

City of Coalville
Mayor's Office

To: Coalville City Council

From: Mayor Rory Swensen

Date: January 27, 2026

Subject: Discussion Item, General Plan Amendments, Purpose and Rationale

Overview

The purpose of this memo is to introduce the need for a focused review and amendment of the Coalville City General Plan. This item is presented for discussion and direction only. No action is requested at this meeting.

The General Plan is the policy foundation for zoning, ordinances, and land use decisions. While it is not an ordinance itself, Utah law requires that City actions be reasonably consistent with it. When the Plan is clear and internally consistent, it provides legal protection, policy clarity, and predictability. When it contains internal tension or outdated assumptions, it creates risk and uncertainty.

Identified Issues

The current General Plan contains several areas of internal conflict that affect decision making.

First, the Plan describes itself as an advisory and flexible guide, yet in multiple sections it uses mandatory language such as shall, must, require, and prohibit. Courts tend to give weight to this language, even when the broader document suggests flexibility. This creates a situation where the City has unintentionally imposed rigid policy constraints on itself.

Second, the Plan simultaneously promotes economic sustainability, tax base growth, higher density housing near Main Street, and infill development, while also emphasizing low population density, rural character, and absolute environmental prohibitions. These goals are not inherently incompatible, but as written they often point in different directions during real world project review.

Third, several Plan sections function as de facto regulations rather than policy guidance. Examples include infrastructure concurrency language, sensitive lands prohibitions, trail requirements, and study mandates. When these provisions are applied inconsistently or waived informally, the City becomes vulnerable to procedural and equal treatment challenges.

Fourth, housing language relies on definitions and assumptions that no longer reflect current market conditions in Summit County. While the Plan expresses support for moderate income housing, it does not clearly align regulatory tools with that goal.

Ramifications

If left unaddressed, these issues increase legal exposure, complicate staff recommendations, reduce applicant predictability, and limit the Council's ability to balance competing community priorities. They also make it harder to advance stated goals related to housing availability, economic development, and long term fiscal sustainability.

Proposed Direction

A targeted General Plan amendment would not change Coalville's identity or values. Instead, it would clarify intent, resolve internal inconsistencies, modernize housing and economic language, and restore appropriate decision making discretion to the City Council, while maintaining clear guardrails for infrastructure, environmental protection, and community character.

Following Council discussion, staff and the Mayor's office propose to return with a cross reference table identifying specific Plan sections, the issue presented, and suggested amendment concepts for further review.