

DURANGO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Interim Phase 1 Public Engagement Summary – September 2026

Note: Additional Phase 1 engagement will take place during the remainder of 2026.

Overview

The City of Durango launched public outreach for the Comprehensive Plan update the week of **September 1-4, 2026**. Staff engaged over **220 community members** through listening sessions, drop-in events, and a public open house kickoff event. Engagement focused on visioning and early stages of identifying key project opportunities across the City.

The City also collected **523 responses via an online community questionnaire** that was live between **August 24-October 6, 2026**. Feedback from in-person engagement and the community questionnaire identified several recurring themes, although some concerns appeared in one engagement method but not the other.

Questionnaire results reflect the people who participated and are not a statistically representative measure of the views of all Durango residents. The number of responses varies by question, and some questions allowed respondents to select multiple options. In-person comments and questionnaire results are presented as distinct sources of input where their findings differ. The interim summary also notes that questionnaire respondents skewed toward long-term residents and homeowners.

How Your Input Shapes the Plan

Input from Phase 1 engagement will be used by the project team in a variety of ways:

- To inform an updated community vision statement for the Plan.
- To identify future opportunities for engagement, such as Roundtable Discussions, as described below.
- To identify areas for additional research that will be incorporated into the Plan's elements.
- To identify potential goals, policies, and actions that can be integrated into the Plan.

Key Topics raised by the Community

In our conversations with community members during this first phase of engagement, we heard many of the same topics raised repeatedly. Housing, water supply, and outdoor recreation and open space, were the top three topics mentioned as areas of interest with growth and development following closely behind. The following section provides summaries of what we heard by topic.

Housing

The ability to provide affordable, resident-serving housing across a wider range of types and densities was the most consistently raised comment in the engagement process.

Housing Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Affordable housing was mentioned across nearly every source.
- Some comments questioned whether "affordable housing" labels accurately reflect affordability (e.g., workforce housing not clearly defined as such).
- Support was expressed for ADUs, alongside comments that cost and code requirements (e.g., 20' peak limits) make ADUs difficult for average homeowners to build.
- Comments noted that vacation rentals/second homes may be reducing housing stock; some suggested taxing them to fund affordable housing.
- Requests were made for housing types beyond single-family: mobile home parks/cooperatives, student rentals, transitional/workforce housing, first-time homebuyer units, multifamily/townhomes.
- Tract F was referenced multiple times with differing views – some support preserving it as childcare and senior housing, others support developing it for workforce housing.
- Some comments requested eliminating parking minimums to support higher density.
- Housing affordability was the single highest-ranked issue among questionnaire respondents (55.9%) and the top planning priority overall (44.7%) – both the highest scores in their respective questions– with particularly strong emphasis among respondents ages 18–24 (67.1% and 65.8%, respectively).

Growth & Development

Residents want growth to be paced deliberately and matched to infrastructure and community capacity, rather than left to market forces alone.

Growth & Development Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Multiple comments expressed support for higher density / "condensed housing" within city limits rather than annexing outward.
- Comments requested that growth happen slowly and intentionally, with citizen input built into the process.
- Some comments referenced not wanting Durango to follow a Vail/Aspen or Boulder-style development pattern.
- Comments raised concern that the current growth rate (e.g., a scenario of doubling population in 20 years) may outpace what infrastructure and water supply can support.
- Some comments questioned whether the City has clearly defined a growth management boundary or land use limits.
- Opposition was expressed toward further annexation of county land in favor of growth within existing city limits.
- Growth and development patterns ranked as a top-four planning priority among questionnaire respondents (28.8%).

Transportation & Mobility

Residents want safer, better-connected streets, particularly at specific high-concern locations, with a focus on improved biking and walking infrastructure.

Transportation & Mobility Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Traffic congestion was raised as a concern related to growth (e.g., "Durango is growing too fast").
- Bike/pedestrian connectivity to Three Springs was the most frequently repeated specific request.
- E-bike/e-moto speed on trails was raised multiple times, with differing views on enforcement approach.
- Comments requested less car-centric infrastructure, additional sidewalks (E 1st/2nd/3rd), and bike boulevards as an alternative to bike lanes.
- Some comments raised concerns about the appearance/design of traffic-calming devices.
- The Camino del Rio underpass was described as a public safety priority.
- The Florida & 3rd Ave intersection ("Dysfunction Junction") was noted as needing a signal or roundabout.
- Comments also referenced speeding on HWY 3 and the removal of the right-turn lane at 8th/College causing vehicle stacking. Similar concern with vehicle stacking at College and 3rd Ave with removal of the right turn lane onto 3rd.
- Despite frequent mentions in listening sessions, Transportation and Mobility ranked as one of the lowest planning priorities in the questionnaire (10.0%, 11th of 13 topics).

Open Space, Parks, & Trails

Preserving access to open space while completing trail connections across the city was one of the single most repeated specific requests.

