

City Comprehensive Plan

Innovative approaches to informed, inclusive planning

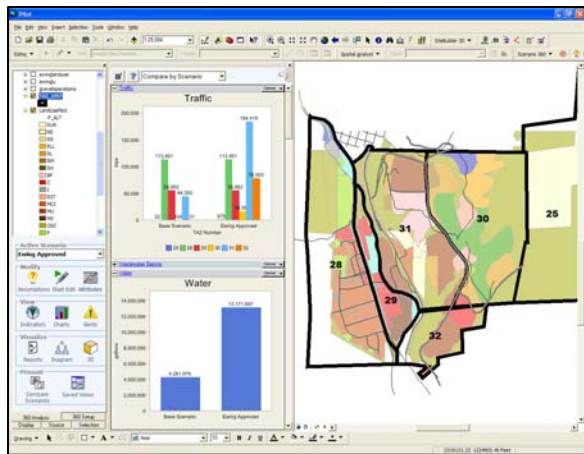
Location: Durango, Colorado

Partners: City of Durango; the Orton Family Foundation; Planning Works as lead consultant; Donley & Associates, Inc. as CommunityViz[®] consultant

Context: The City of Durango, Colorado lies in the Animas River Valley, at an elevation of over 6,000 feet and surrounded by peaks of the San Juan Mountains. With a population of about 16,000 people, and another 6,000 in the outlying areas, Durango has experienced rapid growth in the past decade. As described by the Orton Family Foundation, a partner in the project, “Durangoans are trying to preserve their city’s heart and soul and avoid the ‘anyplace syndrome’ that they see creeping into neighboring communities and the region as a whole.” In 2005, City staff, guided by a broad-based Citizens Review Committee (CRC) and with input from residents across geographic areas and interests, set out to develop a new Comprehensive Plan.



Project Description: The project was notable for its intensity, inclusiveness and innovation. The City hosted twenty different workshops at multiple times and venues. This allowed the City, the consultants and the public to work together on an iterative process to refine and decide on a preferred growth scenario. Early workshops focused on community values; values like authenticity and balance came to the forefront. At later workshops, citizens used tiles on maps to allocate projected new population and employment growth. Twenty maps were completed and later distilled into three distinct growth scenarios: A) 1997 Plan and Subsequently Adopted Areas; B) Growth Centers; and C) Compact Growth. Subsequent workshops showed participants the impacts of the alternatives. Using keypad polling technology and online surveys, participants rated the alternatives with respect to the values and vision developed early on. Ultimately, a preferred plan emerged.



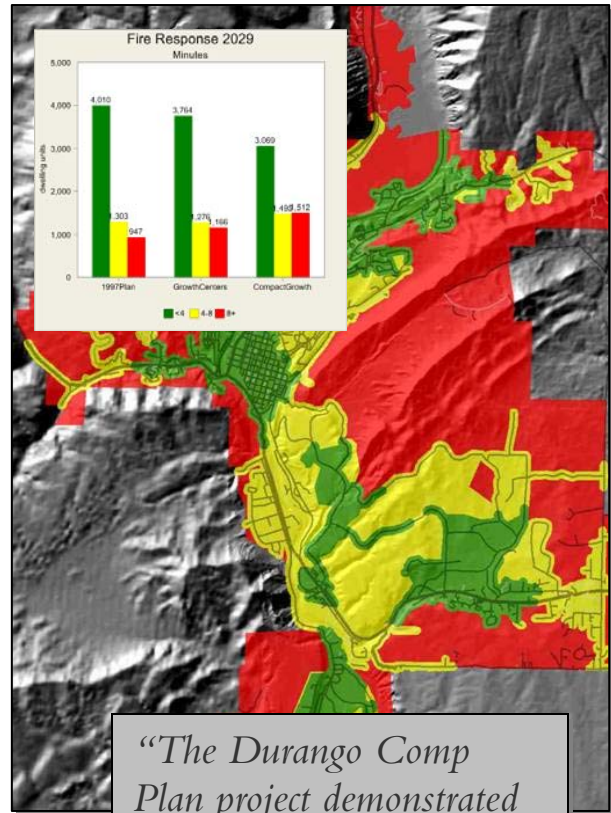
CommunityViz played an important role in the project with many types of analysis and visualization. Near the beginning, CommunityViz suitability analysis helped identify appropriate land uses by evaluating parcels and vacant, undeveloped lands in terms of geologic hazards, wildlife habitat, airport noise, and more. (A separate analysis was done for infill.) As alternative plans were developed, CommunityViz helped the group evaluate them in several ways. Build-out and land use allocation helped illustrate future growth. Visualizations allowed people to fly through the landscape and see alternative future development patterns from various viewpoints. The fiscal and environmental impacts of each alternative were analyzed and re-

analyzed dozens of times during the iterative process, taking advantage of CommunityViz dynamic calculation capabilities.

The model outputs included dwelling units and jobs by type, which were fed to a TransCAD model that estimated traffic impacts. The traffic model results guided changes in land use patterns and transportation improvements, creating a feedback loop.

CommunityViz evaluated impacts on other infrastructure systems as well. For example, a wastewater analysis influenced densities in the La Posta Road area. At the request of the fire authority, fire response times were analyzed to develop a phased plan for building new and upgrading existing fire stations. The revised fire station plan improved response times for new development under all three plan alternatives.

Technology and Tools: CommunityViz Scenario 360™, including Suitability, Build-Out, Common Impacts and Allocator tools, provided the scenario framework and impact analysis. Landscape visualizations were done using CommunityViz SiteBuilder 3D™, Google Earth, ArcGlobe and ArcScene. TransCAD was used for traffic estimates based on CommunityViz jobs and housing calculations and Network Analyst was used in the analysis of fire response times. The public was engaged extensively via a telephone survey; a project website with feedback capability; an interactive online mapping tool; a series of “Update Fact Sheets”; and the series of workshops – some with keypad polling integrated with real-time CommunityViz analysis, and one in which attendees and television viewers at home could participate simultaneously in keypad polling.



“The Durango Comp Plan project demonstrated CommunityViz’s flexibility for responding to a wide range of community issues and community members’ questions.”

—Greg Hoch,
Durango Director of Planning
and Community Development

KEY LINKS

CommunityViz
<http://www.communityviz.com>
City of Durango
<http://www.durangogov.org>
The Orton Family Foundation
<http://www.orton.org>
Planning Works, LLC
<http://www.ourplanningworks.com>
Donley & Associates, Inc.
<http://www.donleyassociates.com>

Outcomes: The Comprehensive Plan included some specific new directions from the earlier 1997 plan, such as an increased focus on sustainability and on adequate public facilities. The Plan was adopted by the City Council upon recommendation of the Planning Commission in March 2007 and with good public support. Since Plan adoption, the City has increased its development impact fees as a result of the project’s impact fee analyses, and it is in the process of updating its land use and development codes to implement the Plan’s adopted growth strategies. As a result of the fire response analysis, the fire authority finalized the decision to eliminate one proposed station site, and instead build stations in two other areas where greater need is projected.