

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

TOWN OF PAONIA

2024 UPDATE



PHOTO CREDIT: STEVE HUNTLEY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Past Plans, Studies, and Work

The 2024 Town of Paonia Comprehensive Plan draws information and inspiration from the following:

- 1996 Paonia Comprehensive Plan
- Draft Paonia Master Plans including EMB Consultants (2021) and Barbara Peterson (2012)
- 2010 Highway 133 Corridor Plan
- 2010 North Fork Valley Vision 2020
- 2014 North Fork Valley Heart & Soul Project
- 2017 Town of Paonia Zoning Map
- 2022 Paonia in Motion: Parks, Recreation & Trails Master Plan (PRTMP)
- 2022 Town of Paonia Community Strategic Planning Session
- 2023 Town of Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan

For a full list of all documents and research please see Appendix E, Reference & Resource Documents.

**This project was supported by a generous grant from the
Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA).**

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ABOUT THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Municipalities in Colorado are authorized to prepare comprehensive plans as long-range guiding documents. According to the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the comprehensive plan “promotes the community’s vision, goals, objectives, and policies, establishes a process for orderly growth and development, addresses both current and long-term needs, and provides for a balance between the natural and built environment.” Paonia’s last comprehensive plan was adopted in 1996.

In late 2022, the Town of Paonia was awarded a DOLA grant to update the 1996 Comprehensive Plan and published a request for proposal (RFP) seeking a consultant; expressing particular interest in working with qualified local community members; and requesting a relatively short, concise, accessible, and user-friendly Comprehensive Plan as the outcome. In response, this consulting team of local professionals came together with diverse, complementary skill sets ranging from public policy and technical writing to architecture and planning to community engagement and facilitation, with a shared love for the community they call home.

The discipline of planning has evolved significantly since Paonia’s last comprehensive plan was adopted in 1996. Rather than limiting a plan’s scope to land use and physical development, the American Planning Association emphasizes sustainability, equity, responsible regionalism, and especially community participation. The process of creating a plan is just as important as the outcome. The initial goals for this process, which the Town established in their call for the Paonia Comprehensive Plan, were as follows:

- Develop a shared vision and a clear, accessible plan to guide our community toward a thriving and resilient future.
- Utilize a participatory community engagement process that builds trust in local government and momentum toward addressing community needs and goals.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

Part I: Introduction

This part includes the Town of Paonia’s vision and a brief background on the Town of Paonia.

Part II: Plan Elements

Each element contains a specific vision as well as a list of values. The policies create a path for the community to achieve the vision and enhance the values. The policies provide guidance for day-to-day and long-term decision-making for the Board of Trustees, Planning Commission, Town staff, and community. They are not listed in any particular order.

The Future Land Use Plan provides guidance on where and what kind of development and land uses are preferred within the Town of Paonia and surrounding areas.

For the housing element of this Plan, see the 2023 Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan. In addition to the Parks, Recreation, & Trails element within this Plan, see the 2022 PRTMP.



Appendix

The appendix provides background on Plan Elements and resources and research used to inform this Plan.

PLAN TIMELINE

- RFP was released in October 2022.
- Contract was awarded in March 2023.
- Kickoff meeting was conducted with the Planning Commission and Board of Trustees and existing plans and background materials were reviewed in March 2023.
- Community engagement workshops took place in April and June 2023.
- Future Land Use Plan public workshop was held in March 2024.
- Three public presentations were made of the draft Plan Elements with public comment during Planning Commission meetings in March, April, and May 2024
- Seven Board of Trustee meetings were participated in from December 2022 to June 2024
- Members of the consulting team met with the Planning Commission and Town Boards/Committees, including the Tree Board and Parks Committee, multiple times throughout the process.
- The consulting team coordinated with Urban Rural Continuum; a consulting firm hired by the Town of Paonia to conduct a Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan at roughly the same time as this Comprehensive Plan.
- A draft Plan, subject to final public comment and revisions by the Town of Paonia, was released in June 2024.
- Final public hearing was held by the Planning Commission in [insert month] 2024

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Public Engagement Session #1

The first Comprehensive Plan community engagement session was held on April 27, 2023, and attracted more than 60 participants. The main objective for this session was to gather feedback on an initial set of community values to guide the Plan. In addition, participants had the opportunity to provide input on all components of the Plan—including Vision, Goals, and Policies—through interactive ranking, brainstorming, and group-discussion activities. Some of the key issues and themes identified were

- protecting the rural, agricultural, and small-town character of Paonia;
- prioritizing the municipal water system and other key infrastructure and services;
- addressing the housing emergency;
- finding a balanced role for tourism as an economic driver;
- identifying climate resilience and ecosystem health; and
- providing transparency and improved communication between the Town and community.





Public Engagement Session #2

The second Comprehensive Plan community engagement session was held on June 24, 2023, and had 44 registered participants. The main objectives for this session were to develop a shared community vision and dig deeper into key issues that were brought forward during the first community engagement session. The Community Vision statement and the Vision statements included at the beginning of each element were developed by the attending in this session and informed by the research conducted for this Plan. Some of the community priorities identified during this session are presented below.

Land Use and Housing

- Preserve and increase open space and river access
- Develop and implement a housing action plan
- Regulate short-term rentals
- As appropriate, increase residential density rather than sprawl
- Conduct a zoning study
- Create design standards and preserve historic character

Infrastructure

- Plan and implement needed water system repairs, improvements, and maintenance
- Follow the guidance of the Town engineer (or firm) to understand source water availability

- Integrate planning and maintenance for water, sewer, streets, sidewalks, and street-trees to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness

Economic Development

- Retain the existing downtown commercial corridor
- Provide support for small businesses and entrepreneurship
- Grow Town capacity for economic development

Parks and Recreation

- With community and partner organizations, prioritize and implement recommendations from the Parks, Recreation & Trails Master Plan
- Prioritize youth recreation and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, including safe routes to schools and designated nonmotorized and accessible routes

Governance and Participation

- Facilitate engagement events to improve working relationship between Town and community members
- Improve accessibility of publicly available information
- Provide training and resources to educate the Town and the public on good governance and participation
- Hold productive and healthy Town Board meetings that enable community participation

Public Engagement Session #3

The third community engagement session was held on March 3, 2024, and included 47 people. This session focused on presenting a draft Future Land Use Plan and map along with the public comment, existing planning, environmental, and geological elements that informed it. Members of the public, Town Staff, and elected officials were given worksheets to provide written comments. Members of the public expressed support for the focus on the following:

- Develop commercial property in the Downtown Core instead of along Highway 133
- Preserve culture and character of the Downtown Core and residential neighborhoods
- Create urban agricultural area designations along the river, in the Highway 133 corridor, and in specific areas of Town
- Integrate cottage industries into more business-heavy areas of Town
- Acknowledge and take wildlife corridors into consideration with all zoning and development
- Provide safe access to parks and places of education and recreation for children

Some members of the public expressed surprise regarding areas with geological hazards including land slides and flooding, and indicated they were not previously aware of these.



LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Town of Paonia is authorized to develop a community master plan (Comprehensive Plan) in accordance with Sections 31-23-206 through 209 of the Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.), which refer to the development, modification, and approval procedures for such a plan.



PART I: INTRODUCTION



PHOTO CREDIT: MICHELLE PATTISON

PAONIA'S COMMUNITY VISION

The community vision that informs this Plan was inspired by the work of the North Fork Heart & Soul project and was further developed with the public through the Town of Paonia Comprehensive Plan community engagement process.

VISION

Paonia is a unique and welcoming small town with strong ethics of self-reliance and care for our families and neighbors. We honor and respect Paonia's rich history and heritage, including arts, agriculture, mining, and the original inhabitants of this land, the Ute.

We balance growth and development with the values of maintaining a small-town feel and dark nighttime skies, economic and cultural diversity and creativity, and existing community resources. We share a deep connection to our rural landscape and natural resources.

We support opportunities to cultivate ecological regeneration and stewardship, protection of wildlands, healthy living, and a thriving place-based economy.



ABOUT PAONIA

PAONIA

Paonia, Colorado, is a small, statutory town with an estimated population of 1,474 as of 2023. The Town sits in an agricultural valley nestled between the North Fork of the Gunnison River and the West Elks range of the Rocky Mountains. Known for its peaches, cherries, vineyards, cider, ranches, small farms, breathtaking views, and access to nature and the arts, Paonia is consistently ranked as one of the best small towns in Colorado. Those who call Paonia home cherish and seek to protect its small-town character, rural landscape, agricultural heritage, surrounding wildlands, and self-reliant way of life.

HISTORY & HERITAGE

The North Fork Valley was part of the ancestral homeland of the Ute people. In 1881, the US federal government closed the North Fork Valley Ute Reservation and relocated the remaining Ute people to a reservation in Utah. Soon after, Paonia was settled by Civil War veteran Samuel Wade and preacher William Clark, who had initially traveled to the area with Enos Hotchkiss. Samuel Wade officially incorporated Paonia in 1902, naming it after his favorite flower, the peony, which he brought to the settlement along with the first fruit trees. Farming, ranching, and mining became some of the Town's primary industries.

CULTURE & CHARACTER

The floral reference to peonies of the Town's name inspires pride in the community's natural and agricultural heritage. The North Fork Valley's long history of cattle ranching, mining, and pioneering spirit remains today. Early horticulturalists living in the valley planted Paonia Town Park with trees that now, at more than 100 years old, offer a beautiful, shaded haven for both community members and tourists. Paonia Town Park is home to popular festivals and gatherings including the Mountain Harvest Festival, the BMW "Top of the Rockies" Rally, the Pickin' in the Park summer concert series, and Cherry Days—one of the longest running 4th of July festivals in Colorado.

The people of Paonia value their cultural, political, and economic diversity. Ranchers, miners, and families who have been in the area for generations share the Town with artists and creatives, entrepreneurs, organic farmers, outdoor enthusiasts, wellness practitioners, and an increasing number of people who work remotely. Neighbors with different lifestyles and political views often come together and help each other in times of need. A 2014 community-led initiative called "The North Fork Heart & Soul Project" succeeded in capturing many of the shared values of Paonia's diverse residents; those values have informed this Plan. During the engagement process for this plan, community members expressed their values related to Paonia's culture and character, including the following:

- The small-town community feel—a culture that is welcoming, safe, respectful, and inclusive
- Community resources and offerings such as a library, schools, a radio station, festivals, art and cultural creatives, churches, and nonprofits
- Honoring the history and heritage, farms and festivals, arts and creative culture



DEMOGRAPHICS

The Town of Paonia's population has remained relatively stable over the past 40+ years; the population in 2023 is just 3.5% higher than in 1980. Paonia's population is older now, with 43% over age 55, while the percentage of adults aged 18-54 has decreased over the past decade. However, single working adults and families are also drawn to the area because of the high quality of life, sense of community, safety, and access to both traditional and alternative forms of education.

