

**CITY OF BOULDER  
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD  
INFORMATION ITEM**

**MEETING DATE:** October 13, 2014

**AGENDA TITLE:** Staff briefing and TAB input regarding scoping for Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update

**PRESENTER/S:** Tracy Winfree, Director of Public Works for Transportation  
Michael Gardner-Sweeney, Transportation Planning and Operations Coordinator  
Kathleen Bracke, GO Boulder Manager  
Lesli Ellis, Comprehensive Planning Manager

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Attached for review and input from the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) is a draft memo to City Council and Planning Board prepared for the joint Study Session regarding the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) Update. Also included as attachments are comments received to-date from Planning Board, stakeholder interviews, and consultant observations.

The purpose of this study session is to review the 2015 Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) update assessment and scoping process; provide information for feedback from interviews and boards regarding ways to make the plan more effective, strategic, and aligned with other outcomes; note the parallel resilience strategy; and seek feedback regarding issues and options for the 2015 Major Update of the BVCP.

Staff will be available to discuss the BVCP memo and comments received to-date as well as seek input from TAB during the October 13 board meeting. Input from TAB will be incorporated into the presentation materials shared with City Council and Planning Board on October 14.

**NEXT STEPS**

Staff will be presenting the BVCP scoping information to City Council and Planning Board at a joint study session on October 14.

**Attachments**

- A. Boulder Planning Board – Key Points for BVCP
- B. Comments from interviews September 2014
- C. Consultant Preliminary Observations for Council

## **Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan – 2015 Update Boulder Planning Board – Summary of Key Points (September 18, 2014)**

The Boulder Planning Board discussed and indicated support for the following ideas regarding the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) Update in 2015.

### **Format of the Plan**

#### *Recognition of its Strengths:*

- It includes great aspirational statements and provides an overview of the community (e.g., built environment, energy, community well-being). Many use it to learn about the community.
- Our partnership with the county and 4-body review provides a strong link to regionalism.

#### *Areas for Improvement:*

1. **Improve the format:** Ideas include using graphics and illustrations to convey ideas. Make it more concise, less wordy, add more visualizations.
2. **Tell the Boulder planning story better:** For instance, include a retrospective (e.g., what the plan has done to shape this community, and what if it had not had the plan)
3. **Broaden its topics to reflect inclusive community ideas:** It is important to be inclusive in the plan regarding all topics beyond land use. *(some new topics noted below)*
4. **Sharpen its policy focus:** Provide community guidance on priorities; make the intent of policies in key areas more clear and less subject to interpretation
5. **Include metrics:** Roll in existing and new metrics related to land use, climate/energy, etc.
6. **Partnerships:** Continue to build partnerships with CU, federal labs, and other important institutional and regional partners.
7. **Bridge to Implementation:** Provide a bridge and stronger, clearer linkage between the plan's vision statements, policy, and implementation tools (e.g., between land use and zoning). Make land use map definitions more specific and clear, and link site review criteria with the plan.
8. **Clarify density and design:** Better define sustainable urban form (e.g., how urban, compact, etc.), and what level of quality is desired as defined through a community conversation. Address form-based design.

### **Current Issues to be addressed**

1. Workforce housing
2. Public art, art, and culture
3. Sustainability goals (integration)
4. Impacts on government services - community facilities and services (e.g., library, etc). More specificity about offsetting/mitigating impacts of development on basic services.
5. Regional system and partnerships
6. Local food
7. Energy and municipalization
8. Carrying capacity
9. Settling planning area questions such as Hogan Pancost
10. Regenerative design vs. greenfield design

11. Resilience

**How Resilience Strategy Might Relate to the BVCP Update**

1. Coordinate resilience strategy and BVCP, at least at high level and for public process, but do not sideline resilience.
2. Let resilience implementation actions move forward without being tied to the plan.
3. Determine where vulnerable populations can best be accommodated (e.g. reserve land for community identified needs).
4. Address communication strategies (e.g., between city and population, or within neighborhoods), as an important part of resilience that could also be addressed through the plan. This is especially relevant during floods, fires, etc.

