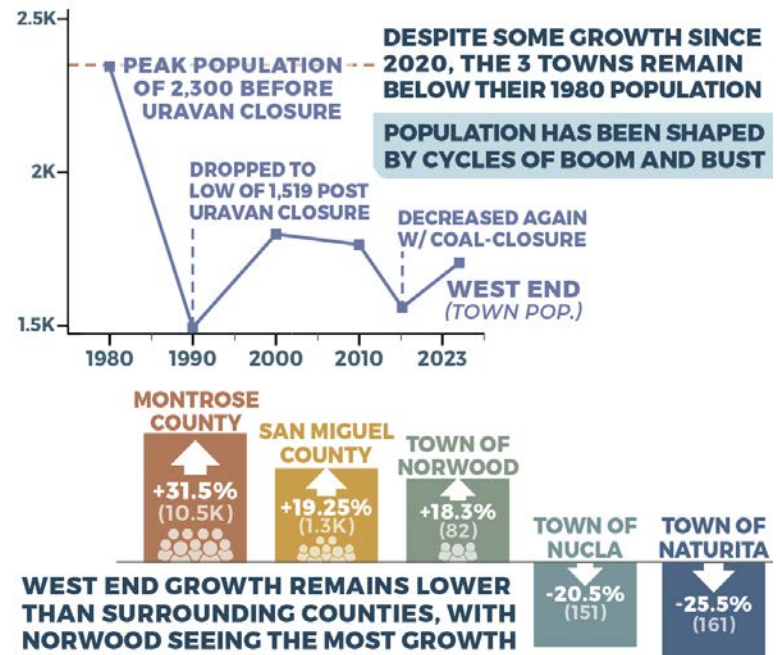
A core West End value is self-reliance—being resourceful, resilient, and not defined by outside growth pressures. This requires careful planning, forward-looking policies, and a clear vision of who we want to be: a thriving rural place, not a bedroom community. It also means investing in the foundations of community such as housing, healthcare, education, food systems, and infrastructure. While this section focuses on planning and policy, others address these other essential building blocks.



WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The West End's population has seen many cycles of growth and decline, tied primarily to economic shocks. The Towns saw sharp losses with the 1980s closure of Urvan and the 2019 coal closures. While the surrounding counties have seen double-digit growth in recent decades, the West End Towns' growth rates remain modest and uneven: Norwood has seen significant growth, while Nucla and Naturita remain close to stagnant. More than half of local workers commute, highlighting the need for more local jobs and growing regional pressures.

A consistent challenge in managing growth is outdated and inconsistent local plans and development codes. Most of the Towns would benefit greatly from updated codes and master plans, and better alignment between mismatched Town and County regulations. Consistent feedback heard is that Montrose County codes are overly lenient, while San Miguel County codes are overly complicated.



ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » The **Town of Nucla completed a 2023 land use and development code update**, providing more detailed direction for improvements projects. The Town is updating their master plan soon as well.
- » The **Town of Norwood has recently begun the process of a land use code and master plan update** that will help guide development. The current master plan is from 2007.
- » The Town of Norwood, seeing growth in speculative buying and vacation rentals, passed a proactive **short-term rental ordinance**, limiting the number of short-term rental permits in the Town to five.
- » **Dark skies** are a key part of the region's rural character. Currently, all three Towns are designated dark skies communities. San Miguel County also has dark skies compliant codes.
- » **San Miguel County has a comprehensive solar development code**, ensuring that large-scale solar doesn't threaten rural character, safety, or prime agricultural lands. **Montrose County is currently working on a solar development code** as well to better define appropriate scales and locations.
- » A variety of **local entities manage the West End's water**. In Nucla and Naturita, the Mustang Water Authority is a collaborative effort to provide and manage potable water access and infrastructure for both Towns. Agricultural groups include Farmers Water, CCC Ditch Company, Lone Cone Ditch Company, and the San Miguel Watershed Coalition. Norwood has a responsive Water Commission and Sanitation District, managed separately by their respective boards in partnership with the Town.
- » The **Wright's Mesa Water Coalition** is a multi-jurisdictional group that improves collaboration across a range of water groups and interests. The group is developing a water resource plan that will look at strategies for storage, delivery, and efficiency.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



The West End community has expressed a strong desire for a practical, common-sense approach to managing growth—putting a few key policies in place to protect the community’s rural character without over-regulating. The focus is on guiding development in a way that strengthens livelihoods, preserves local values and sense of place, and ensures that growth happens where infrastructure and services can support it. The following strategies and actions provide tools to meet this goal.



TOOLS FOR AGRICULTURAL LANDS PRESERVATION

» **Shavano Conservation District partnership:**

Supports farmers and ranchers with technical assistance, funding, and education. Encourage partnerships and “prime farmland” designations to get access to the Shavano STAR Program.

» **Ranchland Stewardship Incentives:**

Encourages multi-benefit land management that supports livestock, biodiversity, and soil health.

» **Working Lands Conservation Easements:**

Voluntary legal agreements that limit development on prime agricultural land, often held by a land trust. Can provide economic benefit to the landowner, protect/encourage agricultural viability, retain the right to build farm housing, and tie water rights to the land and agricultural uses.

» Local Example: [Eagle Bluff Ranch](#)

» **Purchase of Development Rights:** Voluntary program that compensates landowners for preserving farmland (typically as part of a working lands conservation easement).

» **Value-Added or Co-op Programs:** Provide grants, zoning flexibility, or branding support for farm diversification and support ranchers and producers in developing local value-added markets. (More info in Goal 3).

✓1. **Develop policies and practices to protect key aspects of rural character including agricultural lands, local Main Streets, dark skies, and open spaces.**

The community has highlighted the following areas (in order of priority) for preservation and policy adoption:

- » Preserve working agricultural lands and support local producers.
- » Keep the heart of West End Towns authentic, locally owned, and well-maintained.
- » Expand local dark skies designations and lighting standards to allow for the creation of a regional “Dark Skies Reserve.”
- » Cluster development and conserve open landscapes, viewsheds, and recreation assets. **Note:** *Protecting open spaces does not mean limiting local access to public lands. See Goal 5, Public Lands and Resources section for more detail.*
- » Advocate for favorable wildlife policies and enforcement that preserve and manage local populations, ensure continued hunting and fishing access, and support local ranchers.

What does “Large-Scale” Development mean?

When adopting growth policies, each Town will need to define what qualifies as large-scale development in a rural context. This definition determines which projects will require added review or input. Based on examples from other rural communities, a suggested threshold is:

- » Residential: Over 10 housing units
- » Commercial: Over 10,000–15,000 sq. ft.
- » Industrial: 6–10+ acres of site disturbance
- » Buildings over 35 feet

- ✓ 2. Ensure there are intentional policies and plans in place to manage or mitigate growth and development that is out of alignment with community character.

The community has highlighted the following areas (in order of priority) for management and policy adoption:

- » Ensure alignment between Town and County policies in the West End with an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA).
- » Limit the size and location of large-scale, out-of-context development.
- » Protect local character and small businesses by regulating to prevent large chain stores and “big-box” retail. Learn more about the impact of large chain stores here: [Impact of Dollar Stores](#)
- » Maintain community affordability and prevent displacement by limiting or offsetting luxury, second home, and speculative development.
- » Limit the location of large-scale solar development on public lands to areas that don’t impact viewsheds, agricultural lands, or recreation.
- » Limit the size and offset the impacts of large, temporary workforce projects or “man-camps.”

- ✓ 3. Ensure resources like water, infrastructure, and services can meet the needs of growth or have the capacity to expand accordingly.

- » A key opportunity for ensuring infrastructure readiness is to link new, large-scale development to the availability and capacity of community infrastructure. One way to accomplish this is through the use of Impact Fees or Development Agreements, which require large developments to contribute to infrastructure costs (roads, water, emergency services) proportionate to their impact.

4. Prioritize development opportunities that contribute to economic prosperity, access to services, and community vitality.

- » One tool for ensuring new development is tied to local benefits and economic prosperity is Community Benefits Agreements. See “Large-Scale Development” in Goal 3 for more information.

5. Encourage reuse and development on sites with existing utilities before expanding outward.

- » A strong potential tool for revitalizing vacant or underused buildings is Adaptive Reuse Incentives, which encourage rehabilitation through targeted tax credits, grants, or flexible code standards that make reinvestment easier and more affordable.

TOWN-COUNTY COLLABORATION

Collaboration between Towns and Counties helps to create consistency, avoid mixed signals, protect agricultural lands from sprawl, and ensure resources are used efficiently. Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) create this formal partnership to better align land use decisions so development in the West End supports local goals rather than following a one-size-fits-all County code.



CASE STUDY: FORMULA BUSINESS ORDINANCES

Formula Business Ordinances are tools that limit or put conditions on the establishment of chain or “big-box” stores to protect local character and support small businesses. Both Leadville and Paonia have successfully adopted such policies in recent years. These measures have helped maintain vibrant, locally-owned Main Streets and kept economic activity in the community rather than diverted to national chains. Additional information here:

- » [Leadville Ordinance](#)
- » [Paonia Ordinance](#)



ADDRESSING DOWN-VALLEY IMPACTS

A Local Call for Managed Regional Growth & Impacts

As development pressures intensify in resort communities, those pressures ripple outward. People move to nearby towns in search of affordability, and in time, the same rising costs and displacement follow them. Towns like Basalt and Carbondale were once affordable alternatives to Aspen; now they face their own housing crises. The West End is beginning to experience similar pressures, with some residents already being priced out. This is the “down-valley” effect: as up-valley communities grow too expensive for their workforce, people are displaced into smaller, more affordable towns nearby. No town sets out to become a “bedroom community.” Each has its own history, economy, and culture. But when small towns sit in the shadow of larger, wealthier neighbors, their character and independence can be reshaped.

In the West End long commutes and rising costs have increasingly become the norm. This places strain on families, small businesses, and the local tax base, slowly shifting the region toward an economy that benefits few and burdens many. The consequences of this are well documented across the Mountain West:

- » **Tax base imbalance:** Heavy reliance on residential property taxes without local jobs and industries strains public budgets, making it difficult for towns and districts to maintain services and facilities.
- » **Economic leakage:** When residents work elsewhere, they spend wages elsewhere, reducing local spending and weakening small businesses.
- » **Residential/Family displacement:** Not everyone can or wants to commute, so families and young people move away for better opportunities, shrinking the population and workforce.
- » **Lack of resilience:** Towns dependent on another job market are subject to economic pressures outside of their control. Reliance on tourism/hospitality makes them susceptible to boom and bust.
- » **Housing market stress:** Higher-income commuters drive up prices, reducing affordability for long-time locals, especially seniors on a fixed income.
- » **Civic disengagement:** Commuters have less time for volunteering, meetings, or civic leadership.
- » **Infrastructure strain:** Daily commuting increases traffic, road wear, and pressure on emergency services. Space-intensive uses like waste management are also often pushed down-valley.

A Call for Shared Responsibility & Local Agency

The West End should not become the default solution for the challenges of its neighbors. Nor should it bear the costs of growth driven elsewhere. Instead, we call for partnership rooted in shared responsibility, regional fairness and respect, and the right of our communities to chart their own course.

- » **Collaboration from partner jurisdictions:** Neighboring municipalities, counties, and regional planning bodies should work collaboratively to fund infrastructure, affordable housing, and service improvements both locally and regionally rather than exporting pressures to rural areas.
- » **Fair compensation and impact mitigation:** If spillover growth imposes burdens (roads, water, utilities, services), those benefiting should share in the costs.
- » **Protection of rural identity and voice:** The West End must retain its right to define the scale, pace, and form of growth consistent with its heritage and values.
- » **Proactive policy safeguards:** Rather than reacting to outside pressures, the West End is proactively strengthening its own growth management tools.

The West End is not closing the door to growth or change. Rather, we are requesting that we are able to be equal partners in the issues that impact our communities and proactively address them in ways that respect our rural identity, support our residents, and sustain our future. We ask our neighbors to work with us so that together we can build a stronger, more balanced region.

- West End Community Leaders



KEY LEARNING: PLANNING, ZONING & INVESTMENT AS GROWTH TOOLS

Growth is already shaping the future of the West End, whether we plan for it or not. Planning and zoning are the tools that help communities decide how growth happens. Thoughtful planning gives residents and leaders a clear map for where growth goes, what should be protected, and how to use resources efficiently. It helps focus investments in the areas best suited to support new development. By updating old codes, communities can also remove unnecessary barriers and allow the free market to work better, keeping housing and business opportunities within reach for locals.

