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May 5, 1982

MEMORANDUM TO: Board of County Commissioners  
Planning Commission

RE: Policy statement

I have been a little slow in getting this out of my office. In order for us to make this public, I would like to receive your comments back in my office no later than next Tuesday, May 11, 1982. At that time I will be in Dallas at the American Planning Association Conference. However, I would appreciate it if you would give any comments that you have to Karen who is our office manager and who will be in charge of completing the revisions. I will take a copy of the document with me so that I can discuss it with her and draft the wording changes from Dallas. They can then make any final changes here and deliver it to Curt, so that we can get it to the press and get our courtesy copies out on Wednesday. That is only a week before the hearing, but I presume that is tolerable.

Ideally there will be no changes. Certainly if you get a chance to look at it before Tuesday and can tell us that you have no changes, we will get it in circulation sooner.

Thanks.

The subject of this chapter is policies for the regulation of land development. The purpose of these policies is to minimize conflict between land uses, to maintain and improve the quality of life in Mesa County, and to provide clear and consistent standards for land development.

#### Availability of Drinking Water in New Subdivisions and Other Developments

The County has a statutory duty to determine whether a proposed development will have a supply of water which is dependable and adequate in both quality and quantity. In the areas served by the Ute, Clifton, Fruita, and Palisade Water Systems, the County will defer to operators of those systems for the determination of whether an adequate water supply can be provided to a proposed development. The County has no water engineers on its staff and is far less able than those service providers to determine the adequacy of service to a proposed development. However, for other areas of the County, the County will adopt minimum standards for water service for different types of development and will obtain such professional expertise as it needs to review proposed projects against the standards. The new standards will address water quality, reliability, pressure and line sizes.

#### Minimum Fire Flows

The minimum fire flow is the minimum flow of water needed for fire-fighting. The minimum standards are determined by insurance rating organizations and other standard-setting groups. Required minimum fire-flows are currently available in some urbanized areas in Mesa County but such minimum flows are not available in most rural areas and in some urban areas. The County does not provide fire protection and by law is not authorized to establish a water system. Mesa County has adopted building codes which, among other things, provide minimum standards to ensure that occupants of buildings are warned of a fire and have the opportunity to escape. Most property owners carry insurance against property loss; interestingly, fire insurance costs in areas without minimum fire flows amount to only a few dollars more per month for an average house than costs for the same house in a fully protected area.

Under the described circumstances, Mesa County has determined that lower density residential developments should not be required to have minimum fire-flows prior to construction and occupancy. However, for reasons outlined in more detail in the discussion of Fire Response Time (below), the County believes that minimum fire flows or some alternative means of fire protection must be available prior to occupancy for multi-family residential projects, for all institutions and for most commercial and industrial developments. Further, Mesa County believes that provision ought to be made to meet minimum fire-flow standards in urbanizing areas. Thus, Mesa County will require that every new development in an urbanizing area install water lines of adequate size to meet minimum fire-flow standards and that every new development in such an area install fire hydrants at intervals recommended by the appropriate standard-setting organizations. Further, Mesa County will require that every new development within a reasonable distance of a transmission line which would provide minimum fire-flows be connected to such transmission line. The determination of what is a "reasonable distance" will vary depending on the scale and intensity of the development.

#### Fire Response Time

Building code requirements for residences include bedroom escape windows, one hour walls and doors, smoke detectors and other fire protection measures. These requirements are intended to ensure that occupants can safely escape a fire. Thus, the primary risk in an area with little or no fire protection is that of loss of property, a risk against which most persons carry insurance; fire insurance in an unprotected area does not cost a great many more dollars a year than similar insurance in a protected area. Because the safety of the occupants is addressed by the building codes, and because loss of property can be insured, single family residential developments should not be required to be located within a certain distance or response time of fire protection service.

In commercial, industrial, institutional, and higher density residential developments the requirements for fire protection are more complex. A fire starting in one apartment or one office may threaten hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars worth of property and may threaten or affect the lives of persons having no real association with the building where the fire started. Such developments must be located and/or designed in a way that provides for appropriate fire protection. Ideally such developments should be located in existing fire districts

and within a reasonable response time of existing or planned fire stations. However, in some cases special arrangements may be made for fire protection in a particular development; a proposed warehouse may be planned with a sprinkler system and an adequate water supply to service it, while a new fire district may be proposed for a large-scale remote planned unit development. Mesa County will require in the future that all new industrial, institutional, commercial and higher density residential developments have or make provision for reasonable fire protection. The standards for such fire protection should be flexible enough to accommodate the needs and problems of a variety of developments but should also be consistent with standards established by reputable rating and standard-setting organizations.