**Community Engagement Process Ideas**

1. Educate the community about the plan. Start out with some common information (e.g., “Comp Plan 101” sessions). Public forums to set the foundation, via speakers.
2. Consider producing a series of short, snappy videos – educate the community in different ways.
3. Reach out to people not ordinarily engaged (e.g., Mobile home parks, Neighborhood associations)
4. Talk about how the plan actually affects people’s lives – those not interested in zoning, etc. - by illustrating what it means to people.
5. Visualization is really important as part of the outreach process.

## **Attachment B**

### **Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) Assessment and Update Process**

#### **Summary of Comments from Board Members and Staff Interviews**

*09/29/14*

Following is a summary of comments received from a series of staff interviews conducted by the consultants and staff on Sept. 3 to 8, 2014. During the course of these interviews, the consultant/staff team members met with city and county staff from a broad range of service areas, including: Public Works (including Transportation and Utilities), Finance, Fire, Police, City Manager's Office, Community Planning and Sustainability (including Historic Preservation, Climate and Ecology, and Economic Vitality), Energy Future, Human Resources, Communications, Housing, Open Space, and Parks and Recreation. We also met with the City's Master Plan Coordination Committee; Ecological Planning Team; members of the Arts Commission; Downtown Management Commission; and Open Space Board and with Growing Up Boulder, and Boulder County planning staff.

During the interviews, we posed a consistent set of questions in order to obtain a wide range of input in a consistent manner. Topics discussed included the following:

- 1. Plan Usage and Awareness** - How do you currently use the Comprehensive Plan? How would you like to use it in the future, once updated? How widely do you think that the plan is understood and used by the community?
- 2. Content** - What are the strengths of the current plan? What are things in it that are rock solid, must remain – format, content, process? What could be improved (format, content, process)?
- 3. Issues to be Addressed** - What are some of the issues facing the community that you think the plan update needs to address?
- 4. Update Process** - Do you have any ideas for creative ways to engage the community in the update process itself? Any organizations or sectors of the community that you think are particularly important to reach out to?

The following is a summary of feedback received from the interviews, organized in the same manner as the interview questions above.

#### **1. Plan Usage and Awareness**

- **Usage of the Plan varies widely.** Usage of the Plan varies, depending on the role that staff members fill in the city organization. Those involved in development review use it regularly as an implementation tool – to provide direction regarding development projects, or to justify actions or support actions they are about to take as a city. Some use it as more of a “vision” document, to see if what they are proposing is consistent with the city's overall direction. Some departments acknowledged that they have little knowledge of the plan, and do not see it as integral to their work. Many would like to see the Plan have more relevance to what they do – to see it serve as more of a “unifying” document, particularly for those service areas that rely on a Master Plan to guide their efforts.
- **Awareness of the Plan among the general community is perceived as low.** With the exception of Planning Board and City Council members, the development community, and a small number of planning-oriented citizens (many of whom date back to the initial growth management/land preservation efforts in the 1970s), most feel that the Plan is not widely

understood or perceived as relevant to most residents. However, many feel that the community has a good understanding of and support for the Plan's core values (e.g., growth boundary, land preservation, focus on transportation choices, etc.) even if they do not know that those concepts are contained in the Plan.

- **The Plan gets used by the community to support (or repel) proposed development activities.** Many noted that the Plan's policies tend to be used by the public as either a sword or shield, depending on whether they support or oppose a proposed action.

## 2. Plan Content

### a. Plan Strengths

- **Growth Management/Service Area concept is seen as "rock-solid".** There is widespread understanding and support for the Plan's focus on containing urban growth where it can be served, and preserving rural areas and open lands.
- **Core Values (sustainability, city/county cooperation, environmental stewardship, multi-modal transportation, etc.) are widely supported.** Most believe that these values are widely supported and must remain as part of the Plan's foundation.
- **Policies are generally clear and well-founded.** However, as noted below, many believe that there are opportunities to improve on the Plan's policies.