ECONOMY & GROWTH

Coal mining was Paonia's economic lifeblood for decades and remains a source of pride as well as a source of income for the community. In recent years two of three nearby mines have closed; however, the remaining nearby West Elk Mine in Gunnison County is currently the most productive mine in Colorado and offers well-paying mining and wholesale trade jobs. The economic impact of the other closures was strongly felt by the community and has begun to be partially offset by the growth of other industries, particularly remote work (supported by the introduction of high-speed internet in 2017) and tourism.

The 1996 Comprehensive Plan and subsequent land use planning, regulations, and codes sought to limit sprawl and preserve rural character. Over the past two decades, Paonia's remote location and distance from downhill skiing and other high-end recreation has provided some natural buffer to the growth and development seen in many Colorado resort towns. Growth is further constrained by a moratorium on new water taps that went into effect in 2020. Still, challenges related to tourism, economic and demographic shifts, and housing affordability that are common to many Colorado mountain towns are being felt in Paonia. Housing price increases have outpaced rise in wages by a ratio of 5.5 to 1, displacing residents and creating barriers for businesses looking to hire seasonal and full-time wage workers.

EDUCATION, CIVIL SOCIETY, & HEALTH CARE

For a small community, Paonia has abundant educational opportunities. Children have access to diverse preschools and elementary schools within the Delta County School District (DCSD) including Backpack Early Learning Academy (BELA) Preschool and Paonia K-8 elementary school; the North Fork School of Integrated Studies (NFSIS), a Waldorf-inspired public charter school with associated NFSIS BELA Preschool; and North Fork Montessori in Crawford. Teenagers living in Paonia attend the public North Fork High School in neighboring Hotchkiss. Vision Charter Academy has a campus in Delta and provides support for individualized learning and homeschooling in grades K-12.

Paonia is rich in arts, as well as vocational and social nonprofits—many located in the downtown Creative District including the iconic Paradise Theatre, KVNF Community Radio, Blue Sage Center for the Arts, and more. The community is proud of its library, a hub of activity in a beautiful building constructed in 2009. Just outside Paonia is Solar Energy International, a long-running renewable energy vocational school that attracts students from around the world. Environmental, agricultural, and service organizations round out Paonia's civil society, along with churches of many denominations. Finally, nonprofits and private businesses provide access to extracurriculars and education including healthy cooking, organic farming, art and music lessons, karate and dance classes, yoga and exercise, and nature and horse camps, to name a few.



Healthcare within the Town of Paonia is limited to private enterprises including Paonia Care & Rehabilitation Center, a licensed 60-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility, and several private practices including physical therapy, dentistry, acupuncture, chiropractic, and numerous other alternative and integrated wellness practitioners. The nearest public clinic is West Elk Clinic in Hotchkiss, part of the Delta Health system (which features multiple clinics throughout the county) and Delta County Memorial Hospital in Delta.

ECOLOGY, CLIMATE, & WATERSHED

Paonia sits at an elevation of 5,682 feet (about 1.73 kilometers) and is known for its mild climate that has historically been especially suitable for growing fruit. Much of the Town of Paonia and surrounding agricultural land is green thanks to a network of privately managed irrigation systems, which are governed by local ditch companies and complex water laws. The surrounding wildlands are at a similar elevation and include dryland/high desert juniper-sagebrush ecosystems. The North Fork of the Gunnison River runs through the west side of Town, and its riparian corridor is home to abundant wildlife including beavers, mule deer, elk, fox, coyotes, and more. The Town is surrounded by vast expanses of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the US Forest Service (USFS)—which has an office in Paonia, and private ranchers with grazing permits on public lands.

The Paonia region is one of the more extreme climate hotspots in the country. According to the US Geological Survey, Delta County, most of the Western Slope, and parts of Utah have already experienced warming of more than 3.9 degrees Fahrenheit. Like the majority of the Colorado River Basin, Paonia suffers from greater drought stress and has heightened risk for catastrophic wildfire. Paonia's municipal source water springs are located on USFS land, which is leased for cattle grazing. Irregular and decreased snowpack levels and changes in snowmelt patterns are already affecting the infiltration dynamics of the mountain springs that feed the municipal domestic water system and numerous privately managed water systems in the surrounding unincorporated areas.



PART II: PLAN ELEMENTS



PHOTO CREDIT: AARON WATSON

SKIES ALIVE

LAND USE

OVERVIEW

The population of Paonia has changed little since 1980. It has fluctuated over the decades with ebbs and flows of the local economy, especially natural resource extraction. An increase in housing demand has been observed over the past three years, determined mainly by the migration from urban cores to rural areas during the COVID pandemic. In 2020, a water tap moratorium was adopted that prevented the sale of new water taps, which curtailed new construction. The moratorium, along with the pandemic-driven migration, has increased the cost of housing in Paonia. In response, the Town completed a Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan in conjunction with this Comprehensive Plan process which serves as an element of this Comprehensive Plan.

Growth outside of Town limits is currently regulated by the 2011 Growth Management Agreement for the Unincorporated Areas Surrounding the Town of Paonia, Colorado, Between Delta County and the Town of Paonia, Colorado, generally referred to as the Intergovernmental Agreement or IGA. The Town of Paonia Highway 133 Corridor Master Plan also regulates growth and development outside Town boundaries.

This Future Land Use Framework contemplates growth and development in and around Paonia. It informs where and how it may occur, what types may be appropriate, and the general character.

VISION

Paonia's rural character and slower pace of life are interconnected with the landscape, seasons, and thriving community life. Urban agriculture thrives; the community feels connected to the surrounding farmland and natural landscape. Wildlife corridors, dark nighttime skies, greenways, and viewsheds are protected and cherished. The Town has walkable, tree-lined streets that surround a small but vibrant historic downtown. The historic core neighborhoods are celebrated, while "gentle" growth harmoniously adds to the character of the Town and provides housing for all walks of life that make up the diverse local community.

VALUES

- Open space, agricultural land, interconnection with nature, and dark nighttime skies.
- The Town's rural character, historic heritage, and farming and ranching legacy.
- Clear planning for a growing community.
- A diverse and accessible community of all ages, incomes, family status, race, religion, or creed.



POLICIES

- POLICY LUF-1:** Preserve Paonia’s rural character, natural resources, key wildlife habitats, riparian corridors, viewsheds, and open lands while balancing the need for infill, economic growth, housing and redevelopment.
- POLICY LUF-2:** Approach development with clear and consistent regulations and procedures that are effective and fair.
- POLICY LUF-3:** Promote a built environment that is in harmony with the existing scale and historic character of Paonia while remaining open to contemporary, energy efficient, and alternative building methods.
- POLICY LUF-4:** Support diverse and affordable housing options for all to ensure that Paonia remains a complete and vibrant community. Housing is generally considered affordable if the monthly payment (rent or mortgage, plus utilities) is no more than 30% of gross household income (before taxes). See the Town of Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan (2023).
- POLICY LUF-5:** Prioritize development that benefits locals and the local economy. Examples include activation of vacant spaces, opportunities for local entrepreneurs, businesses that meet local needs, and operations that support overall local economic development.
- POLICY LUF-6:** Enhance the Town’s resiliency to natural disasters and environmental hazards.
- POLICY LUF-7:** Ensure that the cost of growth, like extending utilities and roads, is paid for by the developer and not the Town or residents. This includes the cost of annexation where any existing utilities or roads to be dedicated to the Town are brought up to Town standards before such dedication, so Town residents do not bear those costs.
- POLICY LUF-8:** Plan for responsible growth and development through coordination with Delta County by regularly revisiting and adjusting the Growth Management Agreement for the Unincorporated Areas Surrounding the Town of Paonia, generally referred to as the Intergovernmental Agreement or IGA, and the Town of Paonia Highway 133 Corridor Master Plan. Regularly update the Town’s Three-Mile Plan.
- POLICY LUF-9:** Maintain the natural darkness (dark skies) to preserve the nighttime view of the stars and the many other benefits of dark skies.



FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use Plan is a graphic representation of the desired future land uses in and near Paonia, as expressed by the visions, values, and policies in this Comprehensive Plan. The Future Land Use Plan is not a zoning map, but rather a map to help guide updates to existing zoning regulations, proposed rezonings, and the general type and intensity of future development. It is a decision-making tool for the Town Board, Planning Commission, and staff. The Future Land Use Plan's key considerations, map area, map elements are described below.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Preserve Paonia's small-town feel and rural and historic character.
- Maintain the Town's agricultural legacy and its connection to agricultural and public lands.
- Identify areas to accommodate the increasing demand for affordable housing.
- Identify areas for gradual increases in density.
- Maintain the economic vitality of the historic downtown.
- Maintain commercial development along Grand Avenue and cluster new commercial development near the Town's gateways, and still preserve the rural aesthetic of the gateways.
- Identify areas for creative mixed use and business opportunities.
- Preserve and increase public access to open space and the river.
- Protect wildlife habitat and riparian corridors.

MAP AREA

Future land use categories have been assigned to the land within the Town of Paonia's boundary as well as Planning Areas A and B as designated by the Town of Paonia Highway 133 Corridor Master Plan. The future land use for land outside those areas was not discussed in detail throughout the planning process; however, feedback indicated there is a desire to preserve the existing uses and character of such land. Agricultural land, open space, and the general rural feel of these areas is valued by the community. Expansion of existing neighborhoods into areas not assigned a future land use category should be limited to those areas where it is practical to do so, like where utilities and access are readily available.

MAP ELEMENTS

Future Land Use Categories

Downtown Commercial Core

Composed of the vibrant commercial heart of Paonia with a unique historic character, this area is oriented toward local businesses and pedestrian access. Restaurants and historic buildings, including the Paradise Theater, and the small urban Polis Park, make up the gravitational center of the community. Commercial activities generally include a mix of retail, professional offices, and restaurants in existing buildings. This district helps maintain local businesses that serve the community's daily needs and provides a core for activity and visitors. New development should respect the character of existing development, and streetscape improvements are encouraged to improve the pedestrian experience.



- Primary Uses: Retail, restaurants, offices, other commercial uses
- Supporting Uses: A range of residential uses typically mixed in with other uses, pocket parks and plazas, institutional

Mixed Use

These areas support a range of uses that serve and complement the Downtown Commercial Core while transitioning to residential areas. The commercial and residential mix contributes to maintaining access to services and provides diverse housing and employment options. Mixed Use areas are more auto oriented than those in the Downtown Commercial Core but should still be walkable and connected to nearby amenities. Uses should be compatible with neighboring uses by limiting nuisances and mitigating their impacts through screening or other measures.

