



Staff Report

Coalville City
Community Development Director

To: Coalville City Planning Commission
From: Don Sargent, Community Development Director
Date of Meeting: February 17, 2025
Re: Proposed Amendments to General Plan
Action: Initial Review and Discussion - Work Session

Proposed Amendments to the City General Plan

REQUEST

The purpose of this work session is to introduce proposed general plan amendments to the Planning Commission.

This item is scheduled for work session discussion only. No action is requested at this time.

BACKGROUND

Last month, Mayor Swensen reviewed the 2023 General Plan and discovered several sections were inconsistent with the city's current situation, along with internal contradictions that could lead to legal challenges for the Planning Commission and City Council regarding land-use decisions.

The mayor presented the City Council with a memo (Attachment A) on January 27, 2026 explaining the reasons for amending the general plan. On February 9, 2026, a follow-up matrix (Attachment B) including additional detail of the sections, issues identified, suggested edits, and policy rationale was provided to the City Council for review and discussion.

At its meeting on February 9th, the City Council directed Staff and the Planning Commission to begin reviewing and considering amendments to the general plan, with the intention of preparing a recommendation for the city council's further evaluation.

ANALYSIS

According to Chapter 03-070 of the development code, any general plan amendment must first receive a recommendation from the Planning Commission and then be adopted by the City Council through an ordinance. When reviewing proposed amendments to the General Plan, the following factors are to be considered:

- a. Is the Amendment consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the General Plan.

- b. Is the amendment compatible with adjacent land uses and will not adversely impact the character of the surrounding area
- c. Is the proposed development plan for the property in general compliance with all applicable standards and criteria for approval as described in the development code.
- d. Will the amendment adversely affect the public health, safety and general welfare of the community.
- e. The adequacy of facilities and services intended to serve the subject property, including but not limited to roadways, parks and recreation facilities, police and fire protection, schools, storm water drainage systems, water supplies, wastewater and refuse collection.

Suggested language amendments to the General Plan (Attachment C) are included for review and discussion.

Required Review Process

The general plan amendment process starts with an informal review by Staff and the Planning Commission, followed by a formal public hearing to gather input and ensure all required factors are considered before making a recommendation to the City Council.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission review and deliberate on the proposed amendments to the General Plan, and offer guidance to Staff for further evaluation, public hearing, and recommendation to the City Council at a future meeting.

Attachments:

- A. General Plan Review Memo**
- B. General Plan Issues Matrix**
- C. Suggested Language Amendments to the General Plan**

ATTACHMENT A

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 challenges of treatment.

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.

ATTACHMENT B

| <u>General Plan Section</u> | <u>Existing Language or Condition</u> | <u>Issue Identified</u> | <u>Suggested Amendment Concept</u> | <u>Policy Rationale</u> |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Introduction, Purpose of the Plan | Plan described as advisory and flexible, yet states recommendations should be followed | Internal contradiction between advisory intent and mandatory application | Add interpretive language clarifying that mandatory terms guide ordinance implementation unless explicitly stated as absolute | Reduces legal exposure and restores council discretion while preserving intent |
| Community Vision, Community Identity | Emphasis on low population density and rural small-town character | Rural character is implied as uniform | Clarify rural character as scale, design quality, open space, and density and housing type heritage rather than density alone | Allows housing diversity while preserving Coalville's identity |
| Land Use Element, Residential Areas | High and medium density housing identified near Main Street | Policy direction is not consistently reinforced in zoning outcomes | Explicitly encourage higher density and mixed-use housing in areas with infrastructure capacity | Aligns land use policy with housing and infrastructure efficiency goals |
| Land Use Element, Growth Contiguity | Growth should be contiguous to existing development | Rigid language limits strategic development | Allow non-contiguous growth where it advances housing, jobs, or infrastructure efficiency | Supports economic development while retaining planning discipline |
| Land Use Element, Infrastructure Policies | Development approval tied to construction of infrastructure | Can be read as a hard barrier rather than a flexible planning tool | Clarify use of phasing, impact fees, and development agreements | Encourages development while protecting public investment |
| Land Use Element, Development Impacts | Development should pay its own way | Principle is sound but inconsistently applied | Require findings addressing proportional cost responsibility | Improves consistency and defensibility of approvals |
| Moderate Income Housing Element, Definitions | Moderate income defined as up to 80 percent AMI | Definition no longer reflects Summit County housing realities | Introduce attainable housing definition covering broader income ranges | Better aligns housing policy with actual community needs |