### b. Areas for Improvement

- **More focus on implementation.** Many feel that the Plan is weak on implementation and actions.
- **Clarify Policies.** The Plan's policies in key areas (e.g., urban form, density) could be sharpened to make the intent of the policies clearer. (One comment - "dial up enough detail so that 90% of people will agree on what it says".)
- **Strengthen connections to the university and other partners.** These partnerships are seen as critically important to the community, yet they are not broadly addressed in the Plan.
- **Update the format and content to make the Plan more community-friendly.** Many feel that the Plan is too much of a "planner's plan", and would like to see it repackaged in a way that would make it more accessible to the broader community. This could include a stronger vision, as well as a retrospective on how the city has gotten to where it is through planning.
- **Strengthen linkage to Master Plans.** Many departments rely on a Master Plan for their guidance and direction, and see an opportunity to strengthen ties between the Plan and their Master Plans, with the BVCP containing high-level actions and strategies to help integrate the Plan and Master Plans.
- **Add Metrics and Outcomes.** While opinions vary on this topic, many feel that the Plan should set the foundation for the city's increasing efforts to set outcomes and track progress. Some feel that the metrics should be contained in the Master Plans, and that the Plan should set high-level goals and outcomes.

- **Integrate the Sustainability Framework into the Plan.** The Sustainability Framework is seen as an increasingly important tool for the city. While it is mentioned, it is not yet fully integrated into the Plan. However, departments are beginning to use the Framework as a basis for Master Plan updates and for budgeting.

### 3. Issues to be Addressed

- **A wide range of issues was identified for the update to consider.** As may be expected, our interviews identified a wide range of issues that the update might address. These are listed below (in alphabetical order):
  - **15-Minute Neighborhoods** – transition of neighborhoods over time; Where? How? How much?
  - **Arts and culture** – little mention in current plan.
  - **Climate** – action, adaptation, mitigation – no mention of current long term climate goal and climate related metrics in plan
  - **Density/urban form** – identified as a top issue by many; clarify and provide examples of what we mean by sustainable urban form.
  - **Disruptive change** – shift focus of plan from growth management to new challenges (e.g. climate change). How to be more adaptive, dynamic, and fluid?
  - **Economic vitality** – does it need a reset?
  - **Energy Future** – needs to be considered in Plan.
  - **Fiscal health** – linkage with budget, capital projects, tracking fiscal health and outcomes.
  - **Inclusivity/income disparity** – equity issues around income, public health, access, diversity.
  - **Resilience** – one comment; “with two fires, a flood, and a recession, resilience is an important topic”.
  - **Workforce and affordable housing** – in conflict with high economic levels and in short supply.
  - **Youth issues** – interaction with nature, places for teens to “hang”, independent mobility

### 4. Community Outreach

- **Important to get authentic participation in the update process.** There is widespread support for transparent, inclusive, meaningful input from the community, and a variety of ideas were expressed about how to accomplish this. These are listed below:
  - **Tap into neighborhood groups organized as part of flood recovery efforts.** This was mentioned as a way to involve many who would not typically be involved in planning-related topics.
  - **Look to recent successful planning efforts (Transportation Master Plan, Civic Center Plan) for ideas that worked.** Both of these recent efforts were mentioned by

many as having using creative new approaches to citizen engagement – both web-based, videos, as well as activity and event-based. TMP storefront workshops were seen as particularly effective, as were youth workshops organized by school district, university, and the city.

- **Use creative ways to engage the business community.** Look to engage owners, but also employees and in-commuters. Consider focus groups, employee surveys that focus on economic policies.
- **Traditional meetings/open houses not seen as very effective.** These events tend to attract relatively small attendance (unless focused on controversial topics) and provide low return on investment.
- **Make the Plan “real” to people.** Focus on real examples with visual tools for people to understand how changes to the Plan might affect them.
- **Go to where people are, work with trusted groups.** Rather than organizing events and expecting the community to come out for them, go to where they are – senior living centers, schools, places of worship (particularly important for minority communities).

## Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) Assessment and Update Process

### Preliminary Observations

October 6, 2014

Following is a summary of preliminary observations from the consultant team based on our initial assessment of the BVCP (the “Plan”), Planning Board input, interviews with board members and city staff, and observing other community discussions regarding planning policy. While recognizing many long time strengths of the Plan, our assessment identifies a number of potential areas of improvement. Some or all of these ideas may be appropriate as part of the scope of work for the Plan update, depending on discussions with city and county leadership.

