



# TOWN OF RIDGWAY MASTER PLAN

ADOPTED  
JUNE 12, 2019





TOWN OF RIDGWAY

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Ridgway, Colorado 81432

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## Special Thanks

Evan Weissman with Warm Cookies of the Revolution for assistance with planning and facilitating the September 27, 2018 community event.

Adrian Molina (Molina Speaks) for live-scribing poems (featured in the Master Plan) summarizing his experiences meeting with residents and students of Ridgway (*In the City's Master Plan: Ridgway's Kings and Queens*) and the comments made during the September 27, 2018 community event (*The Beautiful Finale*).

The community of Ridgway and all who participated in the Master Plan update process!

## Photo Credits:

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### Community Profile

Community Survey Results – September 2018

Community Event Summary – September 27, 2018

Vision and Goals Survey Summary – February 07, 2019

Community Event Summary – February 27, 2019

Draft Plan Survey Summary – March 28, 2019

***In the City's Master Plan: Ridgway's Kings and Queens***

*a live-scribe poem by Adrian H Molina (From the September 27, 2018 Master Plan Community Event)*

In the City's Master Plan the 2nd and 5th graders are equal parts futurist and historian, and they are as important as the elders, who are as important as the mayor.

Speaking of, could you imagine an evolving 21st century town where the mayor had time to chat with you for an hour under century-old trees in the middle of the park? You might get the feeling, in-between rusting landmarks, a railroad museum, the Rocky Mountains, Sneffels and Uncompahgre Peaks, new school eateries and old school mentalities, a river that contains the town's soul, paved and dirt roads—you get the sense you could be a man or a woman, a sprouting seed or a weathered weed, an artist, a rancher, a construction worker, plant lover, descendant of miners, futurist or old timer, a chef, a designer, a ruffneck, a city councilwoman, a cowboy or an indian—and Mayor John would give you the same time of day.

A moment when the winds could carry pollen from what all the diverging folk may have to say—an opportunity when other towns are dying, to see a future where the children of today's children may want to stick around and play.

The children want:  
a bigger skatepark,  
preservation of their river,  
more flowers and fewer “smoke shops,”  
animal rights,  
a program for the disabled,  
ski benches,  
books and music shops like in Denver  
(“but not like Denver, like Ridgway!”),  
less drugs,  
more play,  
a Starbucks,  
a gymnasium,  
a Gucci store,  
a mall, another market—  
but all agreed, NO MORE BUILDINGS!  
(I wondered if the adults might find all of this familiar.)

A fifth grade surfer wants a “wave maker thing” for the river like they have out in California  
(“but not like California, like Ridgway!”).  
Another wants a dog park, a JC Penney's, and a football field, but none of this should attract more people!

And for all these many ideas the number of cheers to jeers was equal.

The second graders want to be artists, musicians, builders, and believers who may one day play in the beloved summer concert series and they themselves get paid. One with bright ideas wants a Ridgway Pride Parade!

As I walked through the town's history, the old baseball diamond told me it was a field of dreams that somebody had memory of. The fence falling down, the dandelions and weeds had claimed patches of grass, the earth underneath holding the mass of laughter, grit, and “simpler times.”

At the edges of change there were rhymes in the alleys like the poems in the leaves, the shifting dreamscapes that had brought the world's photographers to see what is just an everyday thing to you and me—Beauty.

But the baker can't live here (she lives in Montrose). She can't afford the rent, even though she feeds dozens daily and delights them with her craft. Why is it that even in a place so beautiful where the land demands sustainability, we humans can't seem to do the most basic math?

Could it be true that it was neither the miner's nor the rancher's ill intents, nor the fault of the laborers or the immigrants or the city government... but the bigger forces and structures that got in the way of possibility... even though everyone could imagine living in an affordable, gorgeous, vibrant, historic and future forward town-city, where the trees and the Fourteeners remained the kings, and the wildflowers and fall leaves still presided as queens over the wonder and awe of all living beings?  
(Look around.)

What was truly possible on that warm late-September evening when the village revealed its dreams?