- » **Community Planning**, typically a long-range plan, like the Vision Plan or Town master plans, expresses local values, priorities, and goals for the future.
- » **Zoning and Land Use Policies** are rules that decide what types of development are allowed in certain areas. Clear, up-to-date zoning creates predictability and directs growth where services already exist.
- » **Thoughtful Investment and Incentives** help Towns encourage their desired projects like housing or downtown infill. These tools help spark private sector action without heavy regulation.
- » **Updating Local Codes** helps them align with local goals. Outdated rules often have rigid standards that drive up costs and reduce flexibility, OR, have no protections for larger, un-aligned projects.
- » **Collaboration** between Towns, Counties, and special districts creates more consistent development expectations.

The Policy Spectrum



What Makes a “Strong Community?”



A strong community is one that people choose because it offers opportunities like housing, jobs, recreation, connection, and quality of life. Over the past 80 years, communities and planners have learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. Outdated post-war policies often led to inefficient, sprawling places that are costly to maintain and disconnected from jobs and services. Today, communities are rethinking how to plan: removing barriers, providing more choice, and protecting what makes them unique. Strong communities share a few key principles:



- » **Grow where you're already strong.** Focus new development in areas that already have roads, utilities, and services, rather than sprawling into agricultural lands or rural areas. This keeps costs down and helps towns provide better services.
- » **Support a mix of housing choices.** Offer homes that fit different stages of life and income levels, like smaller homes, rentals, and housing near services.
- » **Invest efficiently and strategically.** Direct growth and infrastructure spending to the places that can best handle it, or where it will catalyze private investment.
- » **Foster a balanced, local economy.** Supporting small businesses and local jobs reduces dependence on outside markets and long commutes.
- » **Engage the community.** Informed, collaborative decision-making helps align Town, County, and community goals so that everyone is pulling in the same direction and local decision-makers support the community.





GOAL 5: BALANCED USE OF LAND AND RESOURCES

We have a locally-led balance between long-term stewardship of the land and shared use and access.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Land is at the heart of life in the West End. It shapes our region's livelihoods, culture, and way of life, from ranching and grazing to recreation, timber, and mining to the open spaces and rugged wilderness that make it unique. More than 75% of the land surrounding and within the West End area is publicly owned and managed, meaning decisions made far beyond our borders have large and lasting effects here. The community's strong desire for more local influence reflects how deeply our economy and identity depend on continued access to the lands that sustain us.

A key value in the West End, memorialized in this Plan, is "Living With the Land:" respecting it, working with and on it, and protecting it. Public lands provide jobs, water, and open space. They support ranchers, outfitters, and miners; invite hunters, campers, and visitors; and are home to the forests and watersheds we rely on. Managing these lands well, and collaboratively, ensures they remain healthy, resilient, and accessible for generations to come.

Finding the right balance between conservation, access, and economic use is both challenging and essential. The West End community is committed to maintaining that balance, but local voices have historically had a more limited say in how these lands are managed and have often been left reacting to outside pressures and proposals. Looking ahead, the region seeks a more proactive, hands-on approach to how the region's public lands are managed.

This goal calls for partnership and shared responsibility among residents, user groups, and public land agencies. By working together, the West End can build a locally led balance that protects natural resources, sustains local livelihoods, and ensures that future generations can grow up, live, work, and play on the same lands that have long defined this region.



LAND MANAGEMENT "WIN-WINS"

Shared land management "win-wins" are integrated approaches that achieve multiple outcomes—such as improving ecological health while supporting economic activity and public access. In practice, this means applying management tools that serve overlapping goals for fire resilience, grazing productivity, water quality, recreation, and habitat protection. Examples include rest-rotation grazing that supports both livestock and soil health, trail projects that double as fire breaks, and watershed restoration that improves water security for residents and ecosystems. Through collaboration between ranchers, recreation groups, miners, and agencies, these efforts can create lasting benefits for everyone.

Photo credit: BLM

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Public lands dominate the West End's landscape, making up roughly 77% of the region. About 80% of that public land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the rest by the US Forest Service (USFS) and State, underscoring just how closely local livelihoods are tied to federal management decisions. The region's public lands serve many purposes and support both local industries and the everyday outdoor access residents value.

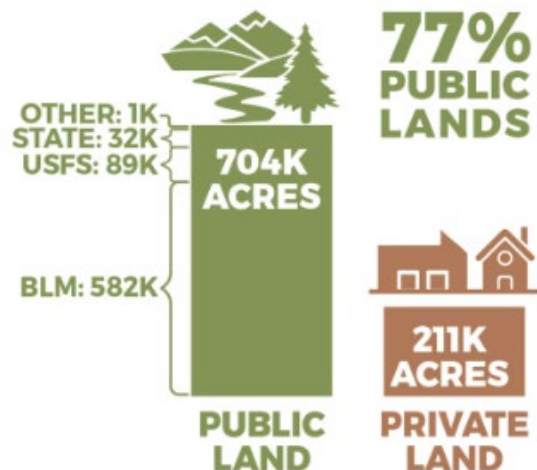
Recreation and camping numbers in the West End remain modest compared to nearby destinations such as Colorado National Monument and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, which each see 400,000+ visitors annually. However, current data likely underestimates use, as dispersed camping across the West End is not actively tracked.

Agriculture continues to be a major anchor of the region's economy and identity. Farmland acreage has grown in both Montrose and San Miguel Counties, and most public lands in the West End are still used for grazing. Continued access to water is essential to the success of these agricultural uses, which face increasing challenges under persistent drought conditions. More information is available at the [San Miguel Watershed Coalition](#).



AGRICULTURE IS A LARGE AND STILL GROWING USE

PUBLIC LANDS MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF THE REGION



BLM LAND HAS A VARIETY OF USES AND VISITORS

*DOES NOT INCLUDE DISPERSED CAMPING

THE MAJORITY OF THE LAND IN THE WEST END IS PUBLICLY OWNED, OF THAT ~80% IS MANAGED BY THE B.L.M.

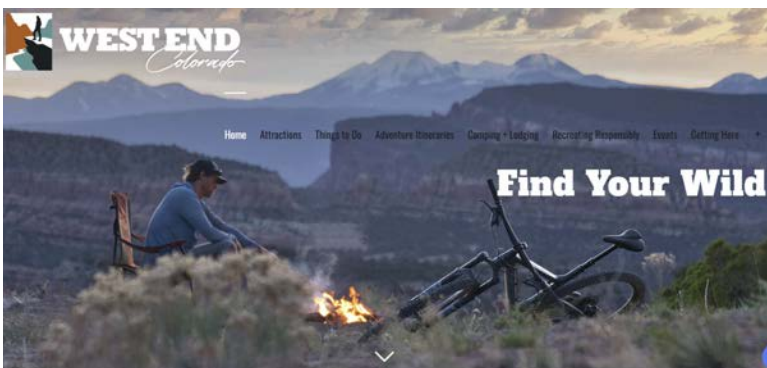
VALUES CONNECTION: LIVING WITH THE LAND

This is a place where livelihoods, lifestyles, and identity are all tied to the land itself. But decisions about our vast public lands are often made far away from those of us who use them, work them, and steward them every day. These strategies aim to change that by ensuring local voices help guide how public lands are managed, keeping them healthy, open, and productive for generations to come.



ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » To date, both the Towns of Nucla and Naturita have requested **formal coordination with the BLM** and received a return “Letter of Agreement.” This agreement to coordinate allows the Towns to dialogue with the BLM to improve consistency between federal and local policies.
- » West End communities have had **successful collaboration efforts with federal entities** in the past, and local voices have contributed to comment periods on a variety of BLM and USFS projects. Examples of past public lands partnerships can be found in both Counties. Community members with experience on these efforts should be tapped for the historical knowledge, context, and lessons learned.
- » The **San Miguel Recreation Roundtable** brings together local voices, land managers, and partner organizations to discuss and coordinate recreation planning across the county. Formed to balance the growing demand for outdoor access with the need to protect natural resources, the group provides non-binding input and recommendations to agencies managing recreation and conservation.
- » The **West End Trails Alliance (WETA)** is actively developing a network of trails to enhance recreation and tourism. Current projects, such as the planned 50+ miles of single-track trails, will improve quality of life for existing residents and position the region as a hub for outdoor enthusiasts. WETA has also completed significant trails mapping in the area.
- » WETA is also launching the **Tabeguache Youth Corps** to equip youth with hands-on training and workforce development opportunities in trail development and maintenance, conservation, and public lands management.



The [West End Colorado website](#) was created by WEEDC and the Nucla-Naturita Chamber of Commerce to promote local businesses and guide visitors in exploring the region’s vast public lands responsibly. The site highlights local attractions, trails, and recreation while emphasizing stewardship practices like staying on designated routes, packing out waste, and respecting private lands and grazing areas.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



The West End community is deeply connected to the land and depends on it for work, recreation, and a sense of identity. As public land management grows more complex, the community seeks a stronger local role in shaping its future. This goal focuses on balancing access, conservation, and economic use, keeping public lands open and productive while protecting what makes the West End unique.

1. **Overarching:** Balance the following community-identified priorities for Public Lands:
 - Protect and sustain our public lands and natural resources through balanced, community-guided stewardship
 - Support legacy uses, livelihoods, and economic opportunity on public lands
 - Prioritize keeping West End public lands open, accessible, and multi-use
- ✓ 2. Form a Working Group that represents various local voices, perspectives, and leaders to explore what a “locally-led balance” looks like and how to make it happen.

This group should:

 - » Bring local voices and perspectives together
 - » Keep it focused and effective
 - » Balance a formal structure and collaborative atmosphere
 - » Work with federal agencies as partners
 - » Stay transparent, informed, and connected
 - » Focus on results, not just more meetings
- ✓ 3. With a unified local voice, coordinate and advocate with public lands entities to encourage more proactive local participation and influence.

In working with outside entities, the West End should:

 - » Engage proactively in federal planning process
 - » Have aligned local policy across Towns and Counties
 - » Show that local stewardship works
 - » Build credibility through collaboration and evidence
- ✓ 4. Work together and collaborate across public lands user groups to identify land management “win-wins,” opportunities to reduce friction points, and ways to build long-term land resilience and mutual benefit.

Collaboration opportunities include:

 - » Taking action through multi-partner stewardship
 - » Identifying and addressing friction between land users
 - » Piloting cooperative management projects
 - » Relationship building and local empowerment
 - » Celebrating (and leveraging) success stories
- ✓ 5. Provide additional opportunities for outdoor recreation on public lands and continue to provide education and resources to encourage respectful use.
 - » Build shared understanding and respect through education, signage, and outreach
 - » Increase outdoor recreation marketing, particularly where it aligns with local values
 - » Improve basic infrastructure, especially at the most popular recreation locations
6. Improve fire mitigation practices through collaboration and education.



FEDERAL COORDINATION

In places where public lands dominate the landscape, aligning federal land management decisions is vital to protecting local economies, land access, and quality of life. Federal law requires agencies such as the BLM and USFS to work toward consistency with local plans and to meaningfully involve local governments in decision-making. This is accomplished through formal consultation called “coordination.”



OUR PUBLIC LANDS PLAYBOOK

Local Positions and Best Practices

A Shared Guide for Stewardship, Access, & Local Voice in Public Lands



Public lands are at the heart of the West End. They're where people make a living, find peace and quiet, and connect with the land and each other. With more than three-quarters of the region publicly owned, how these lands are managed determines much about our future, our economy, our culture, and our way of life. Our vision is lands that are open and multi-use, livelihood- and lifestyle-sustaining, fun for young families and extreme athletes, but not over-developed, commercialized, or crowded.

This Playbook outlines the West End's priorities for keeping its lands healthy, productive, and accessible. It reflects the belief that the people who live closest to the land should have a strong voice in how it's managed, and that balanced, locally-guided stewardship benefits everyone. This Playbook is intended to be built upon and updated by the Public Lands Roundtable to ensure alignment with community and stakeholder priorities.

Community-Guided Stewardship

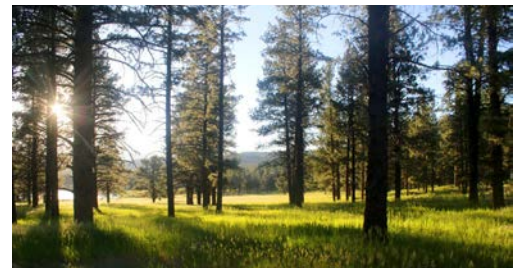
The people who live closest to the land are often its best stewards. We believe in locally-guided and common-sense management practices that help balance conservation and productivity, traditional knowledge with science-based practices, and that keep our forests, rangelands, and watersheds strong.