Open Space, Parks, and Trails Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Extension/connection of the Animas River Trail to Three Springs was the most frequently repeated request.
- Comments requested connecting Horse Gulch, CO Trail, Smelter, and Hogsback trail networks to town.
- Some comments raised concern about invasive species in landscaping.
- Requests were made for a year-round outdoor pool and for citizen input on dog park siting.
- Comments expressed a preference for preserving trails as wildlife corridors and separating hikers from bikers where possible.
- Parks, open space, trails, & recreation ranked third among planning priorities in the questionnaire (29.9%), and "Protection of natural areas & wildlife habitats" was the single highest-scoring answer (35.1%) to what Durango should be known for.

Water

Long-term water reliability and conservation were treated as the foundational issue underlying nearly every other priority.

Water Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Water was referenced frequently and directly, including the comment "It All Comes Down To Water."
- Comments addressed water supply reliability, conservation, greywater systems, and requested a long-term (100–200 year) supply plan.
- Some comments requested prioritizing drinking water and instream flow over landscape irrigation.
- The Nighthorse water supply and the City's water rights purchase were referenced by name.
- Comments requested a full infrastructure assessment prior to large capital investments.
- In the questionnaire, water supply ranked as the second-highest planning priority overall (34.7%), and long-term water supply was cited as a top issue by 32.2% of questionnaire respondents.

Climate

Residents want to plan and actively prepare for a changing, higher-desert climate through renewable energy, sustainable building, and fire mitigation.

Climate Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Comments noted that Durango's climate is shifting toward high desert conditions, suggesting a need to adjust tree/plant palettes.
- Requests included solar-ready roofs, greywater systems, beneficial electrification, and renewable energy, described in one note as "BIG GOALS."
- Fire mitigation and wildfire emergency planning were raised as concerns.
- Some comments noted that sustainability goals from the prior comprehensive plan (recycling, composting, building upgrades) had not been fully met.
- Bear management/human-wildlife conflict was also referenced in this context.
- Climate resiliency and hazard mitigation was selected by 23.8% of questionnaire respondents as a top planning priority.

Economy & Workforce

There is a strong interest in diversifying the local economy beyond tourism to create year-round jobs that support a living wage.

Economy & Workforce Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Comments expressed interest in diversifying the economy to reduce reliance on tourism and seasonal industries.
- Support was noted for manufacturing, trades, and apprenticeship programs to help retain youth and FLC graduates.
- One comment stated a need for "jobs that working people can make a true living from — not just tourist or recreation."
- Comments requested grants or tax relief for new businesses and noted interest in remote work and the film industry as potential economic sectors.

- Some comments expressed a preference for downtown businesses that serve local residents.
- Multiple comments in the questionnaire specifically requested a grocery store (and other retail/restaurants) in Three Springs, citing retail gaps and traffic/congestion caused by having to drive downtown for basic needs.
- Local, independently-owned businesses was the single highest-ranked value residents want to retain as Durango grows (39.7% overall, the top score of any option in that question), with similarly strong support among younger respondents aged 24 and under (34-36%).

Arts & Culture

Public art, inclusive gathering places, and creative community identity were consistently valued as core to Durango's character.

Arts & Culture Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Comments requested more public art (murals, sculpture, installations) throughout downtown.
- Support was expressed for a centralized, inclusive space for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ community events.
- Comments referenced support for a Maker Lab, craftsmen/trades spaces, and music events, including for those under 21.
- Some comments expressed a preference for using historic buildings for arts/community purposes rather than converting them to condominiums.
- Comments referenced creativity and community cohesion as valued characteristics of Durango.
- Arts and culture ranked as the lowest planning priority in the questionnaire (6.1%, last of 13 topics), despite frequent and enthusiastic mentions in Phase 1 conversations. This suggests strong support among a dedicated subset rather than a broad majority priority.

Neighborhoods, Character, & Downtown

Residents want downtown and neighborhoods to remain locally oriented and character-rich even as the city grows and changes.

Neighborhoods, Character, & Downtown Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Comments expressed a desire for downtown to be inviting to local residents, not only tourists.
- Support was noted for establishing new character districts (e.g., North Main), including potential URA funding.
- Comments raised concern about changes to neighborhood character during growth (e.g., Crestview lot sizes, density in Animas Valley).
- Some comments preferred historic buildings be used for arts/community purposes rather than new condo development.

- In the questionnaire, historic character & preservation scored notably higher as an identity value (22.5%, what Durango should be "known for") than as a standalone planning priority (12.3%, "Neighborhood character and historic preservation"). This suggests residents value it as part of Durango's character more than as an urgent action item.

Governance, Trust & Process

Improving transparency were seen as essential to rebuilding public trust in decision-making.