# PART I

# INTRODUCTION

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In June 2018, the Town of Ridgway initiated a community-wide process to update the Town's Master Plan. Key objectives for the process were to: confirm and refine the community's vision and values; consolidate and update the many standalone Master Plan elements under the umbrella of a single, comprehensive plan; develop new goals and strategies to help address pressing community issues, such as affordable and workforce housing; and to ensure the Town of Ridgway is well-positioned to manage growth and development over the next ten to twenty years.

This chapter provides an overview of the process, community input, and influencing factors that helped inform this updated Master Plan.

# ABOUT RIDGWAY

## History of Ridgway

Prior to the arrival of Anglo-American settlers, the area which now includes Ridgway served as part of the homeland of the Tabeguache (or Uncompahgre) band of the Ute people. According to tribal history, the Ute people lived in this area since the beginning of time. Never forming permanent settlements, the Tabeguache Utes travelled seasonally across their large territory hunting and gathering food. Local hot springs were special places to the Utes. Following the 1848 Mexican-American War, the United States took possession of the land that became Colorado from Mexico. Initially, the U.S. government did not seek to remove the Ute bands from their accustomed areas, as officials considered much of Colorado unsuitable for settlement. However, this changed with the discovery of gold and silver.

As miners moved west across Colorado, demands for land and resources grew among the settlers and within the U.S. government. Chief Ouray strove to keep the peace between his band and the U.S. government. However, a series of treaties with the Ute bands created reservations that shrank in size with each subsequent treaty, allowing the U.S. to take advantage of the area's natural resources. By 1880, a delegation of Utes led by Chief Ouray traveled to Washington, D.C. to sign yet another treaty with the federal government. Per its terms, the Tabeguache Utes would be removed from their lands and relocated near Grand Junction. However, after Chief Ouray's death, the Utes were forcibly relocated to the Uintah and Ouray Reservations in present day Utah. By 1881, all Utes living in the Uncompahgre Valley had been forcibly removed by the U.S. Army.

In 1889, the Rio Grande Southern Railroad was incorporated to provide rail service to the mines in present day Ouray, Telluride, Rico and Durango. The railroad company, looking to develop a new town as a headquarters and hub for the growing ranching community, laid out what was to become the Town of Ridgway in 1890. One year later Ridgway was formally established and named after one of the railroad company's founders, Robert M. Ridgway.

Ridgway experienced many challenges over the following decades: the collapse of the silver market in 1893, two catastrophic fires, the Great Depression, two world wars, the demise of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad in the 1950s, and a controversial plan by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to construct a large dam and reservoir that would have inundated the town site. Undaunted, citizens always managed to survive and rebuild, earning Ridgway the reputation as "the town that would not die."

Construction of a new state highway between Ridgway and Telluride in the 1960s turned the Town into a gateway to the San Juan Mountains. The filming of two prominent Hollywood productions, *How the West was Won* (1962) and *True Grit* (1969) brought recognition to the community. Perhaps most importantly, the decision to relocate the planned reservoir to the north of Ridgway spared the community from inundation and prompted a resurgence of growth beginning in the late 1970s. Drawn by a combination of great location, good schools, public amenities, and exhilarating outdoor-oriented lifestyle, the Town started to grow at a steady pace in the 1990s, surpassing for the first time its population of a century earlier.

Today Ridgway is an authentic, friendly, western Colorado small town, with beautiful parks, well-utilized library, railroad museum and ranching museum, excellent restaurants and local businesses, and fantastic views. Whether you are an outdoor enthusiast, a "foodie," history buff or art lover, Ridgway, Colorado has it all.

## Major Trends & Key Issues

A number of trends and key issues facing the Town of Ridgway were identified through the process to update the Town's Master Plan. These figured heavily into conversations held with the community, and the resulting policy guidance provided in this Master Plan. Based on current conditions during 2018, it is anticipated that these issues will continue to affect the Town of Ridgway over the next ten to twenty years in some way or another.