- Primary Uses: All types of residential; commercial including restaurants, offices, art studios, and retail
- Supporting Uses: Institutional, home businesses, small-scale creative industries

Light Manufacturing

This category supports employment opportunities within the Town that are more intense than Downtown Commercial Core and Mixed-Use areas. These areas are typically near major roads for easy access. Uses in these areas should mitigate impacts on neighboring uses, especially residential. While this category is not included in many locations on the Future Land Use Map adopted with this Plan, it is anticipated that there will be a growing interest in this use; therefore, this land use category will be available for future map updates and amendments.

- Primary Uses: Small-scale manufacturing and fabrication, commercial, creative industries
- Supporting Uses: Storage, warehousing, wholesale retail, agricultural processing, residential, institutional

Mixed Neighborhood

Part of the oldest residential areas within the historic town grid, this area is predominantly defined by historical architecture styles. Residential density is slightly higher than other residential areas due to the proximity to the Downtown Commercial Core and Mixed-Use areas. Maintaining the historic character and general scale while allowing for increased density is the focus in this area.

- Primary Uses: Residential including single-family, duplex, and triplex dwellings
- Supporting Uses: Home businesses, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), institutional

Town Original Neighborhood

This category encompasses the central residential neighborhood in the historic town grid, and is characterized by tree-lined streets and alleys. This area has older architecture (from turn of the century to the 1940s); this, along with its walkability and small neighborhood feel, is highly valued by the community. Development and redevelopment in this area should respect the scale and character of existing development.

- Primary Uses: Single-family dwellings
- Supporting Uses: Home businesses, ADUs, institutional



Traditional Neighborhood

This category includes more recent residential development (post-1950), with mostly single-family homes not always on the Town's historic grid. It represents a transition from the historic core area toward the lower-density residential areas that border agricultural land and open space. Residential density in this area could increase gradually over time with the addition of ADUs or duplex dwellings.

- Primary Uses: Single-family dwellings
- Supporting Uses: Duplex dwellings, home businesses, ADUs, institutional

Conservation Neighborhoods

This comprises a low-density areas along the edge of Town, dedicated to preserving open space and other natural resources. These areas act as a transition between the Town and the surrounding rural land. These areas offer a pedestrian and visual connection to the Town core and the recreational areas outside the Town limits. Conservation measures such as clustered residential uses and conservation easements are encouraged here to protect natural resources and to mitigate the impacts of natural hazards, like flood and fire. Where existing agricultural uses exist, they are encouraged to continue as desired by the property owner.

- Primary Uses: Single-family dwellings
- Supporting Uses: ADUs, parks and trails, natural resource preservation, institutional

Urban Farmland

This area is defined by agricultural land that supports the practice of cultivating crops, raising livestock, and agritourism. It creates a transition between Town living and the surrounding rural farmland and contributes to conserving open space and agricultural land. This category plays a critical role in preserving Paonia's rural history and character and in reinforcing its local culinary farm-to-table tradition. Development in this area is minimal but could include clustered and single-family housing to support agriculture uses and land conservation.

- Primary Uses: Agricultural
- Supporting Uses: Residential, uses that support agriculture (e.g., worker housing and small-scale retail), open space conservation, institutional

Historic Core

This central area of Town is defined as approximately from Niagara Avenue to Rio Grand Avenue, and from First Street to Fourth Street. The buildings and streets in these areas reflect the original settlement of Paonia around the turn of the 20th century and into the 1940s. While not all properties are historic, this area generally displays a unique architectural character made up of a traditional street and alley grid with tree-lined streets displaying the rich historic legacy that is highly valued by the community. Redevelopment and new development in this area should be compatible with the general character and scale of the existing lots and development.



Gateways

The two main gateways to Paonia play a crucial role in connecting the Town to Highway 133 and represent key entry points into Town. They provide opportunities for beautification, improved signage, and safe pedestrian paths.

- Samuel Wade Road represents the main access point from the highway. While some Mixed Use is desired in this area, it is crucial to preserve agricultural land and the scenic viewsheds. Any development near this gateway should be concentrated in order to maintain Paonia's small-town, agricultural character.
- Grand Avenue is the secondary access to the Town from the highway. Any development near this gateway should focus on landscaping and beautification, integrating the Paonia River Park, and creating a safe bike and pedestrian-friendly access between the Historic Core and the Paonia K-8 School.

Water/Wildlife Corridors

These areas consist of the Gunnison River and Minnesota Creek along with a 200-foot buffer. These areas often overlap with identified wildlife habitats and migration corridors as well as recreational opportunities. In these areas it is important to recognize and protect nature including wildlife, vegetation, habitat, and migration corridors as well as the river and creek corridors. These corridors should be the focus of further conservation and protection efforts, as well as improved accessibility for recreation where appropriate.



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

OVERVIEW

The 2022 median household income in Paonia was \$53,646, median earning per worker was \$49,625, and 8.4% of the population was below the federal poverty line. These figures are far below both Colorado and national averages: the 2022 Colorado median household income was \$89,930 and the US median household income was \$74,580. Residents are increasingly in need of good jobs to keep up with rising costs of living, and in particular the cost of housing. According to the 2023 Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan, one in five Paonia households is burdened by housing costs, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Of these, over 50% of those households are extremely cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 50% of their income on housing. Lack of affordable housing has been identified as a challenge by local business owners who have trouble recruiting and retaining employees in large part due to limited and costly housing stock.

“Jobs and housing are interconnected. The economic success and mix of jobs in a region inform the amount, type, and price point of housing needed to sustain the local economy. Likewise, a sufficiently diverse housing supply is needed to attract and keep quality employees that are invested in the community.”

- Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan, 2023

A strong local economy is critical to Paonia’s future; it provides respectable job opportunities for locals, a robust tax base for the Town and its infrastructure systems, and overall, a desirable and livable community. This element focuses on strengthening our local economy, supporting local businesses and local agriculture, maintaining a vibrant downtown, balancing tourism benefits with impacts, and developing a workforce that is skilled in needed areas.

Vision

Paonia’s resilient, regenerative, localized economy meets community needs by providing desired goods and services as well as reliable job opportunities that pay living wages. Our economy emphasizes the production of local food and value-added agricultural products, human health and well-being, unique educational opportunities, and the creative and trade industries. Our economy attracts and serves visitors in a way that supports locals. The Town’s revenue is strong and steady and the quality of life among residents is constantly improving.

Values

- Economic development aligns with preserving our community’s rural and agricultural character.
- Local, independent businesses build community wealth, care for our natural resources, and provide opportunities to individuals and families.
- There is a vibrant and beautiful downtown commercial district.
- Economic diversity and resilience ensures the local economy is not overly reliant on one industry and provides access to goods and services that meet real community needs.



POLICIES

- POLICY ECON-1:** With partners, proactively nurture a diverse and resilient economy that prioritizes local needs and is centered in agriculture, health and wellness, tourism, creative industries, and skilled labor and trades.
- POLICY ECON-2:** Support the retention and expansion of locally owned businesses and increase support for entrepreneurship.
- POLICY ECON-3:** Create and maintain a healthy, vibrant, and beautiful economic downtown corridor on and around Grand Avenue.
- POLICY ECON-4:** Ensure an integrated and balanced role for tourism and remote workers in the local economy to allow local businesses, community members, and the Town of Paonia to receive the economic benefit of tourism and spending by remote workers while balancing this with housing affordability and the development of year-round, well paying, place-based jobs for residents.
- POLICY ECON-5:** Support workforce development through skill-based education programs and other efforts that build the local capacity to meet more of the community's basic needs like food production, food service, housing construction, skilled trades, energy production, education, and health care.
- POLICY ECON-6:** Support the continuation of local agriculture including farm-worker housing, education, and value-added processing infrastructure.
- POLICY ECON-7:** Conduct a targeted community and stakeholder engagement process focused on annexation of properties leading up to and along the Highway 133 corridor to increase Town revenue from sales tax in alignment with the Future Land Use Map, above. Build relationships with other key neighborhoods and water districts to enable and incentivize annexation where appropriate.



PARKS, RECREATION, & TRAILS

OVERVIEW

Paonia is home to a beautiful park system consisting of three major parks—Paonia Town Park, Apple Valley Park, and Paonia River Park (which is owned and operated by Western Slope Conservation Center, a local nonprofit)—and several smaller parks and green spaces. Volunteer Park, a popular field for youth sports, is outside Town limits on Matthews Lane, owned by Delta County, and maintained by volunteers. Surrounding the Town are undeveloped public, private, and agricultural lands with diverse wildlife populations and ample opportunities for recreation. Paonia’s access to nature and park and recreational assets are important to the well-being and character of the community. These assets provide immense value to the community and require care including long-term planning and ongoing investment.

Recreational opportunities in Paonia are growing, but are still limited for youth and elders. Amenities that support these age groups are critical to ensuring good health and well-being and maintaining Paonia’s attractiveness as a place to raise a family or retire. Area recreational opportunities—in particular hunting, mountain biking, and hiking—already attract visitors. In response to feedback from the Comprehensive Plan community engagement process, this Plan addresses tourism separate from recreation in the Economic Development element.

The 2022 PRTMP convened community members and local recreation leaders to define priorities for parks and recreation. The PRTMP provides a detailed plan for the development of Paonia’s parks, recreation, and trails and is considered an element of this Comprehensive Plan. To date, most of the progress in implementing the PRTMP has come from the initiative of passionate and skilled community leaders and organizations collaborating with the Town. The Vision, Values, and Policies below were developed by the public in addition to the PRTMP.

“Easy access to green space contributes to the quality of life that’s key to attracting and keeping residents and businesses, [and] research has shown that people who regularly use parks get more and better exercise than people who don’t. A park close by can improve the well-being of everyone from a child managing ADHD to a senior recovering from hip surgery.”

- The Trust for Public Land

VISION

Paonia’s parks, recreation amenities, and trail system are well-maintained, adequately funded, and recognized for the value they provide to the community first and to recreational visitors second.



VALUES

- Recreational amenities that serve and prioritize local residents.
- Access to parks, open space, and opportunities for a full range of recreational uses.
- Access to a green space or park within a safe 10-minute walk from each resident's home.
- Planning and budgeting procedures for parks, recreation assets, and trails involve the public.