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|---|--|---|--|--|
| Moderate Income Housing Element, Zoning Barriers | Zoning identified as a key tool, but few barriers identified | Plan lacks clear direction to remove regulatory obstacles | Commit to reviewing minimum lot sizes, parking, and use restrictions | Creating actionable path toward housing goals |
| Moderate Income Housing Element, Inclusionary Housing | Inclusionary workforce housing language appears mandatory | Risk of legal challenge without feasibility framework | Reframe as flexible tool using incentives and agreements | Preserves housing goals while reducing legal risk |
| Economic Element, Tax Base Goals | Emphasis on strengthening tax base and preventing blight | No explicit linkage to land use or zoning decisions | Require consideration of fiscal sustainability in land use decisions | Provides policy support for commercial and mixed-use projects |
| Economic Element, Employment Land | Desire for jobs stated but not protected | Employment land vulnerable to conversion | Preserve adequate commercial and light industrial zoning | Supports long-term economic resilience |
| Parks and Open Space Element, Sensitive Lands | Multiple absolute prohibitions on development | Functions as de facto regulation with limited discretion | Convert prohibitions to conditional standards with mitigation | Maintains environmental protection while restoring flexibility |
| Parks and Open Space Element, Wildlife and Trails | Studies and trail requirements broadly stated | Ambiguous thresholds invite inconsistent application | Tie requirements to defined major development thresholds | Improves fairness and predictability |
| Transportation Element, Transportation planning tied to Infrastructure Planning | Transportation planning tied to existing patterns | Does not clearly support compact or mixed-use development | Align transportation policy with planned density and redevelopment | Reduces long term infrastructure costs |
| Implementation, Citywide | Plan implementation implied but not explicit | Weak linkage between plan and ordinance updates | Commit to periodic zoning and code review for consistency | Ensures Plan remains a living document |

ATTACHMENT C

1. Introduction

Purpose and Use of the General Plan

Existing language excerpt

“The general plan is to be used as an advisory guide for land use decisions and should remain flexible enough to allow decisions to be made that are in the best interest of the community.”

Amended language

“The general plan is to be used as an advisory guide for land use decisions and should remain flexible enough to allow decisions to be made that are in the best interest of the community. [New text added] Where the terms shall, must, require, or prohibit are used in this Plan, they are intended to guide the adoption and application of ordinances, development standards, and conditions of approval, unless expressly stated as an absolute limitation necessary to protect public health and safety. The City Council retains discretion to balance housing needs, economic vitality, infrastructure capacity, environmental protection, and community character through adopted ordinances and written findings.”

2. Community Vision Element

Community Identity

Existing language excerpt

“Most residents also identify with our rural small-town atmosphere. Quiet, peaceful, family friendly, low population density...”

Amended language

“Most residents also identify with our rural small-town atmosphere. Quiet, peaceful, family friendly, [deleted text] low population density, interspersed agriculture and open lands, safety, quaintness, and proximity to recreation are all important elements of our community. [New text added] Rural character in Coalville is defined by scale, design quality, access to open space, historic context, and neighborhood compatibility. A variety of housing types and densities may be appropriate where they reinforce these characteristics and support long term community sustainability.”

3. Land Use Element

Residential Areas and Density

Existing language excerpt

“Areas immediately surrounding downtown Main Street provide a logical location for high and medium density housing.”

Amended language

“Areas immediately surrounding downtown Main Street provide a logical location for high and medium density housing.