### **Future Local and Regional Growth**

While development activity in Ridgway is down from where it was prior to the Great Recession, the town and the larger region are expected to grow over the next 30 years. Based on past growth and projections for future growth, it is estimated that Ridgway will add between 150 and 700 new residents between 2016 and 2050. The timing and rate of growth in Ridgway will continue to be influenced by many factors. The State of Colorado forecasts that the population of Montrose County, San Miguel County, and Ouray County will nearly double in size over that same period. While most of this growth is projected to occur in neighboring Montrose and San Miguel Counties, regional growth will impact Ridgway's transportation system, housing market, and overall economy.

Both the Town of Ridgway and the City of Ouray have intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) with Ouray County to focus growth in the municipalities. Unlike Ridgway, the City of Ouray's growth potential is limited by topographic constraints. Despite the Town's potential for growth, most undeveloped areas are not served with the infrastructure and services (such as water and sewer) needed to support new growth, and the Town's current water and wastewater facilities will need to be expanded in the near-term before additional growth can occur. Despite these limitations, growth is likely to continue over the next 20 years and has the potential to change the character of Ridgway if not carefully managed.

### **Increasingly Expensive Housing Market**

Ridgway's housing market is shifting, and has become increasingly expensive due to the improving economy and high desirability of the community. The median home sales price in Ridgway is double that of Montrose, and rental prices are beginning to resemble high-cost markets like nearby Telluride. One in five lower income renters and one in ten homeowners struggle with housing costs. While the community is made-up primarily of permanent residents, continued price increases could adversely affect Ridgway's socioeconomic diversity. Anecdotally, employers cite housing costs and a general lack of supply of for-sale and rental housing

as barriers to their ability to attract and retain employees.

The Town has worked in coordination with Ouray County and the City of Ouray to explore a range of strategies to address the region's housing challenges. The Town has also taken steps on its own to expand housing options in Ridgway through its accessory dwelling unit program and its efforts to realize the Space to Create project, a long-term affordable workforce housing project that is a joint partnership between the Town, the State of Colorado, and a non-profit developer. Additional policies related to housing are provided in the Master Plan to guide the Town as it continues to address this issue.

### **Local and Regional Economic Trends**

Over half of jobs in Ouray County are in industries related to tourism. These industries also play a large role in Ridgway's economy, accounting for over a quarter of all jobs. This trend exacerbates the community's housing challenges, as tourism-related industries typically pay lower wages, are more susceptible to economic downturns, and tend to attract a more transient workforce. As a result of a number of recent public and private investments in the heart of Downtown Ridgway, sales tax revenues collected by the Town have nearly doubled since 2009. As an additional economic development strategy, the Town of Ridgway became a State-Certified Creative District in 2013, and a Designated Main Street community. Through these programs, the Town has access to a range of financial and technical resources from the State of Colorado. In order to best leverage these resources, the Town has prioritized local funding to hire a staff member who works closely with creative individuals and creative entrepreneurs, economic development organizations, and other local and regional partners to help enhance Ridgway's economic and civic capital.

However, Ridgway residents voiced a strong desire to see the local economy become more diverse and less dependent on tourism and the seasonal fluctuations such a reliance creates.

Refer to the Community Profile included in Appendix A for more background on these and other trends and statistics considered during the Master Plan process.

# ABOUT THE MASTER PLAN

## Role of the Plan

The Town of Ridgway Master Plan (“the Plan”) is an officially adopted advisory document that outlines the community’s vision and goals for the next ten to twenty years, and beyond. The Plan is comprehensive in nature—addressing issues related to land use, growth and development, community character, historic preservation, economic development and tourism, parks and open space, and other topics of importance to the community. The Plan establishes goals, policies, and actions to help achieve the community’s vision. It also provides a blueprint for future growth within the Town of Ridgway and its defined boundaries that is implemented through the Town’s zoning and subdivision regulations and other regulatory tools. Achieving the vision and goals outlined in the Plan will not occur overnight; rather, the Plan will be implemented incrementally over time through day-to-day decision-making, and through the specific actions outlined in Part V.

## Legislative Authority

The Town of Ridgway is authorized to develop a community master plan (comprehensive plan) in accordance with Sections 31-23-206 through 209 of the Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.) which refer to the development, modification, and approval procedures for such a plan.