- » Encourage collaborative land management that integrates local voices and values.
- » Partner with land agencies on collaborative management rooted in local input and knowledge.
- » Educate community members on evolving best practices and encourage dialogue to ground these practices in local realities.
- » Support broad community involvement in planning and monitoring efforts led by the BLM, Forest Service, and State agencies.
- » Promote stewardship practices that build long-term land resilience, such as fire mitigation, responsible grazing, watershed restoration, and invasive species management.
- » Invest in education, trail maintenance, signage, and basic facilities that support both visitors and resource protection.
- » Protect water resources as the foundation for all other land uses and livelihoods.
- » Support programs that connect local youth and workers to stewardship and outdoor careers.

Legacy Uses and Local Livelihoods

For generations, the West End's economy has relied on the land, through grazing, timber, mineral extraction, and access-driven tourism. These industries remain important to the region's identity and economy, and can continue to coexist with recreation and conservation when managed responsibly.

- » Maintain multi-use access for grazing, timber, mineral extraction, and recreation.
- » Strengthen coordination with agencies to ensure legacy industries remain viable.
- » Promote local ownership and entrepreneurship in recreation and tourism rather than relying solely on outside operators.
- » Support training and workforce programs that connect local residents to stewardship, recreation, industry, and restoration work on public lands.



Open, Accessible, and Multi-Use Lands

Access to public lands is part of what makes the West End special. These lands provide room to roam, recreation, and a sense of freedom that's become rare in other parts of Colorado.

- » Keep lands open and multi-use, balancing access and long-term stewardship.
- » Educate visitors about responsible recreation.
- » Improve trail/road maintenance to balance access, safety, and resource protection.
- » Increase on-the-ground presence from land management agencies to support education, enforcement, and visitor stewardship.
- » Collaborate with regional tourism partners to manage visitation at a scale that fits local capacity and protects quality of life.

West End Lands

By Kathy Cooper

**Upon my great horse did I ride,
Looking over the West End with pride,
From all the vistas east, west, south and north,
Reaping the benefits that my ancestors brought forth.**

**Ours was not an easy land to tame,
Seems like water was the name of the game.
From Wright's Mesa to the Paradox Valley,
The years of hard work add up to quite the tally.**

**We come from good stock and keep our values close to heart,
From these dear lands we would never part.
If you try to muddle with the reasons I live here, I might not bend.
And that's what I love about the West End.**

Being Good Neighbors and Users of Public Lands

Living with the land comes with shared responsibility. Whether you work on it, recreate on it, or simply enjoy the view, caring for the land keeps the West End strong. To be a better steward, user, and neighbor:

- » **Respect "open range" practices.** Leave gates how you find them, there are reasons for ranchers to leave them open or closed based on the time of year.
- » **Drive carefully.** Hitting a cow may ruin your day, but it can be a far bigger financial burden for ranchers. If you see loose cows along busy roads let someone know (a local, the Town Facebook page, etc.)
- » **Go slow.** If you encounter a cattle drive, which are common in the West End in the spring and fall months, keep moving slowly through the herd unless someone tells you otherwise. Don't honk or get out of your car for photos.
- » **Clean vehicles and gear to prevent the spread of noxious weeds.** If you live adjacent to public or farm lands, control your noxious weeds and keep up to date with County provided lists and education.
- » **Use water and ditches responsibly.** Don't block, divert, or contaminate them.
- » **Pack out all trash and human waste.** BLM and Forest Services lands are vast and minimally maintained so it's our responsibility to pick up after ourselves here.
- » **Don't ever leave fires unattended.** Make sure they're put all the way out before walking away as hot coals can easily reignite.
- » **Stay on track.** Use designated roads and trails, respect private land and "no trespassing" signs, and utilize existing, dispersed camping sites and avoid disturbing new areas.
- » **Carry a leash.** If your dog likes a good chase or might harass a cow or local wildlife, keep them on leash. Ranchers have the right to protect their livestock, so keep your pets under your control for their safety.
- » **Tiptoe on the crypto.** Don't bust the crust. Be careful not to disturb the dark, crust-like "cryptobiotic soils," which are millions of years old and how desert landscapes store nutrients in sandy soils.
- » **Leave sites better than you found them,** because someone else will enjoy them after you.
- » **Follow the West End Way:** Freedom with responsibility, access with respect, and pride in taking care of the land we all share.



GOAL 6: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

We have high-quality schools, libraries, and educational opportunities that support our teachers, students, and community members of all ages and stages to succeed.



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Education, like housing and healthcare, is a cornerstone of a thriving community. It directly shapes economic opportunity, quality of life, and the ability to sustain essential local services. West End communities envision their schools as vibrant community hubs that anchor and connect a diverse learning ecosystem with locally tailored job training and vocational programs, opportunities for youth and lifelong learners, and childcare and after-school activities that support families.

Strong local schools are a foundation of place-based economic development: they attract and retain families, businesses, workers, and service providers, while preparing and training the community's future workforce. Education equips residents of all ages with the skills to adapt to change, participate in the economy, and contribute to community life. As the region continues to navigate transitions in its economy, workforce, and population, investing in education and training is one of the clearest pathways to long-term success.

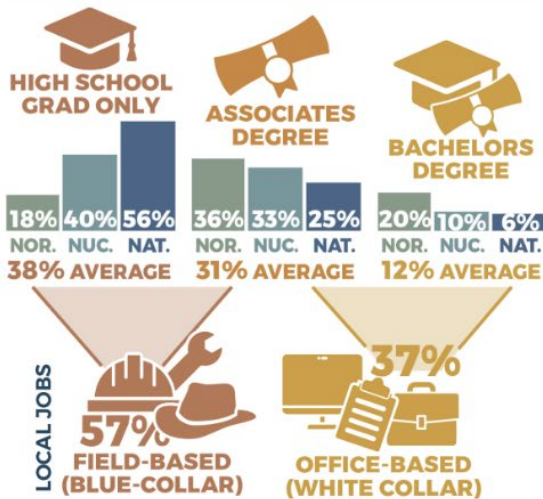


Good schools also play a vital role in community character and can help balance the “bedroom community” dynamic by giving families a reason to live, work, and invest locally, allowing the community to remain vibrant and multigenerational. Pathways to success beyond the traditional classroom are equally important to West End communities. With a proud history in trades and technical fields that provide family-sustaining wages and meet community needs, residents want today's youth to have the same opportunities. To strengthen the local economy, vocational and technical training, distance learning, and apprenticeships should align with local workforce gaps in fields like healthcare, emergency response, construction, childcare, and education.



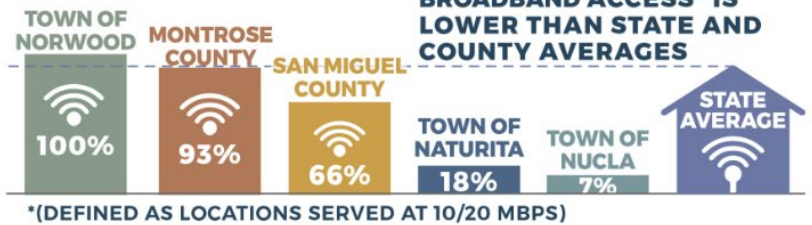
Libraries are a key part of the West End's learning ecosystem, providing access to technology, digital literacy, community classes, and shared spaces that support lifelong learning and workforce development. Each of the Towns libraries provide a variety of programs and learning opportunities. Norwood's new Lone Cone Library hosts after-school programs, community gatherings, and free Friday lunches for children; Naturita's library is a branch of the Montrose County Library District; and Nucla's library is locally funded.

EDUCATION & JOBS ARE ALIGNED



MORE THAN HALF OF WEST END RESIDENTS WORK IN FIELD-BASED JOBS THAT MATCH WITH HIGH SCHOOL & ASSOCIATE'S EDUCATION LEVELS

NUCLA/NATURITA BROADBAND ACCESS IS BELOW AVERAGE



OUTSIDE OF NORWOOD, THE WEST END'S HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND ACCESS* IS LOWER THAN STATE AND COUNTY AVERAGES

INDEPENDENT RATING SYSTEMS GIVE THE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS MIDLING GRADES



RATING SYSTEMS LIKE NICHE & GREAT SCHOOLS SHOW ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The West End communities have worked hard to maintain strong schools and educational opportunities despite limited resources and shifting demographics. The West End is home to two school districts, West End Public Schools (WEPS) and the Norwood School District (NSD). In the 2023-2024 school year, 55 students whose families live in the Norwood School District attended school in Telluride and another 23 students attended school elsewhere. The leakage of students from Norwood to Telluride stems from the logistical realities of parents who commute to Telluride for work and the significant disparity in resources between the school systems. Community members emphasize the need to better support teachers and school staff in both West End school districts through competitive pay, professional development, and housing options.

Students pursuing the trades or other non-college pathways often must travel long distances for courses or certifications, creating barriers to participation. Local access to higher education is limited to distance learning at the new Colorado Mesa University (CMU) remote classroom in Naturita, with the nearest physical campuses for CMU in Montrose and Grand Junction. The nearest technical college campuses are in Montrose, Grand Junction, and Delta.

The West End is a childcare desert, with far fewer childcare options than local families need. This shortage limits parents' ability to work, makes the region less appealing to new workers and businesses, and is compounded by the four-day school week, which increases scheduling and childcare challenges.





ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » WEPS opened a combined, **brand new PK-12 school in Nucla** in 2024, funded primarily by a BEST Grant with support from other sources, including a community bond. The school is a source of pride for the community and includes on-site childcare facilities for infants and younger children during school hours, but the limited childcare hours are not optimal for parents with longer workdays.
- » NSD also received a **BEST Grant to construct a new school in Norwood**, and passed a related school bond initiative. The current Norwood High School is an old building with significant health and safety concerns including asbestos contamination.
- » The site of Norwood's existing school will be redeveloped. One option for redevelopment is a **community center** which could include space for a **licensed childcare facility** and other community services.
- » WEEDC partnered with Colorado Mesa University to establish a **remote learning classroom** at the Collective Mine co-working space in Naturita, equipped with technology and reliable internet access to support local participation in CMU's distance learning programs.
- » High school students in the West End can participate in a paid **High School Apprenticeship Program**, funded and run by the Telluride Foundation. This program pairs students with local employers and reimburses employers for apprentice wages and insurance costs to encourage participation and strengthen the local workforce.
- » In 2024 Telluride Foundation and EcoAction Partners launched an **Energy Workforce Development Program** which provides paid training opportunities to individuals pursuing careers such as renewable energy, beneficial electrification, building science, and more.
- » The **Skillful West End program** offered to displaced workers following coal closures has been widely acknowledged as an impressive and effective effort and demonstrates the region's ability to partner with industry to offer workforce training, should businesses have a future need.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



Strengthening schools, expanding learning pathways, aligning education with local opportunity, and supporting teachers and working families ensures that residents of all ages can see a future for themselves here, and that the community can grow and thrive from within.

1. Strengthen schools as community hubs at the heart of the community.

Key opportunities include:

- » Build a new school in Norwood with improved opportunities such as emerging technologies, hands-on learning, and community connection
- » Prioritize teacher support, competitive compensation, education, and retention
- » Utilize schools as gathering spaces for community events

2. Expand pathways for students beyond college, including trades, apprenticeships, and work-study programs.

3. Partner with regional learning institutions to provide courses, training, and pathways to locally available jobs, especially in essential fields like healthcare and education.

- » Project idea: Develop a vocational program that connects young adults to work experience in local businesses and organizations and provides hands-on training in skills needed locally such as construction, healthcare, and trades.

4. Provide childcare and early childhood education opportunities to support working families.

5. Expand pathways for lifelong learning opportunities like job training and community classes.





GOAL 7: VIBRANT COMMUNITY CHARACTER

We enjoy safe, welcoming, and vibrant communities that celebrate our history and encourage shared participation and community pride.



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Vibrant, welcoming communities are built through connection, care, and participation. This means strengthening our local capacity while ensuring gathering spaces, Main Streets, and neighborhoods reflect the pride we feel for this place. Safe, well-cared-for towns with active public spaces help attract and retain residents, encourage volunteerism, and support local businesses. When people feel connected and proud of where they live, they are more likely to invest time, energy, and creativity back into it.

The West End's legacy is deeply rooted in hard work, resilience, and a strong sense of community. Honoring that history means celebrating the people and stories that built this region while also making space for new voices. A vibrant community both remembers and evolves, welcoming new residents, ideas, and opportunities that strengthen what already makes us special.

