CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION
PAGOSA SPRINGS PAST, PRESENT, AND DESIRED FUTURE

Pagosa Springs is “Refreshingly Authentic”—a place of natural beauty, diverse cultures and a genuine community. That natural beauty, along with the hot springs, has drawn groups to the area for centuries. Native Americans, the Spanish, and early American miners and ranchers settled around the hot springs and cultivated the community heritage that thrives into the present. The Town is steeped in its history and profoundly optimistic about its future. Over the years, Pagosa Springs has grown into an unpretentious scenic mountain town consistently attracting visitors and new residents.

The Town’s economy and residents reveal the dual presence of the old and the new, the constant and the dynamic, in Pagosa Springs. The population is a mix of long-time residents, including an indigenous population, and newcomers. Many of these newcomers are retirees whose presence has helped diversify the local economy. While the Town’s economy continues to revolve around tourism and healthcare, craft and outdoor product industries are growing. Much of the area’s growth is occurring in the uptown area, a commercial corridor home to some of the larger businesses in Pagosa Springs. An emerging economic center, uptown provides much of the Town’s sales tax base. Meanwhile, downtown remains the heart of the community as its recreation, tourism and cultural center.

And at the center of downtown—the unrivaled hot springs that make Pagosa Springs such a unique place. The Mother Pool is the deepest hot spring in the world and the natural hot water is immensely popular for its healing and therapeutic qualities. These springs remain a sacred place for the Native American peoples who have cherished it for a millennium while attracting thousands of visitors from around the world to the area. The Town, a geothermal energy leader, utilizes the springs to heat local buildings.
The springs represent just one of the many assets of the area. The natural assets are remarkable: the scenic beauty of the surroundings, the recreational opportunities in the nearby San Juan National Forest, the San Juan River flowing through Town, multiple trails and recreational offerings in Town, and the hot springs for soaking and relaxing. Beyond these natural features, the Town has an evolving arts scene, historic district, genuine character and western culture, large areas of vacant land and residents that provide a vision and energy for the creation and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. These outstanding assets provide a foundation for Pagosa Springs to move forward into the future and achieve the following Overall Vision:

“Pagosa Springs sustains an authentic mountain experience in a culturally rich, economically diverse rocky mountain town set in a spectacular, healthy environment situated at the confluence of the ancient geothermal hot springs and the headwaters of the San Juan River.”

The Comprehensive Plan establishes thirteen themes that are vital for the community to realize the Overall Vision:

- Natural Environment
- Alternative Energy
- Community Identity
- Heritage and Historic Preservation
- Arts
- Housing
- Transportation and Mobility
- Land Use
- Supporting Economic Vibrancy
- Childhood Development and Lifelong Learning
- Infrastructure
- Government
- Intergovernmental Cooperation and Coordination

For each theme, the Plan specifies a vision for the Town’s future in that area. Goals and specific actions for each theme offer concrete policies and approaches to realize the Overall Vision. All the theme vision statements, goals and actions are interrelated and integral for Pagosa Springs to attain its vision. They should be evaluated holistically as the Town implements budgets, plans and projects and reviews development applications.
The Comprehensive Plan should be the first document that the Town Council, Planning Commission, Historic Preservation Board, special districts, developers and residents review before making decisions that will affect the community’s future. Town Council should also review it when preparing capital plans, budgets, work plans, or strategic plans. Town departments will be instrumental as it will take leadership, money, staffing, commitment and other resources to realize the Overall Vision, the theme vision statements and associated goals and actions. The Comprehensive Plan should also be promoted as the path forward for the entire Pagosa Springs community, including institutions, special districts, non-profits, businesses and residents. It will take every segment of the community working collectively to attain the envisioned and desired future.

As to future development, the Comprehensive Plan establishes many of the standards and policies that support and regulate those projects. The Pagosa Springs Land Use and Development Code (LUDC) states that the Comprehensive Plan “shall serve as a guide for all future Council action concerning land use and development. Future land use and development may vary from the terms of the Comprehensive Plan only for good cause shown.” The LUDC requires several types of land use applications to conform to the Comprehensive Plan, including annexations, re-zonings, subdivisions, and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).

Pagosa Springs adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 2006 and that Plan provided a great foundation for community planning and actions over the past twelve years. Several of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan vision statements, goals and actions were carried over into this plan. Others were modified to fit the new Overall Vision and Plan goals and actions. Comprehensive Plans are typically revisited every five to ten years in order to ensure the community’s vision remains on course or is adjusted as needed. An update should remove already met goals and actions and establish new policies based on the current public interest and pertinent issues. Pagosa Springs initiated the 2018 update to the Comprehensive Plan to stay abreast of present trends, conditions and changes to the community. The update process, known as “Pagosa Springs Forward,” prioritized the longevity and future success of the community.

Since the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, much has changed in Pagosa Springs. The population of town proper has grown slightly. Meanwhile, the areas of the County surrounding the Town grew by 25% between 2000 and 2014, although the growth has plateaued somewhat since 2008. The population of the County is expected to increase significantly over the next ten years, with a projected increase of 28.6%. Likely, much of that growth will occur beyond the Town limits but within its economy and planning area.¹

Over the past ten years, the area has become more of a retirement community. While the median age of the Town itself has remained relatively constant, Archuleta County is seeing a substantial migration of retirees. The County’s median age has increased eight years since 2000 (40.8 to 48.8).²

The 2008 Recession greatly impacted the Pagosa Springs economy. It has largely recovered to pre-Recession levels (its status at the time of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan). The unemployment rate in the County, though it rose dramatically during the Recession, is 2.7%, about half the rate in 2006. However, the unemployment rate continues to have many seasonal fluctuations due to the importance of tourism to the local economy. The number of service-related jobs, relative to non-service related jobs, has increased and now makes up the larger share of the workforce. Homebuilding and construction have been slower to rebound since the Recession. Since 2006 41 new units have been built in the Town, representing 3.8% of the total housing stock. In the County, despite higher population growth, only 0.9% of total housing units were built from 2006 onwards.³

Other changes to the Town include Walmart opening in the uptown area in 2015, expansion of the Pagosa Springs Medical Center, the creation of the Geothermal Greenhouse Partnership and construction of the Geothermal Greenhouse Project in Centennial Park to further utilize the Town’s geothermal resources, the adoption of the Town to Lakes Trail Master Plan and the construction of parts of the Town to Pagosa Lakes Commuter Trail, the opening of new trail segments along the San Juan River and a fire destroying the historic Adobe building in downtown.

² Ibid.  