#### Proximity of New Residential Development to Commercial Services

Mesa County considered the adoption of a policy requiring that new residential development be located within a specified distance of existing commercial services. Such a requirement could be met by a developer building close to other developments or building commercial services as the first phase of his own development. Mesa County believes that private interests are better able than public officials to determine when and where commercial services are needed. Mesa County believes that as new areas develop away from existing commercial development, new commercial developments will be provided. Mesa County recognizes that it is both convenient and energy-saving for people to be able to shop near where they live. However, the County also believes that consumers are better able than County officials to determine what is "convenient" and that consumers are at least as concerned as public officials about the need to conserve expensive gasoline. Thus, Mesa County determines as a matter of policy that a regulation on this issue is unnecessary and that the objective of providing convenient services will be met by the private sector without public intervention.

#### Standards for Sewer Service or Septic Systems

Under the laws of Colorado, Mesa County cannot approve a subdivision unless the Board of County Commissioners determines either that it will be connected to a public sewage disposal system or that it will have a private system or septic tanks

conforming to state and local laws and regulations. Mesa County and the City of Grand Junction have together developed a high quality sewage collection and disposal system within the "201" service area in the Grand Valley. The designation of the 201 service area is the result of a facilities planning project undertaken with assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency several years ago. In order to make efficient use of this system, and to maintain water quality standards all new development within this area will be required to hook up to this system within two years of construction or within thirty days of the time when an interceptor or major service line exists or is built within 400 feet of any part of the development, whichever comes first. During any period between construction and hook-up, temporary sewage vaults will be permitted in accordance with existing Mesa County standards.

The Colorado Department of Health has adopted a firm "non-proliferation" policy to discourage multiple, small and scattered sewage treatment systems because of the difficulty of operating and managing small systems and because of the difficulty in regulating multiple systems. Mesa County supports and adopts that policy. Mesa County in the future will give the greatest possible weight to the recommendation of the Colorado Department of Health on the appropriateness as well as the design of a new proposed treatment system. In general, the County believes that the establishment of new treatment systems is both necessary and desirable to serve existing and proposed urban areas, but that the establishment of new treatment systems to facilitate scattered development on the fringe of existing urban areas and service areas is not desirable. However, Mesa County also recognizes that it does not control the delivery of sewage collection and disposal service and that some providers of such service may be unwilling or unable to expand to meet the growing needs of a growing County. When an existing service provider is unable or unwilling without reason to expand its service area, the County acknowledges that the establishment of a new treatment system near the old one may be necessary even if it represents a form of "proliferation." However, no development relying on such a treatment system should be approved unless the developer has first obtained at least concept approval of the location and design of the proposed system from the Colorado Department of Health.

Septic tanks located, installed and operated in accordance with the regulations of the State of Colorado and of the Mesa County Health Department are suitable means of sewage disposal for low density residential development and for small-scale isolated commercial developments. Septic tanks may also be appropriate to serve domestic water needs of small and isolated industrial plants. However, Mesa County as a matter of policy determines that septic tanks are not appropriate for higher density

residential development, nor for large-scale commercial and industrial development, nor for any quantity of industrial wastes.

Coordination of Long Range School Planning and Development Patterns   Coordination of Development Approval and School Capacity

The proximity of schools to new development is of concern to every person with children and to all public decision-makers. However, the issue can be addressed from a number of perspectives. Advocates of some modern land use control systems urge that new development should be forced to locate around existing schools. Many school planners respond that it is the responsibility of the school district to foresee development patterns and to locate schools accordingly. There are no "right" answers to such difficult issues. However, it is clear that there must be a greater level of cooperation and joint planning between Mesa County and School District 51. Mesa County has been told informally that the District is willing to pay part or all of the cost of a professional staff school planner to work with the City-County Comprehensive Planning Department Staff. Mesa County believes that such staff cooperation in planning will be a good step toward better future coordination of school planning with other public planning and thus Mesa County will pursue that proposal. Mesa County anticipates that after a period of joint planning it can adopt, jointly with District 51, a more specific policy for relating school planning to the review and approval of new developments.

Standards for Street Widths

The determination of adequate street widths and rights-of-way is based on safety, traffic volume and speed, and potential need for expansion. However, streets are expensive to build and maintain, and therefore should not be designed or built to be larger than necessary. While large rights-of-way are necessary for certain major corridors where future street widening is likely, in other areas large rights-of-way simply waste land.

Most arterial and collector roads in Mesa County will ultimately connect with and become part of a total street system which is integrated with the street system in the City of Grand Junction.

In the past Mesa County has had its own separate standards for such roads, standards which have resulted in peculiar designs where County-approved roads connect to City-approved roads. Mesa County will adopt and enforce City of Grand Junction standards for collector and arterial roads.

Local streets are a totally different issue. With modern planning techniques, well-designed local streets will never become collectors or arterials. Thus, the only concern in the design of local streets is that they be adequate to provide safe and efficient access to the development fronting on such streets. Surplus right-of-way is not necessary because future expansion is unlikely. For such streets, Mesa County believes that both old Mesa County standards and City of Grand Junction standards require streets that are unnecessarily wide. Mesa County has turned instead to recommendations of the Urban Land Institute, the American Society of Civil Engineers and the National Association of Homebuilders, and modified those standards slightly to meet local needs.