Community character connects closely with many other goals in this Plan. It influences how we grow and the kinds of places we build. It supports economic development by drawing visitors and businesses and strengthens civic life by encouraging participation and shared responsibility. Investments in Main Streets, public spaces, and beautification are also investments in belonging, sense of community, and shared responsibility.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Across the West End residents fill more than 300 volunteer positions on local boards, nonprofits, and special districts, helping to sustain essential services such as fire protection, water, parks, and community programs. With over 80 registered nonprofits, 11 special districts, and unpaid Town Board positions, much of what keeps the West End running is the dedication of volunteers who give their time to fill gaps and support local needs.

This reliance on volunteer labor has its challenges. Many organizations report difficulty filling open positions, and volunteers face burnout as they wear multiple hats to fill local needs. The community has expressed a strong desire to better streamline volunteer roles and positions, recruit younger residents and those newer to the area, and reduce burnout.



ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » Planning has been completed for **Main Street improvements** in both Naturita and Nucla, and some implementation progress has been made, including replacing several blocks of sidewalk on Nucla's Main Street.
- » WEEDC administers a **West End Facade Improvement Program** that provides funding to local businesses to help improve their facilities, lighting, signage, storefronts, and sidewalk areas. This program helps beautify local Main Streets without overburdening the businesses themselves.
- » Both Nucla and Naturita have **local beautification committees** that provide yearly flower pots, maintenance, and watering along the Main Streets. While these are relatively small efforts, they have a substantial impact on the appearance of the local downtown areas. In Norwood, the Chamber provides similar aesthetic support in the form of decorative lighting and a welcome banner.
- » Nucla has a **"yard of the month"** award to increase beautification and community pride.
- » Each of the three West End Towns have a yearly self-funded **community clean-up effort** to help improve aesthetics, build community, and clean up blight. These events have historically been very productive and successful.
- » WEEDC provides, via state programs, a semi-regular **Nonprofit Board Training** to help local Board Members learn about governance and management of effective nonprofits.
- » The **Telluride Foundation** provides regular trainings, grants, and resources for nonprofit and community organizations.



SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



Vibrant communities require ongoing care, participation, and connection. In the West End, this means supporting the people and places that bring us together: our Main Streets, gathering spaces, events, and local organizations. It also means making it easier for all residents, including newcomers and commuters, to get involved. With this focus we can maintain safe, welcoming, and enjoyable Towns.

1. Foster a culture of participation, community connection, and volunteerism.
2. Welcome new community members by connecting them to local values, history, and opportunities to volunteer.
3. Make Main Streets and gathering places more attractive and enjoyable.
4. Encourage places of community gathering, events, and activities to bring people together.
5. Improve safety and pride by addressing vacant and/or run down properties, promoting community care and prevention, and beautifying community spaces.
6. Work to create more realistic pathways to participation and local engagement for West End commuters.



GOAL 8: CIVIC HEALTH AND COLLABORATION

We build trust, healthy dialogue, and strong, representative local leadership to keep the West End region engaged and effective.



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The WE Vision process and plan began with a belief that the communities of the West End have a lot in common, and we are more capable of tackling our challenges when we work together. The process has only increased the sense that while there are nuanced differences, the region shares values and a vision for the future that are closely aligned. We want to sustain this momentum, strengthen our collaborative practices, and amplify our collective power to pursue positive change.

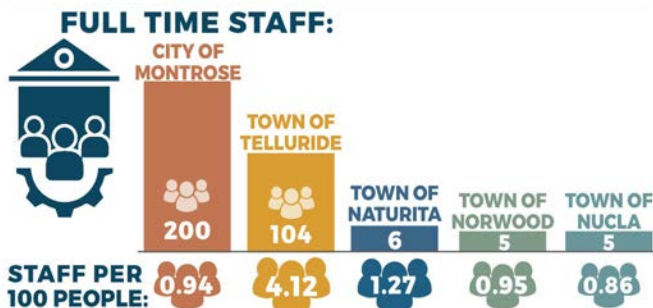
To realize the West End Vision, we will need not only to cultivate star players, but also to develop a deep bench. We must build systems and structures for developing existing leaders' communication and collaboration skills, for tolerating differences and making space for productive dialogue, and for inviting in new energy. These things don't just happen overnight—they require intention and attention.



WHERE WE ARE TODAY

West End communities have limited implementation capacity, with relatively low local government staffing of about 1 per 100 residents. While Nucla and Naturita have a history of collaboration, working together with Norwood and the surrounding unincorporated communities as a regional entity is not an established practice.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY IS VERY LIMITED



Headwaters Economics developed an index measure for rural communities ability to act and implement projects called the [Rural Capacity Index](#). All West End communities are considered low capacity, ranking in the bottom quarter of communities nationally. Montrose and San Miguel Counties are rated as medium capacity, falling in the middle 50% compared to other Counties nationally.

The West End is reliant on and benefits from a strong culture of volunteerism and a dedicated network of local volunteers who are committed to driving community efforts. Grassroots energy supports initiatives ranging from events, to advocacy, to long-term planning.

CURRENTLY VERY LITTLE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION...



...BUT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE!

ONGOING EFFORTS & PROGRESS

- » **West End Economic Development Corporation** serves as a regional convener across West End communities and local governments.
- » **Town staff**, while few, are embedded and deeply invested in their communities. They are active partners in identifying needs and securing funding for community development projects.
- » Both **Montrose and San Miguel County governments** have policies and plans tailored to the West End, i.e., the Wrights Mesa Plan appendix to the San Miguel Comprehensive Plan and the West End planning area policies in the Montrose County Comprehensive Plan.
- » **West End Solutions Group** is a gathering of Nucla and Naturita residents to discuss local issues and solutions facilitated by Montrose County and WEEDC. There is interest in expanding the reach and scope of this group.
- » Local leadership is well connected to **regional and state-level partners and resources**, including the Office of Just Transition (OJT) and the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, and Region 10, as well as community foundations.
- » The West End Vision process **brought together Town and County elected leadership** bodies on multiple occasions and is striving for plan adoption across all five local jurisdictions.

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES



Healthy civic life requires the community to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with one another to identify challenges and solutions. To realize the West End Vision, we need capable leaders who can model positive responses to differing opinions and allow the community to participate meaningfully in decision making. The West End has only so many individuals and resources; establishing structures for regular collaboration and developing new leaders is essential to maximize efficiency and impact.

1. Strengthen local Town leadership through training and enhanced collaboration across the three municipalities.
 - » Regional Leadership Team: Establish regular joint meetings for all Town local elected officials and at least one Commissioner from each County.
2. Cultivate effective local leaders and champions who represent the whole community.
3. Enhance community trust and understanding through transparent processes, respectful communication, and consistent application of adopted policies.
4. Enhance the effectiveness of local community organizations and reduce burnout.
5. Participate in County and regional government planning, budgeting, and decision processes so that the West End has a real voice in decisions that shape our future and is fairly supported.

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES

To implement this plan, a number of Actions are designed to create key collaborative structures:

- » **Leadership West End** - To support and train existing and future local leaders
- » **Regional Leadership Team** - To hold regular meetings that improve collaboration and alignment across the Towns and Counties
- » **Public Lands Working Group** - To coordinate and advocate for local interests in public lands decisions
- » **West End Housing Initiative** - To advance local housing programs and build capacity
- » **Intergovernmental Agreements** - To align priorities and enable local say in decisions about large scale development in the unincorporated West End



04.

IMPLEMENTATION

IN THIS SECTION:

- » THE ACTION PLAN
- » PARTNERS, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES
- » GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL LEADERS
- » RECOMMENDED POLICY QUICK GUIDE
- » FUNDING SOURCES AND STRATEGIES
- » MEASURING PROGRESS

THE ACTION PLAN

In order to streamline and ensure long-term viability of the Vision Plan, it only includes the high-level, direction-setting goals and strategies that will help guide local leaders and organizations for many years to come. However, to ensure ease of implementation and clarity of next steps, specific action items are a key part of the WE Vision process. These Actions can be found in a companion document: The West End Action Plan. This matrix provides a more functional, easy-to-update, living format that can help local champions make and track their progress. The Vision and Action Plan should be updated as such:

- » Vision Plan - Every 3-5 years as additional community engagement and assessment of priorities occurs.
- » Action Plan - Every 6-12 months as key groups convene and assess their progress and additional next steps.

A 2026 read-only version of the Action Plan can be found here:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i7yHUGcMXExGd2RwbTJNo34aYs7IPfsx/view?usp=sharing>

The most up-to-date, working version of the Action Plan is available by request from WEEDC. Find out how you can support and contribute to it!

USING THE ACTION PLAN MATRIX

The Matrix is intended as a living document that helps Town staff, WEEDC, and Chambers coordinate efforts, monitor progress, and stay aligned with community priorities. Other local partners and organizations are also encouraged to use the Matrix to identify shared responsibilities and connect their own projects to the Vision Plan's broader goals. Edit access can be shared with those community organizations carrying forward specific actions within the document.

Primary responsibility for maintaining and updating the Matrix lies with WEEDC, Town staff, and the Chambers, with input from project partners as needed. To keep the Plan active and relevant, the Matrix should be reviewed and updated every 6-12 months, ideally when key groups convene to assess progress, refine next steps, and celebrate accomplishments.

The Action Plan Matrix is also designed to support with tracking and measuring progress, with automated counting and compiling of actions that are *in progress* or *completed*. The final section of the matrix provides more in-depth funding and financing opportunities to supplement the table on page 70.



PARTNERS, ROLES, & RESPONSIBILITIES

Implementing the Vision Plan will take teamwork. Each partner brings unique skills, authority, and resources that shape how the Plan moves from ideas to action. This section outlines how these partners operate and where their efforts align with Plan goals—i.e. where they can help advance the region's vision.

RELATED GOALS

- » Housing Access & Choice
- » Balanced Use of Land & Resources
- » Managed Growth
- » Community Character
- » Civic Health/Collaboration

Town Governments (Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood)

- » Towns play a central role in shaping the West End. Despite limited staff, they provide services, maintain roads and facilities, and pursue improvement projects. Local governments often contribute funding to nonprofits when their work helps advance shared goals. These decisions are subject to budget resources.
- » Elected Town officials make decisions that affect how the community looks and operates, such as development approvals, code updates, and public investments. Policy documents like the Vision Plan can create context for these specific decisions.

RELATED GOALS

- » Vital & Viable Community
- » Housing Access & Choice
- » Balanced Use of Land & Resources
- » Strong Regional Economy
- » Pathways to Success
- » Community Character
- » Civic Health

Economic Development Organizations (WEEDC)

- » EDOs are catalysts for prosperity through business, workforce, and industry support, as well as housing, health, and quality of life, as strong economies depend on thriving communities.
- » WEEDC plays this vital role for the West End, managing business retention and expansion, workforce initiatives, small business assistance, apprenticeships, and grants. WEEDC is well positioned as a trusted local organization and good fiscal agent to lead implementation of many strategies in this Plan. Increasing WEEDC's capacity will be a key first step.

RELATED GOALS

- » Vital & Viable Community
- » Housing Access & Choice
- » Balanced Use of Land & Resources
- » Managed & Meaningful Growth
- » Civic Health

County Governments (Montrose & San Miguel Counties)

- » Counties provide services and infrastructure and make growth decisions in unincorporated areas. They also coordinate with agencies to oversee emergency management, housing authorities, and public health programs.
- » Montrose and San Miguel County are essential partners in road and bridge maintenance, services, and land management. They can support regional alignment through IGAs, shared housing programs, and locally-supportive development standards.

RELATED GOALS

- » Balanced Use of Land & Resources (as part of visitor education)
- » Strong Regional Economy
- » Community Character (beautification & events)

Chambers of Commerce & Visitor Services

- » Chambers of Commerce promote local business vitality through business networking, marketing, area promotion, and advocacy on behalf of the business community.
- » Both local Chambers offer member services and promote the area. Local businesses voice a desire for enhanced learning and visitor attraction as well. NNACC also serves as the local visitors bureau, operating the West End Visitors Center and web page, and supporting events that attract local spending.

RELATED GOALS

- » Vital & Viable Community
- » Strong Economy (job creators & services allow people to live here)

Clinics (Basin Clinic and Uncompahgre Medical Center)

- » Rural clinics are cornerstones of vitality in small communities and contribute directly to local economic stability.
- » The local clinics are critical healthcare providers. Support for and partnership with these resource constrained clinics is a key priority of the Vision Plan.

Special Districts and Water Organizations

- » Special districts are independent, governmental units created to provide a specific public service (such as water, sanitation, and EMS) that is not offered as efficiently by a City or County.
- » The West End's complex water rights, infrastructure, and uses are managed by entities like Mustang Water Authority, Norwood Water Commission, CCC Ditch Company, Farmers Water, and larger regional groups, to support agricultural and municipal interests. Ongoing collaboration with Towns and Counties is vital for managing growth within limited water availability.