## Master Plan Elements

Most communities revisit and update their comprehensive plan every five to seven years to ensure that it continues to meet the community’s vision and goals for the future. The first Town of Ridgway Master Plan was adopted in 1999. Over time, the 1999 plan was replaced by a series of standalone Master Plan elements:

- Parks, Trails, Open Spaces and Facilities Plan (2012)
- Land Use Plan Update (2011)

- Community Outreach and Public Participation Plan (2011)
- Integrated Weed Management and Native Plant Restoration Plan (2011)
- Lighting Plan (2010)
- Prescriptive Energy Code and Green Building Standards (2010)
- Transportation Plan (2007)
- Northwest Area Master Plan Element (2007)

This Master Plan establishes a consolidated policy framework that incorporates key policy recommendations from, and supersedes, all previously adopted Master Plan elements and maps.

## Related Plans and Studies

In addition to the Master Plan elements listed above, the following related plans and studies were used to help inform the goals and policies contained in this Master Plan:

- Town of Ridgway Strategic Plan (2018)
- Ridgway/Ouray Housing Action Plan (2009, and 2017 working document)
- Ridgway Market Study and Opportunity Assessment (2017)
- Community Forest Management Plan (2016)
- Ridgway Main Street & Creative District Signage and Wayfinding Plan (2015)
- Green Street Park Plan (2015)
- Annexation Policy (2014)
- Ridgway Creative District Strategic Plan (2013)
- Ouray County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (2013)
- Ridgway Main Street Downtown Assessment (2012)
- Town of Ridgway Source Water Protection Plan (2012)



- “Bottom –Up” Ouray County Economic Development Summary (2011)
- Regional Housing Needs Assessment (2011)
- Ouray County Housing Needs Assessment (2008)
- Ridgway Parking Assessment Report (2018)

In addition to this introductory chapter, the Master Plan contains the following parts.

While the overarching recommendations contained in these plans are reflected in this Master Plan, some contain additional background information and/or technical information that should be referenced as the recommendations of this Master Plan are carried out.

## Parts of the Plan

### PART II: COMMUNITY VISION & VALUES

- Describes what we value about Ridgway today and the type of community we'd like to create in the future

### PART III: GOALS & POLICIES

- Provides guidance to ensure day-to-day decision-making and other actions taken by the Town Council, the Planning Commission, and Town staff help support and advance the goals of the Master Plan

### PART IV: GROWTH FRAMEWORK

- Provides guidance on how and where different types of development and land uses will be allowed within the Town of Ridgway and its defined growth boundaries
- Establishes policies to guide future annexations

### PART V: ACTION PLAN

- Outlines specific strategies or actions that the Town and its partners will take to implement the Master Plan over time

### APPENDICES

- A: Community Profile (contains data and trends information used to help inform the Master Plan)
- B: Community engagement summaries

## Plan Amendments

Over time, amendments to the Master Plan may be necessary in order to maintain the document's relevance and viability as a planning and decision-making tool. Any amendment to the Plan will include a public process to uphold the tremendous effort put into this Plan and the overall vision while also allowing for the Plan to evolve over time. Targeted text amendments and/or map revisions may be requested by the Town Council, Planning Commission, Town staff, or the public.

Amendments to the Master Plan may be considered based on community desires to shape a positive future for Ridgway, for example, when adjustments to a policy or goal are needed in order to make the Master Plan more relevant to the needs of the community or to correct a policy or goal that is not working as intended. When considering an amendment to the Master Plan, the Planning Commission and Town Council should consider the following criteria to objectively measure the request:

- The proposed amendment is consistent with the overall intent of the Master Plan;
- Strict adherence to a current goal or policy of the Master Plan would result in a situation neither intended by nor in keeping with the vision and values or other goals and policies of the Plan;
- The proposed amendment will not have an undesirable effect on adjacent properties;
- The proposed amendment is compatible with the surrounding area (when amending the Future Land Use Map or Plan) and/or the vision, goals, and policies of the Master Plan;
- The proposed amendment will have minimal effect on public services and facilities and current or planned service provision; and
- The proposed amendment is not adverse to the public health, safety, and general welfare of the Town.