POLICIES

- POLICY REC-1:** Maintain and enhance parks, trails, and other recreation amenities, prioritizing the needs and desires of youth, elders, and residents.
- POLICY REC-2:** Increase capacity and resources for local parks, recreation amenities, and trails through partnerships with community volunteer organizations, relevant local and regional organizations and government agencies, and private landowners.
- POLICY REC-3:** Prioritize development initiatives that preserve and enhance community access to open space. Integrate park and trail development into land use activities that take place in key areas or corridors of connectivity.
- POLICY REC-4:** Preserve and enhance safe access for all public lands that connect to the river, riparian corridor, and wildland while implementing seasonal restrictions as appropriate to protect wildlife.
- POLICY REC-5:** Increase and maintain accessibility of parks, trails, and sidewalks by ensuring ADA standards are met when appropriate and feasible.
- POLICY REC-6:** When developing new, or considering new uses for, parks or recreational assets, collaborate with land managers and agency professionals to implement best practices that minimize the impact on wildlife (e.g., seasonal closures, habitat improvement/mitigation, and stewardship).
- POLICY REC-7:** Support and enhance the recreational use of rivers and creeks in local parks by improving safe public access and advocating for sustainable flow for recreation and/or wildlife needs. Where open channels are unsafe, provide habitat mitigation and safe open water areas when re-engineering.
- POLICY REC-8:** Connect planning and design for trails with considerations around economic development, given the popularity of biking and hiking trails accessible from Town.
- POLICY REC-9:** Focus on implementation of the PRTMP.



INFRASTRUCTURE

OVERVIEW

The Town of Paonia is responsible for managing key infrastructure that collectively shapes the community’s quality of life and economic viability. This includes the full water system from raw water to treated water for distribution, the collection and treatment of stormwater, and the collection and discharge of wastewater. The majority of source water infrastructure is aged and was designed prior to the impacts of desertification, long-term drought, and increasing heat.

Our trees and areas of grass are an essential part of our “green” urban infrastructure. The character of Paonia and quality of life enjoyed by residents is shaped in no small part by the substantial presence of our Town’s forest. Paonia has been designated by the Arbor Day Foundation as Tree City USA.

For a review of Paonia’s water and other infrastructure systems, please see Appendix B, Infrastructure. Streets and sidewalks are often considered infrastructure but are included in the Transportation element of this Plan.

Water Tap Moratorium: In January 2020 the Town of Paonia held a special election for the Citizens Initiative Petition and Water Moratorium which, upon passage, suspended the sale of all new domestic water taps that the Town of Paonia was not already legally obligated to serve. The citizen initiative arose from a critical water supply issue occurring in February of 2019 that resulted in the entire water system losing service. The decision as to if, when, and under what circumstances the moratorium should be lifted is included in the original moratorium and amendments.

VISION

Paonia’s robust infrastructure provides high-quality and reliable service to current residents. The systems are managed proactively such that today’s needs are met while future needs are understood and planned for. The water and wastewater systems are healthy and resilient. The water supply is strong, and the wastewater system plays a positive role in regional water cycle management. Paonia’s waste recovery systems are well maintained and the people of Paonia are encouraged to participate in manufactured and organic material reuse and recycling. Paonia is home to a thriving, safe, and uniquely beloved Town forest that is both resilient and adaptive to a changing climate and the aging of individual trees within the larger canopy. All parts of Paonia’s ecology—people, plants, animals, and natural cycles—are valued and considered with each investment/decision.



VALUES

- Infrastructure that is dependable and provides locals stability and economic prosperity.
- Investing regularly in quality public infrastructure and timely maintenance.
- Planning for infrastructure that is comprehensive, innovative, and forward thinking.
- A healthy watershed that supports both water quality and water production.
- Investing in stormwater, water treatment, and green infrastructure that support quality public services in health, water availability, and safety.
- Ensuring local businesses and residents can build economic prosperity and enhance food security.
- A wastewater utility that explores and pursues innovative solutions for capital asset development.
- Sanitation services that are well maintained, professionally staffed, and in compliance with all state laws.
- Encouraging solid and organic material resource recovery including reuse, recycling, and composting and ensuring the highest and best use of discarded materials.
- The wonderful quality of life, ecosystem, and increased walkability and real estate values that our town forest provides.

POLICIES

POLICY INFRA-1: Ensure that all residents can obtain clean water and essential utility services.

POLICY INFRA-2: Prioritize investments in water, wastewater, stormwater, and reuse that builds confidence in the services and are reliable for existing users while considering future needs.

POLICY INFRA-3: Maintain a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to proactively prepare for infrastructure maintenance and upgrade needs as well as other capital projects into the future. Regularly use the CIP for planning and budgeting improvements each fiscal year.

POLICY INFRA-4: Coordinate infrastructure repairs and upgrades across utilities and other property maintenance needs. Coordinate with overlapping agencies to minimize the number and scale of excavations when completing improvements to Town infrastructure.

POLICY INFRA-5: Maintain a wastewater system that returns high-quality, clean water to the North Fork of the Gunnison River, and explore green infrastructure options for treatment that provide positive impacts on local temperature regulation and enhance the viability and resilience of local ecology.

POLICY INFRA-6: Maintain utility rates that cover the costs of the service provided and consider future needs by conducting regular rate studies.

POLICY INFRA-7: Proactively protect the Town's source water by preventing contamination from wildfire, pollution, and ecological degradation with regional partners. Take a holistic



and regenerative approach to watershed health and protection, including wildfire management and mitigation, soil health, and responsible use of grazing around municipal source waters in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

POLICY INFRA-8: Consider the long-term viability of source water production and explore nature-based solutions to best protect and support the Town's springs. Conduct regional water cycle management at the watershed level in coordination with regional partners. Continue to invest in and acquire water rights with potential new partnerships and within existing agreements or collaborations.

POLICY INFRA-9: Promote water conservation in accordance with Colorado's Growing Water Smart Guidebook. Promote community awareness programs for best landscape management of drought and small water-cycle function in landscaping, new construction, and all irrigation activities.

POLICY INFRA-10: Consider water reuse and recycling when designing new wastewater and stormwater systems.

POLICY INFRA-11: When considering new out-of-town connections to the water distribution system or the wastewater collections system, require pre-annexation agreements to be executed upon the final approval of a connection or tap.

POLICY INFRA-12: Provide consistent and quality waste collection services for all new and existing residents and ensure residential participation is commensurate with rates charged and received.

POLICY INFRA-13: Support public awareness activities and information alongside businesses that provide recycling, composting, and other opportunities to reuse and recycle material resources within the Town and county.

POLICY INFRA-14: Monitor, properly care for, and carefully replace street and park trees to maintain, improve, and expand the Town's urban forest. Provide greater support and accountability for homeowners' maintenance of trees in public rights-of-way and engage and empower citizens to participate in street-tree care.

POLICY INFRA-15: Maintain compliance with Tree City USA designation and work to foster collaboration between the Tree Board, public, and local business community to support tree maintenance, safety, and overall beautification and shade coverage.



TRANSPORTATION

OVERVIEW

Paonia sits to the south of State Highway 133, which serves to connect Paonia to Somerset, Crested Butte, and the Roaring Fork Valley to the east/northeast, and to the larger cities of Delta, Montrose, and Grand Junction to the west. A significant portion of people employed in the Town of Paonia commute from outside the Town, and a significant portion of people who reside within Town limits commute to work elsewhere.

Paonia is not connected to any major cities or transportation hubs by traditional public transit. The Town of Paonia supports All Points Transit a nonprofit organization that supports transit for seniors, people with disabilities, and the general public. Other than All Points Transit, public and private transit options to reach community facilities like schools and healthcare facilities are fairly limited. Lack of regional and local public transportation makes it challenging for individuals without personal vehicles to connect with larger cities and services offered there.

Characteristics of Complete Streets

- Sidewalks
- Bicycle lanes or wide, paved shoulders
- Shared-use paths
- Safe and accessible transit stops
- Frequent and safe crossings for pedestrians, including median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, and curb extensions
- Identified wildlife crossings that connect with green corridors
- Healthy trees and stormwater management
- Lighting for nighttime visibility and safety that complies with Dark Skies best practices

With its compact size and tree-lined streets, the Town of Paonia itself is a naturally walkable and bikeable community. According to Town residents, more than 50% sometimes walk and more than 30% sometimes ride a bike when coming to downtown. Like many towns in the rural West, the street system in Paonia was originally a series of dirt or gravel roads with horse access and later a common speed limit for cars and yield signs at key intersections. As roads have been paved, the traffic system has not formally evolved to control speed, provide stop signs or pass-through/commercial traffic routes. However, some streets—in particular 3rd Street and the western portion of 5th Street—already naturally serve as informal mixed traffic, or shared streets, between multiple modes of transit. Much of Paonia’s shared transportation streets are supported by the old characteristics of the dirt road system, narrower lanes, and disrepair. These attributes naturally slow motorized traffic.

VISION

Paonia’s streets and sidewalks are well-maintained, safe, accessible, and comfortable thoroughfares for multiple modes of transport and support a rural and easy-paced quality of life for residents. Clear and differentiated routes for commercial and pass-through vehicular traffic and pedestrian and bicycle traffic provide safety and convenience. Paonia residents can access key facilities and services without owning or operating a motorized vehicle. Transportation stakeholders understand and are responsive to the transportation needs of our community.



VALUES

- Well-maintained streets and sidewalks that are safe and accessible with ample street-tree presence.
- Core transportation routes that are comfortable and safe for all members of our community regardless of whether they drive, walk, bike, or ride horseback.
- Non-motorized routes and trails that are connected, comfortable, and safe for all members of our community to walk, bike, or ride horseback.
- Major thoroughfares and street redevelopment projects that accommodate both pedestrian non-motorized transport and work with existing and new street-trees.

POLICIES

POLICY TRANS-1: Require all new streets, sidewalks, and developments to include a complete-streets approach to construction with curb and gutter collection systems for stormwater, to ensure daily travel for multimodal transportation and increase alternative transit activity to everyday destinations in Town.

POLICY TRANS-2: Identify and enhance specific transportation routes for shared or multimodal transportation including motorized travel and nonmotorized travel (pedestrians, bikes, children, wheelchairs, strollers, and the elderly) through the development of complete streets, yield streets, mixed-traffic designated streets, and best practice guidelines for rural communities.

POLICY TRANS-3: Designate and improve appropriate nonmotorized routes for people with disabilities or the mobility-challenged, children attending school, commuter and recreational bicycling, wildlife, and nighttime safety.

POLICY TRANS-4: Identify and integrate daily and seasonal wildlife corridors and traffic into consideration when planning and developing new streets and pathways, and redesigning Highway 133 access and in-Town crossings of motorized streets.

POLICY TRANS-5: Prioritize, plan, and implement street and sidewalk repairs along routes that connect to local schools, parks, and other everyday destinations to improve safety and access for community members who bike, walk, or use other forms of nonmotorized transportation.

POLICY TRANS-6: Ensure compliance with ADA for all facets of transportation within Town limits. Ensure that all sidewalk upgrades meet ADA design standards and include features that meet accessibility requirements such as standardized curb ramps at intersection crossings, ample sidewalk width, and an unobstructed pathway clear of overgrowth or tripping hazards.