RELATED GOALS

- » Vital & Viable Community (fire and EMS districts)
- » Managed & Meaningful Growth (tying growth to water availability)
- » Strong Regional Economy (economic growth requires infrastructure & water availability)

Educational Opportunities (schools, libraries, & universities)

- » Schools, libraries, and regional universities and technical colleges play vital roles in workforce development, community learning, youth engagement, and local prosperity.
- » West End and Norwood school districts provide K-12 education and career readiness, and are important partners for vocational education. CMU has begun to offer college-level and technical training locally. Libraries serve as key educational and social spaces, providing access to technology, youth programs, resources, and continuing education.

RELATED GOALS

- » Strong Regional Economy
- » Pathways to Success
- » Vibrant Community Character (as community venues and social spaces)

Other Community and Nonprofit Organizations

- » Local nonprofits and community groups fill critical gaps by providing the social, recreational, and essential services that make it possible for people to live, work, and thrive here.
- » Recreation and quality of life are supported through groups like the West End Trails Alliance and Montrose West Recreation. The Nucla-Naturita Senior Center and True North provide enrichment and connection for youth and seniors. The Fresh Foundation, San Miguel Resource Center, West End Family Link, and Norwood Food Bank provide services that address food security, family support, and crisis response.
- » Many local non-profits are key partners in implementing the Vision Plan, but rely on volunteers and limited funding. Their continued success depends on collaboration and access to resources. Organizations like West End Pay It Forward Trust and Lone Cone Legacy Trust invest in local projects, helping them take root. The Telluride Foundation also provides grant funding, resources, and support for West End nonprofits.

RELATED GOALS

- » Vital & Viable Community (health & services)
- » Balanced Use of Land & Resources (trails and outdoor recreation)
- » Strong Regional Economy
- » Pathways to Success (enrichment for youth)
- » Community Character
- » Civic Health & Collaboration (better coordination among all entities would increase efficacy and help reduce duplicative efforts)

Regional and State Partners

- » Regional and state partners extend capacity and connect the area to broader networks of resources, funding, and expertise.
- » Region 10, Tri-County Health Network, and state agencies like DOLA and OJT expand local capacity with funding, programs, and technical support. State and Federal land agencies (CPW, BLM, USFS) influence public lands decisions. Strong partnerships ensure West End priorities are reflected in regional and state initiatives.

RELATED GOALS

- » Vital & Viable Community (health & services)
- » Balanced Use of Land & Resources
- » Strong Regional Economy



GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL LEADERS

The Vision Plan as a Decision-Making Framework

How to use the West End Vision Plan to guide decisions, strengthen collaboration, and stay aligned with community priorities.

A Community-Backed Framework for Decision-Making

The Vision Plan reflects the voices of more than 700 West End residents. As elected leaders, you can **use this Plan as a reliable compass to help make informed, transparent decisions** about development, policies, and budgets that align with community values, support shared goals, and build public trust.

Predictable, consistent decisions are more than just good governance: they are expected by residents and state planning standards. Arbitrary or ad hoc decisions can also expose a Town or County to legal risk. Following a community-backed guiding plan helps ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability.

Regional Leadership and Collaboration

The West End works best when it works together. The Towns and Counties share many of the same challenges and will be more effective addressing them as a region. Functionally, this means:

- » Regular meetings between all West End Town Boards and a County Commission representative (quarterly or twice a year).
- » Building civic capacity by investing in training, communication, and partnerships that help staff, boards, and volunteers work together efficiently and effectively.

Ongoing Community Involvement

Community engagement was the cornerstone of the Vision process because decisions are more fair and effective when they reflect the voices of the people who live with their outcomes. Early engagement is also more practical. Small communities can't afford to waste limited resources on efforts that aren't supported by the community, which often results in push-back that requires more time and energy later.

- » **Community participation shouldn't end here**, people are more likely to stay engaged and supportive when they see their input regularly reflected in local efforts.
- » **Periodic "check-ins"** with the community through regular progress reports and open houses or surveys will help ensure the Plan remains relevant. An annual update will help maintain momentum.
- » Updating the Plan too frequently can strain capacity and cause meeting fatigue, while **letting it sit idle erodes its value**. Being intentional with engagement will help reduce burnout.
- » In-person meetings that are focused and have a warm community feel (with food!) are most effective.
- » **Keep the Vision Plan alive by using it often**, referencing it in meetings and decisions, and confirming every few years whether it still reflects local priorities or needs adjustment.

How the Vision Plan Benefits You as a Leader:

- » Represents the community's voice, ensuring alignment with shared values and priorities.
- » Provides a clear, defensible framework for making fair, transparent, and consistent decisions.
- » Reduces risk and confusion by linking local land use, infrastructure, and policy decisions to an adopted regional plan.
- » Reinforces trust by upholding the community's adopted vision, not making exceptions based on the politics of the moment.
- » Builds efficiency and collaboration across jurisdictions and with state and federal partners.
- » Helps secure funding, as many grants favor applications with documented, recent, community-backed plans and priorities.



RECOMMENDED POLICY QUICK GUIDE

This quick guide compiles policy recommendations from the Vision Plan in one location to support Towns and partners as they update their codes, plans, and ordinances. These policies are grounded in community priorities and make adoption easier by providing a one-stop guide for proven tools that can support local goals. These policies are sorted by complexity, with “lighter lifts” that require limited time and expertise at the top of each section and longer-term, structural changes towards the bottom.



Housing Access & Choice

- » Revise zoning to **allow more housing diversity**: smaller lot sizes, cottage cluster, ADUs, missing middle (duplexes, fourplexes, townhomes), and mixed-use development.
- » Adopt or improve **nuisance/abatement and vacant property ordinances** to ensure clear, enforceable standards for unsafe or vacant housing.
- » Streamline permitting and PUD approvals to **reduce barriers for smaller housing** developments in the West End context.



Growth Management

- » Set clear caps or **permit limitations on short-term rentals** to balance tourism with long-term housing needs.
- » **Limit chain or “formula” businesses** and/or cap retail store sizes to maintain small town character.
- » Reaffirm and codify lighting ordinances across the region to maintain local **dark sky designations** and reduce light pollution.
- » Amend zoning and building codes to **reduce barriers to reuse of vacant buildings** and infill projects through flexible standards or reduced permitting and fees.
- » **Develop Intergovernmental Agreements** (IGAs) to formalize coordination between Towns and Counties and ensure development in unincorporated areas aligns with local priorities.
- » Use **Overlay Zones or Clustered Housing/Subdivision** standards to guide growth and protect rural lands from sprawl.
- » Create an **Incentive Zoning** system to offer density or height bonuses in exchange for projects that include community benefits such as affordable housing or infrastructure improvements.
- » Adopt **Impact Fees** to ensure large developments contribute proportionately to infrastructure and service costs, consider a tiered fee structure that helps fund local housing or infrastructure.
- » **Review and update all Town zoning** and development codes to create consistency across the West End and better reflect the community’s goals and strategies.
- » Adopt **Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances** to require that new development be approved only when essential infrastructure has adequate capacity or planned improvements.
- » Create **Legacy Business Programs** that establish local ownership preference, notification requirements, or business support programs when commercial properties are sold.
- » Include siting criteria, location recommendations, and design **requirements for large-scale energy** projects to protect community character and safety.

Lighter Lifts
↑
Complex Policies
↓



Strong Economy

- » Establish an **Memorandum of Understanding** between all five regional governments pledging support for the **regional visitor attraction** work of the West End Visitor Center.
- » Establish an **Memorandum of Understanding** between all five regional governments pledging **support for the regional economic development** work of the West End Economic Development Corporation.

FUNDING SOURCES AND STRATEGIES

THE VISION AS A KEY TO FUNDING

The West End Vision Plan is a powerful tool for securing funding and investment. Because it reflects the shared priorities of the community, it provides funders and partners with confidence that proposed projects have broad local support and align with a long-term direction. When local organizations align their funding requests with the Plan's goals, strategies, and values, they demonstrate coordination, foresight, and readiness, which are qualities that make funders more likely to invest. This Plan positions the West End to compete more effectively for public and philanthropic funding, unlocking opportunities that may otherwise be difficult for small, rural communities to access.

A FUNDING ROADMAP

Successful implementation of this Vision will require sustained investment from a variety of funding sources. The key to success is coordination: partners must pursue funding collaboratively, focus on the projects with the greatest community benefit, and avoid competing for the same limited resources.

When applying for grants or funding, organizations are encouraged to consider the following steps and best practices:

- » **Start with a Plan** - Funders prioritize projects that are part of a clear, community-endorsed vision rather than one-off ideas.
- » **Build partnerships early** - Before applying, identify partners whose missions or efforts align. Funders are far more likely to invest in collaborative proposals that leverage multiple organizations' strengths.
- » **Identify the right lead applicant** - Choose the organization best positioned to manage funds, compliance requirements, and the project long-term. In some cases, a partner like WEEDC or the County may serve as fiscal agent or grant administrator to reduce the burden on smaller groups.
- » **Find the right funding source** - Match each project with the appropriate program, scale, and timing of funding. Generally, avoid highly competitive opportunities that only provide a few awards across the nation or have overly burdensome application and reporting requirements.
- » **Leverage shared data** - Use engagement data, quotes, and statistics from the Vision Plan to show broad buy-in and demonstrate need.
- » **Show readiness** - Demonstrate that you have a feasible project, a capable lead, and community partnerships in place. Have letters of support, preliminary designs, or cost estimates ready before deadlines. Funders often prioritize "shovel-ready" projects.
- » **Develop a match strategy** - Plan early for match requirements, whether through local dollars, in-kind contributions, volunteer labor, or partnerships with philanthropy.
- » **Track and share progress** - Track progress and celebrate wins publicly, report back to the community, and keep funders informed of outcomes as they are more likely to reinvest in visible success stories.

Implementation funding should focus first on the projects and partners that deliver the most impact, build community capacity, and advance multiple goals at once. Funders are far more likely to invest in communities that show a united front, demonstrate clear coordination, and highlight shared leadership.



VISION = FUNDING

The Vision Plan strengthens funding requests by:

- » Demonstrating clear alignment with community priorities and needs.
- » Showing that proposals are part of a coordinated, region-wide strategy rather than isolated efforts.
- » Reducing duplication by clarifying which organizations are best positioned to lead specific strategies.
- » Providing a foundation for long-term outcomes, helping funders see how their investments fit into a larger story of change.

Organizations applying for funding are encouraged to use or adapt the following language to show alignment with the West End Vision Plan and demonstrate community support:

The West End Vision Plan engaged more than one-third of the population across the Towns of Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood through over 50 community conversations and events. The activities that *[insert applying organization]* is proposing in this funding request are aligned with the community-wide goals and strategies for *[insert topic or goal area]* as identified in the Vision Plan. These include strategies such as *[insert relevant strategies]*, which were developed and prioritized through broad public engagement.

[Insert applying organization] is among the partners identified in the Vision Plan as best positioned to lead this work and advance these community-driven actions, such as *[insert specific action steps]*. Funding will enable us to fulfill our role in implementing the community's shared vision, supporting the West End's progress toward a more prosperous, livable, and resilient future.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The following Funding Matrix provides a practical reference to identify potential grant sources, programs, and funders for each goal area, along with cross-cutting opportunities that can benefit multiple efforts.