Key observations and possibilities include:

1. Focus the Update on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges and Opportunities
2. Recast the Document Format and Presentation to be More Compelling
3. Use the Plan to Integrate Ongoing and New Ideas
4. Articulate a Clear Vision for the City’s Desired Urban Form
5. Strengthen Linkages between the Plan and Implementation Tools
6. Clarify Policies in Key Areas

### 1. Focus on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges and Opportunities

The Plan has its origins in the challenges facing the community in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; growth management, containment of sprawl, preservation of open lands. In its current form, the Plan is largely a land use and preservation plan. Its role and structure need to broaden if it is to serve the community’s needs and vision for the future. Opportunities include:

- **Address new century challenges.** While the Plan’s core values and vision are still solid, a new and evolving set of challenges is now before the community, such as:
  - resilience
  - climate adaptation and mitigation and energy future
  - equity, income disparity, and aging population
  - workforce housing
  - need for partnerships
  - arts and culture
  - neighborhood action and self-sufficiency and 15-minute neighborhoods (neighborhoods as building blocks for the community)
- **Expand systems and regional scope.** Many of the systems that serve the community and demographic and growth influences that affect it (e.g., water, transportation, air quality and climate, natural systems, energy infrastructure and supply, population growth) have a geographic scope that reaches beyond the boundaries of the Plan. With an increased emphasis on resilience, it may be appropriate during the Plan update to consider these systems in their larger context, beyond the boundaries of the Plan area.

## 2. Make Format and Presentation More Compelling

The Plan in its current form does not present a clear picture of the community’s vision for its future, and while its core values are strong, it is not presented in a manner that is a compelling read for much of the community because it is heavy on text, contains few graphics, maps, and photos and is organized in standalone chapters or elements that do not relate to a broader vision for the city. Opportunities include:

- **Do a better job of telling the Boulder story.** Boulder has an incredible story to tell – its past, present, and future – and the Plan can present so much more in a way that is more inspirational and accessible to the broader community. This can help build a greater understanding of the purpose of the Plan, and garner support for ongoing and new initiatives.
- **Convey a compelling vision.** The Plan and other documents (Sustainability Framework, for example) contain much that speak to the community’s values and vision, but at present this is not presented in a clear, cohesive, form that gives meaning to most people in the community. The Plan document itself could be shorter, and convey the vision in a more visual manner. This could entail more graphics and illustrations to convey desired concepts and restructuring of the Plan to be organized around “big ideas” and themes, such as the Sustainability Framework (see 3. below).



From Imagine Austin:

*“The distinctive benefit of a comprehensive plan is that it confronts big issues in a big-picture way. Other City of Austin plans are more focused and deal with topics such as parks, solid waste, transportation, water, or smaller geographic areas. But only a comprehensive plan fully considers how the whole community’s values, needs, people, and places are interrelated and interdependent.”*

### 3. Use the Plan to Integrate Ongoing and New Ideas

Over the past several years, the City has increasingly focused its efforts on new and ongoing initiatives that support the core values contained in the Plan, such as sustainability, climate, and others. While many of these are addressed to some extent, they are not yet fully integrated into the Plan in a cohesive, coordinated manner. For example, Fort Collins recently updated its plan (*Plan Fort Collins*) to integrate energy, green infrastructure, local food production, public safety, and other topics within a unified document that is structured around the same topics as the City's Budgeting for Outcomes categories. Opportunities to strengthen these connections include:



Above: *Plan Fort Collins* is structured around the city's Budgeting for Outcomes areas.

- ***Include ongoing and new work on these topics in a strategic, coordinated manner.*** Work that is ongoing (Climate Commitment, Energy Future, Resilient Boulder) will need to be included; other topics will need to be addressed in a comprehensive way, leading to an updated Plan that addresses contemporary challenges and opportunities in a fully integrated manner.
- ***Integrate the Sustainability Framework more fully into the Plan.*** The city's Sustainability Framework articulates the outcomes necessary to achieve the desired sustainable vision for the community, and could help inform the Plan update in a number of ways, such as:
  - defining and implementing the community vision
  - aligning the Plan with the city's priority-based budgeting process
  - serve as an organizing framework
- ***Include projections, outcomes and metrics in the Plan (both existing and new).*** Many cutting-edge comprehensive plans contain projections, outcomes and metrics used to set objectives and track progress. These could be linked to maps and other visual tools to help convey and track outcomes in a more graphic style. Opportunities include:
  - include information about growth projections and land use information, to set a foundation for understanding the city's capacity for growth
  - include high-level outcomes or objectives in the Plan to provide stronger linkages with master plans
  - create linkages to the city's budgeting process
  - set the stage for tracking progress over time (possibly through the dashboard being coordinated through the City Manager's Office)