Government, Trust, & Process Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Some comments requested reinstating citizen advisory committees.
- Comments requested greater transparency in decision-making processes.
- Comments noted the number of existing city plans and expressed a desire for the Comprehensive Plan to serve as a connecting document.
- The Engage Durango website was described as difficult to navigate.
- Some comments requested a slower approval/decision-making process.
- Multiple comments in the questionnaire raised concerns about police surveillance technology (license plate cameras) and cooperation with federal immigration enforcement (ICE).

Regional Coordination & Demographics

Stronger City/County coordination and attention to an aging, shrinking-school-age population were raised as long-term planning concerns.

Regional Coordination & Demographics Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what was said:

- Multiple comments referenced a need for improved coordination between the City and County.
- Comments noted declining school enrollment and an aging population.
- Comments expressed interest in retaining young families and college graduates after graduation.
- One comment referenced the distance between "people of privilege and those without."
- A social worker serving as co-police chief was suggested in one comment.

Public Safety & Homelessness

Community members expressed a range of views on how best to address public safety and homelessness in questionnaire comments. Related concerns or comments were not raised during in-person engagement.

Public Safety & Homelessness Summarized

Below is a further breakdown of what came out of the questionnaire:

- Based on questionnaire results, homelessness was explicitly cited as a top issue and came up repeatedly in open-ended responses — described variously as a public safety

concern, a compassion/housing concern, and a park-usability concern (e.g., Buckley Park).

- Homelessness was cited as a top issue facing Durango today by 19.0% of all questionnaire respondents. Separately, Public Safety was selected by 12.7% of respondents as a top priority for the Comprehensive Plan to address.
- Questionnaire comments ranged from requests for a managed shelter/campsite for the unhoused to calls for stricter enforcement — reflecting real disagreement on approach, not consensus.
- Homelessness was most pronounced among questionnaire respondents 17 and under (28.9%, compared to 19.0% across all respondents), and public safety was also elevated in this group (11.1% compared to 5.0% overall).

What the Community Cares about the Most

These below values, identified by community members in both the questionnaire and in-person engagement, will help shape the updated vision statement and plan elements.

"Reality is Durango is many things to many people. We do NOT need to try and define it one way, i.e. mtn town. Let's allow it to be many things." - Community member comment

- **Grow slowly and intentionally** not anti-growth, but growth paced to match infrastructure, water, and community capacity.
- **Housing that works for people who live here year-round**, a repeated distinction between resident-serving housing and tourism/second-home-driven housing.
- **More than a mountain town** — Durango residents want the plan to reflect a fuller identity: agricultural, rural, high-desert, multigenerational — not just ski/tourism branding.
- **Connected, not car-dependent** — trails and bike infrastructure (especially the Three Springs connection) function almost as a symbol of what a well-connected Durango should feel like.
- **Water-secure for the long term** — a 100+ year planning horizon for water, treated as the literal foundation everything else depends on.
- **Strengthening Community Voice and Ongoing Engagement**- Across multiple conversations, community members expressed a desire for continued opportunities to share perspectives, participate in local decision-making, and help shape Durango's future. Suggestions to restore advisory committees highlight the importance of establishing ongoing avenues for community engagement, building trust, and ensuring residents have a meaningful role in decisions affecting their community.
- **An economy that isn't just tourism**— diversifying into trades, manufacturing, remote work, and creative industries so income isn't seasonal or visitor-dependent.
- **Preserve character while allowing change** — historic buildings, downtown character, and neighborhood identity should guide how density happens, not whether it happens.
- **"Local-first," not chain-driven** — local, independently-owned businesses was a top-ranked priority residents want to retain as Durango grows, ahead of housing, recreation, and historic character alike.
- **Protect the natural environment, not just access to it** — protection of natural areas and wildlife habitats outranked outdoor recreation itself as what residents want Durango to

be known for, pointing to a conservation ethic distinct from trail-building or recreational access.

Next Steps - Roundtable Discussions

Following a successful Comprehensive Plan Kickoff week, the City will be conducting additional roundtable discussions to ensure community groups and organizations have the opportunity for in-depth conversations with staff and the project team. In our one-on-one interviews, we heard from many folks in the community that there is interest in diving into specific comprehensive plan topics in more detail. Unlike our Technical Focus Group, made up of staff and city partners who will be responsible for implementing the Comprehensive Plan, the Roundtable Discussions will provide an opportunity for deeper community conversations on topics such as housing, growth and development, and open space and recreation.

Phase 1 engagement reached the broad community, though questionnaire respondents skewed towards long-term residents and homeowners. As Roundtable Discussions are organized, the project team will prioritize outreach to groups who may be underrepresented in Phase 1 feedback, to ensure a fuller range of perspectives informs the Plan.

Roundtable Discussion will take place this fall and follow-up discussions as part of Phase 2 engagement will occur in Winter/Spring 2027. These discussions will allow community groups and organizations to provide specific feedback on goals, policies, and actions that are being developed as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update.