	Opportunity	Description	Eligibility	Timing	Terms
	Lone Cone Legacy Trust (LCLT) and West End Pay it Forward Trust (WEPIFT)	Locally-led charitable funds that support projects and organizations serving Wright's Mesa (LCLT) and western Montrose County (WEPIFT).	Nonprofits, taxing entities, or other orgs (under a non-profit umbrella) that focus on the West End	Annual grant deadlines: LCLT in September WEPIFT in October	Type: Grant Match: Recommended but not required
Overarching Funders	Boettcher Rural Catalyst Grants	Capacity-building grants support planning, convening, short-term staffing, & operating costs. Supports rural CO on housing, childcare, health, placemaking, water, etc.	Nonprofits, community groups; must have one staff or volunteer attend a Rural Leaders Collaborative meeting	Funding Cycle(s): 2 per year Application Deadlines: Winter and fall	Type: Grant Amount: \$1,000-10,000 Match: No
	Musser Rural Initiative Program	Encourages collaborative and participatory efforts in rural communities that will help to strengthen their towns and regions.	Local governments, nonprofits	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: Fall	Type: Grant Amount: \$5-\$25k (varies by project) Match: No
	Telluride Foundation Community Grants	A highly supportive local funder. Funding includes education, health, services, arts, athletics, workforce housing, & economic empowerment.	Nonprofits and organizations within the region	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: Sept	Type: Grant Amount: Varies Match: No
	USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program	This program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas.	Local govs & nonprofits in rural areas with less than 20,000 residents Priority for low-income areas of 5,500 or less	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Grants & Loans Amount: Varies Match: No
	Rural Community Assistance Community Facility Loans	Helps develop & improve facilities in the rural West with loans for property acquisition, predevelopment, construction, & long-term financing	Local govs, public agencies, & nonprofits in rural areas with 50k or less population	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Loans Amount: Varies Term: Varies
	CO Rural Health Transformation Program	Provides grants to states for communities to: increase rural health outcomes & access, develop workforce, innovate	Hospitals, community health centers, behavioral health providers	Funding Cycle(s): Annual App. Deadlines: Nov	Type: Grant Amount: Varies Match: No
Goal 1: Vital & Viable	Colorado Health Foundation Community-Initiated Solutions	Grantees must work to: Address a health challenge; develop a solution; leverage strengths & resources; improve health equity	Community-based groups and nonprofits	Funding Cycle(s): 3 per year App. Deadlines: Feb, June, Oct	Type: Grant Amount: Varies Match: No
	Rural Health Provider Recruitment & Retention Program	Supports rural CO clinics in attracting and retaining staff for underserved areas.	Rural Colorado clinics and hospitals	Funding Cycle(s): N/A Deadlines: N/A	Opportunity type: Technical Assistance
	CO Rural Health Center Healthcare Seed Grants	Provides small-scale funding for rural projects who align w/ the mission of CRHC. For new programs, services, or equipment.	Public or private entities located in rural areas; must be CRHC member (Basin Clinic)	Funding Cycle(s): Annual App. Deadlines: May	Type: Grant Amount: <\$1k Match: Yes

	Opportunity	Description	Eligibility	Timing	Terms
Goal 2: Housing Access	DOLA Housing Planning Grant Program	Provides grants to local governments and regional entities to help them understand their housing needs and develop housing needs assessments and housing action plans.	Local governments, COGs, & public entities formed by voluntary local agreements (Collaborative/ regional projects are allowed)	Funding Cycle(s): 3 per year Application Deadlines: Feb, June, Oct	Type: Grants Amount: Most from \$15-250k Match: Yes - 25%
	USDA Housing Preservation Grant	Grants to sponsoring organizations for repair or rehab of low-income, rural housing. Once awarded, orgs provide grants or loans to eligible recipients to repair/rehab housing.	Most state and local governmental entities, & nonprofits in rural areas and towns with 20,000 or fewer people	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: Sept	Type: Grants Amount: Range \$50,000-350,000 Match: No
	USDA Single Family Housing Repair Loans & Grants	Provides loans to low-income homeowners to repair or improve their homes or grants to elderly low-income homeowners in rural areas to remove health & safety hazards.	Very-low income homeowners living in rural areas	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Loans & Grants Loans up to \$40k Grants up to \$10k Match: No
	Telluride Foundation Housing Opportunity Fund	Provides financial assistance to help qualified buyers purchase a home or secure a rental through Downpayment and Rental Assistance Loans.	Those living & working in San Miguel & Ouray counties plus Naturita, Nucla, & Rico. Based on employment, income, assets, etc.	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Low interest loans (some forgivable) Amount: Varies Match: No
	Western Slope Housing Resources	Offers affordable financing to income-qualifying homeowners to make home repairs and accessibility improvements. Programs include: Weatherization, home improvement lending, and housing counseling.	Low income residents (those receiving SNAP, TANF, LEAP, AND, & SSI automatically qualify) Renters can qualify w/ landlord agreement.	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Low interest loans and technical assistance Amount: Varies
	USDA Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grants	Provides grants to qualified orgs to help carry out local self-help housing projects. Recipients supervise groups of low-income individuals and families as they construct their own homes in rural areas.	Private organizations, nonprofits, government organizations. Must be located in rural areas with populations up to 20,000"	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: TA grants Amount: Varies Match: No
	OJT & OEDIT Coal Transition Community Grants	Offers funding for infrastructure; capacity building; strategically leveraging private investment; economic development; collaboration	Local govs, apprenticeship programs, higher ed institutions, nonprofits The West End is a Tier 1 coal community, giving it priority access	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling (Phase 2 now open) Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Grants Amount: Varies Match: No
Goal 3: Strong Economy	USDA Agriculture Innovation Center Program	Funds technical assistance for ag innovation centers to develop & market value-added products. Can be used for operations, development, marketing, engineering, connecting producers to distribution & processing	Government organizations, institutions of higher education, nonprofits, for-profit organizations	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: TBA	Type: Grant Amount: \$600k-1 million Match: Yes, 30% total project
	USDA Value Added Producer Grants	Helps agricultural producers enter value-added activities to generate new products, create and expand marketing, and increase income.	Farmers & ranchers, agricultural cooperatives	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: Spring	Type: Grant Amount: Varies Match: Yes, 1:1
	OEDIT & CTO Tourism Marketing Grant (also for Goal 5)	Provides funding to support tourism marketing and promotional campaigns across Colorado.	Local governments and nonprofit destination, tourism, and industry associations	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: Sept	Type: Grants Amount: Up to \$40,000 Match: Yes, 2:1
Goal 4: Managed Growth	DOLA Local Planning Capacity Grant Program	Increase the capacity of local governments to address affordable housing. Funds can also support increasing planning capacity to advance affordable housing goals.	Local governments with commitment filings Collaborative/regional projects are allowed	Funding Cycle(s): 2 per year Application Deadlines: Sept, Feb	Type: Grant Amount: Up to \$250,000 Match: Yes, 20-50%
	Rural Community Assistance Corporation Infrastructure Loans	Supports water supply, waste disposal, and other facilities. Loans help rural govs w/ funds to determine feasibility & pay pre-development costs prior to receiving other funding.	Local governments, public agencies, & nonprofits in rural areas w/ populations of 50,000 or less	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A"	Type: Loans Amount: Varies Term: Varies
	Colorado Water Conservation Board Programs	A variety of funding programs for water projects, including: Water Supply Serve Fund Grants, Water Project Loans, and Water Plan Grants	Varies, but typically, local govs, special districts, ditch companies, water partnerships, & non-profits	Varies by program	Varies by program

	Opportunity	Description	Eligibility	Timing	Terms
Goal 5: Land & Resources	CPW Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative & Grant Program	Offers funding to support & grow regionally driven collaboratives working to ensure that Colorado's land, water, and wildlife thrive while also providing access to outdoor rec	Lead entities and/or fiscal sponsors can include local & federal govts, recreation districts, & nonprofits	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: Summer	Type: Grant Amount: \$500,000 - 2.5million Match: No
	Great Outdoors Colorado Pathways Program	Helps address pressing issues & opportunities through research and knowledge-building, data-gathering & analysis, development of tools and models, & expanding staff capacity	State and local govt, special districts, land conservation orgs (By invitation after concept paper submission)	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Deadlines: Jan 15 for concept papers, March 5 for application	Type: Grants Amount: \$100-300k, but no set max Match: No
	OEDIT Tourism Management Grant	Provides funding for tourism-related projects that develop, enhance, or manage visitor experiences. Funding only awarded to projects that can be completed within 12 months (May 1, 2026 to April 30, 2027)	Colorado destination marketing orgs (like a chamber of commerce that received lodging tax revenue)	Application period: December to January, 2025	Type: Grant Amount: Up to \$20,000 Match: Yes, 4:1 (1/4 of costs)
	Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program	Supports wildfire risk reduction through: Workforce Development Grants (entry-level hands-on experience & training in wildfire mitigation) & Landscape Resilience Investments (collaborative & focused fuels reduction projects)	Varies by program	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Deadlines: Varies by Program	Type: Grants Amount: Varies Match: Varies by program (0-25%)
Goal 6: Pathways to Success	Gates Family Foundation School System Innovation & Innovative Learning Environments Grants	Grant programs that focus on system innovation to re-imagine public school systems and learning environments that empower those closest to students	School districts & multi-district partnerships w/ higher ed institutions Special interest in rural school districts	Funding Cycle(s): Vary Application Deadlines: TBA	Type: Grants Amount: Varies Match: No
	Daniels Fund Youth Development Grants	Supports mission-aligned programs across several topical areas, including Youth Development, which is focused on character-building programs, including career and technical education	Non-profits in CO, NM, UT, and WY Accepts applications by invite only. Complete eligibility inquiry to determine	Open on a rolling basis	Type: Grants Amount: Varies Match: No
	CDE Career Development Incentive Program	Financial incentives for schools that encourage high school students to complete industry credential programs, pre-apprenticeships & apprenticeships, workplace training programs, & AP computer science	School districts, charter schools, or Boards of Cooperative Education	Funding Cycle(s): Varies Application Deadlines: TBA	Type: Grant Amount: Up to \$1,000 per pupil who completes program Match: No
7: Vibrant Character	T-Mobile & Main Street America Hometown Grants	Funds projects to build, rebuild, or refresh community spaces that help foster connections. Projects should be shovel-ready & able to be completed in 12 months of funding	Elected officials, town employees, or nonprofit community leaders from small towns with less than 50,000	Funding Cycle(s): 4 per year Application Deadlines: March, June, Sept, Dec	Type: Grants Amount: Up to \$50,000 Match: No
	Colorado Brownfields Partnership	Non-profit that provides technical assistance to communities for planning for & navigating brownfields assessment & cleanup opportunities. A good place to start!	Local governments and non-profits	Open on a rolling basis	N/A - Technical Assistance
8: Civic Health	Boettcher Foundation Leadership Practitioner Catalyst Grant Program	This program strengthens the capacity of leadership organizations that are working to create a more inclusive and accessible leadership ecosystem in Colorado.	Nonprofits and community orgs One staff member or volunteer must attend a Leadership Practitioner Collaborative meeting	Funding Cycle(s): Annual Application Deadlines: June	Type: Grant Amount: Varies Match: No
	EDA Planning and Local Technical Assistance Programs	Awards funding to strengthen capacity to undertake and promote economic development programs through feasibility studies, impact analyses, disaster resiliency plans, and project planning	Local, state, and Tribal governments, educational institutions	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A"	Type: Grant Amount: Varies, median award \$70,000 Match: Yes
	Just Transition Fund Application-Ready Support	Offers grants and technical assistance to develop and submit applications for federal funding.	Local govts & nonprofits from communities affected by coal closure	Funding Cycle(s): Rolling Application Deadlines: N/A	Type: Grants & TA Amount: Up to \$100,000 Match: No

MEASURING PROGRESS



WHY IT MATTERS

Creating a shared plan is a major milestone, but real success comes from what happens next. Measuring progress helps the community stay focused on results, celebrate wins, and adjust course when needed. Ten years from now, we want to look back and clearly see the difference this effort made: stronger communities, better coordination, and tangible improvements in the places and systems residents care about most. Tracking progress keeps the plan off the shelf and ensures that the hard work invested by local leaders, volunteers, and residents continues to shape decisions for years to come. Not only does tracking results provide accountability, it also captures data that can be used to report on grants and make the case for additional funding or investments.



CAPACITY AND EXPECTATIONS

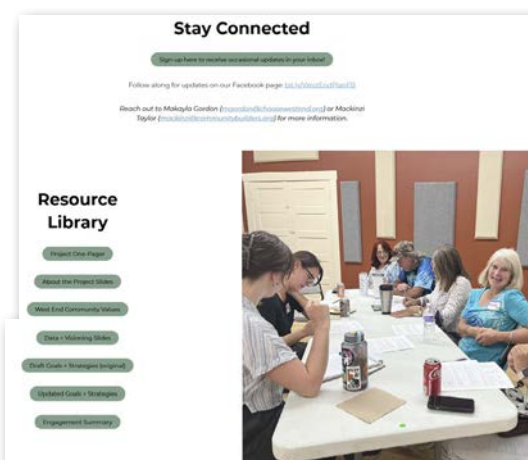
Change in small, rural communities takes time. Many of the Plan's goals, like improving health access, expanding housing, and strengthening the local economy, will unfold gradually over a decade or more. Measuring progress doesn't have to mean tracking dozens of complex indicators. Instead, the goal is to focus on a few meaningful, easy-to-track measures that reflect real change. For communities already stretched for capacity, it's better to track a few metrics consistently than to take on more than can be managed.

COMMUNICATION

Regular communication is essential for sustaining momentum and keeping the plan's priorities front and center, even as community leadership and key roles change over time. Posting updates online, sharing progress through newsletters and social media, and ideally, hosting an annual "State of the West End" forum to review progress and discuss next steps will help keep the whole community engaged and informed.

