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Growth costs \$1,000 a resident

County trying to measure how growth will impact quality of life, environment

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Construction workers Jose Solis, left and Francisco Lambar, right, look over Statton Flats plans as they work on laying down waterlines and sewer pipes in the new affordable housing development Wednesday in Gypsum.

Dominique Taylor/Vail Daily

EAGLE COUNTY, Colorado The county is a growing place, but that growth is costing the county, and planners and looking at ways to keep up with the costs.

The county estimates that each new resident costs the county \$1,242 in services, said County Financial Director John Lewis.

(The cost estimates) are very telling when we look at future development we can make sure were covering the cost of new residents, he said.

The figure was estimated from population growth numbers, the fiscal impacts of new developments and changes in the county budget, he said.

The biggest costs included \$110.36 per person for road and bridge work, \$101.74 for public transportation, \$115.86 for the airport, and \$125.83 for Sheriffs Office services.

Those estimates don't include the cost of second-home owners or tourists, Lewis said.

Health care, day care

Next, the county will be looking at the gap or how much it will cost to fund services the county does not currently offer, but will need to provide in the future, such as senior services and assisted living.

Colorado is the 7th oldest state in the country, and demographers predict that it will exceed Florida in percentage of senior population by 2020, Lewis said.

The county's older population is being forced to move to Denver or Grand Junction to get the care they need, since senior services and assisted living in the county is limited, commissioners said.

In the past, it has been too expensive for private companies to build and operate an assisted living facility in the area, Lewis said.

Other areas that will cost in the future include providing health care and child care. Currently the county is meeting less than 50 percent of the needs of people who are uninsured or underinsured. In child care, the county is only providing a third of the day care spots needed for young children.

Those numbers are pretty significant considering the state demographers' prediction that the population of Eagle County will double over the next 20 to 25 years.

That's a concern for us, said County Community Development Director Keith Montag said. Do we really want that kind of growth?

Helping the free market

County planners are in the process of looking not only at the costs of growth, but the impacts on the community and how to control it.

There are different kinds of tools that can be used to control growth, such as concentrating development in more urban areas, keep certain areas open space or buffer zones between towns or limiting land for a certain number of uses, said county planner Kris Aoki.

New developments contribute to the service needs in the county, too, officials

said.

Every additional 1,000 square feet built in the county results in one additional uninsured person, said public health manager Jill Hunsaker.

Every 1,616 square feet built results in another child without child care, she said.

Commissioner Sara Fisher said her concerns for that amount of growth include protecting the environment and preserving the areas western heritage.

The county and the Eagle Valley Land Trust are investigating all the possible locations left for open space in the county and **asking residents and officials what they would like to see preserved.**

I don't think any who visits or lives here 10 to 15 years from now doesn't want to keep this a beautiful place to live, Fisher said. We need to make better decisions.

To measure the effects of future development, the county has hired consultants to do visioning exercises that show what the county would look like at different levels of build out. The different scenarios would show not only the physical look, but the feel of a scenario, such as how congested traffic would be.

The county is also working on a sustainable community index, which would measure environmental impacts and quality of life for residents as the county grows. Traffic engineers are also mapping out possible locations for transit hubs and mass transportation systems, including a rail system through the county.

Planners hope the research can help both the county and towns make policies for the future and steer growth.

We need to step in and help the free market, if you will, to make the right decisions, Commissioner Peter Runyon said.

By the Numbers

County population in 2005: 49,373

Forecasted population in 2020: 73,848

Forecasted population in 2035: 98,775

Source: Eagle County