For rural developments, all streets may be developed under the "local" classification (standards) unless very low densities suggest that future redevelopment may take place at higher densities which would require greater street capacity. If redevelopment is anticipated, sufficient right of way to expand to collector or minor arterial classification will be required.

Major Arterial	100' ROW	two 25' paved strips with divider
Minor Arterial	77' ROW	56' cartway
Collector	66' ROW	45' cartway
Local	-----	26' cartway
Cul-de-sac	-----	20' cartway
Short loop	-----	18' cartway

The major arterial has four lanes, no parking. The minor arterial has four lanes, two bikelanes, no parking. The collector has two lanes and two rows of parking. The local has two lanes plus one row of parking or can keep one lane moving even with parking on both sides. The cul-de-sac allows one lane of alternate traffic where there is parking, without parking, two lanes of traffic are accommodated. The short loop is the same as the cul-de-sac, very low speeds only are allowed.

Rights-of-way for local streets should be tailored to site-specific needs. Under contemporary circulation planning practices, no local street should ever grow into a collector or arterial. Thus, the right-of-way does not need to include expansion room for the street. What it does need to include is enough room for the street, adjacent utility easements, drainageways, sidewalks, bikeways and a strip for snow removal. The utility easement is compatible with a sidewalk, bikeway or

snow removal strip. In some developments, pedestrian and bike paths may be at the rear of most lots, leaving no need for excess right of way along the street. In order to allow for snow removal, the minimum right-of-way for a local street of any classification should be six feet wider than the cartway. That standard should be expanded as needed for the other peripheral uses.

#### Site Planning Standards

Mesa County believes that it is difficult at best for the County to establish detailed site standards that are suitable for every piece of land in Mesa County. County officials have learned from many public hearings that such matters as side-yard setbacks and fence restrictions are typically matters of neighborhood concern on which it is difficult to set appropriate County-wide policies. When such policies are adopted, they are frequently in the form of rigid, prescriptive standards that discourage creativity and good site-planning.

Therefore, Mesa County is adopting a policy on site planning standards that is similar to the philosophy of the creators of the "planned unit development" concept. Under the new policy, site planning standards in Mesa County must require adequate street and drainage system design and otherwise protect public systems through performance standards. Further, the County must have and enforce requirements for buffer zones between incompatible land use types and provide prescriptive design standards for development of individual lots in established neighborhoods. However, for new developments involving larger land areas, the County will encourage developers to follow the original concept of the planned unit development by creating for each project site planning criteria which fit the site and the character of development proposed. In such developments, the County will encourage developers to develop their own plan and site planning criteria, subject to gross density limits, performance standards and a requirement for a substantial buffer zone between substantially different types of development.

#### Public Hearings before the Planning Commission

The role of the Planning Commission is complex. Viewed originally as a sort of technical review body, the Mesa County



Planning Commission has assumed a growing role in all aspects of project review, including the holding of public hearings. The County has re-evaluated the role of the Planning Commission and considered the possibility of eliminating public hearings before that body and taking other steps to cut the work-load of this traditionally dedicated group of volunteers. However, the result of the evaluation is the conclusion that the role of the Planning Commission ought not to be changed.

Thus, the Planning Commission will continue to hold public hearings on matters coming before it. Hearings will continue to be scheduled by the Planning Commission in a way that makes citizen participation as easy and convenient as possible.

Time Limits for Commencement of Development Following Rezoning

In order to discourage land speculation, Mesa County will place time limits on all development approvals. Developers will be required to show substantial progress within those time limits. Under the new Mesa County procedures, the first step in the approval process will be an Official Development Plan showing land uses and a general development plan. Approval of the plan will be void unless a Final Plat for the project, or in the case of phased developments, for the first phase, is approved within six months of the approval of the Official Development Plan. Final Plat approval will be void unless all roads shown on the Final Plat are completed to County specifications within one year of approval of the Final Plat. On larger, phased developments, developers will be required to include a phasing schedule as part of the Official Development Plan and will be required to adhere to that schedule. A developer will be allowed to apply for one extension of not more than one year on single-phase projects or for one amendment to the phasing schedule on phased projects; such an extension will be granted only for good cause. The expiration of development approvals under this policy will be automatic.

Policy on Utilization of Irrigated Water for Non-household Uses by Developments in Areas Which Have Historically Utilized Irrigated Water

Any development in areas which have historically had access to irrigated water should be required to utilize such water for non-domestic purposes through pressurized or other reliable delivery systems.

Drainage Requirements for New Development

New developments must not create run-off in excess of historic site levels. Run-off will be held to existing pre-development levels by minimizing impervious cover, and the use of swales, detention and retention ponds. This "natural" approach to managing stormwater run-off is not only ecologically sound, but it is also less expensive than putting in curb and gutter.