Some of the communication channels developed during the Vision Project can be re-directed to support communication on progress, including:

- » The WE Vision Facebook Page - Post a quarterly "progress update"
- » The WE Vision Newsletter & Email list - Send a "progress update" and highlight a success story or call to action for a specific strategy 1-2 times per year to help keep those who participated regularly in the project engaged
- » The WE Vision Website (bit.ly/WE-Vision-Web) - This is a potential location to share or link to a simple "Progress Dashboard" as it is simple and quick to update



RECOMMENDED METRICS

A simple regional dashboard, updated annually or biannually, is an easy way to keep the plan alive and visible. **Tracking which actions are in progress or complete is a practical, low-effort first step** that most communities can manage and that clearly shows forward movement. If time and capacity allows, adding a few outcome-oriented indicators can help illustrate the broader impact of those actions—what’s actually changing on the ground. These metrics are a “nice to have” rather than a requirement and should be interpreted with care, since many factors outside local control can influence results.

The potential metrics and data sources below are options for regional tracking, in addition to the “Actions Completed” and “Actions in Progress” recommended dashboard.

	Goal	Optional Metric #1	Optional Metric #2	Data Sources
	Vital & Viable Community	# of patient visits to local clinics	# of Healthcare & EMS staff	Local providers & EMS
	Housing Access & Choice	# of new housing units (new or rehab)	# of additional WE workers housed	Local housing organization
	Strong Regional Economy	# of total jobs	# of new businesses	State labor data; Chambers & WEEDC
	Managed & Meaningful Growth	# of new policies adopted	Regional pop growth rate (community goal = not a negative rate & not a high, double-digit rate)	Local municipalities; State Demographer's Office
	Balanced Use of Land and Resources	# of BLM & USFS touchpoints	# of community stewardship projects	Public Lands Roundtable
	Pathways to Success	# of students enrolled in local schools	# of participants in hands-on job training	CO Dept of Education; WEEDC
	Vibrant Community Character	# of residents receiving WE Welcome Guide	# of new volunteer perks	WEEDC, local nonprofits
	Civic Health and Collaboration	# of Regional Leadership Meetings	Increased voter turnout	Regional Leadership Group, Towns

It should be noted that tracking data metrics in the West End can be particularly challenging. Many metrics are tracked at the County level, however in the West End the Counties’ data is more reflective of the population centers of Montrose and Telluride than the West End. Some metrics are available at the Town level, but given their small population the margin of error for those metrics is typically quite high.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PROJECT WORKING GROUP

- » Makayla Gordon, WEEDC, Local Project Manager
- » Paula Brown, NNACC Director & Mayor, Town of Nucla
- » Becky Hannigan, Norwood Chamber of Commerce
- » Sue Hansen, Montrose County Commissioner
- » Lillie Love, Town of Naturita
- » Sara Owens, Town of Norwood
- » Melissa Lampshire, Town of Nucla (formerly)
- » Kathy Cooper, Town of Naturita (formerly)
- » Amanda Pierce, Town of Norwood (formerly)

AMBASSADOR TEAM

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- » Olivia Bobbitt
- » Kerry Bentler
- » Josh Fengel
- » Miranda Fengel
- » Doylene Garvey
- » Jody Gardner
- » Galena Gleason
- » Bob Grossman
- » Becky Hannigan
- » Erin Jones
- » Terri Lamers
- » Randi Latham
- » Cathy Luce
- » April Montgomery
- » Barb Olander
- » Christina Pierce
- » Everett Piper
- » Dani Reyes-Acosta
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ACTION GROUPS:

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- » Erin Jones
- » Nina Kothe
- » Christina Pierce
- » Chuck Porth
- » Amy Rowan
- » Rachel Zatterstrom

ACTION GROUPS, CONT.

Housing Access

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- » Elaine Demas
- » Doylene Garvey
- » Joseph Hittinger
- » Nina Kothe
- » Lillie Love
- » Troy Masters
- » John Reams
- » Amanda Richards
- » Clint Wytulka

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- » Makayla Gordon
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- » April Montgomery
- » Tim Pierce
- » Aimee Tooker

Managed Growth

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- » Bob Grossman
- » Annika Kristiansen
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- » Candy Meehan
- » Sara Owens
- » Barb Olander
- » Tim Pierce

Public Lands & Resources

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- » Grant Glasier
- » Galena Gleason
- » Paul Koski
- » Dani Reyes-Acosta
- » Liza Tanguay
- » Aimee Tooker

TOWN OF NUCLA TRUSTEES, 2025

- » Paula Brown, Mayor
- » Tim Pierce, Mayor Pro Tem
- » Penni Berry, Trustee
- » Joseph Hittinger, Trustee
- » Ailene Smith, Trustee

TOWN OF NATURITA TRUSTEES, 2025

- » Gene Greenwood - Mayor
- » Jeff Sonnenberg - Mayor Pro Tem
- » Harold Cowles - Trustee
- » Sharon Different - Trustee
- » John Gist - Trustee
- » Susan Kelley - Trustee
- » Dan Williams - Trustee

TOWN OF NORWOOD TRUSTEES, 2025

- » Candy Meehan - Mayor
- » Shawn Fallon - Mayor Pro Tem
- » Niven Drybrough - Trustee
- » Michael Grady - Trustee
- » Liza Tanguay - Trustee

MONTROSE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, 2025

- » Kirstin Copeland, District 1
- » Sue Hansen, District 2
- » Sean Pond, District 3

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, 2025

- » Anne Brown, District 1
- » Lance Waring, District 2
- » Galena Gleason, District 3

FUNDING PARTNERS

- » West End Economic Development
- » Town of Nucla, Norwood, and Naturita
- » Montrose and San Miguel Counties
- » Community Builders

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- » Clark Anderson, Executive Director
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- » Conner Borkowski, Fellow

OUR WEST END COMMUNITY

We would like to extend a warm and heartfelt to the over 700 individuals, groups, organizations, staff, and elected officials who gave their time, energy, ideas, and trust to inform the development of the West End Vision Plan.

PHOTO ATTRIBUTIONS

All photos in this Plan are from the following sources, unless otherwise noted:

- » Images purchased by WEEDC for the West End Colorado campaign.
- » Engagement photos from Community Builders team.
- » Community-sourced photos from:
 - Doylene Garvey
 - Amanda Pierce
 - Becky Hannigan
 - Laurie Koontz
 - Randi Latham
 - Makayla Gordon
 - Tom Meehan
 - Mallory Pottorff
 - Brock Benson
 - Jessica Davis
 - Hollie Marble
 - Sherry Rapp
 - Tamara Butler
 - Tanya Narramore
 - Mandie Atkins
 - Makayla Roster
 - Shannon Rayborn

THANK YOU!



05.

APPENDICES

IN THIS SECTION:

- » RELATED PLANS AND STUDIES
- » COMMUNITY STORYTELLING

RELATED PLANS AND STUDIES

The West End Vision Plan is regional in scope, providing policy guidance about the shared priorities of West End residents. Other recent local government plans and studies also apply, providing additional detail and often delving into more technical detail. Both help the local jurisdictions and organizations move forward, with WE Vision setting overall priorities of what to work on, while detailed plans and studies inform implementation. Looking ahead, the extensive community involvement in the Vision Plan provides a foundation for upcoming local planning efforts and studies.

Local Plans

- » West End Towns have completed a number of planning efforts that can guide specific community improvements and capital investments. These include the Naturita Capital Improvements Plan, Naturita Downtown Streetscape Improvement Study, and Nucla Downtown Streetscape Improvement study; Mustang Water Authority and Norwood Sanitation Districts Plans and engineering studies to guide local water and wastewater utility systems development; and the Naturita Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Norwood Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan.
- » Each Town has a local development code to govern land use development and prevent nuisance activities. Neither Naturita nor Norwood have a recent community-wide plan such as a “Comprehensive,” “General,” or “Master” Plan. In 2025, Nucla began developing a Master Plan.

County Plans

- » [Montrose County Master Plan](#), completed in 2024, is the most recent applicable local government policy document. The plan includes the West End planning area which covers the unincorporated areas around Nucla and Naturita. The plan emphasizes agriculture and tourism as economic opportunities in the West End. The plan supports continuing mining and light industrial, however no unincorporated land is identified for commercial or industrial land use. The first land use goal speaks to balancing impacts and benefits of development when issuing use permits. The plan also speaks to extension of utilities and growth adjacent to existing developed areas. It identifies economic opportunities through investments in transportation, medical services, and collaboration.
- » [San Miguel County Master Plan](#) includes the Wrights Mesa Plan of 2008, which applies to the area around Norwood. The plan promotes Economic Vitality, striving for a more stable and diverse town economy while maintaining agriculture and ranching and expanding small, local businesses; craft industry; clean industries; and tourism and recreation services. The plan supports mining and other heavy industry when it can offset impacts. Land use policies direct investment in infrastructure and orderly development of new residential near the Town, to guide development and retain agricultural lands and character as well as scenic and cultural resources.

Regional Plans

- » The [Region 10 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS) applies to a six county region that includes Montrose and San Miguel Counties. CEDS plans offer a broad regional view of assets, opportunities, barriers, and challenges. The core of this plan is a focus on economic diversification through local, place-based economic development, to create a more resilient and livable region.
- » The [West End Economic Diversification Plan](#) was completed through the Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities program funded by the US Economic Development Administration and led by the National Association of Counties. This plan identifies a broad strategy for economic diversification and transition for the West End region. The plan engaged local stakeholders to identify a variety of strategies and initiatives. The WE Vision process builds from this effort, as a community-led process, and provides clearer prioritization of the strategies and actions most aligned with community values and vision.
- » The [San Miguel Watershed Coalition’s Stream Management Plan](#) (2022) is a multi-year effort involving Norwood and the West End. It identifies environmental and recreational water needs and prioritizes future non-consumptive water projects, ensuring they are considered in regional water planning. This complements the Wright’s Mesa Water Stakeholders Group, which focuses on consumptive projects.

COMMUNITY STORYTELLING

Facts, numbers, and strategies are important to how we move forward. But so are stories and how we talk about and see ourselves as a community. Since the beginning of time, humans have used storytelling to share knowledge, pass down values, and build a sense of belonging. Here in the West End, our stories matter. They reflect our history, our resilience, and the values we want to carry forward. That's why we launched a West End storytelling series, sharing the voices of those who make this place home. Storytelling was an important part of community engagement and helped community members connect more deeply and personally to the Values. Thank you to the five community members who shared their stories in a big way with us, and to the many other community members who shared their stories in smaller ways, through group conversations, values input, and their love of the West End.



Wrights Mesa: A Stronghold of Resilience, Water, and Community — and How the West End Vision Project Builds on That Legacy

By Candy Meehan

Wrights Mesa, anchored by the Town of Norwood in western San Miguel County, is more than a landscape — it's a living example of rural resilience, resourcefulness, and community strength. This high mesa is home to the headwaters that begin on Lone Cone Mountain, where snowmelt and springs feed the watersheds that nourish agriculture, wildlife, and families across the West End.

Water is life here — and those who live on Wrights Mesa understand that intimately. From ranching to gardening, from firefighting to recreation, water shapes our economy, our environment, and our future. Generations of residents have worked to steward these resources with care and foresight, balancing tradition with innovation to sustain this place for the long haul.

For over a century, people have had the privilege of calling Wrights Mesa home. That time has been marked by deep community involvement and collective responsibility — including decades of volunteering with the Norwood Fire Protection District and other vital institutions. But that spirit of service is just one reflection of a greater whole — a testament to the diverse, tight-knit community that continues to grow here. On Wrights Mesa, service is a shared value. Whether it's responding to emergencies, coaching youth sports, attending town meetings, or helping a neighbor in need, people here give of themselves without hesitation.

Our family has been honored to be part of this community for generations. Through our longstanding local business and continued service — especially in emergency response and public service — we have witnessed firsthand the strength, generosity, and grit that define Wrights Mesa. The opportunity to live, work, and contribute here has been not only a responsibility but a privilege, and we are proud to be part of something bigger than ourselves.



Living with the Land as a Ranching Family

By Doyleene Garvey

In the West End the land isn't just where we live, it's how we live. It shapes our days, our work, and our traditions. Ranching, farming, and the outdoors have been part of my family for generations. To make a life here, you have to work with the land.

Ranching is a lot of work and needs everyone to help with their part. On our ranch kids grow up learning to drive a hay truck before they're old enough for a license, moving cattle on horseback, raking hay, and building fences. A family that works together, plays together. It's a childhood where cousins become best friends, playing outside, building forts and teepees, and learning how to solve problems and entertain themselves.