POLICY TRANS-7: Identify, align, and incorporate the use of appropriate materials for sidewalks, trails, and walkways that are ADA-compliant, avoid removal of existing trees, and integrate stormwater management.



POLICY TRANS-8: Ensure that all public buildings, parks, and event venues plan for and include ADA parking and entrances.

POLICY TRANS-9: Encourage, enhance, and promote pedestrian access and walkability to and within the Historic Town Core.

POLICY TRANS-10: Integrate trail development and nonmotorized connectivity into development/land use requirements for properties in key transportation corridors.

POLICY TRANS-11: Increase and maintain safety of Paonia’s motorized gateways to Highway 133 and include nonmotorized access and safety in related planning and updates.

POLICY TRANS-12: Coordinate and communicate with regional transportation stakeholders, both nongovernmental and governmental, to enhance regional transportation services.

POLICY TRANS-13: Work with Delta County and the North Fork Valley Airport to identify potential revenue streams and economic development opportunities, and support connectivity with regional commercial airport locations.

POLICY TRANS-14: In alignment with Delta County’s Recreation and Trails Master Plan, proactively plan and coordinate with stakeholders and other government agencies to reuse or convert the existing coal-train railroad track to regional rail or trail system that can serve members of the public and visitors should coal-train operations cease in the future.

POLICY TRANS-15: Provide continuous safe and accessible routes for pedestrian and nonmotorized transport to core commercial, educational, and social activities and to accommodate residents and visitors with ADA conditions.

POLICY TRANS-16: Ensure the Town plans all street improvements in a manner that supports mixed-use transport in appropriate thoroughfares that align with access to parks, schools, and the downtown commercial district, and other everyday destinations.



GOVERNANCE & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

OVERVIEW

Good governance and informed community participation are essential to the Town of Paonia's ability to implement the vision and values of this Comprehensive Plan. Fostering cooperative and respectful interactions between the public and the Town at public meetings will support long-term engagement and success. Clear and regular public communication designated transparent access to decision-makers, and regular outreach by Board of Trustee members to the community will enhance trust and improve accuracy of information-sharing.

The four pillars of good local governance:

1. Values, ethics, and purpose
 2. Working together toward a common goal
 3. Transformational leadership
 4. Informed and ethical decision-making
- Principals, Council of Europe

VISION

Paonia's governance processes and operations are effective and efficient, breeding trust and buy-in from Town residents. Relevant information is easily accessed by Town residents to help them engage regularly and in constructive manner. The Town practices responsible regionalism, regularly engaging with regional partners.

VALUES

- A culture of respect, healthy communication, cooperation, transparency, and integrity within and between Town staff, elected and appointed officials, and community members.
- Constructive and informed community engagement and partnerships.
- Regional cooperation and coordination.
- Effective and efficient professional Town staff.

POLICIES

POLICY GOV-1: Prioritize and support implementation of adopted community plans.

POLICY GOV-2: Proactively engage with regional, state, and federal partners including but not limited to those below. Ensure local plans and policies account for and are coordinated with relevant partners.

- Delta County
- Private water companies who contract with the Town for water
- North Fork Valley Creative Coalition
- North Fork Chamber of Commerce
- Delta County School District
- Delta County Libraries
- One Delta County
- Delta County Tourism Cabinet



- Region 10
- All Points Transit
- Delta Montrose Electric Association (DMEA)
- Gunnison Basin Roundtable
- Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- BLM
- USFS

POLICY GOV-3: Build Town capacity by maintaining adequate and qualified staff and ensuring proper funding and resources.

POLICY GOV-4: Ensure planning and budgeting processes are transparent and informed by professionals to appropriately plan and prepare for the future.

POLICY GOV-5: Provide accessible information to the public on key issues (e.g., larger infrastructure projects and policy discussion) to promote effective participation.

POLICY GOV-6: Build citizen capacity through well-managed community engagement and providing volunteer pathways for interested citizens. Prioritize filling any vacant elected and appointed positions such as the Planning Commission and Tree Board.

POLICY GOV-7: Maintain a police department that has the staff, resources, and training necessary to provide the community with the desired level of public safety and Code Enforcement Services.



APPENDICES



PHOTO CREDIT: AVERIE CECILE

APPENDIX A, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PAONIA INCOME, JOBS, & WORKFORCE

Due to the nature of the food, agricultural, and entertainment businesses located here, and the associated increase in tourists that these businesses also bring in, many of Paonia's current wage jobs are seasonal. During the public process for this plan, it was clear that the community is motivated to diversify its economic functions.

The age of residents is important to the local economy. The share of residents who are in their prime working years, those aged 25 to 54 as defined by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, has declined from 37% in 2010 to 33% in 2020. The aging population of both the state and the Town of Paonia is pronounced. The median age of residents was 41 in 2000, 44 in 2010, and 49 in 2020. This same trend is occurring in Delta County at large. A decline in the prime working-age cohort coupled with an increase in seniors creates a challenging economic environment, and local employers report difficulty recruiting and retaining workers. At the same time, industries aimed at supplying the goods and services required by a retired population are primed to thrive if they can be successfully cultivated. Housing access is another factor contributing to labor availability and is discussed in detail in the Town of Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan, an element of this Comprehensive Plan.

Economic Development Capacity & Planning

One Delta County formed in 2020 as an investor-based non-profit economic development agency for Delta County and has representation from the County and each municipality. Current key initiatives include workforce education, industrial park expansion and a large workforce housing development in the City of Delta. Beginning in 2015, its predecessor, Delta County Economic Development, commissioned an economic assessment, market assessment, and economic development strategy to better understand how to adapt to a changing economic climate. The strategy was never officially adopted, but consistent with the recommendations of the Region 10 Regional Economic Development Strategy, it argues for focusing on export-oriented sectors including organic agriculture, manufacturing, and to a lesser degree tourism.

Recently the Hotchkiss Chamber of Commerce has rebranded as the North Fork Chamber of Commerce to serve Hotchkiss, Crawford and Paonia. In addition, several industry-specific groups and shared artist spaces exist. The North Fork Chamber of Commerce and existing county-level economic development efforts like One Delta County may serve as resources for Paonia businesses if engaged regularly by Paonia leadership. In addition, some Paonia businesses take advantage of business development opportunities through Region 10.

Fossil Fuel Extraction

Historically, coal mining was a major employer and economic driver; local reserves of "clean coal" are valued for their relatively low ash and sulfur content. The town experienced significant economic impacts with the closure of two of the area's three mines in 2004 and 2014. The remaining West Elk Coal Mine in neighboring Somerset is the most productive mine in Colorado and still employs several hundred people and has no known plans to scale back. This mine is also the largest single industrial point source of methane emissions in Colorado. Many residents are also concerned about impacts on local water quality from upstream fracking for natural gas. The importance of the fossil fuel industry to



the local economy and its simultaneous negative impacts on other industries that are dependent on stable climate and ample clean water access—in particular farming and ranching—is an ongoing tension within the economic fabric of the Paonia community.

FUTURE ECONOMIES

Agriculture, Arts, & Tourism

Paonia is known throughout the state for its excellence in organic, regenerative and biodynamic agriculture. The North Fork Valley's West Elks American Viticultural Area (AVA) is one of only two recognized AVAs in Colorado. The draft Delta County Economic Development Strategy calls for the County to rebrand its economy as an Organic Center of Excellence as the cornerstone of a strategy focused on uplifting the entire agricultural industry and enhancing its synergies with tourism, manufacturing, and education. Though the Delta County EDS was never adopted, it provides a useful framework to inform the development of Paonia's own agricultural economy.

A key element of this approach is investing in agritourism. Agritourism is any recreational or educational activity on a working farm or ranch which consumers can access. It is a nationally recognized entrepreneurial activity that can diversify market outlets for local agricultural businesses and simultaneously stimulate rural development of surrounding communities. The average agritourism visit provides a surplus from \$93 to \$164 per person per trip for primary purpose travelers according to data from Colorado State University. Agritourism creates economic opportunity rather than competition for agricultural producers, because an agritourism destination attracts visitors who will likely want to visit other agritourism destinations. Local restaurants and bakeries, caterers, food trucks, pop-ups, farm and farmers' markets, and value-added businesses are positive examples of farm-to-table enterprise and retail manufacturers that serve locals and attract tourists to enjoy the rural aesthetic and purchase organic value-added agricultural products. Opportunities exist to incubate, strengthen and expand more traditional working farms as well as agritourism-related enterprises in Paonia and the NFV, including developing a regional food hub and expanding value-added food processing facilities.

The Paonia area is also home to many organic, biodynamic and climate smart or regenerative farms with highly skilled farmers. Another opportunity for economic development may lie in the cultivation of educational programs focused on these growing areas of agriculture that utilizes the existing Hotchkiss USDA and Colorado State University Organic Research Station and the knowledge and practice based in the North Fork Valley. Similar to the successful Solar Energy International, such a school could be located within Town boundaries and would increase economic value for area residents employed as teachers as well as attracted out of town visitors and students. The Colorado Workforce Development Council has indicated that agricultural and farmer education is one of its primary areas of focus and has funding available to support the development of such programming. Along this vie, the State of Colorado's 2023 Talent Pipeline Report emphasizes the agricultural sector as one of the key areas of economic development for the state. In particular, it notes that "bringing the next generation of workers into the agricultural industry is important to the sustainability of rural economies and Colorado's agricultural sector."

Wellness Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, & Retirement Services

Tourism is a large and fast-growing industry, however unbalanced by regular year-round well-paying and placed based jobs, deplete a community and lock out locals from housing. This is a major challenge for



many communities in Colorado. However, a rapidly growing subset of tourism called, “wellness tourism” offers a less extractive and more beneficial impact on the communities that develop it. Unlike traditional tourism, wellness tourism is largely based on the authenticity of a place and the continuation of natural local attributes that our community values such as dark skies, clean water and local food. Furthermore, it has been shown to bring in more revenues and create more permanent jobs for the local population than regular tourism. Wellness tourists are high-yield tourists who bring greater economic impacts than traditional tourists and their desire for local healthy food as part of their experience can be a complement to our focus on sustaining and growing local agriculture.

Paonia boasts abundant opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts, offering a wealth of activities such as hiking, mountain biking, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, backpacking, and much more. Tourists and visitors who are attracted to recreational opportunities at the North Fork of the Gunnison River, adjacent BLM land (Jumbo), Grand Mesa, Black Canyon National Park, and Kebler Pass also patronize local restaurants, wineries, lodging and gear shops. The Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan details potential economic benefits of outdoor recreation.