Administrative updates, such as outdated partner names, will not require an amendment. In addition, there will be some natural attrition during the life of this Plan where goals or policies may become less relevant; when there are many, this may indicate that it is time to update the Plan, as described below.

## Plan Updates

Town staff should evaluate whether an update to the Master Plan is needed about every five years. Major updates may be triggered by the need to:

- Update key data points and re-evaluate trends related to demographics, housing, economic development, growth and development activity, and other important factors;
- Affirm the Master Plan's vision, values, goals, and policies in total or regarding a particular topic or issue; and/or
- Re-evaluate the prioritization of implementation actions contained in the Action Plan.

Any update to the Master Plan should include opportunities for involvement by the public, Town staff, elected and appointed officials, and other relevant or affected stakeholders. Depending on the amount of time that has passed since adoption of this Master Plan or any subsequent updates, the community profile or key data in the community profile should be made current as part of the update.



# ABOUT THE PROCESS

## Steering Committee

A steering committee made up of 15 residents was formed to serve as a “sounding-board” for Town staff and the project team throughout the update process. The committee met on a regular basis to review interim work products and provide a citizen perspective on drafts, helped guide the community engagement process, engaged in thoughtful and thorough discussion of issues and opportunities facing Ridgway, and served as “ambassadors” of the Master Plan.

## Community Engagement

The Town of Ridgway has a history of strong citizen engagement and participation. The Master Plan update process included both formal and informal opportunities for the Ridgway community to participate and to provide feedback. Input opportunities were expressly designed to build community awareness about the Master Plan process and to seek input from a wide array of stakeholder groups. Key milestones in the community engagement process included:

- June 2018 - Focus Groups:** A series of focus groups were held with residents, business owners, partner agencies and organizations, and other local and regional stakeholders to explore specific issues and opportunities to be addressed as part of the Master Plan update. Focus group topics included: business/economic development; ranching/heritage; local governments and regional entities; parks, environment, and recreation; arts and culture/creative community; youth; and housing. Issues and opportunities were also explored with Town Council, the Planning Commission, and the Master Plan Steering Committee as part of these initial kick-off meetings.
- July-September 2018 – Master Plan Booth/Activities at Community Events:** Town staff and Steering Committee members attended popular community events to raise awareness





of the process and initial community survey, answer questions, and informally engage the community. Visitors to the Master Plan booth were asked to participate in a photo voice exercise that was used to capture what people love most about Ridgway and what they would add or transform.

- Summer 2018 – Community Survey:** An initial community survey was used to explore how well the Master Plan's current vision, values, and goals aligned with the community's vision for the future. The survey asked residents to share what they love most about Ridgway, as well as their hopes and fears for the future. More than 660 people participated.
- September 2018 – Creating Our Future Community Event:** Approximately 100 people attended an open house and community event at the County Event Center to explore ways to make Ridgway an even more ideal community. The evening was facilitated by Evan Weissman of Warm Cookies of the Revolution (WCR) and featured a series of interactive activities and a live-scribe poet, Adrian Molina.
- November 2018 - Vision, Values, and Goals Survey:** A second online input opportunity was provided to seek input on the preliminary vision, values, and goals of the updated Master Plan. Respondents were asked to rank the vision and the goals for each of the five community values on a scale of 1 to 5, and to provide comments and suggestions for improving the vision and goals. Over 200 people responded to the survey.
- Youth Engagement– Ongoing:** Town staff and the project team partnered with the Ridgway School District to engage area youth—at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and high school level—in the Master Plan conversation and build awareness about the role of Town government and opportunities for civic engagement.
- February 2019 – Draft Master Plan Review:** A final community workshop was held at the County Event Center to present and seek input on the draft Master Plan and priority actions for the future. Follow up meetings with initial focus groups were also conducted to provide





additional opportunities for discussion and input. An online survey was also created to provide an additional opportunity to provide feedback on the Master Plan following the event.

Summaries of these engagement events and survey results can be found in Appendices B and C of the Master Plan.





# TOWN OF RIDGWAY