Topic Group	Priority Program
Compact and Connected	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Compact and Connected (p. 41):</b> Invest in a compact and connected Austin.</li> <li><b>Align Code (p. 47):</b> Revise Austin’s development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city.</li> </ol>
Nature and City	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sustainable Water (p. 57):</b> Sustainably manage our water resources.</li> <li><b>Green Infrastructure (p. 63):</b> Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city.</li> </ol>
Creativity and Economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Workforce Development (p. 71):</b> Continue to grow Austin’s economy by investing in our workforce, education systems, entrepreneurs, and local businesses.</li> <li><b>Creative Economy (p. 77):</b> Grow and invest in Austin’s creative economy.</li> </ol>
Healthy and Affordable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Household Affordability (p. 87):</b> Develop and maintain household affordability throughout Austin.</li> <li><b>Healthy Austin (p. 93):</b> Create a Healthy Austin program.</li> </ol>

Above: *Imagine Austin* includes an Action Plan that focuses on four key areas: Compact and Connected, Nature and the City, Creativity and Economy, and Healthy and Affordable. The Plan includes Action Steps for each of the four areas, along with Community indicators to measure and track progress.

#### 4. Articulate a Clear Vision for City’s Desired Urban Form

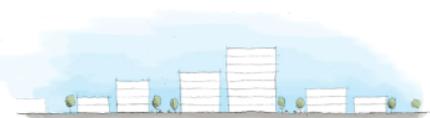
The Plan does not articulate a clear vision of the desired sustainable urban form and how it will be affected by individual projects or public policies. Words alone cannot convey this vision – the Plan needs to use new tools to show what the desired outcome is (graphic images, pictures, perhaps overall 3D modeling). This will help inform ongoing efforts to update the City’s development regulations and procedures.

- **Illustrate the desired outcome so that it is clear to all.** A clear statement and image of the desired future urban form, based on growth projections and reasonable assumptions about trends, would inform public expectations and assist staff, decision-makers, and developers in judging the appropriateness of potential changes to Boulder’s regulations and ultimately built urban form. This could be done at several levels – visual models to illustrate build out of centers, prototype buildings and blocks, or perhaps visuals that conceptualize build out of sectors or the entire city, if desired.

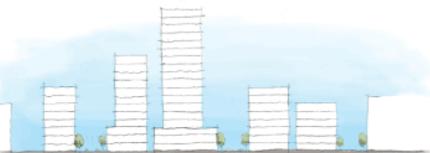
NEIGHBOURHOOD –  
LOW RISE (UP TO 4  
STOREYS)



TOWN & LOCAL CENTRES –  
LOW/MEDIUM RISE  
(UP TO 8 STOREYS)