Colorado has the fourth fastest growing 65+ age group in the US and Paonia over the past several decades has become known as a retirement community. This is also a potentially important source of future economic activity for the Town and relates to the wellness industry with regards to trained services providers in both allopathic and complementary medicine and the food service industries. Retired seniors consume large amounts of local goods and services, and thus require a year-round workforce to support their needs. The growth in retirees will impact every age bracket in the labor force, causing robust demand for replacement workers and increased need for caregiving occupations such as direct care workers. The population of the greater Paonia CCD is also aging. Just under half (48%) of residents in this part of the valley are aged 55+, a much higher share of residents than in 2000 (29%) and 2010 (40%). Paonia currently lacks several key services that would benefit this population, including a pharmacy, walk-in clinic, and in-home care services. These services would also generate stable, year-round jobs.

Downtown & Creative District

In 2013, Paonia became a Certified Colorado Creative District with a unique emphasis on arts and agriculture. A primary goal of this designation is to attract more tourists. Several organizations exist to support the arts and agriculture and to connect these sectors with the tourism industry, including the North Fork Valley Creative Coalition (which manages the Creative District designation), Valley Organic Growers Alliance, and the West Elks American Viticulture Association. The North Fork Valley Creative Coalition has contributed to the vitality of the downtown economic corridor through creative placemaking, wayfinding and signage, events and programming. In recent years new businesses, workspaces, boutiques and galleries have also opened downtown, yet as of January 1, 2024 there are approximately eight empty commercial locations along Grand or in the downtown core. At the same time, there are days when downtown food trucks’ average wait times for food range between 20-40 minutes, suggesting strong demand.

In recent years the growth of music events and festivals has grown with Big B’s summer music series and Pickin in the Park. These events bring out locals and bring in tourists from the area and around the state. They can also attract other business to come and vend in Town, however, Paonia does not currently collect sales tax for vendors who are selling in Town limits but not registered here. Lodging businesses



see boosts during these times, however the overuse of short-term rentals, especially in summer months to accommodate visitors has presented a challenge for both year-round Paonia residents and seasonal workers in need of housing.

Trades & Skilled Labor

The absence of a business that provides year-round, living-wage jobs—other than the remaining coal mine—is felt in the local economy. A key growth opportunity for the local economy is in workforce development, particularly in skilled labor and trades.

Skilled labor is generally characterized by advanced training (expertise attained through experience and certifications or licenses in their specific fields) and likewise generally corresponds with higher wages. Three converging factors—an aging workforce (both Paonia and Colorado have a majority of workers in the aging category), the rural nature of the Town, and what is projected to a rapid rise in automation of the US workforce by AI technology—provide a background for a focus on developing trade and skilled labor education. Solar Energy International (SEI) offers an excellent example of this with their training program. SEI also is an example of the kind of business that brings in people year-round for training.

The State of Colorado has emphasized the need to invest in the infrastructure workforce, advanced manufacturing workforce, medical workforce to support an aging population, and rural workforce. These careers can be stable and lucrative. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many of the fastest-growing career fields in the US are skilled trades.

“Rural communities have often had a difficult time retaining younger generations for number of reasons, including wages, education, and social issues. Communities depend on younger, more educated workers and leaders to grow and survive, this poses a serious risk.”

Report: Rural Economic Resiliency in Colorado (Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade)

Construction

Since 2020, housing construction has been constrained by the moratorium on water taps. Despite the moratorium, General Contractors, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and other related trades are in demand. The Town of Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan calls for 100 new homes to be built in and around Paonia over the next five years, with 25-35 units built “as quickly as possible” after the moratorium is lifted. Further, much of Paonia’s housing stock is considered “extremely old” and will require repairs. Skilled tradespeople will be increasingly needed as construction accelerates over the coming decades.

CHALLENGES

Central to the continued sustainable development of the art, service, agricultural, and tourism sectors will be policies aimed at regulating short term rentals and the creation of affordable housing to ensure that artists and wage workers can continue to reside within the community. The tension between growth in tourism and housing for locals due to the rise of short-term-rentals is detailed in the Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan.

The success of export industries such as agriculture and tourism depend largely on macro-economic and ecological trends. Both the Delta County Tourism Board Marketing Plan and the Region 10 Economic



Development Strategy point to the negative economic impacts of natural disasters (fire, drought, fluvial hazards, etc.). Pollution from fossil fuel extraction and other heavy industries could seriously damage the region's reputation for organic excellence. Thus, protecting and caring for the watershed and ecosystems that underpin Paonia's economy, as detailed in the Infrastructure Element of this Plan, is an essential strategy for economic resilience.

RESOURCES

Delta County is designated an enhanced rural enterprise zone by the State of Colorado. This designation allows local businesses to receive state income tax credits and sales and use tax exemptions for specific business investments. Taxpayers who contribute to enterprise zone projects may also earn income tax credits. Taking advantage of these tax credits and exemptions could help existing businesses become more viable as well as incentivize and lower the barrier to entry for new businesses.

The Colorado Rural Resiliency and Recovery Roadmaps program provided technical assistance and grants for regional teams of rural communities to drive economic relief, recovery, diversification, and long-term resilience.

The Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP), formerly known as Colorado Blueprint 2.0, provides free technical assistance, consulting, and funding to help rural communities create economic development strategies

The Career Development Incentive Program, or Career Development Success Program, provides financial incentives for school districts and charter schools that encourage high school students, grades 9-12, to complete qualified industry credential programs, pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, and internships.

The Northwest and Rocky Mountain Regional Food Business Center supports a more resilient, diverse, and competitive food system. This Center is designed to be a node for our region's small and mid-tier food and farm businesses and local and regional food sector development initiatives by supporting cross-regional collaboration, providing and analyzing relevant and timely data, and serving as a gateway for USDA programs and other third-party funding opportunities, with a focus on underserved farmers, ranchers, and food businesses.



APPENDIX B, INFRASTRUCTURE

WATER

Water is precious in the West, and especially so for Paonia. The uniqueness and age of Paonia's water system combined with the level of investment required in the coming years for upgrades, and transitions in climate and temperature, presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to not only rebuild the old system but to also reimagine how the Town and relevant regional stakeholders can work together to preserve the performance of the water source and enhance the longevity of the watershed.

Water in Paonia flows through three distinct systems:

- the North Fork of the Gunnison River and its tributaries, which provide for vegetation and wildlife and which cool, clean, and green the region;
- the river-connected ditches and their laterals that supply water for in-town and out-of-town agricultural users and in-town landscape use; and
- the spring-fed source water system that supplies municipal households and commercial users with drinking water.

Wildlife & Irrigation

The river and ditch systems which support Paonia's unique local microclimate, ecology, wildlife, and agriculture are fed throughout the summer by the reserve of water in Paonia Reservoir, and from the North Fork of the Gunnison that flows from the West Elks and Ragged Mountain ranges. Paonia Reservoir currently has a total holding capacity of 14,674 acre-feet. Its capacity has shrunk 25% since 1962 due to heavy sedimentation from Muddy Creek, its main water source. The reservoir is managed by the US Bureau of Land Management and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Municipal

The municipal system which provides Town treated water is supplied by approximately 25 springs that form five spring complexes which ring the north and west basins of Mount Lamborn. The Town owns the land for Steven's springs, but the majority of springs are located on US Forest Service lands and private property.

Past, Present, Future

Paonia has a unique municipal water system, unlike any other in the State of Colorado. Leading achievements in water engineering at the time it was completed, the Paonia Project—which made the Paonia reservoir, and the series of ditches and pipes constructed around the five spring complexes surrounding the north and west slopes of Mount Lamborn—fed the growth of mining and agriculture in the region. However, complexity, age, change in climatic patterns, and human-caused desertification pose substantial challenges to the viability of the water system. The spring-fed municipal water system needs extensive repair, from restoration of the watershed itself to the treatment plants and the elaborate networks of pipes and valves that deliver water into and around Town.

Water Efficiency & Redundancy

While customer water use efficiency has increased in the past decade, there remains room for further gains from water efficient appliances and practices in both commercial and residential use. There are



substantial efficiency gains to be had from increasing performance in the water delivery system. Approximately 23-39% of water produced is currently unaccounted for in delivery between treatment plants and customers. As of the beginning of 2024, the first steps are already underway with the implementation of the first phase of the Capital Improvement Plan and associated rate increases which will support upgrades and fixes to this system and reduce overall water loss. Due to the overall age and nature of the gravity fed system some level of leaks will remain and should be taken into account when looking at overall water availability going forward.

Redundancy in the water treatment system is critical to the resilience of the system. In 2019 the Town suffered a critical water supply issue that was exacerbated by the fact that “the lower treatment plant and 1-MG storage tank were not in service during this event [thus making] half of the Town’s raw water supply, half of its treatment capacity, and 33% of its finished water storage capacity unavailable to support demand during the emergency.” Current and future proposed upgrades to address these issues including the rehabilitation of the Clock treatment plant, have been outlined in the 2023 Water Capital Improvement Plan.

Water Volume & Source Reliability

The springs that feed the Town of Paonia are highly sensitive to drought conditions due to their strict dependence upon snowfall and runoff season. While Colorado weather is already well known for its variability, the increase in severity and duration of drought, increased winter and spring temperatures, increased duration and severity of spring winds, increased rates of sublimation of snowpack and decreases in soil moisture due to vegetation degradation, and changes in precipitation patterns moving away from snow to rain mean there is and will continue to be less and less reliable or regular snowpack, and also that the moisture from melting snow is less likely to translate into liquid water run-off. The Town of Paonia recognizes these threats to its water supply.

Paonia’s watershed has high groundwater recharge potential and semi-arid climates are known to be especially sensitive to changes in vegetation and surface water making the system also potentially viable for regeneration and land management intervention to support both system water retention and ongoing supply.

“Precipitation type (rainfall versus snowfall), amount, and temporal and spatial distribution are important for determining the amount of recharge that a groundwater system may receive, particularly as infiltration from precipitation to the shallow bedrock groundwater systems.”

Average annual precipitation determines the climate of the project area, and in the case of the North Fork Valley, the topographically higher terrains near Grand Mesa and West Elk Mountains are sub humid and cool and have excellent recharge potential, both from rainfall in the spring, summer, and autumn months, and from the melting of snowpack throughout the winter and early spring, especially areas covered by gravels and slope deposits.

The small water cycle is more important to local precipitation patterns than the large water cycle. In fact, it is estimated that mean global precipitation overland is 720 mm, of which only 310 mm is from the large water cycle and 410 mm comes from the repeated evaporation-precipitation process of the small water cycle. -Walter Jehne



The Town of Paonia has a designated Municipal Watershed within its broader watershed, as defined in the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Source Water Protection Plan. Most of this land lies within the Gunnison National Forest, which is managed by the US Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. Other landowners in the protection area include the Bureau of Land Management and privately owned lands, which sit under jurisdiction of Delta County. Both BLM and USFS lease lands for grazing in these areas to private ranchers. Work to restore and regenerate the watershed will need to be conducted in concert with relevant landowners and stakeholders.