The land here provides in so many ways. There's the garden out back, where vegetables are grown and shared with neighbors, and the pantry full of food preserved for winter. There's the fresh beef and wild game that fill the freezer. Every spring branding the calves is a big event and we share a hot tasty meal together.

For generations, the Garvey family has lived and worked on this land. We wake up with the sunrise and at night we gather for large family dinners where everyone brings a favorite dish, and the noises of grandchildren are enjoyed in the background. Even the smallest things—morning walks watching the deer, kids playing outside from dawn to dusk, the sunsets that light up the Lone Cone, and the stars at night—remind us how connected we are to this land. I feel pride knowing that generations of families continue these traditions, raising cattle, farming, and feeding America.

The West End community understands the importance of Living with the Land, which is why it is one of the five Community Values created for the West End Vision Project. This value reflects what we all know: the land is a part of who we are and why we are here. We respect it, rely on it, and work hard to care for it to ensure that future generations can continue to live and work with the land, just as we have.



The Balance of Honoring Heritage and Looking Ahead

By Paula Brown

Our history and culture makes this a unique and special place that I am proud to call home. Our forefathers made immense sacrifices to make the West End what it is today—traveling through rugged lands, building roads, digging canals and ditches, turning rocky fields into farms, raising animals, and eventually, taking on bigger tasks—mining uranium for the Manhattan Project, mining coal, and like my father, working at Nucla Station to help power the growing West.

Those who came before us endured many challenges and hardships. They worked hard, but they also looked ahead. They had a vision for what the West End could become and they worked collectively to overcome obstacles and build our communities. When I think of their sacrifices I sometimes wonder: Are we really honoring those visionaries and forward thinkers? What if we're not applying the lessons of their efforts?

If we want to truly honor their legacy, we can't just look back at the history they created, we also have to look forward, just as they did. The West End is changing, whether we like it or not. We can't control every outside force, but we can decide how we move forward. That means learning from our past, using the lessons of hard work and resourcefulness to shape a future that still reflects our values and character. It means coming together, just like they did, to create solutions that make this a place where people can and want to stay, work, and raise their families.

I often think about how we can hold on to our unique culture in the face of change. Certainly through education, by celebrating our history, and by keeping traditions alive in a way that brings people together. But part of our unique culture is a spirit of looking ahead, of pioneering, of seeing possibility and opportunity in the rocky soils around us. Vision is a mix of past, present and future.

So let's do as our forefathers did and Chart Our Own Course. There are many ways we can honor that, and the West End Vision Project is one of them. I know that as a community, we are capable of great things. We are strong, resourceful, and resilient. We too can be visionaries, carrying forward what we love about our heritage while shaping an even better future.



Charting Our Own Course

By Brock Benson

Since the turn of the 20th century the West End of Colorado has been leading the way in resilience, grit, and determination. From its humble beginnings as an engineering cooperative company, to its seat in the San Miguel Basin when it was world renown for cattle ranching, to its part in the Uranium boom of the 30's and 40's, and now as one of the last forefronts of unspoiled outdoor recreation and the battle for conservation.

Having been born in the West End I am no stranger to hearing God and following the direction of the heart. In fact, dare I say, that every path I ever walked down was the path that would prepare for my ultimate destiny: bringing my talents home to invest in a sustainable future for the West End. And that's why I thank God everyday for giving me the bicycle to do it with.

The bicycle represents individual freedom as well as a vehicle that promotes play, exploration, and togetherness. Three things that our children desperately need in this digitally saturated era we find ourselves surviving in. To me, the bicycle represents a slower, simpler time in American Culture, a time before the rewiring of our brains and the ingestion of poisons and plastics. And now, as we accept biking as a part of the West End Culture we do so knowing that it's as an investment in our children's future and a new way to keep them connected with this beautiful landscape that we all love so much. It's also a vehicle that promotes fitness and a vibrant, healthy lifestyle.

This is why I could not be more proud of our school for stepping up and allowing our bicycle program to be a part of the curriculum on campus. Now we are at the point in our bike-evolution that we need more trails for our kids to ride on, and we are making that happen. Every time I am out in the backcountry working on putting in new routes to ride and fun features for our kids, I am always reminded of our West End Pioneers who spent years digging away at the Earth and engineering the CC Ditch that would become our lifeline to the land and the very thing which would sustain our culture for centuries to come. Now we repeat that formula for our children, carving out a path in the Earth that will keep their spirit connected to Nature and fill them with vitality and inspiration.

This is the course that we chart for ourselves in the West End and that's why building trails and getting kids on bikes is paramount to their development, memory, and self awareness. Charting our Own Course, a core community value identified through the WE Vision Project, teaches our kids to think for themselves while providing an example to create the change you want to see in the world. Creating this culture is what makes the West End the beacon on the hill that inspires the rest of the world with our connection to nature and our love for each other. Charting our own course is the very essence of grit, resilience, and determination, and it is absolutely what makes us West End Strong!

Community Spotlight: Annika Kristiansen, On Living Rurally in the West End

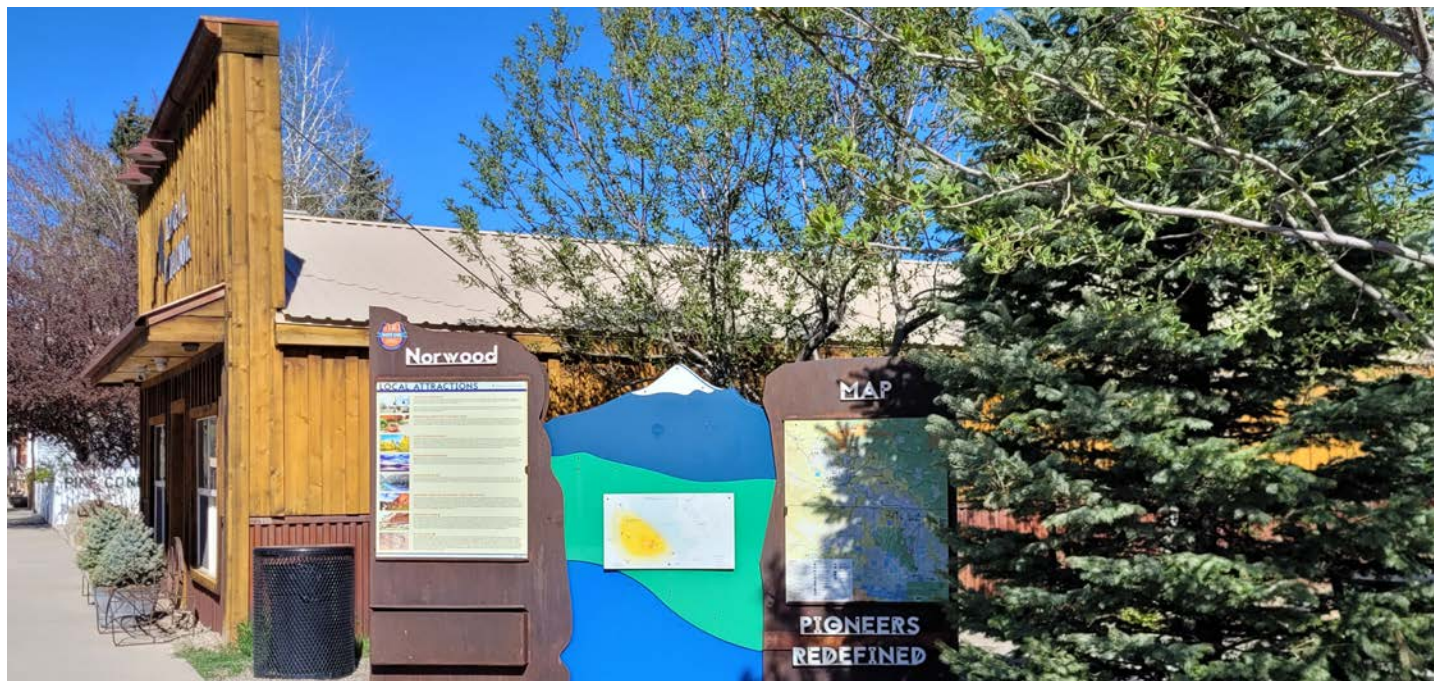
February 20, 2025 // Annika Kristiansen, Mackinzi Taylor

In her own words, Annika is a yogi, trail runner, mother, and backyard chicken keeper with a thriving garden. A Telluride ex-pat, she sought out Norwood for its deep-rooted values—supporting one another through thick and thin, regardless of background, politics, or beliefs. Born and raised on the East Coast, with Norwegian and Ashkenazi Jewish heritage, she found her home in this tight-knit community of powerful, resourceful women who are all learning how to “do it themselves”—living sustainably, locally, and with intention.

The Community Builders team heard about Annika early on as we started our work in the West End. As the 4H coordinator she is a well-liked community connector to the agricultural community and local youth, and someone we knew we wanted to connect with. She was also on maternity leave, so we held off for the time being. A few months and many trips to the West End later, Project Manager Mackinzi Taylor stumbled upon this piece while reading through the *San Miguel Basin Forum*. It was like a light bulb had gone off. This is what we’d been trying to put into words for months: the power and presence of values in the West End and the strength of a community that looks out for each other in the absence of other resources.

We finally met Annika in Naturita at the West End Solutions Group on an unseasonably warm February day, and she was every bit as thoughtful and engaging as expected. When we asked about her inspiration for the article, she shared:

“I wrote this piece as a call to action. As the political landscape grows more divisive, we must hold fast to our true values—the ones shaped by our lives, not imposed upon us by politicians, social media, or the endless news cycle. The outside world demands our attention, but now more than ever, we must resist that pull, turn inward, and focus on each other. Rural is the future. As the world looks to us for solutions—how to live sustainably, build resilient communities, and care for both our people and our planet—it’s up to us to lead the way.”



I grew up on a small farm in rural New England with a couple of sheep, some chickens, and two friendly house cats. My mother, a feisty and tough 120-pound-soaking-wet Norwegian, made soap, butchered our chickens and sheep, and canned her garden's tomatoes. This lifestyle was an oddity, even where I grew up, and I remember my friends thinking our homestead and ways were somewhere between ingenious, crazy, far-out, and super cool.

I've always been painfully aware of what it means to live rurally. Looking back, some of my closest friends as a young child lived in the poorest of conditions, surrounded by breathtaking natural beauty yet starved of the resources needed to address their deepest struggles. Depressed mothers. Alcoholic fathers. Personal trauma that festered in silence. Even access to healthy food was often out of reach, despite living in a place where land stretched endlessly under the sun. It's ironic, isn't it? To grow up in the country, a place that promises abundance, but so often leaves its people with the least.

And yet, living in the country is also a profound strength. It teaches you to be resourceful, to make something out of nothing, and to lean on the strength of your neighbors when your own falters. It's a life rooted in community and resilience, where every season reminds you that hardship is as inevitable as renewal. The land itself holds lessons in perseverance, and in that raw, unpolished existence, there's a beauty that binds people together. There is a rhythm to rural life, a heartbeat that is attuned to the land and the seasons, to neighbors and necessity.

The world today feels unsteady—climate change is disrupting ecosystems, wars over water and resources loom, and politics seem to widen divides rather than bridge them. But in rural areas, the ties that bind people are different. Politics are not the cornerstone of rural identity; relationships, ideas, and shared values are. When your closest neighbor lives miles away, you learn to rely on each other regardless of party lines. When winter snows make roads impassable, it doesn't matter how you voted—you shovel your neighbor's driveway because that's what keeps the community moving forward.

Rural life has always been about finding strength in simplicity and leaning into the collective goodness of people. It's about showing up for a neighbor whose barn needs repair or bringing a casserole to a family in mourning. It's in the potluck dinners at the church basement, the volunteer fire departments, and the unspoken agreement that in times of hardship, everyone steps in to do their part. In the face of adversity, it's not power or politics but the simple acts of kindness and cooperation that make all the difference.

We may face an uncertain future, but the lessons embedded in rural life—adaptability, resourcefulness, and a deep sense of community—are the tools we need to navigate it. And in these small pockets of the world, where politics don't matter but people's hearts and goodness do, there is hope for all of us. Together, rural communities will band together and show the resilience it takes to not just survive but thrive.



Annika's words capture the core of what makes the West End special—hard work, resourcefulness, and a deep commitment to looking out for one another. These are the very values that have emerged through four months of engagement for the West End Vision Project.

In a rapidly changing world, shared values are what keep us grounded. They shape how we grow, how we face challenges, and how we preserve the things that make the West End home. They're the Community Builders' secret sauce for helping community members cut through the noise and talk to each other about what really matters. As we move forward in this process, these values will serve as our foundation, ensuring that the future the West End builds, with the help of advocates like Annika, is one that reflects who they are as a community.