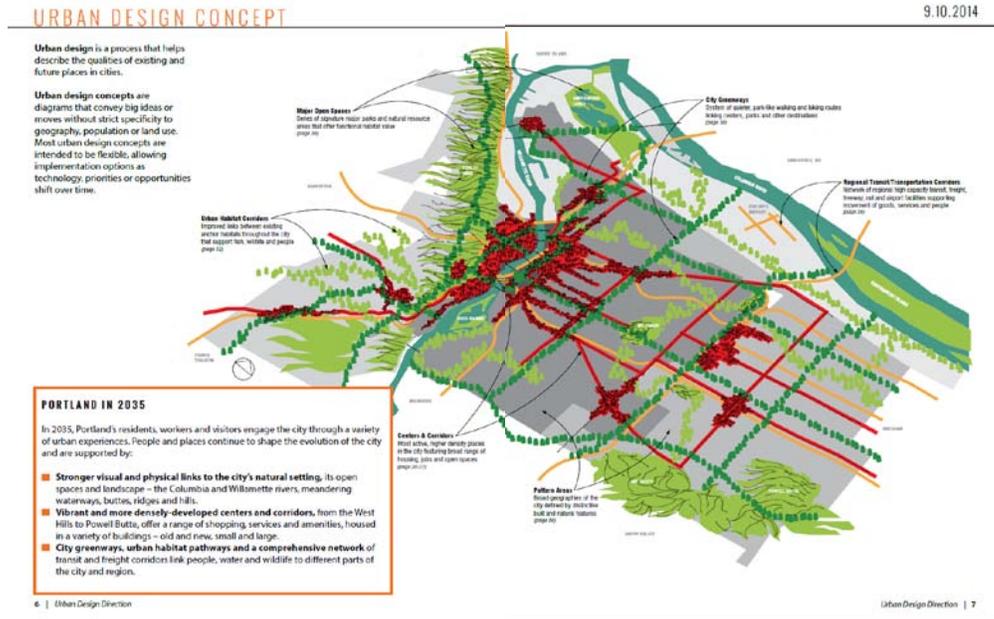


CITY & METROPOLITAN  
CENTRES –  
MEDIUM RISE  
(5-8 STOREYS)  
HIGH RISE  
(9+ STOREYS)



Above: The Auckland Plan (Auckland, NZ) uses 3D graphics and drawings to illustrate the desired urban form for different sectors of the city.

- **Consider including a structure or framework plan that illustrates how all areas of the city fit together.** Many contemporary plans include an illustrative plan that conveys how various centers, corridors, open lands, and other community elements relate to future land use. In the Boulder case, this could supplement the BVCP Land Use Designation Map.



Above: Portland’s newly adopted plan update includes an Urban Design Framework diagram that locates centers and corridors (areas that are expected to grow and change) within the City’s physical context.

## 5. Strengthen Linkages between the Plan and Implementation Tools

The Plan should serve as the guiding document for a number of tools that are used to implement planning in the community. These include: departmental master plans and strategic plans; area and sub-community plans; priority-based budgeting that drives programs and services; and development regulations contained in the Land Use Code. In its present form, the Plan does not clearly illustrate or explain how it relates to the implementing tools. More could be done to strengthen and more clearly articulate this role for the Plan. Opportunities include:

- **Strengthen linkages to other plans and implementation tools.** The Plan could provide stronger linkages to the various master plans and other operational plans and tools, to illustrate more clearly how all of the component parts of the community’s vision and planning framework are integrated. This could be done in a number of ways, such as a matrix that illustrates linkages and connections; an expanded section in the Plan Introduction that more fully explains the relationships between the Plan and implementation tools or perhaps “bridge” language at the beginning of each Plan chapter that describes the tools that implement the topics in the chapter. For example, climate plan is partly implemented through the adoption of the carbon tax and the building code requirements.

- ***Increase the Plan's focus on implementation by Including an Action Plan.*** While implementing actions generally are contained in master plans and other documents as well as the Boulder Revised Code, it may be appropriate to include high-level strategies and actions so that the Plan serves as a unifying element, to show how the master plans and other implementing documents are linked to it, and how they serve to carry out the overall vision contained in the Plan.

## 6. Clarify Policies in Key Areas

The Plan contains a large number of policies that speak to a wide range of topics. While for the most part they are clear and well-written, users of the Plan have told us that it can at times be all things to all people; that policies can be used to both advocate and repel proposed actions. Opportunities include:

- ***Make the intent of policies in key areas more clear.*** Sharpening the focus of key policies can help make them less subject to interpretation.
- ***Address inconsistencies, address trade-offs, and consider reducing the number of policies.*** While the consultants have yet to conduct a detailed analysis, preliminary observations suggest that the Plan's policies could be refined to reduce them to a smaller number, and inconsistencies could be reduced and priorities and trade-offs clarified.
- ***Address development issues at the urban edge.*** Clarify issues related to development at the urban edge (i.e., in Area II) and update policies and regulations for these areas. Develop and implement updated policies and regulations to govern annexation and the management of parts of Area II at the urban edge where development connected to urban services may be desirable, in order to clarify what form of development is appropriate, and how it is to be processed under joint city/county procedures This may also include describing how the boundaries are determined, to clarify why properties are included (or not) in these areas.