Rates

In 2023 the Town of Paonia increased rates for water, sewer and trash. Future increases in rates will be required to meet the base financials required to secure funding to implement the 2023 Water Capital Improvement Plan. While the Town will not wholly rely on water rate revenue, rate increases are likely essential for obtaining other funds in the form of grants and low interest loans needed to fully fund capital improvements.

WASTEWATER

Paonia's Wastewater Treatment Plant manages wastewater collection from residential and commercial customers. The treatment plant was brought online in 2006 and consists of a manual bar screen, two aerated lagoons, a settling/polishing pond, a serpentine chlorine contact chamber and a dichlorination feature. It has a permitted rated capacity of 0.495 million gallons per day (MGD) and typically treats 0.15 MGD. Wastewater from the system is discharged to the North Fork of the Gunnison River.

The 10.5 miles of pipe that make up the wastewater collection system are entirely gravity driven and consist of service laterals, manholes, and gravity sewer mains. The collection system is composed of approximately 63% PVC piping and 37% vitrified clay piping (VCP). The majority of the clay pipe is past its expected lifetime and an estimated 20,000 ft of PVC pipe will need to be replaced in near future making the entire system in need of upgrade in the near future.

It is worth noting that overall treatment levels of water treated are lower in the winter. The Water Tap Moratorium also has an effect here: as long as it remains in effect, or even as 7-14 new homes are added as is planned in the 2023 budget, wastewater treatment levels are unlikely to grow materially. With an ongoing increase in winter temperatures, it is worth considering the use of green infrastructure, in particular constructed wetlands in future wastewater treatment upgrades. Studies have shown the positive impacts that wetlands have in semi-arid regions when it comes to local temperature regulation, in particular when it comes to extreme heat mitigation, as they have been shown to lower ambient temperatures by 7-14 degrees as compared to similar areas where they are not present.

SANITATION AND RESOURCE RECOVERY

The Town provides garbage collection services to approximately 900 accounts within Town limits. There are no municipal composting or recycling services. The majority of trash collection accounts are residential with a varying amount of commercial. Trash services offer 33 Gallon Cans, 2- and 3-cubic yard dumpsters and oversized items. Residents may also leave yard trimmings in bundles no bigger than 1'x3' neatly tied next to the trash bins. Many individuals compost personally or report bringing food scraps to neighbors with farms or livestock. There are at least two private recycling haulers that service Paonia. Aluminum cans may be dropped off for recycling outside of Don's Market and there are cardboard and



paper recycling bins in the parking lot of City Market in Hotchkiss. Delta County supports free recycling at the Double J Recycle Center in Austin. CHT Resources operates a composting facility for organic waste in Austin.

Private recycling services combined with the free drop-off options appear to be servicing the area well. Curbside recycling and composting is unlikely to prove economical given the level of at home and on-farm composting and the small service area. However, the community ethos of self-sufficiency has led to a high individual participation rate in both manufactured and organic materials recycling.

According to the 2023 Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan consultant team, the average residential rates for water, sewer and trash total \$320 per month. These rates are higher than the national monthly average which is \$171 according to Energy Star and the Colorado state average which is \$241. Simultaneously, the assessment found that roughly one of every five homeowners and two of every five renters are cost burdened. While the state of Colorado offers some financial relief for heating costs through the Low-income Energy Assistance LEAP program, the high cost of water and sewer fall outside of LEAP's coverage. Rates are expected to increase in both water and wastewater over the next five years - the base rate for residential water is expected to rise from \$43.00 in 2024, to 48.30 in 2028 and wastewater rates will raise two dollars between 2023 and 2024 (and will likely need to be raised again in the coming three years).

URBAN FOREST

All urban trees require management as they mature in the landscape. To increase tree diversity and canopy resilience in Town, new tree species must be consciously curated and properly planted and cared for. To sustain the urban forest's vital functions in Paonia, funding is needed to take care of existing trees and plant new ones. As Paonia's urban forest ages and comes under increasing stress from drought, increased heat, and high winds, formalizing care for the Town forest is critical. As trees reach maturity new smaller trees must be planted adjacent to them to support successful succession. The 2021 Paonia Street Tree Inventory provides a robust framework with direction for street-tree care and the establishment of regular and professional maintenance and replacement that will support their longevity and reduce risk to the Town. However, this report is just the first step, and several follow-on actions are suggested in this Plan to establish the quality of service required to maintain our valuable urban canopy.



APPENDIX C, TRANSPORTATION

OVERVIEW

Paonia sits to the south of CO State Highway 133, which serves to connect Paonia to Somerset, Crested Butte, and the Roaring Fork Valley to the east/northeast, and to the larger cities of Delta, Montrose, and Grand Junction to the west. Paonia is not connected to any major cities or transportation hubs by public transit and is difficult to access without a car. Transit between Paonia and other communities in the North Fork Valley and Delta County is limited to a few services that provide access to community facilities like schools and healthcare facilities. The Town's remote location may be a limiting factor to the Town's accessibility. However, with its compact size and tree-lined streets, the Town of Paonia itself is already a reasonably walkable and bikeable community. Town residents who responded to the 2020 Revitalizing Main Street study provided the following information on which mode of transportation they use when they visit Grand Avenue: 88% drove a personal automobile, 56% walked and 30% rode a bike. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one mode, indicating that many folks who drive downtown also visit by walking or biking.

"The size, shape and speed of automobiles have changed. There is more interest in the walkability of the Town and we see more bicycles, e-bikes, skateboards and scooters on Grand Ave. With an aging, yet active, population there are more people walking and riding bikes than ever. Sidewalks and crosswalks must accommodate wheelchairs and walkers."

- CDOT Revitalizing Main Street, Interim Report 2021

GETTING TO PAONIA

The nearest international airports are in Denver (4.5 hours) and Salt Lake City (5.5 hours), with regional airports located in Montrose (1 hour) and Grand Junction (1 hour 20 min).

Amtrak train stations are located in Glenwood Springs (1 hour 30 min) and Grand Junction (1 hour 15 minutes).

The shortest route to reach Paonia from I-70 or Roaring Fork Valley (Aspen, Snowmass Village, Basalt, Glenwood Springs, and Carbondale) to the north is by crossing McClure Pass (elevation 8,755 ft), which is occasionally closed for hours or days due to inclement weather, particularly in the winter. In late spring/early summer 2023, damage from a sinkhole caused Highway 133 north of Paonia to be closed for nearly two months, severely impacting tourism and commuting between the North Fork Valley and Roaring Fork Valley until the highway was repaired by Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). Following this incident, CDOT began a \$33.4 million slope stabilization project to reduce erosion and improve highway safety and functionality. Alternate routes from Denver to Paonia are via Grand Junction or Gunnison, adding an additional 50 minutes to 1.5 hours of travel time.

From nearby cities, Carbondale and Delta, there are no regular public transit options available to reach Paonia, nor are there any taxis or commercial ride sharing services in Paonia or the surrounding areas. Travelers without a car can hitch, rideshare, or pay for a private ride to Delta or Glenwood Springs and then utilize the Bustang public bus service operated by CDOT, which travels along I-70 to and from Denver and between Grand Junction and Durango. Currently there are no known plans to expand



Bustang service to the North Fork Valley. From Glenwood Springs or Carbondale travelers can also utilize the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority bus system to reach Aspen Airport.

HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Lack of regional and local public transportation makes it challenging to connect Paonia and the North Fork Valley to larger cities where hospitals are located. EMS ambulance services are provided by North Fork EMS, a local five-member board special district funded by a mill levy. The ambulance service is responsible for responding to all 9-1-1 calls in a 1,500-square-mile area over three counties as well as maintaining three stations in the region. The nearest nonemergency healthcare clinic is in neighboring Hotchkiss (9 miles/17 minutes). This location does not provide 24 hour services. The nearest hospital and emergency room with 24hr services is in Delta (26 miles/39 minutes), with more specialized care available in Montrose (50 miles/1 hour) and Grand Junction (71 miles/1 hour 20 min). Several private taxi services exist which accept insurance and Medicaid to pay for travel to healthcare visits. Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid program) operates its own Med-Ride service available 24/7 for nonemergency healthcare visits. In addition, the nonprofit All Points Transit offers low-cost trips predominantly for seniors and disabled people (healthcare visits can be covered by Medicaid) and the North Fork Senior Connections nonprofit runs Neighborly Connections, a volunteer-based program to help seniors get to their healthcare visits.

SCHOOL ACCESS

Delta County Joint School District 50J buses students from Paonia to North Fork High School, the area's only public high school, located in Hotchkiss (11 miles/20 minutes from Paonia); and to the North Fork Montessori School, located in Crawford (16 miles/25 minutes) from Paonia). The Paonia K-8 school and the North Fork School of Integrated Studies are both located within walking distance of downtown Paonia.

COMMUTING

A significant portion of people employed within the Town of Paonia commute from outside of Town, and a significant portion of people who reside within Town limits commute to work elsewhere. This dynamic is due in part to relatively high housing costs paired with relatively low wages in the local economy and is addressed in greater detail in the 2023 Town of Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan (source of the data in the chart below).

Commuter Type	Source	Percentage of Workforce
Employed in Town of Paonia, live outside Town	US Census	79%
Employed in Paonia CCD, live outside this area (US Census)	US Census	53%

Employed in Paonia area, live outside this area	2023 Employer Questionnaire from Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan by Urban Rural Continuum	20%
Live in Town of Paonia, employed outside Town	US Census	77%
Live in Paonia CCD, employed outside this area	US Census	71%

STREETS & SIDEWALKS

Paonia has four primary roads that run east to west and approximately 32 streets and alleyways that cross at least two of these longer thoroughfares from north to south. Collectively these equal approximately 22 miles of road, over 98% of which are asphalt roads, some concrete paved roadways, and some single lane gravel roads (largely alleyways or short dead-end branches). Only two of the four east/west streets, “2nd” and “3rd,” cross the railroad tracks that separate about one third of the Town to the east, while two thirds, including the downtown, remain to the west of the tracks. The downtown street is “Grand Avenue,” not to be confused with “Main” which is one street to the west of the commercial and creative downtown core.

The Town maintains roads within its boundaries: the intersection of 4th and Grand to the north, intersection of Samuel Wade and Highway 133 to the west, the intersection of Mathews Lane and Niagara Ave, intersection of 1st St and Lamborn Mesa Rd, the intersection of Colorado Ave and Meadowbrook Blvd to the south, the intersection of 7th St and Black Bridge Rd to the east. The side streets between Highway 133 and the North Fork of the Gunnison River are the responsibilities of the County.