[New text added] Targeted higher density residential and mixed use development should be encouraged in areas with existing or planned infrastructure capacity, including near Main Street, schools, civic facilities, and commercial centers, to promote housing availability, walkability, and efficient public service delivery.”

Growth Contiguity

Existing policy

“Growth should be contiguous to existing development to better provide cost effective and efficient city services and transportation facilities.”

Amended policy

“Growth should generally be contiguous to existing development to better provide cost effective and efficient city services and transportation facilities.

[New text added] Noncontiguous development may be approved where it demonstrably advances housing needs, employment opportunities, or infrastructure efficiency, and where required services can be provided without disproportionate public cost.”

Infrastructure and Services

Existing policy

“Development approval should be tied to the construction of culinary and secondary water, sewer, storm drainage, and transportation systems.”

Amended policy

“Development approval should consider the availability, timing, and capacity of culinary and secondary water, sewer, storm drainage, and transportation systems.

[New text added] Impacts may be mitigated through phased development, impact fees, development agreements, or other legally available mechanisms.”

4. Moderate Income Housing Element

Definitions

Existing definition

“Moderate income housing is defined as housing occupied by households earning 80 percent or less of area median income.”

Amended language

“Moderate income housing is defined as housing occupied by households earning 80 percent or less of area median income.

[New text added] Attainable housing refers to housing affordable to households earning approximately 60 percent to 120 percent of area median income, including local workforce, young families, and seniors seeking to age in place.”

Zoning and Regulatory Barriers

New policy added

“The City shall periodically review zoning and development standards to identify and remove regulatory barriers that unnecessarily limit residential density or housing variety, including minimum lot sizes, parking requirements, and use restrictions, particularly in areas identified for attainable housing.”

Inclusionary Housing

Existing language excerpt

“Include an Inclusionary Workforce Housing Program... that mandates a percentage of all new residential major developments to provide employee housing.”

Amended language

“Include an Inclusionary Workforce Housing Program for major residential developments.

[Deleted text] that mandates a percentage

[New text added] that may require or incentivize workforce or employee housing through development agreements, incentives, or alternative compliance options, calibrated to market feasibility and public benefit.”

5. Economic Element

Fiscal Sustainability

New policy added

“Land use and zoning decisions should consider long term fiscal sustainability, including impacts on sales tax, property tax, employment, infrastructure maintenance, and public service costs.”

Employment Land

New policy added

“Sufficient land should be preserved and zoned for commercial and light industrial uses to support local employment opportunities and economic resilience.”

6. Parks, Open Space, and Environment Element

Sensitive Lands

Existing implementation language excerpt

“Prohibit any development on natural slopes that are 30 percent or greater.”

Amended language

“[Deleted text] Prohibit any development

[New text added] Development on natural slopes of 30 percent or greater should generally be avoided. Where development is proposed, it may be approved only if it can be demonstrated that public safety, environmental function, and community character are protected through appropriate design, engineering, and mitigation measures.”

Apply similar amendments to wetlands, ridgelines, floodplains, and sensitive vegetation provisions.

Wildlife and Trails

Existing language excerpt

“Require all major developments to prepare a wildlife impact study.”

Amended language

“Require wildlife impact studies for major developments as defined in the Development Code, where potential impacts to identified habitat or migration corridors exist.”

7. Transportation Element

Alignment with Growth

New policy added

“Transportation planning and capital improvements should support planned residential density, commercial activity, redevelopment, and trail connectivity, recognizing that compact development patterns reduce long term infrastructure costs.”

8. Implementation

Plan Maintenance

New implementation policy added

“The City shall periodically review and update zoning ordinances, development standards, and capital plans to ensure continued consistency with this General Plan and evolving community needs.”

Closing Note for the Record

These amendments are intended to clarify intent, resolve internal inconsistencies, modernize housing and economic policy, and preserve appropriate discretion for elected officials while maintaining Coalville’s values, environmental stewardship, and rural character.