There are two main connection points from Town to Hwy 133: 4025 Road (also referred to as the “P” Road), which enters to the west of Town and becomes Third Street, and State Highway 187, which follows a southern direction from State Highway 133 and becomes Grand Avenue. Both of these roads utilize bridges that cross the North Fork of the Gunnison River. Access routes to the Town from the south include Matthew’s Lane from the southwest, 4100 Road from the south and Dry Gulch from the southeast.

According to the 2021 Asset Inventory, while there are some recent sections of newly paved concrete road, “most sections of Paonia asphalt roads exhibit moderate to severe surface wear and defects referred to as raveling and polishing, [while] virtually all sections of the roads exhibit some type of surface cracking. The PASER scale, which is a 1-10 rating system for road pavement condition, was used in asset evaluation which showed that only 4 major street sections were rated in “excellent” condition, 17 in “good” while 68 sections received “poor” or “fair” ratings and 11 section received “very poor” or “failing”.

According to the “Paonia in Motion” Parks, Recreation & Trails Master Plan there are 40 miles of sidewalk area, while less than half of this area has sidewalks installed. Much of the existing sidewalk infrastructure lacks curb ramps and or ends abruptly at the neighboring yard. By Town municipal code,

“every owner or occupant of any premises within the Town having a sidewalk or walkway on or adjacent to the premises shall have the duty to keep the sidewalk clean of snow and ice.” A sidewalk fee is currently assessed for all residents and businesses. Even with less than 50% of sidewalk areas paved, this fee does not cover annual maintenance needs. The current patchwork of sidewalk pavement is unnavigable for wheelchairs and dangerous for walking, performs poorly in heavy rain and under icy conditions, and is not designed to be copacetic with urban and street-trees as they continue to grow.

Revenue for the Town of Paonia’s Sidewalk Fund is generated by a \$3.00 per month sidewalk fee, approved in 2013, that is paid by in-town residents. The Town’s Sidewalk Fund is designated for the repair and replacement of existing sidewalks within Paonia. This fee is set to expire in December 2024 unless voters approve a renewal/extension.

WALKABILITY & BIKEABILITY

Like many towns in the West, the street system in Paonia was originally a series of dirt or gravel roads with horse access and then a common speed limit for cars and yield signs at key intersections. As roads have been paved, the traffic system has not formally evolved to control for speed or passthrough/commercial traffic routes. Neither has it formally incorporated other means of transportation such as biking or pedestrians. While surveys have shown that many people in Paonia ride their bikes to school, to do errands or to social outings, or reach the Mount Jumbo trail system, there are no designated bike lanes on Paonia’s streets. Likewise, there are no dedicated bike paths nor bike lanes to connect Town residents to Big B’s or other businesses along Hwy 133, nor to Volunteer Park on Mathews Lane which is heavily used for youth sport leagues and other activities. There is no continuous system of sidewalks or routes for residents to walk downtown or for children and youth to walk to school.

“Do everything possible to promote responsible, progressive, growth. Walking-friendly towns tend to promote excellent business opportunities, which is what I want to see more of in this town.”
- Participant in the 2020 CDOT Main St Revitalization Survey

In addition to repairing and maintaining sidewalks, walkability and bikeability can be enhanced by dedicating routes and building new pathways for these modes of transport. There is a prime opportunity to support measures that encourage biking and walking along 3rd Street while funneling nonresidential vehicle traffic to 2nd Street. 3rd Street is almost entirely residential east of Onarga Avenue and is already heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists accessing the parks and schools, while 2nd Street is currently zoned commercial and light industrial from Main Street to Oak Avenue. At a Town of Paonia Board meeting in June 2023, citizens requested ToP reduce the speed limit while improving signage and enforcement for safety purposes, particularly on 3rd Street and Rio Grande Avenue near Apple Valley Park. In addition, the Parks, Recreation & Trails Master Plan provides recommendations for a trail along Mathews Lane to improve safety and connectivity between Town and Volunteer Park. Clearly directing vehicular and nonmotorized traffic along distinct, designated routes—supported by well-maintained sidewalks, and bike lanes, and trails; appropriate speed limits and signage; and safe crossings—would improve safety and traffic flows through Town.

AIRPORT

The North Fork Valley airport is located 4 miles outside Paonia on Back River Road and is jointly owned by Delta County and the Town of Paonia. The airport currently services a low volume of local and recreational flights, with potential to offer connecting commercial flights to regional airports in the coming decade. The Town should work proactively with Delta County to understand the potential to develop the Airport as both an Enterprise account and as a source of tourism income for the area.

RAILROAD

The iconic coal train that runs through Paonia was inaugurated in 1902 as the North Fork Line of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. The route was built to service the coal industry, with the added benefit of serving the agricultural regions up and down the valley, including transport of fruit, cattle, and passengers. What is now the North Fork Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad is still utilized to export coal from the West Elk Mine in Somerset. The North Fork Branch connects Somerset to the City of Delta, where the North Fork Branch ties into the Montrose Branch. The Montrose Branch runs between the City of Montrose and the City of Grand Junction. The anticipated lifetime of the remaining active West Elk coal mine is projected to be less than 20yrs from the date of this Plan's creation. There is both state and national precedent for railways that are no longer in commercial use to be converted to trails.

Key Takeaways from the 2020 CDOT Main St Revitalization Interim Report:

- Strong perception of inadequate parking on Grand Ave
- Lack of awareness of alternate parking options (side streets, public lots, etc.)
- General support for more trees, flowers, green space, benches, bike racks, and art in the downtown economic corridor

PARKING & SIGNAGE

A community survey from the 2020 CDOT-funded Main Street Revitalization study identified a strong perception of inadequate parking on Grand Ave coupled with a lack of awareness of alternate parking options (side streets, public lots, etc.) as one of the main limitations of the downtown business and creative district.



APPENDIX D, GOVERNANCE & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

OVERVIEW

Critical themes that emerged through this comprehensive planning process are the professional development of directors and staff, modernization of internal business practices, increased transparency in budgeting, dedicated public communication from the Town and members of the Board, and transparent planning and execution of public projects by the Board of Trustees. Proactive management of the Town's human resources, including updated job descriptions, professional licensure, incentivizing performance, and ensuring accountability all can further improve effectiveness, and efficiency. Consistent interpretation and enforcement of existing laws, codes and regulations will work to build trust in Town governance and accountability. Maintaining fully staffed and operational bodies such as the Planning Commission and Tree Board will support ongoing implementation and project execution. Finally, the public has expressed its desire for the Town to explore formal, feasible, and legal ways to engage citizen volunteers help to standardize Town processes for volunteer engagement. Engaging local NGOs to help create platforms to engage the human capital and expertise that exist within the community will help develop positive relationships and make use of the good will and expertise in the community.

COMMUNICATION

Regular and professional communication outwardly to citizens via newsletters and text messages, social media, local print media and other means of direct contact will help to counteract an old culture of the "rumor mill" as the primary source of information regarding Town workings, plans and other formal processes. Consistent management of Town logos, letterhead and announcements will further help to solidify what is official Town business and what is not. Direct outreach to stakeholders for key Town Business planning and policy implementation will work to build trust and achieve desired outcomes.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the community engagement process for this Plan the community expressed its desire to support key areas where they have expertise or passion. The City of Fort Collins offers an outstanding model for formal citizen engagement that the Town of Paonia could explore adopting or adapting. Through a strategic process working with a qualified third party and the community, the City of Fort Collins identified a mission to "promote volunteer involvement to improve services and create community" and created a Strategic Plan for Volunteer Engagement.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Effective regionalism requires ensuring local plans and policies account for and coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions and other relevant regional stakeholders. To achieve the goals identified in this plan, to continue to develop our local capacity, and to take on the challenges associated with the restoration of Paonia's watershed, Town of Paonia should seek to designate official representatives to collaborate regularly with, and participate in, regional planning efforts.





APPENDIX E, REFERENCE & RESOURCE DOCUMENTS

- American Planning Association's Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places, 2015
- Asset Inventory and Capital Improvement Plan, SGM, 2021
- Bottom-Up Delta County Economic Development Goals, 2011
- CO 133 Paonia Slope Stabilization, Colorado Department of Transportation, 2023
- CO Creative Districts
- Colorado Bike Law
- Colorado Department of Transportation Main Street Revitalization Grant Application, 2022
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- Colorado Growing Water Smart Guidebook: The Water Land-Use Nexus
- Colorado State Demographer Office Paonia Profile, 2023
- Comprehensive Plans. Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2023
- Connected Communities: Local Governments as a Partner In Citizen Engagement and Community Building, 2010
- Delta County Economic Assessment, 2015
- Draft Delta County Economic Development Strategy, 2015
- Delta County Land Use Code & Zoning Maps
- Delta County Market Assessment, 2015
- Delta County Tourism Marketing Plan, 2017
- Developing a Sediment Management Plan for Paonia Reservoir, Kent Collins, Hydraulic Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation, Denver, Colorado
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- Draft Paonia Master Plan, 2018
- Draft Paonia Master Plan, Barbara Peterson, 2012
- Draft Paonia Master Plan, EMB Consultants, 2021
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- EPA Water Quality Scorecard
- Global Energy Monitor Wiki, West Elk Coal Mine
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- North Fork Valley and Terraces Groundwater System, Delta County, Colorado, 2013



- North Fork Valley Heart & Soul Project, 2014
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- Snowpack Sublimation - Measurements and Modeling in the Colorado River Basin, 2009
- Spatial variation of snowmelt and sublimation in a high-elevation semi-desert basin of western Canada, Scott I. Jackson, Terry D. Prowse, 2009
- Summary of Town of Paonia Community Strategic Planning Session, 2022
- Summary of Town of Paonia Draft Water/Wastewater Capital Improvement Plan
- Town of Paonia Community Strategic Planning Session, 2022
- Town of Paonia Housing Needs Assessment & Housing Action Plan, 2023
- Town of Paonia Source Water Protection Plan, 2010
- Town of Paonia Zoning Map, 2017
- Water for the Recovery of Climate – A New Water Paradigm, Kravčík et al., 2007
- Water from air: an overlooked source of moisture in arid and semiarid regions Theresa A. McHugh, Ember M. Morrissey, Sasha C. Reed, Bruce A. Hungate & Egbert Schwartz, 2015
- What Matters Most: Voices & Values of CO's NFV (Heart & Soul Project), 2014



APPENDIX F, PUBLIC COMMENTS

Please see Paonia Comprehensive Plan (2024) Public Comments Document for all public comments submitted during this planning process.

